

From Contemplation to Pedagogy: A Three-Level *Mettā* Model in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*

ABSTRACT

The dominance of cognitive orientation in modern education limits attention to students' character development, empathy, and emotional maturity. This study analyzes the teaching of *mettā* in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* and formulates its relevance as an ethical-pedagogical foundation for loving-kindness-based education. The study employed a qualitative approach through a literature review of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*, academic books, and relevant journal articles. The findings show that *mettā* operates at three interconnected levels. At the intrapersonal level, *mettā* develops self-awareness, emotional regulation, humility, and moral consistency. At the interpersonal level, *mettā* guides nonviolent communication, respect for dignity, nondiscriminatory treatment, and restorative conflict resolution. At the institutional level, educational institutions translate *mettā* into curricula, disciplinary practices, protection mechanisms, and inclusive school cultures. This study contributes to the strengthening of character education and the creation of educational environments that support emotional well-being. Its originality lies in the formulation of a three-level *mettā* pedagogy model that connects inner development, educational relationships, and institutional governance.

Keywords: Buddhist character education; emotional well-being; *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*; *mettā* pedagogy model; pedagogical ethics.

ARTICLE INFO

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Article History:

Received: 08-01- 2026
Revised: 16-03- 2026
Accepted: 12-05-2026
Published: 30-06-2026

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How to Cite (APA Style):

Widyastuti, E. and
Sukarti, S. (2026). From
Contemplation to
Pedagogy: A Three-Level
Mettā Model in the
Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta.
*Subhasita: Journal of
Buddhist and Religious
Studies*, 4(1), 55-76.
DOI: 10.53417/jsb.187

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INTRODUCTION

Education not only transmits knowledge but also develops students' ability to regulate emotions, respect others, and build dignified social relationships. However, contemporary educational practice still tends to measure success through academic achievement, test scores, and mastery of cognitive competencies (Shakya, 2015). This orientation often places empathy, care, self-control, and moral responsibility in a secondary position. Consequently, improvements in academic achievement do not always correspond with emotional maturity or with students' ability to treat others humanely.

This issue becomes increasingly urgent as mental health problems continue to affect adolescents on a broad scale. The World Health Organization reports that one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 experiences a mental disorder, while

depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders constitute major causes of illness and disability within this age group (World Health Organization) (WHO, 2025). In Indonesia, the Indonesia–National Adolescent Mental Health Survey found that 34.9% of adolescents experienced mental health problems and 5.5% experienced mental disorders during the previous 12 months (Wahdi, Wilopo, & Erskine, 2023). These figures represent approximately 15.5 million adolescents with mental health problems and 2.45 million adolescents with mental disorders. These data do not directly prove that cognitively oriented education causes mental disorders. However, they indicate that education that focuses only on academic achievement cannot adequately address students' emotional and social needs.

Violence and bullying in educational settings represent another major concern. UNESCO reports that approximately one in three students worldwide experiences bullying at school each month, while more than 36% of students engage in physical fights with their peers (UNESCO, 2019). PISA 2022 data also show that 25% of female students and 30% of male students in Indonesia experienced bullying at least several times per month. These percentages exceed the OECD averages of 20% for female students and 21% for male students (OECD, 2023). These findings indicate that schools do not always provide safe, inclusive environments that support students' human development. Therefore, education requires an ethical foundation that not only teaches values verbally but also guides thoughts, speech, actions, and patterns of interaction within learning environments.

Within this context, the teaching of *mettā* in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* deserves examination as a source of pedagogical ethics. *Mettā* does not merely refer to affectionate feelings; it describes an inner orientation that wishes happiness, safety, and freedom from suffering for all beings. This orientation requires self-control, humility, freedom from hatred, non-harmful speech, and nondiscriminatory action. Therefore, *mettā* has both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions: individuals must cultivate their inner condition and express loving-kindness through concrete relationships. These characteristics create the possibility of developing the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* from a contemplative teaching into an ethical framework for interactions among educators, students, and school communities (Buddharakkhita, 2020).

Research on *mettā* has developed along at least three major lines. The first line treats *mettā* as a doctrinal, philosophical, and ethical concept within the Buddhist tradition. Khin (2025) identifies principles of *mettā* from the Pāli Canon and its commentaries as the foundation for cultivating loving-kindness. Patel (2013) discusses the practice of *mettābhāvanā* in traditional and popular Buddhist contexts, while Buddharakkhita (2020) presents *mettā* as both a philosophy and a practice of universal love. Studies of the *brahmavihāra* also emphasize the relationship between *mettā*, human values, morality, wisdom, and social harmony (Das, 2025; Phosrikham, Peykao, & Taisrikhot, 2025). These studies clarify the normative and philosophical foundations of *mettā*. However, they primarily focus on doctrinal explanations and do not systematically formulate how educational institutions can translate the principles of *mettā* into educational goals, relationships, methods, and cultures.

The second line of research views *mettā* as a contemplative practice and a source of psychological well-being. Trungpa (2005) connects mind training with the

cultivation of loving-kindness, while Hofmann et al. (2011) explain the potential of loving-kindness and compassion meditation for psychological interventions. Shonin et al. (2015) also identify Buddhist-derived loving-kindness and compassion meditation as a potentially useful approach to the treatment of psychopathology. Meanwhile, Thondup (2021) and Griffin (2022) describe loving-kindness as a practice that can support healing and foster a more mindful way of life. This line of research extends *mettā* from a religious concept into a psychological practice. Nevertheless, it still concentrates mainly on changes in an individual's inner condition. Researchers have given less attention to the relational and institutional dimensions of *mettā*, especially within pedagogical interactions and the development of school culture.

