

The Role of Volunteerism in Shaping Youth Social Skills: A Study of Motivational Factors in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Volunteering by young people is essential because it helps them to contribute to the country and society. Volunteering is a concept and practice that refers to contributing or sharing time, resources, knowledge, skills or abilities, and experience voluntarily, without coercion, and without expecting a reward. Its central aim is to contribute to the development of the country. Despite all efforts to cultivate the spirit of voluntarism in society, studies on the motivation of young people to participate in voluntary activities have yet to receive much attention in research. This study examines youth participation in volunteer activities in Malaysia. In particular, the factors that motivate youths to participate in volunteer activities were examined. The snowball method was used in this study. According to the results, respondents ranked value factors as the most important part of volunteering. At the same time, they ranked understanding as the second most important part of volunteering. Respondents also saw protective qualities as an important aspect of volunteering. Finally, young people consider career and social issues the least important aspects of volunteering. The results of this study will provide some suggestions and recommendations on how institutions can help attract and engage students in volunteering more successfully.

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Contribution/Originality: This study enhances the current literature by investigating the influence of non-governmental organisations on youth volunteering and the development of social skills in Malaysia. It offers new insights into the motivating factors that drive youth to volunteer and highlights the importance of values, career and social elements in youth volunteering.

1. Introduction

Many individuals worldwide devote their time and effort to organizations that support those in need, offering social support, physical assistance, and guidance to facilitate group activities and improve quality of life. These volunteers typically engage in such services sincerely, without expecting any reward.

As defined by [Azizan \(2016\)](#), volunteerism is a concept and practice that refers to the contribution or sharing of time, resources, knowledge, skills or abilities, and experience, made voluntarily and without coercion or expectation of reward. Volunteers are essential because these groups usually have diverse skills and expertise. They contribute their expertise, skills, knowledge, and energy to facilitate and assist those in need ([Zulhaimi et al., 2019](#)). With the volunteers being there to lend help and assistance, the lives of people affected by tragedy and natural disasters would be more stable as they rely heavily on the labor of volunteers. Individuals globally engage in volunteerism for several motivations or reasons: to eradicate poverty, to enhance primary healthcare and education, to secure the necessities of daily life, to cope with tragedy, and to combat social prohibitions and violent struggles ([Tierney et al., 2022](#); [Sahri et al., 2013](#); [Zulhaimi et al., 2019](#)). In addition, a person gains meaning in life by performing voluntary services, protecting them from being isolated during difficult times ([Deci & Ryan, 2000](#)).

Nevertheless, there still needs to be a more voluntary commitment among young people. To date, most studies on volunteering in Malaysia have examined the factors that motivate people to volunteer ([Turiman et al., 2011](#)), the challenges of volunteering ([Kamaludin et al., 2013](#)), youth empowerment and motivating factors ([Mokhzan et al., 2023](#)), and psychosocial factors that influence volunteers to offer their services to the community. Although research on volunteering is gaining momentum, limited studies have focused on the motivations that lead youth to volunteer. Volunteering by young people provides an excellent opportunity for personal and social development. Volunteering is an essential aspect of every human nature that can be associated with other constructive human elements.

Volunteering may not pay a young person a hefty sum for the hard work, but it will undoubtedly teach them skills and lessons that will benefit the child. Volunteering is not a one-way street; people can learn many skills by working in various social and charitable organizations and NGOs. The soft skills youth can learn by volunteering are leadership, time management, communication, professionalism, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. These skills are essential in the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF). [Department of Higher Education Malaysia \(2019\)](#) has recognised the importance of student engagement in society and has established the Service-Learning Malaysia University (SULAM). SULAM is a credit-bearing educational experience where students engage in structured service activities that address community needs. Students reflect on their experiences through these activities to achieve desired learning outcomes. This process enhances their understanding of course content, broadens their appreciation of the discipline, and strengthens their personal values and civic responsibility. SULAM community services are initiatives identified by higher learning institutions through formal or informal consultations with local nonprofit organizations, government bodies, and community-based organizations. These consultations aim to enhance the quality of life for community people, especially those with low income, or to tackle specific challenges according to community requirements. This cooperative method guarantees that the services fulfill the needs of the community.

