

**VERNACULAR AND MODERN LANGUAGES IN THE TRANSMISSION OF
BUDDHA DHARMA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Abstrak: Artikel ini merupakan systematic literature review (SLR) yang mengkaji peran bahasa vernakular dan bahasa modern dalam transmisi Buddha Dharma pada berbagai konteks pendidikan, budaya, dan wilayah. Seiring dengan sirkulasi ajaran Buddha yang semakin global dalam bingkai multibahasa, pilihan bahasa menjadi faktor krusial yang memengaruhi pemahaman doktrinal, faktor keberlanjutan budaya, dan aksesibilitas pendidikan Buddhis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan sistematis terhadap 50 artikel ilmiah relevan yang diseleksi dari total 143 publikasi potensial. Literatur yang dianalisis mencakup beragam konteks regional, termasuk Asia Selatan, Asia Timur, Asia Tenggara, serta komunitas Buddhis transnasional dan diaspora, dengan latar disiplin yang meliputi studi Buddhis, pendidikan, dan sosiolinguistik. Analisis dilakukan melalui sintesis tematik kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola yang berulang dan gesekan-gesekan kritis dalam penggunaan bahasa dalam transmisi Dharma. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa bahasa vernakular berperan penting dalam menjaga keotentikan ajaran, identitas budaya, dan pengalaman belajar yang berakar pada spiritualitas. Sebaliknya, bahasa modern, khususnya bahasa Inggris dan Mandarin, berfungsi dalam memperluas jangkauan ajaran, integrasi institusional, dan akses lintas wilayah. Namun demikian, literatur juga mengungkap adanya persoalan sambung silih antara kedalaman pemahaman spiritual dan perluasan akses pendidikan. Pendekatan dwibahasa dan multibahasa muncul sebagai strategi mediasi potensial, meskipun implementasinya masih belum merata dan kurang terkonseptualisasi secara sistematis. Kajian ini juga mengidentifikasi celah penelitian yang signifikan, antara lain dominasi studi deskriptif, keterbatasan evaluasi hasil pembelajaran, serta minimnya penelitian berorientasi pengembangan yang mengintegrasikan bahasa vernakular dan bahasa modern. Dengan mensintesis temuan dan merumuskan celah riset tersebut, artikel ini memberikan landasan konseptual bagi pengembangan pendidikan Buddhis yang lebih inklusif dan kontekstual di lingkungan multibahasa.

Kata Kunci: Transmisi Buddha Dharma, Bahasa Vernakular; Bahasa Modern; Pendidikan Buddhis; Pendidikan Dwibahasa.

***Abstract:** This systematic literature review examines the role of vernacular and modern languages in the transmission of Buddha Dharma across diverse educational, cultural, and regional contexts. As Buddhist teachings increasingly circulate within multilingual and globalized environments, language choice has emerged as a critical factor shaping doctrinal understanding, cultural continuity, and educational accessibility. Employing a systematic*

review approach, this study analyzed 50 peer-reviewed studies selected from an initial pool of 143 publications. The reviewed literature spans multiple regions, including South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and transnational Buddhist communities, and draws on interdisciplinary perspectives from Buddhist studies, education, and sociolinguistics. Qualitative thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring patterns and critical tensions in language-mediated Dharma transmission. The findings indicate that vernacular languages play a central role in preserving doctrinal authenticity, cultural identity, and spiritually embedded learning practices, while modern languages, particularly English and Mandarin, facilitate broader dissemination, institutional integration, and transregional accessibility. However, the literature also reveals persistent tensions between depth-oriented spiritual engagement and breadth-oriented educational reach. Bilingual and multilingual approaches emerge as potential mediating strategies, though their implementation remains uneven and under-theorized. This review further identifies significant research gaps, including the predominance of descriptive studies, limited evaluation of learning outcomes, and a notable absence of design-oriented research integrating vernacular and modern languages. By synthesizing existing scholarship and articulating critical gaps, this review contributes to a more integrated understanding of language use in Buddhist education and provides a conceptual foundation for future pedagogical and developmental research in diverse linguistic contexts.

