# From Resentment to Redemption: A Mixed-Methods Study of English Language Teachers' (Un)Forgiveness

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**Abstract**
Forgiveness has been identified as one of the 24 fundamental character strengths, and its reflection signals one's temperance, which is among six major virtues residing in the human psyche, alongside wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, and transcendence. However, (un)forgiveness has been rarely discussed in language teaching and learning research. Thus, the present exploratory sequential mixed-methods study sought to profile the preliminary evidence on the psycho-emotional outcomes of unforgiveness among Iranian EFL teachers. The thematic analysis of the data obtained through semi-structured interviews with 25 teachers revealed that unforgiveness in L2 class entails rumination, in-creased anxiety, disrupted authority, and reduced energy. Building upon the qualitative findings, the researcher obtained the quantitative data by surveying 276 teachers to determine the extent to which they are forgiving towards themselves and their students in stressful situations. Results indicated non-significant differences in-between the three subcomponents of forgiveness, suggesting that teachers rely on forgiveness as a tension-coping strategy to detach themselves from the unpleasant consequences of unforgiveness. Find-ings imply that the extent to which teachers remain in the darkness of hatred and bitterness depends on their choice of grudging over things that cannot be reverted but can be compensated or forgiving themselves and others in favor of spreading love, kindness, and humanity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent psycho-emotional studies have verified the emotionally-intensiveness of language teaching. Many factors, such as students' misbehaviors, classroom management issues, anxiety, and psychological distress, have been identified as tension-provokers, and ignoring their presence in educational contexts would threaten the mental health and overall wellbeing of teachers (Dewaele et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). Many words like anger, anxiety, retribution, and retaliation burst into the mind while facing such adversities in life and profession. These are our

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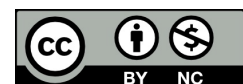
natural proclivities to deflect threats and unpleasant feelings that have been with us throughout human history, and triggering them puts individuals in a distressful state of mind. Therefore, empowering teachers with stress-coping mindsets and strategies can help them to thrive in hardships, remain immune to unpleasant situations, and protect their wellbeing from detrimental threats (MacIntyre et al., 2020). In this vein, instead of responding negatively to transgressions and adversities, one can consider forgiveness as an option to break the cycle of harsh thoughts, alter and manage the negative feelings, and plant the seeds of benevolence, compassion, understanding, and love (Black, 1998; Fry & Bjorkqvist, 1997; Thompson et al., 2005). The non-forgiving atmosphere of the classrooms would lead the students to see their teacher as incompetent, indolent, and offensive (Kearney et al., 1991). Teachers might also feel distressed and offended due to their students' misbehaviors (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). In either scenario, the wellbeing of both groups will be negatively influenced (Sapmaz et al., 2016), and the probability of learning will decline; therefore, paying attention to teachers' mindsets about forgiveness not only helps them to remain immune but also beneficial to their students' wellbeing and growth since it provides the basis for an emotionally supportive educational context wherein teachers and students' flexibility relative to diverse psycho-emotional fluctuations is honed and strengthened (Dwomoh et al., 2022; Tigert et al., 2022). However, few studies have considered language teachers' forgiveness relative to sociology and social psychology.

Forgiveness has been identified as one of the 24 fundamental character strengths, and its reflection signals one's temperance, which is among six major virtues residing in the human psyche, alongside wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The introduction of positive psychology (PosPsy) to SLA studies paved the way for studying and reflecting on various psycho-emotional factors among learners and teachers (Wang et al., 2021). PosPsy seeks to find ways by which the existing positive characteristics of the individuals can be honed since it tries to ensure the emergence and flourishing of the aforementioned character strengths, such as perseverance, hope, and wisdom, in light of recognizing and managing the negative factors that might infect one's wellbeing and safety (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2001). Relying on the tenets of PosPsy, scholars assert that forgiveness is an integral part of teachers' emotional competence, which also encompasses compassion, enthusiasm, optimism, power, and self-confidence (Madalińska-Michalak & Bavli, 2018). It is argued that an emotionally competent teacher would cultivate the students' tolerance, respect, integrity, fairness, personal and social responsibility, and awareness (Schleicher, 2012; Madalińska-Michalak, 2015). The growing body of PosPsy-laden studies in recent years indicates that forgiveness has to be acknowledged in a peacebuilding and loving pedagogy frameworks that seek to nurture the language education stakeholders' proficiency along with enabling them to grow and flourish emotionally and psychologically despite hardships and threatening learning and teaching circumstances (Grimmer, 2021; Page, 2018; Yin et al., 2019). According to both frameworks, educational systems are to acknowledge and nurture hope, harmony, peace, and love, which are required to resolve interpersonal conflicts, violence, and misunderstandings that occur in classroom contexts. Thus, it becomes essential for teachers to become familiar with and equipped with a mindset about forgiveness as a fundamental notion in peacebuilding and loving pedagogies and a relevant competency required for nurturing peace and love in educational ciphers (Gabryś-Barker, 2021).

