

Language, Literacy and Cultural Transmission in a Lutuv Community

Alina Matthews ~ Indiana University Bloomington ~ Department of Linguistics

Mentor: Professor Kelly Berkson

IU Undergraduate Research Poster Symposium ~ July 29, 2021

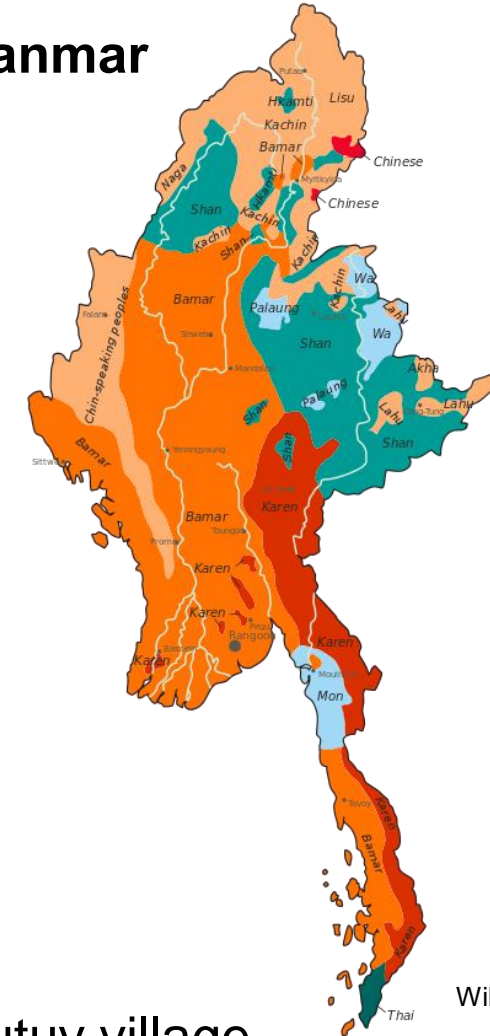


The Burmese Population of Indianapolis

Indianapolis is home to a community of over 20,000 Burmese refugees^{1,2}

- ❖ Highly multilingual; 30 or more Chin languages from the Tibeto-Burman language family are spoken. Hakha Lai acts as a common community language.
- ❖ Lutuv (also sometimes called Lautu) is one of these languages. A Lutuv orthography exists but it is not widely or commonly used and very few literacy materials exist.³
- ❖ 15-20K Lutuv speakers worldwide; <1000 in Indianapolis, by community member estimate³
- ❖ In Summer 2020, we created six Lutuv children's books (Par & Matthews 2020). Overwhelming positive feedback inspired the current research.

Burma/Myanmar



Hnaring (below), Lutuv village



Research Questions

We conducted a pilot survey on the literacy desires of the Indianapolis Lutuv community to investigate the following questions:

- Do community members value Lutuv literacy materials?
- Do community members want to be able to read in Lutuv?
 - How many people can already read in Lutuv?
 - How many people want to be able to read better?
- Do community members want their children to develop literacy in Lutuv?
- What types of literacy materials (for children and for adults) do community members want access to?

Methods

- Our methods were influenced by Thawngza and Wamsley (2019) "A Survey on Hakha Lai Acquisition and Attitudes"⁴
- A survey created on Qualtrics was distributed via Facebook and Viber, the predominant media connections used by the community. Announcements were also made in church.
- **Participants:** Lutuv speakers from the Indianapolis community who were over the ages of 18

IN TOTAL: 35+ responses, presenting data from 14 respondents

Methodological Considerations

- Online written survey design included both Lutuv and English text in order to increase accessibility to participants

