



The Role of Teachers and Parents in Overcoming *Separation Anxiety* in Early Childhood

Siti Salbiyah^{✉1}, Yolanda Pahrul², Maulida Nur³, Inten Risna⁴, Ratu Yustika Rini⁵

sitalbiyah80@gmail.com

yolanda.pahrul@binabangsa.ac.id²,maulida.nur@binabangsa.ac.id³,ratuyustika21@gmail.com⁴,intenrisna22@gmail.com⁵

Early Childhood Education Program, Bina Bangsa University, Serang Banten, Indonesia

Abstract

Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is an emotional problem often experienced in early childhood, especially when they first enter an educational environment. This condition can hinder the adaptation process, independence, and involvement of children in learning activities. Therefore, the role of teachers and parents is an important factor in helping children overcome separation anxiety. This study aims to describe the role of teachers and parents in overcoming SAD in early childhood at PAUD. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method because it allows researchers to explore in depth the behavior of children and the dynamics of interaction between children, teachers, and parents in a natural context. The research subject was one child at the Al-Hafidz Early Childhood Education Center in Cipocok Jaya, Serang City. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The results of the study, based on observation and interviews, showed that the child experienced symptoms of SAD, such as crying when separated from parents, refusing to enter the classroom, and showing high emotional dependence. Teachers act as surrogate figures who provide a sense of security through play-based approaches, empathetic communication, and enjoyable learning strategies. Meanwhile, parents, especially mothers, play a role through permissive parenting patterns that influence the child's condition. Intensive collaboration between teachers and parents has a positive impact on improving the child's independence and adaptability in the classroom.

Keywords: Separation Anxiety Disorder, Early Childhood, Teachers, Parents, Early Childhood Education

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[✉] Corresponding author:

Email Address: First author's email address (**Siti Salbiyah**)

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a fundamental stage in shaping children's social, emotional, and independence development. At this stage, children begin to learn to adapt to new environments, interact with peers, and build self-confidence outside the family environment (Wahidah, 2021) . Mimin et al.(2025) However, the adaptation process does not always run smoothly. Some children experience emotional difficulties when separated from their parents, especially their mothers, which can hinder their involvement in school learning activities.

One of the disorders that children often experience when they first enter a school environment such as early childhood education is *separation anxiety disorder*. *Separation anxiety disorder* is the worry and fear of separation experienced by children from their closest relatives, namely their mothers. This anxiety can affect children's social lives, preventing them from becoming independent and requiring parents to be more involved in their children's activities, especially when they start school (Fadilah et al., 2023) . In fact, a longitudinal study found that separation anxiety can lead to school refusal, which in turn can cause serious problems such as declining academic performance, difficulty interacting with peers, and family conflicts. (Wulandari & Nisa, 2024) . If not addressed appropriately, separation anxiety can impact a child's social adaptation skills, delay independence, and lead to *school refusal* in early childhood.

Previous studies have discussed the role of teachers in dealing with separation anxiety in young children, especially through emotional approaches and fun learning strategies. However, this anxiety can arise even when parents simply leave their children in another room in the house. Last and Strauss (in Wulandari & Nisa, 2024) state that around 75% of children who are reluctant to go to school experience anxiety due to separation from a close figure, especially their mother who usually accompanies them. Therefore, children need time to adapt when they first enter the school environment. Darnia & Wulandari, (2024) mention that various factors can trigger anxiety, including genetic factors and experiences of violence experienced by children. In addition, an insecure attachment relationship with parents can also contribute to the emergence of anxiety in children. The role of the family and educational institutions is crucial in preventing separation anxiety disorders, as both have a major influence on children's emotional well-being. Therefore , collaboration between families and schools is necessary to create an environment that supports children's psychological development while reducing the risk of anxiety.

Children who experience separation anxiety need emotional support from those closest to them, especially teachers and parents (Zahra et al., 2024) . During the learning process in the

classroom, children often need repeated instructions and assistance when doing assignments or following the teacher's directions. The role of teachers and parents is very important in helping children overcome this anxiety by improving their understanding and skills and establishing good cooperation. Through this support, it is hoped that children can grow to be more courageous and confident in doing various things independently (Puspitasari & Wati, 2018) .

Teachers have tried various strategies, such as providing explanations, accompanying students during the learning process, allowing them to go home early, and offering rewards. However, these steps have not shown effective results, as some children are still reluctant to go to school due to their fear of being left alone. Limited knowledge and skills make teachers prone to panic when faced with children who cry or throw tantrums due to separation anxiety (Muthie & Sugito, 2023) . As a result, some teachers choose to ignore children's behavior in class, including when they refuse or fail to complete assigned tasks. This condition also causes teachers to become less focused and not fully involve children in learning activities. In addition to the ability to deal with children with separation anxiety, teachers also need to have skills in interacting with parents (Darnia & Wulandari, 2024) .

