

## Student Volunteer Motivations in a Student Support Centre for English for Academic Purposes Students

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### Abstract

The findings presented in this paper look at the motivations of volunteers who supported English for Academic Purposes students at a self-access Language Learning Centre at a university in Canada. It also importantly sheds light on the motivations of a less investigated aspect of volunteerism, that of non-native English speakers who provide support to English language learners. In this study, 90% of the volunteers were non-native speakers of English, with most being international students. The majority of the volunteers were also graduate students (90%). Thirty volunteers in total participated in the survey, with seven volunteers participating in the focus group study. The data gleaned from both the survey and the focus groups in terms of motivations were analyzed (the latter via a content analysis) and then placed into the categories of Clary et al.'s (1998) *Volunteer Function Inventory*. The analysis revealed that a strong motivating factor for many was career-related, with a secondary motive of learning through volunteering in the centre or of using previously unused skills at the centre. Additionally, 97% of the volunteer students surveyed stated their work at the centre was an opportunity to make new friends.

### Introduction

Attending university is much more than only going to class, and students and universities can benefit from student volunteer contributions in myriad ways. Students are on the receiving end of many opportunities that allow them to develop personally and professionally through on-campus volunteer activities. Volunteer opportunities help students build their skills, experience, resumes, and social connections. This paper presents research on the motivations of student volunteers who provided support for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students in a Language Learning Centre (LLC) at a public university in British Columbia. This LLC was established in 2017 with a model that included both paid teaching assistants and volunteers. While understanding the needs of the students for whom the volunteers' support is important, so too is gaining an understanding of what makes the experiences at this LLC meaningful for the student volunteers themselves.

At this public university in British Columbia, the opportunity to create a student-driven self-access centre filled a gap in much-needed student support for EAP students as well as to provide volunteer opportunities for students. With a mandate to provide self-access support for

students through one-on-one or small group tutorials, workshops, and events, the LLC was established in 2017 to create robust support and other opportunities for EAP students. Teaching assistants and volunteers were mentored through a combination of orientation and training sessions alongside observation and peer mentoring. The LLC's evolution was rapid, and this study, which highlights the perspectives of student volunteers, may not only help shape the LLC in the future, but may also provide useful insight for other institutions that are seeking new approaches to support students and provide meaningful volunteer opportunities.

In this study, 90% of the volunteers were both international students and non-native speakers of English, most of whom were relatively new to Canada. This is notable as changing student demographics at Canadian universities have been profound in recent years. At many universities, international students comprise an increasingly large percentage of student numbers, with 642,480 alone registered in 2019 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2020). This study not only highlights the motivations of student volunteers but, more importantly, sheds light on the motivations of a less investigated aspect of volunteerism, that of non-native English speakers providing support to English language learners.

### Literature Review

Volunteerism and its many components, specifically the motivations of volunteers, has been a well-researched topic within the academic community. With investigations into the various reasons individuals volunteer, research has found that motives span from job security (Baines & Hardill, 2008) and personal development (Omoto et al., 2010) to societal pressure or the need to be of assistance (Matsuba et al., 2007). In order to understand the underlying reasons behind volunteerism, one must first understand what constitutes a volunteer and the term volunteerism.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the term volunteer was first used to describe citizens who enlisted in the military in times of emergency for no monetary compensation (Cnaan et al., 1996). It is interesting to note how this act of free service has now expanded to include other areas of service outside the military framework. In fact, the expansion of the notion of volunteerism was witnessed in Canada's own war efforts during World War I, where civilians contributed in a "meaningful and practical way... to the national war effort" (Wartime Canada, n.d., line 3). This contribution included not only signing up for service but also giving time, money, skills, and knowledge to the war effort in general. Civilians were strongly encouraged to become involved in the war effort in any way they could—even if it meant participating in alternatives to enlisting. This view on volunteerism grew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and morphed into areas beyond war efforts. Hence, a number of different definitions exist.

