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The Importance of Buddhist Education and Human Resource Development at Prey Speu Primary School, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of Buddhist education in human resource development at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research investigated how Buddhist education contributes to cognitive, affective, and behavioral development among students. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 70 participants, including teachers and students from grades 5 and 6, supplemented by in-depth interviews with five key informants comprising senior teachers and school administrators. The survey instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency, with missing data handled through listwise deletion. Quantitative findings revealed strong participant recognition of Buddhist education's importance across multiple dimensions, with 77.14% strongly agreeing it teaches citizenship and appropriate behavior, 74.28% valuing the integration of religious and universal knowledge, and 71.42% recognizing its role in developing critical thinking. Regarding specific contributions to human resource development, 88.57% of participants acknowledged the school provides educational opportunities for orphans, 82.85% recognized access for poor students, and 75.71% agreed the curriculum provides sufficient knowledge for higher education progression. Qualitative interviews identified three major themes: holistic student development through integrated practice, educational accessibility as social mission, and balancing secular curriculum with Buddhist teachings. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that Buddhist education contributes substantially to human resource development through ethical formation, contemplative practices, comprehensive support systems, and integrated curriculum combining ministry requirements with Buddhist principles, thereby preparing students for both practical livelihood and moral development.

Keywords: *Buddhist Education, Education Equality, Human Resource Development, Monastic Schools, Primary Education*

INTRODUCTION

Buddhist education encompasses the systematic transmission of wisdom and compassion, serving as a pedagogical framework through which individuals acquire foundational knowledge, develop critical thinking capabilities, internalize social norms, cultivate moral discernment, and enhance practical competencies (Ruksat et al., 2025). This educational approach is characterized by three distinct methodological dimensions: ethics, serenity, and insight (Bhandari, 2023; Lodewijk et al., 2023). In contemporary contexts, Buddhist education extends beyond traditional religious instruction to encompass broader objectives of knowledge dissemination and the cultivation of compassionate engagement with diverse communities (Nyanabhadra et al., 2025; Sapardi, 2023).

The contribution of Buddhist education to human resource development manifests through the enhancement of cognitive capacities, attitudinal orientations, and practical skills among learners. According to Areekul (2017), Buddhist studies play a substantial role in preparing individuals to meet current and future workforce requirements. This educational model has demonstrated particular relevance in Southeast Asian contexts, where Buddhist institutions have historically functioned as primary sites of learning and community development. In Cambodia, the constitutional recognition of Buddhism as the state religion has facilitated the integration of Buddhist principles into formal education systems through festivals, religious training programs, curriculum development, and institutional support for Buddhist organizations (Lawrence, 2022).

The historical trajectory of Buddhist education in Cambodia extends across centuries, experiencing significant development during the Sangkum Reas Niyum era under King Norodom Sihanouk. Contemporary Buddhist educational institutions continue this legacy by establishing primary schools that combine secular curriculum requirements with Buddhist teachings. These institutions provide students with opportunities to pursue higher education and subsequent employment while maintaining foundations in Buddhist philosophy and practice (Thaijongrak, 2023). Educational institutions bear responsibility not only for knowledge transmission but also for creating supportive learning environments that promote student well-being. This shared responsibility encompasses teachers, students, and broader school communities (Heng & Sol, 2021; Kimkong & Koemhong, 2022).

Despite the documented benefits of Buddhist education, existing research has insufficiently examined how specific Buddhist primary schools operationalize these principles in practice and measure their impact on student development. While scholarly attention has addressed Buddhist education at theoretical and macro levels, empirical investigations of particular institutions remain limited. This gap is particularly evident in studies examining the relationship between Buddhist educational practices and concrete human resource development outcomes at the

primary education level. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which Buddhist education contributes to the development of academic competencies, ethical reasoning, and psychological resilience warrant systematic investigation.

The present study addresses this research gap by examining Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School in Chaom Chao II, Po Senchey, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. This institution was selected as the case study site for several reasons. First, it represents a typical Buddhist primary school model operating within Cambodia's formal education system, thereby offering insights transferable to similar institutions. Second, the school has maintained consistent operations over multiple years, allowing for assessment of sustained educational outcomes. Third, institutional leadership expressed willingness to participate in comprehensive data collection, facilitating access to teachers, students, and administrative records. Finally, the school serves a diverse student population, enabling examination of Buddhist education's impact across varied learner backgrounds.

