



Pedagogical Implications of the Buddhist Philosophy: A Great Antiquity for Today's Education

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Submission:
Nov 23, 2025
Acceptance:
Dec 3, 2025
Published:
Jan 31, 2026

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<https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v35i1.90361>

Abstract

This paper explores the pedagogical implications of the Buddhist philosophy for classroom teaching. Specifically, this paper discusses the aims of education, teaching methods, curriculum/subjects, role of teachers and students from the perspective of the Buddhist philosophy. This qualitative study employed the library study method to explore the multiple realities of the pedagogical dimensions of the Buddhist philosophy. During the library study, I collected different books, research articles and papers. Based on these documents, I explored that the main aim of education in the Buddhist philosophy is to achieve Nirvana from suffering and ignorance. The role of educational institutions is to promote the moral and character development of an individual. For this, the realization of the four noble truths is necessary and needs to be incorporated in the school's curriculum. The eight-fold paths (Astha Marga) are the methods to achieve Nirvana from sufferings in life. Thus, this philosophy suggests that a teacher must have ethical character in teaching the four noble truths. Likewise, both teachers and students need to spend their lives in simplicity, celibacy, morality, constant study and strength of character. Along with this, teachers should be close with their students and behave affectionately with them.

Keywords: Buddhist philosophy, curriculum, nirvana, teaching methods, teachers' role

To cite this article:

Mishra, N. R. (2026). Pedagogical implications of the Buddhist philosophy: a great antiquity for today's education. *Education and Development*, 35(1). 15–20. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ed.v35i1.90361>

Introduction

Buddhism is one of the earliest forms of philosophy and is most popular among a large number of people till now. Lord Gautam Buddha is the founder of this philosophy (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Buddha was primarily an ethical and religious reformer and teacher (Muller, 1899). Buddha presented the path (Marga) through which an individual can attain self-realization of the causes of suffering and methods of its elimination. This philosophy is primarily concerned with the problems of life and always discusses the questions of suffering, causes of suffering, its cessation and ways of cessation (Dash, 2015). Buddhist philosophy sees life as full of pain and ignorance due to the root cause of suffering. It is possible to eradicate in human life through right education (Pathak, 2009). This philosophy does not accept the role of God in human existence. It posits that the universe or life has no ultimate beginning nor end, and passes in and out of existence. Similarly, it explains that

life is nothing but the cycle of repeated births and deaths (Das, 2025). Thus, the beginning and end of life are within this Samsara. Each individual should realize the cycle of birth and death of human existence through the schooling process to live a meaningful life.

The collection of Buddha's preaching or teaching is composed of three baskets:- known as *Tripitakas* (Das, 2015), viz. *Vinaya Pitak*, *Sukta Pitak* and *Abhidhamma Pitak*. *Vinaya Pitak* states the rules of monks (*Bhikshus*) and nuns (*Bhikshunis*). The *Sukta Pitak* presents the religious sermons, and the *Abhidhamma Pitak* consists of Buddha's philosophical thoughts (Chaube & Chaube, 2002). Similarly, people need to follow the *triratna* viz. *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha*. *Dharma* is understood as the practice (*Paripatti*) of truth. People who refuge Dharma seem to take refusal of Buddha (Dash, 2015). Dharma is an object of the mind that teaches how we can attain peace and happiness in life (Rhea, 2012). Correspondingly, this philosophical thought



mainly believes in Karma. Karma is an intentional action of physical, verbal, or mental activities. The person who adopts good Karma receives happiness, and bad Karma brings suffering. It helps to go beyond the cycle and achieve a blissful state is Nirvana (enlightenment) (Ghimire, 2014). As a result, the ultimate goal of education is to eliminate bad Karma for the attainment of Nirvana (Dash, 2015).

