

Buddhist Philosophy-Based Capacity-Building Model for Holistic Teacher Education: A Concentric Framework for Self-Cultivation, Ethical Agency and Transformative Pedagogy

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63363/aijfr.2026.v07i04.7429>

Abstract

Teacher education has traditionally concentrated on subject knowledge, instructional methods, assessment and classroom management. Although these competencies remain indispensable, contemporary teachers also require emotional stability, ethical discernment, compassionate relational competence, reflective wisdom, social sensitivity and the ability to respond constructively to complex educational situations. The present conceptual research paper develops a Buddhist philosophy-based capacity-building framework for holistic teacher education. Rather than reducing Buddhist educational thought to mindfulness or meditation, the framework draws upon broader principles such as dependent origination, the Middle Path, ethical intentionality, compassion, non-attachment, experiential inquiry and practical wisdom. These principles are translated into secular and professionally relevant capacities appropriate for pluralistic teacher-education institutions. The proposed framework has a concentric structure comprising six interrelated domains: inner stability and attentive presence, ethical-professional agency, compassionate relationality, interdependent and ecological understanding, reflective-practical wisdom and transformative pedagogical action. These domains operate through a recurring professional process of attentive engagement, contextual interpretation, ethical discernment, compassionate response and pedagogical transformation. The paper proposes a capacity-building programme, learning activities, assessment strategies and a multi-stage empirical-validation plan. The framework offers a new insight that holistic teacher development should not be viewed as the accumulation of separate competencies. It is better understood as a progressive transformation of how teachers perceive themselves, relate to others, interpret educational situations and act within classrooms and communities. The framework does not promote

Buddhist religious instruction. It selectively translates universal philosophical principles into professional capacities that may support humane, inclusive, reflective and socially responsible teacher education.

Keywords: Buddhist Philosophy, Holistic Teacher Education, Capacity Building, Compassion, Professional Ethics, Reflective Wisdom, Contemplative Pedagogy, Transformative Teaching.

1. Introduction

Teachers are expected to perform simultaneously as subject specialists, instructional designers, assessors, counsellors, facilitators, ethical decision-makers and agents of social transformation. Their work involves continuous encounters with diversity, uncertainty, emotional pressure, technological disruption, institutional expectations and competing learner needs. Consequently, teaching competence cannot be limited to knowledge of content and instructional techniques. It must include how teachers perceive, interpret, regulate, relate, judge and respond.

The social and emotional competence of teachers influences classroom relationships, classroom organisation and learners' academic and developmental experiences (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Contemporary social-emotional learning frameworks similarly recognise that cognitive development cannot be separated from emotional awareness, responsible decision-making, relationships, inclusion and well-being. UNESCO's recent policy guidance positions social and emotional learning as a system-wide educational concern involving curriculum, teacher preparation, pedagogy, assessment and supportive learning environments (UNESCO, 2024).

However, teacher education programmes frequently address these capacities in fragmented ways. Emotional regulation may be taught through stress-management sessions, professional ethics through codes of conduct, inclusion through a separate course, reflection through internship journals and pedagogy through method papers. Teachers may therefore understand each component individually without developing an integrated way of responding to actual professional situations.

Buddhist philosophy offers a valuable but insufficiently explored foundation for addressing this fragmentation. Its educational significance extends beyond mindfulness. Buddhist thought examines the nature of attention, intention, suffering, causation, interdependence, ethical action, compassion, disciplined practice and wisdom. The Buddha's teaching traditions also reveal pedagogical attention to learner readiness, context, dialogue, illustration, experience and gradual development (Ashcraft & Calvert, 2023).

The present paper develops a new Buddhist Philosophy-Based Capacity-Building Model for Holistic Teacher Education. The framework does not reproduce a predetermined acronym or sequence. Instead, it conceptualises teacher capacity as a concentric expansion from inner self-cultivation to relational, pedagogical, institutional and social transformation.

Need for a New Capacity-Building Framework

Recent teacher-development research has demonstrated increasing interest in mindfulness, compassion, reflective practice, resilience and social-emotional competence. A quasi-experimental study among pre-service teachers found that a culturally adapted mindfulness-based social-emotional learning programme was associated with improved mindfulness, self-compassion and life satisfaction (Wu & Qin, 2025).

Compassion-based professional development has also produced encouraging findings. Matos et al. (2024) reported that compassion-related processes helped explain reductions in psychological distress and burnout following a compassionate mind training programme for teachers. Mindfulness research with educators has likewise identified possible benefits for teacher well-being, attention, stress management and prosocial competence (Roeser et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, Three Conceptual Limitations Remain.

