

Survey on Voluntary Service Intention of College Students in Rural Communities

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Abstract: With the rapid development of society, college students, as the youthful force of the new era, are increasingly valued for the cultivation of their social practical abilities and sense of social responsibility. Voluntary service is a good way to practice theirs which refers to the service work made by volunteering one's time and energy in order to improve society and promote social progress without expecting any return. Voluntary service for rural community, as a form of social practice activity, not only allows college students to apply their learned professional skills to practice but also enhances their social practical abilities and strengthens their sense of responsibility towards society. This study aims to utilize a convenience sampling method to select 507 students from a university in Nanchang as subjects so that the intentions of college students to participate in volunteering for rural community through questionnaires are investigated. Its aim is to examine the willingness and concerns of college students regarding participation in voluntary service for rural community, and to propose suggestions and strategies to better encourage engagement of college students in voluntary service for rural community.

1. Introduction

College students always have one or two months of vacation time in winter and summer. It is a great challenge for them to leverage and arrange the time reasonably. Consequently, they often feel lost at that time. Voluntary service is an important way for college students to practice the core socialist values. [1] volunteering for rural community has become an important approach for college students to improve their social practical abilities and realize their social value. However, currently, the amount of university students volunteering for rural community is not enough. It is observed that some students choose part-time jobs in summer; Some have done nothing but stay at home; Only a small portion of them devote themselves to voluntary work. How to guide students to volunteer in rural community and understand their willingness and concerns regarding such participation have become practical issues on giving full play to the social values of college students. In this study, some college students in Nanchang are chosen to conduct a questionnaire on college students' willingness to volunteer in rural communities in order to analyse their willingness and worries to engage in rural community volunteering and put forward measures to solve the problems.

2. Survey on college students' willingness to serve in rural communities

2.1 Questionnaires' distribution and collection

Convenience sampling is adopted, and 507 undergraduates enrolled in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 in a university in Nanchang are included, among whom 78 from Class 2020, 127 from Class 2021, 146 from Class 2022 and 156 from Class 2023. Inclusion criteria are as follows. First, full-time undergraduate students; Second, informed, consent and voluntary participants. Exclusion Criteria are as follows. First, those who do not attending classes at school due to taking a leave of absence, joining in the army, etc., but retain their academic status; Second, those who are transferring majors or schools.

The questionnaires are distributed in two ways: on-site distribution of paper questionnaires and remote distribution of electronic questionnaires. First, paper questionnaires were distributed to 155 students. The investigators used the same instructions to make the respondents understand the purpose and matters need attention of the research, and the questionnaire should be filled out by themselves and returned on the spot. Second, electronic questionnaires were distributed and collected by Wenjuanxing. The investigators give instructions with the same instruction online so that the respondents can understand the purpose and matters need attention of the research, and then the respondents scan the code and fill in the questionnaire by themselves without any interference. The questionnaires are distributed on January 24th, 2024 and ended on February 1st, 2024. 400 questionnaires were distributed and 352 valid questionnaires were returned, with an effective return rate of 88 percent. Questionnaire exclusion criteria are as follows. First, general information is incomplete more than 5percent; Second, the filling time of the questionnaire is less than 20 seconds; Third, respondents answer regularly.

Pie charts and bar charts were used to describe the data in terms of percentages and to analyse the data.

2.2 Results and analysis of questionnaire

2.2.1 College students' willingness to engage in volunteering for rural community

According to the survey and data on Table 1, among 507 college students, 270 students have volunteered in rural communities, accounting for 53.25 percent; and 237 students have never engaged in rural communities volunteering, accounting for 46.75percent. Moreover, 489 out of 507 suggest that they are willing to participate in rural communities volunteering in the future, accounting for 96.41percent, while the rest of 18 indicate that they are not willing to do it, accounting for 3.59 percent. The research results of Yuan Xiaobo and his team reveal that the participation rate of university student volunteers in Zhangjiakou City has reached 79.3percent, with an overall positive outcome and widespread recognition among university students.[2] These findings share great similarity with the data characteristics of our research, further indicating that university students currently still harbor a strong willingness to engage in volunteer services.

