# TEACHERS' VIEWS OF FORGIVENESS EDUCATION: A CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMINATION IN GREECE AND SAUDI ARABIA

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## Abstract

   Most research exploring school-based forgiveness education programs focuses on student outcomes. However, some scholars have begun studying teachers' views of forgiveness. We build on this work by exploring teachers' views of forgiveness education in Greece and Saudi Arabia. A total of 134 teachers (76 Greek and 58 Saudi) completed a survey asking about the meaning of forgiveness, topics to include in forgiveness education, and benefits and challenges of forgiveness education. We compared responses between Greek teachers with and without experience delivering forgiveness education and between Greek and Saudi teachers. Greek teachers with and without forgiveness education experience had different views of the benefits and practical challenges of forgiveness education. The Greek and Saudi teachers differed in how they understood forgiveness in relation to reconciliation, excusing behavior, mercy, and beliefs about the benefits of forgiveness education for the classroom. Implications for the implementation of forgiveness education and teacher training are discussed.

**Keywords**: forgiveness, peace education, schools, teacher training, cross-cultural context

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Schools have historically been important settings for peace education (Harris, 2010), and researchers around the world have studied peace education in schools (e.g., Hantzopoulos, 2011; Levy, 2014; Ubogu, 2016). Recently, the concept of forgiveness has been proposed as an important component of peace efforts (e.g., Bright & Exline, 2012; Enright et al. 2016) and forgiveness education has been explored empirically in schools (e.g., Ghobari Bonab et al. 2021; McGlynn et al., 2004; Nasser & Abu-Nimer, 2012; Wong et al., 2020). Although teachers have an important role in implementing forgiveness education in schools, their understanding of forgiveness has not received much attention from social scientists.

The current study explored teachers' understanding of forgiveness in two different countries, Greece and Saudi Arabia. We addressed two questions with this research. First, we asked, do teachers who have taught forgiveness education and those who have not, understand the construct of forgiveness in the same way? Second, we asked, what are the similarities and differences between teachers' conceptualizations of forgiveness in two different cultural contexts? The results of this study can be used to improve both the implementation of forgiveness education in schools and for training teachers to deliver forgiveness education.

## Literature Review

As an important developmental context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), schools can exert an influence on students' attitudes and values as well as their intellectual, social, and emotional abilities. Of particular interest in this study was examining how teachers conceptualize forgiveness to better understand how teachers can influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and emotions in the context of interpersonal and / or intergroup conflict. Nasser and Abu-Nimer (2012) argued schools and teachers can shape students' beliefs about others and their abilities to deal with conflict situations. Nasser and Abu-Nimer, as well as others (e.g., van der Walt et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2020), have called for forgiveness education in schools as a mechanism to improve students' responses to interpersonal and intergroup conflict.

A brief review of forgiveness education programs in schools will contextualize the research that is beginning to emerge on teachers' views of forgiveness. Social scientists have developed and implemented forgiveness interventions and educational programs in schools with students of different ages, in different cultural contexts, and with different histories of group conflict (e.g., Enright et al., 2007; Ghobari Bonab et al., 2021; Hui & Chau, 2009). These programs have demonstrated that forgiveness education had positive effects on individual well-being and intergroup relationships. Enright and colleagues developed a definition of forgiveness that has been validated across cultures. Interested readers can find a discussion of the cross-cultural understanding of forgiveness in Enright et al. (2016). Although factors impacting forgiveness and the ways in which forgiveness is expressed may differ across cultures, Enright and colleagues have found forgiveness has a common meaning across cultures. They define the construct as "A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her (Enright et al., 1998, p. 47)." Enright's work also differentiates forgiveness from other concepts such as justice, reconciliation, and pardoning; they also distinguish interpersonal and intergroup forgiveness (Enright et al., 2016). Given the robust nature of Enright's definition and its use in forgiveness education programs around the world, we used it to inform our study.

Enright et al. (2007) developed school-based forgiveness curricula for first and third grade students. The curricula were implemented and studied in Belfast, Northern Ireland, a

country which has significant intergroup conflict. The intervention used a teacher/psychologist consultation model, in which psychologists instructed and supported teachers who led the forgiveness education program in their classrooms. Compared to students in the control groups, students in the forgiveness education groups had significant reductions in anger and depression and significant increases in forgiveness.

