Integrating Buddhist Concepts into Global Citizenship Education to Promote Sustainability

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Abstract

This paper explores the integration of Buddhist concepts into Global Citizenship Education (GCED) to promote sustainability and foster interconnectedness. By examining Arne Naess's deep ecology (1973), Schumacher's Buddhist economics (1973), and P.A. Payutto's writings on economics in a Buddhist way (2023), the study demonstrates how these philosophies offer a comprehensive framework for nurturing global citizens who are aware of their responsibilities toward both people and the planet. Naess's deep ecology advocates the intrinsic value of all living beings--a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric worldview. Central to deep ecology is its spiritual dimension, which resonates closely with Buddhist teachings on the interconnectedness of all life. Schumacher's Buddhist Economics, outlined in his seminal work, *Small Is Beautiful*, advocates for economic models that prioritize human well-being and environmental sustainability over mere profit and growth. His ideas of the 'middle path' and the 'right livelihood' challenge conventional economic practices. He urges a shift towards community-centered development, ethical consumption, and the pursuit of meaningful work. P.A. Payutto's writings of Buddhist economics emphasize moderation, mindfulness, and ethical consumption. His teachings encourage a balanced approach to material wealth, advocating for mindful consumption, the reduction of harmful desires (*lobha*) and the cultivation of skillful desires (*chanda*). Integrating these Buddhist concepts into GCED not only nurtures global citizens who are equipped to address environmental challenges but also fosters a worldview rooted in interconnectedness, non-violence, ethics,

and sustainability. This comprehensive approach can contribute to the development of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable global society.

Keywords: Global Citizen Education, Deep Ecology, Buddhist Economics

Introduction

The UN's Global Education First Initiative wrote that the function of education is not just to teach people how to read, write, and count; instead, its duty is to assist people in bringing justice, peace, tolerance, and inclusiveness to our communities—an ideal that becomes the primary goal of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) to "nurture respect for all, build a sense of belonging to a common humanity, and help learners become responsible and active global citizens" (United Nations).

To achieve this, what core competencies should individuals develop to be "proactive" and "engage" with global issues? What values are needed to cope with the challenges of the 21st century? GCED aligns with Target 4.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 on Education)—Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action—which urges international communities to ensure that all learners are educated with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, such as "sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development" (United Nations).

In other words, GCED is significant in our contemporary society because it is a teaching/learning approach for young learners to become global citizens who live together peacefully on one planet. According to UNESCO, whose work aligns with the UN framework, Global Citizen Education can be developed within four key areas:

1.Adjusting curricula and content of lessons to provide knowledge about the world and the interconnected nature of contemporary challenges

and threats, 2. Nurturing cognitive, social, and other skills to put the knowledge into practice and make it relevant to learners' realities, 3. Instilling values that reflect the vision of the world and provide purpose, such as respect for diversity, empathy, open-mindedness, justice, and fairness for everyone, and 4. Adopting behaviors to act on their values and beliefs (UNESCO).

Being aware of the significance of GCED, the bachelor's program in English, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, developed ENGL424 English for the Global Citizen as a major elective course for fourth-year students, focusing on English skills, exposure to various texts and media, promotion of critical literacy, and knowledge about global citizenship and a sustainable world. This led to the course learning objectives, which aim at students being able to 1) develop integrated skills in English to communicate as a global citizen with cultural creative awareness, 2) analyze various texts of global themes using critical literacy, and 3) discuss issues with critical, creative, and collaborative thinking. The course content covers key concepts of global citizenship, new paradigms for sustainability, communal spirit and common humanity, interaction with local, national, and international communities, and becoming a global citizen with cultural creative awareness.

The content concerning new paradigms of sustainability are the core concepts of the course. This unit opens possibilities for incorporating knowledge from various disciplines such as life science, philosophy, history, literature, etc., to find a paradigm shift for our sustainable world. New paradigms of sustainability are neither about promoting environmental awareness nor finding a scientific solution to world problems, but adopting the right attitude toward the way of the world among young learners through learning about intrinsic values. The objective of this study is to explore Buddhist-related concepts or knowledge with a spiritual dimension that can be incorporated into the course to introduce learners to intrinsic values necessary to become global citizens. The scope of the study includes philosophical ideas from Arne Naess's Deep Ecology (1973), E.F. Schumacher's Buddhist Economics (1973), and P.A. Payutto's Economics in a Buddhist Way (2023).