1. First, contemporary mindfulness programmes may separate attentional training from the ethical and social contexts in which Buddhist mindfulness developed. Awareness without ethical discernment may help a teacher remain calm without necessarily recognising prejudice, injustice or misuse of authority. Romano and Chang (2022) therefore argued for connecting contemplative practice in teacher education with compassion, perspective-taking, critical consciousness and equity. ([MDPI](#))
2. Second, teacher well-being is sometimes treated primarily as the ability of teachers to adapt to pressure. Although resilience and emotional regulation are necessary, capacity-building should not prepare teachers merely to endure harmful systems. It should also enable them to identify structural causes of stress, exclusion and educational disadvantage.
3. Third, existing approaches commonly focus on one level of teacher development. Some concentrate on the teacher's internal state, others on classroom relationships and others on pedagogical performance. Holistic teacher development requires these levels to be connected.

The proposed framework addresses these limitations through a concentric structure in which personal awareness, ethical agency, compassionate relationships, interdependent understanding, reflective wisdom and pedagogical transformation are mutually reinforcing.

Objectives of the Paper

The paper aims to:

1. Identify Buddhist philosophical principles relevant to holistic teacher development;
2. Translate these principles into secular professional capacities;
3. Propose a concentric model connecting personal, relational, pedagogical and social development;
4. Design a capacity-building process suitable for pre-service and in-service teacher education;
5. Identify assessment strategies for evaluating holistic teacher capacities; and
6. Propose directions for the empirical validation of the framework.

Methodological Orientation

The paper follows a conceptual model-development approach. It synthesises Buddhist philosophy, reflective practice, experiential learning, care ethics, contemplative pedagogy, social-emotional learning and contemporary teacher-development research.

The model was developed through five analytical steps:

1. Identifying educationally relevant concepts from Buddhist philosophical and pedagogical literature;
2. Distinguishing universal professional principles from explicitly religious beliefs and practices;
3. Connecting the principles with contemporary teacher-education needs;
4. Organising the resulting capacities into intrapersonal, interpersonal, pedagogical and social levels; and
5. Constructing a practical training, assessment and validation framework.

The outcome is a theoretically derived model. It should not be described as empirically standardised until expert validation, pilot implementation, psychometric analysis and intervention research have been completed.

Buddhist Philosophical Foundations

1. **The Middle Path as balanced Professional Judgement :** The Middle Path represents the avoidance of destructive extremes and the cultivation of balanced judgement. In teacher education, this principle may inform the balance between authority and autonomy, academic expectations and emotional support, structure and flexibility, innovation and continuity, or digital technology and human interaction. Balanced judgement does not mean passive neutrality. A teacher should not remain neutral toward discrimination, humiliation or injustice. Rather, balance refers to freedom from impulsive and excessive reactions so that the teacher can respond proportionately and responsibly.
2. **Dependent Origination as a context for Understanding :** Dependent origination emphasises that events arise from interconnected conditions rather than isolated causes. Educational problems can similarly be understood as products of interacting personal, family, institutional, cultural and social conditions. For example, learner disengagement may be influenced by language barriers, prior failure, classroom relationships, economic pressures, curriculum relevance or teaching practices. A teacher guided by interdependent understanding avoids assigning the entire cause to the learner's motivation or character. This principle offers a major new insight for teacher education: professional judgement should move from individual blame to contextual analysis.
3. **Intention as the foundation of Ethical Action :** Buddhist ethics emphasises the intention, process, and consequences of action. In professional teaching, ethical competence involves more than compliance with regulations. Teachers must examine why they are acting, who may benefit, who may be harmed and whether the action preserves dignity and fairness. A punishment intended to restore order may still be unethical when it humiliates a learner. Similarly, the use of artificial intelligence may appear educationally innovative but become ethically problematic when it compromises privacy, authorship, fairness or independent thinking.
4. **Compassion as Intelligent Responsiveness :** Compassion involves recognising difficulty and developing an informed commitment to respond. It is not identical to pity, emotional softness or avoidance of accountability. A compassionate teacher may maintain high expectations while changing the support, time, representation or feedback available to a learner. Compassion,

therefore, combines care with discernment. Research on compassionate mind training suggests that compassion can be cultivated through structured practice and may support teacher well-being and reduce burnout-related difficulties (Matos et al., 2024).

