

Nurturing Spirituality in the Digital Age: Insights from Online Buddhist Sunday Schools

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ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, traditional religious education increasingly leverages online platforms to foster spiritual development and community among practitioners. By employing a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the YouTube recordings and Instagram content of the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma, this study focuses on the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma, examining its methods for cultivating spiritual journeys, fostering virtual communities, and employing innovative teaching approaches. It addresses the challenges of adapting traditional Buddhist education to digital formats, including managing online learning platforms, and maintaining student engagement. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and accessibility for diverse student backgrounds and needs, contributing to the broader understanding of online religious education's potential in the digital age.

Keywords: *Buddhist Sunday School, Community building, Digital learning, On line Buddhist education; Religious education; Spiritual development.*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital age, the landscape of religious education is undergoing a significant transformation. Traditional religious practices and teachings are increasingly being integrated with online platforms, providing new opportunities and challenges for spiritual development. This shift is particularly evident in Buddhist education, where the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma has emerged as a vital medium for nurturing spirituality and fostering a sense of community among practitioners. The digital environment offers a unique space for spiritual growth, allowing students to access teachings and participate in religious activities from the comfort of their homes. This transition to online platforms has become essential, especially in the face of global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has restricted physical gatherings and necessitated alternative methods of religious instruction.

The preservation and advancement of Buddhist teachings and ideals is greatly aided by the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma. The difficult burden of converting conventional methods to a digital platform while maintaining the core principles of spiritual instruction falls to this online school. In order to engage students and motivate active engagement, this adaptation calls for the use of multimedia materials, interactive conversations, and joint projects. However, the shift to digital platforms also presents several challenges (Rizvi&Nabi,2021). Managing online learning environments, ensuring student engagement, and overcoming technical and logistical barriers are some of the hurdles faced by this school. Additionally, there is a need to address the diverse backgrounds and needs of students, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all participants.

The increasing shift to online platforms for religious education, particularly the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma, has prompted a need to understand the effectiveness and challenges of these digital transitions. Previous studies, such as Arifin (2021) and Wijoyo & Nyanasuryanadi (2020), have focused on specific Buddhist Sunday Schools' adaptation to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Arifin's study highlights the structured nature of online sessions and the engagement of students despite facing information gaps, internet connectivity issues, and economic constraints. Wijoyo and Nyanasuryanadi's research emphasizes the effectiveness of online learning in maintaining the SMB curriculum, yet points out the need for improved teaching

methods and the challenges of identifying learning difficulties and maintaining patience with students. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding a comprehensive analysis of the teaching structures, topics covered, and interactions in the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma. This broader analysis is crucial to understand the overall dynamics and effectiveness of online Buddhist education in fostering spiritual development.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to explore the methods employed by the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma in cultivating the spiritual journeys of students, examine how virtual communities within this school foster cooperation and solidarity, investigate the innovative teaching approaches utilized in online Buddhist education, identify strategies implemented to stimulate student involvement and engagement, analyze the challenges faced by the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma, assess the inclusivity and accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds and needs, and conduct a content analysis of YouTube recordings from the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma to provide a comprehensive understanding of their teaching structures, topics covered, and interactions between teachers and students. By analyzing an online Buddhist Sunday Schools, the study seeks to uncover best practices, common challenges, and potential solutions applicable across various contexts, contributing to the broader field of online religious education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the YouTube recordings and Instagram content of the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of teaching structures, topics covered, and teacher-student interactions in the digital context. A representative sample of YouTube channels and Instagram accounts associated with these sessions was selected, with videos and posts chosen based on criteria such as topic, media, and learning strategy, to offer a holistic view of the online Buddhist educational landscape. Data was systematically collected from both platforms, focusing on aspects such as lesson structure, content, and interactions, with audio transcriptions and visual content aiding in further examination. A coding scheme was developed to categorize data based on themes like teaching methods, subject matter, student participation, and technological tools used, identifying recurring patterns and unique instances within the data.

The analysis delves into the structure of lessons, the use of multimedia resources, and the balance between didactic instruction and interactive elements, examining how traditional Buddhist teachings are adapted for online delivery. The topics covered in the lessons are identified and categorized, assessing their alignment with the goals of spiritual development and community building. This integrated analysis of YouTube recordings and Instagram content seeks to uncover the dynamics of digital Buddhist education, providing insights into effective methods, challenges, and strategies for enhancing spiritual development in the digital age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The YouTube Classes: Digital Transformation of Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School

The Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School was inaugurated on October 6, 2019, with the primary goal of providing a platform for kindergarten and elementary school-aged children to learn about Buddha Dharma. This initiative was driven by the recognition that such spiritual education is often not available in regular school curricula. The Sunday school aims to fill this gap by offering structured learning opportunities about Buddhist teachings and practices (<https://www.viharagunadharma.com>).

