

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERISM AND SELF-ESTEEM AMONG STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: *Volunteerism is integral to co-curricular activities in universities, playing a pivotal role in enhancing students' personal growth. This study investigated volunteerism among 1,161 undergraduate students from three major campuses of a public university in Malaysia, focusing on their levels of knowledge, attitudes, spirit towards volunteerism, and self-esteem. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design and data collected through self-administered questionnaires, the study assessed various dimensions of volunteerism and its impact. The analysis, conducted using SPSS Version 21, revealed that 53.7% of respondents were occasional volunteers, with 76.1% demonstrating a positive spirit towards volunteerism. A majority exhibited high knowledge (58.1%) and positive attitudes (82.5%) and reported high self-esteem (60.9%). Significant associations were found between the levels of knowledge, attitudes, and spirit towards volunteerism and self-esteem, indicating that greater involvement and positive perceptions of volunteerism are linked to higher self-esteem. These findings suggest that university students generally possess a strong commitment to volunteerism, underscoring the need for enhanced communication strategies by the Ministry of Higher Education and universities to foster greater participation and awareness of volunteer opportunities*

Keywords: *Volunteerism, knowledge, attitude, spirit, self-esteem*

Introduction

Volunteerism, defined as the voluntary participation in activities, services, or programs undertaken with genuine intent, is a critical component in addressing various social and environmental challenges, especially during disasters like floods, earthquakes, and pandemics (Mamat et al., 2018). Over the last decade, the significance of volunteerism has grown, driven by the establishment of numerous organizations worldwide and the increasing demand for humanitarian assistance (UNV, 2022). Informal voluntary action, often initiated by individuals and groups, has become a crucial resource for emergency response, filling gaps that formal structures may overlook (Twigg & Mosel, 2017). University students, in particular, have emerged as key contributors to the future of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and charitable movements, offering fresh energy and ideas (Abuiyada, 2018).

In Malaysia, the government has recognized the importance of youth in volunteerism, launching initiatives like the 1Malaysia for Youth (1M4U) with substantial financial support, signaling a strong commitment to fostering a volunteer culture (Aishah et al., 2018). Programs such as Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS) and Majlis Sukarelawan Universiti Malaysia (MASKUM) serve as platforms to encourage youth participation. Recent studies highlight that involvement in volunteerism has positive effects on youth, enhancing their personality, identity, values, and motivation (Junaidi et al., 2023). Moreover, participation in volunteer activities, such as health campaigns and environmental projects, has been linked to increased self-esteem and broader community engagement, which, in turn, contributes to national development (Abdullah et al., 2018; Sukor et al., 2023).

Despite various university-led programs promoting volunteerism, actual student participation rates have not met expectations (Abuiyada, 2018). Studies in other countries, such as Pakistan and Oman, have also revealed gaps in youth engagement in volunteer activities, indicating a need for improved strategies (Butt et al., 2015; Abuiyada, 2018). In Malaysia, although university students generally demonstrate a good understanding of volunteerism and hold positive attitudes towards it (Hamzah et al., 2016), there is still a need for more detailed research on the profiles of youth volunteers. This study aims to explore these profiles, focusing on the knowledge, attitudes, and self-esteem of university students in relation to their volunteer activities.

Although university students in Malaysia generally possess a positive attitude and adequate knowledge about volunteerism, their actual participation in volunteer activities does not always reflect this enthusiasm (Abuiyada, 2018). There is limited research that explores how knowledge, attitudes, and self-esteem influence students' engagement in volunteer work. Furthermore, existing studies often fail to provide a detailed understanding of the profiles of university volunteers, particularly how these factors interact. This gap in knowledge hampers the development of effective strategies to enhance student involvement in volunteerism. Thus, there is a pressing need to better understand these factors to strengthen volunteerism efforts within universities and across the nation.

