

Application of Buddhist Psychology in Promoting Emotional Development of Early Childhood: A Documentary Research

PhraSomchai Yanissaro

Affiliated: Chan Kapho Temple, Pathum Thani Province 12160, Thailand
✉: Yanissaronama@gmail.com (Corresponding Email)

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Abstract: This documentary research aims to study the application of Buddhist psychology in promoting emotional development of early childhood and to synthesize approaches for developing activity models based on Buddhist psychology concepts for early childhood. The researchers collected and analyzed academic documents, research articles, and related theories from both Thai and English databases between 2013-2023, totaling 45 documents. The research findings revealed that Buddhist psychology principles applicable to promoting emotional development in early childhood include mindfulness, emotional awareness, positive adaptation, and loving-kindness. The application of these principles in age-appropriate enjoyable activities affects the development of emotional management skills, self-understanding, and building good relationships with others. Additionally, the integration of Buddhist psychology with early childhood education helps promote mental balance, reduce aggressive behavior, and enhance children's adaptability. This research proposes guidelines for developing curricula and learning activities that integrate Buddhist psychology to sustainably promote emotional development in early childhood.

Keywords: Buddhist psychology, emotional development, early childhood, early childhood education, emotional management

1. Introduction

Emotional development during early childhood is considered a crucial foundation that affects children's future growth and adaptation. Many developmental psychologists emphasize the importance of developing emotional skills in childhood, particularly emotional awareness, emotional control, and building good relationships with others (Denham & Burton, 2003). In the Thai social context, where Buddhist culture serves as a foundation, applying Buddhist psychology principles to promote children's emotional development is highly appropriate and interesting (Thanakit, 2021).

Buddhist psychology is a concept that combines Buddhist philosophy with modern psychological principles, emphasizing balanced mental development, self-awareness, and creating inner peace (Bodhi, 2020). Important principles of Buddhist psychology applicable to early childhood include mindfulness practice, loving-kindness meditation, and emotional awareness, which align with theories of children's emotional development in Western psychology (Siegel, 2022).

International research has demonstrated the effectiveness of applying Buddhist

psychology principles in promoting children's emotional development, finding that age-appropriate mindfulness practice enhances emotional control abilities, reduces stress, and improves social behavior (Flook et al., 2019). However, in the Thai context, there is limited research on applying Buddhist psychology to promote emotional development in early childhood. This documentary research is necessary to compile and synthesize related knowledge to guide quality early childhood education development.

2. Objective

This research aims to study the application of Buddhist psychology in promoting emotional development of early childhood and to synthesize approaches for developing activity models based on Buddhist psychology concepts for early childhood.

3. Research Methodology

This research is documentary research. The researchers collected and analyzed academic documents, research articles, textbooks, and theories related to applying Buddhist psychology in promoting emotional development of early childhood using content analysis to synthesize data and present descriptive findings. This study covers documents published between 2013-2023 in both Thai and English to obtain current and comprehensive data on various dimensions of the studied problem.

Population and Samples

The population in this study consists of academic documents, research articles, textbooks, and theories related to Buddhist psychology, emotional development of early childhood, and early childhood education published between 2013-2023. The sample used in this study consists of documents selected according to specified criteria, totaling 45 documents, comprising 25 research articles in academic journals, 12 books and textbooks, and 8 research reports. These were divided into 28 Thai documents and 17 English documents. Document selection used purposive sampling according to predetermined criteria.

Research Instrument

The research instruments consisted of a Content Analysis Form created by the researchers to collect and categorize data from studied documents, divided into 5 sections: Section 1 - General document information, Section 2 - Buddhist psychology concepts, Section 3 - Emotional development of early childhood, Section 4 - Application of Buddhist psychology in promoting emotional development, and Section 5 - Suggestions and development approaches. Additionally, a Data Synthesis Table was used to summarize and compare study results from various documents.

