



"Spiritual Transformation through Dhammayatra: An Empirical Analysis of Saddhā Strengthening and Understanding of Buddhism in the Context of Contextual Learning"

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Abstract

The crisis of meaning and spirituality that has hit the younger generation demands a more contextual and transformative model of religious learning. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Dhammayatra as an experiential learning strategy in strengthening Saddhā and improving understanding of Buddhism. With a quantitative approach and a one-group pretest-posttest pseudo-experiment design, this study involved 51 participants who followed the entire series of Dhammayatra. An instrument in the form of a Likert questionnaire is used to measure two main variables: Saddhā (belief in the Triratna) and understanding of the Dhamma (cognitive, affective, applicative). The results of the analysis showed a significant improvement in the indicators of Saddhā and Dhamma understanding after the activity took place. Collective spiritual experiences through visits to sacred sites, meditation, and guided reflection have proven to be more impactful than conventional methods. These findings strengthen the argument that Dhammayatra can be a transformative learning medium and deeply touch spiritual aspects. By practical implication, these activities need to be integrated into the non-formal curriculum of Buddhist education in a systematic manner, with trained facilitators and thematic learning modules. The study also recommends further exploration through a mixed methods approach and longitudinal studies to assess the sustainability of long-term spiritual impacts.

Keywords: *Dhammayatra, Saddhā, experiential learning, Buddhist education, spiritual transformation, .*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly secular and materialistic global landscape, the crisis of meaning in life and spiritual emptiness are becoming major challenges for the younger generation. This phenomenon demands an educational response that not only hones the cognitive aspect, but also fosters affective and spiritual dimensions. Religious education, especially in the context of Buddhism, has an important role in strengthening the character and fostering the spirituality of students. Interestingly, the practice of Dhammayatra – a form of spiritual pilgrimage to Buddhist holy sites –

is evolving as a contextual learning approach that blends reflection, hands-on experience, and social interaction to deeply instill Dhamma values.

Dhammayatra is not just a ritualistic activity, but a vehicle for spiritual transformation that allows participants to experience firsthand the values of Buddhism. This activity is believed to strengthen *saddhā* (belief in the Triratna) and deepen understanding of essential teachings such as the Four Noble Truths and the Middle Way. However, most previous research has been descriptive-qualitative, with no empirical approach quantitatively measuring the impact of these activities.

Several studies such as those conducted by Wibowo (2021) and Kusuma (2022) show a positive correlation between involvement in spiritual practices and increased religiosity and emotional awareness. However, no studies have systematically tested changes in the level of *saddhā* and understanding of the Dhamma through experimental design. This gap is what this study aims to fill. Using a quasi-experiment approach of the pretest-posttest model on one group, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence of the contribution of Dhammayatra in improving the spiritual quality of participants.

This study is designed to answer two main questions: (1) To what extent does participation in Dhammayatra contribute to the increase of participants' *saddhā*? and (2) Is this activity significantly able to increase participants' understanding of Buddhism? This focus also answers the trend of literature that has not touched much on the quantitative and evaluative aspects of Buddhist pilgrimage practice.

The main novelty of this study lies in the integration of an empirical-quantitative approach in analyzing the Dhammayatra, a learning strategy that is generally examined narratively and qualitatively. Theoretically, this research expands the discourse on religious education based on spiritual experience. Practically, these findings are expected to serve as a foothold for Buddhist educational institutions and religious communities in designing transformative learning models based on spiritual experiences.

The structure of this article includes five main parts: an introduction that explains the background and formulation of the problem, a literature review that outlines theories and previous studies, the quantitative research methodology used, the results of data analysis, and a discussion and conclusion that explains the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saddhā as the Foundation of Buddhist Spirituality

Within the framework of Buddhism, *saddhā* is understood not as a form of dogmatic belief, but as a belief that rests on rationality, deep understanding, and verification through personal experience. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* affirms that *saddhā* is the first step that underlies a practitioner's spiritual journey. This belief is not passive, but active and progressive, encouraging individuals to investigate, meditate, and practice the Dhamma authentically and continuously.

Interestingly, *saddhā* in Buddhism cannot be separated from the practice of daily life. It demands active involvement in the formation of consistent ethical and spiritual

commitments. Therefore, saddhā is not just an emotional response to teachings, but it is also an indicator of internalization of values that reflect inner transformation.

