

THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEER WORK PROGRAMMES IN PROMOTING NATIONAL IDENTITY AMONG UNIVERSITY VOLUNTEERS IN ACHIEVING SAUDI VISION 2030

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ABSTRACT

Involving volunteer workers in social support has become more popular in most developing countries. In Saudi Arabia, volunteer work has been underutilised due to a lack of understanding of the roles involved, and this has affected the development of the national identity programme. Hence, there is a lack of qualitative studies aimed at exploring the role of volunteer work in promoting national identity. To address this issue, the present study sought to investigate the role of volunteerism in strengthening the national identity programme to achieve the country's Vision 2030. The study adopted the qualitative phenomenological method. A sample of 20 informants was purposefully selected. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to gather data and interpretive phenomenology techniques were used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that young volunteers at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University lack skills such as patience, deliberation, and impartiality. The results further revealed that the social benefit of volunteering includes enhancing citizenship and pride in one's country, which have positive impacts on the wider community; this serves as a foundation for strengthening the national identity programme to realise the aims of Vision 2030. The findings support the recommendation that the government should implement mechanisms to enhance volunteer work in the country. This study is significant because it will assist policymakers in improving the national identity of Vision 2030 and provide a detailed body of knowledge on

university students' experiences as volunteer workers. Therefore, the novelty of this study contributes to the practice of solving problems in volunteer work programmes.

Keywords: National identity, roles and skills, volunteer work, Vision 2030

INTRODUCTION

Regularly involving volunteer workers in welfare and social support has become more popular in most developing countries over recent years. Typically, these volunteers are tasked with helping the government and other organisations directly serve the target communities. People of all generations enjoy volunteering and try to find the best fit to suit their skills, interests, and free time (Veerasingam et al. 2013). However, the significance of volunteer work in accomplishing social, political, and economic objectives in communities, particularly in rural and isolated locations, has been established and demonstrated in recent research (Harkin 2008). A grassroots approach to community sport volunteering is intended to improve policy responses at the state and national levels to explore more comprehensive understandings of volunteering and the social context driving problem-solving approaches (Tye and Costello 2015). Generally speaking, volunteering is viewed as an altruistic exercise in research with the goals of promoting virtue and enhancing people's quality of life (Veerasingam et al. 2013). As such, one of the best methods to acquire relevant, practical experience in the field of social work is via volunteer work. It allows existing social workers to enhance or supplement their experience and allows prospective students (university students) to prepare for practice in real-world contexts.

Volunteering is unpaid and it is performed for the benefit of others. Although anyone could decide to volunteer in any area of society where there is a need, not all volunteers are qualified to work in all types of sectors (Ochman and Jordan 1997). Despite the lack of financial benefit, volunteers often report gaining an improved sense of self-respect and self-worth (Veerasingam et al. 2013). Other benefits of volunteering include opportunities to develop one's social skills and enjoyment. Both the person or community served by the volunteer and the volunteer often benefit. As trust, solidarity, and reciprocity among citizens are strengthened through volunteering, both society as a whole and the individual volunteer benefit (Atalay Noordegraaf and Celebi 2015). Despite the benefits of volunteering for volunteers and the community, volunteers face many challenges including financial issues and sustainability considerations due to a lack of professionalism in selecting

the correct person for the volunteering position. Other factors that hinder the success of volunteer work include a lack of adequate role-specific training (Du 2009), underutilising volunteer talent, and poor communication between coordinators and volunteers (Wysong and Maellaro 2013).

In Saudi Arabia, volunteer work has been underutilised due to a lack of understanding of the associated work roles, which hinders the succession of professionals in the volunteering sector and means that volunteering skills are not maintained or passed on to younger generations (Alhomaïd and Suleiman 2022). This has affected the continuity of many Saudi Arabian volunteer programmes. In Saudi Arabia, many young people tend to imitate prominent role models of volunteers in their behaviour (Bokova 2013), among these models are the active volunteers who were well known for their services to the community through volunteer work and most of them are currently teaching in social work department in various universities. As a result, such volunteers tend to gain widespread affection for their sacrifices and inspiring examples.

In recent years, the effects of globalisation have resulted in young Saudis becoming increasingly familiar with other cultures across the globe which contributed to many changes in Saudi culture and traditions. These changes have raised the question of how best to bolster or maintain volunteering and support national identity programmes among its citizens at present and in the future, a challenge that called for transformative changes (Thompson 2019). In response, on 25 April 2016, the Saudi government, led by Prince Mohammed bin Salman, unveiled Vision 2030, a long-term plan for Saudi Arabia that calls for several national changes and ensures that everyone is recognised for their contribution to the country's progress (Akeel 2017).

