
Synergizing SDG's Focus on Quality Education with Buddhist Principles to Reduce Communication Apprehension in 21st Century Learners

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Buddhist principles with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4's focus on quality education to address communication apprehension in 21st-century learners. Effective communication skills are crucial for personal, academic, and professional success, yet anxiety associated with communication often hinders learning outcomes. By synergizing Buddhist teachings, which emphasize mindfulness and compassion, with SDG 4's objectives, educators can create inclusive learning environments that empower students to overcome communication barriers and foster holistic development. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and breathing exercises rooted in Buddhist principles, have been shown to reduce anxiety and enhance communication skills. Additionally, incorporating cognitive-behavioral therapy principles can challenge negative beliefs about communication and promote confidence. This integration improves communication skills and nurtures emotional intelligence, empathy, and resilience, creating a positive and supportive learning environment. Meditation, as a core Buddhist practice, cultivates mindfulness and emotional regulation, helping students manage stress, focus better, and communicate more effectively, which is aligned with the SDG 4 goal of providing inclusive, equitable quality education by enhancing students' ability to learn and engage fully. On the other hand, meditation also supports SDG 4 by equipping learners with essential life skills, such as concentration, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence, which are vital for academic success and personal development. By fostering these skills, educators help students overcome communication apprehension, a common barrier to participation and success in educational and professional settings. Therefore, integrating meditation into education directly addresses SDG 4 by promoting well-rounded development, reducing barriers to effective communication, and ensuring that all students are prepared for active participation in society and the global workforce. This approach ensures that education imparts knowledge and builds the inner resilience needed to thrive in diverse and challenging environments.

Keywords: Reducing anxiety; communication apprehension; SDGs; Quality Education

Introduction

Effective communication techniques are crucial foundations for success in the personal, academic, and professional spheres in the fast-paced world of the 21st century. Effective communication crosses borders and creates possibilities whether one is negotiating interpersonal relationships, participating in intellectual discourse, or succeeding in the job. Therefore, it is impossible to exaggerate how important it is to hone these talents. Furthermore, the definition of "sustainable development" encompasses two primary ideas: (1) the notion of 'needs', especially the fundamental requirements of impoverished populations worldwide, which should receive utmost priority; and (2) the concept of constraints imposed by the current level of technology and social structure on the environment's capacity to fulfill both current and future needs (Kittiprapas, 2022). Moreover, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a comprehensive framework for tackling global issues while promoting high-quality education. SDG 4 highlights the significance of providing inclusive and equitable quality education for everyone, among other goals. But obtaining a decent education requires more than just sharing knowledge; in order to promote understanding and learning, there must be good communication. Sustainable development is a strategic priority increasingly encountered across industries and educational institutions, championed globally by the United Nations through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The definition of sustainable development is commonly accepted as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1998). A possible strategy for reducing communication anxiety in the context of 21st century education is to combine Buddhist concepts with SDG's emphasis on quality education. This is because learners often experience a variety of communication apprehensions. On the other hand, according to the teachings of Buddhism as outlined in the Tipitaka, education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but the development of wisdom and compassion. Education in Buddhism aims not only to cultivate intellectual abilities but also to nurture ethical and moral values, leading to the holistic development of individuals and the betterment of society. Moreover, in the Pali canon, education is referred to as *Sikkhā*, which translates to "training." *Sikkhā* is depicted as a means of self-realization,

implying an understanding of one's own qualities, abilities, and potential, and the skill to utilize them effectively. In summary, education enables individuals to develop various aspects such as practical skills, knowledge, and the capacity to engage effectively in their chosen fields. Self-awareness leads to self-realization and enables individuals to relate to appropriate aspects of life. Therefore, education, according to this perspective, is aimed at facilitating self-realization (Srivichai, 2004). According to Chansomsak & Vale (2008), education in Buddhism serves as a pathway to embodying a life of virtue, emphasizing the importance of personal growth through ethical living. Sila Sikkhā, representing moral conduct, fosters harmony and tranquility by guiding our actions and speech. Samadhi Sikkhā focuses on understanding the mind and cultivating self-awareness, facilitating personal growth and the pursuit of objectives. Panna Sikkhā involves examining the interconnectedness of phenomena and the principles of cause and effect.

