


Voluntariado en educación superior como base para el desarrollo profesional de los docentes


Volunteering in higher education as a basis for teacher professional development

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to define the role of volunteer activities in the professional development of future teachers who are currently students attending higher education institutions. The main research method used in this work is descriptive and qualitative, since analyze a number of volunteer students in the Pedagogical Institute at Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University (Sakha, Russia) on the basis of results of annual NEFU sociological research for the period 2017-2019 and examining their motivation for volunteering through a survey. Students volunteered in a wide range of activities: educational programs, academic practical training, preparation of scientific papers, and implementation of socially significant projects. When the pedagogical university students arranged their volunteer activities to relate to their future professional activities, they significantly broadened their knowledge about the chosen profession, reinforced their motivation for professional development, and generated adequate self-assessments of their personal and professional qualities as future teachers. In conclusion: professionally oriented volunteer activity as part of educating future teachers develops not only the required professional qualities and competencies but also becomes a stage of their professionalization, helping them to find their place of employment faster and developing their social and professional skill sets. The practical implications of the study lie in the possibility of using the research results to arrange volunteer activities at universities.

Keywords. Volunteering; teacher professional development; volunteer activities; volunteer students; intensification of volunteer activities.

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Resumen

El propósito de este trabajo es definir el papel de las actividades de voluntariado en el desarrollo profesional de los futuros docentes que actualmente son estudiantes de instituciones de educación superior. El principal método de investigación utilizado en este trabajo es descriptivo y cualitativo, ya que analiza un número de estudiantes voluntarios en el Instituto Pedagógico de la Universidad Federal del Nordeste de Ammosov (Sakha, Rusia) sobre la base de los resultados de la investigación sociológica anual de NEFU “Estudiante” para el período 2017-2019 y examinar su motivación por ser voluntario(a) a través de una encuesta. Los estudiantes se ofrecieron como voluntarios en una amplia gama de actividades: programas educativos, formación práctica académica, preparación de artículos científicos e implementación de proyectos socialmente significativos. Cuando los estudiantes universitarios de pedagogía organizaron sus actividades de voluntariado para relacionarlas con sus futuras actividades profesionales, ampliaron significativamente sus conocimientos sobre la profesión elegida, reforzaron su motivación para el desarrollo profesional y generaron adecuadas autoevaluaciones de sus cualidades personales y profesionales como futuros docentes. En conclusión: la actividad de voluntariado con orientación profesional como parte de la formación de futuros profesores desarrolla no solo las cualidades y competencias profesionales requeridas, sino que también se convierte en una etapa de su profesionalización, ayudándoles a encontrar su lugar de trabajo más rápidamente y desarrollando sus habilidades sociales y profesionales. Las implicaciones prácticas del estudio radican en la posibilidad de utilizar los resultados de la investigación para organizar actividades de voluntariado en las universidades.

Palabras clave: Trabajo voluntario; desarrollo profesional docente; actividades voluntarias; estudiantes voluntarios; intensificación de las actividades de voluntariado.

Introduction

The current global pandemic has triggered the need for the systematic development of volunteer activities. Volunteers' assistance has eased the social, economic, and psychological problems the most vulnerable members of the population have endured in isolation. Volunteering affects self-determination of an individual, his or her matching with a community and acceptance of its values (self-identification), as well as affects the desire to improve and develop (self-actualization). It is a powerful tool for developing a socially responsible and proactive person.

Volunteering is of particular importance for students. Participation not only helps to reveal the socially oriented potential of young people but also contributes to the development of their leadership skills and sociability and thus can become part of their professional development. However, the problem of forming students' readiness to participate in volunteer activities as an essential professionalization stage has been investigated insufficiently. In view of it, this article's objective is to describe the role of volunteer activities in the professional development of future teachers who are currently students at higher educational institutions, including volunteering features and types, motives for volunteerism, and the practice of creating facilities to support students' volunteering, as is occurring at Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University (NEFU).

