

# Volunteering as a Catalyst for Motivation and Skill Development in Malaysian University Students

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## Abstract

This research examines the underlying reasons and advantages of volunteerism among Malaysian university students aged between 18 to 25. The study utilized a quantitative approach and administered a questionnaire to 113 participants who had previously engaged in volunteer work. The research employed the self-determination theory to comprehend the students' motives for participating in volunteerism, including fulfilling personal needs and contributing to society. The study focused on the participants' motivations for volunteering and revealed that they gained skills, personal growth, and enjoyed the social aspect of volunteering. The research identified that the primary skills obtained through volunteering were communication and teamwork, leading to significant changes in the volunteers' lives, such as improved interpersonal relationships and a new worldview. The study's findings were examined using one-way ANOVA, which tested four hypotheses. The study confirmed the first hypothesis that volunteering can reduce loneliness and enhance self-appreciation among university students ( $F=9.682$ ,  $Sig=.000$ ). However, the second hypothesis that university students volunteer to promote societal development was not supported ( $F=3.341$ ,  $Sig=.070$ ). The third hypothesis that university students volunteer to acquire skills was supported ( $F=5.153$ ,  $Sig=.001$ ). Finally, the fourth hypothesis that volunteering offers a new perspective was supported ( $F=5.650$ ,  $Sig=.000$ ). In conclusion, this study provides concrete evidence that volunteering offers numerous benefits for university students, including personal growth, skill acquisition, and a fresh perspective on the world.

**Keyword:** Volunteering, University Students, Self-Determination Theory, Motivation and Skills

## Introduction

Volunteering is a vital component of society that benefits communities in numerous ways. Volunteers selflessly devote their time and energy to help others, which is especially critical during national elections, epidemic periods, and community activities. Their contributions are essential in creating a world filled with love and compassion. Volunteers possess a strong sense of responsibility and a spirit of sacrifice, helping others without expecting any reward in return. In addition to the satisfaction of making a difference in someone's life, volunteers also receive physical and mental rewards, as volunteering promotes physical and mental health (Emad *et al.*, 2018). Volunteering also promotes community development by making

people aware of the importance of volunteer activities. University and College students are a significant target group for volunteerism since they possess the potential to make a difference in society. The International Labour Organization (2011) defined volunteer work as "activities that produce goods or provide services to people outside the volunteer's family or household on a voluntary and unpaid basis." Volunteers come from all walks of life and choose to participate for different reasons. Those who volunteer experience greater self-empowerment than non-volunteers, have more positive attitudes toward other people (Marta & Pozzi, 2008), expand their social circle, and step out of their comfort zone. University and college students, in particular, are highly educated individuals who can use their knowledge to provide relevant help to society and serve as role models for their communities (Faranadia, *et al.*, 2018).

In Malaysia, MyCrops is an organization that promotes and enhances the spirit of youth volunteerism by providing awareness about domestic and international issues, such as peace, war, conflict, education, and health (Hamzah, *et al.*, 2016). Youth volunteers are crucial in reducing or preventing unnecessary problems by using their knowledge and skills to guide society (Mamat *et al.*, 2018). Volunteers provide different types of services, but they all have one common trait: a heart that is willing to contribute to society and others. Despite the fast-paced and technologically advanced world, volunteerism remains irreplaceable. Passionate people are always needed to participate and work together to improve society.

Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives

1. To investigate volunteers' motivations for volunteering.
2. To identify what drives the university students to volunteer.
3. To determine what the university students learn from volunteering.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: Volunteering can make university students feel less lonely and appreciate themselves more.

H2: University students participate in volunteering to help the development of society.

H3: University students participate in volunteering to gain skills.

H4: Volunteering allows university students to gain a new perspective on things.

### **Literature Review**

According to the official website of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2022, hot topics include air pollution, coronavirus disease, pneumonia, and monkey pox. Diseases in the world never cease, and it is not only doctors who deal with them, but also volunteers who provide their assistance. Volunteers give their time and energy to society, dedicating themselves in helping the poor, disadvantaged, or lonely elderly. Volunteering is a form of social practice, whereby people contribute to building a better society through their abilities and lives (Mamat, *et al.*, 2018). There are always people in society who need to give in order to maintain social peace and community balance.

The benefits of volunteering for youth are numerous, including the opportunity to learn things that cannot be taught in a classroom, such as how to improve the lives of others. Among youth aged 18-29, this is the group that takes up the largest percentage of volunteers, indicating their inclination to participate (Yasmin *et al.*, 2021). According to Llenares and Deocarís (2019), volunteering also allows individuals to acquire skills such as leadership, problem solving, and organization and planning, communication and interpersonal skills,

relationship building, mentoring, training others, team work, and time management. Some volunteers participate to help the community, while others want to acquire skills. Each volunteer gains different experiences and skills through volunteering, allowing them to give back to the community and reduce the current social burden.

