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**Understanding the Reasons for Malaysian
Youth Participation in Volunteering
Activities**

**Siti Raba' ah Hamzah
Youth and Sport Officer
University Putra Malaysia
Malaysia**

**Turiman Suandi
Lecturer
Putra Malaysia University
Malaysia**

**Ismi Arif Ismail
Lecturer
Putra Malaysia University
Malaysia**

**Jasmin Arif Shah
Researcher
Putra Malaysia University
Malaysia**

Azimi Hamzah

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Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr
URL: www.atiner.gr

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Understanding the Reasons for Malaysian Youth Participation in Volunteering Activities

Siti Raba'ah Hamzah

Turiman Suandi

Jasmin Arif Shah

Ismi Arif Ismail

Azimi Hamzah

Abstract

This paper explores the reasons for Malaysian youth participating in volunteering activities and examines the variables that predict their participation. The subjects in the study were from the Department of Youth and Sports, Malaysia. A total of 251 respondents, between the ages of 15 to 25 (M age = 20.2, SD = 2.7), participated in this study. Using the Social Exchange theory as a framework for this study, three main factors contributing to youth participation in volunteering activities were the perceived benefits from volunteering ('benefits'), the personal needs or fulfilment the respondents to volunteer ('needs'), and their personal reasons for volunteering ('reasons'). Our findings showed that the benefits included learning to shoulder responsibility, broadening interest, fostering relationships, building teamwork spirit, and encouraging socialisation within the community setting. The need to volunteer was associated with the desire to unleash leadership potential and improve communication skills. Finally, the reasons for volunteering included using leisure time meaningfully, getting new experience, improving confidence and self-esteem, attaining emotional stability, and getting a better understanding of the realities of life. The findings indicated positive relationships between participation and 'benefits', 'needs' and 'reasons' to volunteer. However, 'reason' was the strongest predictor of youth becoming volunteers.

In the study; Pompidou Center (1977) which is a landmark in circulation area design's, by giving examples of today's museum buildings, Orsay Museum(1986) which was transformed into a museum from train station and Jean Nouvel's Quai Branly Museum (2006) which is a recent example of this striking change has been analyzed thorough spatial experiences, observations, syntactic analysis technique and semantic examinations.

Keywords: youth, participation, volunteer activities, benefit, need, reason

Introduction

The spirit of volunteerism first swept the country in the nineteenth century. Initially fuelled by religious and community revivals in the 1950s, the first generation of volunteers were drawn to charity in a very personal and religious way (Hussain, 1986). However, increasingly throughout the twentieth century, those who became wealthy withdrew from direct community involvement. Today's volunteer efforts are a reflection of this historical development and diversified growth of the Malaysian volunteer force in many ways. A trend pointing towards this continuous growth of volunteer demand is that many voluntary, public, and private human service agencies are recruiting volunteers to complement and enrich service delivery (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991).

In Malaysia, one such effort is the creation of a new organization called MyCorps (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010), a joint effort between the Ministry of Youth and Sport and relevant agencies such as Youth Council Malaysia (MBM), Malaysian Relief Agency, Yayasan Salam, Youth Council Mosques and other voluntary bodies within and outside the country. MyCorps aims to promote and enhance the spirit of volunteerism among youth through their involvement at the local and international levels, as well as create awareness in youth about issues related to domestic and international peace, war, conflict, cohesion, education, disaster, health and so on. It is a national institutionalized youth platform on which youth can engage and participate in community welfare and humanitarian activities.

Encouraging youth to volunteer to serve the community and individual is widely viewed as beneficial to the society. Throughout history, volunteering is a contribution to the society in one form or another without monetary reimbursement. Although there is no financial return for volunteering, research has shown that volunteers do expect other considerations for the work that they do. Studies show that most youths participate actively volunteering activities to satisfy their own needs while helping others in their community (Gage & Thapa, 2010).