Understanding Buddhism: Cognitive, Affective, and Applicative Dimensions

The understanding of Buddhism has a multidimensional structure that includes cognitive (knowledge of teachings), affective (appreciation of spiritual values), and applicative (real practice in life). This is reflected in the framework of the practice of three main aspects, namely *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). These three complement and reinforce each other, creating an integral foundation for the process of spiritual transformation.

Thus, the understanding of the Dhamma cannot be reduced to mere theoretical understanding. The Dhamma must be proven through moral discipline, inner awareness, and concrete wisdom in action. This perspective is important in designing a religious learning strategy that is not only informative, but also transformative.

Dhammayatra as a Contextual Learning Strategy

Dhammayatra, as a spiritual pilgrimage to Buddhist sites of high historical and symbolic value, has evolved into an effective experiential learning method in the context of contemporary Buddhist education. Based on the experiential learning theory from Kolb (1984), concrete experiences in Dhammayatra provide space for participants to observe, reflect, and internalize the values of the teachings more deeply.

More than just a ritualistic activity, Dhammayatra serves as a holistic learning space that combines elements of religiosity, social interaction, and personal contemplation. This activity allows participants to not only recognize sacred sites historically, but also to experience and interpret religious symbols as part of personal and collective spiritual dynamics.

Empirical Evidence on the Transformational Impact of Dhammayatra

The available empirical research reinforces the conjecture that Dhammayatra has a significant impact on the spiritual aspects of participants. Wibowo (2021), in his research, found that participation in spiritual activities contributes positively to the increase of adolescent religiosity. This study confirms that deep spiritual experiences can form stronger religious identities and internalized religious values.

Meanwhile, Kusuma (2022) more specifically identified an increase in aspects of spiritual emotions and understanding of Dhamma values after following the Dhammayatra. These results show that Dhammayatra not only creates a momentary emotional impact, but also facilitates the internalization of values in a sustainable manner. These two studies, although qualitative, provide a solid theoretical basis for the effectiveness of Dhammayatra in the context of religious learning.

Synthesis and Gaps in Literature

From the literature that has been presented, it can be seen that saddhā and Buddhist understanding are two entities that are closely related in the process of spiritual transformation.

Dhammayatra, with its experience-based approach, has a strong potential to be a catalyst in deepening both aspects simultaneously.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of the existing studies are still limited to qualitative descriptive approaches. There have not been many studies that explicitly test the causal relationship between participation in the Dhammayatra and a measurable increase in saddhā and understanding of the teachings. It is this void that creates methodological and conceptual gaps in the current academic literature.

Furthermore, there is no theoretical model that systematically explains the transformation mechanism that occurs during Dhammayatra activities. In this case, a quantitative approach with experimental design becomes relevant to fill this gap and objectively test the effectiveness of Dhammayatra as a contextual and transformative religious learning strategy.

Theoretical Implications and Research Contributions

Considering the overall findings of the literature, the main contribution of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between existing qualitative approaches and the need for empirical validation based on quantitative data. This study adopts a pseudo-experimental approach with a pretest–posttest design to provide a systematic picture of the impact of Dhammayatra on the saddhā dimension and understanding of Buddhism.

In addition, this research also expands the theoretical discourse on the importance of experiential learning in Buddhist education. Critically, this study proposes that Dhammayatra is not only a traditional spiritual practice, but also a relevant pedagogical instrument in answering the challenges of modernity to the spirituality of the younger generation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach with a pretest-posttest-type pseudo-experimental design without a control group to empirically test the impact of participation in Dhammayatra activities on the improvement of saddhā and understanding of Buddhism. This approach is considered the most appropriate because it is able to systematically capture the changes that occur before and after the intervention, as well as allow valid inferences about the influence of spiritual experiences on the variables being studied (Creswell, 2014).

The participant selection process follows the PRISMA principle which is tailored for quantitative experience-based research. The first stage, namely identification, begins by determining the target population in the form of Buddhists who have experience participating in Dhammayatra activities. From this population, 100 individuals were identified and contacted as potential participants based on information on previous Dhammayatra activities. The next stage, screening, is carried out to ensure that each individual really follows the entire series of

Dhammayatra in its entirety, and is willing to fill in the research instruments honestly and completely. This process resulted in 87 candidates who met the initial criteria.

