
Navigating Higher Education and Monastic Life: Challenges Faced by Buddhist Nuns in Hue, Vietnam

Tran Thi Xanh

Faculty of Education, Hue University of Education, Vietnam

Corresponding author email: kusalajana91@gmail.com

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education at secular universities in Hue, Vietnam. It addressed three objectives: (1) to identify the challenges they encounter, (2) to examine the coping strategies they use, and (3) to analyze how they balance academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations. Five Buddhist nuns enrolled in undergraduate programs were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically.

The findings revealed four interrelated challenges: time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. Participants responded through strategic time management, Buddhist practices such as mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection, and social and institutional support from temples, mentors, fellow nuns, classmates, lecturers, and universities. Balancing academic and monastic life involved both practical adjustment and psychological and spiritual integration. Participants used flexible scheduling and task prioritization while interpreting higher education as compatible with Buddhist values, personal development, and service to society. Rather than viewing secular education and monastic life as opposing domains, they understood university study as a complementary dimension of their religious vocation. The study contributes context-specific evidence to the limited literature on Buddhist nuns in secular higher education and highlights the importance of institutional flexibility, financial and social support, and recognition of the dual academic and monastic responsibilities of religious students.

Keywords: Buddhist nuns; Higher education; Secular universities; Coping strategies; Monastic life

Introduction

Higher education has become increasingly accessible to religious practitioners in Vietnam. The 2019 Law on Education affirms equal learning opportunities regardless of religion, belief, gender, social status, or economic circumstances and provides a legal basis for participation in the national education system (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). Since Đổi Mới, religious communities have also become more engaged in educational and social development, including Buddhist participation in preschool, vocational, and higher-education activities (Van Bien et al., 2024). Within this changing environment, Buddhist nuns increasingly encounter opportunities to pursue secular academic study alongside monastic education and religious service.

Nevertheless, Buddhist nuns' educational experiences are shaped by distinctive institutional and personal demands. International studies have documented unequal access to advanced education, limited institutional resources, and gendered expectations among Buddhist nuns in several Asian contexts (Gutschow, 2004; Heirman, 2011; Kawanami, 1997; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). Research on Buddhist students in higher education more broadly also indicates that religious identity may create specific needs for institutional understanding, accommodation, and supportive campus environments (Edwards, 2024). For Buddhist nuns, these concerns are intensified by monastic schedules, ritual obligations, temple responsibilities, and behavioral expectations that continue while they participate in secular university life.

In Vietnam, Buddhism has long contributed to moral, educational, and social development through values such as compassion, wisdom, and ethical conduct (Ngo & Tran, 2019). Higher education may therefore offer Buddhist nuns additional knowledge and professional competencies that strengthen their ability to contribute to teaching, counseling, communication, and community service. However, participation in secular universities also requires them to negotiate academic workload, financial limitations, mixed-gender interaction, travel, and the practical tension between university and monastery schedules.

Despite growing scholarship on Buddhist women, existing research has focused mainly on monastic education, gender inequality, historical development, and religious participation. Little empirical attention has been given to Buddhist nuns studying in secular universities in Vietnam, particularly in Hue,

an important center of Vietnamese Buddhism. This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges Buddhist nuns face in higher education, the strategies they use to cope, and how they integrate academic responsibilities with monastic practice. By focusing on their lived experiences, the study contributes to research on religion, gender, higher education, and contemporary Buddhist adaptation.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the challenges experienced by Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education in secular universities in Hue, Vietnam.
2. To examine the coping strategies they use to manage academic and monastic demands.
3. To analyze how they integrate academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations.

Literature review

Research on Buddhist nuns and education has concentrated primarily on monastic training, gender inequality, institutional access, and religious participation. Across several Buddhist contexts, women have historically received fewer educational opportunities, resources, and leadership pathways than monks. Gutschow (2004) documented structural disadvantages affecting nuns in the Himalayan region, while Kawanami (1997) and Theri (2019) described the constrained educational and institutional position of Buddhist nuns in Myanmar. Heirman (2011) similarly showed that the status of Buddhist nuns must be understood within broader historical and disciplinary structures. In Bhutan, Sonam and Juli (2016) found that monastic education could empower nuns while remaining shaped by unequal institutional support.