In Buddhism, several schools of thought exist-, at present, Hinayan, Mahayan and Vajrayana are the most popular schools of thought in the Buddhist ideology. The Hinayan School is the oldest form and is also known as Theravada Buddhism (Ghimire, 2014). This school focuses on the individual salvation or enlightenment (Chaube & Chaube, 2002; Mandal, 2023). The monastic community (*Sangh*) pays more attention to learning in Gumba (Ghimire, 2014). Similarly, another school of thought, Mahayan focuses on the welfare of the group (Chaube & Chaube, 2002) and compassion (Mandal, 2023). The third school of thought, Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism (Mandal, 2023), focuses on the Tantrik practice in the realization of emptiness (Ghimire, 2014). On the other hand, critics argue that the emergence of Buddhism is a consequence of the later Vedic thought where orthodox (aastik) Hindu philosophy injected the knowledge gained through the body pain tradition (jap and tap) for union with God. Besides, it is a reaction to the Brahmanic domination and sacrificial practice, as well as a formative force in redefining the Hindu culture (Muller, 1899; Ozmon & Craver, 2003). Due to these facts-, it developed the heterodox (nastik) philosophy that believed in a materialist world (Muller, 1899). Nevertheless, the process of getting Nirvana or Salvation is different and involves their own ritual practices for it.

The Four Noble Truths

The four noble truths are a summary of Buddha's teaching (Santina, 1984). The teachings of Buddha refer to Dharma. Dharma begins with the "four noble truths", viz., life is suffering, the cause of suffering is desire, suffering can be eliminated or ceased, and suffering can be eliminated through the eight-fold paths. These eight-fold paths are the means to achieve Nirvana (Ozmon & Craver, 2003; Weerasinghe, Thesera, & Kumara, 2015; Dash, 2015). The first two truths belong to the realm of birth and the death circle; which is aligned with the repeated cycle of birth and death; called Samsara. It means that suffering leads to the cause of suffering and suffering produces the cause of suffering (Santina, 1984). The root cause of suffering is ignorance and that can be eliminated through the eight-fold path. There are various forms of suffering in human life. Birth, old age, sickness, and death are primary sufferings. Apart from these, there are countless secondary forms of suffering (Das, 2025). As a result, life is full of suffering from birth to death. However, there is a solution to get Nirvana from suffering.

The Eight-fold Path

For an individual to get Nirvana, proper qualities like

morality, wisdom and mental discipline must be present in him/her. The way of achieving Nirvana consists of proper thinking, causing no harm to others, not overindulging, not having wrong thoughts and intentions, being mindful and practicing meditation (Weerasinghe, Thesera, and Kumara, 2015). The eight-fold paths represent the wheel that helps to eradicate all types of suffering. These paths are right insight (Samyak Dristi), right will power (Samyak Sankalpa), right speech (Samyak Vakya), right action (Samyak Karmanta), right living (Samyak Ajiva), right thought (Samyak Smriti), right concentration (Samyak Samadhi) and right effort (Samyak Vyayama) (Dash, 2015; Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). These eight-fold paths provide the moral guidance to the teachers and students for ethical living. Apart from these, the five precepts (Panchasila) viz. prohibit harming living beings, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and use of toxicants are the moral principles or ethical guidelines in Buddhism (Nasawaeng, 2024). These eight rules have been discussed under the divisions of *Pragya*, *Sheel*, and *Samadhi* in the Buddhist literature. These three divisions have been considered to attain salvation for each individual (Chaube & Chaube, 2002). Furthermore, these eight rules of life help to understand the life and ignorance of material reality. Those people who want to become enlightened from all types of suffering, each individual must follow these eight rules accurately. Therefore, students need to adopt these rules to make their lives complete and happy. Till now, it is necessary to follow these rules in order to cultivate inner peace among students during the classroom teaching.

