



The Relationship Between Forgiveness and Self-Esteem among High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem among 11th-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. A quantitative, correlational approach was used in this research. The sample consisted of 373 students, measured using the Forgiveness Scale and the Self-Esteem Scale. Data analysis was performed using Pearson's product-moment correlation technique with SPSS version 25. The results showed that students' level of forgiveness was moderate, while their self-esteem was high. The correlation test yielded $r = -0.216$ and $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a significant negative relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. In other words, the higher the level of forgiveness among students, the lower their self-esteem, and vice versa. These findings emphasize the importance of guidance and counseling services in helping students understand that forgiveness is not a weakness, but rather a psychological strength that supports emotional development and positive social relationships. The implications of this study suggest the need for counseling programs that introduce healthy forgiveness concepts to help students improve their self-esteem.

KATA KUNCI

Pemaafan;
Harga Diri;
Siswa SMA

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara pemaafan dan harga diri pada siswa kelas XI SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode korelasional. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 373 siswa yang diukur menggunakan Skala Pemaafan dan Skala Harga Diri. Analisis data dilakukan dengan teknik korelasi Product Moment Pearson menggunakan program SPSS versi 25. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tingkat pemaafan siswa berada pada kategori sedang, sedangkan tingkat harga diri berada pada kategori tinggi. Uji korelasi menghasilkan nilai $r = -0,216$ dengan $p = 0,000$ ($p < 0,01$), yang menunjukkan adanya hubungan negatif dan signifikan antara pemaafan dan harga diri. Dengan kata lain, semakin tinggi tingkat pemaafan siswa, semakin rendah tingkat harga dirinya, dan sebaliknya. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya peran layanan bimbingan dan konseling dalam membantu siswa memahami bahwa memaafkan bukanlah bentuk kelemahan, melainkan kekuatan psikologis yang mendukung perkembangan emosi dan hubungan sosial yang positif. Implikasi dari hasil penelitian ini adalah perlunya program bimbingan yang dapat memperkenalkan konsep pemaafan yang sehat kepada siswa untuk mendukung peningkatan harga diri mereka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by highly dynamic emotional, social, and cognitive changes. During this phase, adolescents strive to establish their personal identity, form stable social relationships, and develop more mature emotional regulation skills (Santrock, 2019). The school environment serves as one of the most influential contexts, as it provides opportunities for adolescents to interact, collaborate, and encounter various forms of interpersonal conflict. When such conflicts are not managed effectively, adolescents may experience emotional distress in the form of prolonged anger, resentment, and hostility. These conditions not only

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disrupt psychological well-being but also negatively affect the quality of social relationships within the school setting.

One essential capacity that adolescents need to develop is forgiveness, defined as the process of letting go of negative emotions and replacing them with empathy, understanding, and goodwill (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Forgiveness has been shown to have positive effects on mental health, including reducing stress, improving the quality of interpersonal relationships, and promoting psychological well-being (Wade et al., 2014). However, the ability to forgive does not emerge automatically; various internal factors shape this process. One of the most influential personal factors is self-esteem, which refers to an individual's evaluation of their own worth and abilities (Rosenberg, 1965).

Research indicates that adolescents with high self-esteem tend to regulate their emotions more effectively, feel less threatened by interpersonal situations, and are more willing to forgive others' mistakes (Orth et al., 2014). In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to harbor anger for extended periods and struggle to release negative emotional experiences (Baumeister et al., 2003). These findings suggest that self-esteem influences not only self-perception but also an individual's capacity to build healthy social relationships through forgiveness.

In addition to theoretical foundations, empirical studies also support the relationship between self-esteem and forgiveness. Juwita and Kustanti (2020) found that forgiveness is positively associated with psychological well-being among victims of bullying. Helmut and Nancy (2021) demonstrated that empathy plays a significant role in enhancing forgiveness among adolescents. Another study by Mubarok (2024) revealed that emotional maturity is correlated with students' levels of forgiveness. Meanwhile, research on self-esteem shows that it plays a crucial role in the development of adolescents' social behavior (Kasherman, 2023), and higher self-esteem is associated with the ability to forgive oneself and others (Inventory & Scale, 2023).

