Willingness to Forgive Oneself and Others as a Way of Personal Growth of University Students

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the problem the personal growth of students in educational environment. It is indicated that psychological consultation with students in the educational environment on interpersonal problems is a factor in their personal development. The relationship between willingness to forgiveness oneself and others and personal growth in university students is analyzed. The factors of personal growth in university students were investigated. The following hypotheses were formulated: 1) willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness in university students are positively correlated with personal growth, personal self-efficacy; 2) willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness, hardiness, sociability, psychological resilience are significant factors of personal growth in university students. The participants were 512 Ukrainian university students (260 women; 252 men). Scale of Deep Readiness for Forgiveness, Trait Forgivingness (dispositional) Scale, Overall Self-efficacy Scale, Scale of psychological well-being, Psychological Resilience Scale (PRS-11), Freiburg Personality Inventory, Hardiness Test, Mental Health Outcome Measures, Depression and Anxiety (BSI – 12) were applied. Pearson's correlation coefficients to test the features of the relationship between willingness to forgiveness and personal growth, personal self-efficacy in university students were investigated. The multiple regression analysis for the factors of personal growth in university students was performed. The important factors of personal growth were identified by the study. High levels of willingness to forgiveness, trait forgivingness, sociability, personal self-efficacy, autonomy, psychological resilience, hardiness, self-acceptance increase personal growth university students. The presented findings should be taken into account by persons offering professional support for university students.

Keywords: *willingness to forgiveness; trait forgivingness; personal growth; university students; personal self-efficacy.*

How to cite: Kravchuk, S. (2021). Willingness to Forgive Oneself and Others as a Way of Personal Growth of University Students. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 13(3), 262-279.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/13.3/451>

1. Introduction

According to many empirical studies, the concept of personal growth is one of the central concepts used to analyze the processes of personal development, self-realization, self-actualization (Anderson et. al., 2020; Cirtia-Buzoianu et al., 2020; Dorfman & Kalugin, 2020; Maurer & Daukantaite, 2020; Van Woerkom & Meyers, 2019).

The educational environment in universities is a factor that can create optimal conditions for personal development. The view of education as a process of information transfer and assimilation of knowledge will not hinder the personal development of students. It is necessary to create such an educational environment that would take into account the psychological characteristics of personality development and would promote its personal growth and self-realization.

The educational environment is defined as a system of purposeful influences and effective conditions for the development of the individual, as well as opportunities for self-realization and self-improvement.

Dorfman and Kalugin (2020) argue that the urgent task in today's educational environment is to create conditions that would promote personal growth.

That is why it is very important to introduce into the education system psychological and pedagogical support for the development of personal potential. The development of personal potential will contribute to successful social adaptation, self-realization, creative and spiritual formation, and formation of an active life position.

Azrak (2020) and Lyberger (2020) emphasize the importance of psychological support in the educational environment.

The content of psychological and pedagogical support of personality development is the process of studying, forming, and correcting personality development. Psychological counseling on personal development is one of the important components of psychological support of the educational process.

Researchers Esquivel and Cordova (2020) argue that educational programs need to take into account emotions, social relationships, the meaning of life, personal goals and achievements.

Cirtia-Buzoianu, Cojocariu and Mares (2020) believe that it is very important to involve students in psychological counseling and career guidance to support the process of building their own professional and personal path.

Psychological consultation with students in the educational environment on interpersonal problems is a factor in their personal development.

Morales-Rodrigues et al. (2020) point out that educational policy should be aimed at improving the psychological well-being of university students. Psychological well-being is correlated with personal growth and development during the academic semester (Anderson et al., 2020; Esquivel & Cordova, 2020).

Van Woerkom and Meyers (2019) believe that personal growth is a central individual need that determines self-efficacy.

Researchers Maurer and Daukantaite (2020) view personal growth as a process that integrates various aspects of well-being.

We believe that willingness to forgiveness oneself and others is an important factor in psychological well-being and personal growth in university students.

It is very important in psychological counseling of students to show that forgiveness is a way of solving many personal and interpersonal problems, reducing aggression and violence.

Today the concept of forgiveness is not clearly defined.

Forgiveness is considered by scholars as mental state, action, personal disposition, abilities, characteristics of social units, ***partial manifestation and result of the mechanisms of social cognition of the person*** (Berry et al., 2005; Emmons, 2000; McCullough, 2001; VanderWeele, 2018; Wade & Worthington, 2005; Worthington, Cowden, 2017; Yucel & Arslanturk, 2019).

