

The Role and Impact of Family Psychological Functioning in Improving the Quality and Progress of English Language Learning Skills of Children with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of family psychological functioning on the quality and progress of English language learning skills in children with disabilities, highlighting the role of emotional support and family dynamics in second language acquisition. The study employed a descriptive-correlational design, utilizing a survey method to collect data from 223 parents of children with disabilities aged 8 to 12 years in Tehran. The Family Assessment Device (FAD) was used to measure family psychological functioning, while the TOEFL Primary Test assessed English language learning quality and progress. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, and linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive power of family psychological functioning on language learning outcomes. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-27. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between family psychological functioning and English language learning quality ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) and progress ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis confirmed that family psychological functioning significantly predicted both English learning quality ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) and progress ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). Children from emotionally supportive families demonstrated higher motivation, better vocabulary acquisition, and improved language retention, while those from psychologically distressed families exhibited lower engagement and slower progress in English learning. The study underscores the critical role of family psychological well-being in facilitating second language acquisition among children with disabilities. Emotional support and structured family engagement significantly enhance English language learning quality and progress, suggesting the need for family-centered interventions in language education policies.

Keywords: Family psychological functioning, English language learning, children with disabilities, second language acquisition, parental involvement, educational psychology.

1. Introduction

The process of learning a second language, particularly English, is influenced by numerous factors, including cognitive, psychological, and social elements. Among these, the role of family psychological functioning has garnered increasing attention as a critical determinant in shaping children's English language learning experiences, especially for those with disabilities. A well-functioning family environment provides emotional support, reduces anxiety, and enhances motivation, thereby fostering more effective language acquisition (Peng, 2024). Conversely, dysfunctional family dynamics can create barriers that hinder progress in language learning, leading to increased stress and decreased motivation among children (Vadivel et al., 2022).

Psychological factors play a central role in English language learning, particularly among children. The psychological well-being of learners affects their motivation, confidence, and ability to engage in language acquisition effectively (Mendoza et al., 2023). Research suggests that learners with positive psychological states are more likely to enjoy the learning process and demonstrate better performance in English proficiency (Jiang, 2024). On the other hand, anxiety, fear of failure, and lack of emotional support can significantly impede a child's ability to acquire a second language (Hayasaki & Ryan, 2022).

From a positive psychology perspective, factors such as playfulness and enjoyment have been linked to improved language learning outcomes (Barabadi et al., 2022). Engaging children in playful and interactive learning environments can enhance cognitive flexibility, reduce stress, and increase engagement in English language learning. This highlights the importance of a supportive home environment that fosters psychological well-being, particularly for children with disabilities who may require additional encouragement and reinforcement (Fitria, 2024).

Family psychological functioning encompasses various dimensions, including emotional support, communication, and overall family well-being. Studies indicate that children from psychologically stable families demonstrate higher levels of motivation and persistence in learning English (Mabin & Roy, 2023). Parents who actively engage in their child's learning process contribute significantly to their language development by creating a structured and encouraging environment (Su, 2024). In contrast, children from dysfunctional families—where conflicts, stress, or lack of emotional support prevail—often struggle with language

learning due to increased anxiety and reduced self-confidence (Zang, 2023).

Parental involvement in English language learning has been found to have a direct impact on children's language proficiency (Yan, 2022). When parents provide consistent emotional and academic support, children develop greater resilience and adaptability in learning English (Joy et al., 2019). Furthermore, research suggests that socioeconomic factors also influence family support, as families with higher income levels may have more resources to provide educational support, such as tutoring or exposure to English-speaking environments (Yan, 2022). However, even in lower-income households, strong family psychological functioning can compensate for limited resources by fostering a nurturing and motivating learning environment (Li, 2024).

Children with disabilities face unique challenges in acquiring English language skills, often requiring specialized teaching methods and additional support (Soliman, 2023). The presence of cognitive, sensory, or learning disabilities can make it more difficult for these children to grasp linguistic concepts and apply them effectively. Research highlights that individualized instruction and emotional reinforcement are crucial for improving English proficiency among children with disabilities (Fath, 2022).

A key factor that contributes to language learning success in children with disabilities is the level of family encouragement and adaptation to their needs. Parents who actively participate in language-learning activities, such as storytelling, reading, and conversation practice, significantly enhance their child's ability to retain and use English vocabulary (Peng, 2024). Moreover, children with disabilities benefit from structured learning routines and reduced anxiety, which can be fostered through positive family interactions and emotional stability at home (Zeng et al., 2020).