Some studies of forgiveness interventions have not only measured student well-being, but also examined indicators of intergroup relationships. Enright et al. (2014) designed and evaluated a school-based forgiveness intervention in a highly segregated city in the United States to explore its effect of forgiveness on intergroup relationships. The authors used Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis as a framework for the study. Eighth graders across racially segregated schools were brought into contact with one another. Using a randomized quasi-experimental design, the authors found the participants had reduced prejudice toward the other group and increased forgiveness. Ghobari Bonab et al. (2021) studied forgiveness education in Iran. The authors used an experimental / control group design to study a program that teachers implemented with eighth graders. The schools that participated in the study came from three different provinces in Iran. The researchers found that compared to students in the control group, students in the forgiveness education group showed increased forgiveness as well as reduced ethnic prejudice, state anger, trait anger, and anger expression. These studies suggest forgiveness education in schools has positive effects on students' attitudes toward members of other groups.

Other school-based forgiveness intervention studies have been conducted in school counseling settings rather than as part of classroom education. These programs focused on well-being rather than on peace. Freedman (2018) designed and implemented a forgiveness intervention for at-risk high school students and compared it to an active control group. Both groups met daily for about a month. The experimental group improved more than the control group on several variables including forgiveness, hope, anxiety, and depression. Shechtman et al. (2009) found Arab adolescents in Israel who participated in a school counseling forgiveness intervention showed greater gains in empathy and endorsed less aggression, revenge, and hostility than youth in a control group. Hui and Chau (2009) tested a forgiveness guidance program with Hong Kong Chinese youth who had suffered an interpersonal injury. They found the youth in the forgiveness intervention outperformed youth in the control group in forgiving attitudes and psychological well-being. Gambaro et al. (2008) investigated a school-based counseling program for students high in anger. The authors compared a forgiveness intervention to an alternative program on both behavioral and academic outcomes. The students in the forgiveness intervention showed greater reductions in behavioral problems and greater gains in academic performance than youth in the alternative treatment group. Vassilopoulos et al. (2018) studied the effectiveness of a school-based forgiveness intervention with Greek students between 10 and 13 years old using an experimental design. Compared to the control group, students in the forgiveness intervention group had significant reductions in depression and anger as well as increased satisfaction with life and positive attitudes toward their offenders.

Scholarly works by McGlynn and colleagues and Wong and colleagues are important to note even though the works do not explore forgiveness education programs specifically. McGlynn et al. (2004) summarized research on integrated education in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has long standing religious and political conflicts between Catholics and Protestants and is largely segregated along Catholic and Protestant lines. Integrated education was a way of reducing the segregation by bringing Catholic and Protestant youth together in the same school. Integrated education was viewed as a way to increase contact

and reduce conflict between the groups. Based on their review, the authors concluded that integrated education can have a positive impact on students' identity, outgroup attitudes, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Wong et al. (2020) proposed creating schools as "just and merciful" communities that could foster peace within and between people. They suggested that schools have historically focused on justice and have neglected mercy, and they explored teachers' views on schools as just and merciful communities in a qualitative study. Teachers in the United States and in China participated in the study. The teachers reported that justice alone was not sufficient for a peaceful school community and that mercy was also important. The teachers in the study also reported that mercy was increasingly used in matters related to school discipline. Since an important goal of school discipline and peace education is to help students learn how to get along with others in a peaceful way, the authors concluded that a just and merciful community approach in schools could facilitate peace efforts. Although McGlynn et al. (2004) and Wong et al. (2020) did not conduct research on forgiveness programs, their work on integrated schools and on the just and merciful community addressed the importance of the school context in shaping students' attitudes and behaviors toward others.

The research we have reviewed demonstrates forgiveness interventions in schools are effective. These programs have explored a wide range of outcome variables and have been used across grade levels and in different parts of the world. Although researchers have studied the outcomes of forgiveness education on students, little research has focused on teachers' understanding of forgiveness and their views on forgiveness education. Greater knowledge about teachers' views on forgiveness is important because teachers can influence the place of forgiveness education within a school (Zembylas, 2012). In addition, teachers' views about forgiveness could impact teacher training, curriculum development, and curriculum implementation. A few scholars have begun work in this area.

Nasser and Abu-Nimer (2012) conducted a study that focused on teachers' perceptions of forgiveness. The authors wanted to learn what skills teachers needed to forgive and to educate students about responding to conflict situations. Their study explored K–12 teachers' responses to hypothetical scenarios of cultural and social conflict among Palestinian teachers in Israel. Sixty-two classroom teachers completed a survey that included questions about their level of education, their religion, and the importance of religion to them. The survey also had 10 hypothetical scenarios with questions about the severity of the wrongdoing depicted in the scenario, whether the behavior should be punished, and if the behavior could be forgiven. The authors found that willingness to forgive in the hypothetical scenarios was lower when the behavior was viewed as severe and when the behavior was intentional. This is consistent with past research in other settings (Fincham et al., 2005). The authors argued that forgiveness has a cultural component and that factors impacting Arab teachers' forgiveness may not be the same as the factors impacting teachers' forgiveness in other cultural settings.

