

Student perspectives on volunteering following participation in a volunteering studies course

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Abstract

Volunteering is an activity that individuals carry out to help others and contribute to society without expecting anything in return. Volunteering activities allow individuals to fulfill their social responsibilities, contribute to society and support their personal development. In the field of education, especially in universities, volunteering activities have an important place to provide students with a sense of social responsibility, increase their sensitivity to social events and contribute to their personal development. Volunteering activities strengthen students' ties with society while also helping them develop skills such as empathy, leadership and teamwork. This study aims to assess the impact of activities conducted within volunteer studies courses on students' perspectives on volunteering. Utilizing a quantitative research method, specifically a survey model, data were collected using a 21-item questionnaire from 73 students enrolled in the "Volunteer Studies" course. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS 25 software. The analysis results indicate that the "Volunteer Studies" course facilitates students in achieving the anticipated outcomes. Through the course's content and activities, students have developed social awareness, engaged in volunteer work with NGOs, and improved their teamwork abilities. These findings align with existing literature that highlights the positive effects of volunteering and service-learning experiences on empathy development. Consequently, the implementation of this course and the benefits students derive from it are expected to influence the development of similar courses in the future, contributing to the cultivation of socially conscious individuals equipped with a strong sense of volunteerism.

Keywords: Volunteering; Student perspective; Social responsibility; Volunteering activities

1. Introduction

Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause [1]. Volunteering is one of the criteria that demonstrate the awareness level of society and its service. As is well known, an advanced society distinguishes itself from others by the opportunities it provides to volunteers, both within and outside of its institutions. Volunteering continues to be the cornerstone of building communities and spreading love and social connections among community members [2]. Throughout history, in different cultures and societies, individual or collective actions in areas such as charity and assistance have existed due to their values and beliefs. Therefore, the term volunteering has been present since the existence of humanity [3].

Volunteering consists of activities carried out by individuals with the aim of helping others and contributing to society without expecting any material compensation [4]. Four main criteria are distinguished when defining volunteering: it is not mandatory, it is done for the benefit of others (other individuals, institutions or society as a whole), it is not a paid

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activity and it is usually done within an organizational framework [5, 6, 7]. Volunteer work, in addition to professional and personal development, are activities that provide individuals with pleasure and help them achieve peace of mind [8]. Voluntary participation in activities helps individuals overcome their shyness and increase their social courage, and these gains, in turn, enhance their willingness to seek psychological support [9].

In the field of education, especially in universities, volunteerism plays an important role in raising students' awareness of social responsibility, increasing their sensitivity to social issues, and contributing to their personal development [10]. Student volunteers make significant contributions to the activities of volunteer organizations, ranging from small community groups to national charities and the public sector. Organizations involving volunteers highly value university students, viewing them as valuable sources of talent, time, and enthusiasm [11]. Youth work and volunteer activities are becoming widespread in our society day by day. Volunteering activities are organized by many groups such as public institutions and organizations, local governments, non-governmental organizations, universities and youth societies in our country [12].

Volunteering activities, led by universities in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, are gaining popularity by offering young people various opportunities to become visible on national and international platforms. These activities contribute significantly to societal progress, development, and welfare at minimal costs. To encourage the participation of university youth and ensure the sustainability of this involvement, it is crucial to research and understand the outcomes gained from volunteering [13].

Through their volunteer efforts, students offer a substantial and relatively untapped resource to foster quality interactions between universities and the public, helping to break down barriers. Volunteering can enhance students' academic and personal skill development, foster a sense of civic responsibility, and influence their career choices and employability post-graduation [14].

In some universities and colleges, volunteer activities are part of the curriculum. These activities are often organized like other curricular programs; students are given a set number of hours' work to complete, followed by assessments [15].

1.1. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of activities carried out in volunteer studies courses on students' opinions. It will investigate how students' participation in volunteer activities leads to changes in attitudes in areas such as social responsibility, community contribution, and personal development.

1.2. The significant of the study

No prior research has been conducted in this field at Afyon Kocatepe University. This study represents the first attempt to examine university students' responses to volunteering. Volunteering Studies is a course included in the university curriculum. The aim of this study is to present, for the first time, a comprehensive overview of student participation in volunteer activities within a university setting. How this course is implemented and what kind of outcomes students who choose this course achieve through practical experiences will influence the future development of this and similar courses. This study has revealed that the "Volunteering Studies" course provides students with the intended outcomes and helps them develop a positive perspective on the concept of volunteering.

