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The Effects of Songs on Hmong Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract

This action research assessed the effects of singing a song to learn language in a bilingual classroom. The research took place at a bilingual Hmong-English Montessori preschool program. 28 preschool-aged children participated in the research which was conducted over five weeks. Data sources included a parent questionnaire, vocabulary pre-test, vocabulary post-test with a follow-up conversation, daily observation logs, and tally sheet. The children were taught 16 Hmong vocabulary words with half the words sung to the tune of a common children's song and the other half by simple reciting. The results from the vocabulary post-test showed that there was an increase in the children's ability to recall Hmong vocabulary taught through the song and the follow-up conversation showed that the children enjoyed learning by singing. Further research could examine the continued use of singing vocabulary to common children's songs and its effects on language learning in the long-term.

Keywords: Hmong, vocabulary, song, dual-language, bilingual, preschool

Singing songs helped me learn English words. My parents are refugees from Laos and did not know any English. Growing up, the only language spoken at home was Hmong. Hmong was the language I heard and learned as a young child. I did not learn English until I entered kindergarten. At first, I remember feeling confused by the teacher's instructions because I did not know the words she was speaking. Fortunately, my teacher used many tools for learning, including singing songs, and I quickly gained knowledge and understanding of English. One song that I have fond memories of learning is "The Green Grass Grows All Around." The song begins with a hole in the ground and then continues to have a tree in the hole, then a branch in the tree, a nest on the branch, an egg in the nest, and finally a bird in the egg. This is a classic children's song with a building of vocabulary that is set to a lively beat. This song is special to me because it taught me many simple English words. Words like tree, branch, nest, egg and bird were all taught to me through this song. I seem to remember singing it anywhere and everywhere I went - on the playground, in the car ride home from school, in the bathroom while brushing my teeth. Songs like "The Green Grass Grows All Around," and others like it, made it fun and easier for me to learn English words. My personal experience learning English through a song led me to wonder if the same method would help children learn Hmong language.

This study arose out of my observation of the children in a bilingual Hmong-English preschool classroom during my student teaching assignment in the spring of 2018. I spent three weeks in this classroom working with the children. During my time there, I observed that when the staff and I spoke to the children in English, the children would respond in English. When the staff and I spoke to the children in Hmong, the children would again respond in English. Through my conversations with the children, I gathered that only a few of them were using the Hmong language. I asked the children individually, "What are you doing?" in Hmong. Only a

few of the children responded in Hmong of what they were doing. Many of the children responded to me in English. There were some children who said that they did not know what I was saying. In this bilingual Hmong-English classroom, my observations and interactions with the children showed me that their Hmong language skills were limited.

One reason for this could be the three-generation process. According to Alba, Logan, Lutz and Stultz (2002), language in itself typically goes through what is called the three-generation process. The first generation, usually of an immigration population, learns English, but will generally prefer to speak their native language. The second generation will be bilingual, but prefer to speak English at home. By the third generation, the primary language will be English monolingualism with fragmented knowledge of the mother tongue. As I continued to observe the children while understanding that the classroom was built as a Hmong-English language environment and seeing that most of the children were mainly speaking English, I thought to myself, “How could the children be supported to speak more Hmong?” I realized that just like I was taught English words through the use of a song, I could teach Hmong words to the children through the use of a song.

This study took place in a Montessori preschool classroom in an urban area. The environment is set up as a dual-language classroom with Hmong and English being the languages spoken. There were three staff in the classroom, all of whom were Hmong and spoke Hmong. The class consisted of 28 children ages three to six years old, with 26 children being Hmong, or 93%. To help the children learn more Hmong words, I chose to use a song. This action research project examines the effects of using a song as a tool to teach Hmong language to primary age children. It seeks to answer the question: Will singing a song create a fun learning experience and be effective in helping children learn new Hmong words?

Theoretical Framework

To explore the research topic of using a song as a tool to help children learn Hmong words, I used Jean Piaget's Cognitive Theory of Development as the lens to my research. Piaget was a psychologist famously known for his work in child development. Piaget's Cognitive Theory of Development is considered to fall under the Constructivist Theory of child development. According to general Constructivist Theory, children's development comes from activity. Activity is the child physically interacting with his or her environment. This activity creates experiences that the child relies on to gain more information about his or her environment and then construct knowledge (Wardle, 2009). Piaget believed that children are able to take that knowledge and change the way they think or cognitively see the world. Children do so by taking the knowledge of these experiences and mentally organizing them into what he refers to as schemes, which "are a series of related cognitive content that operates as a unit, or whole" (Wardle, 2009, p. 25). Following Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development, schemes start out with the Sensorimotor stage during the infant years (age 0-2 years) then move to the Pre-operational stage (age 2-6/7 years), next is the Concrete Operational stage (6/7-11/14 years), and finally the Formal Operations stage (11/14+ years) (Wardle, 2009, p. 27). The importance of each stage is that they detail how children's cognitive development is acquired and developed qualitatively from stage to stage. At the Sensorimotor stage, infants gather experiences through actions and reactions via the physical senses. At the Preoperational stage, children start to have internal thoughts although unsophisticated. Children's thought processes become rigorous and logical and with rational thinking at the Concrete Operational stage. At the Formal Operations stage, thinking is not dependent on direct observed or experienced information anymore and the child can think of things that have not actually happened to him or her (Wardle, 2009). Piaget

believed that all four stages are real and that every child goes through each stage. As the child grows and progresses to each stage, the schemes become more sophisticated and therefore cognitive development becomes more complex over time. In parallel, through the use of cognitive content, or schemes, children form and reform their knowledge and understanding of the world.

Piaget's Cognitive Theory of Development is a window into seeing how children think and how children's thinking changes over time. This theory offers insight to better understand how children learn and process information. Piaget describes two processes that the child uses in forming knowledge to build his or her worldview. Assimilation is the process where the child takes in information and adapts it to his or her already existing knowledge of the world.

Accommodation is the process where the child forces the mind to accept and understand new and more complex structures and concepts (Pinter, 2011; Wardle, 2009). Accommodating new data "requires the mind to change and create new schemes or make old schemes more complex" (Wardle, 2009, p. 26). Children use schemes to either assimilate or accommodate the knowledge they are newly introduced to or already have.

Piaget points out that children are best served when learning is meaningful. Piaget believed that children must be motivated to construct their knowledge (Wardle, 2009). Motivation applies to things that interest the child that encourages continual interaction with the environment and promotes meaningful learning. When there is no motivation or interest to learn from the child, then the child will not construct knowledge about those things. Some ideas to keep in mind in making learning meaningful are using real, concrete, multi-sensory materials; carefully observing children, using a balance of guided, self-correcting and open-minded activities (Wardle, 2009). So, providing a cognitively appropriate learning

environment that is both stimulating and challenging should be continually made to be meaningful for children to construct knowledge. As Shively (2015) noted "...learning begins with where our students are and how they see the world...we should cross over to the students to connect to them" (p.132).