Rique and Lins-Dyer (2003) also explored teachers' views of forgiveness; they investigated teachers' perceptions of forgiveness and pardon in response to students violating school norms. Using two hypothetical scenarios, the authors asked teachers (n = 53) about forgiveness and school pardon; they evaluated perceptions of forgiveness in relation to the teachers' sociomoral orientation. The authors found the amount of teaching experience a teacher had was positively correlated with the endorsement of forgiveness and that an authoritarian approach to discipline was negatively correlated with endorsing forgiveness. They also found that sociomoral orientation was related to forgiveness; teachers who endorsed the use of forgiveness provided reasons that were based on interpersonal

relationships rather than on a societal moral perspective.

Zembylas and Bekerman (2012) used interviews, writing exercises, and focus groups to investigate teachers' views on forgiveness in the political context in which they taught. A sample of 15 Greek teachers from the Republic of Cyprus and a sample of 14 Jewish and Palestinian teachers in Israel participated in the study. Most of the teachers had participated in peace education prior to the study. The goal of the study was to explore how the concept of forgiveness could be integrated into schools for the purpose of reducing intergroup conflict. Teachers were asked about what forgiveness means and about the prospects and limits of forgiveness in the context of their societal conflicts. The authors found some similarities and differences across the samples. Similarities included the conditions under which forgiveness could be considered and a distinction between individual and collective forgiveness. Differences included participants' views on the possibility of forgiveness. The sample in Israel focused on the recognition that harm was done and the role one had in the harm, while the sample from Cyprus focused on the need for justice before considering forgiveness.

The current study builds on research exploring the effectiveness of forgiveness education in schools and on research investigating teachers' views of forgiveness. We used Enright's definition of forgiveness, a conceptualization of forgiveness that has been used in school-based forgiveness education and has been validated across cultures, to create a survey that would allow us to examine teachers' understandings of specific and salient aspects of forgiveness. We also go further than past studies of teachers' views of forgiveness by not only asking teachers how they understand the meaning of the construct, but also asking teachers about what forgiveness education should include, the potential benefits and risks of forgiveness education, and the practical challenges of forgiveness education. We explore similarities and differences among teachers with different levels of experience teaching forgiveness education and across two different cultural contexts. By including two different cultures in the study, we continue to explore cross-cultural similarities and differences in teachers' perspectives on forgiveness (Nasser & Abu-Nimer, 2012; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2012).

## Methods

### Sample

The study was conducted in Greece and Saudi Arabia. Greece and Saudi Arabia have unique and rich cultural histories and influences. Greece is part of the Eurozone and Eastern Orthodoxy is its main religion. Saudi Arabia is an Arab state, and its main religion is Islam. The differences between the countries provided an opportunity to explore cross-cultural similarities and differences in teachers' views of forgiveness. Convenience sampling was used to recruit volunteer kindergarten through 12th grade teachers.

In Greece, teachers were recruited using the school network of teachers under the oversight of school advisors as well as from teachers known to have experience delivering forgiveness education (FE). The Greek sample had 76 teachers, 31 (41%) of whom were experienced forgiveness education teachers (FEt), and 45 (59%) of whom did not have experience with forgiveness education (nonFEt). The sample of Greek teachers was 45% female, 8% male, and 47% undisclosed. Nine percent of the teachers were between 24 and 36 years old, 45% between 37 and 48 years old, 43% between 49 and 60 years old, and 3% did not report their ages. Thirteen percent of the Greek sample taught in kindergarten, 21% in elementary schools, 51% in middle schools, and 15% in high schools. Thirty-five percent of

the teachers reported frequent dealing with student conflicts, and 80% of the teachers (43% FEt and 57% nonFEt) wanted guidance on dealing with student conflicts.

In Saudi Arabia, a total of 116 teachers initially signed-up to participate in the study. However, the final sample consisted of 58 teachers because some of the participants only answered the demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, school level taught, etc.). None of the teachers from Saudi Arabia had experience teaching forgiveness education. All teachers in Saudi Arabia were eligible to participate in the online survey if they had an interest in delivering forgiveness education. The Saudi Arabian sample was 50% female and 50% male. Thirty-one percent of the teachers were between 24 and 34 years old, 50% between 35 and 44 years old, 17% between 45 and 64 years old, and 2% did not report their ages. Ten percent of the teachers taught in kindergarten, 41% in elementary schools, 26% in middle schools, and 22% in high schools. Twenty-eight percent of the teachers reported dealing with conflict between students. The combined sample had 134 teachers (56.7% from Greece and 43.3% from Saudi Arabia) who volunteered to participate in the study.

