



Student Volunteerism: An Analysis of Prevalence, Motivation and Barriers in the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the motivational factors influencing students' participation in community volunteering activities at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF), in Pakistan. The instrument for data collection was the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) framework, administered as a structured questionnaire to a sample of 300 students, using a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design. The paper has examined five dimensions of motivation, including Values/Altruism, Career and Skill Development, Religious/Cultural Motives, Social Motives, and Academic/Curricular Incentives, as well as demographic/contextual variables. The results indicated that intrinsic motivation factors that affect participation in volunteering were altruistic values and moral satisfaction ($M = 4.42$), as well as career and skill development motives ($M = 4.18$). The gender variables, academic year, and past volunteer experience were found to have a significant effect on motivation and the rate of volunteering ($P < 0.05$). Academic workload (68%), the absence of institutional support (50%), and financial pressure (42.7%) are the most significant barriers. The study concludes that the sustainability of young people's engagement and civic engagement at the university can be achieved by integrating volunteer programs with their personal values, academic ambitions, and career aspirations.

Keywords: Volunteerism, Motivation, Altruism, Career Development, Religious Values.

INTRODUCTION

The action of volunteerism, serving to help others or society as a whole without any financial motives, is in the spotlight for creating social capital, cementing civic life, and fostering the personal and professional evolution of young adults (Do Van Huan, 2023). University students are one of the largest categories of volunteers: they are the most energetic, generate new ideas, can develop lifelong civic behaviours, and, simultaneously, learn transferable skills, build social networks, and enhance employability (Nguyen et al., 2021). Recently, higher education institutions have placed greater emphasis on student engagement in community volunteer work and civic participation, which is why nonprofit organisations are also seeking volunteers through campuses.

The motivation for volunteering is multi-dimensional. Psychological theories distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motives (e.g., altruism, values, personal growth, career benefits, social recognition, curricular requirements) and suggest that these motives are associated with different commitment and retention patterns (Nguyen, 2023; Vo Trong Dinh, 2020). Clary and colleagues developed the framework of the powerful Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) to characterize six broad functions, such as Values, Understanding, Social, Career, Protective, and Enhancement, which are common underlying motivation-based reasons why people volunteer. It confirms that the roles of volunteers must be designed to align with volunteers' motives to enhance satisfaction and retention (Overgaard and Kerlin, 2022).

The contextual and structural issues also affect volunteering behaviour. The factors that shape students' involvement in community service include social capital and community norms, organisational support and recruitment methods (Nguyen and Dao, 2025), religious or cultural values, and skills-building opportunities. The volunteering process can be quite tempting to many students, as service work offering leadership, project management, or exposure to relevant professional activities can be quite alluring to career preparation. Conversely, conflicting needs - academic studies, part-time jobs, and family life are often seen as a hindrance (Kraja & Shabani, 2022; Coombs et al., 2021).

Despite the enormous literature on student volunteering at the international level, there is very little literature on the motivation factors among university students in Pakistan, and even less on their operation in agricultural universities. Agricultural universities might offer specialized volunteer opportunities (e.g., rural outreach, agricultural community projects, extension work) that align with students' academic needs and career objectives. The study of the motivation factors in this environment will help university administrators, student societies, and community partners develop culturally competent, long-term, win-win volunteer programs.

The current study was therefore designed to provide a clear understanding of the current volunteer status among university students, the motivation factors, and the barriers to students volunteering at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. Specifically, the study measured the prevalence of volunteer activities and their types, examined the relative importance of the key motivational dimensions, such as altruism values, social relationships, professional and skill development, religion or cultural background, academic motivation, and established the association between demographic and situational factors, i.e. gender, study year, and previous volunteer experience, on the motivations and participation. In addition, the research seeks to identify key barriers influencing student engagement in volunteerism. The study provided evidence-based recommendations to boost the number of volunteers recruited, engaged, and retained in the university setting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design used in this study was a quantitative, descriptive, correlational design to establish and analyze the motivational factors that drive student participation in community volunteering at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (UAF). The study population was the entire undergraduate and postgraduate student population enrolled at the university. A sample of 300 students was considered for the study. The sampling was done using the stratified random selection to represent a proportionate number of the faculties and academic years. The data were obtained via the structured questionnaire in accordance with the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998) of five motivational dimensions of Values/Altruism, Career and Skill Development, Religious/Cultural Motives, Social Motives, and Academic/Curricular Incentives on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 Strongly Agree). The questionnaire included types of volunteer activity, demographic information, and perceived barriers and facilitators. A pilot study with 30 students was conducted before the main data collection, which demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .87) and content validity.