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought significant challenges. Many places of worship, including the Guna Dharma Vihara, had to close their doors to adhere to health and safety regulations. This situation disrupted the traditional face-to-face Buddha Dharma education that the Sunday school provided. Recognizing the need to continue this important educational activity, the Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School made a strategic decision to transition to an online format.

On February 6, 2021, the Sunday school officially moved its activities online. This transition leveraged various digital platforms to ensure continuity in learning. The school uses its YouTube channel (@gunadharmas399) to share video lessons and activities, its Instagram account (@smbvbgd) to engage with students and parents through posts and stories, and platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom to conduct live classes and distribute learning materials. This multi-platform approach has enabled the Sunday school to maintain its educational mission despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In this study, a significant portion of the data was gathered from the Guna Dharma Sunday School's YouTube and Instagram platforms. These platforms provided rich insights into the online learning experiences of the children and the ways in which the Sunday school adapted its teaching methods to the digital environment. The study aims to analyze the effectiveness of this transition and the impact of digital learning on the children's understanding of Buddha Dharma.

Description of Learning Activities at Guna Dharma Vihara Buddhist Sunday School

1. Introduction

On January 30, 2021, the Guna Dharma Buddhist Sunday School held an introductory session via YouTube, announcing the exciting news about the launch of the online Sunday School starting in February 2021. This video aimed to introduce the programs and activities that would be conducted online, making them accessible to all Buddhist children in Indonesia from anywhere. In the video, the teachers introduced themselves and provided information about the various activities to be carried out, such as:

- Devotional Service and Dharma Learning: Children can participate in the devotional service and learn Dharma together with their friends online.
- Creative Activities: There are various creative activities such as listening to stories, singing together, making crafts, drawing, coloring, and learning languages.
- Accessibility for All: This online Sunday School is designed to be accessible to all Buddhist children in Indonesia, allowing them to participate even if they cannot come to the Vihara.

The teachers also emphasized the importance of diligently following the Sunday School even though it is conducted online and hoped that this program could be a place to channel hobbies and cultivate goodness. This video encouraged children to register immediately and provided contact information for further inquiries.

2. "Buddha, Teacher of Gods and Humans"

On April 2, 2023, the Guna Dharma Vihara Buddhist Sunday School conducted an online learning activity titled "Buddha, Teacher of Gods and Humans." This educational video lasted approximately 28 minutes and was broadcasted via YouTube (https://youtu.be/g4bEDIO3GKs?si=bgCzhgyQUsgS4I_m). The session began with an introduction that mentioned the facilitator's name and the topic. The facilitator, appearing as an avatar, used a clear voice-over that was well-coordinated with the cartoon avatar. Before delving into the topic, the facilitator asked the students to compose themselves in a respectful manner as a preparation for starting the devotional service (puja bakti).

The puja bakti commenced with the sound of a Buddhist singing bowl, followed by namaskara (a form of homage performed by prostration accompanied by the anjali gesture). The students were then invited to sing the gatha pedupaan. This chant was performed by a singer

accompanied by music, but the singer did not appear visually, keeping the focus on the incense and the Buddha statue at the altar.

After the devotional service, the facilitator, who referred to herself as "Cici" (big sister), invited the students to sing a song titled "The Great Teacher." This song narrated the story of the Great Teacher Buddha, and the video included the lyrics, making it easy for the students to sing along. Following this, Cici presented an account of the life of Buddha Gautama. This presentation aimed to encourage the Buddhist Sunday School (SMB) students to emulate the Buddha's virtues and habits in their daily lives. The session concluded with a meditation activity. During this meditation, the students were invited to internalize the belief that Buddha is the perfect role model and teacher, with the hope that they would embody the Buddha's qualities in their daily lives.

3. Buddhist Symbol

On August 1, 2021, the Online Buddhist Sunday School session lasted about 30 minutes. The activities began with an invitation to perform puja bhakti, shown through a video of two individuals performing homage at the altar, accompanied by the sound of a singing bowl. Following this, the students were invited to sing the "Gatha Pendupaan" together. Then, the students recited "Sakyamuni Buddhaya" three times, with an altar background displaying a Buddha statue. The session continued with the recitation of the merit dedication gatha, with the same altar image.