Literature review

According to the Federal Law of Russia “On charitable activities and volunteerism” (1995), volunteer activity is equivalent to the concept of “voluntary service” and features voluntary and gratuitous execution of works or services. Gorlova (2019) considers the absence of external pressure and monetary remuneration to be the main feature of voluntary activity. Therefore, according to the author, motivation for volunteering is formed by the “internal needs, life orientations and value system of an individual”. Volunteering is also pro-social in nature and emphasizes socially significant and socially useful activities. In this case, Titova (2019) suggested the following criteria to define volunteer activity: “voluntary involvement, targeting at strangers, absence of remuneration, scheduled events, duration, organization context”.

Non-profit organizations and, in some countries, government agencies are especially important for volunteer movement development (Liu & Zhang, 2020), e.g. in the history of Russia, volunteerism development was managed by the state. International volunteerism has also increased in the context of globalization (Lough & Tiessen, 2018). Although volunteerism is self-imposed, several researchers emphasize the need for training to improve its efficiency (Rombach, Kang, & Bitsch, 2018); Dawson, Baker, & Dowell (2019). Future volunteers’ training is a prerequisite for their efficiency. At the moment, our University conducts a special course for the training of volunteers.

The literature also presents a variety of volunteer activity classifications. For example, Kobysheva (2016) identifies four types of volunteerism: mutual help or self-help, charity, participation and self-government, and education or propaganda. Mironenko (2014) defines various types of volunteer activities by the form of social interaction involved: virtual (online), which is the most modern social interaction form, and typical volunteering (offline).

Volunteer activities are crucial for students. Currently, domestic and foreign studies regard students’ volunteering as a tool for education quality enhancement (McFadden & Smeaton, 2017), as a way to develop a socially responsible personality (Krutitskaya, 2018), as a social activity (Vasilieva & Nogovitsyna, 2018), as a stage in professional self-realization (Kuznetsova & Solovyova, 2018), as a factor of innovative and scientific students’ activity, since students via volunteering are involved in innovative projects and develop their scientific potential (Pevnaya & Pevnaya, 2019), as a condition for moral values development (Kobysheva, 2016), and as a “serious leisure” pursuit (Kruglova, 2017).

According to Vasiliadi (2016), the advantages of volunteer activities arranged in professional educational institutions can be split into three groups: organizational (the ability to accommodate to academic groups’ schedule); existence of socially-oriented specialty groups, common interests and nearly similar level of volunteer skills.

As many scientists indicate, for students' involvement in volunteer activities, special conditions shall be created: motivation shall be formed and the relevant factors affecting the need for volunteerism shall be accounted for. Based on analysis of foreign studies from 1983 to 2014, Mainardes et al. (2017) stipulated 18 factors influencing volunteer activity. Finally, the authors assumed that internal factors, especially self-esteem and social responsibility, are of particular importance.

Forster, Archer, & Tajin (2015) identified factors that influence and prevent students from being involved in volunteer activities. Lack of free time was the main factor preventing students from becoming volunteers. Clerck et al. (2019) also identified motivating and demotivating factors for volunteerism, but in the context of management. Barriers to volunteerism were reviewed by Southby et al. (2019). Proceeding from the study of volunteer process dynamics in the UK, Dawson, Baker & Dowell (2019) found that socialization mechanisms, i.e. emulation, imitation, example, etc. are important factors for being engaged in voluntary activities.

Russian researchers as Stegny and Nikonov (2018) propose the following typology of volunteering motives: career motives, compensatory motives, motives for expanding social contacts, altruistic motives, motives of debt, motives of personal growth. We agree that a set of motives is important for volunteers, and the motives are shifted depending on volunteering participation term, activity area and age.

A study by Pevnaya (2016) revealed differences in motivation for volunteers of different age groups. Professional development and career promotion are particularly important for young people engaged in volunteer activities. Transformation of volunteers' motives was studied by Isboli, Borges-Senra & Pépece (2020) and presented as a volunteer life cycle. The baseline motives are associated with altruism, and then volunteering becomes a part of his personality: it affects his self-esteem and identity. The impact of volunteering on individual's self-identification and values was studied by Gronlund (2011).

The study by Kuznetsova and Solovyova (2018) revealed the importance of volunteering for developing personal and professionally important qualities, such as empathy, communication skills, and motivation to help. The authors once again highlight the need for volunteer activities for students majoring in "helping" professions: teachers, doctors, psychologists, social workers, etc. While organizing volunteer activities at the University, it should be taken into account that "the self-organizing potential of young people is one of the main conditions for volunteerism development" (Kisilenko, 2018) as it demonstrates the realistic readiness of students to participate in volunteer activities.