Following PosPsy trends in L2 research, the present study would be among the first attempts in the language education realm that directly taps into language teachers' (un)forgiveness. The trial seeks to fill the gap within the L2 literature by highlighting the idea that forgiveness might function as a possible practical solution to language teachers' unpleasant experiences (Davis et al., 2015). In other words, forgiveness, as one's internal psychological strength, has been overlooked in the

literature, and the field is yet to discuss the stress-coping potentialities of this phenomenon. Specifically, language teachers face unique yet challenging stressors that might trigger interpersonal conflicts, perceived unpleasant experiences, and unresolved grievances (MacIntyre et al., 2019). In such an emotionally diverse context, language teachers might blame themselves for their students' poor performance and see themselves as incapable, incompetent, and inefficient teachers (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2011; Toussaint et al., 2017; Wettstein et al., 2023; Winding et al., 2022). Further, they might cling to the idea that they are to be blamed for the students' misbehaviors, and their inability to control and manage the classroom might further evoke excessive negative feelings. Moreover, teachers might be unaware of the classroom realities by forgetting the fact that they are only a piece of educational domino, and there are numerous intervening variables, such as students' background, school facilities, and flawed policies, which might, in turn, affect the classroom situations, teachers' emotional engagement, interpersonal relationships with students and colleagues, and the students' experiences (Allen & Leary, 2010; Birch & Nasser, 2017). Additionally, the realization of forgiveness, like any other psycho-emotional factor, is also context-dependent and requires a localized view for interpretation and generalization (Fu et al., 2004; Paz et al., 2008), thus, envisioning the forgiveness-laden pedagogy within the educational curriculum and teacher education programs requires a clarification of this phenomenon to the teachers (Azzi, 2022; Birch & Nasser, 2017). This would also lead to raising the awareness of the teachers that gives them an insight into their feelings and emotions and the possible positive outcomes that lie in forgiving their student's misbehaviors or language-related mistakes. The present research would also highlight the role of forgiveness relative to peacebuilding and loving pedagogy of language in which the notion has been recognized as one of the central pillars and goals, but studies that further justify the inclusion of forgiveness within these frameworks are scanty (Derakhshan et al., 2022; Gabryś-Barker, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### (Un)Forgiveness

Forgiveness and its counterpart, unforgiveness, had no room in scientific studies for over 300 years. It was only during the last two decades that social psychologists decided to put an end to the hibernation mode of this phenomenon and open a new chapter in discussing the epistemology and nature of forgiveness among individuals (McCullough et al., 2000). To demystify forgiveness, one can reflect on it from an opposite vantage point by considering what forgiveness is not. The philosophical underpinnings of forgiveness suggest that it differs from notions such as condoning, pardoning, excusing, forgetting, and denying (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Mason & Dougherty, 2022; Strabbing, 2020). When we condone, we see ourselves as deserving of the abuse, or during excuse, we pretend that the offender had no intent to hurt us. Elaborating more on the differences between forgiveness and similar notions, Enright (2001) argues that a forgiver has the right to resent the offender or choose to respond with mercy, compassion, benevolence, and love because forgiveness involves "a change of heart, a shift in attitude, an alteration of an inner state" (Neu, 2011, p. 134). Meanwhile, unforgiveness refers to "a cold emotion involving resentment, bitterness, and perhaps hatred, along with the motivated avoidance of or retaliation against a transgressor" (Worthington & Wade, 1999, p.386). Factors such as religiosity, shame, trait empathy, anger, agreeableness, and altruistic motives have been discussed as predictors of one's tendency towards forgiveness (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Worthington et al., 2007).

Reflecting on the theoretical aspects of forgiveness, one comes up with three vantage points by which psychologists studied forgiveness. Some scholars believe that forgiveness is a prosocial positive or less negative response to the blameworthy transgressor (McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Scobie & Scobie, 1998). Moreover, the disposition view scales people along a forgiving-

unforgiving continuum and describes people somewhere between the two poles based on interpersonal circumstances (Mullet et al., 1998). Furthermore, the social characteristic standpoint brands forgiveness and other social values such as intimacy, commitment, and trust (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Several models and frameworks have been postulated to describe the boundaries of forgiveness. Based on Luskin's conceptualization (2002), the phenomenon is rendered in three layers, namely, one's own actions, others' actions, and inevitable circumstances where no one can be blamed for the situation. Self- and others' forgiveness is an emotion-laden tensions-coping strategy that helps individuals reduce negative thoughts, emotions, and intentions toward themselves and others (Davis et al., 2015). Reflecting on Luskin's model, Exline et al. (2003) extended the territories of forgiveness-guided studies by posing a dichotomy of decisional and emotional forgiveness. The former type functions as a channel that reduces anger and resentment towards others and is a restoring strategy that helps the individual reconcile distorted interpersonal relations. The latter type (i.e., emotional forgiveness) arises from one's sense of love, compassion, and empathy. Guided by these frameworks, studies show that forgiveness leads to decreased stress and anger (Harris et al., 2006), reduced resentment (Berry & Worthington, 2001), and self-condemnation (Toussaint et al., 2017), which includes guilt, shame, regret, disappointment, and despair (McConnell, 2015). Moreover, studies suggest that forgiving leads to increased resilience (Worthington et al., 2001; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), empathy (Toussaint & Webb, 2010), life satisfaction, and subjective wellbeing (Fincham, 2015; Thompson et al., 2005).