Literature Review

Involvement of University Students in Volunteerism

Volunteerism is often seen as a personal investment, where individuals willingly dedicate their time without expecting material rewards (Kemp, 2002). This selfless contribution can have significant impacts not only on communities but also on the broader economy and societal

development. In Malaysia, the importance of volunteerism is emphasized through the Malaysian Youth Policy, which highlights volunteer activities as essential in nurturing a talented and responsible citizenry capable of contributing at all levels of life (Azimi, 2014). Recognizing the global significance of volunteerism, the United Nations established December 5 as International Volunteer Day in 1985, acknowledging the critical role that volunteers play in organizing programs and fostering community development worldwide (Mustafa, 2015).

Despite these efforts to cultivate a strong volunteer culture, the motivation among youth to engage in voluntary activities remains a topic that requires further exploration. Studies indicate that youth participation in volunteer work is often inconsistent and lacks sustained commitment (Ooi & Teh, 2022). The World Giving Index 2022 by the Charities Aid Foundation found that, while there has been some improvement, there is still significant work needed to make volunteerism a core value in Malaysian society. Malaysia ranked 70th out of 119 countries surveyed, reflecting moderate levels of readiness among citizens to engage in volunteerism, provide financial aid to others, and assist non-citizens (CAF, 2022).

The increasing demand for volunteer services has led to a growing need for a larger and more dedicated volunteer workforce. However, many organizations continue to struggle with volunteer shortages, which hampers their ability to meet client needs effectively (Ramlan et al., 2015). This challenge underscores the importance of attracting youth, particularly university students, to volunteer work, as they represent a group with high energy levels and the potential for sustained engagement.

University students, who fall within the youth demographic, are seen as ideal candidates for volunteerism due to their age, enthusiasm, and capacity for learning and growth (Ghazali et al., 2023). Studies have shown that university students who engage in volunteer activities not only contribute to the community but also benefit from personal development, gaining skills that enhance their employability and civic mindedness (Junaidi et al., 2023). Therefore, fostering a strong volunteer culture within universities can help address the growing demand for volunteers while also contributing to the personal and professional development of students.

The Importance of Volunteerism

Volunteerism is a critical avenue through which youth, particularly university students, can engage in meaningful social change and personal development. Globally, individuals participate in volunteer activities for various reasons, such as eradicating poverty, improving health and education, addressing environmental issues, and promoting social inclusion (UN Volunteers, 2019). For university students, volunteerism not only enhances their sense of civic responsibility but also provides a platform for them to contribute to societal transformation while developing essential life skills.

According to the United Nations, volunteerism allows young people to achieve a strong sense of civic engagement, fostering a connection with their communities and promoting social change (United Nations, 2013). However, young volunteers also face challenges, such as social barriers, gender-based violence, and economic deficiencies, which can hinder their participation. Addressing these challenges through supportive volunteer programs is crucial in ensuring sustained youth engagement in volunteerism.

The National Youth Agency emphasizes that volunteer work can significantly boost confidence and self-esteem among young people. It also instills values of responsibility, concern for the

community, and enhances communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills (Great Britain, 2007). These qualities are particularly relevant for university students as they transition from academic life to the professional world.

Research further supports the notion that volunteering helps students develop pro-social behaviors, enriching their knowledge and abilities to address social problems (Eley, 2003). In the United States, studies have shown that volunteering enhances students' academic development, personal growth, and civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998). Similarly, in Malaysia, voluntary activities have been found to allow students to apply their knowledge in practical ways, benefiting both themselves and the communities they serve (Aishah et al., 2018).

Volunteering is also critical in enhancing employability. Participation in voluntary activities helps students develop skills that are valuable in the job market, such as teamwork, communication, and leadership (Abuiyada, 2018). These experiences can lead to social interactions that evolve into professional networks and employment opportunities. For graduates, volunteering offers practical experience that can be leveraged when seeking employment, making them more attractive to potential employers.

Moreover, regular volunteering has been linked to increased motivation and team morale, as well as improved mental health and well-being. The National Council of Social Service highlights that volunteering benefits both the giver and the recipient, creating a positive feedback loop that strengthens the community as a whole (National Council of Social Service, 2016).

