

# The Development of the Integrated Curriculum of the Buddhist Morals for Strengthening Social Adaptation of Vulnerable Youth

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## Abstract

The purposes of the study consequently were (1) to study background information needed in the development of a Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation, (2) to develop a Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation, and (3) to implement the Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation. The study was divided into 3 phases including need analysis, curriculum development, and curriculum implementation. The participants were 50 stakeholders of vulnerable youth caregivers in phase 1, 5 experts in phase 2, and 100 vulnerable youths in phase 3. The instruments were an interview form, a curriculum evaluation form, an integrated curriculum of the Buddhist morals, and a pre-post test. The data were analyzed using content analysis, percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, and a paired sample t-test. The main findings could be summarized that using the integrated curriculum of the Buddhist morals was beneficial in strengthening the social adaptation of vulnerable youths. However, the developmental processes of the curriculum also demand the analysis of information regarding vulnerable youths, their environment, and potential Buddhism morals that could benefit their life skills. Students also need learning activities that could help them make a connection between religious morals and life situations.

**Keywords:** Life skills, Social adaptation, Buddhist morals, Curriculum development

## 1. Introduction

Social adaptation is regarded as a critical issue directly related to human behavior, which is a reaction of an individual seeking to balance his or her motives and needs on the one hand, and the requirements of the environment and various circumstances on the other. Therefore,

one is concerned with the positive activities that provide satisfaction and increase social approval, and hence the capacity to adapt to diverse situations and circumstances in life (AlZboon, 2013). Therefore, one should be aware of social values, legal regulations, and morality to be blended as a preferable member of the society. According to Giddens and Sutton (2013), adaptability can be defined as the capacity of an individual to effectively deal with or adapt to his or her natural and social surroundings, including the capacity to live freely, manage his or her own life, and meet cultural requirements. Therefore, social adaptation can be crucial in education as it allows students to utilize what they learn in class in real life.

It can also be noted that social adaptation is one of the life skills which are important in teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hodge, Danish, and Martin (2013) described life skills as the qualities that enable humans to cope effectively with life's demands and obstacles. They are also referred to as psychosocial abilities, as they are psychological in character and encompass both cognitive and behavioral processes. This includes cognitive, behavioral, or interpersonal abilities that help individuals to excel in a variety of domains of life. Moreover, Prajapati, Sharma, and Sharma (2017) provided an example of the components of life skills including thinking skills, social, and emotional skills. In detail, to cope with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, learners are expected to systematically use high-order thinking, be adaptive in society, and effectively manage their emotions. This would help students to adapt to social norms and contribute to social harmony.

However, the development of learners' social adaptation might not be simple for a certain group of learners. Especially for the vulnerable youth group, factors and issues should be considered. Broadly, vulnerability is a broad term that refers to groups of people who are more exposed to risks than their peers. According to Arora et al. (2015), young people frequently experiment with sexual identity, sexual practices, and high-risk activities, placing them at a proportionally high risk of assault, injury, and reproductive tract infections. This could drive them into desirable social situations such as teen pregnancy, crime, drugs, etc. Consequently, the vulnerable group of youth should be specifically taken care of in terms of the development of life skills education.

The utilization of religious doctrine in education has been found throughout the history of human beings. Religion serves a variety of purposes in society. These include providing meaning and purpose to life, creating social unity and stability, acting as a social control agency, encouraging physical and psychological well-being, and motivating individuals to work for positive social change (Emerson, Monahan, & Mirola, 2011). Students could gain benefits in developing their life skills and social adaptability by learning in a curriculum designed with the integration of religious doctrine, especially for vulnerable youth who could use the philosophy to prevent risks in life.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Vulnerable Youth*

As discussed, the vulnerability of youth relies on their curiosity natures to explore new things

which could involve risks such as sexual activities, drugs, violence, etc. With less experience and immature consideration, they could let to difficult situations in life (Arora et al., 2015). World Vision (2014) defined vulnerable children and youth as one who could be orphaned, living without the necessities, uneducated, suffering from abuse or exploitation, facing discrimination, and involved in exploitative labor. Skinner et al. (2006), defined vulnerable youth as “The ones not having certain of their basic rights fulfilled” (p. 1). Hence, apart from orphanhood, 3 aspects of the material, emotion, and society should be involved in identifying vulnerability. According to the authors, children need material aspects—money, food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education; emotional aspects—care, love, support, space to grieve and containment of emotions; social aspects—supportive peer groups of role models to follow or to provide guidance in difficult situations and risks in the immediate environment. The lack of each aspect could trouble the glowing path of youth and lead to social problems.

