

THE RELEVANCE OF VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES IN THE TRAINING OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the issues of the voluntary activities of students during their preschool education studies. European youth policy is promoting volunteering for young people within and beyond the EU to foster learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding. Higher education institutions encourage students' voluntary activities as this contributes to local community initiatives and their own institutional goals, provides experience and skills for further students' personal and career development. Although society acknowledges the importance of volunteering development, Lithuania does not devote enough attention to strengthening the idea of students' volunteering. This paper highlights the selected results of the empirical survey from the year 2023–2024, organised in Kauno kolegija Higher Education Institution, Lithuania. The aim of the study was to reveal the relevance of voluntary activities in the training of preschool education teachers in Lithuania. The results of the survey highlight the extent, motives and benefits of future preschool education teachers' involvement in voluntary activities. 260 students participated in the quantitative survey. The research results revealed that half of the respondents had never participated in voluntary activities but would like to. The majority of surveyed students from the pedagogical studies participated in episodic rather than long-term formal voluntary activities. The primary motivation for engaging in voluntary work is the desire to help others. Students consider volunteering in different activities as important personal challenge, as well as opportunity to develop personal qualities, to try new activities and to gain diverse experiences. Respondents participate in voluntary activities on their own initiative or encouraged by friends, and they usually work not alone but in collaboration with others or as part of a group. Students highlighted that they experienced emotional satisfaction, had the opportunity for self-fulfilment and gained new experiences and skills relevant to their pedagogical careers.

Keywords: *preschool teachers' training, preschool education studies, students' volunteering, students' voluntary activities, volunteering development*

Introduction

Volunteering plays an important role in today's society, expanding on a global scale, fostering the development of civil society and helping to address social issues. The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania declared the year 2022 “The Year of Volunteering”, encouraging the public to recognize the importance of volunteering and to participate more actively in voluntary activities (LR Seimas, 2021). The initiative emphasized that voluntary work is a vital part of the activities of non-governmental organizations and communities, and that promoting and supporting it requires long-term, trust-based cooperation and coordination between various institutions and agencies at both the national and municipal levels.

Furthermore, the 2019–2027 EU Youth Strategy highlights the promotion of voluntary activities among young people within the EU and beyond as one of its main areas of activities, aiming to foster learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding (European Commission: Directorate-General, 2019). The research report “Development of Youth Volunteering in Lithuania” (Jaunimo savanoriškos veiklos vystymas Lietuvoje, 2020) notes that young people aged 14 to 29 are the age group most actively engaged in volunteering compared to other age groups. In Lithuania, the average number of young people participating in voluntary activities over a 12-month period is approaching the European Union average. Volunteering fosters a sense of responsibility and has a significant positive impact on both physical and mental health. Volunteering experiences help to develop personal skills, encourage socialization and self-realization, and become valuable experiences and future capital that young people can later apply, particularly in the labour market (LR Seimas, 2021).

Students represent a distinct social group of young people and are potential participants in voluntary activities. The students' community is characterized by high levels of civic engagement, reflected in their desire for self-realization across various areas of life. The phenomenon of volunteering is considered as an important factor in promoting social solidarity, building social trust and encouraging prosocial individual behaviour. From the students' volunteering (it can be observed as a new trend in voluntary activities) benefit students, higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations and society as a whole. Universities promote student volunteering as an opportunity to contribute to community life while also pursuing their personal goals (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). Voluntary activities during the study period become particularly important providing experiences and skills that support further personal development and create opportunities for informal learning. Although society recognizes the importance of promoting volunteering in Lithuania, insufficient attention is given to strengthening the idea of volunteering, and many processes are left to develop on their own (Jaunimo savanoriškos veiklos vystymas Lietuvoje, 2020).

An overview of various authors' insights (Karasevičiūtė, 2013; Lippman et al., 2015; Khasanzyanova, 2017) on the topic of volunteering shows that volunteering plays a crucial role in fostering young people's social confidence and critical thinking skills. From the voluntary activities benefit the volunteer (by providing opportunities for personal

growth and self-realization), the organizing organization (by mobilizing human resources to achieve its mission and goals) and the state (by building civil society and accumulating social capital, thus contributing to the creation of a welfare state). Volunteering encourages personal development, cultivates a sense of social usefulness, and enhances essential human abilities – it is time devoted to meaningful activities for the benefit of others (Pevnaya & Pevnaya, 2019; Karasevičiūtė, 2013; Jaunimo savanoriškos veiklos vystymas Lietuvoje, 2020).