**Instrument**

A questionnaire was created for this study to measure teachers' perspectives of what forgiveness is, what the teaching of forgiveness education should include, the potential short- and long-term benefits for forgiveness education, the potential risks of forgiveness education, and the challenges of implementing forgiveness education. Enright's forgiveness education programs (e.g., Enright et al., 2007), and research on the programs were used to develop the survey questions. This strategy was used so that we could interpret study findings in relation to a definition of forgiveness that has been empirically validated across cultures (e.g., Ghobari Bonab et al., 2021). The survey had both closed questions in which participants selected answers from a set of options, and open-ended questions in which participants provided their own thoughts. The questionnaire was translated from English to Greek by a research team member and a professional translator, both of whom were fluent in Greek. The Greek questionnaire was then translated back from Greek to English by a third-party Greek scholar to ensure accuracy of the translation. The Saudi Arabian questionnaire was translated into Arabic by one of the research team members who was fluent in both Arabic and English. Once translated, a bilingual graduate student reviewed the Arabic version against the English version for accuracy. The translated questionnaire was then reviewed by two Arabic teachers to check the linguistic quality of the translation before administering the survey. Both questionnaires were distributed online.

Questions assessing the meaning of forgiveness asked participants if forgiveness is the same as justice, reconciliation, and excusing and offender. A sample item included, "When one person forgives another, is the forgiver excusing what the other person did?" To assess what forgiveness education should include, teachers were asked a couple of questions that had a list of possible responses. Participants were instructed to select all the answers they thought applied. For example, teachers were asked, "What would be some important themes or ideas that you would want the students to know in forgiveness education?" A few of the responses included: helping students to see the value of each person, helping students to be kind to those who have hurt them, and helping students get higher grades in their academic subjects. Participants could also add their own ideas. Finally, teachers were asked to identify benefits and risks of forgiveness education. Each question provided options for teachers to select and an opportunity to share their own thoughts. For example, participants responded to the following question, "In the short run, what do you think some benefits of forgiveness education are?" Options included less anger in students who are frustrated, greater

cooperation among students, and less arguing among students. Teachers selected all the options they thought applied.

The questionnaires used in Greece and Saudi Arabia had small variations; modifications were made so that the instruments could fit the contexts and be culturally relevant. For example, once question asks, "When one forgives another person, should the one who forgives also seek justice or fairness regarding what happened?" Because the Greek sample had experienced forgiveness education teachers, we expected many teachers to respond, "no". Therefore, several additional questions were added to the Greek survey to explore how teachers perceived justice if an offended party was closely or remotely related to the injured party. For example, teachers were asked, "If someone hits you in a fight and injures you slightly, are you going to report him to the police?" Participants were then asked if their responses would differ if the offender was a family member or if the offender was a stranger. In addition, one of the options for a question related to the personal benefit of teaching forgiveness education was worded differently across the two samples. In the Greek sample one of the answer choices was, "Help me to be a better person, more loving and kinder toward people", in the Saudi Arabian sample the response option read, "Forgiveness will help me to become a better Muslim attentive to the word of Quran". For reference, the full questionnaire used in Saudi Arabia is presented in the Appendix.

**Analysis**

Data from the survey were analyzed in two ways. First, in the sample from Greece, we compared responses from teachers who had previous experience with forgiveness education (FEt) with responses from teachers who did not have experience teaching forgiveness education (nonFEt). Second, we compared the nonFEt from Greece with the teachers from Saudi Arabia, all of whom were nonFEt. Two-tailed proportional tests were used to analyze the categorical data from closed questions. According to Agresti and Finlay (2009), this test is robust when the data set has at least 10 outcomes of each type (e.g., successes and failures), and when each group being compared has at least five outcomes of each type. Since multiple comparisons were planned in the study, we used a 2.5% probability of false discovery. Using the Benjamini-Hochberg method, the p-value of each statistical test was ordered from smallest to largest and then compared to the corresponding false discovery rate (FDR) for each test. When the p-value was smaller or equal to the corresponding critical FDR value, the null hypothesis, that the groups were the same, was rejected, which implied a statistically significant difference between the groups. Conversely, when the p-value was larger than the corresponding critical FDR value, there was insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis indicating the two groups were not statistically different. The FDR was chosen to control the expected proportion of false discoveries because it has more power than the more stringent family wise rate (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Where appropriate, 95% confidence intervals were used throughout the analysis.

