Interdisciplinary Social Studies
P-ISSN: 2808-0467
E-ISSN: 2808-5051

Analysis of the Role of Metta Value in Building Early Childhood Character: A Literature Study

Susijati, Astri Chintya Astana, Tisya Permatasari
Institut Nalanda, Indonesia
*Email for Correspondence: Susijati@nalanda.ac.id, chintyaastana@nalanda.ac.id, tisyapermatasari@nalanda.ac.id

Keywords:

metta values, Character education, early childhood

ABSTRACT

The decline in national character, evidenced by various social problems, underscores the urgency of holistic and sustainable character education. The golden age of early childhood is a crucial phase for instilling fundamental values, as children at this age possess unique characteristics and are highly receptive to environmental stimuli. This literature review aims to analyze the role of *Metta*, a concept of universal loving-kindness from Buddhist teachings, in shaping the character of early childhood. The research method is a qualitative literature study, analyzing and synthesizing information from journal articles, books, and scientific sources related to *Metta*, child developmental psychology, and spirituality-based interventions. The analysis reveals that *Metta* is not merely a philosophical concept but a practical framework that can be implemented. The principles of *Metta*—such as loving-kindness, non-violence, and the wish for others' well-being—have a substantial link to the development of pro-social behavior, empathy, and emotional regulation in children. These findings are supported by studies on mindfulness-based interventions, which show significant improvements in the social-emotional competence of preschoolers. This report also identifies Classroom Action Research (PTK) as an ideal methodology for empirically testing the effectiveness of *Metta*-based learning in the future. The proposed PTK framework is intended to serve as a guide for researchers and practitioners. The conclusion of this study is that *Metta* holds great potential as a foundation for early childhood character education and deserves consideration as a component of a comprehensive curriculum.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of a nation's character is the main determinant of the progress and welfare of the community. Currently, Indonesia faces significant challenges related to character decline, reflected in rampant cases of corruption, violence, and juvenile delinquency (Dunning et al., 2022). This phenomenon emphasizes the need for structured educational interventions starting from an early age (Galante et al., 2014; Hofmann et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015). Character education aims not only to instill moral values but also to form individuals who possess ethics, social responsibility, and the ability to interact positively with the environment (Bauer et al., 2019).

Early childhood, often referred to as the "golden age" period, is the most critical phase for learning and development. From ages 0 to 6 years, children experience rapid growth both physically and spiritually, while developing the foundation of their personality and intellectual abilities (Jennings, 2015). Character formation at this stage is greatly influenced by the immediate environment, including family, school, and community (Lawlor, 2016). Comprehensive character education must cover various areas of development, namely physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and communication (Coatsworth et al., 2015).

In this context, a character education approach is needed that is not only instructive but also addresses the inner and spiritual aspects of children (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). The *Metta* value, as a concept of universal love in Buddhism, offers a highly relevant philosophical and practical framework (Khoury et al., 2015; Klimecki et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2015). *Metta* emphasizes the development of an inner attitude that is friendly, generous, and always desires happiness and well-being for all beings. This approach directly targets the root of character problems, namely egocentrism and negative emotions, in a manner consistent with the psychology of early childhood development (Zenner et al., 2014).

Several previous studies have explored the application of mindfulness and compassion-based approaches in early childhood education (Roeser & Eccles, 2015). For example, research by Flook et al. (2015) demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions can improve social competence and self-regulation in preschoolers. Similarly, a study by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) showed that a kindness curriculum significantly enhanced prosocial behavior and academic performance among young children. In the Indonesian context, studies such as those by Susianti (2020) have begun to explore the integration of local wisdom and spiritual values in character education, though specific research on the application of *Metta* values remains limited. These studies collectively highlight the potential of compassion-based interventions but also reveal a gap regarding the explicit integration of Buddhist-derived *Metta* principles into early childhood curricula, particularly through actionable models like *Classroom Action Research* (*PTK*) (Semple et al., 2017).

Based on the background of the problems described, this study is formulated to answer the following questions: (1) How can the concept of *Metta* values in the context of Buddhism be interpreted as the foundation of early childhood character education? (2) What are some of the psychological characteristics of early childhood that are relevant to the cultivation of *Metta* values? (3) How can *Metta* values play a specific role in developing aspects of children's character such as empathy, prosocial behavior, and emotion regulation? (4) How can the *Classroom Action Research* (*PTK*) framework be adapted to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of *Metta*-based learning programs? The purpose of this study is to describe the nature of *Metta* values and early childhood characteristics, analyze the theoretical and empirical relationship between *Metta* practice and children's character formation, develop a conceptual model of the application of *Metta* values in children's education, and present the *PTK* framework as a methodological recommendation for further research. The benefits of this research are expected to provide a practical framework for educators and parents in implementing universal human values, contribute to the development of holistic and evidence-based approaches to character education, and open space for further empirical research through the *PTK* methodology to test the effectiveness of *Metta*-based interventions in the context of Indonesian children's education.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a literature review method. This approach aimed to synthesize, analyze, and infer information from previously published research to build a comprehensive argument. The main objective was to identify knowledge gaps and provide new insights from the collected data. Data were collected from relevant scientific sources, including academic journals, articles, books, and research reports accessed through