The third line of research examines *mettā* in relation to social life, conflict resolution, and engaged Buddhism. Siddhi et al. (2018) develop an integrated *mettā*-based method for managing conflict in modern societies. King (2023) identifies mindfulness, compassion, and skillful means as essential elements of engaged Buddhism. In the context of interreligious dialogue, Lai and Rouyan (2022) compare self-love and altruistic love in Buddhist thought with Christian theological reflection. These studies show that loving-kindness produces social consequences and does not remain confined to personal spiritual experience. However, they focus more heavily on social conflict, public engagement, and theological dialogue than on education as a space for developing ethical relationships from an early stage.

These three lines of research demonstrate that the study of *mettā* remains fragmented. Doctrinal studies explain its normative foundations but do not translate them into pedagogical practice. Psychological studies emphasize contemplative and therapeutic benefits but tend to position *mettā* as an individual exercise. Social studies reveal its relevance to conflict resolution but do not explain how education can cultivate loving-kindness. Research that specifically constructs the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* as an ethical-pedagogical framework connecting inner cultivation, educational interaction, character formation, and institutional culture remains limited. This limitation creates a need to examine *mettā* not only as a positive emotion or meditation technique but also as a principle that guides the entire educational process.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the ethical structure of *mettā* in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, formulate its relevance to pedagogical practice, and explain its contribution to character education and students' emotional well-being. More specifically, this study examines how educational institutions can translate the principle of universal loving-kindness into the self-management of educators and students, non-harmful language, nondiscriminatory relationships, conflict resolution, and the development of safe and inclusive learning environments. Through this focus, the study integrates the philosophical, psychological, and social dimensions of *mettā* into a unified educational framework.

This study argues that *mettā* is neither merely an affective feeling nor simply a meditation technique; rather, it constitutes a pedagogical praxis that operates at three levels. At the intrapersonal level, *mettā* shapes the regulation of thoughts, emotions, and moral intentions. At the interpersonal level, *mettā* guides nonviolent communication, empathy, care, and nondiscriminatory treatment. At the institutional level, *mettā* provides a foundation for developing a peaceful and

inclusive educational culture oriented toward collective well-being. This argument extends previous studies that primarily locate *mettā* within doctrinal and contemplative frameworks by repositioning it within a pedagogical-relational framework. Therefore, this study not only affirms the dimension of universal love within the theory of *mettā* but also identifies education as an institutional arena for actualizing loving-kindness through thoughts, speech, actions, and social relationships.

METHOD

This study analyzes the concept of *mettā* in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* and its relevance to educational practice. The analysis focuses on ethical principles related to self-control, universal loving-kindness, nonviolent communication, social concern, and the development of a humane learning environment. The study does not examine ritual practices or the doctrinal truth of Buddhist teachings. Instead, it examines ethical and pedagogical meanings that educators can apply in character education.

This study employed a qualitative research design. The researchers selected this design because the study examines a religious text, philosophical concepts, and educational ideas that require in-depth interpretation. The qualitative design enabled the researchers to identify meanings, principles, and conceptual relationships between the teaching of *mettā* and educational practice in a systematic manner. This approach also supported the formulation of an ethical-pedagogical framework through the synthesis of various scholarly sources.

The study used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary source consisted of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*. The secondary sources included books, national and international journal articles, and previous studies that discuss *mettā*, *mettābhāvanā*, *brahmavihāra*, loving-kindness, character education, empathy, emotional well-being, and conflict resolution. The researchers selected the literature based on thematic relevance, publisher credibility, academic significance, and alignment with the research objectives.

The researchers collected the data through a literature review by searching for, selecting, reading, and classifying relevant sources. The data collection process began with the identification of passages in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* that contain principles of loving-kindness and ethical conduct. The researchers then searched for secondary literature by using the keywords *mettā*, loving-kindness, *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, character education, empathy, and loving-kindness-based education. Afterward, they classified the data into doctrinal, psychological, social, and pedagogical themes.

The researchers analyzed the data through thematic content analysis. The analysis involved five stages: close reading of the sources, coding of key concepts, organization of the codes into themes, comparison of findings across sources, and development of theoretical interpretations. The researchers mapped the findings into three main dimensions: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional. This process produced a synthesis that positions *mettā* as an inner disposition, an ethical practice, and a pedagogical foundation for character formation and the development of peaceful, inclusive, and humane educational environments.

RESULT

1. *Mettā as an Intrapersonal Ethical Discipline in Education*

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* presents loving-kindness not as a spontaneous emotion but as an ethical discipline that requires moral readiness before individuals direct it toward others. The text first establishes personal qualities such as competence, honesty, integrity, gentleness, humility, simplicity, and sensory calmness. Its statement that a person should be “capable and honest, truly honest, humble, gentle, and free from conceit” indicates that *mettā* cannot be separated from the formation of inner character (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, verse 1; Amaravati Sangha, 2004). This structure matters because loving-kindness without self-control can remain a normative ideal without behavioral consistency. By contrast, inner readiness enables individuals to regulate their intentions, restrain egoistic impulses, and direct their emotions so that they do not develop into harmful speech or actions. Thus, *mettā* moves from the inner self toward social relationships: a mind free from hatred provides the foundation for conduct that respects the dignity of others.

