
Integrating Buddhist Principles and Peace Education: A Model for Youth Development in Kengtung, Myanmar

Tu May Dar¹ Maechee Narumon Jiwattanasuk²

Phramaha Weerasak Abhinandavedi³

International Buddhist Studies College. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University^{1,2,3}

Corresponding author email: aungkhammong@gmail.com¹

Received 13/05/2026; Revised 29/09/2026; Accepted 29/09/2026

Abstract

This study examined Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development in summer school contexts, analyzed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar, and developed an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts. The study used a qualitative design, including documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with five senior monastic teachers selected through purposive sampling. The study analyzed documentary and interview data using content and thematic analysis. The findings identified mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (metta), compassion (karuṇā), gratitude, moral discipline (sīla), and right speech as key principles supporting emotional regulation, empathy, ethical awareness, and harmonious relationships among youth. The study also identified declining student participation, limited curriculum innovation, insufficient integration of peace-oriented learning activities, and continued reliance on lecture-based instruction as major challenges. In response, the study developed an integrated Summer School Model with four interconnected components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model emphasizes experiential learning, dialogue, meditation, and service learning. The study contributes to Buddhist Peace Studies by proposing a culturally grounded educational framework that connects Buddhist ethical cultivation with contemporary peace education. The proposed model is conceptual and requires further implementation and evaluation before claims of effectiveness can be established.

Keywords: Buddhist principles; Peace education; Summer School Model; Youth development; Self-development

Introduction

Summer schools in Kengtung, Shan State, have long served as centers of Buddhist education, moral cultivation, and community cohesion. Monastic summer programs provide young people with opportunities to study Buddhist teachings, practice meditation, cultivate ethical conduct, and strengthen social relationships. In recent years, however, these programs have faced declining enrollment, reduced community participation, and limited pedagogical innovation. Modernization, digital technology, migration, economic pressure, and changing parental expectations have shaped perceptions of the relevance of traditional summer programs. At the same time, contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes peace education, social-emotional learning, and character development. Harris and Morrison (2013) describe peace education as an educational process concerned with nonviolence, conflict transformation, and peaceful citizenship. Longitudinal research also suggests that adolescent gratitude growth is associated with increases in prosocial behavior and related developmental outcomes (Bono et al., 2019). Buddhist teachings likewise emphasize loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, and ethical conduct as foundations for harmonious living (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). These converging perspectives provide a basis for examining how Buddhist principles and contemporary peace education might be integrated within summer school programs in Kengtung.

This study focuses on Buddhist educational development and peace education within Kengtung's sociocultural context, Shan State, Myanmar. The central problem is declining participation in monastic summer programs and the lack of a clear educational framework that integrates Buddhist principles with contemporary peace education. Young people in changing social environments may encounter emotional stress, cultural transition, digital distraction, and challenges to social cohesion. Educational programs that cultivate emotional resilience, ethical awareness, compassion, self-discipline, and peaceful coexistence may therefore be increasingly important. Previous scholarship supports the relevance of cooperative learning, multicultural education, teacher quality, compassion, and gratitude to educational and psychosocial development (Banks, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Singer & Klimecki, 2014).

Accordingly, this article analyzes Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development, examines the current conditions and challenges of summer

schools in Kengtung, and proposes an integrated Summer School Model grounded in Buddhist and peace education concepts. The study seeks to contribute to Buddhist educational development while offering practical implications for community-based peacebuilding and youth development.

Research Objectives

1. To study Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development in summer school contexts.
2. To analyze the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung.
3. To propose an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts.

Literature Review

1. Buddhist Principles for Peace and Self-Development

Buddhist teachings emphasize inner cultivation as an important foundation for ethical conduct and harmonious relationships. The Aṅguttara Nikāya presents teachings on mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), wisdom (paññā), and moral discipline (sīla), all of which support wholesome conduct and emotional balance (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The Dalai Lama (1999) similarly emphasizes compassion and universal responsibility as foundations for peace at personal and social levels. Buddhist educational traditions also stress gratitude, patience, and right speech as qualities that support responsible and peaceful interaction.

