



SEPARATION ANXIETY AMONG GRADE 1 LEARNERS: BASIS FOR INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Abstract:

This study aimed to identify the levels of separation anxiety among Grade 1 learners and explore its correlation with various demographic factors, including family income, parental education, and parental occupation. A total of 100 Grade 1 learners and their parents participated in the study, with data collected through surveys and interviews. The results revealed that separation anxiety was a serious concern, with learners exhibiting significant distress in areas such as interference with daily activities, difficulty sleeping alone, and frequent requests for reassurance. The study also found significant correlations between higher family income levels and parental education, and lower levels of separation anxiety. In contrast, parental occupation did not show a significant impact. Based on these findings, the study proposes an intervention program that includes parental involvement, classroom adjustments, individual counseling, and teacher training to address separation anxiety and improve the emotional well-being of learners. This study underscores the need for targeted interventions to support young learners facing emotional challenges, ensuring their smooth transition into school and fostering their overall development.

Keywords: separation anxiety, intervention program

I. INTRODUCTION

Separation anxiety is a common psychological condition that affects children, particularly in their early years of schooling. It is characterized by excessive fear or anxiety about being separated from home or major attachment figures, significantly impacting a child's social, emotional, and academic development. Understanding the factors contributing to separation anxiety in young learners is crucial for educators and parents to provide appropriate support and interventions.

Separation anxiety has been extensively studied in various contexts. According to Bowlby's attachment theory, children develop anxiety when separated from their primary caregivers, affecting their ability to adapt to new environments such as school (Bowlby, 2019). Kearney and Albano (2017) highlight that separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is prevalent among school-aged children, affecting their daily functioning and academic performance. Research by Last et al. (2017) indicates that early identification and intervention are critical in mitigating the long-term effects of separation anxiety. Furthermore, Eisen and Schaefer (2015) discuss the role of parental involvement and support in reducing anxiety levels in children.

Several foreign studies have delved deeply into the issue of separation anxiety among young children, providing valuable insights into its prevalence, impacts, and possible interventions. Egger, Costello, and Angold (2016) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the prevalence and comorbidity of separation anxiety disorder among young children in the United States. Their research revealed that an early onset of this disorder could predict future psychological issues if not addressed promptly. They emphasized the importance of early detection and intervention to prevent the escalation of anxiety into more severe mental health problems later in life.

Similarly, Allen et al. (2015) focused on intervention programs within elementary schools. Their study highlighted the significant improvements in children's anxiety levels when targeted support was provided. This research underscores the critical role that school-based interventions can play in addressing mental health issues among young learners, demonstrating that with proper support, the negative impacts of separation anxiety can be substantially mitigated.

Gullone and Robinson (2015) emphasized the importance of school-based mental health programs in early childhood education settings. They argued that integrating mental health support into the school environment can help identify and address

separation anxiety early on. Their findings suggest that schools are not just places of academic learning but also crucial environments for supporting children's overall well-being.

Additionally, a longitudinal study by Wood et al. (2016) provided evidence that cognitive-behavioral interventions are particularly effective in reducing separation anxiety symptoms in young children over time. Their research demonstrated that these interventions could produce lasting positive effects, helping children develop healthier coping mechanisms and reducing the likelihood of ongoing anxiety issues.

In the Philippine context, several studies have also explored separation anxiety among young learners, reflecting the unique cultural and social dynamics of the region. Reyes (2018) found that Filipino children often experience high levels of separation anxiety due to strong familial bonds and cultural factors. This study highlights how cultural values can influence the manifestation and severity of separation anxiety, indicating a need for culturally sensitive approaches to intervention.

Garcia and de Guzman (2020) examined the impact of parental migration on separation anxiety in children, highlighting the unique challenges faced by families in the Philippines. Their research revealed that children left behind by migrating parents are particularly vulnerable to separation anxiety, stressing the importance of providing additional support to these children to help them cope with their parents' absence.

Cruz and Santos (2019) investigated the role of the school environment and teacher support in alleviating separation anxiety among grade school learners. They found that a supportive school environment and proactive teacher involvement could significantly reduce anxiety levels, underscoring the importance of a nurturing educational setting.