These studies are important, but they focus mainly on education within Buddhist institutions. The experience of nuns entering secular higher education introduces a different set of demands because participants must move between two institutional environments with distinct schedules, social norms, pedagogical expectations, and forms of authority. Research on religiously minoritized students indicates that higher-education institutions may overlook religious identity when designing academic and student-support systems. Edwards (2024), for example, argues that Buddhist students can encounter both barriers and opportunities depending on the inclusiveness of the campus environment. Such concerns are particularly relevant for monastics whose religious commitments are embodied in daily schedules, dress, ritual practice, and interpersonal boundaries.

In Vietnam, the relationship between religion and national education has become more open since Đổi Mới. Religious communities, including the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, have contributed to literacy programs, preschool education, vocational training, and other educational initiatives, while religious individuals participate in the national education system under state law (Van Bien et al., 2024). Buddhist educational engagement is also consistent with an ethical tradition that links wisdom, compassion, and service to social development (Ngo & Tran, 2019).

The literature also suggests that individuals occupying multiple roles may experience tension when demands from one domain interfere with responsibilities in another. Classic role-conflict theory identifies time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based forms of conflict between competing roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), while work–life balance scholarship emphasizes that balance should be understood as a dynamic process involving the management of competing demands, resources, and subjective well-being rather than equal time allocation across domains (Guest, 2002). More recent research has extended this perspective to higher education. In a scoping review of boundary management among university students, Eastgate et al. (2021) found that how students manage boundaries between different life roles is associated with role conflict, role overload, role balance, academic performance, and well-being. These perspectives are particularly relevant to Buddhist nuns, who must continually negotiate the boundaries between university study and monastic responsibilities. At the same time, religious commitment may provide coping resources rather than functioning solely as a competing demand. Religious coping can involve meaning-making, spiritual support, and reinterpreting stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000), while Buddhist practices such as mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection may help participants regulate emotion and sustain resilience.

A clear research gap therefore remains. Existing scholarship provides substantial knowledge about Buddhist nuns in monastic education and about religious communities in social development, but little empirical research examines how Buddhist nuns navigate secular university education in Vietnam. The present study addresses this gap by investigating their challenges, coping strategies, and processes of academic-monastic integration in Hue.

The study is guided by an integrated framework combining role-conflict theory, religious coping, and lived experience. Role-conflict theory provides a useful lens for understanding how demands from different institutional roles may compete for time, generate strain, or require incompatible behaviors (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Applied to this study, Buddhist nuns occupy at least two

structured roles, university student and monastic practitioner, whose schedules and expectations may occasionally overlap or conflict.

Religious coping complements this perspective by explaining how religious beliefs and practices can become resources for interpreting and managing stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000). Mindfulness, meditation, chanting, reflection on impermanence, and support from spiritual mentors may therefore operate not only as religious obligations but also as resources for emotional regulation, meaning-making, and resilience.

Finally, a lived-experience perspective directs attention to how participants themselves interpret the relationship between academic and monastic life. Rather than assuming that the two roles are inherently incompatible, the framework allows the analysis to examine whether participants experience tension, accommodation, or integration. The study therefore conceptualizes the process as: dual academic and monastic demands → role tension → coping resources → adaptive academic-monastic integration.

Although previous research has documented gendered educational inequality, monastic training, and the social roles of Buddhist nuns, little attention has been given to nuns enrolled in secular universities in Vietnam. The present study contributes context-specific evidence from Hue by examining not only barriers to participation but also the strategies and interpretive processes through which Buddhist nuns sustain higher education. Its distinctive contribution is identifying academic-monastic integration as a dynamic process involving role tension, Buddhist coping resources, social support, and meaning-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education while maintaining monastic commitments in Hue, Vietnam. A case study approach was appropriate because it permits in-depth examination of a bounded contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting (Stake, 1995). The qualitative design emphasized participants' perceptions, meanings, and interpretations rather than statistical generalization.