It seems that youths with certain social, material, and emotional conditions are vulnerable to risks, and they need support from state and social organizations to cope with problems in their lives. According to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2013), vulnerable young people need literacy and life skills to adapt to society and develop their careers. This may include the development of thinking processes, social skills, and emotional management. The understanding of the causes and effects of things in life could help them develop their thinking processes in making decisions. Comprehending social expectations and learning how to deal with emotion whether being able to reach the bar or not is also helpful in making a decent life. These skills would help vulnerable youth manage their problems and develop their social adaptability.

## *2.2 Potential of Buddhism Morals in Life-Based Education*

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines life skills as an individual’s capacity to engage in adaptive and positive behavior to effectively meet the demands and challenges of daily life (1997). According to the WHO, these skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship building, negotiation, self-awareness development, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. According to UNICEF, life skills education is a method of behavioral change or development that focuses on a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude, and skills (UNESCO, 2001). Therefore, moral teaching could be a fundamental treatment to develop this non-content knowledge.

Buddhism has been the center of Thai Education since ancient times. Like in other civilizations, Thai ancestors received their first education in religious places. Buddhist monks took the roles of both literacy givers and moral teachers for Thais (Preechapermpasit, 2012). Therefore, it could be claimed that life skill education originated from Buddhism temples. According to Khakhlary (2019), Buddhism teaches man to be prudent, humanist, logical, and free of superstitions. They are constantly concerned with their own well-being as well as the well-being of others. Lately, Buddhist education has made tremendous strides by incorporating modern subjects into the curriculum. Considering the core principles of the religion, it could be seen that the Buddhism doctrine could be a potential tool in developing

learners' life skills, especially in the vulnerable teen group as it might implant self and interpersonal understanding which is beneficial in developing social adaptation.

### *2.3 Previous Studies*

As life skills, social adaptation, and religious morals are related, studies have been conducted using various doctrines in teaching learners life skills (e.g., Adarkar & Keiser, 2007; Amirudin & Muzaki, 2019; Croitorua & Munteanub, 2013; Eissa & Khalid, 2019; Onyango, 2020). For example, in the Islamic world, Amirudin and Muzaki (2019) studied the impact of Islamic education on the life skills of students in Indonesia. The results of the survey of 130 respondents indicate that doctrine in the Quran helps them acquire self-awareness, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and vocational skills. Regarding the Christian community, Onyango (2020) used the role-play teaching technique with the adaptation of that Christian doctrine and found that it could enhance students' life skills competency, thus achieving the desired outcomes. The author also added that it would imbue the learners with experiences that would ensure future success in any endeavor they pursue in life. In Buddhism studies, Adarkar and Keiser (2007) found that the instruction of Buddhism morals was beneficial in developing life skills such as generosity, renunciation, patience, determination, trustfulness, and equanimity. It could be seen that religious morals have been used in the development of life skills across areas and cultures. The current study, therefore, employed Buddhism morals in curriculum development to develop social adaptation as a life skill of youth in a vulnerable group in Thailand. The purposes of the study consequently were (1) to study background information needed in the development of a Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation, (2) to develop a Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation, and (3) to implement the Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design*

The study was designed in a Research and Development method (R&D) which utilizes the processes of need analysis, curriculum development, and experimental design. Background information and needs related to the development of vulnerable youths' social adaptation were gathered from stakeholders to develop a Buddhism curriculum. The developed curriculum was later implemented in the target group. Therefore, the study was divided into 3 phases below.

#### **3.1.1 Phase 1—The Study on Background Information Needed in the Development of a Buddhism Curriculum in Developing Vulnerable Youths' Social Adaptation**

Phase 1 was a study on background information needed in the development of a Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation. The samples were 50 teachers and stakeholders who manage vulnerable youth in the area. The instruments were a document analysis form and an interview form. The data were gathered from the target area of Khon Khaen Province, Thailand. The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis.