This study treats volunteer activity of pedagogical university students being arranged in view of their future professional activity as facilitating revealing and further development of students'

social and professional potential while providing voluntary and gratuitous sociological, psychological and pedagogical support to students, their families, and teachers. At the same time, as claimed by Danilov and Kornilova (2014), this potential can be comprehensively described within the concept of psychological and pedagogical support of teacher's personal and professional development in the system of higher humanitarian education. Therefore, the analysis of current research confirms that volunteer activities within future teachers' training can develop their professional skills and competencies and become a stage of their professionalization, assist in employment, and develop social and professional activity.

Materials and methods

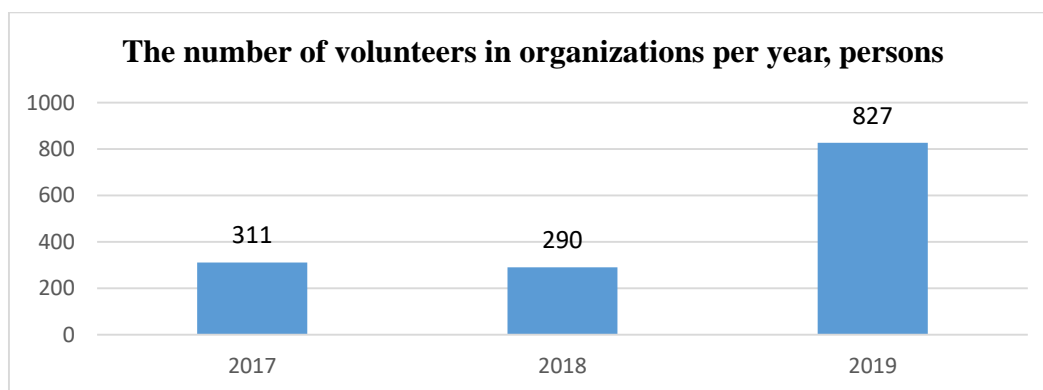
Our research was carried out in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) of the Russian Federation - in the most territorially vast, sparsely populated region of Russia, with harsh natural and climatic conditions and ethnic specificity of the population. During the study, we reviewed Russian and foreign scientific, methodological, psychological and pedagogical literature. In the research was used the methodology of studying the phenomenon of volunteering (Pevnaya, 2016), including the integration of the management approach with the methodological approaches: systemic, institutional, community and activity. Besides, the results of annual NEFU sociological research "Student" for the period 2017-2019 were analyzed. It was attended by full-time students (2017 – 7636 students; 2018 – 7466, 2019 – 7685). NEFU is a leading educational center that trains highly-qualified specialists for education systems of the RS (Ya) and of the entire north-eastern region of the Russian Federation. Besides, the experience of the NEFU Pedagogical Institute (655 students) was summarized in developing the most significant personal and professional qualities such as empathy, tolerance, and reflexivity via students' involvement in volunteer activities. This study also had regard for students' motivation to participate in volunteering, difficulties faced by them, the educational effect and personal growth observed during educational process and participating in volunteer group activities.

Results

The following results were obtained while conducting the study. The profile of Pedagogical Institute students: the average age is 20 years old; 78% of students have secondary vocational education, including 47% with education in other areas (law, economy, engineering, etc.). Most students hold an active social position, participate in activities of public organizations and movements: 61% of them are involved in student self-governance (NEFU Students' Primary Trade Union Organization, the Council for Students' Creative Development, Students' Volunteer Center "The Pole of the Good", Youth Public Association of Fellow-Countrymen "ZEMA" International Students' Club "NEFU International", Students' Scientific Society, NEFU Students' League "Club

of the Funny and Inventive”, Yakutsk City Youth Public Organization "The NEFU United Students' Council of Student Campus Dormitories “Sergeleekh”, "University" Voluntary Vigilante Group, etc.); 15% of students work at various enterprises, in companies and organizations not related to the education system.