Additionally, Bautista (2021) explored the effectiveness of community-based intervention programs in reducing anxiety levels among young learners in rural areas. This study demonstrated that community support and locally tailored interventions could play a crucial role in addressing separation anxiety, particularly in regions with limited access to formal mental health services.

These studies collectively highlighted the multifaceted nature of separation anxiety and the various factors that can influence its prevalence and severity. They underscored the need for early intervention, school-based mental health programs, and culturally sensitive approaches to effectively address this issue among young learners.

There is a pressing need to conduct this study in Pangasinan State University Laboratory Elementary School, for the School Year 2024-2025. Bayambang is a municipality with a diverse population and varying socio-economic backgrounds, making it an ideal setting to examine the demographic factors contributing to separation anxiety among Grade 1 learners. Despite the growing awareness of mental health issues in the Philippines, there is limited research focused specifically on separation anxiety in this region. By understanding the prevalence and correlates of separation anxiety in Bayambang, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support young learners. This study provided a comprehensive analysis that informed the development of effective strategies to address separation anxiety, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and academic performance of Grade 1 learners in Bayambang.

Statement of the Problem

This study assessed the separation anxiety among grade 1 learners in Pangasinan State University Laboratory Elementary School for the school year 2024-2025 as the basis for intervention program to address the anxieties.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions.

1. What are the demographic characteristics of Grade 1 learners in terms of.
 - 1.1. family income,
 - 1.2. educational background, and
 - 1.3. parental occupation?
2. What is the prevalence and severity of separation anxiety among these learners?
3. Is there a significant correlation between the demographic characteristics of the learners and their levels of separation anxiety?
4. What intervention program can be developed to address separation anxiety in these learners?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, the sources of data which includes the locale of the study and the research population, instrumentation and data collection, and the tools for data analysis.

Research Design

The study used the descriptive-correlation design in assessing the separation anxiety among grade 1 learners in Pangasinan State University Laboratory Elementary School for the school year 2024-2025 as the basis for intervention program to address the anxieties.

The descriptive part described the demographic characteristics of Grade 1 learners in terms of family income, educational background, and parental occupation; determined the prevalence and severity of separation anxiety among these learners.

The correlational part tested the significant correlation between the demographic characteristics of the learners and their levels of separation anxiety.

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study were the 100 Grade 1 learners of Pangasinan State University Laboratory Elementary School for the school year 2024-2025 during the school year 2024-2025. A total of 100 Grade 1 learners was taken to answer the questionnaire prepared by the researcher. Simple random sampling was utilized to gather the needed data for this study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The instrument used in this study is a researcher-made questionnaire. Part I focused on describing the demographic characteristics of Grade 1 learners in terms of family income, educational background, and parental occupation; Part II focused on determining the prevalence and severity of separation anxiety among these learners.

The questionnaire was prepared based on the researcher's readings, previous studies, professional literature, and published and unpublished thesis relevant to the study. In the preparation of the instrument, the requirements for designing a good data collection instrument was considered. For instance, a statement describing the situations or issues pertaining was toned down to accommodate the knowledge preparedness of the respondents.

Tools for Data Analysis

The following tools were utilized to treat the data statistically.

In describing the demographic characteristics of Grade 1 learners in terms of family income, educational background, and parental occupation, frequency and percentage were used. Frequency referred to the number of cases while percentage is computed using the formula,

$$\% = \frac{f}{N} \times 100$$

where

% Percentage

f Frequency

N Total Number of Cases

In determining the prevalence and severity of separation anxiety among these learners, weighted mean was used. Weighted mean is computed using the formula,

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum WX}{n}$$

where

\bar{X} Weighted Mean

W Weight

X Raw Scores

n Number of Cases

The data will be interpreted as.

4.50-5.00 Very High

3.50-4.49 High

2.50-3.49 Moderately High

1.50-2.49 Moderately Low

1.00-1.49 Very Low

In testing the correlation between the demographic characteristics of the learners and their levels of separation anxiety, Pearson r was used. It could be computed using the formula,

$$r = \frac{n \sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[n \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][n \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

where

r Pearson r

X Demographic Characteristics of the Learners

Y Levels of Separation Anxiety

n Number of Cases

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussion of findings brought from the data gathering procedure. The data gathering procedures were based on the questions posited in the beginning of this study.