Methods

This review article used the library study method to collect the relevant information from the different data sources. Basically, this paper drew upon the classical secondary sources such as-, books, research articles and seminar papers as the secondary sources. It aimed to capture the theoretical and conceptual contributions of the Buddhist philosophy to the field of pedagogy. Hence, the nature of this article aligns closely to qualitative research. Qualitative research explores multiple realities from different dimensions (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2007). For this, I reviewed the interlinkage between the Buddhist philosophy and the pedagogical implications for the classroom teaching. I grasped the pedagogical implications with the help of different books, research articles, and research papers. These findings are organized within the different themes and subthemes.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the pedagogical implications of the Buddhist philosophy. This section specifically, discusses the education system, aims of education, curriculum, teaching methods, teachers and students' role in education. Here, it also discusses how these pedagogical dimensions are effectively used in classroom teaching.

Buddhist Education System

The Buddhist education system prefers the secular education (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Further, there is no discrimination in terms of caste, class and race for taking admission of students in Vihars and monasteries. Within educational institutions, the learning process is guided through Tripitak and threefold training like precepts, meditation and wisdom (Zana, 2023). In the past, the selection process of students is primarily merit-based and encouraged to send ordinary men and women to Buddhist monasteries (Sharma, 2004). Basically, education is a means to achieve Nirvana from suffering. Ignorance (Avidya) is the root cause of suffering in human life. Coping the ignorance, education plays an important role in becoming enlightened person. When individuals achieve Nirvana through education, individuals are enlightened from suffering. Education plays the role of eradicating the Avidya or ignorance. For this, education should be provided in peaceful surroundings in monasteries, Viharas, and other organized educational institutions. Within Monastic schools, the atmosphere must be more democratic and things of luxury must be prohibited for students (Dash, 2015). The Core of Buddha's teaching contains three major points discipline, meditation, and wisdom. In the early period, Buddhist education was limited within the monasteries and was only for the members of the monastery. The major education centers were monasteries and Buddha Vihars. At that time, monks could admit the students for learning (Meshram, 2013). These educational institutions set out the rule for students to leave home and reside with the teacher in Vihars. Before being admitted to monasteries and Vihars, each student necessarily performs the Pabbajja rituals to take admission for learning (Sharma, 2004). These students should be age of eight years old to enter school. Furthermore, both primary and higher education institutions have existed in history to till now. The primary or elementary education offers reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. In the ancient period, the popular elementary education was religious in nature and included worldly education up to the age of 12 years. Pupils got an instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion at the elementary level. After completion of elementary education, the student performed the Upsampada ritual after twenty years of age to get entry into higher education (Meshram, 2013). Especially, those students who want to become monks and nuns, - they allowed to join higher education (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). And, higher education offers subjects like religion, philosophy, Ayurveda, and military training. Everyone was free to choose the subject without any restriction. This education system also put the value of vocational education at that time. The vocational skills like spinning, weaving, and sewing were taught by monks in Vihar (Meshram, 2013). From the beginning to till now, every individual can receive education equally in terms of gender caste, religion etc. in monasteries. These educational institutions ensure equal access and opportunities in the personal growth of students (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla,

2022). As a result, the role of an educational institution is crucial to develop the moral and spiritual growth of students (Acharya, 2024). An educational institution serves as a core setting for nurturing students' moral and spiritual behavior within a peaceful environment.

Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogy evolved from the strict discipline (Hinayana), inclusive (Mahayana) and mystical practices (Bajayana/ Tantrayana) (Ghimire, 2014). At present, the pedagogical thoughts of Buddhist philosophy can connect with the area of modern education, viz. aims of education, curriculum, teaching methods, teacher roles, and student roles. Here, I have discussed these major areas of pedagogical dimensions from the Buddhist perspectives.

