

A Meditation Teaching Model Based on Buddhist Psychology of Theravada Buddhist Monks in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This study aimed 1. to investigate meditation teaching models within Theravada Buddhism, 2. to examine current meditation teaching methods grounded in Buddhist psychology practiced by monks in the United Kingdom, and 3. to propose a refined meditation teaching model suited to the UK context. This qualitative research employed documentary analysis, in-depth interviews with 19 key informants (monks from Thai, Sri Lankan, and Myanmar traditions, and lay Buddhist instructors), and a focus group discussion with nine participants. Data were analysed using the 6'C QDAT technique concept definition, content compilation, classification, categorisation, conceptualisation, and communication to ensure analytical rigour and contextual relevance.

Findings revealed that traditional Theravada practices Samatha (concentration) and Vipassana (insight) meditation, rooted in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana) remain the foundation of Buddhist meditation teaching. In the UK, these models have been adapted into secular mindfulness movements to address contemporary psychological needs. Meditation teaching among Theravada monks has evolved to incorporate learner-centred pedagogies, digital tools, and the “Four S” model—clarification, inspiration, encouragement, and consolation—enhancing accessibility and cultural sensitivity.

The study proposed the Buddhist Psychology-Based Meditation Teaching Model in the UK, grounded in four principles: Mindfulness in Daily Life

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(MDL), Emotional Awareness Practice (EAP), Integration of Buddhist Teachings (IBT), and Community Support for Practice (CSP). These are supported by eight components: Present-Moment Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Practical Compassion, Community Engagement, Adaptation of Buddhist Teachings, Personal Growth, Mindful Communication, and Structured Teaching Methodology. The model represents a holistic, culturally responsive, and psychologically grounded framework that upholds Theravada authenticity while addressing modern emotional well-being and promoting ethical and transformative meditation teaching in Western contexts.

Keywords: Meditation Teaching, Buddhist Psychology, Cultural Adaptation, Theravada Buddhist Monks

Introduction

In recent decades, mindfulness meditation has gained remarkable popularity in the United Kingdom (UK), both in secular and spiritual contexts. This growth has drawn increased attention to Buddhist-derived meditation practices, particularly those grounded in Buddhist psychology. The proliferation of meditation courses under banners such as "Buddhist Meditation" or "Mindfulness" has become commonplace across the UK, often without clear articulation of their doctrinal origins, affiliations, or pedagogical frameworks. While many of these programs are inspired by Buddhist principles, questions remain regarding the authenticity, consistency, and adaptation of such teachings, especially those led by Buddhist monks in the monasteries in the UK.

British Buddhism initially emerged as an intellectual curiosity and philosophical interest, primarily among colonial officers, scholars and spiritual seekers. Over time, however, this engagement evolved due to factors such as increased migration from Buddhist-majority countries, empirical support for mindfulness in clinical psychology, and public interest in meditation's impact on mental and emotional well-being (McMahan, 2008; Wilson, 2014). As mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), gained

scientific legitimacy, Buddhist psychology and its meditative practices began to be viewed as rich sources of contemplative knowledge applicable to modern life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013).

Theravada Buddhist monks in the UK, many of whom come from Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, have played a significant role in introducing and sustaining meditation practices rooted in Buddhist psychology. Their efforts, however, are shaped by the need to address the cultural, linguistic, social and psychological contexts of a predominantly Western audience. The adaptation process has involved challenges related to communication, cultural translation, and educational innovation. Meditation Practices traditionally embedded in monastic training, such as *Samatha* (tranquillity meditation) and *Vipassana* (insight meditation), have been introduced to lay audiences through a variety of techniques, including breath awareness, mantra recitation (e.g., *Buddho*), and body-based awareness exercises like rising and falling of the abdomen.

Despite the presence of over fifty Theravada Buddhist monasteries in the UK, there is no standard model for teaching meditation based on Buddhist psychology. Each centre often develops its own curriculum, most likely shaped by lineage, teacher experience, and perceived needs of the community. While this flexibility allows responsiveness to context, it also contributes to inconsistencies and confusion among practitioners. Moreover, critiques from Western Buddhist modernists suggest that what is being taught may represent a form of pragmatic adaptation rather than doctrinal fidelity (Coleman, 2001; Gethin, 1998).