Therefore, Buddhist perspective on education transcends mere knowledge acquisition; it encompasses the cultivation of wisdom, compassion, and ethical values. Deeply rooted from the teachings of the Tipitaka, Buddhist education emphasizes the holistic development of individuals, fostering self-realization and societal betterment. Described as Sikkhā, or "training," education in Buddhism is viewed as a journey towards self-awareness and actualization, enabling individuals to harness their potential effectively. Through moral conduct (Sila), understanding the mind (Citta Sikkhā), and analyzing cause and effect (Panna Sikkhā), education becomes a transformative force, guiding individuals towards virtuous living and personal growth. Ultimately, education in Buddhism serves as a pathway to self-realization and the embodiment of ethical principles, shaping individuals to lead purposeful and harmonious lives.

Additionally, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are not the first set of objectives intended to support international cooperation in the creation of a more equitable and cleaner world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the previous agenda were created in 2000 and had eight objectives that were to be completed by 2015: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; the achievement of universal primary education; the empowerment of women and gender equality; the reduction of child mortality; the enhancement of maternal health; the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;

the preservation of the environment; and the formation of an international development partnership (United Nations Millenium Decleration, 2000). The agenda prioritizes quality education, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Its objective is to ensure that all individuals have access to inclusive, fair, and high-quality educational opportunities, fostering lifelong learning opportunities for everyone (Unterhalter, 2019). Reducing communication apprehension in educational settings is paramount for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by enhancing the quality and inclusivity of education. states that addressing communication apprehension fosters inclusive learning environments where students feel empowered to actively participate in classroom activities, discussions, and presentations. This active engagement not only enriches the educational experience but also improves academic performance (McCroskey (1992). Moreover, reducing communication apprehension promotes collaborative learning by facilitating effective communication among students, thereby contributing to a more equitable learning environment (Pavlina, 2014).

Additionally, it prepares students for lifelong learning and success in the workforce by equipping them with essential communication skills (Rubin & Martin, 1994). Furthermore, by fostering intercultural understanding and global citizenship, addressing communication apprehension aligns with the goal of promoting inclusive education (Nemati, & Razavieh, 2012). Therefore, efforts to reduce communication apprehension are essential for advancing the objectives of SDG 4, ensuring that all individuals have access to high-quality education opportunities that prepare them for active participation in society and the global workforce. In terms of achieving sustainable development goal 4, which covers the inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, which underscores the importance of quality education for all, addressing communication apprehension among learners emerges as a critical endeavor. Communication apprehension, characterized by anxiety and discomfort in interpersonal communication situations, can hinder academic success and social integration. Therefore, effective communication skills are foundational in navigating the complexities of the modern world, spanning personal, academic, and professional realms. The concept of sustainable development, encapsulating the meeting of present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own, underscores the vital role of education as a driver of societal progress.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, underscore the imperative of providing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all individuals by

bridging the gap between effective communication and sustainable development entails addressing communication apprehension among learners. Buddhist education offers a holistic approach to personal development, emphasizing wisdom, compassion, and ethical values. Rooted in disciplines such as moral conduct, mind training, and wisdom cultivation, Buddhist education fosters self-realization and societal betterment. Furthermore, efforts to reduce communication apprehension align with the broader objectives of SDG 4, promoting inclusive and equitable quality education. By fostering collaborative learning environments and intercultural understanding, addressing communication apprehension prepares students for active participation in society and the global workforce. In summary, integrating mindfulness techniques rooted in Buddhist teachings into educational curricula represents a promising approach to reducing communication apprehension, enhancing student well-being, and advancing the goals of quality education outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4. By embracing mindfulness, educators empower students to navigate communication challenges, cultivate essential life skills, and contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

Addressing Communication Apprehension in 21st-Century Learners: A Pathway to Sustainable Education

Anxiety plays a vital factor within learning communities, as it can hinder both effective communication and the overall learning outcomes. In such environments, learners often encounter challenges stemming from differences in communication skills and anxiety levels, particularly when there's a mismatch between the experts and novices (McCroskey, 1984) states in his study that people may experience communication apprehension when they are speaking or writing. According to Gardner, et. al., (2005) oral communication apprehension, is an anxious feeling when communicating with others, whether it's students, professionals, or other groups, and this anxiety may be influenced by cultural factors. For instance, individuals might feel subordinate and act according to hierarchical expectations set by authority figures.

Communication apprehension or the reduced willingness and anxiety is related to talking, it can significantly impact the quality education and learning outcomes. High levels of communication apprehension may hinder students' ability to effectively participate in classroom discussions, engage with peers and teachers, and express their ideas and opinions. This can ultimately impede their overall learning experience and academic performance.