Heider (1958) noted that forgiveness is better considered as a person's choice to give up vindictive behavior. The forgiveness of the offender involves letting go of negative experiences such as anger, hatred, sadness, resentment (Worthington & Cowden, 2017).

Scholars Mu and Bobocel (2019) believe that cognitive and motivational processes play an important role in understanding reconciliation and forgiveness.

Emmons (2000) points out that forgiveness is seen as a high-level personal construct in which individuals have the certain characteristics. In this context, Emmons identifies such important characteristics as empathy, friendliness and desire to be in a harmonious relationship, humility, availability of emotion control skills, the ability to be receptive to circumstances that reduce anger.

Enright (2001) proves that forgiveness requires the offended person to renounce anger and resentment. Breslav (2020) believes that forgiveness is the opposite of resentment.

Researchers Yucel and Arslanturk (2019) view forgiveness as a strength of character and a forerunner of humility.

We believe that forgiveness should be considered as a process of a person's conscious rejection of resentment, anger, hatred, indignation, sadness caused by the unfair treatment of others. ***In the process of forgiveness there is a replacement*** of negative feelings with more neutral and, finally, positive, such as compassion, pity, accompanied by positive thoughts about the offender and the termination of his conviction.

Scholars Freedman and Zarifkar (2016) highlight the importance of forgiveness as a therapeutic approach. According to some empirical studies, people who have not learned forgiveness have significantly more stress-related illnesses (Fitzgibbons, 1986; Masten, 2014; Raj et al., 2016; Reed & Enright, 2006; Strelan & Covic, 2006; VanderWeele, 2018).

In our opinion, the forgiveness plays an important role in personal growth, personal self-efficacy in university students.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this study were to explore the features of the relationship between willingness to forgive oneself and others and personal growth in university students; to empirically determine the factors of personal growth in university students.

3. Hypotheses

Such hypotheses formed the basis of the study design plan:

H1: Willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness in university students are positively correlated with personal growth, personal self-efficacy.

H2: Willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness, hardiness, sociability, psychological resilience are significant factors of personal growth in university students.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

The ***respondents*** of study were 512 Ukrainian students (female = 260, 50.78 %; male = 252, 49.22 %). ***The sample of respondents***

consisted of 261 Ukrainian youthful students who receive the first higher education (female = 132, 25.78 %; male = 129, 25.20 %), aged between 19 and 23 years and 251 Ukrainian students who receive a second degree (female = 128, 25.00 %; male = 123, 24.02 %), aged between 24 and 56 years. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample of respondents by gender and age.

Table 1. Sample distribution by gender and age
Source: Authors' own conception

Groups	19-23 years		24-56 years		Total	
	№	%	№	%	№	%
Female	132	25.78	128	25.00	260	50.78
Male	129	25.20	123	24.02	252	49.22
Total	261	50.98	251	49.02	512	100.00

The sample of **respondents** was formed from 5 Ukrainian universities: Taras Shevchenko National University, M. P. Drahomanov National Pedagogical University, Kyiv National Linguistic University, Borys Hrinchenko University, "KROK" University of Economics and Law.

Tests and questionnaires were offered to respondents individually. Respondents participated in the study voluntarily. Respondents' participation in the study was confidential and voluntary. **The study was conducted according to the ethical principles** and codes of conduct **of the** American Psychological Association (2016).

4.2. Measurement instruments

The scale of deep readiness for forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005). The questionnaire contains four such scales: 1) forgiveness of oneself (**in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90**); 2) forgiveness of another (**in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.89**); 3) forgiveness of the situation (**in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91**); 4) an integral indicator of willingness to forgive (**in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90**).

Trait Forgivingness (dispositional) Scale (the authors: J. W. Berry, E. L. Worthington, L. E. O'Connor, L. Parrott, N. G. Wade, 2005) contains 10 items rated on a five-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency. **In this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91.**

Psychological Resilience Scale (PRS-11) (the author: S. Kravchuk, 2019). Psychological Resilience Scale contains 11 items rated on a seven-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency. ***In this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92.***

The scale of psychological well-being (the authors: C. D. Ryff, C. L. Keyes, 1995) contains six such scales: 1) Positive Relationships (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 2) Autonomy (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92***); 3) Management of the environment (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91***); 4) Personal Growth (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 5) Goals in Life (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.89***); 6) Self-Acceptance (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91***). The integral indicator is Psychological Well-being (84 items) rated on a six-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency. ***In this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91.***

Overall Self-efficacy Scale (the authors: Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). The scale measures the overall measure of the subjective assessment of personal performance. Overall Self-efficacy Scale contains 10 items rated on a four-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency. ***In this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92.***

