

# AM I SELFISHLY SELFLESS? THE ROLES OF ALTRUISM AND SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS ON VOLUNTEERING COMMITMENT AMONG PREMIER PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT** – Volunteers are the backbone of civil society and voluntary organizations. However, there is a considerable lack of scientific studies conducted on investigating why Malaysian university students involve themselves in volunteering activities. This study aims to determine the differences in the level of students' commitment toward volunteerism across the demographic backgrounds of respondents who participate in volunteering activities. It also tries to examine the effect of altruism on the level of students volunteering activities by using a sample taken from one of the public universities in Malaysia. A cross-sectional study among students at the University of Malaya was employed. The analysis of data based on 375 collected and usable questionnaires. The results indicated that only the gender of respondents found to be significantly different in terms of their volunteering commitment. However, it discovered that no differences in terms of ethnicity and education level of the students affect the level of dedication towards volunteerism. Lastly, the present results also revealed that the influence of altruism found to be significant on the level of students' volunteerism. To pave the way for a successful implementation of volunteering work, the university itself must set up efforts to integrate its students into the communities that surround them. One example is the growth in community service and service-learning programmes. It envisaged that the government must see that student volunteering is a core part of developing an engaged and civil society. Thus, it is safe to say that volunteering plays a vital role in the development and wellbeing of a community.

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## INTRODUCTION

The growing awareness of volunteerism has made volunteerism as an issue on the global scale. Concerning this, the essential role of volunteerism in modern society has been the subject of increased attention from many leaders. It was well captured in the first 1988 presidential debate when President Bush of the United States of America stressed on the prevalence of the voluntary sector in helping the government to solve many of its domestic problems such as poverty, school dropouts, crime, and substance abuse (Turiman Suandi, 1991). According to Chambre (1998), every US president, since John Kennedy has emphasised the vital role of citizen involvement in volunteering activities. Therefore, it perceived that in building social capital that strengthens the social fabric of a community, the leaders are the ones that should be in the front line to initiate and see value in volunteerism.

Over the last few decades, the idea of volunteerism has also become a salient part of American society. Despite busy schedules and rigorous demands of the modern world, volunteering occurs every day in every city throughout the US. Based on the report by Independent Sector (2001) as cited in Mardhiyyah Shari et al. (2013), the volunteering activities carried out through non-profit organisations in the US have been estimated to be equivalent to 9 million full-time jobs. It perceived that volunteering activities are crucial in America. Moreover, volunteerism has been evident to be an integral part of the social and economic landscape of Australia. It is reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], (2007) that approximately 713 million hours spent on volunteering annually. These statistics situate that volunteering activity believed to be prevalent among Australian society, and it discovered that 34 percent of the adult population in the country was actively involved in volunteering work (ABS, 2007).

Mardhiyyah Shari et al. (2013) also found that a survey in the UK suggested that volunteering was worth up to 40 billion pounds per annum, making it the third-largest contributor to the nation's Gross Domestic Product. While in Canada, 7.5 million out of 24 million people aged 15 or above are volunteers, and this creates job opportunities. Surprisingly, according to Pi (2001), in Taiwan, volunteerism as a concept is still relatively new and, therefore, most voluntary organisations do not know how to attract and retain volunteers. All those reported cases of volunteering work all over the world overviewed and discussed to provide a better prospect and a deeper understanding of how those developed countries view and perceive volunteerism.

While the ongoing Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016- 2020) designed to anchor growth on people in 2020 and the final leg before we enter the arena of developed nations, thus the volunteering activities and associations are identified as one of the vital agenda incorporated in the plans. It highlighted under the first and third thrusts on inclusivity and human capital, respectively, which give special emphasis on youth volunteerism by implementing National Youth Policy (Official Website of Economic Planning Unit (EPU), 2017). In that respect, the Malaysian government committed in its plans to nurture the young generations as the targeted group of the population that could spearhead this volunteering work and play their parts effectively. Despite all the government efforts as outlined above, the younger generations are still not aware of this spirit. It supported by Mercy Malaysia president, Datuk Dr Ahmad Faizal Perdaus who said that the low level of volunteerism among Malaysians could be due to the lack of focus on community service among the young in schools (The Star Online, October 15, 2017). Recently, for instance, he further claimed that despite 20 years of humanitarian service experience for Mercy Malaysia with 7,000 volunteers registered in its system, there was only about 10 percent being active participants in their programmes (*News Strait Times Online*, September 28, 2019). The university students are not an exception. For example, Aisyah Dara et al., (2013) and Mamat Ibrahim et al., (2014) claimed that lack of interest in volunteerism among youth, such as making the Voluntary Youth Anti Drug Programme to be a success has always been a problem. The programme should arouse students at various levels ranging from secondary schools to the tertiary level in Higher Educational Institutions (HEI), somehow it is not.