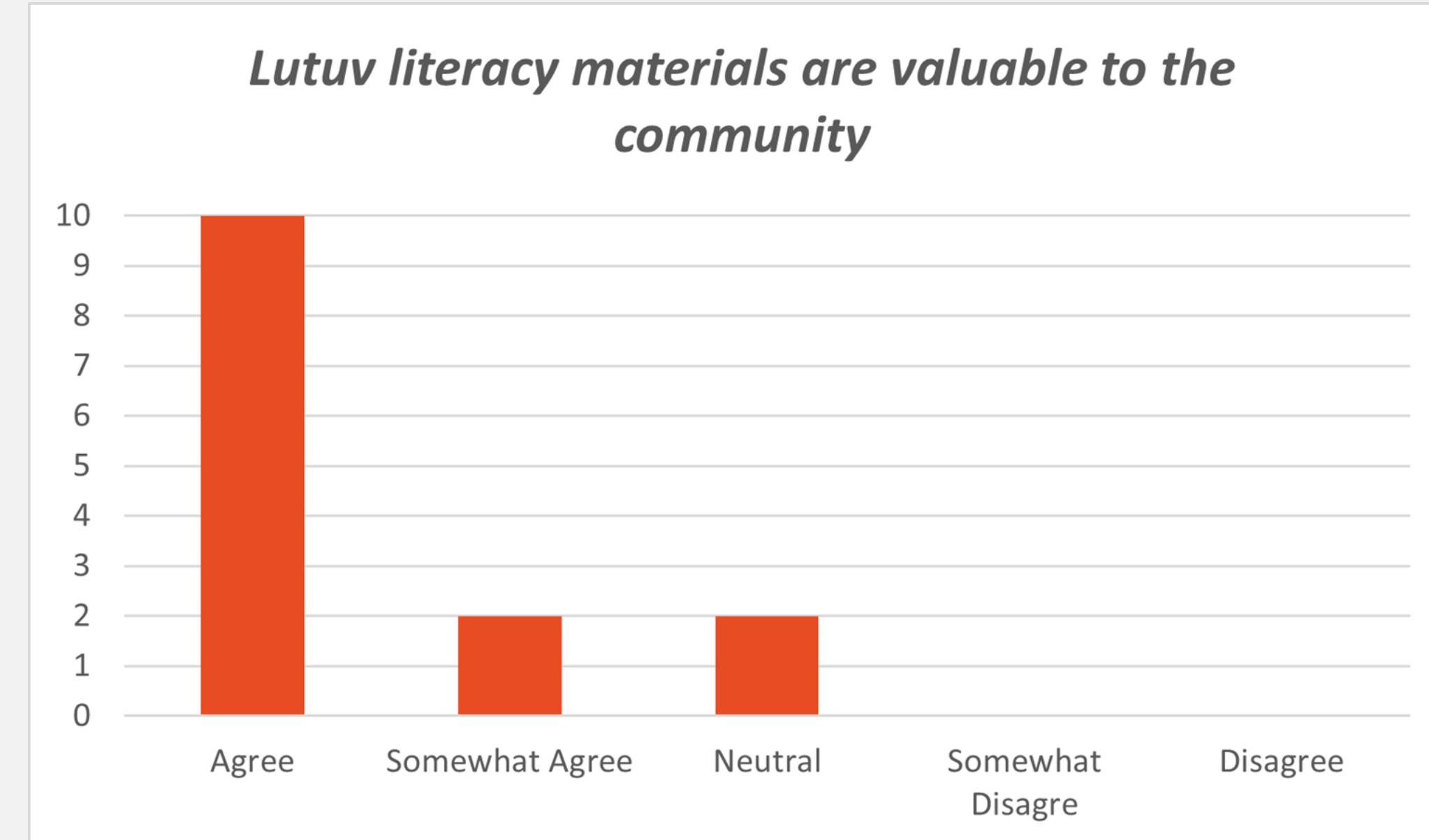
Q14

Khaapa pa lie hmuo pa caa zaw kha pa ma, palie papa na khing?
What other materials would you like to see translated into Lutuv, if any?