## Results

**Comparing Teachers With and Without Forgiveness Education Experience**

Two statistically significant differences were found among the thirty comparisons of Greek teachers with experience (FEt) and without experience (nonFEt) delivering forgiveness education. The FEt and nonFEt did not differ significantly with respect to how they understood forgiveness or what they thought forgiveness education should include. The teachers did differ with respect to their views of the benefits of forgiveness education and the

practical challenges of forgiveness education. More FEt (94%) than nonFEt (67%) endorsed emotional well-being as a long-term benefit of forgiveness education, $z = -3.24$, $p = 4.07e-4$, CI = -0.106, -0.431, and $\alpha = .004$. In addition, more nonFEt (36%) viewed a lack of knowledge about forgiveness education as an implementation challenge than the FEt (3%), $z = 4.14$, *SE* = 0.078, $p = 2.38e-05$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.476], and FDR $\alpha = .002$).

Table 1.
*Summary of Major Findings*

| Comparing Teachers With and Without Forgiveness Education Experience | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Finding | z | p | α |
| More FEt than nonFEt endorsed emotional well-being as a benefit of forgiveness education | -3.24 | 4.07e-4 | .004 |
| More nonFEt than FEt viewed a lack of knowledge as an implementation challenge | 4.14 | 2.38e-5 | .002 |

| Comparing Greek and Saudi Arabian Teachers' Perspectives | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Finding | z | p | α |
| More Saudi than Greek teachers viewed forgiveness as reconciliation | 8.75 | < 2.87e-7 | 4.46 |
| More Saudi than Greek teachers viewed forgiveness as excusing an unjust act | 5.509 | < 2.87e-7 | .002 |
| More Greek than Saudi teachers viewed forgiveness as a merciful act | 3.323 | 6.3e-4 | .004 |
| More Greek than Saudi teachers viewed calmer student as a benefit of forgiveness education | 3.207 | 8.88e-4 | .005 |
| More Greek than Saudi teachers viewed conflict resolution skills to be a benefit of forgiveness education | 2.887 | 0.0019 | .005 |
| More Saudi than Greek teachers thought students would take advantage of forgiveness | 3.359 | 5.84e-4 | .0031 |
| Fewer Greek than Saudi teachers thought there was no danger for teachers forgiving students | 3.841 | 96e-5 | .003 |

Some of the similarities across the two Greek subsamples are worth noting. Most of the Greek participants (91%) perceived forgiveness to be different than reconciliation (93% FEt and 100% nonFEt, $p = .072$, $\alpha = .013$). The FEt and nonFEt also had similar views regarding what should be included in forgiveness education. Seventy-one percent of FEt and 73% of nonFEt, $p = .411$, $\alpha = .025$, thought teaching generosity was important for forgiveness education. Similarly, teachers shared perceptions of the classroom benefits of

forgiveness education: creating better classroom cooperation (90% FEt and 80% nonFEt, p = 0.098, α = .15), improving conflict resolution skills (81% FEt and 78% nonFEt, p = .381, α =0.024), and to a lesser degree, calming students down (55% FEt and 58% nonFEt, p = .40, α = .024). Moreover, the concerns of FEt and nonFEt were both relatively small regarding students taking advantage of forgiveness education (19% FEt and 24% nonFEt, p = .297, α = .022), and how forgiveness education could be integrated with the current curricular offering (16% FEt and 20% nonFEt, p = .332, α = .023).

**Comparing Greek and Saudi Arabian Teachers' Perspectives**

In addition to comparing teachers' views of forgiveness among teachers with and without experience delivering forgiveness education, we also compared teachers' views of forgiveness among teachers who were from two different geographical regions and cultures. Neither group had experience delivering forgiveness education. We found seven statistically significant differences between the groups. More Saudi (57%) than Greek (0%) teachers viewed forgiveness as reconciliation (z = 8.75, *SE* = 0.065, p < 2.87e-7, 95% CI = 0.441, 0.696, α = 4.46e-4). More Saudi (67%) than Greek (20%) teachers viewed forgiveness as excusing an unjust act (z = 5.509, *SE* = 0.086, p < 2.87e-7, CI = 0.304, 0.64, α = 0.0018). More Greek (51%) than Saudi (21%) teachers viewed forgiveness as a merciful act (z = -3.323, *SE* = 0.092, p = .00063, CI = - 0.125, -0.484, α = .0036). More Greek (58%) than Saudi (28%) teachers thought calmer student would be a short-term benefit of forgiveness education (z = -3.207, *SE* = 0.0942, p = 8.88e-4, CI = -0.117, -0.486, α = .0045). More Greek (78%) than Saudi (52%) teachers thought conflict resolution skills would be a long-term benefit of forgiveness education for students (z = -2.887, *SE* = 0.0903, p = 0.0019, CI = -0.084, -0.437, α = .0054). More Saudi (55%) than Greek (24%) teachers thought a risk of forgiveness education would be that students would take advantage of forgiveness (z = 3.359, *SE* = 0.0915, p = 5.84e-4, CI = 0.487, 0.128, α = .0031). Fewer Greek (2.2%) than Saudi (25.9%) teachers thought there was no danger for teachers forgiving students (z = -3.841, *SE* = 0.0616, p = 96e-5, CI [0.358, 0.116], α = .0027). We present a summary of the major findings in Table 1.