Based on initial observations at KB Al-Hafidz Cipocok Jaya, one case of persistent separation anxiety was identified, lasting for more than one semester. The child exhibited continuous crying, refused to enter the classroom without the presence of his mother, and had difficulty participating in all learning activities. This condition indicates that the child's adaptation process was not optimal and required integrated handling involving various parties. This situation became an urgent matter to be studied in more depth, given the long-term impact of separation anxiety on the social and emotional development of early childhood.

Separation anxiety was experienced by one child out of 31 students at KB Al-Hafidz. From the beginning of semester 1 to semester 2, the child still had considerable difficulty separating from his mother. Every day, from the moment they arrived at school until it was time to go home, the child was reluctant to separate and always tried to stay close to their mother. Even when playing outside, they continued to hold their mother's hand. Even before class started, the child still refused to enter the classroom if their mother was not nearby. The child often cries, hugs his mother tightly , and constantly looks for her. The child only appears calm and willing to sit in class when his mother remains by his side. This also occurs during various other activities, such as prayer, reciting the Quran, and the entire learning process. This condition has persisted for quite a long time, namely more than one semester, indicating that the child's adaptation process has not been optimal.

Based on this description, *the research gap* in this study lies in the lack of studies that specifically explore intensive collaboration between teachers and parents in handling cases of

separation anxiety disorder in early childhood through a case study approach. Therefore, this study has *novelty* in its focus on highlighting the dynamics of the roles of teachers and parents together in a real case in an early childhood education setting. This study is expected to provide practical contributions for educators and parents in designing more effective assistance strategies to help children overcome separation anxiety and improve their social-emotional readiness in the school environment.

Based on the background description, urgency, and research gap that has been presented, this study focuses on understanding the role of teachers and parents in overcoming separation anxiety disorder (SAD) in early childhood at KB Al-Hafidz Cipocok Jaya. The main issues in this study relate to how teachers carry out their role in helping children deal with separation anxiety in the school environment, how parents support their children's adaptation process at home, and how teachers and parents collaborate to reduce separation anxiety and increase children's independence. Thus, this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the roles of teachers and parents in handling cases of *separation anxiety disorder* in early childhood.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. According to Sugiyono (2020), qualitative research is a method used to study the natural conditions of an object, where the researcher is the main instrument in collecting and interpreting data. This approach allows researchers to deeply understand the meaning behind the behavior, experiences, and social interactions that occur in the field. Meanwhile, according to , case studies are used to gain an in-depth understanding of an event or situation that occurs in real life, focusing on a single case that is considered important and meaningful. Therefore, this approach was chosen so that researchers could explore in depth the phenomenon of *separation anxiety* experienced by young children and understand the role of teachers and parents in helping them adapt to school.

Research Time and Place

This research was conducted at KB Al-Hafidz Cipocok Jaya, Serang City, from March to June 2025. The time frame was chosen to coincide with the school's learning activities so that data collection could be carried out optimally and continuously.

The research subjects were selected *purposively* based on specific considerations. The child who was the subject of the study was the only child in the class who persistently exhibited symptoms of *separation anxiety disorder* (SAD). These separation anxiety symptoms lasted for a relatively long

period of time, namely more than one semester, and were characterized by refusal to separate from the mother, repeated crying, and high emotional dependence during learning activities. These conditions formed the basis for the selection of subjects because they were considered relevant for in-depth study through a case study approach.

Research Objectives

Subject selection was conducted purposively in accordance with the research focus, which was to understand the role of teachers and parents in helping children overcome separation anxiety. In addition, other teachers and the principal were also involved as supporting informants to strengthen the validity of the data.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Data collection in this study was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly to observe children's behavior and their interactions with teachers and parents during learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with classroom teachers and parents to obtain in-depth information about their experiences, support strategies, and responses to the separation anxiety experienced by children. Documentation was used as supporting data, such as notes on children's development and photos of learning activities.

In this study, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer who was involved to a limited extent in the learning context. The researcher did not act as a classroom teacher directly responsible for the children, but rather as an observer in the school environment to observe phenomena naturally. This position allowed the researcher to obtain contextual data while maintaining analytical distance so as not to overly influence the behavior of the research subjects. To minimize potential bias, the researcher triangulated the data by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also conducted *member checking* to confirm the data with teachers and parents to ensure consistency between the research findings and the conditions in the field. Thus, the data obtained is expected to have a high level of validity and reflect the conditions of the research subjects objectively.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study used the interactive model of (2019), which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process was carried out repeatedly and continuously from the time the data was collected until the study was completed.

