



Motivations, Benefits, and Challenges of Students Volunteering in Civil Society Organizations: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in society, enhancing democratic values and advocating for human rights. Volunteering in CSOs affects tertiary students. This review highlights how volunteering maps evidences of students' motivations, benefits, and challenges. Systematic data analysis from Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Moher et al.'s (2010) scoping review framework and retrieved from six widely open and trusted electronic databases, motivations such as altruism, career development, and social connections drive students to engage in volunteer work, reflecting a desire to contribute positively to society while also enhancing their personal and professional growth. The benefits derived from these experiences include improved mental health, increased employability, and a profound sense of belonging, which collectively foster a supportive community among peers. However, students also encounter significant challenges, including time constraints, insufficient training, and emotional stress, which can impede their ability to participate fully in volunteer activities. Addressing the literature gaps and challenges and enhancing the overall volunteer experience through the stakeholders can foster a more robust culture of civic engagement among students.

Keywords: *Student Volunteerism; Civil Society Organizations; Motivations; Benefits; Challenges; Tertiary Education; Volunteering*

1. Introduction

1.1 Volunteering in Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Volunteering in CSOs presents tertiary students with a valuable opportunity to engage with their communities while simultaneously developing essential skills and competencies. Research has shown that volunteering not only promotes personal growth but also enhances academic learning and fosters a sense of civic responsibility (Pancer, 2020). In an era where social responsibility and community engagement

are more crucial than ever, student volunteerism stands out as a powerful catalyst for change. How can we harness the enthusiasm and skills of the youth to address pressing societal challenges? This scoping review seeks to illuminate the multifaceted landscape of student volunteerism in CSOs, exploring the motivations, benefits, and challenges faced by tertiary students. By synthesizing existing literature, an evidence-based map emerges not only to inform higher education policies but also to inspire future research and practice.

1.2 Student Volunteerism

Understanding the motivations that drive students to volunteer is crucial for organizations seeking to attract and retain student volunteers. Volunteering offers a range of benefits that contribute to the holistic well-being of individuals, including improved mental health, increased employability, and the development of soft skills such as teamwork and leadership (Michael et al., 2023; Susanti et al., 2023). Furthermore, students who engage in volunteer activities often report a heightened sense of fulfillment and belonging, which can significantly enhance their overall educational experience (G-Watch, 2023). However, students can also encounter various challenges which can hinder their participation. Providing clarity and answers about these challenges is essential for maximizing student involvement and ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of volunteer programs.

1.3 Role of CSOs

Student volunteerism is a critical area of research that warrants further exploration, particularly regarding its impact on CSOs. Research indicates that student volunteers contribute significantly to organizational capacity development and youth empowerment, thereby strengthening the social fabric of communities (Naumovski & Naumovska, 2022). Students provide valuable unpaid labor, bringing enthusiasm and skills to nonprofit organizations (Jones et al., 2019). Notably, undergraduate students, especially those in liberal arts colleges, tend to volunteer at higher rates due to altruistic motivations, which enhance their civic engagement and active citizenship (Washington, 2018). Community-based projects, such as those in Ukraine, illustrate the positive effects of youth volunteerism on organizational capacity and the importance of incorporating youth perspectives in decision-making processes (Stevens et al., 2022). The need for further research to understand how CSOs can encourage learning and enhance democratic citizenship among students (Evans, 2024) remains overlooked.

1.4 Implications for Scoping Review

Despite the numerous benefits associated with volunteering, it is essential to recognize the challenges that students face. Factors such as emotional stress, particularly in high-pressure environments or when working with vulnerable populations, can impact their volunteer experience (Susanti et al., 2023). To maximize the potential of volunteerism, it is crucial to establish a supportive environment that empowers students and meets their needs while they are engaged in volunteer activities (Wondimu & Admas, 2024).

The need to gather evidence on the motivations, benefits, and challenges of tertiary students volunteering in CSOs is paramount. This review sheds light on the current global landscape of student volunteerism and serves as a foundation for future research and practice. By informing the development of targeted recruitment and retention strategies, as well as volunteer program designs, CSOs can meet the needs and expectations of student volunteers. Additionally, understanding the complexities of student engagement in civil society will enable stakeholders, including colleges, universities, policymakers, and CSOs, to develop targeted strategies that enhance participation and support student volunteers. Ultimately, fostering a more engaged and socially responsible generation becomes essential for community development and social change.