One common definition of volunteerism is that of Handy et al. (2010) who defined the term as free labour or assistance given towards an activity by a person to either a non-relative or a stranger. While it can be argued that this is a well-stated definition, it can also be maintained that it lacks the personal gain element often included in the act. Wilson (2012) expanded the definition to include the personal gain element by defining volunteerism as "a form of unpaid labor, consuming resources and motivated by the promise of rewards" (p. 178). This definition highlights that though there may be no monetary compensation in the volunteer act itself, there is other equally tangible compensation available. Snyder and Omoto (2008) offered a more

inclusive definition of volunteerism that reflects this lack of monetary compensation. They described it as participating in acts that are “freely chosen and deliberate... [which] extend over time [and] are engaged in without expectation of reward or other compensation... often through formal organizations, and that are performed on behalf of causes...” (p.3). Another noteworthy definition is that volunteering is a non-salary-based activity which is done by a participant for the benefit of people other than oneself whether it be for an organization, individual, [or] initiative (Wilson, 2000). For the purpose of this research paper, Wilson’s (2000) definition is the one that will be used as it encompasses all aspects of the student support centre on which this study is based; benefits are reaped not only by the organization (university) but by individual students as well.

### **Motivations for Volunteering**

Volunteerism has been and continues to be a highly sought-after activity by both the general public and students alike. Studies have shown that many benefits exist for students that choose to volunteer. These include, but are not limited to, enhanced brain function and moral development (Ewing et al., 2002) as well as the building of leadership, teamwork, and time management skills (Madsen, 2004). According to Moser (2005), volunteering also improves a student’s academic performance, not to mention the increased employability options that result from volunteering (Astin & Sax, 1998). Astin and Sax (1998) have added that the honing of critical thinking and conflict resolution skills are also benefits from volunteering, and Madsen (2004) has claimed that self-confidence is also increased by the act.

Given this long list of benefits, it is understandable why students would want to volunteer. However, there is more to the decision to volunteer. Research has shown that reasons in the general population vary from being an extrovert and having the ability to deal with people (Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett, 2010); feeling good about oneself for helping (Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2007); and using the experience as a stepping stone or protection from the societal stigma of not being able to find a job (Baines & Hardill, 2008); to a means of nation-building or a sign of citizenship (Patel, 2007). These reasons, among others, resonate with many volunteers, some of whom are students. The motivational factors driving students, however, may be influenced by other forces as well. For example, youth volunteers’ motivations at drop-in centres for at-risk youth in Israel were more relationship-oriented than their adult counterparts (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2008). There are also unique challenges that students may face which prevent them from engaging in volunteer work. The economic struggles associated with the acquisition of higher education is one such issue. This challenge often demands the need for paid work for students, leaving little to no time to volunteer (Evans & Saxton, 2005). In spite of this, many students *do* find the time to volunteer. Exploring the underlying reasons for these efforts has been the focus of much research.

In terms of university settings, students can often be found volunteering on campus in various support centres, of which the writing centre is a popular choice. Originally created in the United States, the writing centre is very common at North American and Canadian universities. It is characterized as a space where students receive free academic writing support, usually from student tutors or volunteers. It is usually based on a collaborative, peer learning approach. Initially, writing centres were developed as student-centred spaces where students could work

together to discover and construct the knowledge needed for the writing process (Bruffee, 1984). Some centres also have university instructors and community volunteers providing assistance.

English Language Learning Centres, which are very similar to writing centres, could also be classified as a special type of self-access support centre for students. This kind of centre differs from the writing centre in that it comes to the aid of non-native English-speaking students on post-secondary campuses. The main goal of such centres is to help English language learners manage and understand the content material within their academic studies (Okuda & Anderson, 2018). This research study was conducted in this particular setting.

### **Student Motivations for Volunteering**

With very little time in a student's schedule left to volunteer, the question must then be asked, why *do* students volunteer their time, and what motivates them to do so? Clary et al. (1998) constructed a pivotal and widely used assessment tool which illustrated some influential factors. This assessment tool, the *Volunteer Functions Inventory* (VFI), lists the factors which influence the decisions to become a volunteer. These factors are related to values, career, understanding, society, enhancement, and protection. In this study, Clary et al. (1998) found that the altruistic motive was the predominant motive behind student volunteerism. There have been other studies which support this view of altruistic value-based volunteering as well (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991). While this may be the driving force in many cases, there are also other reasons students volunteer. For example, social reasons (Cappellari & Turarti, 2004) and career-related reasons (McCabe et al., 2007) rank high on the list. The latter study found that the career motive was the second most important reason, followed by enhancement. In this study, the social and protective motives were deemed less important. Other studies have shown that there has been an increase in career-based motives by student volunteers as well (Handy et al., 2010). According to Eley (2003), a major motivating factor for the younger generation is the opportunity to acquire the relevant work experience and qualifications to obtain a job. A UK study showed that learning new skills was the second most important reason for volunteering within the 16–24 age group (Low et al., 2007). In a Canadian study, students were found to volunteer for the sake of job opportunities themselves (Hall et al., 2006). Societal recognition of volunteer experience as work experience plays an important role here. Studies have shown that employers use volunteer experience to distinguish among candidates who would be more suitable for a given position (Smith & Weaver, 2006). Consequently, students may choose to volunteer as a means of appearing more employable (Ellingsen & Johnansson, 2009). Volunteering also allows students to build a social network, which may help with future employment opportunities as well (Wuthnow, 1998).