Also, forgiveness has been discussed as an essential component of one's flourishing, which expands the boundaries of wellbeing from individual positive emotions to shared welfare in social contexts (Seligman, 2011). Further, it contributes to flourishing by increasing positive emotions, harmony, mastery, and amplified perceptions of self-worth and self-acceptance (Toussaint et al., 2023). Recently, Tiwari et al. (2023) looked upon transgressions and forgiveness in the workplace context qualitatively, and their thematic analyses of the data obtained from 48 participants revealed that forgiveness is beneficial for promoting positive emotions, good relations, and a healthy work environment. Further, Haikola (2023) investigated forgiveness among seven interviewees through a religious and spiritual scope. The analyses supported the spiritual aspects of forgiveness by pinpointing that believers attribute forgiveness to God, and without God's mercy, they would not have been able to forgive. Also, Rapp et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis of 20 studies involving 1477 youths from 10 countries revealed that informing individuals about forgiveness and its process would benefit those exposed to disturbing and unpleasant feelings and experiences.

(Un)Forgiveness has rarely been discussed in L2 studies. Birch and Nasser's (2017) study is among the first attempts in L2 education where the researchers highlighted the role of forgiveness pedagogy in multilingual and diverse contexts. The rationale behind their trial was to highlight that forgiveness-laden pedagogies would help teachers face classroom realities since they detach the teachers from a pre-determined globalized agenda for education and provide a contextualized lens through which the teachers can be responsive to their students' needs based on the classroom realities. In other words, they assert that applying forgiveness to education would possibly infuse more tolerance to the context and enhance the humanized aspects of education where teachers and students bond better and become capable of solving problems collaboratively in an emotionally supportive environment where to fail means to learn. Their idea aligns with Wang et al. (2022), who postulated the agenda for a Loving Pedagogy approach to language education. As discussed earlier, Loving Pedagogy tries to nurture positive feelings and experiences during the learning process and empower the teachers and learners psychologically and emotionally. In doing so, they elaborate on forgiveness as one of the central pillars of the Loving Pedagogy, along with notions such as kindness, sacrifice, empathy, growth, acceptance, and respect; however, the field of

language education lacks the empirical evidence further to justify the inclusion of forgiveness within this framework. Specifically, the outcomes of forgiveness have been discussed in areas other than L2 learning, and the multilayered nature of L2 teaching and learning calls for more elaborations and discussion regarding the role of forgiveness and the outcomes of unforgiveness in the L2 milieu. To date, Derakhshan et al.'s (2022) study is the only empirical study in this regard where the researchers sought to validate the Disposition towards Loving Pedagogy Scale (DTLP) (Yin et al., 2019), which aims at the teachers' forgiveness, acceptance of diversity, intimacy, kindness, and similar entities. The data analysis from 773 EFL/ESL teachers revealed that DTLP predicts the teachers' work engagement and is significantly correlated with teachers' creativity.

As discussed earlier, forgiveness could lead to reconciliation of distorted relations, increased sense of compassion and empathy, reduced resentment, and decreased self-condemnation (McConnell, 2015; Toussaint et al., 2017). However, to date, studies that exclusively frame forgiveness within language teaching boundaries are nonexistent, and the present study tries to address this gap along with identifying the negative psycho-emotional factors that unforgiveness might entail. Therefore, the present attempt is justifiable relative to several reasons which were addressed earlier. The foremost reason behind the present trial rests upon the premise that language teaching is an emotionally intense profession. Thus, the field urgently needs practical anti-stress strategies which help teachers remain calm and focused during apprehensive situations which arise in the class (Gabryś-Barker, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, the thoughts of adverse incidents might further disturb the teachers' feelings. The more anxious the teachers, the less willing they become to their job, which in turn might lead to various adverse outcomes such as distress and burnout; thus, forgiveness, as an integral strength and virtue within the human psyche, might help the language teachers to deflect negative and stressful thoughts. Thus, the present exploratory sequential mixed-methods study would provide insight into the opposite side of forgiveness (i.e., unforgiveness). The trial would provide the initial empirical and qualitative data, which enable the researchers to discuss further and justify the inclusion of forgiveness into contextualized curricula and pedagogies. Further, it highlights the possible beneficial role of forgiveness in detaching from stressful language-teaching experiences. Finally, it tries to warn about the possible negative outcomes of unforgiveness. In this vein, the answers of the following questions are sought:

1. What psycho-emotional outcomes does unforgiveness entail among EFL teachers?
2. To what extent are EFL teachers forgiving towards themselves, their students, and unpleasant classroom situations?

## 3. METHODS

### Design

To further theorize (un)forgiveness within L2 teaching domain, the present study provided preliminary evidence on EFL teachers' tendency towards forgiving themselves, their students, and unpleasant situations and outcomes of unforgiveness. In this vein, an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was utilized where the qualitative data is obtained prior to the quantitative phase. The qualitative aspect of the study helps to identify the key themes, while the quantitative phase permits generalization and statistical analysis, which paves the way for future inquiries (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design was selected to see whether English teachers tend to replace or allay the outcomes of unforgiveness via forgiving motives.