Because the children I will be interacting with are between three and six years old, I am particularly interested in the Preoperational stage of Piaget's Four Stages of Cognitive Development. The children at this age and stage react to "dramatic play, language, drawing, and symbolic use of materials" (Wardle, 2009, p.28). I am looking forward to how using a song can better develop the children's language skills. With the aim of teaching new words through the use of a song, this method supports the preoperational stage of development and I hope the children will feel motivated to learn the Hmong words I attempt to teach simultaneously.

While Piaget does not provide steps on how to apply his ideas and theory in the classroom, the ideas and theory do provide huge insight to how children learn and construct their worldview, therefore guiding educators to more effectively prepare activities and lessons to aid the learning process.

Literature Review

There is a chance that when walking into any Montessori primary (preschool) classroom, singing can be heard at one time or another. Songs are often used as an educational tool in the classroom to help children with many skills, including learning vocabulary (Winter, 2010). For example, the popular children's song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" has been sung many times to help children learn the vocabulary to particular body parts. This literature review will review past research on language development, bilingual education, and songs as a tool to build

vocabulary. It will first discuss language development in children. Next, it will examine bilingual education in early childhood and the benefits of bilingualism. Then, it will follow with a discussion of the effects of songs as a strategy to support vocabulary learning in children.

Language Learning

Language is an essential communication tool and furthering language development helps in communicating better. Matthews (2014) described in phases how children develop communication skills through the first two years of life via pragmatic socio-cognitive foundations in first language acquisition. From birth to nine months, communication is dyadic - that is the infant and caregiver respond to each other through various activities such as response to eye-contact, imitation, sensing emotion, taking turns, and speech and temporal contingency. After nine months, communication is triadic - the child can establish joint attention (showing, giving, and pointing to things), understand intentions of communication, and engage in role reversal imitation (Matthews, 2014). Around 12 months is when babies say their first words (Pinter, 2011). Between 18 and 24 months, there is an increase in vocabulary learning as parents continue to name things that children point to (Pinter, 2011). Much of this early language learning is common vocabulary that become the basis for further communication (Pinter, 2011).

Vocabulary acquisition is important for language development and communication (Joyce, 2012; Taylor, 2015; Winter, 2010). Children need to learn words, know the meaning of words, and be able to use them so that they can interact with others (Joyce, 2012). Being able to produce words is crucial for communicating. Neurologically, studies have shown that 20-month old children with vocabularies of more than 150 words have more brain activity than those children that did not have as vast of a vocabulary (Taylor, 2015). The rate at which vocabulary grows is dependent on the input that children receive from their environment (Bond & Wasik

2009; Taylor 2015). As children grow, they absorb the language that is around them. According to Montessori (2010), adults learn language by using their intelligence, whereas young children learn language through their experiences in their environment. Montessori (2010) wrote that “It may be said that we (referring to adults) acquire knowledge by using our minds, but the child absorbs knowledge directly into his psychic life. Simply by continuing to live, the child learns to speak his native tongue” (p. 25). This indicates the importance of the roles of parents and teachers to engage and have rich conversations with young children to increase vocabulary (Bond & Wasik 2009; Tayler, 2015). Children learn through keen observation of their environment and listening to others’ use of language, even when the language is not directed toward them (Pinter, 2011; Tayler, 2015). Children learn new words through meaningful interactions that interests them (Whorrall, 2016). A study conducted by Liang (2015) concluded that children could more easily acquire vocabulary of a second language when the context is interesting to them. In the study by Liang (2015), a group of children showed the ability to recall Chinese words that were presented only once to them, but because of mere interests in the topic (i.e., tornado, explosion, ninja), the children were able to remember the words and use them in a storytelling right away.

Dual language education and the benefits of bilingualism in early childhood

In the United States, there are more than 300 different languages spoken (United States Census Bureau, 2013). According to the American Community Survey, as released by the Metropolitan Council, there are an estimated 400,000 residents in the Twin Cities area (one of every seven residents age five and older) whose home language is other than English (Metro Stats, 2014). As communities grow with an influx of different ethnic groups, there is an essential need for dual language programs to support diverse communities. According to the National

Association for Bilingual Education, the number of dual-language programs has increased from an estimated 260 in 2000 to more than 2,000 in 2011 across the United States (Ramirez, 2016). The increase is due to a need for more bilingual people in the workforce (Ramirez, 2016). Dual language education provides many benefits that include high academic achievement, bilingualism, biliteracy, and intercultural awareness (Valdez, Friere, & Delavan, 2016). Dual language education is defined by the Center for Applied Linguistics as:

Any program that provides literacy and content instruction to all students through two languages and that promotes bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic achievement, and multicultural competence for all students (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindhom-Leary, & Rogers, 2007, p.1)

Around the world, parents are convinced that the earlier they put their children in language school to learn a second language, the better it is for the children's learning (Pinter, 2011). Genesee (2015) concluded that children could acquire full competency in two languages and "that learning two languages simultaneously is as natural as learning one" (p.12). Pinter (2011) discussed the Critical Period Hypothesis, which states that there is a limited time period during which children can acquire language, whether a first or second language, at native-like levels. However, this is capable only if conditions to do so are favorable to the child as not all children may be able to thrive in dual language families or dual language schools (Genesee, 2015). Ellen Bialystok, a Canadian psychologist, professor and expert in bilingualism and cognitive development, discussed why some people could more easily learn another language than others:

Language is a kind of talent. Some people are very good at physics or math or music or dance or sport, and some people are very good at language. We all get some kind of

ability profile. And if you link up ability with interest and motivation and opportunity, you'll learn language. (Ideas roadshow, 2015, 4:30)

Studies show that bilingual individuals outperform monolingual individuals in various tasks that include executive control (Bialystok, 2011). Bialystok (2011) reasoned that experiences help change the brain and mold cognitive abilities. She pointed out that bilingualism is an experience that is as intense as juggling and is sustained over a long period of time. Through these experiences and cognitive development, bilingual individuals performed better than monolingual individuals in tasks with salient conflict or inhibiting a learned or habitual response. Morales, Yudes, Gomez-Ariza and Bajo (2015) conducted a study where bilinguals and monolinguals relied on context clues to solve a task while having their brains monitored. The study suggested that bilinguals selectively adjust and engage proactive and reactive control more efficiently than monolinguals and that this supported the idea that bilingual experience might affect the cascade of processes involved in a complex neural circuit of cognitive control. Friesen, Latman, Calvo and Bialystok (2015) found that bilinguals had better visual attention than monolinguals (quickly finding a target shape within distractor shapes) and concluded that bilingualism positively affects selective attention. Bialystok examined to see if competency in two languages affects children's acquisition of literacy and found that in general, it does (McCardle & Hoff, 2006).

