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Student Volunteerism in Civil Society: A Scoping Review of Motivations, Advantages, and Obstacles

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Abstract: This scoping review systematically maps and synthesizes the existing literature on the motivations, benefits, and challenges associated with students volunteering in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). As global challenges necessitate increased civic engagement, understanding the dynamics of student volunteerism is crucial for universities, CSOs, and students themselves. Utilizing a comprehensive search strategy, this review identifies key drivers for student participation, the multifaceted advantages derived from such engagement, and the common obstacles encountered. Findings indicate that students are motivated by a blend of altruistic desires, personal development goals, and academic requirements. The benefits extend beyond individual skill acquisition to include enhanced civic responsibility, improved well-being, and strengthened career prospects. However, challenges such as time management, lack of adequate support, and logistical issues often impede sustained involvement. This review underscores the vital role of strategic partnerships between educational institutions and CSOs to optimize student volunteering experiences, fostering a symbiotic relationship that benefits individuals, organizations, and broader society.

Keywords: Student Volunteering, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Motivations, Benefits, Challenges, Scoping Review, Youth Engagement, Civic Engagement, Higher Education.

Introduction: Volunteerism, defined as an activity undertaken by choice and for no financial gain, plays a crucial role in strengthening civil society, addressing social needs, and fostering community development [1]. Globally, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) rely heavily

on volunteer efforts to achieve their missions, ranging from environmental protection and humanitarian aid to social justice advocacy and community empowerment [2]. Within this landscape, students represent a unique and increasingly vital demographic of volunteers. Their engagement in CSOs offers a dynamic intersection of academic learning, personal growth, and civic participation, contributing significantly to both their individual development and the broader societal good [3].

The motivations driving students to volunteer are diverse, often encompassing altruistic desires to contribute to society, a pursuit of personal development, the acquisition of new skills, and sometimes, the fulfillment of academic requirements or career aspirations [4, 5]. Beyond these motivations, student volunteerism is associated with a myriad of benefits, including enhanced civic responsibility, improved well-being, stronger social connections, and increased employability [6, 7]. However, engaging in volunteer work alongside academic commitments also presents distinct challenges, such as time management, balancing competing priorities, and navigating organizational structures [8].

Understanding the complex interplay of motivations, benefits, and challenges is crucial for optimizing student volunteer experiences and for CSOs to effectively recruit, engage, and retain this valuable demographic. Universities, recognizing the pedagogical value of experiential learning and civic engagement, are increasingly integrating volunteerism into their curricula and promoting extracurricular opportunities [9]. Despite the growing interest in student volunteerism, a comprehensive and systematic overview of the existing literature that synthesizes these diverse aspects is lacking.

This scoping review aims to systematically map and synthesize the current evidence base on the motivations, benefits, and challenges of students volunteering in Civil Society Organizations. By identifying key themes and prevalent research findings, this review seeks to provide a holistic understanding that can inform policy and practice for higher education institutions, CSOs, and students, ultimately fostering more effective and sustainable student volunteerism.

Literature Review

Volunteerism among students is a growing area of academic and practical interest, reflecting its multifaceted benefits for individuals, educational institutions, and civil society [1]. The broader concept of volunteerism emphasizes its non-compulsory nature and its contribution to the well-being of others or the

community [13]. In the context of civil society, volunteerism serves as a vehicle for community engagement and development, fostering active citizenship and addressing societal needs [17, 18].

2.1 Motivations for Student Volunteering Students are driven to volunteer by a complex array of motivations, often categorized into altruistic, egoistic, and career-related factors [14].

- **Altruistic Motivations:** Many students are primarily motivated by a desire to help others, contribute to a cause they believe in, or give back to their community [19]. This aligns with the concept of social responsibility and ethical development [1].
- **Personal Development:** Volunteering offers opportunities for personal growth, self-discovery, and enhancing self-esteem [15]. Students often seek to develop new skills, gain experience, and build confidence outside the traditional classroom setting [4].
- **Skill Acquisition and Career Prospects:** A significant motivation is the acquisition of practical skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving) that are highly valued in the job market [3, 4]. Volunteering can enhance resumes and provide networking opportunities, improving career prospects [19].
- **Social Connections:** Students may volunteer to meet new people, expand their social networks, and feel a sense of belonging within a community or organization [19].
- **Academic Requirements:** For some students, volunteering is a requirement for specific courses (e.g., service-learning), internships, or scholarship programs [19]. Programs like G-Watch in the Philippines, for instance, integrate volunteerism for OJT and NSTP students [20].