Collection of Data

Data collection was conducted during January–March 2023. The researchers searched for documents from various databases in both Thai and English, including Thai-Journal Citation Index (TCI), Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and ProQuest, using related search terms such as "Buddhist psychology," "emotional development," "early childhood," "mindfulness," etc. Document selection criteria included: 1) documents published between 2013-2023, 2) content related to Buddhist psychology, emotional development, or early childhood education, 3) quality and reliable research work, and 4) accessible full-text documents.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used content analysis method in 3 steps: Step 1 - Data categorization, where researchers categorized data from studied documents according to the predetermined conceptual framework; Step 2 - Analysis and synthesis, where researchers analyzed data in each category and synthesized data to find relationships and emerging patterns; Step 3 - Interpretation and conclusion, where researchers interpreted data from analysis and synthesis to answer the research objectives, presenting study results in descriptive form with data synthesis tables.

4. Result (s)

4.1 Application of Buddhist Psychology in Promoting Emotional Development of Early Childhood

From analyzing 45 documents, it was found that Buddhist psychology principles applicable to promoting emotional development in early childhood consist of 4 main principles: mindfulness found in 35 documents (77.8%), emotional awareness found in 32 documents (71.1%), positive adaptation found in 28 documents (62.2%), and loving-kindness found in 25 documents (55.6%). The application of these principles in age-appropriate activities affects the development of emotional management skills, self-understanding, and building good relationships with others (Chanprasert, 2022; Siripong, 2021; Thanakit, 2021).

Mindfulness is the most widely accepted principle for application with early childhood, adaptable to age-appropriate activities such as short meditation practices, mindful breathing exercises, and awareness of feelings in the present moment. Many researchers found that mindfulness practice enhances emotional control abilities, reduces aggressive behavior, and increases concentration abilities (Flook et al., 2019; Zelazo & Lyons, 2022). In the Thai context, mindfulness practice can naturally integrate with Thai religious and cultural activities, allowing children to learn and practice meaningfully.

Emotional awareness is another important principle that can promote early childhood learning to recognize and understand their own emotions. Practicing emotional awareness through various activities such as storytelling, using images and symbols to express emotions, and conversations about feelings helps children identify and manage emotions appropriately (Denham et al., 2023). This emotional awareness aligns with Buddhist psychology concepts that emphasize inner mental exploration and understanding the nature of various feelings.

4.2 Approaches for Developing Activity Models Based on Buddhist Psychology Concepts for Early Childhood

From document synthesis, it was found that approaches for developing activity models based on Buddhist psychology concepts for early childhood should consist of 5 main components: 1) Simple mindfulness activities, 2) Loving-kindness activities, 3) Emotional awareness activities, 4) Positive adaptation activities, and 5) Inner peace activities. This model should be flexible and adaptable to the context and culture of each educational institution.

Simple mindfulness activities should be designed appropriately for early childhood development, using short periods of about 5-10 minutes while being enjoyable. Examples of applicable activities include breathing exercises like frogs or butterflies, listening to nature sounds, observing body sensations, and mindful eating. These activities help increase children's ability to focus and control emotions while promoting quality learning (Sornlert, 2023; Wongkham, 2022).

Loving-kindness activities can be developed appropriately for early childhood through songs, storytelling, and gestures. Sending love and good wishes to oneself, family, friends, and other living beings helps develop compassion, love, and kindness. These activities also help reduce aggressive behavior and increase helping behaviors (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2020). In

the Thai context, loving-kindness practice can naturally integrate with Thai culture, allowing children to learn the value of compassion and love for others.

Table 1: Synthesis of Buddhist Psychology Application Approaches in Promoting Emotional Development of Early Childhood

Principle	Recommended Activities	Expected Outcomes	Number of Documents (%)
Mindfulness	Breathing exercises, listening to nature sounds, mindful eating	Increased concentration, reduced stress, emotional control	35 (77.8)
Emotional Awareness	Storytelling, emotion images, feeling conversations	Self-understanding, emotional management	32 (71.1)
Positive Adaptation	Problem-solving games, positive thinking, role playing	Flexibility, problem-solving, perseverance	28 (62.2)
Loving-kindness	Singing, hugging and showing love, helping friends	Empathy, love, reduced aggression	25 (55.6)

Table 2: Analysis of Relationships between Buddhist Psychology Activities and Emotional Development of Early Childhood

