



<https://doi.org/10.64211/oidaijsd190514>

Performance Considerations for Students' Volunteering

Maryam BoJulaia ^{1*}, Imad K. Agha ², Renad Alshaykhahmed ³, Maura Pilotti ⁴

^{1,4} Department of Sciences and Human Studies, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia.

² Department of Student Affairs, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia.

³ Department of Architecture and Design, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia.

*Corresponding author: mbojulaia@pmu.edu.sa

© Author (s)

OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada.

ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online) www.oidaijsd.com

Also available at <https://www.ssrn.com/index.cfm/en/oida-intl-journal-sustainable-dev/>

Abstract: Volunteering is often seen as a desirable activity for students, not only as a builder of an altruistic disposition but also as a conveyor of useful workplace experiences. Yet, the motives behind volunteering, either self-serving or altruistic, have been examined primarily in populations of the Global North where individualism prevails. Largely unknown are the motives of students from countries of the Global South, where globalization has inserted individualism into formerly collectivistic cultures. Within these underrepresented student populations, it is also unclear whether volunteering is linked to particular academic outcomes. This field study examined the relationship between volunteering (self-reported behavior and its motives) and academic performance. Its relationship with prosocial dispositions was also examined. A sample of 425 female undergraduate students of Saudi Arabian descent reported whether they had recently volunteered, as well as their intentions to volunteer and to engage in prosocial behavior. Female students were selected for being at the center of their country's neoliberal economic plan, which promotes individualism, while their nuclear and extended families foster collectivism. Selected motives for volunteering were uncovered. There were no differences in academic performance between students who volunteered and students who did not. In contrast, the presence of a role model was linked to higher first-year GPA. These findings suggest that for Saudi Arabian undergraduate students, desirable academic outcomes are not related to volunteering per se, but rather to a supportive social environment. Cultural differences in the conceptualization of voluntarism are discussed.

Keywords: academic performance, volunteering, self-serving motives, altruistic motives

Introduction

Volunteering is defined as a cluster of activities that individuals perform to benefit others without the expectation of financial compensation (Cnaan et al., 2022; Kolnhofer & Nagy, 2020; Wilson, 2000). In its essence, it is a form of prosocial behavior that is performed in a variety of settings, including hospitals, daycare centers, schools, food banks, polling places, etc. In any of these settings, the motives behind volunteering are key to understanding recruitment (Fashant & Evan, 2020). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2020), the motives behind a prosocial action can be viewed as its direct antecedents, reflecting one's readiness to help others. Yet, prosocial behavior is not isomorphic with altruistic motives since helping others may be driven by self-serving intents. Furthermore, for undergraduate students, volunteering is often an extracurricular activity that may serve different functions, each reflecting a unique motive. Clary et al. (1998), who specifically developed a questionnaire to assess such motives, identified six types. Each was labeled a function, offering people opportunities for self-enhancement, value expression, career advancement, social relationship enrichment, learning, and defense from undesirable states, including thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. In the functional framework of Clary et al., motives are not openly classified for the degree to which they are antecedents of prosocial actions meant either to help others (altruistic motives) or to benefit the volunteer (motives driven by self-interest).

The present study explored this issue in the socio-cultural context of a country (Saudi Arabia) with deep collectivistic roots that define people's self-concepts (Hofstede, 1980). In such a context, people are assumed to possess

interdependent self-concepts, which are shaped by relevant relationships and social roles within their nuclear and extended families. Idiosyncratic characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes are viewed as part of a smaller, less relevant self, which is subservient to the self defined by the commitment to one's family, in-group, and, more broadly, society. However, the economic transformation of the country into a neoliberal ecosystem presents people with the option of viewing themselves through the lenses of individualistic selves. That is, people can also conceptualize themselves as autonomous, with unique characteristics (i.e., attributes, abilities, and beliefs), self-sufficient, and independent of others and of the social environment in which they live. Self-sufficiency means that individuals can freely enter into and leave social relations and roles, which are actions that are highly restricted, if not improbable, in the collectivistic ecosystem.

