

The Interplay Between Formal Volunteering and Youth Employment in Tanzania: The Case of Selected Volunteer-involving Organizations

Christian Lunda Mwamanga & Hezron Makundi[§]*

Abstract

The study explores how formal volunteering impacts access to employment among the youth in Tanzania by focusing on skills development. A survey was conducted on 257 volunteer alumni from four volunteer-involving organizations. The analysis was conducted via a variance-based structural equation modelling, using Smart-PLS software. The findings revealed that volunteering positively influences the acquisition of professional, core competencies, and basic skills. However, while basic skills are crucial, they do not directly enhance access to employment. The study suggests that a multifaceted approach is critical in tackling employability challenges. Core competencies—like problem-solving and communication—are among the leading drivers in improving job prospects. However, it is strategies such as targeted skills development programs, career counselling, and professional certification that tend to enhance job market readiness when acquired through volunteer programs. Evidences from the four volunteer-involving organizations reveal the importance of integrating formal volunteering into educational curricula, and fostering cross-sector partnerships for mentorship and training. The study underscores the need for a holistic workforce development, tailored skill programs, and collaborative efforts to nurture a skilled and competitive workforce; ultimately boosting employment outcomes and productivity.

Keywords: *volunteering, employability, youth, skills development, Tanzania.*

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Introduction

Several advantages of volunteering for individuals and their communities have been reported, with employment creation being one of them. Volunteers tend to increase their chances of engaging in the activities of their respective communities (Crittenden & Butler, 2019). Studies have shown that formal volunteering provides a pathway to paid employment opportunities (Paine et al., 2013; Van der Horst et al., 2017; Allan 2019,). Accordingly, Trembath et al. (2010) posit that formal volunteering has been endorsed as both a stepping stone to, and an alternative, employment. What is yet unknown is the extent to which access to employment is realized upon the completion of formal volunteer services in the context of developing countries like Tanzania. There are limited studies on volunteering in Tanzania, especially those that are geared towards addressing youth unemployment.

* PhD candidate, Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam: christianmwamanga@yahoo.co.uk, ORCID ID: 0009-0005-8424-6829 (Corresponding author).

[§] Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam. hmakundi@udsm.ac.tz, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8558-1198.

In Tanzania, understanding the intricate relationship between formal volunteering and youth employment is crucial as this will enable the country to navigate the challenges of unemployment, and seek avenues for youth development. In addition, understanding how formal volunteering interconnects with employment opportunities is essential for crafting effective policies that foster sustainable socio-economic growth (Lough, 2016).

The youth in Tanzania constitute a significant portion of the population, and have a considerable potential as agents of change and drivers of innovation (ILO, 2019). According to the recent census of 2022, the youth in Tanzania—aged between 15 to 35 years—constitute 34.5 percent of the entire population. However, persistent unemployment rates among this demographic segment—which stands at 11.5 percent according to ILO (2019)—underscore the urgency of exploring diverse pathways to harness their talents and aspirations. As a result, formal volunteering emerges as a multifaceted avenue through which the youth can acquire skills, expand their networks, and contribute meaningfully to community development initiatives (Briggs, 2008).

According to Taimur and Mursaleen (2020), young people engage in volunteering activities because of altruism and social responsibility, connection building, mandatory requirements of study programmes, self-development and reward. Accordingly, O'Higgins (2022) adds that youth participation in formal volunteerism helps in the social and professional integration of youth in the labour force. Against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape, this study explores the determinants of formal volunteering, and the connection between formal volunteering and youth employment within the context of selected volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs) operating in Tanzania. While previous research on this topic has predominantly focused on developed countries (Brudney, 2012; Puckering, 2015; Lee & Tavares et al., 2022), limited attention has been given to the context of developing nations like Tanzania. Moreover, prior studies often lack an empirical focus on how the skills gained through volunteering translate into youth employability. This study addresses this gap by empirically analysing the extent to which specific skills acquired through volunteering enhance the employability of youth volunteers in Tanzania.

One of the critical policy gaps in Tanzania is the limited focus on the employability outcomes of formal volunteering. While various policies exist to promote youth development, such as the National Youth Development Policy (2007), they often fail to explicitly link volunteering with skill acquisition and job readiness. For instance, there are no clear mechanisms to integrate volunteering into national employment strategies, leaving VIOs disconnected from the broader policy framework for youth empowerment. This contrasts with the case of developed countries, where volunteering is often strategically embedded in workforce development initiatives (Puckering, 2015). Additionally, there is a lack of systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of volunteering on skill development and

employment outcomes. Without robust data collection and reporting mechanisms, policymakers cannot assess how volunteering experiences translate into job market readiness. Such mechanisms are essential for creating targeted interventions that align with Tanzania's socio-economic needs.