2. Peace Education and Youth Development

Peace education promotes nonviolence, conflict transformation, human dignity, dialogue, and social responsibility. Harris and Morrison (2013) define it as an educational process that develops knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills needed for peaceful living. Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning provide a complementary pedagogical basis for collaborative learning environments that strengthen communication, participation, and constructive interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Multicultural education further helps learners understand diversity and respect cultural differences (Banks, 2008). Community-based youth programs can support emotional development, social responsibility, and leadership when they provide appropriate developmental settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Psychological research also supports the

relevance of compassion and gratitude: compassion training has been associated with improved emotional responses and prosocial orientation, while gratitude practices have been linked to subjective well-being and prosocial behavior (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Singer & Klimecki, 2014).

3. Summer Schools and Contemporary Educational Challenges

Traditional summer schools in Kengtung have functioned as centers of Buddhist learning and moral training, but contemporary social change has created challenges for participation and pedagogy. Programs that rely heavily on sermon- or lecture-based instruction may provide limited opportunities for experiential learning and active student participation. Youth development literature suggests that effective programs benefit from supportive relationships, meaningful participation, skill-building opportunities, and responsiveness to young people's developmental contexts (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Integrating Buddhist principles with participatory peace education may therefore provide a constructive direction for strengthening summer school programs while preserving their religious and cultural foundations.

Overall, the literature indicates substantial conceptual overlap between Buddhist ethical cultivation and peace education in their concern with self-regulation, compassion, constructive relationships, and social harmony. This study draws on mindfulness, compassion, cooperative learning, dialogue, and conflict transformation to develop an integrated Summer School Model for youth development and peace education in Kengtung.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates Buddhist principles, peace education, and participatory educational practices to examine peace and self-development through summer school activities in Kengtung. Buddhist principles provide the ethical and contemplative foundation for individual development, while peace education contributes social and pedagogical dimensions such as nonviolence, dialogue, cooperation, intercultural understanding, and conflict transformation. Cooperative learning is treated as a pedagogical strategy within the broader peace education framework (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The study connects individual cultivation with relational and social development through documentary research and in-depth interviews. The principal areas of analysis include emotional regulation, peaceful behavior, empathy, self-discipline,

communication, social responsibility, self-development, community harmony, and peacebuilding.