Buddhist scriptures emphasize the complementary nature of serenity (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassana*) meditation, often taught in conjunction. According to the Anguttara Nikaya book of four discourse number, *Yuganaddha Sutta* (Bodhi, 2012), liberation can be attained through various combinations of these practices. Building on this foundational view, Theravada monks in the UK have adapted traditional meditation teaching models to include innovative formats such as guided meditations, themed retreats, and secularized programs, all while striving to uphold core principles samatha and vipassana meditation which are rooted in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

This study emerges in response to the current gap in academic research on how Theravada Buddhist monks in the UK are teaching meditation based on Buddhist psychology. There is a need to systematically explore the teaching models in use, the ways in which traditional principles are being integrated or modified, and how these models serve diverse audiences. More importantly, the study seeks to propose a refined, adaptable, and doctrinally rooted model that can offer a coherent framework for meditation instruction in multicultural and secular contexts.

Objectives of Research

1. To investigate the meditation teaching models within the context of the Theravada tradition.
2. To examine the current status of meditation teaching methods rooted in Buddhist psychology as practiced by Theravada monks in the United Kingdom.
3. To propose a refined meditation teaching model based on Buddhist psychology for Theravada monks in the United Kingdom.

Research Methodology

The research employed a multi-method qualitative design comprising documentary research, in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion, and limited participant observation. Documentary analysis reviewed primary Buddhist sources (Tipitaka, commentaries, treatises) alongside psychological theories/Buddhist psychology and secondary academic works; documents were quality-checked, analysed, and synthesised into a preliminary framework. Guided by this, purposive sampling identified 19 key informants, Theravada monks (Thai, Sri Lankan, Myanmar) five candidates from each countries to get closer view of the context, and lay Buddhist instructors with expertise in Buddhism, psychology/Buddhist psychology, or meditation-teaching management, for semi-structured interviews. The interview guide underwent face-validity review by two advisors and Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) assessment by five experts, then was revised.

Each interview lasted not less than an hour. A focus group of nine participants (monks, instructors, scholars, practitioners) was conducted over an hour of online meeting via Zoom using structured prompts; informed consent was obtained, and the session was observed and immediately analysed with advisor consultation to ensure completeness. Data from documents, interviews, focus group, and field observations were analysed using content analysis and the 6'C QDAT technique: (Analysis) define concepts, compile contents, classify sub-issues; (Synthesis) categorise sub-issues, conceptualise the framework, communicate findings. Thematic analysis and triangulation were applied to enhance credibility, culminating in a final meditation-teaching model based on Buddhist psychology tailored to the UK Theravada context.

Research Results

Findings Based on Research Objectives

This section presents the research findings in accordance with the study's three primary objectives: 1. to investigate the meditation teaching models within the context of the Theravada tradition; 2. to examine the current status of meditation teaching methods rooted in Buddhist psychology as practiced by Theravada monks in the United Kingdom; and 3. to propose a refined meditation teaching model based on Buddhist psychology tailored to the UK context.

1. Meditation Teaching Models within the Context of the Theravada Tradition

The study found that traditional Theravada Buddhist meditation practices, particularly Samatha (serenity) and Vipassana (insight), remain foundational in both monastic and lay meditation instruction. These methods are deeply rooted in the Satipatthana framework, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which include mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. These form the doctrinal basis for meditation practices aimed at cultivating concentration and insight leading to liberation.

Canonical texts such as the Yuganaddha Sutta outline four modes of practice, emphasizing the integration of samatha and vipassana in different

sequences or simultaneously. In practice, these models have been interpreted through various national and doctrinal lineages, such as the Thai Forest Tradition, Burmese insight schools, and Sri Lankan mindfulness-based systems. Commonly used techniques include mindfulness of breathing with mantra recitation (e.g., Buddhho), rising and falling of the abdomen, and silent repetition of Samma Araham. Each method serves the broader objective of cultivating awareness, ethical discipline, and liberative insight. These findings demonstrate that while methods vary by lineage, the core meditative aims remain consistent and grounded in early Buddhist psychological principles.

2. Current Status of Meditation Teaching Models Rooted in Buddhist Psychology in the United Kingdom

Theravada Buddhist monks in the United Kingdom have significantly adapted their teaching practices to meet the cultural, educational, social and psychological needs of diverse populations. The research identified a strong trend toward learner-centered, context-sensitive approaches, where traditional meditative techniques are combined with secular psychological language and therapeutic applications.

A key development is the emergence of the pedagogical model—clarification, inspiration, encouragement, and consolation (CIEC)—which reflects an emotionally responsive approach to teaching. Meditation retreats have been restructured into shorter, more flexible formats, and technological tools such as guided meditation apps, online teachings, and video conferencing platforms are widely used to reach broader audiences.

