

# **The Effectiveness Study of Novice Monk Education: By Evaluating the Significance of the Ultimate Goal of Buddhism**

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## **1. Introduction**

The complex interplay between education systems and the spiritual development of novice Buddhist monks has been a topic of longstanding interest and debate within the religious and academic spheres. This study aims to investigate the impact of contemporary education approaches on the training of novice monks and their alignment with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, which center on the perception of human suffering and its ceaselessness (Bodhi, 2005). Rooted in the foundational principles espoused by Lord Buddha, the Buddhist tradition emphasizes the attainment of enlightenment and the ultimate cessation of suffering as the ultimate goal for its adherents (Gethin, 1998). However, as modern education systems have become increasingly prevalent, there is a need to critically examine how these systems may influence the spiritual formation and development of novice monks, who are tasked with upholding and propagating the core tenets of the Buddhist faith (Sayadaw, 2017). To this end, the researcher has undertaken an immersive and extensive fieldwork approach, staying for more than five years within a novice monk institute, observing and engaging with the daily lives, training, and educational experiences of these young monastics (Sayadaw, 2017). This sustained engagement has provided the researcher with a unique and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the current education system as it relates to the spiritual growth and ultimate enlightenment of novice Buddhist monks. By drawing on this rich empirical data and the researcher's deep familiarity with the subject matter, this study delves into the complex interplay between modern education and the traditional Buddhist teachings, exploring how the former may hinder or facilitate the latter in the context of novice monk training (Bodhi, 2005). The findings of this research aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between education and spiritual development within the Buddhist monastic tradition, ultimately informing efforts to align novice monk education with the ultimate goal of Buddhism: the eradication of human suffering. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of contemporary education systems on the training and development of novice Buddhist monks, and to explore how these systems align (or fail to align) with the fundamental teachings of Lord Buddha and the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment and the cessation of suffering.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

To address the research objectives, this study employs a qualitative research approach, leveraging the valuable insights and experiences gained by the researcher through an extended immersion within a novice monk institute over the course of more than five years. The primary data collection method involves a thematic analysis of written, electronic, and digital sources related to the education and training of novice Buddhist monks. This includes an in-depth review of curricula, training manuals, and institutional policies, as well as an examination of scholarly literature and historical records pertaining to the evolution of novice monk education.

### 3. Results and Discussion

*Evolution of Buddhist Education:* The early Buddhist tradition emphasized the practice of meditation as a means to end the cycle of suffering and rebirth, a core tenet of Buddhist doctrine. This is evidenced by the Buddha's own attainment of enlightenment through deep meditation, as well as the central role of meditation in traditional Buddhist monasticism (Gethin, 1998). In addition to meditation, the early Buddhist community also practiced the recitation of paritta, or protective chants, as a form of spiritual practice and education (Gombrich, 1988). These chants were seen as having the power to provide blessings and protection, and were an important part of the Buddhist educational system in the early centuries. However, over the course of the 2,600 years since the time of the Buddha, the Buddhist educational system has evolved considerably. As Buddhism spread and adapted to different cultural contexts, the emphasis on meditation and monastic life was sometimes supplemented or even supplanted by a greater focus on textual study and engagement with the laity (Bechert, 1995). This shift is evidenced by the emergence of a class of "non-meditation" Buddhist monks who, as you note, have expressed a desire to pursue mainstream university education, similar to the contemporary education system. This reflects a broader trend in which Buddhist education has become more integrated with, and influenced by, the secular education system (Swearer, 2010). It is important to note that this evolution of Buddhist education does not negate the continued importance of meditation and other traditional practices within certain Buddhist contexts. However, it does highlight the adaptability and dynamism of the Buddhist tradition, as it has sought to remain relevant and accessible to new generations of practitioners (Tambiah, 1976).