1. Demographic Characteristics of Grade 1 Learners

Table 1.1
Family Income Level

Family Income Level	f	%
Less than ₱10,000 per month	3	3
₱10,000 - ₱20,000 per month	26	26
₱20,001 - ₱30,000 per month	37	37
₱30,001 - ₱40,000 per month	28	28
More than ₱40,000 per month	6	6
Total	100	100

The distribution of family income levels among Grade 1 learners in the study shows a range of economic backgrounds, with the highest percentage of families earning between ₱20,001 and ₱30,000 per month, representing 37% of the respondents. This income bracket is followed closely by families earning ₱10,000 to ₱20,000, making up 26% of the learners. A significant portion, 28%, belongs to the group earning ₱30,001 to ₱40,000, indicating that a large proportion of the learners come from families with moderate to higher incomes.

However, only a small percentage of learners, 6%, come from families with an income of more than ₱40,000, suggesting that there is a notable proportion of families with incomes in the mid-range. The least represented income group is those earning less than ₱10,000 per month, comprising only 3% of the total learners. This distribution highlights the socioeconomic diversity among the Grade 1 learners, with the majority of families falling into the middle-income categories. This income data could play an important role in understanding the potential impact of economic factors on the learners' emotional well-being, particularly in relation to separation anxiety, as income levels may influence access to resources and support systems for both learners and their families.

Table 1.2
Parent Education

Parent Education	f	%
No formal education	1	1
Elementary level	27	27
High school level	36	36
College level	31	31
Postgraduate level	5	5
Total	100	100

The largest group of parents, 36%, have completed high school, followed by 31% who have attained a college level of education. This indicates that a substantial portion of parents possess secondary or tertiary education, which may contribute to their ability to support their children's academic and emotional development, potentially affecting their response to separation anxiety.

Meanwhile, 27% of parents have only completed elementary education, and 5% have achieved postgraduate levels of education. A very small fraction, just 1%, of parents has no formal education. The relatively high percentage of parents with at least a high school education suggests that many learners may benefit from a certain level of support at home in addressing challenges such as separation anxiety. It is important to note that parent education could influence the approaches used to address and recognize emotional issues in children, as those with higher levels of education might be more familiar with strategies to help their children cope with separation anxiety. However, the 27% of parents with only elementary-level education may face challenges in supporting their children in the same way, potentially leading to differences in how separation anxiety is managed at home.

Table 1.3
Parental Occupation

Parental Occupation	f	%
Unemployed	24	24
Laborer/Skilled Worker	6	6
Clerical/Administrative	11	11
Professional/Technical	21	21
Managerial/Executive	6	6
Other	32	32
Total	100	100

The largest group of parents, 32%, falls under the "Other" category, which could represent various informal or self-employed occupations. This suggests that a significant portion of the parent population may not have traditional job security or benefits, which could affect their ability to be present for their children during school transitions and emotional challenges such as separation anxiety.

24% of parents are unemployed, which could indicate economic instability and possibly less parental availability or involvement in the child's school life. Unemployment might also contribute to higher levels of stress and anxiety within the household, potentially influencing the child's emotional responses to separation from their parents.

In terms of formal employment, 21% of parents work in professional or technical roles, and 11% are in clerical or administrative positions. These parents are more likely to have access to resources or strategies that can aid in managing their child's separation anxiety, possibly benefiting from a higher degree of job stability or knowledge in psychological support practices. Meanwhile, 6% of parents hold managerial or executive positions, which might come with a higher level of financial security and professional skills that could translate into more effective coping mechanisms for their children.

