

Evaluation on Buddhist Education and Curriculum of International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University in Myanmar

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Abstract

Buddhism has flourished in Myanmar since the eleventh century. Many Buddhist monasteries have provided Buddhist education. Myanmar is one of the countries with high literacy rates because of monastic education. Monastic schools are allowed to teach up to primary school level. The Fifth Buddhist Synod was held in 1871 at Mandalay. The contents of thirty one books were inscribed on marble slabs by King Mindon. The Sixth Buddhist Synod was held in 1954 at Yangon. Though there are five Buddhist Universities in Myanmar, the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University is the only one wholly supported by the Government. It has granted admission to foreign monks, nuns and lay persons

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every year, after they have passed Entrance examinations held in the Myanmar Embassies abroad and the University itself.

The purpose of this paper is to explore briefly the Buddhist Education in Myanmar and to investigate and evaluate the Curriculum of International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU). It will include objectives, faculties, Courses for Diploma, BA program, MA program, Ph.D. program, awarding of diploma and degrees (B.A, M.A, and Ph.D.), Credit System ,etc.

In methodology, both primary and secondary sources will be used. In order to enhance creative thinking in the teaching and learning process, the teachers should evaluate them and then, assess their students.

Key words: Buddhist Synod, Monastic education - Curriculum of ITBMU, Creative thinking

Introduction

Since thousand years, all the people in Myanmar have enjoyed the freedom of religion. Since then, there have been different religious faiths such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Animism and others. Of the total population, nearly ninety percent follow Buddhism.

Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are -

1. To explore briefly the Buddhist Education in Myanmar,
2. To investigate and evaluate the curriculum of International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU).

Methodology

In methodology, both primary and secondary sources are used.

I am professor at the Department of Myanmar Language, Faculty of Pariyatti, ITBMU. My experience in this university is the

primary source. The secondary sources include studying internet information, seminars, conferences, books, articles etc.

Buddhist Education

The Role of Monastic Schools

Education in Myanmar was carried on from the time of the Introduction of Buddhism in Myanmar before the 10th century by the Buddhist monks in their Buddhist monasteries

(Hpongyee-Kyaung). There were also Lay School (Ain-Kyaung) which gave education to girls and little boys too young to go to the monastic schools. Higher learning with its necessary adjunct of primary education has had a continuous existence in the whole of Myanmar from the 11th century onwards. (Hla Tun Aung, 2003)

The main aim is to provide religious culture and not to prepare the pupils for worldly success in the narrow sense. The three main influences in Monastery education were those of the monastery environment (spacious and clean precincts, the buildings beautiful in shape and color), the monk teachers (a spiritual and intellectual guide), and the content of instruction (Pitaka in Pāli with their Myanmar translation, arithmetic, astronomy, indigenous medicine, religious and moral portion of Myanmar literature, together with books written on dried palm leaves). (Kaung, 1929,1963)

“During the period from Pinya Dynasty to Nyaungyan Dynasty (1387-1752) the contemporary humanities were included in the content of the instruction. In the schools of some Orders (such as Anyayawathi Order and Gamawathi Order), fine arts, vocational training and military training were also given. In Konbaung period, the educational objectives were the same”. (Than Htut, 1980)

Under the British rule, there was a fundamental change in the educational system. The monastery, which had served the people as the centre of secular and religious education, suddenly lost its social importance. However, most of the rural areas were beyond the scope of western type of education.

According to Grant (1942), there were 7,000 recognized schools with a registration of 516,000 students in 1935. Of those enrolled, over 443,000 were in the Primary Schools over 52,000 in the Middle Schools and over 13,000 in the High Schools. In addition, there were more than 18,000 unrecognized institutions (mostly monastic schools) accommodating more than 200,000 pupils.

A proposal to encourage the teaching of English in monastic school was vetoed on the ground that the boys would not acquire a correct accent and the attention of the Education Department came to concentrate on Anglo-Vernacular School (Furnival, 1956). It seemed to be one of the lame excuses in order to cut down the number of recognized and aided monastery schools.

Indeed, due to the achievements of monastic education, the literacy rate was relatively higher (e.g. 48.9 per cent in 1901, 50.1 per cent in 1911) (Hla Tun Aung, 2003). When compared to that of colonies of Western Imperialists, Myanmar's literacy rate was better.

Buddhist Synod

Under the leadership of King Minton the Fifth Council (synod) was convened at Mandalay in 1871. Buddhism consist of nineteen books on Discourses, seven books on Philosophy, and five books on Disciplinary Rules. The contents of these thirty one books were inscribed on (729) marble slabs at Mandalay.

Again, the Sixth Council (synod) to purity and promote sāsana was held at Yangon in 1954. Then, approved texts were published.