Theoretical Framework

When young people engage in volunteerism, it helps them develop soft and professional skills that enhances their competitiveness in the labour market, and facilitates access to formal employment (Paine et al., 2013). This study hinges on the private benefits model, which presupposes that people derive personal advantages from their voluntary work (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). It particularly focuses on the benefits that are likely to increase the employability of the youth in the labour market. Depending on the form of volunteerism, such benefits may include increased employability, social integration and support, a 'warm glow', mental and physical health, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, civic-mindedness, collective goods, and trust (Hustinx, 2010).

From the perspective of the private benefits model, volunteerism can be viewed as an investment in human capital, where individuals engage in such activities not only for altruistic reasons but also for the personal benefits they expect to gain. These benefits include skill development—such as improved communication, teamwork, leadership, and technical expertise—which make individuals more attractive to employers. The model suggests further that individuals assess the value of volunteerism by weighing the time and effort invested against the expected rewards, such as networking opportunities and increased employability. Thus, volunteerism serves as a pathway to formal employment by providing real-world experience that is often required for job opportunities. Moreover, the aggregate effect of increased skill acquisition and employability among the youth contributes to broader economic growth by reducing unemployment and enhancing productivity. This aligns with Paine et al. (2013), who argue that volunteerism helps youth gain valuable experience, which ultimately improves their career prospects. Therefore, volunteerism creates both private and public benefits; enhancing individual careers while contributing to economic development.

Literature Review

This section examines the key features of youth formal volunteering and its impact on youth employment. It explores the motivations behind youth volunteerism; including altruism, skill development, and networking opportunities. The review also investigates the relationship between volunteering and employment, discussing how volunteering may improve employability by providing valuable skills and experience. It highlights gaps in the literature, offering a theoretical foundation for exploring the connection between volunteering and youth employment. Alongside empirical analysis, this section also establishes the hypotheses of the study.

Drivers of Youth Volunteerism

The first driver of youth formal volunteering is *human capital*, which is vital for qualifying for, and succeeding in, volunteer roles. Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and qualifications individuals acquire, often through *formal education*, which enable them to effectively participate in volunteer programs. Without a certain level of education and the skills it provides, the youth may struggle to meet the requirements or expectations of volunteer positions. Formal education equips individuals with foundational competencies such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and communication; which are essential for performing tasks and responsibilities in volunteer roles (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011).

Many volunteer positions, particularly those requiring specialized knowledge—such as in healthcare, education, or social services—demand human capital derived from formal education (Ainsworth et al., 2020). For example, youth with healthcare training might volunteer in clinics or public health initiatives, while those with expertise in environmental science may work with sustainability programs. Hence, formal education serves as a stepping stone not only for employment, but also for gaining access to volunteer opportunities that require technical skills. As such, human capital that is acquired through education enables young people to engage in meaningful volunteer work, fostering both personal development and community impact (Benz & Frey, 2008).

Social capital is the second driver of youth volunteerism. Social capital is described by Bourdieu (1985) as the aggregate of the real or potential resources that are related to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutional networks of mutual acquaintance or recognition. Social capital is defined as the assets of people or groups that are rooted in social interactions, and are based on their position in a social network (Lin, 2000). Social capital is created through networks of mutual trust and shared ideals, which can be found in both formal and informal social networks (Putnam, 2001). Putnam (2000) further contends that the network of social connections and institutions makes it possible to coordinate and communicate, which helps to address difficulties of collective action. People with more social networks are more willing to volunteer than people with fewer networks because they consider volunteering to have more rewards when they are more integrated into the community (Lee & Brudney, 2009).

Recent studies highlight the significant role of social capital in promoting formal volunteering. Baik et al. (2024) found that caregivers with strong social support and active participation in group activities are more likely to engage in formal volunteering. Additionally, a research by Lu et al. (2020) indicates that cognitive social capital, encompassing trust and shared values, positively correlates with formal volunteering among older adults in urban China. These findings underscore the importance of social networks and communal engagement in fostering volunteerism. Organizations aiming to boost volunteer participation should consider strategies that enhance social capital within communities.

