

## Religious Understanding and Buddhayana Values among Members of the Youth Secretariat of Buddhayana Vihara Associations (PMVBI) in Boyolali, Central Java

### ABSTRACT

This study examines how young members of the Youth Secretariat of Buddhayana Vihara Associations (PMVBI) in Boyolali, Central Java, understand Buddhayana as a nonsectarian Buddhist framework and why this understanding is relevant for shaping the religious character of contemporary Buddhist youth. This inquiry emerges from the limited empirical research on Buddhayana comprehension among young Buddhists in Indonesia, despite Buddhayana's historical significance as an inclusive movement initiated by Ashin Jinarakkhita. The study employs a descriptive qualitative design, with data collected through interviews, document analysis, and limited observation. The findings reveal three main insights. First, the youth interpret Buddhayana primarily as an integrative framework that unites diverse expressions of Buddhism within their community, rather than as a distinct doctrinal school. Their interpretation emphasizes inclusivity and openness. Second, they understand Buddhayana values mainly in social-practical terms—such as tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect—while doctrinal aspects receive limited attention. Third, the strengthening of Buddhayana understanding takes place through organizational activities, informal mentoring, and communal learning, although the absence of structured learning materials limits deeper conceptual development. This study carries important implications for Buddhist youth education, particularly in enhancing historical and doctrinal literacy on Buddhayana to reduce misconceptions and support the development of a more mature religious identity. Practically, the findings may serve as a foundation for developing youth learning modules and programs that introduce Buddhayana's inclusive principles more systematically. The originality of this study lies in its empirical mapping of how contemporary Buddhist youth interpret Buddhayana—an aspect that remains understudied in Indonesian Buddhist scholarship.

**Keywords:** Buddhayana understanding; Buddhist youth education; Buddhist youth; nonsectarian Buddhism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the era of Industry 4.0 has brought significant changes to the culture, mindset, and lifestyle of young people in Indonesia. The APJII (2024) report shows that national internet penetration has reached 79.5 percent, with the 13–24 age group as the dominant users. Increased internet accessibility, including in rural areas, exposes young people to an extremely diverse flow of information, ranging from educational content and entertainment to religious discourses that are often contradictory. This exposure shapes their character formation and moral values, offering opportunities for enhanced literacy and broader insight while simultaneously presenting risks such as value disorientation and the diminishing authority of traditional religious institutions (Purwani, 2021).

This phenomenon is also experienced by young Buddhists in Indonesia. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2022) indicates that there are approximately 2.09 million Buddhists in Indonesia, most of whom belong to productive age groups. This demographic position places young Buddhists in a strategic role as successors and drivers of the future development of Buddhism in the country, while also requiring them to navigate religious teachings amid rapid social change. Various Buddhist youth organizations—such as the Sekretariat Bersama Persaudaraan Muda-Mudi Vihara-Vihara Buddhayana Indonesia (Sekber PMVBI), PATRIA, Gemabudhi, Hikmabudi, and Pemuda Mahayana—play an important role in guiding the religious development of young Buddhists. However, in the midst of the rapid flow of digital information and increasing plurality of religious interpretations, questions arise about how young Buddhists understand the foundational teachings that form their organizational identity, including the values of Buddhayana as a nonsectarian framework within Indonesian Buddhism.

Among these organizations, the Sekber PMVBI holds a particularly significant role in fostering young Buddhists. Established on 29–30 December 1979 at Vihara Sakyawanaram, Pacet, it functions as a coordinating body for Buddhayana youth from various *vihara*. The organization promotes a system of youth development grounded in Buddhayana values—such as nonsectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and the belief in Dharmakaya—that are highly relevant for cultivating tolerance and harmony within Indonesia’s multicultural society. Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what extent members at the local level, particularly in Boyolali Regency, understand these values. This question is important because the quality of religious understanding serves as the foundation for shaping the religious identity and social ethics of young Buddhists.

Research on religious understanding and Buddhist youth can be grouped into several tendencies. First, studies on the role of youth in religious communities emphasize that young people occupy a strategic position in religious regeneration. The quality of their understanding is significantly influenced by patterns of training at the *vihara*, community interactions, and activities organized by youth groups (Mukti, 2020; Prihantika, Utoyo, Daud, & Purba, 2019). These studies highlight the importance of value-based religious education but do not specifically address how youth understand the Buddhayana tradition. Second, studies on Buddhayana as a nonsectarian tradition largely focus on its historical and theological aspects. These

works emphasize the integration of the three major Buddhist traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—alongside teachings on universalism and religious tolerance (Ismoyo, Lisniasari, & Boniran, 2021; Sudhamek, 2012; Susanto, 2018). However, such studies tend to operate at a macro level and do not explore how these ideas are understood by younger generations in today's fast-changing social context. Third, research on Buddhist organizations mostly examines institutional structures, organizational roles, and the effectiveness of training programs (Diputhera, 2010; Prasetyo, Muflikhun, Pramono, Nurhayati, & Firstantin, 2020). These studies focus more on organizational dynamics than on how members interpret fundamental organizational values. Consequently, the micro-level understanding of Buddhayana values among youth remains underexplored.

These three research tendencies reveal a clear gap: no study has specifically examined how youth members of Sekber PMVBI understand Buddhayana, particularly in Boyolali, where the organization has shown relatively active development. This gap is crucial because a shallow understanding of religious values may weaken religious identity, reduce the quality of organizational regeneration, and limit the internalization of Buddhayana values in the social lives of young Buddhists.

