

HMONG HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAM AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL AND
ITS IMPACT ON HMONG STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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HMONG HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAM AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL AND
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A Thesis

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Abstract
of
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Statement of Problem

The Hmong heritage language program at Lucky Banks High School has been implemented for over eight years. How has this program helped Hmong students improve their academic achievement?

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is a combination of quantitative analysis of student academic records and qualitative data collected from a survey of Hmong high school seniors at Lucky Banks High School.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a strong correlation between the number of years of Hmong heritage language students have taken and their level academic achievement. However, further studies are needed to directly link academic achievement to participation in the heritage language program at Lucky Banks High School.

_____, Committee Chair
Forrest R. Davis, PhD

Date

DEDICATION

To my parents,
Kou Shue Cha and Va Mee Lee,
who never had the opportunity to
pursue a formal education,
and to my wife and kids
for their support and inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my wife, Mai Xee Vue, for her encouragement and support. I also want to thank all the BMED instructors for mentoring me. A very special thank you goes to Dr. Lisa William-White for editing my writing time and time again.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The site of this research study is at an urban, inner city school called Lucky Banks High School (LBHS)¹ in northern California. The school is a Title I school which means more than 40% of the students come from low-income families (US Department of Education, 2009). The student population at LBHS is quite diverse. From 1998 to 2009, the ethnic Asian student population fluctuates between 34% and 43%, whereas non-Hispanic White students hovered around 5% to 9% of the total student population. The percentages of African-American and Hispanic students break nearly even in the 20% range (School Report Card, 1998 through 2009). Included in the Asian population are Hmong-speaking students who constitute about 15.1% of the overall student population in the 1998-1999 school year, 23.8% in 1999-2000 and 21.5% in the 2000-2001 (School Report Card, 1999, School Report card, 2000, School Report Card, 2001). To get a more accurate count of the Hmong student population at LBHS, the researcher did an analysis of students with common Hmong surnames in the school information system called Zangle (Zangle Report, 2009). The researcher counts all students with the last name Cha, Chang, Fang, Hang, Her, Herr, Heu, Khang, Kue, Lao, Lor, Lee, Moua, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong and Yang. Chang, Lee and Yang are surnames shared by Chinese-Americans and Korean-Americans, but all the other surnames are exclusively Hmong. A count of these students compared with the total student population indicates that the Hmong student population during the 2009-2010 school year is 31%.

This research study focuses on the Hmong students who participate in a heritage language program at LBHS. The language program is a series of Hmong language courses taught sequentially from level one to level four. The primary emphasis of the program is language development. With more than 90% of the students having some level of competency in Hmong language as a primary language; however, the courses are designed with native speakers in mind. As such, lessons are geared toward helping students to develop cultural capital, literacy skills and academic achievement.

This chapter will provide the background information, state the purpose of the study, set limitations and define terms used in this study.

Background

As one of the two Hmong language teachers at Lucky Banks High School, I helped develop the curriculum for the Language program there. The curriculum was developed with literacy as the main focus, but is also build around that are different components that emphasize student performance and academic success. Since the program was implemented eight years ago, there has not been a formal study on the success of this heritage language program. Overall, students seem to have made great progress in Hmong literacy, but the question of whether or not the Hmong language program made any difference in Hmong students' academic improvement in the broader spectrum remains unanswered. After all, these language courses were designed to improve students' primary language skills, help them maintain their cultural identity and increase their self-esteem which ultimately translates into higher academic performance (Garcia-

Vazquez, Vazquez, Lopez, and Ward, 1997, Kwon, 2006). So, the focus of this study is to determine whether or not the Hmong language classes contributed to the academic improvement of Hmong students at LBHS.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine what, if any role, the Hmong heritage language program plays in the academic improvement of Hmong at Lucky Banks High School. In this study, an academic improvement involves a higher grade point average and a higher standardized test scores on the part of the treated subjects in comparison to the control group. Furthermore, this study will seek to discover if the program helps to develop personal growth amongst Hmong students who participated in the program. This is to determine if the students who have completed the program have gained more self-confidence, become more knowledgeable about their own cultural identity, and acquired the motivation to pursue a higher education as a result. Evidently, the language classes are gaining popularity among native Hmong speakers, because these classes have grown from two sections in the 2001-2002 academic year to ten in 2007-2008. In formal surveys done by Mr. Vong, the teacher who started the Hmong heritage language program at LBHS, on his graduating seniors who have completed all four levels of Hmong courses indicate that the majority of them are going to college, and they are more confident about their language skills. Even so, no formal studies have been done on this heritage language program to see if it helps students to improve their

academic performance. The purpose of this research study is to determine the effectiveness of this language program.

This study will explore the prospects and/or challenges embedded in the heritage language at LBHS. Such knowledge can be used to help teachers in the program to reflect on their practices, deem, if necessary, ways to improve the program and spur continuing growth.

Theoretical Frame

Researches have shown that basic literacy skills developed in the primary language (L_1) transfer to the second language (L_2) (Roberts, 1994, p. 218). Cummins illustrated in his Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) Model of second language acquisition that literacy proficiency in the primary language and secondary language are common or interdependent across languages (Gonzales, 1994, p.167). In essence, language skills in the primary language influence a person's acquisition of the second language in a positive manner. The researcher will use the language and academic skills transfer lenses to study how the intense literacy skills emphasis in the Hmong language program at Lucky Banks High School has helped Hmong students develop English language skills, which ultimately will help them succeed academically.

Timm (1994) suggested that, "Educators should, consider not only the cognitive psychology of learning but the contextual anthropology of learning . . . so we can build cross-cultural bridges to enable Hmong students to succeed in both their Hmong and American cultural worlds" (Timm, 1994, p.295). The heritage language program at

LBHS places great emphasis on the contextual anthropology of learning as suggested by Timm. This is to develop self-confidence and build cultural capital. Contextually, students are learning about their cultural identity and cultural heritage in a public education setting, making their own experiences and cultural traditions more accepting; thus, students feel more comfortable about their own culture. In doing so, students are developing academic skills in mainstream society and the academic system. In other words, when students build cultural capital in the Hmong language program, they will become successful in the dual-world of mainstream America and in the Hmong community.

Limitations

This study focuses on students who live in the inner city urban region of northern California. Findings from this research may not be applicable to other Hmong language programs in different geographical areas. The students under consideration are first-generation Hmong students who came to the United States at pre-adolescent age or American born children of Hmong refugees who came to the United States as adults. These students have parents who speak primarily Hmong at home. The results of this study may not be relevant to honors and International Baccalaureate students who have maintained high academic achievements throughout their academic careers. English language learners who have already built strong academic skills or those who are proficient in their primary language may benefit more from a strong ELD or bilingual program rather than heritage language classes such as these. The findings of this study

may not benefit students of other ethnicities who do not share a similar cultural heritage with Hmong students. Overall, this study is a longitudinal study on a very narrow sector of our student population in a very unique program.

Definition of Terms

To ensure a clear understanding of this study, terms used throughout the study, the following terms are defined.

Cultural capital is the collection of non-economic forces such as language, family background, social class, varying investments in and commitments to education, different resources, etc. which influence academic success.

Hmong is an ethnic minority from Laos with ancestors originally from Southern China identifiable with Miao ancestors.

native speaker refers to a student who learned a language other than English first or simultaneously and has acquired satisfactory fluency in the primary language.

culture is often used loosely to mean the way of life of a group of people. In this study, *culture* refers to the way of life for the Hmong people who are currently living in the United States with American being the dominant culture and English the dominant language.

Small Learning Communities (SLC) are small schools within a school where the students are tracked, with students in the same SLC being taught by the same teachers in core subject classes.

impact is a term used in this study to refer to both negative and positive influences in personal, social, educational and academic growth of the students who participate in the language program at Lucky Banks High School.

cultural capital is the knowledge of one's culture heritage and societal struggles where culture capital is the knowledge that will help guide the person to navigate through the road to success.

indigenous is a term used to describe a group of people who live the lives of a pre-industrial society in harmony with the natural world and without the need for neither modern technology nor formal education.

personal growth is an expression that describes the level of competent in Hmong language and how comfortable students feel about being Hmong.

Summary

For several years now, the Hmong language classes at Lucky Banks High School have been gaining popularity among students and momentum from the faculty. However, there has not been any formal study to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. This research study will determine the impact these Hmong heritage language classes have on Hmong students who take the classes. This research study will focus on the effects of Hmong language courses have on academic and personal growth. A quantitative analysis of the academic records and standardized test scores of the students will reveal the academic progress made by the students. An unstructured, open-end

interview with students who advanced through all four levels of the program will determine students' personal growth.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter two relates to the Hmong historical background, language acquisition, and appropriate modification of classroom discourse. Chapter three will talk about the methodology that will be employed in the research study. An analysis of the collected data will be detailed in chapter four followed by a conclusion and suggestions for further study in the last chapter.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The Hmong heritage language at Lucky Banks High School has in place for nine years. Although the program has expanded over the years, no formal study or evaluations have been completed on the effectiveness of the program. This research study is to determine the impact the Hmong heritage language program has on students.