Preliminary observations indicate that some students at Buddhist schools experience difficulties achieving their educational objectives. Certain learners demonstrate limited self-awareness and may exhibit self-centered perspectives or insufficient diligence in their studies. However, evidence suggests these challenges often diminish when students actively engage with institutional resources and seek guidance from teachers. Continuous practice appears essential for students to develop competencies and expand their knowledge base. These observations underscore the need for systematic investigation into how Buddhist education influences student development and what factors mediate educational success.

This study employs a conceptual framework that positions Buddhist education as an independent variable influencing human resource development outcomes. For the purposes of this research, Human Resource Development (HRD) is operationally defined as the systematic enhancement of individual capabilities across three domains: cognitive development (knowledge acquisition and academic performance), affective development (moral reasoning and emotional regulation), and behavioral development (practical skills and social competencies). Buddhist Education is operationally defined as the instructional approach integrating Buddhist philosophical principles (specifically ethics, meditation practices, and wisdom cultivation) with standard primary curriculum content (Ruksat et al., 2025). The framework posits that Buddhist education contributes to HRD through several pathways. First, the ethical dimension cultivates moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors. Second, meditation and mindfulness practices enhance cognitive focus and emotional regulation. Third, the wisdom component develops critical thinking and holistic understanding. These elements collectively equip students with competencies extending beyond conventional academic achievement to encompass psychological resilience, ethical conduct, and community engagement.

According to Watthanabut (2017), Buddhist education at institutions such as Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School contributes to HRD by teaching students

mindfulness, discipline, compassion, and wisdom. This approach provides learners not only with academic knowledge but also with moral and psychological foundations necessary for becoming responsible, ethical individuals capable of contributing positively to society. Buddhist education emphasizes inner transformation and the cultivation of core virtues essential for optimal human functioning, focusing on ethical living, mental clarity, and emotional balance as conditions for developing a high-quality workforce and engaged citizenship.

This research investigates the role of Buddhist education in human resource development at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School. The study evaluates educational outcomes among students who completed their studies at the institution, utilizing data gathered through interviews with school administrators and teachers, along with surveys administered to students in grades 5 and 6. The research scope is deliberately circumscribed to this single institution to enable in-depth examination of educational processes and outcomes. Data collection focuses on instructors and upper-primary students (grades 5 and 6), as these participants possess sufficient experience with the educational program to provide informed perspectives. The study seeks to analyze the significance of Buddhist education and emphasize the role Buddhism plays in providing beneficial perspectives to individuals in society. Furthermore, this investigation explores the benefits students derive from attending Buddhist institutions and how they apply these benefits to subsequent educational stages and careers. By examining these dimensions, the research contributes to understanding how Buddhist educational principles translate into measurable human resource development outcomes in contemporary Cambodian contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Buddhist Education

Buddhist education is fundamentally concerned with the cultivation of wisdom and compassion. It aims to liberate human potential through systematic study and understanding of consciousness in its various manifestations. The educational process enables individuals to acquire knowledge, develop reasoning abilities, internalize social standards, distinguish between beneficial and harmful actions, and cultivate practical competencies (Loeung & Phal, 2025). Buddhist schools serve as institutional contexts where individuals learn about moral principles, compassion, and Buddhist philosophical traditions. These institutions represent the diverse doctrinal and organizational divisions within Buddhism that have evolved from ancient times to the present day (Loeung & Phal, 2025).

The Buddhist educational framework rests on three foundational pillars: knowledge acquisition, wisdom development (prajna), and conceptual reasoning (manasikara). Varma's analysis of educational systems suggests that knowledge transcends mere factual accumulation, operating instead as a transformative system that converts understanding into right vision. This process challenges conventional

assumptions and generates evaluative frameworks through which individuals assess experience and make judgments (Xusanovna, 2019).

Buddhist education proceeds from the premise that all beings possess inherent capacity for knowledge and enlightened reasoning. The term “Buddha” denotes an awakened or enlightened individual, indicating that Buddhism constitutes both study and practice directed toward recognizing truth and perceiving reality accurately (Anālayo, 2021; Bodhi, 2020). Such inquiry necessarily begins with self-examination. The objective of learning within this framework is to actualize inner wisdom characterized by mental freedom from attachment and compassionate concern for all beings. Because this wisdom emerges from within rather than being imposed externally, Buddhist education adopts a non-dogmatic approach that facilitates learning “from the inside out” (Zhe et al., 2020).

