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THE IMPACT OF DYSFUNCTIONAL HOME ENVIRONMENTS ON L2 ACQUISITION AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG TEENAGERS"

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Abstract: Dysfunctional home environments—characterized by chronic interparental conflict, socio-economic instability, emotional neglect, and domestic stress—exert a profound, multi-dimensional impact on adolescent cognitive development and educational performance. During adolescence, a critical neurodevelopmental period marked by heightened socio-emotional sensitivity, family dysfunction severely compromises a learner's executive functioning, working memory capacity, and affective domain. This paper investigates how toxic family dynamics negatively impair language learning acquisition and broader academic engagement among teenage learners. Utilizing Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and neurobiological models of chronic stress response, this study demonstrates that high levels of cortisol induced by home stress drastically elevate language learning anxiety, suppress risk-taking in communicative practice, and impede long-term lexical retention. The findings underscore the urgent need for trauma-informed EFL pedagogy, socio-emotional scaffolding, and supportive classroom environments to mitigate domestic barriers to language learning.

Keywords: Dysfunctional home environments, Adolescent L2 acquisition, Affective Filter Hypothesis, Chronic stress, Trauma-informed pedagogy, Executive function.

Introduction

Adolescence represents a pivotal developmental stage wherein cognitive architectures undergo substantial maturation alongside identity formation. However, when teenagers are exposed to persistent domestic adversity—ranging from verbal and domestic abuse to marital instability and emotional detachment—their capacity for sustained academic focus is severely disrupted (Harold and Sellers, 2018). In foreign language learning environments, which intrinsically require high cognitive flexibility, vulnerability, and active communicative risk-taking, the downstream effects of a dysfunctional home environment manifest as acute academic disengagement, heightened performance anxiety, and chronic underachievement.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Neurobiological research highlights that prolonged exposure to family discord triggers chronic activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, leading to elevated baseline cortisol levels (Lupien et al., 2009). For teenage learners, chronic stress directly impairs prefrontal cortex function, damaging working memory allocation,



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information processing speed, and sustained attention spans necessary for mastering complex L2 syntactic structures and vocabulary (Evans and Schamberg, 2009).

The Affective Filter in Language Acquisition

In second language acquisition (SLA), Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that emotional variables—specifically motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety—directly filter linguistic input (Krashen, 1982). Adolescents living in unstable home environments enter the classroom with a chronically elevated "affective filter." Domestic stress breeds fear of negative evaluation, leading to emotional withdrawal and extreme reluctance to participate in communicative speaking activities (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

Methodology

This qualitative meta-synthesis analyzes existing empirical literature on family systems theory, developmental psychology, and SLA methodologies. By synthesizing cross-disciplinary empirical findings, the study maps specific domestic stressors (interparental conflict, emotional neglect, socio-economic strain) directly to observable SLA bottlenecks (communicative apprehension, lower lexical retention, reduced willingness to communicate).

Discussion and Key Findings

- **Communicative Apprehension and Risk Aversion:** Teenagers from conflict-ridden households demonstrate a significant decline in Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Fear of hostility at home translates into hyper-vigilance in class, where making a linguistic error is perceived as a threat rather than a learning opportunity (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012).

- **Deficits in Executive Function:** Chronic home stress diminishes working memory capacity. As a result, teenage EFL learners struggle with complex grammar decoding, structural recall, and reading comprehension tasks that demand high cognitive load (Evans and Schamberg, 2009).

- **Emotional Disengagement:** Emotional insecurity caused by family instability often manifests as passive resistance, absenteeism, or behavioral detachment during collaborative, peer-led learning tasks (Harold and Sellers, 2018).

To counteract these negative impacts, language educators must implement **Trauma-Informed EFL Pedagogy**. Constructing an emotionally safe classroom environment with clear routines, low-stakes communicative exercises, and empathetic instructor scaffolding can significantly lower the affective filter for vulnerable teenage learners.

Conclusion

A dysfunctional home environment acts as a major barrier to adolescent L2 acquisition and holistic educational development. By elevating emotional anxiety and impairing core cognitive functions, home-based stress prevents teenage learners from realizing their full academic potential. Recognizing these socio-emotional dynamics



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enables educators and curriculum designers to foster supportive, trauma-sensitive language classrooms that cushion vulnerable students against domestic hardship.

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