In summary, volunteerism is a powerful tool for personal and professional development among university students. It equips them with essential life skills, enhances their employability, and fosters a strong sense of civic duty. As the demand for socially conscious and skilled individuals grows, promoting volunteerism within universities becomes increasingly important for shaping the future workforce and contributing to societal well-being.

Research Methodology

Sample

The study targeted undergraduate students across three main campuses of public universities in Selangor. Data collection was conducted using a survey method, with cooperation from the Student Affairs Office. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Respondents were given 8 to 10 minutes to complete the survey. The data collection period spanned from February 2020 to April 2020, including a pilot test to ensure the reliability of the instruments, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, indicating acceptable consistency.

Measure

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to evaluate the levels of knowledge, attitude, and spirit of volunteerism, as well as self-esteem among students. The research instruments were adapted from the "Knowledge, Attitude, and Spirit of Volunteerism among Students in Public Institutions of Higher Learning" (Hamzah et al., 2016) and the "Level of Self-Esteem" (Rosenberg, 1965). The questionnaire comprised six sections: socio-demographic characteristics, family profile, knowledge of the organization and volunteer activities, attitudes

towards volunteer activities, spirit of volunteerism, and self-esteem levels. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0, and Chi-Square Tests were employed to assess associations between variables.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 1,161 undergraduate students from three main campuses of a public university in Malaysia. Participants were drawn from 28 faculties, distributed across three academic clusters: Science & Technology (41.5%, n = 482), Social Sciences & Humanities (37.5%, n = 435), and Business & Management (21.0%, n = 244). The age of respondents ranged from 19 to 30 years, with a mean age of 21.94 years (SD = 1.32); the majority were under 23 years old (91.6%).

Gender distribution revealed a predominance of female students, accounting for 71.7% (n = 832), while males constituted 28.3% (n = 329). Religiously, most respondents identified as Muslim (95.8%, n = 1,112), with a small proportion identifying as Christian (4.2%, n = 49). Educationally, the majority were pursuing bachelor's degrees (97.2%, n = 1,129), whereas 2.8% (n = 32) were enrolled in Diploma programs.

Geographically, more than half of the respondents came from urban areas (58.1%, n = 675), and 82.4% (n = 957) were campus residents. Academic performance varied, with 16.1% having a CGPA below 3.0 (n = 187), 54.4% falling within the 3.01 to 3.50 range (n = 632), and 29.5% achieving a CGPA above 3.50 (n = 342).

Regarding volunteering experience, 18.3% (n = 212) were regular volunteers, 53.7% (n = 624) were occasional volunteers, and 28.0% (n = 325) had no volunteering experience. Most respondents volunteered between 1 and 3 times (51.8%, n = 601), with smaller groups having volunteered 4 to 6 times (16.1%, n = 187), 7 to 10 times (4.7%, n = 55), or more than 10 times (2.1%, n = 24). Additionally, 16.6% (n = 193) reported never having volunteered, and 8.7% (n = 101) were unsure of their volunteering frequency.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n= 1161)

	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
Academic Cluster		
Science & Technology	482	41.5
Social Sciences & Humanities	435	37.5
Business & Management	244	21.0
Age (Mean: 21.94) (SD: 1.32)		
Below 23 years old	1064	91.6
23-30 years old	97	8.4
Gender		
Male	329	28.3
Female	832	71.7
Religion		
Islam	1112	95.8
Kristian	49	4.2
Educational Level		
Diploma	32	2.8

Bachelor	1129	97.2
Hometown		
Urban	675	58.1
Rural	486	41.9
Residency		
Resident	957	82.4
Non-resident	204	17.6
CGPA		
Below 3.0	187	16.1
3.01-3.50	632	54.4
Above 3.50	342	29.5
Experience in Volunteering		
Regular Volunteer	212	18.3
Occasional Volunteer	624	53.7
Non-Volunteer	325	28.0
Frequency in Volunteering Time		
1 to 3 times	601	51.8
4 to 6 times	187	16.1
7 to 10 times	55	4.7
More than 10 times	24	2.1
Never	193	16.6
Unsure	101	8.7

A Knowledge, Attitudes, And Spirit Towards Volunteerism

The results from Table 2 provide a comprehensive overview of the respondents' perspectives and feelings about volunteerism, highlighting their levels of knowledge, attitudes, spirit, and self-esteem.