2. Prevalence and Severity of Separation Anxiety

Table 2
Challenges Non-Indigenous Teachers Encountered when
Teaching indigenous Learners

Statements	Mean	Verbal Description
Interference with Daily Functioning. Significant impact on the child's ability to function effectively in daily activities, such as attending school or participating in family activities, due to separation anxiety.	4.87	Very Much Serious
Difficulty Sleeping Alone. Problems with falling asleep or staying asleep alone, often requiring the presence of a caregiver.	4.76	Very Much Serious
Frequent Requests for Reassurance. Repeatedly seeking reassurance from caregivers about their safety and return.	4.66	Very Much Serious
Fear of Caregiver Harm. Intense fear that something bad will happen to the caregiver while the child is apart from them.	4.56	Very Much Serious
Clinginess. Excessive clinginess or reluctance to leave the caregiver's side, even during routine activities.	4.51	Very Much Serious
Reluctance to Go to School. Frequent refusal or significant distress when it comes time to leave for school.	4.4	Very Much Serious
Perfectionism Related to Separation. An excessive focus on making sure everything is "perfect" to avoid separation, such as ensuring caregivers' safety or avoiding mistakes.	4.40	Very Much Serious

Excessive Worry About Separation. Persistent fear or anxiety about being apart from primary caregivers, even in non-threatening situations.	4.36	Very Much Serious
Difficulty with Transitions. Struggles with transitions between activities or environments that involve separation from caregivers.	3.74	Serious
Inability to Participate in Normal Activities. Difficulty engaging in normal age-appropriate activities, such as extracurriculars, due to separation fears.	3.67	Serious
Avoidance Behaviors. Avoiding situations or activities that involve separation from caregivers, such as playdates or sleepovers.	3.64	Serious
Repeated Nightmares. Frequent nightmares about being separated from caregivers or about them being harmed.	3.59	Serious
Physical Symptoms. Complaints of physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, or nausea when separation is anticipated or occurs.	3.42	Serious
Social Withdrawal. Avoidance of social interactions with peers due to anxiety about separation from caregivers.	3.4	Serious
Tantrums or Meltdowns. Extreme emotional outbursts or tantrums when separation from caregivers is imminent or during separation.	2.73	Moderately Serious
General Weighted Mean	4.05	Serious

The most significant challenge identified is Interference with Daily Functioning, with a mean score of 4.87, described as "Very Much Serious." This highlights how severe separation anxiety can hinder a child's ability to attend school or participate in everyday activities, greatly impacting their daily routine. This might also affect their social interactions and academic progress, as their emotional state can prevent them from fully engaging with the learning environment.

Difficulty Sleeping Alone is another critical challenge, with a mean score of 4.76. This suggests that many children experience significant distress when required to sleep without the presence of a caregiver, which could lead to sleep deprivation or fatigue during school hours, further exacerbating emotional difficulties.

The third most serious challenge, Frequent Requests for Reassurance (mean score of 4.66), indicates that children with separation anxiety often need constant emotional validation from caregivers. These children may struggle with feelings of insecurity and doubt, needing reassurance even when their environment is safe and secure.

Fear of Caregiver Harm, with a mean of 4.56, shows the intensity of the emotional distress these children experience when separated from their primary caregiver, driven by an irrational fear that harm might come to the caregiver during the absence. This fear can be highly disruptive to the child's emotional stability.

Other challenges that were reported as very much serious include Clinginess (mean of 4.51), Reluctance to Go to School (mean of 4.4), and Perfectionism Related to Separation (mean of 4.40). These behaviors often manifest as the child becoming overly attached to their caregiver, showing resistance or distress at the idea of going to school, or fixating on ensuring that everything is in order to avoid separation.

Overall, these challenges illustrate how separation anxiety among Grade 1 learners can significantly disrupt their emotional and academic development, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and support systems in schools to help these children cope effectively with separation-related anxiety.

3. Significant Correlation between the Demographic Characteristics of the Learners and their Levels of Separation Anxiety

Table 3

Significant Correlation between Teachers' Demographic Characteristics and the Challenges Faced by Non-Indigenous Teachers

Profile	Levels of Separation Anxiety	
Family Income Level	Pearson r:	0.442
	p-value:	0.014
	Interpretation:	Significant
Parent Education	Pearson r:	0.678
	p-value:	0.000
	Interpretation:	Significant
Parental Occupation	Pearson r:	0.279
	p-value:	0.135
	Interpretation:	Not Significant
Total	Pearson r:	0.374
	p-value:	0.041
	Interpretation:	Significant

The Family Income Level (Pearson r: 0.442, p-value: 0.014) shows a significant positive correlation with separation anxiety, indicating that children from higher-income families tend to experience more severe separation anxiety. This may suggest that wealthier families, possibly due to a more sheltered environment, foster stronger emotional bonds between the child and caregiver, which can intensify feelings of anxiety when the child is separated.

