Psychological Distance in Language Learning: A Case Study in Higher Education

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to describe the psychological gap that exists between students and teachers in higher education. This study uses a qualitative approach to examine a specific case. The subject for this study comprises 36 students enrolled in the English Department of Madura University.   The purposive sampling method is employed to select a sample. Primary sources of data collection encompass observation and interviews, whereas papers serve as supplementary sources. The study's findings indicate that enhancing the psychological distance between students and lecturers positively impacts students' learning processes and contributes to their learning outcomes. Teachers employ these strategies to uphold a psychological barrier between themselves and their students. Thirteen students, accounting for 36.1% of the total, believe that one way to maintain distance is by promoting the expression of thoughts, statements, and viewpoints among young people. Enhancing student motivation heightens the psychological divide between educators and learners. Out of the total number of students, 14 (41.7%) express agreement, whereas 8 (22.2%) hold the belief that teachers also greet students. It is recommended that teachers and members of the academic community at Madura University create a suitable linguistic environment for students. It will ensure that students have the best possible classroom conditions to acquire relevant information and engage in social interactions, thereby enhancing their understanding of society.

Key words: *Psychological; Distance; Learning; Higher Education*

INTRODUCTION

Psychological distance pertains to the perceived distance individuals experience in relation to events (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2022b).   Distance, in this context, is not limited to physical space but can also refer to abstract concepts.   Distance is the term used to describe the distinction between oneself and other entities, such as individuals, occurrences, data, or periods of time.   The proximity between an incident and a person is crucial. The proximity factor impacts an individual's perception of a certain issue. Psychological distance refers to the subjective sense of significance that diminishes when the physical or emotional distance between an individual and an event grows (Alomyan, 2021). Getting away from painful experiences may aid in coping by lessening unpleasant feelings. When unpleasant images and stressful social encounters are viewed from a distance or even from a third-person viewpoint, self-reported negative affect is lessened. Psychological distancing techniques also reduce physiologic indicators of emotional sensitivity, such as blood pressure and amygdale activity (Haidara, 2014). As

a result, psychological distance and unpleasant feeling have an inverse relationship: pushing bad things away, even if just mentally, decreases their impact.

A teacher goes through basic changes when teaching English. The teacher creates environments and activities that allow students to practice the language in a meaningful context. It is the teacher's obligation to create in students a positive attitude toward English learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator, a resource person, an expert, an advocate, a consultant, and a language model for the students (Amiruddin et al., 2021). He or she must assess the students' potential requirements. The activities should be designed with the purpose of ensuring that the students attain a high level of success. The teacher will also have a lot of success if the activities are planned around the students' interests and take into consideration areas about which they already have some understanding (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2022b). The instructor's role in building a healthy and effective learning environment in the classroom is equally vital.

Students who feel comfortable in their surroundings are significantly more likely to participate in target language practice. A relevant educational atmosphere encourages students to take risks and explore. In terms of language, the instructor will continue to serve as a role model for the students. While the teacher will continue to be the person with whom the students will most frequently interact, one of the instructor's primary responsibilities will be to seek out ways for students to engage meaningfully with one another. Before functioning as a resource person, the instructor will aim to establish conditions for meaningful practice rather than actively leading and managing all activities (Wati, 2018).

It is also necessary for English language growth to share ideas, feelings, and opinions with others. It is also necessary for the instructor. Teachers with empathy are more effective with all of their students in sharing the ideas (Puspandari & Basthomi, 2022). It helps to create a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom. An empathic teacher absorbs the culture of his or her students and responds to others from that culture's point of view. Empathy facilitates dialogue. Both pupils and the teacher can send and receive messages. Every teacher is accountable for creating an empathic environment in the classroom in order to promote students' enthusiasm to communicate and develop students' language use skill as much as feasible (Al-Jarf, 2022).