2.2 Benefits of Student Volunteering The benefits of student volunteering are extensive and accrue to individuals, universities, and CSOs:

- **For Students:**
 - o **Personal Growth and Well-being:** Volunteering is linked to increased self-esteem, empathy, civic responsibility, and overall well-being [6, 12]. It can also contribute to positive coping strategies [21].
 - o **Skill Development:** Students develop a range of transferable skills, including leadership, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and organizational skills, which are crucial for future employment [3, 4].
 - o **Academic Persistence and Engagement:** Engagement in voluntary activities can positively impact student persistence and engagement in their studies [15].

o Civic Engagement and Citizenship: Volunteering fosters active citizenship, democratic participation, and a deeper understanding of societal issues [3, 4]. It can be a vehicle for political learning and democratic citizenship education [22].

o Career Advancement: Practical experience gained through volunteering enhances employability and provides valuable insights into potential career paths [19].

- For Universities: Student volunteerism enhances the university's reputation, fulfills its civic mission, and provides experiential learning opportunities that complement academic curricula [3, 9].

- For Civil Society Organizations: Students provide much-needed human resources, fresh perspectives, and innovative ideas, contributing to the capacity and impact of CSOs [7, 11].

2.3 Challenges of Student Volunteering Despite the numerous benefits, students and CSOs face several challenges:

- Time Management: Balancing academic demands, part-time jobs, and social life with volunteer commitments is a significant challenge for students [8, 9].

- Lack of Support/Recognition: Students may feel undervalued if their contributions are not adequately recognized by CSOs or if they lack sufficient support and supervision [7].

- Logistical Issues: Transportation, scheduling conflicts, and lack of clear roles can create practical difficulties [7].

- Disillusionment: Students may become disillusioned if their expectations are not met, if they perceive inefficiency, or if they encounter ethical dilemmas within the CSO [8].

- Impact on Academic Performance: Concerns about volunteering negatively impacting academic performance can deter participation [15].

This literature review highlights the multifaceted nature of student volunteerism. However, a systematic scoping review is necessary to synthesize these findings comprehensively, identify prevalent research methodologies, and pinpoint gaps in the existing evidence base, particularly concerning the interplay of these factors in diverse global contexts. The methodological framework for scoping reviews by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2010) provide a robust approach for such a synthesis [1, 10].

METHODOLOGY

This scoping review followed the methodological framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) extension for scoping reviews (Moher et al., 2010) [1, 10]. This approach was chosen to systematically map the existing literature on the motivations, benefits, and challenges of students volunteering in Civil Society Organizations, providing a comprehensive overview of the research landscape rather than a critical appraisal of individual study quality.

3.1 Research Questions The review was guided by the following broad research questions:

1. What are the primary motivations for students to volunteer in Civil Society Organizations?
2. What are the reported benefits for students engaging in volunteer activities with CSOs?
3. What challenges do students face when volunteering in CSOs?
4. What is the extent and nature of the existing literature on this topic?

3.2 Search Strategy A comprehensive search strategy was developed and executed across multiple electronic databases, including [e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, Google Scholar]. The search terms included combinations of keywords such as "student volunteer," "university student volunteering," "college student volunteering," "youth volunteerism," "civil society organizations," "non-profit organizations," "motivations," "benefits," "challenges," "obstacles," "drivers," and "impacts." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to combine terms effectively. The search was not limited by publication date to capture a broad historical perspective, but a focus was placed on more recent publications where available. Reference lists of included studies and relevant systematic reviews were also hand-searched for additional articles.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- Population: Focused on students (e.g., university, college, pre-tertiary, or youth in higher education contexts) as volunteers.
- Concept: Explored motivations, benefits, challenges, experiences, or perceptions related to student volunteerism.
- Context: Involved volunteering specifically within Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), non-profit organizations, or community-based initiatives. Studies focused solely on academic service-learning without a clear CSO partnership were excluded unless they explicitly discussed student motivations/benefits/challenges in a volunteer

capacity.

- Study Design: All empirical study designs (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), reviews, and conceptual papers were considered.
- Language: Articles published in English.

Studies were excluded if they focused solely on compulsory service, paid internships, or volunteering in contexts entirely unrelated to CSOs (e.g., purely political campaigns without a civil society component).

3.4 Data Charting Process A standardized data charting form was developed and iteratively refined to extract relevant information from each eligible study. For each included study, the following information was extracted:

- Author(s), year of publication, and journal/source.
- Country/context of the study.
- Study design and methodology (e.g., survey, interview, mixed methods).
- Specific focus of the study (e.g., motivations, benefits, challenges).
- Key findings related to motivations (e.g., altruism, skill development, academic), benefits (e.g., personal growth, civic engagement, career), and challenges (e.g., time, support, logistics).
- Recommendations or implications for practice.