To date, most of the studies on volunteering in Malaysia include examining the factors that influence people to volunteer (Turiman et al., 2011), challenges in voluntary work (Kauthar et al., 2013), empowering youth volunteerism and motivating factors (Mardiyyah et al., 2013), altruism as motivational factors toward volunteerism among youth (Hussin & Mohd Arshad, 2012), and psychosocial factors that influence the volunteers to offer their services to the community (Surjit et al., 2005). In light of the growing interest among youths to engage in work-related volunteering activities and an increase in the kinds of the programmes offered, studies on the understanding of youth participation are necessary. The current study focuses on youth participation and the reasons why they get involved in volunteering programme and activities in Malaysia.

The Current Study

Research related to understanding youth participation in volunteering activities in Malaysia is still lacking at the time of writing. Hence this study has been undertaken to examine the benefits, needs and reasons that influence Malaysian youth involvement in volunteerism.

Flanagan and Levine (2010) evaluate the effect of youth participation on their personal and social development, such as skills and knowledge, academic achievement and school performance, sense of direction, social connectedness, and their psychosocial well-being. Other studies evaluate youth participation *vis-a-vis* organizational development, which is related to administrative structure and allocation of the resources, leadership, management and collaboration with other organization (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). However, according to Morrissey (2000), it is difficult to document such changes in personal, social and organizational development with regard to youth participation in volunteering activities.

Realizing young people's right to participate voluntarily in community projects is vital to ensuring the achievement of internationally agreed developmental goals, such as those by the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Youths must be empowered to contribute to informed decisions about their personal, family, social, economic, environmental and political development. Youth participation is a right protected by the Convention on the Rights Child (United Nations General Assembly, 2011), which states that children have the right to participate in the decision-making processes related to their lives, including participation in volunteering activities.

There should be greater effort to create a supportive environment for participation, engagement and volunteering for young people, including what can be achieved through youth-led organizations, to volunteer within their communities, to allow them to contribute to their own livelihoods, and improve their capability, and employability. Volunteers can thus be moulded into active leaders and useful citizens. Studies show that young people engaged in volunteering also develop positive social behaviours that can help reduce negative risk-taking. Volunteering can also help young people prepare for employment and in their transition to responsible adulthood.

Literature Review

Existing literature on participation by young people often treats them as a homogenous group, having the same experiences and interactions with decision-makers in their communities and with the government. Different levels or models of youth participation have been identified (Hart 1992) but they have a common end point that focuses on partnership and power being shared between other powerful organisational forms and young people. For

example, Shier (2001) defines participation on a continuum along five levels: children and young people are listened to; children and young people are supported to express views; children and young people's views are taken into account; children and young people are involved in decision-making; children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making.

Participation tends to be conceptualised in three main ways. First, as individuals, institutionalised acts that people do by themselves are aimed at trying to influence political outcomes. Second, participation as a group or collectively based action, usually undertaken on a voluntary basis, can influence government or general public opinion. Third, participation is fostered by governments and other formal organisations to include people and groups overtly within their decision-making processes. These three ways of understanding participation are often used interchangeably in both academic and policy-practitioner literature, despite the fact that they entail significantly different approaches to becoming involved in politics and society. Different approaches to understanding participation are more or less prescriptive in both recognising *how* young people are currently involved in government and community decision-making, and for making suggestions on how they ought to be involved in the future.

Participation as a collective action is an activity undertaken with others, in a formal or informal group structure, to achieve a shared goal, often for the creation of social and political change. Such participation is through activities like joining local community or volunteering groups.

Driskell (2002) developed the dimension of youth participation based on two strong concepts: first, the power of young people to make decisions and effect changes and second, and interaction of young people with others in their community. Merging these two concepts sheds new light on the continuous debate around the ultimate goal of voluntary participation in community services by young people. Focusing on volunteers working with the communities, Driskell and Neema (2009) developed a framework that presents participation as a spatial practice shaped by five dimensions, *viz.* normative, structural, operational, physical, and attitudinal. All these dimensions are mutually constitutive and highly interactive for volunteers.

The Benefits of Participation in Volunteering Activities

A volunteer is a person who allots a part of his time to help community members without being materially rewarded; he assumes responsibility for voluntary activity, seeking personal satisfaction and acquisition of new experience (Adler, 2011). According to Wilson (2000) the decision to volunteer is based on a rational weighing of its costs and benefits.