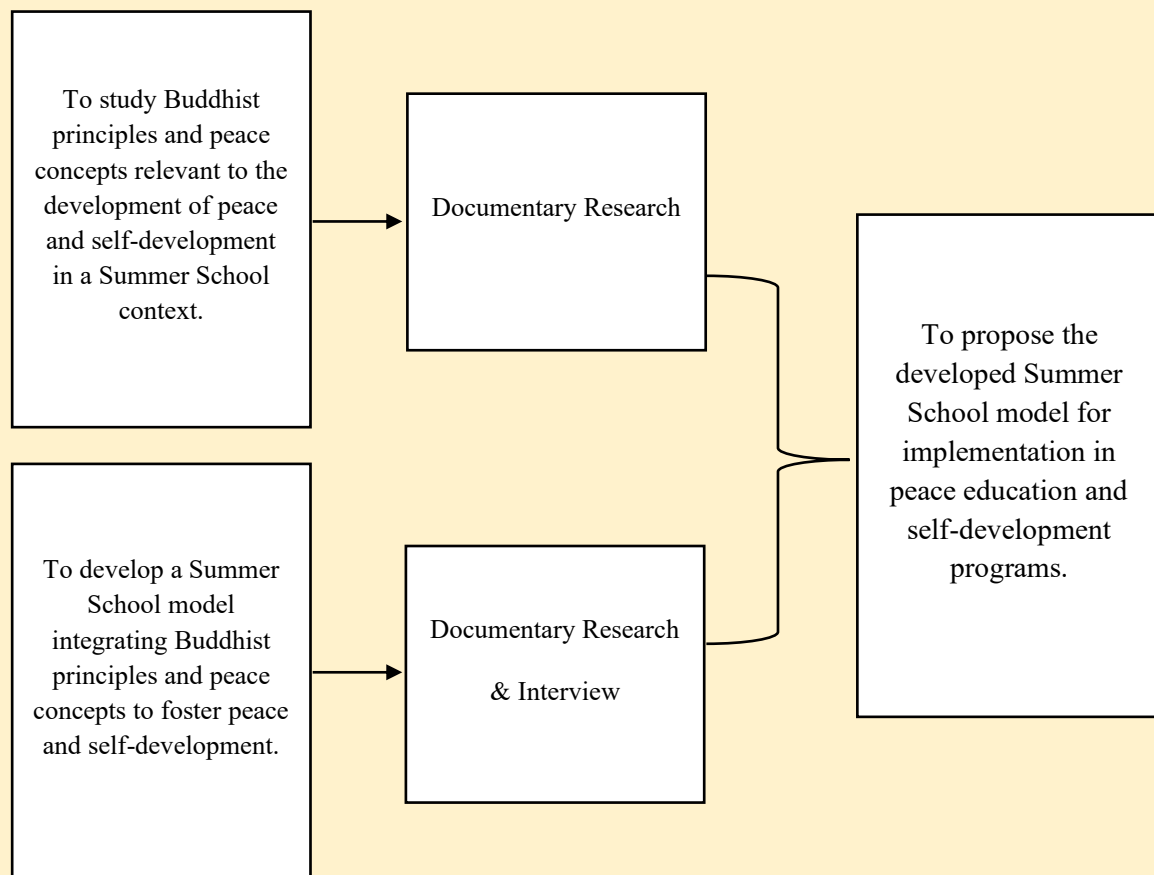


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design that combined documentary research with qualitative field research in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar. Data were collected between June 2025 and April 2026 through documentary analysis and in-depth interviews. Two research instruments were used: (1) a documentary analysis form for reviewing Buddhist texts, academic literature, educational theories, and previous research related to Buddhist principles, peace education, youth development, and summer school programs; and (2) a semi-structured interview guide for exploring participants' experiences, perspectives, challenges, and recommendations concerning summer school programs. Academic advisors and two relevant experts reviewed the interview guide to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

The study analyzed documentary data through content analysis and descriptive synthesis, while coding and analyzing interview data thematically.

The study then integrated findings from both sources to develop a proposed Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts for youth development in Kengtung. The research process consisted of three stages.

Step 1: Documentary Research

The study reviewed relevant Buddhist texts, academic books, journal articles, educational theories, and prior studies on Buddhist principles, peace education, youth development, and summer school programs. A documentary analysis form was used to classify and synthesize key concepts and theoretical perspectives. The study identified sources through library research and academic databases and analyzed them using content analysis and descriptive synthesis to establish the study's conceptual and theoretical foundation.

Step 2: Qualitative Field Research

The study conducted in-depth interviews with five senior monastic teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their direct experience with summer school programs and Buddhist education, their knowledge of teaching or program management, their ability to provide relevant information, and their willingness to participate.

The semi-structured interview guide addressed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools, educational practices, student behavior, and recommendations for program improvement. Following expert review, the interview questions were revised before data collection. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis and descriptive interpretation.

Step 3: Data Synthesis and Model Development

The study synthesized findings from the documentary and interview components to develop an integrated Summer School Model appropriate to the Kengtung context. The synthesis used thematic comparison and descriptive interpretation to connect Buddhist ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion practices, cooperative learning, dialogue-based peace education, and community engagement.

The resulting model is conceptual and is intended to provide a framework for future implementation and evaluation rather than to demonstrate established program effectiveness.

Research Results

Objective 1. Documentary and interview findings identified mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), moral discipline (*sīla*), gratitude, and right speech as Buddhist principles closely related to peace and self-development in summer school contexts. The reviewed sources and interview participants associated these principles with self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, patience, ethical conduct, and responsibility toward others.

Interview findings further indicated that monastic teachers regarded mindfulness and moral discipline as especially important foundations for youth development. As Dr. Phramaha Duangthip Pariyattidhari, abbot of Wat Jomkham, stated, “Mindfulness helps young people control their thoughts and actions, while moral discipline guides them to distinguish between what is right and wrong.” Participants also reported that meditation practice and ethical training can help students improve concentration, reduce reactive behavior, and strengthen harmonious relationships. Participants also identified loving-kindness and compassion as qualities that encourage mutual respect, cooperation, and nonviolent communication.

