

Factors Involvement in Volunteerism and Type of Volunteering Activities Preferred by the Public University Students

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Abstract

Volunteering is defined as a voluntary activity or activity that benefits both the volunteer and the group or community that is aided in urban and rural areas. There is no doubt that students have extensive exposure and accessibility to enable them to actively engage in volunteering activities. However, the changing lifestyle of the community nowadays directly affects the trend of student participation in volunteer activities. In this regard, this study was conducted to examine the trends of students getting involved and participating in volunteering activities. This trend of engagement will be seen from two aspects, i) the factors influencing engagement and ii) the type of volunteering activity preferred by students. The study involves 400 students who participated in volunteering activities at three public universities, namely UM, UKM, and UPM. The results showed that the main factors of influence student participation in volunteering activities was colleagues and instructors (i.e. lecturers, teachers, etc.). Meanwhile, the type of activities preferred by the student are community services, education, and environmental protection. The results of this study can be used as an indicator for universities and voluntary organizations to encourage student involvement in volunteering activities further.

Keywords

Volunteerism, involvement in volunteerism, volunteer activities, university students, public university

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Introduction

Volunteering refers to the act of performing an action with the aim of assisting a particular individual or group, done voluntarily without the involvement of coercion from any party, not involving any form of payment or purpose to obtain a material reward, an activity that is carried out individually or collectively, carried out formally or informally (Normah et al., 2019). Volunteering is not a new phenomenon in a society where its existence dates back to the construction of civilization and the formation of a society of ancient times (Aishah Nadirah & Tajul Arifin, 2013; Harris et al., 2016; Azizan, 2016). The history of volunteerism in each country is not much different in that the attitude to volunteering was initially due to the responsibility towards religion and the desire to come to another's aid (Mardhiyyah et al., 2013; Azizan, 2016). Volunteerism appears in each society in different forms depending on the history, ideology, politics, socioeconomic and culture of a country (Rehberg, 2005; UNV, 2011). Humanitarian tragedies such as wars, political conflicts, economic recessions, and natural disasters lead to the response of individuals and communities to engage in volunteerism (Siti Hawa, 2002; Mardhiyyah et al., 2013). Thus, participation in volunteerism is no longer local and out-of-reach, but a global nature that crosses the borders of the country, culture, religion, and society (Saifuddin, 2001; Rochester, 2006). Volunteerism has become a global effort that is gaining more attention due to its importance to individuals, communities, and countries (Ockenden, 2007; Simha et al., 2011; Muhd Nadzmi and Diana, 2020).

Literature Review

Student Participation in Volunteerism

The formal involvement of students participating in volunteering activities began to take shape around the 1960s and 1970s (Gage III and Thapa, 2012). At the time, the university offered a variety of community service activities aimed at encouraging the involvement of students in local volunteering activities through student associations, student affairs divisions as well as campus-based religious organizations (Lee and Won, 2011; Gage III and Thapa, 2012; Siti Nazilah, 2014). Campus activities refer to activities conducted by the university to foster and promote the formation of good values in students, whether sponsored or not (Raslinda, 2006). According to Raslinda, participation from external agencies or organizations is encouraged for raising funds for the university and the local community. Apart from being involved in campus-based activities, student volunteers are also actively involved in volunteer activities organized by NGOs outside the university.

Good exposure and accessibility make it easier for them to get information about the activities organized by NGOs. There are also volunteer organizations that are willing to pay student volunteers to get involved. These organizations are willing to pay student volunteers because they recognize these students as a valuable resource for many volunteer organizations whose role is to cover the shortage, generate funds for the organization and support the mission and goals of the organization (Astin and Sax, 1998; Mohd Hafiz et al., 2018). The participation of student volunteers in volunteer activities outside the campus usually has the full support of the university, which in turn, does not limit student involvement to be at a mere campus level only (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020).

Factors Influencing Student Participation in Volunteerism Activities

Student participation in volunteerism is heavily influenced by the individuals who are directly in the student's life such as family members, peers, schools, and neighborhoods (Holdsworth, 2010; Gronlund et al., 2011). The socialization process plays an important role in shaping the behavior and trust of students in a particular matter. The strengthening of positive values from the environment towards volunteering activities increases the motivation of students to engage in volunteer activities (Gasiorek and Giles, 2013). Students are more likely to participate in volunteer activities if their parents or close friends also participate in volunteer activities (Stukas et al., 1999). According to Azimi and Turiman (1996), friends have a strong influence power to encourage students to engage in volunteering activities. Most students utilize their friends as points of reference whether for additional information or inquiries if they encounter a problem (Mardhiyyah et al., 2013). The sociable lifestyle of students who like to live in groups and mingle around with other students from other groups influences their behavior and thinking patterns.