### Context and participants

Two hundred and seventy-six Iranian EFL teachers with experience ranging from 1 to 20 years were recruited as the study participants using a convenient sampling method. The sample included 171 females (62%) and 105 males (38%), aged between 20 to 50 years old (M=31). All the

respondents were English language teachers who worked in state, private, or both channels of education in Iran, where English is taught as a foreign language along with Arabic in junior and senior high schools. The majority of the participants (58%) were M.A. holders (N = 160), and the rest were (34%) B.A. holders (N = 93) and (8%) Ph.D. candidates (N = 22). Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographics of participants**

|  | Range/type | Number |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 105 (38%) |
|  | Female | 171 (62%) |
| Age | 20-25 | 52 (19%) |
|  | 26-30 | 84 (30%) |
|  | 31-35 | 56 (20%) |
|  | 36-40 | 64 (23%) |
|  | 40-50 | 20 (7.5%) |
| Years of experience | 1-5 | 123 |
|  | 6-10 | 111 |
|  | 11-15 | 34 |
|  | 16-20 | 8 |

## 4. INSTRUMENTS

### Semi-structured Interview

The researcher used three semi-structured questions (Appendix) aimed at unforgiveness within L2 classrooms to elicit qualitative data. The design of the questions is in line with Hanson et al. (2005), who elaborated on the use of semi-structured interviews by mentioning that such questions would aim at the subjective perspectives of language teachers. Further, the semi-structured questions would be beneficial to gain in-depth insights about the lived experiences and emotions. Moreover, since the study tried to profile the initial mixed data on forgiveness, the inclusion of semi-structured questions in the qualitative phase would expand the existing literature on forgiveness and its counterpart (Toussaint et al., 2017). Thus, the first interview question aimed at eliciting data on the extent to which the respondents see themselves as a forgiving person. This question provided a basis to distinguish the unforgiving teachers from forgiving ones. Accordingly, teachers with six or higher scores on the scale were treated as unforgiving teachers. The second interview question expanded previous question by delving into reasons for which L2 teachers become unforgiving. Finally, the third question asked them about their feelings during unforgiveness. In doing so, 25 Iranian EFL teachers were randomly selected from the total 267 study participants and were asked to participate in the initial qualitative phase of the study. The interviews continued until the satisfactory saturation point was reached, and no new information emerged afterward (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Respondents were free to add any additional information or leave the interview on will. They also had the freedom to provide the answers in Persian or English, but all of their answers were transcribed into English for the analysis phase. Six non-participants were recruited to ensure the trustworthiness of the questions (Nassaji, 2020). Content validation of the questions was also confirmed by the opinion of three applied linguistics experts. Each interview lasted for about 15-20 minutes.

### Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS)

HFS is an 18-item scale constructed by Thompson et al. (2005) and aims at forgiveness from three angles, namely, forgiving oneself, others, and circumstances beyond one's control by

dedicating six items to each subscale aligned on a 7-point Likert ranging from 1 (almost always false of me) to 7 (almost always true of me). Since the scale targets forgiveness from a general perspective, some minor adaptations were made to the wording of the scale to make it appropriate for language teaching and classroom contexts. In this vein, items such as "If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them" were changed into "If my students mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them."

## Data collection and analysis procedure

Data of the present exploratory sequential mixed-methods study was collected in two phases. The qualitative phase attempted to unravel the psycho-emotional outcomes of unforgiveness motives among EFL teachers. Prior to both phases, all the respondents were informed about the objectives of the study and were ensured anonymity and confidentiality concerns following the guidelines outlined by BERA (2011). In the qualitative phase, 25 Iranian teachers answered three semi-structured questions in 15-20 minutes, and their answers were transcribed into English. Using a thematic analysis approach as outlined by Boyatzis (1998), the researcher read the answers multiple times to become familiar with the overall tone of the answers. The transcribed interviews were first codified through open thematic coding to identify the key concepts about the teachers' perceptions towards the outcomes unforgiveness. Consequently, themes were grouped according to their semantic interconnectedness and transparency in the axial coding stage. The final selective stage helped label and outline the similar key groups, building the major themes. The processes of coding, categorizing, and labeling were checked out by a qualitative research expert and another expert L2 researcher to ensure the inter-rater agreement process during which the discrepancies were negotiated and resolved (Gass & Mackey, 2000), resulting in the estimated .92 Cohen's Kappa, hence, ensuring the dependability and confirmability of the findings (Nassaji, 2020). Moreover, the credibility of the analyses was checked through a member-checking process in which the respondents reflected on the extracted themes and categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the quantitative phase of the study, teachers' attitudes towards forgiving themselves, their students, and classroom situations were probed using the HFS. Before the primary quantitative data collection, the scale was piloted, and the responses of 40 individuals were used to test the psychometrics of the scale. Consequently, the respondents were added to a Telegram group and were given a link designed by Google Forms. By clicking on the link, the participants were guided to a two-page form in which they were asked to fill out the participant consent form along with demographic information and the forgiveness scale, the completion of which required less than 5 minutes.

## 5. RESULTS

## Qualitative findings

The first research question sought to identify the adverse psycho-emotional outcomes of unforgiveness. In this vein, three interview questions (Appendix) guided the qualitative phase of the study. The first interview prompt concerned the extent to which teachers rated themselves as forgiving on a scale of one to ten. Individuals who ranked five or more (n=15) were categorized as forgiving, and those who rated themselves on a scale of one to four were treated as unforgiving teachers (n=9). However, all the respondents asserted that sometimes, during their teaching practice, they become unforgiving and that all of them had experiences of unforgiveness for the most salient and frequent reason, which was the students' misbehaviors (n=25), which outscored all other unforgiveness provokers such as teachers' economic status (n=4) and introvert personality (n=2). The following excerpts from participants seven and twelve clarify teachers' stance regarding the misbehaviors of their students:

"Every time I have to go to that class, I know that something bad would happen, because the students are very rude and don't listen to me. Although I've tried so many times to let go of their behaviors, sometime it becomes unbearable and for misbehaviors of one student, I become unforgiving of them all and punish them by lowering their scores, and criticizing them for their grammatical, pronunciation, and spelling mistakes." [p. 7]