Theoretical Background

Arne Naess's Deep ecology

Arne Naess (1912–2009) is a Norwegian philosopher, mountaineer, and activist who was an important intellectual and inspirational figure within the environmental movement of the late twentieth century. According to Open Air Philosophy, Naess is Gandhian and holds on to Gandhi's notion of active non-violent resistance and strongly believes that non-violent communication can solve any human conflict.

In his essay "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," published in 1973 in the journal *Inquiry*, Arne Næss coined the term "*deep ecology*."

Naess (2005) distinguished "deep ecology" from what he called "shallow ecology" as follows:

The *shallow ecology movement* is concerned with fighting against pollution and resource depletion. Its central objective is the health and affluence of people in the developed countries. The *deep ecology movement* has deeper concerns, which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism and classlessness. (p.1)

The term "shallow ecology" is derived from his concern over deviations from the deep ecology movement. When ecologists have adopted "a one-sided stress" in solving the environmental issues, they concentrate on specific aspects of an environmental issue without considering broader impacts or industrial practices that cause it. Without a deeper ecological or systemic view of the root cause of the problem, individuals will opt for surface-level solutions that can lead to unexpected consequences.

The core concepts of deep ecology have been elaborated in detail in this article. The movement recognizes organisms as knots in the biospherical relationship; believes in the equal right to live, not to disregard our dependence; contends that survival of the fittest refers to live together, not to destroy, use, and control; adopts an anti-class stance as opposed to any class structures; fights

against pollution and resource exploitation with ethics of responsibility, rather than causing any ill effects; embraces complex and intricate values, rather than unwanted and complicated factors; and promotes self-government, not a hierarchy in decision-making process (Naess, 2005, pp.1-3).

In 1984, during an Easter vacation in Death Valley, California, Naess and Sessions formulated the core concepts of deep ecology and called them the basic principles of deep ecology which are as follows:

1) The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes, 2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves, 3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs, 4) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease, 5) Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening, 6) The dominant socio-political living situation must therefore end. This will affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present, 7) The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great, 8) Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes. (p.5)

With a central theme revolving around inherent values, deep ecology is believed to be a concept that can lead to a radical shift in our consciousness, leading to a fundamental change that can help us cope with the environmental crisis.

According to Fritjof Capra, who views himself a life scientist, "deep ecology" is related to the term "ecological view" that he elaborates on in his book, *The Web of Life: A Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (1997), as it holds that humans are not separated from the environment and the world is not a cluster of single objects but a phenomenal network that is "interconnected and inter-dependent".

Capra (1997) discusses further the differences between deep ecology and shallow ecology. The former is eco-centric--it accepts the intrinsic worth of all living beings and regards humans as only a strand in the "web of life" while the latter is anthropocentric or human-centered--humans are above or outside nature, are a source of all values, and attribute instrumental value to nature. Capra (1997) emphasizes that deep ecology is spiritual or religious awareness; it is perceived as the mode of consciousness.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the emerging new vision of reality based on deep ecological awareness is consistent with the so-called 'perennial philosophy' of spiritual traditions, whether we talk about the spirituality of Christian mystics, that of Buddhists or the philosophy and cosmology underlying the Native American traditions. (para 5)

The concept of deep ecology has a spiritual dimension and aligns with the Buddhism concepts of compassion (*karuna*) and non-harm (*ahimsa*) towards all beings. The principle of compassionate action extends to all forms of life. Both deep ecology and Buddhism advocate for the interconnectedness of life and the respect for intrinsic value of all beings, and they opposed killing or suppressing. Practices such as meditation cultivate spiritual development, awareness, and mindfulness, which can lead to greater ecological sensitivity and compassion.

