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**Influence of Perceived Parental Involvement on Hmong Children's Academic  
Performance<sup>1</sup>**

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Influence of Perceived Parental Involvement on Hmong Children's Academic Performance

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine what predicted parental involvement based on children's report and whether parental involvement serves as an advantage to children's math and reading abilities and academic performance. This study included 380 students (179 boys and 201 girls) in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades from five Hmong-focused charter schools in Minnesota. It was found that gender, number of siblings, and temperament were predictive of home-based parent involvement, while ethnicity, temperament, and language spoken with parents was predictive of school-based parent involvement. Subsequently, school-based parent involvement was predictive of children's self-report academic competence and academic performance. Overall, the model explains 8.3% and 21.7% of the variation in home- and school-based involvement, respectively, and explains 11.9% and 4.1% of the variation in reported academic competence and academic performance, respectively. The study ends with some implications and future research with Hmong students and parents.

**KEYWORDS.** Hmong American Families, Parental Involvement, Hmong Education, Achievement Gaps.

## Influence of Perceived Parental Involvement on Hmong Children's Academic Performance

Research examining predictors of parental involvement and the influence of parental involvement on children's school adjustment is vast (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2011; Lee & Green, 2008). However, results varied depending on the family characteristics and school conditions, types of involvement measured, age and grade of the children, family structure and size, language comfort, child's school performance, and parents' race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Coleman, 1988, 1994; Fan, 2001; Ho, 2001; Lareau, 2002). Despite the breadth and depth of the literature on parental involvement, little is known about: 1) what makes parents get involved in their children's education; 2) whether parents' involvement makes any difference in their children's academic competence and performance as reported by children; and 3) parental involvement and children's self-reported academic competence and performance at Hmong-focused charter schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what predicted parental involvement and whether parental involvement serves as an advantage to children's academic competence and academic performance.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There are about 7,000 charter schools across 43 states and the District of Columbia with nearly 3.2 million students enrolled, and the number of charter schools is increasing every year (David & Hesla, 2018). In Minnesota, there are 164 charter schools with about 65% located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area with over 56,000 students enrolled. Since 2000, more than 10 Hmong-focused charter schools have been institutionalized in Minnesota and enrolled about 7,000 Asian (mostly Hmong) students (MDE, n.d.). Yet, we know very little about the levels and correlates of parental involvement of Hmong parents in these culturally focused schools and

what types of parental involvement are related to student's academic competence and performance.

### *Predictors of Parental Involvement*

*Gender.* Studies showed that parents tend to tailor their involvement to children's needs depending on the context (Iver, Douglas, & Epstein, 1993). Thus, on the average, parents tend to monitor girls more than boys and boys tend to have more flexibility to explore outside the family than girls (Muller, 1998). Other researchers also found that mothers are more sensitive towards girls than boys (Smith, Spinrad, Eisenberg, Gaertner, Popp & Maxon, 2007). As such, some research suggests that, compared to boys, girls are more likely to talk to their parents more at home, including conversations about school (Chu & Willms, 1996; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Given what we know about Hmong families and cultural values related to gender (Lee, Xiong, & Yuen, 2006), it is expected that gender will predict parental involvement in this study.

*Age of the child.* The extant literature suggests that parents are more likely to be involved during elementary school age or younger compared to older children, especially in middle or high schools (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013). Specifically, as children enter into middle and high schools, parental levels of involvement declines significantly due to the lack of opportunities to be involved at the school and the children's demands to be more autonomous (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lee & Green, 2009; Muller, 1998). In addition, one recent study on Hmong parents showed that after sixth grade, parents' levels of involvement declined significantly due to their inability to support their children's homework (Supple & Cavanaugh, 2013). As such, empirical evidence suggests that younger children tend to benefit more from their parents' involvement compared to older children. For example, Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found that kindergarteners improved their

reading scores significantly when their parents' levels of involvement increased; however, the same level of parental involvement has no effect on the reading scores of high school students.

Therefore, age is expected to predict parental involvement in this study.

*Ethnicity.* Studies show that Hmong and other immigrant parents are less likely to get involved in their children's education at school due to language and cultural barriers (Aung & Yu, 2007; Grant & Wong, 2004; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006); however, these previous studies have not examined immigrant parental involvement at culturally and linguistically focused schools. Therefore, it is predicted that there are three reasons why Hmong-focused charter schools will increase opportunities for Hmong parental involvement. First, these charter schools have employed mostly Hmong-speaking staff and administrators in order to overcome barriers parents have encountered in traditional public school settings (Grant & Wong, 2004; MDE, n.d.). Second, Hmong-focused charter schools have tried to respond to Hmong parents' strong desire for curriculum, methods, and educational opportunities that preserve and center Hmong language and culture (Lee, 2007). Finally, given the culture-focus of these schools, parents may feel an increased sense of belonging to the school and may therefore be more involved when given the opportunity (Olivos, 2006; Thao, 2003; Watkins, 1997). Therefore, students who identified themselves as Hmong are expected to report higher levels of parental involvement compared to non-Hmong students.

*Number of siblings.* Studies have suggested that the more children in the family, the lower the levels of parental involvement. For example, Eng, Szmodis, and Mulsow (2014) studied parents of elementary school students in Cambodia and found that parents who had fewer numbers of children tended to report a higher score of parental involvement at home (as measured by activities such as asking the child about his or her school day and helping the child

with homework). Since Hmong families have more children than the average U.S.-sized family (Lee & Green, 2008), the level of involvement is expected to be low for both home- and school-based involvement (Hesketh, Qu, & Tomkins, 2003).