This study aims to fill this research gap by examining the understanding of Buddhayana among youth members of Sekber PMVBI in Boyolali. Specifically, it seeks to describe how members interpret Buddhayana as a nonsectarian religious framework, identify the Buddhayana values they recognize and apply in organizational and daily social life, and analyze the strategies used by the organization to strengthen such understanding through training activities, mentoring, and communal learning processes. This study contributes to the broader field of Buddhist religious education, particularly regarding the dynamics of religious understanding among youth within organizational contexts.

The study is guided by the argument that Sekber members' understanding of Buddhayana is likely heterogeneous. Such variation may stem from differences in *vihara* background, religious experiences, doctrinal literacy, and the quality of training they receive within the organization. Therefore, the Sekber PMVBI plays an essential role as a coordinating body in harmonizing members' understanding and ensuring the consistent internalization of Buddhayana values amid rapid social and technological change. This argument is examined through qualitative data analysis to understand how young people interpret Buddhayana in their organizational involvement and social practices.

## METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of members of the Youth Secretariat of Buddhayana *Vihara* Associations of Indonesia (Sekber PMVBI) in Boyolali, Central Java, particularly youth who actively participate in organizational activities. This group was selected because they serve as the primary actors in the internalization of Buddhayana values at the community level. By examining their understanding and experiences, this study aims to describe how the concept of Buddhayana is interpreted, understood, and actualized in both organizational participation and socio-religious life.

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This study employs a descriptive qualitative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach was selected because it aligns with the study's aim to explore the subjective meanings and religious experiences of Buddhist youth in depth. Religious understanding cannot be reduced to statistical data; rather, it must be examined through the narratives, interpretations, and reflections of the participants. In addition, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to understand the social context that shapes how Sekber members perceive Buddhayana values. The descriptive design allows the researcher to present the findings comprehensively and as they are, without imposing external interpretations.

The study draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from three active members of Sekber PMVBI Boyolali as key informants, as well as two supporting informants from the provincial PMVBI board and the local Buddhayana Council (MBI). These informants were purposefully selected based on their involvement in youth training activities and their knowledge of Buddhayana. Secondary data include organizational documents, Buddhayana value guidelines, relevant literature, and archival records of Sekber activities. These sources were used to substantiate and verify the information obtained from interviews.

Data collection techniques included interviews, limited observation, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide to maintain focus while also allowing participants to express their experiences and perspectives freely. Limited observation was conducted during several Sekber activities to directly observe interactions and forms of youth training. In addition, documentation such as activity photographs, organizational notes, and training materials was analyzed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the context of Buddhayana youth development.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, the researcher selected significant information, coded the data, and categorized it into key themes such as understanding Buddhayana, Buddhayana values, and training processes. The data display phase involved organizing thematic narratives to clearly illustrate relationships among the findings. Conclusion drawing was carried out by verifying interpretations through source triangulation and by seeking clarification from informants when necessary. This analytical process ensures that the study's findings possess validity and can be scientifically justified.

## **RESULTS**

### ***1. Representation of the Buddhayana Concept in the Understanding of Sekber Members***

The findings of this study, particularly the interviews conducted with three members of *Sekber* PMVBI Boyolali, indicate that their understanding of Buddhayana is primarily rooted in the view of Buddhayana as a unifying concept across Buddhist traditions. The informants interpret Buddhayana not as an

independent school or sect but as a nonsectarian framework intended to embrace the internal diversity of the Buddhist community, especially the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. For them, the existence of Buddhayana represents a response to the sociological reality of Indonesian Buddhists, who come from varied doctrinal and historical backgrounds. Consequently, they understand Buddhayana as an integrative vessel that enables Buddhists to cultivate a sense of togetherness and collective identity without abandoning the unique characteristics of their respective traditions.

This understanding demonstrates not only the informants' conceptual knowledge but also their interpretation of the social function of Buddhayana. They view Buddhayana as providing a space for dialogue and inter-traditional cooperation, particularly within organizational activities and religious practices at the *vihara*. In this sense, they represent Buddhayana as an "umbrella framework" that unites Buddhists through the values of inclusivity and solidarity. They consider this integrative spirit to be a defining feature of Buddhayana, distinguishing it from more sectarian patterns of religious expression.

However, the informants also highlight the existence of misconceptions among some young Buddhists. According to them, several individuals still perceive Buddhayana as an "Indonesian sect," a view that emerges primarily from those with limited religious training or insufficient familiarity with the historical development of Buddhayana. They explain that such misunderstandings often stem from the historical association with Bhikkhu Ashin Jinarakkhita's efforts to secure state recognition for Buddhism during the early post-independence period. The informants emphasize that this label arises from the historical context rather than from the teachings of Buddhayana itself. They consistently reject this misconception and reaffirm Buddhayana's position as a nonsectarian movement oriented toward the unity of the Buddhist community.

The informants' narratives further illustrate the depth of their understanding. One informant explained that Buddhayana is "a vessel that unites Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana," highlighting its function as a unifying umbrella. Another informant noted that the perception of Buddhayana as a sect arises from its historical connection to Ashin Jinarakkhita's role but insisted that Buddhayana fundamentally serves to bring Buddhists together rather than to establish a new school. Meanwhile, a third informant linked Buddhayana to the goal of maintaining internal cohesion among Buddhists so that they "do not become divided despite following different traditions."

These findings show that Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members represent Buddhayana as an integrative, dialogical, and functional concept. Their understanding emphasizes the social-practical dimensions of Buddhayana as a unifying force for the Buddhist community while acknowledging the challenges posed by broader misconceptions at the community level. Thus, this sub-finding illustrates that the members' construction of Buddhayana is shaped more by organizational context and collective experience than by doctrinal or theological depth (Dammapada, 2010).