Monks have also demonstrated increasing cultural fluency, often significant effort to improve their English and gained familiarity with Western cognitive frameworks. However, several challenges remain, including inconsistent methodologies across centres, language and cultural barriers, and difficulties in maintaining traditional authenticity while adapting to secular settings.

Nonetheless, many monks have effectively assumed roles as cultural mediators, bridging Eastern meditative traditions with Western worldviews. Their

engagement in interfaith dialogue, community outreach, and public education underscores the evolving role of the modern Theravada monk as both spiritual teacher and cross-cultural communicator.

3. A Refined Meditation Teaching Model Based on Buddhist Psychology

The most significant outcome of the study is the development of a refined and contextually adapted meditation teaching model titled “A Buddhist Psychology-Based Meditation Teaching Model in the UK.” The findings of this study reveal that meditation teaching by Theravada monks in the United Kingdom continues to be anchored in the dual practice of Samatha (calmness) and Vipassana (insight) as outlined in the *Satipatthana Sutta* and supported by the psychological framework of Theravada Buddhism. This doctrinal base confirms the enduring role of meditation as a process of mental purification, insight into impermanence, suffering, and non-self, and the gradual path to liberation. At the same time, the evidence demonstrates an active process of cultural adaptation, where monks integrate traditional practices with contemporary pedagogical strategies and modern psychological insights. From these findings, a refined model was identified, organised into four core principles and eight integrative components, ensuring both fidelity to tradition and responsiveness to the UK context. The model is structured around four core principles: Mindfulness in Daily Life (MDL), Emotional Awareness Practice (EAP), Integration of Buddhist Teachings (IBT) and Community Support for Practice (CSP).

They are supported by these eight interconnected components that reflect the practical application of Buddhist psychology in modern meditation teaching: Present-Moment Awareness (PMA), Emotional Intelligence (EI), Adaptation of Buddhist Teachings (ABT), Practices for Calm and Renewal (PCN), Community Engagement and Participation (CEP), Cultivation of Compassion (CC), Mindful Communication (MC) and Personal Growth and Transformation (PGT)

This model provides a flexible and holistic framework that integrates the psychological depth of traditional Buddhist practice with the pedagogical

innovations needed for Western cultural contexts. It allows teachers to begin with accessible mindfulness practices, while guiding practitioners toward deeper meditative insights, ethical conduct, and spiritual development. Furthermore, it emphasizes tiered instruction, community support, and competency in Buddhist psychology, making it suitable for both monastic teachers and secular facilitators.

Result of the Study and discussion

1. Results of an Investigation into Existing Meditation Teaching Models

Through qualitative research methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus discussion the study revealed that traditional Theravada meditation practices, particularly *Samatha* (calmness) and *Vipassana* (insight), remain central to contemporary meditation instruction. These practices are grounded in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*), which continue to inform the theoretical and practical basis of meditation teaching within the Theravada tradition. The findings further indicate that these core practices have been increasingly adapted and integrated into secular frameworks, particularly within mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). This integration reflects an evolving approach to meditation instruction that responds to the psychological and emotional needs of diverse populations in the United Kingdom.

2. Examination of the Current Status of Meditation Teaching Models in the UK

The study demonstrates that meditation teaching models employed by Theravada monks in the United Kingdom have undergone significant adaptation in response to Western cultural, educational, and psychological contexts. While traditional practices such as *Samatha* and *Vipassana* remain central, they are increasingly being delivered through learner-centred pedagogies and supported by digital technologies. Notably, the emergence of the "CIEC" model illustrates a pedagogical shift towards more emotionally resonant and accessible forms of teaching.

Monastic teachers have made conscious efforts to enhance their English proficiency and intercultural competence, thereby enabling them to

design and deliver structured meditation programs that emphasise practical outcomes such as emotional resilience and mental well-being. Despite persistent challenges—including variability in teaching approaches, linguistic limitations, and the tension between adaptation and the preservation of monastic integrity—many monks are actively engaging with diverse communities. Their efforts reflect a dynamic and inclusive expression of Theravada Buddhism that remains rooted in its traditional foundations while responding effectively to the needs of contemporary practitioners.

