

# Students and Voluntary Services: A Case of Dhaka University

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the attitude of Dhaka University students towards voluntary services on campus and across the country. In addition, it explores the possible reasons that avert the students to participate more in voluntary activities. This paper uses close-ended survey questionnaires and distributed survey forms to one hundred residential and non-residential students of Dhaka University. This paper argues that the humanitarian approach, status and prestige in the campus and community, effective use of spare time, and work experience are the essential motivating factors of volunteering. Furthermore, to make curriculum vitae (CV) attractive, religious beliefs and responsibility to the community are also the catalysts of voluntary services at the Dhaka University campus. However, favoritism, engagement in social media, politics in the voluntary organizations, and Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination trend are the significant causes that impede students from participating in voluntary services.*

**Keywords:** Students, Voluntary services, Attitude, Motivation, Obstacles, Dhaka University.

## 1. Introduction:

Scholars argued that state capacity has decreased to provide political, economic, and other social services to the masses due to rapid globalization. Heywood wrote that some theorists have boldly proclaimed the emergence of ‘post-sovereign governance’, suggesting that the decline of the state inevitably marks the rise of globalization as a meaningful actor. (Heywood, 2011, 2014; Jackson and Sorenson (2013). As a result, thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and voluntary organizations have emerged to serve the needy people. Volunteering has become an essential part of our education and social security sector for a better society. Millions of people worldwide participate in voluntary services to contribute their merit and energy to make a more skillful and happy nation. To improve their lives, volunteers and voluntary organizations take flexible and persuasive programs. According to Finlay, the burden of governments in providing people with access to development has ceased by their agendas (Finlay, 2005).

In Bangladesh, thousands of students are involved in voluntary organizations and services for a better community. It is considered that Dhaka University is the ‘cultural hub’ of Bangladesh. For example, in every national fest, such as in ‘Pahela Boishakh’ (The first day of the Bangla calendar), Hundreds of students participate in voluntary services. Therefore, it is conceivable that the students of Dhaka University are more dedicated to voluntary service than any other university student in the country. Hundreds of students expand their hands to the destitute people during the national crisis, such as heavy floods, cyclones, storms, earthquakes, and other problems. They provide mental and material support to the affected people. In addition, volunteers campaign on campus and across the country to raise social awareness against rape and other social injustice against girls and women. In the last couple of years, hundreds of students have been sent to peripheral areas of Bangladesh to protect against injustice like dowry, and torture. In addition, students talked with people about the destructive impacts of drug addiction, early marriage, and poverty on individual and societal, and national levels.

Volunteering can improve students’ academic and personal skill development and sense of civic responsibility and explore career choices and employability after graduation (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). Therefore, voluntary service is urgent for the students and the nation. To make volunteering a routine and habitual work, we must come forward to encourage university students.

## 3. Research Methodology:

This study has been conducted based on closed-ended survey questions. This paper takes an exploratory research method that pursues both quantitative and qualitative data. This study includes one hundred participants. The respondents were undergraduate students pursuing bachelor's degrees from different faculties at the University of Dhaka. The questionnaires were distributed to the twenty dormitories, including both males and females on the campus. In addition, some students were also included in the study who do not stay in dormitories and come from their houses from different parts of Dhaka city and the nearest districts. All respondents were selected based on a random selection process. However, this study excludes its affiliated colleges’ students, especially the seven affiliated colleges of Dhaka University, because it is problematic to identify the significant number of voluntary services in their respective college campuses that are separate from each other.

### 1.3 Research Questions:

This paper is the outcome of several questions. To conduct this research, we identified some specific questions. Based on these questions, we have analyzed data to discover the result. The questions were:

- ❖ What are the perceptions of Dhaka University students toward voluntary organizations and services?
- ❖ What factors motivate the students to take part in volunteering?
- ❖ Do teachers and University authorities inspire students for voluntary services?
- ❖ What are the main obstacles to involve in voluntary services at the Dhaka University campus?

### 1.1 Aims and Objectives of this Study:

This study aims to disclose the attitude of Dhaka University's students toward voluntary services and organizations. This paper focuses on the student's participation level in voluntary services. It evaluates the motivating factors that inspire students to be volunteers. In addition, it will explore the University's academic environment and infrastructural facilities to be a member of voluntary organizations and services and incentives from university authorities and course teachers. To examine the cost-benefit of volunteering, this paper will explore students' perceptions of being a volunteer. Finally, it will highlight the obstacles that demotivated the students to participate in voluntary services and organizations.