Data were analyzed using statistical tools (descriptive and inferential) of SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize participation trends, and inferential tests were used to establish relationships between variables. Specifically, the independent samples t-tests and chi-square (2) tests were applied to find the difference between genders, year of study, and faculty. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between motivational factors and the frequency of volunteering.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Community Volunteer Activities

Table 1 indicates that the majority of students were engaged in environmental clean-up community initiatives, such as tree planting and recycling programs (66%), which is why this is the most widespread type of volunteerism among UAF students. This finding aligns with earlier studies on the growing interest in environmental issues and young people's participation in voluntary sustainability actions (Geng et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2023). The next most prevalent activity was educational tutoring and literacy campaigns, in which participants were 57.3% and expressed a desire to help students achieve educational equity in communities and enhance literacy. The same behavior has been observed among students at other universities, where students generally volunteer to serve as tutors or mentors in literacy and school outreach programmes (Abdul Aziz et al., 2021).

Students were also involved in health awareness and blood donation campaigns (53.3 percent) and campus-based volunteer societies (52 percent), indicating that students at the university tend to engage with the institutions and in health-related activities (Fig 1). The findings can be discussed in the context of Strkljevic et al. (2024), who found that organized campus volunteer clubs significantly increased student engagement in volunteering for social and health-related causes.

An intermediate level of engagement has been reported in fundraising and charity events (44.7%), culture and awareness campaigns (42.7%), and disaster relief activities (39.3%). Still, the engagement rate is high. According to

Al Gharash et al. (2021) and Dolu et al. (2023), the volunteering rate is higher when the institution establishes and maintains a system that effectively convinces and organizes students to participate in volunteer programs. The rural development and agricultural extension programs attained the lowest score (34%), which can also be attributed to the specialization of the activities and logistical challenges in reaching rural areas. Overall, the results show that UAF students are highly inclined towards socially and environmentally responsible volunteerism. The results show that university-based volunteerism can foster civic responsibility and, at the same time, develop leadership and community engagement among students (Coombs et al., 2021; Nguyen and Dao, 2025).

Table 1. Types of Community Volunteer Activities Undertaken by UAF Students (N = 300)

Type of Volunteer Activity	Students Participated (f)	Percentage (%)	Frequency of Participation (%): Occasionally / Regularly
Environmental Clean-up Drives (e.g., tree planting, recycling)	198	66.0	47.3 / 18.7
Educational Tutoring and Literacy Campaigns	172	57.3	38.0 / 19.3
Health Awareness and Blood Donation Camps	160	53.3	35.7 / 17.6
Community Welfare (e.g., orphanage, old-age home visits)	146	48.7	33.0 / 15.7
Disaster Relief and Emergency Response	118	39.3	26.3 / 13.0
Fundraising and Charity Events	134	44.7	30.0 / 14.7
Campus-Based Volunteer Societies and Clubs	156	52.0	34.0 / 18.0
Cultural and Awareness Campaigns (e.g., gender equality, civic rights)	128	42.7	27.7 / 15.0
Rural Development and Agricultural Extension Programs	102	34.0	22.0 / 12.0
Sports and Event Management Volunteering	140	46.7	28.7 / 18.0