*Family structure.* Studies have consistently shown that intact families, or families with two parents living in the household, are more likely to be involved and supportive in their child's education (i.e., checking homework, helping with homework, discussing school courses, activities, and grades) compared to single parent families (Asakawa, 2001; Chu & Willms, 1996). Even though the majority of Hmong families are two parent households, it is hypothesized that both types (intact or single-parent) will have a high level involvement, since most Hmong parents have a high expectation of their children's school success (Lee, 2007).

*Child's temperament.* Parents are typically involved in their children's education, especially when it comes to their child's school performance (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007). In addition, children who have high levels of activity and anger issues are more difficult to care for at home and school (Houts et al., 2010). Therefore, children with temperament issues are more likely to be subjected to parental control (Brody, Stoneman & McCoy, 1992). Conversely, the literature suggests that children who are doing well in school are less likely to see their parents involved at the school (Watkins, 1997; Zellman & Waterman, 1989). Given the low frequency of childhood conduct problems and expulsion rates for Asian American students (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014), child temperament is not expected to be a predictor of parental involvement in the present study.

*Language and Generation.* Studies have consistently shown that parents, specifically first generation immigrant parents who are not fluent in English, tend to be less involved (Aung & Yu, 2007; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Mueller, Gozali-Lee, and Sherman (1996) found

that Hmong parents frequently lack the English language and literacy skills and flexible work schedules that are needed for high levels of school involvement. Hawkins and Legler (2004) suggest that embarrassment over not being able to communicate effectively with teachers is perhaps the primary reason for immigrant parents' low involvement. For example, Kim's (2002) study of Korean immigrant families found that the level of parental English language fluency correlated with school involvement; as a result, the children who were the strongest academic performers tended to have parents who were more fluent in English and therefore more involved with their school. Given the high proportion of linguistically isolated families in the Hmong community (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012), a strong correlation between English language fluency, generation (proximity to recent immigrant-status), and parental involvement is anticipated.

#### *Home-based vs. School-based Parental Involvement*

The extant literature on the effect of parental involvement on children's school performance is mixed. Some scholars found that higher levels of parental involvement in children's learning are positively related to children's school performance, including higher academic achievement (McNeal, 1999), reading (Powell-Smith, Stoner, Shinn, & Good, 2000; Rasinski & Stevenson, 2005), math (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sirvani, 2007), and children's self-concept and self-control (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). Kim (2002) studied Korean American students and their parents and found that parental involvement at home, such as high expectations, frequent communication, homework-checking, rules about TV viewing, and monitoring are positively correlated with children's educational achievement. Cheung and Pomerantz (2011) compared students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade attending public schools in the United States and China and found that children's perceptions of competence and emotional functioning were

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directly related to parental involvement, especially for American children. Other researchers have found that, on the average, parental involvement improves students' homework habits and decreases absenteeism and school dropout rates (Epstein, 1990, 2011; Ho & Willms, 1996; Lareau, 2002; Wolfendale, 1992).

On the other hand, scholars have also suggested that parental involvement might benefit some racial/ethnic groups more than Asian Americans (Dearing, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2007; Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012), especially when it comes to parental involvement at school (Kim, 2002, Mau, 1997). For example, first-generation Asian Americans, including many Hmong parents, come to the U.S. with limited formal education and knowledge of the U.S. educational system (Keo, 2010; Weinberg, 1997; Yang, 1981). Furthermore, many Asian American cultures promote respect for teachers; as a result, some parents fear that if they are to become involved in the business of teachers they will be perceived as being disrespectful (Thao, 2003). When these factors intersect parental involvement at their children's schools has been found to be low (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012), but its impact on children's educational achievements is minimal (Kim, 2002; Mau, 1997). For example, Eng, Szmodis, and Mulsow (2014) studied parents of elementary school students in Cambodia and found parental involvement scores at school to be among the lowest of all other involvement measures. In their analysis of the ECLA-K dataset, including 12, 954 parents of kindergartners participating in the first, second, and fourth waves of data collection, Turney and Kao (2009) found that Asian foreign-born parents scored significantly lower on measures of involvement as compared to native-born Caucasian parents (Turney & Kao, 2009). Supple, McCoy, and Wang (2010) conducted focus groups with Hmong college students and found that students discussed a variety of parental involvement strategies at home to help them succeed but only discussed attending school-



sponsored events as part of their school involvement.

Similarly, the existing literature is also mixed in regards to specific parental involvement behaviors. For example, homework supervision has been found to be positively associated with students' performance on standardized tests (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Zhan, 2006), whereas other findings indicate that homework help and supervision do not significantly predict students' academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Similarly, Schlee, Mullis, and Shriner (2009) found that parents' attendance at open houses and rates of volunteering at school were associated with higher levels of academic achievement, whereas their attendance at parent-teacher conferences was associated with lower levels of academic achievement. Other studies have found negative relationships between parent involvement at school and academic achievement (Tan & Goldberg, 2009) or no association at all (Zhan, 2006). These conflicting findings may relate to increased levels of involvement for the parents of students who are already academically behind, or what McNeal (2001) called the "reactive hypothesis." For example, Hampden-Thompson, Guzman, and Lippman (2013) studied youth in 21 countries and found that regardless of country, children with lower levels of reading literacy are significantly more likely to receive frequent parental help.