Volunteer motivation can be conceptualised within the framework of the Social Exchange theory, i.e. in order for volunteer efforts to be sustained over time, the rewards to the volunteer must exceed, or at minimum, balance out the costs (Schafer, 1979). The theory suggests that people contribute to the degree that they perceive that they are being rewarded. When an imbalance between contributions and rewards is perceived, an individual is likely to move toward a

greater equilibrium. An individual who perceives that the rewards for volunteering are imbalanced with contributions is likely to discontinue involvement. According to Blau (1964), the Social Exchange theory describes six types of social rewards, *viz.* personal attraction, social acceptance, social approval, instrumental services, respect/prestige, and compliance/power. In the case of volunteering, the reward can take the form of learning, love, gratitude, perceived higher status associated with giving back to the community, and an overall sense of positive spirituality.

There are multiple benefits from volunteering. Research has found that volunteering can enhance personal skills development, sense of civic responsibility, career choice and employability (Hall et al., 2009; Musick & Wilson, 2008). According to Holdsworth (2010), volunteers have altruistic and instrumental reasons for helping out in their community. They learn new skills and gain experience that may benefit their career advancement. Studies have also identified volunteering programme characteristics that maximize benefits to youth volunteers. These include activities that provide opportunities for (i) youth autonomy and decision-making, (ii) collaborative work with youth and adults, (iii) reflection, (iv) psychological engagement, and (v) building competence, confidence, character, connection and caring attitude (Stukas, Clary & Snyder, 1999).

Need to Volunteer

According to the Social Exchange theory, the need to volunteer is motivated by self-interest. It assumes that self-interest has no genetic basis. The theory hypothesizes that social exchanges comprise actions conditional on the rewarding actions of others i.e. it can increase the probability that someone will help us in return in the future; it can relieve the personal distress of the bystander; and it can gain us social approval and increased self-worth.

Research has shown that volunteering can provide social capital (Putnam, 2012; Wollbaeck & Selle, 2002) and human capital (McNamara & Gonzales, 2011; Schram & Dunsing, 1981). Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1985), is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”. According to Putnam (1993: 167), social capital is often defined as “those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions”. Volunteering activities can expand the circle of professional contacts, durable networks, employment leads and social relationships. Statham and Rhoton (1986) suggest that volunteering enhances human capital, which includes knowledge, skills, abilities, leadership opportunities and work experience. Based on the literature, volunteering can serve as a pathway to employment through increases in one’s social capital and human capital. The combination of these two important aspects will enhance the volunteers’ skills and experience. When volunteers gain or update skills that are needed in the workplace through their volunteer activities, they will become more employable or productive at their workplace.

Findings consistently show strong correlations between social capital and the tendency to volunteer (Wilson, 2000). Social contacts usually encourage volunteerism, either by direct request or by setting an example. People are more likely to volunteer in response to a personal appeal, particularly from a current volunteer. It was found that people who were asked by a current volunteer to offer their services were four times more likely to do so than if they were asked by others (Penner, 2004). In fact, social capital can also explain the impact of human capital (income and education) on volunteering, given that individuals with higher positions at work and those who have attended college have more social contacts. Furthermore, social networks provide rewards for helping behaviours, in the form of increasing positive attitudes from significant others and increased prestige.

Reasons to Get Involved in Volunteering Activities

Many studies have been undertaken to investigate why people volunteer and what benefits volunteers gain from helping others. Cross-cultural studies have shown that people in different countries have different perceptions of volunteering, varying with local cultures, political climate, government policy and history. Helping others has been found to be an important and consistent factor amongst volunteers of all ages (Nichols & King, 1999; Brudney, 1994). Research on volunteering has examined and categorized the motivational objectives of individuals who donate their services in volunteering programmes. One of the major motives for volunteering is giving something worthwhile back to society. In this regard, Yeung (2004) identifies different motivations such as altruism, social contact, personal interest and emotional needs as some of the reasons for people's involvement in volunteering activities. Some motives especially associated with youth volunteering include sharpening or stretching one's job skills, testing new careers, building a resume, and achievement, affiliation or power.

