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Exploring Volunteering and Its Perceived Influence on Students' Social Responsibility
In Azerbaijani Higher Education

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I certify, having reviewed the ADA's policy on plagiarism, that this thesis entitled "Exploring Volunteering and Its Perceived Influence on Students' Social Responsibility in Azerbaijani Higher Education" is entirely my work and does not contain any unacknowledged contributions. I hereby affirm that this master's thesis, which represents my independent research, has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the perceived influence of volunteering on the development of students' social responsibility within Azerbaijani higher education. The literature review examined relevant global and local research, along with theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, to better understand how volunteerism may shape students' moral, cognitive, and social development.

The study applied a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, including both current students and alumni actively engaged in volunteering. A thematic analysis of the data identified several key findings. The study findings revealed how volunteering is perceived to contribute to the development of social responsibility among students, along with the benefits and challenges they faced during the process.

The findings emphasize the need for more structured volunteer programs to maximize the transformative benefits of volunteering. Future large-scale research is recommended to deepen understanding and contribute to the more effective integration of volunteering into higher education practices in Azerbaijan.

Keywords: volunteering, social responsibility, higher education, Azerbaijan

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Exploring Volunteering and Its Perceived Influence on Students' Social Responsibility In Azerbaijani Higher Education

Chapter 1: Introduction

Participation in volunteer movements is reported to benefit communities as well as volunteers themselves (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016). Each year, millions of people worldwide volunteer their time to support organizations that help those in need, offering assistance in areas such as social support, organizing events, and advocacy. Many essential services- schools, health clinics, and animal shelters- rely heavily on volunteers to function effectively (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016).

People in Azerbaijan participate in various volunteer programs, such as the ASAN Volunteers Organization, which has 36,000 volunteer members (United Nations Volunteers, n.d.), One Volunteer Student Cooperation Public Union, Volunteer DOST Program, Agrarian Development Volunteers Public Union, Reform Volunteers Organization, and others. These programs actively engage students in community service projects. For instance, the "Bir" student-volunteer program in 2021-2022 engaged about 250 student volunteers to support efforts in Karabakh, especially in Shusa and Aghdam (Konullu.edu.az, n.d.). In 2024, Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University's volunteer unions (Təhsil Könüllüləri Tələbə Birliyi) offered language and piano lessons to other students as a part of volunteer work. In the same year, the same union dedicated its efforts to the "Year of Solidarity for the Green World" and "COP -29" event with the project "Treasure not waste", where students made handicrafts from waste considered unnecessary (Azerbaijan State News Agency [AZERTAC], 2023).

Volunteering offers numerous benefits. According to Haski-Leventhal et al. (2010),

students perceive volunteering as a way to enhance physical and psychological well-being, expand social networks, foster social responsibility, and reduce loneliness. Additionally, it has been found to positively influence academic success while reducing the likelihood of drug abuse. Moreover, volunteering has a significant impact on individuals as well as the community. Volunteerism helps young people develop empathy and a strong sense of social responsibility (Bošković, 2024). According to Bacter and Marc (2016), students' social responsibility can be increased through participating in volunteering. Students with experience in volunteering have a considerably higher sense of social responsibility compared to those without it (Liu & Wei, 2016).

This study aims to explore the perceived influence of volunteering on the development of social responsibility of students in Azerbaijani higher education institutions.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been identified:

1. To explore students' perceptions of how volunteering influences their social responsibility.
2. To examine students' reflections on the benefits and challenges associated with volunteering.
3. To identify implications for higher-education policy makers.

Besides, a qualitative study was implemented to explore these perceptions of the influence in-depth. The audience that will benefit from the study includes higher education administrators focusing on integrating social responsibility, and students who are involved or interested in volunteering for the development of social responsibility.

Research questions

1. How do students perceive volunteering in higher education institutions?
2. What are students' experiences?
3. How do students perceive the influence of volunteering on their social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan?

Problem statement

Social responsibility is a voluntary behavior culture aimed at protecting and improving society and the environment (Mehdiyeva, 2023). In recent years, the growing importance of social responsibility has been emphasized, especially through volunteer programs embedded into higher education as an extracurricular activity. In 2020, the President of Azerbaijan Republic Ilham Aliyev declared the *Year of Volunteers* “to promote the individual development of young people, increase their social responsibility, and ensure the rational use of their potential for the sake of sustainable development of our country” among youth (Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, 2019; Report. az, 2020, para. 1). Additionally, the document “Azerbaijani Youth Development Strategy for 2015-2025” approved by President Ilham Aliyev focused on developing the potential of Azerbaijani youth and promoting active citizenships (Aslanbayova, 2021). The state standards and curricula for general education focus on values. One of these values for students is understanding their responsibility to society, participating in social projects, and engaging in volunteer work (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, n.d.). The "Bir" student-volunteer program, established by the Ministry of Education in 2015, now known as the Ministry of Science and Education (It was renamed the Ministry of Science and Education in 2022), was designed to organize interactions with student volunteers, encourage volunteering, and make effective use of students' free time. Its primary goal is to develop socially active and responsible students and instill a culture of volunteering (Konullu.edu.az, n.d.; United Nations Volunteers, n.d.).

Although some separate studies highlighted a positive relationship between volunteerism and social responsibility (Cheung, Lo, & Liu, 2014), there has been little knowledge regarding the perceptions of Azerbaijani students regarding their development of social responsibility

through volunteering. While students in Azerbaijani higher education institutions participate in embedded volunteering programs and events as extracurricular activities, there is a limited understanding of how they perceive the development of their social responsibility through these experiences. Cheung et. al (2015) argued that volunteerism not only strengthens individuals' social responsibility but also offers opportunities for personal growth (Astin & Sax, 1998). In addition, the country's "Youth Strategy" places strong importance on nurturing responsible, active citizens (Aslanbayova, 2021). Therefore, understanding the perceptions of the students in the Azerbaijan context regarding these programs is essential, as it can support or challenge that volunteering contributes to the growth of their social responsibility.

Definition of key terms

Volunteering is the activity in which time is freely donated to serve people, groups, or communities and benefit them (Wilson, 2000).

Social responsibility is an ethical framework that encourages communities and individuals to act in a way that benefits society and the environment (Human Rights Careers, n.d.).

Chapter:2 Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review was synthesized by researching Google Scholar, ERIC, and JSTOR sources. The search strategy involved narrowing the focus of the topic, starting from a broad theoretical framework and narrowing it towards a specific context of higher education in Azerbaijan. A regional approach is employed in the literature review to contextualize the findings within Azerbaijan's unique historical and cultural background as a post-Soviet country.

Theoretical Framework

This research considered the views of students regarding the influence of volunteering on their social responsibilities through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (*see* Figure 1). Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of learning within social contexts, emphasizing that development and learning occur through interactions with peers, teachers, parents, and more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1997). Similarly, Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasizes that behaviors and attitudes are formed through observation, direct experience, and role modeling in social environments (Bandura, 1971). Social learning-related theories can explain how volunteers might develop values and behaviors through observation, interaction, and participation, which are core aspects of volunteering. Bandura's theory emphasizes learning through role models and direct experience, while Vygotsky emphasizes learning through social interaction and guidance. These theories help explain how volunteer experiences can foster students' social responsibility by exposing them to real-life challenges, collaboration, and socially responsible behavior (Bandura, 1971; Vygotsky, 1997).