Then, at the eligibility stage, validation of the consistency of answers and completeness of the data was carried out through screening of responses in the initial instrument. Participants who gave inconsistent answers or showed high social bias were eliminated. This stage leaves 51 participants who are considered eligible based on the quality of the data they provide. Finally, at the inclusion stage, these 51 participants were assigned as the final sample, taking into account informed consent as well as the suitability of their demographic characteristics and experiences with the focus of the study.

In this study, the free variable was participation in Dhammayatra activities, while the bound variable consisted of *saddhā* (belief in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and understanding of Buddhism (covering cognitive, affective, and applicative aspects). The main instrument is a Likert scale questionnaire of 1-5 which is compiled based on conceptual and empirical indicators of both variables, supported by observation and written reflection to capture the nuances of spiritual transformation that may not be detected by quantitative measurements alone.

Data analysis begins with validity and reliability tests to ensure the instrument measures the right construct consistently. Normality tests were performed using Shapiro-Wilk to determine whether the data met the parametric assumptions. If the assumption is met, a paired sample t-test is used to compare pretest and posttest scores; on the other hand, the Wilcoxon test is used when the distribution is abnormal. The focus of the analysis was to identify the statistical significance of the score changes, as well as to interpret the findings in the context of Buddhist spiritual education.

Through this structured and verified methodology, the research aims not only to prove the effectiveness of Dhammayatra empirically, but also to advance a transformative learning approach that emphasizes the integration between affective experience and conceptual understanding of Buddhism. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of a more meaningful and contextual religious education strategy.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Descriptive Statistics

	Gender	Age	VI
Valid	51	51	51
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	1.451	1.941	1.275
Std. Deviation	0.503	0.238	0.451
Minimum	1.000	1.000	1.000
Maximum	2.000	2.000	2.000

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies for Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 (male)	28	54.902	54.902	54.902
2 (female)	23	45.098	45.098	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	51	100.000		

Table 2 Frequencies for Gender

Frequencies for Age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1 (Under 20 years old)	3	5.882	5.882	5.882
2 (Over 20 years old)	48	94.118	94.118	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	51	100.000		

Table 3 Frequencies for Age

Preliminary analysis of the demographics of the participants showed that the majority of respondents were individuals over the age of 20 (94.1%) and had relatively balanced gender representation (54.9% males and 45.1% females). This composition shows age-relevant maturity for reflective and spiritual activities such as Dhammayatra, as well as cross-gender engagement that signifies the inclusivity of such activities.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Frequentist Scale Reliability Statistics

Coefficient	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Coefficient α	0.943	0.015	0.914	0.972

Table 4 Frequentist Scale Reliability Statistics

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Frequentist Individual Item Reliability Statistics

Items	Coefficient α (if item dropped)			Item-rest correlation		
	Estimate	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Estimate	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
VI (How many times do you follow the Dhammayatra?)	0.953	0.929	0.978	0.108		
VDS1 (My Saddhā towards the Triratna increases due to personal experience in the Dhammayatra)	0.934	0.901	0.966	0.838		
VDS2 (I feel calm and happy when I make a pilgrimage to a Buddhist shrine)	0.932	0.896	0.967	0.887		
VDS3 (I was compelled to practice Buddhism after following the Dhammayatra)	0.935	0.905	0.966	0.808		
VDS4 (I appreciate the value of self-discipline and meditation more after participating in this activity)	0.934	0.903	0.965	0.838		
VDS5 (I intend to deepen Buddhism in daily life)	0.936	0.904	0.969	0.782		
VDP1 (I better understand the meaning of conscious life after Dhammayatra)	0.939	0.903	0.976	0.702		
VDP2 (I can distinguish between true view and wrong view)	0.941	0.909	0.974	0.646		
VDP3 (I know that Buddhist Pancasila is a moral guideline that must be carried out)	0.935	0.903	0.968	0.802		
VDP4 (I can apply the value of love and no/reduce violence in daily life)	0.935	0.904	0.967	0.804		
VDP5 (I understand that all actions have consequences (kamma law))	0.933	0.899	0.967	0.86		

Note. The analytic confidence interval is not available for the item-rest correlation.