Empathy in English shows the connection between the educator and the pupils. Teachers, like students, have personal characteristics and differences that influence their performance in L2 classrooms and, as a result, their impact on student progress. Teachers' qualities can include showing an interest in the students, being friendly and funny, having a good sense of humor, treating students well, being a good friend for the students, being helpful, fair, being on good terms with the students, teaching in a pleasant and graceful manner, and so on, but some do not. The teachers' attributes influence the students' desired proficiency level (Larasati & Simatupang, 2020). Some higher education teachers just distribute assignments to students without interacting with them, which builds and heightens the psychological barrier (Amiruddin & Tafrilyanto, 2018) . Some teachers have no closeness to their students; they do not give motivation to the students. They make the students in high anxiety level in language learning. Therefore, it is important to study more the ways to keep the psychological distance in higher education between students and the teachers. What are the ways to keep social distance? This is the formulation of the problem in this research.

METHOD

The research is of a qualitative nature. The objective of this research is to investigate the psychological disparity that occurs between students and teachers in higher education.   The case study approach is being utilized in this investigation. This research involves conducting a comprehensive analysis of a particular case, such as an individual, organization, institute, or community. A total of 36 students from the English Department of Madura University participated in the study. The study employed purposive sampling to choose the study participants. The main methods for gathering data are observation and semi-structured interviews, while articles are considered secondary sources of information. This study employs the observation method to collect data on the psychological distance between students and teachers in higher education. Additionally, the interview method is utilized to gather information on the impacts of the psychological distance between students and teachers in higher education. The objective of documentation is to gather and document data about students' activities in relation to the process of teaching and learning. The data is analyzed by inductive method via identifying, reducing, confirming, analyzing, and drawing conclusions (Darlington & Scott, 2020). Professionals are encouraged to contribute comments and replies in order to examine the data and determine its trustworthiness. The results of the research are displayed in tables and figures. Empathy, exchanging opinions, thoughts, sayings, and so on, as well as good behavior by stimulating pupils, are markers of psychological distance between teachers and students (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014), (Saville-Troike, 2012), and (Amiruddin & Tafrilyanto, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, the teachers encountered a range of settings in which they were unaware of empathy, concerned about a relaxing environment, and utilized the environment to their disadvantage in language acquisition. The teachers' purpose is to create a psychological gap to their students. They create a good atmosphere for students who are learning a language. In higher education, there are certain techniques for maintaining psychological distance such as inviting students to state their opinion, ideas; motivating, etc in order to have positive environment and meaningful input for the students (Saville-Troike, 2012), (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014), and (Amiruddin & Tafrilyanto, 2018). Table 1 and Figure 1 show them.