2. Methods

Scoping review undertakes the stages in a rigorous, reflexive, and transparent manner, and its explicitness allows further replication, increased reliability, and response to any suggestion of deficiency (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The main stages were to (1) identify the research questions, (2) determine relevant studies, (3) select studies, (4) chart the data, and lastly, (5) collate, summarize, and report the data.

2.1 Research Questions

Clear, responsive, investigative statements composed of research questions guiding the review procedures. These questions were: (1) What motivates the students to volunteer in CSOs?; (2) What are the benefits students get from volunteering in CSOs?; (3) What are the challenges of students in volunteering with CSOs?

2.2 Relevant Studies

Six electronic databases provided wide, relevant studies: Google Scholar, Journal Storage (JSTOR), Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Proquest, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Key search terms were developed to cover a comprehensive coverage of literature (see Table 1).

Table 1. Essential terms for the retrieval of articles

Searched key words
"Students volunteer" to/in "civil society organizations"
"Motivations", "benefits", "challenges", "student volunteers", "civil society organizations"

Moreover, inclusion and exclusion criteria were devised to identify the whole number of studies used in the original literature (Guden & Bellen, 2020). These eligibility criteria (see Table 2) served as a foundation for validating the study selection to be included in the review and reducing the process' distortion.

Table 2. Criteria for studies included

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
<i>Published year</i>	2020-2024	2019 and the years before
<i>Language</i>	English	Non-English
<i>Article type</i>	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Not peer-reviewed journal articles or Grey literature
	Indexed in any of the following: JSTOR, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ERIC, Proquest, and DOAJ	Not mentioned in the indexes in the inclusion criteria
<i>Focus of study</i>	Students who volunteer in any type of CSO, inside or outside the college or university	Professionals or employees who work in/for CSOs
<i>Literature focus</i>	Motivations, benefits, and challenges of students volunteering for CSOs	Motivations, benefits, and challenges of paid workers or interns in CSOs
<i>Design</i>	Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-methods	Quantitative-experimental
<i>Sample</i>	Tertiary, college, bachelor, or undergraduate students	Pre-elementary, elementary, high school, graduate school, post-graduate school

2.3 Studies Selection

Systematic data analysis from articles was developed using Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and Moher et al.'s (2010) scoping review framework.