**Limitations**

Our study had three important limitations. First, we used convenience sampling which could limit the generalizability of the results. Convenience sampling might have introduced a source of systematic error. For example, it is possible that the similarities in the subsamples of Greek teachers were influenced by recruiting participants from a known network of teachers. We recommend that researchers interested in studying teachers' views of forgiveness education in the future use random sampling. Second, we recruited teachers across a wide range of grade levels, kindergarten through 12th grade. Teachers across grade levels instruct students with differing cognitive, behavioral, and emotional abilities. The teachers' experience with students at different developmental stages could influence their views of forgiveness education. We recommend researchers consider exploring grade level similarities and differences in teachers views of forgiveness education. Future research could focus on a grade level, middle school for example, or use a research design and data analyses that can control for grade level variation. Third, the survey asking teachers about their views of forgiveness did not specify a context for forgiveness. Some teachers may have answered the survey while thinking about interpersonal forgiveness while others may have been thinking about intergroup forgiveness. In addition, the nature of intergroup conflicts in

Greece and Saudi Arabia are different. Potential differences in participants' frame of reference could have affected the results. Future research could control for this by priming participants to consider a particular context for forgiveness. Despite these limitations, we believe the study advances the knowledgebase related to teachers' perceptions of forgiveness in schools.

## Discussion & Conclusion

Forgiveness education in schools has been proposed as a strategy to promote peace between groups (Nasser & Abu-Nimer, 2012; van der Walt et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2020). Empirical research on forgiveness in schools indicates forgiveness education has positive effects on psychological well-being as well as interpersonal and intergroup relationships (e.g., Enright et al., 2014; Ghobari Bonab et al., 2021). Most research on forgiveness education focuses on student outcomes; only a few studies have addressed teachers' understanding of forgiveness.

Our study adds to existing research by examining teachers' perceptions of what forgiveness education should include, the benefits and risks of forgiveness education, and the practical challenges of implementing forgiveness education. The questions used in the survey were derived from an existing forgiveness education curriculum and the research conducted on it. Our study had three distinct subsamples that allowed us to make comparisons between teachers with and without experience delivering forgiveness education and between teachers across two cultural contexts. The results of this study have implications for implementing forgiveness education in schools and for training teachers to deliver forgiveness education programs.

We found few differences between the Greek teachers who had experience teaching forgiveness education and the Greek teachers who did not. Teachers who had experience delivering forgiveness education were more likely than those without experience to think emotional well-being was a long-term benefit of forgiveness education. This difference could be due to training the educators received before implementing a forgiveness curriculum. This difference could also be the result of the teachers' observations of students who received forgiveness education. When implementing forgiveness education in a school system, training should include some information about existing research regarding the effects of forgiveness education. Training that provides teachers with empirically-based information about the benefits of forgiveness education could give teachers an accurate idea of what to expect for short- and long-term benefits of instructional programs focusing on forgiveness.

In addition, teachers without experience delivering forgiveness education were more likely than those with experience to view a lack of knowledge regarding forgiveness as a practical challenge of implementing forgiveness curricula in schools. This result is not surprising; we would not expect knowledge of forgiveness to be a barrier for teachers who have taught a forgiveness education program. Similarly, we would not expect teachers without experience delivering forgiveness education to feel confident in their knowledge of forgiveness. It is interesting to note that we did not find group differences between experienced and non- experienced forgiveness educators regarding their knowledge of forgiveness. This finding has an important implication for training teachers before implementing forgiveness education programs. Peace educators and school administrators who are interested in implementing forgiveness education should assess teachers' baseline understanding of forgiveness, and design the training based on the assessment results. In contexts like Greece, that already have forgiveness education programs in schools, teachers may not need a lot of structured training about the concept of forgiveness; training that addresses teachers' self-efficacy by emphasizing the knowledge of forgiveness teachers

already possess could be very effective. In addition, training could focus more time on what the curriculum includes as well as teaching strategies for delivering content than on conceptual issues related to the meaning of forgiveness. Experienced forgiveness educators could participate in training and share their experiences implementing forgiveness programs in their classrooms. Hearing directly from other teachers might alleviate concerns teachers have regarding their knowledge of forgiveness.

