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School Transition Management In Reducing Separation Anxiety In Early Childhood Education: A Case Study Towards A School Transition Management Framework

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Abstract

The transition from home to school represents a critical period in early childhood that is often accompanied by separation anxiety, potentially hindering children's social-emotional adjustment and learning readiness. While previous studies have predominantly examined separation anxiety from psychological and family perspectives, limited attention has been given to the role of school management in facilitating successful transitions. This study aimed to analyze how school management addresses separation anxiety during the initial days of school and to develop a conceptual framework for managing school transitions. A qualitative case study was conducted at PAUD-TK Ar-Rahmah, East Java, involving one principal, three teachers, and five parents. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using the interactive model. The findings revealed five key management practices: structured transition planning, classroom-based emotional support, parent-school partnership, continuous emotional monitoring, and program evaluation. These practices collectively fostered three core mechanisms: trust building, emotional safety, and parent-school partnership, which generated a Secure Transition Experience that reduced separation anxiety and promoted successful school adjustment. Based on these findings, the study proposes the School Transition Management Framework (STMF) as a conceptual model for managing children's school transition through an integrated student management approach.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from the family environment to the school environment is one of the most important developmental phases in the life of early childhood. This period not only marks a change in the learning environment but also requires children to adapt to new routines, new caregivers, broader social interactions, and demands for independence that have not been experienced before. Research conducted by Rahmawati et al. (2018), Nurhayati (2019), Widiastuti et al. (2025), and Astriya (2025) shows that a successful school transition contributes to socio-emotional development, learning readiness, children's engagement in learning, and subsequent educational success. Therefore, the transition to school cannot be viewed as merely an administrative process, but rather as a developmental process that requires systematic support from both the family and the school.

The success of the school transition is greatly influenced by a child's readiness (school readiness), particularly in the socio-emotional aspect. Although parents often place greater emphasis on early academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, various studies show that emotional management, independence, discipline, self-confidence, and social skills are the primary determinants of a child's success in entering the school environment (Hapidin et al., 2024; Suhendar et al., 2025). Emotional readiness enables children to recognize, understand, control, and express their emotions appropriately, enabling them to build positive relationships with teachers and peers. Conversely, low emotional readiness makes children more susceptible to difficulties adapting when entering a new school environment (Amalia et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2024).

One of the most common forms of adaptation difficulties that arise in the early days of school is separation anxiety. This condition is a common developmental phenomenon experienced by young children and is characterized by the emergence of anxiety when having to separate from attachment figures, especially parents. Children who experience separation anxiety generally exhibit crying behavior, difficulty separating from parents, tantrums, refusal to interact with the surrounding environment, withdrawal, and experience physical complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, nausea, and sleep disturbances (Altman et al., 2009). If it persists excessively and does not receive appropriate treatment, separation anxiety can hinder social, emotional, and academic development, and even lead to school refusal in children (Ehrenreich et

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al., 2008; Puspitasari & Wati, 2018). Research by Astuti et al. (2020) also shows that the quality of attachment (parental attachment) significantly influences children's levels of separation anxiety while at school.

Previous studies have shown that separation anxiety is influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors, with family being the most dominant factor. Parenting styles, the quality of the emotional relationship between children and parents, and children's experiences before entering school are all factors that influence the emergence of separation anxiety (Kartika et al., 2020; Oktamarin et al., 2022). Therefore, various interventions developed to date have focused more on improving attachment quality, strengthening the role of parents, and psychological approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to reduce symptoms of separation anxiety.

However, this perspective still positions separation anxiety as an individual child or family issue. In fact, a child's transition experience is influenced not only by individual characteristics and parenting styles, but also by how the school manages the acceptance and adaptation process for new students. Schools are the first environment outside the family and must be able to provide a sense of security, build warm relationships with children, and create a positive transition experience. This perspective aligns with the view that the success of education is determined not only by the quality of the school's internal services but also by the school's ability to build collaborative relationships with parents and the community as educational partners (Satria et al., 2019; Sumarsono et al., 2016). Thus, the success of a child's adaptation is not solely determined by the child's readiness to enter school, but also by the school's readiness to accept and support the child during the transition.

From an educational management perspective, student management is a systematic process encompassing the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all services provided to students from the time they are admitted to school until they complete their education (Terry, 1968). The goal of student management extends beyond administrative aspects to creating a learning environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional development and overall well-being of students (Amrona et al., 2023; Wasiati, 2024). In the context of early childhood education, managing the transition period should be an integral part of student management because this period determines the quality of a child's initial school experience. Furthermore, the success of the transition process is also influenced by a close partnership between the school and the family through two-way communication, mutual trust, and active parental involvement in supporting the child's adaptation process (Bojuwoye, 2009;

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Graham et al., 2021; Keyes, 2002; Swap, 1993).

