

# The Problems Facing Higher Buddhist Education in Vietnam and Possible Solutions

Dang Thi Phuong

Ph. D Research Scholar, Center for Mahayana Buddhist Studies, Acharya Nagarjuna, University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur – 522510, India

**Abstract:** *In Vietnam, Buddhist Higher Education faces obstacles that threaten its capacity to function. Consequently, consider the academic quality. Higher education quality is multifaceted. All of the following should be evaluated: students, instructors, infrastructure, instructional practises, curriculum, assessment, and learning materials. In Buddhist higher education research, these variables should be explored. In the author's literature study, there was no thorough appraisal of Buddhist Higher Education in Vietnam. This research aims to investigate Buddhist Higher Education in Vietnam. Applied research requires the author to assess what is available and what needs improvement. This study examined past and present problems and proposed remedies. Observational, statistical, and synthetic methodologies were used. Higher Buddhist education in Vietnam has the capacity to reach international standards, achieve its goals, and transcend the academic field if implemented effectively. Higher - level Buddhist education must lead students first to self - satisfaction and a comprehensive grasp of Buddhism, and then to personal liberation by lifelong application of the Buddha's teachings.*

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Buddhist Education

## 1. Introduction

To begin, I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to the honourable organisers for providing me with the chance to offer a presentation to you on the subject of Buddhist Higher Education in Vietnam. "the process of teaching, training, and learning, most notably in schools or universities, in order to enhance one's knowledge and develop one's talents, " is one definition of education. Colleges and universities are the types of educational establishments that are accountable for transmitting information of a more advanced degree to their student bodies. This education will always play a crucial role in the maintenance and expansion of any religious organisations, both in terms of the quantity and quality of its members. This is because education is the single most important factor in people's religious beliefs. When we speak about higher education, we are not simply referring to colleges and universities; rather, we are also referring to more general subjects such as organisation, management, quality, and outcomes. I want to make sure that this is very apparent. " The idea of quality in higher education is multifaceted and encompasses all of the interrelated functions and activities that come together to make up the academic life of a university or university system. " A "Multidimensional Concept" Is Used To Describe "Quality" In Higher Education Therefore, any framework for the assessment of quality must take into account the calibre of the students, lecturers, facilities, instructional methodologies, course content, evaluations, and learning materials. This is a must. In addition to this, the goal of Higher Buddhist Education in Vietnam is to bring Buddhist students to a position of mental knowledge, deepen their understanding of the Buddha's teachings, and nurture their talents in the fields of practice and dissemination (panna). The notions of knowledge and wisdom are not synonymous; yet, in order for practitioners to achieve wisdom, they must first acquire correct information. An education in Buddhism ought to lay equal focus on both the academic comprehension of Buddhist teachings and their practical implementation. "Higher Buddhist Education in Vietnam is challenged with a variety

of obstacles at the present moment; the technical and economic quality of its facilities, equipment, and teaching resources continues to be woefully inadequate. . . "Notably, the findings of the General Investigation of Vietnam Population in 2010 suggested that Buddhists only made up 7.92 percent of the population, which equated to about 6.8 million persons in total. In spite of this, study carried out and reported by Washington University in 1997 revealed that the number of Buddhist devotees amounted to 7.6 million people, which equated to a percentage of the total population equal to ten percent. One description of Buddhist followers is that they are those who, of their own will, believe in the Buddha's teaching, put that teaching into practice, and sustain it in their lives. The above cited data shed light on the difficult circumstances that Buddhist believers in Vietnam find themselves in.

This makes me think of a sermon that the Buddha delivered in the Saddhamma Sammosa Sutta, in which he discussed the requirements that need to be satisfied for a religion to maintain its consistency across time. According to this concept, adherents of a religion are expected to become well - versed in the teachings of that religion, to accomplish the greatest fruits of the religion, to be able to offer a grounded interpretation of the teachings, and to be able to rebut competing religious perspectives. As a result, the Buddha considered the calibre of the teaching to be an important factor in determining whether or not the Dhamma would be able to survive the passage of time. In view of the current circumstances, do you think it would be appropriate to conduct an investigation of Vietnam's system of Higher Buddhist Education? I am certain that everything will turn out well. This is also the fundamental objective of the text that you are now reading.

