Volunteer Management Practices in Youth Volunteerism: Evidence from East Coast Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Volunteerism is defined as an activity carried out voluntarily, without expecting material rewards, and which brings benefits to both the volunteer and the individuals receiving assistance. Modernization and globalization have reshaped the landscape of volunteerism, making it an increasingly significant component of community and national development agendas. However, the issue of declining participation and inactivity among youth in volunteer activities has become a major challenge for volunteer organizations. This is because volunteers are the backbone that drives the operations and activities of the voluntary sector. Therefore, this issue must be addressed, particularly by volunteer organizations, to ensure that the human resources needed to sustain volunteer initiatives remain available and ready to serve. Accordingly, this study aims to examine management practices and their relationship to volunteer retention in volunteering activities. This research adopts a quantitative approach involving 300 youths who have participated in volunteer activities across the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia (Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang). A survey method using structured questionnaires was administered to respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using SPSS software. The findings revealed that volunteer organizations demonstrate effective leadership and strong program planning in sustaining volunteers. However, the training and development component showed comparatively lower mean values. This indicates that volunteer organizations place less emphasis on volunteer training and development. The results are expected to serve as an important indicator for volunteer organizations in developing effective management process to retain volunteers over the long term.

Keywords: Volunteerism, Youth Volunteers, Volunteer Retention, Volunteer Management Practices

INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism is widely recognised as an essential catalyst for social harmony, community resilience and national development. Among young people, participation in volunteer activities offers opportunities to develop interpersonal and leadership skills, strengthen employability, enhance civic-mindedness and contribute meaningfully to societal well-being. In recent years, the significance and contribution of the volunteerism sector have become increasingly evident, particularly within the broader agenda of community development and nation-building. Various efforts ranging from government initiatives to programmes by private organisations and non-profit bodies have been implemented to elevate the visibility and importance of volunteerism. This increased attention reflects the growing belief that volunteerism serves as an effective platform for developing high-quality human capital capable of thriving in a competitive and globalised environment (Mohd Nor et al., 2018).

Despite its importance, the landscape of volunteerism has undergone considerable transformation due to rapid modernisation and globalisation. Digitalisation, shifting youth lifestyles and the dynamic labour market have reshaped the motivations, preferences and commitments of young volunteers. These changes have introduced new challenges, particularly in sustaining consistent engagement. Numerous studies highlight issues such as irregular participation, high dropout rates and the tendency among youth to engage in "one-off" volunteer

activities rather than committing long-term. These patterns threaten the continuity of volunteer-driven initiatives and place pressure on organisations to maintain a stable pool of volunteers.

Against this backdrop, the internal capacity and organisational readiness of volunteer organisations emerge as critical determinants of volunteer sustainability. Volunteer management today extends beyond administrative coordination, it encompasses strategic functions such as planning, recruitment, training, supervision, communication, recognition and performance evaluation. Effective management practices have been shown to influence volunteer satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention especially among younger volunteers who seek meaningful, well-structured and supportive experiences.

Given these developments, this study aims to examine the volunteer management practices implemented within volunteer organisations, analyse the relationship between management practices and youth volunteer retention, and propose strategies to strengthen long-term engagement through effective volunteer management. By focusing on youth volunteers in the Malaysian context, the study contributes to addressing a notable gap in existing literature, which has traditionally emphasised volunteer motivations but paid less attention to organisational practices that sustain commitment. The findings of this study are expected to provide evidence-based insights for volunteer organisations, educational institutions and policymakers in designing more holistic and sustainable volunteer management systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Volunteerism Concept