Although research on separation anxiety, school readiness, and home-school partnerships has grown rapidly, most studies still focus on aspects of child development psychology, family factors, and the effectiveness of clinical interventions. Research examining how schools manage the transition process for new students as part of student management is still relatively limited. Furthermore, there is little research explaining the mechanisms of school management in building a secure transition experience as a preventive strategy to minimize separation anxiety in early childhood. This gap in research indicates the need for a new perspective that views separation anxiety management not only as an intervention for children, but also as the result of a planned and collaborative school transition management system.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how school management manages the transition process of new students in dealing with separation anxiety in the early days of school at PAUD-TK Ar-Rahmah, East Java. Through a case study approach, this study seeks to identify management practices implemented by schools in building parental trust, creating a sense of emotional security for children, strengthening school-family partnerships, and monitoring and evaluating the student adaptation process. Furthermore, this study offers a conceptual model of the School Transition Management Framework that explains how the school management system creates a secure transition experience so that it can support the successful adaptation of children and minimize separation anxiety in early childhood education.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how school management manages the transition process for new students in dealing with separation anxiety in the early days of school. The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to comprehensively explore management practices applied in a real-world context, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between school policies, program implementation, and students' adaptation experiences.

The research was conducted at the Ar-Rahmah Preschool and Kindergarten (PAUD-TK) in East Java, which was purposively selected because the school has a systematic transition program for new students implemented at the beginning of the school year. The program includes pre-school parenting activities, the School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS), student mentoring strategies, parental involvement, and periodic evaluations of children's adaptation. These characteristics make the school a relevant case study for exploring transition management

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practices in early childhood education.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in the implementation of the student transition program. The informants included one principal, three class teachers, and five parents of students who had children in their first year of education at Ar-Rahmah PAUD-TK. The principal was selected because of his role in planning and policy-making, the teachers were chosen because of their responsibility in providing support during the adaptation period, and the parents were selected to gain perspective on the child's transition experience from the family environment to school.

Data were collected over three months using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with all informants to obtain information on school policies, mentoring strategies, children's adaptation experiences, and forms of collaboration between schools and families. Non-participant observation was conducted on four visits during the transition period for new students, focusing on teacher-student interactions, children's emotional responses to separation from their parents, the implementation of adaptation strategies in the classroom, and parental involvement during the transition process. Document analysis was conducted on school handbooks, regulations, students' daily behavior journals, and other supporting documents related to the implementation of the transition program.

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles et al. (2014) model, which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis process began with transcribing the interview results, reading all the data repeatedly, and then conducting open coding to identify units of meaning that emerged from the interviews, observations, and documents. Related codes were then grouped into categories and main themes that represent school transition management practices. Next, these themes were analyzed synthetically to identify relationships between themes to produce a conceptual model of the School Transition Management Framework as the main research finding.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the principal, teachers, and parents. Technical triangulation was conducted by confirming findings through interviews, observations, and document analysis to obtain a more comprehensive picture of school transition management practices. Furthermore, preliminary interpretations were discussed with several informants (member checking) to ensure consistency between the researcher's analysis and the experiences shared by the research participants.

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DISCUSSION

Data analysis yielded five main themes that describe how PAUD-TK Ar-Rahmah manages the transition process for new students in dealing with separation anxiety in the early days of school. The five themes include: (1) structured school transition planning, (2) creating a sense of emotional safety through adaptation strategies in the classroom, (3) strengthening school-parent partnerships, (4) monitoring students' emotional development, and (5) ongoing evaluation of the transition program.

Structured School Transition Planning

Research findings indicate that managing separation anxiety begins long before children enter the school environment. Principals believe that successful adaptation depends not only on the child's readiness, but also on the readiness of parents and teachers to face the transition. Therefore, schools hold parenting meetings before the new school year to align perceptions between the school and families regarding the adaptation process students will undergo.

During the activity, parents received a school handbook containing the school profile, vision and mission, teacher profiles, school regulations, and information regarding class divisions. In addition to providing administrative information, the parenting activity also served to explain school policies during the School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS), including the provision that parents are only permitted to accompany their children for the first three days. After this period, students are expected to begin participating in independent learning activities with teacher guidance.

The principal explained that building parental trust is the main foundation before the adaptation process begins.

> *"At the beginning of the new school year, at the parenting meeting for new parents, I emphasized the importance of trust in the school, in this case how parents entrust their children to be handled by our teachers." (Principal)*

The school also implemented human resource management during the transition period. During the MPLS period, new PAUD and Kindergarten A students entered earlier than TK B students, allowing TK B teachers to assist with classroom support. This arrangement allowed for a smaller teacher-to-student ratio, allowing each child to receive more intensive attention.

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"During the MPLS period, new students in PAUD and TK A entered first, while TK B had not yet entered. The aim was to assign TK B teachers to handle new students." (School Principal)

In addition, the school has prepared a referral mechanism to a child psychologist if students are found to require further assistance during the adaptation process.

"We provide child psychology support for children who need intervention related to separation anxiety." (Principal)

These findings suggest that transition management is viewed as part of the school management planning process involving the preparation of policies, human resources, communication with parents, and support services before students enter the learning environment.

Creating a Sense of Emotional Safety through Classroom Learning Practices

During the adaptation process, teachers implemented various strategies aimed at creating a sense of emotional safety for students. Based on observations, teachers did not force students to immediately participate in all learning activities, but instead gave them the opportunity to adjust gradually through approximately fifteen minutes of free play at the beginning of the learning activity.