Table 1. The Ways to Keep Psychological Distance

	The Ways to Keep Psychological Distance	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Invite students to state their opinion	13	36.1	36.1	36.1
	Motivate students	15	41.7	41.7	77.8
	Say hallo	8	22.2	22.2	100.0
	Total	36	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1. The ways to keep psychological distance
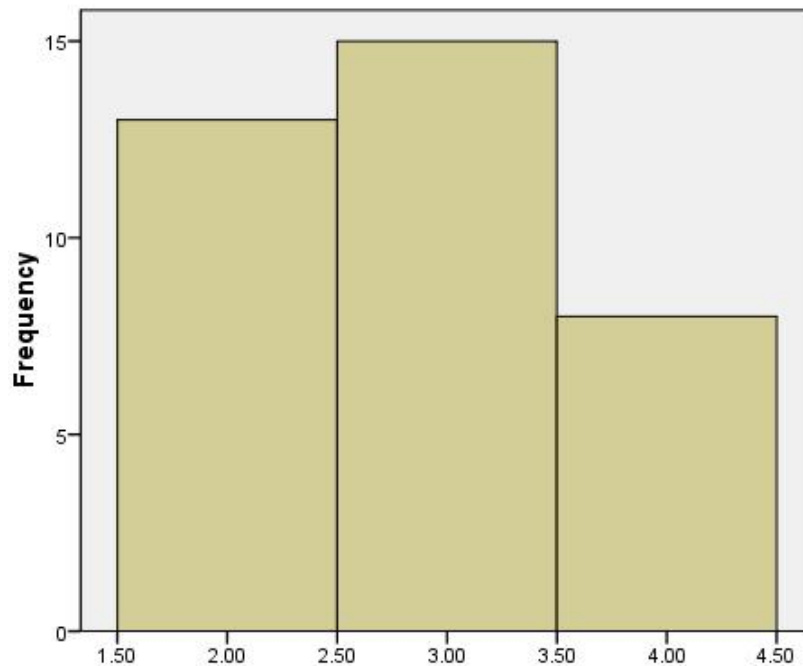
According to Table 1 and Figure 1, the goal of language acquisition instructors is to provide students with appropriate input and create a conducive environment. Educators have a crucial role in this process. Teachers utilize these strategies to establish a psychological detachment from their students. Thirteen students, which accounts for 36.1% of the total, hold the belief that promoting student expression of opinions, statements, and points of view is an effective method for maintaining their distance. Motivating students also helps to establish a significant psychological distance between teachers and pupils. Out of the total number of pupils, 14 of them, accounting for 41.7%, report that teachers say hello or greet students. Similarly, 8 students, representing 22.2%, indicate that teachers also engage in this greeting. These strategies can enhance the students' English competence by fostering a strong rapport between them and their teachers, who can provide guidance in language acquisition and serve as exemplary figures.   An individual who possesses self-assurance or confidence is anticipated to be more adept at increasing intake and experiencing a reduced filter. Hence, it is anticipated that traits associated with self-confidence, such as indifference, extroversion, and self-worth, will be correlated with the acquisition of a second language. Due to their robust ego strength, individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in self-expression, have fewer limitations, and tolerate the necessary errors during language acquisition without significant damage to their self-image. The individual with lower self-assurance may comprehend information, but may not absorb it in the same manner as the self-conscious one, who may selectively process or avoid it in other domains.

The teacher greets students by calling their names every time they enter class, asking them questions, giving them assignments, giving them motivation to speak English, and giving them the opportunity to speak English in front of the class. The purposes of these activities are to create closeness between teachers and students. To create closeness between the teacher and students, the teacher greets the students by calling their names one by one every time they enter the class. This is the first step taken by the teacher, as shown in the following quotation.

> R : *"OK, now what I want to ask is: how do English teachers, when teaching, maintain closeness with students? When you pay attention to the teacher."*
>
> P : *"Often call students and often communicate with students. When entering the class, call the names of students one by one and interact with them."*

Through careful observation of the scenario and the learning process, as well as posing targeted questions to the first participant, the teacher engages in various activities to foster a sense of intimacy with students.   According to the kids' accounts, each time they enter the classroom for a meeting, they initiate interaction between the teacher and themselves. The teacher verbally summons the students by calling their names and frequently engages in communication with them.   The act of the teacher addressing the student by their name is intended to foster a sense of closeness and connection between the teacher and the students.

The second participant had the similar idea about how teachers establish a sense of closeness by greeting their students.   Prior to engaging in learning activities such as writing and completing tasks, the teacher individually records the attendance of each student. This is done to cultivate a serene ambiance wherein the instructor can inspire students to acquire and articulate English.   Calling students by their names serves as an initial step to initiate learning activities that foster a close relationship between the teacher and students.   Teacher-initiated calls can foster students' sense of affiliation with the class as they perceive receiving individualized attention from the teacher. Furthermore, initiating connection with students can be achieved by addressing them individually with personalized greetings. The following is an excerpt from the results of observations obtained by questioning the third person with a series of questions..