Example survey questions with Lutuv and English

- The survey was distributed online rather than on paper

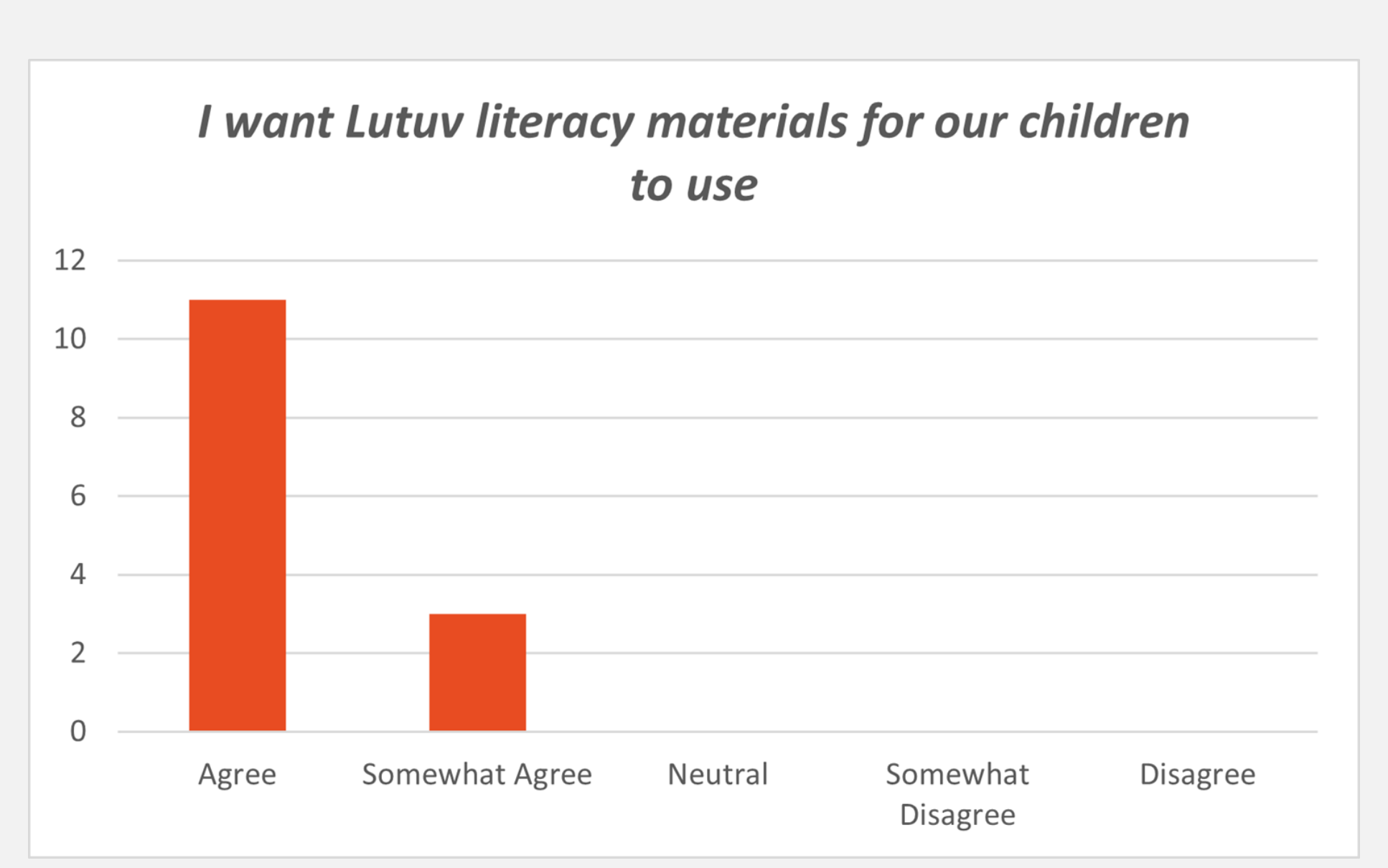