In class, each student is also asked to bring a family photo to display on the classroom wall. Teachers use this tool to help children cope with missing their parents. When students begin to show anxiety, teachers direct them to look at the family photo while explaining that their parents will return to pick them up after the learning activity is over.

The teacher explains as follows.

“Explaining the 'presence' of the family through displaying family photos to students is very important, we tell them 'if the children miss their mother or father, please stand in front of this photo, okay?'” (Teacher 2)

Teachers also strive to build emotional closeness with students through the use of familial greetings. Children are allowed to call teachers "mom," "mom," or "mami," so that teachers are perceived as figures who provide a sense of security while at school.

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"We welcome the children to call us 'mother, mama, or mami' if they wish. We repeatedly suggest that the teacher is your mother at school." (Teacher 2)

Interview results showed that the strategy's success was significantly influenced by teachers' emotional preparedness. Teachers considered the ability to manage their own emotions to be a key prerequisite for assisting students who were crying or having a tantrum.

"Teachers play a crucial role in managing new students. The most fundamental aspect is emotional readiness. We can't handle students who are crying or throwing tantrums if we're emotionally unstable." (Teacher 1)

In addition, the mentoring process is carried out collaboratively between teachers so that each teacher can help each other when several students show anxiety simultaneously.

"Teachers in a class must work together well, sharing the task of handling students who are crying or having tantrums." (Teacher 1)

Observations showed that these strategies helped divert students' attention from separation anxiety to engagement in play activities and interactions with teachers and peers.

Strengthening Partnerships between Parents and Schools during Transition

Research findings indicate that partnerships between schools and families are crucial to the success of students' adaptation. After the initial three-day mentoring period ended, the school maintained intensive communication with parents via WhatsApp. Teachers regularly sent photos and videos of students' activities to report on their progress and build parental trust in the learning process at school.

As stated by one of the teachers,

"Communication with parents is very important, we ensure that parents are indirectly involved in their children's activities by sending photos or videos of their children's activities." (Teacher 3)

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From the parents' perspective, this communication provides a sense of peace of mind because they can still know about their child's condition while they are at school.

"Good cooperation and communication between the school and parents plays a crucial role in fostering trust and helping children adapt more quickly to school conditions." (Parent 2)

In addition to communication during the learning process, parents also contribute to preparing their children before entering school by providing affirmations regarding the importance of independence.

"Even before he started school, I have been affirming to my child that he is a big boy, it is time for him to go to school, he must be independent, so he must not cry when he comes to school." (Parent 3)

In some cases, schools also provide flexibility to accommodate individual student needs. One example is allowing children to bring their favorite dolls as transitional objects during the adjustment period.

"I asked the teacher for permission to let my child bring the doll to class. And it turned out to be a big help in helping him overcome his anxiety more quickly." (Parent 4)

These findings indicate that school-family partnerships do not stop at communication, but develop into a collaborative process in designing adaptation strategies that suit each child's needs.

Monitoring Students' Emotional Adjustment

Monitoring of students' emotional development is carried out systematically during the adaptation period. Teachers document students' daily behavior through development journals that include various emotional responses, interaction skills, and the child's adaptation to the school environment. This information then becomes the basis for discussions in quarterly parenting activities.

In addition to daily observations by teachers, the school also provides consultations with child psychologists for students who exhibit symptoms of prolonged separation anxiety or require specialized support. This approach demonstrates that monitoring not only aims to identify

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successful adaptation but also serves as a basis for decisions regarding the type of follow-up support each student requires.

Ongoing Evaluation of the Transition Program

Program evaluations are conducted periodically through teacher reflections with the principal. The evaluations focus on the effectiveness of the implemented adaptation strategies, any obstacles encountered during the mentoring process, and the progress of each student.

Based on school observations and documentation, indicators of the program's success include a reduction in hysterical crying when students are left by their parents, increased child engagement in class activities, and the ability to quickly join their peers. However, the length of the adaptation process varies from child to child, ranging from five days to a month, so the school does not implement a uniform timeframe for all students.

Parents also shared this experience. One parent revealed that the school's strategy helped her child adapt more quickly by utilizing family photos available in the classroom.

> *"At first, I was worried that my child would keep crying, but it turned out my child adapted quickly. He said, 'Mom, if I miss you, I just look at your photo in class.'" (Parent 1)*

Overall, the research results show that the management of student transitions at PAUD-TK Ar-Rahmah does not only focus on handling children experiencing separation anxiety, but includes a series of integrated management practices starting from the planning stage, implementation, collaboration with families, monitoring emotional development, to continuous program evaluation.

School Transition as Part of Student Management

Research findings indicate that Ar-Rahmah PAUD-TK views the transition period for new students as an integral part of student management, not simply an orientation activity at the beginning of the school year. This is reflected in systematic planning through parenting activities, the development of school handbooks, the management of teacher resources during the School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS), and the provision of psychological support services for students requiring special intervention. These practices demonstrate that transition management has been designed before children enter the school environment and is implemented in a structured manner until the evaluation process takes place.