In Malaysia, youths tend to devote less time in volunteering due to their responsibilities in school and work (Yasmin et al., 2021). However, the number of university students in Malaysia was reported to be 1, 325, 699 in 2019 (Oriental Daily, 2019). University students are an energetic group who will be pillars of society in the future; they are educated in university and can apply their knowledge to solve societal problems. This group can serve as an effective role model for other youth and be agents of society (Mamat *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the motivations and benefits of university college volunteers can inspire more youths to get involved in volunteering.

### Theoretical Framework

The study used Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is a broad theory of human personality and motivation, with how humans interact with their environment in society (Legault, 2017). By studying the needs of individuals, SDT allows the researcher to understand the determining motivations of volunteers to participate in volunteerism, which includes intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation refers to a person's desire to satisfy his or her own needs or to gain satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation is the action that a person takes because of external factors. According to Naqshbandi, *et al* (2022) motivation, engagement, and well-being are highly interrelated, and many determinants of well-being directly or indirectly influence engagement.

Referring to Legault (2017), humans have three basic needs, which are competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and these factors influence human motivation. Motivation refers to the need for individuals to have the ability to handle things in their lives, while autonomy refers to the ability to control their lives without external influence, and relatedness is the need for individuals to have emotional relationships with others. In the context of volunteering, Mamat et al (2018) argued that it is possible to analyse whether university college students are involved in volunteering activities because they need to meet these basic needs based on SDT.

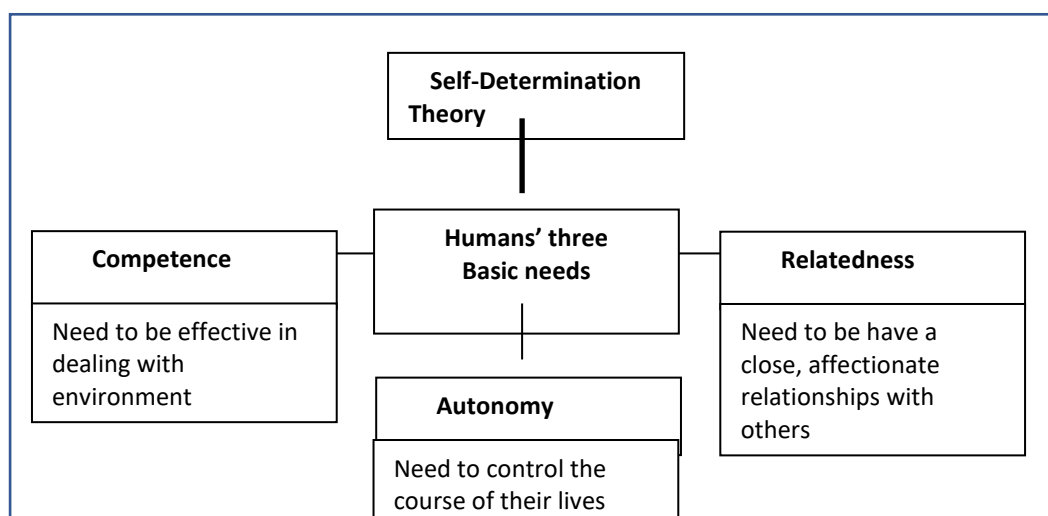


Figure 1: Self- Determination Theory

### Research Method

This study employed a stratified sampling approach to survey University College students aged 18-25 who had participated in volunteering work before, with the aim of exploring their motivation for volunteering and the skills they have gained or developed as a result. Quantitative data collection was utilized in the study, using a questionnaire as the primary tool. This method allows for direct comparisons and hypothesis testing with large samples (Bhandari, 2020). The questionnaire collected statistics on university college students' volunteering experiences, what they gained from volunteering, and the factors that influenced their decision to volunteer. The target population for the questionnaire was current university college students who had participated in at least one volunteer service before. Given that university and college students need to balance their studies with volunteering, the researchers sought to understand why they choose to volunteer and serve others. The questionnaire was conducted online via Google Forms from December 14, 2022, to January 12, 2023, and a total of 113 responses were collected. Quantitative methods were employed to analyse the results using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Additionally, the questionnaire included Likert scales to allow respondents to measure motivation, self-perception, and psychological needs. The study tested four hypotheses using one-way ANOVA, and the results were presented through descriptive and inferential analyses.

### Results

#### ***Descriptive Analysis***

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants, which includes information on their awareness of volunteering opportunities and the frequency of their participation in volunteer work.