Keywords: *Buddha Dharma Transmission, Vernacular Language, Modern Language, Bilingual Education, Buddhist Education.*

INTRODUCTION

The transmission of Buddha Dharma has always been inseparable from language, not merely as a medium of instruction but as a carrier of doctrinal meaning, cultural identity, and spiritual experience. In recent decades, scholarly attention to the use of vernacular and modern languages in Buddhist education has increased, reflecting broader concerns regarding religious transmission, cultural preservation, and educational accessibility across diverse Buddhist communities (Sukma et al., 2025). As Buddhist teachings continue to circulate in contexts shaped by globalization, migration, and state language policies, questions surrounding language choice have become increasingly critical for both educators and practitioners.

Historically, Buddhist teachings have undergone significant linguistic evolution, transitioning from early canonical languages such as Pāli and Sanskrit to a wide range of vernacular and contemporary languages. This evolution reflects adaptive pedagogical strategies shaped by shifting sociopolitical contexts and educational needs (Medhacitto, 2024; Ollett, 2017). Evidence of this linguistic adaptation can be observed in diverse settings,

including the incorporation of Javanese vernacular language in ritual and instructional contexts in Indonesia (Sukma et al., 2025), the implementation of Tibetan–Mandarin bilingual education in monastic and secular schools (Wang & Talin, 2025; Xiao & Higgins, 2015), and the challenges faced by endangered Buddhist-associated languages such as Nepal Bhasa in sustaining intergenerational transmission (Shrestha, 2024). These cases illustrate that language choice is not a neutral pedagogical decision but one that directly influences doctrinal authenticity, spiritual engagement, and cultural continuity.

The literature further suggests that vernacular languages often facilitate deeper spiritual resonance and cultural embeddedness by connecting learners to familiar linguistic and symbolic worlds (Sukma et al., 2025). At the same time, modern languages—particularly globally dominant or nationally standardized languages—are frequently associated with increased educational access, broader communication, and institutional integration (Wang & Talin, 2025; Xiao & Higgins, 2015). However, this pragmatic advantage is often accompanied by concerns regarding reduced spiritual depth, cultural dilution, or uneven educational outcomes, especially among minority and marginalized communities (Dolma, 2014; Jia & Qie, 2021).

Despite the growing body of research on Buddhist linguistic practices, significant knowledge gaps remain. Comparative evidence on the relative effectiveness of vernacular versus modern languages in Buddhist education is still fragmented, with many studies relying on qualitative or ethnographic approaches and limited longitudinal data (Hobhouse, 2024; Nima, 2008; Phuntsog, 2019). Moreover, debates surrounding language policy—particularly in minority education contexts such as Tibet—highlight tensions between cultural retention and political assimilation, further complicating language choices in Dharma transmission (Zenz, 2010). These tensions have tangible consequences, including the potential erosion of linguistic diversity, diminished religious comprehension, and inequitable educational outcomes.

Building on these concerns, this systematic literature review situates language use in Buddhist education at the intersection of linguistic identity, pedagogical effectiveness, and cultural sustainability (LaMuCuo, 2019; Tamang, 2025). Drawing on perspectives from linguistic ecology and sociolinguistics, language is conceptualized not merely as an instructional tool but as a site of negotiation where power, identity, and religious meaning

converge (Roche, 2017). Within this framework, vernacular languages function as primary vehicles of cultural transmission, while modern languages serve as instruments of accessibility and broader integration, with bilingual and multilingual education emerging as mediating strategies between these dimensions (Phuntsog, 2018; Wang & Talin, 2025).