Human Resource Development in Educational Contexts

Human Resource Development (HRD) constitutes a systematic framework for enhancing individual skills, knowledge, and capabilities, thereby improving organizational or institutional effectiveness (Dwivedi et al., 2024). Through employee training and career development initiatives, organizations cultivate their personnel, resulting in enhanced organizational performance and effectiveness (Swanson, 2022). In educational contexts, HRD encompasses the development of student capacities across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, preparing individuals for productive participation in society and the workforce (Chan et al., 2020).

The relationship between Buddhist education and HRD operates through the integration of academic instruction with character development. Buddhist educational approaches emphasize values alongside knowledge, focusing on developing students' spiritual and moral capacities in addition to their social and professional competencies (Barua, 2025). This integrated approach recognizes that optimal human functioning requires both material stability and spiritual development. While acknowledging that spiritual aspirations depend partly on physical health and economic security, Buddhist education insists that practical educational elements must be accompanied by additional conditions designed to actualize human potential according to Buddhist philosophical vision.

Buddhist Education in Cambodian Contexts

Buddhism has constituted an integral component of Cambodian education since the tradition's inception in the region. Buddhist pagodas maintained central educational roles even following the introduction of French educational systems during the colonial period (Ladwig, 2018). The establishment of the French Language School of the Protectorate in 1873 marked the beginning of modern schooling in Cambodia, initiating a process of school construction that has continued to the present. According to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and

Sports, the Kingdom currently operates 12,889 public schools encompassing primary, secondary, and high school levels (Hai et al., 2021).

Despite the proliferation of schools employing modern pedagogical methods, Buddhist monasteries continue to fulfill significant educational functions. Buddhist monks have played particularly important roles in education, reflecting Buddhism's integration into Khmer culture and society. During holidays and ceremonies, monks are formally invited to deliver dharma teachings to gatherings of varying sizes. These teachings combine moral instruction, social values, cultural transmission, and religious doctrine in the form of practical guidance. Although this educational mode lacks the formal structure of schools with fixed schedules and standardized curricula, the learning environment effectively facilitates knowledge absorption among laypeople (Huot & Chheang, 2025).

The constitutional designation of Buddhism as Cambodia's state religion has supported educational initiatives through multiple channels, including festival celebrations, religious training and education programs, curriculum development incorporating Buddhist principles, and funding for Buddhist organizations. This institutional support has enabled Buddhist schools to operate within the formal education system while maintaining their distinctive religious and philosophical orientations (Lawrence, 2022). Buddhist educational contributions to Cambodian human resource development extend across centuries, with particular flourishing during the Sangkum Reas Niyum era. This legacy continues in contemporary institutions that combine secular curriculum requirements with Buddhist pedagogical approaches (Thaijongrak, 2023).

Buddhist Education and Social Development

Buddhist education aims to contribute to the creation of harmonious societies by strengthening connections between material and spiritual dimensions of human experience. As societies progress, multiple aspects of human nature evolve, including personality, psychological functioning, philosophical understanding, and ethical reasoning. Contemporary social contexts often prioritize material acquisition over spiritual development, resulting in conflicts, resentment, selfishness, and greed. These orientations generate negative social consequences including social fragmentation, gambling, theft, and truancy. Despite widespread awareness of these issues through social media and news coverage, such problems persist (Mudiyanselage & Dharmasiri, 2019).

Buddhist educational approaches address these challenges by emphasizing values over mere knowledge accumulation. The cultivation of spiritual nobility alongside social and professional competencies provides students with frameworks for ethical decision-making and prosocial behavior. This balanced approach recognizes that practical efficiency matters for achieving material goals and maintaining community stability, while simultaneously insisting that education must develop human potential according to Buddhist philosophical ideals (Barua,

2025). Through this integration, Buddhist education contributes to human resource development by producing individuals equipped not only with technical capabilities but also with moral reasoning and psychological resilience necessary for constructive social participation (Suparmanto et al., 2023).

The literature reviewed demonstrates that Buddhist education offers distinctive contributions to human resource development through its integration of academic instruction with character formation, its emphasis on inner transformation alongside external achievement, and its cultivation of both cognitive capabilities and ethical dispositions (Jovini et al., 2024). However, empirical investigations examining how these principles operate in specific institutional contexts remain limited, particularly at the primary education level. The present study addresses this gap by systematically investigating the implementation and outcomes of Buddhist education at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design to investigate the role of Buddhist education in human resource development at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School. (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) The research proceeded in two distinct phases. The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews with five key informants, consisting of prominent teachers and school administrators, to identify core themes regarding educational values, institutional practices, and implementation challenges. These interviews provided rich contextual insights into how Buddhist educational principles operate within the institutional setting. The quantitative phase utilized a descriptive approach through structured questionnaires administered to a randomly selected sample of 70 participants, including instructors and students from grades 5 and 6 (Duque et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2021).