Table 1

*Demographics Profile*

Demographics	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	42	37.2%
	Female	71	62.8%
Age	18-19	33	29.2%
	20-21	44	38.9%
	22-23	31	27.4%
	24-25	5	4.4%
Faculty	Faculty of Art and Design	21	18.6%
	Faculty of Business and Management	29	25.7%
	Faculty of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10	8.8%
	Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology	6	5.3%
	Faculty of Education and Psychology	9	8.0%
	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences	23	20.4%
	School of Foundation	12	10.6%
	Others	3	2.7
Educational Level	Degree	52	46.0%
	Diploma	42	37.2%
	Foundation	19	16.8%

The study found that more than half of the respondents were female, with 113 participants, of which 62.8% (71) were female and 37.2% (42) were male. The largest age group was respondents aged 20-21 years, accounting for 38.9% of participants, followed by 29.2% of respondents aged 18-19 years, 27.4% of respondents aged 22-23 years, and only 4.4% of respondents aged 24-25 years. The most common way that respondents learned about volunteering opportunities was through their student society and clubs, which accounted for 28.3% of responses in Figure 1 below. The majority of respondents (46%) were studying for a bachelor's degree, and 59.3% had volunteered 1-5 times in Figure 2 below. Finally, 25.7% of respondents were from the Faculty of Business and Management.