In 2006, there were 63,297 monasteries, with 246,663 monks and 299,077 novices. There were also 3, 690 nunneries with 43,480 nuns (Po Ye Chan 2007).

Encouragement to Nunnery / Monastic Schools

“Since 1990, in order to strengthen national culture and basic education, many monastic schools are opened again in hilly regions, remote areas and poor areas. The objectives of the monastic

education are both educational and cultural in keeping with the social objectives of the government. The salient points are:

- To give basic education for everyone rich or poor,
- To get education easier and at lesser cost,
- To have good morality so that the children may become good citizen,
- To cherish cultural heritage and tradition,
- To become good Buddhist by following Buddha's teachings,
- To safeguard one's race and religion.

About 94,392 students are attending 1557 monastic schools in 244 townships under the supervision of township Saṅgha committee. Monastic schools follow the curriculum of the government primary school but the emphasis is mainly on "Buddhist Culture". (Myo Myint, 2010)

Curriculum of International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University

Although there are five Buddhist Universities in Myanmar, the International Theravāda Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) is the only one wholly supported by the government. ITBMU was inaugurated on 9 December 1998. It is situated on the Dhammapāla Hill near the Sacred Tooth Relic Pagoda, Yangon, Myanmar. Also it is one of the members of International Association of Buddhist Universities in 2007.

Objectives

The five objectives of the university are:

1. To share the genuine Theravada Buddhism (the teaching of Gotama Buddha) with the people of the world,
2. To study and comprehend the canonical text of Theravāda Piṭakas as approved successively by the six Buddhist councils
3. To abstain from evil deeds and practice good deeds,
4. To promote the four nodes of sublime living (Brahmavihāra) which would lead to the establishment of peaceful and prosperous world,

5. To train more missionaries endowed with good morality that are well-versed in Piṭaka literature and meditational practices.

Faculties and Department

There are four faculties and twelve departments. Faculty of Pariyatti, Faculty of Patipatti, Faculty of Religious, and Missionary Works, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Translation. Twelve departments are Vinaya, Suttanta, Abhidamma, Samatha, Vipassana, Pāli, History, Myanmar Language and Culture, Religious Studies, Missionary Works, Research Methodology, English Language and translation.

Diploma and Degrees

There is one year Diploma course, two years Bachelor of Buddha Dhamma course, three years Master of Buddha Dhamma course and four years Doctor of Philosophy in Buddha Dhamma course.

The Grading System

The grading system at the university is A to F.

There are also rules for Academic Probation, Academic Disqualification, Repeating Courses, Transcript or Record.

Undergraduate Level for Diploma and BA Degree

Students for a Diploma are expected to maintain a Grade Points Average (GPA) of 2.0, (C), for BA degree (GPA) of 3.0 (B) or better in their academic work in good standing at ITBMU for recognition to quality for MA program.

Graduate Level for MA Degree

Graduate level is for those who possess a recognized BA degree with GPA 3.0 (B) or better and those who are currently enrolled in graduate level in the ITBMU. In this level students have earned a total of 30 semester units in three academic years of study plus an

acceptable thesis.

Graduate Level for PhD Degree

The academic students can pursue the PhD degree based on their final accomplishment for MA. The dean of university permits the student to focus on a particular area of interest in order to perform their academic talent. A dissertation is to be systematic investigation in a particular field of knowledge which results in previously unknown knowledge.

Curriculum

Some educationists have defined “Curriculum as a document containing the guidelines for developing a course or courses in an educational institution. This guideline provides statement about aims, objectives, stated, in terms of knowledge, skills, and values, organizational structure such as concepts, themes and units, learning experiences and technique of evaluation.” (Bridle,1982). However, course is generally regarded as synonymous with curriculum. Aims and objectives are mentioned for the courses concerned.

Diploma Program or First year BA Degree

Before students consider the higher degrees, students must register the appropriate courses at ITBMU. Their first semester and second semester schedule are provided by ITBMU.

Courses of Study

- 101. Introduction to Vinaya Studies
- 111. Introduction to Suttanta Studies
- 121. Introduction to Abhidhamma Studies
- 131. Introduction to Dhammānuloma
- 141. Introduction to Pāli Studies
- 151. Introduction to Samatha and Vipassana meditation
- 161. Introduction to Myanmar Language
- 162. Intermediate English
- 171. Introduction to World Religions

172. Introduction to Missionary Works

173. Introduction to Buddhist Culture and History

Second Year BA Degree

In the second year, after completing Diploma program for first year BA students have involved in a second BA program. Every course has been reviewed to assure that they are engaged in their academic fulfillment.