Data reduction was carried out by selecting and simplifying the data obtained from observations and interviews. Observations revealed behaviors such as crying when left by their mothers, refusing to enter the classroom, and looking for their mothers. These data were coded into

the category "symptoms of separation anxiety." The results of interviews with teachers about strategies for accompanying children, such as inviting them to play and empathetic communication, were coded as "the role of teachers." Interviews with parents about the habit of accompanying children excessively were categorized as "parental role." After being reduced and coded, the data was presented in narrative form to describe the relationship between categories. The final stage was drawing conclusions by interpreting the patterns that emerged. The conclusions were then verified through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure that the results were valid and accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Based on observations from March to June 2025, one child at KB Al-Hafidz Cipocok Jaya was found to show persistent symptoms of *separation anxiety disorder* (SAD). Since arriving at school, the child has been reluctant to separate from his mother and has cried when his mother tried to leave the classroom. The child also refused to enter the classroom if his mother was not nearby and tended to keep looking for his mother during learning activities. In addition, the child showed high emotional dependence, such as always holding his mother's hand while playing and being reluctant to interact with peers without his mother's assistance. This condition lasted for quite a long time, namely more than one semester, and did not show a significant decrease at the initial stage of observation.

This behavior indicates a high level of emotional dependence on parents. The child tends to only want to sit in class when his mother is beside him and is reluctant to participate in learning activities independently. This condition is reinforced by observation documentation showing that the child does not want to let go of his mother when he is in the school environment.



Figure 1. The child does not want to leave his mother

To clarify the observation findings, the child's behavior showing symptoms of separation anxiety is summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of Observation Results of Child Behavior

Observed Aspects	Behavior Description
Reaction when separated from mother	The child cries and refuses to enter the classroom
Independence in class	The child only wants to sit if the mother is nearby
Social interaction	The child is reluctant to play with peers without the mother
Response to the teacher	Children are calmer when accompanied by teachers intensively
Adaptation development	Crying decreased after gradual accompaniment

Based on initial observations, the child showed behavior of refusing to separate from the mother when arriving at school. The child cried, held the mother's hand tightly, and was reluctant to enter the classroom without the mother's presence. During learning activities, the child only wanted to sit when the mother was nearby and did not actively participate in class activities. This condition persisted consistently during the first few weeks of observation. The child also seemed to frequently look for the mother and showed signs of anxiety when the mother was not visible in the classroom, as shown.

During the learning process, the child showed limitations in interacting with peers. The child tended to be alone and refused invitations to play from friends. The child's response to the teacher's instructions was also limited, especially when the mother was not in the classroom. However, when the teacher provided intensive assistance, the child appeared calmer and began to participate in simple activities such as sitting in a circle and playing with the teacher. This behavior did not occur when the teacher maintained distance or when the mother left the classroom without notice. Based on the interview results, the teacher said that the child had shown difficulties in adapting since starting school. The teacher explained that the child often cried when the mother left the classroom and took a long time to calm down.

"When the mother leaves, the child immediately cries and refuses to participate in activities. So I have to accompany him constantly at the beginning." (Teacher Interview, 2025).

Interviews with parents revealed that the child was accustomed to being accompanied at all times in daily activities. Parents stated that the child was rarely left alone and often asked the mother to always be near him.

"I rarely leave my child, so if I leave even for a moment, they usually cry immediately." (Parent Interview, 2025).

Based on further observation, a change in the child's behavior was found after gradual assistance was provided. The child began to be able to enter the classroom without the mother's presence for a certain period of time and showed a decrease in the intensity of crying. The child also began to participate in learning activities with peers, although still requiring the assistance of a teacher.



Figure 2. The child begins to be independent and is not accompanied by parents

DISCUSSION

The research findings show that children experience separation anxiety, characterized by high emotional dependence on their mothers, such as refusing to enter the classroom and crying when their mothers leave the school environment. This condition can be understood through attachment theory, which states that a child's attachment to a primary figure is formed through intense and consistent interaction. In this case, the child's attachment to the mother has developed very strongly, but this has not been balanced with the child's ability to tolerate temporary separation (Rohayani et al., 2023) .