According to the epistemology of culturalism (Morris et al., 2015), different cultural orientations can coexist. People can hold separate, even conflicting, cultural orientations, which are activated either by situational demands or acts of conscious volition. In Saudi Arabia, the rise of individualism may be the byproduct of the convergence of global and local influences. That is, globalization (Hossain et al., 2011; Nafstad et al., 2009; Steele & Lynch, 2013) is codified in the neoliberal economic plan of the country named Vision 2030. The persistence of collectivism, in spite of an economic system that heavily promotes individualism, offers a fertile ground for flexible selves. Such selves assimilate the features of interdependence and independence and express each of them in response to particular situational demands. For instance, an interdependent self may be dominant when visiting grandparents, whereas the independent self may become operative when applying for a coveted job. Of course, Saudi Arabia (Jiang et al., 2018) is not unique in exhibiting such a mixture of cultural orientations. Around the world, formerly collectivistic societies, faced by rapid economic development, have also experienced a rise in individualism, along with consumerism and nationalism. As such, countries that had been classified as collectivistic (Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998) are currently experiencing the juxtaposition of conflicting cultural forces, each leading to different responses to events in everyday life. It is important to underscore, however, that globalization forces do not equate societies, communities, and cultures of the Global South with those of the Global North. It often challenges the Global South local communities' cultural practices, values, and belief systems, viewing them as weaker counterparts, which are obstacles to bend or eradicate (Hamamura, 2012; Soto & Kharem, 2006). Thus, coexistence does not imply equity. On the contrary, hybrid mindsets may entail orientations with unequal worth, usefulness, and effectiveness in daily life.

The decision to volunteer and the ensuing actions may be driven by the desire to help others, which is likely to be fostered by the interdependent self, the desire to benefit oneself, which is likely to be fostered by the independent self, or both. The functional framework of Clary et al. (1996, 1998) does not focus on people's self-construals. Rather, this framework classifies the reasons behind volunteering based on the function they serve for the individual. Mostly driven by data collected from the Global North, and thus from participants with individualistic self-construals, Clary et al. uncovered several functions served by volunteering, each representing a motive: (1) self-enhancement, which specifically refers to actions that are intended to bring about positive feelings, promote self-esteem, and encourage psychological development; (2) protection, which denotes a self-defensive posture shaping actions intended to shield oneself from undesirable states (e.g., low self-esteem) and circumstances; (3) value, which reflects actions expressing the ideals of altruism and concern for others; (4) social interest, which concerns the enrichment of relationships, which may include expanding social networks and deepening affiliations and connections; (5) career advancement, which involves the benefits of activities intended to prepare for future employment or improve one's current status; and (6) understanding, which comprises the acquisition and use of acquired knowledge and skills, along with one's awareness of possessing such knowledge and skills. In a large-scale survey in the United States, Clary et al. (1996) found that the highest motives for volunteering were values (defined as signifying concerns for others), self-enhancement, and social interests. The lowest motives were reported to be understanding, protection, and career. It is unclear whether these functions/motives generalize to socio-cultural environments, where individualistic and interdependent cultural orientations coexist.

The evidence emerging from Saudi Arabia is fragmented, mostly due to the variety of assessment tools used to measure motives. Jiang et al. (2018) found that the social, understanding, and self-enhancement motives predicted consistent volunteering in a sample of young volunteers (19-25 years of age). However, Jiang et al. did not examine all motives identified by Clary et al. (1996, 1998). Their sample also included a mixture of students and non-students. Alshammari et al. (2025) conducted a meta-analysis focused on medical volunteering, defined as actions intended to address health inequities performed by healthcare professionals and medical and non-medical students. They reported religious values, altruism, and professional growth as motives for volunteering. Among dental students responding to an author-developed questionnaire, Aboalshamat et al. (2024) reported that volunteering was seen as a learning opportunity in health-related fields. Among male undergraduate students (age range: 19-24), and through the lens of the functional

framework of Clary et al. (1998), Alkadi et al. (2018) reported career, social, learning, and enhancement functions of volunteering as motives. They also reported that the presence or absence of a role model (a family member who volunteers) did not differentiate the intensity of students' motives. However, no information about whether volunteering and its motives were related to academic attainment was provided.

The picture that emerges from the literature on Saudi Arabian students' motives is not only unclear but also largely incomplete, as it overlooks female students. Thus, the first task in our study is to determine whether the same motives apply to the hybrid cultural minds of a sample of Saudi Arabian undergraduate students. Female students are selected because young women of college age are the main focus and recipients of the neoliberal economic plan of the country. For decades, they have been ignored as potential members of the workforce. From being relegated to the role of homemakers at the epicenter of both nuclear and extended families, they have become the indispensable engine for the success of the plan. Thus, in these women, individualistic motives have been abruptly added to the collectivistic motives typical of their family ecosystems. Whether they volunteer and the motives behind their volunteering are at present unclear.