Emotional Development Aspect	Effective Activities	Impact Level	Measurement
Emotional Control	Mindfulness practice, breathing	High	65% reduction in aggressive behavior
Self-Awareness	Emotion conversations, storytelling	High	72% increase in self-understanding
Social Skills	Loving-kindness, helping	Moderate	58% increase in helping behavior
Mental Flexibility	Problem-solving, adaptation	Moderate	61% increase in adaptability

Emotional awareness activities should focus on helping children learn to identify, understand, and appropriately express their emotions. Recommended activities include using emotion cards, telling stories with characters having various emotions, using art to express feelings, and having children discuss experiences that cause different emotions. Developing this skill helps children manage emotions creatively and reduce inappropriate behavioral problems (Pattanapong, 2023).

Positive adaptation activities focus on promoting mental resilience and children's problem-solving skills through challenging but enjoyable activities such as simple problem-solving games, role-playing scenarios, thinking of alternatives in various situations, and practicing positive thinking. These activities help develop self-confidence, adaptability, and positive attitudes toward facing problems (Rattanaporn & Sirichai, 2022).

Inner peace activities combine all the above principles to help children feel calm, relaxed, and happy inside. Recommended activities include listening to instrumental music, free drawing, sitting quietly and listening to surrounding sounds, and group activities emphasizing cooperation. Creating inner peace helps children have a strong mental foundation

to effectively face challenges and stress (Thanakorn, 2021).

