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Teachers' Moral Self-Image and Forgiveness across Diverse Educational Contexts in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study studied the relationship between forgiveness and moral self-image among teachers across different educational levels such as school, college, and university and institutional both public and private in Pakistan. A sample of 1,200 teachers 400 from each level participated. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Thompson et al., 2005) and Moral Self-Image Scale (MSIS; Naeem et al., 2022) were used. Results of the study showed that MSI was significantly correlated with age r = .269 and teaching level r = .057 whereas forgiveness was positively linked with gender r = .150 and institution type r = .123. Regression analyses further revealed that teaching level β = 1.653, was a strong positive predictor of MSI, while age β = .078, and institutional context β = .450 significantly predicted forgiveness. These findings highlight that teachers' moral and emotional directions are shaped not only by demographic factors but also by their educational context. In Pakistan's collectivist and culturally diverse educational environment, where teachers are observed as both academic guides and moral patterns forgiveness and MSI play critical roles in fostering resilience, reducing burnout and promoting ethical classroom follows. The study highlights the standing of integrating moral development, emotional intelligence and forgiveness-based exercise into teacher education programs to enhance both particular well-being and institutional agreement.

Introduction

Since teachers are not only responsible for delivering information but also are moral guides, they play important role in shaping the moral and emotional growth of their students. A student's moral self-image (MSI) is influenced by reflection, peer pressure, and outside events, all of which support ethical choices, honesty, and teamwork. Building resilience, managing emotions, and MSI

are closely connected to forgiving others (Saarento & Salmivalli, 2024; Menesini & Camodeca, 2024). When teachers see themselves positively, it often leads to happier and more resilient lives (Shahzadi, Shahzadi, & Mufti, 2024). Especially in today's complex education environment, and amidst global challenges like COVID-19, MSI, forgiveness, and teaching methods are deeply linked. Strategies like mindfulness, social-emotional learning, and emotionally supportive teaching help promote forgiveness, moral understanding, and empathy (Ibrahim & Waanders, 2024). While some teaching approaches focus mainly on control to keep classrooms orderly, they can limit students' chances to explore their own ethics and practice forgiveness (Shahzadi, Arshad, & Toor, 2025). Programs that prioritize moral and emotional growth boost teachers' confidence and help them handle career challenges better. A teacher's background, cultural setting, and school support also shape their moral self-image (MSI), influencing how easily they can forgive or hold grudges. Research shows that student-centered, constructivist teaching methods that promote reflection, independence, and moral consistency help improve mental health and sense of purpose (Shahzadi, Arshad, & Toor, 2025). Forgiveness plays a key role in healing and coping, especially in emotionally demanding learning environments focused on social justice. Since the pandemic, online and hybrid teaching methods have become more common, especially in tech-savvy places. But these can sometimes make connections feel shallow and challenge teachers' moral integrity (Shahzadi, Shahzadi, & Mufti, 2024). In Scandinavian and New Zealand schools that follow restorative practices, forgiveness is a core part of daily teaching, helping teachers manage their moral direction and sustain positive relationships. Learning methods based on research and projects help clarify ethics and increase job satisfaction by encouraging critical thinking, mutual respect, and understanding (Saarento & Salmivalli, 2024).

Forgiveness is now being increasingly appreciated for enhancing teachers' moral resilience, promoting their professional relations, and contributing to their ongoing moral development. Forgiveness is the teacher's moral resistance that enhances resilience, nurtures relationships, and counters emotional exhaustion in the stressful teaching profession (Maqsood, Shahzadi, & Arshad, 2025). Teaching forgiveness strengthens moral agency, empowers ethical practice, and lessens teacher burnout. Teachers employ a wide range of strategies with success, including sincerely apologizing to student groups. Teachers were using their success paths with multiple strategies, including religious activities, performing arts, storytelling, and systematic procedures such as The Six-Fold Path to Self-Forgiveness (6-FPSF). These actions by the teachers have enabled teachers to face adversity, recover from self-deprecation, or develop an aptitude at refocusing the moral aspect of the self, making it possible to forgive without necessarily compromising the core values profession (Maqsood, Shahzadi, & Arshad, 2025).