Barton, Bates and O'Donovan's (2019) UK study showed that although students initially signed up to volunteer for career-related reasons, they often stayed for reasons of enhancement. Barton et al. (2019) categorized their findings into the initial need to volunteer, the reasons to continue to volunteer, and the result of the experience. They found that students were motivated to begin volunteering to acquire necessary work experience and increase their employability levels. The volunteer experience also allowed students to discover possible career paths free of cost and with no real commitment. Interestingly, students were motivated to continue volunteering on the basis of "doing good and making a difference" (Barton, Bates & O'Donovan,

2019, p. 458). According to Clary et al.'s (1998) VFI assessment tool, these two motives would be classified respectively as enhancement and understanding. Moreover, the Barton et al. study also concluded that there is no set motivation for volunteering, as motivations are subject to change with time and experience. Gender also may impact student volunteer decisions. For example, Stroup et al. (2015) claimed that in addition to altruistic reasons, gender and experience as a volunteer play an instrumental role in the decision to volunteer. Both females and male students who had past volunteer experiences showed a stronger motivation to volunteer for altruistic reasons. Unlike female students, male students who had little to no volunteer experience, however, rarely volunteered. While this study may suggest that women are generally more inclined to volunteer, confirmed by Clerkin & Paynter (2009) and Gallant et al. (2010), it is important to note the influence of previous experience on male volunteers (Marks & Jones, 2004). Joseph and Carolissen's (2018) study also supported the notion of gender playing an important part in the decision to volunteer, with results similar to that of Stroup et al. (2015). They found that men with little to no experience were more likely to be influenced based on social interactions and career opportunities. This finding suggests that male students tend to be more extrinsically motivated than female students.

Research has also shown that there are other notable factors to take into consideration when examining motivations for volunteering including age, race/ethnicity, academic-based components, and personality traits (Cruce & Moore, 2007). Cruce and Moore's (2007) US study, which was done across 623 degree-granting schools, called attention to the importance of how these factors can influence students to volunteer. They found that among first-year undergraduate students, those aged over 20 were more inclined to volunteer compared to students below 20; Caucasians were not necessarily more willing to volunteer when compared to students from other backgrounds such as African American, Latino, and Asian American; students who acquired higher academic achievement were more likely to volunteer than their counterparts; and students majoring in education, business, biological science, and social science were more likely to volunteer than arts and humanities majors. Many of the findings mentioned in this section; however, relate to the United States only. The case may be different in other parts of the world.

### **International Studies on Student Volunteers**

With much of the student volunteer research done in the United States (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008) and this particular study focusing on student volunteers from all over the world (albeit currently residing in Canada), it is important to examine international studies on student volunteer motives. When considering motivations to volunteer, the country in which a person lives can be an influencing factor. For example, Grönlund et al. (2011) found students in Korea, Japan, and Finland do not volunteer for the sake of resume building—as is often the case in North America—but for a variety of other reasons. According to Szabo and Marian (2010), young people in Hungary choose to volunteer based on the need to belong to a community, to develop professionally, to spend time in a useful way, or to make new friends. In China, students choose to volunteer as a means of repaying their home community (Geng, 2008). Joseph and Carolissen's (2018) study of three South African universities provided another international perspective, albeit a little different in nature. This study revealed that institutions were being given incentives to implement community engagement activities into their curriculum. Hence, the culture of the institution influenced the need to volunteer. The study also found that altruistic

values and personal development (interpersonal skills) were some other reasons for students' volunteer efforts in the community.