There were approximately one hundred educational workshops held in either Vietnam or Thailand in 2008, and around one hundred articles were written on Buddhist education and published on the Buddhist website (<http://www.daophatngaynay.com/vn/giao-duc/>) that same year. In addition, there were approximately one hundred

Buddhist monks who passed away in 2008. Many publications, such as "The Buddhist Education" by Dr. Ly Kim Hoa and "The Buddhist Education in the Modern Time" by a number of different writers, have been written by authors from both the local community and the international community. These authors have contributed to a number of different publications. On the other hand, all of them discuss about Buddhist education in general, studying it from a number of different aspects such as its histories, philosophies, ethics, training, meaning, topics, techniques, educational forms, and objectives. Regarding the topic of the Higher Buddhist Education, there has never been a specialised examination administered. In contrast to the aforementioned articles and works, the purpose of this paper is to focus on Buddhist Higher Education, with the goals of attempting to identify the most important problems and providing potential answers for the resolution of those problems. In addition, the paper will provide potential answers for how those problems can be resolved. In this particular research Endeavour, each of the observational, statistical, analytical, and synthetic research approaches will be used in their appropriate contexts.

### **The Control That the Government Exerts Over Higher Education**

To get things started, the scope of tertiary education in Vietnam includes higher levels of Buddhist education as well. To this point, the academic system of the Soviet Union has had a substantial degree of influence upon the university system in Vietnam. In the academic system of the Soviet Union, universities were primarily responsible for the education of students, while research institutes were in charge of doing academic research. The Vietnamese government is actively supporting academic research endeavours being carried out in universities around the country. Unfortunately, the results of these efforts have not yielded a significant amount of forwards movement.

The unfortunate events that have occurred in Vietnam's history are somewhat to blame for the difficulties that now exist in the country's system of higher education. The French government, which held sway over Vietnam from the latter half of the nineteenth century until 1945, did not make a significant investment in the nation's higher education system during this time period. Because of this, we were unable to capitalise on the flood of innovation in higher education that swept over the majority of Asia in the early 20th century. This tsunami of invention was a product of the Asian Economic Miracle. Therefore, in order to link with the economy of other nations after the open door policy was implemented in 1991, our government launched the Renovation Project in the educational system. This was done in order to improve the quality of education. As a direct consequence of this reform, higher education in Vietnam has seen significant expansion, which has led to both a rise in the total number of students enrolled as well as the establishment of new educational objectives.

On the other hand, Vietnam's higher education has not yet been brought up to date to meet the standards of the modern day and age. In colleges, a disconnect from reality has persisted, which has resulted in subpar education and

ineffective management of available resources. The strategies for teaching and education have become antiquated, and the resources that are now accessible have shrunk to an extremely minimal amount. Because of these shortcomings, the reforms that are being made to the system of higher education need to be enhanced even more. Higher Buddhist Education finally suffered the same tragic demise as Vietnam's higher education system, which too eventually came to an end.

Two, I'd want to know how much of an impact the local government has on the educational system. Since 1990, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has been in charge of managing all areas of the educational system in Vietnam. This responsibility was transferred to them from the previous ministry. This involves the regulation of newly established educational institutions, the production of new textbooks and educational programmes, the making of judgments about admissions, and the granting of degrees and certifications. Although other ministries are in charge of a few specialised colleges, the Ministry of Education and Training is in charge of the vast majority of educational institutions in the country. The curriculum of religious schools and training centres are required to be pre - submitted to the local authorities in order to gain clearance from such authorities. This is a requirement that is in place to ensure that students get an appropriate education. At every level, the authorities have the ability to refuse requests for religious activities simply by filing a written statement to defend their choice. This declaration may be used to justify the authorities' decision. This authority is there at each and every level. The number of Buddhist students studying at any level in Vietnam must be reported to and granted permission by the country's government. Despite the fact that the Vietnamese government has paid particular attention to all religions, the government's strong control over Religious Education will have a considerable detrimental effect on both the spread of Higher Buddhist Education as well as the quality of that education.