The two Greek subsamples had important similarities which included their understanding of forgiveness, the concepts they thought should be included in forgiveness education, and the benefits they anticipated for classroom cooperation and for improving conflict resolution skills. Neither group was concerned that students would take advantage of forgiveness in the classroom. The consistency across the teachers is important to note. Nasser and Abu-Nimer (2012) discuss the importance of teachers in shaping students' beliefs and attitudes about others and students' abilities to deal with conflict situations. If teachers have a consistent conceptualization of forgiveness and agree on the important concepts that should be included in forgiveness education, then students across grade levels and across schools are likely to receive similar messages from their teachers about the importance of forgiveness for understanding others and for dealing with perceived unfair treatment. The common understanding of forgiveness would allow teachers to shape students' beliefs and attitudes in a consistent way, creating the possibility of systemic change in intergroup conflict across school districts.

We found important group differences between the teachers from Greece and from Saudi Arabia. The two groups had different conceptual understandings of forgiveness. Fewer Saudi teachers than Greek teachers differentiated forgiveness from reconciliation and excusing a bad act. In addition, more Greek than Saudi teachers viewed forgiveness as a merciful act. These differences are at the heart of what forgives means and are therefore important for peace educators to consider. On these variables, the Greek teachers' views of forgiveness were more consistent with the definition of forgiveness used in this study than the Saudi teachers' views. We used the philosophical definition of forgiveness developed by Enright (Enright et al., 1998) because of its cross-cultural validity (Enright et al., 2016) and its use in developing forgiveness education programs.

At this point we are not sure if the differences observed in this study are the result of cultural differences. It is possible Eastern Orthodoxy and Muslim countries might need different educational approaches to forgiveness. Nasser and Abu-Nimer (2012) argued in their study of teachers' views of forgiveness, that culture has a role in forgiveness. Our findings could be interpreted as cross-cultural differences between Greek and Saudi teachers. However, we caution that additional research is needed before making this conclusion for two reasons. First, two studies we reviewed indicated contextual and intrapersonal factors are related to views on forgiveness. Zembylas and Bekerman (2012) found teachers from Cyprus and Israel had different views regarding if or when forgiveness could be offered. They noted historical and political contexts of intergroup conflict make the relationships between forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation very complex. In addition, Rique and Lins-Dyer (2003) reported characteristics of individual teachers, such as teaching experience and approaches to discipline, were related to views about forgiveness in schools. The group differences we observed in our study might be the result of contextual factors in Greece and Saudi Arabia and / or individual characteristics of the teachers in the study rather than differences in the ways in which the two cultural groups understand forgives. Second, the forgiveness intervention study by Ghobari Bonab et al., (2021) used Enright's educational framework in Iran, a Muslim country like Saudi Arabia. The teachers in Iran received training on

forgiveness and accepted the philosophical views from the Enright model. Peace educators need additional research examining cultural influences on forgiveness education before concluding people across cultures have fundamentally different understandings of what forgiveness means.

For our purposes here, we conclude training for forgiveness education should clearly present the philosophical distinctions between forgiveness and similar concepts. In addition, training should identify social and intrapersonal factors that can influence personal views on the conditions in which forgiveness is possible or appropriate. In some settings training will need to help teachers understand how forgiveness relates to seeking justice and reconciling with offenders. After teachers understand the nuances between forgiveness, pardoning, excusing, and reconciling as well as between justice and mercy, training can address the content of forgiveness education programs and pedagogical strategies. Although program concepts will be similar across contexts, instructional materials and teaching methods can be context specific to address different cultural expressions of forgiveness as well as differences in historical, political, and intrapersonal contexts. Training can help educators build cultural variations into forgiveness curriculum, such as the kinds of stories presented to students, while keeping the underlying themes of what forgiveness is and what it is not common across curricula and cultures.

The two groups of teachers also had different views of the benefits and risks of forgiveness in the classroom. Specifically, more Greek than Saudi teachers thought benefits of forgiveness education included calmer students and better conflict resolution skills. In addition, educators form Saudi Arabia were more likely than those from Greece to think students would take advantage of forgiveness education, and that there was danger in teachers forgiving students. Peace educators interested in implementing forgiveness education in schools should include the growing empirical literature investigating the outcomes of forgiveness education in training materials. The research literature on forgiveness education can not only provide teachers with accurate expectations for what they will likely observe in their classrooms, but also with tools to assess their own programs. Expanding forgiveness education to more classrooms and more schools might depend on convincing teachers that forgiveness programs in schools will benefit their classrooms.