Through the PRCA-24 questionnaire, the communication apprehension tendencies can be assessed and detected. Furthermore, educators and policymakers also gain insights about the barrier's learners face in communication. Therefore, by addressing these barriers are essential for achieving objectives SDG 4, as it promotes an inclusive learning environment where all students have equal opportunities to actively participate and engage in the educational process.

Furthermore, reducing communication apprehension is also in line with the broader objectives of SDG 4 which aims to enhance the quality of education and foster holistic development among learners. Therefore, when Students feel confident and comfortable communicating, they are more likely to learn, share their ideas, and inquire all which ultimately lead to a positive learning environment. This, in turn, fosters critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for achieving sustainable development in the long run.

However, it is also important to note that while addressing communication apprehension is for quality education, it just an aspect for achieving the SDG goal 4, which cannot be covered for the whole other 17 SDGs goal. Therefore, Sustainable development in education requires a comprehensive approach that also addresses factors such as access to education, teacher training, curriculum development, and educational infrastructure. Therefore, while studying communication apprehension levels contributes to SDG 4, it should be complemented by broader efforts to ensure inclusive and quality education for all learners.

Integrating Psychology and Buddhist Doctrines to Alleviate Communication Apprehension: A Path towards Sustainable Development: Quality Education

Strategies for reducing communication apprehension that are in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which prioritizes inclusive and equitable high-quality education for all, by using ideas from psychology and Buddhist teachings. Communication apprehension, often a hindrance to effective learning and communication, can be addressed through various psychological and philosophical approaches. By integrating principles from psychology and Buddhist doctrines, educators and learners can cultivate environments conducive to overcoming communication barriers and fostering holistic development, by incorporating mindfulness practices into communication training programs. Mindfulness, rooted in Buddhist teachings, involves cultivating present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance.

Research has shown that mindfulness-based interventions can effectively reduce anxiety and improve communication skills. Furthermore, by incorporating mindfulness techniques into communication training, learners can develop a greater sense of self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy, which are essential for effective communication and building positive relationships.

Another approach to alleviate communication apprehension is through cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), a psychological intervention that focuses on identifying and modifying negative thought patterns and behaviors. CBT has been shown to be effective in reducing communication anxiety and improving communication competence. Based on problems found in a research study, interventions of CBT have shown a positive effect on reducing communication apprehension, which includes behavior therapy (Erford, 2015), and cognitive therapy. The cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) method is regarded as effective in reducing communication apprehension by addressing cognitive aspects contributing to communication anxiety, along with the practical experience aspect in communication, which can reinforce these cognitive changes (Khoirunnisa, et.al., 2023). By integrating CBT principles into educational programs, learners can develop cognitive strategies to challenge and reframe negative beliefs about communication, leading to increased confidence and improved communication outcomes. The integration of psychology and Buddhist doctrines in addressing communication apprehension can have several benefits. Furthermore, Levine (2009) states that there are some similarities between Western psychology and Buddhism: Both care about reducing pain in people. Both emphasize the human situation and give a naturalistic interpretation of it as opposed to a religious one. Both view persons as caught in a matrix of forces derived from their cravings according to their nature. Both impart the wisdom that kindness, care, and unwavering respect for all living things are acceptable and also growing and developing are ideals shared by both. Furthermore, both agree on the superficial and deep level of mental functions. Firstly, it promotes a holistic approach to education by considering both the psychological and spiritual aspects of individuals. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of mental well-being and effective communication skills, which are crucial for personal and professional success. Secondly, integrating these perspectives can foster a more inclusive and compassionate learning environment. Buddhist teachings emphasize empathy, compassion, and non-violent communication, which can enhance interpersonal relationships and create a supportive atmosphere for learners. By

incorporating these principles into educational practices, learners can develop a deeper understanding of others' perspectives and engage in respectful and empathetic communication.

