

Research Paper

Constructivist Psychology and Buddhist Thought: An Educational Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The core of constructivist psychology is the concept of the construction of knowledge through experiential processes, cognition, and social interactions rather than the reception of knowledge through passive exposure to the external world. In this sense, Buddhism also suggests that knowledge, identity, and perception of individuals arise through conditioned and experiential ways. The current paper presents the findings of a literature review and educational analysis about the association between constructivist psychology and Buddhist philosophy. This research analyses the ideas of constructivist theories and philosophies in relation to their educational relevance in association with Buddhist psychology and philosophy. The main findings show that both traditions stress experiential learning, critical reflection, learner-oriented instruction, and transformative growth. It seems possible to integrate Buddhist perspectives with constructivist learning theories in order to develop a more comprehensive approach to teaching and learning, which includes elements of self-reflection, emotional regulation, ethics, and critical thinking.

Keywords: *Constructivism, Buddhist Psychology, Educational Psychology, Mindfulness, Experiential Learning, Learner-Centred Pedagogy*

Psychology and philosophy have had an impact on the development of education through their relationship to educational theory and practice. The constructivist approach to psychology became a paradigm in education through the contributions of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Both psychologists stressed the constructive nature of learning, where knowledge is constructed through the interactions between individuals and experiences. Contrary to the traditional assumption of knowledge as something static that can be imparted to learners, constructivists suggest that knowledge is acquired through cognitive, social, and experiential processes (Raskin, 2002).

According to Piaget, learning occurs through assimilation and accommodation, where individuals organise and reorganise cognitive structures in relation to their experiences (Piaget, 1972). Moreover, Vygotsky (1978) further highlighted the sociocultural dimension of learning by emphasising the role of language, collaboration, and social mediation in

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cognitive development. Radical constructivism later challenged the positivist notion of objectivity and emphasised the interpretative nature of human cognition (von Glasersfeld, E., 1995).

In addition to that, Buddhism offers some complex theories on consciousness, cognition, self, and personal development. The core principles of dependent origination, impermanence, and non-self within Buddhist philosophy highlight the importance of conditioning and relation (Gethin, 1998). As a result, Buddhist philosophy is not interested in any essentialist theories of reality but sees the process of human understanding as something dynamic and relational.

Recently, there have been numerous attempts to explore the connection between constructivist psychology and Buddhism (Thompson, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). In general, these two schools of thought criticise the idea of naïve realism and pay attention to the aspects of experiential knowledge, reflexive understanding, and constructivism in perception and self-understanding. For an educator, these similarities are very significant.

That is why this research will analyse the convergence of ideas in constructivist psychology and Buddhist philosophy in terms of education using the method of qualitative literature survey.

Motivation of the Study

The present study was stimulated by an increasing interest among scholars in exploring how Eastern philosophy can be used to inform current educational psychology practice. As modern educational institutions encounter difficulties with emotional dysregulation, lack of focus, unhealthy levels of competition, and rigid instruction methods, the need for contemplative and person-focused educational practices that encourage reflective thinking and self-development becomes more evident (Miller, 2007).

Constructivist psychology and Buddhism both highlight the importance of learning through experience, reflective inquiry, and transformative human development. Moreover, the role of mindfulness and emotional awareness in education has become increasingly acknowledged in modern educational psychology (Miller, 2007). Therefore, an examination of similarities between constructivist psychology and Buddhism might help in formulating holistic educational theories.

A crucial factor stimulating the present research is the relative rarity of educational research on the connection between constructivist psychology and Buddhism. Previous literature often explores Buddhist psychology, mindfulness, or constructivism in isolation but seldom considers their interplay in education.

Objectives of the Study and Corresponding Research Questions

In order to maintain conceptual clarity and methodological consistency, each research objective of the study was aligned with a corresponding research question.