Singing Songs Support Language Learning

Music can be used as a tool for children's language development. Music can create a fun and enjoyable environment and motivate children to learn a language (Lin, 2013). Pastuszek-Lipinska (2008) suggested that music should be viewed as another factor in facilitating second-language acquisition. Winter (2010) described that characteristics of music such as rhythms,

melodies, and tempos are shared with language. Language, when spoken, has a cadence or distinct rhythm, melody, and tempo and it is these characteristics that can help language acquisition (Winter, 2010). Language features such as rhyme, repetition, and alliteration can help to remember words and phrases like lyrics from a song set to a musical melody. Additionally, songs can enhance memorization (rote memory), retention, and recollection (Winter, 2010). The repeating lyrics and rhythmic patterns of songs make it an effective tool for memorizing vocabulary and other language features (Charalambous & Yerosimou, 2015; Li & Brand 2009).

Sheppard (2005) proclaimed that children are all born musical and furthering the innate music ability can make the child smarter. Also, Sheppard (2005) indicated that music can have a profound and positive effect on children's mental and physical development. Just like patterns found in music, patterns found in speech form the foundation of language acquisition and strong similarities exist between the way the brain processes speech and the way we interpret music (Sheppard, 2005). The brain can physically change through music education due to improved cognitive function, linguistic pitch processing, and sensory encoding of sound which all affect language learning (Foster & Marcus Jenkins, 2017). Charalambous and Yerosimou (2015) studied the use of music in the classroom to teach a heritage language – that is a language where the learner has a family connection to that language – and found that music allowed the children to express themselves, their ideas and feelings, and helped to improve pronunciation of specific words and letters.

Motivation is an important factor in children's success in second language acquisition (Liang, 2015; Pinter, 2011). Using music is beneficial in the classroom. In a study by Li and Brand (2009), using music resulted in learner's positive attitude toward language learning. Berk (2008) stated that music creates a mood and has a strong effect on an individual's reaction. Using

music in the classroom elevates the learning and grabs students' attention, generate interest in a class, increase understanding, and make learning fun (Berk, 2008). Music can help children in the classroom with basic skills in their native language, for example, teaching children how to read left to right by singing a tune and act out actions using their hand (Prescott, 2005). Singing songs can also help children with language difficulties in learning how to modify words to acquire a new word based on the new letters or sound (Prescott, 2005).

Conclusion

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial for language development (Joyce, 2012; Taylor, 2015; Winter, 2010). Children need to learn words, know words, and understand the meaning of words in order to use it effectively in communicating (Joyce, 2012). In addition, children are capable of learning two languages simultaneously (Genesee, 2015), thus becoming bilingual individuals. Bilingualism has many benefits, including positive effects on visual and selective attention (Friesen, Latman, Calvo, and Bialystok, 2015). Music can be used as an effective tool for language development and learning (Pastuszek-Lipinska, 2008; Winter, 2010). Pastuszek-Lipinska (2008) hypothesized that music education and training could exert a positive impact on second language acquisition. More specifically, using songs can enhance rote memory (Winter, 2010) with its repetitive nature, thus making it an effective strategy for language learning. Music can create an enjoyable environment (Berk, 2018) and make learning fun.

Methodology

I received permission and support from the school administrator in November 2018 for this research. In the middle of January 2019, I sent home a passive consent letter to parents to inform them of this research. This letter explained the purpose of my research and my intervention. Parents were given one week to return the letter should they choose to have their

child's data excluded. I had hoped to begin the research on January 28, 2019, but due to extreme weather conditions, the school was closed for four consecutive days. By the end of the week, the weather cooperated and school resumed as usual. On February 1st, I began my research and collected the baseline data.

The baseline data collection activity consisted of two data tools: a parent questionnaire (see Appendix A) and a pre-test of Hmong words (see Appendix B). I sent home a parent questionnaire that asked three questions: "What language(s) do you speak at home? What language do you speak the most with your child at home? What language does your child speak the most to you when answering/asking questions, or engaging in conversations?" These questions helped me understand the children's exposure to Hmong language at home along with and their language preference.

Initially, the Hmong words that I planned to teach the children were body parts like eyes, nose, lips, etc., (see Appendix B). After a conversation I had with the lead teacher, I discovered that the children already learned most of the words from my word list because the lead teacher had been teaching Hmong words for body parts. I decided to create a new list of Hmong words in which I chose words of household objects (see Appendix G) that the children would see often in their home or in the classroom so that it would reinforce their learning. I made picture cards with an image for each word. The picture cards do not have the word written out on them. The 16 words were randomly divided into two equal sets of 8 (Appendix G). One set I planned to teach to the children by incorporating the words into a song, and the other set I planned to teach by only reciting the words.

For the pre-test, I set up a table in the classroom and had both sets of picture cards. I invited each child individually to the table. In English, I spoke to each child and said, "*I am*

going to show you some pictures.” From picture card set 1, I randomly placed a picture card in front of the child and asked, “*Do you know what this is called in Hmong?*” I recorded the child’s response on the pretest form (Appendix G), by using ‘X’ to indicate that the child knew the word in Hmong. If the child did not know the word in Hmong, it was left blank. I continued doing this with all the picture cards in set 1. When all of the responses for picture cards set 1 were recorded and completed, I repeated the same process for picture card set 2. The pre-test was completed for all of the children on the first day of my research.

The plan for the intervention was to teach the Hmong words in picture card set 1 via a song and teach the words in picture card set 2 by just reciting the word. To teach the words from picture card set 1, I put those words into the tune of the song “Oh My Darling, Clementine.” The eight Hmong words were (in this order for the song): *lub teeb* (lamp), *lub moos* (clock), *khaub rhuab* (broom), *phau ntawv* (book), *qhov rooj* (door), *qhov rais* (window), *rooj zaum* (chair), *khob* (cup). Once a week for four weeks, I invited the students to a small group (2-4 children) language lesson. We gathered on the floor around a rug that was two feet by three feet. I placed the picture cards one at a time on the mat in the order that they come in the song and asked the children (in English), “*What is this called in Hmong?*” I waited for a moment for the children to respond. After listening to the children, I would say the Hmong word for the children to hear. The reason for me to say the word in Hmong was to allow the children to hear the correct pronunciation. The Hmong language is a tonal language and using the incorrect tone will change the meaning of the word. Sometimes, when words are set to the melody of a song, it may distort the tone of the word. Therefore, it was important for me to properly say the word for the children to hear prior to teaching the song. I repeated this process for all eight picture cards and then I said to them, “*Now I am going to teach you a song using these Hmong words. Would you like to*

learn it? Please listen to me sing it first, and then we can sing it together." I sang the song and I pointed to each picture card as the word came up in the song. After I sang the song, I invited the children to sing along with me and pointed to each word card as it came along in the song.

