

# **Incorporating the Quantitative Approach to Buddhist Psychology: Insights and Implications**

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## **Introduction**

Psychology, a scientific discipline, studies mental states and process as well as behavior in human and other animals (Mischel,2024). The field emerged as a formal discipline in 19th century with the scientific investigation of Wilhelm Wundt in 1879 at Leipzig university in Germany. Now the field has developed with numerous subfields. In psychology, there are two main approaches to study human behavior, mental states, and mental process: quantitative and qualitative as well as three perspectives: first-person, second person and the third person, Modern psychologists incorporate these approaches and perspectives in their research to develop the discipline scientifically (Plotnik and kouyoumdjian, 2011). Buddhist psychology emerged in the 20th century with the publication of *An Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pali Literature* by C.A.F. Rhys Davids in 1914. Since then, numerous books and research articles have been published as well as many academic programs have been commenced form diploma level to master level. However, the majority of the research and degree programs mainly focus qualitative approach rather than quantitative approach. Therefore, Recently, some scholars criticized about the scientific basis in the field of Buddhist Psychology. Therefore, this paper addresses the following objectives and questions in order to fill the above gap in the field.

## **General objective**

To establish a consensus of the scientific basis of Buddhist Psychology through incorporating quantitative approach to the field

## **Specific Objectives**

- i. To identify the nature and scope of quantitative approach to study mental states, mental process and behavior

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- ii. To examine the ways of incorporating quantitative approach to Buddhist Psychological research and academic programs

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the nature and scope of quantitative approach to study mental states, mental process and behavior?
- ii. How can be the quantitative approach incorporated to Buddhist Psychological research and degree programs?

### **Methodology**

Methodology in this research was qualitative. Firstly, five (05) published books in the field of Buddhist psychology and two (2) bachelor level syllabi of Buddhist Psychology were reviewed with focusing the research approaches applied in those books and degree programs in order to understand the nature of the field. Then, it was critically examined the possible application of quantitative approach to Buddhist psychology considering the Quantitative approach in modern psychology.

### **Discussion**

Nature and scope of Quantitative Approach to study mental states, mental process and behavior

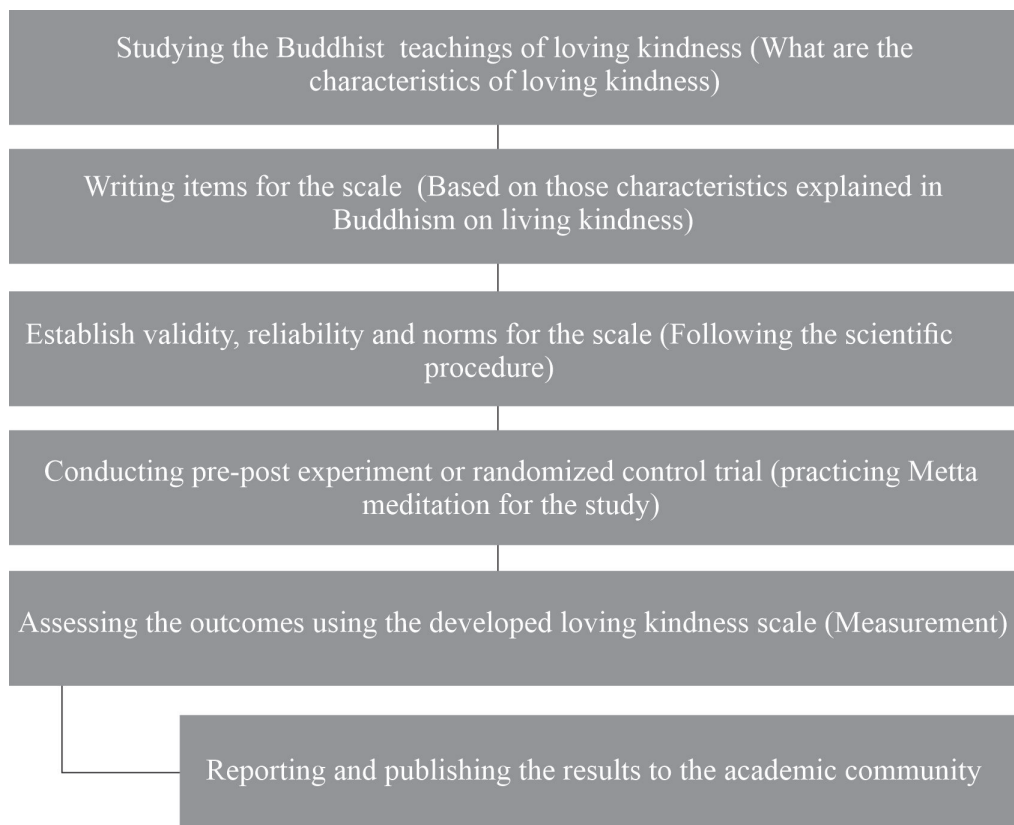
In Psychology, there are two major phenomena of Studying: mental states and process and behavior. Behaviors such as walking, sitting, playing etc., are directly observable ones. Mental states and process like emotion, motivation, attitude, abilities, intelligence, values, are directly unobservable ones. These unobservable mental attributes are known as psychological constructs. Quantitative approach in psychology focusses of measuring these psychological constructs scientifically. This field of psychology is known as mental measurement or psychometrics. Psychometrics is defined as the science of mental measurement (Rust et al, 2021). The aim of this field is to assign numbers to mental attributes or quantifying psychological constructs. The scope of this field includes scale construction, validation and administration and assessment.