Cultural values are the third indicator of youth volunteerism as they significantly influence youth participation by creating barriers that limit young people's desire to engage. For instance, in their study on youth volunteerism in Pakistan, Taimur and Mursaleen (2020) found that societal expectations and traditional norms often discourage young individuals, especially women, from participating in formal volunteer activities. These cultural constraints can lead to limited opportunities for the youth to engage in volunteering, thereby affecting their social and professional integration. Similarly, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV, 2019) highlights that societal gender norms often create barriers for women, restricting their access to volunteer opportunities. These cultural influences particularly impact young women, preventing them from participating in volunteer work. It is for the aforesaid reasons that cultural values were used as a third indicator for youth formal volunteering.

Youth Formal Volunteering and Acquisition of Core Work Skills

Core work skills refer to the ability to learn and adapt; read, write and compute competently; listen and communicate effectively; think creatively; solve problems independently; manage oneself at work; interact with co-workers; work in teams or groups; handle basic technology; lead effectively; and organize (Keow, 2011; ILO 2013; Taimur & Mursaleen, 2020). While technical skills are the hard skills (technical expertise) and knowledge that are required for a job, core work skills are interpersonal expertise—also known as people skills and personal attributes—that one possesses (Robles, 2012). According to Robles (2012) and Khasanzyanova (2017), these skills are among the top proficiencies that are dominantly needed in the labour market, hence increasing the chances of being employed in the formal sector. As employers are progressively looking for employees who are mature and socially well-adjusted, they rate core work skills as number one in importance for entry-level success on a job (Jabeen et al., 2022; Onwuamaegbu et al., 2024). All in all, core work skills are employability skills that are transferrable in many jobs. This brings us to the following hypotheses:

H₁: Youth formal volunteering positively affects core work skills acquisition.

H₂: Core work skills acquisition is positively related to youth access to employment.

Youth Formal Volunteering and Basic Skills Acquisition Needed for Employment

ILO (2003) defines basic skills as the levels of literacy and numeracy required to get employment that will pay enough to cover daily expenses. As the name suggests, these abilities are also necessary for furthering one's education and training, as well as for acquiring the transferable technical and vocational abilities that improve one's chances of landing better employment. Robles (2012) describes basic/fundamental skills as skills that include technical, knowledge of tasks, and hands-on ability. Workplace competencies—including typing, writing, numeracy, reading, writing grants, using computers, and the ability to utilize software—are examples of technical skills (Robles 2012). The following hypotheses are therefore put forth:

H₃: Youth formal volunteering positively affects basic skills acquisition.

H₄: Basic skills acquisition positively affects youth access to employment.

Youth Formal Volunteering and Professional Skills Acquisition Needed for Employment

According to ILO (2013), professional skills refer to the individual attributes that impact work habits; such as honesty, integrity and work ethics. Taimur and Mursaleen, (2020) found that volunteering youths learned some professional virtues such as empathy and compassion. Virtues are also referred to as moral excellence, which is among the important prerequisites for employment. Being empathetic means understanding and caring about the feelings of others, which Keow (2011) mentioned as one of the important requirements for employment. Accordingly, Puckering (2015) posits that virtues are traits that reduce the focus on self-interest and instrumentalism. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₅: Youth formal volunteering positively affects professional skills acquisition.

H₆: Professional skills acquisition is positively related to youth access to employment.

Methodology

This section outlines the research framework employed to achieve the objectives of the study. It provides a detailed explanation of the research design, approach, and methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. By clearly defining these elements, the section ensures transparency and replicability, enabling readers to understand how the study was conducted, and how conclusions were drawn.

Research Design

This study employs an explanatory research design, which aims to investigate causal relationships between variables, and provide insights into the underlying mechanisms driving formal volunteering. The design is well-suited for understanding the factors influencing volunteering and its impact on youth employment. By systematically analysing data, this design enables the study to test hypotheses and draw conclusions that contribute to theoretical and practical knowledge.

Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was adopted to ensure a structured and objective examination of the relationships under study. This approach involves collecting numerical data, which is analysed statistically to test hypotheses and validate findings. The quantitative methodology enables the study to identify patterns, measure the strength of relationships, and generalize results across the population of interest.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in four volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs) located across different regions in Tanzania. These include organizations based in the cities of Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Dodoma; as well as in Morogoro municipality. These locations were selected to provide a diverse representation of urban and semi-urban settings and capture varying social, cultural, and economic

dynamics that influence volunteering behaviours. The inclusion of multiple regions ensures a broader understanding of the factors driving formal volunteering in the Tanzanian context.