### 1.2 Importance of the Study:

This study is essential for many reasons: It is considered that university students and voluntary services are integral parts of student life. Voluntary services promote 'social capital', which is urgent for a democratic mind and a pluralistic society. Secondly, no research has been conducted on the student's perception of the voluntary services and organizations at the Dhaka University campus. In this sense, urgent but necessary research has to be conducted to examine the attitudes of Dhaka University's students toward voluntary services. Therefore, for the first time, this paper will try to disclose the attitude, inspiration, and obstacles to the voluntary services of the Dhaka University Students. It explores the overall picture of volunteering on the campus. Third, this research is important because it will assist policymakers, university administrators, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing training opportunities to students on the Dhaka University campus and throughout the country. Finally, it might be helpful for the other public and private universities to inspire students to indulge in voluntary services and organizations to serve the nation in critical and optimistic situations.

## 2. Literature Review:

A significant number of researchers have addressed this issue to identify the benefits and the barriers of voluntary services. Researchers have conducted studies for a specific university, regional, and international levels of volunteering among university-going students. Reem Abuiyada conducted research for a specific university. Those studies aimed to explore the university students' attitude towards voluntary services in the Sultanate of Oman and identify the obstacles preventing them from participating in voluntary services. His studies found that altruistic motivations are most commonly cited as reasons to volunteer among the students at Dhofar University. In addition, promoting national affiliation, proper use of spare time, and gaining work experience are also important motivating factors. Students wanted their volunteering to make a difference, and some preferred to select activities that allowed them to see more impacts (Abuiyada, 2018).

On the other hand, many scholars have conducted considerable research on voluntary and community services at the international and regional levels. Flanagan and others have conducted a comparative study among seven countries. The study's objectives were to explore the nature and attitude of students' participation in voluntary and community services in the country. They found that the rate of students volunteering varies from country to country. Australia (28%), the United States (51%), Sweden (19.9%), Hungary (60.4%), the Czech Republic (46.3%), Bulgaria (42.2%), and Russia (23.4%) were the countries with the highest percentages of voluntary and community service (Flanagan and others, 1999).

Butt and others (2015) studied volunteering in Pakistan. They found that people are not very familiar with volunteering or formal volunteering. In contrast, they think they have time and fewer commitments and want to volunteer. In most cases, people are more interested in medical or other educational institutions' centric volunteering than other areas.

15% of general British students from four universities were involved in voluntary work, 7% organized through their university, and 11% organized in another way, a study revealed by Holdsworth and Quinn (2010). On the other hand, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the US Department of State, volunteering was more common among people with a greater degree of education than those with a lower level of education. 38.8% of college graduates with a bachelor's degree or above

volunteered. Among individuals aged 25 and over, 26.5 percent have some college or an associate's degree, 15.6 percent have a high school diploma, and 8.1 percent have less than a high school diploma. (BLS, 2016).

Many students from schools, colleges, and universities participate in voluntary and community service in Bangladesh, motivated by various factors. Under the ministry of planning, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted a survey on voluntarism in Bangladesh to examine the youth's perception of voluntary services. The main aim of the survey was to find out and assess the state of volunteering in the country. The BBS report reveals the bitter truth about students' attitudes toward volunteering. In the education sector, voluntarism was nearly 40.7 percent, meaning that all volunteers reported having no formal education.

On the other hand, those with primary education are 21.3 percent compared to 7.1 percent with secondary level education and 5.0 percent with higher secondary level education. Graduate and post-graduate volunteers are 3.5 percent and 2.7 percent, respectively (BBS, 2011). This report shows us how many university Students' are involved in volunteering in Bangladesh. Although many students of Dhaka University take part in voluntary services such as 'Badhon', a blood collection and donation group, Debating society, an environmental protection group, and so forth. Still, no research has been conducted at Dhaka university to examine the students' attitudes toward voluntary services.