Many nonprofit organisations and voluntary groups help and assist people and groups in need. Volunteering provides advantages to both communities and the volunteers. When tragedy or mishap occurs, the volunteers provide the needed help, or otherwise, the core activities of these affected people would be disrupted. The volunteers offer physical and emotional support in times of need. [Omoto et al. \(2010\)](#) identified various motivations for volunteering, including dispositional traits, interpersonal abilities, and demographic factors.

Volunteer participation or volunteerism is a crucial aspect of life that helps, benefits, and welfare the community. As a result, it can contribute to the development of the country. However, despite all efforts to cultivate the spirit of volunteerism in society, studies on youth motivation to participate in voluntary activities still need to be studied. Involving youth in volunteerism to establish a new community or foster a sense of belonging can be difficult. According to [Turiman et al. \(2009\)](#), not all methods of promoting these behaviors are equally effective in cultivating committed volunteers, particularly among youth. Statistically, youth in Malaysia represent the largest segment of the population compared to other age groups, such as children and adults. On July 3, 2019, the Dewan Rakyat in Malaysia passed an amendment to the Youth Societies and Youth Development (Amendment) Act 2019 (Act 668). This changed the definition of "youth" by lowering the age from 40 to 30 years and codifying the term in Malaysia's youth policy. Previously, "youth" was defined as someone between 15 and 40 years old ([Yunus & Landau, 2019](#)).

Youth participation in volunteering is also seen as inconsistent. Initiatives to attract young people to volunteer are sometimes seen as inappropriate and need to meet the wishes and needs of young people. It is also necessary to introduce young people to existing communities and assist them in developing a sense of belonging to these organisations. This is a component of socialization. Considering the growing interest of youth in work-related volunteering activities and the increased programmes offered, studies on the understanding of youth participation are necessary as most of the population in Malaysia consists of youth. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the factors that encourage or hinder youth involvement in volunteering.

1.1. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- i. To investigate the motivating factors involved in youth volunteerism.
- ii. To determine the most significant factors in youth volunteerism.

2. Literature Review

From a psychological perspective, the most widely advocated theory for volunteering is the functional approach theory ([Clary et al., 1998](#); [Omoto & Snyder, 1995](#)), which is practical and helpful in explaining the motivation for volunteering. According to [Clary et al. \(1998\)](#), there are six categories of motivation. The first category is values, which permits people to convey their values. Such values concern altruism and humanitarianism. The second is understanding which drives volunteers to discover new knowledge and enhance and practice skills. The third category is career: this type of motivation causes volunteers to expand and enhance care-related experiences, seek job opportunities, and improve their chances of securing a job. The fourth type is known as social needs. This type of motivation lets individuals fulfil their need to reinforce and enhance social connections and interaction. The fifth type is an enhancement that motivates volunteers to improve individual growth and self-development. The final category is a sense of security. This type of motivation is directed at volunteers' desire to

overcome intrinsic negative feelings, overcome personal difficulties, and reduce the feeling of guilt for being more fortunate than others.

The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) is a prevalent tool for evaluating volunteer motivation, grounded in the functionalist model proposed by [Omoto and Snyder \(1995\)](#). It assesses six factors that reflect several motivational functions. VFI is recognised to be a valuable tool in analysing motivation in volunteerism. The Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) is drawn from four assumptions. The first assumption is that people are purposeful, planned and goal oriented. Such can be observed in volunteers who are involved in volunteer work to fulfil crucial individual objectives. The second assumption is that people have different reasons to volunteer. For example, volunteers of the same organisation may have various justifications for volunteerism. Thirdly, in volunteerism, an individual may have multiple goals to achieve. For example, a volunteer may be needed to fulfill two or more intentions. The final assumption is that results may depend on matching needs and goals to the environment's opportunities. To illustrate, the ability of a volunteer to fulfill important intentions is related to how he or she values enlistment, satisfaction, and retention.

[Abdullah Sahimi et al. \(2018\)](#) studied 342 Malaysian youths' involvement in volunteerism. The study shows that the relationship between motivation and participation in volunteering is positively significant. It shows that almost all respondents in this study who participated in volunteer activities were influenced by several motivating factors. The findings indicated that volunteering enabled individuals to apply their knowledge for community benefit while cultivating and honing abilities that may have remained underutilized. Furthermore, the results showed that improving volunteers' skills was necessary to improve their employability. Volunteering improves social interaction, which can develop into friendships, professional networks and employment opportunities. Participation in activities such as donating blood, helping the community and the environment, and participating in health campaigns and sporting activities also boosted volunteers' self-esteem.