Knowledge of Volunteerism: The majority of respondents, 58.1% (n = 674), had a high level of knowledge about volunteerism, indicating a strong understanding of its principles and practices. A further 30.7% (n = 356) possessed a moderate level of knowledge, suggesting a reasonable but not exhaustive understanding. However, 11.3% (n = 131) had a low level of knowledge, pointing to a gap in their awareness or understanding of volunteerism.

Attitudes Towards Volunteerism: The attitudes of the respondents towards volunteerism were predominantly positive, with 82.5% (n = 958) demonstrating a favorable view of volunteer activities. This suggests that most students recognize the value and benefits of volunteering. In contrast, 17.5% (n = 203) held a negative attitude, which could reflect a range of issues from personal disinterest to negative experiences or perceptions about volunteer work.

Spirit Towards Volunteerism: The spirit or enthusiasm towards volunteerism was also largely positive among the respondents. A significant 76.1% (n = 884) showed a good spirit, indicating that they are generally enthusiastic and supportive of volunteer activities. On the other hand, 23.9% (n = 277) exhibited a poor spirit, suggesting a lack of motivation or interest in engaging with volunteer work.

Self-Esteem: In terms of self-esteem, 60.9% (n = 707) of respondents reported high self-esteem, indicating a positive self-regard and confidence in their abilities. This is a favorable outcome as high self-esteem is often associated with better personal well-being and social functioning.

Conversely, 39.1% (n = 454) reported low self-esteem, which might affect their engagement and perceptions related to volunteerism.

Overall, the data suggests that while most respondents are well-informed and positive about volunteerism, there is a notable proportion with lower levels of knowledge, negative attitudes, or poor spirits towards volunteering. Additionally, a significant number of students struggle with low self-esteem, which may impact their involvement and experiences with volunteer activities.

Table 2: Level of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Spirit towards Volunteerism

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Level of Knowledge towards volunteerism		
High	674	58.1
Moderate	356	30.7
Low	131	11.3
Attitudes towards volunteerism		
Positive attitude	958	82.5
Negative attitude	203	17.5
Spirit towards volunteerism		
Good spirit	884	76.1
Poor spirit	277	23.9
Self-esteem		
High self-esteem	707	60.9
Low self-esteem	454	39.1

Association Between Knowledge, Attitude, Spirit of Volunteerism and Self-Esteem

The results presented in Table 3 explore the associations between respondents' self-esteem and their levels of knowledge, attitudes, and spirit towards volunteerism. The findings reveal significant relationships in each area.

Association with Knowledge of Volunteerism: The statistical test showed a significant association between the level of knowledge about volunteerism and self-esteem ($\chi^2 = 15.21$, $p < 0.01$). Respondents with high knowledge levels had a higher frequency of high self-esteem, with 58.2% (n = 411) of those with high self-esteem having high knowledge, compared to only 8.6% (n = 61) of those with low self-esteem. Conversely, those with low knowledge had a lower frequency of high self-esteem (15.4%, n = 70) and a higher frequency of low self-esteem (15.4%, n = 70).

Association with Attitudes towards Volunteerism: There was a significant association between attitudes towards volunteerism and self-esteem ($\chi^2 = 45.54$, $p < 0.01$). Respondents with a positive attitude towards volunteerism were more likely to report high self-esteem, with 88.5% (n = 626) of those with high self-esteem having a positive attitude, compared to only 11.5% (n = 81) with a negative attitude. In contrast, those with negative attitudes had a higher frequency of low self-esteem (26.9%, n = 122).