The study population comprised instructors and upper-primary students (grades 5 and 6) at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School. Simple random sampling procedures were applied to select the 70 participants for the quantitative phase, ensuring equal probability of selection and representativeness of the sample. Data collection instruments included a well-structured printed questionnaire designed to measure perceived benefits and importance of Buddhist education in relation to human resource development outcomes. The questionnaire items were developed based on the conceptual framework and addressed three key domains: cognitive development, affective development, and behavioral development. The qualitative interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing informants to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining focus on research objectives.

Data integration occurred through triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings. The qualitative data gathered from interviews with key informants was analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns in how Buddhist education

contributes to student development. These themes were then compared with statistical trends observed in the quantitative survey responses to verify consistency between expert perspectives and broader participant perceptions. This mixed-methods approach enhanced the validity and reliability of findings by ensuring that statistical patterns were grounded in the real-world experiences and expert opinions of teaching staff. The integration of both data types provided a comprehensive understanding of Buddhist education's role in human resource development at the institution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Participants

The study included 70 participants from Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School, consisting of instructors and students from grades 5 and 6. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. All participants were male, reflecting the monastic nature of the institution where male students predominate in Buddhist educational settings. The age distribution revealed that more than half of participants (52.85%) were between 16 and 20 years old, while the remaining participants were distributed across other age categories. Regarding educational background, the vast majority of participants (97.71%) were currently enrolled at or had previously attended the primary school level, indicating appropriate alignment between the sample and the research focus on primary education outcomes.

In terms of institutional affiliation, 57.14% of participants reported studying at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School for two to five years, suggesting sustained engagement with the educational program. Similarly, 61.42% had resided in the Prey Speu monastery for two to five years, indicating that the majority of participants experience both the educational and residential dimensions of monastic life. A smaller proportion (17.14%) had prior educational experience at other institutions for approximately one year before enrolling at PSBPS. These demographic patterns indicate that the sample predominantly comprised students with sufficient exposure to Buddhist education to provide informed evaluations of its contributions to their development.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants

Characteristic	Percentage	Interpretation
Gender (Male)	100%	All participants were male
Age (16-20 years)	52.85%	Majority of participants in this age range
Educational Level (Primary School)	97.71%	Nearly all currently at or completed primary level
Prior Study Elsewhere (1 year)	17.14%	Small proportion with previous educational experience

Characteristic	Percentage	Interpretation
Duration at PSBPS (2-5 years)	57.14%	Over half with sustained institutional engagement
Residence at Monastery (2-5 years)	61.42%	Majority experiencing residential monastic life

Source: Survey Data Collected by Researchers

The demographic composition of this sample has important implications for interpreting findings. The exclusively male sample reflects traditional monastic educational structures in Cambodian Buddhism, where male ordination and monastic education remain more common than female participation. The concentration of participants in the 16 to 20 year age range suggests that most respondents are in late primary or early secondary stages, providing perspectives from students nearing completion of their primary education who can reflect on accumulated learning experiences. The high proportion of students with two to five years at both the school and monastery indicates that participants have sufficient institutional experience to assess educational quality and developmental outcomes meaningfully.

Perceived Importance of Buddhist Education

Table 2 presents participant responses regarding the general importance of Buddhist education across eleven dimensions. The survey instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency for this scale. Missing data was minimal (less than 2% across all items) and was handled through listwise deletion. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," with analysis focusing on the percentage of participants selecting "Strongly Agree" for each item to identify areas of highest consensus.

Table 2 Perceived Importance of Buddhist Education

Category	Strongly Agree (%)
Learn the ways to behave and to be good citizens	77.14%
Provide religious and universal knowledge	74.28%
Educate people to think critically	71.42%
Understand ways of life	65.71%
Build good attitude and behavior	61.42%
Live in harmony	57.14%
Good education and occupation	55.71%
Provide essential knowledge	54.28%
Provide people wider knowledge	52.85%
Guide people to avoid extreme of life	44.28%
Have peaceful life	42.85%

Source: Survey Data Collected by Researchers

The findings reveal strong participant endorsement of Buddhist education's importance across multiple dimensions, with particularly high agreement for items related to citizenship formation, knowledge provision, and critical thinking. The item receiving the highest level of strong agreement was "Learn the ways to behave and to be good citizens" (77.14%), indicating that participants view Buddhist education primarily as cultivating appropriate social conduct and civic responsibility. This finding aligns with theoretical frameworks emphasizing Buddhist education's role in moral development and prosocial behavior formation (Barua, 2025). The second highest rated item, "Provide religious and universal knowledge" (74.28%), suggests participants value the integrative approach combining Buddhist teachings with secular knowledge, supporting the conceptual framework's emphasis on holistic education.

