The Lived Experiences of Teachers and Parents on Kindergarten Learners' Separation Anxiety

Geralyn B. Guantia

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the phenomenon on the separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils. The study revealed two (2) generated major themes with seven (7) subthemes that emerged during several interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with the research participants. The causes of separation anxiety was considered the first major theme with three (3) subthemes: (a) stress, (b) new environment, and (c) overprotected parents. The display of separation anxiety was the second major theme that emerged with four (4) subthemes: (a) crying, (b) clinginess, (c) shyness, and (d) silence. The study further revealed one (1) major theme emerged with three (3) subthemes. The separation anxiety's intrusiveness was the major theme that emerged with three (3) subthemes: (a) parents hampered daily routine activities, (b) teachers' disruptive school-related activities, and (c) agent for pupil's behavioral change. In terms of the coping mechanisms of parents and kindergarten teachers concerning the separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils, the results showed that there was one (1) major theme and three (3) subthemes. The fostering dialogue was the generated major theme and the subthemes are: (a) validate their feelings, (b) do not sneak out, and (c) clear communication. Parents and teachers should be vigilant in monitoring and should address children who exhibit signs of separation anxiety so that they may be treated as early and effectively as possible.

Suggested Citation:
Guantia, G.B. (2023). The Lived Experiences of Teachers and Parents on Kindergarten Learners' Separation Anxiety. *Industry and Academic Research Review, 4* (1), 493-503.

About the author:
Master of Arts in Education, Teacher III, Alegria Elementary School

*This paper is presented at the 4ᵗʰ International Conference on Multidisciplinary Industry and Academic Research (ICMIAR)-2023

Introduction

Kindergarten marks the beginning of formal schooling for children and is crucial for their overall development, especially social-emotional development. The transition from a play-and-home setting to formal education will occur, allowing each kid to reach a greater level of learning. This allegation was also supported by Brown et al. (2021) that consistent, developmentally sound, and emotionally supportive early experiences have favorable consequences on kindergarten pupils entering formal schooling.

School readiness, as defined by scholars Boivin and Bierman (2014), is a fundamental ability that children need to possess upon entering the school setting to adjust effectively, study, and succeed at a satisfactory level. According to Valiente (2021), when kids start kindergarten with high school readiness, they possess the abilities essential to participate in productive classroom interactions that promote academic growth. These components include establishing security, healthy relationships with others, managing and expressing emotions in culturally and socially acceptable ways, and exhibiting self-regulatory behaviors (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016; Houri & Miller, 2019). However, when compared to kindergarten pupils' school readiness, it is worth noting in their actions that they have this *separation anxiety* on their first day of school and beyond. Separation anxiety is broadly described as the anxiety of separation from the parents or primary caregiver. Tantrums and clinging are the most frequent ways for youngsters to express their separation anxiety (Fritscher, 2020).

Over the last 20 years of teaching kindergarten pupils, the researcher had seen that separation anxiety among kindergarteners usually persisted within the first week or beyond the start of classes. Significant changes in kindergarten pupil's behavior are inevitably noticeable, especially when children are left in class by caregivers or parents (Keough & Eisen, 2019). These scenarios are always happening year after year. Likewise, the researcher observed that pupils were easily influenced by their peers and lost focus and attention during psychosocial activities; in the worst case, they were influenced by peers who were crying, causing them to cry as well. Moreover, it was noticed that most children had difficulties forming positive connections with their classmates for they competed in various activities, which might lead to conflict.

This research topic inspired the researcher to undertake an in-depth inquiry of the study to comprehend better the reasons that cause separation anxiety to reoccur annually among kindergarten pupils. Finally, parents and teachers will perceive and understand how to effectively handle the identified phenomenon - separation anxiety among kindergarten pupils.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used the phenomenological research design to understand people's lived experiences in relation to a certain phenomenon (Yilmaz, 2020). According to Dorfler and Stierand (2020), phenomenology is a technique in which the researcher starts with a concrete example of the thing being examined, brackets presuppositions, and creatively investigates the phenomenon to disclose its basic aspects. In addition, phenomenology is a method for doing qualitative research that centers its attention on the collective experiences of a sample of individuals. The technique's primary objective is to describe the nature of the particular phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Thus, in this study, the researcher aimed to analyze a pre-existing phenomenon: separation anxiety among kindergarteners during their first day in school and thereafter.