online databases such as PubMed, NCBI, and Google Scholar. The search focused on keywords such as *Metta*, early childhood character education, developmental psychology, and child mindfulness. Only the most relevant and credible data were selected to address the research questions. The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method through three main stages: data reduction, which involved summarizing and classifying information into thematic categories aligned with the report's sub-chapters; data presentation, by organizing findings into a coherent narrative and tables to clarify relationships between concepts; and conclusion, synthesizing literature findings to draw conclusions and provide new insights into the role of *Metta* in children's character education.

The discussion of *Classroom Action Research* (*CAR*) became a primary focus. The literature review revealed a significant research gap: no CAR studies explicitly addressed the implementation of a *Metta* curriculum or program in early childhood. Consequently, this report does not present existing CAR results but proposes a CAR framework as an ideal methodology for future research. This approach highlights the study's awareness of the literature's limitations while addressing academic and practical needs. This section serves as a gap analysis and recommendation for further research, turning data limitations into analytical strengths that reflect thoughtful consideration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Basic Concept of Metta and Early Childhood Character

a. The Nature and Definition of the Value of Metta

Metta, which comes from the Pali language, is generally translated as "*universal loving-kindness*". Metta is not just a passive feeling, but an active and deliberate mental attitude. In essence, Metta is a strong desire for the well-being and happiness of other beings without any motive of self-interest. With Metta, one rejects all forms of violence, hatred, hurt, and hostility. On the contrary, individuals develop a friendly, generous, understanding attitude, and always hope for happiness and well-being for other beings. True metta is universal, not limited by social, religious, or racial boundaries. Metta is also considered a "healing" force that can mature the reward of virtue, as well as underpinning all activities aimed at advancing humanity.

b. Characteristics of Early Childhood Development Psychology

Early childhood has unique and challenging psychological characteristics, which are particularly relevant to character education efforts.

- **Potential Period (*Golden Age*):** Early childhood is in the "golden age" or the most potential time for learning. The quality of education and stimulation they receive during this period will greatly affect their development in the later stages.
- **Egocentrism**: Naturally, early childhood tends to view things from their own point of view and interests. They consider the object they want to be their own and often find it difficult to understand the perspective of others. This trait is related to their stage of cognitive development.
- **Strong Curiosity and Adventurer**: They have a very high curiosity, which encourages them to keep asking questions and exploring the environment. This is a good modality for exploratory learning.

- **Spontaneity and High Imagination**: Children at this age are natural, not good at pretending, and have very high imagination and fantasy.

The Role of Metta Values in the Formation of Children's Character

a. Metta as a Foundation for the Development of Pro-social and Empathetic Behavior

The principles of Metta are functionally very similar to *mindfulness-based* interventions that have been empirically researched in the context of early childhood education. The practice of Metta, known as *Metta-bhavana* (universal love meditation), involves the gradual transmission of goodwill and compassion, starting from oneself to all beings. Scientific studies show that *mindfulness-based* interventions in preschoolers result in significant improvements in pro-social behavior, self-regulation, and the ability to take on the perspective of others.

By practicing Metta, children are trained to consciously desire the happiness and well-being of others. This is the main cornerstone for developing empathy, which is the ability to understand and feel the feelings of others. This practice directly guides children to interact with the world around them in a loving and supportive way. A study showed that the group of children who received a *mindfulness* and kindness-based training curriculum (which is substantially similar to Metta's practice) showed greater improvements in social competence and report card scores in the social-emotional domain, while the control group showed more selfish behaviors over time, as evidenced by the lack of interest in sharing stickers. Thus, the positive results found in mindfulness-based intervention studies can be analogous to potential outcomes of the application of Metta, as both focus on the development of compassion and awareness.

b. Metta in Overcoming Egocentrism and Developing Perspectives

Egocentric characteristics in early childhood often pose challenges in social interactions, such as scrambling over toys or having difficulty accepting rejection. However, the practice of Metta-bhavana offers a gradual mechanism that can systematically soften this egocentric nature. This practice begins by focusing compassion on oneself ("May I be safe, healthy, and happy"), then extends to loved ones, then indifferent people, and finally to "difficult people" or all beings.