According to Lippman et al. (2015), higher education does not provide all the knowledge and skills necessary for successful adaptation in modern society. Personal and interpersonal skills complement professional skills and are an essential part of personality development. One of the ways to acquire these important competencies is volunteering in associations and non-governmental organizations (Khasanzyanova, 2017). For students, planning their careers, volunteering can be a significant factor that enhances career management, improves future career prospects and helps secure better job positions. Through participation in voluntary activities, students can recognize their personal potential, acquire skills that are strategically important for their future careers, and prepare themselves for the labour market. Involvement in volunteering allows individuals to understand their value orientations, solve emerging problems, engage with and accept different cultures, explore human relationships, and work as part of a team. Volunteering also develops conflict resolution, critical thinking, and leadership skills, helping students prepare for their careers and build self-confidence (Fényes et al., 2021; Giancaspro & Manuti, 2021).

During the study presented in this article, it was important to examine the extent of future preschool and pre-primary education teachers' involvement in voluntary activities, the motives behind it, and its benefits for personal development. This study aimed to explore the expression, characteristics and personal attitudes of students enrolled in Pre-school and Pre-primary Education programs towards volunteering. To define the essence of the research problem, the following questions were raised: What is the level of engagement of students of pedagogical study programs in voluntary activities? What motives encourage them to engage in volunteering? What are the students' attitudes towards the benefits of volunteering?

Research problem – what is the involvement of students of pedagogical study programs in voluntary activities?

Research object – the expression of students' voluntary activities.

Research aim – to reveal the relevance of voluntary activities in the training of pre-school education teachers in Lithuania.

Research objectives

1. To substantiate theoretically the phenomenon of voluntary activity.
2. To reveal empirically the motives for and benefits of participation in voluntary activities among students of pedagogical study programs at Kauno kolegija Higher Education Institution (Kauno kolegija HEI).

Research methods: analysis of scientific literature and documents, a questionnaire (survey), descriptive statistics, content analysis.

The concept of voluntary activity

Voluntary activity is the most visible expression of promoting solidarity, social inclusion and the creation of social capital, having a transformative impact on society (Measuring the Impact of Volunteering, 2018). Voluntary activity (volunteering) is an unpaid activity performed by a volunteer for the benefit of society, with the terms established through an agreement between the volunteer and the organizer of the activity, guided by principles of mutual benefit for society and the individual, cooperation, diversity and flexibility (LR Seimas, 2011). A volunteer is an individual who chooses by his own will to dedicate his time and energy to society and its needs, without seeking financial gain for himself (Kurapkaitienė, 2013).

Voluntary activities can be defined as *formal* or *informal* (Savanorystės esamos situacijos analizė, 2019):

- *Formal voluntary activity* – unpaid contribution through participation in groups, clubs or organizations with the aim to provide the benefit for the people or the environment (e.g., participation in animal protection organizations, etc.);
- *Informal voluntary activity* – unpaid personal help to others who are not related by family ties, without formally engaging in organized activities.
- Voluntary activities can also be categorized by duration (Kurapkaitienė, 2013; Kurapkaitienė & Kėžaitė-Jankūnienė, 2015):
- *episodic* – when a volunteer performs only one in the particular time determined task without committing to any long-term connection with the organizers of the activity;
- *Short-term* – the voluntary activities lasting not more than 3 months, when the volunteers are admitted into an organization to carry out specific short-term tasks and these tasks are more results-oriented than process-oriented;
- *Long-term* – the voluntary activities lasting more than 3 months, when the volunteer deals with a specific, defined task. Long-term voluntary activities are usually formal, that means they are acting within an organization.

There is a growing trend in society for episodic voluntary activity, when volunteers provide help once or several times, either randomly or intentionally, i.e. when needed, e.g. in case of an unfortunate incident (e.g., fire, flood), assisting to a friend occupied in voluntary activity or simply visiting a particular organization without the special commitment. Often people, that do not have enough free time, get involved in this form of activity led by their curiosity, interest or a desire for new social interactions and meaningful activity. Many cannot commit to long-term volunteering but still wish to experience it. Volunteers can choose the area of voluntary activity that aligns with their interests and goals.