The study also identified gratitude and respect toward parents, teachers, and community members as important for moral awareness and social responsibility. Taken together, the findings suggest that Buddhist educational principles may provide both spiritual guidance and practical resources for self-regulation, ethical development, and peaceful relationships among youth.

Table 1: Buddhist Principles Relevant to Peace and Self-Development

Buddhist Principles	Contribution to Youth Development
Mindfulness (<i>sati</i>)	Emotional regulation and self-awareness
Loving-kindness (<i>metta</i>)	Empathy and harmonious relationships
Compassion (<i>karuna</i>)	Nonviolence and helping behavior
Moral Discipline (<i>sila</i>)	Ethical behavior and self-control
Gratitude (<i>katannu</i>)	Respect and social responsibility
Right Speech (<i>sammavaca</i>)	Peaceful communication and conflict reduction

Objective 2. The findings indicate that summer schools in Kengtung remain important settings for Buddhist education, cultural preservation, and moral training. Programs commonly emphasize chanting, Buddhist teachings, meditation, and discipline, and interview participants reported that parents and community members continue to value these functions.

Several challenges were also identified. Participants described declining student participation linked to modernization, technology use, migration, and changing parental expectations for formal education. They also reported continued reliance on lecture-based teaching, limited student participation, insufficient structured peace education activities, and limited curriculum innovation suited to contemporary youth learning preferences.

Interviewees also reported that students respond positively to interactive activities such as group discussion, meditation practice, role-playing, teamwork, and community service. Monastic teachers therefore emphasized curriculum development and teacher training as priorities to improve teaching practice and sustain the relevance of summer school programs.

Objective 3. Based on the documentary and interview findings, the study developed an integrated Summer School Model combining Buddhist principles with peace education. The proposed model consists of four interconnected components: (1) ethical formation, (2) mindfulness and compassion training, (3) cooperative peace education, and (4) community engagement. The model is intended to support peace and self-development among youth but has not yet been empirically evaluated as an intervention.

The first component, ethical formation, focuses on moral discipline, daily reflection, gratitude practice, and responsible behavior based on Buddhist teachings. Students are encouraged to observe precepts, develop self-discipline, and cultivate respect toward others. The second component, mindfulness and compassion training, includes meditation practice, emotional awareness exercises, loving-kindness meditation, and reflective activities designed to strengthen emotional regulation and empathy.

The third component, cooperative peace education, uses interactive learning methods such as group dialogue, teamwork, role-playing, and conflict-resolution exercises. These activities aim to improve communication skills, cooperation, mutual understanding, and peaceful problem-solving abilities among students.

The fourth component, community engagement, encourages students to participate in service-learning activities, environmental conservation projects, and community support programs in order to strengthen social responsibility and civic awareness.

The integrated model is designed to create a learning environment that connects emotional, ethical, social, and spiritual development. Interview

participants favored participatory and experiential approaches over exclusive reliance on lecture-centered instruction for contemporary youth.

Proposed practical elements for implementation include teacher training, structured daily activities, curriculum planning, meditation and reflective exercises, cooperative learning, community service, and appropriate behavioral and program evaluation. These elements connect Buddhist self-cultivation with peace education while remaining open to future testing and refinement.

Discussion

The findings for Objective 1 indicate that mindfulness, loving-kindness, compassion, moral discipline, gratitude, and right speech form a coherent Buddhist ethical foundation for peace and self-development in youth education. This interpretation aligns with teachings in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which emphasize cultivating wholesome mental qualities and ethical conduct as foundations for individual and relational well-being (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). It is also supported by contemporary research on contemplative education. A systematic review of 77 school-based mindfulness studies involving more than 12,000 students found relatively strong evidence for improvements in prosocial behavior, resilience, executive function, attention, and mindfulness, together with reductions in anxiety and conduct-related difficulties (Phan et al., 2022). An updated meta-analysis of 66 randomized controlled trials likewise found small but significant benefits of mindfulness-based programs for anxiety and stress, attention, executive functioning, and social behavior among children and adolescents, although the authors emphasized that effects were generally modest and less consistent against active controls (Dunning et al., 2022).