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These findings broaden the understanding of student management, which has been largely associated with administrative aspects such as new student admissions, data recording, class grouping, and discipline management. From an educational management perspective, student management is a process encompassing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all services provided to students with the goal of optimally supporting their academic, social, emotional, and character development (Amrona et al., 2023; Wasiati, 2024). Therefore, the transition to school should be viewed as a crucial phase in the student management cycle, as it is the initial period in which children develop their learning experiences within the school environment.

This interpretation aligns with the concept of school transition, which positions a child's transition from home to school as a critical milestone requiring systematic support from various parties. Research by Rahmawati et al. (2018), Nurhayati (2019), Widiastuti et al. (2025), and Astriya (2025) shows that the success of the transition is determined not only by the child's readiness, but also by the readiness of the school environment to provide a structured transition program. Research by Soenaryo et al. (2024) even confirms that the success of a child's adaptation depends on three main components: the child's emotional maturity, parental support, and school readiness. In other words, schools play an equally important role as families in determining the success of a student's adaptation process.

The results of this study demonstrate that school readiness is realized through various interrelated managerial decisions. Parenting before the new school year serves not only to convey information but also as a means of building shared expectations regarding the student adaptation process. The MPLS schedule, which involves the Kindergarten B teacher as an additional companion, demonstrates how the school allocates human resources to improve service quality during the transition period. Similarly, the provision of psychological services reflects the school's anticipation of the potential emergence of special needs in some students from the planning stage. These practices demonstrate that successful child adaptation is not the result of spontaneous teacher actions in the classroom, but rather a consequence of a comprehensively designed school management system.

These findings also broaden the research perspective on separation anxiety. Most previous studies have explained separation anxiety from the perspective of developmental psychology, the quality of attachment between children and parents, and psychological interventions provided after anxiety symptoms emerge (Altman et al., 2009; Astuti et al., 2020; Oktamarin et al., 2022). While these perspectives are important for understanding the characteristics and causes of

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separation anxiety, this study suggests that preventative efforts can begin earlier through planned school transition management. This way, the focus of management is no longer solely directed at treating children who are already experiencing anxiety, but rather on how schools create conditions that allow for a safe and gradual adaptation process from the first day of school.

Based on these findings, this study argues that the transition period for new students needs to be positioned as an integral part of student management in early childhood education. In this context, the management function does not stop at the administrative aspect, but develops into a service system that integrates planning, organizing resources, implementing adaptation strategies, monitoring emotional development, and ongoing evaluation. This perspective forms the basis for subsequent discussions on how school management systems build parental trust, create a sense of emotional security for children, and strengthen school-family partnerships as a primary mechanism in reducing separation anxiety during the school transition period.

Building Trust through Early Collaboration between Parents and Schools

Research findings indicate that the success of the transition program at Ar-Rahmah Preschool and Kindergarten (PAUD-TK) begins with the school's systematic efforts to build trust between the school and parents. Contrary to the view that separation anxiety is a problem experienced only by children, this study shows that parents also experience anxiety during the transition when they must hand over their children to a new environment. Therefore, the adaptation process is not only oriented towards student readiness but also directed at building parental confidence that the school is capable of providing a safe, warm, and supportive environment for children's development.

Building this trust begins before the new school year through parenting activities. These activities not only serve as a means of conveying information about school rules but also provide a dialogue space to align expectations between the school and families regarding the student's adaptation process. The principal explicitly emphasized that the success of the transition period depends heavily on parents' willingness to entrust the mentoring process to teachers.

> *"At the beginning of the new school year, at the parenting meeting for new parents, I emphasized the importance of trust in the school, in this case, how parents entrust their children to be handled by our teachers." (Principal)*

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These findings indicate that parenting activities are not merely a means of administrative communication, but rather a managerial strategy for building relationships based on mutual trust. This trust is further strengthened through the transparent communication of school policies, including the regulation regarding parental guidance, which is only provided during the first three days of the School Environment Introduction Period (MPLS). This policy transparency provides parents with an understanding of the objectives of each adaptation stage, ensuring they have the same expectations of the school. This strategy is consistent with research by Sumarsono et al. (2019), which shows that optimizing parental participation requires engaging programs, intensive communication, the application of transparency principles, and the creation of a conducive school climate that encourages parents to actively participate in various school programs.

The trust established before children enter school is then maintained through ongoing communication. Teachers routinely send photos and videos of students' activities via WhatsApp to report on their children's progress during their time at school. Interestingly, this communication is not only intended to provide information about learning activities but also serves as a mechanism to reduce parental anxiety during the separation process. Sumarsono (2018) explains that intense communication through various media is a key strategy in maintaining a harmonious relationship between schools and parents. Ongoing communication allows for the development of mutual trust while strengthening parental support for school programs.

As one teacher stated,

> *“Communication with parents is very important, we ensure parents are indirectly involved in their children’s activities by sending photos or videos of their children’s activities.” (Teacher 3)*

This perspective is reinforced by the experiences of parents who stated that intensive communication with the school provides a sense of calm and speeds up the child's adaptation process.