Having such volunteering studies in the context of Pakistan, Ahmad and Mahmood (2022), for instance report the significance of ethics training on MSI development among teachers as part of public schooling system of Punjab. Similarly, Hassan and Riaz (2021) as well as Tariq and Shaukat (2023) suggest that reflection on teaching practice together with school environment based on collaboration and fairness essentially contributes towards the establishment of a stronger MSI for Pakistani teachers. For Din et al. (2021), an indication of significant predictors of morale for teachers is marital status, teaching experience and compensation, whereas recommendation depicts more focus on development programs aimed for motivating faculty, indicating that such transformational leadership through ethical modelling and supportive climates could considerably augment MSI of a teacher (Khalid & Mushtaq, 2022). Involving teachers with their communities was also identified by Adeel and Akhtar (2023) as leading teachers toward the development of a stronger moral self-concept through linking professional work with sustainability for society at large.

The benefits of forgiveness extend across the learning environment, conferring psychological wellness and relationship cohesion upon all involved. In one illustration, a study by Hussain and Damani (2022) among youth in Karachi linked higher forgiveness with better mental health, and revenge inclinations with negative outcomes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, forgiveness became a key coping strategy, allowing teachers to maintain their emotional fortitude amidst prolonged change (Zewude et al., 2022). In more studies, where teachers engage forgiveness among themselves, it improves their collegiate comfort and, as a consequence, their classroom interaction (Hinduja et al., 2021).

Teachers with greater emotional intelligence are more likely to resolve professional disagreements via forgiveness, which supports their own moral self-image (Akhtar & Mushtaq, 2021; Ghafouri, 2023). This suggests that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in this process. Implementing forgiveness-based conflict resolution techniques in the classroom promotes emotional stability and increases teacher-student trust, underscoring its usefulness for academic achievement (Shahid & Riaz, 2023; Asghar & Kanwal, 2023). It has been demonstrated that promising treatments that emphasize mindfulness, appreciation, and culturally sensitive practices can improve a teacher's capacity for forgiveness (Javed & Khatoon, 2021; Saeed & Khalil, 2021).

Philosophically speaking, forgiving may be viewed as a moral requirement that underpins human agency and respect for one another, directing moral behavior in educational institutions (Satne, 2016). When considered collectively, an increasing amount of research demonstrates that forgiveness is not only a personal virtue but also a crucial instrument for creating emotionally resilient educators, peaceful partnerships, and productive educational institutions (Shahzadi, Shahzadi, & Mufti, 2024). The purpose of this study was to investigate how teachers' moral self-perception and forgiveness affect their professional conduct, mental health, and relationships with students in the classroom.

Method

Using a cross-sectional approach, this quantitative correlational study examined the connection between forgiveness and instructors' moral self-perception. The purpose of the study was to assess how moral self-image and forgiveness relate to instructors at different educational levels.

Sample

Convenience sampling was employed in this study to collect data from instructors in both public and private schools at different educational levels. This approach was used by the researcher in order to efficiently gather data. There were 1,200 teachers in the sample, 400 of them were from universities, colleges, and schools, respectively. From both government and private schools, colleges, and universities, two hundred instructors were selected for each institution. Because it reduced the likelihood of missing data and non-responses, this sample size was adequate for statistically significant analysis, including correlation and comparison tests. In correlational research, statistical power was attained by calculating sample sizes in accordance with established standards.

Instruments

The Moral Self-Image Scale (MSIS) and Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) are used.

Moral Self-Image Scale (MSIS)

The present study measured participants' self-image of their morality using the Moral Self-Image Scale (MSIS), developed by (Naeem et al., 2022). It is a 49-item questionnaire comprising five points; the Likert scale runs from "Never" to "Always." To get the overall results, all answers are totaled. Higher total scores suggest a more robust and optimistic moral self-image. In MSIS, Point 1 was considered 1 score, and 5 points were considered 5 scores. MSIS is divided into six sub-scales: integrity (items 1–12), generosity (items 13–25), compassion (items 26–31), forgiveness and social welfare (items 32–37), lawfulness (items 38–44), and tolerance (items 45–49). A higher score on the scale denotes a morally superior perception, while a lower score denotes a morally inferior one.

Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) was developed by Thompson et al. in 2005. This scale measures the ability to forgive others. It is an 18-item questionnaire with 3 subsets: self-subscale (items 1-6), HFS other subscale (items 7-12), and HFS situation subscale (items 13-18). This tool is a 7-point Likert scale from “almost always false of me” to “almost always true of me.” For the HFS and its three subscales, scoring is determined in the following way: reverse score items 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 17. Greater dispositional propensity to forgive in a variety of situations is indicated by higher HFS scores. Interestingly, each subscale has half negatively worded items, so in order to maintain scoring consistency and calculate the total score accurately, reverse scoring is required. In this instance, reverse scoring entails recoding item responses so that high levels of forgiveness are associated with lower numerical responses on negatively phrased items.

Procedure

This study involved 1,200 teachers from various educational institutions, chosen through convenience sampling. The sample was evenly divided among grade levels and institutions. The study aimed to examine teachers' moral self-perception and forgiveness capacity. Participants provided informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation. Data was kept private and used solely for academic purposes. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale and Moral Self-Image Scale were provided, along with a demographic information form. Participants completed the surveys under the researcher's supervision in a designated area within their institutions, ensuring consistency and clarity during data collection.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of demographic variables (n=1200)

Variables	Categories	F	%	Mean	SD
Age				32.3	9.7
Education	Graduation	664	55.3		
	Masters	444	37		
	PhD	92	7.7		
Gender	Male	386	32.7		
	Female	814	67.3		
Institution	School	400	33.3		
	College	400	33.3		
	University	400	33.3		

The study explored at differences in moral self-image and forgiveness across several educational levels by using 1200 teachers from schools, colleges and universities. With 55.3% having a Graduation degree, 37% having completed a Master degree, and 7.7% have PhD.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and Spearman Correlation among study variables (N=1200)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. MSI total	213.61	10.10	-	.269**	.122**	-.382**	-.082**	.057*
2.Age	1.58	0.75		-	.475**	-.111**	.195**	.288**
3.Education	1.52	0.64			-	.039	.521**	.635**
4.Gender	6.68	3.38				-	.692**	.455**
5.Institution	3.50	1.71					-	.956**
6.Teaching level	2.00	0.82						-

M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**

Table 2 showed that there was a positive correlation between moral self-image (MSI) and demographic variables such as age ($p < .01$, $r = .269$), education ($p < .01$, $r = .122$), and teaching level ($r = .057$, $p < .05$). There was weak negative correlation between MSI and gender ($r = -.382$, $p < .01$) and institution ($r = -.082$, $p < .01$).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and Spearman Correlation among study variables (N=1200)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	1.58	0.75	-	.475**	.111**	.195**	.288**	0.054
2. Education	1.52	0.64		-	0.039	.521**	.635**	0.026
3. Gender	6.68	3.4			-	.692**	.455**	.150**
4. Institution	3.5	1.71				-	.956**	.123**
5.Teaching level	2	0.82					-	.092**
6.HFS Total	80.8	7.21						-

The results of table 3 showed statistically significant correlations between forgiveness (HFS total) and gender ($r = .150$, $p < .01$), institution ($r = .123$, $p < .01$), and teaching level ($r = .092$, $p > .01$). , However, HFS reported non-significant correlations with age ($r = .054$, $p > .05$) and education ($r = .026$, $p > .05$).

Table 4: Regression Coefficients of demographic variables on moral self-image MSI

Variable	B	B	S.E
(Constant)	206.291	-	.783
Age	2.608	.194	.386
Education	-2.951	-.186	.588
Institution	-9.480	-1.604	.552
Teaching level	20.436	1.653	1.275
$\mathbf{R^2}$	0.256		

Table 4 showed the impact of different demographic variables in teachers at different educational levels. The R^2 value of 0.256 revealed that the predictor variable explained 0.25% variance in the outcome variable with $F (4, 1195) = 102.989$, $p < 0.001$. The findings revealed that age ($\beta = .194$) and teaching level ($\beta = 1.653$) positively predicted moral self-image in teachers. While education ($\beta = -.186$) and institution ($\beta = -1.604$) were significant negative predictors of moral self-image in teachers.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients of independent variables on forgiveness