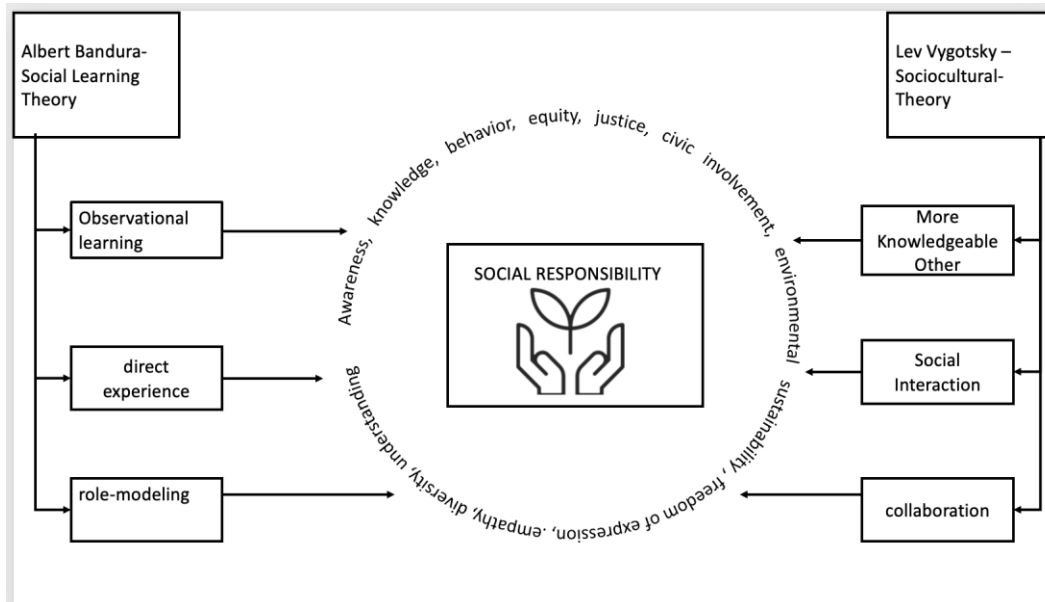
According to the definition provided by Tyer-Viola et al. (2009), social responsibility encompasses equity, justice, engagement in public life, environmental sustainability, and respect for different cultures, societies, and freedom of speech. Empathy – the ability to appreciate the feelings of others– emerges as a central idea in the concept of social responsibility. Social empathy extends this definition that encompasses appreciating social systems and the realities of people in various societies and cultures (Segal, 2011). Based on the research, people who can accurately empathize conditions and needs of others become more likely to feel socially responsible and more willing to perform actions that are beneficial to society (Segal, 2011).

The University of New South Wales illustrates the role of volunteering in fostering social responsibility through its ASPIRE Outreach Program. In this initiative, students of the university serve as role models to mentor and encourage other students who belong to poorer communities (Jardine, 2017, p.126). Volunteer Ambassadors work along with teachers and fellow students, becoming role models for these peers, many of whom want to become Ambassadors in the future. Role-modeling and social interactions align with Bandura's theory closely, since Ambassadors inspire others while also experiencing personal growth. Through interaction with different students, ASPIRE Ambassadors acquire empathy, teamwork, and social awareness (Jardine, 2017). Their experiences give them a better perspective on life and also greater insight into the problems encountered by marginalized groups, especially in low socio-economic communities. Several Ambassadors mentioned that this journey allowed them to 'Deeply empathize' by 'Putting in others' shoes' (Jardine, 2017, p.129). It is also the case that was mentioned by Vygotsky that social interaction is an important aspect of the construction of an individual's understanding and meaning (Vygotsky et al., 1978) (*see* Figure 1).

Through volunteer programs, students cultivate a strong sense of community and responsibility, as supported by research (Kropp & Wolfe, 2018). These programs create cultural contexts that foster moral and social understanding, empathy, and a commitment to societal values—key elements of social responsibility (Cheung et al., 2015). For this reason, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (*see* Figure 1) were chosen as the theoretical framework of this research due to their emphasis on the role of social interaction and observation in shaping behavior, attitudes, and moral development. These frameworks were considered appropriate to understand the contribution of volunteering activities to the development of students' social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



Volunteerism in Post-Soviet Countries in the Past

In the Soviet era, volunteering was a state-controlled and compulsory activity, exemplified by events like subbotniks that shaped the understanding of volunteering in Azerbaijan. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), these forced activities disappeared, and interest in volunteering declined (Juknevičius 2003). “Subbotnik” originally began as a voluntary and socially beneficial Saturday workday, but over time, it became a mandatory activity that people accepted mainly out of fear of social exclusion (Bagramyants & Ivleva, 2023, p. 274). After the Chernobyl catastrophe in Ukraine, local workers were compelled to volunteer in rescue operations without being informed of the dangers of radiation (Khvorostianov & Remennick, 2018). This compulsory volunteering fostered negative attitudes toward volunteerism as they were seen as forced rather than voluntary community service (Voicu & Voicu, 2009). Similarly, the study of Apukhtin and Bogomolov (2015) also emphasizes that volunteer movement in the post-Soviet countries contributed to the formation of a negative perception of volunteer activities within society. In contrast to their communist predecessors, nowadays young people engage in volunteering willingly, recognizing benefits such as new skills and career opportunities (Walker & Stephenson, 2012). According to Sillo (2016), volunteering in the Soviet period was mandatory, which seems like a contradiction to the real definition of volunteering. Compulsory activities considered as volunteering were those performed during the Soviet Union, such as subbotnik, work camp, blood donation, Parades, and demonstrations (Pranaityte, 2022). Volunteering was a mandatory activity in the Soviet era, not an individual choice. It is not coincidental that with the collapse of governmental pressure, Red Saturdays vanished, and the importance of volunteering declined dramatically (Juknevičius & Savicka, 2003).

Volunteerism in Post-Soviet Countries at Present

Azerbaijan shares a common historical and cultural heritage with other post Soviet countries. Therefore, examining regional examples might provide valuable insight into how youth volunteering has developed across similar contexts. In Estonia, volunteering benefits both volunteers and the community by promoting social cohesion, inclusion, environmental protection, and humanitarian aid. Volunteers gain personal satisfaction and valuable skills, especially young people. Volunteers also make community activities possible, help build strong local networks, with skills formally recognized and training opportunities provided. Moreover, Volunteering is also integrated into Estonia's education system (Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia, 2011). The state program *The Fundamentals of State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation*, with a focus on the period up to 2025, identifies youth volunteering as an area requiring special attention, because it represents socially beneficial work. In this document, youth volunteering is described as one of the social services that contributes to personal development and the way to benefit the community (Zakirova et al., 2017). According to Pevnaya et al. (2025), female students with volunteering backgrounds in Russia and Belarus tend to plan their post-graduation life more clearly than those who never volunteered. The authors state that volunteering helps to foster a feeling of purpose, set professional goals, and acquire new knowledge and skills. In this regard, during the pandemic in Kazakhstan, 2500 students were involved in volunteer work in hospitals, demonstrating a high level of altruism and experiencing enhanced well-being. Volunteer work also fostered their connection to the community and helped develop relationships (Bolatov et al., 2021).

The Role of Volunteering in Fostering Social Responsibility: A Student's Perspective

The study by Gudžinskienė and Kurapkaitienė (2022) found that volunteering teaches individuals to take responsibility for both their own lives and their volunteer work. Participants learned to be accountable not just for themselves but also for others, including the individuals and organizations they assist. The study underscored the significance of this sense of responsibility for others (Gudžinskienė & Kurapkaitienė, 2022). Similarly, the study of Kropp and Wolfe (2018) shows that volunteering enhances empathy and positive attitudes, which are essential components of social responsibility. Student volunteers who interacted with people with disabilities developed a deeper understanding of their shared humanity, recognizing that they deserve equal treatment. This experience underscores the principles of social responsibility and social justice, emphasizing that everyone should be treated equally regardless of their background or status (Kropp & Wolfe, 2018). Domaradzki (2022) found that the participation of medical university students in volunteer work during the COVID-19 pandemic was driven by an insufficient number of workers and the desire to gain experience in Poland. The author highlighted that during the pandemic, due to the online classes and closed universities, volunteering played a crucial role in service learning and created an opportunity for education and development. The respondents reported benefits of volunteering, strengthening their moral values such as altruism, civic responsibility, and professional solidarity (Domaradzki, 2022). The benefits of volunteering are both personal and social, contributing to societal development (Bacter & Marc, 2016). Therefore, the development of volunteering in the social sector requires getting young people to participate in this experience (Bacter & Marc, 2016). Similarly, Hagen and Bryant emphasize the importance of social responsibility and its promotion in organizations

like universities, highlighting its role in fostering social justice and enhancing community development (Hagen & Bryant, 2003, as cited in Meikle, 2023).