### *Current Study*

The current study used cultural capital theory (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010) to guide the formation of research questions. Cultural capital has been defined in a variety of ways across studies and disciplines (Kim, 2009; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). For example, Wegmann and Bowen (2010) defined it "as knowledge or resources unique to a particular cultural group that give social advantage to members of that group (p. 7). Specifically, it is developed to examine the ways in which families and social institutions (e.g., schools)

perpetuate existing social structures based on the distribution of social capital at different levels within the social structure. Two central concepts of cultural capital are *habitus* and *field*. *Habitus* refers to “the disposition to act in a certain way, to grasp experience in a certain way, to think in a certain way” (Grenfell & James, 1988, p. 15, as cited in Lee & Bowen, 2006). *Field* refers to a system of structured social relationships (e.g., school) wherein those holding different positions hold different levels of power (Lee & Bowen, 2006). “When an individual’s habitus is consistent with the field in which he or she is operating... he or she enjoys a social advantage” (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 197).

Cultural capital has been previously conceptualized to include “cultural attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and goods” (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 155), “networks with other parents, an understanding of the schooling process and teacher jargon, and contact with school personnel” (McNeal, 2001, p. 172), and “family’s knowledge and norms about education and whether or not those norms are congruent with the knowledge and norms presupposed and valued by the school” (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010, p. 7). This last definition provided by Wegmann and Bowen (which values congruence between habitus and field) creates the foundation for the way cultural capital is conceptualized in the present study.

It is important to note that many studies that utilize cultural capital theory define cultural capital in ways that are consistent with the behaviors of middle-class White families. As Kim (2009) notes, “the expectations of schools regarding parental involvement are more matched to middle-class White parents’ beliefs, capacities, and involvement styles than those of the minority middle or working class” (p. 82). Because of the consistency between schools’ and middle-class White parents’ beliefs and expectations, children from these families enter school with an unearned advantage over their minority and lower-SES peers, and this gap frequently widens

over time. As noted by Lamont and Lareau (1988), “because differences in academic achievement are normally explained by differences in ability rather than by cultural resources transmitted by the family, social transmission of privileges is itself legitimized, for academic standards are not seen as handicapping lower class children” (p. 155). Thus, because schools’ expectations are generally more consistent with the norms of middle-class White families, middle-class White students demonstrate more success (as it is defined by those norms). Thus, the social structures are maintained through these systems, and inequality based on race, ethnicity, culture, and SES is further perpetuated (Kim, 2009).

Research on cultural capital has often focused on minority and low-SES families’ “lack” of cultural capital and efforts to increase this capital (i.e., to help these families demonstrate behaviors that are more consistent with those of middle-class White families). This application of cultural capital has led to critiques of “deficit theorizing” that “takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (Yasso, 2005, p. 75). Thus, when researchers and educators use cultural capital as a support for this type of deficit thinking, they perpetuate systems of oppression that ultimately limit the opportunities of minority and lower-SES students. Thus, it is essential that researchers and educators reject this type of deficit thinking and instead recognize the strengths families from different backgrounds bring to schools and work on incorporating these families’ values and norms into the expectations surrounding family-school partnerships.

With these critical perspectives on the limitations of cultural capital theory in mind, the current study defines cultural capital in terms of fit or consistency between school and family norms and expectations surrounding involvement behaviors. Parental involvement behaviors are

defined more broadly to include both traditional measures and others that have been found to be more culturally sensitive for Asian American students. Additionally, all participants in this study came from Hmong-focused charter schools. These culturally-focused schools demonstrate one instance in which a “match” between school and home cultures may foster consistency in expectations between parents and teachers, thereby enabling students to demonstrate more academic success as evidenced by their commitment to school and their self-perceived academic abilities. By conceptualizing cultural capital in terms of congruence and focusing on schools that are presumed to be more attuned with cultural norms in the Hmong community, this study rejects deficit thinking and instead focuses on parental involvement behaviors (in whatever form) as strengths. By highlighting these strengths, efforts can be made to help schools serving Hmong students understand and integrate these norms to foster congruence between schools’ and families’ norms and expectations.

Specifically, we tried to address the following research questions:

1. What accounts for parents’ levels of involvement at home and at school for parents who enrolled their children in Hmong-focused charter schools?
2. Which type of parental involvement (home vs. school involvement) has a bigger impact on children’s academic competence and academic performance?

## METHODS

### *Sample*

This study was part of the larger Hmong Children’s Longitudinal Study that sampled 523 students from five Hmong-focused charter schools in Minnesota. Of the total sample, 380 students who provided complete information on the variables included in the present study comprised the final sample for the analysis. A comparison of the standardized mean differences

between the original sample and the final sample on all relevant variables found no meaningful differences (i.e., none > .10). This indicates that eliminating cases with missing data did not unduly alter conclusions drawn from the analysis. As shown in Table 1, the final sample consisted of 28% 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, 33% 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and 39% 5<sup>th</sup> graders with the majority of students being female (53%), Hmong (82%), and from an intact family (85%). When speaking with their parents, 31% of students speak Hmong with their parents, 28% speak English, and 41% speak a mix of Hmong and English.