Variable	B	B	S.E
(Constant)	79.498	-	.640
Age	.747	.078	.316
Education	-.310	-.027	.480
Institution	1.899	.450	.452
Teaching level	-3.030	-.343	1.042
$\mathbf{R^2}$	0.27		

Table 5 showed that relationship of demographic variables (age, education, institution, and teaching level) with forgiveness among teachers at different educational levels. The model's R^2 of .027 and statistical significance $F (4, 1195) = 8.303$, $p < .001$) showed that the predictors were estimated to be responsible for almost 2.7% of the variation in forgiveness scores. The findings showed that while teaching level ($\beta = -.343$, $p = .004$) was a significant negative predictor of forgiveness, age ($\beta = .078$, $p = .018$) and institution ($\beta = .450$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors. Education has not been a significant predictor ($\beta = -.027$, $p = .518$).

Discussion

This study's findings were consistent with and enriched the current body of literature on the wellness of educators and moral growth. The positive relationship between a teacher's age and their Moral Self-Image (MSI) shows that experience led to a firmer sense of ethical identity, mirroring Din et al. (2021), who identified experience as a major element in teacher morale. This growth was most likely aided by the reflective techniques and ethical role-modeling outlined by Tariq and Shaukat (2023) and Khalid and Mushtaq (2022), which enabled educators to constantly rebuild and strengthen their moral self-concept over time. Additionally, university instructors, who frequently worked in settings with more autonomy, may have more opportunities to practice the kind of reflective teaching and critical consciousness that Marshall and Marsh (2020) associated with a strong moral agency, as evidenced by the positive prediction of MSI by teaching level. On the other hand, the negative MSI prediction by institution type (e.g., school vs. university) may indicate that pre-university settings are more restrictive and possibly stressful, which can affect morale and, consequently, a teacher's sense of their moral self, according to Din et al. (2021).

The findings indicated that forgiveness's link to demographics is more complex than MSI's. Age was a minor positive predictor of forgiveness, whereas teaching level was a negative predictor, indicating the concept of forgiveness is not something that is simply learned with age or seniority. Instead, both natural and interpersonal factors may have a more direct impact on it (Zewude et al., 2022; Hinduja et al., 2021). This is reinforced by the conclusion that the organization was a positive predictor of forgiveness, showing that promoting forgiveness required the specific ethical atmosphere and supporting environment of a workplace touched by transformational leadership. This demonstrated that forgiveness is encouraged by institutional culture in addition to being an individual quality.

The research results of Javed & Khatoon (2021) and Akhtar & Mushtaq (2021) indicating that forgiveness was a complex ability more closely connected to emotionally intelligent and deliberately nurtured abilities like mindfulness than with background factors were further supported by the small variance in forgiveness explained by demographics alone. This supported the idea that teachers should deliberately acquire these crucial resilience-building skills through organized programs like narrative therapy or the Six-Fold Path to Self-Forgiveness.

Conclusion

A teacher's professional identity and overall well-being are greatly impacted by their moral self-perception and forgiveness, which are shaped by their institutional environment as well as their personal experiences, as this study shown. Even while experience improved a teacher's moral self-concept, a teacher's emotional intelligence and the school culture had a greater impact on forgiveness. These results clearly supported a change in teacher professional development that incorporates deliberate, research-based tactics that encourage moral reasoning, emotional forbearance, and forgiveness in addition to traditional education. Schools may support teachers in becoming moral role models and thriving personally and professionally by creating cultures that encourage reflective practice, transformational leadership, and psychological safety. This will ultimately benefit the learning community as a whole.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a convenience sampling technique restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the diverse population of teachers across Pakistan. Second, the cross-sectional correlational design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between forgiveness and moral self-image. Additionally, both constructs were assessed through self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias and subjective interpretation. The study also focused only on demographic variables, overlooking other contextual and psychological factors such as personality traits, organizational climate, and coping strategies that may influence forgiveness and moral self-image. Future research may address these limitations by employing probability-based sampling and adopting longitudinal designs to capture developmental changes over time. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into teachers lived experiences. Moreover, cross-cultural comparisons and intervention-based studies would be valuable in exploring the impact of teacher training programs designed to foster moral growth, emotional intelligence, and forgiveness, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in the field of education.

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