Participants and Sampling

Five Buddhist nuns enrolled in secular university programs in Hue were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling identified information-rich participants with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Eligibility required participants to have completed at least one year of university study, to be actively fulfilling both academic and monastic responsibilities, and to participate voluntarily. Participants ranged from 22 to 34 years of age and had 11–20 years of monastic experience. Their fields included Educational Psychology, Literature Education, and English Language Studies.

Table 1. Participants and Sampling

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Years in Monastery	Current University	Field of Study (Major)	Year of Study
Hai	Female	Kinh	22	11	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	4
Giac	Female	Kinh	28	15	Phu Xuan University, Hue City	English Language	2
Chan	Female	Kinh	30	15	University of Education, Hue City	Literature Pedagogy	3
Tran	Female	Kinh	34	18	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	4
Hien	Female	Kinh	30	20	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	3

Data Collection

Data were collected between November and December 2024 through five semi-structured individual interviews: three face-to-face and two telephone interviews. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it enables systematic coverage of key topics while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences that are significant to them (Kvale, 1996; Dörnyei, 2007). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and addressed three areas corresponding to the research objectives: challenges encountered in higher education, coping strategies, and experiences of balancing academic and

monastic responsibilities. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis and Ethics

The transcripts were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach. Analysis involved repeated reading, initial coding, identifying recurring patterns, developing and reviewing themes, and interpreting them in relation to the research objectives and theoretical framework. Both inductive and deductive reasoning were used: themes were allowed to emerge from participants' accounts while the concepts of role tension, coping, and integration informed interpretation. Participants were invited to review their interview transcripts for accuracy, consistent with member-checking procedures used to strengthen credibility in qualitative research (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023).

Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and pseudonyms. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and used only for research purposes. Because the manuscript does not provide an institutional ethics approval number, no approval number is reported here; insert this information before publication if formal approval was obtained.

Research results

The thematic analysis produced three groups of findings corresponding to the research objectives: challenges encountered in secular higher education, coping strategies, and processes used to integrate academic and monastic responsibilities.

Challenges in Secular Higher Education

The first objective was to identify the challenges Buddhist nuns encountered while pursuing higher education in secular universities. Analysis of the interview data revealed four major and interconnected challenges: time management, financial constraints, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. These challenges arose from the participants' simultaneous responsibilities as university students and Buddhist monastic practitioners.

Time Management

Time management emerged as the most prominent challenge reported by the participants. The nuns had to coordinate university classes, assignments, examinations, and travel with regular monastic responsibilities, including chanting, meditation, scriptural study, temple duties, and community activities. The overlap between these responsibilities frequently resulted in limited time for study and rest.

Participants described particularly demanding daily schedules. One participant explained:

“I have to wake up at 4 a.m. every day to prepare for morning prayers and temple duties. Then I rush to the university for my classes. By the time I return to the temple in the evening, there are evening prayer sessions to attend. I often stay up until midnight or later to complete my assignments.” (Hai, personal communication, November 22, 2024)

Commuting between temples and universities further intensified the problem. Participants reported that travel time could be substantial, particularly when the temple was located far from the university. Restrictions concerning leaving the temple also made participation in university activities more complicated.

Participants therefore experienced time management not simply as organizing academic activities but as a continuing need to negotiate competing academic and monastic schedules. When classes, examinations, group assignments, and Buddhist studies overlapped, participants sometimes had to prioritize one responsibility over another.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints constituted another significant challenge. Participants reported expenses associated with tuition fees, transportation, learning materials, and other educational requirements. Because they generally lacked independent income, they relied on support from temples, spiritual mentors, lay Buddhists, scholarships, and tuition reductions to sustain their studies.

Although such assistance enabled participants to continue their university education, financial concerns remained. Some participants also expressed feelings of indebtedness and responsibility toward those who supported their education. Thus, financial difficulties involved both material concerns and an emotional dimension associated with dependence on external support.