In that same week, I also invited the children to another small group language lesson where I taught the eight Hmong words in picture card set 2 by just reciting the word. In a similar fashion to teaching the words in picture card set 1, I placed each picture card one at a time on the rug and asked the children, *"What is this called in Hmong?"* I waited for a moment for the children to respond. After listening to the children, I would say the Hmong word for the children to hear and move on to the next picture card. I repeated this for all eight cards. Next, I said to them *"I am going to say the words again. Please listen to me say each word first, and then you may repeat after me."* As I said each word, I pointed to the picture card and waited for the children to repeat the word before moving on to the next word. During the second week, the children requested to work with picture cards set 2 right after we finished working with singing picture cards set 1. Because of this, instead of giving two separate lessons, I ended up combining the language lesson for both picture cards set 1 and set 2 together. For the rest of the intervention period, I taught the words in picture card set 1 by singing, then immediately followed with teaching the words in picture card set 2 by reciting the words.

In a typical Montessori classroom, there is a 3-hour morning work period where children are free to choose materials to work with. At the end of each small group lesson, I told the children that both picture card sets would be placed in the Language area. I also told them they are welcome to take the picture card sets anytime and use it like I had shown them. They may work with a friend and practice reciting the words or singing, whichever they choose. I then walked the children over to the shelf where the picture cards were kept and showed them where

they can find it. Both picture cards sets were placed side by side on a low shelf within the children's reach.

To ensure that all students received these language lessons, I recorded each student's lesson received on the *Log of Language Lessons* (see Appendix C). During these four weeks of lessons, I observed daily during the 3-hour morning work period to see if the children independently chose the picture cards and worked with them. Every time a child independently chose the picture cards to work with, I recorded in the *Daily Tally of Use of Picture Cards* (see Appendix D). In addition to keeping a daily tally, I spent 5 minutes in the middle of the work period to reflect on the day and recorded my thoughts on the *Daily Observational Record Log* (see Appendix E). This qualitative data allowed me to write down notes about the children's attitude and engagement in working with the picture cards. When the children independently chose the picture cards to work with, I observed to see which set they chose and whether they sang the song or recited the Hmong words. I also recorded any changes in the schedule that might affect the work cycle.

After four weeks of the intervention, I sat down with each child individually to give a post-test. The post-test began on March 4, 2019. In the same manner as the pre-test, I said to the child again, "*I am going to show you some pictures. Can you tell me what it is called in Hmong?*" Starting with picture card set 1, I randomly placed a picture card in front of the child and asked, "*Do you know what this is called in Hmong?*" I purposefully did not place them in the order of the song. I recorded the child's response on the post-test (Appendix B), by using 'X' to indicate that the child knew the Hmong word. If the child did not know the Hmong word, then it was left blank. In addition to the post-test, I also had a short conversation with the child about how he or she enjoyed learning the Hmong words from both picture card sets. To guide the

conversation, I asked questions from the post student conversation questions form (see Appendix F). I recorded the child's responses on the form as we talked. Due to a few absences on this day, I was not able to give the post-test to all the children. I continued the next day with the post-test and conversation with the children who had been absent the day before. I was able to complete the post-tests for all the children and completed my data collection on March 5, 2019.

Data Analysis

Data was collected over a five-week time span. The research consisted of a parent questionnaire, vocabulary pre-test, implementation of daily small group language lessons, and recorded observations of the children using the picture cards. At the conclusion of the intervention, the children were given a vocabulary post-test and participated in a follow-up conversation where I asked them questions about their learning experience.

During the first week of research, I sent home a parent questionnaire to all the families in the class (Appendix A). The questionnaire provided insight to what languages were spoken in the child's home. I confirmed with the lead teacher that 26 out of the 28 children, or 93%, were Hmong. Out of the 28 children's families that were provided the questionnaire, I received 14 questionnaires back. In response to the first question, "What language(s) do you speak at home?", 1 family spoke Hmong only, or 7%; 4 responded that they spoke English only, or 29%; 8 responded that they spoke both Hmong and English, or 57%; and 1 did not respond to the question, or 7%. This data is shown in Figure 1.

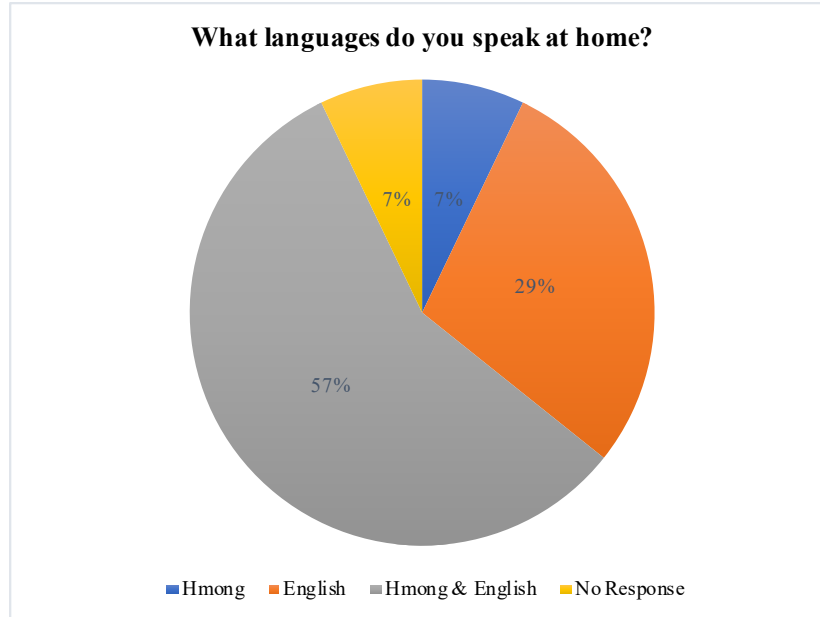


Figure 1. Question 1 of Parent Questionnaire

In regard to the second question, “What language do you speak most with your child at home?”, 3 responded that they spoke Hmong only to their child, or 21%; 10 responded that they spoke English only to their child, or 72%; and 1 responded that they spoke Hmong and English to their child, or 7%. This data is shown Figure 2.