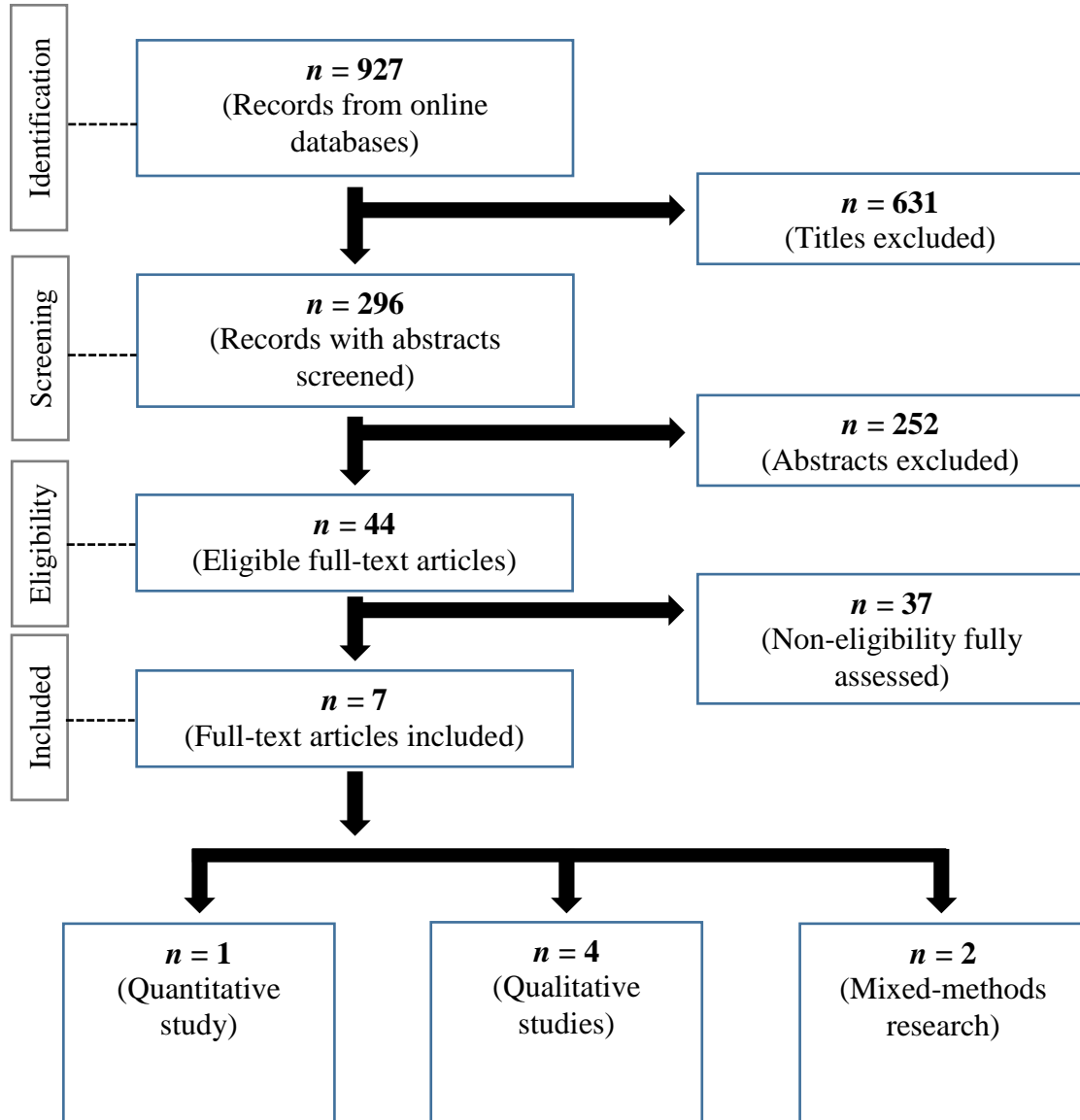


Figure 1. Scoping Review using PRISMA Flow Chart

2.4 Data Charting

Relevant data and information from various articles were collected and carefully assessed, such as the country, author(s), year published, study objectives, design, sample, and study outcomes (see Table 3). The outcomes were constructed dependently based on the research questions, which highlighted the motivations, benefits, and challenges of students who volunteer in CSOs.

2.5 Findings Summary

The fifth and final stage of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review framework summarizes and reports the findings. In this review, the results presented in Table 3 were discussed, and their

implications were expressed. It also provided gaps in literature and the limitations others need to delve into to address issues and concerns.

Table 3. Motivations, Benefits, and Challenges of Students Volunteering in CSOs

	Country	Author(s), Year	Objective(s)	Design and sample	Motivations	Benefits
1]	Fiji	Mati, 2024	Demonstrate the effect of the nature of existing youth volunteerism opportunities on citizenship values.	Convergent parallel mixed method approach; 156 youth for survey while 35 participants for interviews from different bachelor's degree	Adds value or is rewarding to both self and their communities; Shares a common ethnic or religious identity.	Influences them to act with a sense of responsibility; Provides them with avenues for overcoming existing structural barriers; They learn and acquire skills in mobilization, organization, and persuasion; Serves as pathway for them to secure employment; Shapes their progressive citizenship values.
2]	Spain	Cívico-Ariza et al., 2020	Ascertain the reality of the axiological perception and the participation of university students in the field of volunteering.	Mixed descriptive and interpretative study, a non-experimental design; 208 university students	Values and highlights the importance and need for volunteering; Accesses the world of work or acquires professional skills.	No findings.
3]	Bangladesh	Rubel et al., 2024	Identify how the involvement of female university students in volunteer organizations contributes to their self-empowerment.	Exploratory qualitative cross-sectional research design; 20 students	Provides a safe, supportive, and harassment-free environment; Secures lesser gender gap within the voluntary organizations; Shows mutual respect among colleagues; Fosters a culture of increased participation in social work among newcomers.	Involves them in decision-making under the supervision of the volunteer organizations' advisors; Includes them in decorative activities within their respective volunteer organizations; Ensures men and women play an equal role at the top decision-making level in a few organizations;