**Table 1. Representation of the Buddhayana Concept in the Understanding of Sekber Members**

<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Example of Informant Statement</b>
Buddhayana as a nonsectarian framework	Informants understand Buddhayana not as a sect but as an integrative umbrella uniting the three major Buddhist traditions (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana).	An informant explained that Buddhayana is “a large umbrella that unites various traditions.”
Social function of Buddhayana as a dialogical space	Buddhayana is regarded as a mechanism for fostering inter-traditional cooperation and strengthening communal cohesion among Indonesian Buddhists.	An informant noted that Buddhayana provides “a space for cooperation without abandoning each tradition’s identity.”
Misconceptions of Buddhayana as a sect	Informants observed that some young Buddhists believe Buddhayana is a sect, especially those with limited religious training or insufficient historical knowledge.	An informant stated that some youth “refer to Buddhayana as an Indonesian sect,” but this is considered a misunderstanding.
Buddhayana and the historical role of Jinarakkhita	Misconceptions often arise due to historical associations with Ashin Jinarakkhita’s efforts to secure official recognition of Buddhism in Indonesia.	An informant noted that the sect label is due more to “Jinarakkhita’s historical context than to the teachings themselves.”
Buddhayana as a cohesive identity marker	Buddhayana is interpreted as a means of maintaining cohesion among Buddhists despite their diverse traditions.	An informant explained that Buddhayana exists “so that the community does not become divided even if their traditions differ.”
Dominance of social-practical over doctrinal understanding	Informants emphasize the social functions of Buddhayana (unity, dialogue, cooperation) more than doctrinal or theological foundations.	An informant viewed Buddhayana primarily as “a unifying teaching, not a new doctrine.”

The table illustrates a consistent pattern in the informants’ understanding of Buddhayana, namely that they primarily represent Buddhayana as a nonsectarian

framework designed to unite diverse Buddhist traditions. All informants describe Buddhayana not as a new school or sect but as a dialogical space and a collective platform for Indonesian Buddhists. At the same time, they acknowledge the presence of misconceptions among some Buddhist youth who perceive Buddhayana as a sect (Jayamedho, 2015), often due to limited historical literacy or insufficient religious training, particularly regarding the legacy of Ashin Jinarakkhita. These findings show that the representation of Buddhayana among Sekber members emphasizes its social-practical dimensions—such as unity, dialogue, and communal cohesion—rather than its doctrinal components.

Based on the interview data, Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members generally understand Buddhayana as a unifying concept that brings together the various Buddhist traditions in Indonesia. They assert that Buddhayana is not a sect or a doctrinal school but a nonsectarian framework intended to embrace the diverse traditions of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Their understanding also reflects the view that Buddhayana serves as a dialogical and cooperative space through which Buddhists can strengthen their collective identity without relinquishing their respective traditional distinctiveness. Nevertheless, the informants recognize that misunderstandings persist among some Buddhist youth who believe Buddhayana is an Indonesian sect, a misunderstanding they attribute to limited historical literacy and inadequate religious training. Overall, the informants interpret Buddhayana more as a social mechanism for maintaining unity than as a doctrinal system with distinct theological boundaries.

The findings further reveal a relatively consistent pattern in how Sekber members conceptualize the position and function of Buddhayana in their religious life. They generally perceive Buddhayana as a unifying framework across Buddhist traditions, with narratives of integration and solidarity appearing far more dominant than doctrinal interpretations. This understanding develops largely through their organizational experiences, which emphasize cooperation and inter-traditional solidarity, making the social functions of Buddhayana more tangible in everyday communal practice. This dominance of integrative meaning suggests that Sekber members view Buddhayana primarily as a relational system that connects Buddhist communities rather than as a theological construct with rigid doctrinal features.

In addition, there is a strong tendency for Sekber members to interpret Buddhayana within a social-practical framework. They emphasize values such as harmony, dialogue among Buddhist youth, community empowerment, and efforts to sustain internal solidarity. This pattern shows that their understanding is shaped more by direct organizational experience than by formal doctrinal study. As a result, the doctrinal aspects of Buddhayana tend to receive less attention, even though its social values are widely recognized and practiced.

Another significant finding is that misconceptions about Buddhayana as a sect continue to circulate among some Buddhist youth outside the Sekber environment. Informants attribute this misunderstanding to limited religious guidance, insufficient access to Buddhayana literature, and a lack of awareness of Ashin Jinarakkhita's historical role in securing official recognition of Buddhism in Indonesia. This situation highlights the need for more structured educational efforts

to ensure that youth understand Buddhayana's original purpose as a nonsectarian and integrative movement (Syukur, 2009).

Furthermore, historical context plays an important role in shaping young Buddhists' interpretations of Buddhayana. Informants link public perceptions of Buddhayana to early narratives of Buddhism's development in Indonesia, particularly the figure of Bhikkhu Ashin Jinarakkhita. This indicates that young people's understanding is influenced not only by organizational experience but also by transmitted historical narratives originating from communities and informal religious education in *vihara*. However, these historical accounts are not always received comprehensively, leaving room for misinterpretation.

Taken together, these patterns lead to the interim conclusion that the representation of Buddhayana among Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members is predominantly social-integrative and dialogical. They understand Buddhayana mainly as a means of maintaining Buddhist unity and accommodating internal diversity, while doctrinal aspects remain secondary. The persistence of misconceptions about Buddhayana as a sect underscores the importance of strengthening historical and doctrinal literacy through organizational training programs. Consequently, young Buddhists' understanding of Buddhayana appears to be shaped substantially by social interaction, organizational experience, and historical narratives embedded within the Buddhayana community.