"Parents and educational system see us as babysitters who have to educate the student; however, we are only one part of the whole. Being an unforgiving person is not I personally adhere in out-class environment, but dealing with over 30 students varying in mindsets and behaviors in each class and having at least classes each day, drains a lot of energy and being an unforgiving person in some instances is natural." [p. 12]
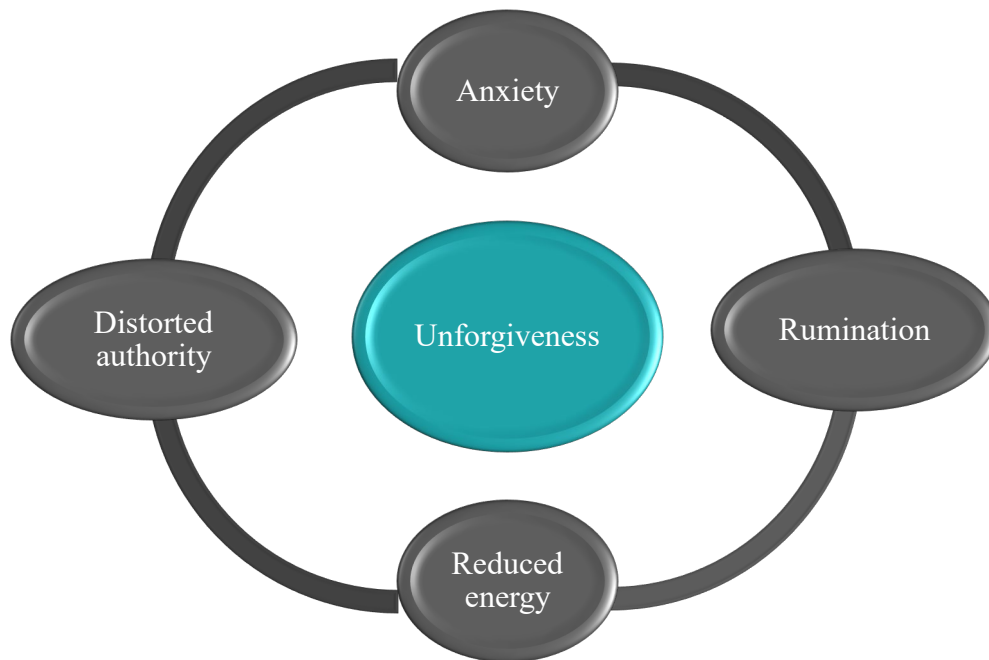


**Figure 1: Outcomes of L2 teachers' unforgiveness**

By asking the third interview question, teachers elaborated on the outcomes of being unforgiving. Rumination emerged as the most salient theme (n=22), followed by, increased anxiety (n=20), disrupted authority (n=19), and reduced energy (n= 14). Precisely, 22 of the teachers mentioned that unforgiveness makes them think and overthink unpleasant situations for hours and days even after the class is finished:

"It was the time when I spent a whole week thinking about one of my students who had said something inappropriate in the class and made me angry. Things got out of control, and I shouted at her out of anger. Afterwards, it took me a week for letting go of the thought of that day." [p. 2]

Additionally, teachers (n=19) noted that being unforgiving makes classroom management more difficult because students' misbehaviors make them feel angry and lonely. Teachers believed that the unpleasant classroom climate threatened their authority and agency since students became less supportive of angry teachers, did not follow orders, and welcomed more conflicts. For this reason,

teachers noted that they had to switch to an unforgiving mood and practice hatred, bitterness, and less flexible that drains much energy out of them (n=14).

> "After my in-class conflicts, we experience some minutes of silence. Afterwards, I hear that my students spread the word in the school that I am an unforgiving person, but the reality is that they don't see themselves and everyone criticizes me and expects patience and forgiveness, but no one blames the students for they say many bad words and mistreat me and their classmates" [p. 14]
>
> "Being unforgiving drains my energy and soul. I have no choice but to say nothing most of the times I have troubles. I just check the clock and burst out of the class once it is finished. I myself am a quiet and introvert person, but dealing with so many misbehaviors has reduced my patience. I sometimes think that my students abuse my kindness and forgiveness. I wasn't like this the time I entered this profession, but now after 10 years of experience, I feel emotionally, mentally, and physically drained. Nobody cares about teachers' mentality and we have to show off that everything is in control while we are in the class, but the reality is that trouble finds its way to your class and sometimes you have to be tough for your own sake, otherwise, students become abusive and rude." [p. 5]

## Quantitative results

In the quantitative phase, all the participants (n=276) filled out the HFS questionnaire and provided information on the extent to which they forgive themselves, their students, and the unpleasant situations. Prior to data analysis, Cronbach's alpha method showed .891 index, which is described as a good reliability indicator by George and Mallery (2020). Table 2 displays the skewness and kurtosis indices of normality. Since all values were within the ranges of ±2, it was concluded that the present data did not show any significant deviation from a normal distribution (Bachman, 2005; George & Mallery, 2020).

**Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis Indices of Normality**

| | N | Skewness | | Kurtosis | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Self | 276 | .151 | .147 | -.450 | .292 |
| Students | 276 | -.342 | .147 | -.761 | .292 |
| Situations | 276 | -.062 | .147 | -.286 | .292 |

The only quantitative research question raised in this study was analyzed through Multivariate. Since this study did not include any independent (grouping) variables, there was no need to check the assumptions of homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of covariance matrices, and sphericity. All these assumptions require at least two groups' means to be compared. Table 3 shows the EFL teachers' means of forgiving themselves, their students, and unpleasant situations. EFL teachers had roughly equal means on forgiving self (M = 27.12, SE = .389), students (M = 26.80, SE = .500), and unpleasant situations (M = 26.44, SE = .427).

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Forgiving Self, Students, and Unpleasant Situations**

| Forgiving | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Self | 27.127 | .389 | 26.362 | 27.892 |
| Students | 26.808 | .500 | 25.824 | 27.792 |
| Unpleasant Situations | 26.446 | .427 | 25.605 | 27.287 |

Table 4 shows the main results of MANOVA. The results (F (2, 274) = 2.63, p > .05, pη2 = .019 representing a weak effect size) indicated that there were not any significant differences between EFL teachers' forgiving themselves, others, and unpleasant situations. Figure 2 shows the mean described in Table 4.

**Table 4: Multivariate Tests for Forgiving Self, Others, and Unpleasant Situations**

| Effect | | Value | F | Hypothesis df | Error df | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Forgiving | Pillai's Trace | .019 | 2.631 | 2 | 274 | .074 | .019 |
| | Wilks' Lambda | .981 | 2.631 | 2 | 274 | .074 | .019 |
| | Hotelling's Trace | .019 | 2.631 | 2 | 274 | .074 | .019 |
| | Roy's Largest Root | .019 | 2.631 | 2 | 274 | .074 | .019 |
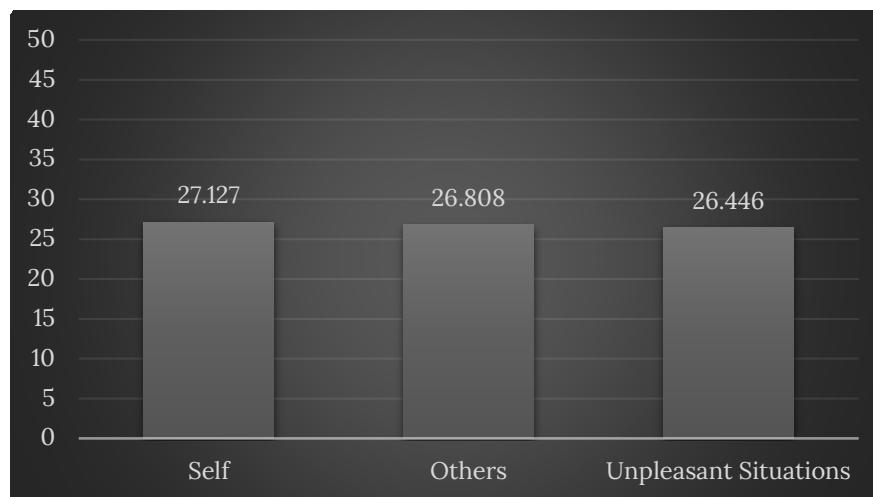
**Figure 2: Means for Forgiving Self, Others, and Unpleasant Situations**

## 6. DISCUSSION

The paucity of research for justifying the inclusion of forgiveness in peacebuilding and loving pedagogies of L2, along with the dearth of evidence for highlighting tension-coping potentialities of forgiveness in language classroom contexts, motivated the researcher to fill the gap by conducting an exploratory sequential mixed-methods study the qualitative aspect of which identified primary psycho-emotional outcomes of unforgiveness and the quantitative aspect provided evidence on the forgiveness tendencies of EFL teachers towards themselves, their students, and unpleasant classroom context.

Accordingly, teachers asserted that whenever their merciless side (i.e., unforgiveness) triggers, they start ruminating the problems and overthink about them anxiously which further leads to the

disruption of their authority and reduced energy. The findings clearly illustrate one's cold emotion shrouded by anger, hatred, and bitterness against the transgressor, which is in line with Worthington and Wade's (1999) definition of unforgiveness. It is noteworthy that psycho-emotional notions occur simultaneously, and teachers might feel various in short or long time periods (Dewaele et al., 2019); thus, the emergence of rumination, reduced energy, and increased anxiety, as shown by the qualitative findings, are to be discussed and justified relative to each other. Accordingly, rumination (i.e., mulling over an offense) triggers a depressed mood which in turn reduces one's energy and makes forgiveness difficult. The idea builds upon Worthington and Wade's (1999) elaborations and recent discussions of forgiveness (e.g., Debreli & Ishanova, 2019; Dwomoh et al., 2022; Haikola, 2023; Rapp et al., 2023; Sapmaz et al., 2016; Tigert et al., 2022; Tiwari et al., 2023) and expands the literature of L2 teachers' emotions by suggesting that in light of rumination and the triggered depression, language teachers might feel hopeless and threatened by the classroom situations and lose their concentration and focus, hence, embracing the sense of disrupted authority. An unforgiving L2 teacher would possibly mule over negative experiences and keep the detrimental thoughts alive. This might lead to the formation of a negative attitude toward particular L2 classes and students, which in turn disturbs the interpersonal relationship between language teachers and learners. Additionally, based on the results and by considering anxiety, rumination, distorted authority, and reduced energy alongside each other, it can be further argued that unforgiving L2 teachers clung to negative thoughts would possibly lose the opportunity to see the bright side of their efforts and their attempts would be negatively shrouded by the presence of disturbing feelings that could be resolved by forgiveness.

