



**SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN  
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**

**By**

**WONG LI JUAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

**July 2021**

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**Chair: Evelyn Lim Ai Lin, PhD**  
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The environmental conservation volunteer program provides secondary school students the opportunity to connect to their environment and contribute to its natural heritage conservation. However, there is a lack of school students participating in environmental conservation volunteer programs. This is because they perceived these programs to be irrelevant to them as most times the programs cater to volunteers who are adults and senior citizens. Hence, many existing environmental conservation volunteer program is ill-fitting to school students' motivation.

A qualitative research was conducted to explore the motivation of secondary school students who had volunteered in an Environmental Conservation Volunteer Program (ECVP) in the state of Perak. Data was primarily gathered using focus group discussions to provide exploratory and descriptive findings of school students' motivation, opportunity and ability to volunteer in the ECVP. The focus group discussion was conducted at the end of the study, using questions developed based on the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) theoretical framework. The group discussions involved forty-five secondary school students who had participated actively in the program. All discussions were audio-recorded and analyzed thematically using a constant comparative method and critical incident analysis to identify recurring themes across the dataset. The observation was used to triangulate findings from the group discussions.

Seven themes emerged from the analysis to describe secondary school students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to participate in the ECVP. The intrinsic motivation were gain new experiences and knowledge, seeking altruistic value, personal enhancement, and the love of nature, while the extrinsic motivation were the influences of social norms and goal-orientation. The study identified the barriers and facilitators to describe the situational conditions that influenced students' actual volunteering participation and their continuous involvement in the program. Social factors, transportation and duration of the program have been identified as the barriers to their continued participation in the

program. The desire to receive certificate, parents' approval, good mentors and instructors, activities which fit their interest and food are the facilitators which enhanced their motivation to participate in the program. The implementation process of the ECVP that is cyclical and repetitive had enhanced their ability to perform the tasks, which encouraged their actual participation and continuous involvement in the program. The volunteering experiences also offer various benefits to the volunteers as they ride through the volunteering program's challenges and learning experiences.

Understanding secondary school student's motivation enables an organization to design an ECVP that is in line with their motivation to encourage their actual participation. The barriers and facilitators identified to school students' participation would also help organizations take important measures to increase students' actual participation and continuous involvement in the ECVP and ensure students gained benefits from their participation.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

## **MOTIVASI PELAJAR SEKOLAH MENENGAH UNTUK MENYERTA PROGRAM VOLUNTEER KONSERVASI ALAM SEKITAR**

Oleh

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Program sukarelawan pemeliharaan alam sekitar memberi peluang kepada pelajar sekolah menengah untuk berhubung dengan persekitaran mereka dan menyumbang kepada pemuliharaan warisan semula jadi. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat kekurangan pelajar sekolah yang mengambil bahagian dalam program sukarelawan pemeliharaan alam sekitar. Ini kerana mereka menganggap program-program ini tidak relevan bagi mereka kerana kebiasaannya program tersebut melayani sukarelawan dewasa dan warga emas. Oleh itu, banyak program sukarelawan pemeliharaan alam sekitar yang ada tidak sesuai dengan motivasi pelajar sekolah.

Satu kajian kualitatif dilakukan untuk meneroka motivasi pelajar sekolah menengah yang telah menjadi sukarelawan dalam Program Sukarelawan Pemuliharaan Alam Sekitar (ECVP) di negeri Perak. Data dikumpulkan terutamanya menggunakan perbincangan kumpulan fokus untuk memberikan penemuan eksploratif dan deskriptif mengenai motivasi, peluang dan kemampuan pelajar sekolah untuk menjadi sukarelawan dalam ECVP. Perbincangan kumpulan fokus dilakukan pada akhir kajian, menggunakan soalan yang dikembangkan berdasarkan kerangka teori Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA). Perbincangan kumpulan ini melibatkan empat puluh lima pelajar sekolah menengah yang telah mengambil bahagian secara aktif dalam program ini. Semua perbincangan dirakam audio dan dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan kaedah perbandingan tetap dan analisis kejadian kritikal untuk mengenal pasti tema berulang di seluruh dataset. Pemerhatian juga digunakan untuk mengesahkan penemuan dari perbincangan kumpulan.

Tujuh tema muncul dari analisis untuk menggambarkan motivasi intrinsik dan ekstrinsik pelajar sekolah menengah untuk mengambil bahagian dalam ECVP. Motivasi intrinsik adalah memperoleh pengalaman dan pengetahuan baru, mencari nilai altruistik, peningkatan pribadi, dan cinta akan alam, sementara motivasi ekstrinsik adalah pengaruh norma sosial dan orientasi tujuan. Kajian ini mengenal pasti halangan dan fasilitator untuk menerangkan keadaan yang mempengaruhi penyertaan sukarelawan sebenar pelajar dan penglibatan mereka secara berterusan dalam program ini. Faktor sosial, pengangkutan dan jangka masa program telah dikenal pasti sebagai penghalang

penyertaan mereka secara berterusan dalam program ini. Keinginan untuk menerima sijil, persetujuan ibu bapa, mentor dan tenaga pengajar yang baik, aktiviti yang sesuai dengan minat dan makanan mereka adalah fasilitator yang meningkatkan motivasi mereka untuk menyertai program ini. Proses pelaksanaan ECVP yang bersifat siklik dan berulang telah meningkatkan kemampuan mereka untuk melaksanakan tugas, yang mendorong penyertaan mereka yang sebenarnya dan keterlibatan yang berkesinambungan dalam program ini. Pengalaman sukarela juga menawarkan pelbagai faedah kepada para sukarelawan ketika mereka melalui cabaran dan pengalaman belajar program sukarelawan.