Furthermore, integrating psychology and Buddhist doctrines in communication training aligns with the principles of SDG 4, as it promotes lifelong learning and the development of essential skills for personal and professional growth. By equipping learners with effective communication strategies and fostering their psychological well-being, this integration contributes to creating a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

In conclusion, by integrating both the psychological and Buddhist teachings and approaching alleviate communication apprehension based on psychology and Buddhist doctrines with Sustainable Development Goal 4 can enhance the quality of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. By incorporating mindfulness practices, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and principles of empathy and compassion, learners can develop effective communication skills and psychological well-being. This integration aligns with the principles of SDG 4 and contributes to creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Application of Buddhist-Based Approaches to Reduce Communication Apprehension: Promoting Quality Education

Buddhist education is a way to end all the mental ills like lust, faults and ignorance through the entire physical and mental discipline and can be a way of gaining spiritual purity. Discipline, an important education objective, is the controlling body and speech. The knowledge that a person gains on crafts without any discipline is not for the good of society, but the Buddhist view is that it should be with ethics. The intelligence of the person, who is without virtue and discipline, is fruitless. It is clear from one of the main activities of an education process is training members to live honoring the other members of the society. The object of Buddhist education is to teach person keeping him as the center and subordinates in various social status by keeping close relationship with them from childhood (Piyarathana, 2017). Educators can improve communication anxiety by adding techniques that help students manage their emotions. These techniques come from mindfulness practices based on Buddhist teachings, like meditation and breathing exercises. Studies show these practices can help people control their feelings and feel less stressed while communicating. Furthermore, most of the literature on mindfulness meditation and its effects on health focuses on

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Ospina, 2009). Therefore, by teaching these skills in communication classes, educators give students practical tools to overcome their anxiety and enhance their communicator skills. While MBSR and mindfulness meditation are distinct concepts, they are often treated interchangeably in current literary works. A diagram is included below to illustrate their relationship as depicted in contemporary literature.

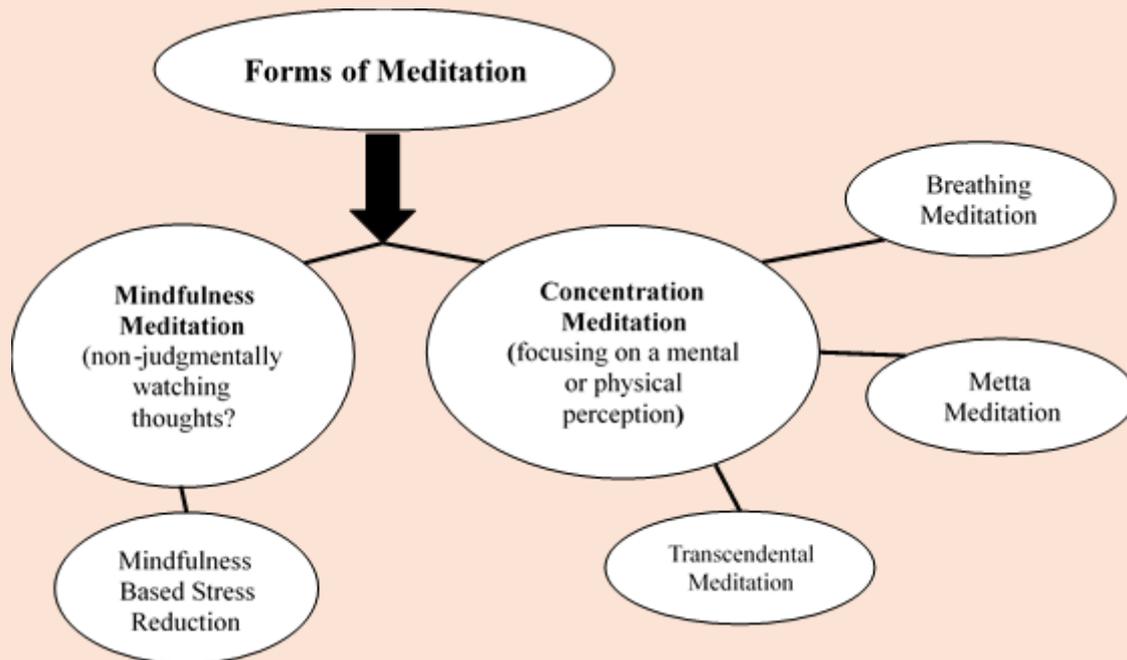


Figure 1: Mindfulness Meditation: A brief overview of different forms of meditation in the current literature. **Note.** The figure of Forms of Meditation is from Spowart, S. A. (2014). Long-Term Mindfulness Meditation: Anxiety, Depression, Stress and Pain, Is There a Connection for Public Health? University of South Florida (p.2).