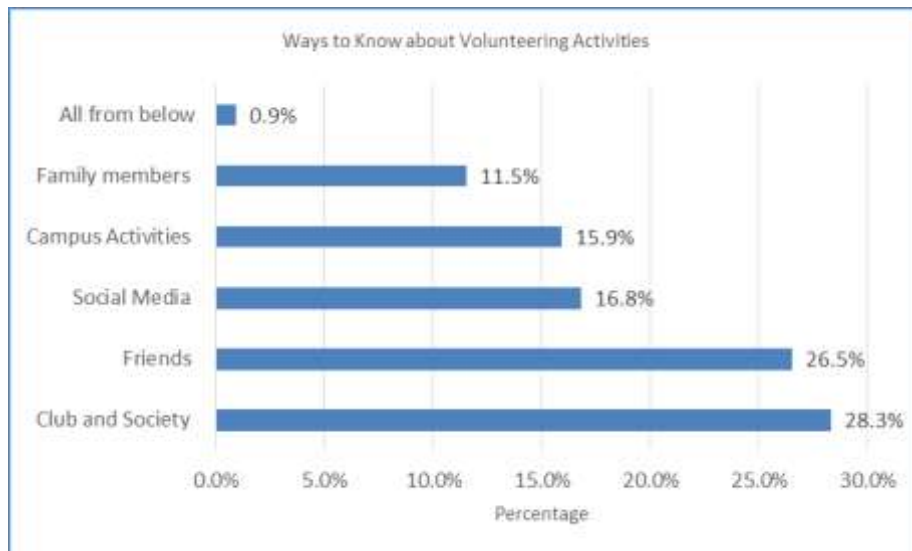


Figure 2 Ways to Know about Volunteering Activities

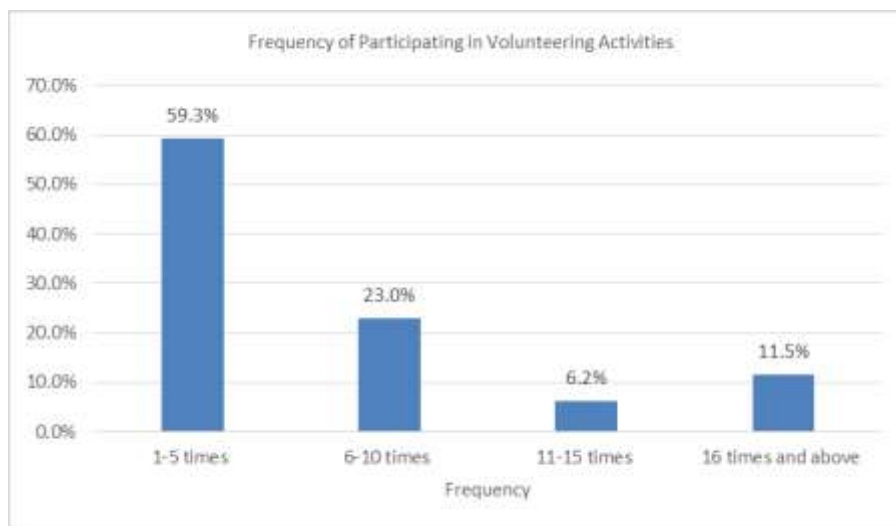


Figure 3 Frequency of Participating in Volunteering Activities

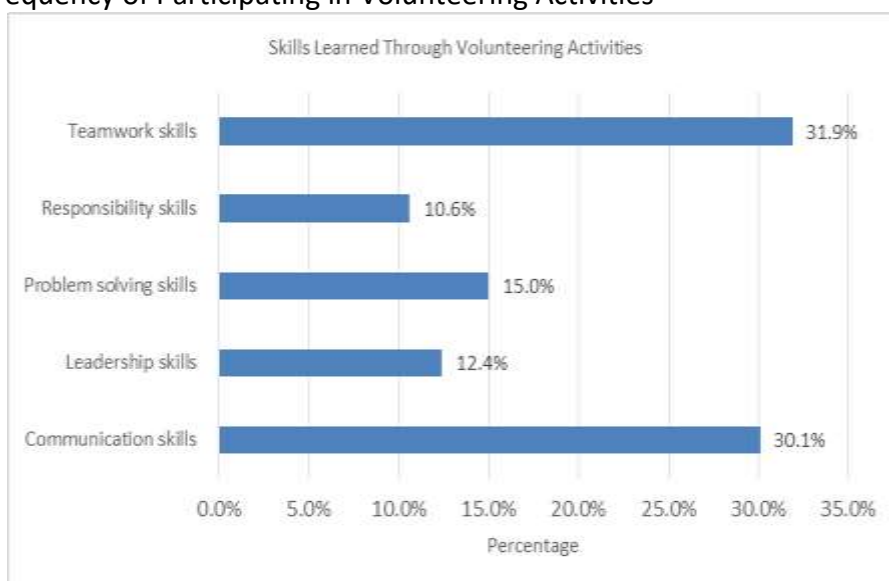


Figure 4 Skills Learned Through Volunteering Activities

Figure 4, there was no significant difference observed in the skills acquired by volunteers after participating. However, the data indicates that the majority of respondents reported learning teamwork skills (31.9%), followed closely by communication skills (30.1%). Problem-solving skills were acquired by 15% of respondents, while leadership skills were gained by 12.4%. Responsibility skills were reported to be the least commonly acquired at 10.4%.

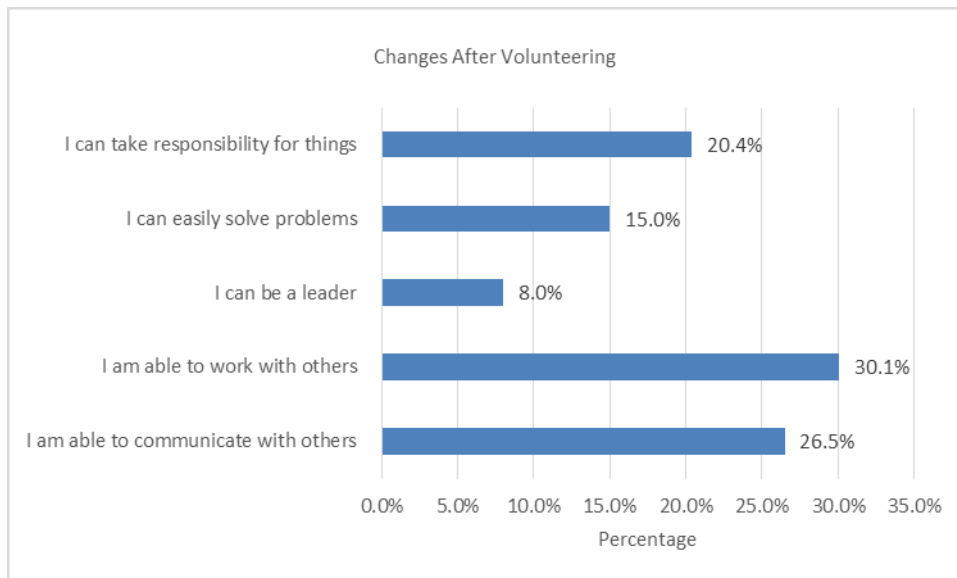


Figure 5 Changes after Volunteering

Figure 5, volunteers reported various changes they experienced after volunteering. The majority of respondents (30.1%) reported an improvement in their ability to work with others. This was closely followed by an improvement in their communication skills (26.5%) and their ability to take responsibility for things (20.4%). 15% of respondents reported being able to easily solve problems, while only 8% reported an improvement in their leadership skills.