Patel (2007) conducted a large study across five African countries. This study's findings revealed volunteer motives linked to citizenship, with South African students in particular volunteering for the sake of nation-building. Students from the South African universities in the study also indicated that understanding, values, and social responsibility were the top drivers to volunteer—all in line with global volunteer responses according to Van den Berg and Cuskelly (2014). Joseph (2018), however, felt that the motive of social responsibility was a unique finding when compared to other South African studies on volunteering.

Grönlund et al. (2011), mentioned earlier, conducted an international study on data from thirteen non-African countries. They found that altruism (values) and learning (understanding) were the most popular motives for volunteering overall. Further, their findings indicated that while social motives were in the fore in the United States, Canada, and Belgium, the predominant motives in India and Korea were protective in nature. Ultimately, this study suggests that the environment in which a student grows up and develops can impact their decision to volunteer. The relevance of context is evidenced by the finding that while in Africa it is important to give back to society, this is not necessarily the case in North America.

Another study that looked at different groupings was Bocsi, Fenyes, and Valeria (2017). Their study was conducted in four Central Eastern European countries: Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. This study shows—once again—how the motives of volunteers may differ based on culture and ethnicity. It found that the volunteers fell into different categories: career-oriented volunteers, unmotivated volunteers, highly motivated volunteers, the helping new type of volunteer (with reasons to volunteer such as making new friends or making good use of free time), and the volunteer in an anti-volunteering climate (those who find volunteering important in and of itself but do not showcase their efforts). Interestingly, the study found commonality amongst the countries for the anti-volunteering group. Romanian student volunteers, however, stood out as career-oriented people whose strong religious belief system might explain their high altruistic response to volunteering. Hungary, on the other hand, was found to have the highest level of unmotivated groups, illustrating an overall lack of volunteering culture in the country. One significant finding in this study was that not all young volunteers actually wished to volunteer.

An interesting point that has found commonality amongst much of the research is the distinguishing of volunteers. Further categorizing students into volunteers, non-volunteers, and occasional volunteers can provide good analytical perspectives in terms of motivation. An Australian study by McCabe et al. (2007), for example, provided a comparison between volunteers and non-volunteers. The study found that values and understanding were the most important motivators for both groups of students but that non-volunteers also felt volunteering for career reasons was important, unlike the volunteer group. This finding illustrates how the experience *as a volunteer* may change the initial reasons to volunteer.

Overall, it appears that volunteer motives are subject to change and are influenced by a number of different factors, of which culture is only one (Eley & Kirk, 2002). With this in mind,

this study investigated the motivations of volunteers at a Language Learning Centre for EAP students at a public university in British Columbia in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of what drives the students to volunteer and what could be done to enhance their experiences while volunteering. In light of this, this research study aims to answer the following questions: 1) What are the student volunteers' primary motivations for volunteering in the LLC, 2) What are the student volunteers' secondary motivations for volunteering in the LLC, and 3) What are the student volunteers other motivations for volunteering in the LLC.

### Methods

This study used a mixed methods approach to investigate the motivations of the LLC student volunteers. The reason for the use of a mixed methods approach is that it allows for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, resulting in a more in-depth examination of the research question (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Firstly, the researchers conducted an online survey open to all past volunteers at the centre. A total of 30 students partook in this survey (over 60% of all volunteers). All past student volunteers were then invited to participate in small focus groups, which is a form of group interview where participants answer questions and interact with one another, commenting on each other's perspectives as well (Powell & Single, 1996). The rationale behind using focus groups is that the method allows researchers to closely examine the experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of the participants in the study (Krueger, 2015). There were three focus groups in all, with a total of seven volunteer students participating. Group one and group two each had two volunteer students while group three had three past volunteers.

The data gleaned from both the survey and the focus groups in terms of motivations were analyzed and then placed into the categories of Clary et al.'s (1998) *Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI)*. The focus group data underwent a content analysis, a process where raw data (in this case transcripts) are analyzed for the existence or frequency of themes and then coded and placed into categories—in this case, the *VFI* (Silverman, 2011; Bryman, 2012). According to Gage and Thapa (2012), the *VFI* is now "...the standard instrument [used] to assess volunteer motivation" (p. 413). Given this, it is logical for the data gleaned in this study to be represented in the six categories outlined in the *VFI*, namely: values, career, understanding, society, enhancement, and protection. For example, if a student volunteer in the focus group says one reason to volunteer at the LLC was "to gain some working experience, especially when I put that in the resume...." then this would be placed into the career category.