5. **Non-Attachment as Openness to Revision** : Non-attachment should not be interpreted as a lack of concern. Professionally, it can be understood as the capacity to avoid rigid identification with one's opinions, teaching methods, authority or success. A teacher practising intellectual non-attachment can acknowledge that a lesson failed, that a learner's criticism is valid or that a familiar method is inappropriate for a particular group. This disposition supports professional learning, feedback acceptance and pedagogical adaptability.
6. **Wisdom as Context-Sensitive Action** : Wisdom involves understanding relationships, causes, consequences and appropriate action. In teaching, wisdom is not merely accumulated information. It is the capacity to select a response that is academically meaningful, ethically responsible, emotionally appropriate and contextually feasible. Buddhist educational research has emphasised the relationship among study, reflection, cultivation and compassionate practice, suggesting that knowledge becomes transformative when it is examined and embodied rather than merely remembered (Krämer, 2022).

The Concentric Capacity-Building Model

The proposed model consists of six interrelated capacity domains. They are represented concentrically rather than hierarchically. Development begins with the teacher's internal awareness but expands toward relationships, pedagogy, institutions, society and the environment.

Table 1: Domains of the Buddhist Philosophy-Based Capacity-Building Model

Capacity Domain	Central Question	Professional Capacities	Illustrative Evidence
Inner Stability and Attentive Presence	What is happening within me and around me?	Attention regulation, emotional awareness, equanimity, resilience and professional presence	Recognising emotional triggers, pausing before reacting and attentive listening
Ethical-Professional Agency	What is the responsible action?	Integrity, fairness, non-harm, accountability, courage and responsible use of authority	Transparent assessment, confidentiality and ethical technology use
Compassionate Relationality	How does this situation affect others?	Empathy, care, self-compassion, dialogue, inclusion and restorative communication	Preserving dignity, differentiated support and respectful correction
Interdependent and Ecological Understanding	Which conditions have shaped this situation?	Contextual analysis, systemic thinking, social sensitivity and ecological responsibility	Examining family, cultural, institutional and environmental influences

Reflective-Practical Wisdom	What can be learned and revised?	Critical reflection, metacognition, perspective-taking, feedback acceptance and adaptive judgement	Critical-incident analysis, journalling and revision of assumptions
Transformative Pedagogical Action	How should understanding change teaching and learning?	Inclusive design, experiential learning, formative assessment, learner agency and social application	Context-responsive lessons, authentic tasks and pedagogical redesign

Inner Stability and Attentive Presence

- This innermost domain concerns the teacher's ability to remain present and emotionally regulated. It includes recognising tension, preference, irritation, anxiety and automatic judgement before these states influence professional conduct.
- Attentive presence also involves noticing learners' verbal and non-verbal responses. Teachers may be physically present while cognitively occupied with completing the syllabus. Capacity building should therefore cultivate both self-awareness and classroom awareness.
- This domain may be developed through attention exercises, emotional-trigger mapping, non-judgemental observation, reflective pauses and analysis of reactive classroom episodes.

Ethical-Professional Agency

Ethical agency refers to the ability and willingness to act responsibly, especially when convenience, pressure or institutional culture encourages otherwise.

It includes:

- Fairness in assessment;
- Confidentiality;
- Responsible authority;
- Academic honesty;
- Non-discrimination;
- Protection from humiliation;
- Transparency;
- Ethical technology use; and
- Professional courage.

The inclusion of courage is significant. Teachers may know what is ethical but fail to act because of fear, conformity or institutional pressure. Capacity building must therefore address both ethical reasoning and ethical action.

Compassionate Relationality

- Teacher education often treats interpersonal skills as communication techniques. Compassionate relationality goes further by asking teachers to understand how learners experience educational situations.
- It includes empathy, attentive listening, self-compassion, patience, restoration after conflict and responsiveness to diversity. However, compassion should not become uncritical accommodation. It must be combined with boundaries, fairness and educational purpose.
- This domain may be cultivated through learner narratives, perspective-taking, restorative dialogue, compassionate feedback, role-play and analysis of exclusionary classroom practices.

Interdependent and Ecological Understanding

- This domain expands teacher capacity beyond individual classroom interaction. It encourages teachers to examine how educational experiences are influenced by language, culture, socioeconomic conditions, institutional policies, technology, community and environment.
- The domain is inspired by interdependence but translated into systemic and ecological professional understanding. It discourages deficit-based thinking in which learners or families are blamed without considering structural conditions.
- Teachers may develop this capacity through community mapping, learner-context profiles, school-culture analysis, environmental projects and examination of institutional barriers.