## **2. Interpretation of Buddhayana Values among Sekber Members**

The findings further show that members of Sekber PMVBI Boyolali interpret Buddhayana values through five central principles: nonsectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in *Dharmakaya*. They do not understand these values as formal doctrines studied through canonical religious texts but as ethical guidelines and social orientations that they encounter through participation, interaction, and organizational life within the Buddhayana community. Consequently, their interpretations tend to be practical, contextual, and closely tied to their experiences in cross-*vihara* activities and Buddhist youth training programs.

Nonsectarianism is the value most frequently mentioned by the informants. They interpret it as a principle that rejects favoritism toward any specific Buddhist tradition and opposes exclusive attitudes that may divide the Buddhist community. The informants emphasize that young Buddhists should regard all traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—as part of a single Buddhist family. This understanding emerges from their direct experiences participating in activities that bring together youth from different *vihara*. Within this context, nonsectarianism becomes a foundation for building fraternity and avoiding sectarian thinking that categorizes Buddhists by their respective traditions. The informants stress that nonsectarianism entails not only refusing to differentiate between traditions but also being willing to bridge interpretive differences across them.

The informants understand inclusivism as a willingness to learn from various Buddhist teachings and practices without falling into fanaticism toward a single tradition. For them, inclusivism involves accepting differences, studying rituals from other traditions, and appreciating diverse perspectives that flourish within the Indonesian Buddhist community. In Sekber activities, this value manifests through knowledge sharing, attendance at rituals from different traditions, and active

engagement in cross-*vihara* initiatives. The informants view inclusivism as an essential asset for fostering an open and adaptive young Buddhist generation in a multicultural society.

The informants interpret pluralism as acceptance of the diversity of Buddhist traditions, beliefs, and practices in Indonesia. Whereas inclusivism emphasizes an individual's openness to learning from others, pluralism focuses on acknowledging that diversity within Buddhism is natural and should be embraced. Informants associate pluralism with their experiences observing different forms of devotional practices, variations in liturgical language, and diverse religious symbols used across *vihara*. For them, pluralism is not merely a normative discourse but a lived reality that shapes the identity of Buddhayana as a movement that welcomes diversity.

The informants understand universalism as the belief that the Buddha's teachings apply to all living beings regardless of ethnicity, culture, or tradition. They regard Buddhayana as a movement that emphasizes the universal nature of the Dhamma, whereby moral, ethical, and spiritual values can be applied across various cultural contexts. This interpretation arises from their awareness of the ethnic diversity among Indonesian Buddhists—such as Chinese, Javanese, Lampungese, Balinese, and others—leading them to view universalism as a principle that maintains the relevance of Buddhist teachings for all communities. The informants describe universalism as an ethical foundation that suggests that Buddhayana practice does not confine Buddhists to any specific cultural expression.

The fifth value, belief in *Dharmakaya*, is understood by the informants as faith in the highest essence of the Buddha or Sanghyang Adi Buddha, as recognized within the Buddhayana tradition. Their understanding appears relatively simple and not deeply theological. They view this value as a reminder that there exists an essence or nature of the Buddha that transcends the material and symbolic forms found in various traditions. Although their conceptual grasp of *Dharmakaya* is not profound, they believe that this value helps them feel connected to the universal and transcendent spiritual dimension of Buddhayana.

Overall, the interviews indicate that these five Buddhayana values are understood primarily as moral and social principles that guide interactions across traditions within the Sekber environment. The informants do not present complex theological understandings of these values but instead emphasize their functional role in maintaining harmony and solidarity among Buddhist youth. They perceive Buddhayana values as guidelines that enable young Buddhists from different traditions to collaborate, avoid sectarian conflict, and strengthen a more inclusive religious identity (Powers, 1995).

**Table 2. Interpretation of Buddhayana Values among Sekber Members**

<b>Buddhayana Value</b>	<b>Meaning According to Informants</b>	<b>Practical Forms / Social Implications</b>
Nonsectarianism	Not distinguishing between Buddhist traditions; viewing all traditions as part of one Buddhist family	Participation in cross- <i>vihara</i> activities; avoiding exclusive attitudes; strengthening youth solidarity
Inclusivism	Openness to learning from all traditions without fanaticism	Inter-traditional learning; willingness to attend rituals from different traditions; openness to differences
Pluralism	Acceptance of diverse practices, cultures, and rituals within Buddhism	Recognition of variations in devotional practices, liturgy, and symbols; appreciating practices across different <i>vihara</i>
Universalism	Belief that the Dhamma applies to all beings, not limited to one group	Cultivating universal compassion; viewing the Buddha's teachings as relevant to all ethnic and cultural groups
Belief in Dharmakaya	Faith in the highest essence of the Buddha / Sanghyang Adi Buddha; understood in a simplified manner	Feeling spiritual connectedness in Buddhayana practice; accepting the Buddha as a universal essence

The table illustrates that the five Buddhayana values—nonsectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in *Dharmakaya*—are understood by Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members primarily within ethical and social-practical frameworks. The informants do not emphasize theological or doctrinal aspects in depth; instead, they interpret these values through their lived experiences in cross-*vihara* interactions, learning from diverse traditions, and encountering the reality of Buddhist diversity in Boyolali. This understanding manifests in daily practices such as openness to differences, participation in inter-traditional activities, and efforts to maintain solidarity among Buddhist youth. Thus, the table shows that the internalization of Buddhayana values develops more through social dynamics and community experiences than through formal doctrinal learning.