Figure 1



As follows from Figure 1 above, the number of NEFU volunteer students in 2017-2019 tended to increase. For 6 months of 2020, 747 students took part in volunteer activities in various areas and of various types. According to survey results, the percentage of volunteer students was highest in providing assistance to the elderly, children, disabled people, transportation of people, etc. The second most popular participation activity is work at the settlement territory – cleaning, garbage removal, urban land improvement in parks, on roads, and area landscaping.

For now, the following students' volunteer centers run at NEFU: “The Pole of the Good”, “ViNyL”, “Alliance”, and “Medical Volunteers” – totaling 747 volunteer students. Also, since March 2020, University students have joined the all -Russian action of mutual assistance “We are together” during the coronavirus pandemic.

At the Pedagogical Institute, the social pedagogical system forming activity of students is implemented mostly via their participation in the Students' Primary Trade Union Organization, pedagogical teams, and in volunteer, cultural and creative activities. Pedagogical teams provide an opportunity for self-realization and engagement in varied social activities. Next comes a brief summary of the NEFU Pedagogical Institute experience in this area.

From 2003 to 2014, Students' Youth Public Organization “Volunteers” conducted its activity at NEFU Social Pedagogy Department. The mission of the organization was spreading the ideas of humanism and charity among students by engaging them in active social life. Its motto says: “An hour in the good will fade away all the grief”. For this period, the volunteer students have become organizers of various events for students – theatrical performances, charity events, mass scale games, and many others.

The most significant and long-running organization's project was "The Friendship Planet", which was implemented in 2012-2013 with the aim of involving students with disabilities in social life. The events involved joint activities of students from the Republican Boarding School for Professional, Medical and Social Rehabilitation of Disabled People and their healthy counterparts from NEFU Pedagogical Institute. According to students, holding such events is very important for them, as they gain an invaluable experience in communicating with different population groups; they establish contacts with organizations and public foundations. Moreover, there arises an additional opportunity to be engaged in scientific activities while preparing term papers, final qualification works, and scientific articles.

In 2005, "Dar" Pedagogical Team members became winners in the category "The best project to support young people with disabilities" of the project competition held by the RS (Ya) Ministry of Youth Policy with the project "Adaptation of children with severe speech disorders in social and cultural environment of a multi-ethnic society". In 2010, "Dar" Pedagogical Team was recognized to be the best pedagogical unit of the Republic and received the Certificate of Acknowledgement by the President of the RS (Ya) E. A. Borisov. In April 2011, Team members became diploma winners of all-Russian competition of scientific and educational projects "My Initiative in Education" (St. Petersburg), diploma winners of all-Russian competition for the best project "My Legislative Initiative" (Moscow), and winners in the category "Opening opportunities" in the Far Eastern inter-university competition of pedagogical teams in Birobidzhan.

Since 2017, based on NEFU Social Pedagogy Department, Tigers' Pedagogical Team has been operating within the framework of the project "Development of student volunteer movement". The project objective is systematic engagement of young people in public life, development and support of youth initiatives aimed at arrangement of young people's voluntary work, providing opportunities for implementing students' potential in social and public areas; facilitating students' research, teaching and practically-oriented activities. Since 2017, Team members participate in implementing the social project of the RS (Ya) Ministry of Youth and Family Policy "The Palette of Success". The project is focused on creating a unique site for personal growth, career guidance and enhancement of young people's social activity in various public and personally significant events. The most significant projects implemented by students of the Social Pedagogy Department comprise the following:

- The traditional city New Year's Matinee for disabled children who do not attend children's institutions held in cooperation with the RS (Ya) National Public Establishment "Yakutsk Labor and Social Protection Department" at the RS (Ya) Ministry of Labor and Social Development (it annually covers about 50 children with disabilities);

- Students' project "Organization of Children's Leisure" for students of special (correctional) institutions, held on the base of the Municipal State Institution Centre for Assistance and Comprehensive Support of Orphans and Children Left without Parental Care, and Children with Disabilities "Bereginya" in Yakutsk;
- Since 2009, the project "Book-03" has been implemented to engage first-year students into social activities of the specialized library for the elderly and disabled;
- As part of the project "We share joy with you" of "Tigers" Pedagogical Team, a charity concert is held annually in the Republican Boarding House for the elderly and disabled in Yakutsk.