Perceived Influence of Volunteerism in Fostering Social Responsibility: Azerbaijani

Context

The understanding of social responsibility has become essential for profit and non-profit organizations, including schools and universities (Mehdiyeva, 2023). This emphasis is reflected in Azerbaijan's "Youth Strategy", which prioritizes the cultivation of responsible citizens (Aslanbayova, 2021). There are 51 higher education institutions in Azerbaijan (The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2024), and many volunteer programs embedded in their academic and extra-curricular frameworks. However, there is limited understanding of the perceived impact of these programs on social responsibility in Azerbaijani students. While existing scholarly research acknowledges the perceived benefits of volunteer programs, there is little specific study on how Azerbaijani students perceive social responsibility due to volunteering. The findings can show the perceived influences of volunteering on the social responsibility of Azerbaijani students in higher education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research method to explore the perceived influence of volunteering on students' social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan. This research method was expected to help capture students' voices regarding their experiences, feelings, and beliefs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the interpretivist paradigm was founded on the assumption that people' perceptions, ideas, thinking, and the significant meanings they attached to them to construct reality, the study was based on it to understand students' perceptions through researching their volunteering experiences and constructed interpretations they assigned to that reality (Schutt, 2012). This paradigm helped prioritize the contextual and subjective nature of student experiences and assisted in capturing the ways in which volunteering shaped their social responsibility. The research was exploratory in nature with the aim to investigate how students acted in specific situations and how they interpreted their actions (Schutt, 2012).

Research Site

Through a personal contact, students involved in volunteering programs at two universities in Baku were reached out to. They assisted in providing contacts of volunteers actively participating in volunteering activities. The rationale for selecting those two universities lay in their mission, vision, and core values, which closely aligned with the goals of this study, particularly their commitment to promoting social responsibility among their students.

Participants

The participants in this research were students from 2 universities in Azerbaijan who were involved in volunteer programs. The sample size consisted of 12 participants (10 current students and 2 alumni).

Sampling

The study employed convenience sampling, and the study participants were recruited based on their availability and willingness to participate in the interviews. This sampling method was suitable as it ensured access to the participants who were informed about the volunteering and could contribute to the study's focus, providing relevant insights. This sampling method allowed to collect of useful information to address the research questions and hypothesis (Creswell, 2012) by utilizing accessible and willing participants who were likely to have relevant experiences and perspectives related to the research topic. In addition, participants were attracted and interviewed until reaching a point of saturation when no new significant information was gained from additional interviews (Schutt, 2012).

Data Collection

In this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with predetermined and follow-up questions to explore in-depth insights of the participants. All questions were open-ended, so participants could share their experiences without being influenced by the views of a researcher or the findings of a previous study (Creswell, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary research instrument, allowing flexibility to explore the participants' perspectives. In fact, I sought to understand the experiences of the study participants in-depth, and the interview method was well-suited for my purpose (Schutt, 2012). Interview questions focused on exploring the students' experiences within volunteering, and their perceived influence on the development of social responsibility in higher education. Data collection took place over the period of the first two weeks of February. The 12 study participants were contacted via email to schedule interviews at their convenience. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in a quiet, neutral setting, either in person or

online via Zoom program, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. The interviews were audio-recorded with the study participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data collection and transcription. As some interviews were conducted in Russian, they were further translated into English and revised by the translator and the supervisor. In addition, data collection was guided by the saturation principle when new interviews provided little additional information (Schutt, 2012)

Data Analysis

In this study, the data was analyzed simultaneously while the data were being collected. Once I conducted and transcribed the first interview, I immediately started the data analysis. The reason behind the simultaneous analysis was the repetitive, enormous data that could be hard to manage (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The utilized coding method involved assigning labels to words using colors (*see* Table 1). The coding assisted in organizing and retrieving relevant information. The codes were assigned to key ideas and grouped based on similar meanings (Saldaña, 2013). Furthermore, thematic analysis was employed in the study to systematically analyze and present the participants' views on the perceived impact of volunteering on the development of social responsibility.

Table 1

Coding Key

Themes	Codes	Participants
Personal Growth	Overcoming shyness	6 out of 12
	Communication development	10 out of 12
	Building confidence	5 out of 12
Teamwork	Learning to trust others	7 out of 12
	Working in groups	11 out of 12
	Sense of community	7 out of 12
Career Preparation	Job offers from volunteering	3 out of 12
	Work environment adaptation	9 out of 12
	Leadership & responsibility	6 out of 12
Acquisition of Skills	Soft skills	12 out of 12

	Interpersonal skills	12 out of 12
Challenges	Communication difficulties	5 out of 12
	Heavy workload	4 out of 12
	Adapting to diverse personalities	6 out of 12
Awareness of Social Issues	Exposure to real-life societal problems	6 out of 12
	Understanding different socio-economic backgrounds	7 out of 12
Empathy & Inclusion	Developing empathy through helping others	12 out of 12
	Respecting diversity and inclusion	7 out of 12
Environmental Responsibility	Awareness of environmental impact	6 out of 12
	Participation in ecological initiatives	6 out of 12
	Caring for animals and nature	6 out off 12

Table 2*Scheduled Tasks, Times, and Details*

Task	Timeline	Details
Data collection	February 1-15	Conducting 10-12 interviews
Transcribing	February 1-15	Begin transcription as interviews are completed
Data Analysis	February 5-March 15	Analyze data simultaneously in the nearest time
Dissertation Drafting	March 15-April 20	Writing findings and discussion sections.
Submit Draft	April 20	Submit to the thesis supervisor and committee members

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that dependability, transferability, and credibility are essential concepts to build trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Credibility

To ensure credibility and internal validity, the findings were aligned with what participants genuinely experienced and expressed. To boost credibility, member checking was applied, and the initial findings were shared with the participants to confirm whether the interpretations aligned with their experiences or not (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Besides, the triangulation of the findings was applied as the data were collected from the various sources. It involved the comparison and cross-checking of the findings from two different universities (Denzin, 1978).

Dependability

Given the participants' multiple interpretations of reality and the dynamic nature of human behavior, peer review was applied as a strategy to enhance this study's rigor. It helped address these challenges by strengthening both the credibility and dependability of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As my study was conducted in an academic setting, my supervisor oversaw the research process and helped to enhance its dependability. I also did piloting with one alumnus from a public university that was not part of the selected research sites, who had volunteering experience, to reach accuracy and appropriateness of the language and to be ready for the data collection (Tate et al., 2023)

Transferability

To establish external validity or transferability, the study findings were presented through rich and thick descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This strategy assisted in providing as much detailed information about the findings and direct quotes as possible so that the readers

could evaluate the findings and determine the participants' positions by themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical consideration

As the dependability and accuracy of the research relied on the ethical considerations of mine, the permission letters were obtained to reach out to the research sites (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A formal letter was sent to the administration of the two universities in which the objectives of the study and how the information would be gathered and utilized were explained. The letter also indicated the specific target group that would be addressed in the study and the nature of participation in the study. After getting permission, I stated that all personal information would be kept secure and controlled, provided them with consent forms to participate in the interviews, and explained that the whole purpose of the research was just for academic reasons. Each participant in the research was fully informed about the nature and aim of this study and the reasons for conducting it. The collected data was securely stored on my computer. The study participants ensured that their participation would not result in physical, psychological, or emotional harm. Moreover, their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. The collected data was presented honestly, without modifying findings for the benefit of satisfying certain interest groups, and the research would be published, and findings will be openly shared (Creswell, 2012).