*Table 1: Descriptive of Binary and Continuous Predictors*

Variable	Mean or Proportion	SD	Min	Max
Age	10.10	0.87	7.6	12.93
Male	0.47		0	1
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0.39		0	1
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0.37		0	1
Hmong	0.82		0	1
Both Parents	0.85		0	1
# of Siblings	4.65	3.27	0	34
Temperament – Easy	0.63		0	1
Temperament – Difficult	0.12		0	1
Temperament – Very Difficult	0.03		0	1
Language with Parents - Hmong	0.31		0	1
Language with Parents - Mix	0.41		0	1

*Note.* N = 380 children. SD = Standard Deviation

*Procedure*

Prior to the study, the principal investigator and school administrators met to review the study proposal and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU). After the MOU was signed, the PI sent recruitment materials (e.g., a letter to teachers, recruitment float chart, and a letter to parents asking permission for their children to participate in the study) and links to the online survey to the school administrators to review and refine.

School administrators worked with 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to send students home with a letter containing the parent release form. Returned release forms were entered into a password-protected spreadsheet by the research team. After school administrators or a designated school staff member used this password-protected spreadsheet to schedule the survey the PI and his research assistants met with the school IT staff to upload and test the survey on the school computers. During the survey administration, eligible students (i.e., those with signed parental release forms) were directed to take the survey in the computer lab. Students whose parents did not sign the release form remained in the classroom while others took the survey.

Prior to taking the survey, students were read the child assent form and the research team answered their questions. Since students came to the study with varying reading levels, the research team decided to read the survey in English to all students. All surveys took place between March and May 2017 and all survey administrations took between 30 to 35 minutes.

## MEASURES

Descriptive statistics for dichotomous and continuous predictors are in Table 1 while the frequency of responses to ordinal items comprising the outcome variables are shown in Table 2.

*Predictors of Parental Involvement*

*Child's gender and age.* Gender was measured with a dichotomous variable where 1 = boy and 0 = girl, and the child's age, in years, was a continuous variable calculated from the child's birthday to the date of data collection.

*Ethnicity.* Ethnicity was measured with a single item asking the child, "Which of the following best describes you?" Response options were *Hmong, Asian but not Hmong, White, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino*, and *Other*. Responses were dichotomized for this analysis where 1= Hmong and 0 = Not Hmong.

*Number of siblings.* The total number of siblings was summed from two items, one item asked, "How many brothers do you have?" with the other item for sisters. The more siblings, the less social capital a child has because more siblings means the child receives less attention from his or her parents (Coleman, 1988).

*Family structure.* One item asked "Which adult(s) lives with you at home?" with 11 response options from which children were asked to pick one answer that fit them best. The item was dichotomized, whereby 1 = Lives with both parents and 0 = Does not live with both parents. Parents could be biological, adoptive, or include a step-parent. This coding was chosen because having two parents present at home physically gives the child access to adults' human capital and attention. Alternatively, having only one adult at home "may be described as a structural deficiency in family social capital" (Coleman, 1988, p. 111).

*Temperament.* One item adapted from Schachter & Stone (1985) asking "children are sometimes described as particularly "easy" or "difficult" for parents to handle. Would you say you are..." with four possible responses: *Very easy to handle, Fairly easy to handle, Fairly*

*difficult to handle*, and *Very difficult to handle*. For the analysis, three dummy coded variables were created with very easy to handle serving as the reference group.

*Parent’s language proficiency.* Parent’s language proficiency was approximated from a question adapted from a longitudinal study with immigrant adolescents (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001) asking “What language do you use when speaking with the following people?” Response options were *English*, *Hmong (or your parent’s home language)*, or *A mixture of English and Hmong (or a mixture of English and your parent’s home language)*. For the analysis, two dummy coded variables were created with English serving as the reference group.

Table 2: Percent of Responses for Ordered Categories of the Outcome Variables

	Very behind and it is hard to catch up	Somewhat behind and can catch up	A little behind and can easily catch up	Current with most class work	Ahead of most classmates in class work
Academic Performance	1.8	5.8	20.3	44.2	27.9
	Never	1-2 times a week	3-4 times a week	Every day	
Help At School (PI-School)	75.5	14.5	4.7	5.3	
Talk About School	21.6	33.7	14.7	30.0	
Watch Homework	21.8	27.6	13.9	36.6	
Homework Help	26.8	28.2	19.7	25.3	
Practice Skills	34.2	28.7	18.9	18.2	
Read With You	63.4	17.1	10.5	8.9	
	Don't know much at all	Know a little bit	Know somewhat	Know much	Know a lot
Know Math	1.6	4.7	10.0	35.8	47.9
Good at Math	1.3	9.5	12.4	33.2	43.7
Learning New	1.8	7.6	20.0	37.4	33.2
Know Reading	1.6	8.9	12.4	37.4	39.7
Good at Reading	2.9	8.4	15.3	34.2	39.2

Note. N = 380 children.

### *Outcome Variables*

*Parental involvement at home.* Five items adapted from Walker, Wilkens, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey’s (2005) original measure were used to assess home-based activities from the child’s perspective. Due to the focus of this study, we changed the wording of the questions from “someone in this family” to “parents” to more precisely represent parent



behaviors. Items included “How often do your parents talk with you about the school day?”, “How often do your parents help you with your homework?” and “How often do your parents read with you?” Four ordinal response options ranged from *Never* to *Everyday*. Although scale score reliability ( $\omega_h = .72$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ) was lower in the present sample than in Walker, et al.'s (2005) study ( $\alpha = .85$ ), it was still acceptable.