Table 1: Participation in rural community volunteering

Degree of participation	Number of participants	Percentage
Have participated	270	53.25%
Have never participated	237	46.75%
Willing to participate	489	96.41%
Not willing to participate	18	3.59%

2.2.2 College students' tendency to the time spent on rural community volunteering

Based on the Table 2, it is showed that most of students tend to volunteer for shorter time, mainly between 1-2 hours and 3-5 hours. Only a small number of people choose longer hours of volunteering, such as 1-2 days or more than more than 3 days.

Table 2: The Tendency for the time of rural community volunteering

Duration	Percentage
1-2 h	38.92%
3-5 h	35.33%
1-2 days	14.37%
More than3 days	11.38%

2.2.3 Condition on college students' access to information about voluntary service for rural community

As it's shown in Table 3, recommendation from school, introduction from family or friends, online platforms and WeChat official number are the main access to sign up for rural community volunteering, accounting for 46.11 percent, 44.91 percent and 50.90 percent respectively. Some people have no access to it, accounting for 28.14 percent.

Table 3: College Students' Access to Information on Rural Community Volunteering

Information acquisition channel	Percentage
Online platform and WeChat official account	50.90%
Introduction from family or friends	44.91%
Recommendation from school	46.11%
Others	13.77%
No access	28.14%

2.2.4 College students' concerns for rural community volunteering

According to the data on Table 4, the greatest concerns for the respondents are information asymmetries about volunteering, lack of organization and management, unreliable volunteering channels, effective information channels, and their proportions are 63.47 percent, 63.47 percent, 57.49 percent and 61.08 percent respectively.

Table 4: College Students' concerns for rural community volunteering

Concern	Percentage
Information asymmetries about volunteering	63.47%
Lack of organization and management	63.47%
Unreliable volunteering channels	57.49%
Lack of effective information channels	61.08%
Security	51.50%

2.2.5 The distance of rural community volunteering Influencing on college students

The data of Table 5 reveals that 16.77 percent of participants don't care about the distance of rural community volunteering. And the majority of individuals prefer to volunteer within 5km reached up to 48.5 percent. Followed by 5-10km, it accounts for 23.95 percent. Only 5.99 percent of participants showed willingness to volunteer in a longer distances of 10-15km. 4.79 percent of the

participants can travel 15-20 km for volunteering in rural communities.

Table 5: The distance of rural community volunteering Influencing on college students

Distance	Percentage
Within 5 km	48.50%
5-10 km	23.95%
10-15 km	5.99%
15-20 km	4.79%
Not caring about distance	16.77%

2.2.6 College students' tendency to the type of voluntary service for rural community

Presented in Table 6 manifested that the proportion of community service and propaganda activities occupy the highest proportion, accounting for 49.1 percent and 46.11 percent respectively, followed by teaching (35.93 percent), environmental protection (35.33 percent) and cleaning (33.53 percent), and the proportion of other types of volunteer service (24.55 percent) is the lowest.

Table 6: College Students' Access to Information on Rural Community Volunteering

Access	Number	Percentage
Community service	249	49.10%
Propaganda activities	233	46.11%
Teaching	182	35.93%
Environmental protection	179	35.33%
Cleaning	170	33.53%
Others	124	24.55%

2.2.7 College students' motivation for volunteering in rural communities

Table 7 reflects that the main aim is to increase knowledge and prepare for employment reaching up to 64.67 percent. Certification of volunteer service is also an important motive, accounting for 61.08 percent. Learning useful skills and exercising themselves is also an important, accounting for 53.29 percent. Certificates and titles of honour as well as obtaining loyal thanks from recipients are also the motivation, accounting for 41.32 percent and 35.93percent respectively. Material rewards and expanding the friendship circle are relatively low motivations, accounting for 25.75percent and 29.94percent respectively.