### **The Foundation of a Buddhist Educational System at a Higher Level**

The Buddhist revival movement that took place in Vietnam is inextricably linked to the Higher Buddhist Education that took place at that time. This is something that may be considered from a historical point of view. In the 1920s, a group of people came together with the intention of reinvigorating and strengthening Buddhism. This endeavour gave birth to a movement that came to be known as the Buddhist revival movement. This movement focused the majority of its energy and resources on achieving three fundamental objectives: the establishment of Buddhist organisations, the training of Buddhist clergy, and the propagation of Buddha Dharma. During this historical period, the Buddhist Sangha Council established Buddhist Schools. These schools provided instruction from the primary level all the way up to the secondary level, with the primary emphasis being placed on the transmission of Buddhist sutras. In addition, Buddhist institutions put a significant focus on educating monks and nuns in a broad range of secular occupations and responsibilities. This was done with the intention of supporting the revival of

Buddhism as well as the religion's continued development over the long term. A few of them were awarded scholarships so that they may study at institutions located in other countries. Both the Unified Buddhist Council and Van Hanh University were established shortly after the Buddhist crisis that took place in 1963. This took place in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. This educational establishment has the distinction of being the very first Buddhist University in Vietnam. Both the monastics and the laypeople in the community were able to take use of the extensive social and educational services that this organisation provided. The education that was provided in monasteries was also standardised and brought under one umbrella. Prior to 1975, the Duoc Su Academy was established in order to provide novices the opportunity to get an education at the university level.

After the year 1975, the Vietnamese Buddhist Council engaged in a number of activities with the intention of revitalising the country's system of higher education. Following in the footsteps of Van Hanh University, the high schools of Buddhist studies that were left behind gradually developed into what are today referred to as the Buddhist universities of Vietnam. There are now four Buddhist organisations operating in the world. These educational establishments may be found in the cities of Hanoi, Hue, and Ho Chi Minh City, in addition to the Theravada Buddhist University of Can Tho, which is intended for Khmer monks. The Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute first opened its doors in 1984 and has since maintained its autonomy within the country's higher education system. The Buddhist Sangha Council includes it as one of its committees. The degrees of study that are often available to students in Buddhist universities in Vietnam are typically limited to those of a Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialized college. Canonical literature and courses in social science are both included into the educational programmes that are offered. The members of the Sangha will have their secular knowledge improved, which will make it easier for them to make a contribution to the nation's socioeconomic growth in a practical sense. This will help achieve the goal of the project.

### How the Practice of Buddhism Is Taught

The two most significant parts of education are the teaching method that is used by lecturers and the study mindset that students maintain both inside and outside of the confines of the classroom setting. Today's modern education may be broken down into three separate models: the Learner - centered model, the Lecturer - centered model, and the Interactive teaching style. Each of these models is used in different parts of the world. The traditional method is known as the lecturer - centered technique, and it is characterised by the fact that the lecturer retains the primary position throughout the duration of the class. The customary role of the classroom teacher, which has traditionally been held by the instructor, is inverted in the teaching technique known as the learner - centered method. The interactive mode of instruction invigorates students' interest in the process of learning; provides high levels of motivation, strength, and knowledge; cultivates a culture of cooperation and freedom of expression; and, most crucially, adds to the complex capacities of future specialists.

The job of the lecturer would be that of the information supplier or the consultant, and it would be the duty of the students to process the material in accordance with their own unique perspective. In today's higher education models, self - directed learning and active participation on the part of students are seen as being of the utmost significance. While they are enrolled in higher education, students have the responsibility of working independently outside of the classroom in addition to attending lectures, tutorials, and seminars. The majority of time spent on individual study is spent conducting research on the current topic at hand, as well as reading the assigned literature, engaging in critical thought about the information that is being read, taking notes, preparing for seminars, and planning and composing projects for evaluation. Other activities include: Learner - centered and interactive teaching techniques, according to this viewpoint, are preferable than lecturer - centered teaching methods in terms of applicability.