> *"Good cooperation and communication between the school and parents plays a crucial role in fostering trust and helping children adapt more quickly to school conditions." (Parent 2)*

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Interpretation of these findings suggests that school communication serves not only to convey information but also as a mechanism for building parental trust. When parents receive consistent information about their child's condition at school, their anxiety is reduced, making them better able to provide positive emotional support to their child during the adjustment period. Conversely, if parents still show hesitation or anxiety when sending their child to school, this situation has the potential to exacerbate the child's anxiety, prolonging the adjustment process. Thus, parental trust is a factor that indirectly influences the success of managing separation anxiety.

The findings of this study reinforce the concept of home-school partnerships, which places collaborative relationships between schools and families as a key factor in the success of early childhood education. Swap (1993) explains that school-family partnerships are built through ongoing communication and active involvement of both parties in supporting children's development. This view is reinforced by Keyes (2002), who emphasizes the importance of relationships based on mutual trust and shared responsibility. Meanwhile, Bojuwoye (2009) found that although teachers and parents have positive attitudes toward school-family partnerships, many of them do not understand the forms of partnership practices that can be implemented in practice. Graham et al. (2021) even identified a gap between the expected concept of partnership and the practices actually experienced by families.

The results of this study provide a more operational perspective on this concept. School-family partnerships are not only realized through parental involvement in school activities, but are also built through a series of management practices that consistently foster trust from before children enter the school environment through the adaptation process. Parenting, transparent policy delivery, daily communication through digital media, and parental involvement in supporting the adaptation process at home are a complementary strategy. Thus, trust-building does not emerge spontaneously as a result of a good relationship between teachers and parents, but rather is the result of a consciously designed management process by the school.

These findings expand the study of home-school partnerships in the context of early childhood education. Previous research generally positions school-family partnerships as a factor supporting children's overall learning development. In contrast, this study shows that the trust built through these partnerships has a more specific function, namely creating psychological conditions that support students' transition during the early days of school. Therefore, trust-building can be viewed as a key mechanism linking school management practices to students' successful adaptation to separation anxiety.

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Creating a Sense of Emotional Safety During School Transitions

Research findings indicate that the primary strategy implemented by Ar-Rahmah Preschool and Kindergarten during the transition period is not simply helping children stop crying, but rather creating a sense of emotional safety so that children can build trust in the new school environment. This perspective suggests that successful adaptation is not measured solely by the elimination of crying behavior, but by the formation of psychological conditions that make children feel accepted, protected, and comfortable interacting with teachers and peers. Thus, the various strategies implemented by the school can be understood as a systematic effort to build an environment that supports the emotional well-being of students during the transition period.

One of the most prominent strategies is the use of family photos displayed in the classroom. Research shows that family photos serve not only as visual media but also as symbolic representations of the presence of close figures when children are at school. Teachers actively direct students to look at these photos when they begin to show signs of missing their parents.

> *"Explaining the 'presence' of the family through displaying family photos to students is very important, we tell them 'if the children miss their mother or father, please stand in front of this photo, okay?'" (Teacher 2)*

The effectiveness of this strategy was also directly felt by parents. One parent shared that her child used family photos as a way to cope with homesickness while at school.

> *"At first, I was worried that my child would keep crying, but it turned out my child adapted quickly. He said, 'Mom, if I miss you, I just look at your photo in class.'" (Parent 1)*

These findings indicate that schools do not seek to replace the role of the family, but rather to restore the sense of security children have traditionally gained from their home environment. This practice aligns with Attachment Theory developed by Bowlby (1980), which explains that children need a secure base or a figure who provides a sense of security when facing a new environment. In the context of school transition, this sense of security is not always manifested through the physical presence of parents, but can be maintained through various forms of representation and emotional relationships that keep children feeling connected to their attachment figures. Thus, family photos function as a symbolic secure base that helps children manage anxiety during the adaptation process.

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In addition to representing families, schools also foster emotional closeness through relationships between teachers and students. Teachers allow children to call them "mom," "mom," or "mami" as a more intimate and reassuring approach.

> *"We welcome the children to call us 'mother, mama, or mami' if they wish. We repeatedly suggest that the teacher is your mother at school." (Teacher 2)*

This approach demonstrates that teachers not only perform pedagogical functions but also act as supportive figures capable of providing a sense of security while children are at school. From an Attachment Theory perspective, teachers can function as secondary attachment figures, helping children build trust in their new environment without replacing the role of parents. The presence of a responsive and warm figure allows children to gradually develop the courage to explore the classroom environment, interact with peers, and engage in various learning activities.

The research also shows that creating a sense of emotional safety depends not only on the strategies implemented with students, but also on the emotional preparedness of teachers. Teachers recognize that the ability to manage one's emotions is a key prerequisite for dealing with students who cry, refuse to be separated from their parents, or experience tantrums on the first days of school.

> *"Teachers play a crucial role in handling new students. The most fundamental aspect is emotional readiness. We can't handle students who are crying or throwing tantrums if we're emotionally unstable." (Teacher 1)*

The teacher also explained that mentoring is carried out collaboratively so that each teacher can help each other when several students need attention simultaneously.