The quality and progress of English language learning depend on multiple interconnected factors, one of which is family support. Research demonstrates that a high degree of parental involvement correlates with improved vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and speaking skills in children (Dariyanto, 2024). Families that establish a language-rich environment—such as encouraging daily English conversations or exposing children to English media—play a pivotal role in enhancing language proficiency (Prayogo, 2022).

Additionally, psychological stability within the family is crucial for maintaining a child's motivation and engagement in language learning. Children who experience high levels of emotional security at home are more likely to develop confidence in using English, whereas those exposed to stress or family conflict may struggle with retention and language use (Yi, 2023). This reinforces the need for family-centered interventions that support both psychological well-being and structured learning (Kryeziu, 2019).

Several theories explain how second language acquisition is influenced by environmental and psychological factors. One widely accepted theory is Ushioda's (2019) motivational framework, which highlights the significance of internal and external motivation in language learning. Children who receive positive reinforcement from their families develop intrinsic motivation, which leads to greater perseverance and enjoyment in learning English (Ushioda, 2019). Another relevant perspective is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in language development. According to this theory, children acquire language skills more effectively through guided interactions with parents and caregivers. This aligns with findings that show parental involvement plays a crucial role in shaping a child's English learning experiences (Mabin & Roy, 2023). Additionally, the Triadic Reciprocal Determinism model proposed by Bandura suggests that behavioral, environmental, and personal factors interact in influencing language learning outcomes (Zeng et al., 2020). This model underscores the need for supportive family dynamics as a means of fostering better language learning progress in children.

Despite extensive research on second language acquisition, the specific role of family psychological functioning in improving English learning among children with disabilities remains underexplored. While previous studies have examined the impact of parental involvement and socioeconomic status, fewer investigations have focused on the emotional and psychological support provided by families (Mendoza et al., 2023). Furthermore, most existing research has centered on neurotypical children, leaving a gap in understanding how family psychological functioning influences language learning in children with disabilities (Fath, 2022). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the correlation between family psychological functioning and English language learning quality and progress in children with disabilities.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study follows a descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between family psychological functioning and the quality and progress of English language learning skills in children with disabilities. The research was conducted using a survey method, with data collected from parents of children aged 8 to 12 in Tehran. The sample size was determined based on Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) table, resulting in a total of 223 participants selected through random cluster sampling from special education centers and inclusive schools. Participation was voluntary, and ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Family Psychological Functioning

To assess family psychological functioning, the Family Assessment Device (FAD) developed by Epstein, Baldwin, and Bishop (1983) is used. This tool evaluates various dimensions of family functioning based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning. The FAD consists of 60 items divided into seven subscales: Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behavior Control, and General Functioning. Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with higher scores indicating poorer family functioning. The validity and reliability of the FAD have been confirmed in various studies, including research conducted in Iran, demonstrating strong psychometric properties for assessing family psychological dynamics (Ahlberg et al., 2023; Elbracht et al., 2023).

2.2.2. English Language Learning Quality and Progress

For measuring the quality and progress of English language learning skills, the Test of English as a Foreign Language Primary (TOEFL Primary), developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 2013, is an appropriate standard tool. The TOEFL Primary is specifically designed for assessing English proficiency in young learners, including those with disabilities. It consists of two main sections: Listening and Reading Comprehension, each containing multiple-choice questions that assess fundamental English skills. The test is scored on a scale of

100 to 115 for each section, with higher scores indicating better proficiency and progress. The reliability and validity of this test have been established in multiple international studies, including research conducted in Iran, confirming its effectiveness in evaluating young learners' English skills (Arifin, 2020).

2.3. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS-27 software. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information and overall trends in the data. To assess the relationship between family psychological functioning (dependent variable) and English language learning quality and progress (independent variables), Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Additionally, linear regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive power of family psychological functioning on both quality and progress of English language learning. All statistical tests were conducted with a significance level of $p < 0.05$ to ensure the robustness of the findings.

3. Findings and Results

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Family Psychological Functioning	2.85	0.65
English Learning Quality	92.36	7.92
English Learning Progress	88.74	8.23

The Pearson correlation coefficients between Family Psychological Functioning and both English Learning Quality and Progress are displayed in Table 2. A significant positive correlation was found between Family Psychological Functioning and English Learning Quality ($r = 0.61$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that higher family psychological well-being is associated with better English learning quality. Additionally, a positive correlation was observed between Family Psychological Functioning and English Learning Progress ($r = 0.58$, $p = 0.004$), suggesting that emotionally supportive family environments contribute to enhanced language learning progress.