These findings reinforce the view that the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem constitutes a relevant and important area of study, particularly among secondary school adolescents. Adolescents who can forgive are more likely to develop healthy social relationships, while positive self-esteem serves as a key foundation for these emotional capacities. Therefore, research examining the relationship between these two variables can make a meaningful contribution to the development of school guidance and counseling services.

Beyond its theoretical value, research on forgiveness and self-esteem also carries practical significance. School counselors need to understand the factors that influence students' ability to manage interpersonal conflicts. If self-esteem is shown to be related to the tendency to forgive, guidance and counseling services can design intervention programs to strengthen self-esteem, such as individual counseling, emotional regulation training, and classroom-based guidance on self-acceptance. These approaches are consistent with the recommendations of Enright and Fitzgibbons (1968), who emphasize the importance of integrating forgiveness values into character education.

Research on the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem among high school students is highly relevant from both academic and practical perspectives. A deeper understanding of the relationship between these two variables is expected to help schools create a healthy and supportive environment that fosters optimal social and emotional development among students.

This study aims to examine and analyze the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. More specifically, the study seeks to obtain an empirical overview of students' levels of forgiveness and self-esteem and to identify the extent to which forgiveness contributes to the formation and strengthening of self-esteem during adolescence. The findings of this study are expected to provide a scientific basis for the development of school guidance and counseling services to enhance students' psychological well-being and adjustment.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive approach. The quantitative approach was designed to address the research questions through statistical analysis, thereby yielding numerical scores that offer an overview of students' levels of forgiveness and self-esteem. The descriptive method was used to present the research findings based on the obtained scores. Heppner et al. (2016) explain that descriptive research focuses on describing phenomena or conditions as they naturally occur, without manipulating the variables under investigation.

This study also adopted a correlational research design. According to Heppner et al. (2016), a correlational design aims to examine the relationship between two or more variables. Similarly, Sugiyono (2019) states that

correlational research is conducted to determine the extent of relationships among variables without manipulating, adding to, or altering the variables being studied. Based on these perspectives, correlational research is used to identify the association between two or more variables. In this study, a correlational design was selected to examine whether forgiveness is related to self-esteem among adolescents at SMAN 2 Tasikmalaya, without implementing any intervention or manipulating the research subjects.

2.2 Participants

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya in 2025. This school was selected because its population characteristics aligned with the study's focus. The sampling technique used was saturated sampling, in which the entire population of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya was included as the research sample. This approach was applied because the population size was manageable and all members met the research criteria. By using this technique, the findings are expected to represent the overall population conditions comprehensively, with minimal sampling bias.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in classrooms during instructional hours, with the assistance of school counselors to ensure that the procedures were implemented systematically and in accordance with research standards. This assistance aimed to facilitate the smooth administration of the research instruments and to ensure that students responded honestly and without external disturbances. Involving school counselors was also expected to foster a supportive, comfortable environment for respondents during data collection. This procedure ensured that all participants clearly understood the instructions, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the collected data.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study population consisted of all eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. The sampling technique used was saturated sampling, in which the entire population was included as the sample because the number was manageable and all members met the research criteria (Sugiyono, 2019). This approach ensured that the research findings represented the overall population conditions.

Data were collected using two validated instruments. The researcher developed the Forgiveness Scale based on the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-18) theory proposed by McCullough (2000), which includes three dimensions: avoidance motivation, revenge motivation, and benevolence motivation. The Self-Esteem Scale was adopted from Aryanto (2021) and developed based on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) by Coopersmith (1967), encompassing four dimensions: power, competence, significance, and virtue.

Both instruments used Likert-type scales with five response options for forgiveness and four for self-esteem. The instruments were tested for validity and reliability, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.921 for forgiveness and 0.931 for self-esteem, indicating very high reliability. Data were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation through IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

2.5 Research Procedure

The research procedure consisted of four stages: (1) instrument preparation and research permission, (2) distribution and completion of the instruments, (3) data processing and analysis, and (4) preparation of the final report. All stages adhered to ethical principles of educational research, including maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The data analysis in this study aimed to provide an overview of levels of forgiveness and self-esteem among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. The research data are presented in tabular form to facilitate understanding and interpretation. The following tables present the distributions of forgiveness and self-esteem scores across assessment categories.