The strong endorsement of "Educate people to think critically" (71.42%) is particularly noteworthy, as it indicates that participants perceive Buddhist education as developing analytical capacities rather than merely transmitting doctrinal information. This finding extends previous research suggesting that Buddhist pedagogical methods emphasize inquiry and reasoning alongside ethical formation (Xusanovna, 2019). Similarly, high agreement with "Understand ways of life" (65.71%) reflects participants' recognition that Buddhist education provides frameworks for interpreting experience and navigating social contexts, consistent with literature emphasizing wisdom cultivation as a core Buddhist educational objective (Zhe et al., 2020).

Items related to knowledge provision received moderate to strong endorsement, with "Provide people wider knowledge" (52.85%), "Provide essential knowledge" (54.28%), and "Good education and occupation" (55.71%) all showing majority strong agreement. These patterns suggest that participants view Buddhist education as serving both spiritual and practical functions, preparing students for livelihood pursuits while cultivating moral and philosophical understanding. This dual emphasis reflects the integrated approach to human resource development articulated in the conceptual framework.

However, items directly referencing Buddhist philosophical concepts received comparatively lower agreement levels. "Have peaceful life" garnered strong agreement from only 42.85% of participants, while "Guide people to avoid extreme of life" received 44.28% strong agreement. These relatively lower ratings warrant careful interpretation. One possibility is that participants, particularly younger students, prioritize immediate practical benefits such as education quality, citizenship skills, and career preparation over abstract philosophical outcomes. This interpretation aligns with developmental theories suggesting that appreciation for philosophical or spiritual dimensions may emerge more fully with maturity and continued practice. Alternatively, these items may have been less clearly worded or less relevant to participants' current life circumstances, where immediate concerns about education and livelihood necessarily take precedence.

Contributions to Human Resource Development at PSBPS

Table 3 examines participant perceptions of how Buddhist education specifically contributes to human resource development at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School. This table includes twenty items addressing cognitive development (knowledge acquisition), affective development (moral and emotional growth), and behavioral development (practical skills and social competencies). The breadth of items allows for comprehensive assessment of Buddhist education's multidimensional contributions to HRD.

Table 3 Buddhist Education's Contribution to Human Resource Development at PSBPS

Category	Agreement Level	Percentage
Orphans have chance to study	Strongly Agree	88.57%
Give opportunity to poor students to study in religious and general concepts	Strongly Agree	82.85%
Students from countryside are able to continue their study at higher levels	Strongly Agree	81.42%
Provide enough knowledge to continue to study at higher level	Strongly Agree	75.71%
Provide both religious and universal knowledge	Strongly Agree	72.85%
Become civil servants and can help family	Strongly Agree	68.57%
Build up students' potential	Strongly Agree	67.14%
Do the wholesome in the three ways: body, speech, and mindset	Strongly Agree	67.14%
Build up students' morality	Strongly Agree	64.28%
Good students have chance to be teachers	Strongly Agree	64.28%
Become legible	Strongly Agree	58.57%
Learn the ways to behave to be good people	Agree	58.57%
Curriculum following standards and meets social demands	Agree	57.14%
Meet the students' goal in future careers	Strongly Agree	55.71%
Educate mindsets to live in harmony	Agree	54.28%
Develop mindset to love peace	Strongly Agree	48.57%
Have chance to become civil servants	Agree	48.57%
Provide knowledge and build confidence	Agree	45.71%
Build students' good attitude and behavior	Strongly Agree	45.71%
Live with sanitation and live healthily	Agree	44.28%

Source: Survey Data Collected by Researchers

The findings reveal particularly strong recognition of PSBPS's role in providing educational access to disadvantaged populations. The item "Orphans have chance to study" received the highest level of strong agreement (88.57%), indicating broad recognition that the school serves vulnerable children who might

otherwise lack educational opportunities. Similarly, "Give opportunity to poor students to study in religious and general concepts" garnered strong agreement from 82.85% of participants, while "Students from countryside are able to continue their study at higher levels" received 81.42% strong agreement. These findings illuminate an essential function of Buddhist educational institutions in Cambodia: serving as social safety nets that provide access to education for marginalized populations.