Accordingly, Sekber members' interpretations of Buddhayana values can be understood as the result of a synthesis between organizational experience, cross-*vihara* practices, and informally developed religious understanding. Their construction of meaning arises not only from textual teachings but also from the social dynamics they encounter within the Buddhayana community. These findings affirm that the internalization of Buddhayana values among youth occurs largely through dialogue, social interaction, and practical experiences rather than through formal study of Buddhayana doctrine.

Based on the interviews, Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members understand Buddhayana values not through complex theological approaches but through their experiences of interacting within cross-*vihara* activities. They interpret the five core values—nonsectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in *Dharmakaya*—as ethical guidelines for maintaining harmony and strengthening inter-traditional relationships. They understand nonsectarianism as refraining from differentiating between Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions, while inclusivism is interpreted as openness to learning from any tradition without developing fanaticism. They also interpret pluralism as acceptance of the diversity of Buddhist practices and cultures, and universalism as the belief that the Buddha's teachings apply to all beings regardless of ethnicity or tradition. Meanwhile, belief in *Dharmakaya* is understood simply as recognition of a universal essence of the Buddha that transcends physical form. Taken together, these values are understood in practical, contextual terms and serve as a foundation for maintaining unity among Buddhist youth in Boyolali.

The analysis reveals several significant patterns in how Sekber members interpret Buddhayana values. First, their understanding of the values focuses primarily on social-practical dimensions rather than doctrinal ones. The informants emphasize the functional role of these values in fostering harmonious relationships and facilitating cooperation across traditions, indicating that value internalization occurs through social experience rather than doctrinal study. Second, nonsectarianism and inclusivism emerge as the most prominent values associated with Buddhayana identity. Their strong emphasis on these values reflects the need for youth to respond to the diversity of Buddhist traditions in Boyolali while avoiding potential divisions. The idea that all traditions are “brothers” illustrates how these values have become central to their collective religious identity.

Third, their interpretations of pluralism and universalism reveal an awareness that Buddhayana supports a form of religious life that is inclusive and open to all Buddhists regardless of cultural or traditional background. This reflects the youth's perception of the Dhamma as broad and expansive, transcending traditional boundaries. Their experiences in cross-*vihara* settings also make them accustomed to encountering diverse rituals and religious symbols. Fourth, their understanding of *Dharmakaya* tends to be simple and not theologically detailed. Although they acknowledge the existence of the Buddha's highest essence, they do not articulate deeper philosophical interpretations. Even so, belief in *Dharmakaya* remains an important spiritual dimension in their Buddhayana identity.

These patterns lead to the conclusion that Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members interpret Buddhayana values largely through social experience, community interaction, and organizational involvement. They view Buddhayana values as tools to cultivate inclusivity, solidarity, and inter-traditional harmony, while doctrinal aspects remain secondary. These findings indicate that value formation among young Buddhayana members occurs at a social-practical level, yet it still requires strengthened doctrinal literacy and more comprehensive conceptual understanding.

### **3. Strategies Used by Sekber Members to Enhance Their Understanding of Buddhayana**

The findings show that Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members view the process of strengthening their understanding of Buddhayana as gradual, continuous, and highly dependent on the active involvement of youth in organizational activities. All three informants agreed that an understanding of Buddhayana cannot be obtained solely through doctrinal or theoretical instruction but must be internalized through social experience and concrete practice within the community. They regard this training process not as a one-directional transfer of knowledge but as a form of character formation through participation, interaction, and collective experiences that embody the values of Buddhayana.

The first strategy most emphasized by the informants is the importance of youth participation in organizational activities. Informant A explained that youth “must be involved in activities, not only in worship,” suggesting that understanding Buddhayana develops primarily through socio-religious activities that allow youth to interact and directly experience its values. Activities such as community service, cross-*vihara* programs, organizational meetings, and personal development sessions are seen as learning mediums through which youth can understand Buddhayana in a contextual manner. This active involvement is considered more effective than lectures or rote learning because it allows youth to connect Buddhayana values with concrete experiences in daily life.

Beyond active involvement, the second strategy identified is the cultivation of social values in daily interactions. Informant B emphasized the importance of building attitudes of mutual respect, mutual assistance, and mutual encouragement as a foundation before exploring more abstract concepts of Buddhayana. He noted that values such as tolerance, empathy, and cooperation must first be practiced within small groups before youth participate in larger activities. This habituation functions as an “ethical laboratory” that allows youth to practice Buddhayana values on a micro level within interpersonal relationships. These findings indicate that the internalization of Buddhayana values begins with simple yet consistent everyday practices, not solely with large-scale activities.

The third emerging strategy is early education as a foundation for regeneration and value preservation. Informant C stressed that the process of cultivating an understanding of Buddhayana should begin at a young age so that youth develop stronger emotional attachment and comprehension as they mature. He explained that “children must be introduced to Sekber early... so they are prepared to become successors,” indicating that training is considered less effective if it begins only during adolescence. In this sense, early education becomes a long-term strategy to ensure organizational continuity and intergenerational transmission of Buddhayana values. Sekber is therefore perceived not merely as a youth organization but as a tiered training platform that prepares members from childhood to adulthood.

The fourth strategy highlighted in the findings involves cross-*vihara* activities that are collaborative and dialogical in nature. Informants stated that activities such as *vihara* visits, youth camps, inter-traditional discussions, and joint celebrations of Buddhist holy days provide direct experience of the diversity within

Indonesian Buddhism. Through these activities, youth observe the practical implementation of Buddhayana values—such as how different rituals can coexist, how inter-traditional dialogue can occur peacefully, and how inter-community cooperation embodies nonsectarianism and pluralism. Thus, cross-*vihara* engagement is not merely a social activity but also a medium for reinforcing the understanding of Buddhayana values (Gokhale, 2021).