						They become extroverted by learning new topics and perspectives and become familiar with interpersonal and relational skills; Promotes strengthened social capital of women, increasing their access to resources and creating opportunities for personal and professional growth.
4]	Canada	McGuire et al., 2023	Examine the experiences of varsity student-athlete volunteers within a university athletics–community sports partnership program.	Pragmatic approach, using semi-structured interviews; 10 student-athletes	Gives back to their sporting community (intrinsic); Participates in a 'youthful' sports environment; Engages in an activity that they love.	Provides an opportunity to develop trusting and supportive reciprocal relationships with the participants; Impacts their sports experiences as relatable role models; Acquires various sport-specific and transferable skills; Gives the opportunity to build new connections with their varsity teammates.
5]	Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia	Pusztai et al., 2021	Discuss persistence, students' volunteer work and, voluntary organization and group membership, how volunteering and voluntary group membership could provide support in one's studies; Present	Large-sample survey; 2199 students	No findings.	Cultivates close relationships with faculty, parents, and fellow students, strengthening students' persistence.

			the general characteristics, trends, and influencing factors of civic engagement.			
6]	China	Lili et al., 2020	Investigate the underlying factors affecting volunteer teaching activities of Chinese college students.	Mixed-methods approach, using a self-developed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews; 400 students surveyed, 104 interviewed – all from 10 universities	Expresses educational support by the university; Participates with willingness under the influence of their skills, activity experience, and volunteer performance.	No findings.
7]	South Africa	Bhagwan, 2020	Highlight the benefits of student volunteerism as one pathway to engagement and promotion of social responsibility amongst students.	Qualitative, exploratory study, through interviews and focus group discussion; 14 students	Shows strong support amongst students for community engagement.	Results in increased skills portfolio; Provides enriched educational experience; Produces increased social capital; Promotes deeper socio-political awareness; Cultivates a sense of responsibility in giving back to society.

3. Results and Discussion

The scoping review method extracted the seven most relevant and qualified articles. Various countries were involved. Fiji, Spain, Bangladesh, Canada, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, China, and South Africa were these countries.

The study presented in Table 3 explored the multifaceted landscape of student volunteerism within civil society organizations (CSOs) by identifying the motivations, benefits, and challenges encountered by students across various contexts. By synthesizing findings from diverse geographical settings, this research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how student volunteerism can be optimized to foster civic engagement and personal growth among youth.

3.1 Motivations

The key motivations for students volunteering in CSOs include a desire to contribute positively to their communities, the opportunity to develop professional skills, and the pursuit of personal growth and social responsibility. Specifically, students are often driven by intrinsic motivations such as a sense of duty to give back, the enjoyment of engaging in meaningful activities, and the aspiration to build

connections with peers and mentors. Additionally, factors such as shared ethnic or religious identities and the potential for enhancing employability through skill acquisition play significant roles in motivating students to volunteer.

The implications of these motivations are profound. Understanding what drives students to volunteer can help organizations tailor their programs to better meet the needs and interests of young volunteers, thereby increasing participation and retention rates. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of personal and professional development in volunteerism can lead to the design of more effective training and support systems that equip students with the skills they seek. This alignment not only enhances the volunteer experience but also strengthens the capacity of CSOs to address community needs effectively. Ultimately, fostering a culture of volunteerism that resonates with students' motivations can lead to greater civic engagement, social cohesion, and the development of responsible future leaders.

3.2 Benefits

Students volunteering in CSOs results in the development of their valuable skills, enhanced social capital, enriched educational experiences, and increased socio-political awareness. Specifically, students gain practical skills related to mobilization, organization, and communication, which are transferable to their future careers. Additionally, volunteering fosters strong relationships with peers, faculty, and community members, thereby expanding their social networks and support systems. The experience also cultivates a deeper understanding of social issues and a sense of responsibility toward community engagement.

The implications of these benefits are significant. Firstly, the skills acquired through volunteering can enhance students' employability, making them more competitive in the job market. Organizations can leverage this by creating structured volunteer programs that emphasize skill development and career readiness. Secondly, the social capital gained through volunteering can lead to increased collaboration and networking opportunities, which are essential for personal and professional growth. This interconnectedness can also strengthen community ties and promote a culture of civic engagement. Lastly, by fostering socio-political awareness, volunteering can empower students to become active participants in their communities, advocating for social change and contributing to a more informed and engaged citizenry. Overall, the benefits of volunteering not only enrich the individual student experience but also contribute to the broader goals of community development and social responsibility.

3.3 Challenges

Balancing responsibilities, gender dynamics, lack of support and supervision, ethnic intolerance and exclusionary practices, and disinterest in social improvement are the challenges students face while volunteering in CSOs.

Student-athletes face stressors related to balancing academics, athletics, and extracurricular activities, which can hinder their ability to commit fully to volunteer work. These challenges can lead to decreased engagement in volunteer activities, which not only affects the students' personal development but also limits the potential benefits that CSOs can provide to the community.