Population, Sampling Procedure, Sample Size and Data Sources

The target population involved 720 volunteer alumni who had had an opportunity to engage in formal volunteering through four (4) selected not-for-profit VIOs labelled **W** with 150 alumni, **X** with 200 alumni, **Y** with 150 alumni, and **Z** with 220 alumni. This study employs a stratified random sampling. The unit of analysis consisted of individual volunteer alumni. These individuals were selected from a list provided by each VIO. The list served as the sampling frame for identifying potential respondents. The sample size was computed proportionately from the four strata using Yamane's (1967) formula, which resulted in obtaining a sample size of 257 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Distribution by VIO

VIO	No. of Alumni	Proportion	Sample Size
W	150	0.208	53
X	200	0.278	72
Y	150	0.208	53
Z	220	0.306	79
Total	720	1.000	257

Source: Field Data (2023)

Only primary data collected from volunteering alumni from the selected VIOs was used. The primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire.

Variables, Measurement Methods and Data Analysis

The independent variable is youth volunteerism formed by human capital, social capital and cultural values that were borrowed from the resource theory of volunteering. The intermediate variables are the three categories of skills that result from formal volunteering according to the ILO (2013). These are core work skills/core competencies, technical skills, and professional skills. The dependent variable is access to employment. This was measured using quality of employment indicators as suggested by Lamba (2003). The variance-based structural equation modelling (VB-SEM), using the SMART-PLS software, was used for data analysis.

Reliability and Validity Measures

Composite reliability test was used to assess internal consistency, whereas convergent and discriminant validity were used to validate the model.

Results

The model was made of five (5) unobserved variables, one of which forms the outer model; and four (4) forming the inner models. Youth volunteerism, which formed the outer model, was a formative construct being explained by human capital,

social capital, and cultural values; while the remaining constructs (the inner model) were reflective. As a result, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted for the inner model only.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s Test

The current study yielded a KMO value of 0.956, which is well above the recommended cut-off point of 0.5. In addition, Bartlett’s test of sphericity yielded a chi-square value that is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the sample size was adequate for factor analysis; and that the matrix is not an identity matrix.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett’s Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.956
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	17765.107
	df	903
	Sig.	.000

Source: EFA Output (2023)

Factor Extraction and Retention Methods

The principal components analysis (PCA), with Oblimin rotation, was used to extract the factors. Having extracted the cumulative percent of variance, Kaiser’s criteria (Eigenvalue > 1 rule) was used for factor retentions. Based on the aforesaid criteria, the final EFA output generated 4 components (Table 3). The 4 components accounted for 80.862% of all variations in the model, which is well above the recommended cut-off of 50% (Hair et al., 1995).

Table 3: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	19.757	45.947	45.947	18.190
2	7.105	16.523	62.469	10.748
3	5.442	12.656	75.125	9.321
4	2.467	5.736	80.862	7.641

Source: Field Data (2023)

The four (4) components were fairly distributed in the pattern matrix output table as seen in Table 3. The factor loadings were all above 0.5 as recommended.

Assessment of the Outer Model

Outer Loadings

In this study, six (6) indicator items had insufficient loadings, and were hence dropped. These were PS5, PS16, PS12, CC9 and AE5. All the remaining items had sufficient outer loadings higher than the recommended cut-off point of .70 (Hair et al., 2022).

Composite Reliability (CR), Internal Consistency Reliability and Average Variance

All the composite reliability values in this study were above 0.7, indicating that the observed variables reliably measure the latent construct. Using Cronbach’s alpha, the internal consistency reliability was found to be above 0.7. Also, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were all above 0.5, indicating that the indicator items had a strong relationship with the underlying constructs. In addition, all the rho_A values were above 0.7, which suggests that the indicator variables were true measures of the underlying constructs. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

Table 4: Reliability and AVE Values

	Cronbach’s Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Access to Employment	0.972	0.977	0.977	0.843
Basic Skills	0.971	0.973	0.978	0.898
Core Competencies	0.956	0.964	0.963	0.722
Professional Skills	0.989	0.99	0.989	0.832
Youth Volunteering		1		

Source: Field Data (2023)

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios. Results show that most of the HTMT ratios are less than 1, which is a good sign for discriminant validity (Table 5). Therefore, there were no significant issues with discriminant validity in the model.