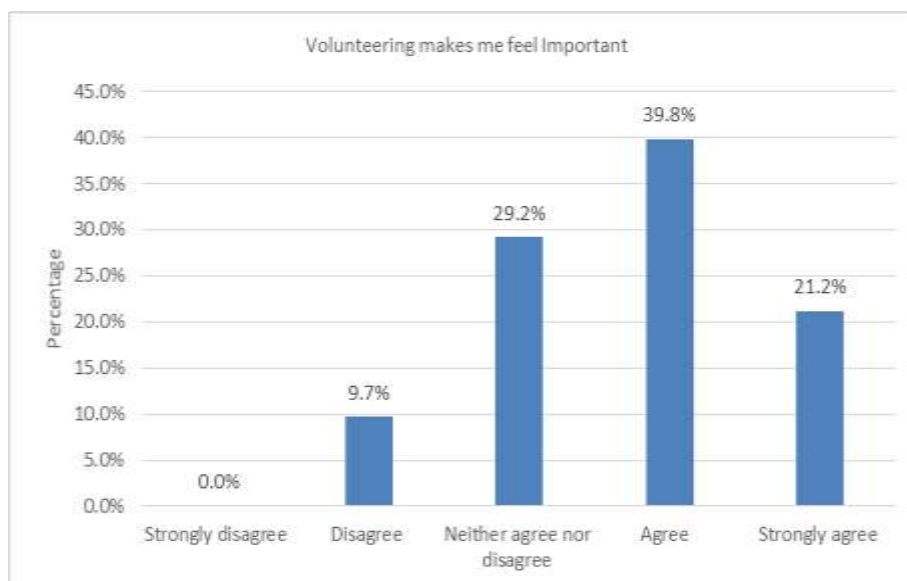


Figure 6 Volunteering Makes me feel Important

Figure 6 depicts the respondents' perception regarding whether volunteering makes them feel a sense of meaning. Out of the total respondents, 39.8% agreed, 29.2% remained neutral, 21.2% strongly agreed, 9.7% disagreed, and no respondents strongly disagreed.

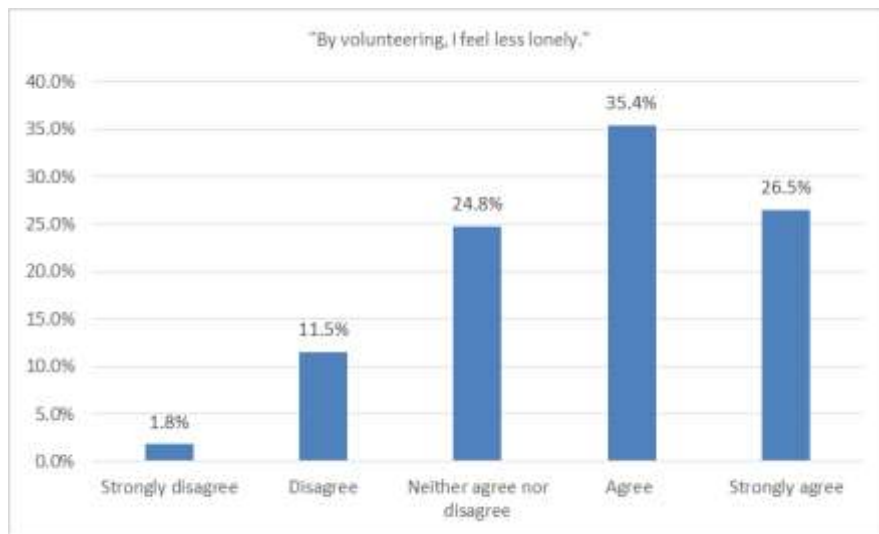


Figure 7 By Volunteering, I Feel less lonely

Figure 7 illustrates the extent to which volunteers feel less lonely as a result of their volunteer work. Among the respondents, 35.4% agreed, 26.5% strongly agreed, 24.8% remained neutral, 11.8% disagreed, and 1.8% strongly disagreed.

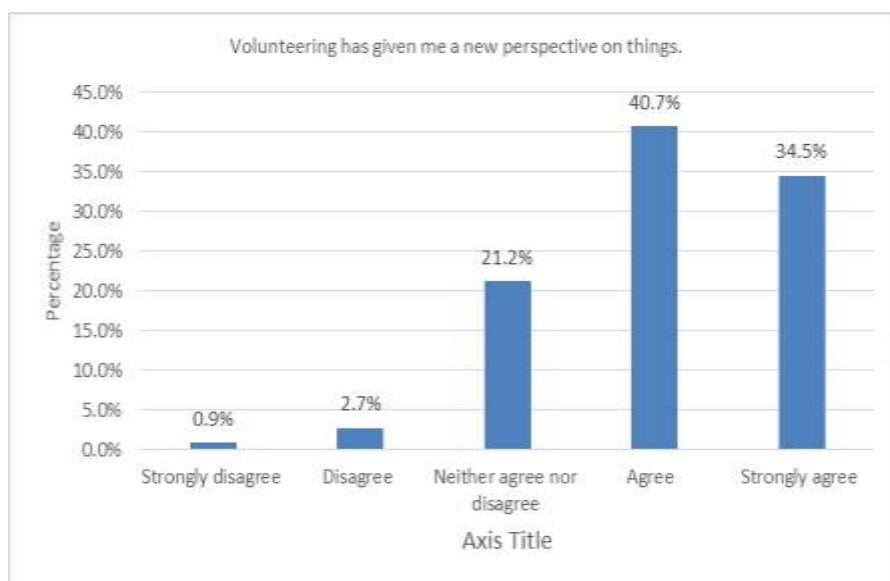


Figure 8 Volunteering has given them a new perspective on things

Figure 8 highlights the respondents' perception of whether volunteering has provided them with a fresh perspective. Among the respondents, 40.7% agreed, 34.5% strongly agreed, 21.2% remained neutral, 2.7% disagreed, and only 0.9% strongly disagreed.