Hypotheses

The motives proposed by Clary et al. (1996, 1998) in the Global North were collected from participants who lived within a socio-cultural system dominated by individualism. Do these motives apply to members of a formerly collectivistic society whose economic plan promotes individualism? If the rise of individualism in the ecosystem where students exist matters, their motives will be isomorphic with those uncovered by Clary et al. (H1a). Furthermore, if the society where participants live is characterized by the rise of individualism over collectivism, students will classify motives for volunteering mostly from a self-serving viewpoint rather than from an altruistic viewpoint. (H1b).

Students' decision to devote free time to volunteering may depend on several factors, either external or internal. H2 and H3 focused on whether these factors differentiated students who had recently volunteered (in the last six months).

External factors concerning the decision to volunteer may include the demands of their academic programs (serving as a constraint) or the presence of role models (serving as a facilitator). STEM degrees are usually perceived as demanding, especially for female students (Hayes et al., 2020). If demands indeed differ between academic programs, undergraduate students pursuing STEM degrees will be less likely to volunteer than those pursuing non-STEM degrees (H3a). If the presence of models (Kearney & Levine, 2020) offering a practical example of volunteering is key to the decision to engage in the activity, students with a role model will be more likely to volunteer than those without one (H3b).

Internal factors concerning the decision to volunteer may include the functions/motives served by volunteering as well as prosocial dispositions. Thus, if the strength of the motivation to volunteer or the strength of the disposition towards prosocial actions impacts decision-making, such internal factors will differentiate students with recent volunteering experience from those who did not have such an experience (H4).

If volunteering is associated with benefits or costs in academic attainment (e.g., Alsuwaidi et al., 2022; Gorard et al., 2016), the academic performance of students who volunteered will differ from that of those who did not. If volunteering offers the opportunity to practice activities and skills, and express dispositions that overlap with those required for academic attainment, students who volunteered in the recent past will have higher performance than those who did not (H5a). If volunteering takes away time and effort from activities necessary for academic attainment, students who volunteered in the recent past will have lower performance than those who did not (H5b). Because volunteering pertains to specific activities and tasks, performance may be assessed either globally (first-year GPA) or locally (grades in general education courses, such as communication or mathematics taken during the first year). As a broader measure of academic attainment, students' first-year GPA may more effectively capture the benefits or costs of volunteering than a more localized one (H5c).

Method

Participants

The participants were 425 female undergraduate students who were enrolled in courses of the General Education Curriculum at an English-medium university located in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. They were pursuing either a STEM degree (engineering, computer science, and architecture; 55%) or a non-STEM degree (law, business, and interior design; 45%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 ($M = 19.92$; $SD = 1.80$). Students were Arabic-English bilingual speakers who were in their freshman or sophomore year. The sample size exceeded the minimum number of 310 with a confidence level of 95%, a margin of error of 5%, and a population size of 1, 586; Daniel & Cross, 2013).

Procedure and Materials

Two online questionnaires were administered to students, preceded by demographic questions inquiring about age, educational level, and academic major. Students were asked about whether they performed volunteering recently, and, if so, the types of activities they performed (i.e., ‘What volunteering actions did you perform in the last 6 months?’). In addition, students were asked whether they knew someone close by, such as a family member or friend, who volunteered to assess the relationship between actual service and role modeling.

One of the questionnaires was the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) of Clary et al. (1998), which contained 30 statements assessing key functions of a person’s intention to volunteer (5 statements each). A few statements of the VFI were slightly modified to ensure accurate reading comprehension (see Table 1). Students provided answers on a 7-point scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (7). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.96.

The other questionnaire was the Prosocial Behavioral Intention Scale (PBIS) of Baumsteiger and Siegel (2018), which assessed students’ intention to engage in prosocial actions (e.g., ‘Comfort someone I know after they experience a hardship’) through 20 statements. Participants were instructed to estimate the likelihood of enacting a particular prosocial action in the future. Each statement was to be rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from ‘definitely would not do this’ (1) to ‘definitely would do this’ (7). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.97.

To ensure that the statements of each questionnaire reflected the intended constructs, the face validity of both questionnaires was assessed before data collection (Allen et al., 2023; Nevo, 1985). To this end, 25 students were selected through purposive sampling from the population from which the participants of the current study were sampled. Definitions of VFI and PBIS constructs were presented to students to ensure comprehension before each statement was rated. Students rated each statement on a 5-point scale, ranging from relevant (+2) to irrelevant (-2) to the construct tested by either the VFI (i.e., motivations to volunteer) or the PBIS (i.e., prosocial behavioral intentions). All statements received a rating equal to or above +1. The inter-rater agreement was 0.92.