Hardiness Test (the author: Maddi, 1996) contains three such scales: 1) Commitment (18 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 2) Control (17 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92***); 3) Challenge (10 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***). The integral indicator is Hardiness. Hardiness Test contains 45 items rated on a four-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency. ***In this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91.***

Freiburg Personality Inventory (the authors: Fahrenberg et al., 2010) contains twelve such scales: 1) Neuroticism (17 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 2) Spontaneous Aggressiveness (13 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91***); 3) Depressiveness (14 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92***); 4) Irritability (11 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 5) Sociability (15 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 6) Stress Tolerance (10 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.89***); 7) Reactive Aggressiveness (10 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.90***); 8) Shyness (10 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91***); 9) Openness (13 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91***); 10) Extraversion-Introversion (12 items; ***in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92***); 11)

Emotional Lability (14 items; *in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.91*); 12) Masculinity-Femininity (15 items; *in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92*). Freiburg Personality Inventory contains 114 items rated on a two-point Scale (agree; disagree).

Mental Health Inventory. *Depression and Anxiety (BSI – 12)* (the author: L. R. Derogatis (Derogatis, 2001) contains two such scales: 1) Anxiety (6 items, *in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.92*); 2) Depression (6 items, *in this study, the McDonald's omega index is 0.93*). Depression and Anxiety (BSI – 12) contains 12 items rated on a five-point Likert-type Scale of Frequency.

4.3. Study design and statistical analysis

All the statistical analyses were conducted in Mplus, version 7.4 and IBM SPSS Statistics 21 Premium+AMOS.

Statistical analysis of the data included five procedural **steps**:

First, reliability of measures was assessed by indicator McDonald's omega.

Second, the sample of respondents for normal distribution based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test **was checked**.

Third, the Pearson's correlation coefficient to test the features of the relationship between willingness to forgiveness, trait forgivingness and personal growth, personal self-efficacy in university students was investigated.

Fourth, the Pearson's correlation coefficient to test the features of the relationship between personal growth and individual psychological characteristics were identified.

Fifth, multiple regression analysis for the factors of personal growth was performed.

5. Results and discussion

The sample of study **respondents** corresponds to the normal distribution. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that all variables have the significance level $p > 0.05$. It means that the given distribution does not differ statistically from the normal one.

Table 2 shows the relationship willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness and personal growth, personal self-efficacy in university students and other individual psychological characteristics.

Table 2. The relationship of willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness with individual psychological characteristics in university students

Source: Authors' own conception

<i>Indicators</i>	Willingness to forgive oneself		Willingness to forgive others		Trait forgivingness	
	Correlation coefficient	Sig. level	Correlation coefficient	Sig. level	Correlation coefficient	Sig. level
Personal growth	.41	$p < .001$	.48	$p < .001$	.56	$p < .001$
Personal self-efficacy	.39	$p < .001$	.45	$p < .001$	.49	$p < .001$
Hardiness	.46	$p < .001$	.42	$p < .001$	.52	$p < .001$
Commitment	.38	$p < .001$	.34	$p < .001$	.39	$p < .001$
Control	.42	$p < .001$	.47	$p < .001$	.51	$p < .001$
Challenge	.34	$p < .001$	.41	$p < .001$	.44	$p < .001$
Psychological resilience	.48	$p < .001$	.51	$p < .001$	.54	$p < .001$
Sociability	.37	$p < .001$	.39	$p < .001$	.42	$p < .001$
Resistance to stress	.43	$p < .001$	.46	$p < .001$	.53	$p < .001$
Anxiety	-.43	$p < .01$	-.41	$p < .01$	-.46	$p < .01$
Neuroticism	-.57	$p < .001$	-.54	$p < .001$	-.59	$p < .001$
Irritability	-.62	$p < .001$	-.58	$p < .001$	-.64	$p < .001$
Spontaneous aggressiveness	-.53	$p < .001$	-.55	$p < .001$	-.58	$p < .001$
Depression (BSI – 12)	-.59	$p < .001$	-.62	$p < .001$	-.64	$p < .01$
Depressiveness (FPI)	-.53	$p < .001$	-.56	$p < .001$	-.61	$p < .01$

Analysis of correlations between personal growth and willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness and other variables in university students showed that all the correlations were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Positive correlations between personal growth and willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness in university students were found. It means that higher level of personal growth is connected with higher level of willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness. The more university students are willing to forgive oneself and others the more they have a sense of continuous development, perceive themselves as “growing” and self-fulfilling, open to new experience, feel a sense of the realization of their potential, observe improvements in themselves and their

actions over time, change in accordance with their own knowledge and achievements.