> *“Teachers in a class must work together well, sharing the task of handling students who are crying or having tantrums.” (Teacher 1)*

Interpretation of these findings suggests that emotional safety is not only formed through interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, but also through the school's organizational capacity to provide an environment responsive to students' emotional needs. The arrangement of the number of teachers during the MPLS period, the division of tasks between

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teachers, and teachers' readiness to manage their emotions are all part of a system that allows each child to receive optimal attention. In other words, emotional safety is the result of a combination of individual teacher competency and managerial support provided by the school.

In addition to strategies applied to all students, this study also found that schools provide space for individualized approaches tailored to each child's needs. One example is allowing students to bring their favorite dolls as transitional objects during the adaptation period.

> *"My child is used to carrying her doll everywhere. I asked the teacher for permission to bring it to class. And it really helped her overcome her anxiety." (Parent 4)*

These findings indicate that schools employ a flexible approach to supporting the adaptation process. Rather than applying a uniform strategy to all students, schools consider each child's characteristics and emotional needs, thus providing more personalized support. This approach reinforces the view that successful transitions are determined not only by the consistency of school rules but also by the school's ability to adapt services to the developmental needs of students.

The findings of this study expand the study of school transition and emotional readiness. Previous research has shown that emotional readiness is a key factor in determining a child's success in entering the school environment (Amalia et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2024; Suhendar et al., 2025). However, most of these studies still view emotional readiness as a characteristic a child possesses before entering school. Conversely, this study demonstrates that emotional readiness can also be fostered through school management practices that intentionally create a safe, warm, and responsive learning environment to students' needs. Thus, emotional safety is not only a condition a child possesses but also a result of the school's systematic transition management process.

Overall, the research findings suggest that fostering a sense of emotional safety is a crucial mechanism linking school management practices to students' successful adaptation during transition. Strategies such as providing symbols of family closeness, building warm relationships between teachers and children, providing a responsive environment, and providing support tailored to individual student needs demonstrate that successfully reducing separation anxiety depends not solely on the child's characteristics but also on the school's ability to foster positive emotional experiences from the child's first day of school.

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Creating a Secure Transition Experience

An analysis of all research findings shows that the success of the transition program at Ar-Rahmah PAUD-TK cannot be explained solely by the presence of various adaptation activities such as parenting, games at the beginning of learning, communication via WhatsApp, or monitoring student progress. These various practices are essentially part of a larger mechanism, namely the creation of a Secure Transition Experience (STE), or a safe transition experience for children entering the school environment. Thus, the success of student adaptation is not solely determined by the number of programs implemented by the school, but by the extent to which these programs overall are able to build positive emotional experiences during the transition.

Research findings show that a Secure Transition Experience is formed through the interaction of three main mechanisms: trust building, emotional safety, and parent-school partnership. These three mechanisms do not operate in isolation but rather reinforce each other throughout the transition process. Parents' trust in the school provides the foundation for a positive partnership during the adaptation period. Furthermore, a warm relationship between teachers and students fosters a sense of emotional security, enabling children to begin exploring the school environment. At the same time, ongoing communication between the school and the family ensures consistent support for children at home and at school. The interaction of these three mechanisms results in a more stable transition experience, allowing the adaptation process to proceed gradually without causing excessive emotional stress.

The research results of Timan et al. (2024) show that the success of school programs is also influenced by the active involvement of parents and the community as strategic partners of the school. Although the context of this research is vocational education, the collaborative principles established demonstrate that close relationships between schools, families, and the community can strengthen the implementation of various educational programs. In the context of early childhood education, this partnership contributes to the formation of a safe transition experience for students.

Interestingly, research findings indicate that emotional safety is not only experienced by students, but also by parents. Separation anxiety is generally understood as a condition experienced by children when separated from an attachment figure. However, research findings show that parents also experience anxiety when entrusting their children to a new environment. Schools respond to this situation through various strategies such as parenting activities, intensive communication, regular updates on children's progress, and transparency throughout the entire adaptation process. Thus, a safe transition experience is actually built simultaneously for both

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students and parents.

This interpretation broadens the concept of school transition, which has traditionally emphasized children's readiness before entering school. Research by Rahmawati et al. (2018), Nurhayati (2019), Widiastuti et al. (2025), and Astriya (2025) explains that a successful transition is influenced by child readiness, family support, and school readiness. Meanwhile, research by Soenaryo et al. (2024) emphasizes that successful adaptation requires children's emotional maturity, parental support, and the readiness of educational institutions. The results of this study complement these findings by showing that these three components actually work through a transition experience directly felt by children. In other words, school readiness is not only manifested in the form of policies or programs, but is translated into experiences that make children feel safe separating from their parents, building relationships with teachers, and beginning to engage in learning activities.