Saudi Arabia's programme to strengthen national identity among its citizens is one of ten initiatives that the Saudi Council of Economic Affairs and Development has designated to realise Vision 2030. A nation's past, present, and future national identity encapsulates the attributes that make a country unique, enduring, and central (Edensor 2002). It is noted that national identity has continued to influence economic, social, and political behaviour despite the flexibility of national identity in today's globalised and modern world (Windari 2021). The term national identity therefore refers to the identification of a nation's citizens with their own historical and cultural traditions, moral values, ideals, beliefs, and other characteristics such as national sovereignty. People or groups who believe they are part of a nation's political community will exhibit behaviours that align with this community (He and Yan 2008; Liu and Turner 2018).

As part of Vision 2030, the Saudi national identity programme seeks to enhance its citizens' sense of national identity based on Islamic and national principles. It also seeks to stimulate the psychological and personal traits that motivate citizens to be optimistic, achieve success, and help create a more productive workforce. Therefore, the most significant tenet of Vision 2030 is the development of an inclusive Saudi national identity, which is considered to be vital in improving the economy, diversifying sources of revenue, and lowering unemployment rates (Al-Mustapha 2021). In this, the younger Saudi generations are thus seen as the crucial demographic, which has concentrated on promoting liberalisation, tourism, cultural events, entertainment pursuits, technological developments, and newly built cities (Massod 2022). To achieve these goals successfully, the government must enlist volunteers to help promote the values of Saudi Arabia's new national identity initiative to realise Vision 2030.

Several studies have highlighted a significant positive relationship between volunteering and national identity. For example, Lai et al. (2013) found that a stronger sense of national identity is associated with greater motivation among volunteers. It concluded that citizens' motivation to volunteer increases alongside their sense of national identity, yet tangible actions to bring potential volunteers to genuine volunteering need to be further explored. Therefore, it appears likely that Saudi Arabia's national identity programme can be strengthened by encouraging more widespread, evidenced-based volunteering schemes backed by government support. Through such initiatives, young Saudis can also be encouraged to join such programmes, which will also foster a sense of pride in the traditions and values of the country and enhance the cohesion of the country's shared social values, norms, traditions, and culture. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no extant studies have examined the topic of strengthening Saudi Arabians' national identity through volunteering. Therefore, the researcher sought to explore the role of volunteer work programmes in promoting national identity within the broader framework of achieving Vision 2030.

ROLE THEORY

To address the research problem, the researcher adopted role theory to guide the research process. Role theory is frequently employed to explain the advantages of volunteering and assist people in achieving well-being through volunteering. Role theory, first coined by American sociologist,

Robert Merton (1957), posits that people's social positions (e.g., teacher, mother, client, etc.) determine their respective associated behaviours, referred to as roles. The risks and benefits associated with a particular role might vary depending on the individual, the historical period, and the cultural setting. Roles can facilitate social interaction and resource access, which can support feelings of security, enhanced social standing, and life satisfaction. In addition, roles offer guidance for conduct in ambiguous circumstances, which may reduce stress and enhance well-being among those performing such roles (Hogg 2000).

Accordingly, role theory posits that in any social environment, roles are associated with recognisable social positions and are created by normative expectations (Biddle 1986). According to role theory, "how their roles evolve and are defined" determines how people behave (Matta et al. 2015: 1692). However, a role-holder may descend into a condition known as "role ambiguity" if responsibilities and expectations are not sufficiently clarified to direct their conduct (Biddle 1986: 83). According to role theory, an individual who is aware of the expectations of their role will know how to act (Biddle 1986). This portrays that the more knowledge an individual has about their duty and responsibilities, the more positive behaviour they likely adopt when approaching situations related to their role. Under role theory, role ambiguity causes dissatisfaction with their roles, hesitating when making judgements, and experiencing anxiety and confusion, all of which will lead to poor performance (Kahn et al. 1964; Rizzo et al. 1970).

In the context of Vision 2030's national identity programme, successfully performing volunteering roles entails participants having the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required to carry out the role effectively. This involves two or more people performing the required roles according to an organisational hierarchy; for example, a teacher (professional volunteer/leader) and a student (trainee volunteer/follower). Professional volunteers/leaders teach and train students/followers on the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required so that the latter can become professional volunteers in the future. Roles for trainee volunteers are chosen to help them experience a range of challenging real-life situations, thus, providing opportunities to explore and rehearse various ways of dealing with a variety of demanding situations and developing useful insights. Student volunteers are normally given independent impartial roles that involve reaching out to members of the community to promote and inform the latter about relevant government policies related to, in this case, Vision 2030, and the importance of such policies as well as what the government expects of its citizens. Therefore, it is expected