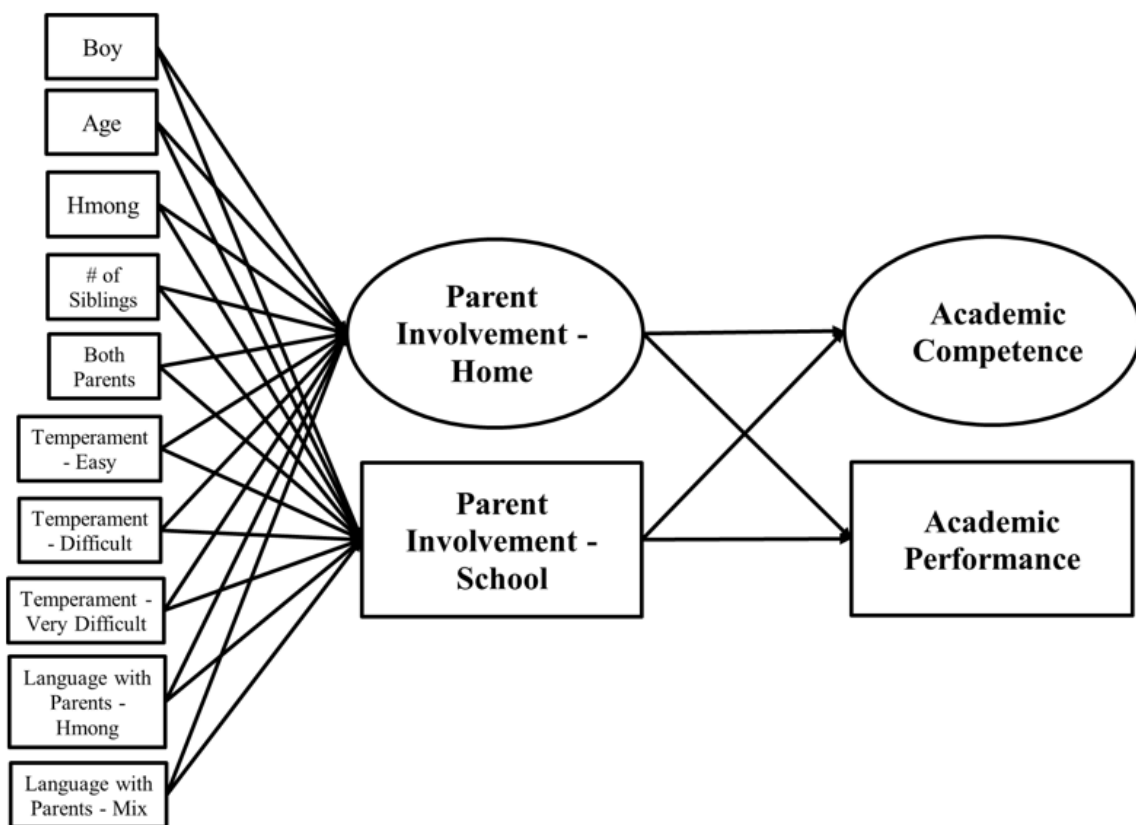
*Parental involvement at school.* A single item borrowed from Walker, Wilkens, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey's (2005) original measure was used to assess parental involvement at school: “How often do your parents come to help out at your school?” Students rated this question with a 4-point scale from *Never* to *Everyday*.

*Perceived academic competence.* Perceived academic competence in math and reading was adapted from the Feeling About School measure (Valeski & Stipek, 2001). This measure included five items, three assessing math and two assessing reading, with five ordinal response options ranging from *Don't know much at all* to *Know a lot*. Sample questions included “How much do you know about numbers/math?” and “How good are you at reading?” Score reliability ( $\omega_h = .88$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ) in the present study with math and reading items combined into a single scale was higher than the separate scales reported in Valeski & Stipek (2001) with first grade students (math:  $\alpha = .63$ , reading  $\alpha = .74$ ).

*Academic performance.* Academic performance was measured using a single item borrowed from Gonzales, Cauce, Frideman, and Mason (1996), “How well do you keep up with your schoolwork this year?”, with responses on a 5-point scale ranging from *Very behind and it's hard to catch up to Ahead of most classmates in class work*. Gonzales et al. found high correlation ( $r=.79$ ) between self-reported academic performance and official grade point average.

*Analysis Plan*

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used in order to demonstrate that a certain interrelationship among variables is possible (Maruyama, 1998). Specifically, the model tested whether a child’s gender, age, ethnicity, number of siblings, family structure, temperament, and language spoken with parents predicted their parent’s involvement at home and at school, which in turn, predicted the child’s self-reported academic competence and performance (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Theoretical structural model predicting parent involvement and children’s academic competence and performance. Rectangles denote observed variables and ovals denote latent variables.

SEM was chosen over alternative approaches because, unlike multivariate regression or ANOVA, a variable in SEM can be treated as both an outcome and a predictor simultaneously (Maruyama, 1998; Nachtigall, Kroehne, Funke, & Steyer, 2003). Parental involvement at home (PI-Home) and parental involvement at school (PI-School) were treated as such in our analysis.