Table 5: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios

	Access to Employment	Basic Skills	Core Competencies	Professional Skills
Access to Employment				
Basic Skills	0.177			
Core Competencies	0.277	0.583		
Professional Skills	0.354	0.282	0.375	

Source: Field Data (2023)

Assessment of the Inner Model

To assess the inner model, this study used path coefficients (standardized estimates), significance of path coefficients, R-squared (R²) or variance explained, effect size and practical significance, goodness-of-fit indices, bootstrapping results, and hypothesis testing.

Path Coefficients

In SEM, path coefficients represent the relationships between variables in a model. The results in Table 6 indicate that youth volunteering has positive effects on basic skills, core competencies, and professional skills. An increase in youth volunteering tends to be associated with increases in basic skills, core competencies, and professional skills. Among them, professional skills show the strongest effect, followed by core competencies, and then basic skills.

Table 6: Path Coefficients

	Access to Employment	Basic Skills	Core Competencies	Professional Skills
Basic Skills	-0.003			
Core Competencies	0.169			
Professional Skills	0.286			
Youth Volunteering		0.298	0.412	0.431

Source: Field Data (2023)

On the other end, as Table 6 further shows, basic skills have a negligible negative effect on access to employment, meaning changes in basic skills have negligible influence on access to employment. Core competencies have a moderate positive effect on access to employment, suggesting that an increase in core competencies tends to lead to a moderate increase in access to employment. Professional skills have a relatively strong positive effect on access to employment, indicating that an increase in professional skills is associated with a notable increase in access to employment.

Effect Size (f-square)

Effect size was used to evaluate the statistical significance and practical significance of the relationships. It is important to consider both statistical and practical significance to understand the importance of these relationships. The results are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Effect Sizes

	Access to Employment	Basic Skills	Core Competencies	Professional Skills
Basic Skills	0.002			
Core competencies	0.021			
Professional Skills	0.082			
Youth Volunteering		0.097	0.205	0.228

Source: Field Data (2023)

The effect size between access to employment and basic skills is 0. There is no effect of basic skills on access to employment. This suggests that changes in basic skills do not have a meaningful impact on access to employment. Core competencies have a small effect on access to employment. This means that changes in core competencies are associated with a small increase in access to employment. Professional skills have a small to moderate effect on access to employment. This indicates that changes in access to employment are associated with a small to moderate increase in professional skills.

The Model Fit

SRMR measures the average standardized discrepancy between the observed correlations and the correlations implied by the model. A lower SRMR indicates a better model fit. In this case, a saturated model has a lower SRMR (0.038), suggesting a better fit than the estimated model (0.119) (Table 8).

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d_ULS is a measure of the discrepancy between the model-implied covariance matrix and the observed covariance matrix. A smaller d_ULS indicates a better fit. The saturated model has a much smaller d_ULS, indicating a better fit compared to the estimated model. Similar to d_ULS, d_G is a measure of the discrepancy between the model-implied covariance matrix and the observed covariance matrix. In this case, the saturated model has lower d_G values, indicating a better fit compared to the estimated model. These findings are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Model Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.038	0.119
d_ULS	1.524	14.693
d_G	2.577	2.767
Chi-Square	3,128.15	3,266.91
NFI	0.836	0.829

Source: Field Data (2023)

A chi-square statistic assesses the difference between the observed and expected covariance matrices. A smaller chi-square indicates a better fit. In this case, the saturated model has a slightly lower chi-square value, suggesting a slightly better fit than the estimated model. NFI is a goodness-of-fit index that measures the relative improvement in fit compared to a null model. Higher NFI values indicate a better fit. In this case, the saturated model has slightly lower NFI values, indicating a goodness of fit.

Bootstrapping Results and Hypotheses Testing

In this study, bootstrapping was conducted using 500 samples. As seen in Table 9, all paths were found to be statistically significant, except for the relationship between basic skills and access to employment.

Table 9: Bootstrapping Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Hypothesis Test Results
Basic Skills -> Access to Employment	-0.003	-0.009	0.072	0.036	0.971	Rejected
Core Competencies -> Access to Employment	0.169	0.173	0.077	2.18	0.030	Accepted
Professional Skills -> Access to Employment	0.286	0.288	0.07	4.107	0.000	Accepted
Youth Volunteering -> Basic Skills	0.298	0.299	0.07	4.262	0.000	Accepted
Youth Volunteering -> Core Competencies	0.412	0.419	0.064	6.442	0.000	Accepted
Youth Volunteering -> Professional Skills	0.431	0.434	0.061	7.033	0.000	Accepted

Source: Field Data (2023)

Figure 2 presents the output path model.