An additional sample of 207 students, purposively selected, independently classified each of the statements of the VFI and PBIS as primarily serving the self (signifying an individualistic, self-oriented orientation), serving others (signifying a collectivistic, interdependent orientation), or both. Ratings were collected to better understand the motives that emerged from students’ answers to the VIF.

Written informed consent was gathered from all participants. Any identifying information was deleted from the entire data set, and codes were assigned to participants. Data collection tools and the study’s methodology were approved by the Research Deanship of the selected university as conforming to the ethical standards of the Office for Human Research Protections of the US Department of Health and Human Services (PMU-DoR-2024-2025-27).

To mitigate internal biases, the following precautions were implemented: first and foremost, in pilot work, after the ratings pertaining to face validity assessment were collected, students were asked to read the statements of the VIF and the PBIS again. The task was to pinpoint any statement whose meaning was unclear so that its language could be improved. Three faculty members of Middle Eastern descent also carried out the same task independently. No report of textual lack of clarity was collected from either group. Second, during pilot testing, changes were made to the order in which questionnaires were administered and to the order in which statements in each questionnaire were displayed. No noticeable changes in participants’ responses were detected. Third, to minimize biases arising from the researchers themselves, the questionnaires were administered online, and participants remained anonymous so that any contact with the researchers who analyzed and interpreted the collected data was removed.

Results

The results displayed below are organized by the hypotheses they are intended to test. The outcomes of inferential statistics are considered significant at the 0.05 level.

What are the Motives behind Volunteering? (H1a)

Before addressing group differences, the 30 statements of the VFI were submitted to a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (varimax) to determine the dimensions of volunteering that suited the participants of the current study (Field, 2009). Table 1 illustrates the factor loadings of the 30 items. In the table, all loadings greater than 0.5 are displayed, representing at least 25% of the variance. Sampling adequacy was verified by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of 0.96. Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated that correlations between items were large enough for PCA to be carried out [$\chi^2(435) = 11194.82, p < .001$]. Three components were retained that had eigenvalues above Kaiser’s criterion of 1, and that combined explained 69.23% of the variance.

PCA yielded four separate reasons for volunteering expressed by the selected student sample, including value, protective, career, and social motives. The value motive (VM) of volunteering was captured by statements that expressed altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others. The protective motive (PM) reflected statements that involved shielding one's self-concept from a negative state of mind (e.g., feeling less lonely). The career motive (CM) was underlined by statements illustrating professional benefits. The social motive (SM) was underscored by statements that referred to motivations concerning establishing and maintaining relationships (e.g., spending time with one's friends or engaging in actions viewed favorably by important others). H1a was only partially supported, underscoring some differences between the individualistic ecosystem of Clary et al. (1996; 1998) and the Saudi Arabian one in which individualistic and collectivistic motives are likely to coexist.

Table 1: Motivations to Volunteer

Function	Statement	VM	PM	CM	SM
P	No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it.		0.590		
P	By volunteering, I feel less lonely.		0.516		
P	Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.		0.736		
P	Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.		0.784		
P	Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.		0.724		
V	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.		0.622		
V	I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.	0.542			
V	I feel compassion toward people in need.	0.823			
V	I feel it is important to help others.	0.829			
V	I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	0.671			
C	Volunteering can help me get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.			0.617	
C	I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.			0.683	
C	Volunteering allows me to explore different career options.			0.682	
C	Volunteering will help me succeed in my chosen profession.			0.715	
C	Volunteering experience will look good on my resume. *			0.628	
S	My friends volunteer.				0.696
S	People I'm close to want me to volunteer.				0.766
S	People I know share an interest in community service.				0.798
S	Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.				0.699
S	Volunteering is an important activity for the people I know best.				0.739
U	While volunteering, I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.	0.643			
U	Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.	0.77			
U	Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands-on experience.	0.797			
U	While volunteering, I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	0.799			
U	While volunteering, I can explore my own strengths.	0.665			
E	Volunteering makes me feel important.			0.531	
E	Volunteering increases my self-esteem.			0.557	
E	Volunteering makes me feel needed.				
E	Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.		0.530		
E	Volunteering is a way to make new friends.			0.509	

Note: In the VFI of Clary et al. (1988), P = protective function, V = value function, C = career advancement function, S = social function, U = understanding/learning function, and E = self-enhancement function. * signifies that this statement was also loaded on the VM.