On the one hand, in modern Psychology, researches are conducted based on positivist paradigm and third person perspective. Positivist paradigm aligns with the third person perspective. The assumption of these both perspectives is that psychological attributes can be measured. Therefore, quantitative researches are conducted in the forms of surveys, experiments and observations. These forms are considered as most scientific research designs because the findings

of these research can be generalized. The widely applied research instruments for these types of studies in psychology are scales and questionnaires. There are thousands of such instruments at present in modern psychology. personality scales, intelligence scales, attitudes scales, happiness indexes, emotional regulation scales are a few of them.

### **Incorporating quantitative approach to Buddhist Psychology**

Buddhism is flourished with valuable psychological teachings. The ultimate achievement in Buddhism is known as Nibbān which is a psychological in nature. Buddhist teachings also enrich with explaining the states of human mind, way of developing positive mental states aligning with mental well-being like kindness, loving kindness, mindfulness, generosity, non-attachment, equanimity. On the other hand, it explains the way of overcoming negative mental states such as anger, lust, jealousy, hatred, deletions, it also explains the individual differences (personality types). All these are psychological constructs. Already available Buddhist psychological books have been adequately discussed the nature of these psychological constructs theoretically. (De Silva, 2014; Kalupahana, 1987). On the other hand, the reviewed syllabi of Buddhist Psychology for this study also included course units to teach these types of psychological constructs theoretically. There is a gap of Buddhist Psychology in applying psychological instruments like standardized scales, questionnaires, indexes to measure psychological constructs discussed in Buddhist perspectives. Therefore, it is necessary to apply psychometrics techniques to develop such instruments in the field. When developing such instruments, the first step is to study the theoretical explanation of the construct as it explains in Buddhist teachings. Then, the researcher should develop items for the scales aligning with Buddhist teachings. And, it should be followed scientific procedure to establish validity, reliability and norms for the instrument as per psychometric methods. At the end, this instrument could be applied in researches to assess the individual differences of the psychological constructs. The applied aspect of Buddhist Psychology is Buddhist counselling. theoretically explained numerous counselling techniques are available In Buddhist counselling books and syllabi. (Lee, 2020; Hung, & Wa, 2021). But It is necessary to establish the validity of those techniques through assessing the effectiveness of practical applications of those techniques. Psychological measurements are required for this purpose. For instance, if a Buddhist psychology researcher is interested to study the impact of mettā meditation on developing loving kindness. Then, the following research process could be followed.



When incorporating quantitative approach to Buddhist psychology degree programs it is necessary to include adequate research methodology course units including psychometrics, experimental and survey designs etc. in syllabi.

### **Conclusion**

Even though Buddhist psychology emerged in the 20th century. It developed as an academic discipline recently. The published Buddhist psychological books and available degree programs of the discipline have been given a little attention for the quantitative approach. Therefore, there is a current debate in Buddhist Psychology whether it could be a scientific study or not and how it is studied scientifically. By incorporating quantitative approach to conduct scientific inquiries in the field of Buddhist Psychology, the field could be developed and establish a consensus on Buddhist psychology while defining Buddhist Psychology as a valid and distinct scientific discipline to study mental states, mental process and behavior through the lens of Buddhist teachings and flourishing human potentials through Buddhist practices.

**Keywords:** Quantitative Approach, Buddhist Psychology, Buddhism, Psychometric

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