[Hamzah et al. \(2016\)](#) investigate the motivations behind Malaysian teenagers' involvement in volunteer activities and analyse the factors that forecast their engagement. The participants in the study were associated with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Malaysia. This study involved a total of 251 respondents who were aged between 15 and 25 years old.

The study identified several benefits of volunteering, including being more responsible, broadening their interest, and fostering relationships among them. In addition, the participants learned to have team spirit and to socialise with the community. Volunteering not only can help to unlock one's potential but also improve communication skills. The study also found various reasons for volunteering, such as making productive use of free time, acquiring new experiences, enhancing self-confidence and self-esteem, achieving emotional balance, and gaining a deeper understanding of real-life challenges. The results indicate a positive correlation between participation and the benefits, needs, and reasons for volunteering.

Youths' social cohesion is essential for the sustainability of youth development programs. [Yacob et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the medium of interactions to measure the level of social cohesion of adolescents. The application of a community of practice framework was measured to determine the level of social cohesion among adolescents in Malaysia. This study conducted by [Yacob et al. \(2020\)](#) employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Two hundred sixty-five youths participating in the Duke of Edinburgh International Award were selected as respondents. The results show that the more community programs are conducted, the greater the social cohesion among the youth.

[Ekpe \(2017\)](#) investigated elements including social media, social groupings, and government regulations that affect youth participation in leadership roles in Malaysia. The study employed a conceptual framework and social influence theory to examine why most Malaysian youth need more active involvement in community leadership activities in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. The research employed a cross-sectional survey and proportionate stratified random sample technique to gather data from 141 youth leaders in Peninsular Malaysia. The duration of social media usage and the presence of mentors were identified as having the most substantial beneficial influence on the leadership engagement of Malaysian teenagers.

The studies by [Abdullah Sahimi et al. \(2018\)](#), [Hamzah et al. \(2016\)](#), [Yaccob et al. \(2020\)](#), and [Ekpe \(2017\)](#) highlight the crucial role of youth participation in volunteerism and community leadership in Malaysia. It was found that there was a positive correlation between participation and motivating factors such as personal benefits, social interaction, and skill enhancement. While Sahimi et al. and [Hamzah et al. \(2016\)](#) focus on volunteering and emphasize personal development and contribution to the community, [Yaccob et al. \(2020\)](#) examine how community programs promote social cohesion among youth. In contrast, [Ekpe \(2017\)](#) identifies barriers to leadership participation and emphasizes the significant influence of social media and mentorship. These studies highlight the complex nature of youth engagement and the various factors that can promote or hinder it.

3. Research Methods

This section describes the participants, data collection, research design, and study analysis. A quantitative research design was employed to investigate the motivations of youth involved in volunteerism. Survey questions were distributed to 101 youth engaged in volunteerism. The questionnaires consisted of two sections. The first section asked for each respondent's demographic profile. The following section consisted of questions to investigate the respondents' motivations to be involved in volunteerism. The questions were adapted from [Clary's \(1998\)](#) Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) Framework. The authors use a functionalist approach to volunteering, examining individuals' functional motives. The Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) identifies six critical motivations for volunteering: Protective—engaging in volunteer work to shield oneself from life's challenges and reduce negative feelings; Values—volunteering as a means to express altruistic and humanitarian principles; Career—participating in volunteer activities to enhance career prospects and gain relevant experience; Social—using volunteer opportunities to develop and strengthen social connections; Understanding—seeking to acquire new knowledge, skills, and abilities through volunteer work; and Enhancement—volunteering to promote personal growth and boost self-esteem. These factors help organizations understand and address the diverse motivations of volunteers. Data were then analyzed through descriptive statistics. The Social and Welfare Department Malaysia reported that in 2020, there were 11559 registered volunteers with the ministry. However, only 2000 volunteers were active. According to [Israel \(1992\)](#), with a population of 2000, a margin error of 10%, and Precision Levels where the Confidence Level Is 95% and $P=.5$, the ideal sample is 85. Hence, a sample size of 100 respondents will be sufficient for the research.

In this study, the respondents were carefully selected according to the following criteria: They were young people aged 18-30 years old, involved in non-governmental organizations in Selangor, and proficient in both English and Malay to participate in the survey, with English proficiency required for respondents. All respondents had to be able to give informed consent.