Chapter 4: Findings

A comprehensive review of the findings is provided in this chapter. The main themes based on the study participants' experiences were identified, and the key ideas were presented. Moreover, the direct quotes from the study participants and visual diagrams of findings are included to offer a deeper understanding of volunteering and its perceived influence on students' social responsibility.

The purpose of this study was to explore volunteering and its perceived influence on the development of social responsibility among students in Azerbaijani higher education institutions involved in volunteer programs. The collected and analyzed data provided answers to the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive volunteering?
2. What are students' experiences?
3. How do students perceive the influence of volunteering on their social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan?

Besides, a qualitative study was implemented to explore the study participants' perceptions and experiences of volunteering in depth at two universities in Azerbaijan (University A and University B). The data collection took place during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year and involved 12 individuals (10 current students and 2 alumni; 5 males and 7 females) from two universities in Azerbaijan, all of whom had prior volunteering experience. Both universities are officially recognized higher education institutions in Azerbaijan and operate under the Ministry of Science and Education. They share a common goal of developing students' academic knowledge, practical skills, and sense of civic responsibility, including through participation in extracurricular activities such as volunteering. University A primarily

specializes in teacher education and pedagogical sciences, while University B focuses on international affairs, business, information technology, and public policy. The teaching approach at University A tends to be more traditional and lecture-based, while University B emphasizes interactive, student-centered learning.

Table 3

Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Position	Codes	Major
University A				
P1	Female	Alumni	P1FUAA	English teacher
P2	Female	Current	P2FUAC	Primary School Teacher
P3	Female	Current	P3FUAC	Teacher of fine arts
P4	Female	Current	P4FUAC	Teacher of fine arts
P1	Male	Alumni	P1MUAA	Preschool education
P2	Male	Current	P2MUAC	Physical Education
University B				
P1	Female	Current	P1FUBC	Business administration
P2	Female	Current	P2FUBC	Business administration
P3	Female	Current	P3FUBC	Business administration
P1	Male	Current	P1MUBC	Public Affairs
P2	Male	Alumni	P2MUBA	Finance
P3	Male	Current	P3MUBC	Finance

Research Question

How do students perceive volunteering?

Definition of Volunteering

When asked about participants' understanding of the meaning of "volunteering", they expressed diverse perspectives, yet commonalities emerged in their responses (*see* Figure 2).

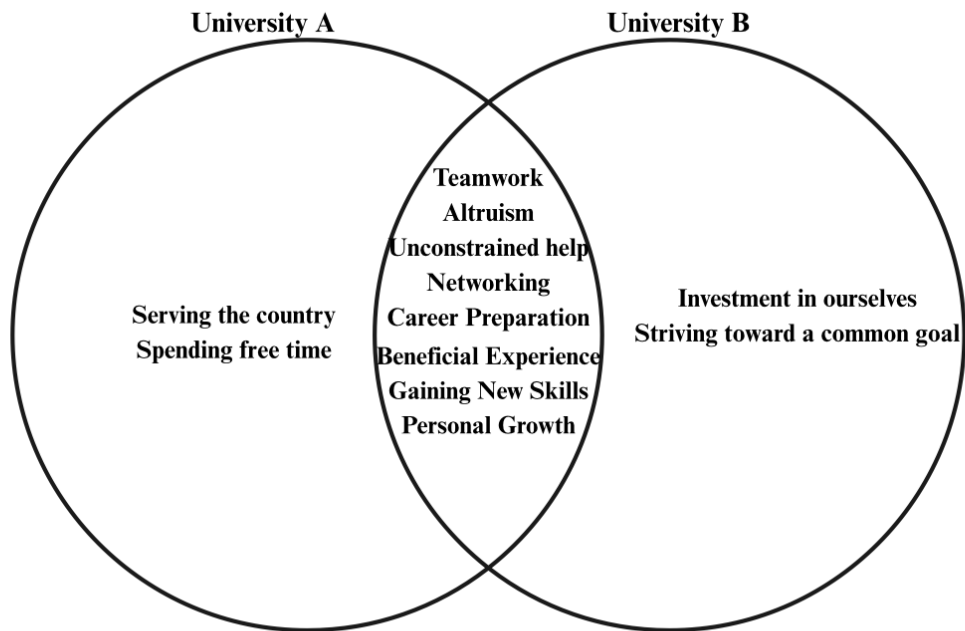
Several participants emphasized the selfless and altruistic nature of volunteering. P1FUAA defined it as "helping others without expecting anything in return", while P2FUAC described it as "unconstrained help". Similarly, P3FUBC stated:

I believe that volunteering is about helping without expecting material benefits. Instead, you gain something much more valuable - experience, new connections, and personal growth. Volunteering presents challenges that make us stronger, and I see it as an investment in ourselves. The skills develop and the life lessons stay with us forever.

The others focused on the role of volunteering in personal development and career preparation. P4FUAC highlighted its significance for future success, noting that it helped individuals adjust to professional life. P1MUAA mentioned:

For me, volunteering is about serving my country and society – it is selfless. But at the same time, what does it give me? It provides me with invaluable experience, which I believe will greatly benefit my future career and teamwork skills.

Additionally, some participants associated volunteering with social connections, teamwork, and networking. P2MUBA described it as "working in a team, supporting one another, and striving toward a common goal". PP3MUBC similarly viewed it as "a way to access new networking opportunities". P2MUAC mentioned that volunteering is an activity that some people engaged in "during their free time" and that it helped individuals gain knowledge.

Figure 2*Definition of Volunteering***Research Question 2****What are students' experiences?**

This research explored how participants perceived volunteering and what experiences they gained from participating in such activities. The results revealed that volunteering played a role in personal growth, developing teamwork skills, preparing for careers, and a range of skills that they could apply in professional life. However, participants also faced a range of challenges along the way.

Personal Growth and Development

Most participants described volunteering as a transformative experience that contributed to personal growth. Many noted that they were initially shy and hesitant to interact with others, but volunteering helped them become more open and confident. Participant P2FUAC from University A commented.

I was a very introverted person. I didn't communicate with anyone, I knew very little, but my biggest goal when I volunteered was to communicate with more people, meet new people, and express myself more comfortably, and I really achieved my goal. I can now express myself better among people.

Similarly, P3MUBC from University B reflected on the point:

Before, I struggled to communicate with people, I was afraid and shy. After becoming a volunteer, I gained the ability to interact with others.

Another participant(P2MUAC) also highlighted the impact of volunteering on overcoming shyness:

Before volunteering, I was afraid to talk to people. I worried about what I would say and how I would connect with others. But after volunteering, I became more open- I was no longer shy or afraid, and I felt completely confident.

P1FUBC also described how volunteering contributed to their communication skills and personal growth:

It provided me with the opportunity to connect with new people and feel comfortable in unfamiliar environments. Previously, I struggled in such situations- I would sit quietly, unable to engage with others. However, after participating in these events, I overcame this challenge. Now I no longer feel lost in new surroundings and can confidently interact with strangers. Volunteering is not just about helping others; it also fosters personal development.

These reflections show that volunteering could push the study participants out of their comfort zones, help them overcome shyness, and improve their communication skills. They

recognized that their growing self-confidence strengthened their ability to build relationships with others.

Teamwork

Regarding teamwork, 58% of participants mentioned that volunteering taught them the value of teamwork, helping them trust others, develop a better understanding, and appreciate collaboration (*see* Figure 3). P1MUAA reflected on this transformation:

In the past, I believed I had to do everything on my own. However, as a volunteer, I realized that teamwork is essential and that I am not always right.

Similarly, P3FUBC stated:

I learned to trust people more because I understood that a successful team is built on trust, flexibility, and effective communication.

P2MUBA described his volunteer team as a “family”, emphasizing the deep sense of connection and belonging he developed. Likewise, another participant noted that volunteering helped him strengthen his collaboration skills, making him a more effective team player.