that young Saudi volunteers play a significant role in achieving the goals of the national identity programme by applying their knowledge and skills and demonstrating behaviours that align with the goals of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was used to gather, analyse, and interpret the interview data drawn from the informants of the study. A phenomenological approach was chosen because the study places a strong emphasis on the real-life experiences of university students and professors on how they feel about participating in voluntary work. For Qutoshi (2018), phenomenology is an experiential philosophy that seeks to understand individuals' conscious experiences of a particular phenomenon in terms of the meaning they attach to it. In terms of scope, the study was conducted at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University's Department of Sociology and Social Work. The essence was to explore the experiences and opinions of professors and students in the department who have worked as volunteers for a couple of years. All the informants were chosen using criterion-based purposive sampling, which is commonly used by qualitative researchers to identify informants who can provide comprehensive information on the phenomenon under investigation (Moser and Korstjens 2018). Criterion-based purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique that selects a specific sample following a pre-established set of criteria or goals (Kalu 2019). The inclusion criteria were as follows: the informant must be a male student or professor who is 18 years of age or above; the informants must be volunteers (professors and students) of the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University; willing to participate; and possess knowledge and experience of volunteering in social work contexts (Creswell 2014). As a result, a total of twenty informants were purposively selected for inclusion in the study. This sample size was determined based on the saturation point reached in the data collection process. A summary of the participants' characteristics and their respective identification codes is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Informant categories and codes

No.	Category	No. of informants	Informant's identification code
1.	Student (volunteer)	12	S1–S12
2.	Expert	8	E1–E8

The chosen informants were then sent invitation letters via SMS, email, and phone calls. The researcher thanked those who made the effort to respond if they declined and contacted those who accepted the invitation to arrange an interview time and date. Before the interview began, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide to gather data using one-to-one interviews at campus-based settings such as coffee shops and offices. The interview sessions typically lasted 30–60 minutes. Arabic was used for the interview. However, all 20 interviews were transcribed and then translated into English. Both versions of each transcript were then sent to an expert translator and editor to check the accuracy to help avoid bias in the results.

As a research approach, interpretative phenomenology consists of three steps: reading, reflecting, and writing; these steps were followed to analyse the data. The data were analysed manually; no computer software (e.g., ATLAS, NVivo) was used in the analysis process. This approach acknowledges that meaning is collaboratively co-created by the researcher and participants and that the researcher cannot eliminate their perspective and prejudices from the data collection and analysis process (Burns et al. 2022). The findings drawn from the data are presented by themes using secondary sources to triangulate the findings concerning those of extant studies and evaluate the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the data (Patton 1999). Experts were asked to cross-check the data and findings. Comparison of the back-to-back transcripts ensured data reliability. The informants were given their transcripts to check if their views, opinions, and perspectives had been captured correctly in the interview. This research project also complied with all the relevant ethical standards, including ensuring participant anonymity, voluntary participation, freedom to discontinue at any time, and securing permission to use the data via signed consent forms.

RESULTS

This section summarises the key findings drawn from the interviews with 12 volunteer students and eight volunteer work experts who study and work at the Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, on their experiences of volunteer work in terms of involvement and supervision. The interviews provide valuable insights into the underlying reservations, challenges, wishes, and hopes of the university's volunteer students and volunteer experts, regarding their experiences of volunteer work in terms of involvement and supervision.

Participants' Demographic Profile

The sample consisted of two groups: (1) twelve university students with 1–3 years of experience in social work volunteering at the time of data collection; and (2) eight volunteering experts (professors) with 4–30 years of experience in volunteer work. Both groups of informants are from the Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. The identities of the informants were anonymised. Pseudonyms were assigned to each informant when describing the themes that emerged from the data. Providing a demographic profile of the participants is important to ensure that the findings were not unduly influenced by the respondents' length of volunteering experience or their educational attainment. An overview of the participants' demographic data in terms of education and total volunteering experience is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Demographic profile of student volunteers ($n = 12$)

Code	Age (years)	Academic level	Years of experience in volunteer work
S1	21	SN6	1
S2	22	SN7	2
S3	23	SN8	3
S4	21	SN6	1
S5	22	SN7	2
S6	23	SN8	3
S7	22	SN8	3
S8	22	SN7	1
S9	24	SN8	1
S10	23	SN8	2
S11	22	SN7	1
S12	24	SN8	1

Note: SN = Semester number.

Table 3: Demographic profile of volunteering experts ($n = 8$)

Code	Current job	Qualification	Age (years)	Years of volunteering experience
E1	Supervisor and trainer for the National Volunteer Work Platform.	BA	32	5
E2	Faculty member, supervisor, and representative for volunteer work.	PhD	44	15

(continued on next page)

Table 3: (continued)

Code	Current job	Qualification	Age (years)	Years of volunteering experience
E3	Supervisor and representative for volunteer work.	Master	34	4
E4	Researcher and author in volunteer work.	PhD	65	30
E5	Researcher in volunteer work.	Master	–	5
E6	Faculty member and researcher in volunteer work and former head of the Centre for Voluntary Work Studies.	PhD	60	25
E7	Faculty member and head of the Centre for Voluntary Work Studies.	PhD	–	15
E8	Supervisor and representative for volunteer work.	Master	–	8

Themes and Sub-themes from the Interview Data

After analysing the interview data, the following three themes emerged: (1) the acquisition of skills through volunteer work; (2) the social benefits of voluntary work to strengthen national identity; and (3) the ethical and moral results of voluntary work. In addition to these three themes, there are several relevant subthemes and categories.