Students who are in a positive environment tend to exhibit good behavior and engage in activities that benefit themselves and the community (Ismail and Amin, 2020). Students who are in a negative environment, are usually easily involved in unhealthy habits, which also relates to the lack of interest and enthusiasm to engage in volunteerism (Mardhiyyah et al., 2013). In the academic world, there is no doubt that instructors such as lecturers also play an important role in the involvement of students in volunteering activities. Holdsworth (2010) thinks that instructors or lecturers are said to have more influence on students than parents to engage in volunteer activities. This situation occurs because most of the students studying at the university are forced to migrate and live far away from their families. This causes the control or influence of the parents towards the students to decrease as the student's time is spent with friends and lecturers. Furthermore, most parents nowadays have a busy routine and have various commitments for survival (Saifuddin, 2001). However, a study conducted by Gage III and Thapa (2011) showed that parents still have the power to influence undergraduates to engage in volunteer activities. The results showed that the majority of undergraduates (40.2%) stated that their involvement was driven by parents, including instructors (23.4%), friends (15.9%), religious members (11.2%), members of organizations (6.5%) and others (2.8%).

Type of Volunteering Activities Preferred by University Students

The development of the volunteering sector has led to the existence of various types of volunteer activities. According to Gage and Thapa (2012), volunteering activities are classified into several categories:

- i. **Community Service** - Involves activities related to the welfare of the community such as assisting the needy (OKU, elderly, children), providing disaster relief and emergency control, temporary protection, assistance to refugees.
- ii. **Health** - Involves activities related to education and healthcare support, rehabilitation, home care, emergency services, conducting health-related awareness campaigns.
- iii. **Culture and Recreation** - Involves arts and heritage-related activities, organizing excursions, conducting sports and leisure activities.
- iv. **Education** - Involves tutoring and mentoring activities, advisory and mentoring services, counsellors, organizing motivational camps for

- students, teaching illiterate children, teaching students about information technology (ICT).
- v. **Environment** - Involves activities related to environmental preservation and conservation, animal welfare protection, providing veterinary services, providing education and awareness of the importance of caring for the environment.
 - vi. **Development and Housing** - Involves activities related to maintenance and repair works, technical maintenance and construction, housing assistance.
 - vii. **Law and Politics** - Carry out work related to advocacy, defense of public rights, provision of legal services, crime prevention and public safety, rehabilitation of offenders and assistance to victims, consumer protection, serving political campaigns.
 - viii. **Religious** - Carry out activities related to the care of the religious centre, to deliver religious knowledge for free

The involvement of students in volunteering activities is diverse. A study conducted by Smith et al. (2010) found that students are more interested in participating in educational welfare activities as mentors, tutors, coaches and counsellors who can benefit the needy (48.2%). The rest were involved in sports and cultural activities (42.7 %), activities organized by university student associations or clubs (39.4 %) and health and emergency services related activities (37.5 %). In addition to education, sports activities are also the choice of students. The Julinawati et al. (2012) study of Malay students found that the involvement of students in sports activities was higher (44%) compared to other volunteer activities such as community service (30.1%), uniformed activities (27.8 %), religious (23.4 %), recreation (23.3 %), education (21.3 %), culture (18.7 %), arts (18.4 %), environment (16.4 %), health (13.9 %), economy (12.8 %), family (12.7%), disaster relief (10.6%) and agriculture (10.1%).

Samnegard (2011) through his study of students at Lund University found that most students chose volunteering activities involving the welfare of students (58%), followed by sports organizations (29%), social (16%), cultural (7%), community services (3%), others (10%). In addition, community service activities stand out as the popular choice among students in volunteering. Gage III (2009) who conducted a study on undergraduates at the University of Florida found that human service activities (58.5%) and educational activities (57.0%) were the top choices of undergraduates. The rest were involved in cultural activities (36.7%), environmental (36.3%), political (13%) and others (5.2%). The Bastien Study (2015) also showed students chose community services as the main choice of involvement in volunteering activities (59.2%), followed by cultural activities (55.8%), education (38.1%), recreational (33.3%), environmental (17%) and politics (3.4%).