One of the participants (P1MUAA) explained how working in a team contributed to personal growth:

When you work with people, you realize that you have changed. I have changed- even now, I am still changing.

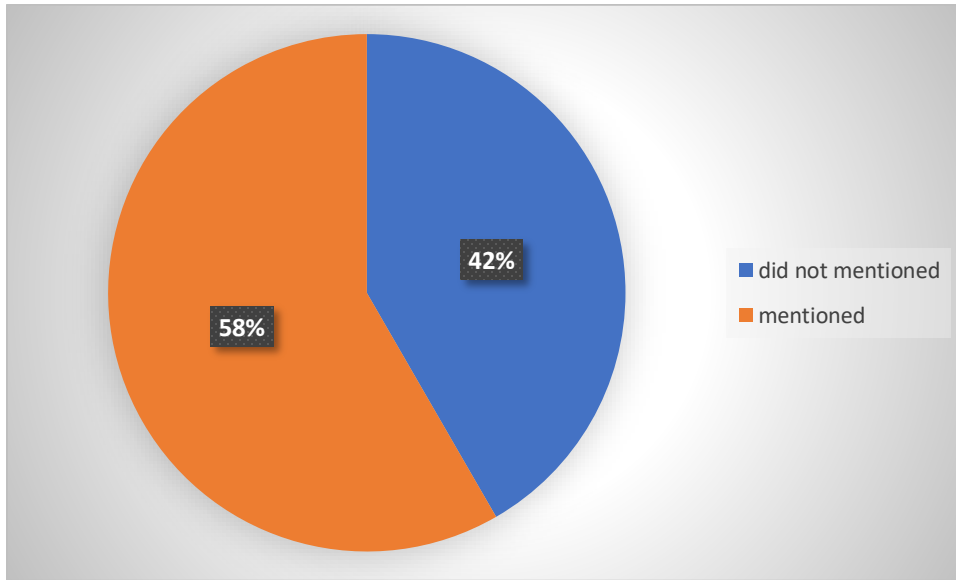
The aforementioned statement highlighted the continuous self-improvement and adaptability fostered through volunteering. Additionally, the role of communication in teamwork was frequently mentioned. One participant (P3FUAC) pointed out:

Through volunteering, you meet many different people, and with each of them, you must find a way to connect. These experiences help develop communication skills, making it easier to build relationships.

The study participants' reflections indicated that volunteering was not just about completing tasks but also cultivating a strong sense of community and fostering relationships.

Figure 3

Teamwork Skills



Impact on Future Career

The study participants (8 out of 12) from University A and University B view volunteering as an initial step in their careers. In fact, some participants mentioned that they were offered official positions at the same organizations where they had volunteered. At University A, the participants shared examples of how volunteering opened professional doors for their peers. P1FUAA mentioned that she had friends who after volunteering, continued working in the same field.

Similarly, P1MUAA noted that some of his friends started as volunteers, and now they hold higher positions in those organizations. Similarly, the participant from University B (P2FUBC) reflected on how their own volunteering experiences led to career opportunities:

I initially joined as a volunteer, but later they offered me a job, and I transitioned into a full-time role.

Beyond securing jobs, participants acknowledged the practical skills they developed through volunteering, particularly in teamwork and collaboration.

P3FUAC mentioned:

It gave me a great experience. I think it will be very beneficial for my future work life and teamwork. I learned how to work with people.

One participant (P3MUBC) emphasized that volunteering provided both experience and job prospects:

First, you gain experience, and second, you can get hired. Many people start as volunteers and later continue as employees.

Additionally, the majority of participants recognized the role of volunteer work in enhancing employability. P2FUAC mentioned:

When applying for a job, they ask if we have volunteer experience on our CV. Of course, I always include mine.

The reflection stated above showed the benefits of volunteering. The study participants believed that beyond fostering personal and professional growth, it serves as a direct pathway to employment, equipping students with skills and opportunities for career advancement.

Acquired skills

The study participants from University A and University B acknowledged the valuable skills they developed through volunteering (*see* Figure 4).

At University A, the participants noted that volunteering helped them adapt to the work environment and gain firsthand experience:

Volunteering supported us in preparing for our future careers, we are adjusting to work life. - P4FUAC

Similarly, P3FUAC mentioned that she began to gain valuable work experience when she started volunteering. In contrast, participants from university B mentioned developing essential soft skills, such as tolerance and conflict resolution. P3MUBC described how volunteering transformed his approach to handling conflicts:

I used to react aggressively in conflicts. However, after volunteering, I realized that this is not effective. The best approach is to find common ground and reach an agreement.

Another participant (P1MUBC) also stressed the importance of tolerance in volunteer work mentioning that tolerance is very important, and for a volunteer, it is twice as important.

Likewise, P2MUBA mentioned that volunteering helped him develop tolerance. Additionally, alumni from both universities reflected on how the skills they gained through volunteering benefited their professional lives:

Now that I'm working, all the skills I developed through volunteering- communication, problem-solving, punctuality, and responsibility- are truly helping me in my job.

Some participants emphasized that volunteering helped them develop leadership skills and a stronger sense of responsibility. P2FUAC noted that volunteering made him more active and responsible and how he took up everything he did with greater responsibility. Similarly, P1FUBC stated:

I started taking responsibility not just for myself but for others as well. Over time, I became the kind of leader I used to rely on. Now, instead of waiting for someone else to take charge, I take responsibility myself.

These insights highlighted how volunteering serves as a bridge between student life and professional careers, equipping individuals with both technical and interpersonal skills essential for future success.

Figure 4

Acquired Skills



Challenges

Despite the many positive aspects, participants from both universities also faced various challenges in their volunteer experiences (*see* Figure 5). The main difficulties included a heavy workload, interacting with different people, and the need to adapt to unexpected situations. 5 out of 12 participants mentioned that working with people from diverse backgrounds and personalities was challenging at first:

At first, it's hard when you work with people from different cultures. You have to step out of your comfort zone, but over time, you adjust (P3FUBC).

The others highlighted the difficulty of addressing the unique needs of each individual:

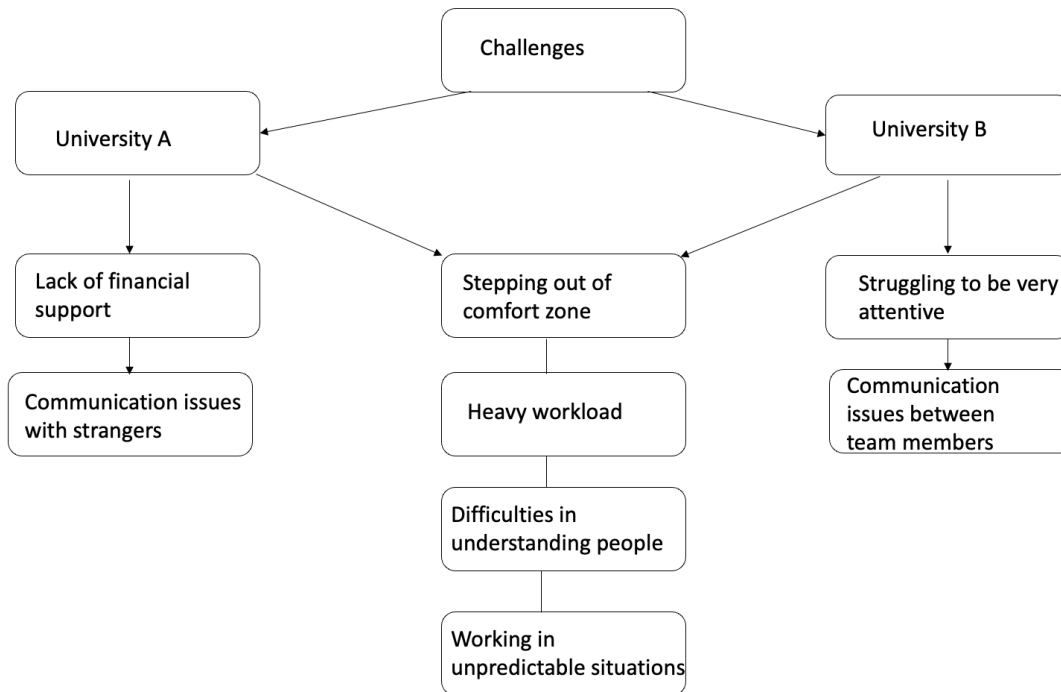
It's a bit hard to pay attention to everyone because each person has different problems and needs help (P3MUBC).

