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Jerm Program: An Intervention to Separation Anxiety Among Kindergarten Pupils in Southern Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Separation anxiety is very common and normal fear of being separated from parents. Anxieties are part of a child's developmental milestone. When a child goes to school for the first time, mixed emotions are present. It might be exciting but fear is normal too. This study aimed to identify the separation anxiety level of Kindergarten Pupils of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines as well as the symptoms of separation anxiety in terms of cognitive, psychophysiological and behavioural conditions among kindergartens. The study employed a quasi-experimental research design to study the effectiveness of the JERM Program. Respondents were classified as controlled and experimental groups. Data showed that a number of kindergartens have separation anxiety in both the experimental and controlled group in pre assessment. After the pre survey, the researcher employed the JERM program in the experimental group meanwhile the controlled group did not have any intervention to assess the effectiveness of the program employed. After the intervention both groups underwent a post survey. The researcher identified the improvement of the experimental group compared to the controlled group. The result has proven that the JERM program among kindergarten pupils has a potential in improving their cognitive, psychophysiological and behavioural aspects however the success of the program depends on how the parents and teachers are trained to employ it.

Keywords: Separation Anxiety, Kindergarten, Reduction Program, Kindergarten Pupils, Intervention

INTRODUCTION

The family is an intimate social setting where the child first experiences love, care and attention that eventually help in launching him into the bigger environment (Gamboa, 2019). One of the factors which certainly sets Filipinos apart from the rest, are their close family ties (Annie, 2019). It's one of the Filipino values that results in extended family structure (Goyola, 2019). In the Philippines they value their family so much that they keep them intact (Cruz, 2017). Unfortunately, this close-knit family ties develop separation anxiety among children (Alampay, 2017).

The World Health Organization estimated that 154 million Filipinos suffer from mental illness (DOH, 2018). Mental illness is the third most common disability in the Philippines (WHO, 2017) wherein six million Filipinos live with depression and separation anxiety disorder (Martinez, 2020). Not only adults of all ages suffer from separation anxiety, but almost 40% lifetime separation anxiety first manifests in adulthood (DOH, 2018). According to research, the diagnostic and statistical manual 5th

edition has broadened the range of adult anxiety disorder to include the separation anxiety among children (DSM, 2013).

A kindergarten child is at the age where he is learning to negotiate his independence, a concept that is both scary and exciting at the same time. (The First day of School: Dealing With Preschool Separation Anxiety, 2017). The start of preschool is a milestone that's often anticipated with great excitement and joy, but also with lots of crying, uncertainty, and heel digging- from both kids and parents (Koenig, 2019 A). Entering a new environment can cause anxiety for children (Bilich, 2018). For children the main source of anxiety around entering preschool is that they have absolutely no idea what to expect (Koenig, 2019b).

The researcher observed that on the first day of every school year, a large group of parents, particularly those of kindergarten, would peep over the window panes looking at the classroom just to check on how their kids were doing. Each new school year brings many unknowns to kindergarten teachers when it comes to challenging behaviors. We never know what new challenges await us each year, it's always a surprise. (Levin, 2019 A). One of the biggest challenges any early childhood teacher faces on the first day of school is separation anxiety (Levin, 2019 B). The words "Separation Anxiety" are often used during the early toddler years. As toddlers become more aware of their surroundings and begin to understand the world around them, they struggle to separate from parents or caregivers. A toddler who once transitioned to a preschool setting with ease screams and cries when the parent or caregiver leaves (Hurley, 2018). Some children become hysterical when mom is out of sight for a very short time, while other children seem to demonstrate ongoing anxiety at separations during toddler and preschool (Swanson, 2015).

It was noted that a number of Kindergarten pupils of the said school have separation anxiety during the first day of School Year 2019-2020. The fear of separation causes great distress to the child and may interfere with the child's normal activities, such as going to school or playing with other children (Brennan, 2018). This prompted the researcher to address the aforementioned problem and to prove the effectiveness of the JERM Program. The researcher strongly believed the importance of this study because it will promote the readiness of the pupils in school by developing their cognitive, psychophysiological, and behavioral skills.

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to determine the level of separation anxiety in terms of cognitive, psychophysiological, behavioral and calmness of separation. It also aimed to determine the effectiveness of JERM Program.