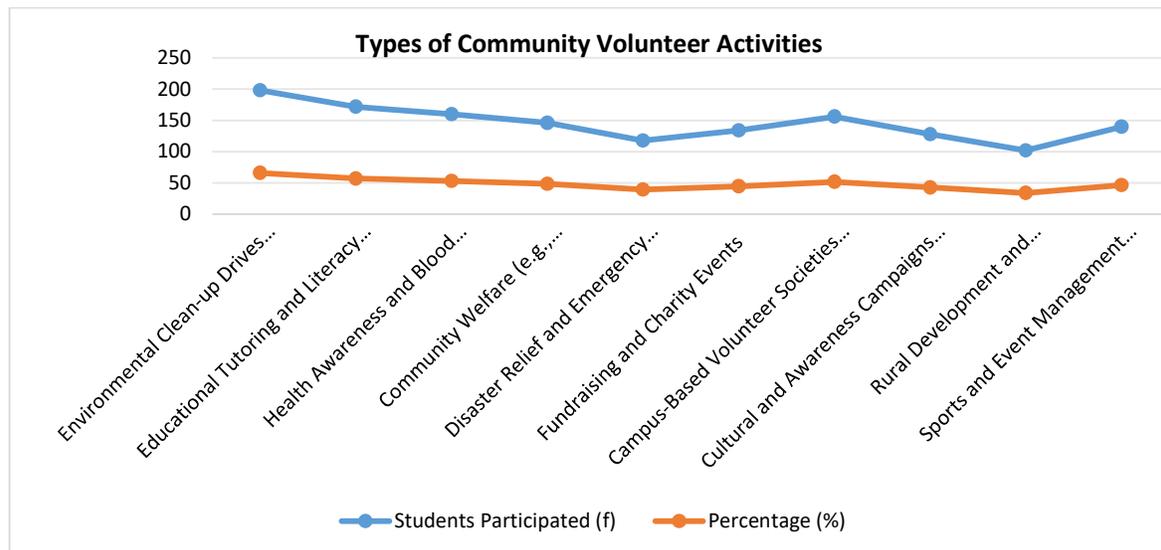


Figure 1. Types of Community Volunteer Activities Undertaken by UAF Students.

Motivational Factors Influencing Volunteerism

Table 2 presents the relative importance of motivational variables in students' participation in volunteering activities at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) using the modified Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) scale proposed by Clary et al. (1998). As seen, the highest value (mean score: M = 4.42, SD = 0.61) is observed for values and altruistic motives, indicating that the majority of students are primarily motivated to volunteer by the desire to assist people and help them in their society. The research aligns with the literature, which indicates that altruism remains one of the most compelling forces behind young audiences' voluntary activity (Alsuwaidi et al., 2022; Seah et al., 2021).

Table 2. Motivational Factors Influencing Volunteerism among UAF Students (Adapted from the Volunteer Functions Inventory Framework) (n = 300)

Motivational Factor	Indicators	Mean	SD	Rank
Values / Altruism	Helping others, making a positive social impact	4.42	0.61	1
Career / Skill Development	Gaining experience, enhancing employability, leadership skills	4.18	0.74	2
Religious / Cultural Motives	Serving community as part of faith or tradition	4.02	0.79	3
Social Motives	Making friends, building networks, belonging to a group	3.87	0.82	4
Academic / Curricular Incentives	Course requirements, extra credit, institutional recognition	3.65	0.88	5

The second strongest influencer is career and skill development ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.74$), which explains why a considerable number of students consider the volunteer role as a path to becoming more employable, a future leader, and a people person. This trend can be compared to the increase in the popularity of volunteer experiences as a significant part of an individual's professional growth and career portfolio among students, which is not the sole outcome of the Kraja et al. (2024) study and Pusztai et al. (2021): the latter found the same motives among University students based on a higher education. Religious and cultural motives ($M = 4.02, SD = 0.79$) ranked third, indicating that faith-based and traditional values are very significant factors motivating individuals to volunteer in Pakistani society. The popularity of such motives indicates a high degree of integration of cultural and moral principles that advance the duty to serve others as a social or religious obligation. The same findings have been observed in collectivist nations, where volunteering is often linked to religious affiliation and a sense of moral responsibility (Seah et al., 2021; Giancaspro and Manuti, 2021).

The social motives ($M = 3.87, SD = 0.82$) and academic or curricular motivators ($M = 3.65, SD = 0.88$) were identified as moderate motivators. Such results suggest that although the availability of social interactions and peer influence, as well as institutional recognition are among the factors that drive students to engage in social interactions, they are not as important as intrinsic or value-related factors. The given fact is consistent with the results of Kraja et al. (2022), who found that extrinsic motivation, e.g., social belonging or academic incentives, is a situational phenomenon and can be overridden by more significant intrinsic factors. Table 2 indicates that intrinsic and prosocial motivation have the greatest influence on UAF students' volunteerism, as they reflect personal values, altruism, and self-development goals. This tendency confirms the assumptions of the global community that the principle of active involvement of volunteers in work should be grounded in the growth of a person, social responsibility, and the value-based approach and should not be fixated on the institutional and reward-based motivators (Al Gharash et al., 2021; Strkljek et al., 2024).