Accordingly, the purpose of this systematic literature review is to synthesize existing research on the historical evolution of language use in Buddhist teachings, to evaluate the effectiveness and cultural implications of vernacular and modern languages in Dharma education, and to assess issues of accessibility across different demographic and regional contexts (Shrestha, 2024; Sukma et al., 2025; Xiao & Higgins, 2015). By addressing these interrelated dimensions, this review aims to inform educational policy, support language preservation initiatives, and enhance pedagogical strategies within Buddhist communities worldwide (Simmer-Brown, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize scholarly research on the use of vernacular and modern languages in the transmission of Buddha Dharma. The review followed established principles of systematic inquiry, emphasizing transparency, replicability, and thematic coherence in order to map the current state of knowledge, identify dominant patterns, and highlight critical research gaps within the field. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic—situated at the intersection of Buddhist studies, linguistics, education, and cultural studies—a qualitative synthesis approach was adopted to accommodate diverse methodological traditions, including ethnographic, historical, sociolinguistic, and comparative studies.

2. Search Strategy and Query Transformation

The literature search was guided by a broad research question concerning the effectiveness, cultural preservation, and accessibility of vernacular and modern languages in Buddhist education, as well as the historical evolution of language use in the transmission of Buddhist teachings across regions and communities. To ensure comprehensive coverage while maintaining analytical focus, this core question was systematically transformed into multiple targeted search queries. This process allowed the inclusion of studies addressing niche contexts

and specialized terminology without fragmenting the overall scope of the review.

The transformed queries encompassed themes such as: vernacular language use in Buddhist ritual and education, bilingual and multilingual education in Buddhist contexts, historical shifts from canonical to vernacular and modern languages, language policy and minority education in Buddhist regions, translation practices and linguistic mediation in Buddhist literature.

Through this strategy, the search process balanced breadth and specificity, minimizing the risk of omitting relevant studies while avoiding excessive retrieval of unrelated literature.

3. Data Sources and Study Identification

The systematic search yielded 143 potentially relevant publications. These studies spanned multiple geographical regions, including Tibet, Nepal, China, Southeast Asia, and Buddhist diaspora communities, and reflected a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. Following an initial screening based on titles and abstracts, 50 studies were identified as highly relevant and retained for full-text review. These studies formed the core corpus for qualitative synthesis.

4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure conceptual consistency and analytical rigor, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) Peer-reviewed journal articles or scholarly book chapters. (2) Studies explicitly addressing language use in Buddhist education, ritual, textual transmission, or pedagogy. (3) Research examining vernacular, modern, bilingual, or multilingual language practices in Buddhist contexts. (4) Studies employing qualitative, ethnographic, historical, linguistic, or comparative methodologies. (5) Publications focusing on identifiable regional, cultural, or demographic Buddhist communities.

Exclusion criteria included: (1) Studies addressing Buddhism without substantive discussion of language use. (2) Purely theological or philosophical analyses lacking educational, cultural, or linguistic dimensions. (3) Non-scholarly publications, opinion pieces, or sources without clear methodological grounding. (4) Studies focusing exclusively on secular language education without relevance to Buddhist transmission.

This screening process ensured that the final corpus directly addressed the research

objectives while maintaining methodological credibility.

5. Analytical Framework and Data Synthesis

The selected studies were analyzed using qualitative thematic synthesis, allowing patterns and relationships to emerge inductively from the literature. Analysis proceeded through iterative coding and categorization, resulting in several overarching thematic domains: (1) Effectiveness of language use in facilitating comprehension and spiritual engagement. (2) Cultural preservation and identity formation through vernacular and heritage languages. (3) Accessibility and inclusivity in Buddhist education across linguistic and demographic groups. (4) Historical evolution of linguistic practices in Buddhist transmission. (5) Demographic and regional variations in language-related educational outcomes.

This synthesis was informed by theoretical perspectives from linguistic ecology and sociolinguistics, which conceptualize language as a dynamic cultural resource embedded within broader sociopolitical structures. Within this framework, vernacular languages were interpreted as vehicles of cultural continuity and embodied religious experience, while modern languages were examined as tools for institutional integration and transregional communication. Bilingual and multilingual models were analyzed as mediating strategies negotiating these dimensions.