Another identified strategy is informal mentoring by senior members or organizational leaders, which takes place through advice, exemplary conduct, and everyday behavioral models. Informants noted that the way seniors resolve conflicts, manage activities, and offer motivation serves as a significant learning process for youth. This mentoring reflects a role-model-based learning approach, in which youth learn Buddhayana values not only through verbal instruction but also through observing the behavior of informal community leaders. Through this process, youth witness the embodiment of values such as compassion, patience, and wisdom in concrete actions.

In addition, the findings show that the limited availability of formal learning materials leads Sekber to rely heavily on experience-based and interaction-based strategies. Informants acknowledged that no standardized module currently explains Buddhayana values systematically for youth. However, this gap is addressed through routine activities, internal meetings, and discussions with organizational leaders. Although experiential learning is perceived as effective, this situation also highlights the need for more structured training materials to ensure that youth develop not only practical but also conceptual understanding.

Overall, these findings indicate that the strategies used to enhance understanding of Buddhayana within Sekber PMVBI Boyolali are participatory, relational, and multilayered. Youth understanding develops through a combination of active involvement, value habituation in daily life, early education, cross-community engagement, and mentoring by senior members. This process shows that the internalization of Buddhayana values is not merely cognitive but deeply social, shaped by interaction, shared experiences, and community dynamics. The findings also highlight the need for comprehensive training strategies—ranging from the individual to the community level—to ensure that Buddhayana values remain vibrant and relevant among younger generations.

**Table 3. Strategies Used by Sekber Members to Enhance Their Understanding of Buddhayana**

<b>Main Strategy</b>	<b>Explanation of Findings</b>	<b>Forms of Implementation / Examples of Practice</b>
1. Active Participation in Activities	Understanding of Buddhayana is viewed as developing through direct participation rather than doctrinal memorization.	Joining Sekber activities, community service, meetings, cross- <i>vihara</i> programs.
2. Habituation of Values in Daily Interactions	Buddhayana values are learned through simple practices within social relationships.	Showing mutual respect, motivating peers, cooperating in small groups.
3. Early Education for Regeneration	Training from a young age is considered important so that understanding of Buddhayana becomes more deeply rooted.	Introducing Sekber to children, youth-focused programs, early-stage mentoring.
4. Cross- <i>Vihara</i> Collaborative Activities	Understanding of Buddhayana values is strengthened through direct encounters with diversity.	<i>Vihara</i> visits, inter-traditional discussions, joint celebrations of Buddhist holy days.
5. Informal Mentoring by Senior Members	Training occurs through exemplary behavior, advice, and personal guidance.	Seniors accompanying youth, modeling leadership and conflict resolution.
6. Experience-Based Learning (due to limited formal materials)	The absence of standardized modules makes experiential learning dominant.	Spontaneous discussions, learning during activities, group reflections.

The table illustrates that the strategies for enhancing Buddhayana understanding within Sekber PMVBI Boyolali are dominated by experience-based and socially interactive approaches. Youth develop their understanding not through structured doctrinal study but through active participation in organizational activities, value habituation in daily interactions, and informal mentoring from senior members. These strategies are reinforced by cross-*vihara* activities that expose youth to the diversity of Buddhist traditions and allow them to practice Buddhayana values in real settings. Early education also emerges as an important strategy to ensure continuity of understanding and organizational regeneration. Although formal learning materials are limited, training remains dynamic and

practice-based, demonstrating that Buddhayana understanding grows through community interactions and collective experiences. Overall, the table reflects that Sekber's training strategies are holistic, relational, and oriented toward participatory learning (Yusna, 2021).

Based on the interview findings, Sekber PMVBI Boyolali members recognize that strengthening their understanding of Buddhayana cannot be achieved through doctrinal memorization or theoretical learning alone. They emphasize that young Buddhists can develop their understanding of Buddhayana values only through direct experience in organizational activities and social interactions grounded in those values. The informants expressed that active youth involvement in Sekber activities, cultivation of mutual respect in everyday life, early-stage education, cross-*vihara* engagement, and informal mentoring by seniors are the primary strategies perceived as effective in fostering sustainable understanding of Buddhayana. They also acknowledged that the lack of formal learning materials makes organizational experience and senior modeling the main sources of learning for youth. Therefore, training strategies in Sekber tend to be practical and social, emphasizing character formation and value internalization through lived experience rather than doctrinal instruction.

From the collected data, several significant patterns emerge regarding how Buddhayana training strategies are implemented in Sekber PMVBI Boyolali. First, the strategies strongly emphasize active youth involvement in organizational activities as the primary method of building understanding. This pattern indicates that experience-based learning is considered more effective than lectures or written materials. Youth are believed to understand Buddhayana values when they encounter them directly through social activities, collective rituals, and cross-community engagement.

Second, the findings indicate that training relies heavily on habituating social interactions that reflect Buddhayana values, such as respect, empathy, and cooperation. This approach reinforces that value internalization begins with simple, everyday practices before being strengthened through larger-scale activities. It also illustrates that Buddhayana value formation is seen as a gradual social process that requires continuity.

Third, all informants emphasized the importance of early education as the foundation for regeneration. They believe that introducing Buddhayana from an early age fosters emotional attachment and greater responsibility toward the organization as youth mature. This pattern reflects Sekber's long-term orientation in preparing future generations who not only understand Buddhayana values but are also committed to their preservation.