Objectives of the Study	Corresponding Research Questions
O₁: To analyse the principles of constructivist psychology in relation to learning and cognition.	Q₁: What are the major theoretical principles of constructivist psychology in relation to learning and knowledge construction?

Objectives of the Study	Corresponding Research Questions
O₂: To examine major Buddhist psychological and philosophical concepts relevant to education.	Q₂: What psychological and philosophical concepts of Buddhist thought are relevant to educational analysis?
O₃: To explore similarities between constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought.	Q₃: In what ways do constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought converge in their understanding of cognition, experience, and selfhood?
O₄: To investigate the relevance of dependent origination to constructivist learning theory.	Q₄: How does the Buddhist concept of dependent origination relate to constructivist interpretations of learning and knowledge?
O₅: To examine the contribution of mindfulness to constructivist learning processes.	Q₅: How may Buddhist contemplative practices, such as mindfulness, contribute to constructivist educational processes?
O₆: To analyse pedagogical implications emerging from the integration of constructivism and Buddhist thought.	Q₆: What pedagogical implications emerge from integrating constructivist psychology with Buddhist educational philosophy?
O₇: To propose a holistic educational framework integrating constructivism and Buddhist thought.	Q₇: How can the synthesis of constructivist and Buddhist approaches contribute to holistic and transformative education?

Additional Research Question (AQ₁): What challenges and possibilities exist in applying Buddhist-informed constructivist approaches within contemporary educational systems?

Significance of the Study

This paper will make an important contribution to the interdisciplinary field of educational research in the context of constructivist psychology and Buddhism. This study may assist educators and researchers to comprehend the ways in which contemplative and learner-centred approaches can facilitate holistic education.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the principal theoretical and conceptual foundations behind the current study, as related to constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought, are outlined in terms of learning, cognition, self, and educational theory.

Constructivist Psychology and Construction of Knowledge

Constructivist psychology suggests that knowledge construction is a dynamic process facilitated by one's active engagement with experience (Piaget, 1970). Learning entails interpretation, structuring, and re-creation of experiences through cognitive schemas.

While Piaget stressed the importance of assimilation and accommodation in cognitive development, Vygotsky focused on the socio-cultural character of learning and collaborative engagement in cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, constructivist pedagogy emphasises reflective thinking, experiential learning, learner engagement, and collaborative sense-making.

Buddhist Thought and Psychological Understanding

Buddhist philosophy views cognition, consciousness, and selfhood as dynamic processes. Concepts like dependent origination, impermanence, and non-self in Buddhism illustrate the conditioned aspect of human experience (Rahula, 1974; Bodhi, 2000).

The Buddhist view of psychology sees the mind as a process-driven entity. Furthermore, according to the Yogācāra philosophy, perception and experience are conditioned and affected by cognitive structures and mental constructs (Lusthaus, 2002).

Shared Constructs of Education and Psychology

There are various common educational constructs between constructivist psychology and Buddhism. These include the following concepts: experiential learning; reflective consciousness; contextual comprehension; participative involvement; relational cognition; and transformative growth.

Moreover, both constructivist psychology and Buddhism do not consider the idea of essential and absolute conceptions of selfhood and knowledge. In other words, constructivist psychology sees identity as a socially and cognitively constructed reality, while Buddhism views selfhood as an ever-changing construct.

Mindfulness and Transformative Learning

Mindfulness represents one of the key areas where the constructivist approach to education converges with the Buddhist tradition of contemplation and meditation. Modern educational psychology more and more acknowledges mindfulness as an educational strategy focusing on attention, self-regulation, metacognition, and reflection (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

The incorporation of mindfulness into a constructivist educational framework supports holistic education through the consideration of the cognitive, emotional, ethical, and interpersonal aspects of the educational process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of relevant academic literature concerning the constructivist approach to psychology, Buddhism, contemplation-based education, and learner-centeredness in order to outline the theoretical context of the current research.