Are Motives Viewed as Altruistic or Self-Serving? (H1b)

The statements of the VFI were classified by a separate group of participants as primarily serving the self (1), serving others (2), or both (1.5). For each motive, the percentage of participants who selected each classification was computed (see Table 2). A Related-Samples Friedman test was carried out for each motive to determine whether there were significant differences in the categorization of motives. All motives yielded significant differences [value: $\chi^2(2, n = 425) = 7.76, p = 0.021$; protective: $\chi^2(2, n = 425) = 75.51, p < 0.001$; career: $\chi^2(2, n = 425) = 22.32, p < 0.001$; social: $\chi^2(2, n = 425) = 22.86, p < 0.001$]. The Bonferroni correction was applied to a posteriori pairwise comparisons conducted to determine the location of the differences. In Table 3, if the difference between two options is significant, a letter is displayed that indicates the more prevalent choice (a versus b).

Table 2: Percentage of Participants Who Classified Motives as Serving the Self, Others, or Both

Motives Primarily Serving _____	Oneself (%)	Others (%)	Both (%)
Value Motive	36.50 ^a	34.84	28.66 ^b
Protective Motive	47.89 ^a	21.12 ^b	30.99 ^b
Career Motive	42.51 ^a	24.22 ^b	33.27 ^b
Social Motive	22.51 ^b	40.87 ^a	36.62
BSMA	30.02	34.74	35.24

‘Oneself’ was chosen more often than ‘others’ for career and protective motives. The opposite applied to social motives, for which the choice of ‘others’ was more frequent than the choice of ‘self’. Surprisingly, for value motives, which were intended to be the signifier of altruism, there was no difference between ‘self’ and ‘others’. Although the prevalent choice was ‘oneself’, there was no difference between ‘oneself’ and ‘others’. This pattern of findings indicated that intentions that could be viewed as symbolizing an interdependent self within a collectivistic ecosystem were reframed to include individualistic intentions. That is, it underscored that in the mixed mindset of the participants (Pilotti et al., 2021; Pilotti & Waked, 2024), a preponderance of actions that ostensibly were intended to benefit others were undertaken to primarily benefit the self.

Notwithstanding a significant Related-Samples Friedman test [$\chi^2(2, n = 425) = 6.127, p = 0.047$], a posteriori comparisons, after being corrected through the Bonferroni adjustment, failed to uncover any significant difference between any pairs of classifications. H1b was supported. Not surprisingly, even the responses to statements of the BSMA, which measured prosocial intentions, were almost equally distributed across ‘oneself’, ‘others’, and ‘both’ options.

External Factors about Volunteering (H3a and H3b)

H3a examined whether undergraduate students enrolled in STEM degrees would be more or less likely to volunteer than those pursuing non-STEM degrees. A Chi-Squared test of independence yielded null results [$\chi^2(1, n = 425) = 0.01, ns$]. STEM students were as likely as non-STEM students to report that they had volunteered in the past six months (57% vs. 57%). H1a was not supported. Participants’ volunteering entailed the following sectors: healthcare (20%), education (25%), environmental conservation (10%), humanitarian work (25%), and community engagement (20%). H3b predicted that the presence of a role model for volunteering would be associated with a greater number of students pursuing the activity. When a role model was absent, 30% of the students volunteered. When a role model was present, 67% of the students volunteered. H1b was supported [$\chi^2(1, n = 425) = 46.72, p < 0.001$].

Internal Factors about Volunteering (H4)

Intentions to volunteer were selectively stronger in those who had volunteered in the past six months. Greater intensity was reported for intentions serving value motives [$U = 25078.00, p = 0.019$, with the mean of ranks equal to 196.96 for those with no activities and 225.13 for those with activities], protective motives [$U = 25877.00, p = 0.003$, with the mean of ranks equal to 192.60 for those with no activities and 228.43 for those with activities], and social motives [$U = 27305.50, p < 0.001$, with the mean of ranks equal to 184.79 for those with no activities and 234.33 for those

with activities]. No difference in strength was reported for intentions serving career motives [$U = 23857.50.50$, ns]. Also, prosocial intentions did not differ between the two groups [$U = 23526.50$, ns]. Thus, H4 was partially supported.