#### **4. Understanding Voluntary Services:**

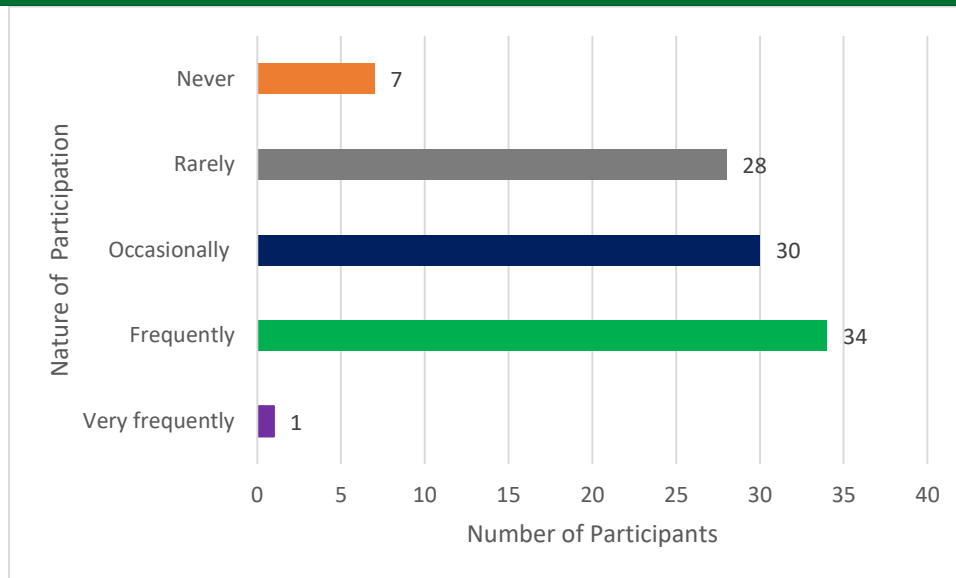
There are many different definitions of precisely what 'voluntary service' is frequently used in social science literature. Therefore, experts and activists in this arena have defined voluntary services based on their understanding. Wilson defined volunteering is an altruistic activity in which an individual or a group performs services "to benefit another person, group, or organization" for no financial or social gain. (Wilson, 2000). It emphasizes willing services based on humanitarian approaches to help other people, groups, or organizations. Anheier (2005) refers to volunteering as individuals who give their time to help others without compulsion and for no monetary pay. However, when such activity occurs within a voluntary organization, it is often referred to as formal volunteering (Milligan and Conradson et al. 2006). Without structure, it can be seen as informal volunteering.

Respondents were asked to define voluntary services, and in their responses, they answered different ways. Some respondents emphasized willingness and without remuneration activities. In contrast, some respondents have taken into account attitudes toward social welfare. The essential characteristics of respondents' definitions of voluntary services can be summarized as follows:

- *Willingness participation or participation by own motivation;*
- *No remuneration of services; Humanitarian attitude;*
- *To help needy people or others;*
- *To improve social well-being;*
- *For self-development; and*
- *Absence of discrimination against a particular group or religion.*

#### **5. Findings of the Study:**

The study shows that students' participation in volunteering among undergraduate students is divergent. The data finds that the involvement of students in voluntary services very frequently was abysmal (1%). In contrast, more than one-third (34%) of students of Dhaka University frequently participate in voluntary services. According to the survey, slightly larger than a quartile (30% and 28%) of students adopted occasional and rare voluntary services, respectively. Only less than ten percent (7%) of participants expressed that they did not participate in any voluntary services.



**Figure-1:** Students' participation in volunteering

Then what are the motivating factors of voluntary services at Dhaka University Campus? The table below shows us the motivational factors of volunteering at the University of Dhaka. Religious belief is the most insignificant motivation factor for voluntary services among the students. A large share of participants (57%) considered that the humanitarian attitude attracted them to volunteer. Around a quartile of students participate in voluntary services to acquire work experience.

Nevertheless, most respondents disagreed with the familiar concept 'student participation in voluntary services for prestige and status in the campus and community'. A very few students (4%) supported that idea. On the other hand, around a quarter, the students think they participate in voluntary services to use time effectively.

**Table-1:** Motivating factors of Voluntary Services

Motivating Factors	Percentage
Humanitarian approach	57
Effective use of spare time	13
Status and prestige on the campus and in the community	4
Acquisition of work experience	24
Religious belief	2
Total	100

This paper investigates the teachers' role in voluntary services. The survey reveals the teachers' role in pursuing volunteering among the students at Dhaka University. Teachers played a significant role in building an attitude toward social services and our responsibility to the nation in campus life. To be responsible citizens, teachers guide students in the classroom and vice versa. Overall, this table shows us that the most significant number of students (34.3%) thought that their teachers rarely motivated them to be involved in voluntary services.