Demographic and Contextual Variables and Students' Motivations and Volunteering Behaviour

The results of various demographic and contextual variables on students' motivation orientations and actual volunteering behavior are summarized in Table 3. The findings show a significant gender difference ($P < 0.05$), with female students ($M = 4.21$) reporting higher levels of motivation and participation than male students ($M = 3.98$). This finding aligns with prior research indicating that women exhibit higher levels of altruism and community involvement in volunteering (Alsuwaidi et al., 2022).

Table 3. Relationship Between Demographic and Contextual Variables and Students' Motivations and Volunteering Behaviour (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Mean Motivation Score (VFI)	Mean Frequency of Volunteering	χ^2 / t-value	p-value
Gender	Male (n=160)	3.98	2.86	$t = 2.47$	0.014*
	Female (n=140)	4.21	3.12		
Year of Study	1st–2nd Year (n=130)	3.82	2.65	$\chi^2 = 9.34$	0.025*
	3rd–4th Year (n=170)	4.25	3.18		
Faculty / Department	Agriculture & Environmental Sciences (n=110)	4.28	3.20	$\chi^2 = 11.62$	0.009**
	Social Sciences & Humanities (n=90)	4.35	3.27		
	Animal/ Veterinary Sciences (n=100)	3.95	2.84		
Prior Volunteer Experience	Yes (n=180)	4.36	3.42	$t = 5.18$	0.000***
	No (n=120)	3.74	2.43		

Significance Levels: $P < 0.05$, $P < 0.01$, $*P < 0.001$; Scale for Motivation: 1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High; Scale for Volunteering Frequency: 1 = Rarely, 5 = Very Often.

The results also show the positive correlation between the year of study and motivation and participation ($\chi^2 = 9.34, P < 0.05$), which means that older students are more active regarding participating in the volunteering work, which may be because they are more aware and exposed to volunteering work, and they are more mature. Similar trends were also reported by Kraja et al. (2022) and Giancaspro and Manuti (2021), who found higher rates of civic engagement among upper-year students at the university. Faculty/department Students in the Social Sciences and Environmental Sciences faculties reported higher mean motivation scores ($M = 4.35$ and 4.28 , respectively) than students in the Animal/Veterinary Sciences faculty ($M = 3.95$). This may be the expression of disciplinary tendencies that facilitate social responsibility and environmental sustainability, as Hampton et al. (2023) note. It showed a very high correlation with prior volunteering experience ($t = 5.18, P < 0.001$). Students with prior volunteering experience were significantly more motivated ($M = 4.36$) and more likely to participate ($M = 3.42$) than those without prior volunteering experience ($M = 3.74$). This supports the idea that initial engagement implies a prolonged commitment to volunteering and the internalization of altruistic values (Clary et al., 1998; Yoo et al., 2021). In general, Table 3 shows that gender, academic progression, disciplinary background, and prior volunteer experience are highly influential in shaping the frequency of volunteering among UAF students.

Relation Between Motivational Factors and Frequency of Volunteering

According to Table 4, there are statistically significant positive relationships between the five motivational dimensions and the frequency of volunteering, but not necessarily strong associations between the factors. The highest correlation was found between values/altruism and volunteering frequency ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$), indicating that students who hold altruistic and humanitarian values are more frequent and consistent volunteers in community service. This outcome confirms the theoretical hypothesis by Clary et al. (1998), which stated that donation motives are the core of long-term volunteering. Similarly, Berduc et al. (2023) and Kraja et al. (2022) emphasized that prosocial values and moral responsibility may be long-term factors in volunteering, especially in collectivist societies that emphasize the importance of community cohesion.

Table 4. Correlation Between Motivational Factors and Frequency of Volunteering Among UAF Students (N = 300)

Motivational Factor (VFI Dimension)	r-value	p-value	Strength of Relationship
Values / Altruism	0.61	0.000***	Strong Positive
Career / Skill Development	0.54	0.000***	Moderate-Strong Positive
Religious / Cultural Motives	0.47	0.001**	Moderate Positive
Social Motives	0.38	0.004**	Moderate Positive
Academic / Curricular Incentives	0.29	0.018*	Weak-Moderate Positive

Significance levels: $p < 0.05, p < 0.01, *p < 0.001$

Further, the motive of career and skill development was found to have a moderate association ($r = 0.54, p < 0.001$), indicating that students considering volunteering to be an opportunity to acquire employability skills, experience in a leadership position or any experience relevant to their career, are more likely to volunteer on a more frequent basis. The authors of the study under discussion stated that the very notion of voluntarizability is gaining popularity among students at universities and colleges, who regard it as one of the methods to advance their professional competence and fieldwork experience (Berduc et al., 2023). These findings are similar to those reported by Yang et al. (2020), who noted similar trends in Malaysian universities, where volunteering was valued as an element of career establishment and experiential learning among students.