Volunteering refers to the act of performing an action with the aim of assisting a particular individual or group, done voluntarily without the involvement of coercion from any party, not involving any form of payment or purpose to obtain a material reward, an activity that is carried out individually or collectively, carried out formally or informally (Noh et al., 2023). The fundamental concept of volunteerism is anchored in three key elements: activities carried out voluntarily without coercion, activities undertaken without the intention of receiving material rewards or compensation, and activities that generate benefits for both the volunteer and the individuals being assisted. Volunteerism is a global issue that continues to gain significant attention due to its importance to individuals, communities and nations. The contributions of volunteerism to individuals can be observed through self-development, career development and social development. At the community level, participation in volunteer activities helps to strengthen and empower communities, enhance social integration, build trust and strong social bonds, improve community health and well-being, cultivate active and positive citizens, develop high-quality social capital, reduce social problems and crime, and promote social inclusion programmed for marginalized groups. Beyond individual and community development, volunteerism also contributes to national development by fostering a strong and progressive nation-state and supporting the formation of democratic societies (Ismail et al, 2024).

Youth and Volunteerism

Youth volunteerism refers to the voluntary participation of young individuals in activities that benefit communities, organisations or target groups without expecting material rewards. It is widely associated with the development of civic responsibility, personal growth and social cohesion. In the context of national development, youth volunteerism contributes to strengthening social capital, fostering community resilience and creating collective responsibility among future leaders. In Malaysia, youth volunteerism is increasingly integrated into policies such as the National Youth Development Policy, higher education community engagement agendas and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These frameworks position volunteerism as a strategic mechanism for cultivating responsible, empathetic and skilled youth. However, despite these initiatives, research consistently shows that youth participation remains inconsistent. Many young people engage in volunteer activities only during specific events or university programmes, resulting in limited long-term commitment (Thomas & Siti Hajar, 2024). Although interest in volunteering is relatively high among youth, sustaining their involvement is challenging. Modernisation, digital lifestyles and changing social dynamics have reshaped volunteers' expectations and motivations.

Findings from several researchers indicate that youth are less active in volunteer activities due to the presence of specific barriers. According to Normah et al., (2022), there are three categories of barriers that hinder youth from participating actively in volunteerism: intrapersonal barriers, interpersonal barriers, and structural barriers. Findings from Normah et al. (2022) similarly show that the primary barrier limiting youth involvement in volunteer activities is structural barriers. Structural barriers refer to constraints arising from uncontrollable circumstances such as high academic or work commitments, distant locations, lack of transportation, ineffective organisational management, and other logistical challenges. In addition, interpersonal barriers, such as the absence of encouragement and support from close individuals and negative perceptions toward volunteerism, also reduce youth participation in volunteer activities. Furthermore, intrapersonal barriers including feelings of laziness, poor health conditions, lack of interest, limited skills and other personal factors also influence the extent of youth involvement in volunteerism.

Retention of Youth Volunteers in Volunteer Activities

Volunteer retention is one of the major issues in the field of volunteerism. Volunteer organisations frequently face challenges in sustaining volunteers over a long period of time (Faletehan et al., 2021). According to Rodrigue (2010), most of youth volunteers tend to participate in volunteer activities episodically or only occasionally due to their various commitments. Their involvement largely depends on the availability of free time. In addition, the issue of retaining youth volunteers is also associated with elements of coercion. Many educational systems today aim to instil volunteerism at an early age, particularly at the school level. However, this cultivation process sometimes occurs through coercive means, where schools or higher education institutions (HEIs) require students to participate in volunteer activities. For example, in HEIs, policies often mandate students to engage in community work as part of graduation requirements. The imposition of coercion affects volunteer retention because such involvement contradicts the core principle of volunteerism, which emphasises genuine, voluntary participation without external pressure.