This gradual process trains children to consciously go beyond the limits of their own view of themselves. By intentionally radiating goodwill to others, children begin to understand that others also have feelings, desires, and needs that deserve to be respected. This directly targets and "softens" the egocentric traits that characterize this age, making it a highly relevant and developmentally appropriate method.

c. The Role of Family and School as Mestizo's Character-Building Environment

Character formation does not occur spontaneously; rather, it is a sustainable process and is heavily influenced by the environment. The family is the smallest and first community for the child, which is the main determinant in the formation of character. Consistent affection from parents can build a child's confidence, emotional health, and social skills.

The Metta School, as a clear example, emphasizes a balanced combination of academics and character, with the aim of developing universal morality, ethics, empathy, and tolerance. The Buddhist Sunday School (SMB) at the Theravada Buddha Sasana Vihara also demonstrates how these values can be integrated through a child-centered thematic

learning model. This model provides hands-on experience and uses appreciation and praise to foster confidence and appreciation for others. Harmonious collaboration between educators, students, and parents is the key to success in instilling these values.

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between Metta values, child development characteristics, and the benefits that can be generated.

Table 1: The Relationship of Metta Values with Early Childhood Character Aspects

Metta Concept	Related Early Childhood Characteristics	Benefits (Impact)	Supporting Evidence
Love Universel	Egocentrism, Social Ability	Increased Pro-social Behavior, Reduced selfish behavior	The practice *of Metta-bhavana* trains children to radiate goodwill to others, beyond their own point of view, thereby enhancing sharing and cooperation behaviors.
Friendly, Generous Attitude	Spontaneous Nature, High Curiosity	Empathy Development and Emotion Regulation	Help children recognize their emotions and respond to situations more thoughtfully, not impulsively.
No Violence, No Malice	Tends to be easily frustrated	Improved Emotional Health and Resilience	Helping children cope with stress and anxiety, as well as building resilience in facing challenges.
Selfless Attitude	Needs Praise and Recognition	Increased Confidence and Self-Esteem	Genuine affection from parents and educators builds a sense of appreciation, which is the foundation of healthy self-confidence.

Source: Analysis of literature findings (Flook et al., 2015; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Susianti, 2020)

The Potential of Classroom Action Research (PTK) in Metta Based Learning

Research Gap

Although literature reviews have identified the potential value of Metta and empirical evidence from similar studies, there are currently no Classroom Action Research (PTK) studies that specifically implement and evaluate Metta based learning programs in early childhood (Susianti, 2020). This indicates a large research gap (Weare, 2019). PTK is a methodology that is particularly relevant for this context because it allows educators to systematically observe and improve learning practices in authentic environments, as well as measure the impact of interventions directly on learners (Singh et al., 2014).

PTK Framework for Metta Implementation

Based on the above analysis, a dual-cycle PTK framework was proposed to implement and evaluate Metta-based learning.

Table 2: PTK Cycle Framework for the Implementation of Metta Based Learning

Cycle	Phase	Activity Description	Observation Indicators
Cycle I Focus: Pro-social Behavior (Sharing and Cooperation)	**1. Planning**	Designing Metta learning modules that are integrated into daily activities, such as storytelling, singing, and role-playing sessions. Using fairy tales about sharing and friendship.	Availability and suitability of learning modules.
	2. Implementation	Implement modules in the classroom with educators as examples. Doing activities such as "Toy Sharing	Children's involvement in activities. The application

Cycle	Phase	Activity Description	Observation Indicators
		Sessions" or "Assembling Blocks Together." Educators will provide a real example of Metta's attitude.	of the Metta attitude by educators.
	3. Observation	Observing and recording a child's behavior, particularly in tasks that require sharing and cooperation, is similar to the method used in *mindfulness studies* (e.g., the task of sharing stickers or snacks).	Frequency of sharing and cooperation behavior. The quantity of stickers shared with friends.
	4. Reflection	Analyzing observation data. Identify successes, bottlenecks, and formulate improvements for Cycle II.	The results of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Improvement plan.
Cycle II Focus: Emotion Regulation and Empathy	**1. Planning**	Improved the module by adding activities that target emotion regulation, such as the recognition and naming of emotions (e.g., through facial expression cards) and healthy ways to express them.	Enhancement of learning modules.
	2. Implementation	Execute the improved modules. Integrate short *Metta-bhavana* sessions that children can understand, such as visualizing radiating a "light of affection" to a friend who is grieving.	Children show the ability to recognize emotions. Children's participation in Metta sessions.
	3. Observation	Observe and record the child's response to conflict situations. Measure their ability to take the perspective of others (e.g., asking "How does your friend feel when you pick up his toy?").	The child's response to conflict. Demonstrated level of empathy.
	4. Reflection	Draw final conclusions about the overall effectiveness of the program. Formulating suggestions for further research and practical implementation.	Final conclusions and recommendations.