This pattern extends previous research documenting Buddhism's historical role in Cambodian education and social welfare (Hai et al., 2021; Huot & Chheang, 2025). The constitutional designation of Buddhism as Cambodia's state religion has supported educational initiatives serving disadvantaged communities, and the present findings demonstrate that this support translates into concrete access for orphans, poor students, and rural populations (Lawrence, 2022). The high agreement levels for these items suggest that participants view educational equity as a central contribution of Buddhist education to human resource development, recognizing that HRD fundamentally depends on providing opportunities to individuals regardless of socioeconomic background.

Regarding curriculum quality and knowledge provision, 75.71% of participants strongly agreed that the education provides sufficient knowledge for continuation to higher levels of study. This finding addresses concerns sometimes raised about alternative educational systems' capacity to prepare students for mainstream academic progression. The data suggest that PSBPS successfully equips students with foundational competencies necessary for advanced education. Additionally, 72.85% of participants strongly agreed that the school provides both religious and universal knowledge, indicating appreciation for the integrated curriculum combining Buddhist teachings with secular subjects. This integration reflects the conceptual framework's emphasis on holistic education addressing multiple developmental domains simultaneously.

Items addressing character development and moral formation also received substantial endorsement. "Build up students' potential" and "Do the wholesome in the three ways: body, speech, and mindset" each received 67.14% strong agreement, while "Build up students' morality" garnered 64.28% strong agreement. These responses indicate that participants perceive Buddhist education as contributing significantly to affective development, cultivating moral reasoning and ethical conduct alongside cognitive capabilities. This finding aligns with theoretical literature emphasizing Buddhist education's distinctive focus on inner transformation and virtue cultivation (Watthanabut, 2017; Zhe et al., 2020).

Career preparation and livelihood outcomes also emerged as recognized benefits. Items such as "Become civil servants and can help family" (68.57% strongly agree), "Good students have chance to be teachers" (64.28% strongly agree), and "Meet the students' goal in future careers" (55.71% strongly agree) demonstrate that participants view Buddhist education as providing practical

pathways to employment and economic stability. This perception is particularly important given that many students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds where education represents a primary avenue for social mobility.

However, some items received comparatively moderate agreement levels. "Provide knowledge and build confidence" garnered only 45.71% agreement, while "Live with sanitation and live healthily" received 44.28% agreement. These lower ratings may reflect participants' perception that these outcomes, while present, are not the most distinctive contributions of Buddhist education compared to dimensions such as moral development, educational access, or knowledge integration. Alternatively, these items may address areas where participants perceive room for institutional improvement.

Open-Ended Perceptions of Buddhist Education's Importance

Table 4 presents participant responses to an open-ended question about the importance of Buddhist education, with responses coded into two primary thematic categories. This analysis provides insight into how participants spontaneously conceptualize Buddhist education's value when not prompted by specific dimensions.

Table 4 Open-Ended Perceptions of Buddhist Education's Importance

Theme	Percentage	Description
General Educational Value	50%	Buddhist education provides knowledge and understanding of the world, develops skills necessary for life success
Human Resource Development	42.85%	Buddhist education develops appropriate behavior, teaches correct conduct, shapes character

Source: Survey Data Collected by Researchers

Half of the respondents (50.00%) defined Buddhist education's importance primarily in terms of general educational value, emphasizing that it helps people understand their environment and develop competencies needed for successful lives. This framing positions Buddhist education as serving broad educational functions comparable to secular schooling, though potentially with distinctive pedagogical approaches or content emphases. The prominence of this theme suggests that many participants view Buddhist education through a practical lens, valuing its capacity to provide knowledge and skills applicable to varied life contexts.

Meanwhile, 42.85% of participants specifically linked Buddhist education's importance to human resource development, highlighting its capacity to shape learner behavior and foster correct moral conduct. This framing emphasizes Buddhist education's distinctive contribution to character formation and ethical

development, dimensions that participants may perceive as less central to secular education. The substantial proportion of participants offering this response indicates widespread recognition that Buddhist education serves formative functions beyond knowledge transmission, actively cultivating particular virtues, dispositions, and behavioral patterns.

The division between these two themes provides insight into how participants conceptualize the relationship between Buddhist education and human resource development. While both themes ultimately relate to HRD (as general educational value contributes to cognitive development and behavioral formation contributes to affective and behavioral development), participants distinguish between Buddhist education's broad educational contributions and its specific role in character development. This distinction may reflect varying priorities among participants, with some emphasizing practical outcomes (knowledge, skills, career preparation) and others emphasizing formative outcomes (moral development, behavioral cultivation, character formation).