Beyond coercion, the retention of student volunteers is also influenced by motivational factors and the perceived benefits of volunteering. Robinson et al. (2021) reported that volunteers driven by altruistic motivations tend to show higher commitment with involvement rooted in helping relationships and social justice. This means that altruistically motivated volunteers are likely to remain in volunteer activities regardless of whether they receive personal benefits. Conversely, volunteers motivated by egoistic motives remain only if their personal needs are met, and they may discontinue involvement if the activity no longer aligns with their personal goals or interests (Windon et al., 2022). The effort to retain student volunteers is therefore not an easy task. Nevertheless, several strategies have been identified to sustain the continued engagement of student volunteers in volunteer activities:

i. Offering activities or programmes aligned with the motivations and needs of student volunteers

ii. Providing recognition appreciation and incentive for the contributions made by youth volunteer

iii. Ensuring availability of resources, quality training, counselling and continuous supervision

iv. Creating a positive culture of volunteerism and strengthening organisational management and leadership

v. Providing activities that are challenging, enjoyable and personally fulfilling

vi. Offering continuous learning, skills development and relevant experiences

vii. Providing opportunities, autonomy and rights for student volunteers to share ideas and participate in decision-making processes

viii. Avoiding excessive workload and undue pressure on student volunteer

ix. Adapting to changes in student lifestyle such as offering short-term programmes and integrating information technology.

x.   Providing realistic and diverse volunteer roles

Management Practice in Volunteerism

Volunteer management is an essential element within the volunteerism sector, encompassing a wide scope of systematic administrative processes beginning from the point an individual is recruited as a volunteer until the time they either leave or continue serving within the organisation. Efficient volunteer management enables organisations to recruit new volunteers more effectively while also retaining existing volunteers over the long term. There are six effective volunteer management practices that support the long-term retention of volunteers.

Needs Assessment

At the initial stage, organisations must conduct a needs assessment (Azizan, 2016). This assessment is essential to ensure that the targeted group or only qualified individuals are selected to fulfil the mission of the organisation (Woodard et a., 2001). For example, organisations need to identify the number of volunteers required, determine the tasks to be carried out, and specify the skills needed. Clarity regarding organisational needs is crucial as it helps save time and costs, considering that the recruitment process often demands substantial time and financial resources. Therefore, to minimise recruitment costs, organisations should implement proper screening and selection procedures to ensure that only suitable and competent volunteers are chosen. Organisations should also cultivate or instil altruistic values among potential volunteers to encourage long-term commitment. This is important to reduce organisational expenditure, as constantly replacing volunteers can be costly and disruptive.

Volunteer Recruitment

The decline in the number of volunteers has become a significant challenge for organisations, requiring them to design effective, appropriate and systematic plans and strategies for recruiting volunteers. Volunteer organisations often face difficulties attracting individuals to participate in volunteer activities (Kaur et al., 2022). These challenges in securing volunteers necessitate proper screening and selection processes to ensure that only qualified individuals are recruited. Effective recruitment is essential because volunteers are the driving force behind the success of any volunteer organisation. An efficient recruitment process may also help reduce organisational costs. There are several strategies that organisations can implement to encourage individuals to participate in volunteerism, such as developing attractive campaigns and promotional materials, meeting the needs and interests of potential volunteers, leveraging social influence and peer encouragement, ensuring appropriate and appealing recruitment approaches, offering meaningful positions and roles, addressing barriers that hinder participation and utilising technology and digital platforms to reach wider audiences (Oprea & Niculescu, 2025).

Organisational Support for Volunteers

Organisational support is essential, particularly for individuals who are newly involved in volunteer activities. Support provided by the organisation helps create a sense of comfort among volunteers and subsequently fosters enthusiasm and motivation for them to remain engaged in volunteerism for the long term (Ngah et al., 2021). According to the authors, organisational support can be observed through the organisation's attentiveness to volunteers' needs, concerns and complaints throughout their involvement in volunteer activities. The absence of organisational support may have negative implications for volunteers and can indirectly affect the quality of services delivered (Oprea & Niculescu, 2025).