Aims of Education

The ultimate goal of education is to attain freedom from suffering, which is called Nirvana (liberation) (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Primarily, Buddhist education aims to attain wisdom or perfect ultimate wisdom (Anuttara-Samyak- Sambhodi). Similarly, it also emphasizes all-round development of the child's personality. The all-round development includes physical, mental, emotional, moral, and intellectual development of the child (Meshram, 2013). In a similar vein, the Buddhist education system expects to cultivate the physical, mental, and intellectual dimensions of an individual for holistic development (Acharya, 2024). Similarly, education should cultivate the three things Prajna (wisdom), Sila (ethics and morality), and Samadhi (mental discipline through meditation) (Ghimire, 2014). It also aims to develop the personal character and mental transformation in students (Medhacitto, 2024). Additionally, the attainment of Bodhisattva is the ultimate objective of Buddhism. It means to sacrifice one's life for the welfare of others. Due to this fact, the aims of education should be to make a Bodhisattva for each student (Chaube & Chaube, 2002). Alongside, Buddhist education focuses on moral life, the development of personality, conservation of culture, and total development of students (Pathak, 2009). Equally, Buddhist education aims is to make a free man, a wise, intelligent, moral, non-violent & secular man, and students become judicious, humanist, logical and free from superstitious. They also became free from greed, lust, and ignorance (Meshram, 2013). The morality, mental discipline, cultural conservation, welfare of others, and holistic development of the child are the major intents of education which need to be fulfilled through the school education.

The Curriculum

According to Buddhism, nothing in the world is permanent and eternal or impermanent. The phenomena are changing in every moment and nothing is ultimate forever (Das, 2025). Therefore, the nature of knowledge is changeable. Because of this, the subject matter of the curriculum should be dynamic and relevant. For this, the curriculum needs to focus on the practical activities such as physical, intellectual,

social, and moral actions (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Hence, the permanent curriculum is not possible to eradicate suffering and attempts to achieve Nirvana. Similarly, the Buddhist philosophy of education highlights subjects/curricula that are complete understanding or realization of the four noble truths, the art of earning through rightful means, right vocation, the study of Buddhist literature, and the life history of Buddha. This knowledge expanded the areas of the curriculum for teaching-learning, which include word knowledge, craftsmanship, medical education, logic, and spiritual education (Pathak, 2009). Similarly, Buddhism also prefers subjects like theology, astronomy, medicine, law, polity, administration, music, art, and technical education (Sharma, 2004). Moreover, this school of thought also focuses on subjects like learning of Grammar, logic (Hetu vidya), science of reasoning (Nyaya), philosophy (Adyatma vidya), arts and crafts (shilpa sthan), and medicine (chikitsya vidya). In ancient times, Buddhist monasteries and universities were well organized and taught based on Tripitaka, which consists of Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka. The entire Tripitaka consists of Buddha's teachings, message, philosophy, and rules for the monks (Bhikkhus) and nuns (Bhikkhunis). Consequently, the curriculum was primarily spiritual in nature (Meshram, 2013). At that time, higher education was given to only those students who intended to become monks or nuns. In higher education institutions, students were taught the subjects like Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Theology, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Logic, Sanskrit, Pali, Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine, Law, Politics, Administration, and Tantrik philosophy. At present, these subjects are more useful for the development of the eternal and external peace of an individual. These subjects make life more judicious, humanistic and rational.

Teaching Methods

In ancient times, the medium of education was the mother tongue, and later, included Pali and Prakrit languages as the medium of instruction (Meshram, 2013). Formally, the Buddhist education system continued through the Pali language as a medium of instruction in the ancient period (Sharma, 2004; Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). The monks and nuns use the Pali language in monasteries and sangha as a medium of instruction. The curriculum/syllabus and teaching materials are developed in the Pali language by monks and nuns. At that time, teaching methods were mostly verbal in nature. Shravan, imitation, demonstration, practice, interpretation, lecture, debate, logic, self-study, and conference methods were popular and are still practiced in Buddhist monasteries. These teaching methods help to foster the moral values in human life (Acharya, 2024). In addition to this, traveling, nature study, preaching, conferences, vernacular dialects are also used in teaching. Another, the monitorial system (Agra Shiksha Parnali) is a commonly established teaching method in Buddhist tradition. Similarly, the four teaching methods, such as lecture, teaching in small groups, interpretation, and discussion, are most popular in imparting the education.