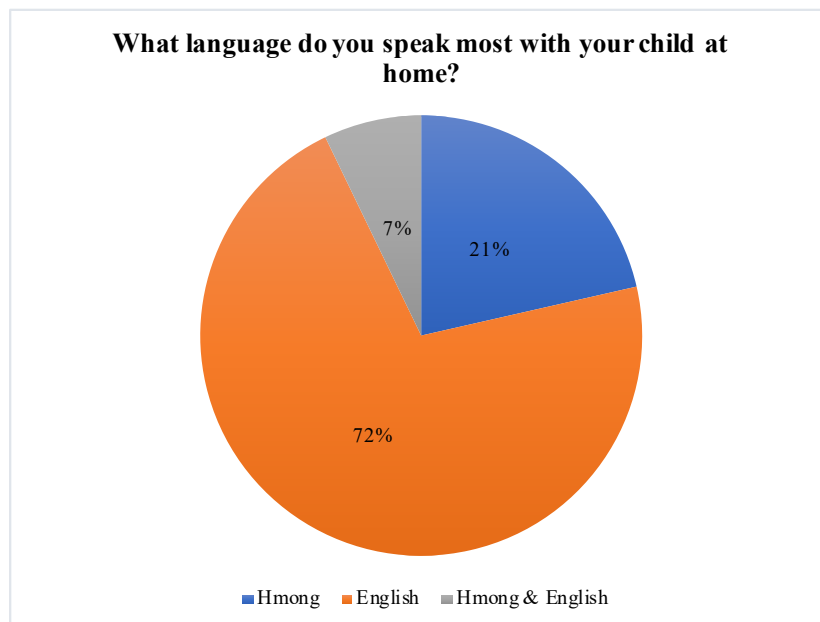


Figure 2. Question 2 of Parent Questionnaire

In regard to the third question, “What language does your child speak the most to you when answering/asking questions, or engaging in conversation?”, 1 responded that their child spoke Hmong to them, or 7% and 13 responded that their child spoke English to them, or 93%. This data is shown in Figure 3.

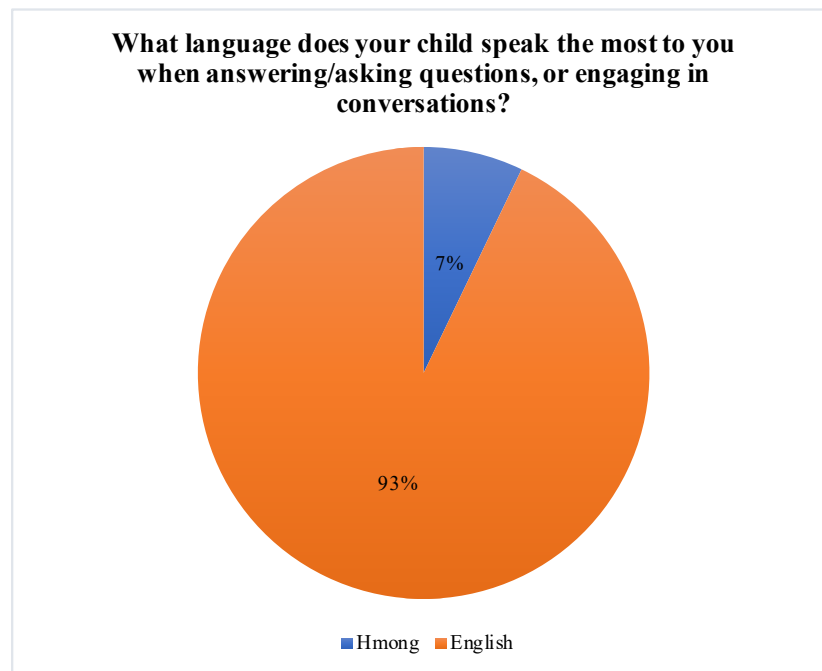


Figure 3. Question 3 of Parent Questionnaire

The data from the parent questionnaire inferred that the children were more exposed to English at home despite parents choosing to talk to one another in Hmong. There was only one family that responded that the parents spoke Hmong to each other, spoke Hmong to the child, and that the child spoke Hmong back to the parents. The majority of the families spoke a mixture of Hmong and English to each other and that included the child speaking English back to the parents.

In addition to sending home the parent questionnaire during the first week, I also administered a pre-test (Appendix G) to all the children. This test allowed me to gauge the

children's knowledge of Hmong words. Figures 4 and 5 show the number of children who identified the picture by saying the correct Hmong word.

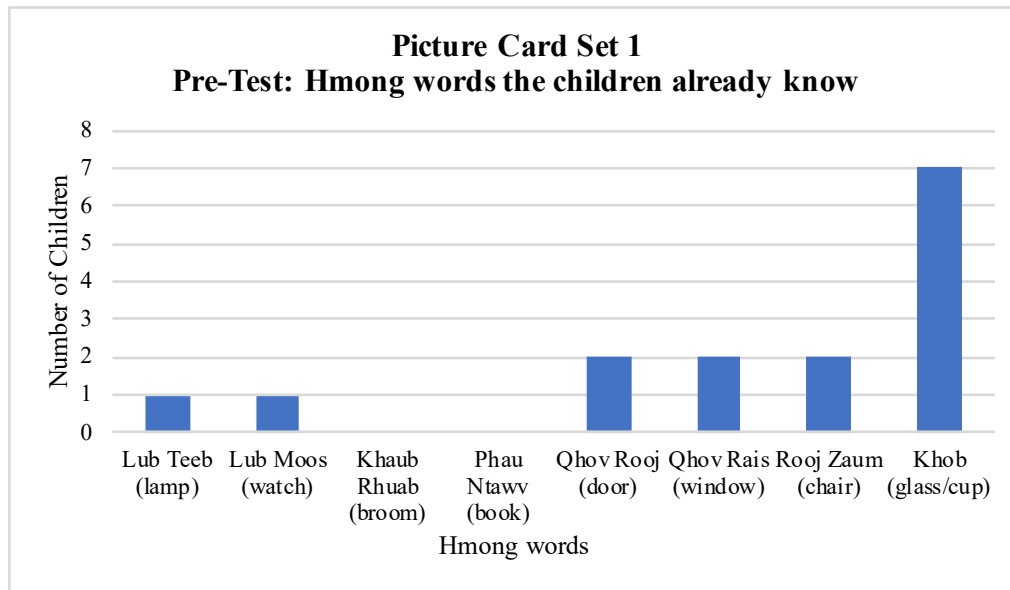


Figure 4. Picture card set 1 Pre-Test

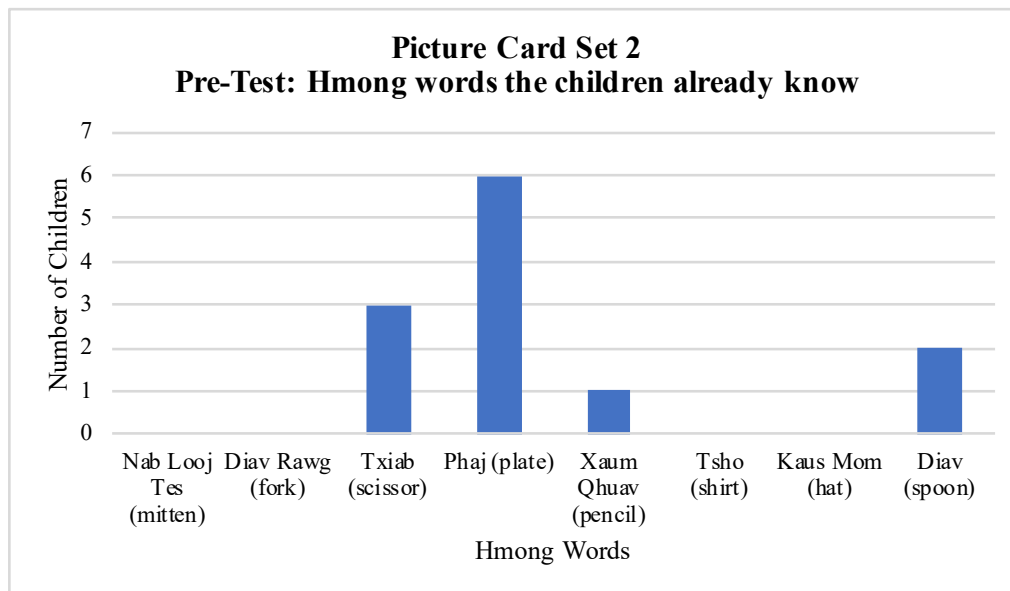


Figure 5. Picture card set 2 Pre-Test

Post-test results were analyzed in the same manner as the pre-test results. I have included figures of post-test results for both picture card set 1 and 2 along with figures that show pre-test