Theme 1: Acquisition of skills through volunteer work

The acquisition of skills gained through volunteer work such as decision-making skills, teamwork skills, and building and designing volunteer programmes emerged as an important theme.

Sub-theme 1a: Decision-making skills

The university student participants talked about themselves, recalling their first experiences of volunteer work and how they originally lacked essential decision-making traits such as patience, deliberation, and impartiality. The following interview extract describes this:

When I first started volunteering, I was lacking in a few areas. I was in a rush. Everything is being rushed...You asked for an example, so here it is. I make decisions that affect both myself and my team. I am in charge of a volunteer team. I deal with everyone and make

team-related choices. One example of my hastiness and impatience at the time would be the dismissal of one of the team's volunteers because that member was generating difficulties and his debates with certain team members were heated. I believe that he contributed to a charged atmosphere inside the team. I decided to exclude him at the time. (S8)

Similarly, participants also emphasised the significance of understanding all of the specifics of the issue about which they must make a decision, and that the pressure to make judgments quickly can affect the quality of the decision made. They also highlighted the implications of rushing into decision-making, such as a sense of remorse. For example, S2 reported:

Decision-making must be based on a solid basis. The first step is to learn everything there is to know about the issue, and then assess it before making a decision. I have a coworker who is always rushing and regrets the majority of his judgments and decisions.

The participants underlined that their decisions should not be motivated by self-interest and that the decisionmaker must be objective and fair. Most of the participants pointed out the causes of suffering when making decisions that may damage their interests; specifically, they ascribed this suffering to the use of emotion in decision-making, which indicated their opposition to allowing strong emotions to affect the decision-making processes. For example, S5 noted, "Why do we constantly suffer when we make a decision that goes against our interests? Because emotions are involved! Emotions should not be involved when making decisions. This is my opinion".

Another attribute that the participants reported was essential for decisionmakers is the ability to continuously improve their theoretical knowledge and practical abilities. They also underlined the need to consider other people's perspectives and seek guidance from others. For example, as S3 stated: "I constantly attempt to learn from voluntary work and rectify my mistakes to increase my practical skills...and I do not decide until I confer with others who have expertise in what I'm deciding on".

Participants also highlighted the importance of timing when making decisions. They asserted that a decision cannot be "the right" one unless it is made at the appropriate time. For instance, as S4 described: "Making the correct decision at the right time is a talent that we must develop; it is crucial in any sector: official employment, volunteering, or even in our studies".

Sub-theme 1b: Teamwork skills

The participants emphasised the importance of teamwork and that each person is a member of a team whose success or failure is tied to that of the team. Volunteering, according to the participants, teaches various skills, including the ability to work within a volunteer team. Participants stated that while each person has their own unique strengths and weaknesses, they are best used and directed when they work as part of a team. They also stressed the need to be eager to develop strong relationships with team members, as well as having decent and cooperative morals so that the individual team members can build rapport with their peers. They also reinforced that a team member must be open to accepting the perspectives of others, whether or not they accord with their position on a given issue. The interviewees agreed that doing so is not only encouraged but is also a key responsibility. For example, this sub-theme was summed up by S1:

Working with a group necessitates positive interactions with your coworkers. Of course, you make certain that your principles are reserved, that you have the chance to speak with all team members and that you accept their various points of view. Do not impose your viewpoint on others. It's draining. What is the point of working together if we don't learn from each other?

The participants also stressed that working in a team requires team members to avoid focusing on personal gains; instead, they should focus on the best interests of the team as a whole. Participants also affirmed the need to enact laws and regulations that govern team members' work and mobility to make them less likely to prioritise personal interests above the interests of the team. For example, as S1 commented, "You must not focus on your ambitions; your job must be to fulfil the group's overall aim".

Sub-theme 1c: The skill of building and designing volunteer programmes

Because volunteers tend to seek exciting programmes to join, the participants emphasised the need to establish the purpose of a volunteer programme that one plans to create. Furthermore, the volunteer experts emphasised that the ability to design exciting volunteer opportunities and/or programmes is an important skill, which is why they, as academics, seek to offer such opportunities to their students. This effort has resulted in remarkable improvements to the abilities of students who participate in volunteer programmes. Furthermore,

the volunteer work experts stated that the task of assisting volunteers in contributing to the creation of voluntary programmes that suit the latter's requirements is the responsibility of supervisors and experts in terms of imparting their expertise and knowledge. For example, E5 remarked, "People are good and want to do something for their community, but they need such skills that help develop their abilities, and they must continue training in designing volunteer programmes until they develop more and more".

The university student participants also voiced their approval of volunteer initiatives and programmes targeted at enabling students engaged in volunteer work to construct new voluntary programmes. For example, as one volunteer student noted: "Now, thanks to my volunteer experience, I can assist in the creation of volunteer programmes and events, and I can arrange them from start to finish".