1.3. Literature Review

Volunteer work has been the subject of numerous studies in the field of social sciences. Studies have shown that volunteering has numerous positive effects, including strengthening individuals' social bonds, enhancing empathy skills, reinforcing leadership qualities, and improving problem-solving abilities [16]. In studies conducted in the field of education, there is evidence that volunteering increases students' academic achievement and overall life satisfaction [17]. In studies conducted in the field of education, there is evidence that volunteering increases students' academic achievements and overall life satisfaction. Additionally, it is stated that volunteer activities help students become more successful in the labor market [18].

As a result of the study conducted with 500 students from Dhofar University in the Sultanate of Oman, it was found that the volunteering rates were low; however, students mostly contributed to sports, cultural activities, and local organizations [19].

A study conducted to determine the prevalence of volunteering and attitudes toward volunteering among nursing students revealed that volunteering is at low levels among these students. Time constraints, limited access, and lack of academic support were identified as the main barriers to volunteering. Nevertheless, students demonstrated positive attitudes toward volunteering [20].

In a study conducted in the context of higher education that investigated the relationship between different types of volunteering and work values among young people, it was found that these two areas (work values and volunteering) are closely related [21].

A study conducted with 400 students aimed to reveal the attitudes of Social Responsibility students at Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) toward voluntary work and the challenges they face while engaging in such activities. The study found that students' attitudes toward volunteering and the challenges they encounter were at a "high" level. The most significant challenges identified were: the overlap between volunteering time and study time, the low economic status of some students' families, and the inadequacy of courses in preparing students to take leadership roles in voluntary activities [2].

In the study conducted at Sultan Idris Education University, the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of students regarding volunteering were evaluated, along with an examination of differences in knowledge levels based on areas of interest. According to the survey results from 459 participants, students demonstrated a high level of knowledge about volunteering and showed a tendency to participate in activities aligned with their personal interests. Key elements that stood out in volunteering practices included a willingness to learn, a desire to help others, and encouraging peers to engage in volunteering. It was found that students interested in community service had significantly higher levels of knowledge [22].

A study conducted with 422 students examining the volunteering motivations and areas of engagement of Gondar University students revealed that factors such as gaining learning experiences, applying skills, career development, and the desire to help others are influential in students' participation in volunteering. 47% of the participants engage in volunteering activities in the areas of social services and disability. The study emphasizes the importance of well-planned and implemented programs to maximize the benefits of volunteering [23].

A survey conducted among university students in Australia showed that 43% of students had volunteered recently, and 74.4% had volunteered at some point in the past. Regarding the functions of volunteering, both volunteers and non-volunteers rated the values and understanding functions as more important than any other functions. Furthermore, non-volunteer students rated the career function as more important than current volunteers did. These results highlight strategies for effectively engaging young volunteers. [24].

The use of volunteer work in education not only helps students fulfill their social responsibilities but also contributes to their personal development. Activities conducted in courses related to volunteering enable students to think more deeply about this subject and gain practical experience. Studies examining the impact of these activities on student attitudes show that positive attitudes towards volunteering are developed [25].

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research Model

In this study, which evaluates the opinions of students in the Laboratory and Veterinary Health Department of Afyon Kocatepe University Şuhut Vocational School regarding the activities they participated in during the "Volunteering Studies" course, the "Survey" model, one of the quantitative research methods, has been used. The commonly used data collection tool in this model is a questionnaire. The survey model aims to describe past or current situation as it exists. It strives to define the event, individual, or object within its own context and as it is. The goal is not to influence or change the event, individual, or object. According to this model, what is to be known is already present and exists. The key is to "observe" and present what is to be known in an appropriate manner [26].

2.2. Population and Sample

The population and sample of this study, which evaluates the opinions of students who took the "Volunteering Studies" course, consists of 73 students who chose the "Volunteering Studies" course as an elective in the 2024-2025 academic year, fall semester, in the Laboratory and Veterinary Health Department of Afyon Kocatepe University Şuhut Vocational School. Four students did not participate in the survey as they did not attend the course.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

In this study, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire ("Strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Indecisive", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree"), developed by the researcher and based on a literature review, was used as the data collection tool. In the process of preparing the questionnaire, a 25-item questionnaire was created to evaluate the opinions of students who chose the "Volunteering Studies" course regarding the activities they participated in during the course. After obtaining expert opinions and making evaluations, the questionnaire was reduced to 21 items, and the final version was prepared.