Data charting was performed by [number] reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

3.5 Data Synthesis The extracted data were synthesized using a narrative approach, identifying overarching themes, patterns, and categories related to the motivations, benefits, and challenges of student volunteering in CSOs. This involved grouping studies by their primary focus and synthesizing their findings descriptively. Quantitative findings (e.g., prevalence rates of motivations) were summarized, and qualitative insights (e.g., detailed experiences of challenges) were integrated to provide a rich and comprehensive overview. No formal critical appraisal of individual study quality was undertaken, consistent with the methodology of a scoping review. The synthesis aimed to present the breadth of the literature and identify areas for future research.

RESULTS

The systematic search and screening process yielded [Number] records. After removing duplicates and applying eligibility criteria, [Number] studies were included in the final scoping review. These studies encompassed a range of geographical contexts,

including [e.g., Ghana, China, Fiji, Ukraine, USA, and various other international settings], reflecting the global nature of student volunteerism.

4.1 Motivations for Student Volunteering The review identified a consistent set of motivations driving students to volunteer in CSOs:

- Altruism and Social Responsibility: A predominant motivation was the desire to help others, contribute to a cause, and make a positive impact on society [4, 19]. Students often expressed a strong sense of social responsibility and a desire to address community needs [19].

- Personal Growth and Self-Development: Many students were motivated by opportunities for personal growth, enhancing self-esteem, and building confidence [15]. This included a desire to explore their interests and values [19].

- Skill Acquisition and Career Enhancement: The acquisition of practical skills (e.g., leadership, communication, teamwork, problem-solving) and the enhancement of their resume for future career prospects were significant motivators [3, 4, 19]. This was particularly evident in studies focusing on specific professional fields or academic disciplines [7].

- Academic Requirements and Experiential Learning: For some, volunteering was driven by academic course requirements or a desire for experiential learning that complemented their studies [9, 20].

- Socialization and Belonging: The opportunity to meet new people, expand social networks, and feel part of a community was also a recurring motivation [19].

4.2 Benefits of Student Volunteering The literature consistently reported a wide array of benefits for students engaged in CSO volunteerism:

- Enhanced Personal and Social Competencies: Students reported significant improvements in soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and adaptability [3, 4].

- Increased Civic Engagement and Responsibility: Volunteering fostered a deeper understanding of societal issues, increased civic responsibility, and promoted active citizenship [3, 4, 22]. Students developed a greater sense of community and a desire for continued engagement [19].

- Improved Well-being and Satisfaction: Engagement in meaningful volunteer work was linked to increased life satisfaction, reduced stress, and enhanced overall well-being [6, 21].

- Academic and Career Advantages: Volunteering experiences often led to improved academic

persistence [15], provided practical experience relevant to their studies, and enhanced employability by making their resumes more competitive [19].

- **Expanded Networks:** Students gained valuable networking opportunities with professionals, community leaders, and peers [19].

4.3 Challenges of Student Volunteering Despite the benefits, several common challenges were identified:

- **Time Management and Academic Pressure:** The most frequently cited challenge was balancing volunteer commitments with demanding academic schedules, coursework, and examinations [8, 9]. This often led to stress and potential burnout [21].
- **Lack of Support and Recognition:** Some students reported feeling inadequately supported by the CSOs, lacking clear roles, sufficient supervision, or proper recognition for their contributions [7]. This could lead to a sense of being a "burden" rather than a "lifeblood" for the voluntary sector [7].
- **Logistical and Financial Barriers:** Issues such as transportation costs, inconvenient scheduling, and lack of clear communication from CSOs posed practical obstacles [7, 8].
- **Disillusionment and Emotional Strain:** Some students experienced disillusionment due to encountering complex social problems, organizational inefficiencies, or a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of the volunteer work [8]. Dealing with challenging situations could also lead to emotional strain [21].
- **Limited Opportunities for Meaningful Engagement:** In some cases, students felt that the tasks assigned were menial or did not fully utilize their skills, leading to a lack of meaningful engagement [8].

4.4 Nature and Extent of Literature The literature comprised a mix of quantitative surveys assessing motivations and benefits, qualitative studies exploring experiences, and mixed-methods approaches. Geographical coverage was diverse, but there was a notable concentration of studies in developed countries, with growing research from developing contexts like China and Southeast Asia [8, 11, 19]. The review confirmed the relevance of scoping review methodologies for mapping this broad field [1, 7].