Integrating Findings with Qualitative Evidence

The quantitative findings are substantially enriched by qualitative data gathered through interviews with five key informants (three senior teachers and two school administrators). The interviews revealed three major themes that help explain the patterns observed in survey responses: holistic student development, educational accessibility, and curriculum integration.

Regarding holistic development, informants consistently described how Buddhist education at PSBPS addresses multiple dimensions simultaneously. One senior teacher explained that students engage in morning meditation before classes, which cultivates mental clarity supporting subsequent academic learning. Another informant described how ethical instruction permeates daily activities rather than being confined to specific classes, helping students internalize moral reasoning. These practices illuminate why 67.14% of participants strongly agreed that Buddhist education builds student potential and 64.28% recognized its role in building morality. The integration of contemplative practices, ethical training, and academic instruction creates comprehensive developmental experiences that participants recognize as valuable.

The theme of educational accessibility emerged prominently across all interviews, contextualizing the quantitative finding that 88.57% of participants recognized opportunities for orphans. Informants explained that PSBPS was founded specifically to serve disadvantaged populations, providing not only instruction but also housing, meals, and materials without charge. One teacher shared an illustrative case of an orphaned student from a remote village who arrived at age 12 with no prior schooling. Through intensive support and the structured monastic environment, this student developed fundamental competencies and eventually expressed aspirations to become a teacher. Such accounts demonstrate

how Buddhist educational institutions operationalize their social mission, translating the constitutional support for Buddhist education into concrete opportunities for vulnerable populations (Lawrence, 2022).

Informants also discussed the challenge and importance of integrating ministry curriculum requirements with Buddhist teachings. One senior teacher explained that PSBPS follows the national curriculum for core subjects while incorporating Buddhist studies, Pali language, meditation practice, and ethical training. Another informant described strategies for connecting Buddhist principles to academic subjects, such as discussing Buddhist cosmology in science classes or examining historical texts in Khmer language instruction. Despite implementation challenges including time pressure and varying student priorities, informants expressed conviction that this integration produces distinctive benefits. One teacher argued that Buddhist ethical training provides moral foundations preventing misuse of secular knowledge, while another suggested that contemplative practices cultivate psychological resilience helping students navigate challenges effectively. These perspectives explain why 72.85% of participants valued the provision of both religious and universal knowledge.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that Buddhist education at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School contributes substantially to human resource development across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. These findings both support and extend existing literature on Buddhist education. The strong emphasis on moral development and character formation aligns with theoretical frameworks positing that Buddhist education distinctively emphasizes inner transformation and virtue cultivation alongside knowledge acquisition (Watthanabut, 2017; Zhe et al., 2020). The finding that 71.42% of participants valued critical thinking development supports Xusanovna's (2019) argument that Buddhist educational frameworks emphasize reasoning rather than mere memorization. Similarly, the integration of secular and religious knowledge observed in both survey responses and interviews reflects Barua's (2025) contention that Buddhist education must balance practical effectiveness with conditions designed to actualize human potential.

The findings extend existing literature in several important ways. While previous research has documented Buddhism's historical role in Cambodian education, this study provides empirical evidence of contemporary Buddhist schools' specific contributions to HRD outcomes (Hai et al., 2021; Huot & Chheang, 2025). The strong recognition of educational access for disadvantaged populations (88.57% for orphans, 82.85% for poor students) demonstrates that Buddhist educational institutions continue serving social welfare functions in contemporary Cambodia, extending Lawrence's (2022) observations about Buddhism's integration into state-supported educational infrastructure. This finding is particularly significant given that human resource development fundamentally depends on providing opportunities regardless of socioeconomic background.

The finding that 75.71% of participants believe PSBPS provides sufficient knowledge for higher education progression addresses an important gap in literature regarding Buddhist schools' capacity to prepare students for mainstream academic advancement. Some discourse on alternative educational systems raises concerns about whether religiously-based schools adequately prepare students for secular higher education and employment. The present findings suggest that Buddhist primary education can successfully provide foundational competencies for continued academic progression when it integrates ministry curriculum requirements with Buddhist teachings. This integration allows students to develop both practical skills necessary for livelihood and moral foundations that guide their application of knowledge.