Concerning the above statement, Siti Nazilah et al. (2014) raised the issue of a considerable lack of scientific studies conducted on the investigation of why Malaysian university students involved themselves in volunteering activities. Recognising the value of volunteerism would advocate the act of volunteerism for the good and growth of the country. In other words, given the importance of volunteerism not only for helping those in need but also uniting the communities. She also claimed that although students have exposed to volunteerism, the number of active volunteers is still low. It is unfortunate as the positive impacts that volunteerism carries are undeniable. Nevertheless, due to those mentioned problems and the degree of seriousness, the call for further study on volunteering is a viable mechanism. Thus, the present study aims to explore the demographic background of university students who participate in volunteering activities, to identify the effect of altruism on the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism and lastly to examine the differences in terms of students' commitment towards volunteerism across their gender, education level & ethnicity.

### Importance of Altruism Towards Volunteerism

Altruism refers to other-oriented concerns or compassion that is motivated by generativity (Erikson, 1968), by concern for the welfare of others (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroder, & Penner, 2006). Generally, as claimed by Samuel and Pearl (1996), the word altruism is rooted in the Latin *alter*, which simply means 'other'. The study of altruism has been critical for this reason in line with the early work of August Comte, who coined it about 150 years ago, and he stressed altruism as devotion to the welfare of others, based on selflessness (Piliavin & Charng, 1990).

Altruism is giving of one's self for the benefit of others or, in other words, as acting on behalf of others. Similarly, Amar (2001) defines altruism as unselfishly giving to others in need, for the sole purpose or welfare of the beneficiary. This definition is concurrence with the other study's definition of altruism by Monroe (1996) of which altruism as behaviour intended to benefit another, even when this risks possible sacrifice to the welfare of the volunteer. In other words, the easiest helping behaviours to explain are those directed to family members.

It is also prevalent to highlight that altruism as a salient aspect of volunteerism because it indicates the willingness of an individual to put aside personal interest for the sake of others (Turiman Suandi, 1991). Several empirical studies have demonstrated that altruism is the primary reason for volunteering (Philips, 1982; Fitch, 1987; Fischer & Schaffer, 1993; Johnston, Twynam & Farrell, 1998; Wearing, 2001; Burns et al. 2005; Carpenter & Myers, 2010). These concerns are not without evidence. A review of the literature would serve as a basis of understanding how altruism as a motive for volunteerism has been extensively discussed and debated among various scholars and studies in other parts of the world. Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen's study (1991) indicated that altruism as one of the primary motives for the health service volunteer. The study states that health service volunteers who continue to volunteer are more altruistic towards volunteering work than the community service volunteer.

Furthermore, in a Malaysian case, a study carried out by Zaliha Hj Hussin, and Mohd Ramlan (2012) have similarly found out the importance of altruism as the predicting factor that shapes youth intention towards volunteering work. In Turkey, for example, a study conducted on 175 youth community volunteers showed that the best factors affected by volunteerism are altruism (Boz, 2007). Meanwhile, the study was comparable to a study conducted in the United States. The study reported that the altruistic motive becomes one of the best predictors for youths volunteers (Burns et al. 2005). In England, there was a study undertaken at a national level among university students' primary reasons for volunteering. As reported by Holdsworth (2010), respondents gave both altruistic and instrumental reasons for volunteering. This global evidence is of concern that altruism identified as a significant contributing factor towards volunteering work. In other words, if the majority of university students around the world see and view volunteerism as important, this evidence can be used as a reference for Malaysian university students to understand volunteerism as a way of life. Thus, based on the discussion of the prior findings, this following hypothesis was proposed. Altruism has a significant positive effect on university students' commitment towards volunteerism