> R : *"Okay,… when your English teacher teaches, how does the teacher maintain closeness with students as they learn English?"*
>
> P : *"Be absent first, sir; continue writing after writing; explain if no one understands; explain again several times, sir."*
>
> R : *"Then?"*
>
> P : *"The teacher calls the names of students one by one and gives assignments so that there is interaction between the teacher and students. So that students want to speak and write English, sir"*
>
> "

The students' statements were also supported by the statements of their English teacher. He stated that in order to maintain closeness with the students, the English teacher greeted them. The greeting aims to establish interaction with students. The English teacher, besides being a teacher for his students, also positions himself as a friend for them. Students have the opportunity to always interact and exchange opinions with English teachers. Teachers build empathy with students.

Another way for teachers to maintain psychological distance with students is by asking them questions. Giving questions to students is another way for teachers to build closeness with them. The teacher stated that English was easy to learn and speak; it was easier than Arabic and Indonesian. This information can motivate students to learn

English. The student emphasized this. Motivating students to memorize English vocabulary and instructing and encouraging them to speak English is the method used by the teacher. To establish and tie the emotional relationship between teachers and students, teachers always provide direction and motivation to students. The teacher also gives advice to students about the importance of memorizing English vocabulary to support conversations in English. Also encourage them to practice their English, either with the teacher or with fellow students.

The teacher's giving students the opportunity to express their opinions and ideas by using English is the fifth way that the teacher maintains closeness with students, as in the following quote.

> R : Okay, when your English teacher teaches, how does your English teacher build rapport with students in their learning?
> P : They often ask us to speak English; they continue to ask us to do assignments; and sometimes we are asked to explain.

Students get the opportunity to practice their English by responding to questions asked by the teacher and expressing their opinions. In addition, they consulted and exchanged opinions with their teachers using English. To build closeness with students, the teacher also invites them to use and practice their English.

The importance of psychological distance such as asking students to express their opinions and thoughts, inspiring them, and so on, in order to create a pleasant environment with relevant input for the students. in the language teaching-learning process cannot be overstated. Students who engage with their teachers often in the target language achieve more success in the language they are studying. Individuals' language learning success is influenced by the psychological distance between them and their environment. The relationship between teachers and students has an impact on student's motivation to study the target language. Students who are very motivated to study English are more likely to interact in English with their teachers and peers. Students who have been lowered utilize their target language readily (Amiruddin & Jannah, 2022a). This should aid in the development of greater levels of English proficiency. It is reasonable to presume that they require cultural counseling to improve their English proficiency (Rahimi & Tavakoli, 2016). Despite the fact that they are proud of having a coherent group that cares for its members and distinguishes itself from the TL, achieving SLA is a symptom of linguistic disease rather than a healthy norm.

A teacher and pupils must keep psychological distance. The psychological distance between teachers and pupils improves learning outcomes. Furthermore, psychological distance allows pupils to speak up without feeling anxious. (Lee, 2010) indicates that pupils with lower hesitated have more success in language acquisition than those with higher hesitant. Students' anxiety levels have an impact on their fluency and accuracy when generating English. It is also supported by (Anderson, 2018), (Nook et al., 2017) and (Al-Jarf, 2022) Sharing the ideas, feeling, and thought to one another is also important in English language learning.

The connection between students and teachers can be a predictor of student reported learning accomplishment. The presence of the professor in the classroom was found to be positively connected to student learning and satisfaction (Nook et al., 2022) and (Ratnasari & Amirullah, 2022). In this regard, the instructional efficacy of online

learning must take into account how students view their professors and their relationships with them. Furthermore, the expectations that students and instructors have for this connection in the online setting may differ from those in traditional classrooms. As the number of online courses in college is predicted to grow tremendously, the online student-teacher interaction will become prevalent even in traditional campus-based colleges (Huang, 2021). Some people express their fear over rising online courses in that technology would devalue higher education and ruin the particular ties professors have with their students.