*Contemporary secular education systems on novice monks:* The study's findings reveal a concerning divergence between the contemporary education systems for novice Buddhist monks and the fundamental teachings of Lord Buddha, which emphasize the attainment of enlightenment and the cessation of suffering as the ultimate goal. Most scholarly works have traditionally focused on how monks can achieve this goal through the practices of meditation, ethical conduct, and spiritual development. However, the researcher's immersive experience within a novice monk institute has shed light on the significant impact of the commercialization and influence of mainstream education systems on the Buddhist community, including the novice monks. The study found that novice monks are increasingly compelled to pursue common academic subjects and sit for examinations alongside lay students, a departure from the traditional monastic focus on spiritual cultivation. Furthermore, the aspirations of many novice monks appear to have shifted towards becoming teachers or lecturers, rather than solely pursuing the path of emancipation. This shift was corroborated through the researcher's interviews with the novice monks themselves. In stark contrast, the researcher also identified an institute of novice monks that has actively resisted the adoption of traditional education systems, prioritizing the attainment of Nirvana over academic pursuits. The novice monks in this institute expressed a deep commitment to the fundamental teachings of Lord Buddha and a resolute determination to follow the spiritual path towards the cessation of suffering. These findings underscore the pressing need for substantial changes in the education system for novice Buddhist monks, to align it more closely with the ultimate goal of Buddhism. The commercialization and influence of mainstream education have posed significant challenges to the spiritual development and enlightenment of these young monastics, necessitating a re-

evaluation of the educational frameworks and strategies employed within the Buddhist community.

*Development of spirituality:* The early Buddhist tradition emphasized the practice of meditation as a means to end the cycle of suffering and rebirth, a core tenet of Buddhist doctrine. This is evidenced by the Buddha's own attainment of enlightenment through deep meditation, as well as the central role of meditation in traditional Buddhist monasticism (Gethin, 1998). In addition to meditation, the early Buddhist community also practiced the recitation of paritta, or protective chants, as a form of spiritual practice and education (Gombrich, 1988). These chants were seen as having the power to provide blessings and protection, and were an important part of the Buddhist educational system in the early centuries. However, over the course of the 2,600 years since the time of the Buddha, the Buddhist educational system has evolved considerably. As Buddhism spread and adapted to different cultural contexts, the emphasis on meditation and monastic life was sometimes supplemented or even supplanted by a greater focus on textual study and engagement with the laity (Bechert, 1995). This shift is evidenced by the emergence of a class of "non-meditation" Buddhist monks who, as have expressed a desire to pursue mainstream university education, similar to the contemporary education system. This reflects a broader trend in which Buddhist education has become more integrated with, and influenced by, the secular education system (Swearer, 2010). It is important to note that this evolution of Buddhist education does not negate the continued importance of meditation and other traditional practices within certain Buddhist contexts. However, it does highlight the adaptability and dynamism of the Buddhist tradition, as it has sought to remain relevant and accessible to new generations of practitioners (Tambiah, 1976). The shift towards a greater emphasis on textual study and engagement with the laity in Buddhist education, rather than a sole focus on meditation, can be traced back several centuries. As Buddhism spread and adapted to new cultural contexts, monasteries and educational institutions began incorporating more secular subjects and pedagogical approaches (Bechert, 1995). This evolution was particularly pronounced in regions where Buddhism interacted extensively with other religious and educational traditions, such as in East Asia. Here, the rise of "scholastic" Buddhist monks who were highly trained in Buddhist texts and philosophy, but not necessarily expert meditators, became more common (Welch, 1967).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Buddhist education system is crucial for the survival of a country, the establishment of a good society, and the preservation of Buddhism for future generations. Historically, it primarily focused on meditation and the attainment of Nirvana. Unfortunately, in the contemporary period, this practice has diminished among novice monks. Instead, they often prioritize becoming teachers or lecturers, neglecting the path to Nirvana. There is a pressing need to reform the educational system for monks. Researchers have identified an institute for novice monks that integrates meditation from childhood with traditional education, emphasizing the path to Nirvana. This approach is essential for the development of novice monk education globally.

#### **5. Keywords**

Emancipation, Novice's education, Sustainable development, Lecturers

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