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section is on Hmong historical and cultural background. Section two focuses on the academic achievement gap between Hmong students and their mainstream counterparts. In section three, the discussion will concentrate on how existing programs and research studies linking primary language skills and building cultural capital to improved academic performance. The last section in this literature review analyzes research studies on the modification of classroom discourse which is instrumental in the Hmong heritage language program at LBHS.

Historical and cultural background of the Hmong students

To better understand Hmong students and begin to explain why there is a disparity in academic achievement between Hmong students and their mainstream peers, it is essential to look at Hmong students' historical and cultural background. Hmong have been historically disadvantaged academically, politically and economically. There are many ways Hmong students are disadvantaged.

Throughout recorded history, Hmong people have been subordinates to people of a more dominant culture. Vang (2008) asserted that Hmong people have always sought after independence and self-subsistence they have always been subjects of oppression and domination. In China, the Hmong people have been subordinates to the Hans Chinese. For thousands of years, they were faced with warfare, forced assimilation and ethnic cleansing. It is said that Hmong people rebelled against their Chinese adversaries every ten years and had a major conflict with them every thirty years (Wu, 1999). According to Professor Wu, for thousands of years, Hmong predecessors were constantly impacted by war or the threat of war. Consequently, they were forced out of central China into the rugged mountainous regions of Southwestern China, and eventually into Southeast Asia (Vang, 2008).

In Southeast Asia, Vang asserted that the conditions were great at first, but eventually deteriorated in the 20th century. In both Laos and Vietnam, Hmong people were subjected to heavy taxation by French colonial oppression in the early 1900s. Throughout the Vietnam War era, the Hmong became the hinge men of the US Central Intelligence Agency in its secret operations in Laos (Vang, 2008). As recent as the 1975, Hmong men were still balancing their lives between warfare and self-subsistence farming in the mountains of Laos. Formal education has always been a foreign concept. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the Hmong fled their beloved homeland and became refugees of war in Thailand. From Thailand, they were bound for the most economically and technologically advanced nation in the world, the United States of America.

For more than thirty years now, many Hmong have been calling the United States home. Here, Hmong people constitute less than 0.1% of the total US population (Carroll, Lor and Camane, 2000). In the United States, Hmong people relied on families, friends and sponsors to help them transition to self-reliance. That is because Hmong do not have the language, the marketable skills or trades to survive in the new land. They knew how to hunt and farm to survive, but these skills did not transfer well to the job markets in the United States. Survival is still the primary goal for Hmong people, even if it means that they have to produce a lot of children and have large extended families living in small apartments (Mote, 2004). That puts Hmong people at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder where their children attend some of the lowest performing schools. That is where Hmong students come from.

Mortensen (2009) asserted that Hmong people did not have a written language until the 1953; thus, formal education in their native language has not been a possibility. Earning an education in the dominant society was not a conceivable concept either because of discrimination and oppression. When Hmong refugees arrived in the United States in the late 1970s, most of the adults neither adapted well nor did they have the capacity to learn English due to the fact that they were illiterate in their primary language. As a result, Hmong parents have not been able to help their children in education even after more than thirty years of being in the United States. Very few Hmong parents who came to the U.S. at a young age made it through college. The majority of Hmong parents today are not highly educated. School age children, these days, have parents with education levels that range from no formal education to college

graduates.

Xiong and Lee (2005) conducted a study in the St. Paul and Minneapolis area and discovered that 62% of Hmong parents surveyed did not receive a high school diploma (Xiong and Lee, 2005). Students who attend large inner city schools have parents who are either uneducated or have very low level of formal education. These parents cannot provide their children with academic guidance or educational support. As a result, Hmong students do not fair well in school due to the lack of support at home (Hidalgo, 1995).

Hmong people are not typical immigrants who voluntarily come to the United States to seek a better life. When the United States government decided to pull out of Southeast Asia, Hmong people (American allies) were left behind to be slaughtered by their enemies, the communist regime (Hamilton-Merritt, 1999). They were traumatized by war for decades and enraged by the loss of their beloved homeland. They came to America with only the clothes they had on their back and war scars in their psyche. That is a total departure from the American perception of immigrants. Yet, the Hmong were treated to the same expectations as traditional immigrants. In comparison, traditional Asian immigrants came to the United States of America voluntarily and most of them came with an education, trade skill, money or the intention to earn a better life. Hmong people, on the other hand, came without the education, knowledge and job skills necessary to survive in the United States. As such, adaptation to their new environment has been a bleak and slow process.

A quarter of a century has passed since the bulk of Hmong immigrants arrived in the

United States. Hmong have not assimilated well, and most parents are still using Hmong language as the primary mechanism to communicate with their children at home. Xiong and Lee found that 59% of Hmong parents speak Hmong to their children at home (Xiong and Lee, 2005). Hmong children, on the other hand, are losing their knowledge in Hmong language and culture. They are unable to communicate effectively with their parents in their primary language (Timm, 1994). In essence, there is a disconnection between Hmong parents and their children leaving Hmong students with little and no involvement and support at home. Researchers have consistently shown that family involvement and support at home help students succeed in school (Hidalgo, 1995). Without the structure and support, Hmong students would not be expected to perform at the same level as their peers.

As first generation-refugee Hmong parents struggle to adapt and survive in the US, their children are left to struggle in school without academic support at home. The slow educational progress made by Hmong parents is also a contributing factor in Hmong children's lower than expected academic performance. All in all, Hmong students have a historical and family background that hinders their academic progress.

The academic achievement gap between Hmong students and their peers

Standardized testing quantifies student success, and the average Hmong student often performs at a lower level compared to his or her peers, but this academic achievement gap is sometimes overlooked. It is, however, quite visible when educational statistics are analyzed closely. The low academic achievement in Hmong

students is quite evident in standardized test such as the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). According to the 2003 CAHSEE statistics, Hmong students scored as much as 25% lower than their white classmates (Garcia, 2003). Due to the small number of Hmong students statewide, when Hmong student scores are lumped with all the other Asian students, the disparity in test scores is overlooked. However, the academic achievement gap is there.

The academic achievement gap between Hmong students and students of other Asian heritage is even greater than the gap between Hmong students and their White peers. Here too, the gap is usually hidden. The California Standardized Test, for example, categorizes Hmong students as Laotian students. Laotian includes ethnic Lao, Hmong, Mien and Khmer (California STAR, 2008). Nowhere on the demographics of this test mentions Hmong student. Hmong students are usually invisible statistically. Without the break down of students by ethnic group, the consistently low performance by the Hmong students are not evident.

When student academic statistics between various ethnic Asian groups are broken down, the academic achievement gap between Hmong students and other Asian ethnic groups can be quite alarming. Studies have shown that Hmong students at all grade levels underachieve academically compared to students of East Asian origins (Lee and Madyun, 2008). On the 2008 California Standardized Test (CST), Japanese-American students from grades two to eleven scored an average of 386.6 on the English-Language Arts (ELA) portion and 396.1 on the math section with the highest possible score of 600. At the same time, Hmong students (reported under Laotian) state wide scored

334.7 in ELA and 337.2 in math (California STAR, 2008). Hmong students scored an average of 13% lower than their Japanese-American peers. Evidently, there is a wide academic achievement gap between Hmong students and other Asian-American students.

There are many factors contributing to the low academic performance of Hmong students. Due to the lack of specific studies related to Hmong students, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact problems attributable to Hmong students' inability to perform in school. The following are the few related studies and speculations that will shed some light on the issues concerning Hmong students and their academic achievement.

Although subordinating ethnic minorities generally do poorly in school, some groups perform better than others. Ogbu (1987) hypothesized that minority with immigrant status perform better in school than non-immigrant minorities. Hmong students are immigrants, yet they perform at a much lower level than their peers. Ogbu identified two primary adaptive categories voluntary and involuntary minorities in his explanation model of a minority school failure. The initial study from 1968 to 1970 consisted of his analysis of data from academic records of Blacks, Chinese, Filipino and Japanese students. This data indicated that the Chinese, Japanese and Filipino students achieved an academic level higher than their White counterparts, and the Black and Mexican American students were behind the dominant culture. Ogbu cited a similar variability pattern from an international perspective (Ogbu, 1978). He cited variability in patterns in Britain where the West Indian students performed academically at a far lower level in comparison to the East Asian students. In addition, he cited another

example in Ontario Canada, where French Canadian students do less well in school than Canadian-born children of immigrant minorities (Cummins, 1982). Ogbu cited another example in Japan where the Buraku underperform compared to the dominant Ippon group (Ito, 1967 and Shimahara, 1983). When the Buraku immigrated to the United States, however, they performed equally well compared to their Japanese immigrant counterparts. The researcher cited additional studies (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa, 1976; De Vos, 1983; Loo, Schneider and Werner, 1984) in summarizing his position. The immigrant minorities tend to perform better than the non-immigrants.