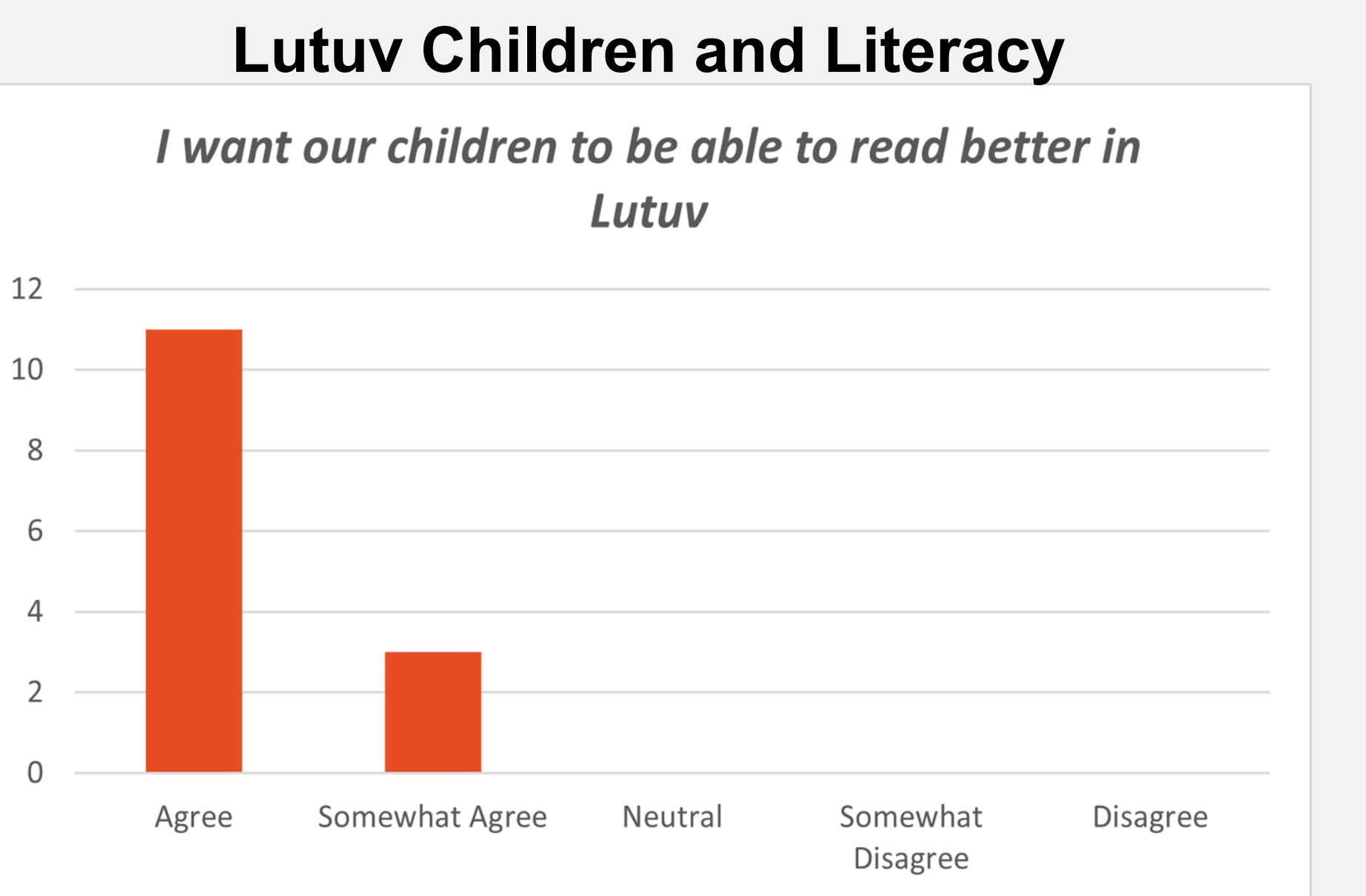
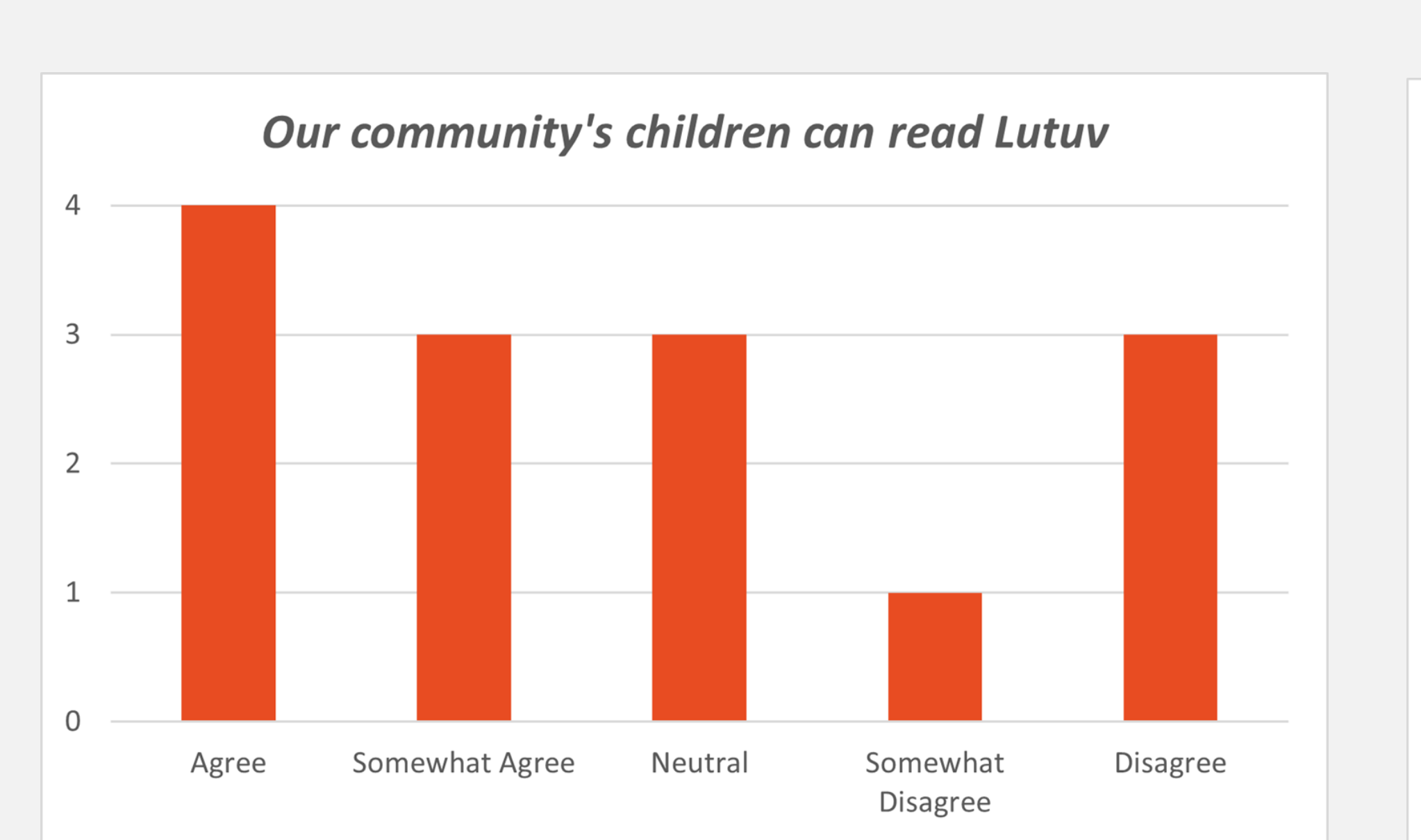