Specifically this study seeks to answer the following Questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of
 1. Age;
 2. Sex;
 3. Tribe;
2. What is the separation anxiety level of the kindergarten pupils in controlled and experimental groups during pre-survey and post survey in terms of:
 1. Cognitive;
 2. Psychophysiological;
 3. Behavioral; and
 4. Calm at Separation?
3. Is there a significant difference between the separation anxiety level of the pupils in pre-survey and post-survey in controlled and experimental groups?

METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental design was used in this study to prove the effectiveness of the JERM Program. This study involved a descriptive research survey to determine causes of separation anxiety. This study was conducted at a public school of Sultan Kudarat, Philippines for the school year 2019-2020.

The researcher has chosen the said school because this was where the researcher teaches. The respondents of the study were 40 kindergarten pupils of the kindergarten Sultan Kudarat. The researcher employed purposive sampling since there were only two kindergarten sections that were ideal in choosing the experimental and controlled group.

There were procedures undertaken in gathering the data of the study. First, the researcher secured an approval letter from the school head and the parents of the respondents to conduct the research in the school. Then, the researcher disseminated the survey forms among the two kindergarten sections: Controlled and Experimental Groups to assess their separation anxiety. The tool was taken from CSAS (Child Separation Anxiety Scale) and CSAS: Psychometric Properties by Xavier Mendez. The results were recorded and checked by the researcher and another teacher for validity. After the pre-survey the researcher conducted the JERM Program in the experimental group that was conducted for four weeks. The intervention involved class discussions and lectures with activities that focused on improving the cognitive, social, motor, and psychophysiological skills of the respondents. In addition, parents of the respondents from the experimental group were required to attend symposiums and were given with researcher-made handbook to help the parents in the appropriate response to the separation anxiety of their children. After the intervention, both kindergarten pupils from controlled and experimental groups answered the post survey. The improvement of the experimental group was the basis on the effectiveness of the JERM Program.

The researcher used a questionnaire to gather the data needed in the study. The questionnaire consists of two parts, part one was personal data about the respondents, part two was the frequency level of separation Anxiety Level of Kindergarten Pupils. The separation anxiety survey was adapted from CSAS (Child Separation Anxiety Scale) and Psychometric Properties by Xavier Mendez to validate the different symptoms manifested by a child with separation anxiety.

The researcher employed a mean percentage score in assessing the answers of the respondents. Meanwhile, likert scale was used to determine the variation and closeness of the respondents' responses. On the other hand, the T test was also used to determine the effectiveness of the JERM Program conducted by the researcher.

The researcher made a handbook for Kindergarten teachers and parents. This handbook was intended to help the parents and teachers in dealing the children with separation anxiety. Moreover, the researcher made a handbook for teachers that served as a strategic intervention material that composed a compilation of activities. The said activities were pro-active which were effective in dealing with child's separation anxiety. Activities in this handbook were aligned according to Department of Education's Kindergarten Competencies. Some activities contain sample outputs of the pupils. The intervention involved class discussions and lectures with activities that will improve their cognitive, social, motor, and psychophysiological skills of the respondents. In addition, parents of the respondents in the experimental group were required to attend symposiums and were given the researcher-made handbook to assist them in giving appropriate responses to the separation anxiety of their children. This intervention developed teachers and parents' awareness on the causes of separation anxiety at the same time providing teaching methods on how to deal with it. JeRM stands for Join, Expose, Ready and Move this was the strategy used by the researcher. Kindergarten pupils joined in class discussions and activities were exposed in the classroom environment then later became ready to move up to the next level.

RESULTS

This part presents the results of the data gathered. This would also determine the effectiveness of the JERM Program in improving the cognitive, psychophysiological and behavior of kindergarten learners under the experimental group.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents According to Age Group

Age (Year, Month)	Experimen-tal Group				Control Group			
	F	%	Mean	SD	F	%	Mean	SD
5.8	1	5			2	10		
5.7	1	5			3	15		
5.6	0	0			2	10		
5.5	4	20			2	10		
5.4	2	10	5.1605	1.250	1	5	5.285	1.078
5.3	2	10			1	5		
5.2	4	20			4	20		
5.1	2	10			1	5		
5	1	5			2	10		
4.11	1	5			0	0		
4.10	2	10			2	10		
Total	20	100			20	100		
SD	0.121							