Fourth, cross-*vihara* activities and informal mentoring by senior members strengthen youth understanding of Buddhist diversity and Buddhayana values. Through cross-*vihara* programs, youth directly encounter diverse rituals and cultural expressions within Indonesian Buddhism, enabling them to practice nonsectarianism and inclusivism in concrete ways. Meanwhile, mentoring by seniors provides behavioral models that demonstrate how Buddhayana values are applied in leadership and organizational management. This pattern shows that youth learning is shaped significantly by role models and community dynamics.

These patterns lead to the preliminary conclusion that strategies for enhancing Buddhayana understanding in Sekber PMVBI Boyolali rely heavily on social interaction, direct experience, and multilayered training processes within the community. Training does not focus solely on cognitive aspects but emphasizes value internalization through participation, role modeling, and cross-tradition engagement. These findings affirm that youth understanding of Buddhayana develops primarily through community dynamics and socio-religious practices embedded in organizational life.

## DISCUSSION

This study produced three main findings regarding the understanding of Buddhayana among members of Sekber PMVBI Boyolali. First, the informants understand Buddhayana primarily as a unifying framework that integrates the three major Buddhist traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—rather than as a distinct sect or new school. They view Buddhayana as an integrative structure created to maintain the unity of Buddhists in Indonesia. Second, their understanding of Buddhayana values centers on five principles: nonsectarianism, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in *Dharmakaya*. These values are interpreted primarily in social and ethical terms rather than as complex theological doctrines. Third, the informants believe that efforts to enhance understanding of Buddhayana must be carried out through direct involvement in Sekber activities, habituation of social values, and early organizational introduction to ensure effective regeneration. Together, these findings show that young Buddhayana members understand Buddhayana in practical and social ways, with limited theological depth.

Several factors explain why the findings reflect a practical and social understanding of Buddhayana. First, the patterns of training in *vihara* and Sekber environments tend to emphasize social and community-based activities rather than deep theological study. This orientation makes it easier for youth to understand Buddhayana as a guide for interpersonal interaction rather than a philosophical construct. Second, the historical development of Buddhayana in Indonesia, rooted in Ashin Jinarakkhita's efforts to unify the Buddhist community, shapes the perception that Buddhayana is a nonsectarian movement prioritizing unity. This historical background directly influences how youth conceptualize Buddhayana as a symbol of togetherness. Third, the characteristics of youth development in the digital era—where learning often occurs through direct experience—reinforce the tendency to understand Buddhayana values through collective activities rather than theoretical instruction. These factors explain why the informants' theological understanding is relatively limited while their social understanding is more developed and consistent.

The findings align with several studies on Buddhist youth and Buddhayana organizations in Indonesia. Haudi, Rudy and Grace (2021) highlight the role of Buddhayana as a unifying movement that provides an effective dialogical space across Buddhist traditions, consistent with this study's finding that Sekber members view Buddhayana as an integrative platform. Similarly, Ismoyo et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of inter-sectarian values in Buddhist community development in Lampung, particularly in maintaining harmony and inter-traditional

cooperation, which aligns with informants' interpretations of nonsectarianism and inclusivism. However, this study contributes new insight by focusing on the perspectives of Buddhayana youth at the district level—an understudied domain—and illustrating how their understanding is formed through social rather than theological mechanisms. Few studies have examined the internalization of Buddhayana values through organizational practices at the grassroots level, and this study therefore expands the understanding of Buddhayana training patterns in local communities.

Historically, the findings indicate that the intellectual legacy of Ashin Jinarakkhita continues to exert strong influence on young Buddhayana members, particularly in how they understand Buddhayana as a framework uniting the three major Buddhist traditions. This pattern resonates with the context of Indonesia's Buddhist revivalism during the 1950s–1970s, when Jinarakkhita played a central role in constructing an integrative Buddhist model compatible with postcolonial Indonesian nationalism (Bloembergen, 2023; Steenbrink, 2013). His unification efforts were not only theological but also socio-political, negotiated within a predominantly Muslim society and a state still formulating its religious identity. The Sekber youths' perception of Buddhayana as a nonsectarian movement reflects the historical continuity of this integrative project, especially as contemporary youth organizations continue the spirit of Buddhist revivalism through social practices and cross-*vihara* activities (Rizzo, 2024). The findings also show that the perception of Buddhayana as a symbol of unity remains relevant today, particularly amid ongoing competition over ritual and denominational identity within Indonesian Buddhism (Buaban, 2025). Thus, today's Sekber members' understanding of Buddhayana cannot be separated from the long trajectory of Indonesian Buddhist revivalism that shaped its historical, social, and ideological orientation as a unifying movement.

Socially, the findings indicate that Buddhayana values function as an ethical framework that promotes inter-*vihara* cohesion in Boyolali. This is evident in the way youth emphasize tolerance, openness, and cooperation as foundations for cross-community interaction. This pattern aligns with studies on Buddhist inter-community cohesion that highlight the role of ethical values, shared practices, and local traditions in fostering mutual respect (Jayadi, 2025). The nonsectarian orientation of Buddhayana also parallels the principles of engaged Buddhism, which prioritizes peaceful relations and cross-group coexistence (King, 2020). In several transnational Buddhist communities, cohesion is strengthened through collective activities and routine encounters that build solidarity across backgrounds (Bártová, 2014), a pattern also observed within Sekber Boyolali. Moreover, the emphasis on harmony and peaceful conflict resolution mirrors broader Buddhist principles that center on mediation and negotiation as means to maintain communal unity (Mukhametzaripov & Kozlov, 2024). The Sekber youths' perception of Buddhayana as a social mechanism for unity therefore indicates that Buddhayana values function as an ethical glue, reinforcing solidarity and fostering togetherness within Boyolali's diverse intra-Buddhist landscape.