The intrapersonal structure of *mettā* consists of six interrelated elements: awareness of thoughts and intentions, regulation of negative emotions, simplicity and contentment, humility, calmness in responding to circumstances, and consistency between values and actions. These six elements show that *mettā* does not operate through affective impulses alone but through continuous self-monitoring. Awareness of intention prevents individuals from performing moral actions merely as formal obligations, while emotional regulation limits anger, hatred, and the impulse to demean others. Simplicity, contentment, and humility also reduce egoistic tendencies that can turn relationships into spaces of domination. At the same time, calmness allows individuals to respond proportionately rather than reactively. Therefore, consistency between values and actions becomes an essential measure of *mettā*: loving-kindness loses its ethical meaning when individuals express it verbally but fail to embody it through non-harmful conduct. This interpretation aligns with the view that individuals must cultivate *mettā* as a deliberate inner practice and embody it concretely in everyday life (Buddharakkhita, 2020; Gunaratana, 2017; Khin, 2025).

Table 1. The Structure of Intrapersonal Ethical Discipline in *Mettā*-Based Education

Intrapersonal element	Basis in the <i>Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta</i>	Ethical meaning	Pedagogical implication
Awareness of thoughts and intentions	Competence, honesty, and integrity	Individuals recognize their motives before speaking or acting	Educators and students consider the purpose and consequences of their actions
Regulation of negative emotions	Calm senses and careful judgment	Individuals do not immediately express anger, hatred, or	Educators and students respond to mistakes

		aggressive impulses	reflectively rather than reactively
Simplicity and contentment	Contentment, modest needs, and a simple way of life	Individuals reduce attachment to personal interests and social recognition	Educational relationships do not revolve around competition, prestige, or self-interest
Humility	Gentleness and freedom from conceit	Individuals do not use authority to dominate others	Educators remain firm without undermining students' dignity
Calmness in responding to circumstances	Sensory calmness and carefulness	Individuals choose proportionate responses	Educators apply correction, discipline, and problem-solving in a controlled manner
Consistency between values and actions	Avoiding even minor actions that wise people would criticize	Individuals measure loving-kindness through consistency among intention, speech, and action	Educators and students embody <i>mettā</i> through ethical example, non-harmful language, and fair conduct

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (Amaravati Sangha, 2004), Buddharakkhita (2020), Gunaratana (2017), and Khin (2025).

Within education, educators must become the first actors to internalize *mettā* because the quality of pedagogical relationships depends heavily on how they regulate emotions, exercise authority, and respond to students' mistakes. The teaching of loving-kindness loses its legitimacy when educators communicate it through threats, humiliation, or punishment that undermines human dignity. Therefore, moral example must precede verbal instruction. Calmness and self-control enable educators to distinguish between correcting inappropriate behavior and rejecting the student as a person. This distinction matters because reactive pedagogical actions often turn discipline into an outlet for emotion rather than a process for cultivating responsibility. Within the framework of *mettā*, educators do not abandon authority; instead, they exercise it proportionately, nondiscriminatorily, and with an orientation toward improvement. Educators may still establish boundaries and impose consequences, but they must protect students' self-respect and create opportunities for reflection and change. Thus, the internalization of *mettā* positions educators not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as ethical role models who demonstrate patience, openness, and care in everyday educational practice (Buddharakkhita, 2020; Griffin, 2022; Gunaratana, 2017).

For students, the intrapersonal dimension of *mettā* provides an ethical foundation for self-awareness, emotional regulation, patience, and moral

responsibility (see Table 1). Awareness of thoughts and intentions helps students recognize anger, envy, fear, or aggressive impulses before those impulses develop into harmful speech and actions. Within this framework, self-control does not require emotional suppression. Instead, it requires students to understand their emotions, assess their consequences, and choose more appropriate responses. This interpretation matters because character education often emphasizes compliance without allowing students to understand the inner processes that shape their behavior. *Mettā* corrects this tendency by defining moral responsibility as the ability to connect inner conditions with social consequences. Educators do not merely direct students to avoid wrongdoing because they fear punishment; they also help students understand that every word and action can affect the dignity and well-being of others. Therefore, the intrapersonal structure of *mettā* can provide a conceptual foundation for education that develops reflective, nonreactive individuals who consider the interests of others when making moral decisions (Gunaratana, 2017; Khin, 2025; Siddhi et al., 2018).

Intrapersonal discipline therefore serves as a prerequisite for the realization of *mettā* in social relationships. Individuals cannot embody loving-kindness consistently unless they can regulate their intentions, recognize their emotions, and control their responses. In education, a failure to manage inner conditions can transform authority into domination, correction into punishment, and communication into degradation. By contrast, self-awareness and emotional regulation enable educators and students to build relationships that remain reflective, proportionate, and respectful of human dignity. The intrapersonal dimension should therefore not be understood as an individual exercise isolated from social life. Instead, it provides the ethical foundation that determines the quality of speech, action, and interaction within educational environments. From this foundation, *mettā* develops into a relational ethic that guides individuals to treat others without hatred, discrimination, or violence.

2. *Mettā* as Relational Ethics in Pedagogical Interactions

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* extends loving-kindness to all beings without distinguishing among their strength, size, visibility, distance, or stage of life. The text includes beings “whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,” “the seen and the unseen,” “those living near and far away,” and “those born and to be born” (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, verses 4–5) (Sangha, 2004). This scope demonstrates that *mettā* does not depend on emotional closeness, shared identity, social usefulness, or hierarchical position. Instead, it rests on the recognition of the inherent value of life. Therefore, loving-kindness in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* rejects the tendency to evaluate others according to their abilities, status, achievements, backgrounds, or personal proximity. In education, this principle challenges pedagogical relationships that give greater attention to high-achieving, compliant, or personally favored students while marginalizing students whom educators perceive as weak, problematic, or different. The universality of *mettā* requires educators to treat every student as a subject of equal dignity, even when students demonstrate different abilities, needs, and personal characteristics. Thus, *mettā* provides an ethical foundation for nondiscriminatory pedagogical practice because loving-kindness

does not depend on the perceived worthiness of its recipient. Instead, it reflects a moral commitment to promote the safety and happiness of all parties (Buddharakkhita, 2020; Gunaratana, 2017; Khin, 2025).