Positive correlations between willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness and psychological resilience, hardiness, resistance to stress, control in university students were found. The more university students are willing to forgive oneself and others the more they are able to adapt positively in stressful, crisis, or emergencies; more capable of constructive reflection of difficult events and competent functioning in difficult life situations.

Fletcher and Sarkar (2013) believe that people with psychological resilience have the competence in stressful conditions, the ability to constructively reflect complex events.

Research has shown that there is a significant positive association between psychological resilience and mental health (Gong et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2015).

According to Maddi and Khoshaba (1994), hardiness reflects the psychological vitality and increased efficiency of personality, as well as an indicator of his mental health. Control as a “hardy” attitude motivates the individual to find ways to influence the results of stressful changes, as opposed to falling into a state of helplessness and passivity. Maddi and Khoshaba (1994) noted that a person with developed control chooses his own activities, his own way of life.

Positive correlations were found between willingness to forgive of oneself and others, trait forgivingness and personal self-efficacy, commitment, sociability, challenge. The more university students are willing to forgive oneself and others the more successfully cope with social tasks and have optimistic scenarios for the development of events; ***the more they perceive themselves as a significant and valuable person to be fully involved in solving life's problems;*** the more they have a satisfactory, trusting relationship with others; care for ***the well-being of others; are able to empathize, allow attachments and close relationships; understand that human relations are based on mutual concessions; the more they see life as a way of acquiring positive and negative experiences with the aim of their own development.***

Satici's research (2020) findings showed a significant and positive correlation between belongingness and forgiveness.

Research by Haslip, Allen-Handy and Donaldson (2019) found that love, kindness, and forgiveness contribute to emotional health, positive relationships, and increased well-being in children and adults. Research by

Karduz and Saricam (2018) has shown a significant positive correlation between forgiveness and positivity.

The studies (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Crandall et al., 2019; Lijo, 2018; Ursua & Valdes, 2018) found that forgiveness was positively correlated with mental health.

Negative correlations were found between willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness and irritability, depression (BSI – 12), neuroticism, depressiveness (FPI), spontaneous aggressiveness, anxiety, which mean that higher levels of willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness are connected with lower levels of these variables.

According to a study by Abid et al. (2015), there is a negative significant correlation between the level of forgiveness and neuroticism. Interestingly, this study also found a positive significant correlation between the level of forgiveness and conscientiousness, extroversion, openness and agreeableness.

Researchers Kaleta and Mroz (2020) believe that forgiveness may be a mechanism by which hope reduces the likelihood of depression. Forgiveness can help reduce anger, depression, and anxiety and increase empathy, hope, and life satisfaction (Asici, 2019).

Another analysis focused on identifying factors of personal growth. The method of multiple regression analysis was used to assess statistically significant predictors on the dependent variable, i. e. personal growth (see Table 3).

Table 3. Coefficients for multiple regression analysis for dependent variable of personal growth in university students

Source: Authors' own conception

R = .726; R ² = .527; Adjusted R ² = .512 F = 17.826, p < .001					
Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p level
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	24.431	3.236		7.358	p < 0.01
Hardiness	.341	.048	.299	2.776	p < 0.01
Willingness to forgive oneself	.512	.068	.309	2.834	p < 0.01
Willingness to forgive others	.369	.158	.325	2.932	p < 0.01
Trait forgivingness	.632	.057	.376	3.241	p < 0.01

Sociability	.338	.088	.293	2.695	$p < 0.01$
Self-acceptance	.331	.026	.284	2.673	$p < 0.01$
Management of the environment	.056	.048	.078	1.062	$p > 0.05$
Resistance to stress	.339	.052	.281	2.670	$p < 0.01$
Autonomy	.094	.055	.127	1.989	$p < 0.05$
Psychological resilience	.351	.087	.336	3.122	$p < 0.01$
Goals in life	.466	.089	.209	2.293	$p < 0.01$

The regression model was found to be statistically significant and explained approximately 53 % of the dependent variable. The following predictors were included in the model: willingness to forgive of oneself, willingness to forgive others, trait forgivingness, psychological resilience, hardiness, resistance to stress, sociability, self-acceptance, management of the environment, autonomy, goals in life.