Voluntary activities can be carried out in various fields, related to different human issues, such as listed below (Jaunimo informavimo ir konsultavimo vadovas, 2013; Kurapkaitienė & Kėžaitė-Jankūnienė, 2015):

- *Social sector* (helping exposed groups of population, collecting charity for poor, including food, clothing and other necessary items, etc.);
- *Education sector* (volunteers' involvement in extracurricular or post-study activities at institutions);

- *Environmental sector* (e. g., environmental organizations, that organize social and political actions, animal protection organizations, that care for pets abandoned by their owners, etc.);
- *Cultural sector* (arts and cultural events: concerts, festivals, performances, exhibitions, etc., where volunteers assist with organizational tasks, maintaining order and other duties);
- *Sports sector* (international and national sports events requiring various forms of voluntary work, promoting physical activity);
- *Healthcare sector* (organizations that unite individuals affected by a specific illness, representing common interests and facilitating the lives of those living with the disease, as well as home visits to patients);
- *Community sector* (organizations in residential neighbourhoods, villages and local communities addressing local issues);
- *Religious sector* (volunteering in the daily activities and events of church communities).

It is observed that more and more people in Lithuania are becoming interested in volunteering and getting involved, although the concept of volunteering as an activity supported and promoted by state policy is still new phenomenon in Lithuanian society (Paplauskienė, 2021). Volunteering gives youth an opportunity to develop competencies needed for both personal and professional life. It strengthens civic attitudes, helps with self-expression, promotes personal development as well as provides the chance to gain knowledge and skills that facilitate better integration into the labour market (Jaunimo savarankiškos veiklos vystymas, 2020; LR Socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministerija [LR SADM], 2013, II sk.). Volunteering is especially meaningful for young people. It is often their first activity where they face with the social needs and can quickly observe the impact of their actions as active citizens, in that way reducing the risk of social exclusion (Europos ekonomikos ir socialinių reikalų komiteto nuomonė, 2022).

Methodology

The empirical study is based on the thematical framework presented earlier in this article (Europos ekonomikos ir socialinių reikalų komiteto nuomonė, 2022; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; Jaunimo informavimo ir konsultavimo vadovas, 2013; Jaunimo savarankiškos veiklos vystymas Lietuvoje, 2020), e.g. on the idea of *student's participation in voluntary activities during their study period*. This article presents some selected research data gained via statistical analysis of the survey data that were collected from the students of the Preschool and Pre-primary Education program of Kauno kolegija HEI during the study year 2023–2024. A part of these students had already pedagogical experience before they were enrolled in the study program, or they were working in the pedagogical fields at the moment of the conducting the survey, e.g. during their studies. After completing the study program, the most of the graduates from the Preschool and Pre-primary Education program of Kauno kolegija HEI work as preschool or pre-primary education teachers throughout Lithuania (Majauskienė et al., 2024).

The authors of this study found it as important to explore the extent of these students' involvement in volunteer activities, to identify the competencies and experiences they gain during this process, to reveal the level of their participation in voluntary activities, the motives behind it and the benefits for different subjects participating in the process of the volunteering.

For data collection a quantitative research instrument – a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions, organized into four sections: 1. Introduction section. 2. Diagnostic question block (13 questions). 3. Open-ended question (1 question). 4. Demographic questions (4 questions).

The main diagnostic block includes 10 substantive questions related to the main issues of voluntary work: the concept of the voluntary work, the terms used in the voluntary work, the forms and the areas of the voluntary work, the motives for participating in the volunteer work, the characteristics of the activities students are involved in. One open-ended question was included in the diagnostic block to assess the impact of volunteer work on personal development.

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire and the results were subsequently uploaded into an Excel format for further analysis. Due to limited extent of this article, only a part of the summarized data is presented in the form of tables. In general, the data of an empirical study are considered statistically reliable when the sample is representative with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This study is statistically reliable, as the margin of error is 3% for the sample consisting of the students of the Preschool and Pre-primary Education study programs at Kauno kolegija HEI. 260 students of a total 320 students enrolled in pedagogical studies at Kauno kolegija HEI took part in the survey. It represents 81% of the total student population presented above as a respondents group.

During the research the volunteerism of the research participants and the anonymity of the research data were ensured. The research data were used in general and for research purposes only.

Results

The respondents – the students of the pedagogical study programs at Kauno kolegija HEI understand volunteering as an activity performed for the benefit of society without financial compensation (25.8%) or a voluntary activity chosen by an individual own, for which any payment is received (23.2%). Furthermore, the respondents understand volunteering as an expression of altruism and the provision of unpaid assistance. Future teachers participate in voluntary activities occasionally (50.4%) or randomly (47.1%), while only a relative small part of respondents are engaged in voluntary activities regularly (14.6%). Nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) stated that they have never participated in voluntary activities but would like to under the right circumstances. It is important to motivate these individuals and involve them in volunteering.