The relational principle of *mettā* becomes more concrete when the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* prohibits deception, contempt, hatred, and the desire for others to suffer. The text declares, “Do not harm others or despise anyone” (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, verse 6) (Sangha, 2004). This prohibition indicates that individuals cannot express loving-kindness solely through abstract goodwill. They must embody it through their thoughts, speech, and actions. At the level of thought, *mettā* requires individuals to refrain from harboring hatred or imagining the suffering of others. At the level of speech, *mettā* rejects language that insults, humiliates, stigmatizes, or degrades human dignity. At the level of action, *mettā* prevents conduct that produces fear, alienation, and suffering. These three channels shape one another because harmful speech and actions often arise from thoughts dominated by anger, prejudice, or the desire to control others. In pedagogical interactions, this principle challenges the assumption that educators may justify humiliation or intimidation in the name of discipline. Educators still need to correct inappropriate behavior, but they must direct the correction toward behavioral improvement rather than the destruction of students’ self-worth. Therefore, *mettā* establishes an ethics of communication that connects inner self-control with the social responsibility to avoid causing suffering through words or actions (Buddharakkhita, 2020; Siddhi et al., 2018).

In relationships between educators and students, *mettā* requires educators to maintain firm discipline without turning correction into humiliation. Educators should use corrective language that clearly explains the mistake, the consequences of the behavior, and the steps required for improvement. They should not use language that attacks a student’s personal identity. The distinction between inappropriate behavior and the dignity of the person who committed it remains essential because labels such as “lazy,” “naughty,” or “incapable” can transform a situational mistake into a lasting stigma. At the same time, educators must provide attention without discrimination, including to students who demonstrate limited academic ability, display challenging behavior, or come from different backgrounds. For students, relationships grounded in *mettā* encourage careful listening, respect for differences, regulation of aggressive responses, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Therefore, *mettā*-based education does not eliminate rules or consequences. Instead, *mettā* directs educators to apply rules proportionately, consistently, and with an orientation toward relational restoration and moral responsibility rather than retaliation. Within this framework, discipline develops awareness and improves behavior while preserving the dignity of everyone involved (Ma Rhea, 2018; Siddhi et al., 2018).

In conflict resolution, *mettā* shifts relational orientation from retaliation toward understanding, self-control, and relational restoration. The practice of loving-kindness helps individuals reduce hostility by directing their attention toward the suffering, needs, and dignity of others. As a result, they no longer understand conflict merely as a struggle to determine winners and losers. Within this framework, empathy does not stop at the ability to recognize another person’s feelings. It develops into an ethical commitment to avoid increasing suffering

through thoughts, speech, or actions. Siddhi et al. (2018) show that individuals can integrate the principle of *mettā* into conflict management by reducing hatred, regulating emotional reactions, and seeking resolutions that preserve social relationships. Similarly, King (2023) identifies compassion and skillful means as essential elements of ethical responses to social tension, while Hofmann et al. (2011) and Shonin et al. (2015) demonstrate that loving-kindness and compassion practices may reduce negative affect and strengthen prosocial attitudes. In education, this orientation prevents conflict resolution from ending with sanctions alone. It also requires acknowledgment of wrongdoing, understanding of the consequences of harmful behavior, restoration of safety, and reconstruction of relationships among the parties involved. Thus, *mettā*-based conflict resolution does not eliminate accountability. Instead, it rejects retaliation as its primary objective and treats relational restoration as a measure of ethical success.

Overall, *mettā* establishes a pattern of pedagogical relationships based on four principal elements: respect for dignity, nonviolent communication, nondiscriminatory treatment, and restorative conflict resolution. These four elements remain interconnected and inseparable. Respect for dignity prevents educators and students from treating others as objects that they may degrade. Nonviolent communication ensures that they express correction, criticism, and disagreement without humiliation. Nondiscriminatory treatment rejects the evaluation of human worth according to achievement, personal closeness, background, or ability. Restorative conflict resolution directs discipline toward acknowledgment of wrongdoing, restoration of safety, and improvement of relationships. This framework demonstrates that learning content alone does not determine the quality of educational relationships. The ways in which educators exercise authority, respond to differences, and resolve conflicts also shape those relationships. Therefore, *mettā* functions as a relational ethic that guides how educators and students perceive others, communicate with others, and act when they encounter mistakes, differences, and conflicts within educational environments.

