

Assessing Teachers' Capabilities in Handling Kindergarten Separation Anxiety in Selected Districts, Division of Sulu

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ABSTRACT. This study assessed the extent of teachers' capabilities in handling kindergarten separation anxiety in selected districts of the Division of Sulu. It employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 100 teacher-respondents selected through purposive sampling and analyzed data using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, Pearson's correlation, t-test, and ANOVA. The study examined teachers' knowledge of separation anxiety, strategies used to alleviate it, and the support or resources needed in handling separation anxiety, considering respondents' demographic profiles such as age, gender, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service. Findings revealed that most respondents were 26-35 years old, female, married, had 6-10 years of service, and possessed a bachelor's degree. Results further showed that teachers' capabilities in handling kindergarten separation anxiety across all domains were generally perceived as favorable, consistently obtaining a 'Satisfactory' rating. No significant differences were found in teachers' capabilities when grouped according to demographic profile, while a high positive significant correlation was observed among the variables. These findings validate John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), which emphasizes the importance of a secure environment in facilitating healthy transitions for children. The findings also align with Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1950), suggesting that teachers with diverse alleviation strategies help foster predictability, safety, and trust in children. Furthermore, the study reinforces B. F. Skinner's Behaviorist Theory (1938), highlighting the use of operant conditioning principles in stabilizing the classroom environment. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of foundational knowledge and empathetic, proactive approaches in managing separation anxiety and supporting early childhood education.

KEYWORDS: *Separation Anxiety, Kindergarten Teachers' Capabilities, Early Childhood Education, Classroom Management, Attachment Theory, Child Development*

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Introduction

Kindergarten is an important stage in which children's early experiences form their attitudes towards learning and prepare them for primary school. However, this transition exposes young learners to separation anxiety, especially during their initial encounters with formal education (Ruar & Quimson, 2018). Many children experience dread, and emotional problems

while separated from their parents, which might have an impact on their adjustment to school (Torralba & Ponce, 2022).

In the Division of Sulu, where strong family ties and cultural traditions shape communal life, meeting kindergarten students' emotional needs is critical. Teachers have an important role in assisting children with adjustment; nevertheless, their capacity to manage separation anxiety is dependent on their training, experience, and accessible support (LGU-Sulu Province, 2021). Understanding teachers' preparation is thus critical for creating a secure and helpful learning environment.

Separation Anxiety Disorder is defined as excessive fear or distress associated with separation from home or attachment figures (Strauss & Todaro, 2001). Separation anxiety is typical in early childhood, but it can become a problem when children start school and are expected to be away from caregivers for extended times.

The tactics and approaches that preschool instructors use have a significant impact on how children deal with and adapt to school. Despite its importance, few research have looked into teachers' experiences and viewpoints on dealing with separation anxiety (DSWD, 2018). Based on the Department of Social Welfare and Development's commitment to child welfare, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education, this study evaluates teachers' abilities to handle kindergarten separation anxiety in selected districts of the Division of Sulu, focusing on their knowledge, strategies, and preparedness to identify strengths and gaps in early childhood education.

Research Questions

1. What is the demographic profile of the teacher-respondents in terms of:
 - 1.1. Age;
 - 1.2. Gender;
 - 1.3. Civil status;
 - 1.4. Length of service; and
 - 1.5. Educational attainment?
2. What is the extent of the teachers' capabilities in handling kindergarten separation anxiety in terms of:
 - 2.1. Knowledge about separation anxiety;
 - 2.2. Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety; and
 - 2.3. Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten?
3. Is there a significant difference in the extent of teachers' capabilities in handling separation anxiety in selected Districts, Division of Sulu when data are categorized according to their demographic profile in terms:
 - 3.1. Age;
 - 3.2. Gender;
 - 3.3. Civil status;
 - 3.4. Length of service; and
 - 3.5. Educational attainment?
4. Is there a significant correlation among the sub-categories subsumed under the extent of teachers' capabilities in handling separation anxiety?

Literature

Separation Anxiety in Early Childhood: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

Separation anxiety often emerges as a typical developmental reaction during the transition to school, marked by feelings of distress in children when they are apart from their main caregivers. Bowlby's Attachment Theory illustrates that deep emotional connections with caregivers can lead to feelings of fear, crying, and clinginess when separation occurs (Bowlby, 1982). Furthermore, the DSM-5 categorizes separation anxiety as an excessive and developmentally inappropriate fear that disrupts typical functioning (APA, 2013).