### Volunteering Work Across Gender, Ethnicity and Education Level

Previous studies have also reported that volunteering generally increases with educational attainment whereby those with higher levels of formal education are more likely to volunteer than others and may contribute more hours in

volunteering (Hall et al., 2009; Claxton-Oldfield et al., 2011; Wilson & Newman, 2011). Their findings advanced the idea who were employed were more likely to volunteer as compared to those who were unemployed. It is interesting to find that, based on a recent study by Kauthar MohamadKamaludin et al. (2013), gender, marital status, and education are among the demographic variables that identified as indicators of an inclination towards volunteerism. This study further supports the studies done by Zweigenhattm et al., (1996) and Lindenmeir (2008), which found that women are more likely to engage in voluntary work and are more dependable compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, it also found that those who were married and having partners, compared to single individuals, were likely to feel rushed and have lesser time to spare for other work such as volunteerism (Warburton and Crosier, 2001; Claxton- Oldfield et al., 2011).

Interestingly, in contrast to the aforementioned perspectives, some findings show that gender and race are not factors that influence volunteerism (Mohd Kasim, 2008). Moreover, there is no relationship between the income of their family and their locality (Johar, 2008) or even CGPA results with volunteerism (Mohd Yasin, 2005). It shows how the act of volunteerism goes beyond personal gain for race, gender, money, or intelligence.

In other perspectives, in terms of gender, empirical studies have found different preferences of voluntary engagement. For example, a volunteer survey conducted in Germany revealed that while male volunteers were mainly interested in recreational, job related or political engagement, female volunteers preferred activities associated with caring and helping others (Ziemek, 2005). Similarly, a volunteer survey in Austria found that the majority of male volunteers were engaged in culture, entertainment, and sports, while females were predominantly involved in social services (Badelt&Hollerweger 2001, p. 26). This finding of females' interest in caring, person to person tasks and males' interest in public political activities, has been replicated in numerous studies and is found to be stable across countries (Gaskin and Smith 1997, p. 35).

On the other hand, one's level of education found to be among the most consistent predictors for voluntary engagement (McPherson & Rotolo 1996). The significance of one's educational level for volunteer engagement varies; however, across different types of volunteer work. For example, it is particularly strong for political volunteering and insignificant for informal, community work (Omoto & Snyder 1993, Wilson 2000). One reason for this is that educated people are more likely to be asked to volunteer (Brady et al. 1999). Furthermore, education is also assumed to increase an individual's awareness of problems and to raise empathy (Wilson, 2000). A further empirical study analysing the influence of education on volunteers' motivations found that less educated people place a higher emphasis on investment motivation (Clary et al. 1996), justifying the hypothesis of decreasing investment motivation with one's educational level. Therefore, based on the above findings, the following hypotheses were proposed.

On the other hand, concerning ethnic groups, the influence of ethnic groups on volunteering, and the pattern of association varies from study to study. A review of the literature reveals several studies that have contradictory findings on volunteers. One most possible explanation on this matter is that the nature of the sample and the measure of volunteerism (Wilson, 2012). In Malaysia, the most popular ways of volunteering work among Malays is synonymous with the concept of "*gotong- royong*" or carrying together. The spirit of volunteerism among the Malays was said to embodied the community practice of '*gotong- royong*' (Uttam Singh, Sail, Abu Samah, Shah & Lumayag, 2005) which means teamwork (Gilligan, 1998). It is in contrast to a review of research literature, which indicates that the differences in ethnicity can predict volunteering and other forms of civic engagement such as voting, participating in community meetings, membership in community associations, and writing letters to the editor. However, many racial and ethnic minorities may engage in helping behaviour in more informal settings, such as helping one's neighbour or working on a community problem outside of a formal non-profit (Bey, 2008). The most likely explanation that implied is that some argued that these differences are the artefact of how various surveys measure volunteering and civic engagement. For instance, surveys on volunteering may have a certain cultural and class bias because the focus is on unpaid service in non-profit organisations. A review of the literature reveals some studies of whom volunteers, but they present inconsistently, even contradictory findings. One most possible explanation on this matter is that the nature of the sample and the measure of volunteerism (Wilson, 2012). Findings in the United States (data from the U.S. Current Population Survey) have shown that there are significant differences in volunteering work by ethnicity (Bey, 2008). It confirmed the findings from his study that Whites are much more likely than African America who was inclined to volunteer.