Memahami motivasi pelajar sekolah menengah membolehkan organisasi merancang ECVP yang sesuai dengan motivasi mereka untuk mendorong penyertaan mereka yang sebenarnya. Halangan dan fasilitator yang dikenal pasti untuk penyertaan pelajar sekolah juga akan membantu organisasi mengambil langkah-langkah penting untuk meningkatkan penyertaan sebenar pelajar dan penglibatan berterusan dalam ECVP dan memastikan pelajar mendapat faedah daripada penyertaan mereka.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ECVP	Environmental Conservation Volunteer Program
iM4U	1Malaysia 4 Youth
DRe1M	Dana Sukarelawan 1Malaysia
NGOs	Non-government Organisations
MASKUM	Malaysia Universities Volunteer Council
VFI	Volunteer Function Index
MOA	Motivation-Opportunity-Ability
FGD	Focus Group Discussion

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is an important global phenomenon because it provides basic social services, creates arts and culture, and contributes to community life. However, the origin of voluntary service is very vague and there is no clear record. Most researchers believe that this began at the end of the First World War where people gathered to help reconstruct and rebuild war-torn villages and those in need (Gregorová & Stachoň, 2015; Harris et al., 2016). In modern society, volunteering is considered an altruistic activity where people contribute towards a cause without the hope of being paid. It is also regarded as an activity that enhances individuals' intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are beneficial to the local community where they volunteer.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The Malaysian government has been focusing on youth development issues, especially volunteerism and social participation among the younger generation. Yet, there is still a lacking in school students' involvement in volunteerism. Hence, it is crucial to understand the reason for students' lack of involvement and this can be done by understanding their motivation to be volunteers.

Human motivation is complex, goal-oriented, and purposive (Ryan et al., 2011). Many factors are interplaying to motivate or discourage a person from engaging in a specific volunteering behaviour. Researchers have been attempting to identify the range of motives associated with volunteering. Although it has been noted that conservation volunteers share many similar motives with other volunteers, they are a unique group with special needs and wants. Conservation volunteers do not only give their time and skills, but they also engage in environmentally significant behaviour beyond recycling and other eco-friendly activities. There are several factors that lead a person to engage in environmentally significant behaviour. It usually begins with the individual becoming aware of the problem and a feeling that something important to them is being threatened, for example, a place where they grow up. Next, they realize that they can do something to improve the situation and it is their responsibility to act to the best of their ability to improve or protect the environment. Hence, to understand volunteers' motivation and commitment within conservation organizations, it is necessary to understand their specific motivation and concepts related to volunteering and environmental behaviour.

Secondary school students are the group in focus for this research because evidence suggests that young people are likely to be socialized into pro-social behaviour (Hooghe & Stolle, 2003). Data has shown that people who volunteer while in school are more likely to volunteer later in their lives (Astin & Sax, 1998). The President of Mercy Malaysia, Datuk Dr. Ahmad Faizal Perdaus has stated that the low level of volunteerism among Malaysians could be due to the lack of focus on community service among the

young in schools (The Star Online, 2017). The question is, how can we encourage school students to be involved in conservation volunteerism programs?

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Although the concept of volunteer is popular among Malaysians, the level of participation is still very low (Siti Hawa, 2002). The number of young volunteers has decreased dramatically since 2010 due to their self-discovery behaviour (Kim, Zhang & Connoughton, 2010). A study involving 3,816 respondents found that the spirit of volunteerism among students was only moderate (Julinawati et al., 2012). Although there are more volunteering organizations in Malaysia due to the increased awareness of the importance of volunteerism (Nawi & Asmuni, 2013), studies showed that the number of active volunteers is still low (Hamzah et al., 2016; The Star Online, 2017; Sahimi et al., 2018).