Source: Developed by the author based on the PTK model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988)

CONCLUSION

Metta's value, as a concept of universal love, has great and profound potential in building early childhood character. Through her principles of rejecting hate and encouraging selfless compassion, Metta is directly in line with a child's developmental need to overcome egocentrism and develop pro-social behavior. This analysis suggests that Metta practice can, theoretically, serve as an effective intervention to improve children's social-emotional competence, a claim reinforced by empirical findings from similar studies of mindfulness-based interventions. The application of Metta values in education requires a supportive environment, both at school and in the family, with educators and parents serving as role models. Success in instilling these values depends not only on the curriculum, but also on harmonious collaboration between all parties involved. Although this report does not find any PTK studies that specifically implement Metta, the proposed PTK framework suggests that this methodology is well-suited to test the effectiveness of Metta in the future.

REFERENCES

Bauer, C. C., Caballero, C., Scherer, E., West, M. R., Mrazek, M. D., Phillips, D. T., ... & Gabrieli, J. D. (2019). Mindfulness training reduces stress and amygdala reactivity in preschoolers: A randomized controlled trial. Developmental Psychology, 55(10), 2131-2151.

Coatsworth, J. D., Duncan, L. G., Nix, R. L., Greenberg, M. T., Gayles, J. G., Bamberger, K. T., ... & Demi, M. A. (2015). Integrating mindfulness with parent training: Effects of the Mindfulness-Enhanced Strengthening Families Program. Developmental Psychology, 51(1), 26-35.

Dunning, D., Tudor, K., Radley, L., Dalrymple, N., Funk, J., Vainre, M., ... & Kuyken, W. (2022). Do mindfulness-based programmes improve the cognitive skills, behaviour and mental health of children and adolescents? An updated meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. Evidence-Based Mental Health, 25(3), 135-142.

Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., & Davidson, R. J. (2015). Promoting prosocial behavior and self-regulatory skills in preschool children through a mindfulness-based kindness curriculum. Developmental Psychology, 51(1), 44-51.

Galante, J., Galante, I., Bekkers, M. J., & Gallacher, J. (2014). Effect of kindness-based meditation on health and well-being: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 82(6), 1101-1114.

Hofmann, S. G., Grossman, P., & Hinton, D. E. (2011). Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: Potential for psychological interventions. Clinical Psychology Review, 31(7), 1126-1132.

Jennings, P. A. (2015). Mindfulness for teachers: Simple skills for peace and productivity in the classroom. W. W. Norton & Company.

Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. American Journal of Public Health, 105(11), 2283-2290.

Khoury, B., Sharma, M., Rush, S. E., & Fournier, C. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis. Journal of Health Psychology, 20(6), 725-735.

Klimecki, O. M., Leiberg, S., Ricard, M., & Singer, T. (2014). Differential pattern of functional brain plasticity after compassion and empathy training. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 9(6), 873-879.

Lawlor, M. S. (2016). Mindfulness in practice: Considerations for implementation of mindfulness-based programming for adolescents in school contexts. New Directions for Student Leadership, 2016(149), 83-95.

Meiklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, M. L., Griffin, M. L., Biegel, G., Roach, A., ... & Isberg, R. (2012). Integrating mindfulness training into K-12 education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students. Mindfulness, 3(4), 291-307.

Roeser, R. W., & Eccles, J. S. (2015). Mindfulness and compassion in human development: Introduction to the special section. Developmental Psychology, 51(1), 1-6.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M. S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., Oberlander, T. F., & Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary

school children: A randomized controlled trial. Developmental Psychology, 51(1), 52-66.

Semple, R. J., Droutman, V., & Reid, B. A. (2017). Mindfulness goes to school: Things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences. Psychology in the Schools, 54(1), 29-52.

Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Karazsia, B. T., Winton, A. S., Myers, R. E., Latham, L. L., & Singh, J. (2014). Mindfulness-based positive behavior support (MBPBS) for mothers of adolescents with autism spectrum disorder: Effects on adolescents' behavior and parental stress. Mindfulness, 5(6), 646-657.

Susianti, S. (2020). Integration of local wisdom and spiritual values in early childhood character education: An Indonesian perspective. International Journal of Early Childhood Education, 12(2), 145-162.

Tang, Y. Y., Hölzel, B. K., & Posner, M. I. (2015). The neuroscience of mindfulness meditation. Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 16(4), 213-225.

Weare, K. (2019). Mindfulness and contemplative approaches in education. Current Opinion in Psychology, 28, 321-326.

Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. Frontiers in Psychology, 5, 603.