Data collection was conducted using a snowball method, and Google forms were distributed to collect responses to the survey.

4. Results

Tables 1 to 6 show the means and standard deviations of the factors motivating participants to volunteer. **Table 1** presents the means and standard deviations of the protective factors motivating participants to volunteer. The highest mean score, 4.17, was recorded for the statement "By volunteering, I feel less lonely," indicating that this was the most significant protective factor. The second highest mean, 3.99, was "Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others." The statement "Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles" had a mean of 3.94, followed closely by "No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it," with a mean of 3.88. The lowest mean score, 3.62, was recorded for the statement, "Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems."

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the protective factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No.	Protective factor	Mean	SD
1	No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it.	3.88	.972
2	By volunteering I feel less lonely.	4.17	.959
3	Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.	3.99	1.09
4	Volunteering helps me work through by own personal problems.	3.62	1.07
5	Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	3.94	1.02

Table 2 presents the values factor motivating participants to volunteer. With a high mean score of 4.69, the value factor "I feel it is important to help others" highlights the importance of altruism and the innate desire to help others. The value element "I am concerned about those who are less fortunate than myself" received the second-highest mean score of 4.47, demonstrating participants' significant empathy and concern for disadvantaged people. With a mean score of 4.55, participants also showed great sympathy for those in need. Finally, "I can do something for a cause that is important to me" and "I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving" had mean scores of 4.30 and 4.18, respectively.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the values factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No.	Values factor	Mean	SD
6	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	4.47	.657
7	I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.	4.18	.973
8	I feel compassion toward people in need.	4.55	.624
9	I feel it is important to help others.	4.69	.543
10	I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	4.3	.758

Table 3 shows many crucial characteristics that motivate people to volunteer for professional reasons. Item 15 with a mean score of 4.2 "Volunteering looks good on my CV" is the career element with the highest mean. Item 12, "I can make new contacts that could help me in my

work or career," is another essential career element with a mean score of 4.1. A mean score of 4.11 indicates that volunteering is also seen as an opportunity to explore other career options. In addition, with a mean score of 3.99, participants believed that volunteering would help them succeed in their chosen profession. Item 11, "Volunteering can help me get my foot in the door of a job I would like to work in," received the lowest mean of 3.69.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of the career factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No	Career Factor	Mean	SD
11	Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.	3.69	1.06
12	I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.	4.1	1.07
13	Volunteering allows me to explore different career options.	4.11	.908
14	Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession.	3.99	.994
15	Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.	4.2	.88

The social factors motivating participants to volunteer were examined, and Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations of these factors. The social element with the highest mean score is item 20, "Volunteering is an important activity for the people I know best." The following item, number 16, "My friends volunteer," received a mean score of 3.79. The component "People I'm close to want me to volunteer" had a lower average score, 1.165, in comparison. The low mean score of 1.02 for the factor "People I know share an interest in community service". Finally, "Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service" has the lowest mean score for the social element, which was 0.97.

Table 4: Means and standard deviations of the social factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No.	Social factor	Mean	SD
16	My friends volunteer.	3.79	1.01
17	People I'm close to want me to volunteer.	1.165	1.16
18	People I know share an interest in community service.	1.02	1.02
19	Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	.97	1.06
20	Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.	4.06	.978

Table 5 shows the mean values and standard deviations of the understanding factor that motivates participants to volunteer. The mean values for all items are above 4, which indicates that the participants are highly motivated by the understanding factor. The highest mean score of 4.44 for item 22, "Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things," is closely followed by items 23 and 24, which relate to learning through direct experience. Item 21, "I can learn more about the cause I am working for," has the lowest mean score at 4.07 but is still above 4, suggesting that participants are also motivated by this factor. Overall, the results suggest that participants are motivated to volunteer because they see it as an opportunity to learn and gain new perspectives.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of the understanding factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No.	Understanding factor	Mean	SD
21	I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.	4.07	.875
22	Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.	4.44	.853
23	Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands-on experience.	4.42	.752
24	I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	4.39	.800
25	I can explore my own strengths.	4.4	.838

Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations of the enhancement factor motivating participants to volunteer. The mean scores for all items are above 3, indicating that participants are moderately motivated by the enhancement factor. The highest mean score of 4.32 was for item 30, "Volunteering is a way to make new friends," followed by item 27, "Volunteering increases my self-esteem." The lowest mean score of 3.88 was for item 26, "Volunteering makes me feel important," but it is still above 3. The results suggest that participants are motivated to volunteer because it enhances their self-esteem and provides opportunities to make new friends. However, the results also suggest that participants are less motivated by feeling essential or needed.