Association with Spirit towards Volunteerism: The association between the spirit towards volunteerism and self-esteem was also significant ($\chi^2 = 45.27$, $p < 0.01$). Respondents with a

good spirit towards volunteerism were more likely to have high self-esteem, with 82.9% (n = 586) of those with high self-esteem showing a good spirit, compared to 17.1% (n = 121) with a poor spirit. Conversely, those with a poor spirit had a higher proportion of low self-esteem (34.4%, n = 156).

Overall, the results indicate that higher levels of knowledge, positive attitudes, and a good spirit towards volunteerism are strongly associated with higher self-esteem among the respondents.

Table 3: Association between Knowledge, Attitude, Spirit of Volunteerism and Self Esteem

Variables	Self-Esteem		Statistical Test (p-value)
	Frequency (Percentage)		
	Low	High	
Level of Spirit			15.21 (0.01)
Low	70 (15.4)	61 (8.6)	
Moderate	121 (26.7)	235 (33.2)	
High	263 (57.9)	411 (58.2)	
Level of Attitude			45.54 (0.01)
Negative Attitude	122 (26.9)	81 (11.5)	
Positive Attitude	332 (73.1)	626 (88.5)	
Level of Spirit			45.27 (0.01)
Poor Spirit	156 (34.4)	121 (17.1)	
Good Spirit	298 (65.6)	586 (82.9)	

Discussion

The findings from this study provide crucial insights into the intersection of demographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, spirit towards volunteerism, and self-esteem among university students in Malaysia. These results have significant implications for understanding how volunteerism can be harnessed to promote both personal and community development.

Demographic Characteristics and Volunteerism: The demographic data reveals a few interesting trends. The high percentage of female participants (71.7%) is consistent with broader educational trends in Malaysia, where female enrollment in higher education has outpaced male enrollment in recent years. This could suggest that women, particularly university students, might be more inclined to engage in volunteer activities, which has been corroborated by other studies that point to higher rates of altruistic behavior among women (Abdullah et al., 2023). However, this also raises the question of how to engage more male students in volunteerism, which could be an area for future research and targeted interventions.

The study also highlights the urban dominance (58.1%) among the respondents, which might reflect better access to educational resources and opportunities for volunteering in urban areas compared to rural areas. This urban-rural divide in volunteerism participation is worth exploring further, as it could indicate disparities in opportunities or awareness of volunteer programs between these regions (Ghazali et al., 2023).

In terms of academic performance, the finding that more than half of the students have a moderate to good CGPA (3.01-3.50) and that many of these students participate in volunteer activities challenges the notion that volunteering detracts from academic success. On the contrary, it suggests that volunteering might be positively correlated with academic

performance, possibly due to the development of soft skills such as time management and leadership, which are transferable to academic work (Ooi & Teh, 2022).

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Spirit Towards Volunteerism: The high level of knowledge regarding volunteerism (58.1%) among the students is a positive finding, indicating that many students understand the demands and benefits of volunteer work. However, the gaps in knowledge concerning the administrative aspects of volunteerism (such as knowing the department or officer responsible for organizing activities) highlight a critical area for improvement. Universities could enhance their communication strategies by making this information more accessible and visible to students. This could include creating dedicated volunteer coordination offices or platforms that streamline the process of getting involved (Hamid & Abdul Rahman, 2023).

The overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards volunteerism (82.5%) underscore the potential of university students as a vital resource for community development. Students recognize the value of teamwork, social interaction, and the sense of responsibility that comes with volunteering. This aligns with global research indicating that volunteerism can foster essential life skills, such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving (Junaidi et al., 2023).

However, it's also important to consider the 17.5% of students who have a negative attitude towards volunteerism. Understanding the reasons behind this could provide valuable insights into the barriers that prevent some students from engaging in volunteer work. These barriers could include time constraints, lack of interest, or negative past experiences with volunteering, and addressing them could help increase overall participation (Ooi & Teh, 2022).