Another benefit of SEM is the capability of including latent variables, which are constructs that cannot be directly measured. In the present study, this includes PI-Home and perceived academic competence. Although the model suggests that causal pathways are possible, conclusions are only correlational because data were from a single point in time. The analysis was run in *R* (R Core Team, 2017) using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012). Weighted least squares mean and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimation was used because the latent variables of PI-Home and perceived academic competence were measured with ordinal observed variables and the other outcome variables, PI-School and academic performance, were also ordinal (DiStefano & Morgan, 2014; Flora & Curran, 2004; Mîndrilă, 2010). The SEM analysis was conducted in two steps. In the first step a measurement model tested whether the intended items appropriately measured the latent variables of PI-Home and perceived academic competence. After evaluating the fit of the measurement model, the full model as shown in Figure 2 was run.

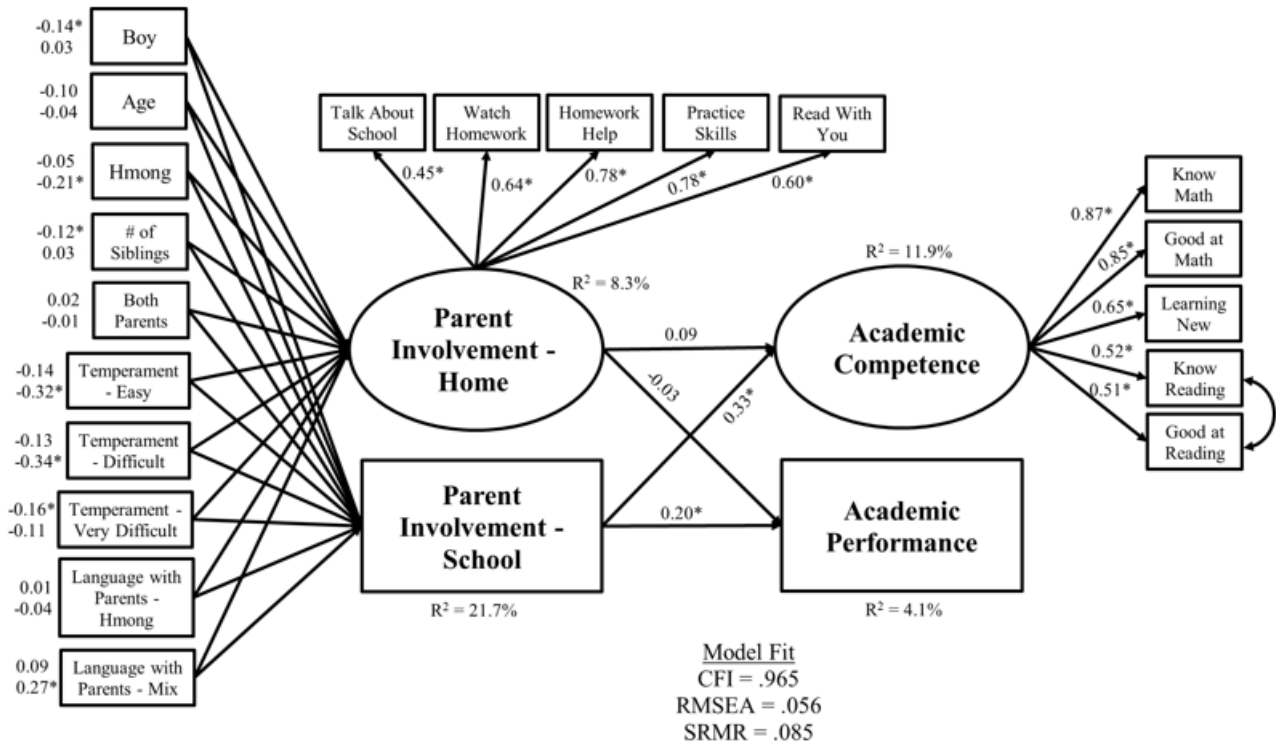
## RESULTS

The comparative fit index (CFI), root means squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) were used to assess model fit for the SEM analysis. Although many fit indices exist, these three are fairly popular and, more importantly, perform well in selecting the correctly specified model in simulation studies (Brown, 2015; Miles & Shevlin, 2007). CFI evaluates incremental fit by comparing the fit of the tested model to the fit of the null model where all covariances are fixed to 0. RMSEA and SRMR assess absolute fit - the degree to which the model implied associations between variables are similar to the associations actually found in the data. RMSEA also includes a penalty for greater model complexity. Simulation studies suggest good model fit should have a  $CFI \geq .95$ ,  $RMSEA \leq .06$ , and  $SRMR \leq .08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The measurement model evaluated the quality of the

items measuring the latent variables of PI-Home and perceived academic competence. The measurement model demonstrated good fit with CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = .07, implying that the items appropriately measured the latent variables. The full model (Figure 2) produced a CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06, and SRMR = .09 which can be interpreted as adequate to good fit, thus enabling conclusions to be drawn from the model.