These findings also provide a new perspective on the study of home-school partnerships. Previous studies have emphasized that two-way communication, mutual trust, and parental involvement are key prerequisites for partnerships between schools and families (Bojuwoye, 2009; Graham et al., 2021; Keyes, 2002; Swap, 1993). However, these studies generally discuss partnerships as a strategy to increase parental involvement in children's education in general. This research suggests that partnerships function more specifically during the school transition period, serving as a mechanism that helps build a safe emotional experience as children enter a new learning environment. Thus, parent-school partnerships not only result in improved communication but also contribute to a sense of security that supports students' adaptation.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that a Secure Transition Experience is not built through a single intervention, but rather through the accumulation of positive experiences students experience from before entering school until the evaluation process is completed. Parenting helps build parental trust in the school. The presence of responsive teachers, the use of family photos, play activities at the beginning of the lesson, and flexibility in meeting students' individual needs create a sense of emotional security. Furthermore, ongoing communication and monitoring of children's development ensure that any changes students experience can be promptly addressed with appropriate support. Therefore, a safe transition experience is the result of the integration of various complementary school management practices, not the result of a single strategy.

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Based on this synthesis, this study argues that the Secure Transition Experience is a mechanism that bridges the relationship between school management practices and successful student adaptation. When schools successfully establish a safe transition experience, students not only experience a decrease in separation anxiety symptoms, but also demonstrate increased trust in teachers, more active engagement in learning activities, the ability to build relationships with peers, and faster adjustment to the school environment. Thus, a safe transition experience can be viewed as an intermediate outcome that explains how various school management practices result in successful student adaptation to early childhood education.

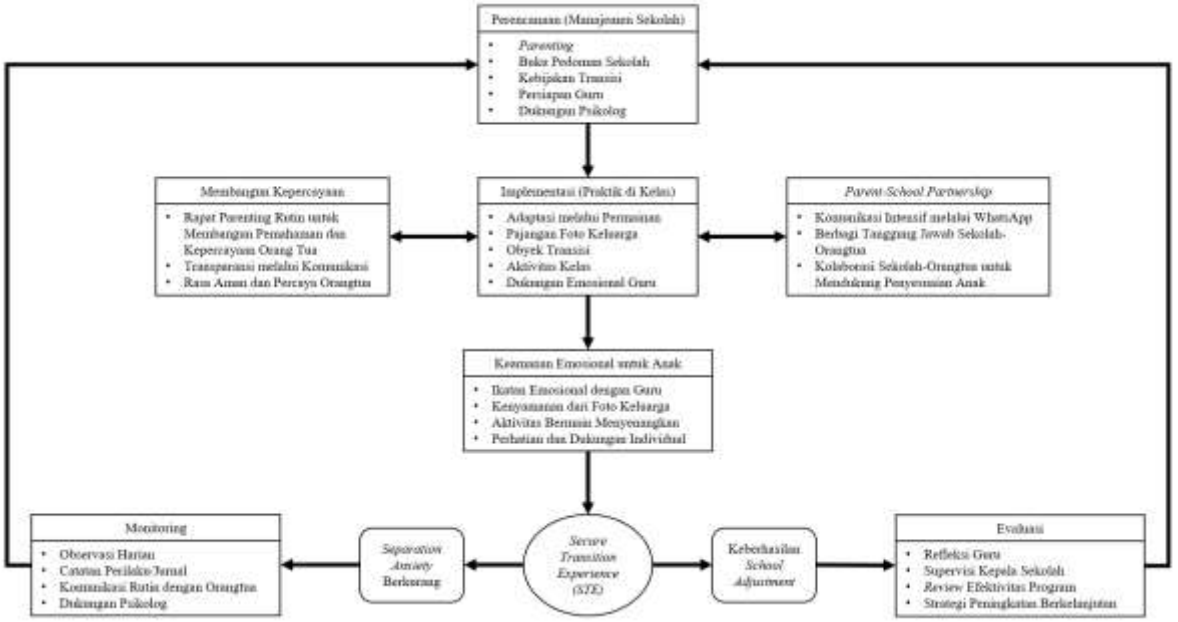
This synthesis serves as the basis for the development of the School Transition Management Framework, which will be presented in the following subsection. The model not only summarizes the various management practices identified in this study but also explains the conceptual relationship between school management functions, the mechanisms for establishing a Secure Transition Experience, and students' successful adaptation to separation anxiety during their initial school years.

School Transition Management Framework (STMF): An Integrated Model for Managing Separation Anxiety in Early Childhood Education

The synthesis of all research findings resulted in a conceptual model called the School Transition Management Framework (STMF). This model was developed based on the integration of interview results, observations, document analysis, and interpretations of theories of student management, school transition, attachment theory, and home-school partnerships. Unlike previous research that generally explains separation anxiety from the perspective of child characteristics, attachment quality, or psychological interventions after anxiety arises, the model produced in this study positions separation anxiety as a phenomenon that can be managed through a planned, collaborative school management system that is oriented toward students' emotional well-being.

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Picture1School Transition Management Framework

The proposed conceptual model illustrates that successful student adaptation is the result of a hierarchical relationship between school management functions, psychosocial mechanisms established during the transition period, and student experiences. At the first level, schools carry out management functions through planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating transition programs. Planning is realized through parenting activities, developing school handbooks, developing adaptation policies, and allocating human resources to support the transition process. The implementation stage includes various adaptation strategies in the classroom, communicating with families, and providing support services to students. Monitoring is carried out through daily observations, student behavior journals, communicating with parents, and referrals to psychologists when necessary. Furthermore, evaluation is carried out through teacher reflection, principal supervision, and assessing the success of the student adaptation process.