Basic Orientation and Training for Volunteers

Basic exposure to volunteerism is a crucial aspect that must be instilled in every volunteer within an organisation. This initial exposure may be delivered through briefings, short courses, seminars, training sessions or induction programmes, especially for new volunteers (Kaur et al., 2022). Such exposure is important to enable volunteers to understand fundamental aspects of volunteerism, including the scope of

work, organisational goals, target groups, stakeholders involved, expectations and performance objectives, challenges encountered in volunteer activities, essential principles and attitudes, volunteer rights and other related matters. The implementation of effective, continuous and robust training programmes helps develop volunteers' skills, enables them to perform their tasks and roles effectively, equips them to face various challenges, enhances the relationship between volunteers and the organisation, and contributes positively to the organisation's image and performance (Oprea & Niculescu, 2025). Training and induction therefore serve as meaningful learning processes for volunteers.

Planning of Volunteer Tasks and Activities

Planning is a fundamental element of effective volunteer management and must be carried out across various aspects, including the roles and responsibilities of volunteers as well as the volunteer activities to be implemented (Kaur et al., 2022). Volunteer programmes require careful and efficient planning because many volunteer organisations struggle to design effective programmes while simultaneously addressing volunteer needs. To retain volunteers in the long term, organisations must assign tasks that are realistic and aligned with volunteers' abilities and skill sets. Most volunteers prefer tasks that allow them to apply their existing knowledge and competencies. Organisations should avoid assigning excessive workloads that may lead to stress and tension among volunteers. Inappropriate task assignments may cause volunteers to perform their duties reluctantly. Coercion in volunteerism is an unhealthy practice with negative implications, as it reduces productivity and contradicts the fundamental principle of voluntary engagement.

Developing a Positive Organisational Culture

Organisations hold the responsibility of cultivating a positive organisational culture and climate to create a sense of comfort and belonging among volunteers (Woods, 2006). A positive culture helps build volunteer trust towards the organisation, encourages commitment and motivation, and supports long-term volunteer retention. There are several ways organisations can create such a positive climate such as recognising and rewarding volunteers, providing autonomy in completing tasks, addressing conflicts among volunteers, ensuring effective leadership in volunteer management and offering opportunities for lifelong learning and continuous development. A strong and positive organisational culture has the potential to influence volunteers to continue serving within the organisation for an extended period (Oprea & Niculescu, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between volunteer management practices and youth retention in volunteerism. This design is appropriate for exploring perceptions, identifying patterns and determining associations between variables at a single point in time. The target population of this study consists of youths aged 15 to 30 years who have experience participating in volunteer activities in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang. A total of 300 youth volunteers were selected using simple random sampling, ensuring that respondents represent various volunteer organizations. The data was analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistical analyses in the form of percentages and mean scores.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents

The sample consisted of 157 female respondents (52.3%) and 143 male respondents (47.7%), indicating a relatively balanced gender composition with a slight predominance of female volunteers. The findings of the study show that most respondents were youths aged between 20 and 29 years (40%), followed by those below 20 years old (27.7%). The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with a slightly higher proportion of female respondents (52.3%) compared to males (47.7%). In terms of educational background, most respondents held SPM and diploma qualifications, while a smaller proportion possessed bachelor's degrees and higher academic credentials. The ethnic and religious composition of the sample was predominantly

Malay (95%) and Muslim (94%), reflecting the general demographic structure of the East Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia.

From a socioeconomic perspective, almost half of the respondents reported having no monthly income (47.7%), which aligns with the large number of students in the sample. The remaining respondents comprised full-time workers (40.7%), part-time workers and unemployed individuals. Most respondents also reported having good health (91.7%), with only a small proportion consisting of persons with disabilities or those experiencing health issues. Marital status further indicated a typical youth demographic profile, with the majority being single (66.3%), followed by married individuals (31.3%) and a small percentage who were divorced (2.3%).