At the Department of Special (Defectological) Education, the Center for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance to Children with Disabilities "Saydy" was established to create a scientific and practical base for developing professional competencies for students majoring in special (defectological) education and to provide a correctional psychological and pedagogical support to disabled children. In this centre, the students can take an active part in implementing socially significant projects starting from the first year: City Speech Therapy Campaign "Rechenka" in providing diagnostic and advisory assistance to children with speech disorders, offsite logopedic diagnostic and advisory campaigns in uluses (districts) of the Republic (42). Independent designing and implementing of such projects is done at the Centre by students while preparing term papers and final qualification works. The students are engaged in activities of an inclusive theater group, an inclusive decorative art studio, and two groups for children with general speech underdevelopment: a theatre group and a decorative art studio. While working at scientific research projects, the students gain a positive experience of social interaction, professional cooperation with their colleagues, and satisfaction from the outcomes of their work that caters for their professional development.

Time-honored traditions of the Pedagogical Institute comprise annual conducting of New Year's Matinees for orphans and children left without parental care, and for children with health limitations and disabilities and the campaign "Give children a holiday" (collecting gifts for these children) by students of the Department of Special (Defectological) Education.

In view of providing professional guidance and inspiring students' interest in their future profession, providing charitable, socially significant support to disabled children, as well as helping teachers in guidance and education of children with special educational needs, Students' Pedagogical Club for autistic children "Seedling" has been working at the Department of Special (Defectological) Education since 2008.

In 2012, Volunteer Unit "Sun Twinkle" for first-year students was established. Its members participate in charity events held by the Public Organization "Sunny City", organize pedagogic events

in educational institutions, and arrange leisure activities for children with severe speech disorders and intellectual disabilities. Such social interaction of students in the professional area helps to realize the essence of their future profession and contributes to development of social activity, professional and personal self-determination (38).

Monitoring of graduates' employment and professional growth confirmed that engagement in volunteer movement, manifestation of social activity during the years of studies contributes to teachers' successful personal and professional development. It is illustrated by achievements of our graduates in the professional area. Our former graduates include the RS (Ya) Deputy Minister for external relations and affairs of Yakutia peoples, directors of secondary schools, heads of pre-school educational institutions, the Head of the Department of education monitoring and quality of the Municipal Public Institution "Board of Education" of Yakutsk Urban District, higher education teachers, holders of the badge "Hope of Yakutia" of the RS (Ya) Ministry of Education, "Expert of the RS (Ya) in Youth Policy", winners of XVI International Makarenko Competition among educational institutions in Moscow (2018), winners in categories "Professional Competence", "Up the Stairs of Mastership" of the city competition "Young Speech Therapist-2018", etc.

In line with the subject of the study, the analysis of students' motivation to participate in volunteer movement was done to establish the following main motives: 1) involvement in a wide range of social, economic and political relations; 2) rendering assistance (social, pedagogical, psychological) to those who seek it; 3) volunteers' participation in arranging and holding events of various levels, such as International Intellectual Games; International Sports Children's Games, the Universiade, "Student Spring" Festival, etc.; 4) participation in traineeships; 5) continuation of education after awarding bachelor's degree, participation in social activities; 6) upgrading professional qualification; 7) gaining job experience; 8) applying the experience accumulated as a product that can be implemented and distributed; 9) new opportunities, new knowledge; 10) relationship between volunteering and future professional activities; 11) expansion of the communication circle, contacts, etc.

In response to the question about the difficulties they encountered during volunteering, the students mentioned time shortage; misunderstanding of the purpose of some activities; lack of basic knowledge; inability to select an individual education pattern to match it with participation in volunteer activities, mostly due to self-government and self-organization issues in within academic activities.

Answering questions about further employment, 42% of respondents said that they would work in educational institutions and organizations of extended education; 49% would continue their studies to get Master's degree in teaching profile; 9% said they intended to relate their work to activities of public organizations and movements.