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach to achieve the objectives of the study. The main objective of this study is to examine the characteristics of student involvement in volunteering activities. In this study, survey methods involving structured questionnaires were used. The survey using a set of structured questionnaires was conducted on students who are members of selected volunteer associations, namely *Kelab Penyayang Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*, *Kelab Penyayang Universiti Putra Malaysia* and *Sekretariat Sukarelawan Universiti Malaya* (SEKRUM). A

total of 400 respondents were involved in the study and the selection of respondents was done at random based on their membership in the association. To achieve the objectives of the study, descriptive analysis such as distribution and percentage are used to understand the trends of student participation in volunteering activities.

Findings

Factors Influencing Student Participation in Volunteerism Activities

Based on Table 1, the results showed that the main driver of student involvement in volunteering activities was their closest friends (78.6). In addition, the role of instructors such as teachers and lecturers is also important in encouraging student involvement in volunteering activities (74%). These findings suggest that external factors are more influential than family institutions such as family members and relatives (40.6%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Factors Influencing Student Participation in Volunteerism Activities

Influential Factors	Total	Percentage
Family Members	144	29.1
Relatives	57	11.5
Friends	389	78.6
Teachers	187	37.8
Lecturers	179	36.2
Local Community Members	91	18.4
Volunteer Organization	148	29.9
Political	17	3.4
Own-self	10	2.0
Mass Media	2	0.4

Source: Authors (2019)

Student's Preferred Type of Volunteer Activities

The volunteering sector offers a wide range of welfare activities whether formal or informal as well as individually or collectively. Table 2 shows the three types of activities with the most participation from the respondents volunteering activities in the form of community service (66.1%), education (47.7%) and environmental conservation (43.4%). While the two volunteering activities that were less participated by the study respondents were activities in the form of governance (4.2%) and politics (7.5%). Other types of volunteering activities participated by the respondents were advocacy or campaigning activities (20.2%), recreation (32.9%), religious (29.9%), sports (30.9%), culture or art (15.8%) and health (20.2%).

Table 2: Type of Volunteer Activities Participated by Respondents

Type of Activities	Total	Percentage
Politics	37	7.5
Education	236	47.7
Advocacy / Campaign	100	20.2
Environmental Conservation	215	43.4
Recreation	163	32.9
Religious	148	29.9
Sports	153	30.9
Governance	21	4.2
Culture / Arts	78	15.8
Health	100	20.2
Community Service	327	66.1

Source: Authors (2019)

Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the main influence of students' involvement in volunteering activities is due to the influence of colleagues and instructors such as teachers and lecturers. This suggests that external influences are more dominant compared to internal influences such as family members. However, these findings contradict the Gage III and Thapa (2012) studies that showed family members play an important role in influencing undergraduates to engage in volunteerism. The influence of this involvement varies between schoolchildren and university undergraduates. According to the opinion of the researchers, the involvement of students during school is heavily influenced by the family especially the parents and teachers as they are unable to make their own decisions and are under the control of the family and the school. Only upon entering the university, does the power and control of the family dissipate because the average student lives and is out of reach from the family and away from supervision and parental guidance. This causes the students to rely on their peers in making a decision. Accordingly, the results of involvement in volunteerism indirectly stem from the influence of their closest friends.

The results also showed that the type of activity that is the preferred choice for student volunteers is in the form of community service, education, and environmental protection. The findings are in line with several studies such as Gage III (2009) and Bastien (2015) which found that students are more likely to engage in volunteer activities in the form of community service compared to other types of activities. Generally, an individual chooses the type of volunteering activity that he wants to participate in to get the optimal benefit from the involvement. A study done by Smith et al. (2010) found that educational activities are preferred by students compared to other activities while the study by Julinawati et al. (2012) showed that students tend to choose volunteering activities in the form of sportsmanship. Involvement in a diverse set of activities shows that each individual has a variety of goals that allow them to obtain optimal benefits. Students will choose volunteering activities that are able to empower them holistically.

Conclusion

Empirically, student involvement in volunteerism is influenced by a few external factors and activities which they preferred. On the other hand, the involvement of the students

in volunteering activities is important to empower them as a whole. In this regard, a positive environment (family, friends, and instructors) is essential in influencing the participation of students in volunteering activities. Collective action from all parties is needed to make volunteerism a culture in student life.

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