Theme 2: The social benefit of practising voluntary work to enhance national identity

The second theme to emerge from the data was the social benefit of practising voluntary work to achieve an improved sense of national identity through developing citizenship qualities, and national pride, and practising positive volunteer programmes that positively impact the community. The descriptions of the responders varied, as shown in the sub-themes.

Sub-theme 2a: Developing a sense of citizenship and national pride

The participants emphasised that when volunteers participate in volunteer programmes, apart from all the positive benefits they obtain in terms of improved skills and abilities, there is another important aspect that can be activated through volunteer work: enhancing their sense of national identity. The participants gave examples of particular volunteer programmes that enhanced their sense of national identity, including the volunteers' participation in voluntary forums accompanying Saudi Arabia's National Day. The volunteer work encouraged through such programmes raises volunteers' awareness of the importance of their homeland and enhances their affection for it. Thus, the participants expressed that such volunteer programmes provide a good example of how individuals' sense of citizenship can be enhanced. For example, one participant (E4) noted:

The celebration of the National Day serves as a reminder of the importance of the homeland and its achievements as well as its impact on people's lives. It enhances the vitality of the country's leadership in the hearts of its people...For what reason is this day given attention by countries except for such returns that have a positive social impact on the souls of the people belonging to these countries?

The participants discussed how a nation's advancement and development required conscious and competent citizenship. The participants stressed that simply saying "I love my country" does not imply a complete sense of citizenship; rather, individuals must be encouraged to work for their country as volunteers because genuine patriotism, according to the study participants, is the sense that your nation is their true home. The respondents revealed that patriotism is an emotion that cannot be negotiated and that it is more than simply a word or a slogan to be expressed in chants; rather, patriotism is a sense of belonging and allegiance to one's motherland. As E6, for example, expressed:

The homeland is the sincerity of belonging, and citizenship does not exist without real belonging to the homeland and its history and defending it, even if that defence was through a kind word or embodying this by volunteering, especially in national participations such as the country's National Day.

Sub-theme 2b: Establishing positive volunteer programmes that have positive impacts on the community

The participants took issue with certain volunteer initiatives that may have a harmful influence on society and expressed that others provide no social benefits. There was a sense of urging policymakers to prioritise volunteer programmes and opportunities that make a difference, have a positive influence on volunteers' personalities and identities, and help the community as a whole. Participants indicated that the volunteers' sense of their role in society and the importance of the work they do has a positive impact on other volunteers and encourages them to do more. The participants emphasised that volunteers should not feel that what they provide is merely routine work, as this would discourage volunteers to keep on participating in volunteer work whenever an opportunity was available, as opposed to when the work they provide has tangible positive impacts. For instance, S5 explained:

I enjoy doing high-quality, innovative volunteer work. I dislike work that anyone can perform...I must recognise the significance of community service. I need to do something for my country and work with my colleagues on our volunteer team to serve the country because, thankfully, we are a cohesive society and our passion for our country brings us together [...] I am pleased more than you can imagine whenever the effort I give has a positive impact on my people and my nation, because the country has not failed us, and we must return the favour. Believe me, this is a common emotion among most young people, not just myself.

The participants brought up the point that people voluntarily offer their time and effort for free, and this is the reality of volunteer work. As a result, they emphasised that volunteers' efforts must have a direct and positive impact on Saudi society. Regrettably, some volunteer programmes are outdated and monotonous and appear to have no positive influence on people's lives, as one participant (S11) explained: "Either I participate in outstanding initiatives that influence the community, or I will not". Volunteering, according to the participants, fundamentally promotes individuals to join in voluntary events and projects by highlighting that they are making a genuine difference in their community.

Theme 3: The moral and ethical outcomes from the practice of voluntary work

The moral and ethical outcomes from the practice of voluntary work through instilling a desire to serve the country and volunteer rights and duties emerged as the main theme. The characterisations of the respondents vary.

Sub-theme 3a: Instilling a desire in volunteers to serve their country

The participants clarified that volunteering—particularly volunteering in sectors such as working with children, teaching, public health, and women's empowerment—provides them with a wonderful sense of accomplishment and pride and enables them to help people while advancing in their own careers. They stated that the emotion of helping the people and the country to which they belong is so distinct that it is difficult to convey to those who have not participated in volunteer work and that only those who have participated in volunteer work can grasp that feeling. S9, one of the volunteers, noted, "You will experience a unique feeling [...] Only those who have tried

volunteering can get what I am saying [...] My colleagues and I are continually encouraging one another to serve the country”. Meanwhile, another student volunteer participant said, “Our volunteer work occurred during the Corona crisis, despite the tough circumstances, but the sense and exhilaration of the work were great...unexplainable! and I am delighted with what I accomplished”.

The participants also emphasised the need to instil a passion for volunteer work in children through other family members. Parents can convey the importance of and love for voluntary work to their children, which can be seen as a moral virtue that benefits everyone in Saudi society. The participants emphasised that volunteer work is one of the most important social values because it is linked to gratitude and giving back to the homeland, which has given a lot to its citizens, their parents, and their grandparents, and which continues to provide its citizens with everything they need to sustain a good quality of life. For example, E4, a faculty member and researcher of volunteer work, said:

From an early age, children’s hearts must be inculcated with the culture of volunteering. This is a moral virtue that helps the volunteer, his family, and the community as a whole. We are obligated to serve our nation, thus, choosing to serve it is a duty we must do rather than a favour we may give.