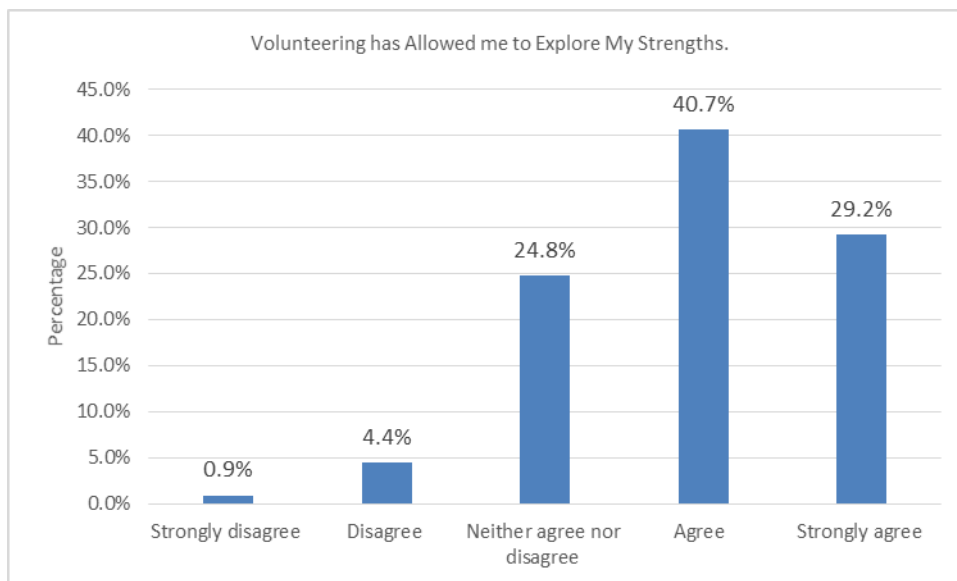


Figure 9 Volunteering has allowed me to Explore My Strengths

Figure 9 illustrates the respondents' opinion on whether volunteering enabled them to discover their strengths. Out of the total respondents, 40.7% agreed, 29.2% strongly agreed, 24.8% remained neutral, 4.4% disagreed, and only 0.9% strongly disagreed.

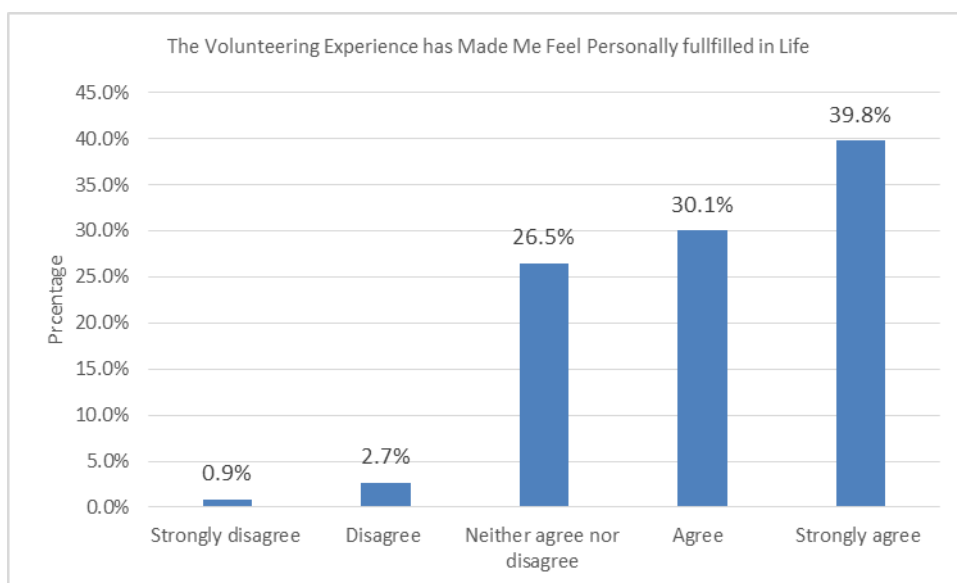


Figure 10 Volunteering Experience has made me feel personally fulfilled in life

Figure 10 illustrates the respondents' perception of whether their volunteer experience provided them with a sense of fulfilment in life. Among the respondents, 39.8% strongly agreed, 30.1% agreed, 26.5% remained neutral, 2.7% disagreed, and only 0.9% strongly disagreed.