In addition, the study comparison between Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to other typical stress treatments found that both were equally good at reducing stress. However, MBSR offered additional benefits. It helped people dwell less on negative thoughts (rumination) linked to depression and anxiety. It also increased empathy and self-compassion more than just stress reduction techniques, that highlights the need to understand how MBSR works and how it compares to treatments that aren't as focused, like daily meditation practice for a long time (Chiesa, 2009, pp. 585-592). Mindfulness isn't just about helping students deal with communication anxiety; it also improves the overall learning environment. By learning to stay present and manage their emotions through mindfulness practices, students can better focus on the material and interact positively with classmates. This improved focus and

emotional control create a more positive and supportive classroom atmosphere, which ultimately leads to better learning for everyone.

Furthermore, Berger and McCroskey (1982) have shown that programs that help students see things from each other's perspectives (empathy and understanding) can greatly reduce their fear of communication. When teachers encourage students to be kind to themselves and others (compassion), they create a safe learning space where students feel respected and supported. This approach isn't just about communication skills; it also improves students' overall well-being and their ability to connect with each other (pp. 132-136). Therefore, incorporating mindfulness practices goes beyond just improving communication skills in the classroom. It actually fits perfectly with one of the big goals on quality education laid out in Sustainable Development Goal 4. This goal emphasizes equipping students with important life skills and focusing on their overall well-being. Mindfulness helps with both of these by preparing students to succeed in various academic and professional settings. Additionally, by fostering emotional intelligence and resilience through mindfulness, educators create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This ensures all students have the support they need to. Overall, integrating mindfulness techniques rooted in Buddhist teachings into educational curricula represents a promising approach to reducing communication apprehension, enhancing student well-being, and advancing the goals of quality education outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4. Through this integration, educators empower students with the tools and skills necessary to navigate challenges, communicate effectively, and succeed in their academic and personal endeavors.

Therefore, Buddhist education offers a holistic approach to address mental challenges and attain spiritual purity through rigorous physical and mental discipline. Central to this education is the cultivation of discipline, which governs actions and speech, ensuring knowledge acquisition is accompanied by ethical considerations. By instilling virtues and discipline, Buddhist education aims to nurture individuals who honor and respect others within society, fostering harmonious relationships from childhood. Moreover, integrating mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist teachings into educational settings proves beneficial in addressing communication anxiety and enhancing overall well-being. These practices enable students to manage emotions effectively, fostering a positive learning environment conducive to academic success and personal growth. Additionally, incorporating mindfulness aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4's objective of promoting inclusive and equitable quality

education, equipping students with essential life skills and preparing them for diverse academic and professional challenges. Ultimately, by embracing mindfulness techniques, educators can empower students to overcome communication apprehension, enhance well-being, and achieve success in their educational journey and beyond.

Conclusion

In conclusion, effective communication skills are indispensable in today's rapidly evolving world, spanning personal, academic, and professional domains. Quality education, as envisioned by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all, recognizing education as a fundamental human right and a catalyst for societal progress. Sustainable development encompasses meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, underscoring the importance of education in fostering global prosperity while preserving environmental integrity by bridging the gap between effective communication and sustainable development necessitates addressing communication apprehension among learners. Communication apprehension, characterized by anxiety and reluctance in interpersonal communication, poses a significant barrier to inclusive education and hinders academic achievement and social integration. By integrating psychological principles and Buddhist teachings, educators can cultivate learning environments that empower students to overcome communication barriers and thrive. Therefore, Buddhist education, rooted in *Sila* (moral conduct), *Citta Sikkha* (mind training), and *Panna Sikkha* (wisdom cultivation), offers a holistic approach to personal development, emphasizing ethical living and self-realization. By instilling virtues and discipline, Buddhist education nurtures individuals who honor and respect others, fostering harmonious relationships and societal cohesion. Moreover, integrating mindfulness practices derived from Buddhist teachings into educational settings proves beneficial in addressing communication anxiety and enhancing overall well-being. Mindfulness techniques, including meditation and breathing exercises, enable students to manage emotions effectively, cultivate present-moment awareness, and foster emotional resilience. By incorporating mindfulness into communication training programs, educators provide students with practical tools to overcome anxiety and enhance their communication skills. Moreover, mindfulness fosters a positive learning environment characterized by empathy, compassion, and respect, aligning with the principles of inclusive and equitable education

outlined in SDG 4. Therefore, integrating mindfulness techniques rooted in Buddhist teachings into educational curricula represents a promising approach to reducing communication apprehension, enhancing student well-being, and advancing the goals of quality education outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4. By embracing mindfulness, educators empower students to navigate communication challenges, cultivate essential life skills, and succeed in their academic and personal endeavors, contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

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