The Theory of Constructivist Education

According to constructivism, learning represents an active and constructive activity that results from interacting with experiences and the sociocultural environment. Cognitive construction, reflective inquiry, cooperative learning, and learner-centeredness were advocated by such authors as Piaget (1972), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1996), and Fosnot (2013).

Modern educational scholarship reveals that constructivist learning environments foster critical thinking, self-governance, and involvement in the classroom through the connection of past experiences and newly acquired information (Schunk, 2020).

Buddhist Psychology and Contemplative Education

However, Buddhism offers significant psychological perspectives with respect to cognition, consciousness, selfhood, and emotional management. There has been increasing interest in the applicability of Buddhist meditative practices to educational and psychological realms

(Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Educational interventions based on Buddhist mindfulness practices have shown positive impacts on attention, emotions, reflective thinking, and student engagement (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Parallels Between Constructivist Psychology and Buddhist Philosophy

There has been increasing recognition of the conceptual parallels between constructivist psychology and Buddhist philosophy. Similarities include the focus on experiential knowledge, relational cognition, reflective thinking, and interpretation of experiences (Thompson, 2015).

The principle of dependent origination in Buddhism is similar to the constructivist assumption about context- and society-mediated learning. Likewise, Buddhist meditation techniques can be compared to the constructivist principle of reflective thinking and meta-cognition.

Research Gap

Despite increasing scholarly interest in mindfulness and meditative education, there have been few systematic investigations into the educational connection between constructivist psychology and Buddhist philosophy from an interdisciplinary perspective. The current study endeavours to fill this research gap.

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodological approach that has been used for carrying out this research work, including the design and process of the literature review.

Research Design

A qualitative literature survey approach has been applied in this study using both descriptive and analytical approaches. This research design is interdisciplinary since it involves different disciplines, such as psychology, philosophy, Buddhism, and educational theories.

Procedure of Literature Analysis

The study was completely carried out using secondary sources of data, such as academic journals, books, and other sources of data available online. Literature that is relevant to constructivist psychology, Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness education, experiential learning, and learner-centred teaching was collected and analysed for thematic content. These collected sources of literature were classified according to topics, including cognition, selfhood, mindfulness, experiential learning, and education transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section systematically provides results obtained from the current study in direct relation to each research question, followed by a detailed discussion.

Q1: What are the major theoretical principles of constructivist psychology in relation to learning and knowledge construction?

The analysis revealed that constructivist psychology conceptualises learning as an active and interpretive process shaped by prior experience, cognitive structures, and social interaction. Major principles identified included experiential learning, reflective inquiry, social mediation, learner autonomy, and contextual understanding. Piaget emphasised assimilation and accommodation as central mechanisms of cognitive development, whereas Vygotsky highlighted the sociocultural dimensions of learning (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings indicate that constructivist psychology challenges transmission-based models of education by redefining learners as active participants in the construction of meaning. Consequently, constructivist pedagogy promotes reflective, collaborative, and learner-centred educational practices.

Q₂: What psychological and philosophical concepts of Buddhist thought are relevant to educational analysis?

The study identified several Buddhist concepts relevant to educational analysis, including impermanence, non-self, dependent origination, mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. These concepts collectively contribute to a holistic understanding of cognition, consciousness, and human development.

The analysis suggests that Buddhist thought integrates cognitive, ethical, emotional, and contemplative dimensions of learning. Buddhist contemplative traditions further emphasise experiential understanding, reflective awareness, and ethical self-cultivation, all of which possess important educational significance.

Q₃: In what ways do constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought converge in their understanding of cognition, experience, and selfhood?

The findings demonstrated substantial convergence between constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought concerning cognition, experience, and selfhood. Both traditions reject essentialist understandings of reality and instead emphasise relationality, process, and experiential interpretation.

Constructivist psychology conceptualises identity as socially and cognitively constructed, whereas Buddhist philosophy interprets the self as impermanent and conditionally constituted. Both perspectives, therefore, support reflective awareness and transformative learning.