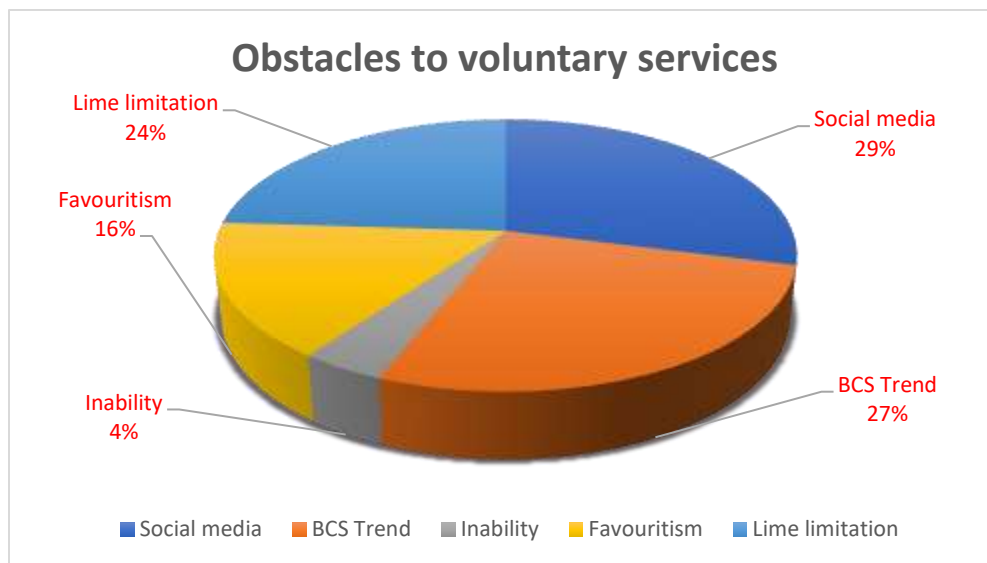
In contrast, less than a quarter of students agreed that their class teachers always motivate them to be volunteers. On the other hand, a quarter of respondents said their teachers frequently invite them to join any voluntary clubs. Slightly less than a quartile of participants assumed that their course teachers sometimes provoke them to participate in voluntary services.

**Table-2:** Teachers' role in motivating students in volunteering

Variable	percentage
Always	12.1
Most of the time	25.3
Some of the time	23.2
Rarely	34.3
Never	5.1

Limitations and obstacles are the main problems of voluntary services worldwide, and Bangladesh is not an exceptional case. This pie chart below illustrates the barriers to the voluntary services of Dhaka University students. Respondents were asked to identify the obstacles to volunteering in their campus life. This pie chart shows that most participants prefer social media as the main obstacle to volunteering at Dhaka University students. Twenty-seven percent, slightly larger than a quartile, conveyed that the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination is the second chief obstacle to participating in voluntary services.

On the other hand, twenty-four percent of respondents agreed that the time limitation of students resists them toward the voluntary services. Finally, some respondents believe that bias in volunteer organizations has demotivated them from volunteering. Only a tiny portion depicts students' incapability as another reason for less volunteering on the campus.



**Figure-2:** Obstacle to Voluntary Services:

**Table-3:** Politics in Voluntary Organizations and Services

Factor	Opinions (In Percentage)				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
Politics reduces student's participation	18.1%	47.5%	19.2%	15.2%	No comment

Other obstacles to voluntary activities at the Dhaka University campus include the presence of politics in the voluntary organizations and the environment of the campus premises. The survey demonstrates the attitude of respondents about politics as a barrier to voluntary services. Overall, nearly fifty percent of participants agreed that politics curbs the participation of students in voluntary services. In contrast, around twenty percent reported that politics is not the problem for volunteering at the University of

Dhaka. Approximately 18% expressed that they strongly agree that politics is the barrier for non-affiliated students to the voluntary services. In conclusion, most of the students of Dhaka University thought politics could be seen as a problem for the voluntary services on the campus.