E6, another specialist in volunteer work, said, “Equipping and preparing youths for the upliftment of their community is a public obligation that all families must bear...Instilling a desire to serve one’s nation at a young age yields excellent results”.

Sub-theme 3b: Volunteers’ rights and duties

Volunteering experts among the participants stated that the Ministry of Human Resources, which is responsible for supervising the National Platform for Voluntary Work (an electronic platform where all volunteers are registered and their volunteer hours are calculated, among other related statistics), is attempting to institutionalise volunteer work and standardise the associated procedures and regulations in some sectors. Furthermore, volunteer expert participants added that the Ministry of Human Resources provides volunteer training and is concerned with clarifying the rights and duties expected of volunteers during the volunteer process.

However, there was some disagreement between volunteer experts and volunteer university students participating in the study on the management of volunteer work and the treatment of volunteers by their supervisors. Specifically, university student participants emphasised that they, as volunteers, have rights and duties that must be upheld. The volunteer university students underlined the need for discipline, dedication, following directions, and maintaining confidentiality in any endeavour. Nevertheless, some of the volunteer university students who took part in the study indicated their discontent with the maltreatment they had experienced by those directing voluntary work, including how their rights had been ignored. According to volunteer university students, volunteers in Saudi Arabia tend to be viewed as though they have been granted a “favour” by being allowed to participate in voluntary work, and they often have no option but to listen to and obey those directing the volunteer work. For example, as one volunteer university student (S12) expressed:

Unfortunately, some supervisors do not appreciate me; I come and provide work for free, but I must [show] respect only [...] Why do they make me feel inferior to them and as if they are doing me a favour? Unfortunately, some people abuse their positions in the most heinous ways...I know what is expected of me: discipline, punctuality, and commitment. Unfortunately, many volunteers pull out from volunteering due to poor treatment.

Interestingly, the above point of view was not mentioned by the volunteer work experts participating in the study; rather, they expressed the desire to promote the culture of volunteering and move the emphasis away from working for monetary reward and instead make volunteering a sustainable lifestyle. The volunteer work experts interviewed also stressed that the role of the different sectors involved in volunteer work, including universities, is to contribute to raising awareness of volunteers’ rights and obligations, as well as contributing to the sought-after growth and advancement as set out in the Saudi Vision 2030.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the key findings of the interviews conducted with twelve volunteer students and eight volunteer work experts from Saudi Arabia who study and work at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, respectively, on their experience in volunteer work in terms of involvement

and supervision in the universities. The interviews provided valuable insights into the underlying reservations, challenges, wishes, and hopes of the volunteer students and volunteering experts concerning their experience of volunteer work in terms of involvement and supervision in Saudi Arabia.

As shown by Theme 1 (acquisition of skills through volunteer work), students involved in volunteer work benefit by acquiring various skills which they originally lacked such as decision-making (e.g., patience, deliberation, and impartiality) as well as the capability to design and create volunteer programmes. This notion is consistent with the work of Radhakrishna and Ewing (2011), which found that two factors—skills and belonging—explained 28.1% of the variance in youth life skills. This suggests that when volunteer leaders succeed in making volunteer students feel important and welcome to the programmes and emphasise the value of life skills, volunteers successfully learn life skills related to goal-setting and decision-making. It is concluded that volunteering helps people improve their skills, particularly those related to decision-making that positively affect the communities they serve. Particularly, since social media makes it easier for people to interact with politicians and other government officials, this has changed how volunteers see and anticipate participating in public decision-making (Roth and Prior 2019). Now, while working with civil society groups, governmental organisations should embrace lengthy procedures to encourage grassroots democracy and participatory decision-making rather than complaining about the “chaotic character” of volunteer organisations. For example, “attempts to ‘integrate’ informal volunteers into formal systems may prove counter-productive because they quash the adaptability, innovativeness, and responsiveness that informal volunteers bring to emergency and disaster management” (Whittaker et al. 2015: 366). Additionally, a collectivistic cultural orientation emphasises the significance of group identities, group goals, and group interests (Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly 1998; Al-Saggaf and Weckert 2011). Since Middle Eastern cultures like Saudi Arabia are known for their collectivistic cultural orientation, which emphasises the significance of group identities, group goals, and group interests (Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly 1998; Al-Saggaf and Weckert 2011), developing decision-making skills in students involved in volunteer work is particularly important for these cultures because the impact of the decisions made in such societies tend to affect a large number of people (Cassell and Blake 2012; Itim 2016, as cited in Jiang et al. 2018). Every element of Saudi life, including decision-making, is influenced by this sense of collectivism (Al Suwaidi 2008). In contrast, a lack of decision-making skills among

volunteers might be extremely harmful to the cause and has historically been one of the biggest obstacles to relief efforts in major catastrophes, in some cases, leading to an increased number of victims (Vafadar et al. 2021).