and post-test results side by side for an easier comparison. Figures 6 and 7 show the number of students that correctly said the Hmong word for the picture cards in the post-test. Figures 8 and 9 show a comparison of the results for the pre-test and post-test.

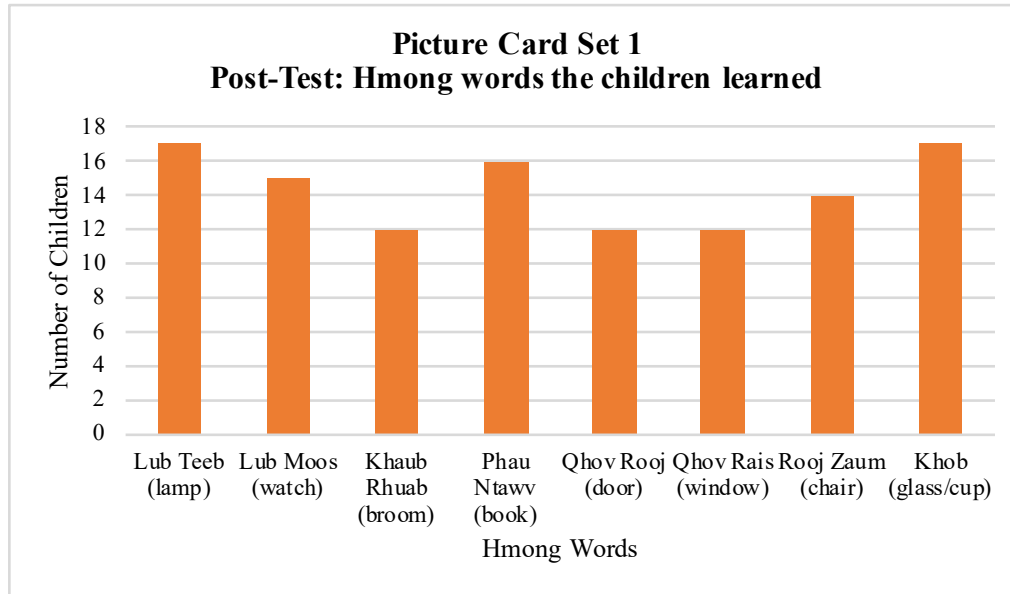


Figure 6. Picture card set 1 Post-Test

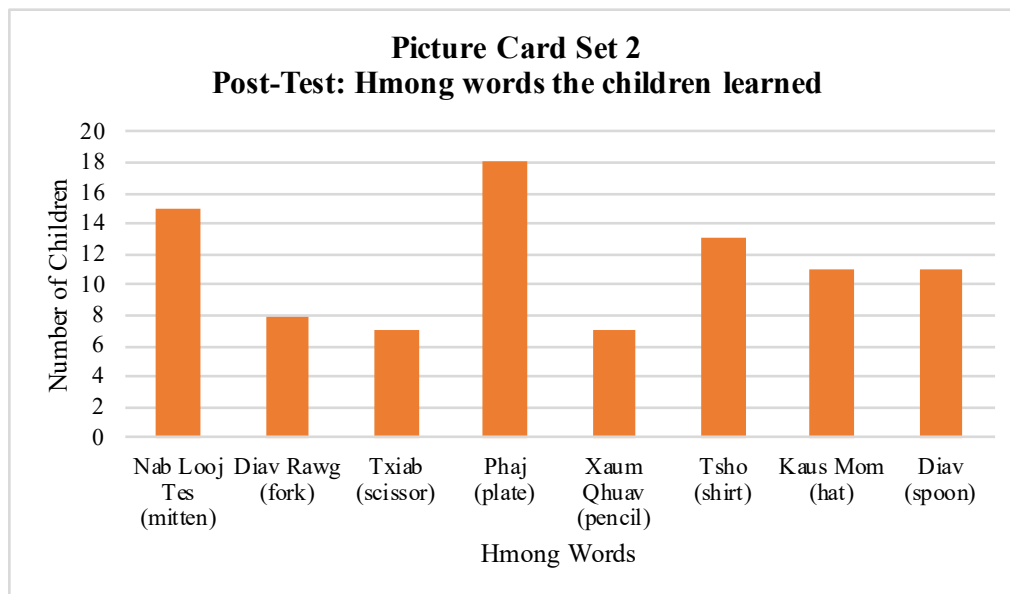


Figure 7. Picture card set 2 Post-Test

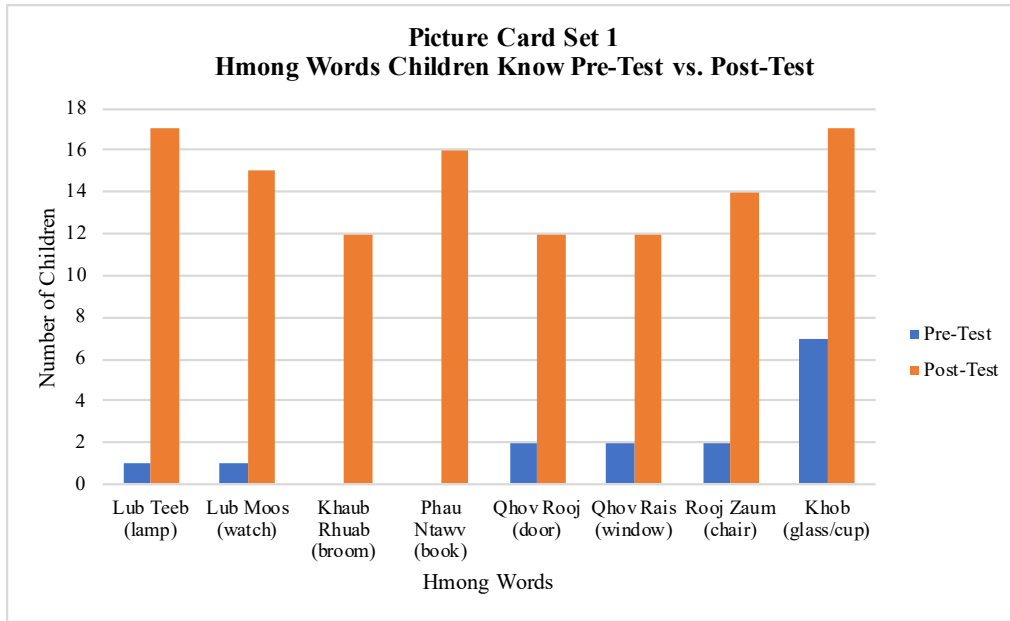


Figure 8. Picture card set 1 Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test