2.4. Data Analysis

The survey forms collected were analyzed using the SPSS 25 program in line with the general aim of the research. Descriptive analysis tables were created with the program, and the tables were interpreted to write a quantitative research report. The data was analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test.

2.5. Sociodemographic Information of Students Participating in Research

Table 1 Frequency and Percentage Values for the Gender Variable

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	48	65.8
Female	25	34.2
Total	73	100

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage values for the gender variable of the participants in the study. As shown, 65.8% of the respondents are male, while 34.2% are female. The total number of participants is 73.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings obtained because of the analyses conducted in accordance with the objectives of the research are presented in this section. The findings are provided in the form of tables and figures, and explanations regarding these tables and figures are given below each of them.

3.1. Findings about Pre-Course Situation

Students were asked to answer various questionnaire items to measure their interest in pre-course volunteering activities.

Table 2 Responses to Survey Question "Before the Volunteering Studies Course, I was a member of any civil society organization."

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	33	45.2
Disagree	11	15.1
Indecisive	8	11.0
Agree	5	6.8
Strongly Agree	16	21.9
Total	73	100

Table 2 presents most students (approximately 60%) had no prior experience with civil society organizations before taking the Volunteering Studies course. This suggests that the course plays an important role in fostering initial awareness and encouraging civic participation among university students.

Table 3 Responses to Survey Question "Before the Volunteering Studies Course, I participated in social responsibility projects"

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	20	27.4
Disagree	12	16.4
Indecisive	7	9.6
Agree	11	15.1
Strongly Agree	23	31.5
Total	73	100

Table 3 presents, the results reveal a nearly even split among students regarding prior participation in social responsibility projects. While 43.8% had no such experience before the course, 46.6% reported previous involvement, highlighting a diverse range of backgrounds among the participants. This indicates that the Volunteering Studies course attracts both students with prior experience and those new to civic engagement, offering opportunities for growth and learning across the spectrum.

Table 4 Responses to Survey Question "Before the Volunteering Studies Course, I had the desire to participate in such projects."

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	11	15.1
Disagree	8	11.0
Indecisive	17	23.3
Agree	14	19.2
Strongly Agree	23	31.5
Total	73	100

Table 4 presents that while a quarter of the students expressed no initial interest, over half showed a positive inclination toward involvement even before taking the course, indicating a foundation of motivation that the course could build upon.

3.2. Findings about the Course and Curriculum

Students were asked to answer various questionnaire items to identify their views on the conduct and curriculum of the course.

Table 5 presents that most students appreciated taking the Volunteering Studies Course, showing its positive reception and potential value in the curriculum.

Also in Table 5 it can be seen as most students (61.6%) found the course content beneficial, while 15.1% viewed it as not useful. Most students perceived the course content as useful, while a smaller group remained indecisive or held negative views.

Table 5 also presents, the majority of students (61.7%) felt the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course were relevant to the course content, while 20.6% disagreed. Also it can be determined that the responses to the statement about including the Volunteering Studies Course in every department's curriculum show that there is significant support, but also notable opposition and many indecisive students.

Table 5 presents, most students were satisfied with the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course, with 65.8% expressing satisfaction (42.5% strongly agreed and 23.3% agreed). Overall, most students were satisfied with the activities, but there was a smaller group of students who were dissatisfied or uncertain.

Table 5 also presents, most students (74%) believed that the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course achieved their goals, with 38.4% strongly agreeing and 35.6% agreeing. Overall, most students were satisfied with the effectiveness of the activities, but a small group had reservations.