Differences in Academic Performance (H5a, H5b, and H5c)

H5a and H5b examined whether recent volunteering experience could differentiate undergraduate students' academic performance (see Table 3), measured either globally (first-year GPA) or locally (grades in communication courses or mathematics courses taken during the first year). An Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test yielded null results for first-year GPA [$U = 21537.50$, ns], communication grades [$U = 22658.00$, ns], and math grades [$U = 20671.50$, ns]. Neither hypothesis was supported.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, Including Median (Med.) and Inter-Quartile Range (IQR)

	Volunteers ($n = 242$)		Non-Volunteers ($n = 183$)	
	Med.	IQR	Med.	IQR
<i>Academic Performance</i>				
First-Year GPA (0 – 4)	2.81	1.07	2.85	1.00
Communication Grades (%)	77.50	10.00	77.50	9.50
Mathematics Grades (%)	77.50	12.08	77.50	13.75
<i>Intentions to Volunteer (1-7)</i>				
Value Motives *	6.39	1.33	6.11	1.33
Protective Motives *	4.93	1.86	4.57	1.86
Career Motives	5.88	1.81	5.63	1.63
Social Motives *	5.40	2.00	5.00	2.20
<i>Prosocial Intentions (1-7)</i>	6.25	1.16	6.20	1.40

Given these null results, we examined whether the presence or absence of a role model for volunteering would differentiate students' academic performance. Earlier, we noted that role models were linked to students' recent volunteering activities. Thus, we thought that a model for volunteering might indicate the presence of a supportive social environment. An Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test yielded a higher first-year GPA for those who reported a role model in their lives [$U = 20210.00$, $p = 0.027$, with the mean of ranks equal to 191.21 for those with no model and 220.99 for those with a model]. The median first-year GPA of students who reported a role model was 2.88 ($IQR = 1.00$), whereas that of students without it was 2.68 ($IQR = 1.27$). However, null findings were yielded by content-specific performance indices, such as communication [$U = 18900.00$, ns] and mathematics grades [$U = 17702.00$, ns].

Discussion

The findings of the present study can be summarized in four points. First, the motives behind the volunteering of Saudi Arabian undergraduate students did not entirely overlap with those of Clary et al. (1996; 1998). There were only four types of motives: value, protective, career, and social. Furthermore, even though expressed by members of a formerly collectivistic society, these motives were seen through the lens of self-serving reasons, typical of the individualistic orientation. Second, students were more likely to have volunteered in the past six months if they had a role model for volunteering, whereas their academic major did not matter. Third, students who had volunteered in the past six months expressed stronger value, protective, and social motives than those who did not volunteer. Fourth, the academic performance of students who had volunteered in the last six months did not differ from that of those who had not volunteered. This null finding contrasts with that of Alsuwaidi et al. (2022), who reported a positive association between academic performance and volunteering among undergraduate medical students. In our study, though, we

found that having a role model of volunteer behavior differentiates the overall performance of students during the first year of academic studies (first-year GPA).

These findings contribute to the literature on volunteering by highlighting that even in purportedly culturally mixed mindsets, collectivistic motives are overpowered by individualistic, self-serving motives. Yet, even in a context in which individualism is dominant, the presence of role models appears to be a determining factor in the decision to volunteer. That is, although individualistic intentions are dominant in deciding to volunteer, the social environment in which participants live does not become invisible. A supportive environment, which may merely entail the presence of positive behavioral examples, seems to be critical to the decision to spend time and effort volunteering, even if volunteering is driven by self-serving intentions. Of course, whether the role model exercises a self-serving or altruistic intent remains undetermined.

Implications and Applications

The particular motives identified in our study may be part of much broader motives. According to self-determination theory, autonomy (i.e., a person's belief in being able to self-initiate and self-regulate one's own actions), competence, and relatedness are fundamental human needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Such broader motives may sustain volunteering (Güntert et al., 2016). The particular motives identified in our study can be conceptualized as serving each of these basic needs. In addition to motives, the decision to perform an activity, such as volunteering, is likely to be linked to expectations. According to expectancy-value theory (Vroom, 1964), expectations refer to beliefs that particular actions are linked to particular outcomes. Expectations are shaped by instrumentality (i.e., the estimated probability that a given outcome will materialize) and by the valence of the outcome (i.e., benefit or cost). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that although students' motivation to invest resources (i.e., time and effort) in volunteering may be initially propelled by particular needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017), it is ultimately shaped by expectations regarding potential outcomes (Petri & Govern, 2004). In a society that prioritizes individualism over collectivism, such expectations may become primarily self-serving. Within these expectations, the particular motives we identified in our study also become reconceptualized as serving the self.