Reflective-Practical Wisdom

- Reflection becomes professionally useful when it changes understanding and future action. Reflective-practical wisdom combines evidence, experience, dialogue, theory and ethical judgement.
- Recent teacher-education research continues to emphasise the need for structured scaffolds that help pre-service teachers move beyond descriptive reflection toward deeper professional analysis (Behr et al., 2025).

This capacity may be developed through:

- Critical-Incident Analysis;
- Video-based Lesson Reflection;
- Peer Observation;
- Reflective Journals;
- Alternative-Perspective Analysis;
- Action Research; and
- Post-Lesson Redesign.

Transformative Pedagogical Action

- The outer domain translates all other capacities into teaching. It includes the design of learning experiences that are inclusive, meaningful, experiential, ethically responsible and responsive to evidence.

Transformative pedagogical action is visible when teachers:

- Adapt teaching to learner diversity;
- Use formative assessment to modify instruction;
- Connect learning with lived experience;
- Develop learner agency;
- Encourage ethical and social application;
- Address misconceptions without humiliation;
- Use digital tools responsibly; and
- Redesign unsuccessful lessons.

This domain prevents the framework from remaining a philosophy of personal self-improvement. Its final test is whether internal development improves educational practice and learner experience.

Dynamic Process of Capacity Development

The six capacity domains operate through a recurring five-movement professional process:

- **Attend:** The teacher becomes aware of internal reactions, learner responses and situational conditions.
- **Interpret:** The teacher examines causes, assumptions, relationships and contextual influences rather than accepting the first explanation.
- **Discern:** Possible responses are evaluated in relation to evidence, fairness, non-harm, professional responsibility and consequences.
- **Respond:** The teacher acts compassionately and proportionately while maintaining learner dignity and educational purpose.
- **Transform:** The experience is used to revise pedagogy, professional understanding or institutional practice.

This process is not a lesson sequence. It is a professional reasoning cycle that may operate during classroom teaching, assessment, conflict resolution, planning, mentoring and institutional decision-making.

Proposed Capacity-Building Programme

The framework may be implemented through a ten-module programme of approximately 30–40 hours.

Table 2 : Suggested Capacity-Building Modules

Module	Focus	Illustrative activities
1	Understanding Holistic Teacher Capacity	Professional identity mapping and capacity self-assessment
2	Attentional Presence	Focused observation, trigger identification and reaction–response analysis
3	Emotional Balance	Stress mapping, regulation strategies and classroom simulations
4	Ethical Agency	Dilemma analysis, professional codes and ethical decision matrices
5	Compassionate Communication	Listening, perspective-taking and restorative dialogue
6	Learner and Community Contexts	Learner profiles, community mapping and systemic analysis
7	Reflective-Practical Wisdom	Critical incidents, peer observation and video reflection
8	Inclusive and Responsive Pedagogy	Differentiated planning and universal participation strategies
9	Ethical Digital and AI Practices	Privacy, authorship, bias, verification and accessibility
10	Integrated Professional Practicum	Teaching demonstration, feedback, action research and development planning

The programme should combine conceptual study, experiential activities, simulated cases, field practice, mentoring, reflective writing and performance assessment. Contemplative activities should be voluntary, secular, age-appropriate and sensitive to participant diversity.

Assessment of Capacity Development

Holistic teacher capacity cannot be adequately evaluated with a single questionnaire. A multi-method assessment system is therefore proposed.

1. **Self-Report Assessment :** A capacity scale may measure perceived awareness, ethical agency, compassion, contextual understanding, reflection and adaptive pedagogy. Self-report findings should be interpreted cautiously because participants may provide socially desirable responses.
2. **Performance Assessment :** Teaching demonstrations and field lessons may be evaluated through an observation rubric covering emotional presence, fairness, learner dignity, inclusion, responsiveness and pedagogical adaptation.

3. **Scenario-Based Ethical Judgement** : Participants may respond to realistic dilemmas involving assessment, confidentiality, discrimination, artificial intelligence, learner discipline and institutional pressure.
4. **Reflective Portfolio** : Portfolios may include critical incidents, feedback responses, redesigned lesson plans, learner-context analyses and evidence of professional change.
5. **Learner and Peer Feedback** : Learners and peers can provide evidence about whether the teacher demonstrates respect, fairness, attentiveness, inclusion and meaningful pedagogical support.
6. **Action-Research Evidence** : Teachers may identify a classroom or institutional problem, analyse contributing conditions, implement a response and evaluate its consequences.