Courses of Study

201. The Study of the Pātimokkha

211. Critical approach to prescribed Suttas in Dīgha-Nikāya and Mijjhima-Nikāya

221. The Study of Abhidhamma

231. The Study of Samatha and Vipassana Meditation

241. Intermediate Pāḷi

251. Intermediate Myanmar Language and Grammer

252. Advanced English

261. World Religions

262. Missionary Works

263. Buddhist Culture and History

Third Year BA Degree

In the final year of ITBMU students are expanded to demonstrate certain standards in learning process. Since students have reached senior status, they will have to engage in a variety of experiences with proper courses.

Courses of Study

301. The Study of the Pātimokkha

311. Critical approach to prescribed Suttas in Dīgha-Nikāya and Mijjhima-Nikāya

321. The Study of Advanced Abhidhamma

331. Study and Practice of Samatha and Vipassana Meditation

341. Advanced Pāḷi

342. Pāli Grammer (Kaccayana)

351. Advanced Myanmar Language and Culture

352. Advanced English

MA Program

The ITBMU Master of Arts Degree Program runs a combined course of teaching and research; the course is a two years program, after which the candidate is required to submit a Thesis within one year. The program offers four major subjects and one minor subject.

Courses of Study

401. An Analytical Study of Vinaya Pitaka

411. An Analytical Study of Suttanta Pitaka

421. An Analytical Study of the Abhidhamma Pitaka

431. An Analytical Study of Vipassana

441. Advanced Pāḷi

442. Research Methodology

Teaching - Learning Process

Teaching is giving knowledge or concept and principles or subject master of the course. Teaching is indeed teaching how to think. Whenever we consider for the teaching we need to ask ourselves the following questions.

1. Whom shall we teach?
2. Why shall we teach?
3. What resources do we have?
4. What shall we teach?
5. How shall we teach?
6. What is to be assessed?
7. What is to be evaluated?
8. How much do your students understand and how to improve?

The answer to these questions will be the criteria in the formulation of our curriculum.

Probably teaching methods and assessment procedure may be

responsible for the appropriate learning style or strategy.

There are surface- level approach and deep- level approach.

Surface-level approach includes:

1. Learning as the increase of knowledge
2. Learning as memorizing and
3. Learning as the acquisition of facts, procedures etc.

Deep-level approach includes:

1. Learning as the abstraction of meaning and
2. Learning as an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality, and coming out with individual themes and ideas.

There are also 'atomistic' approach and 'holistic' approach.

Atomistic approach has focused on specific comparison in a text, focused on the part in sequence, or memorizing details.

Holistic approach has focused on understanding the overall meaning of the text, the author's intention etc.

Some teaching methods

1. Lecturing
2. Lecturing and discussion
3. Seminar
4. Small group teaching
 - Controlled discussion
 - Free group discussion
 - Problem-Centered group discussion
 - Brain Storming

Four factors for Effective Teaching

A. Advising

1. The instructor's interaction with his students
2. Flexibility

3. Tolerance
4. Willingness to help
5. Feed back
6. Consideration
7. Informality
8. Encouragement

B. Methods of Instruction

1. Organization
2. Planning of lessons
3. Giving clear explanation
4. Sense of humor
5. Informality
6. Tolerance

C. Contribution

1. Transmission of knowledge
2. Development of creative Thinking
3. Motivation of Learning

D. Scholarship

1. Desired status of the instructor as an intellectual
2. Instructor as researcher

These factors for effective teaching promote active teaching rather than passive teaching. In Buddhism, “there are three kinds of knowledge, namely

1. Knowledge acquired by reading and hearing the doctrine,
2. Knowledge acquired by reasoning and
3. Knowledge acquired by concentration and meditation” (Po Sa, 1995, P.4)

“To many people, lecturing symbolists what teaching in higher education is all about.

Lectures are best reserved for transmitting information rather than stimulating thinking or changing attitude”. (UTMU, 1980, P.34)

Teaching for rote learning is suitable only for the memorization of some facts or points. In order to obtain critical thinking and creative thinking, other types of teaching methods should be used.

In ITBMU such small group discussions have been conducted. However, the more critical thinking practice can perform, the better will be.

In order to enhance thinking power, evaluation in teaching and assessment on the participation of students should be improved.

Conclusion

Buddhism and Buddhist institutions have deeply influenced the tangible and intangible aspects of Myanmar culture in general, daily life from cradle to grave in particular.

Buddhist thoughts on living within one's own means and enjoying deathlessness (contentment), on protection of environment (planting shady trees and fruit trees for public use) providing drinking water on the road-sides, digging wells and ponds for public use etc. as meritorious deeds, establishment of peaceful and prosperous world etc. are invaluable teaching for mankind.

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