In contrast, Asians and Hispanics consistently appear to have low rates of volunteering work. They also seem to be much less actively engaged in their communities as compared to either Whites or Blacks. Thus based on the review of this literature, the following hypotheses were proposed.

- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between gender
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between ethnicity
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between education level

## METHODOLOGY

The information on the demographic backgrounds and the level of commitment towards volunteerism among students at the University of Malaya were surveyed and using a quantitative research strategy. A cross-sectional study and a self-administered questionnaire employed at the university. In light of the above context, the current study data were collected and gathered at a given point-in-time directly from the respondents. In that respect, this study successfully obtained feedbacks from the respondents. As shown in Table 4.1, out of 450 distributed questionnaires, 400 completed questionnaires returned, but only 375 were usable. The study conducted at the University of Malaya throughout three (3) weeks targeted undergraduates and postgraduates students. The sampling methods applied were purposive and convenience sampling, whereby the sample was chosen based on the researcher's convenience and the availability of the sample (Creswell, 2014). Besides, the study was limited to students who had a volunteering experience within or outside the University of Malaya. Therefore, only students who matched the scope of this study asked to participate in this study.

The constructs in this study were measured using Likert scales drawn from the existing study. Hence, the commitment towards volunteerism with a 7-items scale adapted with some modification from Turiman Suandi's (1991) study. For this purpose, the respondents asked to evaluate their current level of commitment towards volunteerism based on statements such as *"I would always want to participate more and more in volunteer work"* and *"I would accept almost any kind of job assignment/work in order to keep myself involved in voluntary activities"*. For altruism, this study adapted Functional theory as proposed by Clary et al. (1996). These questions measure altruism as a motive to volunteer: For this purpose, the respondents asked to evaluate their altruism level based on statements such as *"I feel satisfied to help others"* and *"I must always share what I have with people who are in need"*.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 to answer the research objectives by way of descriptive and inferential methods. The *descriptive analysis* reported the frequency and percentage used to measure and describe the respondents' demographics. The data analysis procedure is extended to *Simple Linear Regression Analysis* to generate the strength of the model and the effect of altruism on the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism. In addition to that, *Independent Sample T-Test* was used to examine differences in the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism across gender, educational attainment, and ethnicity.

**Table 1.** Response rate

Statements	Number/Frequency
Number of Questionnaires distributed	450
Number of Questionnaires returned /received	400
Response rate	88.89 percent
Number of Usable Questionnaires	375
Effective Response rate	83.3 percent

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Demographic Background of Students' Volunteering

Before illustrating the results, it is essential to discuss the respondents' background, including their gender, age, religion, education level, ethnicity, marital status, main financial support, memberships of any voluntary associations, and previous life experiences in volunteering work. Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents' gender was equally distributed. It seems that slightly more than 58.7 percent were female compared to 41.3 percent male. The table also shows that the number of females outnumbered the number of males as it reflects the ratio of female students' population at the university. The majority of the respondents, which is almost 96.3 percent were 25 years old and below, compared to 3.7 percent of 26 years old and above. A large percentage of the respondents, which is 67.2 percent were Muslims compared to 32.8 percent represented by Non-Muslims. Results also show the current academic undertaking at the university. Furthermore, the highest percentage of respondents with 85.2 percent were undergraduates, only 14.5 percent of them were postgraduates. Table 2 illustrates that Malays comprised of 62.1 percent, Chinese represented by 20.8 percent, and 7.7 percent were Indians. A large percentage of the respondents, with 92.8 percent were singles and followed by a 6.9 percent who were married.

Table 2 shows the types of main financial support at the University. The majority of them received scholarships and loans, which are 33.6 percent and 45.3 percent, respectively. Only 16.8 percent of the students were financially supported by their parents to study at the university. On the other hand, to support their studies at the university, 3.5 percent and 8 percent of the respondents used savings and others as their main financial support, respectively. The largest part of respondents at 75.5 percent were non-members of a voluntary organisation compared to the rest (24.5 percent) who becomes members of voluntary organisations. The most substantial part of them, which is 67.5 percent have less than 1-year length of involvement in volunteering activities. In contrast, there was only 32.5 percent of the respondents were involved in volunteering activities for more than a year.