Findings

1. To understand lived experiences of parents and teachers concerning the separation anxiety of kindergarten pupils. The *Causes of Separation Anxiety* was considered the first major theme that emerged with three (3) subthemes: (a) Stress, (b) new environment, and (c) overprotected parents. Then, the *Display of Separation Anxiety* was the second major theme that emerged with four (4) subthemes: (a) crying, (b) clinginess, (c) shyness, and (d) silence.

2. Regarding the challenges and difficulties that parents and teachers encountered concerning the separation anxiety of kindergarten pupils, the study findings revealed that one (1) major theme emerged with three (3) subthemes. These themes were generated from study's participants' significant statements during the several interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The *Separation Anxiety's Intrusiveness* was the major theme that emerged with three (3) subthemes: (a) parents hampered daily routine activities, (b) teachers disruptive school-related activities, and (c) agent for pupil's behavioral change.

3. In terms of the coping mechanisms of the parents and teachers concerning the separation anxiety of kindergarten learners, the results showed that there was one (1) major theme that emerged and three (3) subthemes taken from the significant statements of the research participants during the several interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The *Fostering Dialogue* was the generated major theme that emerged, and the subthemes are as follows: (a) validate their feelings, (b) do not sneak out, and (c) clear communication.

4. In terms of the study's proposed intervention in the future, the researcher named this as *A Symposium on the Separation Anxiety of Kindergarten Pupils and How they Cope with It Program* in which the participants are the parents and preschool teachers to educate them on how to address, understand and cope with the separation anxiety of kindergarten pupils.

Conclusion

1. Separation anxiety among kindergarten students was caused not only by children's fear of being abandoned by their parents, but also by a number of common factors such as stress, new surroundings, and overprotective parents. Then, to determine whether or not children had separation anxiety attacks, certain behaviors such as crying, clinginess, shyness, and silence were observed inside or outside of the classroom or at home. Separation anxiety may differ in some children or different parts of the globe, but the research found that it is typically caused by the stresses that children perceive in their new surroundings and the parental interactions that they have at home.

2. Separation anxiety in children may create disturbance and engross someone's attention, most notably parents, teachers, and classmates. This indicates that if children have separation anxiety at home, their parents' daily routines may be disrupted. When kindergarten students have separation anxiety at school, their classmates' emotions may shift, and teachers' planned activities might be interrupted since separation anxiety is believed to be contagious.

3. Dialogue with children with separation anxiety was perceived as the ideal coping mechanism to relieve their stress because parents and teachers set conditions for childrens' minds with all sincerity. They will feel relieved that they have nothing to worry about if you compassionately communicate with them and provide them with clear instructions. This was a simple act of giving them love, care, and appreciation at all times.

4. Parents and preschool teachers should attend a symposium to learn how to cope with children who suffer from separation anxiety, as well as how to be effective parents at home. Good parenting will be one of the topics of the symposium since the stressors that prompt the child to experience separation anxiety attacks were attributed from home.

References

Alampay, J. (2017). *Parent Sci Pract*. Retrieved September 1, 2021, from www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov:https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150789/

American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders.* 4. Washington, DC: APA Press; 2000. text rev. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.).* Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330410506

Annie (2019, January 17). *Aimtalk-blog.* Retrieved August 24, 2021, from www.aimtalkblog.com: https://aimtalkblog.com/2019/01/15/annies-note/filipinos-strong-family-ties/

Asan, A. (2013). Computer technology awareness by elementary school teachers: A case study from Turkey. *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research, 2*(1), 153-164. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350276047

Baker, K. J. (2020). Schooling amid a pandemic. *The National Teaching & Learning Forum, 29*(4), p. 11. Wiley-Blackwell.

Bell-Dolan, D. (2015). Separation anxiety disorder. In: Ammerman RT, Hersen M, editors. Handbook of child behavior therapy in the psychiatric settings. *New York: Wiley*, pp. 217–298.