### 3.1.2 Phase 2—The Development of the Buddhism Curriculum

Phase 2 was the development of the Buddhism curriculum using the data gained from the previous section of the study. 5 experts were assigned to evaluate the developed curriculum. The instruments were the draft version of the developed curriculum and a curriculum evaluation form. In detail, 8 components are in the curriculum including background and rationale, principles, purposes, contents, instructional processes, learning activities, learning material, and assessment. In detail, the main purpose of the curriculum was to develop the social adaptation of vulnerable youth using the instruction of Buddhism morals. The contents are related to using the basic morals such as 5 precepts, conscience, and 6 vices in solving life problems and dealing with risks such as drugs and sexual activities. The learning activities focus on an active learning environment that helps learners understand the morals and how to use them in their lives. The data were analyzed using percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation.

### 3.1.3 Phase 3—The Implementation of the Developed Curriculum

Phase 3 was the implementation of the developed curriculum. The participants were 100 vulnerable youths in Khon Kaen province selected by the voluntary selection method. The participants took part in a workshop on the implementation of the Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation. Their social adaptation knowledge was assessed to identify the effectiveness of the curriculum. The instruments were the Buddhism curriculum for developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation and a social adaptation knowledge test. The data were analyzed using percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, and a paired t-test.

## 4. Results

The result of the study could be discussed along with the following issues.

### *4.1 The Background Information and Needs in the Curriculum Development*

The need for the development of the curriculum from the result of content analysis could be summarized as follows.

First, caregivers of vulnerable youths believed that the implementation of Buddhism morals would be beneficial in developing their pupils' life skills as well as life progress. According to the interview result, the instruction of Buddhism morals would increase students' ability to analyze things in life and make good decisions. In other words, moral teaching could inform the students of the expectation of society and the causes of that moral standards. Therefore, the participants believed that vulnerable youths in their care would adapt themselves to society and prevent risks that could delay their life progress.

In terms of the curriculum characteristics, the participants reported that a short workshop course with active activities should be considered in designing the curriculum. The students taking part in the curriculum should be treated with respect and care. The main purpose of the curriculum should be to make vulnerable youth comprehend Buddhism's morals and Thai society's expectations. The utilization of morals in daily life in social adaptation processes

should also be exemplified in the activities.

In terms of the curriculum content, the Buddhism doctrine (Dharma) related to risk activities that could be involved in vulnerable youths' lives such as drug and sexual activities should be selected. The content should not be too complicated as the target group could not connect it to their lives. The curriculum content should also help the students to make the connection between the Dharmas and life situations.

#### *4.2 The Development of the Curriculum*

The data in the need analysis were used in the development of the curriculum. The results of the study show that the curriculum was developed to be a short course in the active workshop design. There were 8 components of the curriculum including background and rationale, principles, purposes, contents, instructional processes, learning activities, learning material, and assessment. In detail, the main purpose of the curriculum was to develop the social adaptation of vulnerable youth using the instruction of Buddhism morals. The contents are related to using the basic morals such as 5 precepts, conscience, and 6 vices in solving life problems and dealing with risks such as drugs and sexual activities. The learning activities focus on an active learning environment that helps learners understand the morals and how to use them in their lives. Lastly, the effectiveness of the curriculum was assessed by the participants' knowledge of social adaptation before and after the implementation of the curriculum. The evaluation of the curriculum can be seen below.

Table 1. Curriculum evaluation result

Components	Validity ( $\bar{x}$ , S.D.)	Appropriateness ( $\bar{x}$ , S.D.)
Rationale	4.43, 0.56	4.59, 0.51
Principles	4.50, 0.63	4.67, 0.33
Purposes	4.53, 0.66	4.80, 0.33
Contents	5.00, 0.00	4.85, 0.34
Instructional Processes	4.40, 0.55	4.35, 0.67
Learning Activities	4.33, 0.77	4.35, 0.67
Learning Material	4.60, 0.55	4.56, 0.55
Assessment	4.47, 0.61	4.53, 0.51
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.53, 0.54</b>	<b>4.62, 0.47</b>

The result of the study indicates that the curriculum was evaluated to be a very high level of validity ( $\bar{x} = 4.53, 0.54$ ) and appropriateness ( $\bar{x} = 4.62, 0.47$ ). In detail, components of the curriculum were rated at either high or very high levels by 5 experts assigned in the second



phase of the study. It could be implied that the developed Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation was proved to reach an expected quality before being implemented in phase 3.