Q₄: How does the Buddhist concept of dependent origination relate to constructivist interpretations of learning and knowledge?

The doctrine of dependent origination closely parallels constructivist interpretations of learning by emphasising interconnectedness and contextual emergence. Both perspectives maintain that knowledge arises through interaction among multiple conditions rather than existing independently.

Educationally, this relational understanding supports collaborative learning, contextual pedagogy, and sociocultural participation.

Q₅: How may Buddhist contemplative practices, such as mindfulness, contribute to constructivist educational processes?

The analysis revealed that mindfulness contributes significantly to constructivist educational processes by promoting reflective awareness, metacognition, emotional regulation, and learner engagement.

Mindfulness-based educational approaches strengthen reflective inquiry and experiential learning by encouraging conscious observation of thoughts, experiences, and emotions. Such practices, therefore, extend constructivist education toward emotional and ethical dimensions of learning.

Q₆: What pedagogical implications emerge from integrating constructivist psychology with Buddhist educational philosophy?

The integration of constructivist psychology and Buddhist educational philosophy promotes learner-centred pedagogy, contemplative education, reflective teaching, collaborative inquiry, and ethical awareness.

The findings further indicate that teachers may be reconceptualised as facilitators of reflective and transformative learning rather than mere transmitters of information.

Q₇: How can the synthesis of constructivist and Buddhist approaches contribute to holistic and transformative education?

The synthesis of constructivist and Buddhist approaches contributes significantly to holistic and transformative education by integrating cognitive, emotional, ethical, contemplative, and social dimensions of learning.

Such integration supports the development of reflective, compassionate, emotionally balanced, and socially responsible learners while extending educational objectives beyond academic achievement.

Additional Research Question (AQ₁): What challenges and possibilities exist in applying Buddhist-informed constructivist approaches within contemporary educational systems?

The findings identified both possibilities and challenges associated with implementing Buddhist-informed constructivist approaches within contemporary educational systems.

Potential benefits include improved learner well-being, reflective awareness, emotional regulation, and inclusive pedagogy. However, practical challenges include institutional rigidity, examination-oriented educational systems, insufficient teacher preparation, and cultural misunderstandings concerning contemplative practices.

Educational Implications

The current study underscores various crucial implications in education that can arise from the convergence of constructivist psychology and Buddhism. Firstly, this convergence emphasises learner-centred teaching approaches characterised by reflective engagement and active learning.

Secondly, contemplation techniques of Buddhism, like mindfulness, could play a vital role in regulating emotions, promoting attentiveness, encouraging empathic tendencies, and fostering metacognition in the context of education.

Thirdly, the fusion of constructivism and Buddhism facilitates a holistic approach to education that takes into account cognitive, affective, ethical, and interpersonal aspects of human development.

Challenges and Limitations

This research was confined to an analysis of the literature and theoretical perspectives and lacked empirical validation. In addition, the research concentrated on the implications for education but not on the theological arguments in Buddhism.

The incorporation of Buddhist-influenced constructivist education would also face some pragmatic difficulties, like institutional opposition, exam-driven educational systems, and a lack of teachers' training in contemplation education.

CONCLUSION

In light of the above findings, the current research suggests that there are important philosophical, psychological, and educational connections between constructivist psychology and Buddhist thought that can help explain the process of learning and human development in more holistic ways. Indeed, both schools of thought promote experiential learning, reflective consciousness, relational cognition, and transformative processes.

On the one hand, constructivist psychology offers a new approach to learning and meaning-making, seeing it as a social activity through which individuals build knowledge. On the other hand, Buddhism provides a set of contemplative and ethical principles, such as mindfulness, dependent origination, and experiential wisdom, that can complement constructivist psychology by moving beyond conventional approaches to education. It is also suggested that the use of constructivist and Buddhist perspectives can be important for modern educational theory by allowing the promotion of holistic education.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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