For this study, the focus group interviews included two separate questions on motivations: primary and secondary. This separation allowed for a more detailed analysis and understanding of motivations. In the cases where two motivators of equal value were given by student volunteers, .5 was assigned to the category in which the motivator fit. If one main motivator was given, 1 was assigned to the corresponding category. Table 1 shows the itemization of what each *VFI* category refers to in terms of motivational factors as described by Clary and Snyder (1999).

**Table 1**

*Functions Served by Volunteering and Their Assessment on the VFI* (Clary & Snyder, 1999, p. 157)

<b>Function</b>	<b>Conceptual Definition</b>	<b>Sample VFI Item</b>
<b>Values</b>	The individual volunteers in order to express or act on important values like humanitarianism.	I feel it is important to help others.
<b>Understanding</b>	The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused.	Volunteering lets me learn through direct, hands-on experience.
<b>Enhancement</b>	One can grow and develop psychologically through volunteer activities.	Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.
<b>Career</b>	The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.	Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.
<b>Social</b>	Volunteering allows an individual to strengthen his or her social relationships.	People I know share an interest in community service.
<b>Protective</b>	The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.	Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.

The answers to the survey questions (see Appendix A) and the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) were placed into the *VFI*'s six categories for further analysis. The focus group study transcripts underwent an analytical content analysis to match the *VFI* categories. Any full category answers received a score of 1. Any divided answers (two answers as main drive) were given a .5 score in the respective categories. The numbers of instances in each category were compared to determine dominant student volunteer factors for the LLC.

## Results

Of the 30 survey respondents, 90% reported that English was not their first language. In terms of gender, 21 students identified as female, eight as male, and one as other. The majority of the students (27) were graduate students with another two at the post-baccalaureate level and one student was an undergraduate student. The survey results show that more than half of the respondents, 18 to be exact, volunteered for one semester at the LLC. Just over a quarter of the volunteers, nine students, reported volunteering for two semesters. Three or more semesters of volunteer service was unusual, with only four students reporting this option. In terms of volunteer hours per week, the majority of the students (14) volunteered 3–4 hours a week, with 10 students volunteering 1–2 hours per week. A total of six students recorded five or more volunteer hours a week. When asked if students had prior volunteer experience of any kind, 19 students responded yes—although whether that experience encouraged them to volunteer at the LLC was unclear in most cases. The survey itself focused on general questions related to volunteering, not specific motives per se, unlike the focus group study. At this point then, the primary and secondary motivations to volunteer, highlighted in the focus group study, need to come to the fore. The tables that follow indicate the student volunteers' primary motives as discussed in the focus group (Table 2), the students' secondary motives as found in the focus group (Table 3), the answers to the survey questions on motivation to volunteer (Table 4), and participant responses to questions on motivations to volunteer (Table 5).

**Table 2**

*Primary Motives of Volunteers*

Student	Value	Understanding	Enhancement	Career	Social	Protective
A	1					
B				.5	.5	
C					1	
D		.5		.5		
E				1		
F				1		
G				1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 3**

*Secondary Motives of Volunteers*

Student	Value	Understanding	Enhancement	Career	Social	Protective
A				1		
B				1		
C				1		
D		1				
E	1					
F		1				
G		1				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Table 4**

*Survey Questions on Motivations to Volunteer I*

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
Volunteering helps my professional development and growth	0.00%	0.00%	30.00%	70.00%	30
Volunteering is an opportunity to be part of a teaching and learning community	0	0	9	21	30
Volunteering provides me with the opportunity to explore different career paths	0.00%	0.00%	36.67%	63.33%	30
Volunteering is an opportunity to gain confidence as an educator	0	0	11	19	30
Volunteering will help me gain experience which will help in future job searches	0.00%	16.67%	40.00%	43.33%	30
I learn through helping others as a volunteer	0	5	12	13	30
I feel more connected to peers and others through volunteering	0.00%	0.00%	40.00%	60.00%	30
I have skills that can help others	0	0	12	18	30
	0.00%	3.33%	33.33%	63.33%	30
	0	1	10	19	30
	0.00%	0.00%	24.14%	75.86%	29
	0	0	7	22	29
	3.33%	6.67%	30.00%	60.00%	30
	1	2	9	18	30
	0.00%	6.67%	23.33%	70.00%	30
	0	2	7	21	30