Table 5 Responses to Survey Questions about the course and curriculum

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Indecisive		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I am pleased to have taken the Volunteering Studies Course.	9	12.3	3	4.1	14	19.2	15	20.5	32	43.8
The content of the Volunteering Studies Course was generally useful for me.	7	9.6	4	5.5	17	23.3	15	20.5	30	41.1
The activities I participated in during the Volunteering Studies Course were related to the course content	11	15.1	4	5.5	13	17.8	21	28.8	24	32.9
The Volunteering Studies Course should be included in every department's curriculum in universities	14	19.2	3	4.1	23	31.5	18	24.7	15	20.5
I am satisfied with the content of the activity I participated in during the Volunteering Studies Course.	6	8.2	3	4.1	16	21.9	17	23.3	31	42.5
I believe the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course achieved their goal.	4	5.5	2	2.7	13	17.8	26	35.6	28	38.4

3.3. Findings about Course Outcomes Achieved by Students

Students were asked to answer various questionnaire items to assess the impact of the course on students,

Table 6 Responses to Survey Questions about Impact of the Course on Students

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Indecisive		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
The activities I participated in during the Volunteering Studies Course positively affected my perspective on society	4	5.5	7	9.6	17	23.3	24	32.9	21	28.8
I could have dedicated more time to the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course.	11	15.1	12	16.4	22	30.1	12	16.4	16	21.9
I could have chosen a different and more beneficial activity for the Volunteering Studies Course.	14	19.2	11	15.1	19	26.0	15	20.5	14	19.2
Taking part in volunteering activities increased my desire to be a more active member of society.	5	6.8	9	12.3	19	26.0	21	28.8	19	26.0
The experiences I gained from the activities in the Volunteering Studies Course supported my personal development.	7	9.6	4	5.5	17	23.3	23	31.5	22	30.1
The activities I participated in during the Volunteer Studies course increased my empathy skills	5	6.8	5	6.8	14	19.2	21	28.8	28	38.4

During the Volunteer Studies course, my ability to collaborate with others improved.	4	5.5	6	8.2	11	15.1	20	27.4	32	43.8
The Volunteer Studies course increased my social responsibility awareness.	5	6.8	6	8.2	11	15.1	24	32.9	27	37.0
The challenges I encountered during the activities in the Volunteer Studies course positively influenced my personal development.	8	11.0	7	9.6	17	23.3	22	30.1	19	26.0
In the Volunteer Studies course, I acquired skills that will contribute to my professional life.	9	12.3	13	17.8	14	19.2	20	27.4	17	23.3
The activities I participated in during the Volunteer Studies course enhanced my ability to work within a group.	6	8.2	4	5.5	18	24.7	21	28.8	24	32.9
The Volunteer Studies course increased my willingness to participate in social responsibility projects.	10	13.7	9	12.3	15	20.5	18	24.7	21	28.8

Table 6 presents, most students (61.7%) felt the activities positively affected their societal perspective, with 32.9% agreeing and 28.8% strongly agreeing. However, 23.3% were indecisive, and 15.1% felt the activities had no positive impact, as they disagreed or strongly disagreed. Overall, most students experienced a positive shift, but some remained uncertain or unaffected.

Table 6 also presents, the responses to the statement show that 38.3% of students felt they could have dedicated more time to the activities, while 31.5% felt they had committed enough time.

In Table 6 it can be concluded that the responses to the statement "I could have chosen a different and more beneficial activity for the Volunteering Studies Course" reveal mixed feelings: 34.3% of students were satisfied with their activity choice, 39.7% felt they could have chosen a more beneficial activity. This suggests that while many students were happy with their choice, nearly 40% felt there could be a better option, with a significant portion unsure.

Table 6 presents, the responses show that 54.8% of students felt the volunteering activities increased their desire to be more active in society. Overall, most students reported a positive influence, though some were unsure or unaffected.

Table 6 also suggest that the responses indicate that most students felt the volunteering activities supported their personal development, with 61.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Overall, the course had a generally positive impact, though some students were uncertain or did not find it beneficial for their personal development.

Table 6 presents, most of the participants (approximately 67%) agreed with the statement, "The activities I participated in during the Volunteer Studies course increased my empathy skills." This finding aligns with existing literature highlighting the positive effects of volunteering and service-learning experiences on empathy development. For instance, a study examining the impact of hospital volunteering on nursing and medical students found a significant increase in empathy levels post-intervention. Additionally, a scoping review identified that volunteering interventions enabled students to practice empathy and experience both professional and personal development [27]. These studies collectively suggest that engaging in volunteer activities can effectively foster empathy among students, which is essential for personal growth and professional practice in healthcare and other fields.