While typically viewed as a standard stage of development, ongoing or long-lasting instances can adversely impact children's social-emotional adaptation and involvement in the classroom. Gonzalez (2021) noted that signs of separation anxiety, including cognitive, psychophysiological, and behavioral indicators, are frequently observed when children start school. Similarly, research from both international and local sources indicates that separation anxiety is particularly common in the initial weeks of schooling, as children are adapting to unfamiliar settings.

Teachers' Role and Capability in Managing Separation Anxiety

Educators act as key emotional anchors during early school transitions, using strategies such as structured routines, reassurance, progressive separation, comfort objects, storytelling, and positive reinforcement to foster children's security and independence (Brooker, 2008; Riley, 2019; Gonzalez-Mena, 2018).

Similarly, structured support frameworks and targeted interventions help reduce anxiety and improve confidence by providing systematic guidance and emotional support that enhance engagement and learning outcomes (Inoferio et al., 2024; Batucan et al., 2025; Savellon et al., 2024). Supportive learning environments further promote emotional safety and motivation (Gumallaoi et al., 2026), while consistent parental practices such as discipline, repetition, and emotional support strengthen children's adaptability, highlighting the importance of home-school collaboration (Chavez et al., 2025).

However, despite these approaches, many kindergarten teachers remain insufficiently prepared for socio-emotional challenges, as training often prioritizes academics over emotional development (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Essa & Burnham, 2019). Thus, teacher self-efficacy becomes crucial in effectively managing separation anxiety, underscoring the need for continuous professional development (Jucoy, 2022), alongside more consistent use of structured, culturally responsive intervention frameworks.

Implementation Challenges and Research Gap

Separation anxiety is influenced by emotional security, family dynamics, and early school experiences, often peaking during the first month of enrollment (Amuyot et al., 2018; Gonzales, 2021). Strategies such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), parent-teacher collaboration, and structured behavioral approaches have been shown to support children's adjustment and reduce anxiety.

Despite these interventions, gaps in implementation remain. Lucero (2023) found that kindergarten teachers often struggle in managing separation anxiety due to limited resources and inadequate pre-service training, underscoring the need for stronger coaching and mentoring. Similarly, De Leon et al. (2024) reported that insufficient training, lack of resources, and weak institutional support continue to hinder the effective use of intervention strategies, despite teachers' awareness of cultural contexts and family involvement. These challenges highlight the need to assess teachers' capabilities in managing separation anxiety in the Division of Sulu.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative research design to evaluate teachers' abilities in managing separation anxiety among kindergarten learners in specific districts of the Division of Sulu. The design was suitable as it did not involve manipulation of variables but concentrated on detailing current conditions, practices, and levels of preparedness of teachers through structured survey questionnaires. It sought to uncover patterns associated with educators' understanding, approaches, and perceived effectiveness in addressing separation anxiety within a natural school setting.

2. Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 100 kindergarten educators from public schools located in specific districts within the Division of Sulu. Teachers were chosen through purposive sampling, focusing specifically on those who are currently teaching kindergarten classes during the academic year. This ensured that participants acquired direct experience in tackling separation anxiety. Teachers were chosen regardless of age, experience, or training background to include a variety of perspectives and practices.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by District

Districts	Number Of Respondents
1. Jolo 1	15
2. Jolo 2	10
3. Patikul West	13
4. Patikul East	13
5. Indanan South	10
6. Indanan North	10
7. Parang East	13
8. Parang West	10
9. Maimbung	6
Total:	100

3. Instruments

The research utilized a structured questionnaire that was adapted from the studies conducted by Joana Catliya L. Fabrea and Harris Inigo, focusing on the behavior of kindergarten pupils and their separation anxiety. The instrument was composed of four components: (1) teacher profile, (2) knowledge of separation anxiety, (3) strategies and classroom practices, and (4) perceived capability and confidence level. A 4-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from 1 for Poor to 4 for Very Satisfactory. The instrument underwent validation by specialists in early childhood education and guidance counseling, and it was pilot tested for reliability prior to its final application.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Office of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, and subsequently from the Schools Division Superintendent, division supervisors, and school heads. The questionnaires were personally administered and retrieved from the teacher-respondents by the researcher. Participants were asked to provide honest and thorough answers, and follow-up interviews were carried out as needed to clarify their responses further.