**Table 2.** Summary of demographic background of students

Demographic Background of Students	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	155	41.3
Female	220	58.7
Age of respondents		
25 and below	361	96.3
26 and above	14	3.7
Religion		
Muslim	252	67.2
Non-Muslim	123	32.8
Education Level		
Undergraduates	320	85.3
Postgraduates	55	14.7
Ethnicity		
Malays	233	62.1
Chinese	78	20.8
Indian	29	7.7
Others	35	9.3
Marital Status		
Single	348	92.8
Married	26	6.9
Main Financial Support		
Scholarship	126	33.6
Loan	170	45.3
Savings	13	3.5
Parents	63	16.8
Others	3	8
Membership of Voluntary Organisations		
Member	92	24.5
Non-member	283	75.5
Years of life experience		
Less than 1 year	253	67.5
1 year and above	122	32.5

### Effect of Altruism on the Level of University Students' Commitment Towards Volunteerism

Table 3 shows the result of the regression of altruism spirit on the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism. Preliminary analyses conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of the ratio of cases to independent variables, multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals. Table 3 denotes that the model is statistically significant,  $F(4) = 96.918$ ,  $p$ -value  $p < .05$  and accounts for approximately 20.5% of the variance of 'access to information' ( $R^2 = 0.205$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.203$ ). It means that this regression model can account for 20.5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

It also noted that based on the reported results, it found that students' altruism significantly influenced the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism at  $p < .05$ . It showed that altruism appeared to have a significant effect ( $\beta = .453$ ,  $p < .05$ ) on the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism. It concluded that the students begin to learn that for the volunteering jobs, altruism is a primary interest for them, and essentially, they were eager to serve more and increase their commitment towards volunteerism without receiving any form of recognition. Therefore, hypothesis 4 supported by the regression tests.

**Table 3.** Effect of Altruism on the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism

	Level of University Students' Commitment Towards Volunteerism
Altruism	( $\beta = 0.453^*$ )
$R^2$	0.205
Adjusted $R^2$	0.203
F value	96.918

### Differences in the Level of Students' Commitment Towards Volunteerism Across Gender, Ethnicity, and Education Level

Results of the t-test analysis in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism behaviour between gender, ethnicity, and education level showcased in Table 4. In examining the influence of gender on students' commitment towards volunteerism, the Levene's test showed that all population variances are assumed to be equal at p-value greater than .05. Thus, the resulting t-value is -2.598 and it is significant as p-value is lesser than .05 ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in students' commitment towards volunteerism between male and female respondents is accepted.

Next, the differences for the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between ethnicity was also run and performed. It discovered that Levene's test showed p-value higher than .05, hence homogeneity of variances in terms of population is equal. The resulting of t-value is -1.237 and was not significant at as p-value is greater than .05 ( $p > .05$ ). Thus, there is no significant difference between the means of Malays and non-Malays students regarding their commitment towards volunteerism as the results shown in Table 4.

Lastly, in examining the influence of gender on volunteering behaviour, Levene's test showed that all group variances are assumed to be equal at p-value greater than .05. The t-value is -1.195 and was not significant at the 5 percent level of significance ( $p > .05$ ). Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in students' commitment towards volunteerism between education level is not accepted.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between gender

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between ethnicity

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant difference in the level of university students' commitment towards volunteerism between education level

**Table 4.** Results of differences in level of students 'commitment towards volunteerism across gender, ethnicity and education level using T-Test analysis

Variables	Mean	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Gender					
Male	49.8645	-2.598	375	.010 (sig)	H <sub>2</sub> is supported
Female	52.4550				
Ethnicity					
Malays	51.5214	.340	375	.734 (not sig)	H <sub>3</sub> is not supported
Non-Malays	51.1748				
Education Level					
Undergraduates	51.1460	-1.195	375	.233 (not sig)	H <sub>4</sub> is not supported
Postgraduates	52.8182				