Table 6: Means and standard deviations of the enhancement factor motivating participants in volunteering

Item No.	Enhancement factor	Mean	SD
26	Volunteering makes me feel important.	3.85	1.04
27	Volunteering increases my self-esteem.	4.13	.808
28	Volunteering makes me feel needed.	3.88	.972
29	Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.	3.92	.976
30	Volunteering is a way to make new friends.	4.32	.882

Table 7 reveals that the respondents significantly perceived the value factors (M= 4.44, SD: .54) as the most important aspect of volunteering. Meanwhile, the respondents highly perceived the understanding factors (M= 4.34, SD: .71) as the second most important aspect of volunteering. Respondents also perceived the enhancement factors (M= 4.02, SD: .75) and protective factors (M= 3.9, SD: .78) as essential aspects of volunteering. Lastly, respondents perceived career factors (M= 4.02, SD: .8) and social factors (M= 3.75, SD: .84) as the least important aspects of volunteering.

Table 7: Means and standard deviations of the factors motivating participants to volunteer

Item No.	Factor(s)	Means	SD
1	Protective factor	3.92	.780
2	Values factor	4.44	.536
3	Career factor	4.02	.786
4	Social factor	3.74	.842
5	Understanding factor	4.34	.708
6	Enhancement factor	4.02	.747

5. Conclusion

The findings reveal the protective factors that motivate participants to volunteer. These factors were considered by youth when engaging in volunteer work, indicating their recognition of their importance. The highest motivation factor was feeling less lonely through volunteering, followed by relieving guilt over being more fortunate and using volunteering as an escape from personal troubles. The lowest motivation factor was using volunteering to work through personal problems. These findings emphasise the significance of social connection, empathy, and finding solace as motivators for youth engagement in volunteering (Cox et al., 2017). Understanding these factors can contribute to developing volunteer programs tailored to individual motivations and improve volunteer experience and sustained engagement. Further research could explore the relationship between these protective factors and other variables to deepen our understanding of youth volunteering.

The results suggest that intrinsic motivations, personal values, and emotional attachment significantly drive individuals' engagement in volunteer work. Participants in volunteer programs are motivated by value-based reasons, such as compassion for people in need and concern for those less fortunate than themselves. The value aspect of assisting others received the highest mean score, succeeded by caring for the less fortunate, and exhibited compassion for individuals in need. Research indicates that volunteering enhances physical and mental health and yields beneficial outcomes. The primary motivations for volunteering pertained to the values and understanding aspect, which involved assisting others and expanding one's perspective on a particular subject (Stukas et al., 2016).

According to the findings, career considerations appeal to individuals' willingness to volunteer. It is noted that volunteering brings extra rewards in the form of improving one's CV and making new business contacts, which received high MIC scores (Chacon et al., 2017). These participants envisage volunteering as a chance to broaden their career perspectives and claim it helps them in the achieved profession. On the other hand, the score for the direct effect of volunteering on securing certain types of jobs was lower than expected with a mean score of 3.8. When considered in this context, such motivations will also enable organizations to orientate different models of volunteer programs to individual needs, such as career networking and skills training. These findings suggest the importance of career aspects in determining people's readiness to volunteer and point out possible consequences for professional advancement derived from volunteering activities.

Intrinsic motivations, personal values, and emotional attachment are significant drivers of individuals' engagement in volunteer work. Participants in volunteer programs are motivated by value-based reasons, such as compassion for people in need and concern for those less fortunate than themselves. Understanding these motivations can help organizations design volunteer programs catering to individuals' motivations, leading to more meaningful and impactful experiences for participants and their communities (Stukas et al., 2014).

Future research could explore the relationship between volunteer motivations and other factors, such as stress and burden, to better understand how to support volunteers in their efforts to impact their communities positively. Understanding these values can inform the development of volunteer programs that cater to individuals' motivations, leading to more meaningful and impactful volunteer experiences.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The study received Ethical approval from the Universiti Teknologi Mara Research Ethics Committee (RECUiTM). According to the Declaration of Helsinki, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest in this work or potential conflicts related to this article's research, authorship, or publication.

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