Psychological and Cultural Pressures

The transition between the monastic environment and the secular university environment generated psychological and cultural pressures. Participants described the monastery as a disciplined, structured, and contemplative environment, whereas the university provided a more diverse and socially open setting.

Particular challenges arose in social interaction, including mixed-gender group work and extracurricular activities. Participants had to navigate forms of interaction that differed from the behavioral expectations and interpersonal boundaries associated with their monastic lives. Some reported feelings of discomfort, isolation, or uncertainty when participating in secular university activities.

These experiences indicate that the participants' adjustment involved more than adapting to academic requirements. They also had to negotiate their religious identity and monastic commitments within a secular educational environment.

Academic Workload and Role Conflict

Academic workload was the fourth major challenge. Participants reported pressure arising from assignments, examinations, presentations, research activities, and group projects. These demands became more difficult because they occurred alongside Buddhist studies and temple responsibilities.

The simultaneous demands of university and religious education sometimes created role conflict. Participants had to choose between academic activities and religious responsibilities. During examination periods, the pressure could increase substantially and affect sleep, physical health, and emotional well-being.

Overall, Objective 1 shows that the challenges participants experienced were interconnected. Limited time could intensify academic workload; financial difficulties could contribute to psychological pressure; and conflicts between university and monastic schedules could affect both academic participation and religious responsibilities.

Coping Strategies

The second objective was to examine the coping strategies Buddhist nuns used to overcome challenges associated with higher education. Three major strategies emerged from the interview data: strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and seeking social and institutional support.

Table 2. Coping Strategies Used by Buddhist Nuns

Main coping strategy	Specific practices identified in the interviews
Strategic time management	Creating daily, weekly, and monthly schedules; setting goals; prioritizing urgent and important tasks; completing tasks efficiently; maximizing available study time
Buddhist practices	Mindfulness; meditation; chanting; reading Buddhist teachings; maintaining emotional calm; reflecting on Buddhist teachings
Seeking social and institutional support	Seeking guidance from spiritual mentors, fellow nuns, friends, classmates, teachers, temples, and educational institutions; receiving academic, emotional, and financial support

Source: Compiled from the five semi-structured interviews.

Strategic Time Management

Strategic time management was the most frequently reported coping strategy. Participants described creating specific schedules, setting daily goals, planning their academic work, and prioritizing important or urgent tasks.

For example, one participant stated:

“I work based on goals and arrange my schedule. On that day, I decide what to do. At night, I set goals for the next day: Where I will study, what I will do to ensure nothing is missed. During a class session, I focus entirely and make the most of my time in class.” (Hai, personal communication, November 22, 2024)

Other participants similarly described preparing detailed schedules for their studies and temple responsibilities. One participant emphasized creating specific plans to balance study and temple duties, while another reported planning in detail on a weekly and monthly basis and prioritizing important and urgent tasks.

These accounts indicate that participants responded to time pressure through deliberate planning rather than attempting to manage competing responsibilities spontaneously.

Buddhist Practices

Buddhist practices represented a second major coping strategy. Participants referred to mindfulness, meditation, chanting, reading Buddhist teachings, and maintaining emotional calm as ways of responding to academic pressure. These practices were described as helping them stabilize their emotions, maintain concentration, and preserve psychological energy during demanding periods.

One participant explained:

“I’ve learned to keep my mind at ease by practicing meditation and taking time to rest, which helps me sustain my energy.” (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

Participants also described mindfulness as a way of becoming more attentive to their actions and words. In this sense, Buddhist practices were not experienced solely as religious obligations but also as resources for managing stress and maintaining emotional stability.

Seeking Social and Institutional Support

The third coping strategy involved seeking support from both monastic and educational communities. Participants described receiving assistance from spiritual mentors, fellow practitioners, friends, classmates, teachers, and universities.

One participant stated:

“At the temple, my spiritual mentor and fellow practitioners are always there to support me when I need help, especially during times of stress.” (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

Support from spiritual mentors could include emotional encouragement and financial assistance. One participant reported that her mentor occasionally provided additional financial support to encourage her studies, while another described the temple as providing a peaceful environment conducive to learning.