The positive statistically significant regression coefficients ($p < .05$) by multiple **regression** analysis shown on table 3 indicate that the greatest influence on personal growth is exerted by the following factors:

- 1) trait forgivingness (standardized Beta coefficient = .376);
- 2) psychological resilience (standardized Beta coefficient = .336);
- 3) willingness to forgive others (standardized Beta coefficient = .325);
- 4) willingness to forgive oneself (standardized Beta coefficient = .309);
- 5) hardiness (standardized Beta coefficient = .299);
- 6) sociability (standardized Beta coefficient = .293);
- 7) self-acceptance (standardized Beta coefficient = .284);
- 8) resistance to stress (standardized Beta coefficient = .281);
- 9) goals in life (standardized Beta coefficient = .209);
- 10) autonomy (standardized Beta coefficient = .127).

The results show that the important factors of personal growth are as follows: tendency to forgive as a trait, psychological resilience (as an integrative feature of individual which manifests itself in ability to maintain a stable level of psychological and physical functioning in critical situations, to come out of such situations without persistent violations, to successfully adapt to adverse changes), willingness to forgive others, willingness to forgive oneself.

Also, the important factors of personal growth are:

1. Success in overcoming the adverse difficulties of life.
2. Satisfactory and trusting relationships with others; concern for the welfare of others; the ability to empathize, the presence of affection and

close relationships; understanding that human relations are based on mutual concessions.

3. A positive attitude towards oneself, knowledge and acceptance of various aspects of oneself, including good and bad qualities, a positive assessment of one's past life.

4. High ability to resist stress factors.

5. Having a purpose in life and a sense of direction; having a belief that past and present life has meaning; having intention and purpose for life.

6. Independence and independence, the ability to resist the attempts of society to make people think and act in a certain way; independence in regulating one's own behavior; self-assessment according to personal criteria.

A study by Kumar and Dixit (2014) showed that there was statistically significant positive correlation among forgiveness, resilience and gratitude. Willingness to forgive displaced persons from the combat zone is a predictor of psychological resilience (Kravchuk, 2020).

It should be said that the study of Porada, Sammut and Milburn (2018) showed that unconditional self-acceptance was significantly positively correlated with dispositional forgiveness.

Research by Hill and Allemand (2010) found that forgiveness and self-forgiveness are correlated with lower levels of negative affect (frustration, sadness, etc.) and higher levels of positive relationships.

Researchers Mavrogiorgou, Meister and Juckel (2018) believe that forgiveness can be seen as a coping mechanism for trauma, injustice and bitterness, as well as a psychotherapeutic intervention that leads to long-term reduction in intrapsychic instability and improves personal well-being.

6. Conclusions

The educational environment in universities should contribute to the personal development of students, their vital self-determination and self-realization.

The formulated hypotheses were confirmed in an empirical study.

Positive correlations between personal growth and willingness to forgive of oneself and others, trait forgivingness in university students were revealed. The higher level of personal growth is connected with higher level of willingness to forgive of oneself and others, trait forgivingness. The more university students are willing to forgive oneself and others the more they have a sense of continuous development, perceive themselves as "growing"

and self-fulfilling, open to new experience, feel a sense of the realization of their potential, observe improvements in themselves and their actions over time, change in accordance with their own knowledge and achievements.

Positive correlations between willingness to forgive of oneself and others, trait forgivingness and psychological resilience, hardiness, resistance to stress, control, personal self-efficacy, commitment, sociability, challenge in university students were found. The more university students are willing to forgive oneself and others

- the more they are able to function competently under stressful conditions;

- they are more successful in overcoming the adverse difficulties of life; the more they feel that they choose their own activities, their own way of life;

- the more successfully cope with social tasks and have optimistic scenarios for the development of events;

- ***the more they perceive themselves as a significant and valuable person to be fully involved in solving life's problems;***

- the more they have a satisfactory, trusting relationship with others; care for the well-being of others; are able to empathize, allow attachments and close relationships; understand that human relations are based on mutual concessions;

- ***the more they see life as a way of acquiring positive and negative experiences with the aim of their own development.***

Negative correlations between willingness to forgive oneself and others, trait forgivingness and irritability, depression (BSI – 12), neuroticism, depressiveness (FPI), spontaneous aggressiveness, anxiety in university students were revealed.

High levels of trait forgivingness, willingness to forgive others, willingness to forgive oneself, hardiness, sociability, self-acceptance, resistance to stress, autonomy, goals in life increase the personal growth in university students.

The practical value of the study is that the results can be used in further research on the problem of personal growth and forgiveness psychology, as well as in psychological counseling of university students in order to solve personal and interpersonal problems and to create conditions for constructive interaction in stressful situations.

The presented findings should be taken into account by persons offering professional support for university students.

The scientific data will contribute to the creation of a training program for personal growth in university students.

We plan to continue studying the psychological features of the relationship between forgiveness and personal growth in further research.

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