However, the relatively lower agreement for items referencing traditional Buddhist philosophical concepts (42.85% for peaceful life, 44.28% for avoiding extremes) suggests potential tensions between Buddhist educational ideals and contemporary student priorities. While Buddhist educational philosophy emphasizes liberation from attachment, cultivation of equanimity, and following the middle path, students may prioritize more immediate practical concerns such as academic achievement and career preparation. This pattern may reflect developmental trajectories, with philosophical appreciation deepening over time as students mature and gain life experience. Alternatively, it may indicate that Buddhist educational institutions operating within modern socioeconomic contexts face genuine challenges in cultivating appreciation for philosophical dimensions alongside practical competencies. Interview data supports the former interpretation, with informants noting that students often arrive with immediate material concerns (poverty, limited opportunities) that necessarily take precedence before deeper philosophical engagement becomes possible.

The study's findings have important theoretical implications for understanding how Buddhist education contributes to human resource development. The data support a model in which Buddhist education operates through multiple pathways simultaneously. First, the ethical dimension cultivates moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors, as evidenced by strong agreement that Buddhist education builds morality (64.28%) and teaches appropriate citizenship (77.14%). Second, contemplative practices enhance cognitive focus and emotional regulation, supporting both academic learning and personal development, as reflected in recognition that Buddhist education builds student potential (67.14%). Third, the integration of secular and religious knowledge provides comprehensive preparation addressing both practical livelihood needs and spiritual development, as indicated by strong valuation of combined knowledge provision (72.85%). Fourth, the residential monastic structure enables comprehensive support extending beyond classroom instruction, facilitating the educational access for disadvantaged populations that participants strongly recognized (88.57% for orphans, 82.85% for poor students).

This multifaceted model helps explain why participants consistently rated Buddhist education highly across diverse dimensions. Rather than excelling in a single area, Buddhist education at PSBPS appears to provide integrated development addressing multiple needs simultaneously. This integration may be particularly valuable for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who require not only academic instruction but also comprehensive support, moral guidance, and pathways to social mobility. The findings suggest that the distinctive contribution of Buddhist education to human resource development lies not in any single element but in the synergistic combination of ethical formation, contemplative practice, knowledge integration, and comprehensive support within a structured residential environment.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of Buddhist education in human resource development at Prey Speu Buddhist Primary School through an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data from 70 participants with qualitative interview insights from five key informants. The findings demonstrate that Buddhist education contributes substantially to HRD across three developmental domains: cognitive development through integrated curriculum combining ministry-mandated subjects with Buddhist teachings, affective development through moral formation and contemplative practices, and behavioral development through ethical instruction and community engagement. Participants strongly recognized Buddhist education's importance for citizenship formation (77.14% strong agreement), critical thinking development (71.42%), and knowledge provision (74.28%), while also acknowledging its essential function in providing educational access to disadvantaged populations, particularly orphans (88.57%) and poor students (82.85%). The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals that Buddhist education's distinctive contribution lies in its holistic approach addressing multiple developmental needs simultaneously through ethical formation, meditation practice, comprehensive residential support, and curriculum integration preparing students for both practical livelihood and spiritual development.

The study's findings extend existing literature by providing empirical evidence of how Buddhist educational principles operationalize in contemporary institutional contexts, demonstrating that Buddhist primary schools can successfully prepare students for mainstream academic progression (75.71% agreement) while maintaining distinctive emphases on moral development (64.28%) and character formation (67.14%). The research confirms that Buddhist educational institutions continue serving vital social welfare functions in Cambodia, functioning as educational safety nets for vulnerable populations while providing quality instruction meeting national curriculum standards. Future

research should address study limitations through comparative multi-site investigations, longitudinal designs tracking students beyond graduation, mixed-gender studies, and controlled comparisons with non-Buddhist schools to strengthen causal inferences regarding Buddhist education's unique contributions to human resource development.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge for future research and practice. Subsequent investigations should employ larger, more representative samples encompassing multiple Buddhist educational institutions across diverse geographic regions to determine whether the observed patterns reflect generalizable characteristics or institution-specific dynamics. Research should extend to Buddhist secondary and higher education sectors to examine whether developmental benefits persist across educational stages, and comparative studies should include participants beyond current students, such as alumni, parents, and community members, to provide comprehensive perspectives on long-term impacts. Future research should employ diverse methodologies including longitudinal designs, controlled comparisons with non-Buddhist schools, and objective assessments of cognitive and moral development to complement self-reported perceptions. For educational practice and policy, Buddhist educational institutions should continue emphasizing integrated approaches combining secular curriculum with contemplative practices and ethical instruction, while policymakers should support these schools through resource allocation and teacher training programs, recognizing their dual function in providing quality education and serving as social safety nets for disadvantaged populations.

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