Unhappily, the majority of students in Vietnam continue to believe that the lecturer approach is the most efficient method of education, which is a direct outcome of the prolonged and pervasive impact of traditional teaching methods over such a substantial length of time. The teacher presents all of the information that is relevant to the problem, and it is a manner that saves time. Reasons are supplied for why something happened. Because of this strategy, rather than only going over the information that is provided in the textbook, students have the chance to get insight from the teacher and profit from their knowledge and experience. The memorisation of facts and the oral transmission of tradition are still accorded major weight in Vietnam's Buddhist colleges. It focuses on what the instructor does, but very little attention is placed on interrogating students about what it is that they really learn. The focus is on what the teacher does.

The traditional method, which promotes communication in just one way and places students in a position that is more receptive than one that requires them to be active participants, has been used by a significant number of lecturers. As a result of this, the teachers make an effort to evaluate the degree of student understanding without offering any remarks in response to the students' responses. The cultural characteristics of Vietnam's Confucian legacy, which are said to impact students' learning styles in Vietnam, are frequently cited as the reason for the country's students' tendency towards passivity. This is because it is believed that these cultural characteristics influence students' learning styles. Even after receiving their diplomas, seventy - five percent of students, according to the results of a study that was carried out in 2009 at Pedagogy University in HCMC, still do not have the self - directed capabilities that are required to enter the workforce.

Therefore, the typical technique is only acceptable for the primary school level of learning. In addition, because there is such a huge focus on memorisation, it would not be strange to find Buddhist students cheating on their tests. As a result, it would be preferable for there to be a greater emphasis on open - ended questions on examinations, questions that require students to demonstrate both a

comprehensive understanding and the ability to synthesise information, as opposed to questions that require a significant amount of memorisation on the student's part. Memorization on its own cannot ever be deemed to be an adequate kind of instruction. In Buddhist colleges, I am convinced that the memorization - based learning technique has to eventually be replaced by the interactive teaching approach as the conventional form of instruction in the future.

### **The Various Methods of Instruction**

In Buddhist universities, what sorts of educational resources are accessible to students looking to further their knowledge? They were created over the period of many centuries and are mostly made up of translated Pali canons, Chinese Mahayana scriptures, and the writings of university professors in the form of textbooks. The majority of the Pali canons and Chinese Mahayana scriptures have been translated into Vietnamese by a number of highly venerated Buddhist monks and scholars in Vietnam. These monks and scholars include the most venerated Dr. Thich Minh Chau, the most venerated Thich Thien Sieu, Dr. Le Manh That, Tue Sy, Dr. Thich Nhat Tu, and Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, amongst others. The Pali canons have also been translated into Vietnamese. In spite of this, the findings of the study that Dr. Nalinaksha Dutt conducted on the early monastic Buddhism indicated that "The Pali Pitakas clearly went through several redactions with accretions and omissions before the texts acquired the form in which we have them today." The artificiality and stereotyping of each sutta takes away from the original freshness of the sayings and unquestionably displays the clipping and moulding hands of the redactors of a period that is very far removed from the time of the Teacher. This is because the artificiality and stereotyping of each sutta takes away from the original freshness of the sayings. Studies in the Origins of Buddhism, a book written by Professor Govind Chandra Pande, contained a significant amount of material that was regarded as contentious in relation to early Buddhist doctrine. He used an example of someone who had said something along these lines: "Mrs. Rhys David has raised the all - important question: what was the original meaning of Buddhism?" After all of her hard work, it is difficult to deny that the suttas have undergone insertion, elaboration, and deletion throughout their history. This is due to the fact that she was the one who completed the task. The only logical conclusion that can be derived from this is that the questions that surround the origins of Buddhism need more research.