The results on the overall level of forgiveness among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya in the 2025/2026 academic year involved a total of 373 students, comprising 177 males and 196 females. The profile of the overall level of forgiveness is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of Forgiveness Levels

Criteria	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
$X > 99$	High	21	5.63%	60%
$61 \leq X \leq 99$	Moderate	325	94.4%	
$X < 61$	Low	0	0%	

The findings indicate that of 373 students, 21 (5.63%) demonstrated a high level of forgiveness, 325 (94.4%) were in the moderate category, and none were in the low category. These results suggest that the students' overall level of forgiveness is moderate.

Meanwhile, the profile of self-esteem among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya in the 2025/2026 academic year, comprising 373 students (177 males and 196 females), is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of Self-Esteem Levels

Score Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mean
$X > 150$	High	234	62.7%	63%
$100 \leq X \leq 150$	Moderate	139	37.3%	
$X < 100$	Low	0	0%	

For the self-esteem variable, 234 students (62.7%) were classified in the high category, 139 students (37.3%) in the moderate category, and none in the low category. Thus, the overall level of students' self-esteem can be categorized as high, reflecting a generally positive psychological condition.

Based on the Pearson correlation analysis between forgiveness and self-esteem among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya, conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, the following results were obtained:

Table 3. Correlation Results]

	Forgiveness	Self-Esteem
Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation = 1 Sig. (2-tailed) = — N = 373	$r = -0.216^{**}$ $p = 0.000$ N = 373
Self-Esteem	$r = -0.216^{**}$ $p = 0.000$ N = 373	Pearson Correlation = 1 Sig. (2-tailed) = — N = 373

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation test yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.216$ with $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.01$). These results indicate a significant negative relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya. This finding suggests that higher levels of forgiveness tend to be associated with lower levels of self-esteem, and vice versa.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the level of forgiveness among eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya falls within the moderate range. At the same time, their self-esteem is classified as high. These findings suggest that students generally possess the ability to manage negative emotions and evaluate themselves positively; however, both aspects can still be enhanced through character education programs and school-based guidance services. The following discussion elaborates on the relationship between the research findings, relevant theories, and previous studies.

The moderate level of forgiveness among students indicates that their ability to reduce negative motivations such as desires for revenge, anger, and resentment has developed. However, it has not yet reached a more advanced stage characterized by the emergence of positive motivations to rebuild relationships. McCullough (2000) explains that forgiveness involves two processes: a reduction in negative motivations and an increase in positive motiva-

tions. In this study, the decline in negative motivations is evident; however, strengthening positive motivations still requires additional support and guidance.

The absence of students in the low-forgiveness category suggests that the school's social environment is supportive. Peer support, harmonious relationships among students, and a conducive learning environment help students develop empathy and make it easier for them to forgive. This finding is consistent with Worthington and Scherer's (2004) finding that forgiveness is more likely to develop in empathetic and supportive environments.

The consistency of these findings with several previous studies further strengthens their validity. Juwita and Kustanti (2020) found that forgiveness is positively associated with psychological well-being, suggesting that students who can alleviate negative emotions tend to have better mental health. The findings of Helmut and Nancy (2021) show that empathy is an important predictor of forgiveness, supporting the notion that positive student interactions influence their ability to forgive. In addition, Habibi and Hidayati (2018) emphasized that forgiveness is associated with resilience, suggesting that students with higher levels of forgiveness are better able to cope adaptively with school-related stress. Mubarok's (2024) study, highlighting the role of emotional maturity in forgiveness, is also aligned with the present findings, as students were able to suppress most negative emotions but still required further development in positive emotional regulation.

Students' self-esteem was found to be in the high range, indicating that they generally have a positive self-perception and feel capable, accepted, and valuable in both social and academic contexts. Orth et al. (2014) state that high self-esteem is an indicator of positive self-evaluation and plays a crucial role in adolescents' psychological health. Accordingly, the condition of students at SMA Negeri 2 Tasikmalaya reflects relatively good psychological well-being.