As well, individual learning techniques could also be applied in the recitation of formula (Sutras), reflection and acquisition of learning materials (Pathak, 2009). Teachers and students share the knowledge through these lectures, question-answer, and discussion methods. Therefore, the seminar, oral discussion, preaching, repetition and debate could be used as additional teaching methods in teaching (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Besides, the mindful pedagogical approach is a new innovation for cultivating awareness in daily activities. Supporting each other, students and teachers can create a peaceful school culture by using this pedagogical approach in a modern classroom (Rhea, 2012). Mindfulness and meditation cultivate one's awareness and introspection, as well as fostering inner peace. This improves attention, emotional regulation, cultivates compassion, and reduces aggression and stress (Mandal, 2023). Particularly, an individual's own experiences and actions are the major methods to know the pragmatic world. To be specific, the eight-fold path (Asthamarga) is the method to attain Nirvana from any form of suffering (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Therefore, these teaching methods are useful to foster the inner peace, harmony, and compassion in students in the classroom.

Roles of the Teacher

Teachers must understand the four noble truths and follow the eight-fold path in their personal lives. In monasteries, the two types of teachers are in practice, such as Acharyas and Upadhyaya (Pathak, 2009; Meshram, 2013). The role of Acharyas is to maintain the discipline with the help of Buddhist moral and spiritual values, and Upadhyaya is directed towards teaching and learning. During the tutoring process, they keep a harmonious relationship among their students (Pathak, 2009). Along with; the role of teacher is like a snake in teaching where teachers teach the students for liberation (Zana, 2023). In ancient times, the duties of a teacher were imparting education to the students, writing books, propagation religion, discussing, and arrangement of debates for the clarification of serious subjects. Similarly, the teachers were also responsible for all-round development, such as physical, mental, spiritual, and moral development of students. Teachers loved and cared for their students in every affair and were responsible for their food, accommodation, and other necessities of livelihood (Meshram, 2013). In the same vein, teachers and students have been reciprocal relationship and established the relationship as father and son. The teacher was regarded as the spiritual and intellectual father of the student. Bhikshus or monks are the main instructors in teaching. They must be ethical in character and holiness (Ghimire, Pandey & Shukla, 2022). Even now, these roles of teachers are useful for the holistic development of students in classroom teaching. Without the harmonious relationship between teachers and students, it is not possible to make an effective teaching learning environment in schools.

Roles of student

Following the Buddha philosophy, students need to become judicious, humanistic, logical, and free from superstitions. Similarly, they must be free from greed, lust, and ignorance (Meshram, 2013). In addition to this, they should be trained in the Five Precepts which are prohibiting in killing of living beings, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and toxin consumption (Nasawaeng, 2024; Medhacitto, 2024). Within educational institutions, students must be active in their learning process. Apart from these, students must take on the roles to support the daily operations of monasteries, such as cleaning, cooking, and other daily routines. Similarly, their role is to actively participate in the classroom by listening, thinking, asking questions, investigating, and taking notes (Zana, 2023). Thus, students must be active in the classroom to investigate the truth in judicious, logical, and humanistic ways.

Conclusion

Buddhist education offers a secular education system. Each individual can pursue education without discrimination in terms of caste, gender, or economic status in Buddhist monasteries. The Gumba and Vihars are the major institutions that provide education in a homely and supportive environment. The main aim of education is to attain Nirvana from suffering. To attain Nirvana, the knowledge about the four noble truths, the eight-fold path and the five precepts need to be integrated into the curriculum of today's modern education for maintaining peace, harmony, and cooperation in society. Due to the impermanent nature of the world, human suffering and ignorance cannot be eradicated through a fixed and rigid curriculum. Specifically, the Buddha's teachings should be taught in the school curriculum for the holistic development of children. The mindful pedagogical approach only cultivates awareness about the mysteries of suffering, ignorance, and unnecessary desires of people. For this, the teacher needs to be ethical and moral to implement the Buddha's teachings in our educational institutions. Similarly, students need to stay away from greed, lust, superstition, and ignorance in the humanist society.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data are publically available at the DOI link of Education and Development journal.

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