Prior to conducting statistical analyses, key assumptions for Pearson correlation and linear regression were tested and met. Normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, yielding non-significant results

The study sample consisted of 223 parents of children with disabilities aged 8 to 12 years in Tehran. Among the participants, 115 (51.56%) were mothers, and 108 (48.43%) were fathers. Regarding the children's age distribution, 64 (28.69%) were 8 years old, 52 (23.31%) were 9 years old, 47 (21.08%) were 10 years old, 35 (15.69%) were 11 years old, and 25 (11.21%) were 12 years old. In terms of educational level, 142 (63.67%) of the parents had a university degree, while 81 (36.32%) had a high school diploma or lower. Additionally, 126 (56.50%) of the children were enrolled in inclusive schools, whereas 97 (43.49%) attended special education centers.

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in Table 1. The mean score for Family Psychological Functioning was 2.85 ($SD = 0.65$), indicating moderate family psychological well-being. The mean score for English Learning Quality was 92.36 ($SD = 7.92$), suggesting a relatively high level of English language proficiency. Similarly, the mean score for English Learning Progress was 88.74 ($SD = 8.23$), reflecting steady improvement in English acquisition among children with disabilities.

for family psychological functioning ($D(223) = 0.062$, $p = 0.200$) and English language learning quality ($D(223) = 0.078$, $p = 0.091$), confirming normal distribution. Linearity was checked through scatterplots, demonstrating a clear linear relationship between independent and dependent variables. Homogeneity of variance was confirmed using Levene's test, with non-significant results for both family psychological functioning ($F(1,221) = 2.37$, $p = 0.125$) and English language learning progress ($F(1,221) = 1.89$, $p = 0.176$), indicating equal variance across groups. Multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which remained below 1.8, ensuring no multicollinearity concerns. These results confirmed that the data met the required assumptions for valid statistical analysis.

Table 2*Pearson Correlation Between Study Variables*

Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Family Psychological Functioning/English Learning Quality	0.61	0.002
Family Psychological Functioning/English Learning Progress	0.58	0.004

The summary of the regression analysis results is presented in [Table 3](#). The overall model was significant ($F = 49.55$, $p = 0.001$), explaining 45% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.45$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$) in English language learning outcomes.

The sum of squares for regression was 1345.23, while the residual sum of squares was 2987.46, indicating that the independent variables contributed significantly to explaining the dependent variable.

Table 3*Summary of Regression Analysis*

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	p-value
Regression	1345.23	2	672.62					
Residual	2987.46	220	13.58	0.67	0.45	0.44	49.55	0.001
Total	4332.69	222						

The results of the multivariate regression analysis are shown in [Table 4](#). The constant ($B = 50.34$, $p < 0.001$) suggests a baseline level of English language learning skills. Family Psychological Functioning ($B = 12.74$, $\beta = 0.53$, $p = 0.001$) was a significant predictor, demonstrating that higher psychological well-being within families strongly

contributes to better English language learning outcomes. Additionally, English Learning Quality ($B = 8.56$, $\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.002$) also significantly predicted English learning progress, confirming that improved language skills are linked to emotional and cognitive support from families.

Table 4*Multivariate Regression Analysis*

Predictors	B	Standard Error	β	t	p-value
Constant	50.34	4.85		10.38	0.000
Family Psychological Functioning	12.74	2.19	0.53	5.81	0.001
English Learning Quality	8.56	1.87	0.49	4.58	0.002

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between family psychological functioning and the quality and progress of English language learning skills in children with disabilities. Pearson correlation analysis indicated that higher levels of family psychological well-being were positively associated with better English learning outcomes ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, linear regression analysis revealed that family psychological functioning significantly predicted both English learning quality ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) and English learning progress ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm that a supportive, emotionally stable family environment enhances children's language acquisition, aligning with previous research on parental

involvement and its impact on second language learning ([Mabin & Roy, 2023](#); [Peng, 2024](#)).

These results reinforce the idea that family support plays a crucial role in language learning, particularly among children with disabilities. Previous studies have shown that children who receive consistent emotional and academic support from their families tend to develop greater motivation and resilience in learning English ([Yan, 2022](#)). The positive correlation found in this study aligns with findings from [Mabin and Roy \(2023\)](#), who reported that parental encouragement and emotional support significantly influence children's English learning outcomes ([Mabin & Roy, 2023](#)). Similarly, [Peng \(2024\)](#) found that family emotional support enhances vocabulary acquisition,

suggesting that psychological stability within the family facilitates effective language learning (Peng, 2024).

The findings are also in agreement with the motivational theories of second language acquisition (Ushioda, 2019). This study confirms that children who feel emotionally secure at home are more motivated and confident in their English learning journey, supporting the argument that intrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as family involvement and positive reinforcement. In contrast, children from families experiencing psychological distress, conflicts, or communication problems showed slower language learning progress, highlighting the adverse effects of an unsupportive home environment on second language acquisition (Zang, 2023).