By adopting deep ecology principles, students learn to develop an ecological view, foster a profound respect for the environment and all life forms, cultivate a sense of interconnectedness, and understand the urgent need for sustainable practices, which correspond to GCED's objectives.

E.F. Schumacher's Buddhist Economics

E.F. Schumacher (1911–1977) was a German economist and journalist who is best known for his proposal for human-scale, decentralized, and appropriate technologies, his advocacy of community-based economies, and his call for an end to excessive consumption. The term "Buddhist economics" was coined by E. F. Schumacher in 1955, when he travelled to Burma as an economic consultant. The term was used in his essay, which was first published in 1966 in *Asia: A Handbook* and republished in his influential collection *Small Is Beautiful* (1973).

According to Schumacher (1973), Buddhist way of life is marvelous in its rational pattern in which--small yields an extremely satisfying outcome. Thus, the characteristics of Buddhist economics are simplicity and non-violence as it applies Buddhist concepts such as middle way and detachment. It calls for technology that is "born of non-violence" *(ahimsa)* and "a relationship of man to nature." He argues that technological production leading to endless consumption of our limited natural resources and deprivation of future generation's benefits is not a viable solution. He emphasizes that what we truly need from people in scientific and technological fields include:

... methods and equipment which are cheap enough so that they are accessible to virtually everyone, suitable for small-scale applications, and compatible with human's need for creativity. (Schumacher, 1973, p.35)

Schumacher (1973) discusses the conflicting views between modern economists and Buddhist economists regarding the degree of consumption. He elaborates that, for modern economists, "standard of living" is measured by what they annually consume; therefore, more consumption is better than less consumption. In contrast, Buddhist economists view consumption as a path to well-being, and thus, we should aim for higher well-being with lesser consumption (Center for New Economics, 2024, para. 12).

Schumacher emphasizes the different approaches to consumption between these two groups. Modern economists claim that consumption is the

ultimate goal of all economic pursuits; therefore, production resources such as land, labor, and capital are considered the means to achieve this goal. They optimize their satisfaction through consumption while Buddhist economists enhance consumption through productive effort (Center for New Economics, 2024, para. 13).

In his essay of "Buddhist Economics," published online on the Center for New Economics website, Schumacher asserts that, "simplicity and non-violence are closely related" (para. 14). Schumacher considers *the optimal pattern of consumption* is higher satisfaction from lower consumption. The modest use of resources to satisfy one's need enables Buddhist economists to live without much pressure as they adhere to the Buddhist principle of "cease to do evil; try to do good," unlike the modern economists (Center for New Economics, 2024, para. 14).

Self-sufficient local communities are another important trait asserted by Schumacher in his essay. Buddhist economists view that relying on production from local resources for local needs is the most rational practice of economic life while a lifestyle dependent on resources from afar--typically seen among modern economists--is a sign of failure (Center for New Economics, 2024, para. 15).

The main distinction between these two is the attitude towards the use of renewable and non-renewable energy. Modern economists do not differentiate between renewable and non-renewable energy; both are treated equally and quantified in unit and prices. On the contrary, Buddhist economists contend that we should use non-renewable energy in the case that it is necessary, with the utmost care and an emphasis on preserving nature. Wasteful and excessive exploitation is considered a violent action (Center for New Economics, 2024, para.18).

To conclude his essay, Schumacher criticizes modern economists that their way of life is not a sustainable living practice: "...a population basing its economic life on non-renewable fuels is living parasitically...such a way of life could have no permanence...is an act of violence against nature..." (Center for New

Economics, 2024, para. 19). Schumacher (1973) also gives an alarming message to Buddhist countries, not to ignore their eastern legacy of spiritual values while adopting the western values of materialism from modern economics.

We can conclude that Buddhist economics has originated from Buddhist concepts and practices. Schumacher views the world and see through our negligence and ignorance. With an economist's eyes, he provides a lens to adjust our mindset using eastern philosophy of right livelihood to change our view on economic life. The approach incorporates Buddhist concepts such as non-violence and the Middle Way, inherent values that can guide students to foster sustainable living practices and provides them insightful thoughts on comprehensive economic systems. The key concept of the approach also resonates with the goals of GCED as it promotes economic systems that are both just and sustainable.