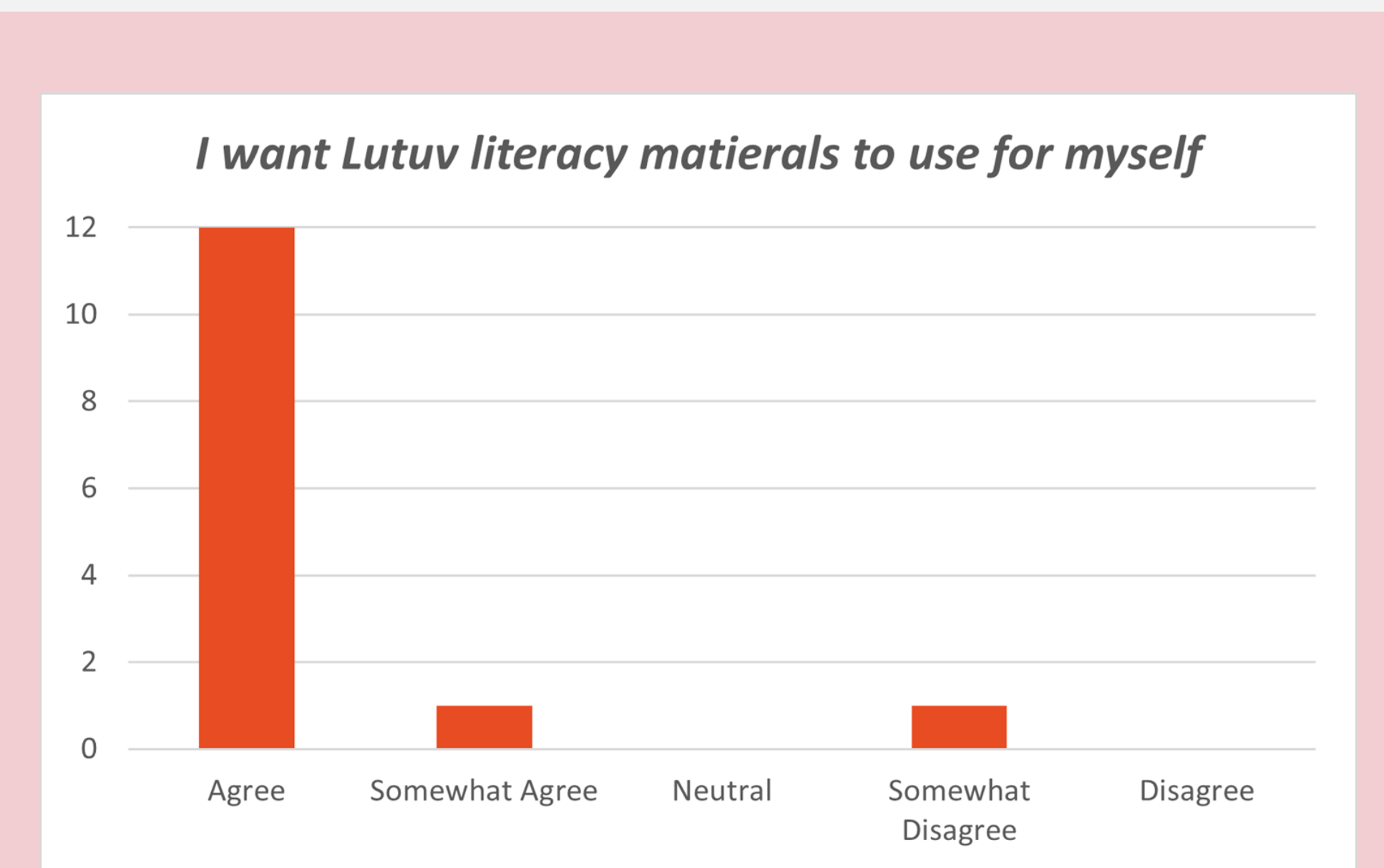
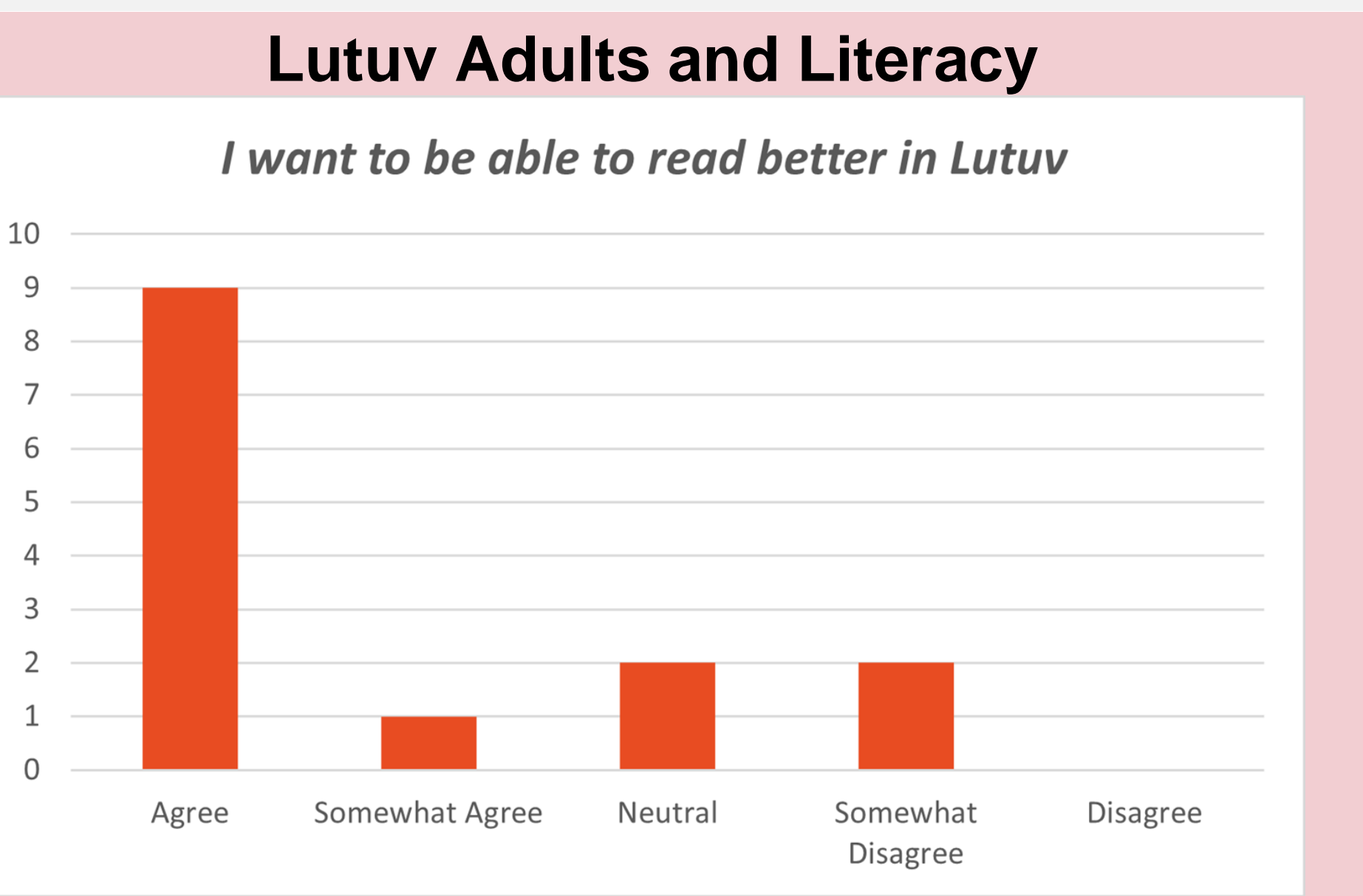