Table 2. The Structure of *Mettā*-Based Relational Ethics in Pedagogical Interactions

Relational principle of <i>mettā</i>	Basis in the <i>Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta</i>	Pedagogical problem challenged	Application in educational interactions	Relational orientation
Respect for universal dignity	Loving-kindness includes the weak and the strong, the great and the small, the near and the far, and the seen and the unseen	Evaluation of students according to achievement, ability, status, or personal closeness	Educators recognize every student as a valuable subject who deserves attention	Equality of dignity

Relational principle of mettā	Basis in the <i>Karaṇiya Mettā Sutta</i>	Pedagogical problem challenged	Application in educational interactions	Relational orientation
Nondiscriminatory treatment	“May all beings be at ease” without exception	Favoritism, marginalization, stereotyping, and neglect of students whom educators consider problematic	Educators provide opportunities, attention, protection, and support according to students’ needs	Inclusivity and justice
Nonviolent communication	The prohibition against deception, contempt, hatred, and wishing suffering upon others	Humiliation, intimidation, labeling, threats, and criticism that attacks personal identity	Educators communicate corrections clearly without embarrassing or degrading students	Communication that preserves dignity
Separation of behavior from personal identity	The prohibition against despising any person in any condition	The conflation of inappropriate behavior with a student’s personal worth	Educators correct inappropriate actions without labeling students as “naughty,” “lazy,” or “incapable”	Opportunity for change
Proportionate discipline	The wish that others remain free from suffering and hostility	Reactive, excessive, or retaliatory punishment	Educators apply rules firmly, consistently, and proportionately without damaging students’ self-respect	Responsibility without degrading punishment
Active empathy	Loving-kindness extends to all beings through a boundless heart	Empathy that stops at sympathy without producing ethical action	Educators and students listen to others’ experiences and consider the consequences of their actions	Care and the prevention of suffering
Restorative conflict resolution	Loving-kindness that remains free	Conflict resolution based on	The parties resolve conflicts through	Reconciliation and

Relational principle of <i>mettā</i>	Basis in the <i>Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta</i>	Pedagogical problem challenged	Application in educational interactions	Relational orientation
	from hatred and hostility	winning and losing, exclusion, or retaliation	acknowledgment of wrongdoing, understanding of consequences, restoration of safety, and improvement of relationships	relational restoration

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (Amaravati Sangha, 2004), Buddharakkhita (2020), Hofmann et al. (2011), Siddhi et al. (2018), Shonin et al. (2015), and King (2023).

Table 2 demonstrates that the relational ethics of *mettā* extend beyond a general recommendation to behave kindly. They establish concrete standards for the exercise of authority, communication, responses to differences, and conflict resolution in education. Respect for dignity provides the foundation, nonviolent communication provides the method, nondiscriminatory treatment guides the distribution of attention, and the restorative approach determines the orientation of problem-solving. These four elements demonstrate that educators cannot measure ethical pedagogical relationships solely through the achievement of order. They must also consider whether the educational process protects each student's self-worth, sense of safety, and opportunity for change. However, personal virtue alone cannot sustain such relationships consistently. Without supportive rules, curricula, protection mechanisms, and school cultures, *mettā* can easily become a fragile and uneven individual practice. Therefore, educational institutions must institutionalize the relational ethics of *mettā* as the foundation of a humane and inclusive educational culture.

3. *Mettā as a Foundation for a Humane and Inclusive Educational Culture*

At the institutional level, *mettā* remains inadequate when educators practice it only as a personal attitude or as a meditation exercise detached from educational structures. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* emphasizes the continuous cultivation of loving-kindness "whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down." Therefore, *mettā* should function as an ethical orientation that continuously guides life rather than as a temporary practice (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, verse 9; Amaravati Sangha, 2004). In schools, this continuity requires educational institutions to translate loving-kindness into patterns of interaction, regulations, learning processes, disciplinary mechanisms, and institutional policies. Individual practices can easily lose their transformative power when institutions continue to maintain cultures of excessive competition, labeling, discrimination, or degrading punishment. Therefore, loving-kindness must move beyond personal virtue and become a shared

norm that guides all members of the educational community. Schools should not merely teach empathy, respect, and care as abstract concepts. They must also create structures that allow all members of the school community to practice these values consistently. Thus, a *mettā*-based educational culture emerges when curricula, governance systems, and institutional policies support individual role models and place students' safety, dignity, and well-being at the center of education (Bodhi, 2008; Ma Rhea, 2018; Suebkrapan, Thepa, Sapanthong, & Sutthirat, 2025; Wright, 2009).

In character education, *mettā* integrates self-awareness, self-control, empathy, social concern, respect for differences, responsibility, and nonviolence into a unified ethical framework. Students do not develop these values through moral memorization or formal compliance alone. They develop them through repeated practices that require them to examine their thoughts, regulate their speech, and consider how their actions affect the well-being of others. This approach challenges forms of character education that merely present lists of virtues without transforming everyday relationships and behavior. Self-awareness enables students to recognize their motives and emotions, while self-control limits impulsive responses. Empathy and social concern direct students' attention toward the experiences of others, while respect for differences prevents character education from becoming a demand for uniformity. Responsibility does not merely require obedience to rules; it also requires individuals to accept the moral consequences of their choices. Within this framework, nonviolence does not indicate weakness or avoidance of conflict. Instead, it reflects the ability to address differences without humiliation, domination, or retaliation. Therefore, *mettā*-based character education develops character by integrating inner orientation, communicative quality, and concrete action that consistently protects human dignity and collective well-being (Kim, 2004; Vokey, 1999; Wright, 2009).

In relation to emotional well-being, *mettā* may support individuals' ability to recognize, regulate, and direct their emotions more constructively. The practice of loving-kindness may reduce the dominance of anger, hatred, and hostility by cultivating concern for the safety and well-being of oneself and others (Hofmann et al., 2011; Van Gordon, Shonin, Griffiths, & Singh, 2015). This orientation holds particular importance in education because students need not only academic instruction but also relational spaces that protect them from humiliation, labeling, and intimidation. An environment that avoids humiliation may strengthen psychological safety, while supportive relationships may reduce social alienation and encourage students to communicate their emotional difficulties openly. Thondup (2021) and Griffin (2022) also describe loving-kindness as a practice that can provide inner support and foster healthier relationships with oneself and others. Nevertheless, *mettā* cannot replace psychological services or professional clinical interventions. In education, *mettā* should function as an ethical foundation and a supportive approach that promotes emotional regulation, psychological safety, and social relationships that support students' well-being.