Biederman, J., Petty, C. R.-B., & Henin, A. (2017). Development Trajectories of anxiety Disorders in Offspring at risk for Panic Disorder and Major Depression. *National Institutes of Health Psychiatry Res Public acces, 3153*(2), 245-252. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330410506

Bilich, K. (2018, July 22). *Parents.com ParentsNetwork Meredith Corporation.* Retrieved May 18, 2019, from Parents.com: https://www.parents/toddlers-preschoolers/starting-preschool/separationanxiety/overcoming-separation anxiety/

Boivin, M., & Bierman, K. L. (2014). *School readiness: Introduction to a multifaceted and developmental construct. In M. Boivin, & K. L. Bierman (Eds.)*, Promoting school readiness and early learning: Implications of developmental research for practice (pp. 3–14). Guilford Press.

Boholano, H. B., Balo, V. T. M., Pogoy, A. M., & Alda, R. (2020). Technology-Enriched Teaching in Support of Quality Education in the 21st Century Skills. *Solid State Technology, 63*(5), 6795-6804.

Boyd, C.P., Kostanski, M., Gullone, E., Ollendick, TH., & Shek, DTL. (2012). Prevalence of anxiety and depression in Australian adolescents: Comparisons with worldwide data. *Journal of Genetic Psychology,161*, 479–492. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

Brown, C. P., Barry, D. P., & Ku, D. H. (2020). How Education Stakeholders Made Sense of School Readiness in and Beyond Kindergarten. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 35(1), 122–142. doi:10.1080/02568543.2020.1717688

Brumariu, L., & Kerns, K.A. (2010). Mother-child attachment patterns and different types of anxiety symptoms: is there specificity of relations*? Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 416*, 663674. DOI: 10.5772/22672

Canady, V. A. (2020). APA stress report amid COVID-19 points to parental challenges. *Mental Health Weekly, 30*(22), 3-4.

Carpenter, D. R. (2007). *Phenomenology as method.* In H. J. Streubert & D. R. Carpenter (Eds.), Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative (pp. 7599). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.

Carpenter, A. L., Puliafico, A. C., M.S, K. S., Pincus, D., & Comer, J. (2014). Extending ParentChild Interaction Therapy for Early Childhood Internalizing Problems: New Advances for an Overlooked Population. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev, 17*, 340-356. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330410506

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The Use of Triangulation in Qualitative Research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(5), 545–547. doi:10.1188/14.onf.545-547

Cartwright-Hatton, S., McNicol, K., & Doubleday E. (2016). Anxiety in a neglected population: Prevalence of anxiety disorders in pre-adolescent children. *Clinical Psychology Review, 26*, 817–833. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

Chan, Z. Y. C., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process. *The Qualitative Report, 18*(59), 1-9.

Cherry, K. (2022). *What is attachment theory? The importance of early emotional bonds. Very Well Mind.* https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (pp. 77-83)c

Collins, C., Ruppanner, L., Christin Landivar, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). The Gendered Consequences of a Weak Infrastructure of Care: School Reopening Plans and Parents' Employment During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Gender & Society, 35*(2), 180-193.

Costello, EJ., Mustillo, S., Erklani, A., Keeler, G., & Angol, A. (2013). Prevalence and development of psychiatric disorders in childhood and adolescence. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 60*, 837–844. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

Cruz, L. R. (2017, April 18). *Family Influences*. Retrieved August 28, 2021, from www.files.ethz:https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/101308/2001_10_Family_Influences_on.pdf

Danzig, A. P., Buffered, S. J., Dougherty, L. R., & Carlson, G. (2013). Longitudinal Associations Between Preschool Psychopathology and School-Age Peer Functioning. *Child Pschiatry Hum Dev, 44*, 621-632.

DepEd Order No. 029, s. 2021. *School calendar and activities for school year 2021-2022. Department of Education.* https://www.deped.gov.ph/2021/08/05/august-5-2021-do-029-s-2021-school-calendar-and-activities-for-school-year-2021-2022/

Department of Health (2018). *Mental Health Program.* Department of Health. Manila, Philippines: Sun Star

Dörfler, V., & Stierand, M. (2020). Bracketing: a phenomenological theory applied through transpersonal reflexivity. Journal of Organizational Change Management, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). doi:10.1108/jocm-12-2019-0393

DSM. (2013, February 7). *Diagnostic Statistical Manual Fifth Edition.* Retrieved August 23, 2021, from DSM Psychiatry: https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/doi/book10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596

Essau, C.A., Conradt, J., & Petermann, F. (2014). Frequency, comorbidity, and psychosocial impairment of anxiety disorders in German adolescents. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 14*, 263–279. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