Table 7: College Students' Motivation for Volunteering in Rural Communities

Motivation	Percentage
Expand social circle	29.94%
Material rewards	25.75%
Sincere thanks	35.93%
Certificates and titles of honour	41.32%
Useful learning	53.29%
Proof of volunteering	61.08%
Increasing knowledge	64.67%

2.2.8 Problems to be solved in volunteering in rural communities for college students

2.2.8.1 Transportation and accommodation

Table 8 indicates that the option that transportation is what people most concern, with 364 choices, accounting for 71.86 percent. Accommodation comes next, with 349 selections, accounting for 68.86 percent. And project support and safety and security are selected 324 and 319 times, accounting for 64.07 percent and 63.47 percent respectively. Other options are selected 81 times, accounting for 16.77 percent.

Table 8: Issues to be Solved in Voluntary Service in Rural Communities

Issues	Percentage
Transportation	71.86%
Security	63.47%
Accommodation	68.86%
Project supporting	64.07%
Others	16.77%

2.2.8.2 Unmotivated activities

As is shown in Table 9, the lack of practical experience is the biggest one, accounting for 82.04 percent. The failure in adapting to the rural environment accounts for 65.27 percent. Difficulties in communicating with local residents is also a significant challenge, occupying 62.28 percent. And lack of relevant professional knowledge is another challenge, accounting for 54.49 percent.

Table 9: Challenges for College Students in Rural Community Volunteering

Challenges	Percentage
Lack of experience	82.04%
Environment adaptation	65.27%
Communication Problem	62.28%
Lack of expertise	54.49%
Others	15.57%

2.2.8.3 Insufficient organization and management ability

Table10 shows that 62.87 percent of the participants suppose that the diversity of rural community volunteering initiatives is limited and lack of attraction; 53.89 percent of the participants suggest that insufficient organization and management ability is the burdens of participating in rural community volunteering; 67.07 percent of college students believe lacking of necessary training in voluntary service activities affects the effect of service; 52.10 percent of the survey respondents deem that the publicity of voluntary activities is insufficient and the social recognition is limited; 50.30 percent of college students believe that part of the content of voluntary activities is out of their abilities.

Table 10: Problems for College Students in Rural Community Volunteering

Problem	Percentage
Single form and lack of attraction	62.87%
Lack of organizational and management	53.89%
Lack of training for volunteering	67.07%
Lack of propaganda and recognition	52.10%
Beyond the ability	50.30%

3. Survey results

3.1 Positive attitudes but low participation in rural community volunteering

Survey results indicate that college students generally have a positive attitude towards rural community volunteering, but actual participation rates hover around only 50percent. Zhang Huiying notes that students can gain various benefits from volunteering, such as enhanced knowledge, skill development, broadened horizons, social integration, and a sense of accomplishment. These benefits explain why many students express a desire to be volunteers. [3] In addition, Jin Weili pointed out that college students' participation in voluntary service for rural revitalization is an inevitable choice for them to respond to the call of the country, and also an important way of innovation to comprehensively promote rural revitalization. [4]

Despite the prevalent spirit of dedication and positive attitudes towards rural community service among contemporary college students, less than half actually participate. As it is stated in Sun Ke's paper, at present, there are various problems in college students' voluntary service for promoting rural revitalization, including lack of professionalism, insufficient motivation, and inadequate safeguards for volunteers. [5] This suggests a lack of motivation for some students. In the survey, one-fifth reported lacking of access to rural community service opportunities, which may significantly contribute to low participation rates.

To address this problem, universities should promote rural community volunteering during holidays, offering more practical opportunities. Local youth volunteering associations should enhance their promotional efforts, using diverse channels to attract more student volunteers. Additionally, establishing connections with local high schools and building a university association volunteer platform could provide students with more information about rural community services, making it easier for them to get involved.