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained for this study demonstrated that altruism found to be an important factor with the level of students' commitment towards volunteers. Therefore, a high spirit of altruism and a stronger volunteering commitment illustrated in this study. In this study, the findings appear to indicate that altruism has been the best predictor for university students' commitment towards volunteerism. Majority of the university students had perceived altruism as the main motive for them to be involved in volunteering activities. In this study, altruism defined as the act of helping another without expecting any reward. It is also prevalent to highlight that altruism as a salient aspect in volunteerism because it indicates the willingness of an individual to put aside personal interest for the sake of others (Turiman Suandi, 1991). It is similar to the study conducted by Unger (1991), which also proved the role of altruism as the primary motive for volunteering work. Consistent with these present findings, in Turkey, a study conducted on 175 youth community volunteers showed that altruism is the major factor affected volunteerism (Boz, 2007). The findings of this study were comparable with a study conducted in the United States. The study reported that the altruistic motive becomes one of the best predictors for youths volunteers (Burns et al. 2005). Also, the finding of Burns et al. (2006) further proved the role of altruism that has affected the college students for engaging in volunteering work. In England, there was a study undertaken at a national level among university students' primary reasons for volunteering. As reported by Holdsworth (2010), respondents gave both altruistic and instrumental reasons for volunteering. The findings of this study enriched our knowledge, specifically on the influence of altruism that shaped and influenced the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism. Nevertheless, our findings support the previous findings in Turkey and the United States and England. There was evidence to show that motivational values and learning interest contribute to students volunteering in most countries.

These present findings do not contradict to an earlier study carried out by Busser and Norwalk (2001), who have also reported that the most important reason for volunteering is altruistic motives. It is also proven by Carpenter & Myers (2007) who investigated the existence of an altruistic motive to volunteer. It provides evidence for an altruistic motive across many types of voluntary activity. They have found out that altruism is a key motivator in choosing to join the

volunteer fire service. Zaliha Hussin and Ramlan Mohd Arshad (2012), who demonstrated altruism as one of the main factors affecting the volunteering activities in a study conducted among youth volunteers in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, further validate the present findings. It viewed that similar findings also reported in an earlier study conducted by Turiman Suandi (1991), which he identified altruism as the best predictor which affected the level of youth volunteering in 4B organisations. The present results were also in consonance with the findings of Uttam Singh et al. (2005), who suggested that altruism was the reason for volunteering with the belief that people volunteer to help others. The substantial evidence showed that altruism is a strong factor for volunteering work, and those studies were further validated and confirmed by the results of this present study.

Meanwhile, there were studies demonstrated that altruism is not the most influential and robust predictor for volunteering activities. Shibli et al. (1999) suggested that although some participants volunteered in a strong altruistic manner, the primary reason for volunteering was not altruistic, but rather to meet the needs of the volunteer. As reported by Farmer and Fedor (2001) in a study conducted through a non-profit health advocacy organisation, this study seems to agree that the reasons for volunteering activities do not only include altruistic motives but financial motives as well. The study was not in line with Hwang's (1998) study, which indicated that the social relationship was the most effective factor in the students' volunteering motivations. It seems that different social interactions and developing social skills are some of the important and effective volunteering motivations are associated with social factors.

Further to this assertion, Han (2007) also found that the most important volunteer motives are related to egoistic factor. It is to say that majority of the respondents in Han's study who were involved in volunteering activities felt that volunteering releases the negative state of loneliness. Perhaps the most apparent explanation is that a review of literature on volunteer motivations also revealed that it is unsurprising that the reasons and motives are different depending on the characteristics of events or organisations (Bang & Ross, 2013). However, although altruism often reported as a primary motivation to volunteer, Wilson and Musick (1999) argued that serving others is mutually beneficial for the donor and recipient. The results of the current study reflect the fact that the majority of the students in Universiti Malaya had a higher level of altruism spirit in which they must give something back to society. It is, thus, apparent that the majority of the students were not selfish and always think about others and people who are in need. The results are similar to a previous national study of university students conducted in England, which found that respondents have agreed that altruism is a factor for volunteering (Holdsworth, 2010). It suggested that the majority of the university students in Malaysia and England dedicated to volunteering activities as the result of a higher level of altruism. However, this warrants further study. Perhaps, one possible explanation to this phenomenon is that altruism, or altruistic behaviours, is a particularly important form of university or college outcome. It is because when students engage in altruistic behaviours, they primarily generate benefits for society. This explanation is supported by Astin (1993 p.xiv), who noted that one of the most "exciting developments in higher education" is the increase in institutional involvement in promoting service-learning and community service. It is to say that university students are more motivated to be involved in volunteering activities as they exposed to various types of social and community services at the university. A previous study by Gronlund et al. (2011) supported the above findings. Motivational dimensions such as altruistic values and learning interest contribute to students volunteering in most countries. The study also found that students who belong to egalitarian cultures were motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons (Gronlund et al. 2011).