Participants also expressed a desire for greater understanding from their mentors, friends, and educational institutions, particularly during examination periods. The combination of personal effort and support from others enabled them to continue their academic activities while maintaining their monastic responsibilities.

Academic-Monastic Integration

The third objective was to analyze how Buddhist nuns balance academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations. The findings indicate that participants approached this balance through two interconnected dimensions: physical and practical adjustment and psychological and spiritual integration.

Table 3. Ways of Balancing Academic and Religious Responsibilities

Dimension	Main strategies	Examples identified in the interviews
Physical and practical balance	Flexible scheduling	Adjusting study and temple schedules according to academic and religious demands
	Prioritizing important tasks and goals	Giving priority to urgent academic or monastic responsibilities, particularly during examinations or important religious activities
Psychological and spiritual balance	Practicing Buddhist teachings	Using mindfulness and reflection on Buddhist teachings to maintain emotional stability
	Integrating academic and religious life	Viewing higher education as connected to wisdom, personal development, service, and monastic life

Source: Compiled from the five semi-structured interviews.

Physical and Practical Balance

Participants achieved practical balance primarily through flexible scheduling and prioritization. When academic and religious responsibilities conflicted, they adjusted their schedules according to the urgency and importance of particular tasks.

During examination periods, some participants reduced participation in non-essential temple activities. At other times, they adjusted academic commitments to accommodate important religious activities. Thus, balance did not necessarily mean allocating equal time to university and monastic activities. Instead, it involved continuously adjusting priorities as circumstances changed.

One participant explained that even with detailed planning, periods of overlapping academic and temple responsibilities could still result in exhaustion:

“These plans help me develop time management, organizational skills, and self-discipline. However, I sometimes feel tired due to the overlap between studying and temple duties.” (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

This suggests that practical balance was an ongoing process rather than a fixed state.

Psychological and Spiritual Balance

Beyond practical scheduling, participants also sought psychological and spiritual balance through Buddhist teachings and practices. Mindfulness, meditation, and reflection helped them maintain emotional stability when facing academic pressure.

A particularly important finding was that participants did not necessarily perceive academic education and monastic life as opposing commitments. Instead, they increasingly understood university education as part of their broader pursuit of knowledge, personal development, and service to society.

Academic knowledge could therefore be connected to their religious and community activities. This integration allowed participants to perceive their

university studies as meaningful within their broader spiritual journey rather than simply as an external obligation.

Overall, the findings indicate that balancing academic and religious responsibilities involved both external adjustment and internal integration. The participants managed their schedules and priorities while also developing a perspective in which academic learning and religious practice could support one another.

Discussion

The findings show that Buddhist nuns pursuing secular higher education in Hue experience a distinctive form of role tension created by the simultaneous demands of university study and monastic life. Time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload were interconnected rather than isolated challenges. This aligns with research showing that students managing multiple responsibilities often struggle to allocate time and sustain well-being (Reay et al., 2002; Stone & O'Shea, 2013). Role-conflict theory similarly suggests that competing domains can generate time-, strain-, and behavior-based tensions when expectations from one role interfere with another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For Buddhist nuns, these tensions are intensified because both university and monastery life involve structured schedules, behavioral expectations, and institutional responsibilities.

Financial and cultural pressures also parallel earlier research documenting unequal educational resources and institutional constraints among Buddhist nuns in Asian contexts (Gutschow, 2004; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). However, this study extends the literature by focusing on nuns who have already entered secular universities. Their challenge is therefore not simply gaining access to education but negotiating monastic identity within mixed-gender and socially diverse academic environments. This finding is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing the need for higher-education institutions to recognize the distinctive experiences of Buddhist students and create more supportive campus environments (Edwards, 2024).