We believe additional research related to teachers' views of forgiveness education is important. As mentioned earlier, continued exploration of cross-cultural similarities or differences in teachers' understanding of forgiveness is warranted. How teachers conceptualize forgiveness could influence training and curriculum development. We also suggest researchers consider designing studies that can assess how teachers' own experience of interpersonal or intergroup injury impact their views of teaching forgiveness in schools. Finally, we believe additional research is needed on what teachers think should be included in forgiveness education. Horowski (2021) posits self-forgiveness is important for education about the forgiveness of others. This is an idea that could be investigated with a study that is like the current research. Learning more about teachers' ideas for structuring forgiveness education could improve the content and the implementation of school-based forgiveness education programs.

Increasingly, forgiveness education is viewed as a way to resolve conflict between individuals and between groups. Few studies have explored teachers' perceptions of forgiveness even though teachers are essential for implementing forgiveness education programs. Our study used an established forgiveness education model to compare teachers' views of forgiveness across levels of experience with forgiveness education and cultural contexts. Our results inform the implementation of forgiveness education in schools.

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**Appendix A**
**Survey of Saudi Teachers**
Teacher Evaluation Questionnaire

General information
Age:
   a) 24-34
   b) 35-44
   c) 45-54
   d) 55-60
Gender:
   a) Male
   b) Female
School level:
   a) Kindergarten
   b) Elementary
   c) Middle school
   d) High school

1. Have you ever handled a conflict situation between students? (give an example)
   Yes                    No
2. When a person forgives is this the same thing as when two people reconcile with one another? Yes                No
3. If forgiveness and reconciliation are different, how are they different?
4. When one person forgives another, is the forgiver excusing what the other person did?
   Yes                        No
5. When one forgives another person, should the one who forgives also seek justice or fairness regarding what happened? (Give us an example or an explanation for why you think like that)?
   a) Yes, the person who forgive should seek justice regarding what happened
   b) No, the person should not seek justice regarding what happened

6. What do you think forgiveness education is?
7. If we presume that forgiveness education exists, what would be some important themes or ideas that you would want the students to know in forgiveness education?
Please check all that apply:
a) Helping students to see the value of each person
b) Helping students to be kind to those who have hurt them
c) Helping students get higher grades in their academic subjects
e) Helping students to be respectful of one another
f) Helping students to be generous with one another
g) Helping students to be loving toward one another
h) Helping students to complete their assignments on time
i) Other, please specify
8. Which of the following would you prefer to teach to your students?
**a)**        Kindness
**b)**        Respect

**c)**     Generosity
**d)**     Love
**e)**     All of the above
9.  In the short run, what do you think some benefits of forgiveness education are?
        Please check all that apply:
a) Less anger in students who are frustrated
b) Greater cooperation among students
c) Less arguing among students
d) Creating more loving hearts in the students
e) The students being calmer
f) Other, please specify


10. In the long run, once they are adults, what are some of the benefits that the
    students may have if they learned to forgive when they are students in school?
        Please check all that apply:
a) Being a better husband or wife
b) Being a more cooperative citizen of the community
c) Being kinder to children who will be raised
d) Being emotionally healthier
e) Being less resentful
f) Knowing better how to resolve conflicts
g) Other, please specify
11. Might forgiveness education help increase cooperation in the classroom? If it so,
    how might that occur?
    Yes                          No


12. What might be some dangers in teaching forgiveness to students?
        Please check all that apply:
a) Students will become weak in their interactions with others
b) Students will stop seeking fair solutions to their problems
c) Students will think that they automatically must reconcile with hurtful others
d) Students might take advantage of another person by telling him or her to forgive
them for anything that they do which is wrong
e) Students will become frustrated and angry that they cannot more boldly solve
their interpersonal problems
f) Other, please specify
g) I don't think there is any danger in teaching forgiveness to students.
13. Do you think boys school need to have forgiveness education more than girls'
    school? (state the reason please)
14. What does it mean for you to forgive? (please choose the possible answer below)
a)  To forgive is to reconcile with another.
b)  To forgive is to wipe away the injustice as if the injustice never existed.
c)  To forgive is to offer mercy and goodness to those who do not have mercy or
    goodness toward the one who forgive.
d)  To forgive is to find an excuse for what the other did so that it seen as morally
    acceptable.
15. When you teach forgiveness education which of the following do you think
    would be your most positive benefit as person?

a) Teaching forgiveness education will help me to be a better teacher, more attentive to the students' needs.
b) Forgiveness education will help me to be a better person, more loving and kinder toward people in general both in school and out of school.
c) Forgiveness will help me to become a better Muslim attentive to the word of Quran.
d) I do not see that I would benefit from teaching forgiveness education to my students.

16. Is there is anything else that you would like to add to help us thinking about forgiveness education in schools?