The strong spirit towards volunteerism (76.1%) found in this study is a promising indicator that many students are not only willing but also motivated to engage in volunteer activities. This intrinsic motivation is crucial for sustaining long-term volunteer engagement and suggests that students who participate in volunteer activities do so out of a genuine desire to contribute to their communities. This finding is consistent with other studies that emphasize the importance of internal motivation in volunteerism, particularly among youth (Ghazali et al., 2023).

Self-Esteem and Its Association with Knowledge, Attitude, and Spirit of Volunteerism: The significant association between knowledge, attitude, and spirit towards volunteerism with self-esteem highlights the psychological benefits of engaging in volunteer work. Students with higher knowledge, a positive attitude, and a strong spirit of volunteerism tend to have higher self-esteem. This finding is consistent with the self-enhancement theory, which suggests that individuals derive psychological benefits, such as increased self-worth, from helping others (Astin & Sax, 1998; Abuiyada, 2018).

Volunteering offers students a sense of accomplishment and purpose, which can boost their confidence and self-respect. Engaging in meaningful activities that benefit others can lead to a positive feedback loop, where the more students volunteer, the better they feel about themselves, and the more likely they are to continue volunteering. This has important implications for student development, as high self-esteem is linked to better academic performance, mental health, and overall life satisfaction (Eley, 2003).

Furthermore, the association between volunteerism and self-esteem suggests that universities can use volunteer programs as a tool for student development. By encouraging students to

participate in volunteer activities, universities can help students build confidence, develop a sense of civic responsibility, and prepare them for future leadership roles. This could be achieved through initiatives such as integrating volunteerism into the curriculum, offering service-learning courses, and providing formal recognition for volunteer contributions (Junaidi et al., 2023).

Addressing Volunteerism Gaps and Enhancing Engagement: Despite the positive findings, this study also highlights areas where improvements can be made. The fact that a significant portion of students (42.7%) either have a moderate or low level of knowledge about volunteerism suggests that there is still work to be done in educating students about the full scope of volunteer opportunities available to them. Universities could offer workshops, seminars, and orientation programs focused on volunteerism to ensure that students are well-informed from the start of their academic journey (Hamid & Abdul Rahman, 2023).

Moreover, the 28% of students identified as non-volunteers indicates a segment of the student population that has yet to engage in volunteer activities. Understanding the reasons behind their lack of participation, whether it be time constraints, lack of awareness, or disinterest, could help universities develop targeted strategies to encourage these students to get involved. This could include offering more flexible volunteer opportunities that fit into students' busy schedules or creating campaigns that highlight the personal and academic benefits of volunteering (Ramlan et al., 2015).

Limitations and Recommendations

This study has several limitations. It was conducted at a single public university in Malaysia, which may not be representative of other institutions or regions. The sample was predominantly Malay and female, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, and the cross-sectional nature of the study provides only a snapshot in time, lacking insights into changes or causal relationships. Additionally, gaps in respondents' knowledge about volunteer departments and officers indicate incomplete understanding, which may affect engagement. Non-response bias and external factors could also influence the results.

Future research should include a more diverse sample from multiple universities and regions to improve generalizability. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track how knowledge, attitudes, and self-esteem related to volunteerism develop over time. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide a deeper understanding of the barriers and motivators influencing volunteer engagement. Additionally, exploring the impact of specific volunteer roles and organizational support on students' development could yield valuable insights. Addressing gaps in respondents' knowledge about volunteer departments and officers could enhance the comprehensiveness of future studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of volunteerism in the personal development of university students. The significant associations between knowledge, attitude, spirit towards volunteerism, and self-esteem highlight the role that volunteering can play in boosting students' confidence and sense of purpose. Universities have a critical role in fostering a volunteer culture by providing more opportunities and better communication about volunteer programs. By doing so, they can help students develop the skills, knowledge, and self-esteem necessary to succeed both in their academic careers and in life beyond university.

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