Moreover, the combination of qualitative and quantitative results permits one to argue that language teachers' (un)forgiveness can be justified relative to the prosocial response and dispositional stances of forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Scobie & Scobie, 1998). The former stance (i.e., prosocial response) justifies EFL teachers' tendency towards forgiving themselves, their students, and the situations, while the latter vantage point (i.e., dispositional view) pertains that the interpersonal circumstances trigger people to show or hide their mercy to themselves and others. Accordingly, and based on Mullet et al.'s (1998) postulation of the dispositional view, it can be argued that language classrooms cradle an array of psycho-emotional factors by which EFL teachers fluctuate in-between unforgiving-forgiving continuum.

The forgiving proclivity of the EFL teachers, as illustrated by the quantitative results, might be further justified with reference to McCullough and Witvliet's (2002) elaborations on the social characteristic viewpoint of forgiveness based on which a breach in the social relations threatens the shared intimacy, commitment, and trust, thus, to recover the sense of intimacy and trust, L2 teachers are prone to practice forgiveness in their interpersonal dialogues with their students. More importantly, it can be argued that the teachers' willingness towards forgiving their students might be a motive to recover their authority, which is disrupted in classroom context. As the teachers noted, whenever the students misbehave, a sense of loneliness and anger flourish, and these two factors might further push the teachers into their detrimental state of mind wherein they overthink and ruminate negative thoughts and feelings and as a result, lose their face and authority in the class. Thus, the findings contribute to the emotion-laden studies in L2 education by further justifying the recognition of forgiveness as an aspect of teachers' emotional competence about which empirical evidence was lacking (Madalińska-Michalak & Bavli, 2018). In other words, results support the idea that L2 teachers' forgiveness would in turn cultivate the learners' awareness about tolerance, integrity, and fairness along with personal and social responsibilities (Schleicher, 2012; Madalińska-Michalak, 2015). Arguably, L2 teachers' forgiveness strengthens the bonds and relatedness between teachers and students, hence increasing the interpersonal rapport and intimacy, which are distorted through unforgiveness. As noted earlier, a non-forgiving

teacher is perceived as an indolent, incompetent, and offensive individual (Kearney et al., 1991). Such an unjust and imbalanced situation might possibly put the class in an offensive state in which the teachers feel more distressed and helpless (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). Therefore, one possible and plausible justification for the teachers' tendency towards relying on forgiveness, as resulted in the present study, lies in that they try to prevent distressful situations by forgiving their students in order to deflect the emergence of unwanted negative factors that infect the wellbeing of the teachers and students altogether (Sapmaz et al., 2016).

Therefore, in line with previous studies (e.g., Davis et al.,2015; Dwomob et al., 2022; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Tigert et al., 2022) who highlighted the significance of finding practical solutions to the teachers' tensions, it can be claimed that the present findings posit the idea that forgiveness can be considered as a tension- and stress-coping strategy among language teachers. The findings contribute to the existing PosPsy-laden studies of L2 emotions by suggesting that language teachers' forgiveness paves the way for an emotionally supportive context flexible to diverse psycho-emotional fluctuations of the language teachers and their students. Further, the present findings provide more evidence for Allen and Leary (2010) and Birch and Nasser (2017), who highlighted the importance of coping strategies and forgiveness-laden pedagogies. Additionally, it suggests that language teachers' forgiveness would potentially prevent language teachers' emotional disengagement, distorted interpersonal relationships with learners, and unpleasant language learning experiences for the students.

Moreover, the quantitative results are also justifiable relative to Exline et al.'s (2003) dichotomy of decisional-emotional forgiveness, according to which it can be argued that EFL teachers decide to forgive because they know that their mercy soothes the situation, brings peace to the classroom, and help the individuals to reconcile the distorted interpersonal relations. Meanwhile the emotional forgiveness of the EFL teachers might be traceable in their sense of love, compassion, empathy, and love. This idea is supported by reflecting on the respondents' answers where the majority of them (n=168; 60%) scored mid- to the highest score to the item "*Although my students have hurt me in the past, I have eventually been able to see them as good individuals*" in Heartland Forgiveness Scale. This implies that EFL teachers are prone to search for findings silver linings and light despite experiencing the darkness of hatred, loneliness, and helplessness in the hope of leading the class toward tolerance, respect, integrity, fairness, and awareness, which have been listed as the characteristics of emotionally competent teachers who are willing to help their students grow and flourish (Madalińska-Michalak, 2015; Schleicher, 2012).