Davis (2009)¹, an African-American anthropologist at California State University at Sacramento, offers an alternative view in response to Ogbu's hypothesis. Davis was critical of the categories: voluntary and involuntary minorities. He proposed an alternative system of categories where migration was used as the primary criteria. Davis indicated that African-Americans could be categorized as members of a subordinate involuntary migrant population. In addition, Native Americans could be categorized as a "subordinate indigenous" population and Latinos assigned a bicultural adaptation of "voluntary migrants" and subordinate indigenous because of their ethnic roots and cultural ties to the Native American culture. The alternative categorization would identify the cultural groups as destined rather than grouping them into just two categories. Following this line of reasoning, I would propose that the Hmong people could be categorized similar to the African Americans, because their migration is involuntary. On the other hand, the Hmong population could be categorized as

¹ F. Davis (personal communication, October 15, 2009)

subordinate indigenous similar to the Native Americans. Therefore, the Hmong culture could be categorized as members of a subordinate indigenous involuntary migrant population which is unique in itself.

The alternative perspective offered by Davis categorizes Hmong immigrants as a subordinate involuntary migrant population. This categorization is based on the information I presented the historical background and economic conditions presented in the first section of this literature review. As involuntary immigrants, Hmong people could also be placed in the same category as African-Americans in that they brought to the United States involuntarily. Henceforth, there is a sense of resistance to education which is viewed as a one-way acculturation and assimilation into mainstream society (Ogbu, 1987). This may explain the lack of motivation to become academically competitive in school as demonstrated by many Hmong students.

Besides the resistance in acculturation, there is incongruence between the culture of the subordinate involuntary immigrants and that of mainstream society. Research findings conducted by Phillips (1989) indicate that the mode of classroom communication and classroom discourse was incongruent with Native American culture making it difficult for Native American students to do well in school (Phillips, 1989). Similarly, the traditional Western classroom discourse is incongruent with the Hmong culture, making it difficult for Hmong students to become academically successful.

There is an academic achievement gap between Hmong students and their peers. It is often cloaked by obscurity. The most logical drawbacks are traced to the nature of the students as indigenous subordinate immigrants whose culture is incongruent with the

culture of the U.S. educational system.

Building cultural capital to help students become academically successful

Every ethnic minority faces obstacles and barriers socially, academically, economically, and politically. Immigrants who are knowledgeable in their own cultural heritage, language and struggles with society are better equipped to overcome these obstacles and barriers to become more successful. Such people have the essential knowledge or cultural capital to succeed. As subordinate immigrants, Hmong students need to build cultural capital to become successful in the educational system and in life.

In order for students to advance educationally and economically, they have to adhere to certain sets of personal conducts considered to be higher class standards. As students' backgrounds are casted as unacceptable by the dominant culture, the student is forced to abolish his/her own ideals, and it causes great personal turmoil (Darder, Baltodano and Torres, 2009). As indigenous people who see education as the key to become successful in the United States, Hmong students have to learn the institutionalized rules and standards of the U.S. educational system. In the process, they lose their own language and cultural practices, because they are deemed unimportant (Withers, 2004). On the contrary, bilingual-multicultural educators contend that primary language and cultural identity are crucial to one's academic success. Therefore, Hmong students who do not have a good comprehension of their primary language and knowledge of their own cultural practices need to reconnect with their ethnic roots.

According bilingual education experts, the language and literacy skills bilingual

students acquire in their primary language aid in the second language acquisition (Kwon, 2006). English learners (ELs) use the knowledge they have in their primary language to help solve problems they have in the new language they are learning (Lightbown and Spada, 2008). English Learners, who are in language and literacy programs with a focus on their primary language, should develop English proficiency faster than those who are not in such programs. Researches have shown strong correlations between knowledge of primary language and high performance on standardized exam in English (Garcia-Vazquez, Vazquez, Lopez, and Ward, 1997). The development of literacy proficiency in English (second language) should help students to improve their academic performance on standardized exams.

There were many recommendations made by bilingual education experts to help struggling Hmong students to include cultural relevancy in their lesson plans. Recommendations included the incorporation of relevant instructional materials and Hmong-related literatures into the classroom (Timm, 1994). Relevant materials include Hmong literature, cultural activities or show and tell. Cultural sensitivity can also be incorporated into classroom instructions to make students feel more inclusive; thus, improving students academic performance.

Another recommendation is in the form of a handbook to help teach Hmong-speaking students. The Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students provides a brief discussion of all aspects of Hmong culture that is relevant to education. It provides anecdotal examples on how to work with Hmong students (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, and Yang, 1988). This adaptation by a school district is strong support for the building

of cultural capital to stimulate academic progress of Hmong students.

By acknowledging and re-affirming students' cultural values and identity, their self-esteem is elevated. As a result, they are more likely to stay focus and excel in school (Nieto, 1999). Thus, students participating in a strong heritage language program should develop enough cultural capital and self-confidence to motivate them to not only succeeds in grade school, but also to pursue dreams far beyond high school graduation.

There are existing charter schools with Hmong language and culture focus. In the St. Paul and Minneapolis metropolitan area, there are seven Hmong-focused charter schools serving the elementary level. These charter schools place a heavy emphasis on Hmong culture and language (Moua, 2008). Although, there has not been a strong correlation between these programs and academic achievement, the community response and parental support have been quite favorable. As long as academic achievement is measured with statistics, and statistically there is an achievement gap, these charter schools may not be providing sufficient structure and support to close the gap.

Many after school and summer programs have been implemented across the state of California specifically geared toward helping Hmong students excel academically. These programs include an alternative school called Academy for New Americans in Fresno, California. Another such program is a Hmong Summer school in Sacramento, California targeting Hmong elementary students in the less affluence South Sacramento area. These language programs and multicultural programs are designed to boost student self-esteem and academic achievement (Beane, 1991). Although these programs seem to have significantly increased the likelihood of Hmong students becoming more

successful academically, there have not been formal studies to probe their full potential or effectiveness.

At the university level, there are many courses on Hmong language and cultural. The California State Universities at Sacramento, Stanislaus and Fresno all have Hmong language courses. These are strong indications that Hmong language is gaining foothold in the educational system.

Studies have shown that primary language skills and cultural knowledge aide students in school. Recommendations were made and programs implements throughout California and the US. These developments are indications that building cultural capital and developing primary language literacy are important in helping students become more academically successful; therefore, closing the academic achievement gap.

The modification of classroom discourse to increase student academic performance

Classroom instruction has evolved to accommodate the various modalities of learning. In recent years, cooperative learning and group activities have become powerful tools for teachers. These classroom discourses are slight departures of the traditional methodology of teaching known as “recitation script” (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). Classroom discourse can be further modified to become compatible with our diverse student population.

Research studies have shown that classroom discourses that are compatible to the culture of students are more effective than conventional lessons (Wills, Lintz, and Mehan, H., 2003). When students are able to identify with the instructions employed by

their teacher, students connect with the lesson. Instructional language and students' home language compatibility make communication more effective, and so learning takes place. Piestrup (1973) observed African American first graders in Oakland, California perform better on standardized exams when their teacher used speech patterns that reflect the language style commonly used in the African American community. This suggests that when the language of instruction is modified so that it is compatible to that of the students, greater academic success is achieved.

The classroom discourse can be modified to become more culturally compatible to engage students. One of the ways to make such modification is to change the way communication is carried out inside a classroom to reflect that of the students at home. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) studied how Kamehameha (Hawaii) Early Education Program (KEEP) teachers draw students into their reading by having students tell their own stories and share their feelings and thoughts (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

Classroom discourse can be modified to be more compatible with the culture of Hmong students in a similar fashion. With the rich and turbulent past, Hmong students have lots of stories to share. After all, storytelling has been a long standing oral tradition of the Hmong people.

Another way to draw students into a discussion is for the teacher to make a special connection with the students. McCullum (1989) noted a Puerto Rican teacher who made that connection by modifying the way he prompted student responses to his questions. The teacher allowed students to volunteer in groups to answer questions. This is the way Puerto Rican families carry conversations at home, making the

communication compatible.

Recitation script lessons are teacher-centered instructions that create a competitive atmosphere that is highly interactive (Wills, Lintz, and Mehan, 2003). This can be problematic for students who are uncomfortable in such classroom atmosphere. Students who are very quiet, for example, would not function well. Students who are taught to do and share everything together at home are another group that would not do well with recitation script. So, classroom discourse can be modified to be more conducive to students who are not very verbal or competitive. John described Native Americans as quiet, passive and nonresponsive who needed each other's support (John, 1972). To be culturally compatible with non-competitive students, they should be encouraged to help each other and allowed to work together.

To further modified instruction to be more culturally compatible for quiet and passive students, teachers can use non-verbal communication techniques. Studies show that some students perform better when teachers use nonverbal instruction (Wills, Lintz, and Mehan, 2003). Gestures and body language provide cues that students may be used to when they are at home. Students may also learn better by seeing demonstrations and hands-on activities rather than verbal instruction (More, 1989). A modification of the classroom discourse to incorporate non-verbal instruction is one way to connect with students and help them learn; thus improve their academic performance.