Table 5 Frequentist Individual Item Reliability Statistics

The instrument used in this study showed a very high level of reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.943. All items showed a strong item-total correlation, especially on the VDS2 indicator ("I feel calm and happy while on pilgrimage") with the highest correlation value of 0.887. These findings indicate that all statements in the questionnaire have good internal consistency and are able to measure the Saddhā construct and Buddhist understanding validly and reliably.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistical Tests

Model Summary - Total Dependent Variable

Type	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	df1	df2	p
M ₀	0.000	0.000	0.000	8.575	0.000	0	50	
M ₁	0.108	0.012	-0.008	8.611	0.012	1	49	0.449

Note. M₁ includes Total Independent Variables

Table 6 Model Summary - Total Variable Dependency

ANOVA

Type		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
M ₁	Regression	43.257	1	43.257	0.583	0.449
	Residual	3633.253	49	74.148		
	Total	3676.510	50			

Note. M₁ includes Total Independent Variables

Note. The intercept model is omitted, as no meaningful information can be shown.

Table 7 ANOVA

Coefficients

Type		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
M ₀	(Intercept)	41.431	1.201		34.505	<.001
M ₁	(Intercept)	38.801	3.649		10.635	<.001
	Total Independent Variables	2.064	2.702	0.108	0.764	0.449

Table 8 Coefficients

Binomial Test

Variable	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion	p
VI (How many times do you follow the Dhammayatra?)	1	37	51	0.725	0.002
	2	14	51	0.275	0.002
VDS1 (My Saddhā towards the Triratna increases due to personal experience in the Dhammayatra)	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
	2	1	51	0.02	<.001
	3	4	51	0.078	<.001

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	4	11	51	0.216	<.001
	5	32	51	0.627	0.092
	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDS2 (I feel calm and happy when I make a pilgrimage to a Buddhist shrine)	3	1	51	0.02	<.001
	4	14	51	0.275	0.002
	5	33	51	0.647	0.049
	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDS3 (I was compelled to practice Buddhism after following the Dhammayatra)	2	1	51	0.02	<.001
	3	9	51	0.176	<.001
	4	17	51	0.333	0.024
	5	21	51	0.412	0.262
	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDS4 (I appreciate the value of self-discipline and meditation more after participating in this activity)	2	1	51	0.02	<.001
	3	5	51	0.098	<.001
	4	21	51	0.412	0.262
	5	21	51	0.412	0.262
	1	2	51	0.039	<.001
VDS5 (I intend to deepen Buddhism in daily life)	3	6	51	0.118	<.001
	4	18	51	0.353	0.049
	5	25	51	0.49	1
	1	2	51	0.039	<.001
VDP1 (I better understand the meaning of conscious life after Dhammayatra)	2	2	51	0.039	<.001
	3	13	51	0.255	<.001
	4	24	51	0.471	0.78
	5	10	51	0.196	<.001
	1	2	51	0.039	<.001
VDP2 (I can distinguish between true view and wrong view)	2	1	51	0.02	<.001
	3	15	51	0.294	0.005
	4	23	51	0.451	0.576
	5	10	51	0.196	<.001
	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDP3 (I know that Buddhist Pancasila is a moral guideline that must be carried out)	3	2	51	0.039	<.001
	4	20	51	0.392	0.161
	5	26	51	0.51	1
	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDP4 (I can apply the value of love and no/reduce violence in daily life)	2	1	51	0.02	<.001
	3	5	51	0.098	<.001
	4	23	51	0.451	0.576
	5	19	51	0.373	0.092

	1	3	51	0.059	<.001
VDP5 (I understand that all actions	3	2	51	0.039	<.001
have consequences (kamma law))	4	13	51	0.255	<.001
	5	33	51	0.647	0.049

Note. Proportions tested against value: 0.5.

Table 9 Binomial Test

Descriptively, the majority of respondents expressed a high level of approval of positive statements regarding the improvement of Saddhā and the understanding of post-Dhammayatra Buddhism. For example, on the VDS1 indicator ("My Saddhā towards the Triratna increased due to personal experience in the Dhammayatra"), as many as 62.7% of respondents chose the highest score (score 5), while the rest were progressively spread on the lower score.

Inferential analysis using paired sample t-test showed a significant increase in scores between pretest and posttest in almost all indicators. Although the linear regression model did not show a statistically significant relationship ($p > 0.05$), this can be explained by the limitations of the number of samples and the homogeneous nature of independent variables (all respondents followed Dhammayatra). Nevertheless, the findings of the binomial test showed that the proportion of respondents who declared a spiritual improvement was significantly greater than those who did not, with a $p < 0.001$ value on most indicators.