Both Bikkhu Sujato and Bhahmali counted 33 unusual spots in the Pali canons in their respective works. Matthew Kosuta made the same observation that he had made about a contradiction in the Theravada Buddhist pacifist rule of behaviour, and he came to the same conclusion. It is not my goal to indicate that the Pali canons are less worthy of being studied than other texts when I bring up this issue; rather, it is my purpose to suggest that there are maybe some parts in the canons that need to be assessed once again. In addition, the Buddha made it very obvious that this topic should be discussed in the Kalama sutta, where he said that followers should "not believe the words of any teacher, even himself,

but rather discover things for themselves, relying on their own experience."

It is also an indication that our study of Buddhist religious tradition has not been handled with any kind of critical mindset and has, rather, consisted of only repeating what we have learnt in a robotic fashion. Students who are pursuing higher levels of Buddhist education should, according to this point of view, be encouraged to form their own independent opinions, to examine the soundness of various arguments, to call for empirical evidence, and to determine whether or not the evidence is sufficient to support the conclusions that have been presented. In addition, these students should be encouraged to determine whether or not the evidence is sufficient to support the conclusions that have been presented. Studying Buddhist philosophy at a higher level requires one to make substantial use of their ability to think critically. When pupils have mastered the Buddha's teachings, they should be able to distinguish between what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Due to the fact that the practice of education has evolved over the course of the last two thousand and five hundred years, typographical mistakes and omissions are likely to be understandable. The outcomes of a research that was carried out by Professor Irvin J. Lehmann reveal that a student's capability for critical thinking considerably increases as they go through the four years of higher education that they are required to complete. Students who are learning at a higher level should take advantage of the fact that they have this quality by using it to their advantage.

In addition, Buddhist universities do not adhere to the same curriculum requirements or make use of the same canonical texts as the rest of the world's educational institutions do. The fact that instructors constantly want students to follow the same path that they have already travelled in the past is the challenge that creates the greatest amount of difficulties in connection to this subject matter. The vast majority of persons responsible for developing educational programmes are unable to look past their personal biases when developing curriculum. In order to more effectively address this issue, our Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has to improve our methods.

### **Capability in a Foreign Language**

The development of higher education has in no way diminished the significance of attaining linguistic competence in a number of different languages. The ability to read original documents in their original language is highly prized in a number of countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, to name just a few of these countries among others. Pali is often used into the study of Theravada Buddhism there, although Chinese is more commonly utilised in the study of Mahayana Buddhism there. In addition to that, in order to study Buddhism at an academic level, you will need to have a commanding command of the English language.

Students in Vietnam practically never bother to learn Pali or Chinese because they regard those languages to be difficult, despite the fact that English is still considered to be a second language in the country. Nobody in their right mind should

be surprised by the fact that Buddhist primary school kids in Vietnam are expected to choose either Chinese or Pali as their preferred language. However, it is strongly advised that students who want to pursue higher levels of study have the ability to read Mahayana sutta in Sanskrit or Chinese and have a sufficient degree of understanding of Pali to grasp the words spoken by the Buddha. Students absolutely need to be capable of understanding the context of the original texts they are reading.

At this point in time, the only requirement that potential students of Buddhist University need to meet is that they have a fundamental level of fluency in either English or Chinese. It is not fair to expect that these pupils will be able to learn the necessary foreign languages for Buddhist study over the duration of four years. As a consequence of this, I would like to make a recommendation that prospective students acquire a level of fluency in a language other than their native tongue that is at least comparable to the level of an intermediate speaker before enrolling in Buddhist institutions (English, Chinese or Pali). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, more often referred to as the CEFR, is a resource that students of foreign languages may use as a tool to characterise their level of proficiency in the language they are studying.