A number of studies have contributed to the understanding of the volunteerism movement in Malaysia. Previous empirical studies have focused on altruism as a motivational factor contributing to volunteerism among youth (Zaliha & Mohd Ramlan, 2012). Other studies include investigations on volunteerism and the development of Malaysian social care system (Hawa, 2002), empowerment of youth volunteerism and global motivating factors (Mardhiyyah et al., 2013), and factors contributing toward sustainability of youth organizations as partners in community development (Azimi & Turiman, 2002).

Methods

Participants and Procedures

The participants in this study were drawn from the Department of Youth and Sports, Malaysia, which had over 2000 volunteers belonging to 40 youth organizations. Many committee members of the organization were volunteers

who actively took part in volunteering programmes. Using a random sampling technique to ensure the representativeness of the chosen sample, a total of 251 respondents participated in this study. There were 123 (49.0%) males and 128 (51.0%) females; 148 respondents (59.0%) were from suburban and rural areas, and 103 (41.0%) from urban areas. The mean age of the participants was 20.2 years ($SD = 2.7$), with a range of 15 to 25 years.

Measures

The survey was prepared to measure the reasons for Malaysian youth participation in volunteering activities. Questions were rated in a 10-point Likert-scale format was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

Statements about the benefits of youth *participation* in volunteering activities were given to elicit responses from the respondents: “Volunteering activities polish my leadership skills”; “Volunteering activities mould good values in me”; “Volunteering activities provide the opportunity to increase social capital”; “Volunteering activities improve social interaction”; “Volunteering activities help problem-solving”; “Volunteering activities boost self-confidence”; “Volunteering activities create happiness”; “Volunteering activities enhance sense of belonging”.

In addition to statements on participation in volunteering, we also included a number of measures to assess the *benefits* of youth volunteering in social capital. We asked respondents to identify, from a given list, the main pillars for social capital (leadership, entrepreneurship, team-work, communication, good ethics and moral, life-long learning, critical thinking).

Next, the respondents were requested to identify their *reasons* for participating in volunteering activities. The questionnaire was framed as follows: “Involvement in volunteering activities helps improve employability”; “Participating in volunteering activities helps me make new friends”; “Getting involved in volunteering activities helps to develop new contacts”; “Participating involved in volunteering activities enriched positive lifestyle choices and behavior”; “Involvement in volunteering activities makes me feel appreciated”; “Involvement in volunteering activities helps me fulfill a religious requirement”; “Participation in volunteering activities help support corporate social responsibility”; “Participation in volunteering activities enables me to support the government development policies”; “Involvement in volunteering activities can create social networks of trust and cooperation”.

Finally, the questionnaire investigated why youth felt the *need* to get involved in volunteering activities. The participants were required to respond to these statements: “I feel I am doing the right thing”; “I need to have a sense of accomplishment”; “I feel I can play a role in community development”; “I need to fulfil a spiritual obligation”; “I need help with my personal growth”; “I need to encourage sharing among communities”; “I need to make life better for the coming generations”; “It helps me to deal better with my day to day problems”; “It gives me a sense of have accomplished something useful in my

community”; and “It makes me act in a responsible manner towards the development of the country”.

Results

Bivariate Correlation (Pearson’s r) - The relationships between participation and benefit, need and reason were investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality and linearity. As depicted in Table 1, according to Cohen (1988), the strongest linear relationship was found to exist between participation and reasons to volunteer ($r = .816, p = .0001$). The positive correlation coefficient of .816 indicates the score for participation and also the rating of reason to participate in volunteering activities. The second highest relationship was found between participation and benefit for volunteers ($r = .702, p = .0001$) and the correlation coefficient indicates that there was strong positive linear relationship between participation and benefit for volunteers. Finally, the third highest relationship was between participation and need to volunteer ($r = .689, p = 0.003$) and a value of .689 indicates a positive linear relationship.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Bivariate Correlations among Predictor and Dependent Variables For Volunteering

Variable	M	SD	Participation	Benefit	Needs	Reason
Participation	7.212	1.405	1.000			
Benefit	7.670	1.535	.702	**		
Needs	7.599	1.625	.689	.609	**	
Reason	7.217	1.355	.816	.521	.685	**