6. Reliability and Limitations

To enhance analytical reliability, thematic interpretations were cross-checked across multiple studies and regional contexts, with attention given to convergent and divergent findings. Nevertheless, the review is subject to limitations inherent in the existing literature, including the predominance of qualitative research designs, uneven geographic representation, and limited availability of longitudinal and experimental data. These constraints are acknowledged as part of the analytical findings rather than treated as methodological weaknesses, as they point to substantive gaps in current scholarship. And while all included studies informed the analytical process, only representative studies central to each theme are explicitly cited and discussed in the manuscript

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overall, the results indicate a diverse yet fragmented body of literature addressing

language use in the transmission of Buddha Dharma. The studies collectively demonstrate heightened scholarly awareness of linguistic issues but vary considerably in scope, methodological rigor, and conceptual framing. This descriptive overview establishes the empirical basis for the thematic and critical analyses presented in the Discussion section.

1. Overview of Selected Studies

Following the systematic screening process, a total of 50 studies were retained for full analysis. These studies constitute the final corpus of this review and represent scholarly work published across diverse disciplinary fields, including Buddhist studies, education, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies. The selected literature reflects a broad geographical distribution, encompassing Buddhist communities and educational contexts in South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and transnational or diaspora settings.

Methodologically, the reviewed studies are predominantly qualitative in nature, employing ethnographic fieldwork, historical-textual analysis, policy analysis, and case study approaches. A smaller subset of studies adopts mixed or comparative methods, particularly in examining bilingual or multilingual educational settings. Quantitative and experimental designs are notably scarce, highlighting a general methodological trend within the existing body of research.

Table 1. Overview of Included Studies by Linguistic Focus and Region

Focus	Region	Number of Studies
Vernacular	Southeast Asia	12
Modern (Mandarin)	China/Tibet	18
Modern (English)	Global/Diaspora	9
Bilingual	Mixed	11

2. Distribution of Linguistic Focus

Analysis of the corpus reveals three primary linguistic orientations in studies of Buddha Dharma transmission: (1) Vernacular languages, including local and heritage languages such as Pāli-derived ritual languages, regional vernaculars (e.g., Javanese), and endangered community languages (e.g., Nepal Bhasa). (2) Modern languages, particularly globally or nationally dominant languages such as English and Mandarin, often associated with formal

education systems, transregional communication, or state language policies. (3) Bilingual or multilingual configurations, where vernacular and modern languages coexist within instructional, ritual, or textual practices. (4) A substantial proportion of studies focus on vernacular language use, emphasizing its role in maintaining cultural continuity, ritual authenticity, and community-based transmission. Another significant group of studies addresses the increasing prominence of modern languages, especially Mandarin in state-regulated educational environments and English in transnational or globally oriented Buddhist communities. Studies explicitly examining integrative bilingual or multilingual models are comparatively fewer but demonstrate growing scholarly interest.

3. Contextual Settings of Dharma Transmission

The reviewed studies examine language use across multiple transmission contexts. These include: (1) Formal educational institutions, such as monastic schools, Buddhist universities, and state-regulated religious education programs. (2) Non-formal and community-based settings, including temples, lay study groups, and local ritual practices. (3) Textual and translational domains, focusing on the translation of canonical texts, commentaries, and contemporary Dharma materials. (4) Digital and transnational environments, where teachings are disseminated through online platforms, international retreats, and diaspora networks. (5) Across these contexts, language choice emerges as a salient feature shaping both access to teachings and modes of interpretation, although the specific implications vary by region and institutional framework.

4. Regional and Demographic Coverage

Regionally, the literature demonstrates uneven coverage. Studies on Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist contexts—particularly those involving Mandarin as a medium of instruction—are well represented, often in relation to education policy and minority language issues. South Asian and Southeast Asian contexts appear primarily in discussions of vernacular ritual language, local pedagogy, and postcolonial educational dynamics. Research focusing on diaspora and global Buddhist communities, where English frequently functions as a lingua franca, constitutes a smaller but conceptually significant segment of the corpus.

In terms of demographics, most studies focus on monastic populations, educators, and

adult practitioners, with relatively limited attention to children, adolescents, or novice learners in formal schooling contexts. This distribution reflects broader trends in Buddhist educational research rather than deliberate exclusion.