Psychological distance allows teachers to be more effective with all of their pupils. It fosters a good learning environment in the classroom. Psychological distance adopts the pupils' culture's perspective and responds to another from that perspective. Communication is aided by psychological distance. Messages can be sent and received by both students and the teacher. Every instructor is accountable for providing a highly empathizing environment in the classroom to encourage students' strong drive to talk and to develop students' language usage ability in the most favorable condition (Rich et al., 2018) and (Ikhwan & Andriyanti, 2021).

In English language instruction, psychological distance indicates the closeness between the teacher and the pupils. Teachers, like students, have personal qualities and individual distinctions that influence their performance in the L2 class and, as a result, their impact on student results. Teachers' characteristics can include showing an interest in the students, being friendly and funny, having a good sense of humor, treating students well, being a good friend for the students, being helpful, fair, being on good terms with the students, teaching in a pleasant and graceful manner, and so on, but some do not. The characteristics of the teachers determine the students' desired proficiency level (Cakir et al., 2018), (Wilczewski et al., 2021), and (Mihai et al., 2022).

Being a teacher with psychological distance is even more difficult when dealing with situations that have few answers. Nonetheless, being optimistic through difficult times may have a huge positive influence on students and everyone around us. A good teacher bridges gaps and fosters partnerships, friendships, and a sense of community. Teachers are always looking for ways to improve things in and out of the classroom. A excellent teacher attempts to build a community in the classroom and extends that to the broader school and community. Everyone admires a great teacher and aspires to be a better teacher, a better student, and, perhaps more importantly, a better person. A skilled teacher unearths hidden riches, possibilities, and opportunities (Mao, 2022). Psychological distance can be lessened by using socio-emotional communication techniques such as body language, facial expressions, and vocal tones, which will be abolished in the online context, particularly text-based engagement (Alkhudiry & Alahdal, 2021) and (Irawan et al., 2020).

Students who experience psychological distance feel safer and more eager to practice the target language. A meaningful educational environment encourages risk-taking and allows pupils to explore. The instructor will continue to function as a role model for the kids in terms of language. While the teacher will continue to be the person with whom the students will most frequently speak, one of the key duties of the instructor will be to look for methods to enable students to engage meaningfully with one another. Instead of aggressively guiding and managing all actions, the teacher will seek to create circumstances for meaningful practice before acting as a resource person (Alomyan, 2021) and (Magistrale et al., 2021).

The proximity between teachers and students does not imply a state of relaxation devoid of educational activities, but rather entails the implementation of language learning activities in accordance with established guidelines.   English learning activities should be conducted in a serious yet easygoing manner, without the teacher exerting unnecessary pressure. However, if the teacher frequently engages in disruptive behavior towards pupils, it can have a detrimental effect, such as instilling fear in students. Students experience a sense of ease and pleasure while acquiring English language skills, free from excessive levels of tension and fear.   Furthermore, the children possess the chance and bravery to seek guidance from lecturers when they experience intimacy. Students are afforded the chance to use the English language skills they have acquired by presenting in front of their peers.   Students also have the chance to interact with teachers who are both academically and non-academically relevant.   The students also deliberated on the challenges they had during the process of acquiring English language skills (Elumalai et al., 2019) and (Haidara, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The study's findings and interpretations indicate that the psychological distance between students and lecturers positively impacts students' learning processes and provides significant input for learning. Teachers utilize these strategies to maintain a psychological detachment from their students.   These tactics can enhance students' English proficiency by fostering a strong rapport between students and their teachers, who can provide valuable support in language acquisition and serve as exemplary figures. It suggests that instructors and members of the academic community at Madura University should create a suitable linguistic atmosphere for students, in order to establish an optimal classroom environment where students can receive appropriate input and engage in social interaction, thereby improving their comprehension of society.   Members of the academic society are urged to be responsive in order to provide pertinent feedback to students and to engage in regular communication in a genuine manner. It suggests that governments, higher education authorities, and future scholars advocate for and endorse a learning approach that takes into account the psychological gap between professors and students.

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