5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed employing suitable statistical methods that corresponded with the research questions. Frequency and percentage were utilized to outline the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean was utilized to assess the extent of teachers' knowledge, strategies,

and perceived capability. A test of difference was employed to identify significant variations in capabilities based on demographic profiles. Pearson r was utilized to assess the relationship between the various sub-categories of teachers' abilities in managing separation anxiety.

Results

1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Analysis of the demographic profile of the teacher-respondents (N = 100) reveals a predominantly female workforce (89%) compared to males (11%). In terms of age distribution, most respondents fall within the 26–35 age group (47%), followed by those aged 36–50 (39%), and 25 years old and below (14%). Regarding civil status, a majority are married (66%), while 33% are single and a minimal proportion are separated or widowed (1%). As to length of service, the largest group has served for 6–10 years (44%), followed by those with 5 years and below (30%), and 11–15 years (26%). In terms of educational attainment, most respondents hold a bachelor's degree (89%), while 4% have master's units and 7% have completed a master's degree.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Number of Respondents (n=100)	Percentage (%)
Age		
25 years old and below	14	14%
26 to 35 years old	47	47%
36 to 50 years old	39	39%
51 years old and above	0	0%
Gender		
Male	11	11%
Female	89	89%
Civil Status		
Single	33	33%
Married	66	66%
Widowed/ Separated	1	1%
Length of Service		
5 years and below	30	30%
6 to 10 years	44	44%
11 to 15 years	26	26%
16 years and above	0	0%
Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	89	89%
With Master's Units	4	4%
Master's Degree	7	7%
With Doctorate Units	0	0%
Doctorate Degree	0	0%

2. Extent of Teachers' Capabilities in Handling Kindergarten Separation Anxiety

Overall, the teacher-respondents showed satisfactory to very satisfactory capability across all domains (Table 3). Teachers' Strategies to Alleviate Separation Anxiety obtained the highest composite mean (M = 3.433, SD = .38900), rated "Satisfactory," with strong use of positive reinforcement (M = 3.76), humor (M = 3.67), and reassurance (M = 3.63).

Knowledge about Separation Anxiety recorded a "Satisfactory" composite mean (M = 2.671, SD = .72003), with highest emphasis on providing comfort objects (M = 3.10), parent communication (M = 3.06), and developing support plans (M = 2.86).

Meanwhile, Support or Resources obtained a “Very Satisfactory” rating ($M = 3.199$, $SD = .38336$), led by peer interaction ($M = 3.71$) and paired/small-group activities ($M = 3.71$), followed by parental involvement ($M = 3.39$).

Table 3: Extent of Teachers’ Capabilities in Handling Kindergarten Separation Anxiety

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation (S.D.)	Descriptive Interpretation
Knowledge about separation anxiety	2.671	.72003	Satisfactory
1. I understand the causes of separation anxiety.	2.77	.76350	Satisfactory
2. I know effective strategies to help kindergartens cope with separation anxiety.	2.54	.85776	Satisfactory
3. I can identify signs and symptoms of separation anxiety in kindergartens.	2.51	.97954	Satisfactory
4. I always provide comfort object for learners with separation anxiety.	3.10	.73168	Satisfactory
5. I can identify the emotional needs of kindergarten learners experiencing separation anxiety.	2.73	.83913	Satisfactory
6. I know how to communicate effectively with parents of kindergarten learners experiencing separation anxiety.	3.06	.69369	Satisfactory
7. I am confident in my ability to develop a plan to support kindergarten students with separation anxiety.	2.86	.81674	Satisfactory
8. I know the different causes of separation anxiety.	2.43	.97706	Fair
9. I know each stage of separation anxiety among children.	2.28	1.05486	Fair
10. I can do simple treatment to ease a child’s separation anxiety.	2.43	1.10330	Fair
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	3.433	.38900	Satisfactory
1. Keeping them busy: Keeping the children busy is the most common strategy of the teacher when a child with separation anxiety comes to their classroom.	3.37	.58006	Satisfactory
2. Encouragement: In order for the children with separation anxiety to stay in school, teachers used encouragement words.	3.56	.51874	Very Satisfactory
3. Cognitive strategies: teachers helped their learners understand their feelings and situations.	3.30	.61134	Satisfactory
4. Research: teachers read research regarding ways in handling and understanding their learners with separation anxiety. They apply some tips they have read in some studies. They tend also to experiment which strategies would suit to their situations.	3.25	.70173	Satisfactory
5. Child-centered strategies: activities for the children are emphasized by the teachers.	3.34	.60670	Satisfactory
6. Positive Reinforcement: Giving reinforcement to children when displaying good behavior is one way a teacher has done to manage her student with separation anxiety.	3.76	.49482	Very Satisfactory
7. Selective Ignoring: Teachers use this strategy to let the child experience, face and regulate the emotions they have.	3.24	.66848	Satisfactory
8. Humor: Who would not love teachers with humor? This is one of the strategies which keep students’ attention.	3.67	.58698	Very Satisfactory
9. Giving outlet of outburst: Giving the children outlet of outburst can help them express their feelings.	3.21	.68601	Satisfactory
10. Reassurance: Teachers initially talked to the child for assurance of his/her safety in school.	3.63	.66142	Very Satisfactory
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	3.199	.38336	Satisfactory
1. Teachers in the kindergarten classroom provide emotional support to children experiencing separation anxiety.	3.36	.55994	Satisfactory
2. The teacher's approach to handling separation anxiety is effective in helping children adjust to the school environment.	3.33	.56951	Satisfactory