The majority of those who have participated in voluntary activities reported that it was mostly short-term (1–2 days) episodic work (93.2%). 45.3% of respondents participated in short-term (up to 3 months) voluntary activities, and 31.6% – in long-term (more than 3 months) voluntary activities. 93.2% of the students participated in informal voluntary activities, while 70.5% stated they were involved in formal volunteering. The main reasons for non-participation in voluntary activities were lack of time (43.2%) and lack of information (29.6%).

It is to be mentioned, that there is a slight increasing trend in participation in voluntary activities. A 2019 study on the attitudes of Lithuanian residents towards volunteering showed that 31% of respondents reported having participated or currently participating in voluntary activities (Jaunimo savanoriškos veiklos vystymas, 2020). According to the European Economic and Social Committee, Europeans are now more likely to engage in short-term voluntary activities (Europos ekonomikos ir socialinių reikalų komiteto nuomonė, 2022). There is a noticeable shift from traditional, long-term volunteer activities based on planned commitments to episodic volunteering. Many volunteers are willing to take part in one-time events as they do not want to make long-term personal commitments (Europos ekonomikos ir socialinių reikalų komiteto nuomonė, 2022).

The main motive for participating in voluntary activities is the desire to help others (21.3%), while students also value testing themselves in different activities (14.3%) and improving their personal qualities (13.2%). Additionally, the search for new challenges (15%) and the desire to try out various activities (14.7%) are important motivators. It was revealed that respondents typically participate in voluntary activities on their own initiative (29.6%) or are encouraged by friends (9.9%). During voluntary work, they mostly collaborate with others (34%) or work in groups (16.6%).

The main motive for students' participation in voluntary activities aligns with the findings from the 2019 study of Lithuanian residents' attitudes towards volunteering. This study revealed that the primary motivation for volunteering among Lithuanians was to help others (30%), to achieve personal sense (28%) and to be useful (19%) (Šalies gyventojų požiūrio į savanorystę ir turimos savanoriškos patirties tyrimas, 2019).

The analysis of students' participation in volunteer activities reveals that the majority of respondents associate volunteering with specific fields that align with pedagogical competencies. The most commonly chosen fields for volunteering were social activities (74.1%), education (62.3%) and cultural activities (70.3%) (see Table 1). In addition, students showed a noticeable tendency to participate in religious (46.9%) and community-based activities (46%). A relatively smaller percentage engaged in sports-related activities (36.1%).

The research results demonstrate that students tend to engage in voluntary work in areas that directly align with the core tasks of educators, such as working with people, organizing events for children and adults and participating in extracurricular activities with children. These activities are crucial in fostering the development of competencies essential for future educators, including leadership, communication and collaboration.

Table 1 Areas of voluntary activities

Area of voluntary activity	Students' engagement (%)
Social activities (helping exposed groups of population, collecting charity for poor, incl. food, clothing and other necessary items, etc.)	74.1%
Environmental field (various environmental organizations carrying out public and political actions, animal welfare organizations whose members protect and care for pets that have been abandoned or brought in by their owners, etc.).	44.3%
Education field (involvement in extracurricular or post-study activities at institutions)	62.3%
Cultural Activities (Art and cultural events: concerts, festivals, performances, exhibitions, etc., where volunteers help with organizational tasks, maintaining order, and other duties)	70.3%
Religious activities (volunteering in the daily activities and events of church communities)	46.9%
Community activities (Organizations of neighbourhoods, villages, and other local communities that are concerned with the current issues of the local community)	46.0%
Sports activities (International and national sports events that need various forms of volunteer involvement, as well as the promotion of physical exercise)	36.1%
Healthcare sector (organizations that unite individuals affected by a specific illness, representing common interests and facilitating the lives of those living with the disease, as well as home visits to patients)	19.3%

Moreover, the findings suggest that volunteering, while serving its primary purpose of providing aid to others, also plays a significant role in the personal and professional development of future preschool teachers. Volunteering facilitates the enhancement of pedagogical skills and competencies, which are pivotal in the context of teaching and educational work.