An analysis of self-esteem dimensions shows that although some students fall into the moderate category, they still exhibit positive tendencies. In the Power and Significance aspects, students feel sufficiently accepted and valued by their environment, consistent with Coopersmith's (1967) theory, which emphasizes the role of social acceptance in the development of self-esteem. In the Competence aspect, students perceive themselves as capable of managing academic and social demands, aligning with Zhao et al. (2021), who state that a sense of competence is associated with learning motivation and academic performance. Meanwhile, the Virtue aspect, which reflects students' moral understanding, supports Kurnaz et al.'s (2020) view that moral behavior is an integral part of positive self-evaluation. These findings are also consistent with Kasherman (2023), who found that self-esteem is positively related to the ability to forgive, and with Inventory and Scale (2023), which reported that adolescents with high self-esteem are better able to forgive themselves and others. Furthermore, self-esteem has been shown to contribute to adolescents' psychological conditions and behaviors, including delinquency and depression, as noted by Fitriah and Hariyono (2019).

The relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem identified in this study indicates that both variables are interrelated and play an important role in shaping students' psychological conditions. The findings show that students with higher self-esteem tend to demonstrate better forgiveness abilities than those with moderate or low self-esteem. This can be explained through psychological processes in which individuals with positive self-evaluations are better able to manage negative emotions, view conflict situations more rationally, and avoid becoming trapped in feelings of anger or resentment. Thus, high self-esteem functions as a protective factor in the development of forgiveness.

These findings are consistent with Juwita and Kustanti (2020), who demonstrated that forgiveness is closely related to psychological well-being. Individuals with strong forgiveness abilities tend to have more stable emotional conditions, better stress management, and reduced psychological impacts from negative experiences. The study by Helmut and Nancy (2021), which emphasizes empathy as a key factor in forgiveness, is also relevant to the students in this study. Students with high self-esteem typically possess greater social sensitivity and empathy, which facilitates understanding others' perspectives and makes the forgiveness process easier. Habibi and Hidayati (2018) further support these findings by showing that forgiveness is associated with resilience. Individuals who forgive easily are better able to recover from negative experiences and adapt to environmental pressures. This relationship aligns with high self-esteem, which also contributes to psychological resilience. Mubarok (2024) emphasized emotional maturity as a significant predictor of forgiveness, noting that students with higher emotional maturity can regulate anger, disappointment, and defensive tendencies more effectively, thereby facilitating forgiveness more quickly and healthily. Emotional maturity is often found in individuals with strong self-esteem, as they tend to have more stable emotional regulation.

From a theoretical perspective, high self-esteem helps students evaluate themselves and others more positively. Orth et al. (2014) state that self-esteem contributes to emotional stability. When students have high self-

esteem, they are less easily provoked by negative emotions. They are better able to view conflicts calmly, enabling them to forgive without feeling threatened or diminished.

Forgiveness and self-esteem can be understood as reciprocally related. Forgiveness helps reduce emotional burdens, while high self-esteem enables individuals to make wiser emotional decisions, including forgiving others. Both variables support students' mental health and psychological well-being. Schools can integrate character education programs, guidance and counseling services, and psychological interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Interventions (Yusof et al., 2025) or Self-Acceptance Counseling to simultaneously enhance self-esteem and forgiveness. These programs can help students manage emotions, increase self-awareness, strengthen self-acceptance, and foster empathy and mature forgiveness abilities. As a result, students gain strong psychological resources to face social and emotional challenges in daily life.

These findings emphasize the importance of guidance and counseling services as platforms for fostering forgiveness and strengthening self-esteem among high school students (Syah et al., 2025). School counselors play a strategic role in helping students understand forgiveness as a constructive psychological process, manage conflicts adaptively, and develop positive emotional regulation (Utomo & Ardian, 2024). Through guidance and counseling services, counselors can facilitate self-reflection, emotional processing, and the development of social skills that support forgiveness and self-acceptance (Umar & Salahudin, 2025).