A *mettā*-based educational culture becomes visible when institutions translate loving-kindness into policies, protection mechanisms, and everyday practices. Such institutions do not tolerate bullying, humiliation, or labeling. They also provide safe and accessible reporting channels that do not expose victims to

retaliation. Schools apply restorative discipline by emphasizing acknowledgment of wrongdoing, accountability, restoration of safety, and improvement of relationships rather than punishment alone. At the same time, schools treat religious, cultural, gender, ability, and socioeconomic diversity as educational realities that deserve respect rather than as grounds for discrimination. Schools should also provide spaces for emotional reflection so that students can recognize their inner experiences, manage conflicts, and communicate difficulties without fear. Educational institutions should encourage cooperation to balance destructive competition, while educators should serve as ethical role models who demonstrate consistency among their values, speech, and actions. Without such structural support, *mettā* may remain a moral slogan that fails to transform students' educational experiences. Therefore, a *mettā*-based educational culture requires alignment among personal example, social relationships, and institutional governance that protects the dignity of all members of the school community (Ma Rhea, 2018; Siddhi et al., 2018; Suebkrapan et al., 2025; Wright, 2009).

Educational institutions can implement *mettā* through three complementary pathways: curricular, pedagogical, and cultural integration. At the curricular level, curriculum developers should incorporate loving-kindness into learning objectives, instructional content, and character-learning outcomes so that schools do not treat it as an additional moral message detached from academic processes. At the pedagogical level, educators should use dialogue, reflection, collaborative learning, and peaceful conflict resolution to help students connect knowledge with responsibility toward others. At the cultural level, schools should establish policies, routines, and patterns of interaction that protect safety, respect differences, and prevent symbolic and physical violence. These three pathways must operate consistently because a curriculum that promotes loving-kindness loses its ethical meaning when educators continue to use authoritarian teaching methods and institutions continue to tolerate humiliation or discrimination. The integration of *mettā* also does not require schools to transform education into the teaching of a particular religion. Schools can position *mettā* as a source of Buddhist ethics that enriches humane education through care, nonviolence, respect for dignity, and social responsibility, all of which can enter into dialogue with universal principles. Therefore, the contribution of *mettā* does not lie in the imposition of a religious identity but in the provision of an ethical framework that institutions can translate inclusively into educational objectives, methods, and cultures (Bodhi, 2008; Ma Rhea, 2018; McGuire, 2021; Suebkrapan et al., 2025). Four dimensions summarize the institutionalization of *mettā* in education by connecting curricula, pedagogical practices, protection mechanisms, and institutional culture.

Table 3. The Institutionalization of *Mettā* in Educational Culture

Implementation dimension	Form of implementation	Institutional indicator	Educational contribution
Curricular	Curriculum developers integrate <i>mettā</i> into learning objectives, instructional content,	The curriculum includes empathy, nonviolence, respect for	Strengthening character education

Implementation dimension	Form of implementation	Institutional indicator	Educational contribution
	and learning outcomes	differences, and responsibility	
Pedagogical	Educators use dialogue, emotional reflection, collaborative learning, and nonviolent communication	Educators correct students without humiliating them, and students participate in supportive learning processes	Emotional regulation and safe relationships
Discipline and protection	Schools implement restorative discipline, reporting mechanisms, and bullying prevention	Schools provide safe reporting procedures, victim protection, and relational restoration	Psychological safety and moral responsibility
Cultural-institutional	Schools establish ethical role modeling, respect for diversity, and cooperation as shared norms	Institutions do not tolerate discrimination, humiliation, labeling, or destructive competition	An inclusive and humane educational culture

Source: Authors' synthesis based on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* (Amaravati Sangha, 2004), Bodhi (2008), Ma Rhea (2018), Siddhi et al. (2018), Suebkrapan et al. (2025), and Wright (2009).

Table 3 demonstrates that schools do not develop a *mettā*-based educational culture through a single specialized program. Instead, they develop it through consistency among curricular objectives, learning practices, disciplinary systems, and institutional governance. Inconsistency in one dimension can weaken the entire implementation process. For example, loving-kindness values within the curriculum lose their ethical force when schools continue to tolerate humiliation, discrimination, or degrading punishment. Therefore, the institutionalization of *mettā* requires changes in both personal practices and educational structures.

The overall analysis supports the formulation of *mettā* pedagogy as a three-level, interdependent model. At the intrapersonal level, *mettā* guides the regulation of thoughts, emotions, and intentions so that individuals do not act reactively. At the interpersonal level, individuals express this inner readiness through nonviolent communication, empathy, respect for dignity, and nondiscriminatory treatment. At the institutional level, schools translate the principles of *mettā* into curricula, policies, disciplinary mechanisms, and educational cultures that protect the safety and well-being of all members of the school community. These three levels do not operate separately. Inner discipline can easily lose its consistency without institutional support, while effective policies can remain formal regulations when educators fail to provide personal examples. Therefore, the three-level *mettā*

pedagogy model understands character formation as a process that moves from self-regulation to the quality of relationships and then to educational structures. The originality of this model lies in its expansion of *mettā* from an individual practice of loving-kindness into a pedagogical framework that integrates moral, relational, and institutional dimensions. Through this framework, *mettā*-based education not only develops individuals who can regulate themselves but also creates relationships and institutions that consistently reject humiliation, discrimination, and violence (Bodhi, 2008; Ma Rhea, 2018; Siddhi et al., 2018; Wright, 2009).