Foster and Peele (2001) described how first grade teacher, Vivette Blackwell, was able to make her lessons culturally compatible with her African-American students by verbalizing her thought process. By sharing her every thought on her decision making

process verbally, the students followed her every move and were able to connect with her lesson. This connection proved to aide the learning process. Blackwell's behavior can be said to have exhibit a cultural compatibility with her students. Again, oral communication is an effective tool for Hmong students.

In the "Handbook for Teaching Hmong-Speaking Students," by Bliatout, Downing, Lewis and Yang stated that Hmong students are used to structured tasks and lots of hands on practices (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis and Yang, 1988). To make classroom discourse culturally compatible for Hmong students, demonstrations and repeated practices should be considered when modifying classroom discourse.

Schultz (2008) described his classroom situation in a Chicago's Cabrini Green neighborhood school to be helpless. The students could not learn because there were so many problems with the physical structure of the school. He modified his classroom discourse from recitation script to advocacy where he called the students to action. In the process of advocating for changes to improve the school, Schultz was able to teach his students every subject in the book. Schultz's modification was a desperate move, but none the less, a modification of the classroom discourse that was socioeconomically compatible to the students.

A modification of classroom discourse can be as subtle as allowing students to discuss answers or as drastic as verbalizing the teacher's decision making process. In the end, however, when the instructions are compatible with language, cultural, and socioeconomic norms of the students, the result can be phenomenal.

Summary

Hmong students come from families that are disadvantaged culturally, educationally and economically. They lack academic support and educational guidance, because their parents lack the means. As such, there is an academic achievement gap between Hmong students and their peers. This academic achievement gap has been addressed over the years. Some of those include recommendations for changes in curriculum and instruction. Primary language instructions have also been implemented. All of these were attempts to improve Hmong students' academic achievement to close the academic achievement gap.

Studies have shown that primary language development and building cultural capital helps students to become more successful in school. A modification of the classroom discourse has been observed to have great impacts on student participation and academic achievement. A modification of classroom instructions and lessons to mirror students' communication styles, cultural congruency, and socioeconomic background become compatible with students. Such modifications connect well with students. The results are greater student academic achievement.

Primary language proficiency, cultural capital building, and classroom modification are the foundation of the Hmong heritage language program at Lucky Banks High School. The effectiveness of this language program is the object of this research study. In chapter three, the methodology used in this study will be discussed and collected data will be presented.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the impact the Hmong heritage language program has on Hmong students at Lucky Banks High School (LBHS). In this chapter, the research design, setting, participants and data collection and analysis will be discussed. The methodology used in this study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection. Data were organized and calculations done by Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Analyses and graphs are generated manually on Microsoft Excel charts.

Research Design

This research study is a comparative study between students with similar background and educational potential who have taken different number of years of Hmong language classes. This study is both cross-sectional and longitudinal. Student academic achievements are compared for three consecutive years. Their academic records are also compared based on the varying levels of Hmong classes they have taken. To get a holistic perspective on the effectiveness of the program, both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected and analyzed. Thus, the methodology used in this study is divided into two sections. The first section is a quantitative analysis of student academic records. The second part is a written survey of the students. Both qualitative and quantitative data collected will be analyzed for academic growth and cultural competency. A comparison of growth between the various groups of students will be used to determine the effect the heritage language program at LBHS has on

participating students.

A quantitative analysis of student academic records

The quantitative analysis in this research is to determine the differences in academic and educational progresses between Hmong students who have taken various numbers of Hmong heritage language classes and those who do not. The transcripts of all members of the class of 2010 who are identified as Hmong students will be printed. Hmong students normally have the surnames Cha, Chang, Fang, Hang, Her, Heu, Khang, Kue, Lee, Moua, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang.

Students whose first semester grade point averages (GPA) in their freshman year are between 1.0 and 3.0 are to be selected for further consideration for this study. Of the selected transcripts, those indicating that the students are transferred students also get thrown out for only students who have been at LBHS continuously since the ninth grade are considered. The last step of the selection process of participants is to purge transcripts indicating that the students are in English Language Development courses and mainstreamed special education students. The names of the remaining transcripts are inked over with a black marker.

The selected transcripts are separated into four groups based on the number of Hmong language courses taken. The first group is the control group in which students do not take any Hmong language courses. The rest are grouped into one year, two years and three years of Hmong language classes taken. In each group, individual transcripts are analyzed and grade point averages for each semester are recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Students California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) scores and

California Standardized Test (CST) scores are also recorded.

The GPA and standardized test scores are averaged out for each group of students. These averages are plotted on Microsoft Excel graphs and the graphs are analyzed for trends and patterns of academic variations between the groups. In terms of academic growth, the grade point average will be the primary indicator of student progress, but standardized test scores will also be an important component of the evaluation.

A qualitative analysis of students' personal growth

The qualitative data are collected with a Hmong student survey. The survey is a set of questionnaire probing students for their self-confidence being Hmong, their willingness to associate with Hmong people in general. Copies of the survey are given to Hmong seniors at random. The survey contains a question that will allow me to separate them into four groups. The four groups are those who have never taken a Hmong class, and those who have taken one, two, three or four Hmong level classes. Level four or Hmong 4 means students are currently taking a Hmong heritage language course that is in level four. Lower levels may be students who have completed that level or are currently taking that class. For example, a student who indicates on the survey that he or she has taken Hmong 1 may be a student who has completed Hmong 1 in a previous year. It may also be that such student is taking Hmong 1 during the time of the survey which means the student has only completed one quarter of the course rather than one whole year of the class.

It is crucial for participants to remain anonymous, so they would answer the

questions honestly. As such, personal information is not gathered. The survey may be completed by many of the same students whose academic records have been selected for analysis, but some students who complete this survey will not be the same students. Thus the qualitative data is a reflection of all Hmong seniors at LBHS in general.

This survey is designed to probe participants for their level of comfort they have concerning the Hmong culture or students' own cultural capital. It also inquires about their personal feelings about their primary language, culture and ethnicity. Other questions ask about students' level of confidence in the language in reading, writing and speaking. The survey requires participants to evaluate themselves and circle the appropriate answer. Printed on one side of the survey are questions in English. On the other side is the same survey printed in Hmong. The Hmong version is intended to gauge participants on their literacy skill and confidence in the Hmong language.

The survey are not going to be conducted by the researcher, for many of the students are his former students where his presence might sway the participants' answers one way or another. The survey is administered to students by their teachers. When completed, the teachers will collect them and turn them in to the researcher. Below is a copy of the survey as it was given to participants to complete.

The survey results will be analyzed for students' perspective on how their participation or lack there of may have influenced their ability to become academically competitive, build cultural capital and gain self-confidence as they navigate through high school and beyond. Students' answers will be analyzed and compared. A correlation between academic success and student responses will be drawn.

Setting

Lucky Banks High School is situated in the heart of a city that is geographically centralized in a metropolitan area with more than a million people. The surrounding community is home to some of the poorest of residents in the region, because people who have made stride in the economic ladder have moved out to the surrounding suburbs. A high percentage of the students come from the poor and crime stricken neighborhoods where street gang activities are common. The vast majority of the students come from economically disadvantaged families. LBHS is a title I school, where at least 40% the school student population receive public assistance. Large businesses in the surrounding neighborhood include a run-down strip mall where the anchored department stores and supermarkets are mostly vacant. Across the streets from LBHS are several auto dealers, some of which went out of business due to the sour economy.

According to California Department of Education statistics, the student demographics in 2007-2008 are 42% Asian, 27% Hispanics or Latinos, 20% African Americans, 5% Whites, 4% Pacific Islanders, 1% Filipinos, and 1% others. All the Asians are lumped together, but the majority of the Asian student population is Hmong. In fact, Hmong students make up about 30% of the total population. Nearly 50% of the English learners are Hmong.

Lucky Banks High School was treading through very tough waters in the late 1990's. Student behavior infractions were exceedingly frequent. In the 1997-1998 school year, for example, there were a total of 633 suspensions (School Report Card,

1999). As a LBHS science teacher on the second floor with a vantage view of the quad area, I remember seeing students running in waves to see fights perhaps once every few days during that same year. The student dropout rates were quite high as illustrated by approximately 11% overall during the 1998-1999 school year (School Report Card, 1999). The overall Aptitude Performance Index (API) in 1999 was a dismal 463 (School Report Card, 2000). The school was one of the worse school in the region as it was placed on program improvement (PI) by the California Department of Education starting with the school year of 1999-2000, because it did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act (School Report Card, 2003). Program improvement is when a school is required by the state department of education to make significant changes to improve student academic performance and meet all AYPs in five years or run the risk of being taken over by the state. Essentially, LBHS was on its way to be taken over by the state.