3. Proposal of a Refined Meditation Teaching Model Based on Buddhist Psychology for Theravada Monks in the United Kingdom

Based on the findings of this study, a refined meditation teaching model is proposed for Theravada monks in the United Kingdom that balances authenticity with adaptability. Rooted in Buddhist psychology, the model comprises four core principles designed to address both the traditional foundations of Theravada practice and the evolving needs of a multicultural, contemporary UK audience. These four principles are:

1) **Mindfulness in Daily Life (MDL)** – Encouraging the integration of mindfulness into everyday activities, fostering continuous awareness beyond formal meditation settings.

2) **Emotional Awareness Practice (EAP)** – Cultivating insight into emotional experiences as part of the meditative process, enhancing emotional regulation and resilience;

3) **Integration of Buddhist Teachings (IBT)** – Contextualizing meditation within the broader framework of Buddhist ethics and wisdom, ensuring doctrinal coherence and spiritual depth;

4) **Community Support for Practice (CSP)** – Emphasizing the role of communal engagement, interpersonal support, and spiritual friendship (*kalyanamittata*) as essential conditions for sustained practice.

These four principles are supported by eight components below:

1. **Present-Moment Awareness (PMA)** – cultivating focused attention on present experiences as a foundation for mindfulness practice;

2. **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** – developing awareness, understanding, and regulation of emotions in accordance with Buddhist psychological principles;
3. **Adaptation of Buddhist Teachings (ABT)** – contextualizing traditional doctrines to suit the cultural and psychological landscape of the United Kingdom;
4. **Practices for Calm and Renewal (PCN)** – focusing on techniques designed to soothe the nervous system, settle mental agitation, and replenish emotional and psychological energy.
5. **Community Engagement and Participation (CEP)** – promoting active involvement in spiritual and social communities to sustain practice;
6. **Cultivation of Compassion (CC)** - focusing on the systematic development of emotional warmth, altruistic concern, and empathic awareness.
7. **Mindful Communication (MC)** – emphasising right speech and attentive listening as part of interpersonal mindfulness;
8. **Personal Growth and Transformation (PGT)** – fostering self-development through introspective practice and ethical living;

Collectively, these principles offer a holistic and sustainable approach to meditation instruction that maintains the integrity of traditional Theravada methods while being responsive to the cultural, linguistic, and psychological needs of practitioners in the United Kingdom. The proposed model represents a culturally sensitive, psychologically informed, and community-oriented paradigm for teaching meditation in UK contexts. It supports Theravada monks in transmitting the Dhamma effectively while ensuring accessibility, relevance, and continuity in a rapidly changing environment.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study offers a meaningful contribution to the evolving discourse on Buddhist meditation teaching and transmission in the UK. Further research is encouraged to evaluate the model's long-term effectiveness across diverse populations and contexts. Future studies might also explore the role of lay teachers, gender inclusion, and institutional support in sustaining culturally adaptive but authentically Buddhist approaches to meditation teaching in the United Kingdom and beyond.

This study explored the development and implementation of a refined meditation teaching model based on Buddhist psychology for Theravada monks operating within the cultural and psychological context of the United Kingdom. Through a combination of documentary analysis and qualitative interviews, the research examined three research objectives. It is discussed in three principles.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of Theravada Buddhist psychology by demonstrating that the dual practice of Samatha (calmness) and Vipassana (insight), rooted in the Satipatthana Sutta, continues to provide the central doctrinal foundation for meditation teaching in contemporary contexts. The findings confirm that these practices are not isolated techniques but mutually supportive methods that cultivate both tranquillity and insight into anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anatta (non-self). The proposed model advances theory by framing these practices within four core principles (Mindfulness in Daily Life, Emotional Awareness Practice, Integration of Buddhist Teachings, and Community Support for Practice) and eight interconnected components. This structured articulation establishes a conceptual framework that integrates Buddhist psychology with modern qualitative insights, offering a fresh theoretical lens for understanding how meditation can be transmitted across cultures without losing doctrinal coherence.

Practical Contribution

On a practical level, the study provides a pedagogical model for Theravada monks teaching meditation in the UK that is both authentic and adaptable. The model operationalises traditional Buddhist teachings into accessible methods such as breath awareness, loving-kindness practice, and mindful communication while structuring them into tiered and progressive stages of training. It also emphasises community support, guided practice, and teacher embodiment, ensuring that meditation is presented as both a personal discipline and a communal way of life. By identifying eight components including Present-

Moment Awareness, Emotional Intelligence, Compassion Cultivation, and Personal Growth and Transformation the model equips monastic and lay teachers with practical strategies for integrating meditation into daily activities, retreats, and therapeutic settings. This provides a concrete, structured framework for delivering meditation instruction in contemporary multicultural contexts, bridging traditional Dhamma training with modern pedagogical methods.