Next, the video showed people performing homage, namaskara. The SMB facilitator then appeared and taught a Mandarin song titled "Ami Tuo Fo Zai Xiu Jian." During this singing activity, the song lyrics and their meanings were displayed alongside illustrations of various Buddhist symbols like temples and Buddha statues beside the facilitator's video. After this song, the facilitator presented material on seven Buddhist symbols, starting with an explanation of what a symbol is. Each Buddhist symbol was explained with accompanying images.

The activities then continued with an invitation to meditate, calm the mind, and assume a proper meditation posture, upright, and slow breathing. Soothing music accompanied the meditation with an image of stacked stones by the ocean. The session ended with a vow to follow Buddha's teachings for happiness.

4. How Do Prayers Work in Buddhism?

On August 28, 2022, the Guna Dharma Vihara Online Buddhist Sunday School was held with the theme "How Do Prayers Work in Buddhism?". The activity began with the live appearance of a Sunday School facilitator inviting students to adopt a respectful attitude as a preparation for starting the devotional service.

After this invitation, the students were asked to sing the "Gatha Pendupaan" song, followed by reciting "Namo Sakyamuni Buddhaya." Then, a Sunday School facilitator invited the students to learn a Mandarin song titled "Zuo Hao Shi Bu Neng Shao Wo Yi Ren" (doing good cannot exclude me). The song lyrics were displayed along with their meanings, helping the students understand the meaning of each word sung.

Next, the facilitator began the material on how to pray in Buddhism. The core of this material was that prayer in Buddhism is not for making requests to Buddha but for reflecting on Buddha's teachings and being motivated to do good. This material was accompanied by cartoon images showing people we should be grateful for and anjali posture images.

The session continued with a meditation session, accompanied by a video of stacked stones by the beach. After meditation, the students were invited to color a picture of children praying in front of a Buddha statue. This coloring activity was guided with an example through a cartoon video, making it easy for the students to follow.

At the end of the session, the students were reminded about the coloring assignment previously explained and also detailed in Google Classroom. Thus, this Buddhist Sunday School activity also utilized Google Classroom to support the teaching and learning process.

5. Buddhist Story "The Great Horse"

The Buddhist Sunday School activity on November 21, 2021, began with the facilitator introducing themselves and presenting the Jataka story topic "The Great Horse." The students were invited to adopt a proper posture for the devotional service, including namaskara, with an image of the Buddha statue and two people performing the service displayed on the screen.

The students then learned the Mandarin song "Dang ni you le yang qi," which means "when you have courage," with the lyrics and their meanings displayed on the screen alongside the singing facilitator. The story "The Great Horse" was read with images and text from the storybook displayed on the screen. The moral of the story was emphasized, highlighting the importance of expressing gratitude after receiving help, being thankful for what we have, and not retaliating with hatred, accompanied by quotes from the Dhammapada related to the story's moral. The session continued with meditation and concluded with a video tutorial on creating a horse craft from used tissue rolls.

The online learning activities conducted by the Vihara Guna Dharma Buddhist Sunday School showcase a well-structured approach, integrating traditional Buddhist practices with modern technological tools to create a comprehensive and engaging learning experience. The lessons typically begin with an introduction and a series of activities such as singing, learning new songs, and delving into the main lesson content, which is followed by interactive and reflective exercises like meditation and art and craft activities. This structure ensures a balanced mix of educational and interactive segments, catering to the diverse needs and interests of young learners.

The content of these sessions is thoughtfully curated to convey key Buddhist teachings and practices. For instance, the lesson on "How to Pray in Buddhism?" emphasizes the reflective nature of Buddhist prayer, focusing on internalizing Buddha's teachings rather than making requests. Similarly, the session on "Buddha, Teacher of Gods and Humans" narrates Buddha's life story, aiming to inspire students to emulate His virtues. Other sessions introduce Buddhist symbols and their meanings, and highlight the importance of consistent practice and participation in spiritual activities. By incorporating traditional songs, new learning material, and explanations of rituals and symbols, the content is both informative and engaging, fostering a deep understanding of Buddhist principles.

Interactions in these lessons are multi-faceted, promoting active participation from students. The use of voice-over guidance, visual aids, and interactive activities such as singing, meditation, and crafting helps maintain student engagement. For example, students are encouraged to sing along with displayed lyrics, meditate with guided instruction, and participate in creative activities like coloring. These interactive elements not only make the learning process enjoyable but also reinforce the lesson content, enabling students to connect with the material on a deeper level.