3.2 Single channel for acquiring information about rural community volunteering

The survey found that among university students who have participated in rural community volunteering, approximately half of them obtained volunteering information directly or indirectly through WeChat public accounts. However, students who have not participated in such services reported a lack of access to relevant information channels. This may indicate that the promotion of rural community volunteering is too reliant on a single channel and lacks sufficient outreach, limiting the number of people who are aware of these opportunities. Chen Min also points out in their research that there is inadequate informatization, value articulation, and promotional efforts for community volunteering, which aligns with our findings.[6]

To address this issue, it's necessary to diversify the channels for promoting information about rural community volunteering and improve management mechanisms while increasing promotional efforts. Specifically, people can adopt the following measures: This is in line with establishing mechanisms and promoting collaboration among communities, townships, and schools. [7]

Firstly, it is online Promotion. Establishing and operating official accounts on popular social platforms like WeChat, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu, publishing posts about volunteer activities and recruitment notices should be done. Secondly, it is offline Promotion. Rural community volunteering promotion teams are formed to organize dedicated events, such as hosting seminars on campus or conducting promotion activities within rural communities, which complemented by online promotion channels. By combining online and offline approaches organically, people can build an authoritative, systematic, and comprehensive promotional platform, enabling more students to learn about and engage in rural community volunteering.

3.3 Time and distance as key constraints for college students' participation in rural community volunteering

Survey results show that college students prefer voluntary activities for rural community that are short in time and close in distance. This preference may be due to inconvenient transportation in rural areas. For instance, Suichuan, located in a hilly region with towns spaced far apart, lacks widespread bike-sharing services, and some village roads are rugged, limiting electric scooter travel. For students, long commutes and inconvenient transportation can consume considerable time and energy, thereby reducing their enthusiasm for participating in rural community volunteering. Further research indicates that over 70 percent of students prefer rural community volunteering service time for 1 to 5 hours. This suggests that when organizing rural community volunteering services, it is important to consider volunteers' physical stamina and energy levels, reasonably scheduling service lengths so that volunteers can maximize their effectiveness within limited time frames.

To address transportation challenges, when planning rural community volunteering events, multiple locations could simultaneously host the same service activity. This allows volunteers to choose the nearest location, minimizing travel time and energy expenditure. Additionally, organizers should provide transportation subsidies to ease the financial burden on volunteers. It's also critical to schedule reasonable service time, avoiding excessively long periods, while monitoring volunteers' conditions and offering necessary support and encouragement. Implementing these measures can better motivate university students, fostering the development of rural community volunteering services.

3.4 Transportation and accommodation as key challenges for college students volunteering in rural communities

The survey reveals that students require basic assurances for their daily needs and safety to effectively serve the community. The top concerns are transportation, accounting for 1.86 percent and accommodation, accounting for 68.86 percent, followed by project support and safety guarantees, noted by 64.07 percent and 63.47 percent of respondents respectively. Based on Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, meeting these hygiene factors is essential for worry-free volunteering engagement. Therefore, rural communities should provide vehicle pick-up and drop-off services, adequate food and lodging, safety assurances and recognition of students' efforts. By addressing these core needs with genuine care, rural communities can encourage student to participate actively, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship.

3.5 Diverse motivations for university students participating in rural community volunteering

According to the survey, the primary reasons for college students engaging in rural community volunteering are: gaining experience for future employment. This ranks first, aligning with Zhang Huiying's findings [3]; Volunteering certificates rank second, accounting for 61.08 percent, which underscores the importance of obtaining certifications for student. Applying knowledge and self-improvement marginally lower than Hao Jijin's findings, which highlights students' desire to apply what they've learned and develop personally.[8] The overlap between gaining experience for employment and applying knowledge and self-improvement in the questionnaire may have influenced students' choices, indicating a need for more precise question design in future surveys. Mei Yi also pointed out that cultivating the spirit of voluntary service can enhance college students' sense of achievement and satisfaction, making them feel social value and self-worth. [9] Other factors influencing participation include: Honor certificates and titles, genuine appreciation from service recipients, expanding social circles, material rewards like allowances.