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation (S.D.)	Descriptive Interpretation
3. Teachers communicate with parents regularly about the child's progress in overcoming separation anxiety.	3.23	.66447	Satisfactory
4. Parents receive adequate guidance on how to help their child cope with separation anxiety before school starts.	2.90	.65905	Satisfactory
5. Parental involvement in school activities helps reduce my child's separation anxiety.	3.39	.60126	Satisfactory
6. Classmates' interactions and friendships help ease my learners' separation anxiety.	3.71	.47768	Very Satisfactory
7. Children are encouraged to work in pairs or small groups, which helps those with separation anxiety feel more comfortable.	3.71	.49838	Very Satisfactory
8. The school provides enough resources, such as counseling or emotional support services, for children with separation anxiety.	2.92	.81253	Satisfactory
9. The school environment (calming spaces, quiet areas) supports children who are struggling with separation anxiety.	2.91	.73985	Satisfactory
10. Staff are equipped with strategies for managing and reducing separation anxiety in the classroom.	2.53	.96875	Satisfactory

Legend: (4) 3.50 – 4.00=Very Satisfactory; (3) 2.50 – 3.49=Satisfactory; (2)1.50 – 2.49=Fair; (1)1.00 – 1.49=Poor

3. Differences in the Extent of Teachers' Capabilities Based on Demographic Profile

To determine whether significant differences exist in the extent of teachers' capabilities in handling kindergarten separation anxiety, t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted across demographic variables (Table 4). Overall, results revealed no significant differences in most categories.

When grouped according to age, no significant differences were found across all domains, except in Knowledge about Separation Anxiety, where post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) showed a significant difference between teachers aged 25 and below and those aged 36–50 ($p = .002$). Despite this, the overall hypothesis was still accepted. For gender, civil status, length of service, and educational attainment, the results consistently showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4: Differences in the Extent of Teachers' Capabilities in Handling Kindergarten Separation Anxiety According to Demographic Profile

Demographic Grouping Domains	Test Statistic (t / F)	p-value (Sig.)	Description
Age			
Knowledge about separation anxiety	6.522	.002	Significant
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	1.449	.240	Not Significant
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	.148	.863	Not Significant
Gender			
Knowledge about separation anxiety	-1.465	.146	Not Significant
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	-.133	.894	Not Significant
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	-.406	.686	Not Significant
Civil Status			
Knowledge about separation anxiety	2.213	.068	Not Significant
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	.686	.506	Not Significant

Demographic Grouping Domains	Test Statistic (t / F)	p-value (Sig.)	Description
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	1.406	.250	Not Significant
Length of Service			
Knowledge about separation anxiety	1.835	.165	Not Significant
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	.706	.496	Not Significant
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	.519	.597	Not Significant
Educational Attainment			
Knowledge about separation anxiety	.417	.660	Not Significant
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	.083	.920	Not Significant
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	.992	.375	Not Significant

*Significance at alpha 0.05

4. Correlational Analysis Among Sub-Categories of Teachers' Capabilities in Handling Separation Anxiety

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationships among the sub-categories of teachers' capabilities on handling separation anxiety (Table 5). Results revealed significant positive correlations among all variables ($p = .000$).

A high positive correlation was found between Knowledge about Separation Anxiety and Support or Resources ($r = .603$), followed by Teachers' Strategies and Support or Resources ($r = .543$), and Knowledge about Separation Anxiety and Teachers' Strategies ($r = .518$). The strongest relationship was observed between knowledge and support/resources, indicating that deeper understanding of separation anxiety is associated with better utilization of supportive interventions and resources.