For the next several years, Lucky Banks High School went through a lot of changes. Some of the changes included a nearly complete turn-over of administrators and teachers, different course offerings, and conversion into schools within a school called small learning communities. The small learning communities concept is describe in the school accountabilities report as:

[A] campus that “houses” 8 thematic small learning communities. These Small Learning Communities, where students are placed in small groups of approximately 325 and share the same “core” teachers, as well as a geographical area of the school site itself, allows for a more personalized instructional experience. In addition to

more personalized instruction, the themes of the small learning communities allows the campus to better connect to the community at large, making instruction more relevant to students as they see, and experience, how curriculum translates to the world beyond our walls (School Report Card, 2003).

As new teachers and administrators came in with new strategies and ideas, a Hmong foreign language teacher, with the pseudonym Mr. Vong, experimented with a Hmong language course offering 2001 of 35 students. The course was approved by the district as a foreign language course that met district high school graduation and college entrance requirements starting in the 2002-2003 school year. Mr. Vong's primary goal of the course was to develop reading, writing, and speaking skills in Hmong. This course grew into a series of level courses. The Hmong heritage language program was developed as a result of the freedom small learning communities afford teachers to create and teach courses that they want. The SLC and language program evolved together and the language classes become global meaning they serve all the SLCs.

As part of the effort to improve students' performance, the district that oversees LBHS commissioned a team of Hmong, Mien and Lao educators to make recommendations for "Closing the Achievement Gap of Hmong, Mien, and Lao Students" during the 2003-2004 school year. Among the many recommendations the committee made was to bring Hmong literacy to Hmong students (Vang, 2004). As a result, many after school Hmong language programs were instituted at the elementary level in the district to help Hmong students learn their primary language in the hope of improving English language acquisition. Greater administrative and district support was

provided to Mr. Vong's Hmong language program that was already in place at Lucky Banks High School.

All these changes turned LBHS around very quickly. In fact the improvement was so drastic, while other high schools in the district converted to charter school in fear of being taken by the state, LBHS started to meet its AYPs. Students at LBHS improved in other respects as well. The dropout rate came down to 3% in 2004-2005 and 1% in 2005-2006. The overall API for the school climbed to 594 in 2006 (School Report Card, 2006). These were significant improvements overall. By 2007, LBHS met all its AYPs and was taken off the program improvement list for the following school year (School Report Card, 2007).

Academic performance for Hmong students shows a similar trend, but with greater vigor. In that Hmong students' API in 1999 was significantly lower than in 2008. The academic performance index (API) for all Asians (where Hmong students are included) was 484 in 1999 (School Report Card, 2000). In 2008, the API for all Asians rose to 662 (School Report Card, 2009), the highest among all subgroups broken down by ethnicity. It is important to point out that although Hmong students are lumped with all other Asians, the assumption here is that with Hmong students constitute the majority of Asian students, so, if they did not improve their academic performances significantly, they would have kept the API for all Asian students low.

Surveys will be conducted on site. Students are to complete the survey inside the classrooms where they have been attending classes. The advantage of the selected setting is that it is a neutral setting where the students are accustomed to and so they will

not feel threatened, and yet they will not feel at home to skew their answers.

Participants

The participants in this research study are fourth year high school seniors at LBHS. All participants are randomly selected on the basis of academic standing and family background. Their transcripts are printed by the school registrar. The same students may or may not be the same ones who complete the written survey.

For the quantitative analysis part of the study, students are selected based on their academic standing and potential when they entered the ninth grade. The targeted students are Hmong students who have a first semester average GPA of 1.0 to 3.0. They must be English proficient or reclassified English Learners (ELs) upon entering high school. The participants are divided into four groups. The control group and four experimental groups based on numbers of Hmong classes taken. The control group is made of students who have not taken any of the Hmong heritage language classes, therefore, not influenced by the language program. The experimental groups are students who have taken any where from one to three years of Hmong heritage language classes.

The qualitative analysis portion of the study target Hmong senior students in general. Participants are categorized into five groups ranging from those who have not taken any Hmong classes to those who have taken four levels of Hmong language classes. Members of the four experimental groups may have taken the classes already or they may be currently taking their highest level of the series at the time of the survey.

Survey questions are given randomly to Hmong high school seniors at Lucky Banks High School through their teachers. The participants cannot be identified, but their answers reveal the number of years of participation in the Hmong heritage language program. This information about the participants allows the researcher to compare the qualitative data with the quantitative data. The survey does not, however, discriminate against the top and bottom tier of academic achievers because students' GPAs were not obtained for the qualitative analysis part.

Overall, the participants are selected randomly at first by a search of their academic record and then by their teachers. All students selected for this study are Hmong seniors who have continuously attended LBHS since the ninth grade.

Data Collection

All Hmong senior students at Lucky Banks High School whose first semester grade point average are between 1.0 and 3.0 were selected and their transcripts printed. Transcripts that reveal English developments classes, Special Education courses and transferred grades from another school were purged. Student names were smeared beyond recognition, and artificial numbers were assigned to their records. Tables 1 thru 4 below show the semester grade point averages from freshman through junior year. Data are entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and average GPA calculations were done by excel functions. Again, all mainstream students within the specified GPA range who have continuously attended LBHS since freshman year are being considered in this part of the study. No qualified participants were left out of this study

intentionally. The first table (Table 3.1) contains the semester GPA of students who have not taken any Hmong heritage language classes. These are the information for the control group.

Table 3.1: Semester GPA of Students without Any Hmong Language.

Student Number	Freshman GPA		Sophomore GPA		Junior GPA	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2
15224	2.83	2.33	3.25	3.25	3.00	3.00
10988	3.00	1.00	1.00	3.60	3.50	3.14
10236	1.33	2.80	1.60	2.60	2.20	2.60
12972	2.33	2.16	2.50	1.83	2.57	2.71
10212	2.83	3.66	3.66	3.50	2.83	3.16
13243	2.80	2.40	2.80	2.20	3.00	3.33
13944	3.00	3.00	3.16	3.33	2.50	3.33
14888	2.40	2.00	1.60	2.33	2.00	2.00
Average	2.57	2.42	2.45	2.83	2.70	2.91

In the next data table (Table 3.2), the grade point average for all students who are Hmong seniors that have taken one year of Hmong heritage language classes during the first three years of high school.

Table 3.2: Semester GPA of Students with One Year of Hmong Language.

Student Number	Freshman GPA		Sophomore GPA		Junior GPA	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Number	Semester 1	Semester 2
19100	2.40	3.40	3.21	3.50	3.33	3.66
11898	1.00	0.00	1.60	1.50	2.80	2.30
12130	2.50	1.83	1.20	0.80	2.00	2.60
10042	1.75	1.80	1.00	0.80	1.33	2.40
13149	2.40	2.00	2.20	2.80	2.85	2.71
19133	3.00	3.60	2.20	1.20	2.71	2.57
12923	1.33	1.20	2.20	1.50	1.60	2.00
Average	2.05	1.98	1.94	1.73	2.37	2.61

Table 3.3 is information for students who have taken two years of Hmong classes.

Table 3.3: Semester GPA of Students with Two Years of Hmong Language.

Student Number	Freshman GPA		Sophomore GPA		Junior GPA	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Number	Semester 1	Semester 2
14303	2.20	2.00	2.20	2.80	1.83	2.00
11826	2.40	2.60	3.40	3.40	3.83	3.66
17217	2.83	3.67	2.40	2.00	2.40	2.60
10573	2.40	2.80	2.28	3.33	3.14	3.33
Average	2.46	2.77	2.57	2.88	2.80	2.90

Table 3.4 is the grade point average for all semesters throughout the first three years of LBHS Hmong students who have completed three levels of Hmong courses. These are students who have taken Hmong classes continuously throughout the first three years of their high school career. Some of these students are currently taking Hmong 4 which is the highest level of Hmong heritage language class being offered at LBHS.

Table 3.4: Semester GPA of Students with Three Years of Hmong Language.

Student Number	Freshman GPA		Sophomore GPA		Junior GPA	
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Number	Semester 1	Semester 2
18285	2.40	2.80	3.71	3.71	3.28	3.71
13197	2.20	1.80	2.67	3.29	2.33	1.86
18431	3.00	3.33	3.50	3.17	3.00	3.43
19068	2.80	3.00	2.80	3.00	2.33	3.16
17365	2.71	3.00	3.00	2.83	3.00	3.16
Average	2.62	2.79	3.14	3.20	2.79	3.06

The average GPA of each group of students for every semester is calculated.

The Hmong student surveys (see actual survey questions in section 2 of research methodology) were given to teachers to pass out to Hmong senior students. Because students were kept anonymous, they were not able to be linked to the same students whose academic records were used in the quantitative analysis part. The survey,

however, tracked students into five categories as follows:

1. Students who have not taken any Hmong classes.
2. Students who have taken or is taking Hmong 1.
3. Students who have taken or currently taking a level two class.
4. Students who have taken or are currently taking a level three class.
5. Students who are taking Hmong 4.