5. Preliminary Thematic Categorization

While detailed interpretation is reserved for the Discussion section, initial coding of the selected studies indicates recurring thematic orientations related to: pedagogical effectiveness and comprehension, cultural and linguistic identity, accessibility and inclusivity, historical continuity and adaptation, and sociopolitical influences on language choice.

These thematic domains form the analytical foundation for the subsequent thematic findings and critical synthesis.

Discussion

A. Thematic Findings

These thematic findings provide a structured synthesis of existing research but also expose significant tensions and inconsistencies across studies. The section that follows, Critical Synthesis and Research Gaps, then builds on these findings to examine unresolved contradictions, methodological limitations, and areas where current scholarship remains insufficiently developed.

1. Vernacular Languages and Doctrinal Authenticity

Across the reviewed studies, vernacular languages consistently emerge as central to the preservation of doctrinal authenticity and culturally embedded modes of Dharma transmission. Research conducted in diverse contexts—including Southeast Asia, South Asia, and minority Buddhist communities—highlights how vernacular languages facilitate deeper comprehension by aligning doctrinal concepts with culturally familiar linguistic structures and symbolic repertoires (Sukma et al., 2025). In ritual and pedagogical settings, vernacular usage is frequently associated with embodied learning practices, where meaning is conveyed not only through semantic clarity but also through affective and communal resonance.

Several studies emphasize that vernacular languages function as repositories of localized interpretive traditions, enabling practitioners to engage with Buddhist teachings in ways that are historically continuous and culturally situated (Ollett, 2017). In endangered-language contexts, such as Nepal Bhasa, vernacular-based Dharma education is portrayed as inseparable

from broader efforts to sustain linguistic identity and intergenerational transmission (Shrestha, 2024). These findings suggest that vernacular languages are not merely pedagogical tools but integral components of religious continuity.

However, the literature also acknowledges limitations associated with exclusive reliance on vernacular languages. In multilingual societies and transregional settings, vernacular-based instruction may restrict access for learners outside specific linguistic communities, potentially reinforcing boundaries rather than facilitating broader dissemination of the Dharma. This tension underscores the need to consider vernacular use within dynamic sociolinguistic ecologies rather than as an inherently superior medium.

2. Modern Languages and Expanding Accessibility

In contrast to vernacular-focused studies, research on modern languages, particularly English and Mandarin, foregrounds issues of accessibility, institutional integration, and transregional communication. In state-regulated educational environments, Mandarin frequently functions as the primary medium of instruction, shaping curricular design and assessment practices in Buddhist schools and monasteries (Wang & Talin, 2025; Xiao & Higgins, 2015). These studies indicate that modern languages enable broader participation in formal education systems and facilitate alignment with national educational standards.

English, meanwhile, appears predominantly in transnational, diasporic, and globally oriented Buddhist contexts. Studies examining English-mediated Dharma transmission highlight its role as a lingua franca that allows teachings to circulate across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Wong, 2019). English-language materials, retreats, and online platforms are frequently portrayed as expanding the reach of Buddhist teachings beyond traditional ethnic or regional communities.

Despite these advantages, the literature raises critical concerns regarding the implications of modern language dominance. Several studies caution that instruction conducted primarily in modern or global languages may reduce conceptual depth, obscure culturally embedded meanings, or encourage overly rationalized interpretations of Buddhist doctrines (Dolma, 2014; Jia & Qie, 2021). In some cases, the use of modern languages is linked to unequal learning outcomes, particularly among students from minority linguistic backgrounds who may experience diminished comprehension or disengagement.

3. Bilingual and Multilingual Mediation Strategies

A smaller but increasingly significant body of literature explores bilingual and multilingual approaches as mediating strategies between vernacular authenticity and modern-language accessibility. Studies conducted in Tibetan–Mandarin educational settings demonstrate how bilingual instruction can support both cultural preservation and institutional participation, although implementation challenges remain substantial (Phuntsog, 2018; Wang & Talin, 2025). These approaches are often framed as pragmatic compromises rather than ideal solutions, shaped by political, economic, and administrative constraints.