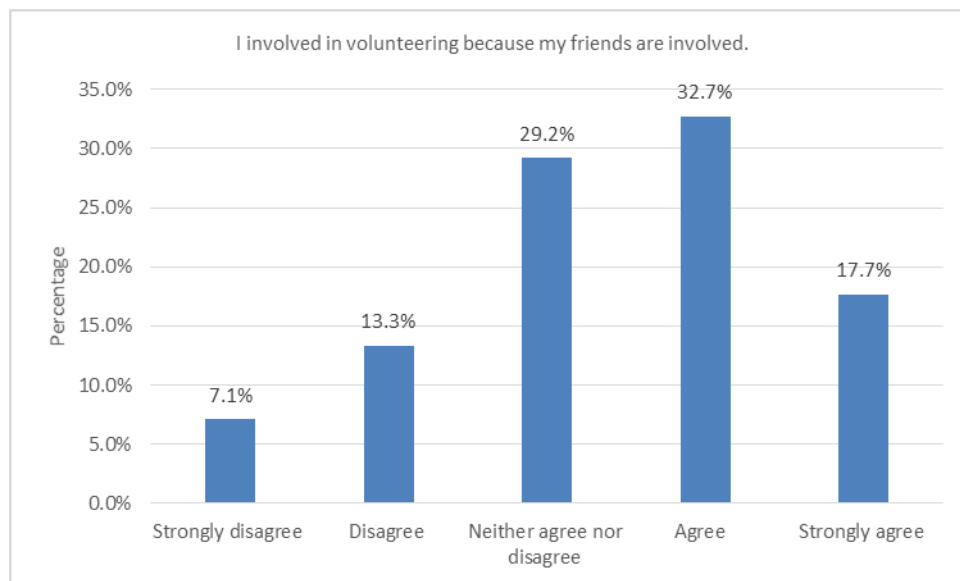


Figure 11 I involved in volunteering because my friends are involved.

Figure 11 depicts the respondents' opinion on whether they became involved in volunteering due to their friends' participation. Among the respondents, 32.7% agreed, 29.2% remained neutral, 17.7% strongly agreed, 13.3% disagreed, and 7.1% strongly disapproved.

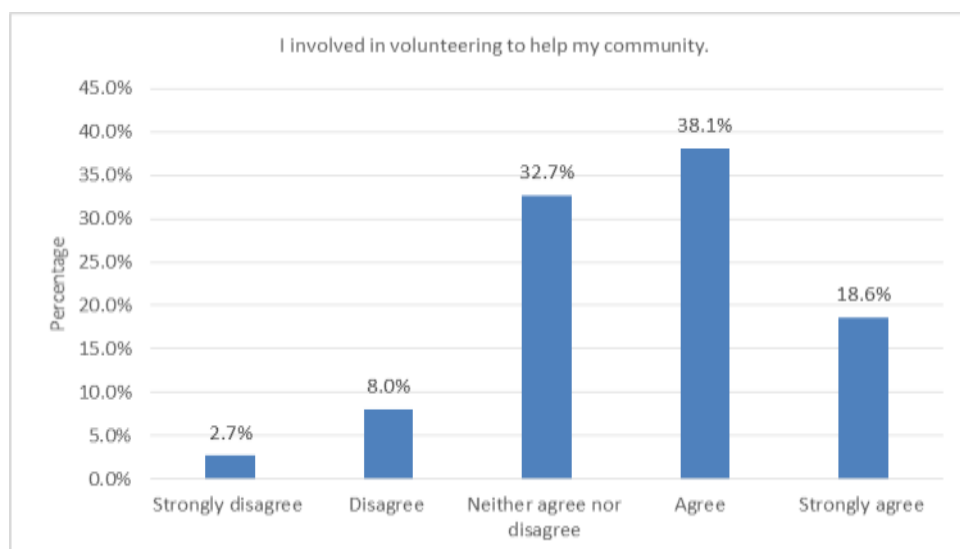


Figure 12 I involved in volunteering to help my community.

Figure 12 depicts the respondents' opinion on whether they engage in volunteering to assist their community. Among the respondents, 38.1% agreed, 32.7% remained neutral, 18.6% strongly agreed, and 8% disagreed. Only 2.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed with this position.

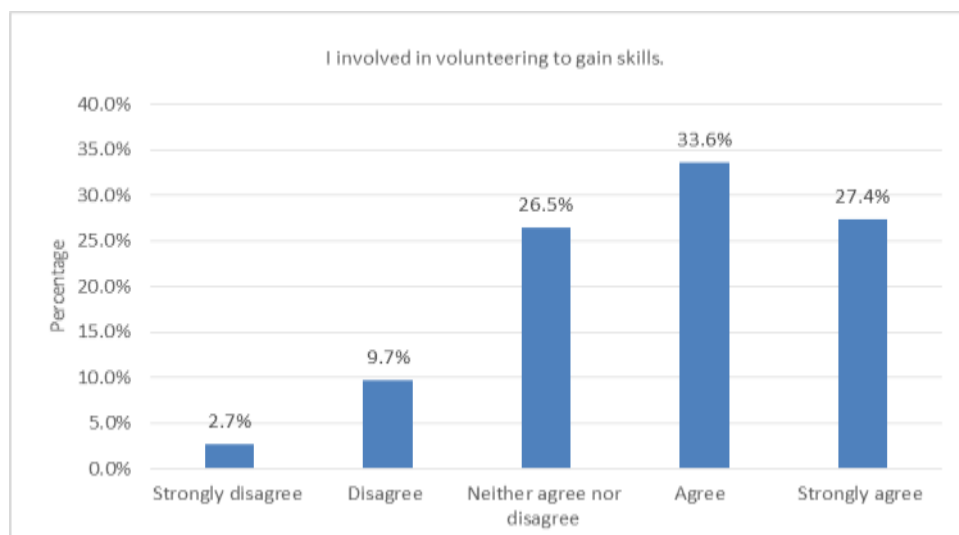


Figure 13 I involved in volunteering to gain skills

Figure 13 illustrates the respondents' perception of whether they participate in volunteering to acquire new skills. Among the respondents, 33.6% agreed, 27.4% strongly agreed, 26.5% remained neutral, 9.7% disagreed, and only 2.7% strongly disagreed with this position.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Table 2