The majority of the Hmong senior students are those who are currently taking Hmong 3. These students have completed at least two lower level classes. Surveys were given to students to complete in the absence of the researcher. After completion, the surveys were collected by the administering teachers and turned in to the researcher. When all surveys were returned, the answers were manually tallied and entered into a data table Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. The following table (Table 4) shows some of the tallied answers from the survey.

Table 3.5: LBHS Hmong Senior Student Survey Results.

	Group w/0 H. Classes	Group w/1 H. Class	Group w/2 H. Classes	Group w/3 H. Classes	Group w/4 H. Classes
My parents/guardians speak Hmong at home.	100%	86%	94%	93%	79%
I feel comfortable talking with elders in Hmong.	30%	34%	67%	53%	62%
I feel most comfortable speaking Hmong.	19%	29%	50%	58%	44%
I talk with my friends in Hmong.	23%	17%	44%	63%	85%
In my next life, I want to be born as Hmong.	85%	50%	75%	60%	38%
I will be attending college 2 years from now.	67%	78%	88%	75%	94%
I want to work with Hmong people in the future.	46%	33%	63%	53%	15%
I want my children to speak/read/write Hmong.	85%	67%	80%	93%	75%

Other responses are tallied but the answers were not distinctive enough to form a pattern and trend.

Summary

This research study employs both quantitative data and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitatively, student academic records were printed and GPA and standardized test scores were extracted. These data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. For the qualitative data, a survey was conducted. Students answers were tallies and the resulting data were analyzed. Analyses of the data indicated that students who participated in the heritage language program at Lucky Banks High School demonstrated greater academic and educational progress. The qualitative analysis showed that students have built greater cultural capital and self-confidence than their peers who have not participated in the Hmong heritage language program. In essence, students who participated in the Hmong heritage language program at LBHS have achieved greater academic and personal progress than their peers.

In chapter 4, the results of the data will be discussed. These results will be used to draw correlations between student level of participation in the Hmong heritage language program and academic progress.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

A preliminary analysis of the academic record of Hmong students at Lucky Banks High School suggests that the Hmong heritage language program has positively impacted the middle tier students who continuously participate in the program. The group average GPA, California Standardized Tests, and survey all lead to the conclusion that the Hmong heritage language program helps students to achieve greater academic success in school.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data are entered manually into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The qualitative data are tallied manually and entered into a similar chart by the researcher. These data will be evaluated for congruency and a combined formulation of a conclusion as to whether or not students who participate in the Hmong heritage language program at LBHS have greater academic and educational success than their peers who do not participate in the program.

From the data collected on student academic records, the information is charted and graphed. All four groups of students are as follows:

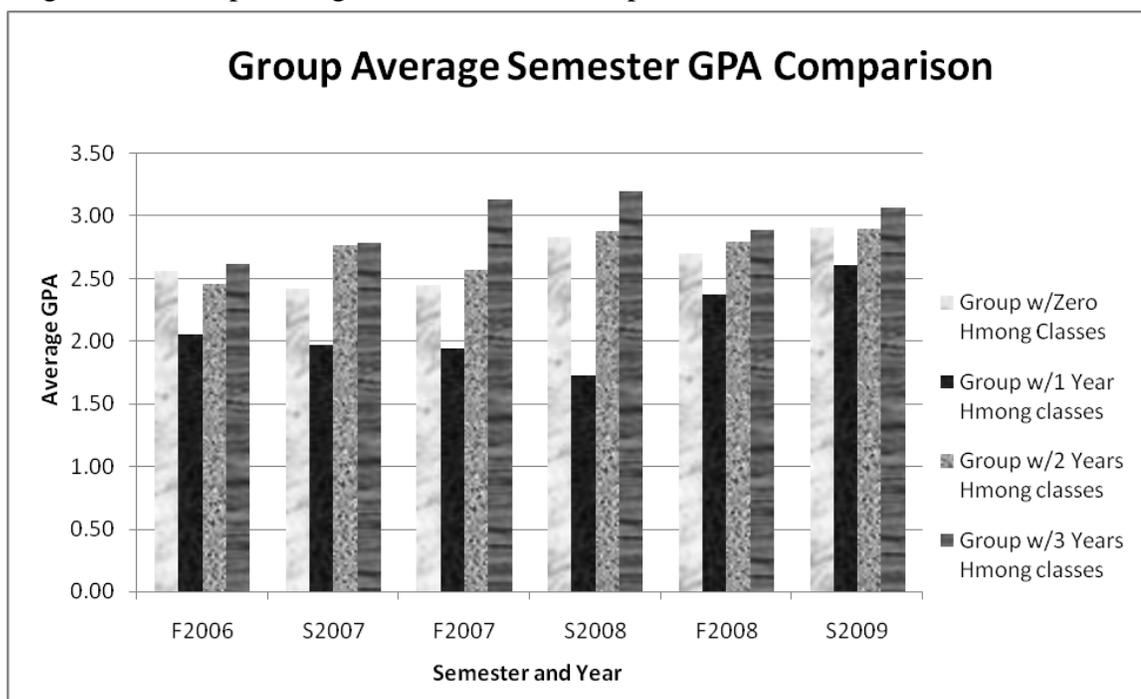
1. The control group or students who have not taken any Hmong classes.
2. The group of students who have taken one year of Hmong heritage language classes.
3. Students who have taken two years of Hmong heritage language classes

sequentially.

4. Participants who have taken Hmong classes continuously for three years, completing the first three levels of Hmong heritage language classes in the series.

The average GPAs for all groups are plotted on Microsoft Excel bar graphs. The resulting graph is in Figure 4.1. In this graph, the average GPAs for all four groups are plotted side-by-side. Similar graphs are plotted for all six semesters.

Figure 4.1: Group Average Semester GPA Comparison.



Overall, the average group GPA progressions for all groups similar except for the group with only one year of the Hmong heritage language classes. Their average GPA consistently dropped for the first four semesters. In their junior year, however, these students improve their average GPA dramatically while all other groups drop their average GPAs. In fact, their GPAs almost caught up with the other groups by the

second semester of their junior year. A close inspection of the transcripts of the students revealed that six of the seven students in this group took Hmong 1 in their junior year. The other took it in the freshman year. It is possible to suggest that the Hmong heritage language class has helped students to improve their academic performance.

Is it possible that these students have earned an easy “A” in the Hmong language course during their junior year to increase their GPAs? To answer this question, a close inspection of the students’ individual grades reveals that such is not the case. In Table 4.1, except for one student, all the students earned grades that are consistently lower than the average GPA for both semesters. This means the grades in Hmong classes actually dragged their grades down. So, these students must have done better in other classes to have increased their GPAs. Another reason may be that this group of students were taking easier classes with other teachers who helped to turn their grades around.

Again, a close look at the courses the students took reveals that the only class they all have in common was the Hmong heritage language class which was taught by the same teacher, Mr. Chu². Other classes ranged from art to chemistry. There were no easy A’s. Whether or not heritage language helped students turn

Table 4.1: 2008-09 Semester Grades.

Student Number	Hmong 1 Semester Grades	
	Fall 2008	Spring 2009
19100	B	B
11898	C	C
12130	D	D
10042	D	D
13149	N/A	N/A
19133	C	C
12923	C	C

their grades around is inconclusive, but the fact that their grades have improved and they were taking Hmong heritage language classes is a promising correlation.

² Pseudonym is used to maintain anonymity.

A comparison of the group average GPAs between those who have not taken Hmong classes and those who have done so every semester shows an interesting trend. Both groups started off with nearly equal footing. However, the first group, the group not taking Hmong heritage language classes, trailed off and then picked up again, but they were never able to catch up with the latter group. The latter group, students with the most Hmong classes, continually maintained the highest average group GPA throughout the studied period.

Another interesting set of data is offered by the group of students who have taken two classes of Hmong heritage language. These students were able to consistently increase their group average GPA from first semester to second semester each and every year. From year to year, however, their group average GPA remains stable with very little upward or downward trends. Not surprisingly, two students took Hmong 1 and Hmong 2 sequentially in their freshman and sophomore years where the other two students took the same sequence in their sophomore and junior years.

Standardized test scores on the California Standardized Test (CST) were recorded and analyzed. Only test scores for the 10th and 11th grades are available. The scores were separated into the same four groups as in the analysis on GPA. The scores are organized on an Excel spreadsheet and the group averages were calculated. There are no stark contrasts or trends as it is illustrated in Figures 4.2 and 4.3. The most noticeable trend is the narrower gap between the average scores in the 10th and 11th grades in both ELA and math CST tests for students who have taken three years of Hmong heritage language classes as compared to those of any other group.

Figure 4.2: Group Average CST ELA Scores Comparison.