**Table 5**

*Survey Questions on Motivation to Volunteer II*

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL
I am genuinely concerned about the students I support	0.00% 0	6.67% 2	43.33% 13	50.00% 15	30
I feel less lonely due to volunteering	0.00% 0	16.67% 5	33.33% 10	50.00% 15	30
Through volunteering, my self-esteem has increased	0.00% 0	6.67% 2	40.00% 12	53.33% 16	30
Volunteering makes me feel important	0.00% 0	13.33% 4	40.00% 12	46.67% 14	30
My friends volunteer and I want to work with them	10.00% 3	13.33% 4	36.67% 11	40.00% 12	30
Volunteering helps me learn about career options	0.00% 0	20.00% 6	50.00% 15	30.00% 9	30
I place a high value on community service	3.33% 1	16.67% 5	33.33% 10	46.67% 14	30
Volunteering helps me forget about some of my personal problems	13.33% 4	30.00% 9	30.00% 9	26.67% 8	30
I can learn how to work with a variety of people through volunteering	0.00% 0	6.67% 2	33.33% 10	60.00% 18	30
Volunteering is an opportunity to make new friends	3.33% 1	0.00% 0	36.67% 11	60.00% 18	30
My resume will be stronger with this volunteer experience	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	30.00% 9	66.67% 20	30

The survey responses confirmed the strong career-oriented motivations of the focus group. Results showed that 100% of the student volunteers felt that volunteering at the LLC would help their professional development and growth. Of the 30 participants, 29 also believed that volunteer experience gained at the LLC would help them with future job searches, with another 25 stating that volunteering in general gives them opportunities to explore different career paths. In addition, 97% of the student volunteers stated their resumes would be stronger thanks to their volunteer positions at the LLC. Students in the focus group reiterated this time and time again:

- Investigator: *... so you are saying you wanted to gain some...umm. work experience, is that right?*
- Student B: *Yes.*
- Student A: *Yea, exactly. I agree that [I] can gain some working experience especially when I put that in the resume... I think it will uhhh bolster my ability...*
- Student C: *...thinking career-wise, I think it [variety of students from ESL (English as a second language) to MBA] gives us ummm a better working experience...*
- Student E: *Ummm, so I always wanted to ummm get some experience... we don't have an internship or anything [in the MEd program] that's can give us working experience in Canada...so I was super excited when I heard about this chance...*

- Student F: *So, I want to get more experiences on tutoring...*
- Investigator: *Okay, in Canada or just in general?*
- Student F: *...maybe in Canada because you know I was a teacher in China for almost 7 years... so I want to get more experiences on tutoring ... so for me maybe in the future... if I have an opportunity to stay ... maybe I can get some opportunity to get position at [this university], right?*
- Student G: *... uh back into the teaching field... that was my main goal...I don't want to be dead in my career... I have been teaching for a long time before coming [here]... good chance for me to resume my career...*

The motive of *understanding* ranked high in the student volunteers' secondary motives. This motive refers to learning through volunteering in the LLC or the use of previously unused skills at the LLC. Of the students surveyed, 97% reported that they learned through helping others while 93% believed they learned how to work with a variety of different people through their efforts. The focus group study supported these findings as well:

- Student A: *Yeah for me, it has kind of improved my interpersonal skills—like talking to people from different countries in the world...*
- Student B: *Ah, for me quite similar [to Student A]*
- Student C: *...like I feel I could empathize more with their [students'] feelings ... experience at the centre gave me a bit more perspective...*
- Student D: *...it's provided me with a better understanding of ummm what those challenges are that people face and its helped given me broader perspective of ummm different cultures, different countries... I think I have more of ... better listening skills to be able to identify different languages...*
- Student E: *It's a good personal growth and it is actually helping me with umm intercultural skill as well...*

The social motive ranked a distant second in the primary motives of the focus group. This finding indicates that students also volunteer at the LLC to enhance their social relationships. The survey confirms this finding with 97% of the volunteer students stating their work at the centre is an opportunity to make new friends. In fact, 23 of the 30 surveyed reported they volunteered so that they could work with their friends. Another 90% felt they were more connected to their peers and others through volunteering, with 83% claiming volunteering made them feel less lonely, and 100% stating it gave them the chance to be part of a greater community—the teaching and learning community. This social motive is further evidenced in the focus group study:

- Investigator: *Can you tell me your main drive for volunteering...?*
- Student A: *...umm I think I am very passionate about teaching and also making friends... my friends was volunteering in the Fall semester...*
- Student C: *...umm building connections*
- Student E: *... you know you really got a sense of community... for me, I was having a lot of friends there...*

Student F: ... you know, I contact to with any all other students... and I feel of that the atmosphere there was very, you know, social, right?