These management functions do not directly result in successful student adaptation, but rather they first establish three main mechanisms: Trust Building, Emotional Safety, and Parent-School Partnership. Trust Building develops through transparent school policies, parenting activities, and ongoing communication, enabling parents to have confidence in the school's ability to support their children during the transition. Emotional Safety is built through various strategies

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that enable children to feel safe in the school environment, such as the use of family photos, warm relationships with teachers, play activities as a means of adaptation, and providing support tailored to the individual needs of students. Meanwhile, Parent-School Partnership develops through the active involvement of parents before, during, and after the adaptation process, enabling schools and families to provide consistent support for children's emotional development.

These three mechanisms then interact to form the Secure Transition Experience, a transitional experience characterized by a sense of security, trust in the school environment, and emotional readiness to participate in learning activities. In this study, the Secure Transition Experience is viewed as an intermediate outcome that explains how various school management practices translate into concrete experiences felt by students upon entering the school environment. Thus, successful adaptation is not understood as a direct consequence of the implementation of a particular program, but rather as the result of a transitional experience that is built gradually through interactions between the school, teachers, students, and families.

The Secure Transition Experience subsequently contributed to two main outcomes. First, a reduction in separation anxiety symptoms, demonstrated by a decrease in hysterical crying, an increase in the child's ability to separate from parents, and a reduction in school refusal behavior. Second, improved school adjustment, characterized by the child's ability to build positive relationships with teachers and peers, participate in learning activities, and demonstrate more active engagement during school. Thus, this model demonstrates that reducing separation anxiety is not an end in itself, but rather part of a process leading to a child's successful adjustment to the school environment.

Theoretically, the School Transition Management Framework expands the concept of student management by positioning the transition period as a strategic part of managing student services in early childhood education. Student management has traditionally been understood as an administrative process encompassing new student admissions, class grouping, discipline development, and student development monitoring (Amrona et al., 2023; Wasiati, 2024). This research demonstrates that this management function also has a psychosocial dimension, namely creating conditions that enable students to feel safe, accepted, and ready to enter a new learning environment. Therefore, transition management needs to be positioned as an integral part of student management, not simply an orientation activity at the beginning of the school year.

This model also expands the study of school transition and home-school partnerships. Previous research has highlighted the importance of school readiness, parental involvement, and emotional support in aiding children's adaptation (Astriya, 2025; Keyes, 2002; Rahmawati et al.,

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2018; Swap, 1993; Widiastuti et al., 2025). However, these studies have not yet explained how these various components are interconnected within a comprehensive school management system. The School Transition Management Framework integrates these various components into a single conceptual framework that demonstrates the relationship between school management functions, mechanisms for establishing a Secure Transition Experience, and student adaptation outcomes. Therefore, this model not only explains practices found in a single school but also offers a conceptual perspective that can be used as a reference in developing student transition programs in other early childhood education units.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that managing separation anxiety in early childhood education cannot be understood solely as an effort to address children's emotional responses when separated from their parents, but needs to be positioned as an integral part of student management. A case study at PAUD-TK Ar-Rahmah shows that successful student adaptation is built through a planned transition management system, including program planning before the start of the school year, implementation of adaptation strategies in the classroom, strengthening partnerships between schools and families, monitoring students' emotional development, and ongoing program evaluation. This approach demonstrates that the transition process is the responsibility of the school organization as a whole, not just the task of the classroom teacher in the first days of learning.

Furthermore, this study identified that the success of transition management is not solely determined by the existence of various adaptation programs, but also by the mechanisms established through school management practices. Three key mechanisms identified—Trust Building, Emotional Safety, and Parent–School Partnership—interact to form a Secure Transition Experience, a transition experience that allows students to feel safe, accepted, and confident in the school environment. This safe transition experience serves as a mechanism that explains how school management practices contribute to reduced separation anxiety and increased student adaptation to the school environment.

The primary contribution of this research lies in the development of the School Transition Management Framework (STMF), a conceptual model that integrates school management functions with psychosocial mechanisms that support successful student transitions. This model expands the study of student management by positioning the transition period as a strategic component of early childhood education services. In addition to contributing to the development

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of educational management theory, this model also offers an implementation framework that can be used by early childhood education units (PAUD) in designing transition programs that are more systematic, collaborative, and oriented toward students' social-emotional well-being.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Evaluation of the significance of different activities and interactions in the process of social learning in future studies would open the path for a quite well method of framework participation in which coordinators, for example, identify when antithetic and synthetic interactions are out of balance and use this information to advise the initiative's supervisor or participants on how to conduct the discussions more constructively(Beers et al., 2016). Education and research methods are crucial because they highlight the role of helping students by assisting students in adopting more effective study methods. The fact that students' social identity and perspectives of the teaching program were not effectively related to students' academic performance is not remarkable, and it implies that investigating the indirect impact of these variables, as well as potentially everyone else, on academic performance might be a useful path to follow in future studies. Moreover, the question whether social media learning is better than conventional learning is another crucial matter to be addressed by future researchers, for it is reasonable to say that publicly available social media platforms give students access to more experiences and knowledge than they might receive in a conventional restricted setting.

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