#### 4.3 The Implementation of the Curriculum

Table 2. Results of pre and post-tests to evaluate the students' knowledge before and after the implementation of the curriculum

Results	n	$\bar{x}$	S.D	t	df	p
Pretest	204	12.50	0.78	-16.66	22	.00
Posttest	204	25.65	0.95			

The result of the study indicates that students' knowledge of social adaptation was improved after taking part in the curriculum. Pre and post-tests were employed to evaluate the students' knowledge before and after the implementation of the curriculum. A paired samples t-test indicates that the participants' average test score after learning the Buddhism curriculum in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation ( $\bar{x} = 25.65$ , S.D. = 0.95) was significantly higher than before receiving the treatment ( $\bar{x} = 12.50$ , S.D. = 0.78),  $t = -16.66$ ,  $df = 22$ ,  $p = .00$ . Consequently, it could be interpreted that the implementation of the developed curriculum could lead to the improvement of students' social adaptation.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the study could be discussed in the following issues.

### 5.1 The Effectiveness of Religious Studies on Life Skill Education

The findings indicate that the developed Buddhism curriculum was beneficial in developing vulnerable youths' social adaptation as there was an improvement in students' knowledge after implementing the curriculum. The results of the study went in line with others (Adarkar & Keiser, 2007; Amirudin & Muzaki, 2019; Croitorua & Munteanub, 2013; Eissa & Khalid, 2019; Onyango, 2020) who also found the benefits of religious teaching in students' development of life skills. Therefore, Moral studies and religious education are still relevant in today's society because they enable students to understand how social values are developed. They could establish a link between morals and risky actions in order to prevent them or, at the very least, to perform more significantly. Therefore, it could be claimed that students in the vulnerable group benefit from learning Buddhism studies.

### 5.2 The Role of Buddhism in Education

The result of the study also confirms the role of Buddhism in Thai education. As discussed earlier, religion has played an important role in teaching Thai citizens from ancient times. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Buddha's teaching is still crucial in developing social adaptation as a life



skill. Students are expected to understand themselves, others, and society to act properly without harming one another. At this point, people are expected to be wise, humane, and logical by the teachings of Buddhism. In addition to their well-being, they are perpetually concerned with the well-being of those around them (Khakhlary, 2019). This would allow vulnerable youths to comprehend the nature of things and develop their right mind of thinking which is crucial in developing life skills.

Moreover, it also confirms the role of religion in human socialization. According to Emerson, Monahan, and Mirola (2011) religions serve humans as it provides meaning and purpose to one's life, fostering social unity and stability, serving as a social control agency, promoting physical and psychological well-being, and motivating individuals to work for positive social change, among many other functions. Moreover, life skills, in the meaning of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, can be developed by such qualities as interpersonal relationships, negotiation, self-awareness, empathy, emotional management, etc. These qualities are assessed by social norms or the standard of social values which are normally derived from strong beliefs in the society. Therefore, teaching life skills and religion studies are related to each other.

### *5.3 The Benefits of Moral Studies in Vulnerable Youth Development*

Considering the definition of vulnerability among youth and the risk they take in life, the findings could be implied that strengthening the relationship between the vulnerable youth and religious institutions could reduce their risks in life. According to Skinner et al. (2006), vulnerable youths need material, social, and emotional support to deal with difficulties in their life. The religious institutions not only provide shelter but also spiritually support them. This would assist the vulnerable youth in adjusting to society and keeps them from engaging in potentially dangerous behaviors such as crime, drugs, and sexual activities.

## **6. Conclusion**

Therefore, the main findings of the current study could be summarized that using the integrated curriculum of the Buddhist morals was beneficial in strengthening the social adaptation of vulnerable youths. However, it needs to be noted that the developmental processes of the curriculum also demand the analysis of information regarding vulnerable youths, their environment, and potential Buddhism morals that could benefit their life skills. Students also need learning activities that could help them make a connection between religious morals and life situations. The results of the study could be implicated in a pedagogical setting as policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and vulnerable youth caregivers should consider the instruction of religious doctrine in the development of life skills. Moreover, further studies should also be conducted using the integration of moral teaching in the development of other life skills such as interpersonal relationships, negotiation, self-awareness, empathy, emotional management, etc. Regarding methodology, further studies are encouraged to assess social adaptation and other life skills using more long-term assessment methods such as behavioral observation, portfolio assessment, etc.

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