DISCUSSION

The six intrapersonal elements of *mettā*—awareness of thoughts and intentions, regulation of negative emotions, simplicity and contentment, humility, calmness in responding to circumstances, and consistency between values and actions—show that loving-kindness does not function as a spontaneous emotion. Instead, it develops the individual as a moral subject. Thoughts and intentions shape the quality of speech and action, while calmness limits impulsive pedagogical responses. Humility also prevents educators from using authority as a means of domination, whereas moral consistency ensures that loving-kindness does not remain a normative discourse. Without inner discipline, correction can easily become punishment, firmness can become intimidation, and authority can become an outlet for emotion. Therefore, the practice of *mettā* requires educators to regulate themselves before they guide students' behavior.

This interpretation aligns with Buddharakkhita (2020), Gunaratana (2017), Griffin (2022), and Khin (2025), who describe *mettā* as an inner discipline, a form of universal love, and an ethical practice that individuals must cultivate continuously. However, this study extends that orientation into the pedagogical domain by treating emotional regulation, language, authority, and corrective action as integral components of *mettā*. Thus, *mettā* functions not only as a contemplative discipline but also as a form of professional ethics for educators. Moral instruction gains legitimacy only when educators first embody the values they teach through ethical example, self-control, and the exercise of authority that protects students' dignity.

The four relational principles of *mettā*—respect for dignity, nonviolent communication, nondiscriminatory treatment, and restorative conflict resolution—further demonstrate the universal character of loving-kindness in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*. Its concern for beings who are strong or weak, near or far, and seen or unseen confirms that ability, status, or personal closeness does not determine the value of life. In education, this principle rejects relationships that allocate attention according to achievement, compliance, academic ability, or social identity. Students who are vulnerable, different, or perceived as problematic retain the same dignity as others. Educators may differentiate support according to students' needs, but they must not differentiate respect for their dignity.

This universality also changes how educators understand and apply discipline. *Mettā* does not remove rules, but it rejects threats, labeling, and humiliation as methods for creating order. Educators direct correction toward behavior rather than toward negative judgments about students' identities; communication replaces intimidation; responsibility replaces retaliation; and restoration replaces punishment that causes shame. Therefore, pedagogical

firmness does not require symbolic or emotional violence. Discipline gains legitimacy when educators apply it proportionately, communicate it clearly, and preserve students' opportunity to change.

This interpretation aligns with Siddhi et al. (2018), who position *mettā* as a foundation for conflict management, and with King (2023), who emphasizes compassion and skillful means in responding to social tension. Hofmann et al. (2011) and Shonin et al. (2015) also demonstrate the potential of loving-kindness to reduce negative affect and strengthen prosocial attitudes. However, this study extends these insights into educator–student relationships and interactions among students. Its theoretical contribution lies in positioning dignity, language, the distribution of attention, and conflict-resolution mechanisms as ethical measures of pedagogical relationships. Therefore, educational success depends not only on classroom order but also on the preservation of safety, self-worth, and the possibility of change for every student.

The structure of *mettā* connects self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, social concern, respect for differences, responsibility, and nonviolence within a unified framework of character formation. This framework challenges character education that ends with the memorization of values, moral slogans, behavioral rules, or compliance driven by fear of punishment. Students do not develop character simply because they know which values are correct. They develop character when they can connect their inner condition, manner of speaking, and the social consequences of their actions. Self-awareness helps students recognize their emotions and motives, while emotional regulation prevents anger or fear from developing into impulsive responses. In this context, *mettā* shifts character education from formal compliance toward moral responsibility grounded in an awareness of the need to avoid increasing the suffering of others.

The relationship between *mettā* and emotional well-being depends on the quality of the educational environment. Communication without humiliation strengthens a sense of safety, nondiscriminatory attention reduces alienation, supportive relationships create space for students to communicate difficulties, and restorative conflict resolution prevents prolonged hostility. This interpretation aligns with Hofmann et al. (2011) and Shonin et al. (2015), who identify the potential of loving-kindness practices to reduce negative affect and strengthen prosocial attitudes. Thondup (2021) and Griffin (2022) also describe loving-kindness as a practice that supports healthier relationships with oneself and others. However, this study broadens that focus by arguing that individual practice alone does not determine emotional well-being. Language, discipline, protection mechanisms, and educational culture also shape it.

Nevertheless, educators and institutions should not position *mettā* as a substitute for counseling, psychological intervention, or professional clinical therapy. They should understand *mettā* as an ethical foundation and a supportive approach that helps create safer and more humane educational conditions. Its contribution to emotional well-being lies in the development of an environment that does not humiliate, exclude, or intensify students' suffering.

The institutionalization of *mettā* in education involves four dimensions: curricular, pedagogical, disciplinary and protective, and cultural-institutional. These dimensions show that educators' personal practices remain insufficient when

school structures continue to tolerate discrimination, bullying, labeling, or degrading punishment. Individual virtue remains fragile when curricula, policies, reporting procedures, disciplinary systems, communication norms, and leadership examples do not support it. Therefore, educational institutions must transform loving-kindness from a personal moral choice into a shared standard that governs the entire educational process.

This orientation aligns with Bodhi (Bodhi, 2008), Ma Rhea (2018), Wright (2009), McGuire (2021), and Suebkrapan et al. (2025), who describe Buddhist education as a process that develops wisdom, character, and ethical responsibility. However, this study adds a more operational institutional dimension by integrating *mettā* into curricula, student protection, restorative discipline, and inclusive educational cultures. Such institutionalization can strengthen character education, support emotional regulation, create a sense of safety, prevent discrimination, and reinforce social relationships. By contrast, partial implementation may reduce *mettā* to a slogan, separate loving-kindness meditation from social practice, or preserve repressive discipline behind a curriculum that promotes empathy.