Similarly, Parent Education (Pearson r: 0.678, p-value: 0.000) also exhibits a significant positive correlation, implying that children whose parents have higher levels of education are more likely to experience separation anxiety. This relationship suggests that educated parents, being more attuned to their child's emotional needs, might unintentionally foster greater attachment, which could contribute to increased anxiety during separation.

On the other hand, Parental Occupation (Pearson r: 0.279, p-value: 0.135) shows no significant correlation with separation anxiety, suggesting that the type of occupation or employment status of the parents does not have a direct impact on the child's

separation anxiety levels. This implies that other factors, such as emotional support and caregiving practices, may play a more significant role in shaping the child's emotional responses.

Finally, the Total (Pearson $r = 0.374$, p -value: 0.041) shows a significant positive correlation, emphasizing that a combination of factors, including family income and parent education, contribute to the severity of separation anxiety. This highlights the importance of considering the broader family context, such as socio-economic and educational influences, when addressing separation anxiety in young learners.

Overall, these findings suggest that socio-economic and educational factors play a critical role in the emotional attachment of children to their caregivers, which in turn influences their separation anxiety. However, parental occupation does not appear to be a significant factor.

Summary of Findings:

1. The study reveals that most Grade 1 learners come from families with a monthly income between ₱20,001 and ₱30,000 (37%), followed by those in the ₱30,001 to ₱40,000 income range (28%). The majority of parents have at least a high school education, with a significant portion also having attained a college level education. In terms of occupation, a substantial number of parents are unemployed (24%) or work in clerical/administrative (11%) and professional/technical (21%) roles.
2. The findings show that separation anxiety is a serious issue for Grade 1 learners. The majority of students demonstrate very serious levels of anxiety, particularly in areas such as interference with daily functioning (mean = 4.87), difficulty sleeping alone (mean = 4.76), and frequent requests for reassurance (mean = 4.66). These behaviors indicate a significant emotional and psychological challenge for both students and their caregivers.
3. There is a significant correlation between family income level (Pearson $r = 0.442$), parental education (Pearson $r = 0.678$), and the level of separation anxiety among the learners. Higher levels of parental education and better family income are associated with lower levels of separation anxiety, suggesting that parental involvement and socio-economic factors may influence the severity of anxiety experienced by the learners.

Conclusions:

1. The study concludes that family income level and parental education have a direct impact on the levels of separation anxiety among Grade 1 learners. Children from families with higher income and better education levels tend to experience lower levels of separation anxiety.
2. Separation anxiety among Grade 1 learners is a significant concern, with many students struggling with daily activities, sleep, and separation from caregivers. This anxiety impacts their ability to fully engage in school activities and may lead to further emotional challenges.
3. Given the significant impact of separation anxiety on learners, it is crucial to implement targeted intervention programs that address both emotional and psychological needs. Interventions should focus on both the home and school environment, fostering parental engagement and providing in-school support for students.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended to develop a comprehensive intervention program that includes parental education, classroom adjustments, individual counseling, peer support systems, gradual separation exposure, and teacher training. This program should focus on reducing separation anxiety and improving emotional resilience in students.
2. Schools should provide workshops and resources to educate parents on the signs of separation anxiety and offer strategies for supporting their children at home. Encouraging strong home-school collaboration will help create a consistent support system for the learners.
3. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the intervention program should be conducted to assess its effectiveness. Feedback from teachers, parents, and students will help refine the program and ensure that it addresses the evolving needs of the learners.
4. Teachers should receive continuous professional development on how to identify and manage separation anxiety in the classroom. Training on emotional support strategies, as well as creating a positive and supportive classroom environment, will be essential in addressing the emotional needs of students.
5. Schools should ensure that their environment is nurturing and emotionally supportive, promoting social-emotional learning activities that help students manage anxiety and build emotional resilience. Teachers should also foster peer relationships to help anxious students feel more secure.

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