4 out of 12 participants mentioned heavy workloads and personality differences.

The workload was heavy, but the biggest challenge is when you are not financially supported (P1MUAA).

The study participants also reported that they encountered difficulties in communicating with diverse people. In this sense, P3FUAC said, "Not everyone is the same. Everyone has a different character and can be in a different mood." Moreover, P2FUAC stated, "No matter how long you have been volunteering, every person is different, and it is hard to understand what is on their mind."

In addition, while some participants from university A mentioned challenges related to communication with people outside their team, participants from university B mentioned challenges in communication between team members.

Figure 5*Challenges*

Also, P2MUBA noted:

As a volunteer, you meet a huge number of people, and it requires an individual approach to everyone.

At University B, the study participants emphasized the challenge of working in unpredictable situations:

The most difficult part is unexpectedness. Situations can arise at any moment that you are not prepared for (P1FUBC).

Additionally, they highlighted the importance of attentiveness and flexibility:

To be a volunteer means to be attentive to people and their needs (P3FUBC).

The responses demonstrated that volunteering requires adaptability, tolerance, and strong communication skills, helping individuals develop essential life skills beyond professional experience.

Research Question 3

How do students perceive the influence of volunteering on their social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan?

During the interviews, the study participants shared their perspectives on how volunteering influenced their sense of social responsibility (*see* Figure 6). Some emphasized that volunteering helped them better understand the needs of others, develop greater empathy, and recognize the importance of ecological awareness. However, not all participants shared this view. Some noted that their volunteering experiences were not directly related to socially responsible projects, which could influence their perception of its impact.

Developing a Deeper Understanding of Current Issues in Society

The interviews revealed that volunteering fostered a deeper awareness of social issues. P2MUBA shared that volunteer experience involved helping people, though not always successfully:

I tried to solve people's problems- sometimes I could, but unfortunately, sometimes I could not.

P3FUBC described how volunteering changed her perspective on the world:

Before, I saw the world through rose-colored glasses and did not think about social problems. However, volunteering helped me see these issues up close, understand their impact on people, and realize that I can make a difference.

The aforementioned comment highlights how volunteering exposed participants to real-world challenges and deepened their understanding of social issues.

P1FUBC emphasized the importance of recognizing the needs of different socio-economic groups:

Through volunteering, we can help people from various socioeconomic backgrounds. When we organize charitable events, we provide essentials like food, sweets, and toys. For us, these may be small things, but for them, it can be a special day that changes their lives.

The statement above underscores how even small acts of charity can have a significant impact on those in need. P1MUAA reflected on how volunteering reshaped his worldview:

I realized that the world does not revolve around me- there are other people in society who need help.

The study participant's insight suggests that volunteering contributes to a sense of social responsibility, helping participants see real problems in society and recognize the importance of taking action.

However, due to a lack of direct experience in social responsibility projects as a volunteer, some participants viewed these issues more abstractly and had surface-level knowledge.

Empathy

As empathy is a part of social responsibility, in this research, it was explored whether participants developed their empathy through volunteering. 12 out of 12 participants mentioned that they could develop empathy through volunteering. P2FUBC shared her experience:

Volunteering opens your eyes to the fact that we are all humans, each with our good and bad sides. It teaches us to respect everyone, regardless of their origin.

Her statement highlights the importance of respecting all people and accepting diverse perspectives. In her opinion, empathy can be developed through volunteering because it allows individuals to "put themselves in others' shoes" and truly feel what others experience.

Similarly, P3FUBC pointed out that empathy was particularly strengthened in crises mentioning that when she encountered a crisis situation, she developed the ability to empathize.

The participant's insight suggested that when volunteers witness or experience difficult situations, they become more attuned to the emotions and struggles of others, making them more sensitive to people's problems. P3MUBC shared a situation he encountered while volunteering at an event where a delegation was visiting. Some attendees insisted on taking photos with dark-skinned individuals, which he recognized as problematic. He intervened and explained:

I told them that by doing this, they were setting someone apart from society in a negative way, and it is important to respect others.

This example demonstrated how volunteering is not just about helping others but also about promoting tolerance and educating others on respectful behavior. P2MUBA also described how volunteering influenced his empathy:

When I became a volunteer, I started solving problems and interacting with different people. I believe this helped me develop my empathy.

The aforementioned participants' insights suggested that volunteering can serve as a tool for fostering empathy. However, some participants from University B had a different perspective. They believed that people who started volunteering "already have empathy" because they thought that most participants who joined social responsibility projects as a volunteer were naturally "altruistic". P2FUAC shared her experience working with children with autism:

I saw how unique each child was. They were very kind, and I realized how important it is to stay positive in any situation, even when facing problems. They changed my worldview.

The abovementioned statement suggested that volunteering is not just about providing support but also a learning experience for the volunteers themselves. As P2FUAC expressed, she began to "love people" regardless of their "difference". Her experience showed that volunteering

can contribute to creating a more inclusive community, where people help and learn from each other.

Nurturing environmental responsibility through volunteering

Through volunteering, the study participants engaged in ecological projects that helped them develop environmental awareness. By taking part in ecological events, 6 out of 12 participants gained an understanding of environmental issues and became more conscious of their impact on natural resources. P2FUBC shared how volunteering changed her perspective:

I do not break trees anymore. Volunteering changed my attitude toward the environment. Now, I take better care of nature.

The statement above suggested that participating in environmental projects as a volunteer fosters a sense of responsibility toward nature and influences participants' actions. P1MUAA emphasized the importance of actively preserving the environment:

Why should we litter? We need to do more to keep clean the air and around the city.

The study participants were sure that volunteering also provided them with hands-on experience in environmental initiatives, reinforcing their commitment to sustainability. P2FUAC described her experience:

We volunteered by planting trees, collecting trash, and creating new things from waste. I started to appreciate nature more. Doing these activities together was both fun and beneficial for the environment.

Her words highlight that collective actions not only motivated participants but also strengthened their sense of environmental responsibility. Moreover, involvement in ecological projects as a volunteer could lead to changes in attitudes. An alumnus (P1FUAA) of University A reflected:

Before volunteering, I did not pay attention to littering. But now, I will not let anyone litter near me- I understand its importance and encourage others to do the same.

Similarly, P1FUBC mentioned:

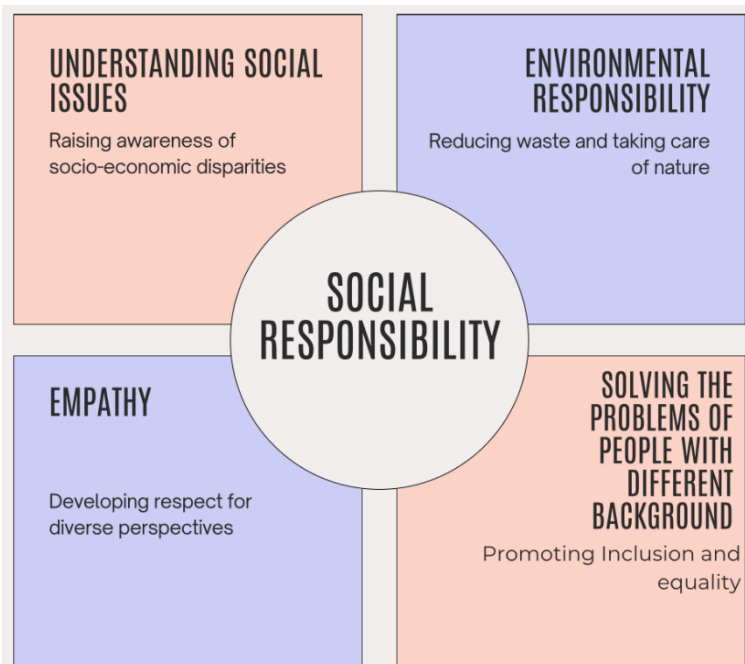
We all need to take care of our planet because we all live on this planet. Even if your efforts may not seem visible now, they will be more noticeable in the future, and we should never underestimate the power of small steps.