Regarding campus environment, more than half of the respondents adopted 'good' as an option for Dhaka University's environment and facilities for voluntary services. Slightly slower than the fifteen percent of participants who thought the environment of Dhaka University is not good and poor, respectively. On the other hand, ten percent of the student said Dhaka university maintains an excellent environment for volunteering. Nearly Ten percent reported that the environment for voluntary services is awful.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion:**

This study examined the students' voluntary services at the University of Dhaka. In addition, this study has been carried out to explore the enthusiasms and barriers toward voluntary services. The study found low motivations for volunteering among the students of Dhaka University. Although frequent voluntary services are more popular, occasional and rarely participation combinedly occurred in 64 percent, the most considerable portion among the University students. Interestingly, nearly thirty percent of respondents agree that the voluntary services at the University of Dhaka are decreasing. In contrast, an equal number of respondents disagreed with the above statement.

This study also confirms that most of the students of Dhaka University appreciate volunteering. Inspiring for several reasons, students involve involuntary services. The humanitarian approach is the most common casus of volunteering among Dhaka University students. Students think, as human beings, we have some rights and responsibilities to society, communities, and as well as to nations. The human being finds happiness when some living organism receives benefits from him or her, commonly known as Rawls's utilitarianism (Heywood, 2014). This altruistic attitude inspires the student to get involved in voluntary services. Other important reasons are the acquisition of work experience and effective use of spare time. Many students consider that work experience in student life is significant to getting a better job and a better career. This attitude motivates students to volunteer and participates more in voluntary organizations and services.

This study suggested many credible arguments against voluntary services among Dhaka University students. In the age of globalization, students have great opportunities to use digital technologies and communication mediums for various purposes. Using these mediums can easily communicate with family members, friends, and relatives. Fixing class schedules, reading journal papers, visiting websites, and using other digital resources like Facebook and YouTube all have substantial positive and harmful effects on students' everyday life. As a result, the languor of students has increased by many folds than the traditional system of communication. In many cases, students expense much time on social media without any critical reason. This way, students failed to find out their time for voluntary services.

Furthermore, bias among volunteer organizations for posts demotivated students from participating in volunteer work. President and secretary positions in many voluntary organizations at Dhaka University are selected based on political affiliation and favoritism policies. As a result, active and enthusiastic workers and members feel alienated and lose their interest in the organizations and voluntary services.

Tendency towards the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination and the time limitation inspire students to abstain from voluntary services. In recent years, the tendency toward government jobs, particularly the BCS examination, has become more attractive among university students. This paper does not examine the reasons of BCS examinations for being a more prestigious job among the students. However, becoming a cadre of Bangladesh civil services students started their job preparation in the second or third year of academic life. As a result, they emphasize that studying job-related books and expensing time on voluntary services is less valuable and wasting time, they think. These unexpected but bitter truths abstain from voluntary services at the University of Dhaka.

Finally, this study unfolds the campus environment and the initiatives of teachers and authorities to inspire students to volunteer. Although University teachers have a moral duty to motivate students to volunteer, this study found that University teachers rarely encourage students to participate in voluntary services in and outside of classrooms. In addition, the government did not take any initiative such as seminars, symposiums, and conferences to increase voluntary services among the students of Dhaka University. They are indifferent to volunteering among the youth and university students.



## 7. Recommendations:

Voluntary services and volunteering can create social awareness, social responsibility, and a pluralistic society. Social capital can be increased through voluntary services necessary for a democratic mind and a democratic society (Putnam, 2000, Mohan and Mohan, 2002). In addition, through participation in voluntary services, students can achieve leadership training and working procedures to help them manage a big mission in real life. To augment more voluntary services among the students of Dhaka University, this paper suggests some specific points to down

- a) University authorities must take some initiatives to volunteer among the students and provide incentives such as certificates, books, and crests for participants.
- b) Teachers could inspire students to participate in voluntary services based on various values.
- c) Obstacles to the voluntary services and organizations must be mitigated
- d) Politics in the voluntary services should be banned, and the hierarchy system must be distributed based on the performance of the organization members.
- e) A safe and environment-friendly campus must be ensured for students to participate in voluntary services
- f) Training facilities might be increased
- g) Ethics, moral values, and humanitarian approaches could be added to the curricula to boost volunteering at the University of Dhaka.

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