Dimension of Saddhā Transformation

The increase in Saddhā is noticeable in both the emotional and affective dimensions. Statements such as "I am motivated to practice Buddhism" and "I value the value of self-discipline and meditation more" received a very positive response. Participants not only experience conceptual belief, but also demonstrate a strong intention to implement Buddhist values in life practice. This reinforces the assumption that direct spiritual experiences, such as pilgrimages to holy places, have transformative potential in shaping deeper, more sustained religious commitments.

Improving Understanding of Buddhism

The aspects of understanding Buddhism that are measured include cognitive dimensions (knowledge of Buddhist Pancasila and the laws of kamma), affective (appreciation of love and compassion), and applicability (the ability to distinguish between right and wrong views). The results showed that the majority of respondents (above 80%) gave a score of 4 or 5 on the related statement. This indicates that Dhammayatra activities not only provide theoretical understanding, but also help participants translate those values into concrete actions. Interestingly, the understanding of the laws of kamma (VDP5) and the value of love

(VDP4) showed very high scores, signifying the depth of spiritual reflection generated by these activities.

Integration of Findings with Conceptual Frameworks

These findings are consistent with the conceptual framework that has been presented in the literature review. The concept of Saddhā as a belief born from direct experience and deep reflection is proven to be reflected in the empirical results of research. In addition, Kolb's experiential learning theory provides theoretical support that concrete experiences such as the Dhammayatra can effectively internalize spiritual values through a process of reflection and active experimentation.

Furthermore, the transformation experienced by participants in terms of saddhā and Buddhist understanding demonstrates the pedagogical potential of Dhammayatra as a transformative learning strategy in religious education. This is important in answering the anxiety in the introduction to the research that conventional religious learning models often fail to reach the affective and spiritual aspects of students.

Implications of the Findings: Towards Transformative Religious Learning

Implicitly, the data shows that Dhammayatra has pedagogical advantages that conventional learning methods do not have. This activity allows participants to connect theoretical concepts with authentic spiritual experiences. Therefore, it is important for Buddhist educational institutions to consider the integration of the Dhammayatra in the curriculum, not as an additional activity, but rather as a primary medium in spiritual strengthening and internalization of teaching values.

In addition, these findings support the proposal that spiritual learning activities should be designed systematically, taking into account participants' emotional engagement and deep reflection. A structured Dhammayatra learning module accompanied by the guidance of a competent facilitator will strengthen the transformative power of this activity.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has made a significant contribution to the development of transformative learning models in Buddhist education, especially through Dhammayatra activities. Empirically, the results of the study show that the direct experience gained by participants through Dhammayatra activities has a real impact in strengthening the Saddhā towards the Triratna and improving the understanding of Buddhism cognitively, affectively, and applicatively. Not only does it show a shift in the level of belief and knowledge, but it also facilitates the internalization of Dhamma values in the practice of daily life. Thus, these findings confirm that spiritual experiential learning is able to create a contemplative space that encourages deep and sustainable self-transformation.

The main contribution of this study lies in the integration of quantitative approaches in measuring the effectiveness of Dhammayatra, which has been more often studied descriptively and qualitatively. The results of the statistical test showed a significant

improvement in the indicators of Saddhā and understanding of the Dhamma after the activity. Interestingly, the spiritual experiences that the participants felt—through pilgrimages to holy places, meditation, collective rituals, and collective reflection—were the main factors that distinguished the Dhammayatra from conventional learning models that tended to be textual and theoretical. These findings reinforce the argument that contextual learning strategies that are oriented towards personal experience and meaning have great relevance in answering the challenges of religious education in the modern era.

However, some limitations need to be observed. This study has not thoroughly explored mediating factors such as age, educational background, and intensity of participants' spiritual practices that may have influenced the outcome. Therefore, the next direction of research can be focused on: (1) the use of mixed methods that combine quantitative analysis with reflective narratives or in-depth interviews to capture the subjective meaning of spiritual experiences more fully; (2) longitudinal studies to observe the consistency of the impact of the Dhammayatra in the long term; and (3) comparative studies of other spiritual learning models such as meditation retreats or self-discipline training.

Future research is also suggested to develop Dhammayatra learning modules that are systematic and adaptive to the needs of participants across ages and cultural contexts. With these steps, Dhammayatra can be interpreted not only as a devotional practice, but as a pedagogical model that is spiritually rich and pedagogically relevant. Finally, this study affirms the importance of designing a Buddhist education that not only teaches the Dhamma, but also allows participants to live it in a whole and transformational way.

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