Arguably, a subtle yet noteworthy point can also be considered regarding the L2 teachers' forgiveness, and that is the possibility of some sacrifice that is required to mend the breach between the teacher and students. In other words, it can be claimed that the unforgiving status of the classroom context warns the teacher to reconcile the situation; otherwise, the situation might get worse, and the class might become unbearable, especially concerning the fact that education year in the Iranian context and many other settings extends in nine months and teachers are aware that tolerating a sense of resentment and hatred for nine months would become an emotionally overwhelming and intense burden, thus instead of remaining in a state of unforgiveness, they probably tend to sacrifice their own emotions and put one step forward towards compensating the situation and repairing the distorted bonds and community. The aforementioned idea is supported by Harris et al. (2006), who suggested that forgiveness leads to less stress and anger if individuals see it as a means of one's growth. In doing so, Luskin (2002) suggested that people might consider restatement of negative circumstances in a positive way, mindfulness practices, and focusing on one's kindness and personal growth in light of unforgiveness-reducing endeavors. Furthermore, quantitative analyses provided evidence in line with and in support of Luskin's (2002) model of forgiveness, based on which forgiveness occurs relative to oneself, others, and situations. As

supported by the results, language teachers tend to reflect forgiveness in all three layers of Luskin's model. However, roughly speaking, they tend to be more forgiving towards themselves (m=27.127) relative to their students (m=26.808) and the situations (m=26.446). In line with previous research, the present study suggests that both self- and others' forgiving tendencies function as stress-coping strategies one might undertake to reduce tensions and unpleasant feelings (Davis et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that EFL teachers also rely on forgiveness to detach themselves from rumination, anxiety, reduced energy, and disrupted authority to embrace wellbeing and peace.

The present study yields several implications for language teachers in particular and teacher educators and researchers in general. First, the study signals that forgiveness is not a weakness but a strength, and choosing forgiveness over unforgiveness would be a win-win for teachers and students altogether. L2 teachers can consider forgiveness as a stress-coping strategy and a bridge toward personal growth, courage, and temperance. The results implied that teachers' unforgiveness leads to rumination, reduced energy, distorted authority, and increased anxiety, the combination of which would potentially strain the interpersonal relationships between L2 teachers and learners. Moreover, unforgiveness might provide a sense of incompetence and indolence to L2 teachers, which makes them feel lonely and helpless in L2 class. Further, the findings implied that teachers' unforgiveness might infect their job satisfaction by shaping a negative mindset toward teaching and learners and eroding joy and fulfillment, hence making it harder to cultivate positive relations and communication. On a larger scale, the findings further justified the inclusion and recognition of forgiveness in peacebuilding and loving pedagogy frameworks, which attempt to help individuals thrive in stressful situations and flourish emotionally and psychologically (Azzi, 2022; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Gabryś-Barker, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). In other words, results implied that nurturing forgiveness and informing the language teachers about the negative outcomes of unforgiveness would equip the teachers with the required competency necessary for infusing peace, understanding, and love into the classroom context. Further, it warned us about the probability of creeping negative and detrimental feelings into the language teaching context despite unforgiveness. In other words, if nurturing a loving, peaceful, and emotionally-supportive language teaching and learning is expected, then investment in raising teachers' awareness about forgiveness and nurturing emotionally competent teachers becomes an inevitable task for educators. The trial, in turn, not only benefits the language teachers but also equips the learners with tolerance, awareness, respect, integrity, and responsibility.

Pedagogically, the findings contribute to the field by suggesting that L2 teachers can reflect on themselves and their emotions to nurture awareness about their emotional boundaries. In other words, teacher educators are suggested to inform the teachers that forgiveness is an option and process which can lead to personal growth and kindness. Teachers are suggested to experience anger, distress, and rumination to obtain a tangible mindset about the negative feelings that these experiences might entail. Meanwhile, they would also consider the idea that holding on to grudges and bitterness would further infect their wellbeing and job satisfaction. As noted earlier, teachers are only a part of the educational domino and should not blame themselves for anything that occurs under their authority. Thus, shifting perspectives and looking at classroom conflicts and tensions from different viewpoints would be another practical solution for practicing forgiveness. Most of the tensions between teachers and learners might be traceable to a lack of proper communication and understanding. L2 teachers are suggested to learn that forgiveness starts by being compassionate and forgiving towards oneself. In other words, teachers are to be reminded that everyone makes mistakes; thus, torturing oneself with negative and disturbing thoughts for students' faults is not a proper solution to classroom tensions.

Language teaching and learning are in the infancy stage of forgiveness-laden studies. Future studies might consider the forgiveness of L2 teachers relative to their religiosity, shame, anger, agreeableness, empathy, and altruistic motives since these factors have been discussed in the literature to be highly influential on one's forgiveness, and evidence aiming at them within the L2 domain is scarce. Additionally, more robust data collection and research designs, such as longitudinal or experimental designs, can provide a more in-depth view of fluctuations of forgiveness over time. Diverse sample sizes, demographics, and contexts can also be considered while studying, interpreting, and generalizing future studies.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The present study shed light on unforgiveness and forgiveness among EFL teachers and suggested that forgiving oneself and others requires courage and is not a weakness. The study metaphorically signaled that if language teachers practice forgiveness and remember that their students need their help, the distance between them diminishes, and they shall enjoy unity, trust, and intimacy. Findings indicated that experiencing unpleasant situations in the classroom context happens for teachers, and they are not alone in this sense. However, the extent to which they remain in the darkness of hatred and bitterness depends on their choice of grudging over things that cannot be reverted but can be compensated by forgiving themselves and others in favor of spreading love, kindness, and humanity.

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## Appendix

This interview aims at understanding the outcomes of unforgiveness in language classrooms. There are no right or wrong answers as it concerns your subjective understanding based on your experiences. We ask you three main questions, and based on your answers, we might ask additional questions. Feel free to add whatever you think describes you as an English teacher:

1. Do you see yourself as a forgiving person? On a scale of one to ten, please select the extent to which you see yourself as a forgiving or unforgiving person.
2. Have you ever been an unforgiving English teacher? When was it, and for what reasons?

How do you feel when the classroom situation calls for no mercy?