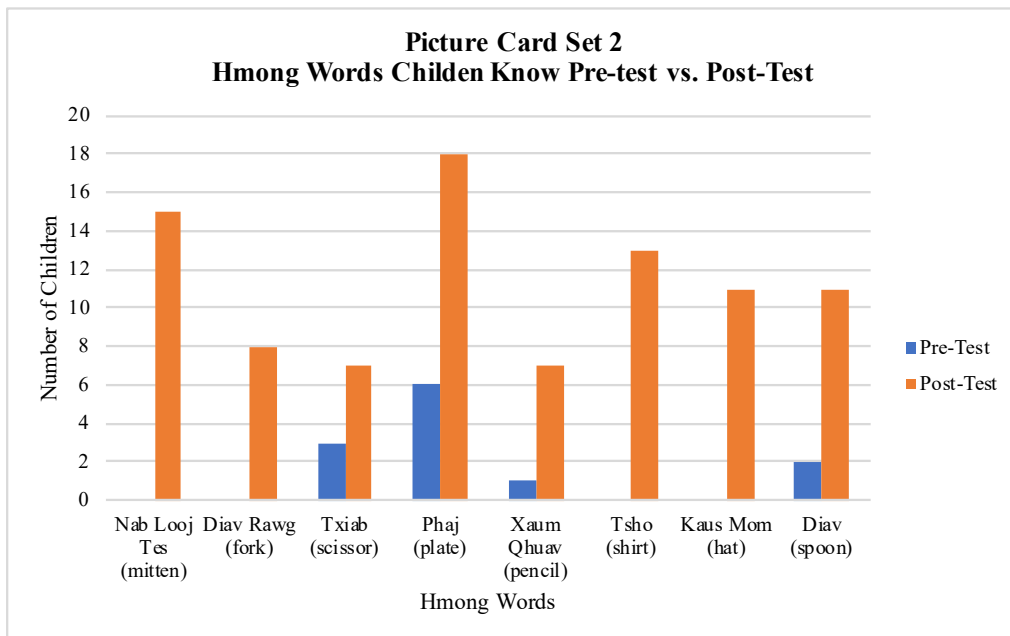


Figure 9. Picture card set 2 Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test

Results from the post-test show that there was an increase in Hmong vocabulary learned during the intervention. The number of children who knew at least one of the targeted Hmong words in picture card set 1 in the pre-test was 10 children (36% of classroom). The post-test

showed that 22 children knew at least one of the targeted Hmong words in picture card set 1 or 79% of classroom, an increase of 43%. The number of children who knew at least one of the targeted Hmong words in picture card set 2 in the pre-test was 8 children (29% of classroom). The post-test showed that 23 children knew at least one Hmong word in picture card set 2 or 82% of the classroom, an increase of 53%. No children knew all 8 of the targeted Hmong words in the pre-test from picture card set 1 or picture card set 2. The post-test showed that 7 children knew all 8 targeted Hmong words in picture card set 1, and 2 children knew all 8 targeted Hmong words from picture card set 2.

Qualitatively, I asked the children which picture card set they liked learning as part of a follow-up conversation (Appendix F) during the post-test and 16 chose picture card set 1 whereas 12 chose picture card set 2. I also asked which method of learning did the children like more and 24 children chose singing (86%) whereas 3 children chose reciting the words (11%). One child did not have a response to this question. Of the 24 children that chose singing, many of them had similar answers for why they liked it. I tallied the answers and placed them into similar response groups. Table 1 shows the responses that the children provided.

Table 1	
<i>Responses to conversation question "Why did you like singing the words?"</i>	
<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage of children who chose singing</u>
Like singing	54%
Think that singing is fun	25%
Experience singing with others/family members	25%
Think that singing makes you smart	8%
Like learning new songs	4%
<i>Note: Some children had more than one comment in a response e.g. "Because singing is fun and singing makes you smart."</i>	

Table 1. Post-Test Follow-up Question: Why did you like the singing the words?

Conversely, although the use of song and singing has shown to be an effective learning tool, not all children favored it. Some students chose reciting the words as the preferred method over singing. One child in particular stated that they liked the reciting method because “I don’t like singing and I just like [saying it].” Overall, the song method allowed many of the children to learn Hmong language in a fun and enjoyable way that provided further positive reinforcement and greater exposure to Hmong language.

Action Plan

The data from this research shows that singing songs does support language learning. Although both methods, singing and reciting, showed that the children learned vocabulary, overall, the song method supported the children to learn Hmong vocabulary in a fun and enjoyable way. Often while I sang with a few children in a small group, many other children would draw near and eventually join us in the singing. From conversations with the children, most of them said that they enjoyed singing versus reciting to learn and that they thought singing was fun. Using songs and singing as a learning tool provided positive reinforcement for teaching and learning language and had a positive impact on the children’s ability to learn new Hmong vocabulary.

The results will not change any teaching practice since singing songs is something that is already being practiced in the classroom to support children’s Hmong vocabulary learning. However, it will reinforce the importance of incorporating and using songs as a tool for learning new vocabulary. Vocabulary acquisition is key in language development. As educators, we must utilize tools that are effective in helping children learn. Therefore, I would recommend continued use of songs as a tool for learning second language vocabulary. Incorporating singing second language vocabulary to the tune of a simple children’s song can be effective in helping children

learn the language. At the beginning of the intervention, there were only a few children that knew a small amount of the targeted Hmong words. At the end of the intervention, there was nearly a 49% increase in the number of children having learned the targeted Hmong words.

Further research would have been to implement it in a classroom that did not have any Hmong families or children exposed to the Hmong language at home and compare results. This can allow data collection without being skewed by previous exposure to Hmong language.

Opportunities for future research investigation would be to use real objects instead of picture cards and increase the timeframe for data collection. The idea of using real objects stemmed from the children's behavior during the intervention. As we sang the song or recited the words and pointed to each corresponding picture card, the children began looking for and identifying the object in the environment as we sang. The small group lesson ended up becoming a game where the children started looking for the object in the classroom and either pointed to it (e.g., door) or brought the object back to me (e.g., broom). Although this deviated from the original small group lesson, I welcomed the change and allowed the children to continue engaging in the activity because they were enjoying it as was I.