The role of loving-kindness and compassion is similarly supported, but should be interpreted cautiously. Perkins et al. (2022) found that kindness- and compassion-based meditation may contribute to well-being and prosocial outcomes among children and adolescents, while also noting variability in study quality and intervention design. These findings reinforce the educational relevance of Buddhist practices concerned with *mettā* and *karuṇā*, but they do not establish that such practices automatically produce prosocial development. The present findings therefore identify educationally meaningful principles that require structured pedagogy and sustained practice, rather than demonstrating direct causal effects.

Objective 2 highlights an important tension between the continuing cultural and moral significance of Kengtung's summer schools and the changing educational expectations of contemporary youth. Participants reported declining participation, continued reliance on lecture-based instruction, and limited

curriculum innovation, while also observing stronger engagement with interactive and experiential activities. This finding aligns with youth development literature that emphasizes participation, supportive relationships, and developmentally responsive learning environments (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). It is also supported by evidence from experiential learning. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that experiential learning programs were more effective than non-experiential approaches in improving empathy and subjective well-being among adolescents, suggesting that active participation and reflection can enhance important social-emotional outcomes (Chan et al., 2021). Cooperative learning research further supports the value of structured interaction and social interdependence for student engagement and interpersonal development (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

This does not mean traditional monastic education should be replaced. Rather, pedagogical adaptation may better sustain its enduring ethical and cultural strengths. Meditation, Dhamma teaching, moral discipline, and respect for Buddhist traditions can remain central while being delivered through dialogue, cooperative activities, reflection, service learning, and participatory learning. This approach preserves continuity while making Buddhist education more responsive to contemporary youth.

For Objective 3, the proposed Summer School Model integrates these findings through four components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model corresponds with peace education's emphasis on nonviolence, dialogue, cooperation, and conflict transformation (Harris & Morrison, 2013), while retaining Buddhist ethical cultivation as its cultural and spiritual foundation. Recent syntheses of peace education research also suggest that effective practice depends not only on curriculum content but also on situated pedagogy, student and teacher agency, relational practice, and sensitivity to local cultural contexts.

The model's principal contribution is therefore integrative rather than evaluative. It connects inner cultivation with interpersonal learning and community participation within a culturally grounded educational framework. However, because the model was derived from documentary analysis and interviews with a small, purposively selected sample and was not experimentally implemented, claims of effectiveness would be premature. Future research should pilot the model, include student and parent perspectives, examine implementation fidelity and acceptability, and assess outcomes such as emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, participation, conflict-management skills, and perceived community relevance.

Knowledge from Research

This study contributes an integrated educational framework linking Buddhist ethical cultivation with contemporary peace education in monastic summer schools in Kengtung. The framework identifies a progression from individual cultivation, through mindfulness, moral discipline, compassion, loving-kindness, gratitude, and right speech, to relational learning through dialogue, cooperation, and conflict transformation, and finally to community engagement. Its distinctive contribution lies in organizing these elements within a single Summer School Model grounded in the local Buddhist educational context.

The study also clarifies that revitalization requires both continuity and adaptation. The Buddhist foundations of summer schools remain central, while participatory pedagogy, curriculum development, teacher preparation, and community engagement are needed to respond to contemporary educational conditions. The resulting model comprises four components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. As a conceptual model derived from documentary and interview evidence, it provides a basis for implementation and future evaluation rather than proof of educational effectiveness.