Table 2: Profile of the Respondents According to Sex

Demographic Profile (Sex)	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	F	%	F	%
Male	10	50	10	50
Female	10	50	10	50
Total	20	100	20	100

Table 3: Profile of the Respondents According to Tribe

Tribe	Experimental Group		Control Group	
	F	%	F	%
Cebuano	8	40	6	30
Hiligaynon	1	5	0	0
Ilocano	3	15	0	0
Maguindanaoan	2	10	5	25
Manobo	6	30	9	45
Total	20	100	20	100

Table 4: Summary Table of Pre-Survey and Post Survey

Domains	Group	Pre- Survey Mean	Qualitative Descriptio n	Treatment	Post Surve y Mean	Qualitative Descriptio n

Cognitive	Experimental	3.33	Agree	T	4.09	Strongly Agree
	Control	3.12	Agree	-No-	3.91	Agree
Psychophysiological	Experimental	2.79	Neutral	T	4.35	Strongly Agree
	Control	2.83	Neutral	-No-	2.03	Neutral
Behavioral	Experimental	1.76	Disagree	T	3.74	Agree
	Control	1.83	Disagree	-No-	1.78	Disagree
Calm at Separation	Experimental	1.44	Disagree	T	3.48	Agree
	Control	1.58	Disagree	-No-	2.69	Neutral

Table 5: Comparison of the Results in Pre-Survey and Post Survey in Experimental and Control Groups

		Group			
		Experimental		Control	
		Pre- Survey	Post Survey	Pre- Survey	Post Survey
Mean		2.32	3.51	2.33	2.59
SD		1.359	1.342	1.204	1.113
Variance		1.848	1.802	1.450	1.239
t value		-6.4341		-0.425	
d.o.f		37		35	
Critical value		2.026		2.03	
Interpretation		Significant		Not Significant	

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1: What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex and tribe?

Table 1 showed that most of the respondents were in the ages appropriate to kindergarten. Among the 20 respondents in the experimental group, 4 (20%) of them belonged to the age group of 5.5 and 4 (20%) belonged to age group of 5.2. On the other hand, 2 (10%) belonged to 5.4 years another 2 (10%) belonged to 5 years and 1 month. Moreover, 1 (5%) belonged to 5 years and 8 months, another 1 (5%) belonged to 5 years and 7 months then 1 (5%) belonged to 5 years old. There were at least 3 (15%) of pupils who were below 5 years old. These respondents had undertaken ECCD and were able to bridge in the Kindergarten program. The total mean in the experimental group is 5.1605 and a standard deviation of 0.121. Therefore there is a close interval of the pupil's age. This means that respondents' ages are appropriate in their grade level.

On the other hand, respondents in the controlled group were also in the age group appropriate to kindergarten. Among the 20 respondents 4 (20%) belonged to 5 years and 2 months. 3 (15%) belonged to the 5.7. Age group of 5.8 years old, 5.6, 5.5, and 5 had the same percentage of 10. Further, the ages of 5.4 and 5.3 had the same percentage of 5.

DepEd Order No. 20, s.2018 states that: age qualification for kindergarten learners in both public and private schools should be five (5) years old by June 1 of every calendar year. However, the school may consider learners entering kindergarten who will turn five (5) years old by the end of August on the condition that the Philippine Early Childhood Development must be administered prior to the start of the opening of the school year. There were 5(12.5%) from the total respondents of both the experimental and controlled group who underwent the ECCD to ensure that the learner is capable of meeting the expectations of the grade level. According to D.O. No.20 s. 2018 parents may also provide documentation and/or certification of the learner's previous Early Childhood Education (ECE) experiences (i.e., preschool, day care, pre-Kindergarten) in addition to the results of the Philippine ECD Checklist.

Table 2 showed that it had the same number of respondents. There were 10(50%) of male and 10(50%) of females from both experimental and controlled groups.

Table 3 showed that in experimental group 8(40%) respondents were Cebuano and had the highest percentage among other tribes, then 1(5%) were Hiligaynon the least number of respondents and 3(15%) were Ilocano 2(10%) were Maguindanaoan and 6(30%) were Manobo. On the other hand, the controlled group had 6(30%) Cebuano, 5(25%) were Maguindaoan and 9(45%) were Manobo. Cebuano and Manobo were the most numbered tribes in the experimental and controlled group.