Religious and cultural motives were also significantly correlated with volunteering frequency ($r = 0.47, p = 0.001$). This underscores the importance of moral and faith-based needs in motivating service-related behaviors among Pakistani youth, who generally perceive community service as an ethical or religious responsibility (Ahmad et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Apparently, Pakistani society values religious values excessively, which is why the blend of spiritual intention with civic activity is a powerful force that contributes to the moral legitimacy of volunteering as a socially and religiously based action. There was also the social motive ($r = 0.38, p = 0.004$), which was suggested to have a positive average correlation, meaning that opportunities to socialize, network, and belong to a group have an average predictive value for volunteering participation. This follows past research by Zenelaga and Beshku (2021), who found that social capital and peer relationships play a significant role in volunteering behavior, particularly among the younger generation, which values social connection and experiences.

Finally, academic or curriculum-based incentives ($r = 0.29, p = 0.018$) were weaker yet significant positive correlates of volunteering frequency. This indicates that course-based or academic credit-based volunteering can encourage students to volunteer, but the extrinsic reward may be short-lived. It was also hypothesized that extrinsically motivated forms of volunteerism can be short-term and not necessarily based on an individual commitment, but reliant on the needs of an institution (Giancaspro & Manuti, 2021; Pusztai et al., 2021). The data in Table 4 also show that intrinsic motivation, in particular altruistic values and skill development, are stronger determinants of the frequency of volunteering than extrinsic motivation, whether academic or social rewards. According to the trend, it can be argued that long-term commitment to volunteering is primarily caused by individual values, moral orientation, and self-development rather than the most significant external factors (Wondimu & Admas, 2024).

Facilitators and Barriers influence students.

Table 5 revealed several limitations that restrict students' involvement in volunteer activities. The most reported barrier was a lack of time due to academic tasks (68%). Competing with academic work is a significant barrier to volunteering. The observation aligns with Kraja et al. (2025), who also noted that learners typically face the challenge of balancing volunteering and studying. The lack of awareness of volunteering work was also a significant barrier, as indicated by respondents (58.7%). Wondimu and Admas (2024) stated that the absence of organizational communication decreases involvement.

Table 5. Perceived Barriers Influencing Students' Decisions to Start or Continue Volunteering (N = 300)

Barriers	Students Reporting (f)	Percentage (%)
Lack of time due to academic workload	204	68.0
Limited awareness of volunteer opportunities	176	58.7
Lack of institutional support or coordination	150	50.0
Financial constraints or lack of transport	128	42.7
Family disapproval or prioritization of paid work	96	32.0

The remaining barriers were institutional support or lack of coordination (50 percent), financial factors or transport (42.7 percent), and family disapproval or preference for paid work (32 percent). All these lead to the conclusion that structural and socio-economic factors discourage volunteering. Budget and logistics have also been identified as challenges in research by Berduc et al. (2023), Vo (2020), and Overgaard and Kerlin (2022), particularly for students with humble backgrounds. Family expectations of paid labor, in turn, are more inclined to reflect general socio-economic norms in South Asian societies, where economic productivity usually prevails over unpaid labor (Ahmad et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The paper provides an in-depth understanding of the factors that motivate students at the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, to volunteer in the community. According to the findings, the internal motivations and driving factors students most often mentioned include altruism and moral satisfaction, as well as the desire to leave a good impression on the community. Career and skill development opportunities are also a strong factor behind volunteerism. Most students regard volunteering as a way to become more employable and gain practical experience. Religious and cultural values also elevate volunteer behavior. The study also found that motivational factors and participation frequency are highly influenced by demographic and situational factors, such as gender, academic year, faculty, and past volunteering experience. Even though intrinsic motivation is very high, academic workload, limited awareness, poor institutional support, and financial constraints are among the challenges to continuous engagement. To strengthen the culture of volunteerism, universities should foster students' character development through civic accountability, leadership, and compassion.

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