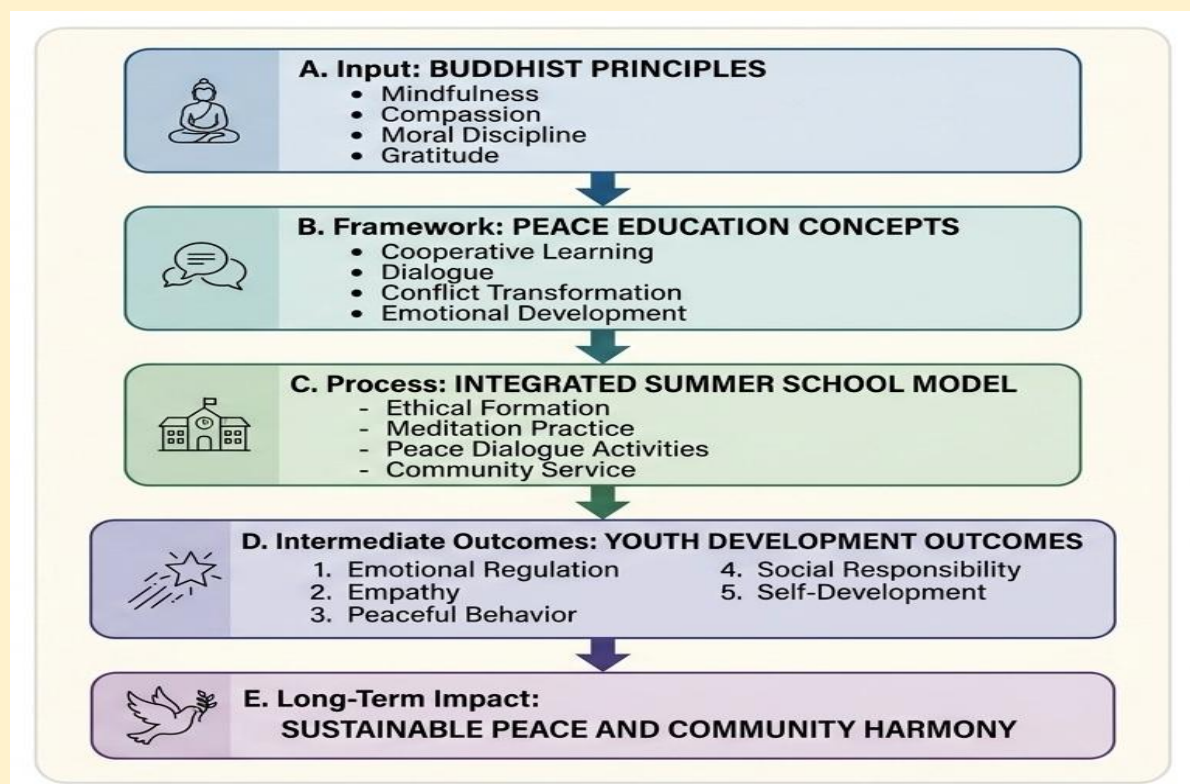


Figure 2: Integrated Summer School Model for Peace and Youth Development.

Conclusion

This study examined Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development, analyzed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung, and developed an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist and peace education concepts. The findings indicate that mindfulness, loving-kindness, compassion, moral discipline, gratitude, and right speech provide an ethical and contemplative foundation for youth development. Interview participants also identified ongoing strengths in Buddhist cultural and moral education, alongside challenges such as declining participation, lecture-centered instruction, limited curriculum innovation, and insufficient peace-oriented learning activities.

In response, the study proposes a four-component model: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model seeks to preserve the Buddhist identity of summer schools while incorporating participatory teaching, dialogue, experiential learning, meditation, and service-oriented activities that may be more responsive to contemporary youth.

The study therefore contributes a culturally grounded framework that connects inner cultivation with interpersonal and community-oriented peace education. However, the model has not yet been implemented or tested through outcome evaluation. The findings should not be interpreted as proof of effectiveness, and the small, purposively selected interview sample and Kengtung's specific sociocultural setting limit their generalizability.

Suggestions

Educational and monastic institutions seeking to strengthen summer school programs may consider integrating structured mindfulness and compassion activities, cooperative learning, dialogue-based peace education, community engagement, and teacher development while preserving core Buddhist educational aims. Any implementation should adapt to local conditions and include systematic evaluation, rather than assuming the proposed model will produce the same outcomes across settings.

Future research should pilot the proposed model with broader participant groups, including students, parents, and teachers; examine implementation processes and acceptability; and evaluate short- and long-term outcomes related to emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, participation, self-development, and community engagement. Comparative studies across Buddhist summer school contexts would also help determine which elements are context-specific and which may be transferable.

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