Next, based on the obtained findings, the present study demonstrated that gender had a significant difference in the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism. It found that in terms of the level of commitment towards volunteerism, there was more female students volunteer compared to the male students. The results were consistent with the study conducted by Rokach and Wankly (2009). Given this, demographic statistics demonstrate that a majority of the volunteer workforce consisted of women compared to men. In another study conducted at the Marion County government volunteer, which is in Ocala, Florida, US, specifically addressed in general, women seem to be more inclined to engage in volunteerism (Salas, 2008). Similar findings reported in Lindenmeir (2008) and Zweigenhattm et al. (1996) where women found to be more likely to engage in voluntary work and more dependable as compared to their male counterparts. Based on previous studies, there is a difference between males and females in the level of commitment towards volunteerism. Those results indicate and show that females are more willing to volunteer.

Earlier studies were also in parallel with these present results. Based on the Independent Sector Report (1995), it found that more women were more likely to volunteer. It suggests that the majority of the volunteers who comprised of females believed to be more committed and passionate to volunteer. Perhaps one most certain reason was female volunteers were more inclined to draw their interests on inorganized voluntary activities as an extension of their so-called feminine roles such as house cleaning, babysitting, and others. It is in agreement with considerable studies in Australia, Japan, and the United States; it suggested that gender played a role in volunteering activities (Chapman & Morley, 1999; Fletcher & Major, 2004; Brettell, 1999; Independent Sector, 1999).

However, studies by Hall et al. (2009) and Rotolo and Wilson (2007) obtained mixed results. Based on their findings, volunteerism throughout the life course often found to be performed equally by both males and females. In addition to that, it reported that Koehler and Koontz (2008) found a significant correlation between volunteering participation and gender. Consistent with previous findings, a study by Kang (2011) also demonstrated that both genders shared a similar level of commitment to volunteering work. The above studies did not uncover any significant difference between males and females in the level of commitment towards volunteerism. However, previous results of Martinez and McMullin (2004) revealed that gender not found to correlate with volunteering work. A study conducted by Simpkins, Ripke, Huston and Eccles (2005) reported demographic variables as a predictor of youth participation in several out-of-school

programmes. The results showed that there were no differences in participation based on gender and that such programmes appeal to both boys and girls. It implies that there is no discrete correlation between gender and the level of volunteerism.

Additionally, based on the obtained result, it is worth mentioning that most of the students, irrespective of their ethnic groups, had a similar level of commitment towards volunteerism. Although, among the ethnic groups, the Chinese showed a slightly lower mean in the level of commitment towards volunteerism compared to other ethnic groups such as the Malays and the Indians. In a multi-ethnic society like Malaysia, volunteering promotes and facilitates cultural understanding and tolerance when volunteer programmes cut across ethnic groups (Surjit Singh et al. 2005). It is in line with the multivariate analyses as reported by Laurence's (2009) study where it had found that there was no ethnic groups' difference for volunteering among the volunteers. It can agree that those volunteers from different ethnic groups had and posed a similar inclination to volunteer. Based on the present results, no differences in terms of students' level of commitment to volunteering activities. It understood that it would be a good starting point and a challenge for universities to provide further activities to encourage and guide students to be involved in volunteerism besides instilling the volunteering spirit across ethnic groups.