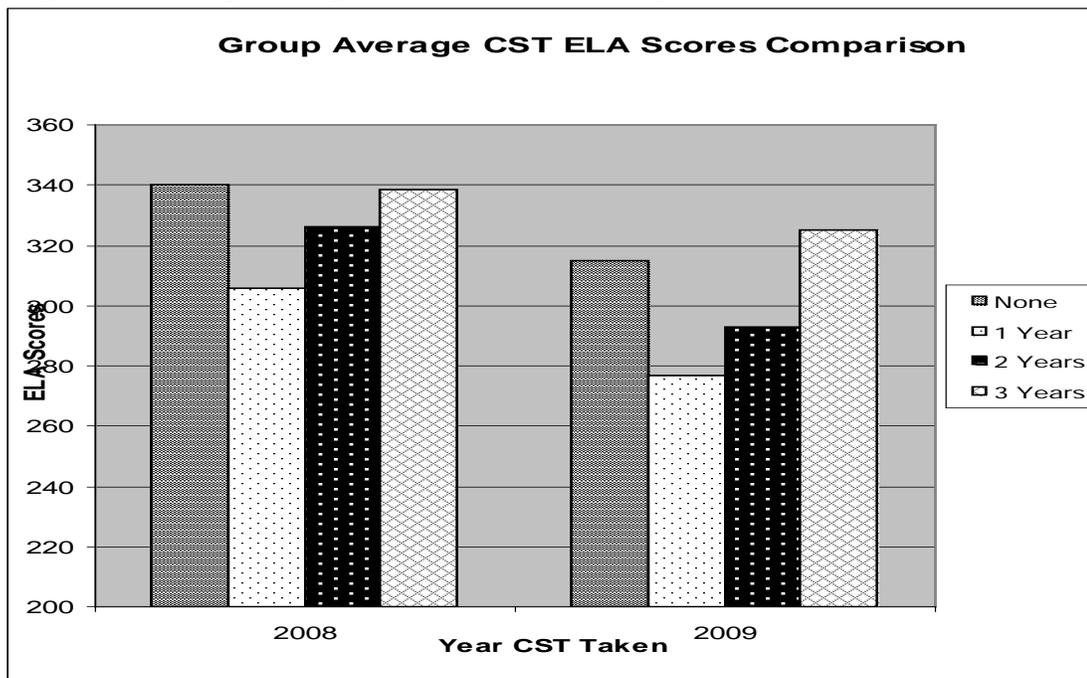
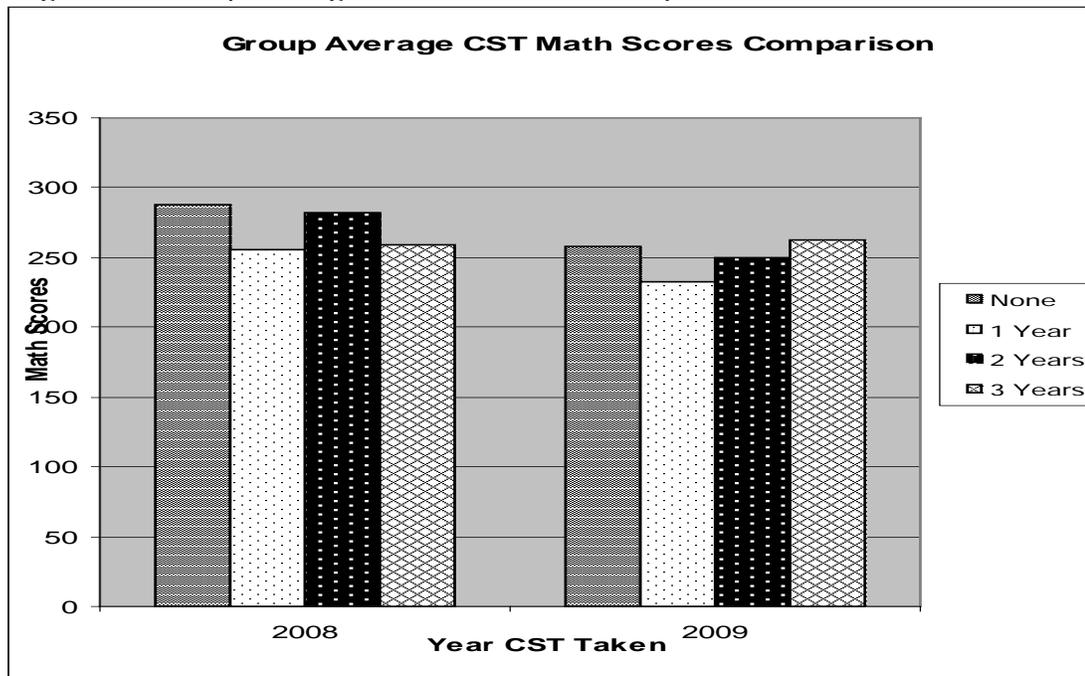


Figure 4.3: Group Average CST Math Scores Comparison.



In fact, the average CST math score for this group improves while the average CST score consistently drop from the sophomore year to the junior year for all other groups. The correlation between the number of years students participate in the heritage language program and their unwavering academic improvement is a probable indication that the program has helped students improve their academic performance on standardized tests.

The California High School Exit Exam scores for all participants have also been analyzed. Nearly all students passed this test. Some passed in their sophomore year and others in the junior year. The score distribution is wide and inconsistent. As such no correlation can be drawn with this component of the students' academic record.

Qualitative analysis

For the qualitative data, the survey was completed and the data were charted. From the data table, there are some clear distinctive patterns.

The majority of High school Hmong seniors surveyed where taking either Hmong 2 or Hmong 3. Thirteen students were taking Hmong 4. A total of 30 participants were taking Hmong three or have completed three years of Hmong heritage language classes at the time of the survey. Sixteen of the participants were taking Hmong 2 or have taken two years of Hmong language classes. Six were taking Hmong 1 or have taken one year of Hmong language classes. Thirteen have neither taken any Hmong classes nor were they taking one. The survey results are tallied and recorded in table 3.5 in chapter 3.

In terms of knowledge of the culture and self-confidence about Hmong culture, the students who did not take any Hmong classes showed an incoherent pattern of answers. Students who have taken 2 or 3 years of Hmong classes showed more favorable answers toward Hmong language and culture. These two latter groups of students have also shown greater confidence in the ability to use the Hmong version of the survey with more than one-third of them completing the Hmong version of the survey rather than the English version. Almost all students who have not taken any Hmong language classes completed the English version. Twice as many of the Hmong heritage language students indicated that they were planning to attend a university compared to those who did not a Hmong heritage language class. The students who did not take Hmong classes were nearly equally distributed between working, trade school, community college and university.

The most surprising result of the data is that 85% students who have not taken any Hmong classes indicated that they want to be reincarnated as Hmong whereas only 38% of the ones with the most Hmong heritage education want the same fate. This is ironic, because one would expect students who have build cultural capital and develop fluency in their primary language culture would have more pride being who they are. Henceforth, they are more likely to want to reincarnate into their own ethnicity again, but that is not the case.

The only gauge in academic progress in this survey is on higher education. Those who did not take Hmong classes revealed that only 67% of them see themselves in college two years from the time of the survey and 94% of those who are in level 4

Hmong plan to attend college. It is also important to point out that the percentage of students who plan to go to college fall between these two groups. The fact that nearly all students who have taken four levels of Hmong plan to go to college, it is quite significant

For the control group, 100% of their parents and guardians speak Hmong at home. That means, whether or not the participants speak Hmong at home, they are exposed to the language on a regular basis. Thirty percent of them feel comfortable talking to elders in Hmong, and only 19% said they feel comfortable speaking Hmong. In group 5 where students are taking level 4 Hmong, 79% of their parents speak Hmong at home, yet 62% of them feel comfortable talking to elders in Hmong, and 44% feel comfortable speaking Hmong. With less exposure at home, and more confidence in their native language probably means students who have taken four years of Hmong heritage language classes must have increased their level of confidence in their cultural language.

Students who have taken more Hmong classes also indicate that more of them talk to their friends in Hmong than those who did not take any Hmong classes. Talking to parents and elders can be because they don't speak English so students have to talk to them in Hmong. When they communicate with their peers, who undoubtedly speak English, this is cutting into their comfort zone and their self-confidence. This, then, is proof that students who have taken multiple levels of Hmong heritage language classes have gained the confidence to communicate in the targeted language.

Summary

Overall, a thorough analysis of the gathered data both quantitatively and qualitatively indicates that students who have been taking Hmong heritage language classes tend to exhibit greater academic success and personal growth. The latter group has more confidence in themselves, their primary language skills and a motivation to pursue a higher education. Thus, students who take multiple levels of Hmong heritage language classes are more likely to narrow the academic achievement gap between Hmong students and their mainstream counterparts.