P.A. Payutto's Buddhist Economics

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P.A. Payutto) (1939-present) is an honorary Tipitaka Scholar from Navanalanda Mahavihara, India. He teaches Buddhist studies and gives lectures at various universities in Thailand and abroad. He has written many books and proposed his theory of Buddhist economics from the perspective of a Buddhist monk.

According to Ven. Payutto (2023), his theory examines the psychology of the human mind and the emotions that guide our economic activities. His Buddhist economics aims to clarify harmful practices and beneficial ones across the range of human activities involving the production and consumption of goods and services, with the hope to teach human beings to become ethically mature.

In his book *Buddhist Economics*, 15th edition, Thai version, which was revised and reprinted from the 7th edition, a special section was written. This section is the focus of this paper. From the perspective of a Buddhist, economics and other streams of knowledge cannot be separated--economics is part of a

concerted effort to solve the problems of humanity, while Buddhist economics works with it to reach a common goal of sufficiency in society, the individual, and the environment (Payutto, 2023).

Central to Ven. Payutto's economics is the concept of "wise consumption" or "skillful desire" (*Chanda*) which contrasts with "unskillful desire" (*Lobha/Tanha*), which advocates for mindful consumption that respects ecological views and promotes sustainability. This concept can be incorporated into GCED to introduce students to learn Buddhist economics from a perspective of Thai Buddhist monk and to encourage students to adopt more responsible and ethical consumption practices. These principles can guide students in making conscious choices as a global citizen, contributing to both individual and collective well-being.

Integrating Buddhist Concepts into Global Citizen Education

Effective teaching strategies for integrating ecological views from Arne Naess's Deep Ecology to Schumacher's and Payutto's Buddhist Economics include collaborative learning, critical reflection, experiential learning and case studies. *Collaborative learning* environments are provided where students can study global initiatives and sustainability challenges together before an oral report. Working in groups can enhance understanding of the new paradigms as well as their role as a global citizen. *Critical reflection* encourages students to critically reflect on their own values and actions upon interacting with philosophical ideas. Discussions in a controlled setting, such as pinwheel, round robins and fishbowl, are an effective strategy to comprehend "deep ecology" together with classmates and reflect their opinion. Reflective essays can help students ask "deeper" questions, connect the theories they learn to their personal and professional lives. Presentations of social enterprises that adopt Buddhist economics is a good means to demonstrate their critical skills. *Case studies* introduce students to companies that have successfully integrated ethical and sustainable practices into their operations, making abstract concepts concrete,

tangible, and applicable. *Experiential learning* from community-based projects and site visits complete the circuit of learning about mindful consumption and right livelihood. The observation of ecological view in real-world scenarios can enrich their learning experience.

Conclusion

The intrinsic values in the Buddhist-related concepts explored in this study can be integrated into global citizenship education, as they foster a worldview rooted in interconnectedness, non-violence, and environmental ethics—an inherent value that an active citizen should possess to promote a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. This corresponds to the goal of GCED. By incorporating an ecological view from these Buddhist-related concepts, students can develop an eco-centric attitude and a deeper understanding of their role as active citizens in global society. As global citizens who are part of the deep ecology movement and embrace the stance of a Buddhist economist, they will be better equipped to address the environmental and social challenges of our time with these new paradigms.

Challenges and Suggestions

First, it is essential to approach Buddhist teachings with cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity. Educational programs should acknowledge the diverse interpretations and practices within Buddhism, as learners come from various backgrounds and beliefs. Second, ensuring that theoretical concepts can be effectively translated into practical applications is challenging. Educators must find ways to make abstract principles tangible for students. A dynamic classroom environment is necessary for learners to understand philosophical ideas and enhance critical thinking skills. Lastly, gaining institutional support for incorporating Buddhist concepts into the curriculum may require advocacy and demonstration of the benefits of such integration.

It is suggested that, apart from incorporating ecological views, we can move forward to include posthuman concepts in the GCED classroom. This might involve considering how technology, artificial intelligence, and biological enhancements could fundamentally alter human identity and experience.

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