In some contexts, there are issues of sexism and nepotism that can create an unwelcoming environment for female volunteers, impacting their participation and decision-making roles. There is a necessity for training programs that raise awareness about gender dynamics and promote a culture of respect and equality within volunteer organizations.

There is a weak incentive mechanism and lack of supervision, which can lead to confusion regarding role identity and motivation for participation in volunteer activities in certain cases. Addressing

these challenges implies a need for better support structures within CSOs, including mentorship programs, clear role definitions, and inclusive practices that encourage participation from all demographics.

In some places, the existence of ethnic intolerance and exclusionary practices can deter youth from engaging in volunteerism, affecting their sense of belonging and community. Efforts to combat ethnic intolerance and promote inclusivity can enhance community cohesion, making volunteering a more attractive and rewarding experience for students.

Some students exhibit a disinterested attitude towards volunteering, which can stem from a lack of perceived impact or relevance of their efforts in improving social realities. Understanding the reasons behind disinterest can help organizations tailor their programs to better align with students' values and motivations, thereby increasing participation rates.

With these challenges, CSOs can create a more supportive and effective environment for student volunteers, ultimately leading to greater social impact and personal growth for the volunteers involved.

3.4 Gaps in the Literature

The scoping review reveals several gaps in the existing literature regarding the motivations, benefits, and challenges faced by student volunteers in CSOs. One significant gap is the limited understanding of the long-term impacts of volunteerism on students' personal and professional development. While many studies highlight immediate benefits such as skill acquisition and social capital, there is a lack of longitudinal research that tracks how these experiences influence students' career trajectories, civic engagement, and social responsibility over time. Additionally, the intersectionality of factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and educational background in shaping students' motivations and experiences in volunteering remains underexplored. This oversight limits the ability to develop tailored programs that address the diverse needs and barriers faced by different student populations.

Furthermore, the literature lacks a comprehensive examination of the organizational dynamics within CSOs that affect student volunteer engagement. While some studies touch on the challenges of gender dynamics and the presence of nepotism, there is insufficient analysis of how organizational culture, leadership styles, and resource allocation impact the volunteer experience. Understanding these internal factors is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of CSOs in attracting and retaining student volunteers. Additionally, there is a need for research that investigates the role of technology and social media in shaping volunteer motivations and experiences, particularly in the context of a rapidly changing digital landscape. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide deeper insights into the multifaceted role of CSOs in fostering meaningful volunteer experiences for students, ultimately contributing to more effective engagement strategies and enhanced community impact.

3.5 Limitations

The limitations of this review should be taken into consideration when interpreting the current findings. First, because this review is generic, a significant number of sources may influence the results even though they do not specifically address the reasons, advantages, and difficulties faced by students who volunteer for CSOs; some of these may have been left out in compliance with the inclusion criteria. Nonetheless, a thorough and exacting analysis of seven out of 927 peer-reviewed publications produced findings that were pertinent, reliable, and well-supported. Second, the review's comprehensiveness was diminished by the exclusion of grey literature. Several extensive mixed-methods studies or reports may be obtained if they were thought to validate or support peer-reviewed publications. Third, excluding papers released in 2019 and earlier might yield more comprehensive and nuanced findings that help answer the issues this study sought to identify. The study's goal may have been viewed differently in the years prior

to the pandemic.

Conclusion

Volunteering in CSOs provides tertiary students with significant opportunities and difficulties. Multifaceted motivations, benefits, and challenges faced by students volunteering in CSOs are underscored. The necessity for educational institutions and CSOs to develop effective volunteer programs that address these barriers while promoting engagement is necessary and crucial. To optimize student participation in volunteering, it is essential to implement practical recommendations. Educational institutions should integrate volunteer training into their curricula to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate their roles effectively. Additionally, creating flexible volunteering schedules can help mitigate time constraints, allowing students to balance their academic responsibilities with volunteer commitments. Furthermore, establishing support systems, such as mentorship programs or peer networks, can alleviate emotional stress by providing students with guidance and camaraderie in their volunteer endeavors. Lastly, ongoing evaluation of volunteer programs should be conducted to ensure they meet the evolving needs of students and the communities they serve. By addressing these challenges and enhancing the overall volunteer experience, stakeholders can foster a more robust culture of civic engagement among students.

Conflict of Interest

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