The second major finding concerns coping. Participants relied on strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and social and institutional support. Planning and prioritization correspond with established research on time-management behaviors and academic performance (Britton & Tesser, 1991; Claessens et al., 2007). More distinctively, mindfulness, meditation, chanting,

and reflection on impermanence functioned simultaneously as religious commitments and coping resources. This interpretation aligns with religious coping theory, which emphasizes meaning-making, spiritual support, and reinterpretation of stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000), and with research linking Buddhist meditation and mindfulness to improved psychological functioning among students (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). Recent research also demonstrates that religious women in higher education may actively reconcile rather than simply choose between academic and religious identities.

Finally, participants achieved balance through flexible adjustment and psychological-spiritual integration. Rather than perceiving university education as incompatible with monastic life, they interpreted learning as contributing to wisdom, personal development, and service. This extends previous studies emphasizing institutional disadvantage by showing that Buddhist nuns can actively construct continuity between academic and religious identities (Gutschow, 2004; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). Overall, the findings suggest that successful academic-monastic integration depends on both individual coping resources and institutional environments that provide flexibility, recognition, and support.

New knowledge from the research

This study generates new knowledge by proposing the Academic–Monastic Integration Framework, illustrated in *Figure 1*. The framework explains how Buddhist nuns pursuing secular higher education in Hue manage the interaction between academic responsibilities and monastic commitments through a dynamic process of tension, coping, and integration.

The first component is *Dual Demands*. Participants simultaneously faced university expectations, academic deadlines, examinations, temple duties, chanting, meditation, and other monastic obligations. These overlapping responsibilities created the second component, *Role Tension*, expressed through time constraints, financial strain, psychological and cultural pressure, and academic workload. The findings therefore show that the challenges experienced by Buddhist nuns are not isolated problems but interconnected consequences of operating within two structured institutional environments.

The third component, *Coping Resources*, represents the principal mechanism through which participants responded to these tensions. These resources included strategic time management, mindfulness, meditation, chanting, social support, and institutional support. Importantly, Buddhist practice

did not function only as an additional religious obligation. It also provided emotional regulation, meaning-making, resilience, and a disciplined foundation for managing academic demands.

The fourth component is *Adaptive Academic–Monastic Integration*. Participants used flexible scheduling, emotional resilience, identity integration, and reinterpretation of higher education as part of spiritual and social development. Rather than experiencing the identities of “student” and “nun” as fundamentally incompatible, they constructed continuity between academic learning, Buddhist values, and service to society.

The study’s core new knowledge is that monastic life can function simultaneously as an obligation and a *resource for academic persistence and resilience*. As Figure 1 demonstrates, successful integration develops through an ongoing pathway:

Dual Demands → Role Tension → Coping Resources → Adaptive Academic–Monastic Integration

This framework offers a context-sensitive model for understanding Buddhist nuns in higher education and provides a basis for future research and institutional support.