Cultural and Psychological Contribution

Culturally and psychologically, the study demonstrates that Theravada monks in the UK play a bridging role between ancient Buddhist traditions and contemporary Western needs. The findings highlight how meditation teaching has been adapted to incorporate learner-centred approaches, secular mindfulness practices such as MBSR and MBCT, and the use of digital technologies for wider accessibility. While acknowledging the therapeutic value of these secular approaches, monks emphasise embedding ethics, wisdom, and compassion to prevent mindfulness from being reduced to a tool for stress relief or productivity. The proposed model reflects a culturally responsive and psychologically grounded framework, sensitive to issues of language, diversity, and the mental health needs of modern practitioners. In this way, the study contributes to intercultural dialogue and applied psychology by showing how Buddhist psychology functions not only as a spiritual system but also as a living tradition capable of addressing contemporary challenges such as stress, anxiety, and emotional imbalance.

Contributions of the Study

The findings of this study have culminated in the development of a proposed meditation teaching framework titled A Buddhist Psychology-Based Meditation Teaching Model for Theravada Monks in the United Kingdom. This model is founded upon four core principles and operationalized through eight interrelated supportive components. These components represent key pedagogical and psychological elements that characterize contemporary approaches to meditation instruction within the Western Theravada context. Together, these components form a flexible and integrated teaching model

that reflects both the lived experiences and the evolving pedagogical practices of Theravada monastics in the UK. This model bridges traditional Buddhist frameworks with contemporary psychological insights, offering a pathway that is both authentic and accessible to diverse populations. These elements are strategically employed to address common psychological challenges, such as stress, anxiety, and distraction, while maintaining fidelity to the core tenets of Buddhist practice. Their inclusion demonstrates a pragmatic yet principled integration of traditional Buddhist psychology with the mental health and well-being concerns of Western practitioners.

Overall, the model exemplifies a culturally responsive and psychologically grounded approach to meditation teaching. It enables Theravada monks to deliver teachings that are both doctrinally sound and pedagogically effective, thereby ensuring that the transmission of the Dhamma remains relevant, sustainable, and transformative within a Western context.

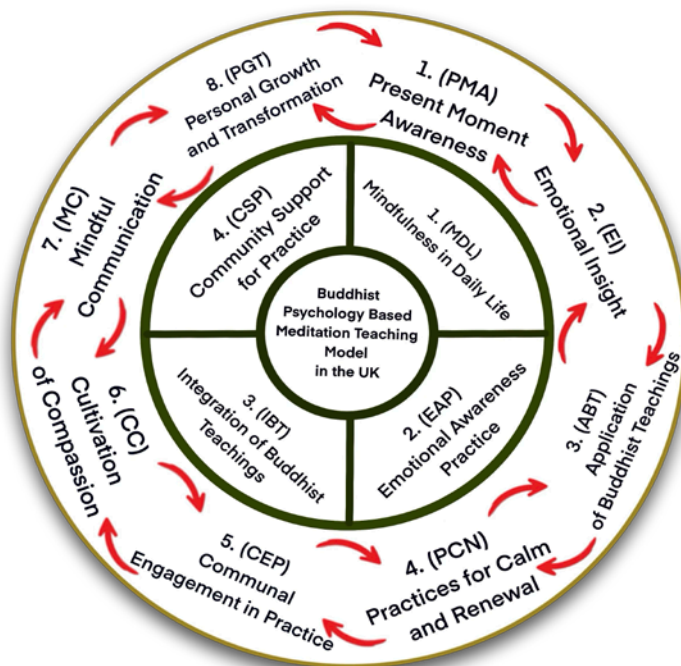


Figure 1 New Knowledge Emerging from the Research

Recommendations

1. Recommendations from the Study

Adopt the refined Buddhist psychology-based meditation teaching model that integrates traditional Samatha–Vipassana practice with modern pedagogy, psychological insights, and cultural adaptability.

2. Recommendations for Practical Application

Adapt retreats into shorter, flexible formats, integrate emotional and cognitive training, build supportive practice communities, and promote intercultural dialogue between monks and laypeople.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

Examine long-term impacts of Buddhist psychology on mental health and spiritual growth, compare with secular mindfulness models, define teacher competencies, and assess digital teaching effectiveness.

4. Policy Recommendations

Develop a unified national framework for meditation teaching, provide monastics with training in psychology and cultural sensitivity, and support hybrid and digital platforms for wider access and engagement.

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