Frank, M., & Barzilai, A. (2016). *Project-based technology: Instructional strategy for developing technological literacy, 18*(1) Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350276047

Fritscher, L. (2020). *What is separation anxiety?* Very Well Mind. https://www.verywellmind.com/separation-anxiety-2671784

Gamboa, H. (2019). *ASIAN JOURNAL MEDIA CENTER.* Retrieved July 20, 2022, from https://www.asianjournal.com/magazines/unboxing-filipino-culture-close-family-ties-and-most-loveditems-in-a-balikbayan-box/

Giannakopoulos, G., Eirini, A., Dimitrakaki, C., Oikonomidou, & Despoina, P. L. (2014). Early Childhood educators' perceptions of preschoolers'mental health problems: a qualitative analysis. *Annals of General Psychiatry, 13*, 1.

Goyola, J. E. (2019, January 14). Retrieved August 29, 2021, from https://medium.com/@janeellapangoyala/traditional-filipino-family-values-that-make-us-distinctamong-others-7a439fdfd28a

Graves, G. (2021). *How to Spot and Treat Anxiety in Children.* https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/social-emotional-learning/social-skills-for-kids/how-to-spot-and-treat-anxiety-children.html

Halle, T. G., & Darling-Churchill, K. E. (2016). Review of measures of social and emotional development. *Journal of Applied Development Psychology, 45*, 8–18. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2016.02.003

Houri, A. K., & Miller, F. G. (2019). A Systematic Review of Universal Screeners Used to Evaluate Social-Emotional and Behavioral Aspects of Kindergarten Readiness. *Early Education and Development,* 1–23. doi:10.1080/10409289.2019.1677132

Hurley, K. (2018, September 26). *Vertical Health Websites.* Retrieved May 4, 2019, from Generalized Anxiety Disorder(GAD)>Helping Kids with Anxiety:Strategies to Help Anxious Children> Separation Anxiety in Children: How to Help your Child with Separation Anxiety: https://www.psycom.net/separationanxiety-disorder-children/

Keough, K. L. & Eisen, A. R. (2022). *Separation anxiety: Reference module in neuroscience and biobehavioral psychology.* Elsevier, https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-91497-0.00098-9.

Koenig, R. (2019, April 18). parents.com. Retrieved April 18, 2019, from www.parents.com: https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/starting-preschool/separation-anxiety/goodbye-withouttears/

Kossowsky, J., Pfaltz, M., Schneider, Taeymans, J., Locher, C., & Gaab, J. (2013). The Separation Anxiety hypothesis of Panic Disorder Revisited:A Meta- Analysis. *Am J Psychiatry, 170*, 768-781.

Lase, D., Zega, T. G. C., & Daeli, D. O. (2021). Parents' perceptions of distance learning during Covid-19 pandemic in rural Indonesia. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn).*

Lavallee, K. L., & Schneider, S. (2019). *Separation Anxiety Disorder. Pediatric Anxiety Disorders*, 151–176. doi:10.1016/b978-0-12-813004-9.00008-6

Levin, V. (2019, May 2). pre-kpages.com. Retrieved May 2, 2019, from Separation Anxiety in Preschool: https://www.pre-kpages.com/separation-anxiety-in-preschool/

Manassis, K., & Hood, J. (2018). Individual and familial predictors of impairment in childhood anxiety disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 37428434*. DOI: 10.5772/22672

Martinez, C. M. (2020, March 1). *Filipino help-seeking for mental health problems and associated barriers and facilitators: A systematic Review*. Retrieved September 4, 2021, from https://soc.psychiatry/psychiatric/55ss/olp/

McLoone, J., JenniferL., H., & Rapee, R. M. (2016). Treating Anxiety Disorders in a School Setting. Education & Treatment of Children Proquest Central, 219-242.

Mian, N. D. (2014). Little Children with Big Worries:Addressing the Needs of Young, anxious children and the problem of parent engagement. *Clin Child Fam psycho Rev, 17,* 85-96.

Mofrad, S., Abdullah, R., & Abu Samah, B. (2019). Perceived Parental Overprotection and Separation anxiety: Does specific parental Rearing serve as Specific Risk Facto. *Asian Social Science, 5*(11).