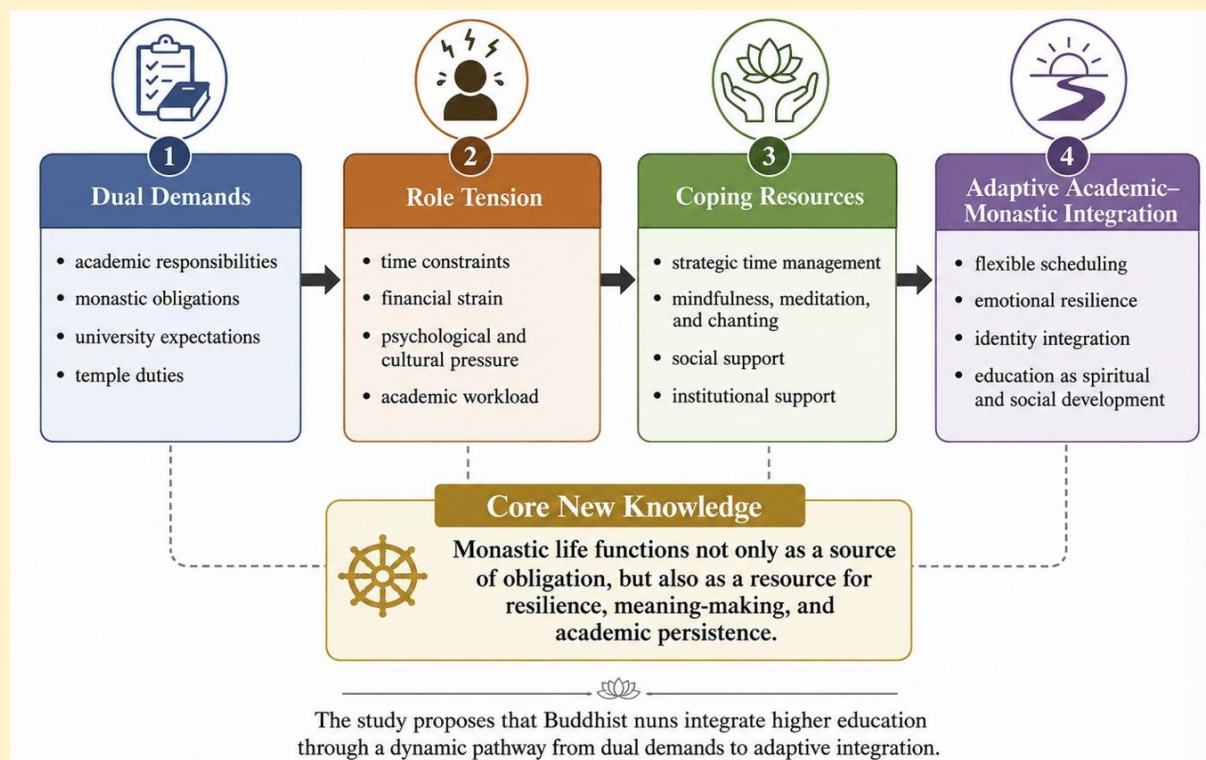


Figure 1. Academic-Monastic Integration Framework

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of five Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education at secular universities in Hue, Vietnam, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to cope, and the ways they balanced academic responsibilities with monastic life. The findings show that four interconnected challenges shaped their educational experiences: time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. These challenges arose largely from the need to meet university requirements while maintaining regular religious practices, temple duties, and monastic responsibilities.

Participants responded through strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and social and institutional support. Planning and prioritization enabled them to manage competing demands, while mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection on Buddhist teachings supported emotional stability and resilience. Support from temples, spiritual mentors, fellow nuns, classmates, lecturers, and universities was also essential. Importantly, participants did not generally regard secular higher education and monastic life as incompatible. They increasingly understood academic learning as complementary to Buddhist values, personal development, and service to society. Balancing the two domains therefore involved both practical flexibility and constructing meaningful continuity between academic and religious identities.

The study contributes context-specific evidence to the limited literature on Buddhist nuns in secular higher education. It suggests that supporting nuns in university settings requires more than individual perseverance: universities and Buddhist institutions should recognize their dual responsibilities and provide appropriate academic flexibility, financial assistance, mentoring, and institutional cooperation. Given the small qualitative sample, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization, but they provide a useful foundation for larger comparative studies of religious identity, gender, monastic life, and higher education in Vietnam and other Buddhist contexts.

Recommendations

The study is limited by its small, context-specific sample of five Buddhist nuns in Hue and by its reliance on self-reported interview data. The findings are therefore intended for analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future studies should include participants from different regions, Buddhist traditions, academic disciplines, and institutional contexts and should consider additional

data sources such as observation and interviews with monastic mentors, lecturers, and university administrators.

Universities should recognize Buddhist nuns as students with distinctive religious responsibilities and provide reasonable flexibility during major religious observances, accessible academic advising, and information about financial support. Buddhist temples and monastic communities can support nuns through mentorship, encouragement, and appropriate adjustment of duties during periods of intense academic demand. Stronger communication between universities and Buddhist institutions may reduce unnecessary role conflict and improve continuity between academic and monastic responsibilities.

Future research should test the Academic-Monastic Integration Framework with larger and more diverse samples and compare the experiences of Buddhist nuns with monks, lay Buddhist students, and religious students from other traditions. Longitudinal research could also examine whether the integration strategies identified here change across different stages of university study and monastic life.

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