Although the motive of value only received third-place ranking in both the primary and secondary motives, it appeared important to student volunteers nonetheless as 80% maintained they place a high value on community service. Of the 30 surveyed, 28 were genuinely concerned about the students they supported. This desire to help others came through in the focus group study as well:

Student B: Ah because I find... passionate helping out in any like students who are ESL.

Student C: ... I just want to umm know more about how I can help them [the students] better...

Student E: ... I just wanted to help out student learn about English... and sometimes there is a bunch of us... just there talking about ...like what we can do to help all the people...

Student G: ... but I think we need to encourage more students to come up with, you know, different questions...

The motive of enhancement which refers to the psychological rewards or growth due to volunteering received no primary or secondary status in the focus groups. In the survey, however, participants acknowledged its importance with 87% stating volunteering made them feel important. Another 93% claimed the act of volunteering also increased their self-esteem, with 100% of the participants reporting a gain in confidence as an educator. Two students in the focus group study touched on this briefly:

Student B: I think for me...uh... I gained confidence after helping out there...

Student A: Yes, totally agree.

The protection motive also achieved no primary or secondary status in the focus group study. This motive refers to volunteering in order to escape one's personal problems or negative feelings. It was only addressed once in the survey with the statement: *volunteering helps me forget about some of my personal problems*. Of the 30 survey responses, 17 agreed with this statement. The focus group study, however, revealed no further details on this motive.

In terms of the research questions then, the findings in this study indicate the following answers to the questions:

1. What are the student volunteers' primary motivations for volunteering in the Language Learning Centre? *The primary motives are career and social in nature.*
2. What are the student volunteers' secondary motivations for volunteering in the Language Learning Centre? *Strong secondary motives include career and understanding themes.*
3. What are the student volunteers' other motivations for volunteering in the Language Learning Centre? *Other motives touched on in the study revealed value and enhancement motives to a lesser degree with no protection motive.*

## Discussion

The main goals of this research were to gain insight into student volunteers' primary, secondary, and other motivations for volunteering in the LLC. To this end, our analysis shows a strong relationship between volunteering and student career motivation. This finding aligns with previous research and indicates a strong link between career ambitions and motivations for students to volunteer in general (Barton, Bates & O'Donovan, 2019; Eley, 2003; Ellingsen & Johnanesson, 2003; Hall et al., 2006; Handy et al., 2010; Wuthnow, 1998). Internationally speaking, Grönlund et al. (2011) found students in Korea, Japan, and Finland volunteered for a variety of reasons, but not for resume-building purposes—a finding at odds with ours. Another finding contradictory to ours is Geng's (2008) study. Findings revealed that in China, students mainly volunteer to repay and give service to their home community—not to build their careers. Interestingly, the volunteers in our study, who were 90% international students (with many from China), did not identify this as a primary factor. Another primary motive for student volunteers at the LLC was social in nature. This finding is substantiated by Grönlund et al.'s (2011) study which highlighted this as a primary motive for students who volunteer in Canada. Wuthnow (1998) also underscored the notion that volunteering allows for the building of a strong social network. Cappellari and Turarti (2004) also found social reasons to be important motivations for volunteering. In terms of gender, 21 students of the 30 surveyed identified as female, eight as male, and one as other. This large number of female volunteers is in line with studies (see Clerkin & Paynter, 2009 & Gallant et al., 2010) that indicate females are more likely to volunteer than males.

The student volunteers' secondary motives were either career-related (for those whose primary motive was something different) or understanding related. The understanding motive connects to volunteering for the benefit of using one's otherwise unused skills or for learning something new about the world. This finding is supported by Patel's 2007 study which revealed that understanding was one of the secondary themes for volunteering for South African students.

In this study, the student volunteers' other motivations revealed—to a lesser degree—value and enhancement motives, but no protection motive. This finding was somewhat surprising as at the LLC, as we observed, many student volunteers have various personal problems. Consequently, it was assumed by the investigators that volunteerism might serve as a way for some students to have a mental escape from their problems. This was not the case.