Overall, findings show that the sub-categories are significantly interrelated, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant correlation among the sub-categories of teachers' capabilities in handling separation anxiety.

Table 5. Correlations Among the Sub-Categories of Teachers' Capabilities

Variables	Pearson r	Sig.	N	Description
Knowledge about separation anxiety				
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety	.518**	.007	100	High Correlation
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	.603**	.000	100	High Correlation
Strategies to alleviate separation anxiety				
Support or resources that would be helpful in handling separation anxiety in kindergarten	.543**	.000	100	High Correlation

** Correlation Coefficient is significant at alpha .01 level

Discussion

The demographic profile of teacher-respondents in the selected Districts of the Division of Sulu indicates a predominantly early-to-mid career workforce, with most teachers aged 26 to 35 years old, largely female, and mostly married. This composition suggests a relatively stable and

community-embedded teaching population. In terms of professional preparation, most respondents are college graduates only, with a high proportion still in the early stages of their teaching careers. Overall, this profile reflects a workforce that is both relatively young in service experience and grounded in basic professional qualifications, which may shape how classroom challenges such as separation anxiety are managed in practical settings.

In terms of teachers' capabilities in handling kindergarten separation anxiety, the findings show a clear emphasis on practical classroom-based interventions. The highest-rated dimension is teachers' strategies to alleviate separation anxiety, indicating strong reliance on intentional and immediate instructional actions to reduce student distress. This is followed by the perceived usefulness of support or resources, suggesting that teachers value classroom social structures and collaborative environments as key mechanisms for easing anxiety among learners. Conversely, knowledge about separation anxiety obtained the lowest rating, implying that while teachers are more confident in applied strategies and resource utilization, their theoretical understanding of the condition is comparatively less developed.

Regarding differences in teachers' capabilities when grouped according to demographic variables, the findings consistently show no significant differences in age, gender, civil status, length of service, and educational attainment. This indicates that teachers generally share similar levels of capability in handling kindergarten separation anxiety regardless of background characteristics. However, a slight variation was observed in age, where teachers aged 36 to 50 demonstrated better perception specifically in the knowledge-related aspect of separation anxiety. Despite this, the overall results suggest a largely uniform level of capability across all respondent groups.

The correlational analysis reveals a strong interrelationship among the sub-categories of teachers' capabilities. The most notable relationship is between knowledge about separation anxiety and support or resources, suggesting that a deeper understanding of the condition is associated with a more effective use of external and classroom-based support systems. Likewise, the strong association involving support or resources and strategies for alleviation indicates that teachers who actively employ varied strategies are also more likely to integrate supportive mechanisms in managing learner anxiety. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers' capabilities function as an interconnected system, where improvements in knowledge, strategies, and resource utilization mutually reinforce one another in addressing kindergarten separation anxiety.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers in the Selected Districts of the Division of Sulu are largely composed of early-to-mid career, predominantly female, married educators who are mostly bachelor's degree holders, reflecting a stable and community-embedded workforce with limited advancement in graduate education. In terms of capability, teachers demonstrated strong proficiency in practical strategies for handling kindergarten separation anxiety and in utilizing classroom-based support systems, while their knowledge of separation anxiety emerged as comparatively less developed. No significant differences were found in teachers' capabilities when grouped according to age, gender, civil status, length of service, and educational attainment, suggesting a generally uniform level of competence across demographic profiles, although slight variation was observed among teachers aged 36 to 50 in the knowledge dimension. Moreover, the strong correlations among the sub-categories suggest that teachers' knowledge, strategies, and use of support resources operate as an interconnected system in effectively addressing separation anxiety among kindergarten learners.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the Department of Education may consider strengthening institutional support by developing structured Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs specifically for kindergarten transition, alongside initiatives that encourage teachers to pursue advanced graduate studies in Early Childhood Education or Child Psychology. Curriculum leaders may also integrate SEL components into kindergarten instruction to formalize anxiety-alleviation strategies within daily classroom practice, while school administrators may support the establishment of safe spaces or comfort corners to better manage learners' emotional needs during transition periods. Kindergarten teachers are encouraged to sustain their empathetic and proactive classroom practices while engaging in continuous professional development to deepen their theoretical understanding of child psychology. Future researchers may further expand this study through longitudinal designs that examine the long-term emotional and academic outcomes of learners exposed to these interventions.

(Disclaimer: While artificial intelligence (AI) was used for language enhancement, all concepts that were generated are entirely original.)

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