Summary of One-way ANOVA test results for hypothesis 1

ANOVA					
By volunteering, I feel less alone.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	25.257	4	8.419	9.682	.000
Within Groups	94.778	109	.870		
Total	120.035	113			

**H1: Volunteering can make university students feel less lonely and appreciate themselves more.**

The study employed a one-way ANOVA to examine four hypotheses. The first hypothesis proposed that volunteering could decrease loneliness and enhance self-esteem among university students. The results from the analysis supported this hypothesis, indicating that university students who participated in volunteering experienced reduced loneliness and increased self-appreciation. The results of the one-way ANOVA test for H1 are presented in Table 2 in the above F-value of 9.682 and a p-value of .000 (F=9.682, Sig=.000).

Table 3

*Summary of One-way ANOVA test results for hypothesis 2*

<b>ANOVA</b>					
I am involved in volunteering to help my community.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.057	2	3.057	3.341	.070
Within Groups	101.580	111	.915		
Total	104.637	113			

***H2: University students participate in volunteering to help the development of society.***

The second hypothesis proposed that university students participate in volunteering to contribute to the development of society. However, the data analysis did not support this hypothesis. The results from the one-way ANOVA test for H2 are presented in Table 3, with an F-value of 3.341 and a p-value of .070 (F=3.341, Sig=.070)

Table 4

*Summary of One-way ANOVA test results for hypothesis 3*

<b>ANOVA</b>					
I got involved in volunteering to gain skills.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19.880	5	4.970	5.153	.001
Within Groups	104.155	108	.964		
Total	124.035	113			

***H3: University students participate in volunteering to gain skills***

The third hypothesis proposed that university students participate in volunteering to gain skills, and the data analysis supports this hypothesis. According to Table 4, the results from the one-way ANOVA test for H3 show an F-value of 5.153 and a p-value of .001, (F= 5.153, Sig=.001) indicating a significant relationship between volunteering and the desire to gain skills among university students. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed by the researcher is supported by the data.

Table 5

*Summary of One-way ANOVA test results for hypothesis 4*

ANOVA					
Volunteering has given me a new perspective on things.					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.480	5	3.620	5.650	.000
Within Groups	69.201	108	.641		
Total	83.681	113			

#### ***H4: Volunteering allows university students to gain a new perspective on things***

The fourth hypothesis proposed that volunteering allows university students to gain a new perspective on things, and the data analysis supports this hypothesis. According to Table 5, the results from the one-way ANOVA test for H4 show an F-value of 5.650 and a p-value of .000, ( $F= 5.650$ ,  $Sig=.000$ ) indicating a significant relationship between volunteering allows university students to gain a new perspective on things. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed by the researcher is supported by the data.

#### **Discussion**

The study conducted among university student volunteers found that the majority of participants were females aged between 20-21 years old and had engaged in 1-5 volunteer services. The study aimed to comprehend the motivation behind university college students' participation in volunteering. Results revealed that students' primary motivation for volunteering was to acquire skills, which satisfied their self-needs. The majority of students believed that teamwork skills were the most gained skill through volunteering, followed by communication skills, as per McFadden & Smeaton's (2017) findings. Teamwork skills are essential not only while volunteering but also while working in small groups to complete tasks. Effective relationships with teammates are vital to meet deadlines, and communication skills bridge this gap. Volunteering provides students with practical skills and learning experiences, improving their employability, as McFadden & Smeaton (2017) suggested. The study showed that volunteering creates a positive difference in students' lives, broadening their perceptions and understanding of community services. It is recommended that universities incorporate volunteering as a social experience in their curriculum to provide students with social practice experience for their future entry into society. Therefore, volunteering should be widely recognized for its significant contribution to students' personal and professional growth.

#### **Conclusion and Limitation**

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the motivations and benefits of volunteerism among university students. Our findings suggest that personal needs, such as psychological well-being and self-improvement, are key drivers of participation. In addition, we found that volunteering can enhance students' self-esteem and contribute to community improvement. However, our study has limitations, including a small sample size and limited response

options. To address these issues, future research could use open-ended questions or in-depth interviews to gather more nuanced and diverse perspectives from university students. By doing so, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence students' decisions to volunteer and the impact of volunteerism on their personal and social development.

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