Furthermore, volunteering, according to the participants, teaches various skills, including the ability to work within a volunteer team. Participants stated that while each person has their unique strengths and weaknesses, these qualities are best used and directed when they work as part of a team. Teachers strongly indicated that they know their roles in this partnership, which is critical to achieving high levels of collaboration with others who are involved in the volunteer team (Almalky and Alqahtani 2021). A study by Noonan et al. (2012) revealed that team members' understanding of their duties led to improved collaboration. However, a lack of knowledge of the duties and tasks of those participating in such partnerships might reduce the amount of collaboration between team members (Plotner et al. 2020).

Theme 2 (the social benefit of practising voluntary work to enhance national identity) highlighted the social benefits of participating in voluntary work (e.g., an enhanced sense of national identity through developing citizenship and pride in one's country and implementing volunteer programmes that have beneficial impacts on the community). These results are in line with the work of Alkohaiz and Shalhoub (2021), who emphasised the value of utilising young people's qualities and skills in voluntary work to benefit the country. Another important consideration is the Shura Council's approval of the Area Youth Councils' goals, which include encouraging and preparing young people to engage in volunteer work, serve their country, and take responsibility for doing so, as well as establishing a culture of dialogue, cooperation, and communication. Along with contributing to the expanding organisational and institutional youth culture, young people should also spend time honing their skills and talents and assisting in the development of future trustworthy national skills (Alkohaiz and Shalhoub 2021). These are, in essence, the goals of the proposed Area Youth Councils rule that was passed by the Shura Council in 2019 (Al-Malk 2019). The present study's findings concur with those of Ali and Abdulhasan (2020), who stressed the value of volunteerism in fostering a sense of homeland identity, developing intellectual, artistic, scientific, and practical skills and capabilities, and providing citizens with numerous opportunities to express their opinions on matters of social importance.

Participation in charitable and voluntary work enables a person to identify particular social problems and express one's abilities to work and participate in providing for the needs of society; thus, satisfying their

psychological and social needs and developing a more concrete sense of self (Ali and Abdulhasan 2020). Additionally, these findings tie in well with social exchange theory, wherein individuals participate in voluntary work when the rewards for that relationship equal more than the costs of doing so. Thus, when the rewards of volunteer work (i.e., the sense of achievement in providing help and assistance to others) are obvious and rewarding, volunteers feel a greater sense of national belonging and pride in their homeland.

Concerning Theme 3 (the moral and ethical outcomes from the practice of voluntary work) the moral and ethical benefits of engaging in voluntary work through instilling a desire to serve one's country and upholding volunteers' rights and duties were significant. These findings concur with those of Bang et al. (2019), who found that volunteers' legacies tend to be realised in enhanced volunteer support for other special events in the community and improved volunteerism in the community in general (e.g., more positive attitudes towards volunteering, increased volunteering rates, and increased level of involvement) (Doherty 2009). As an integral part of efforts to maximise increases in community engagement through sports mega events (SME) volunteering experiences, it is important to understand how volunteers' motivation and satisfaction influence their future intention to volunteer in other community settings. According to social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959), individuals intend to engage in or continue their voluntary work when the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs. That is, when individuals' motives are satisfied through their volunteer work, their future intention to volunteer increases as a return on the exchange relationship (Bang et al. 2019).

Volunteer students in the present study also highlighted the need for discipline in all volunteer-related endeavours. The results of this study go beyond the findings of earlier literature which highlighted that volunteers who showed high levels of discipline also demonstrated high levels of diligence and motivation, whereas volunteers who demonstrated poor levels of discipline also demonstrated low levels of diligence and drive (Fahmi et al. 2022). Specifically, the present study's findings underline that volunteer university students themselves emphasised the importance of discipline as a responsibility.

Furthermore, the volunteer experts interviewed in this study revealed that the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources is attempting to institutionalise volunteer work and standardise the associated procedures and regulations in some sectors. Furthermore, the volunteer experts interviewed added that the Ministry of Human Resources provides volunteer training and is concerned

with clarifying the rights and duties expected of volunteers during the volunteer process. These findings are in line with those of Tavares et al. (2022) that emphasise on volunteer management. Although helping others is the primary goal of volunteer work, volunteers must be aware of the restrictions to which they are subject in some areas, such as limitations on emotional involvement and personal commitment (Wilson 2012). Due to society's ever-growing need for volunteer labour, volunteers now undertake more difficult and complicated duties (Van Schie et al. 2014). Although the fundamental objective of volunteer work is to help others, volunteers must consider the limitations of their status with regard, for example, to emotional and personal involvement (Wilson 2012). Society has increased the demand for voluntary work, which requires volunteers to perform increasingly demanding and complex tasks (Van Schie et al. 2014). The volunteer must "know what to do", "how to do it", and the "effect" (Lynch 2000: 3) of doing these duties to be able to carry them out (Doherty and Hoye 2011; Naylor et al. 2013). These rules and external controls, however, can undermine this sort of motivation because volunteers tend to be intrinsically motivated and autonomous, which might reduce the volunteer's involvement in their work (Deci and Ryan 2008). In contrast, if the volunteer is given insufficient information or clarification regarding their role, this could result in a misalignment of expectations between the volunteer and the organising institution as well as leading to feelings of disappointment or psychological contract breach in the volunteer (Saksida et al. 2017), both of which will harm the volunteer's sense of engagement.