Table 6 presents, the responses to the statement "During the Volunteer Studies course, my ability to collaborate with others improved" show a generally positive outlook. A large majority (71.2%) of students agreed or strongly agreed, indicating that they found the course helpful in developing their collaboration skills.

In Table 6, it can be provided that the responses to the statement "The Volunteer Studies course increased my social responsibility awareness" show a generally positive outcome. A significant 69.9% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that the course helped increase their social responsibility awareness, suggesting its effectiveness in fostering this awareness.

Table 6 presents, most students (56.1%) agreed that the challenges faced during the Volunteer Studies course positively impacted their personal development, indicating a generally favorable perception.

Table 6 also presents that **50.7%** of students agreed that the Volunteer Studies course helped them gain professional skills. This indicates that the course was beneficial for many, though its professional relevance may vary depending on individual career goals and course implementation.

Table 6 presents, most students (61.7%) agreed that the Volunteer Studies course improved their group work skills, indicating a positive impact of collaborative activities.

Table 6 also presents, more than half of the students (53.5%) agreed that the Volunteer Studies course increased their willingness to participate in social responsibility projects, showing a moderately positive overall perception.

3.4. Effect of gender on the responses to the questionnaire

Mann-Whitney U test was employed to determine if there were significant differences between male and female students' responses to the survey items. The analysis revealed significant differences in the following items:

"The Volunteer Studies course should be included in the curriculum of every department in universities." ($p = 0.034$)

"The activities I participated in during the Volunteer Studies course enhanced my ability to work within a group." ($p = 0.029$)

The distribution of responses to these two items by gender is as follows:

Table 7 The activities I participated in during the Volunteer Studies course enhanced my ability to work within a group." – Distribution of responses by gender

Gender	Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%
Strongly Disagree	6	12.5%	0	0%
Disagree	4	8.3%	0	0%
Indecisive	12	25.0%	6	24.0%
Agree	13	27.1%	8	32.0%
Strongly Agree	13	27.1%	11	44.0%
Total	48	100%	25	100%

The responses to the statement "The Volunteering Studies course should be included in the curriculum of every department in universities." were analyzed based on gender. The findings indicate a significant difference between male and female students' opinions on this matter. This difference was statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.034, as determined by the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 8 The Volunteer Studies course should be included in the curriculum of every department at universities." – Distribution of responses by gender

Gender	Male		Female	
	f	%	f	%
Strongly Disagree	14	29.2%	0	0%
Disagree	2	4.2%	1	4.0%
Indecisive	14	29.2%	9	36.0%
Agree	8	16.7%	10	40.0%

Strongly Agree	10	20.8%	5	20.0%
Total	48	100%	25	100%

These results suggest that a higher proportion of male students strongly disagree with the inclusion of the Volunteer Work course in every department's curriculum compared to female students. Conversely, a greater percentage of female students agree or strongly agree with its inclusion. This analysis highlights differing perspectives between male and female students regarding the integration of volunteer work courses into university curricula.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the study show that students who participate in volunteering activities develop more positive attitudes towards social responsibility and social contribution. As students' participation in volunteering activities increased, significant improvement was observed in skills such as empathy, teamwork and leadership. In addition, students stated that volunteering activities contributed significantly to their personal development.

Participation in volunteering activities increases students' awareness of social responsibility and contributes to their personal development. These findings are in line with previous literature; volunteering activities help students improve their social skills and increase their social sensitivity. It was also evident that volunteering activities strengthen students' empathy and sense of belonging. Such activities seem to strengthen students' ties with society and give them a more informed perspective on social issues. This will enable university students to become more responsible individuals in their future professional and social lives.

This study shows that volunteering activities have a significant impact on students' attitudes. Students' participation in volunteering activities strengthens their awareness of social responsibility and contributes to their personal development. It is recommended that educators should include more lessons and activities related to volunteerism

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of ethical approval

This study follows rigorous ethical standards to safeguard participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. Before participation, individuals will provide informed consent, ensuring they have a clear understanding of the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature. Strict confidentiality measures will be maintained, with all personal data securely stored and anonymized to prevent identification. Participants will retain the right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences, ensuring their autonomy and comfort throughout the research process.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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