Research on bilingual Dharma transmission suggests that alternating or integrative language use may enhance comprehension by allowing learners to anchor abstract doctrinal concepts in vernacular frameworks while accessing broader resources through modern languages (Phuntsog, 2019). However, the effectiveness of such models varies widely depending on teacher proficiency, curricular design, and sociopolitical context. The literature notes a lack of systematic evaluation regarding long-term educational and spiritual outcomes of bilingual instruction, pointing to a critical area for future research.

4. Cultural Adaptation, Power, and Language Choice

Beyond pedagogical considerations, the reviewed studies repeatedly frame language choice as a site of cultural negotiation and power. Language policies governing Buddhist education—particularly in minority regions—are shown to shape not only instructional practices but also identity formation and community autonomy (Zenz, 2010). In such contexts, the adoption of modern languages may reflect broader processes of political integration or assimilation, while vernacular resistance functions as an assertion of cultural agency.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use in Dharma transmission is thus embedded within asymmetric power relations, where certain languages carry institutional legitimacy while others are marginalized (Roche, 2017). These dynamics complicate simplistic narratives that frame modern languages solely as tools of progress or vernacular languages solely as symbols of authenticity. Instead, the literature portrays language choice as contingent, negotiated, and deeply contextual.

5. Emerging Patterns and Thematic Convergence

Taken together, the thematic findings reveal a consistent pattern across regions and contexts: vernacular languages tend to support depth, cultural continuity, and spiritual resonance, while modern languages facilitate reach, mobility, and institutional alignment. Bilingual and multilingual strategies emerge as tentative bridges between these orientations, though their implementation remains uneven and under-theorized.

Importantly, the reviewed literature converges on the view that no single language strategy is universally optimal. Rather, effective Dharma transmission appears to depend on context-sensitive approaches that balance authenticity with accessibility, informed by the linguistic repertoires and educational needs of specific communities.

B. Critical Synthesis

The synthesized literature reveals that research on language use in the transmission of Buddha Dharma is characterized by a persistent tension between depth-oriented authenticity and breadth-oriented accessibility. While vernacular languages are consistently associated with culturally embedded understanding and doctrinal intimacy, modern languages function primarily as conduits for institutional reach and transregional dissemination. This dichotomy, however, is not merely pedagogical but reflects deeper structural dynamics shaping Buddhist education in contemporary contexts.

A critical limitation across the reviewed studies lies in their tendency to treat vernacular and modern languages as mutually exclusive categories, rather than as components of a dynamic linguistic repertoire. Many studies implicitly valorize vernacular languages as authentic while positioning modern languages as utilitarian, or conversely, frame modern languages as necessary for educational advancement while marginalizing vernacular use as parochial. Such binary framings obscure the lived realities of multilingual Buddhist communities, where linguistic practices are fluid, negotiated, and context-dependent.

Furthermore, the literature demonstrates an uneven engagement with learning outcomes. While numerous studies assert the spiritual or cultural superiority of vernacular-based instruction, empirical evidence measuring comprehension, retention, or long-term engagement remains limited. Similarly, claims regarding the efficiency of modern-language instruction often rest on assumptions of accessibility and scalability rather than systematically assessed

pedagogical effectiveness. This pattern suggests a broader methodological challenge in Buddhist educational research, where normative commitments frequently precede evaluative analysis.

Another critical issue concerns the political and institutional embeddedness of language choice. Studies situated in minority or state-regulated educational contexts reveal that language decisions are frequently constrained by policy frameworks beyond the control of educators and communities. However, these constraints are often treated as background conditions rather than analytically central variables. As a result, the literature tends to under-theorize how power relations shape not only language availability but also curricular priorities, assessment mechanisms, and teacher training.

Collectively, these patterns indicate that existing scholarship, while rich in contextual detail, remains fragmented and conceptually siloed. There is limited cross-dialogue between studies focusing on ritual practice, formal education, translation, and digital dissemination, despite their shared concern with linguistic mediation. This fragmentation restricts the development of integrative models capable of addressing both spiritual depth and educational reach in Dharma transmission.