Based on the results of this study, we have several recommendations those coordinating language learning centres may want to consider. Knowing that career-oriented motivations are critical for many students, centres can run special workshops for volunteers to learn how to incorporate and showcase their volunteerism in things such as resumes and interviews. Analysis of the data also suggests the importance of strengthening social relationships and providing space for this to happen. More effort should therefore be made to create a feeling of belonging and friendship in learning centres. One way of building important connections is through hosting social events and other activities for volunteers.

As with most studies, however, this study is subject to limitations. The design of the study itself (case study) is limiting in nature as it provides a glimpse into student volunteer

perspectives at one language learning centre at one institution. The number of participants in the study also limit the findings.

### Conclusion

Despite the limitations, the results of this research study may be helpful for institutions with EAP programs and for administrators of language learning centres. By highlighting the students' need for greater social connection and more career-oriented experiences, this research hopes to improve the experience of student volunteers in self-access language learning centres. The findings are also notable as they illustrate the motivations of a less investigated aspect of student volunteerism, namely the motivations of international student volunteers. International students, as they navigate study and life in a new cultural, linguistic, and academic culture have distinct needs from their domestic counterparts, and the opportunity to serve as volunteers may benefit them in establishing social connections and new friendships and in getting relevant experience that may help them with career opportunities.

This study uncovers some areas where further research could further help shed light on student volunteer motivations. Possible future areas of inquiry include exploration of questions such as whether prior volunteer experiences predispose international students to volunteer, what the perceptions and experiences (outside of Canada) of volunteers are that international student volunteers bring with them, and whether the perceptions (and motivations) of international student volunteers change over time after volunteering in a university. These questions and other related ones, could help further build understanding of student volunteer motivations and help institutions identify robust and meaningful ways to provide opportunities for students.

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### Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. I give my permission for my survey answers to be used as part of this research.
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. How many semesters have you volunteered in the Language Learning Centre?
  - a. One

- b. Two
  - c. Three or more
3. Is English your first language?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. What is your gender?
5. Which best describes your status when you have volunteered in the Language Learning Centre?
  - a. Undergraduate Student
  - b. Post-baccalaureate program student (e.g., TESL program)
  - c. Graduate student (e.g., Masters of Education)
6. On average, how many hours did you volunteer per week each semester?
  - a. 1-2 hours per week
  - b. 3-4 hours per week
  - c. 5 or more hours per week
7. Prior to volunteering in the Language Learning Centre have you worked as a volunteer in another
8. capacity?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. If yes (you have been a volunteer previously), how did that experience influence your interest in serving as a volunteer in the Language Learning Centre?
10. Considering your personal and professional motivation and your experience as a volunteer, please indicate how important each of the following aspects is for you as a volunteer based on the following scale: 1. Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly Agree.
  - a. Volunteering helps my professional development and growth
  - b. Volunteering is an opportunity to be part of a teaching and learning community
  - c. Volunteering provides me with the opportunity to explore different career paths
  - d. Volunteering is an opportunity to gain confidence as an educator
  - e. Volunteering will help me gain experience which will help in future job searches
  - f. I learn through helping others as a volunteer
  - g. I feel more connected to peers and others through volunteering
  - h. I have skills that can help other
11. Please consider the following statements and rate these based on the following scale: 1: Strongly disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Agree, 4. Strongly Agree.
  - a. I am genuinely concerned about the students I support
  - b. I feel less lonely due to volunteering
  - c. Through volunteering, my self-esteem has increased
  - d. Volunteering makes me feel important
  - e. My friends volunteer and I want to work with them
  - f. Volunteering helps me learn about career options
  - g. I place a high value on community service
  - h. Volunteering helps me forget about some of my personal problems
  - i. I can learn how to work with a variety of people through volunteering
  - j. Volunteering is an opportunity to make new friends
  - k. My resume will be stronger with this volunteer experience

12. Do you feel that your work as a volunteer tutor made an impact? Please explain.
13. Are there any suggestions you have which you feel would improve your experience as a volunteer?

### Appendix B: Focus Group Questions (Semi-structured)

1. When did you first volunteer in the LLC?
2. What was your main reason for volunteering?
3. Were there any secondary reasons?
4. How has your work at the LLC helped your future or your growth?
5. What was your favourite activity in the LLC?
6. In what ways can the facilitator of the LLC help you with your growth?
7. What else can we do to improve the LLC? more resources? physical space? more hours?
8. Any other comments?



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