Proposed Research and Validation Framework

The framework should be empirically evaluated through the following stages:

1. **Expert Review** : Philosophers, teacher educators, psychologists, measurement specialists and practising teachers should assess conceptual relevance, clarity, cultural appropriateness and feasibility.
2. **Pilot Implementation** : The programme should be tested with a small group to examine duration, participant interpretation, cultural sensitivity and implementation challenges.
3. **Instrument Development** : Capacity indicators should undergo item analysis, content validation, exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.
4. **Reliability Analysis** : Internal consistency, test–retest stability and inter-rater reliability should be established.
5. **Intervention Research** : A mixed-method, pre-test–post-test comparison design may examine changes in teacher well-being, ethical judgement, reflective competence, compassion, inclusive pedagogy and teaching performance.
6. **Process Evaluation** : Attendance, practice quality, facilitator competence and fidelity should be examined so that outcomes are not attributed to the model without evidence of proper implementation.
7. **Longitudinal Research** : Follow-up studies should investigate whether capacities continue during internship or professional teaching.
8. **Contextual Validation** : The model should be studied across languages, disciplines, educational stages and institutional settings.

New Insights Emerging from the Framework

- **Capacity Building is Transformative, not Additive** : Teacher capacity is commonly represented as a list of competencies to be acquired. The present framework suggests that holistic capacity building involves transformation in how teachers perceive, interpret and respond. Adding a communication workshop or mindfulness session is insufficient when underlying assumptions and institutional practices remain unchanged.

- **Inner Development and Social Responsibility are Inseparable** : Personal awareness should not become retreat from social realities. The educational value of awareness lies partly in enabling teachers to recognise bias, privilege, exclusion and harm. Inner cultivation should therefore lead to responsible external action.
- **Compassion should be treated as Professional Intelligence** : Compassion is often considered a personal virtue. The framework reconceptualises it as professional intelligence involving accurate understanding of needs, consequences, relationships and appropriate support.
- **Non-Attachment Supports Professional Learning** : Teachers may become attached to authority, familiar methods or beliefs about learners. Intellectual non-attachment creates openness to evidence, criticism and revision. It can therefore serve as an important foundation for reflective practice and innovation.
- **Interdependence offers an alternative to Deficit Thinking** : Educational difficulties are frequently attributed to individual learners. Interdependent analysis examines the relationships among learner characteristics, teaching, curriculum, language, family, institution and society. This approach may lead to more equitable interventions.
- **Holistic Teacher Education must include Institutional Transformation** : Teachers cannot maintain compassion, balance and ethical agency indefinitely within institutions that reward competition, humiliation, excessive workload or exclusion. Capacity-building efforts should therefore be accompanied by reflective leadership, supportive policies and ethical institutional cultures.

Educational Implications

Teacher-education institutions may integrate the framework across foundational courses, pedagogy papers, internships, action research, educational technology, and professional ethics rather than confining it to a single optional workshop. Teacher educators must model the qualities they are developing. Compassion cannot be cultivated through humiliating supervision, and reflective practice cannot develop when questioning authority is discouraged.

The framework may also guide the integration of artificial intelligence. Teachers should examine not only what an AI tool can do but also why it is being used, who may be excluded, how data is handled, whether outputs are reliable, and whether technology strengthens or weakens independent thought. At the policy level, professional standards may incorporate emotional, relational and ethical capacities alongside content knowledge and instructional competence.

Limitations

The framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. It represents a selective interpretation of diverse Buddhist traditions and should not be treated as a comprehensive account of Buddhist philosophy. The secular translation of Buddhist concepts may also remove aspects of their original religious and cultural contexts. Collaboration with Buddhist-studies scholars and representatives of diverse traditions is therefore necessary.

Contemplative activities may not be equally appropriate for all participants. They must remain voluntary, trauma-sensitive and culturally respectful. Finally, capacity-building cannot substitute for adequate staffing, resources, professional autonomy, fair workload and institutional accountability.

Conclusion

The Buddhist Philosophy-Based Capacity-Building Model presents holistic teacher development as a concentric movement from inner stability toward ethical, relational, pedagogical and social transformation.

Its six capacity domains are:

1. Inner Stability and Attentive Presence;
2. Ethical-Professional Agency;
3. Compassionate Relationality;
4. Interdependent and Ecological Understanding;
5. Reflective-Practical Wisdom; and
6. Transformative Pedagogical Action.

The model offers an alternative to fragmented teacher training by showing how awareness, ethics, compassion, contextual understanding, reflection, and pedagogy can operate as a single professional system.

Its central insight is that holistic teachers are not produced merely by adding more knowledge or techniques. They develop through sustained examination of how they attend to experience, understand causes, exercise authority, relate to learners, revise assumptions and transform educational practice.

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