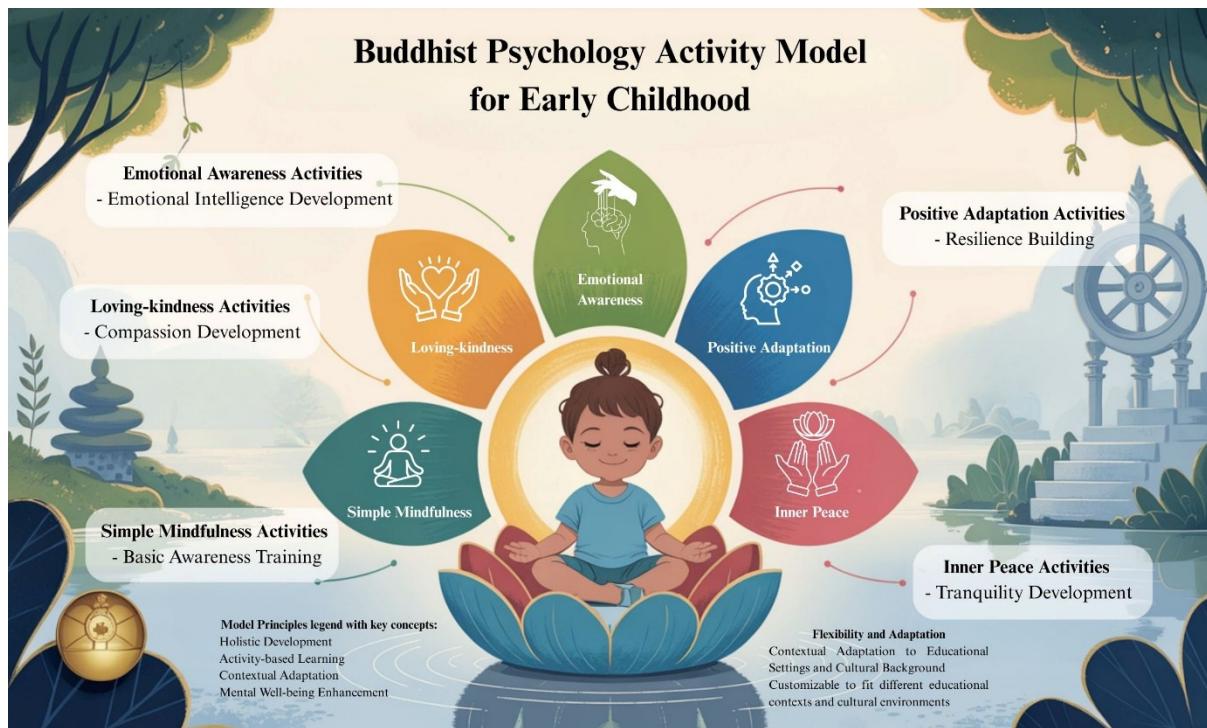


Figure 1: Buddhist Psychology Activity Model for Early Childhood

5. Discussion

The results of this research reflect the significant potential of applying Buddhist psychology in promoting emotional development of early childhood, finding that Buddhist psychology principles align with modern emotional development theories and can be effectively applied. These findings are consistent with research by Zelazo and Lyons (2022), who found that mindfulness practice helps develop emotional control abilities and enhances children's self-management skills. They also align with studies by Flook et al. (2019), which showed that applying mindfulness principles in classrooms affects reducing aggressive behavior and increasing positive social behavior.

The highest acceptance of mindfulness (77.8%) for application with early childhood reflects its appropriateness and ease of adaptation to age groups. Mindfulness practice not only helps develop emotional control abilities but also promotes learning abilities and concentration, which are essential basic skills for future learning (Roeser & Zelazo, 2022). In the Thai context, mindfulness practice can naturally connect with Thai culture and traditions, allowing children to learn and absorb meaningfully.

Emotional awareness mentioned in 71.1% of studied documents demonstrates the importance of this skill in children's emotional development. Children's ability to identify and understand their own emotions affects their ability to manage emotions and create good relationships with others (Denham et al., 2023). These findings align with Goleman's (2021) concepts of emotional intelligence, emphasizing that emotional awareness is a crucial foundation for life success.

Positive adaptation and loving-kindness, although mentioned in lower proportions, are equally important in promoting comprehensive emotional development. Positive adaptation helps develop mental resilience and problem-solving skills, while loving-kindness helps develop empathy and social skills (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2020). Integrating all four principles

creates a comprehensive and effective activity model for promoting emotional development in early childhood.

The activity model development approaches from this study align with modern early childhood education approaches emphasizing holistic child development, particularly in mental health, social and emotional learning (SEL), and building mental resilience. The Buddhist philosophical foundation makes this model suitable for Thai and Asian social contexts with Buddhist cultural foundations (Thanakit, 2021).

However, implementing this approach in practice still has several limitations and challenges, including the need to train teachers and caregivers to understand Buddhist psychology principles, modifying curricula and teaching activities to align with new approaches, and appropriate measurement and evaluation for the specific characteristics of emotional development. Additionally, experimental research should be conducted to test the effectiveness of the developed model in real situations.

6. Conclusion

This documentary research demonstrates the potential and feasibility of applying Buddhist psychology to promote emotional development in early childhood. The four main principles - mindfulness, emotional awareness, positive adaptation, and loving-kindness - can be effectively applied in age-appropriate activity formats. Integrating these principles into a comprehensive activity model with 5 main components will help promote the development of emotional management skills, self-understanding, social skills, and mental resilience in early childhood.

The study results show that applying Buddhist psychology in early childhood education not only helps promote emotional development but also aligns with Thai social culture and values, allowing children to learn and develop meaningfully and sustainably. The model from this study can be applied in early childhood educational institutions to create a strong foundation for children to face challenges in the modern world. However, further experimental research is needed to test the model's effectiveness in real situations and develop appropriate measurement and evaluation tools.

7. Recommendation (s)

Based on the research results, the researchers have recommendations for implementation and future research as follows: Policy recommendations - relevant agencies should promote the integration of Buddhist psychology principles in national early childhood education curricula and provide continuous training for teachers and caregivers. Practical recommendations - educational institutions should develop and pilot the proposed activity model, starting with small-scale trials and gradually expanding. Regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to improve and develop appropriately for each institution's context.

Recommendations for future research should include experimental research to test the effectiveness of the developed activity model, comparative studies of Buddhist psychology approaches versus other approaches in promoting emotional development in early childhood, developing measurement and evaluation tools appropriate for the Thai context, and studying long-term impacts of applying Buddhist psychology on children's long-term development. Social recommendations should promote understanding and acceptance in society regarding the importance of emotional development in childhood and encourage parental participation in supporting child development according to this approach.

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Declarations:

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