During various sessions at the Vihara Guna Dharma Buddhist Sunday School, students were introduced to new Mandarin songs that complemented the learning topics. In one session, the instructor taught the song "Ami Tuo Fo Zai Xiu Jian," with lyrics and their meanings displayed alongside Buddhist symbols like temples and statues of Buddha, providing both a linguistic and cultural learning experience. Another session focused on the theme "How to Pray in Buddhism," where students learned the song "Zuo Hao Shi Bu Neng Shao Wo Yi Ren" (Doing Good Must Not Miss Me), with lyrics and translations to ensure comprehension. Similarly, in a session discussing the Jataka tale "The Great Horse," students learned the song "Dang ni you le yang qi" (When You Have Courage), with the instructor singing and the lyrics and meanings displayed on screen. These activities not only introduced new songs but also reinforced the lesson topics, enhancing students' understanding through the integration of music and meaningful content.

The teaching methods employed are diverse, catering to different learning styles. Direct instruction through voice-over, visual demonstrations via video and illustrations, guided practice in various activities, and interactive tasks such as coloring all contribute to an effective learning experience. Technological tools such as YouTube, cartoon illustrations, and Google Classroom enhance the delivery and accessibility of the lessons. These methods ensure that students can easily grasp the concepts being taught and stay engaged throughout the sessions. Overall, the integration of traditional Buddhist teachings with modern technology and interactive methods creates a rich and dynamic learning environment for young Buddhists.

Promoting and Educating Dharma through the Instagram Platform

Instagram has emerged as a crucial platform for the dynamic promotion of Buddhist Sunday School activities, particularly in announcing schedules, topics, and formats. By presenting this information in an appealing manner, the platform effectively captures the interest of both students and their parents. This strategic use of social media is part of a broader effort by Vihara Guna Dharma's Buddhist Sunday School (@smbvgd) to engage the community in a meaningful way. The visual nature of Instagram, coupled with its wide reach, allows the school to not only inform but also inspire participation, thereby making Dharma education more accessible to a younger audience.

In addition to its role in information dissemination, Instagram is also employed to showcase students' achievements and creative works from various learning activities. This approach serves multiple purposes. On one hand, it highlights the tangible outcomes of the educational process, giving students a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work. On the other hand, it provides parents and the broader community with a glimpse into the school's activities, fostering a sense of transparency and trust. An example of this is the featured Paper Turtle Craft inspired by the Kacchapa Jataka, which underscores the enjoyable and hands-on nature of the lessons. By sharing these creative projects, the school conveys the message that learning Dharma can be both fun and deeply meaningful.

A specific instance of Instagram's use in promoting Buddhist Sunday School activities is the post from July 10, 2022. This post advertised a session on the topic "Bacchara Jataka: The Talkative Turtle." The post was designed to pique the curiosity of children, inviting them to discover why the turtle is talkative by watching related content on the Guna Dharma YouTube Channel. The call to action—"Let's learn Dharma and have fun together!"—reflects the school's commitment to making Dharma lessons engaging and interactive, encouraging a deeper connection with the teachings through multimedia resources.

Beyond creative crafts and storytelling, Instagram also serves as a platform for sharing the outcomes of other educational activities. One example is a post showcasing the results of a cupcake-shaped card-making activity. This post not only displayed the students' work but also reinforced the educational values behind the activity. The accompanying caption emphasized the importance of generosity and the joy of giving, framing the card-making exercise as a practical lesson in reducing greed and spreading happiness. The post further engaged the audience by inviting them to view more examples of the students' work, thereby creating a sense of community and shared experience.

In addition to promoting YouTube content, the Buddhist Sunday School's Instagram account is also used to announce upcoming activities conducted through Zoom meetings. This was exemplified in the promotion of a Zoom class held on May 29, 2022. The versatility of Instagram allows the school to seamlessly transition between different modes of instruction, whether in-person, online, or hybrid. Moreover, the account regularly features educational reels, such as the "Vihara Guna Dharma Dhamma Sharing Videos," which utilize animated content to explain key Buddhist teachings. These reels are particularly effective in conveying complex concepts like Right Livelihood (Samma Ajiva) and Right Action (Samma Kammanta) in a format that is both engaging and easy to understand for young audiences.