C. Future Directions

The critical synthesis highlights several significant gaps that warrant further scholarly attention.

First, there is a clear absence of integrative pedagogical frameworks that systematically combine vernacular and modern languages in Buddhist education. While bilingual and multilingual practices are acknowledged, few studies articulate design principles, curricular models, or instructional strategies that intentionally leverage the complementary strengths of different languages. This gap points to the need for research that moves beyond descriptive accounts toward design-oriented and developmental approaches.

Second, the literature reveals a methodological imbalance, with a strong emphasis on qualitative and ethnographic studies but limited use of mixed-methods or evaluative designs. Future research would benefit from incorporating systematic assessments of learning outcomes, including comprehension, doctrinal retention, and learner engagement across linguistic modalities. Such approaches could provide a more robust empirical basis for

evaluating claims regarding effectiveness and authenticity.

Third, studies focusing on learner demographics, particularly adolescents and novice learners in formal educational settings, remain scarce. Most existing research centers on monastic practitioners or adult learners, leaving significant gaps in understanding how language choice affects early-stage Dharma education. Addressing this gap is especially relevant for contemporary Buddhist education systems seeking to engage younger generations.

Fourth, there is limited exploration of digital and transnational contexts as distinct sites of Dharma transmission. While online platforms and global networks increasingly mediate Buddhist teachings, their linguistic dynamics are often treated peripherally. Future studies should examine how digital environments reshape language hierarchies, pedagogical practices, and access to Buddhist education.

Finally, the existing literature largely lacks design-oriented or developmental studies that translate theoretical insights into pedagogical applications, in other words practical educational innovations. The absence of empirically tested instructional models integrating vernacular and modern languages suggests an opportunity for future research to bridge theory and practice. Such work could contribute not only to academic discourse but also to the improvement of Buddhist educational practice in diverse linguistic contexts.

Taken together, these gaps underscore the need for future scholarship that adopts integrative, design-oriented, and context-sensitive approaches to language use in Buddhist education. By situating language choice within broader pedagogical, cultural, and institutional frameworks, future research can move beyond binary debates and contribute to more sustainable and inclusive models of Dharma transmission.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has examined the role of vernacular and modern languages in the transmission of Buddha Dharma across diverse cultural, educational, and regional contexts. By synthesizing findings from a broad corpus of interdisciplinary studies, the review demonstrates that language choice is not merely a technical or pedagogical consideration, but a central factor shaping doctrinal understanding, cultural continuity, and educational accessibility within Buddhist communities.

The findings indicate that vernacular languages play a crucial role in sustaining doctrinal authenticity and culturally embedded modes of learning, enabling deeper spiritual engagement

through familiar linguistic and symbolic frameworks. In contrast, modern languages, particularly English and Mandarin, facilitate wider dissemination, institutional integration, and transregional communication, expanding access to Buddhist teachings beyond traditional linguistic boundaries. Rather than functioning as competing alternatives, these language orientations reflect complementary strengths that respond to different pedagogical and sociocultural demands.

Importantly, the review highlights that existing scholarship remains largely fragmented, with limited integration across linguistic, pedagogical, and institutional dimensions. The predominance of descriptive and qualitative studies, alongside the scarcity of evaluative and design-oriented research, constrains the development of empirically grounded instructional models capable of balancing authenticity and accessibility. This gap underscores the need for future research to move beyond binary debates and toward integrative frameworks that intentionally combine vernacular and modern languages within context-sensitive educational designs.

By articulating key thematic patterns, critical tensions, and research gaps, this review contributes to a clearer conceptual understanding of language-mediated Dharma transmission. It provides a foundational reference for scholars, educators, and policymakers seeking to develop more inclusive and sustainable approaches to Buddhist education. Ultimately, advancing research that bridges theory, practice, and pedagogical innovation will be essential for ensuring that the transmission of Buddha Dharma remains both culturally rooted and globally accessible in an increasingly interconnected world.

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