### *Predictors of Parental Involvement*

The SEM (structural equation modeling) results showed that parental involvement at home (PI-Home) is lower for boys than girls ( $\beta = -0.14, p = .02$ ), lower for children with more siblings ( $\beta = -0.12, p = .04$ ) than a few siblings, and lower for children with very difficult temperaments as compared to those with very easy temperaments ( $\beta = -0.34, p < .01$ ). However, age, ethnicity, family structure, and children who speak Hmong only with their parents were not statistically significant predictors in the model. Overall, significant variables accounted only for 8.3% of the variation in PI-Home (see Figure 2). On the hand, when examining parental involvement at school (PI-School) the results showed Hmong children scored lower ( $\beta = -0.21, p < .01$ ) compared to non-Hmong children and lower for children with fairly easy ( $\beta = -0.32, p < .01$ ) or fairly difficult ( $\beta = -0.34, p < .01$ ) temperaments in comparison to those with very easy temperaments. Conversely, children who reported speaking a mixture of both English and Hmong (or their parents' home language) with their parents scored higher on PI-School than children who only speak English ( $\beta = 0.27, p < .01$ ). Age, family structure, children with very difficult temperaments, and children who speak Hmong only with their parents were not significantly predicted PI-School. Overall, the statistically significant variables accounted for 21.7% of the variation in PI-School (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Structural equation model predicting parent involvement and children’s academic competence and performance. Rectangles denote observed variables and ovals denote latent variables. All path coefficients are standardized. The top number on the left of the predictors is the path coefficient predicting parent involvement at home while the bottom number is the path coefficient predicting parent involvement at school. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root means squared error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual. *N* = 380 children.

*Influence of Parental Involvement on Children’s Academic Competence and Academic Performance*

When examining the data on the relationship between parental involvement and children’s academic competence and performance, SEM results showed that higher PI-School score is significantly associated with higher reported scores of academic competence ( $\beta = 0.26, p < .01$ ) and academic performance ( $\beta = 0.18, p < .01$ ). In other words, children who reported that their parents often come to help out at their school were also more likely to report that they know a lot about numbers/math and reading (or academic competence), and that they are “ahead of

most classmates in class work” (or academic performance). On the other hand, PI-Home had no statistical association with academic competence and academic performance (see Figure 2). That is, children’s perceptions of their academic competence and academic performance are not statistically related to what their parents do at home, as measured by how often they talk to their children about the school day, help out with their children’s homework, and read with their children. Overall, the variation of academic competence was accounted for by 11.9% of PI-School and the variation of academic performance was accounted for by only 4.1% of PI-School. Despite this significant finding, children’s academic competence and academic performance, especially children who participated in this study, need to be examined using other variables that were not included in the model (see Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to advance our understanding of parental involvement by examining the correlates of parental involvement and the specific type of parental involvement (home vs. school involvement) that accounts for children’s academic competence and academic performance. To address the first research question (what makes parents, especially those who enrolled their children in Hmong-focused charter schools, get involved in their children’s education), we found that gender of the child, the number of siblings living at home, and the child’s temperament play a significant role in getting parents to involve in their children’s education at home. Specifically, we found that children report that parents are more involved (i.e., by communicating about the school day, monitoring homework, or helping with homework) with their daughters than their sons. This is expected since girls are trained early in their lives at home to be more responsible due to the patrilocal practice of the traditional Hmong culture (Lee, Xiong, & Yuen, 2006). We also found that children from less involved parents at home reported having several siblings<sup>3</sup> compared to children from more involved parents; this finding is

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<sup>3</sup> On the average, students in this study have 2.4 brothers (ranging from 0 to 19) and 2.3 sisters (ranging from 0 to 15).

consistent with other studies in the literature (Eng, Szmodis, & Mulsow, 2014; Hesketh, Qu, & Tomkins, 2013). Children who rated themselves as “very easy to handle by their parents” in this study also reported that their parents spent more time involved with them at home as compared to their siblings. This finding is not surprising since the literature suggests that children who have a temperament problem are more difficult for parents to care for (Houts et al., 2010) and are more likely to be subjected to parental control (Brody, Stoneman & McCoy, 1992).

When examining parents' involvement in their children's school activities and events, we found children's bilingualism or fluency in both English and Hmong (or their parents' native language) to be statistically significant compared to children who only speak English or their parents' native language (such as Hmong). We found that parents of bilingual children are more likely to be involved in their children's school activities and events, as compared to parents of monolingual children. Cultural capital theory is useful for understanding the difference in parental involvement because there is a stronger fit or consistency between school and family norms and expectations surrounding involvement behaviors for bilingual children (Kim, 2009; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). In the charter schools where we sampled our participants, most staff and Hmong administrators are bilingual and bicultural (MDE, n.d.); therefore, we posit that parents of bilingual children may be able to relate better with school personnel, as compared with parents of monolingual children. Furthermore, we suspect that parents of monolingual children (English- or Hmong-only speaking) are more likely to be non-Hmong (19.2% of the sample) or recent arrivals, either from the last wave of the refugee resettlement (Ngo, Bigelow, & Wahlstrom, 2007) or from international marriages. As such, monolingual parents may lack the cultural capital to fit school and family norms and expectations surrounding involvement behaviors (Kim, 2009; Lamont & Lareau, 1988); as a result, they have lower levels of involvement at school, as has been suggested by other studies with different immigrant groups

(Aung & Yu, 2007; Coll et al., 2002; Mueller, Gozali-Lee, & Sherman, 1996; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Given the longitudinal design of the larger study, additional qualitative interviews will be used to facilitate a more in-depth exploration of which students have monolingual or bilingual parents and what specific barriers they face at a Hmong-focused charter school.