Ideologically, the findings show that the youths understand Buddhayana not as a rigid doctrinal system but as an ideology of unity that shapes their religious identity. Nonsectarianism and universalism provide the foundation for interpreting

inter-traditional difference as a source of richness rather than conflict, allowing Buddhayana to function as an inclusive identity framework. This finding aligns with literature on Buddhist identity formation, which posits that youth religious identity emerges from the integration of symbolic beliefs, social experience, and cultural context (Sugimura, Matsushima, Hihara, Takahashi, & Crocetti, 2019). Zalta (2016) further argues that Buddhist practices such as mindfulness and the concept of *anatta* contribute to the deconstruction of rigid identity boundaries, encouraging inclusive and dialogical orientations—a pattern similarly reflected in youths' rejection of sectarianism. This phenomenon also parallels developments in various Buddhist communities globally, where Buddhist identity is adapted to social and historical contexts (Markov, 2021). Thus, interpreting Buddhayana as an ideology of unity reflects not only internal dynamics of Indonesian Buddhism but also broader global tendencies in the construction of contemporary Buddhist identity through ethical values, collective experience, and cultural adaptation.

The findings also have important functional implications for organizational life. On a functional level, the practical and social understanding of Buddhayana strengthens inter-*vihara* youth solidarity, facilitates cross-community cooperation, and fosters a harmonious organizational environment. This practical orientation also enables easier internalization of Buddhayana values because they align closely with the everyday experiences of youth. However, the findings also reveal a significant dysfunction within the training process: the limited theological understanding of Buddhayana values among youth, particularly regarding the doctrinal meaning of *Dharmakaya*. This limited conceptual depth causes youth to perceive Buddhayana primarily as a social ethic rather than a structured teaching system, which leaves room for shallow interpretations and potential misconceptions, such as the belief that Buddhayana is a “sect.”

This phenomenon corresponds to studies documenting weak doctrinal literacy in contemporary Buddhist communities, where fundamental concepts such as *anātman*, karma, and *tathāgatagarbha* are often understood partially and disconnected from their philosophical context (Cho, 2017; Hartmann, 2023; Schneider, 2021). This lack of comprehensive doctrinal understanding may influence religious identity formation, as observed in studies of doctrinal shifts in modern Buddhist communities that tend to reduce teachings to moral practices or cultural symbols (Zamorski, 2023). If left unaddressed, this limited theological understanding may weaken the organization's long-term ideological resilience, affect the continuity of Buddhayana identity, and diminish the ability of future generations to sustain the intellectual heritage of the Buddhist tradition.

To address these dysfunctions and strengthen youth understanding, several strategic actions are necessary. First, Sekber PMVBI should develop training modules on Buddhayana values that incorporate historical, doctrinal, and social dimensions for use in both formal and informal educational settings. Such modules would reduce misconceptions and deepen youths' theological understanding. Second, a systematic cross-*vihara* leadership development program should be established so that youth can learn through direct experience while receiving mentorship from seniors with profound knowledge of Buddhayana. Third, the organization should design early education programs for children post-Sunday school, enabling them to learn about Buddhayana's history, identity, and values from

an early age to ensure effective regeneration. Fourth, more structured discussions, seminars, and inter-traditional dialogues should be implemented to support the balanced development of *Buddhayana* understanding in both academic and social contexts. By implementing these action plans, young Buddhists' understanding of *Buddhayana* can become more comprehensive and sustainable.

## CONCLUSION

This study presents three key findings regarding the understanding of *Buddhayana* among youth members of the Sekber PMVBI in Boyolali. First, the members primarily understand *Buddhayana* as a unifying framework for Buddhists across different traditions, rather than as a distinct school or sect. Their understanding emphasizes inclusivity, openness, and nonsectarian principles, which they consider relevant to the religious life of contemporary Buddhist youth. Second, they interpret *Buddhayana* values mainly through social dimensions—such as tolerance, togetherness, and inter-vihara collaboration—while doctrinal or theological aspects receive less attention. Third, the enhancement of *Buddhayana* understanding develops through direct experience, cross-vihara activities, and internal mentoring; however, conceptual understanding remains limited due to the lack of historical modules and formal educational materials on *Buddhayana*.

Academically, this study contributes to the field in three ways. First, it provides new empirical data on how Buddhist youth understand *Buddhayana* within a cross-vihara organizational context—a topic rarely examined in Indonesian Buddhist studies. Second, the findings reveal a unique pattern: the youths' interpretation of *Buddhayana* is predominantly social-practical rather than doctrinal-theological, thereby enriching scholarship on the formation of religious identity among younger generations. Third, the study offers new insight into the role of the Sekber as a social space that cultivates a culture of togetherness and nonsectarianism within Indonesia's diverse Buddhist traditions.

This study also has several limitations. Methodologically, the small number of informants and the focus on Boyolali mean that the findings cannot yet be generalized to other *Buddhayana* communities in Indonesia. Substantively, the depth of theological analysis is limited because most informants possess practical rather than academic knowledge. In addition, the study captures only the perspectives of youth members and does not compare them with views held by senior leaders, Dharma teachers, or the broader *Buddhayana* organizational structure. Future research should therefore involve more informants across different regions, apply a stronger historical–doctrinal approach, and compare the perceptions of youth with those of older generations in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding.

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