Table 1: Socio demographic Profile

Component	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	143	47.7
	Female	157	52.3
Age	<20	80	27.7
	20 – 29	120	40.0
	30 – 39	39	13.0
	40 – 49	39	13.0
	50>	22	7.3
Ethnicity	Malay	285	95
	Chinese	4	1.3
	Indian	1	0.3
	Bumiputra	10	3.3
Religion	Islam	282	94.0
	Hindu	7	2.3
	Buddha	8	2.7
	Lain-Lain	3	1.0
Educational Level	SPM	136	45.3
	Diploma	89	29.7
	Bachelor's Degree	62	20.7
	Master's Degree	8	2.7
	Doctor of Philosophy	1	0.3
	Others	4	1.3
Employment Status	Student	107	35.7
	Fulltime Employed	122	40.7

	Part Time Employed	23	7.7
	Unemployed	36	12.0
	Others	12	4.0
Monthly Income (RM)	0	143	47.7
	<1000	26	8.7
	1000-2999	83	27.7
	3000-4999	30	10.0
	5000>	18	6.0
Health Status	Healthy	275	91.7
	Illness	20	6.7
	Person with disabilities	5	1.7
Marital Status	Married	94	31.3
	Single	199	66.3
	Divorce	7	2.3

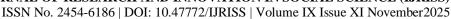**Volunteer Involvement Characteristics of Respondents**

The findings reveal that respondents were first exposed to volunteer activities at different stages of life. The highest proportion began volunteering during secondary school (34.0%), followed by those who became involved during higher education (26.3%). Meanwhile, 21.0% had their earliest exposure at the primary school level, and 18.7% only started participating once they entered the workforce. These results indicate that formal education settings particularly secondary school and university serve as the primary environments where young people are introduced to volunteerism.

In terms of duration of engagement, the same pattern is reflected, with 34.0% having been involved for 6 months to 1 year, followed by 26.3% with 1 to 3 years of experience. Another 21.0% reported volunteering for less than six months, while only 18.7% had sustained involvement beyond three years. This suggests that most youth volunteers are relatively new or short-term participants, highlighting the challenge of sustaining long-term commitment among young volunteers.

Regarding frequency of participation, most respondents stated that they rarely participate in volunteer activities (62.0%), while 30.7% reported occasional involvement. Only 7.0% indicated that they frequently volunteer, and a very small proportion (0.3%) identified themselves as very frequent volunteers. These findings indicate that although many youths have some level of exposure to volunteerism, consistent or regular participation remains low. This further strengthens the importance of understanding organisational strategies that can enhance volunteer retention and encourage more sustained engagement among young volunteers.

Table 2: Volunteer Involvement Characteristic

Component	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Stage of First Involvement	Primary School	63	21.0
	Secondary School	102	34.0

	Higher Education	79	26.3
	Employment Stage	56	18.7
Duration of Involvement	< 6 months	63	21.0
	6 months – 1 year	102	34.0
	1 – 3 years	79	26.3
	> 3 years	56	18.7
	< 6 months	63	21.0
Frequency of Participation	Rarely	186	62.0
	Occasionally	92	30.7
	Frequently	21	7.0
	Very Frequently	1	0.3
	Rarely	186	62.0

Volunteer Organization Management Practice

The findings indicate that the overall level of volunteer management practices in the organisation is high, as reflected by the mean scores across all dimensions, which range between 5.55 and 5.70. Among the six components measured, Volunteer Leadership recorded the highest overall mean (M = 5.7027, SD = 1.17652). Items such as good communication (M = 5.77) and appreciation or recognition (M = 5.66) demonstrate that volunteers perceive their leaders as supportive, communicative and respectful. This suggests that leadership practices within the organisation play a significant role in shaping positive volunteer experiences and fostering a sense of belonging.

The component Programme and Activity Management also show strong practices with an overall mean of 5.6973. Volunteers rated highly on aspects such as sufficient resources (M = 5.70), clear objectives (M = 5.74) and task suitability (M = 5.75). These results indicate that the organisation provides structured planning, adequate logistical support and meaningful task assignments that align with volunteers' skills and interests. Such programme-related strengths are essential for ensuring that volunteers feel competent and engaged in their activities, which ultimately contributes to sustained involvement.