Pacholec, N. A., Tamas, M. E., Poggesi, R., Hoyman, L. C., Tabbarah, S., Thordarson, M., & Friedberg, R. D. (2013). "I Want My Mommy!" Assessment and Treatment Reccomendations for SeparationAnxiety Disorder. *GSTFInternational journal of Law and Social Science*, 124-129.

Pelaez, M., & Novak, G. (2020). Returning to School: Separation Problems and Anxiety in the Age of Pandemics. *Behavior Analysis in Practice, 13*(3), 521–526. doi:10.1007/s40617-020-00467-2

Pincus, D. B., Eyberg, S., & Choate, M. L. (2005). Adapting Parent-Child Interaction Therapy for Young Children with Separation Anxiety Disorder. Education and Treatment of Children Proquest Central, 28,2:163. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330410506

Rapee, R.M. (2017). Potential role of childrearing practices in the development of anxiety and depression. *Clinical Psychology Review, 1714767*. DOI: 10.5772/22672

Republic Act No. 10157, s. 2012. *Kindergarten Education Act of 2012.* https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2012/01/20/republic-act-no-10157/

Republic of the Philippines' Department of Education, "Policy Guidelines for the Provision of Learning Resources in the Implementation of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan," 2020a. [Online]. Available: https://www.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/DO_s2020_018.pdf.

Rimm K. S., & Sandilos, L. (2017). *School transition and school readiness: An outcome of early childhood development.* Updated July 2017. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood development [online]. CEECD, SKC-ECD. https://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/dossiers-complets/en/schoolreadiness.pdf.

Roza, SJ., Hofstra, MB., van der Ende, J., & Verhulst, FC. (2015). Stable prediction of mood and anxiety disorders based on behavioral and emotional problems in childhod: A 14-year follow-up during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 160*, 2116–2121. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

Shear, K., Jin, R., Ruscio, AM., Walters EE., & Kessler, RC. (2016). Prevalence and correlates of estimated DSM-IV child and adult separation anxiety disorder in the national comorbidity survey replication. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 163*,1074–1083.

Swanson, W. S. (2015, November 21). *Mama Doc Medicine: Finding Calm and Confidence in Parenting, Child Health and Work-Life Balance.* Retrieved May 17, 2019, from HealthyChildren.org:https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/pages/Soothing-Your-Childs-SeparationAnxiety.aspx

United Nations (UN) (2020). "*Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond,"* 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid19_and_education_august_2020.pdf.

Valiente, C., Doane, L. D., Clifford, S., Grimm, K. J., & Lemery-Chalfant, K. (2021). School readiness and achievement in early elementary school: Moderation by Students' temperament. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 74*, 101265. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2021.101265

Victor, A.M., Bernat, D.H., Bernstein, G.A., Layne, A.E., (2017). Effects of parent and family characteristics on treatment outcome of anxious children, *Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 216835848*. DOI: 10.5772/22672

Vole, M. (2021, October 7). *Understanding clinginess in children.* Go Student. https://insights.gostudent.org/en/understanding-clinginess-in-children

Warren, S.L., Huston, L., Egeland, B., & Sroufe, L.A. (2017). Child and adolescent anxiety disorders and early attachment. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 365*(1997), 637644. DOI: 10.5772/22672

Wittchen, H., Nelson, CB., & Lachner, G. (2018). Prevalence of mental disorders and psychosocial impairments in adolescents and young adults. *Psychological Medicine, 28*,109–126. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2008.16-389

WHO. (2017). Mental Health of World Health Organization. Philippines: Inquirer.Xavier Méndez ,José P. Espada,Mireia Orgilés,Luis M. Llavona,José M. García-Fernández Published: July 29, 2014 https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0103212

Wood, J. J. (2016). Parental Introsiveness and Children's Separation Anxiety in a Clinical Sample. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev, 37*, 73-87.

Yılmaz, M., Sezerel, H., & Uzuner, Y. (2020). Sharing experiences and interpretation of experiences: a phenomenological research on Instagram influencers. Current Issues in Tourism, 1–8. doi:10.1080/13683500.2020.1763270

Ziv, Y., & Arbel, R. (2020). *Parenting practices, aggressive response evaluation and decision, and social difficulties in kindergarten children: The role of fathers.* Aggressive Behavior. doi:10.1002/ab.21932