Research Question 2: What is the separation anxiety level of the kindergarten pupils in controlled and experimental groups during pre-survey and post survey in terms of cognitive, psychophysiological, behavioral and calm at separation?

Table 4 showed the results in pre-survey and post survey. Respondents in the experimental group received treatment after pre-survey while the controlled group did not.

The respondents in the experimental group became better in the post survey compared to pre-survey. In *cognitive* the respondents in the experimental group attained 3.33 mean and achieved 4.09 mean in the post survey. While the controlled group attained 3.12 mean in pre- survey and got 3.91 mean in the post survey. On the other hand, the respondents in the experimental group attained 2.79 mean in *psychophysiology*. However, the respondents got higher mean in the post survey and achieved 4.35 mean. In the controlled group the respondents got 2.83 mean in the pre- survey then a decreased mean of 2.03 in the post survey. In *behavioral*, the experimental group achieved 1.76 mean in the pre-survey and attained higher mean of 3.74 in the post survey. In the controlled group, the respondents achieved a higher mean of 1.89 in pre survey compared to post survey with a mean of 1.78. Moreover, in *Calm at Separation*, Experimental group achieved 1.44 mean in pre-survey and 3.48 mean in post. While in the controlled group, respondents got 1.58 in pre survey and increased mean in post survey with 2.67.

Respondents in both group experienced separation anxiety because Separation anxiety is a normal and necessary part of development that indicates that things are well with the child rather than not well (Schwartz, 2019). However, after the post survey the results in controlled group implied that there was no improvement in respondents separation anxiety level in psychophysiological and behavioral domain. The trick for surviving separation anxiety demands preparation, brisk transitions, and the evolution of time (Swanson, 2015). Controlled group therefore did not improve because they did not receive any treatment that could help them address the problem. On the other hand, the results in the experimental group implied that there was an improvement in respondent's separation anxiety level in the post survey. This is in connection to the conduct of the JERM Program after the pre-survey.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between the separation anxiety level of the pupils in pre-survey and post survey in controlled and experimental groups?

Table 5 showed the comparison of pre-survey and post survey of the respondents. In the experimental group, respondents in pre-survey attained 2.32 mean and obtained 3.51 in the post survey. The difference of the respondents mean is 1.19. The standard deviation in pre-survey is 1.359 and 1.342 in post survey. The variance is 1.848 in pre-survey and 1.802 in post. Since, the computed t value is -6.4341 with the degree of freedom of 37 and critical value of 2.026 the result is *Significant* at $p < 0.05$ level. On the other hand, respondents in the controlled group obtained 2.33 mean in pre-survey and 2.59 in post survey.

The difference in the respondents mean is 0.26. The standard deviation in pre-survey is 1.204 and 1.113 in post survey. The variance is 1.450 in pre-survey and 1.239 in post. Since, the computed t value is -0.425 with the degree of freedom of 35 and critical value of 2.03 result is *Not Significant* at $p < 0.05$ level.

If your child is suffering separation anxiety, there are lots of things you can do to help him (Lavigne et al., 2009). Moreover, as an adult, make a conscious effort to foster a child's self-esteem by giving him lots of varied activities and positive attention when he's brave about being away from you (Battaglia et al., 2016). Based on the results in pre survey and post survey, the experimental group reduced their separation anxiety level after the intervention while the controlled group did not. In clarifying the findings it can be said that the JERM Program yielded effective results.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study there was improvement between the pre-survey and post survey in the Experimental Group. The researcher proved that handbooks and symposiums were effective innovations and interventions to lessen the separation Anxiety level among Kindergarten pupils.

Hence, schools must conduct Separation Anxiety Symposiums before classes' start. It's also advisable that Kindergarten parents have to attend the above mentioned symposium. The researcher believes that school and parents must work hand in hand to lessen the separation anxiety level. Also, teachers must be tooled with information and strategy with regards to separation anxiety.

Apart from that separation anxiety needs to be addressed to lessen the anxiety problem. Thus, reproduction of the handbook made by the researcher is highly recommended to be reproduced to help not only the teachers and parents but most importantly the pupils as well. Lastly, there should be a bigger scope or more number of respondents. The data in this study may be used as a reference for other research. They may utilize more in depth data collection in order to provide more information that can be used in developing other intervention and programs that will help children with separation anxiety.

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