** Significant at $p < 0.001$ level

Regression analysis on predictors of participation to volunteers - The data were further analysed using utilized multiple regression analysis (Table 2) to identify factors which influence participation in volunteering activities. These factors included benefit, need and reason. To determine the extent that the research data fit the proposed multiple linear regression model, the enter regression method was used. The ANOVA table reveals that the F-statistics ($F = 168.897$) was large and the corresponding p -value was highly significant (0.0001) or lower than the alpha value of 0.05. This indicates that the model as a whole is significant $F(3, 250) = 168.897, p = .0001$. However, based on the enter method used; it is relevant to note that the r square value of the one correlation coefficient between participation and reason is $0.816^2 = 0.67$. It does not require a combination of three predictor variables to reach an R squared value of 0.67. Not surprisingly, Table 2 shows that the other two variables, need ($p = .101$) and benefit ($p = .554$) do not contribute significantly to the amount of variance that is explained.

As depicted in Table 2, the largest beta coefficient is 0.695, which is for reason to participate and this corresponds with the highest t-statistic of 10.156. This means that the reason to participate variable makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variables of engagement in volunteering activities, when the variance explained by all other predictor variables in the model is held constant. It suggests that one standard deviation increase in reason to participate is associated with 0.695 standard deviation increase in engagement towards volunteer activities. The Beta value for needs is (0.109), followed by benefit to volunteer, which is the lowest (0.043). The result showed that the higher the reason to participate, the greater the possibility of participation in volunteering activities.

Table 2. *Predictors of Volunteer Participation in Volunteering Activity*

Factors	Beta (Unstandardized Coefficients)	Std error	Beta (Standardized Coefficients)	t	Sig.
Constant	.993	.283		3.503	.000
Benefit	.039	.066	.043	.953	.554
Needs	.095	.057	.109	1.648	.101
Reason	.721	.071	.695	10.156	.000

R=.820, R²= .672, F= 168.897, ρ =.000

Conclusion and Recommendations

Understanding why Malaysian youth participate in volunteering activities is important to the development of social and human capital in the country. In this study, three factors were explored, *viz.* benefit, need and reason to get involved. The last factor, namely reason, was the strongest predictor of youth becoming a volunteer. This study also shows volunteering activities help youth boost their employability, forge new friendships, develop new contacts, create social networks of trust and cooperation, receive more appreciation, fulfill religious requirement, support corporate social responsibility and contribute to government development policies.

Benefits for volunteering were positively related with participation. Volunteering was perceived to have enabled volunteers develop skills which might be useful in a future career or help to obtain employment, gain academic credits or even aid career advancement. The findings showed that volunteering activities also helped polish leadership skills, mould good values, and provide opportunities to increase social capital, enlargement the social circle, help problem-solving, boost self-confidence, increase happiness and enhance sense of belonging.

Finally, the need to volunteer included the desire to: do the right thing, fulfil a sense of accomplishment, play a role in community development, restore or contribute to spirituality, enhance personal growth, encourage sharing among communities, make life better for the coming generations, help

to deal with day to day problems, accomplish something useful in the community, and act in a responsible manner for the development of the country.

These findings suggest that benefits, needs and reasons are important factors which influence an individual's decision to participate in volunteering activities. This information would benefit volunteer organizations because they could use this data to tailor their promotions to invite more volunteers to participate in volunteering projects. They would also be informed of which kind of benefits, needs and reasons to focus on in order to expand the number of potential volunteers.

By viewing findings in the context of The Social Exchange theory, this study provides a platform for appreciating youth participation in the voluntary activities and to continually reassess and balance the rewards and costs of their involvement. Positive relationships between participation and benefits, need and reason to volunteers all appear to contribute to greater satisfaction and intention to remain committed to volunteering activities in the longer term.

Nevertheless, it would be beneficial to conduct in-depth interviews to discover more details about what might motivate youths to volunteer in the volunteering activities. Perhaps the sample for future studies could include youth who are not from the Department of Youth and Sports. Students and young working adults should be interviewed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of their views regarding youth participation in volunteering activities. It is important to ensure that the youthful volunteers of today are moulded into active leaders and useful citizens. Hence more research to shed light in this area would be most useful.

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