Table 2 illustrates the benefits of volunteering for personal development, including self-realization through volunteering, the improvement of personal traits, the development of competencies, and the acquisition of new skills. These factors collectively contribute to the comprehensive growth of students, preparing them for their future roles as teachers.

Additionally, the benefits of volunteer activities as perceived by the participants highlight the valuable impact that volunteering has on personal and professional development. Future pedagogues gain first-hand experience in organizing, leading, and collaborating, which are critical aspects of their professional identity. Through voluntary engagement, students acquire competencies that are highly transferable to their pedagogical careers, thus strengthening their practical teaching abilities.

The findings also emphasize the importance of motivating students who have not yet engaged in volunteer activities, as nearly half of the respondents (49.2%) expressed

a willingness to participate under the right circumstances. This point to an opportunity for educational institutions to further encourage involvement in volunteer activities, offering the students not only an opportunity to contribute to society but also to enhance their pedagogical skills and competencies.

Table 1 illustrates the most common areas where the surveyed students are engaged in volunteer activities. Social, educational and cultural fields dominate, reflecting the significant relevance of these areas in the training of the future preschool teachers. The students' active participation in religious, community and sports activities also highlights the diverse nature of volunteer involvement among future preschool teachers.

The European Economic and Social Committee states in its report, that young people are most active in two main areas of voluntary activities: charity, humanitarian aid and development support (44%), as well as education, training and sport (40%). Moreover, these are the most popular fields of activity among young people across all EU Member States (Europos ekonomikos ir socialinių reikalų komiteto nuomonė, 2022).

In order to assess the benefits of volunteering for personal development as identified by the respondents, an open-ended question was analysed. The responses were grouped into seven subcategories, which were formed by segmenting the meaningful units into sentences and attributing them to specific phenomena according to their distinct features. Within the main category "The benefits of volunteering for personal development", the following subcategories were distinguished: emotional satisfaction, personal self-realization, gaining new experiences, fostering of moral values, strengthening of communication and cooperation skills, establishment of new social connections and problem-solving management. The frequency of responses was calculated, and their ranking according to their significance was established (Table 2).

It can be observed that from the seven identified subcategories in the students' survey, the subcategories that most strongly reflect the essence of the analysed category are emotional satisfaction, personal self-realization and the gaining of new experiences. For future preschool teachers another important subcategory is the fostering of moral values as well as the establishment of new social connections. It has to be noted that voluntary activities are directed not only toward fulfilling the needs of others but also toward satisfying one's own needs, such as strengthening personal values and self-improvement (Pruskus, 2014). The primary "drivers" of voluntary work are not only the opportunity to help others but also the perception of personal meaning (Šalies gyventojų požiūrio į savanorystę ir turimos savanoriškos patirties tyrimas, 2019). Voluntary activities provide young people with opportunities to develop competencies useful for personal life, strengthening civic attitudes (Jaunimo savanoriškos veiklos vystymas, 2020).

An analysis of the responses regarding the impact of volunteering on the development of students' skills, abilities, and competencies revealed that students highly value the "soft" skills acquired during voluntary activities, which are necessary and important in the pedagogical professional field: social, communication, self-control, and self-awareness skills. Students indicated that through volunteering they gained valuable experience