DISCUSSION

The findings of this scoping review provide a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of student volunteerism in Civil Society Organizations. The identified motivations for student engagement—ranging from altruism and personal growth to skill development and academic requirements—underscore the multifaceted appeal of volunteering.

This blend of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers suggests that effective recruitment strategies by CSOs and universities should appeal to a diverse set of student aspirations [4, 19]. Universities, for instance, can highlight the experiential learning component and career benefits, while CSOs can emphasize the direct social impact and opportunities for meaningful contribution.

The extensive list of benefits accruing to students, including enhanced personal competencies, increased civic engagement, and improved well-being, reinforces the pedagogical and developmental value of volunteerism [3, 6, 12]. These benefits extend beyond the individual, contributing to a more civically minded and skilled future workforce, which ultimately benefits society as a whole. The positive correlation between volunteering and academic persistence [15] also provides a strong argument for universities to actively promote and integrate volunteer opportunities into their student support frameworks.

However, the consistent identification of challenges, particularly time management, lack of support, and logistical hurdles, highlights critical areas for intervention. These obstacles, if unaddressed, can lead to student burnout, disillusionment, and ultimately, a reduced likelihood of sustained volunteer engagement [8]. CSOs, while often resource-constrained, must recognize that providing clear roles, adequate supervision, and timely recognition is crucial for retaining student volunteers and ensuring their experience is positive and impactful [7]. Universities also have a role in helping students manage their time effectively and in providing academic flexibility where possible to accommodate volunteer commitments.

The review also implicitly points to the symbiotic relationship between universities and CSOs. Universities can serve as vital pipelines for student volunteers, while CSOs offer invaluable real-world learning environments. Strengthening these partnerships, perhaps through formal agreements or dedicated liaison roles, can streamline the volunteering process, ensure better matches between student skills and CSO needs, and provide structured support for students [9]. The success stories of programs like G-Watch in the Philippines [20] demonstrate the potential of such collaborations.

While the review successfully mapped the existing literature, a limitation inherent in scoping reviews is the lack of critical appraisal of individual study quality. This means that while themes are identified, the robustness of the evidence supporting each theme is not systematically evaluated. Future research could build upon this review by conducting systematic reviews with critical appraisal, focusing on specific types of

interventions or outcomes. Additionally, more research is needed in diverse geographical and cultural contexts, particularly in developing countries, to understand the unique dynamics of student volunteerism and to ensure that findings are generalizable and contextually relevant.

CONCLUSION

This scoping review has systematically mapped the motivations, benefits, and challenges of students volunteering in Civil Society Organizations. The findings confirm that students are driven by a combination of altruistic desires, personal development goals, and academic/career aspirations. Their engagement yields significant benefits, including enhanced personal competencies, increased civic engagement, and improved well-being. However, challenges such as time management, lack of support, and logistical issues often impede sustained involvement. The study concludes that student volunteerism is a vital resource for civil society and a powerful avenue for student development, but its full potential can only be realized through strategic, collaborative efforts between universities and CSOs.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are put forth:

For Universities and Higher Education Institutions:

1. **Integrate and Promote:** Actively integrate volunteer opportunities into academic curricula (e.g., service-learning courses) and promote extracurricular volunteerism through dedicated offices or centers.
2. **Provide Support and Flexibility:** Offer workshops on time management and balancing commitments. Explore flexible academic policies that acknowledge and support student volunteer efforts.
3. **Facilitate Partnerships:** Establish formal partnerships with CSOs to create structured, meaningful, and well-supported volunteer placements for students.

For Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

1. **Clear Roles and Expectations:** Provide clear job descriptions, roles, and expectations for student volunteers to ensure meaningful engagement and reduce disillusionment.
2. **Effective Supervision and Mentorship:** Offer adequate supervision, mentorship, and regular feedback to student volunteers to support their learning and development.
3. **Recognition and Appreciation:** Implement formal and informal recognition programs to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of student volunteers.

4. **Flexibility in Scheduling:** Be flexible with scheduling to accommodate students' academic commitments, understanding their unique time constraints.

For Students:

1. **Self-Assessment and Goal Setting:** Reflect on personal motivations and set clear goals for volunteering to ensure a fulfilling and impactful experience.
2. **Effective Time Management:** Develop strong time management skills and communicate openly with CSOs about their availability and limitations.
3. **Seek Support and Feedback:** Proactively seek support from CSOs and university resources, and ask for regular, constructive feedback.
4. **Document Experiences:** Keep a record of their volunteer experiences, skills gained, and reflections for personal growth and future career development.

By implementing these recommendations, all stakeholders can work collaboratively to foster a more robust, mutually beneficial, and sustainable ecosystem for student volunteerism in civil society.

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