Overall, the strategic use of Instagram as an educational tool enhances the accessibility and enjoyment of Buddhist teachings for children. By combining visual appeal with informative content, the platform helps to demystify Dharma lessons, making them more relatable and less intimidating. Even when dealing with didactic material, the use of engaging audiovisual media ensures that the teachings are presented in a way that resonates with the students, fostering a positive and lasting connection with the principles of Buddhism.

The Buddhist Sunday School effectively leverages Instagram's visual appeal to promote Dharma education by employing a variety of strategies that engage and inform their audience. They use visually appealing graphics and layouts to announce schedules, topics, and formats for upcoming sessions, making the information more engaging and easier to digest for both students and parents. The platform also serves as a showcase for students' creative projects, such as crafts and artwork inspired by Buddhist teachings, like the Paper Turtle Craft from the Kacchapa Jataka, highlighting the enjoyable and hands-on nature of the lessons. Informative graphics and captions are employed to explain the educational values behind various activities, reinforcing learning objectives and making the content more relatable. Additionally, Instagram posts often include links to related multimedia content, such as YouTube videos, allowing the school to enhance the educational experience through visual storytelling that makes complex concepts more accessible. Educational reels featuring animated content are also used to break down key Buddhist teachings into easily understandable formats, making them more accessible to young audiences. The school further engages the community by sharing photos and videos of students participating in various activities, showcasing the vibrant community aspect of Dharma education and encouraging broader participation. Interactive elements, such as visually engaging call-to-action features, invite viewers to participate in activities or view more examples of students' work, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. By leveraging Instagram's visual appeal in these ways, the Buddhist Sunday School makes Dharma education more engaging, accessible, and relatable to a wider audience.

The Buddhist Sunday School uses Instagram to engage with parents and the broader community in several key ways:

1. Information dissemination: Instagram is used to announce schedules, topics, and formats for upcoming sessions. This ensures that both students and parents are well-informed about what to expect, thereby fostering a sense of preparedness and engagement.
2. Showcasing student achievements: The platform is used to highlight students' creative works and achievements from various learning activities. This not only gives students a sense of accomplishment but also provides parents and the community with a glimpse into the school's activities, promoting transparency and trust.
3. Engaging content: Posts are designed to be visually appealing and informative, often including captions that emphasize the educational values behind the activities. For example, a post showcasing cupcake-shaped card-making emphasized the importance of generosity and the joy of giving, framing the activity as a practical lesson in reducing greed and spreading happiness.
4. Interactive elements: The school uses Instagram to create interactive experiences, such as inviting the audience to view more examples of students' work or to participate in activities. This fosters a sense of community and shared experience, encouraging active engagement.
5. Promotion of multimedia resources: Instagram is used to promote related content on the Guna Dharma YouTube Channel, encouraging deeper engagement with the teachings through multimedia resources. For instance, a post about the "Bacchara Jataka: The Talkative Turtle" invited children to discover the story by watching related content on YouTube.

6. Announcements of upcoming activities: The platform is used to announce upcoming activities conducted through Zoom meetings, allowing the school to seamlessly transition between different modes of instruction and keep the community informed about opportunities to participate.

7. Educational reels: The school features educational reels that utilize animated content to explain key Buddhist teachings. These reels are particularly effective in making complex concepts like Right Livelihood and Right Action accessible and engaging for young audiences.

By employing these strategies, the Buddhist Sunday School leverages Instagram's visual and interactive capabilities to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that extends beyond the classroom, effectively engaging parents and the broader community in the educational process.

Discussion

The integration of traditional religious education with online platforms marks a transformative shift in how spiritual teachings are disseminated and accessed. This study on the online Buddhist Sunday School of Guna Dharma provides valuable insights into this digital transformation, aligning with existing literature and scientific frameworks. The findings reflect a significant shift towards leveraging technology to overcome the barriers of physical distance and to continue religious education amid disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Arifin (2021) and Wijoyo & Nyanasuryanadi (2020) highlight the effectiveness of online platforms in maintaining religious curricula and fostering spiritual development, which aligns with the study's findings. These studies underscore the potential of technology to extend the reach of religious education and adapt to contemporary challenges, thereby reinforcing the theoretical concept of technology-enhanced learning in religious contexts.

The concept of community is central to religious education and has been successfully translated into the online realm by the Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School. Putnam (2000) posits that community building involves creating a shared sense of purpose and identity through regular interactions. The study reveals how virtual spaces, facilitated by discussion forums, live chat features, and collaborative projects, foster a sense of belonging and solidarity among practitioners. The effective use of these digital tools aligns with Putnam's theory, demonstrating that online platforms can indeed support community-building efforts by maintaining regular interactions and shared experiences, albeit in a virtual format.

The Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School exemplifies how digital technology can effectively foster a sense of community among its participants. By utilizing platforms such as YouTube and Instagram, the Sunday School has created virtual spaces where students, parents, and teachers can interact and engage with Buddhist teachings in a meaningful way. These platforms allow for the sharing of student achievements, the broadcasting of lessons, and the promotion of interactive activities that encourage active participation from the community. Through live chat features, comment sections, and collaborative online projects, the school not only maintains regular communication with its members but also cultivates a shared sense of belonging and purpose. This digital approach to community building has enabled the Sunday School to transcend geographical boundaries, bringing together a diverse group of learners who are united by their shared spiritual journey.

The Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School employs innovative teaching approaches that align with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active learning and student-centered instruction (Kerimbayev, et al.2023). The study shows that multimedia resources, interactive activities, and a balance between didactic and participatory elements are used to engage students. These methods are consistent with constructivist principles, which advocate for learning environments that encourage students to actively engage with material and collaborate with peers. The integration of these approaches highlights a successful adaptation of traditional teaching methods to the digital

environment, ensuring that students are not only passive recipients of information but also active participants in their learning process.

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, play a crucial role in enhancing educational experiences. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) argue that social media can provide a dynamic and interactive environment that complements traditional teaching methods. Instagram's visual appeal and wide reach are leveraged effectively by the Buddhist Sunday School to engage learners in new ways. Mayer (2009) emphasizes that multimedia, including visuals, can enhance learning by making complex information more accessible. The study demonstrates how Instagram's visually engaging content, combined with multimedia elements like YouTube videos, captures students' attention and facilitates understanding. This integration supports the idea that social media and multimedia tools can enhance educational engagement and accessibility.

While the study highlights the benefits of online religious education, it also identifies challenges related to technical issues, student engagement, and accessibility. These challenges echo findings from other studies on online education (Kizilcec et al., 2017; Reich & Ruipérez-Valiente, 2019), which underscore the need for addressing technical barriers and ensuring equitable access. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (Rose & Meyer, 2002) advocates for flexible and adaptable learning environments to accommodate diverse student needs. The study's findings reinforce the importance of implementing UDL principles to promote inclusivity and equity in online education. By addressing these challenges, the Buddhist Sunday School can further enhance its educational offerings and ensure that all students can participate fully and effectively.

The study points to several opportunities for innovation and improvement in online religious education. Developing more interactive and engaging online tools, along with strategies to enhance student engagement and support, are key areas for future exploration. This aligns with the broader discourse on online education, which emphasizes the need for continuous improvement and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of learners. By embracing these opportunities, the Buddhist Sunday School can further refine its approach and maximize the impact of its digital learning initiatives.

In brief, the integration of online platforms in religious education offers a dynamic and engaging learning environment that fosters community, supports diverse learning styles, and enhances accessibility. The findings of this study confirm the theoretical concepts of technology-enhanced learning and community building while also highlighting areas for further development and innovation. By addressing the challenges identified and leveraging the opportunities for improvement, online religious education can continue to evolve and meet the needs of a diverse and global audience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the transformative potential of online platforms in redefining traditional religious education. The Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School serves as a model for how digital technology can enhance access to spiritual teachings, foster a sense of community, and introduce innovative teaching methods that resonate with contemporary learners. The efficacy of integrating multimedia and social media tools in religious education providing a framework that other educational institutions can adapt and refine.

Looking forward, the study suggests several prospects for the development and application of its findings. First, there is potential for expanding the use of digital platforms in religious education to reach even broader audiences, particularly those in remote or underserved areas. The success of the Guna Dharma Vihara Sunday School indicates that with the right tools and strategies, online religious education can be made accessible to diverse learner groups, regardless of their geographical or socioeconomic status.

Moreover, future research could explore the long-term impact of online religious education on spiritual development and community building. Investigating how sustained engagement with digital religious education platforms affects learners' spiritual growth and their sense of belonging within the religious community could provide deeper insights. Additionally, studies could examine the scalability of such programs and how they can be effectively integrated into broader educational curricula.

Finally, the findings of this study open up new avenues for interdisciplinary research, combining educational technology with religious studies to explore innovative approaches to spiritual education. By continuing to investigate and refine these approaches, educators and practitioners can ensure that online religious education remains relevant, engaging, and effective in the digital age.

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