The present results are inconsistent with the reported situation in western countries. By contrast, findings in the United States (data from the U.S. Current Population Survey) have shown that there are strong differences in volunteering work by ethnicity (Bey, 2008). It confirmed by findings from his study that Whites are much more likely to volunteer than African America. In contrast, Asians and Hispanics consistently appear to have low rates of volunteering work. They also seem to be much less actively engaged in their communities as compared to whites or blacks. These results suggested that in the western countries, ethnic groups have influenced the inclination on volunteering work or activities, particularly in the US. This western perspective also was supported by the previous Independent Sector Report (1995) as cited by Musick et al. (2000), where it found that more whites were more likely to volunteer, and this pattern shows similar results with those study conducted by Bey (2008). This result also appears to be validated by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), where whites continued to volunteer at a higher rate than others.

The last demographic factor is between education level with the level of students' commitment towards volunteerism. The finding indicated that education attainment had to do with the commitment of the volunteers. Predictably, these current findings are in agreement with considerable studies, which suggested that education levels played a role in the level of volunteering work. The current results appear to be inconsistent with a study by Hsieh (2000) in which demographics characteristic such as education is the best anticipator factor that accounts for volunteer commitment. It is also supported and claimed as important and feasible factor for volunteering work by Huang, Maassen van den Brink & Groot (2009). It was observed by Brand (2010) that college achievement has a significant impact on volunteering among students compared with those who have not completed college. Hence, it implies that education level attainment further warrants a stronger inclination to volunteer. Similar to these present findings, previous findings conducted by Wilson (2000) showed a positive link demonstrated between the levels of education and volunteering.

More importantly, a similar level of the agreement also found in earlier studies of McPherson and Rotolo (1996), Mesch et al. (2006) & Sundeen and Raskoff (1994), which suggested that education level is one of the most consistent predictors of volunteerism. One likely explanation from the above considerable findings was education improves the levels of empathy and also increases the awareness of civic issues (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995; Rosenthal, Feiring, & Lewis, 1998). Furthermore, it observed that the possible explanation concerning the phenomenon was the connection is particularly salient among political volunteering and AIDS-related volunteering, but not when it comes to informal community volunteering positions (Omoto & Snyder, 1993).

A more recent study by Sharififar et al. (2011) was also in tandem with the results of the current study, which demonstrated that education attainment was vital on volunteers' commitment. Previous studies have also reported that volunteering generally increases with educational attainment where those with higher levels of formal education are more likely to volunteer than others and may contribute more hours in volunteering (Hall et al. 2009; Claxton-Oldfield et al. 2011; Wilson & Newman, 2011). It was also consistent with the US Department of Labour's finding that persons with higher educational attainment levels volunteered at higher rates than did those with less education. In contrast, a further empirical study analysing the influence of education on volunteers' motivations found that less educated people place a higher emphasis on investment motivation (Clary et al. 1996), justifying the hypothesis of decreasing investment motivation with educational level. Perhaps, the probable explanation behind this phenomenon is due to the reasons that in the US, more educated people do less volunteering work as reported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016). Moreover, the results were due to volunteering is a noble job across one's level of education. It shows how the act of volunteerism goes beyond personal gain for education level. Perhaps, this explanation warrants further studies conducted. However, these results did not support the present study's findings.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings obtained in this study demonstrated the wide-ranging characteristics of the volunteers at the University of Malaya. The composition of the respondents equally distributed between male and female volunteers. The majority of the respondents were undergraduates and Malays. The results indicated that only the gender of respondents found to be significantly different in terms of their volunteering commitment. However, it discovered that no differences in terms of ethnicity and education level of the students' level of commitment towards volunteerism. Moreover, it found that the students' altruism spirit indicated to be influencing their level of commitment towards volunteerism. It further reflects



the fact that the majority of the students in UM had a higher level of altruism spirit as in giving back to society and engaging in volunteering work.

Firstly, more research should be direct to uncover various factors affecting the level of students' volunteerism. This current research only employed demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and education level. Apart from that, the effect of altruism on the level of students' commitment to volunteering was run and indicated. There are many predictors and factors which have been addressed by previous studies that employed in measuring correlations.

Moreover, a substantial amount of research should conduct throughout universities in Malaysia. This current research only covered one particular public university, which is the University of Malaya. It was due to the limitation of time, and covering other public universities would be a massive undertaking. More comparative studies which include several public universities would enhance and confirm the present results. Lastly, the present study is a cross-sectional study, and it is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies on examining the volunteering work commitment in Malaysia.

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