Another recommendation for future research would be to increase the timeframe for data collection. I collected data for five weeks. At the beginning of the research, no child knew all of the targeted Hmong words from either picture card set. At the end of the intervention, the research showed that 25% of the children learned 100% of the Hmong words in picture card set 1 and 7% of the children learned 100% of the targeted Hmong words in picture card set 2. With more time allotted to continue teaching the children the targeted Hmong words, I believe that there would be an even greater increase in the number of children learning 100% of the targeted

Hmong words. Future research could benefit from examining using songs for vocabulary learning in the long-term.

Language is so important for communication and developing language makes communicating better. Developing language requires learning vocabulary. Introducing vocabulary via a children's song can create an enjoyable learning experience and being able to learn with joy can be motivation to continue learning. As an educator and bi-lingual speaker, this research project helped me to expand my knowledge of the importance and power that language and communication has on me and my classroom. Over the course of singing Hmong words to the children, I saw what started as confused faces turn to joyful smiles. I was able to witness children making concrete connections of the Hmong words to actual objects in the classroom. During the intervention, an assistant teacher who handled bus duty informed me that one afternoon during the bus ride home she observed one of the children singing the song that I had taught. I was overjoyed to know that the children were singing the song outside of the classroom. This showed me that not only were the students learning language in a meaningful way, but that I was teaching language in a meaningful way as well.

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Appendix A
Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parents,

My name is Julie Thao, and I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Master of Education.

As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study the effects of singing on learning vocabulary. I would like to see if singing songs will create a fun experience and help children learn new Hmong words.

In the coming weeks, I will be teaching Hmong words to the children in small group language lessons. I will teach these Hmong words by using picture cards and singing a song. This will be done in the classroom as a regular part of the morning work cycle. As a benefit, your child will learn new Hmong words and enjoy singing. I will be analyzing the results at the end of the language lessons to see if singing songs is effective in building Hmong vocabulary.

To help me gain a better understand of the children's language preference and exposure to Hmong language, I would like to ask parents a few questions. Please take a moment to answer the questions below. By completing these questions, you are consenting to have your data (answers to the questions) be included in my study.

Thank you for your time. I truly appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

Julie Thao

By completing the questions below, I understand that I am consenting to have my data (answers to the questions) be included in the above action research study.

Child's Name:

Parent Signature:

Date:

What language(s) do you speak at home?

What language do you speak the most with your child at home?

What language does your child speak the most to you when answering/asking questions, or engaging in conversations?

Appendix B
Pre/Post Test for Hmong Words
Adapted from Joyce (2012)

Name: _____

Song to be sung: *“Taub Hau, Xub Pwg, Hauv Caug, Ntiv Taw” (English translation is “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” to the tune of Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes)*

Set 1: Words taught with picture cards and singing song

Hmong Word	English translation	Pre Test Date:	Post Test Date:
taub hau	head		
xub pwg	shoulder		
hauv caug	knee		
ntiv taw	toes		
qhov muag	eye		
pob ntseg	ear		
qhov ncauj	mouth		
taub ntswg	nose		

Set 2: Words taught with picture cards without singing song

Hmong Word	English translation	Pre Test Date:	Post Test Date:
pob tsaig	chin		
plhu	cheek		
plaub hau	hair		
kaug niav	teeth		
caj dab	neck		
plab	stomach		
lauj tshib	elbow		
tes	hand		

‘X’ indicates that child correctly names the picture in Hmong when the picture is shown to him/her

Script for pre-test & post-test: *“I am going to show you some pictures. Can you tell me what it is called in Hmong? (show picture) Do you know what this is called in Hmong?”*

Appendix C
Log of Language Lessons

Lesson: *(Example: Set 1, Teaching words with song)*

<i>Child 1</i>				
<i>Child 2</i>				
<i>Child 3</i>				
<i>Child 4</i>				
<i>Child 5</i>				
<i>Child 6</i>				
<i>Child 7</i>				
<i>Child 8</i>				
<i>Child 9</i>				
<i>Child 10</i>				
<i>Child 11</i>				
<i>Child 12</i>				
<i>Child 13</i>				
<i>Child 14</i>				
<i>Child 15</i>				
<i>Child 16</i>				
<i>Child 17</i>				
<i>Child 18</i>				
<i>Child 19</i>				

Appendix D
Daily Tally of Use of Picture Cards

Date _____

I will tally every time the children independently choose a set of picture cards to work with during the morning work cycle (9AM- 12PM)

Hmong Word Set	# of times children choose to work with picture cards	Notes
Set 1- Hmong words w/singing song		
Set 2- Hmong words w/o singing song		

Appendix E
Daily Observational Record Log
Adapted from Mejia-Menendez (2016)

Date _____

Weather _____

Questions to Reflect	Reflection/Observations
<p>Is there anything that could affect the children's mood and/or engagement today? <i>(i.e., returning from family vacation, special events over the weekend, new baby in family, etc.)</i></p>	
<p>Is this a normal work cycle? <i>(i.e., Any changes to schedule? Are there adult guests in the room? Special activities? etc.)</i></p>	
<p>Are most of the children working/engaged in work?</p>	
<p>Are there children working with the picture cards?</p> <p>Which set?</p> <p>Are they singing/saying the target words while using the picture cards?</p>	
<p>Other thoughts</p>	

Appendix F
Post Student Conversation Questions
Adapted from Joyce (2012)

Date: _____

I will place both Set 1 and Set 2 in front of the child and ask the following questions for a conversation:

- 1. We learned new words in both of these sets of picture cards.
Did you like learning the words in *Set 1* or *Set 2*?**

- 2. Why did you like learning the words in (*set that child indicate preference*)?**

- 3. When we learned the words in set 1, we sang a song using the words.
When we learned the words in set 2, we only said the words and did not sing.
What did you like better, when we learned the words by singing a song, or when we learned the words by saying it?**

- 4. Why?**

Appendix G
Modified Pre/Post Test for Hmong Words
Adapted from Joyce (2012)

Name: _____

Song to be sung: *To tune of ‘Oh My Darling, Clementine’*

Set 1: Words taught with picture cards and singing song

Hmong Word	English translation	Pre Test Date:	Post Test Date:
lub teeb	lamp		
lub moos	clock		
khaub rhuab	broom		
phau ntawv	book		
qhov rooj	door		
qhov rais	window		
rooj zaum	chair		
khob	glass (cup)		

Set 2: Words taught with picture cards without singing song

Hmong Word	English translation	Pre Test Date:	Post Test Date:
nab looj tes	mitten		
tsho	shirt		
diav	spoon		
diav rawg	fork		
txiab	scissors		
phaj	plate		
xaum	pencil		
kaus mom	hat		

‘X’ indicates that child correctly names the picture in Hmong when the picture is shown to him/her. Script for pre-test & post-test: “I am going to show you some pictures. Can you tell me what it is called in Hmong? (show picture) Do you know what this is called in Hmong?”