Another strategy employed by teachers is gradual separation, such as asking mothers to wait outside the classroom for a short period while their children participate in classroom activities. This approach is carried out consistently every day so that children have the opportunity to slowly adapt to the school environment. Observations show that this strategy has a positive impact on children's behavior, as they begin to sit in class, participate in play activities, and engage in learning activities.

These findings align with the opinions of , who state that early childhood education teachers need to create a positive psychological atmosphere so that children feel accepted, calm, and protected in the school environment. Research from Ramadhanty et al. (2025) also states that an emotionally

safe learning environment allows children to reduce anxiety and build self-confidence in interacting with teachers and peers.

The approach used by teachers in this study also reflects educational practices based on compassion and play activities. Utami et al., (2025) state that teachers do not force children to be immediately independent, but rather provide continuous emotional support. With patience and consistent attention, children gradually show behavioral changes, such as beginning to participate in play and learning activities with their peers.

This is in line with the views of Nisa,(2024) , who emphasize that a loving and playful approach is key to fostering self-confidence in early childhood. Through warm and enjoyable interactions, children feel valued and accepted, allowing their courage to try new things and adapt to new environments to develop naturally (Aliyah et al., 2025) .

The results of the study show that in the early stages, communication between teachers and parents was not yet effective. Parents still showed excessive concern for their children's emotional state and tended to accompany their children fully in class. This situation limited the teachers' ability to implement optimal mentoring strategies and hindered the children's adaptation process. Over time, communication between teachers and parents began to develop through discussions and mutual agreements regarding the children's emotional needs. Teachers explained the importance of gradual detachment to train children's independence, while parents began to understand their role in supporting the adaptation process from home. This collaboration enabled the formation of consistent mentoring strategies between the school and home environments.

These findings reinforce the opinion of which states that synergy between teachers and parents plays an important role in developing children's emotional regulation and social adaptation skills. Afifah and Arbarini,(2025) also convey that open and continuous communication helps create a common perception of children's needs, so that the interventions carried out become more effective.

Based on Erikson's psychosocial development theory, preschool-aged children are in the autonomy versus shame and doubt stage, which is the phase when children begin to learn independence and develop self-confidence. In the context of this study, the separation anxiety experienced by children indicates that their autonomy development has not progressed optimally (Rizki, 2025) . The results of the study show that parents still often help their children with simple activities, such as opening lunch boxes or taking out stationery. This habit, although done with the intention of helping, indirectly limits children's opportunities to take initiative and develop independence. This condition is in line with Erikson's view (in Mokal & Boangmanalu, 2021) , which states that a lack of opportunities for independence can foster feelings of doubt and dependence in children.

Interventions by teachers and parents through gradual separation and consistent emotional support contribute to strengthening this stage of development. Children are given the opportunity to try to be independent in the school environment while still feeling safe, so that their self-confidence and independence begin to develop.

The results of this study indicate that parenting styles play a significant role in the emergence of separation anxiety in children. Overprotective and indulgent parenting styles make children emotionally dependent on their parents, causing them to feel afraid of facing new situations without their parents present. However, when teachers and parents consistently work together to provide emotional support and gradually accustom children to separation, children demonstrate better adaptability. Collaboration between home and school helps children feel secure while fostering confidence in participating in school activities.

This study has limitations because it only involved one research subject, so the findings cannot be generalized broadly. In addition, the relatively short duration of the study limited the observation of the long-term effects of the intervention. The data obtained also relied heavily on observation and interviews, so even though triangulation was carried out, the potential for subjectivity remained.

The results of this study have important implications for early childhood education practices. Early childhood teachers are expected to apply emotional approaches and play activities to help children overcome separation anxiety. In addition, close and continuous collaboration between teachers and parents needs to be part of the strategy for children's adaptation at the beginning of school. For early childhood education institutions, these findings can be used as a basis for designing support programs that promote children's emotional development, independence, and self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *separation anxiety disorder* in early childhood at Al-Hafidz Cipocok Jaya Kindergarten is characterized by high emotional dependence on parents, especially mothers, which hinders children's adaptation process in the school environment. The findings indicate that this condition is influenced by parenting patterns and children's readiness to face the separation process.

The role of teachers and parents is proven to be important in helping children overcome separation anxiety. The emotional approach and gradual separation habit formation carried out by teachers, as well as parental support in reducing excessive assistance, contribute to increasing

children's independence and self-confidence. Consistent collaboration between teachers and parents is the key to supporting the success of the children's adaptation process at school. This study has limitations because it only involved one subject and was conducted in a relatively short period of time. Nevertheless, the findings of this study have implications for early childhood education, namely the importance of building continuous cooperation between teachers and parents in supporting children's emotional development and independence.

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