Other components, including Volunteer Selection (M = 5.6427), Technology Usage (M = 5.6467), Motivation and Satisfaction (M = 5.6333) and Training and Development (M = 5.5540), also demonstrate consistently high mean values. These findings show that volunteers view the selection process as fair and transparent, appreciate the use of technology in coordination, and feel satisfied with their volunteering experiences. Although Training and Development recorded the lowest mean among the components, its score remains high overall, with motivation-enhancing training (M = 5.80) emerging as the strongest item. Collectively, these results suggest that the organisation has established comprehensive and effective volunteer management practices that support volunteer engagement, satisfaction and long-term retention.

Table 3: Volunteer Organization Management Practices

Management Practice Component	Item	Mean	SD	Total Mean	Total SD
Volunteer Selection	Organisation and system	5.54	1.459		
	Adequate information	5.63	1.397		

	Fair and transparent selection	5.69	1.329	5.6427	1.20636
	Programme-appropriate placement	5.67	1.249		
	Prompt feedback	5.68	1.303		
Training and Development	Sufficient training	5.47	1.372	5.5540	1.19212
	Regular training	5.34	1.406		
	Relevant training	5.49	1.330		
	Support / guidance	5.67	1.256		
	Motivation-enhancing training	5.80	1.257		
Training and Development	Sufficient training	5.47	1.372	5.5540	1.19212
	Regular training	5.34	1.406		
	Relevant training	5.49	1.330		
	Support / guidance	5.67	1.256		
	Motivation-enhancing training	5.80	1.257		
Program and Activity Management	Good planning	5.67	1.334	5.6973	1.15460
	Clear scheduling	5.62	1.260		
	Sufficient resources	5.70	1.226		
	Clear objectives	5.74	1.223		
	Task suitability	5.75	1.224		
Motivation and Satisfaction	Satisfied with experience	5.67	1.356	5.6333	1.16915
	Matches interests	5.69	1.230		
	Recognition	5.53	1.345		
	Continuous support	5.57	1.343		
	Long-term commitment	5.70	1.273		
Technology Usage	Use of technology	5.50	1.401	5.6467	1.17007
	Social media	5.69	1.309		
	Registration system	5.63	1.323		
	Digital tools	5.71	1.282		
	Digital platform	5.71	1.202		

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that although youth are widely exposed to volunteerism particularly through secondary school and higher education their participation remains mostly occasional and short-term. This

pattern reflects broader national and international trends in episodic volunteering, where youths face constraints such as academic workload, limited financial resources and lack of time. The sociodemographic profile, dominated by young students with no income, further emphasises the structural and personal barriers that limit consistent engagement. These results highlight the need for organisations to take a more strategic approach in sustaining youth participation by offering flexible, accessible and meaningful opportunities that align with their lifestyle and developmental needs.

Despite these challenges, the study shows that volunteer organisations in the East Coast region demonstrate strong and systematic management practices across all six dimensions measured. High scores in leadership, programme planning, motivation and technology usage suggest that organisations are providing clear communication, supportive environments and structured activities that enhance volunteer satisfaction. Technology plays an increasingly important role in facilitating youth engagement. However, the relatively lower scores in training and development indicate potential areas for improvement. Strengthening continuous training, personalised development pathways and long-term engagement strategies may further enhance youth retention. Overall, the results underscore the importance of effective organisational management in fostering sustained youth volunteerism.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study demonstrates that while youth show strong initial interest in volunteerism, sustained participation remains a challenge due to personal, structural and contextual factors. The findings highlight that effective volunteer management, particularly supportive leadership, well-planned programs, meaningful roles, recognition and the use of technology play a crucial role in enhancing youth engagement and retention. Strengthening training, offering flexible opportunities and addressing barriers faced by young volunteers can further improve long-term involvement. These insights underscore the need for volunteer organizations to adopt strategic, youth-centered management approaches to ensure a committed and sustainable volunteer base.

ACKNOWLEGEMENT

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