A humane educational culture therefore does not emerge from a single program or symbolic activity. It emerges from consistency among the values that institutions teach, the behavior that educators model, the rules that schools enforce, and the dignity that institutional policies protect. Educators should not interpret *mettā* as unlimited leniency because loving-kindness still requires rules, responsibility, and correction. The distinction lies in its orientation: institutions use rules to improve behavior and restore relationships rather than to humiliate or exclude students.

The *mettā* pedagogy model consists of three mutually influential levels. The intrapersonal level includes the regulation of thoughts, emotions, and intentions as the basis of ethical action. The interpersonal level expresses this inner readiness through nonviolent communication, empathy, respect for dignity, and nondiscriminatory treatment. The institutional level translates the principles of *mettā* into curricula, disciplinary systems, protection mechanisms, and educational culture. These levels do not operate linearly or independently. Self-regulation affects the quality of relationships, healthy relationships shape a shared culture, and institutional policies can either strengthen or weaken personal and interpersonal practices.

The originality of this study does not lie in introducing a new concept of loving-kindness. Instead, it lies in reconstructing *mettā* as an integrated pedagogical framework. First, this study shifts *mettā* from an individual contemplative practice to a principle that governs educational processes. Second, it connects inner development with the quality of pedagogical relationships and institutional governance. Third, it formulates a three-level model that integrates character education, emotional well-being, and an inclusive educational culture. This model explains that loving-kindness gains transformative power only when individuals, social interactions, and institutional structures embody it consistently.

Theoretically, this study supports the view that defines *mettā* as an inner discipline and a form of universal love (Buddharakkhita, 2020; Gunaratana, 2017; Khin, 2025). However, it extends this concept by positioning language, authority, the distribution of attention, and conflict resolution as relational dimensions of *mettā*.

This study also adds the institutional dimension as a condition for consistent practice because personal virtue cannot produce sustainable change when curricula, disciplinary systems, and school cultures continue to tolerate humiliation or discrimination. Therefore, the *mettā* pedagogy model expands the theory of loving-kindness from individual inner development into an educational framework that reciprocally connects moral subjects, pedagogical relationships, and institutions.

The practical implications of the *mettā* pedagogy model require educational institutions to distribute responsibilities clearly among relevant actors. Schools should integrate the principles of *mettā* into protection policies, reporting mechanisms, disciplinary systems, and communication cultures. Educators should use corrective language, emotional reflection, collaborative learning, and restorative discipline that distinguishes behavioral mistakes from students' dignity. Curriculum developers can incorporate empathy, nonviolence, respect for differences, and social responsibility into learning objectives and outcomes. School counselors can use *mettā* as a supportive approach to strengthen emotional awareness and supportive relationships without replacing professional assessment or psychological intervention. Students should also participate in dialogue, emotional regulation, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Institutions can assess implementation through reduced labeling and humiliation, the availability of safe reporting mechanisms, increased use of restorative discipline, greater student participation in emotional reflection, and the development of collaborative learning.

This study has several limitations because it remains conceptual and relies primarily on texts and scholarly literature. The proposed *mettā* pedagogy model has not undergone testing in school settings; therefore, this study cannot establish causal relationships among the implementation of *mettā*, changes in students' character, and emotional well-being. Future studies should test the model through classroom observations, interviews with educators and students, institutional case studies, action research, or quasi-experimental designs. Researchers should also consider differences in educational levels, institutional characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and religious diversity so that the implementation of *mettā* does not become uniform or detached from context. Although the model requires empirical testing, it offers a conceptual framework that connects self-formation, the quality of relationships, and institutional governance in efforts to create education that remains humane, inclusive, and oriented toward collective well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that *mettā* in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* represents not only a feeling of loving-kindness or a contemplative practice but also an ethical discipline that can serve as a pedagogical foundation. The structure of *mettā* operates across three interconnected levels. At the intrapersonal level, *mettā* develops awareness of thoughts, emotional regulation, humility, and moral consistency. At the interpersonal level, *mettā* guides nonviolent communication, respect for dignity, nondiscriminatory treatment, and restorative conflict resolution. At the institutional level, educational institutions translate these values into curricula, disciplinary systems, protection mechanisms, and humane and inclusive

educational cultures. Therefore, *mettā*-based education extends beyond the teaching of values and requires alignment among self-formation, the quality of relationships, and institutional structures.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its formulation of a three-level *mettā* pedagogy model that expands loving-kindness from an individual practice into an integrated educational framework. The model connects moral, relational, and institutional dimensions and demonstrates that learning materials alone do not shape character education and emotional well-being. Language, the exercise of authority, the distribution of attention, conflict resolution, and school governance also shape these outcomes. Thus, this study adds pedagogical and institutional dimensions to previous studies of *mettā*, which have focused primarily on its philosophical, contemplative, and psychological aspects.

This study remains limited to a conceptual analysis of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* and relevant literature. Because researchers have not yet tested the proposed model empirically, this study cannot establish its effectiveness or causal relationships among the implementation of *mettā*, character formation, and students' emotional well-being. Future studies should examine the model through classroom observations, interviews, case studies, action research, or quasi-experimental designs across different educational levels and contexts. Such testing will help researchers assess the relevance, applicability, and limitations of the *mettā* pedagogy model in diverse educational environments.

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