Another possible explanation for these findings relates to sociocultural factors. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, children learn best through social interactions, particularly in supportive family environments (Mabin & Roy, 2023). This study's findings support this perspective, as children who engaged in frequent parent-child conversations, storytelling, and English language exposure at home demonstrated higher proficiency levels. These results also align with Dariyanto (2024), who emphasized that English language learning quality improves when students receive consistent family engagement (Dariyanto, 2024).

Additionally, the findings confirm that family structure and psychological well-being can either facilitate or hinder English learning progress. Research by Li (2024) found that families with strong emotional bonds and clear communication patterns provided children with a more stable learning environment, leading to better language development (Li, 2024). Similarly, Vadivel et al. (2022) highlighted that family-induced anxiety and stress negatively impact a child's ability to acquire English, further supporting the notion that psychological well-being within the family is a determining factor in language learning success (Vadivel et al., 2022).

The results of this study are consistent with previous research highlighting the impact of family psychological functioning on language acquisition. In particular, Yan (2022) found that parental involvement and socioeconomic factors both influence children's English learning outcomes, a finding that aligns with the strong correlation observed in this study between family psychological well-being and English learning quality (Yan, 2022). However, while Yan's (2022) study focused on socioeconomic influences, the present research highlights the importance of psychological

and emotional stability as a fundamental component of language learning success (Yan, 2022).

This study also confirms findings by Barabadi et al. (2022) regarding the role of playfulness and positive emotions in second language acquisition (Barabadi et al., 2022). When children receive emotional support from their families, they experience lower anxiety levels, allowing them to engage in playful and exploratory learning experiences, which enhances their English proficiency. Similarly, Fitria (2024) argued that positive emotional states improve language learning outcomes, reinforcing the importance of emotional security in fostering effective language acquisition (Fitria, 2024).

Additionally, research by Prayogo (2022) highlighted the need for structured learning environments and parental engagement in improving English language proficiency (Prayogo, 2022). The findings of this study align with this perspective, showing that children who had structured support from their families demonstrated greater progress in their English learning. Moreover, Peng (2024) identified that emotional support from family members accelerates vocabulary retention and language processing, a finding that directly correlates with the positive association observed in this study between family psychological well-being and English learning progress (Peng, 2024).

Interestingly, the results of this study also provide contrasting evidence to some prior research. For instance, Zang (2023) suggested that individual psychological factors, such as self-efficacy and anxiety, have a stronger influence on language learning than family dynamics. While this study acknowledges the role of individual psychological traits, the findings suggest that family psychological well-being plays an equally significant role in shaping children's language learning experiences, particularly for children with disabilities (Zang, 2023).

Taken together, these findings suggest that family psychological functioning is a critical yet often overlooked determinant of second language acquisition. By providing a stable, emotionally supportive, and engaging learning environment, families can significantly enhance their children's ability to learn and progress in English.

Despite the significant findings, this study has several limitations. First, the research relied on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias, as participants might have provided socially desirable answers regarding their family functioning and involvement in their children's English learning. Second, the study was conducted only in Tehran, which limits the generalizability of the

findings to other cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Third, while this study established correlational relationships, it does not confirm causality—meaning that while family psychological functioning is strongly associated with English learning progress, other external factors (such as school environment, teacher effectiveness, and peer influence) may also contribute to these outcomes. Finally, the study focused on children with disabilities, meaning the findings might not be directly applicable to neurotypical learners.

Future research should consider using longitudinal designs to track the influence of family psychological functioning on English language learning over time. This would allow for a better understanding of how family dynamics evolve and their long-term impact on second language acquisition. Additionally, experimental or intervention-based studies could be conducted to assess whether targeted family-based interventions improve children's English learning outcomes. Another avenue for research is exploring the role of different types of disabilities—for example, comparing how family psychological functioning affects children with cognitive disabilities versus sensory impairments in their English language learning process. Finally, expanding research to different cultural and linguistic contexts would provide a broader perspective on how family dynamics shape second language acquisition across diverse populations.

Given the findings of this study, educators, policymakers, and families should prioritize enhancing family psychological well-being to support children's English language learning. Schools and special education centers should offer family counseling programs and parental training workshops to help parents create emotionally supportive and structured home environments. Additionally, integrating family engagement strategies into English language curricula—such as home-based language learning activities and parental involvement in school programs—could further enhance learning outcomes. Special attention should be given to children with disabilities, ensuring that

their families receive adequate emotional and educational support tailored to their specific needs. By fostering a psychologically stable and nurturing home environment, parents and caregivers can play a pivotal role in their children's English language learning journey, ultimately leading to greater linguistic competence and academic success.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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