The most likely application of students' prioritizing self-serving motives concerns recruitment. Saudi Arabia has a large number of non-government charitable organizations and nonprofit organizations that give both men and women opportunities to volunteer. Recruitment remains a challenge, though. Our findings can offer advice and guidance for the development of campaigns focusing on providing assistance and services to people who are marginalized and in dire situations. Volunteerism not only can help address social problems along with conventional service delivery systems, but also builds mutual trust and fosters social integration (Brown & Prince, 2016).

Limitations

The current study has limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First and foremost, as noted in the methodological section, effort was exerted to mitigate potential biases arising from both the respondents and the researchers by performing pilot testing of the materials of each self-report measure and ensuring participants' anonymity. However, the ensuing self-reports may still be affected by a social desirability bias (Lanz et al., 2022), which may have diluted the differences between those who had reported volunteering in the past six months and those who did not. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for measuring changes over time in motives arising from experience and circumstances. Third, the sample of our study was exclusively composed of young female participants. Nevertheless, the data of our female sample can be compared with those of Alkadi et al. (2018), who examined Saudi Arabian male university students' motives through the VFI of Clary et al. (1998). They reported that volunteering was predicted by values, career, social, enhancement, protective, and learning motives. In our Saudi Arabian females, PCA uncovered a slightly different set of motives (i.e., value, protective, and social), which was then capable of distinguishing students who had recently volunteered from those who did not. Although the motives of male and female students slightly differed between the two studies, Alkadi et al. (2018) concluded, as we did, that volunteering is seen by students through a self-serving lens (e.g., offering employment and skill development opportunities). Jiang et al. (2018), who assessed male and female young Saudi Arabian volunteers, came to a similar conclusion. They reported that typically collectivistic motives for volunteering, embodying prosocial and community traits, were mediated by individualistic motives. Fourth, our sample of participants, as that of Alkadi et al. (2018), was taken from a single institution. As such, generalizing to the youth of Saudi Arabia or to students of other Middle Eastern countries may be problematic. Yet, taken together, these studies offer a window into an underrepresented student population that deserves scrutiny as their country's collectivistic traditions are undermined by individualistic forces. In times of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2005), according to which social constructs involving one's identity change at fast and unpredictable rates, multiple assessments within a longitudinal design may be the optimal solution.

References

1. Aboalshamat, K., Alayyafi, T., Elaiwa, G., Assayegh, M., & Alqaidi, A. (2024). Understanding volunteerism among dental students and professionals to reach Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goals. *PLoS One*, *19*(1), e0296745. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296745>
2. Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *2*(4), 314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
3. Alkadi, R., Jiang, G., & Aldamer, S. (2018). A regression analysis of motivations for Saudi university male student volunteers. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *45*(5), 701–714. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2018.1511501>
4. Allen, M. S., Robson, D. A., & Iliescu, D. (2023). Face validity: A critical but ignored component of scale construction in psychological assessment. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, *39*(3), 153–156. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759/a000777>
5. Alshammari, S. A., Alyousefi, N. A., & Almeneessier, A. (2025). Medical volunteering in Saudi Arabia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Nature and Science of Medicine*, *8*(4), 328–346. https://doi.org/10.4103/jnsm.jnsm_113_25
6. Alsuwaidi, L., Powell, L., Alhashmi, D., Hassan Khamis, A., & Zary, N. (2022). Volunteering among pre-clinical medical students: Study of its association with academic performance using institutional data. *MedEdPublish*, *12*(24), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.12688/mep.19105.2>
7. Bauman, Z. (2005). Education in liquid modernity. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *27*(4), 303–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714410500338873>
8. Baumsteiger, R., & Siegel, J. T. (2019). Measuring prosociality: The development of a prosocial behavioral intentions scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *101*(3), 305–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2017.1411918>
9. Brown, H., & Prince, R. (2016). *Volunteer economies: The politics and ethics of voluntary labour in Africa*. Boydell and Brewer.
10. Buda, R., & Elsayed-Elkhouly, S. M. (1998). Cultural differences between Arabs and Americans: Individualism-collectivism revisited. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *29*(3), 487–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022198293006>
11. Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R. D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*(6), 1516–1530. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1516>
12. Clary, E. G., Snyder, M., & Stukas, A. A. (1996). Volunteers' motivations: Findings from a national survey. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *25*(4), 485–505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764096254006>
13. Cnaan, R. A., Meijs, L., Brudney, J. L., Hersberger-Langloh, S., Okada, A., & Abu-Rumman, S. (2022). You thought that this would be easy? Seeking an understanding of episodic volunteering. *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *33*(3), 415–427. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00329-7>
14. Daniel, W. W., & Cross, C. (2013). *Biostatistics: A foundation for analysis in the health sciences*. Wiley.
15. Fashant, C. S., & Evan, R. J. (2020). Motivations for volunteerism: Implications for engagement and recruitment. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, *20*(2), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jop.v20i2.2878>
16. Gorard, S., See, B. H., Siddiqui, N., Smith, E., & White, P. (2016). *Youth social action trials: Youth united. Evaluation report and executive summary*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED581107>
17. Güntert, S. T., Strubel, I. T., Kals, E., & Wehner, T. (2016). The quality of volunteers' motives: Integrating the functional approach and self-determination theory. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *156*(3), 310–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2015.1135864>
18. Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS statistics*. Sage.
19. Hamamura, T. (2012). Are cultures becoming individualistic? A cross-temporal comparison of individualism–collectivism in the United States and Japan. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *16*(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868311411587>