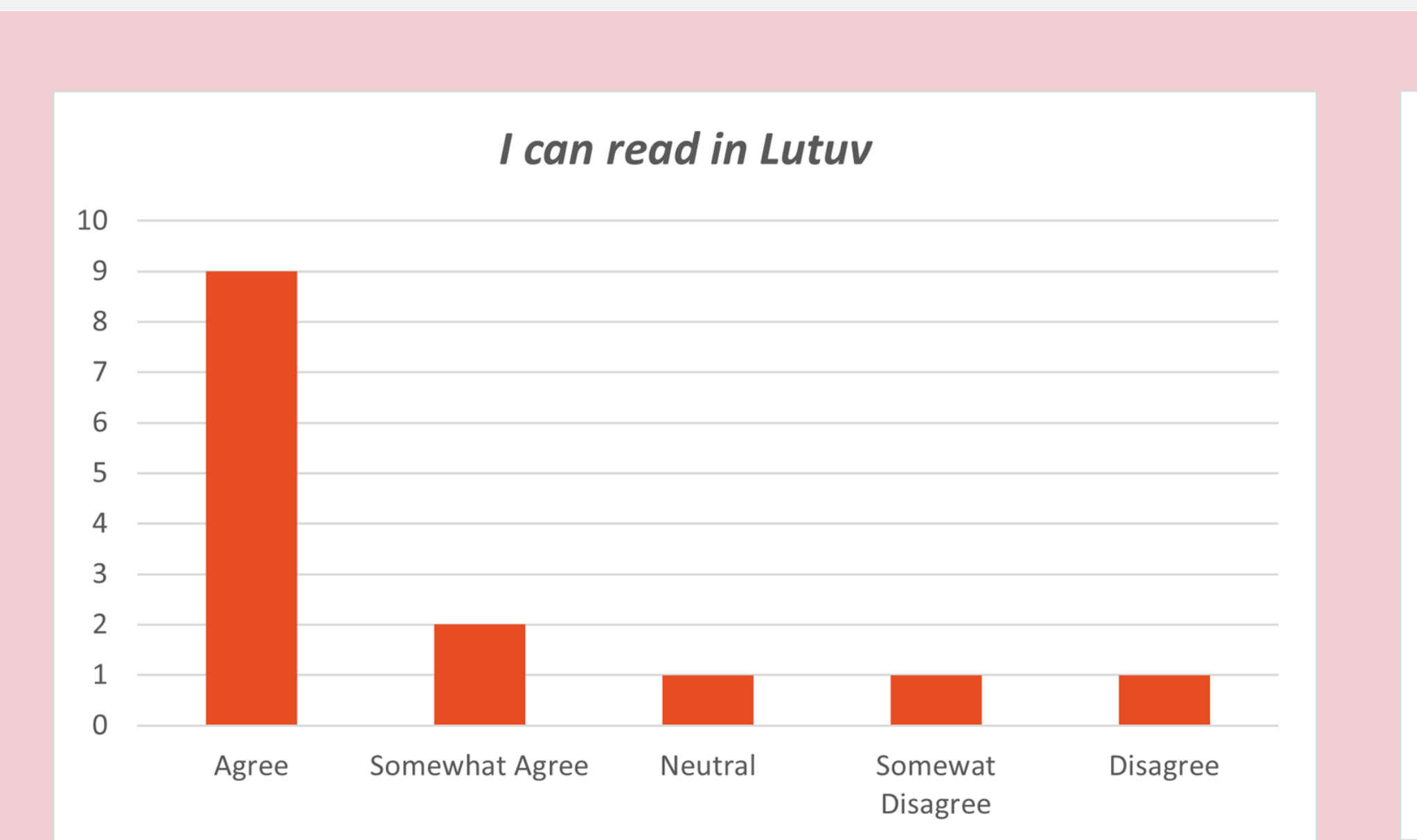
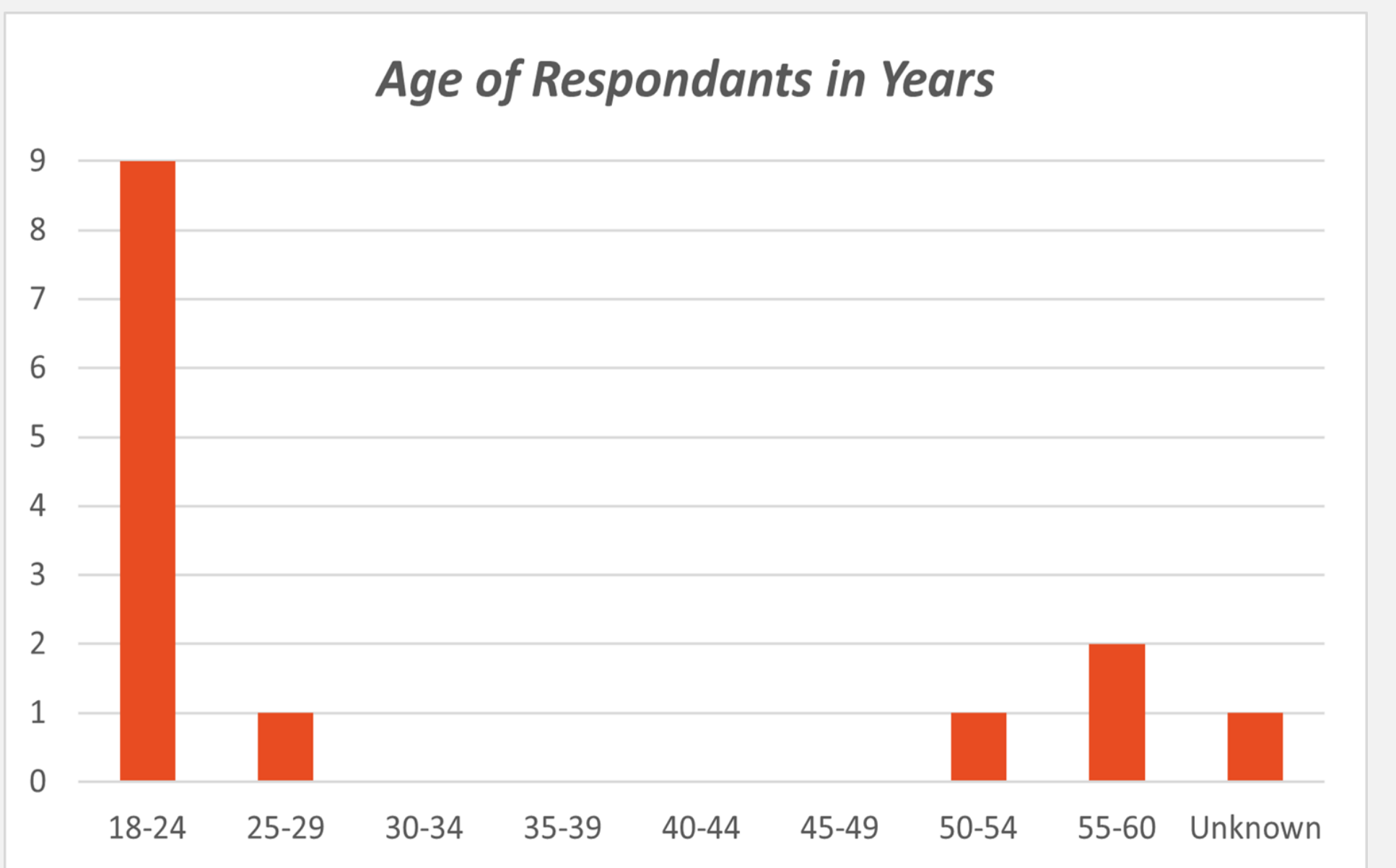
Results