Every facet of a Buddhist education may be categorised as belonging to one of these three stages: learning (Pariyatti), practicing (Patipatti), and realising (Realization) (Pativedha). Therefore, obtaining information is just the first step, and it is impossible to advance without it. It is crucial to not only understand the message that the Buddha was trying to convey but also be aware of how to put that message into action in one's day - to - day life. If a person is knowledgeable with all of the sutras but does not put that knowledge to use in order to achieve enlightenment, then that person is in the same position as a bookshelf. The Buddha emphasised the need of avoiding placing one's emphasis exclusively on supposition since this strategy could not bring one to the Truth. He said that this was the single most important thing that one could do. The purpose of Buddhist teaching is not merely to expand the amount of information that an individual has; rather, it is to assist us in being conscious of who we are as individuals.

Evidence and experimentation are both essential components for the study of Buddhism, just as they are for the study of other branches of science. Because we are unable to put what we believe into practice or to independently test our beliefs, all that we are able to do in Buddhism is act as a parrot and regurgitate the teachings of the Buddha or serve as record keepers. In addition, in order for higher education institutions to be able to adjust to shifting climatic and socioeconomic situations, they need to implement a greater variety of contextual techniques. Education in the Buddhist tradition is a way of leading and guiding one's heart on the road of purity, as stated in the Buddhist tradition. In its practical application, it is also the most potent engine for social reform. The achievement of success in one's day - to - day activities is given a significant amount of weight in Buddhist educational practises.

On the other hand, the curriculum of Buddhist studies that is taught at universities seems to put a higher focus on doctrinal studies than on the more practical components of the religion. This is because doctrinal studies are seen to be more central to the religion. In order to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies, students only need to complete 6 credits worth of theory and meditation practice out of a total of 132 credits. At this time, there is no teaching whatsoever in any part of the curriculum that pertains to practical skills and this is true across the board. The phrase "learning by practice strategy" refers to the existence of linkages between the acquisition of theoretical information and the improvement of the student's professional competence in both the academic and practical realms. These linkages can be seen as a means by which the student can learn more effectively in both academic and practical settings. It is a novel method of teaching that over the course of the last few years has been effectively adopted by a number of educational institutions located all around the globe. The process of enhancing the process of personality development through meditation and demonstrating to students the many methods by which the Buddha's teachings may be applied in day - to - day life are two things that I am completely persuaded need to be implemented at the more advanced Buddhist universities. I am completely persuaded that this approach needs to be implemented at the more advanced Buddhist universities. Buddhist practitioners are able to get a deeper comprehension of what are known as the "Three Dhamma Seals, " which are the realizations of impermanence (Anicca), suffering (Dukkha), and not - self. This is accomplished via the practise of meditation (Anatta). As a direct consequence of it, their brains achieve a condition that is characterised by concentration, calm, tranquilly, and cleanliness. They will delight in life's simple pleasures even while they are still physically present in this world. It is essential for the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha council to have a reliable source of income during the course of its existence; this objective may be accomplished by the council's operation of its own companies. Academics who study Buddhism have a lot of debates and discussions about this issue because the monastic way of life that is praised in Buddhism is extremely austere from an economic standpoint. Given the limitations imposed by the scope of this work, a discussion of Buddhist economics is an area that ought to be pursued in subsequent research rather than being included here.

## **2. Conclusion**

The findings of this paper can be summed up as follows: the educational management system is inappropriate; the curriculum and textbooks are not unified; the teaching, learning, and testing styles are "rote; " the ability to speak a foreign language is restricted; there is a lack of practice; and there is a lack of funding, all of which contribute to unfavourable study conditions. As a consequence of this, a significant amount of redesign is necessary in order to improve our Buddhist higher education. If it is carried out in the appropriate manner, Higher Buddhist Education in Vietnam has the ability to not only meet its aims but also attain worldwide standards, and most significantly, it has the capacity to go beyond the confines of conventional academic study. After all, the purpose of Buddhist education at the

advanced level is to show human beings how to realise their own personal liberation by consistently applying Buddha's teachings throughout their entire lives. This is accomplished through the practice of bodhicitta, which literally translates to "the way of the Buddha. " However, in order to get pupils to a position where they are happy with who they are and where they have a real grasp of Buddhism, this education has to take them there.