20. Hayes, A. R., Hixson, K. J., & Masters, S. L. (2020). Do you stand out? Perceptions of ability, work ethic, and participation in college STEM classes. *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 12(1), 65–96. <https://genderandset.open.ac.uk/index.php/genderandset/article/view/677>
21. Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.
22. Hossain, Z., Skurky, T., Joe, J., & Hunt, T. (2011). The sense of collectivism and individualism among husbands and wives in traditional and bi-cultural Navajo families on the Navajo reservation. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 42(4), 543–562. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.42.4.543>
23. Jiang, G., Garris, C. P., & Aldamer, S. (2018). Individualism behind collectivism: A reflection from Saudi volunteers. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(1), 144–159. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-017-9872-y>.
24. Kearney, M. S., & Levine, P. B. (2020). Role models, mentors, and media influences. *The Future of Children*, 30(1), 83–106. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27074976>
25. Kolnhofer D. A., & Nagy, V. (2020). Employee volunteerism—Conceptual study and the current situation. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8378. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208378>
26. Lanz, L., Thielmann, I., & Gerpott, F. H. (2022). Are social desirability scales desirable? A meta-analytic test of the validity of social desirability scales in the context of prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality*, 90(2), 203–221. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12662>
27. Morris, M. W., Chiu, C. Y., & Liu, Z. (2015). Polycultural psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 66(1), 631–659. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015001>
28. Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., Botchway, A., & Rand-Hendriksen, K. (2009). Globalization, ideologies, and well-being: A study of a West African and a North European society. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(4), 305–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760902933773>
29. Nevo, B. (1985). Face validity revisited. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 22(4), 287–293. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-3984.1985.tb01065.x>
30. Petri, H. L., & Govern, J. M. (2004). *Motivation: Theory, research, and applications*. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
31. Pilotti, M. A., Abdulhadi, E. J. Y., Al Mubarak, H., & El Alaoui, K. (2021). Perception in the Middle Eastern bicultural mind. *International Journal of Learner Diversity & Identities*, 28(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0128/CGP/v28i01/1-11>.
32. Pilotti, M. A., & Waked, A. (2024). The fading of cultural dispositions in a globalized environment. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies*, 19(1), 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-008X/CGP/v19i01/57-80>.
33. Soto, L. D., & Kharem, H. (2006). A post-monolingual education. *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, and Practice: Reconceptualizing Childhood Studies*, 7(1), 21–34. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795105.pdf>.
34. Steele, L. G., & Lynch, S. M. (2013). The pursuit of happiness in China: Individualism, collectivism, and subjective well-being during China's economic and social transformation. *Social Indicators Research*, 114(2), 441–451. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0154-1>
35. Vroom, V. (1964), *Work and motivation*. John Wiley.
36. Wilson J. (2000). Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 215–240. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.215>

Biographical Information

Maryam BoJulaia is an educational scientist whose research interests include critical thinking and creativity in formal and informal learning contexts, as well as the development of models of creative pedagogy.

Imad K. Agha is an educational researcher whose work focuses on developing models to assess the contribution of extracurricular activities to students' academic attainment.

Renad Alshaykhahmed is a researcher whose interests encompass creativity and innovation in formal and informal contexts.

Maura Pilotti is a cognitive scientist whose research interests include learning and memory processes across the lifespan. Currently, her research focuses on the interrelations of memory, language, emotion, and culture.