While much of the extant literature suggests that parental involvement at home was a robust predictor of academic competence and performance, results attained in the present study were contrary, despite the significant finding of school-based involvement on academic competence ( $R^2 = 11.9\%$ ) and academic performance ( $R^2 = 4.1\%$ ). Given the unique nature of Hmong-focused charter schools, these schools may have the ability to provide families with specific cultural resources such as Hmong staff, the inclusion of curriculum and instruction on Hmong culture and language, and honoring Hmong cultural celebrations that public schools may not be able to acknowledge due to a more ethnically and religiously diverse student body. As such, parents of children who attend Hmong-focused charter schools may be more likely to initiate communication with teachers and other school administrators, which in turn may increase the chances that their children have strong overall academic performance and competence. This finding is consistent with the assumptions of cultural capital theory (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010) and provides more evidence that parental involvement at school is crucial to children's cognitive development (Epstein, 1990, 2011), especially for immigrant children living in urban areas (Coll et al., 2002).

### *Limitations*

The results given herein are based on the first year of a five-year longitudinal study called the Hmong Children's Longitudinal Study. While there are many strengths to the overall study, it is imperative to note its limitations. First, participants used for this study were exclusively from



charter schools; therefore, the issues for students in public school may be considerably different. Second, participants in this study were a sample of convenience, which makes generalizing the results to all students enrolled in Hmong-focused charter schools is not advisable. Third, a procedural problem accounted for only 380 students filling out all questions to the study variables, which means that results may have varied. In the future, this procedural problem will be rectified to eliminate any barrier for participants in answering survey questions. Fourth, data for this study was collected from 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders only without corroborating data from their parents. In other words, the perspectives presented here might have been skewed. Lastly, analyses used data from only point in time. Since this preliminary data set accounts for the first year of a longitudinal study, future research using later waves of data will allow for the identification of causal relationships.

### *Implications for Practice*

The present study builds on the extant parental involvement literature by examining children enrolled in Hmong-focused charter schools, their perceptions of their parents' involvement at home and at school, and whether parents' involvement is related to children's perceived academic competence and performance. Results of the present study suggest a few recommendations for parents and school personnel to consider. First, the present study found that children with temperament issues (i.e., difficult or very difficult for parents to handle), especially boys, who have multiple siblings<sup>4</sup> living at home tend to report lower levels of involvement with their parents. Given the emerging achievement gap between males and females in the Hmong community (Xiong, 2012), the evidence of academic underachievement of children with temperament issues (Checa, & Abundis-Gutierrez, 2017; McCall, Beach, & Lau,

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<sup>4</sup> On the average, students in this study have 2.4 brothers (ranging from 0 to 19) and 2.3 sisters (ranging from 0 to 15).

2000), and the effect of large families on children's education (VanEjick & DeGraaf, 2012), it is imperative that parents be more intentional about their involvement at home. Our findings suggest that if parents with multiple children at home only pay attention to children without temperament issues or their daughters, then poor parent-child relationships will only be exacerbated. There is ample evidence that poor parent-child relationships that begin at an early age are more likely to lead to severe parent-child conflicts during adolescence (Updegraff, Delgado, & Wheeler, 2009), and severe parent-adolescent conflict is a major risk factor for school failure and delinquency in Hmong children (Xiong & Huang, 2011). As such, we strongly encourage parents to seek parenting help early (Xiong & Lee, 2011), adjust their parenting styles (Chuang & Su, 2009; Lamborn & Moua, 2008), and be more intentional about their involvement with their temperamental children, especially since these children tend to need the most help at home and school (McCall, Beach, & Lau, 2000; Xiong & Huang, 2011).

Next, the present study also found that parents who have bilingual children (or children who reported speaking a mixture of English and Hmong, or a mixture of English and their parent's home language at home) are more likely to "come and help out at school" compared to parents of monolingual children (or those who reported speaking only English or their parents' native language at home). Although the majority of children at the Hmong-focused school are bilingual, there is still a need to draw parents into school activities (Kim, 2009; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Furthermore, despite the high number of bilingual children, the school environment of our study needs to find strategies to get monolingual parents actively engaged in school activities. As such, it is imperative that school personnel re-examine their family engagement strategies (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & Pedro, 2011) to ensure they are providing opportunities for parents of monolingual children and/or parents of limited English proficient

(LEP) children to be more active at school. As the findings of the present study and other similar studies (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009; Lee & Bowen, 2006) suggest that parental involvement at school plays a significant role in helping close the achievement gap. Specifically, Hmong charter school personnel may want to consider moving from involvement (asking parents to attend school events and parent-teacher conferences) to engagement (asking parents to serve on school leadership positions) when working with English monolingual parents. English monolingual parents are more likely to have direct experience with the U.S. educational system or formal education structures; therefore, they may not share the same appearance of excitement when invited to be involved in simple tasks at school. Schools may want to consider engaging these parents to be involved in leadership positions to co-create activities and/or set future directions with school leaders. Conversely, LEP parents may need additional accommodations if they are to be substantially involved, since they tend have limited formal schooling and may be unable to navigate the K-12 system (Xiong & Lee, 2011; Thao, 2003). As such, providing more support such as hiring a school liaison or family engagement officer to work with them is essential (Sanders, 2008). If Hmong-focused charter schools continue to do “business as usual” without any innovation or efforts to try new strategies aimed at improving parental involvement and engagement in the school’s decision making and activities, they will do their Hmong students a great disservice.

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