However, in this direction, role theory postulates that individuals define roles, and then assume themselves and others to act accordingly. This means that volunteers in volunteering programmes fit into certain roles of enhancing the national identity programme, from students or young volunteers to professional volunteers. Each role has specific behaviour expectations that are required for someone to fit appropriately into that position. For example, young volunteers are not expected to have vast experience and knowledge about volunteering, therefore, their behaviour will not be fully positive as compared to the professional and experienced volunteers. As such harmony exists when volunteers meet the expectations of their role description, and hostile feelings arise when they do not conform to social rules. Merton (1957) asserted that people should be ready to complete most societal roles as many societies treat each role as a duty. Therefore, it becomes pertinent for young Saudis to accept the role of volunteering, to help society in achieving a desired goal. Based on the above, role theory is useful in the current

study by helping the researcher to clearly understand the role of volunteers and the strategies needed to strengthen the national identity programme in Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study on the role of volunteer work programmes in promoting national identity among university volunteers in relation to achieving the Saudi Vision 2030 underline the shortcomings and challenges affecting volunteer work in Saudi Arabia, as well as the importance of enabling volunteers to acquire new skills through their participation in volunteer opportunities. Therefore, the results point to the conclusion that the Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University students volunteering in Saudi Arabia often lack skills such as decision-making (e.g., patience, deliberation, and impartiality) and teamwork, which ultimately hinders the efforts to develop a national identity programme to fulfil the goals of Vision 2030. Furthermore, the results underlined that participating in volunteer work has many social benefits for Saudi society, such as developing a strong sense of citizenship and pride in the country, which positively impacts the volunteers' communities. This finding is important as it serves as a basis for increasing efforts to strengthen the country's national identity programme to help successfully realise Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

In conclusion, the researcher recommends that the government, through the Ministry of Human Resources, should implement mechanisms that seek to enhance the conditions for Saudi volunteer workers. Specifically, the aim should be to provide a set of nationally applicable standards, rules, regulations, and duties that could be used in regulating volunteer work in Saudi Arabia. This would make Saudi Arabia's volunteer sector more professional and beneficial for the community and the country as a whole. To achieve Vision 2030's target of creating a successful national identity programme, volunteers need to be fully aware of the morals, values, and ethics of Saudi culture as well as volunteer-work-specific traits and skills. This means there is a need to provide training courses for students and volunteer work coordinators to enable them to learn how to best manage challenging situations in the volunteer work sector. This can be achieved through providing training, workshops, and seminars to teach the required skills and ensure that all volunteers can develop a keen sense of national identity. Such training should be organised by the government and carried out by volunteer professionals.

Such initiatives will likely further enhance volunteers' skills, abilities, and awareness about the sector, and enable them to deal effectively with any challenges that they may face in the course of their duties.

As Saudi society grows and government policies are increasingly required at the grassroots level, there is an increasing demand from Saudi youth to participate in the voluntary sector. Therefore, government institutions need to adopt a much keener interest in the quality and supervision of volunteer opportunities. Due to its wide-ranging impacts on Saudi society, volunteer work should enshrine the value of upholding a strong sense of national identity. This means that volunteers should be role models for Saudi culture; for example, by speaking Arabic while discharging their duties, respecting Saudi customs and traditions, as well as wearing official Saudi national dress while volunteering. Finally, university students tend to be strongly influenced by their peers, and this can sometimes discourage them from participating in volunteering opportunities. To counter this, proper measures must be taken by the government to promote the value of engaging in volunteering among university students, for example, by emphasising the transferable skills they will learn (e.g., leadership, communication, decision-making) that can be used in their future careers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the useful contributions made by the current research project, it is subject to several limitations. First, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of a small sample of only one university's student and expert volunteers in Saudi Arabia. This means that the findings are unlikely to represent other contexts of volunteering as they focused mainly on the national identity programme and are unrepresentative of the entire volunteer sector of Saudi Arabia, as the sample comes from one university. To overcome such limitations, future studies could capture more representative samples of volunteers and volunteer experts in Saudi Arabia to provide a more comprehensive overview of how volunteering helps to consolidate a sense of national identity among its citizens. Also, future research could investigate the benefits of Saudi Arabia's volunteer sector from the perspective of those in the community who receive help and support from volunteers.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author declares that the research adheres to and respects all ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and the right to participate or withdraw. The informants signed a consent form.

NOTE

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