Table 2. The benefits of volunteering for personal development

Subcategories	Statements
Emotional satisfaction	<i>"<...> the satisfaction of seeing a smile on another person's face"; "<...> the valuable use of time spent doing good things"; "The immense joy it brings <...>"; "<...> it will provide you and those around you with positive emotions <...>"; "<...> dedication to others, without expectation of reward, brings to the perception that money is just a material thing, and emotions cannot be bought through helping others <...>".</i>
Personal self-realization	<i>"<...> show what you can do, discover your hidden talents <...>"; "<...> get to know yourself better, including your hobbies, needs, and abilities, it helps you express yourself and share your thoughts and ideas"; "<...> try volunteering abroad. Based on my experience, the conditions are better and there are more opportunities"; "<...> test yourself, push through anything, get a sense of something you want to improve in the future <...>"; "<...> it encourages not just develop your skills, but also your confidence, your daily life might change, find new talents you didn't know you had".</i>
Gaining new experiences	<i>"You'll gain experience for free, it broadens your perspective in every way"; "<...> you can choose the type of activity based on your abilities and interests <...>"; "The knowledge and experience you gain there can't be replaced by any theory or stories"; "<...> you'll gain a lot of experience, so that in the future you'll know what you want to do or try something new, because it will help you develop the skill of not letting small failures get to you and continuing your work until the goal is achieved"; "<...> improve yourself and broaden your horizons <...>"; "<...> the opportunity to grow, improvement, gaining experience <...>"; "You gain new experiences, you lose nothing, you only gain, volunteer work provides experience and knowledge that can't be gained anywhere else".</i>
Fostering of moral values	<i>"<...> not only do you meet people, but you can also clarify your own values, understand / feel other people"; "<...> help those who need assistance, extend a helping hand, spend time with and talk to a lonely elderly person, it's really not difficult and truly a noble, human thing to do"; "<...> it will inspire you to do good in the future, not just look for personal gain"; "<...> value yourself as a person who cares about helping without reward <...>"; "That can't be bought with any amount of money, we must do more than just physical work on this earth to sustain our physical bodies, we must also enrich our souls, and we can only do that by being compassionate and helping others".</i>
Strengthening of communication and cooperation skills	<i>"It's a way to learn communication and collaboration with others"; "<...> it will strengthen the sense of community"; "<...> initiative to collaborate with others"; "<...> the opportunity to find like-minded people with whom you'll collaborate in the future".</i>
Establishment of new social connections	<i>"It will help you make new connections that can be useful in life"; "<...> make new friends, finding new contacts <...>"; "<...> the opportunity to meet new people, new friends"; "The chance to expand your circle of friends, gaining new contacts <...>".</i>
Problem-solving management	<i>"<...> there's not much work, but it's important to understand and know the information at a critical moment"; "<...> the opportunity to laugh at yourself to better understand other people".</i>

in the following areas: teamwork, communication and collaboration, decision-making, organization and planning, emotional regulation, problem solving, and the application of knowledge in practical situations.

Discussion

The analysis of the research data confirmed the relevance of the phenomenon of volunteering discussed in the theoretical part of the paper. The majority of respondents who participated in volunteer activities positively assessed the links between the experience gained during volunteering and self-confidence in their future professional work. The results of the study revealed direct links between voluntary activities and the development of skills important in pedagogical work: future preschool teachers involved in voluntary activities reported gaining communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which they intend to use in their pedagogical work and community activities. Students indicated that they had further developed the skills they had already acquired through voluntary activities. Preschool education teachers who participate in voluntary activities before their studies, during their studies, and throughout their pedagogical career gain experience, skills, and qualities essential for specialists in this field, which can evolve into key competencies for this profession. Based on the research findings, it can be recommended that students of pedagogical programs or those planning to choose such study programs would engage in voluntary activities, thus not only contributing to society but also acquiring and enhancing personal traits, skills, and competencies necessary for the pedagogical process when working with children, communicating with colleagues, and interacting with the parents of the children. Following the results of the research, institutions of higher education providing pedagogical study programmes should pay more attention for the development of students' volunteering during their studies, as well as discuss the institutional possibilities and existing networks for integrating the students' voluntary activities into the regular study process. It is recommended that HEI personnel encourage the volunteering of students from the pedagogical programs by providing information about volunteering opportunities and benefits, integrating volunteering topics into academic subjects, and volunteering among students.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of scientific literature and documents revealed that volunteering is one of the most important activities promoting individuals' sense of community and social commitment to society. Voluntary activities have a positive impact on society, foster a sense of personal responsibility and positively affect physical and mental health. Volunteering experiences develop personal and professional skills, promote socialization and self-realization, and become experiences that students can later apply in their future profession. In pedagogical activities, the skills and competencies acquired during volunteering can be especially significant, as volunteering can be undertaken by students, pupils, parents of learners, educators and community members, and it can be carried out individually, in groups, or within communities.

2. The results of the empirical study revealed that half of the respondents had never participated in voluntary activities but would like to and plan to participate under the right circumstances. The majority of respondents were engaged in episodic, formal, but not in long-term voluntary activities. The primary motivation for participating in voluntary activities is the desire to help others. For students it is important to challenge themselves in different activities and improve their personal qualities, as well as seek new challenges and test themselves in various roles. Respondents either participate in voluntary activities on their own initiative or encouraged by friends, and during these activities they most often work not alone but with others or in groups. Volunteering typically takes place in the fields of social, educational and cultural activities. When participating in voluntary activities, it is important to meet not only the needs of others but also one's own needs, gaining benefits for personal development. Students noted that they experienced emotional satisfaction, were able to realize themselves and gained new experiences and skills that are important in pedagogical activities.

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