Community Information

Left: Two respondents answered "neutral" but overall, the majority of survey takers believe that Lutuv literacy materials are valuable to the community.

Right: Majority of respondents were in their 20's. Handful of people in their 50's. No ages in their 30's or 40's. One unknown.



Overview of Results

- ❖ 86% of respondents believe Lutuv literacy materials are valuable to the community
 - ❖ 78% reported they can read in Lutuv and 71% reported they wish they could read better
 - ❖ Attitudes on the literacy capabilities of children produced the most varied results but 100% of respondents wished for children to be able to read better
 - ❖ About equal desires for Lutuv literacy materials for adults and for children
- Community members showed desire for: The Old Testament Bible and other biblical stories for children, state/government documents for parents, and Lutuv traditional stories to be made available in Lutuv.**

Future Directions

- ❖ Keep the survey open to continue getting results
- ❖ Find literacy and language attitudes of Lutuv speakers in other parts of the United States and Burma/Myanmar
- ❖ Begin logistical process of how we can get the community's desired materials translated/written in Lutuv
- ❖ Translate findings to be made available to the community and/or create working paper



References

[1] Berkson, Kelly, Samson Lotven, Peng Hlei Thang, Thomas Thawngza, Zai Sung, James Wamsley, Francis Tyers, Kenneth Van Bik, Sandra Kübler, Donald Williamson & Matthew Anderson. 2019. Building a Common Voice Corpus for Laihoh (Hakha Chin). Proceedings of the 3rd Workshop on Computational Methods for Endangered Languages, Vol. 2, Article 2. Available at <https://scholar.colorado.edu/scil-cmel/vol2/iss1/2>. [2] Lotven, Samson, Kelly Berkson, James C. Wamsley, Jillian Danaher, Kenneth Van Bik, and Stuart Davis. 2020. The syllable in Kuki-Chin. Journal of South Asian Languages and Linguistics 6, no. 2: 281-308. [3] Sui Hnem Par. Literacy Efforts in Lutuv. Poster presented at: Engaged Learning Summer Research Poster Session; July 25, 2019, Bloomington, IN. [4] Thomas Thawngza and James C. Wamsley. A Survey on Hakha Lai Acquisition and Attitudes. Poster presented at: Engaged Learning Summer Research Poster Session; July 25, 2019; Bloomington, IN.

Acknowledgements

This project could not have been completed without the help of Sui Hnem Par. The project was also supported in part by IU Undergraduate Research and the funding from the Advanced Summer Research Scholarship.