In addition, the study participants believed that volunteering contributed to developing sensitivity not only toward people but also toward animals.

Now, I bring food with me, and whenever I see a cat or dog, I feed them. I believe this attitude was developed through volunteering. - P2FUBC

The responses above showed that volunteering could influence participants' environmental awareness and foster a caring attitude toward animals, nature, and the environment. From the study participants' perspective, their responses in this study highlighted how volunteering can promote social responsibility. Through their involvement in volunteering, participants not only gained an understanding of environmental and social issues but also cultivated a commitment to sustainable practices in their everyday lives.

Thus, from the participants' perspective, volunteering in higher education in Azerbaijan was viewed as a valuable experience that fosters key aspects of social responsibility, such as environmental awareness, an understanding of social issues, and empathy.

Figure 6*Social Responsibility***Additional Findings**

The analysis of responses from the study participants at University A and University B revealed both similarities and differences in their perceptions of volunteering.

Differences

Graduates from University A, while acknowledging the professional benefits of volunteering, primarily emphasized its value as a way of serving their country. They also highlighted the development of emotional intelligence as one of the key outcomes of their volunteer experience. In contrast, graduates from University B focused more on acquiring job-related skills for career advancement, with a particular emphasis on teamwork. This focus may be attributed to University B's core values, which prioritize collaboration and effective communication.

Similarities

Both groups of graduates mentioned that they no longer engaged in volunteering due to a lack of time caused by work commitments. However, they all strongly recommended that students should start volunteering during their university years, as they believed it provided them with valuable knowledge and experience.

There were also similarities between the current students and graduates' perspectives: their main motivations for starting volunteering were either the influence of other volunteers or the desire to spend their time meaningfully. Additionally, many noted that after they became volunteers, family members or friends who were initially skeptical about volunteering also became motivated and joined volunteer activities.

A Unique Case

One student from University B (P1MUBC) stood out with responses that significantly differed from the rest. While he acknowledged that volunteering had improved his empathy, he did not believe it had any impact on social responsibility. In his view, the more one sees people's problems, the more monotonous emotions become. Moreover, he disliked teamwork, as he preferred to be in control rather than follow instructions. Because volunteering required collaboration and considering others' opinions, he decided to leave. His only motivation for volunteering was to prepare for a work environment, and he believed that volunteering was a temporary activity that should not be viewed as something long-term.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The results of this research showed that students in Azerbaijani higher education perceive volunteering as a meaningful experience which leads to personal development and the formation of social responsibility. The majority of participants define volunteering as “helping without expecting something in return.” This definition is aligned with Wilson (2000), who defines volunteering as a selfless activity to benefit society.

The study participants assumed that their motivation for volunteering started when they had the opportunity to network and from their desire to use their free time in a meaningful way. However, the most frequent answer was a desire to gain work experience. They viewed volunteering as a key pathway to starting work and adjusting to the work environment. This finding is congruent with Williamson et al. (2018), who believe that people start volunteering for their own benefits, namely from self-development to future work and career advancement.

Each participant was convinced that volunteering contributed to the development of their skill set, including tolerance, patience, conflict resolution, time management, responsibility, teamwork, empathy, career readiness, communication, leadership skills. Likewise, Khasanzyanova (2017) concluded that volunteering helped to develop patience, objectivity, communication with the audience, time management skills, empathy, and preparedness for unpredictable situations. Moreover, her study supported the development of teamwork and soft skills through volunteering.

Comparing the research conducted on volunteering in the post-Soviet countries in the past, which was considered a compulsory experience, the current study volunteers consider it a voluntary positive experience that helps to gain personal benefits, skills, and job experience. Besides, the study participants emphasized that they started volunteering willingly, which was in

contrast with the studies carried out in the post-Soviet countries in the past, defining it as a forced rather than voluntary community service (Khvorostianov & Remennick, 2018).

Despite the positive acquisitions and experience, the study participants also mentioned challenges they faced while volunteering that were as heavy workload, difficulties in communication with different personalities, and working in an unfamiliar environment. These challenges were in agreement with studies of Tomazos and Butler (2010), Qi et al. (2018), and Kabonga and Zvokuomba (2022), who concluded that participants struggled to adapt to a new environment, interact with people with different backgrounds and characters, and experienced burnout from heavy workload, respectively.

One of the main takeaways from the research was that participation in volunteer activities could help students better understand social issues. This key finding is supported by Afzal and Hussain (2020), who stated that volunteers boosted their awareness of community problems through involvement in volunteer activities.

All participants underlined the importance of empathy, and they were assured that participating in volunteering and collaborating with others could help them develop empathy and become more empathetic in social interactions. Some of the study participants noted that by volunteering, they learned to "put themselves in others' shoes," that is a phrase directly echoed in Jardine's (2017, p.129) study. Interactions with others, such as peers, mentors, or supervisors, enable learning and development on both the cognitive and moral levels, which were emphasized by Vygotsky. In the context of volunteering, students are active participants in their social environment and learn social values. Students participating in volunteering not only perform tasks but also participate in social interactions, meaningful problem solving, and adopting shared norms and values. These experiences might help develop their sense of social responsibility and

civic duty. Bandura's Social Learning Theory complements this view by focusing on how individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling. In the case of volunteering, students are usually exposed to prosocial behavior by team leaders, coordinators, and even their peers. The social responsibility demonstrated by them can reinforce the belief that such behavior is valuable and achievable. These reflections affirm Bandura's view that role modeling and direct social experience are critical for developing moral behavior and a sense of responsibility (Bandura, 1971). They also support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes that development and learning occur through social interactions and collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1997). Viewed through the lens of both theories, the study reveals that volunteering might not only be an extracurricular activity but also a dynamic learning environment where social responsibility is cultivated through both interpersonal engagement and experiential learning.

Environmental awareness is part of social responsibility (Chen et al., 2015), and only those who took part in ecological events as volunteers mentioned about development of ecological awareness and understanding of the importance of ecological issues. This also supports Bandura's and Vygotsky's theories (Vygotsky, 1997; Bandura, 1971) that learning occurs through direct experience and collaboration with society. Although study participants mentioned about development of empathy and responsibility, those who did not have direct experience in ecological activities as volunteers did not mention about development of ecological awareness.

Limitations

One of the limitations was participant bias. In this sense, the study participants could provide answers that they think could be viewed favorably by others rather than their true experiences. To mitigate this particular bias, I employed open-ended, non-leading questions, allowing participants to express their views freely. Additionally, with some participants, interviews were conducted in Russian, which might have resulted in limitations due to the challenge of accurate translation into English. Being interviewed in their native language allowed those participants to share their subtle emotions, cultural concepts, and experiences that might be lost or inaccurately transmitted through translation. However, to mitigate this potential issue, I consulted with my supervisor to ensure the accuracy of the translated materials. In addition, the gender balance was a limitation to some extent as there was an unequal number of male (5) and female (7) participants, which could affect the diversity of perspectives. Regarding gender balance, I tried to recruit participants in a way that avoided significant disparities between the number of male and female participants.