Yang Shujun and Wang Zhiqiang also mentioned in their paper that it is important to timely and accurately record the themes, number of times, and service duration of college students' participation in voluntary service activities, and integrate this information with the second classroom performance, student practical activities, evaluations for excellence and scholarships, as well as employment recommendations. [10] This approach allows college student volunteers to not only see their achievements during their participation but also gain recognition from the school. Furthermore, supplementing with material rewards can better motivate college students to engage in voluntary service.

4. Conclusion

Through surveying on college students' willingness and worries to take part in rural community volunteering work, it is found that students are usually very keen to help, but not many of them actually do it. The main reason is that it's hard for them to get news about volunteering chances in rural communities. Moreover, how long the service lasts and how far it is can affect their decisions. Above all, finding a place to stay and eating are big problems when college students want to be volunteers, which stop them from getting involved in rural community volunteering work. Therefore, relative sectors should take actions and give college students more help and support to motivate them to participate in rural communities volunteering.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

- 1.What is your gender?
 - A. Male
 - B. Female
- 2.Which grade are you currently in?
 - A. Freshman
 - B. Sophomore
 - C. Junior
 - D. Senior
- 3.What is your current academic major? (Please fill in)
- 4.What is your political affiliation?
 - A. Masses
 - B. Communist Youth League Member
 - C. Party Member or Probationary Party Member
 - D. Members of Other Political Parties
- 5.Are you willing to participate in rural community voluntary service activities during holidays?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
- 6.Have you ever participated in rural community voluntary service?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
- 7.How long do you wish to participate in rural community voluntary service?
 - A. 1-2 hours
 - B. 3-5 hours
 - C. 1-2 days
 - D. More than 3 days
- 8.Which channels do you currently sign up for rural community voluntary service?
 - A. No awareness channels
 - B. School recommendation
 - C. Introduction by friends or family
 - D. Online platforms, WeChat official accounts (such as Qingxuelian, local government official websites, local Communist Youth League)
 - E. Others
- 9.What concerns do you have when obtaining information on rural community voluntary service? (Multiple Choice)
 - A. Unreliable voluntary service channels
 - B. Asymmetric voluntary service information
 - C. Lack of effective information channels
 - D. Lack of organization and management
 - E. Safety problems
- 10.How does the distance of voluntary service affect your willingness to participate?
 - A. Within 5 km
 - B. 5-10 km
 - C. 10-15 km
 - D. 15-20 km
 - E. Not caring about distance

11. Which types of voluntary service have you participated in? (Multiple Choice)
- A. Propaganda activities
 - B. Educational support
 - C. Environmental protection
 - D. Community service
 - E. Do cleaning for the needed
 - F. Others
12. What extent does the relevance of the rural community voluntary service you participated in to your major?
- A. Completely relevant
 - B. Mostly relevant
 - C. Partially relevant
 - D. Completely irrelevant
13. What are your main motivations for participating in voluntary service? (Multiple Choice)
- A. Voluntary service certificate
 - B. To gain insights and prepare for employment
 - C. Honorary certificates and titles
 - D. To obtain heartfelt thanks from service recipients
 - E. Subsidies and other material rewards
 - F. Expand social circle
 - G. To apply knowledge, exercise oneself, and discover shortcomings
 - H. Others
14. What do you think are the most pressing issues that need to be addressed for college students to serve in rural communities? (Multiple Choice)
- A. Transportation
 - B. Accommodation
 - C. Project support
 - D. Safety guarantees
 - E. Others
15. What do you think are the biggest challenges that college students may face when serving in rural communities? (Multiple Choice)
- A. Lack of practical operating experience
 - B. Difficulty communicating with local residents
 - C. Challenges in adapting to the rural environment
 - D. Lack of relevant professional knowledge
 - E. Others
16. What problems are identified by college students in participating in rural community voluntary service activities? (Multiple Choice)
- A. Service activities are monotonous and lack appeal
 - B. Insufficient organizational management capabilities and lack of standardized management
 - C. Lack of necessary training for college student volunteers, affecting the effectiveness of voluntary service
 - D. Insufficient promotion of volunteer activities, low social recognition
 - E. Some content is detached from the actual abilities of college students