According to Sahimi et al. (2018), the initiatives taken to attract young people to volunteer are sometimes seen as inappropriate in the context of voluntary work because it does not fit well into their needs and wants. Meeting their needs and wants is essential because the accomplishment of needs will directly affect their level of motivation (Devito et al., 2016), while their level of motivation will directly influence their level of participation (Tasgin & Tunc, 2018). In Malaysia, researchers have examined volunteers' motivation include examining the factors that influence people to volunteer (Turiman et al. 2011), altruism as motivational factors toward volunteerism among youth (Zaliha & Arshad 2012), the challenges in voluntary work (Kauthar et al. 2013), empowering youth volunteerism and motivating factors (Mardhiyyah et al. 2013), and understanding the reasons for Malaysian youth participation in volunteering activities (Hamzah et al., 2016). These studies have also focused on general volunteerism behaviour and developed a generic list of volunteer motives for general volunteerism behaviour. Nevertheless, the motivation for environmental volunteerism behavior may differ from general volunteerism motivations due to differences in volunteers' beliefs (Aishah et al., 2014) and their specific needs and wants (Hunter & Rollins, 2010; Scott & Etten, 2013; Kragh, 2017). Environmental volunteers are more interested in doing activities in the natural environment such as beach clean up, tree planting, setting up of seedling nursery or conducting wildlife research in the field. This differs from the general volunteer activities that are often organized in Malaysia such as cleaning old folk homes, gotong-royong, caring for orphans or distribution of food to the homeless. Environmental volunteer service can achieve certain voluntary motives that other types of volunteer services cannot provide, such as the opportunity to do outdoor activities, to connect or reconnect with nature, to understand nature better, or find their own place in nature (Gooch 2005; Dalgleish 2007; Guiney & Oberhauser, 2009; Kragh, 2017).

The understanding of volunteers' motivation is also important to provide environmental educators and environmental organizations the guidance to design a successful and well-participated volunteering program. This literary means that to design a successful volunteering program, it must consider volunteers' motivations because people will only join an organization if their motivation is fulfilled (Tohidi, 2012; Jasmin et al., 2015; Varma, 2018; Aranda et al., 2019). Secondary school students' participation in an



environmental conservation volunteer program provides them the opportunity to establish direct contact with their environment and contribute to protecting the natural heritage (Bruyere & Rappe, 2007). Unfortunately, not many secondary school students are involved as volunteers in these programs.

According to Vanson, Gisborne and McCool (2019), secondary school students stated that environmental volunteering is not relevant to them as most of the time, those who volunteer are adults and senior citizens. Students refrain from volunteering in environmental programs because of the negative perception they have towards volunteering. They think that volunteering is 'not cool', 'boring' and is about 'working for free' (Smith et al., 2010; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). Many students do not see the personal benefits they can gain from these experiences because, to them, volunteering is just a waste of their time (Vanson, Gisborne & McCool, 2019). Jardim and Silva (2018) found that young people are primarily focused on the individual benefits they can gain personally and professionally. Hence, it is important to change secondary school students' negative perception of environmental volunteering by emphasizing their benefits from the experiences. When they can see the benefits of volunteering, it would motivate them to participate in the program (Caulfield & Senger, 2018).

Therefore, the present study explores secondary school students' motivations to be a volunteer in an Environmental Conservation Volunteer Program (ECVP) and the benefits they gained from their participation.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The research questions for the study are:

- a. What are secondary school students' motivation to volunteer in an ECVP?
- b. What are the barriers and facilitating factors that influenced secondary school students' motivation to participate as volunteers and continuously be a volunteer in the ECVP over a period of time?
- c. What are the actual benefits secondary school students gained from being a volunteer in the ECVP?

### **1.4 Objectives**

The main objective of the research is to explore secondary school students' motivation to participate in an ECVP. The specific objectives are to explore:

- a. secondary school students' motivation to participate in an ECVP.
- b. the barriers and facilitating factors that influenced secondary school students' motivation to participate and continuously be a volunteer in the ECVP over a period of time.
- c. the actual benefits secondary school students gained from being a volunteer in the ECVP.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The study explores secondary school students' motivation to participate in an ECVP. It also identifies the barriers and facilitating factors that influence their motivation to participate and continuously be a volunteer in the ECVP over a period of time. In ensuring an environmental conservation volunteer program can attract volunteers among school students, it is important to understand their motivation so that the program design fits their motivations. Besides that, discovering the barriers and facilitating factors towards students' participation would guide environmental educators and organizations take important measures to enhance the facilitating factors to their participation and minimize the barriers to increase students' likelihood to participate in volunteering programs and especially encouraging continuous volunteering behaviour over a longer period.

In addition, the study also explores the actual benefits students gained from their participation in the ECVP. The study's findings would provide guidance to environmental educators on the benefits they should be highlighting to influence and change students' negative perception of volunteerism. This is important to encourage more students to volunteer in environmental conservation efforts.

These findings of the study also contribute to the existing body of knowledge on sustainable natural resources and ecotourism. The identification of students' motivation, the facilitating factors and barriers provides essential information for the development of an effective volunteering program which provides an avenue for the performance of a conservation behaviour among the local communities. Both conservation of natural resources and local communities involvement form essential components in ecotourism management. The approach used in the implementation and evaluation of the program also aids environmental educators, ecotourism site managers, and leaders of local community on the process involved to engage local community actively in conservation initiatives. Besides that, the involvement of local school students in the volunteering program ensures the continuance of the conservation of its natural resources and sustainable ecotourism development initiatives.

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