Implications

One of the implications of this research is the need to measure the influence of volunteering on students' social responsibility on a large scale through quantitative research. Such a study could help determine whether participation in volunteering activities within Azerbaijani higher education contributed to the development of students' social responsibility.

Another implication of the study is the significance of volunteering in contributing to students' sense of purpose, increasing self-esteem, skill development, and networking.

The results of the research, along with a unique case highlighted in the findings, indicate that the primary motivation for participating in volunteering was to gain career-related skills,

acquire work experience, and adapt to the professional environment. Considering the frequency of this answer, further research can be done to investigate if the primary reason for volunteering is job-related reason. If volunteering is perceived as a primary tool for career development rather than a social contribution, it can inform managers of the programs and university administration to design volunteer programs to ensure that volunteering will balance career readiness with civil engagement.

Recommendations

Considering the fact that the state standards and curricula for general education concentrate on the importance of students understanding their responsibility to society, participating in social projects, and engaging in volunteer work (Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, n.d.), this research is relevant to the current context of Azerbaijani higher education. Moreover, this is particularly relevant in the context of the “Azerbaijani Youth Development Strategy for 2015–2025,” approved by President Ilham Aliyev, which emphasizes the promotion of active citizenship and the development of socially responsible individuals (Aslanbayova, 2021). Universities in Azerbaijan should think of integrating structured volunteering programs to promote civic engagement and social responsibility among students. Moreover, considering the findings of this research that indicate a positive attitude toward volunteering and its role in developing new skills, alongside Khasanzyanova’s (2017) study supporting the development of such skills, higher education administrators could provide more structured opportunities for volunteering and actively promote participation, particularly for students who may not yet be aware of these initiatives.

Higher education institutions can also consider the challenges faced by volunteers, such as communication issues, diversity of recipients, and heavy workload. In this regard, they can

address the challenges by providing additional training in teamwork, leadership, cultural diversity, resilience, stress management, and diversity of personalities.

This research shows the importance of direct experience and social collaboration in shaping students' social responsibility and the development of new skills. Based on the findings, it is recommended that universities and managers of volunteer programs design programs that offer hands-on experience, especially in environmental projects. This experience is meaningful not only for raising awareness but also for fostering a deep understanding of social and environmental issues. In accordance with Vygotsky's Sociocultural and Bandura's Social Learning Theories (Vygotsky, 1997; Bandura, 1971), such programs may emphasize collaboration, direct experience, and active participation in real-life contexts. Besides, students are recommended to students to directly involved in volunteering activities to develop social responsibility.

Conclusion

In summary, this study aimed to explore volunteering and its perceived influence on students' social responsibility in Azerbaijani higher education. Through interviews with the study participants from two universities, the data was gathered regarding the experience of volunteering and how it contributed to social responsibility.

The results showed that volunteering is generally perceived as a positive experience. The majority of the study participants mentioned that volunteering helped them develop empathy, responsibility, working in a team, and social and environmental issues. These findings align with Vygotsky's and Bandura's theories (Vygotsky, 1997; Bandura, 1971), underscoring the importance of direct experience and collaboration in the process of learning and development.

Furthermore, while some of the study participants were involved in volunteering for altruistic reasons, most of them stated that their primary reason was to gain job experience and future career development.

Nevertheless, the study identified several challenges, such as communication issues with people from diverse backgrounds, heavy workload, and working in unpredictable environments.

Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of how volunteering can influence social responsibility and personal growth. The results suggest that higher education institutions in Azerbaijan have the potential to promote social responsibility among students through well-organized volunteer initiatives.

Appendix 1

Consent Form for Participation in Research

Study Title: Exploring Volunteering and Its Perceived Influence on Students' Social Responsibility in Azerbaijani Higher Education

Researcher: Dinara Ganbarli, Master's Student in Educational Management, ADA University

Purpose of the Research: This study aims to explore the perceived influence of the students in Azerbaijani higher education institutions involved in volunteering on the development of their social responsibility.

What You Will Do in This Research: You are invited to participate in an interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The interview will consist of open-ended questions. The interview will be semi-structured, allowing for both prepared questions and follow-up questions based on your responses.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study without any penalty.

Confidentiality: Your responses will be confidential. Any data collected will be anonymized and used solely for academic purposes. Results will be reported in aggregate form only, and no individual participant will be identifiable from any reports or publications.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks to participating in this interview beyond those encountered in everyday life. Your participation will contribute valuable information that could help enhance the understanding of the perceived influence of the students in Azerbaijani higher education institutions involved in volunteering on the development of their social responsibility.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me at dganbarli18930@ada.edu.az or my research supervisor, Dr. Yunusova, at vyunusova@ada.edu.az

Consent: By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to participate in the research described above.

I, _____, understand the terms of this research study and voluntarily agree to participate.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 2

Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hello, my name is Dinara Ganbarli and I am a Master's student in Education Management at ADA University.

Purpose: I am conducting this interview as part of a study on volunteering and its perceived influence on students' social responsibility in higher education in Azerbaijan.

Procedures: Thank you for agreeing to participate! Your participation is completely voluntary and you may only answer the questions you feel comfortable answering. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. Your personal information will remain confidential – a pseudonym will be used instead of your name. You can choose one yourself or, if you prefer, I will choose the pseudonym for you. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, depending on your answers. It will be audio-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Information will be shared back with participants.

Consent: Do you voluntarily agree to participate in this interview under the conditions described?

Preliminary Questions:

1. Introduce yourself, please.
2. What year of study are you in?
3. What is your major?
4. How would you define volunteering?
5. What are the main goals of volunteering?
6. What or who motivated you to start volunteering?
7. How do you feel when you participate in volunteer activities?
8. Can you describe a meaningful experience you had while volunteering?
9. How has volunteering changed your understanding and responsibilities toward your community and solving its social problems?
10. How has volunteering influenced your values and beliefs in supporting or connecting with other people? Be specific and elaborate on them.
11. Has volunteering made you feel like you were making a difference? If yes, can you share your feelings regarding volunteering.
12. Do you feel more connected to your community because of volunteering? If yes, how?
13. What have you learned about teamwork while volunteering?
14. How has collaborating with others influenced your actions or thoughts while volunteering?
15. Has volunteering helped you build relationships with people from different backgrounds? If yes, how or in what ways?
16. Can your actions as a volunteer inspire others? If yes, why. If not, why?
17. What skills or qualities have you gained from volunteering? Be specific.
18. How important is empathy in your volunteer work? Be specific and share your experience regarding empathy in volunteering.
19. What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about volunteering?

Appendix 3

No _____

“26” Yanvar 2025-ci il

AzərbaycanUniversitetinin

.....*məsələlər üzrə**prorektoru*Hörmətli **bəy/xanım**,

Nəzərinizə çatdırmaq istərdik ki, ADA Universitetinin MAEM 2025 “Təhsilin idarəedilməsi” ixtisası üzrə magistr proqramının ikinci kurs tələbəsi Dinarə Qənbərlinin apardığı yekun tədqiqat işi üçün (Exploring Volunteering and its Perceived Influence on Students’ Social Responsibility in Azerbaijani Higher Education - Azərbaycan Ali Təhsil Pilləsində Könüllülük və Tələbələrin Sosial Məsuliyyətinə Təsirinin Araşdırılması) Azərbaycan Universitetinin tələbə heyəti arasında sorğu keçirilməsi tələb olunur. Sorğunun məqsədi könüllülüyn Azərbaycan ali təhsil pilləsində tələbələrin sosial məsuliyyətinə necə təsir etdiyini araşdırmaqdır.

Bu məqsədlə tədqiqatın aparılması üçün şəraitin yaradılmasını Sizdən xahiş edirik. Əməkdaşlığa görə təşəkkürümüzü bildiririk.

Hörmətlə,

Dr. Elkin Nurməmmədov,

Tədris işləri üzrə prorektor.

Reference

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