Both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate a strong correlation between academic and personal growths by students who participate in the Hmong heritage language program at LBHS. Henceforth, the language program has helped Hmong students who took the classes become more successful in mainstream education and build enough self-confidence to utilize their primary language. They also have a more favorable outlook toward their own cultural heritage. It can be concluded that whether it is the development of language competency and language skills in their primary language or the accumulation of cultural capital that leads students to achieve greater academic success, the language program at LBHS has have a positive impact on the students' academic achievement – thus, moves them one step closer to closing the academic achievement gap.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this research study is to determine the effectiveness of the Hmong heritage language program at Lucky Banks High School. In this study, it was discovered that students who participated in the program have consistently demonstrated an improvement in academic performance in their classes overall by improving their semester grade point averages. Student participants have also shown a slight advantage in scoring higher on standardized tests. Although the gains made by these students were not drastic, they were consistent and the improvements were noticeable.

There are many aspects of the program not being probed in this study. This can be grounds for further investigations in the future. Another interesting possible research study that will be beneficial would be to extend the academic records analysis through students' senior year. Invaluable information may also be obtained through interviews with the students. Another possible study is to focus on the top tier Hmong students to see if there are differences between those who do not participate in the program and those who do. These are recommendations for further study.

The modification of classroom discourse implemented in the Hmong heritage language program was not probed in this research study. It is, however, these modifications that made the program different from other existing language programs. What main culprit that helped to improved student academic and personal growth was not identified in this research either. For whatever that helped students to achieve greater academic success and build greater cultural capital ca be determined thru

additional research studies in the future.

Research studies, as indicated in the literature review, suggest that literacy skills and classroom discourse modification are instrumental in helping to improve students' academic success. To suggest that the literacy skills students developed through participation in the Hmong language program is rather premature, because as a teacher in the program, I can testify to the fact that the language development component of the classes is evident, but the language skills is quite compatible to those students would ordinarily gain in regular English classes. This is not to totally dismiss the idea that literacy skills are not being developed in this program by any means.

In regards to the modification in classroom discourse, there are numerous discourses that deviate from the regular classroom. Some of the modifications employed in the heritage language courses include cooperative learning, debates, class discussions, oral presentations, language coat-switching, literacy skills and projects that involve personal talent. These are just some of the changes I, the teacher-researcher, and my colleague, Mr. Vong, have made to our classroom discourse over the years.

Cooperate learning has been an integral part of classroom instructions and activities. The reason cooperative learning is a heavy emphasis is because Hmong students grow up in a fairly competitive world with strong personal success convictions. Furthermore, there is a great cultural disparity between the sexes which makes students uncomfortable in today's cooperative society. Furthermore, some Hmong students are generally quiet and shy. Individuals who are surrounded by peers of the opposite sex in close proximity would have high anxiety. By making students sit four to table with both genders and

their grades totally dependent on cooperative effort, students don't have a choice but to learn to cooperate. They also learn to contribute to the group and to value each other's contribution. Furthermore, students who are reluctant to contribute are encouraged, if not forced, to become active participants over time. From the students' perspective, it is uncomfortable at first for some, but eventually students learn that group work is fun.

The main goal of the program is Hmong literacy. To achieve this goal, students have to learn to read, write and speak with good comprehension. Regular comprehension check at random usually warrants coat-switching and sometimes literal translation between Hmong and English, so it has become standard practice. This also makes for repetitive in instructions giving students more time to learn knowing most Hmong students would not ask for clarification when they don't understand.

Having literacy skills and being able to demonstrate literacy skills are different things. Too often, Hmong students know the answers to questions, but they are not able to express it so the answer comes out wrong either verbally or in writing. Hmong students seem to have a hard time addressing questions succinctly and directly. They tend to go round and round with the answer. Part of the classroom discourse modification in the Hmong heritage language program is to train students to answer questions with brief and succinct statements. In addition, higher level thinking questions such as inference and application are built into the curriculum. The important point here is that these skills are not expected, they are developed in the discourse.

More often than not, teachers emphasize what students don't know and try to make them learn. In the language program, students are given a variety of tasks or projects to

explore students' talents and interests. These tasks' primary focus is on Hmong language development through students' gifted talent and interests. These tasks include music, singing, sewing, drawing, cooking, storytelling, creative writing, artistic performance, etc. These assignments bring out the best in students. Students learned to admire each other and value their differences. Most importantly, students learn to utilize their talents to help them learn and build on what they have.

The lessons that generated the most positive responses from students are when I took advantage of those “teachable moments.” On numerous occasions throughout the year, one question will trigger a line of questions that last through the whole period. I often take advantage of those teachable moments and generate lengthy class discussions. To illustrate this point, let us take a student who has a question about being a bridesmaid, a role many Hmong girls have the privilege of playing. Though I usually have an answer, I don't offer the answer directly. I would post a question to the class to see if another student has taken on such a role or is familiar with the concept. Whether or not a student has the expertise, there are usually multiple feedbacks. At that point the discussion is on. Students seem to learn about Hmong culture the most from these discussions. The most effective aspect of such discussion is the build up of interest and anticipation throughout the discussion which climax with the objective final words courtesy of the expert students or the teacher. Like Jerry Springer, I always have the final word. This is not only rewarding from the teacher's perspective, but it offers a great learning experience for students.

When students learn from their peers and older siblings about these modifications in

classroom discourse in the Hmong heritage language program, they walk into the class knowing what to expect. Many students entered the classroom excited where others came in with anxiety. In the end, students walk out of the classroom with an academic foundation they can build on and enough cultural capital to navigate through the realms of education and society successfully.

APPENDIX A

English Version of the Survey

Hmong Student Survey

In the following questions, rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least applicable and five being most applicable to you. Circle the number that is most applicable to you.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I feel comfortable talking with elders in Hmong.					
2. I like to live where there are a lot of Hmong people.					
3. I help out at family gatherings and religious ceremonies.					
4. When I grow up, I want to work with Hmong people.					
5. I love listening to Hmong music and Hmong songs.					
6. I understand Hmong chants and folksongs.					
7. I see myself practicing Hmong rituals in the future.					
8. I talk with my friends in Hmong.					
9. I want my children to speak, read and write Hmong.					
10. In my next life, I would want to be born as Hmong.					

Please circle the answer that best applies to you.

11. Where were you born? Laos Thailand US other _____

If you were born outside of the US, how long have you been in America? _____

12. What do you see yourself doing 2 years from now?

working trade school community college university other _____

13. What do you usually identify your ethnicity as?

Hmong American Thai Lao other _____

14. Which language do your parents/guardians speak at your house most often?

Hmong English Thai Lao other _____

15. What is the language you feel most comfortable speaking?

Hmong English Thai Lao other _____

16. What are the Hmong classes you have taken and/or are currently taking? Circle all that applies.

None Hmong 1 Hmong 2 Hmong 3 Hmong 4

APPENDIX B

Hmong Version of the Survey

Tub Ntxhais Hmoob Kawm Ntawv Tshuaj Ntsuam

Nyob rau cov kab lus ram qab no, ntsuas koj tus kheej 1 mus txog 5. Tus lej 1 yog nqe lus ntawd tsis raug koj li, 5 yog raug koj tshaj. Kos vooj voom rau tus lej uas raug koj.

	tsis raug koj			raug koj	
1. Kuv nrog cov laus tham lus Hmoob tau hauj sim.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Kuv nyiam nyob rau tej chaw uas muaj Hmoob coob.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Kuv mus pab tej kwv tij neej tsa thaum lawv ua noj.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Thaum kuv hlob tuaj kuv xav mus ua hauj lwm pab Hmoob.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Kuv nyiam mloog nkauj Hmoob heev.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Kuv to taub zaj tshoob, txiv xaiv thiab kwv txhiaj.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Kuv pom kuv tus kheej ua kev cai Hmoob rau yav kuv laus.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Kuv siv lus Hmoob nrog kuv cov phooj ywg sib tham.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Kuv xav kom kuv cov mi nyuam paub ntawv Hmoob.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Fab lwm tiam kuv yuav tshwj sim rov los ua Hmoob dua.	1	2	3	4	5

Kos ib lub vooj voom rau nqe lus uas raug rau koj. Yog tsis muaj nqe raug, sau ntxiv.

11. Koj yug nyob rau lub teb chaws twg?

Nplog Thaib As Mis Kas lwm lub teb chaws _____

Yog koj yug nyob lwm teb chaws no koj tuaj nyob rau As Mis Kas hov ntev lawm?

—

12. Ob xyoos ntxiv tom ntej no koj xav koj yuav ua dab tsi?

ua hauj lwm kawm hauj lwm community college university lwm yam _

—

13. Koj yog yam neeg dab tsi?

Hmoob As Mis Kas Thaib Nplog lwm yam _____

14. Yam lus twg koj niam thiab koj txiv siv tom tsev heev tshaj?

Hmoob As Mis Kas Thaib Nplog lwm yam _____

15. Yam lus twg yog yam lus uas koj siv tau raug koj siab tshaj?

Hmoob As Kiv Thaib Nplog lwm yam _____

16. Koj tau kawm ntawv Hmoob qib tawg txog qeb twg? Kos txhua qib uas raug koj.

Tsis tau kawm dua Hmoob 1 Hmoob 2 Hmoob 3 Hmoob 4

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