As a suggestion, the students proposed to use more active methods and technologies in education, practice-oriented forms in educational process; to extend the range of subjects available via the electronic distance learning system Moodle. This suggestion was supported by WHO which announced the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 and by students' participation in volunteer movement “#We are together” focused on support of the elderly, disabled citizens and medical staff during the coronavirus pandemic.

Discussion

The research was conducted in North-Eastern Federal University, as a limit of the study. This study stipulates that NEFU educational programs in specialization of “Education and Pedagogical Sciences N° 44.00.00” cover universal, general professional and specific professional competencies. The educational process within the future teachers' program, in line with the topic considered, includes the following disciplines: Practical Training in Volunteer Activities; the Fundamentals of Youth Leader Activities; Recreation and Leisure Studies; Mediation in Social Sphere; Practical Training in Interpersonal Interaction; Social and Educational Technologies in Children and Youth Movement; Methods of Student's Social Activity Development; Social and Pedagogical Activities in Children's and Youth Associations, and others. In educational process, the modular interdisciplinary educational program is implemented engaging contextual learning, game technologies and practice-oriented technologies (Bozhedonova et al., 2018, Vasilieva & Nogovitsyna, 2018)

For example, the objective of the “Basic Professional Educational Program of Higher Education” N° 44.03.02 in Psychological and pedagogical education is facilitating the professional training of graduates capable of arranging and implementing the psychological pedagogical support of children and adults, fostering civic responsibility, aiming at permanent professional growth, and other personal qualities (Vasilieva & Nogovitsyna, 2018). The peculiarity of this professional area assumes specialist's readiness to timely and effective resolving educatee's problems in social establishment, personal development, communication difficulties, professional choice, family relations, education issues, and so on. In this regard, a graduate of a pedagogical University shall evidentiate a high level of both theoretical training and social activity and responsibility, knowledge and skills of an advisor in individual and group development, correction and support (Bozhedonova et al., 2018; Gryazeva et al., 2019; Forster et al., 2015; Kobysheva, 2016; Pevnaya, 2016; Vasiliadi, 2016.

As provided by educational programs in specialty “Education and Pedagogical Sciences N° 44.00.00” students - members of pedagogical teams and volunteers present the experience gained in public organizations and associations in their research and term papers and in final qualification works. Their experience is centered around the following issues: activation of leadership potential of

student's personality in pedagogical teams, social engagement as a space for children's social upbringing in rural society; social and cultural potential of public students' merging for developing a multicultural personality; formation of professional qualities in college students by means of self-government, etc. Therefore, volunteerism also influences scientific achievements in the chosen professional field (Pevnaya & Pevnaya, 2019).

Thus, it is confirmed that engaging future teachers into professionally oriented volunteer activities should be regarded as one of main facilities for students to demonstrate their social and professional activity that is inherent to formation and actualization of a subjective position in further productive professional activity. As a limit of the study, it could be the fact that the research was conducted only in the one federal university. However, that according to the results of the research, there are a number of important issues that require further study. Issues of systematic inclusion of volunteer activities in the educational program of teacher training; inclusion of social partners in the development of volunteerism in universities and the development of internal motivation of students for volunteer work may become subjects for further research in this area.

Conclusion

The analysis of recent research revealed both the social and pedagogical advantages of volunteerism. Professionally oriented volunteer activity as part of educating future teachers develops not only the required professional qualities and competencies but also becomes a stage of their professionalization, helping them to find their place of employment faster and developing their social and professional skill sets. The effective professional education of a student preparing to be a teacher assumes involvement of each modern life subject in reality via university traditions and corporate culture, as well as participation in social project implementation and stable social communities.

Summarizing, these conclusions can be drawn: Students' participation in volunteer initiatives and taking part in volunteer activities in line with their future professional activities, during practical training, participation in organizations and teams implementing socially significant projects, has definite positive results. It significantly consolidates their knowledge in the area of their chosen profession, motivates them to further extend their professional skill range, and scales up their self-esteem in regard to their professional and personal qualities.

Therefore, it is confirmed that a higher education institution, challenged with preserving the best academic traditions while updating educational programs by ensuring the quality of education and its relevance to the current and future needs of educational practice, can prosper by incorporating volunteer activities into future teachers' training to support development of graduates' professional competencies in line with their future professional orientation.

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