Therefore, guidance and counseling services constitute an essential component in strengthening character development and psychological well-being among high school students. Integrating forgiveness development programs into counseling services not only serves as a preventive effort against emotional and social problems but also functions as a developmental strategy to foster positive self-esteem, healthy social relationships, and a harmonious and supportive school climate. Optimizing the role of school counselors is expected to support students' comprehensive and sustainable personal and social development.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study make an important contribution to strengthening theoretical perspectives on the relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem. The finding that higher self-esteem is associated with better forgiveness ability supports the argument of Orth et al. (2014), who emphasize that self-esteem plays a crucial role in emotional stability and individuals' capacity to respond adaptively to stress. In addition, the forgiveness theory proposed by McCullough et al. (1997), which states that forgiveness involves a reduction in negative motivations, such as revenge and avoidance, and an increase in positive motivations, such as benevolence, is also confirmed in this study. Students demonstrated a moderate level of forgiveness, characterized primarily by reduced negative emotions. Support from previous studies by Habibi and Hidayati (2018), which highlight the relationship between forgiveness and resilience, as well as findings by Helmut and Nancy (2021), which position empathy as a key indicator of forgiveness, further strengthen the theoretical relevance of this research within the framework of positive psychology and developmental counseling.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study can be directly applied to school guidance and counseling services. School counselors may use the finding that students' forgiveness is at a moderate level as a basis for designing emotional development programs and interventions to enhance self-esteem. In line with Juwita and Kustanti (2020), who state that forgiveness contributes to psychological well-being, counseling services can integrate programs such as Mindfulness-Based Intervention, Self-Acceptance Counseling, and empathy training to improve students' ability to manage interpersonal conflicts. Zhao et al. (2021) also emphasize that healthy self-esteem is associated with greater academic motivation and performance, underscoring the importance of strengthening self-esteem in supporting students' academic success. These findings underscore the need for counseling services to target emotional regulation, empathy, and positive self-evaluation as integral components of guidance programs.

From a managerial perspective, schools can use these findings to develop educational policies that foster a favorable school climate. Orth et al. (2014) emphasize that a supportive social environment influences self-esteem; therefore, schools should foster a safe, inclusive, and empathetic learning ecosystem. A warm and supportive environment has been shown to facilitate forgiveness (Worthington & Scherer, 2004), indicating that school management should design activities such as character-building programs, peer support initiatives, and social skills training to strengthen a culture of mutual respect. The results of this study also support the view of Kurnaz et al. (2020), who argue that moral virtue plays an important role in self-evaluation. Accordingly, schools may incur-

porate character-strengthening components into the curriculum or student organization programs as part of their school management strategy.

Methodologically, this study demonstrates that a quantitative correlational approach is practical for examining psychological relationships among variables in educational contexts. The use of the TRIM (Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations) scale and the CSEI (Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory) proved effective in obtaining valid data from secondary school students. These findings may serve as a reference for future researchers to expand investigations by incorporating additional variables such as empathy, resilience, or emotional maturity, which are relevant in prior studies (Helmut & Nancy, 2021). Furthermore, future research may employ mixed-methods approaches to explore the dynamics of forgiveness and self-esteem in a more in-depth, context-specific manner.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that there is a significant relationship between forgiveness and self-esteem among high school students. The findings indicate that students with higher self-esteem tend to demonstrate better forgiveness. This suggests that a positive self-evaluation helps students manage negative emotions more adaptively, view interpersonal conflicts more objectively, and reduce tendencies to hold anger or resentment in social relationships within the school environment.

Furthermore, the results highlight that forgiveness is a psychological process closely related to students' emotional well-being and the quality of their interpersonal relationships. The ability to forgive not only helps alleviate emotional burdens resulting from conflict but also supports the development of healthier and more harmonious social interactions. Therefore, forgiveness can be understood as an essential indicator of adolescents' psychological adjustment and overall well-being.

These findings emphasize the critical role of guidance and counseling services in helping students understand that forgiveness is not a sign of weakness, but rather a psychological strength that supports emotional development and positive social relationships. The implications of this study point to the need for counseling programs that systematically introduce healthy forgiveness concepts, strengthen self-esteem, and develop emotional regulation skills, enabling students to build positive self-confidence and adapt effectively to both social and academic demands.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

SN served as the primary author and was responsible for the entire research process, including problem formulation, research design development, initial instrument construction, data collection, data analysis, and the complete preparation of the manuscript. DS contributed through academic supervision, provided methodological guidance, and assisted in refining and validating the research instruments to ensure their appropriateness for data collection. MM contributed by providing academic input, reviewing the manuscript's quality, and offering substantive revisions to ensure the article meets established scientific and ethical research standards.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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