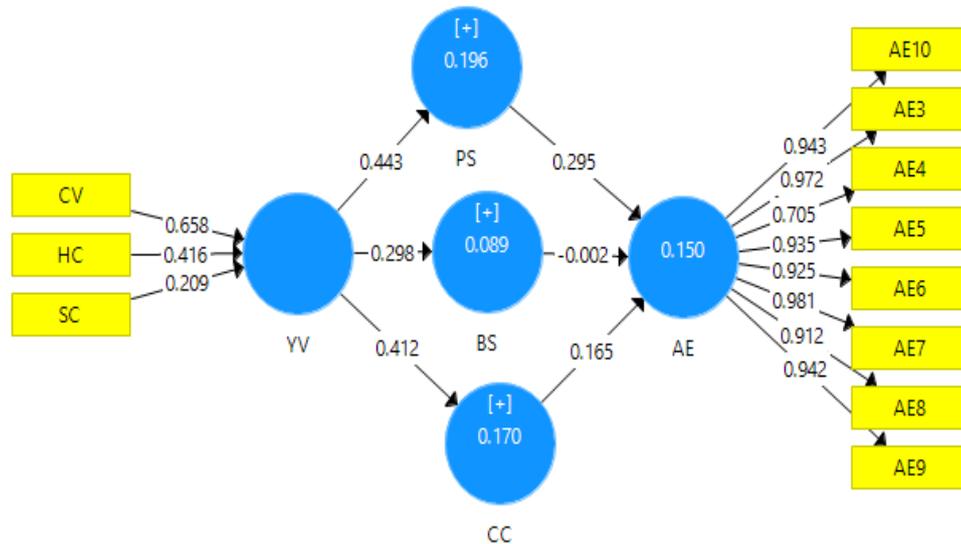


Figure 2: Path Model

Discussion

Basic Skills and Access to Employment

It was hypothesized that basic skills acquisition positively affects youth access to employment. The findings in Table 9 suggest a lack of significant relationship between basic skills and access to employment. According to the findings, while basic skills are certainly essential, their direct impact on accessing employment opportunities might be limited. This is comparable to the study findings by Greenberg et al. (2003), who found that job skills training programs led to increased employment and earnings among participants. Similarly, a research by Calanca et al. (2018) highlights the growing importance of soft skills in the labour market. Their analysis of job advertisements revealed that employers increasingly value skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving; which are often categorized as soft skills. Organizations and policymakers should recognize that addressing employability challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, encompassing not only skill development but also other factors such as job availability and market dynamics.

It is possible that specific types of basic skills, or a combination of skills, may be more relevant in different job markets or industries (Ciarli et al., 2021). Tailoring skill development programs to the specific demands of the job market could enhance their effectiveness. The absence of a direct link between basic skills and employment access also emphasizes the importance of comprehensive support

systems, including job placement services and mentorship programs. These services can help bridge the gap between skill acquisition and successful job placement, especially for individuals who may face additional barriers to employment.

The non-significant relationship between *basic skills* and *access to employment* emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to workforce development (Ozkan-Ozen & Kazancoglu, 2022). It encourages organizations and policymakers to consider broader contextual factors and tailor skill development programs to the specific needs of different job markets. This suggests that workforce development strategies must go beyond the traditional focus on basic education to include a broader set of competencies, such as soft skills, technical expertise, and work readiness. In addition, contextual factors—such as the local economic environment, industry demands, and socio-cultural influences—play a significant role in determining access to employment.

Core Competencies and Access to Employment

It was hypothesized that core competencies have a positive effect on youth access to employment. The findings suggest a significant positive effect. This significant positive relationship between core competencies and access to employment has important practical implications for workforce development and job placement strategies. This finding underlines the importance of cultivating and enhancing core competencies among job seekers, including more personalized training programs (Brundiers et al, 2021; Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al, 2022). By recognizing the pivotal role of core competencies, organizations, educational institutions, and employment agencies can implement several practical strategies to enhance individuals' preparedness for the job market.

These findings are consistent with Brundiers et al. (2021), who found that investing in skills development programs that specifically target core competencies—such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability—can significantly enhance employability. Tailoring these programs to align with the diverse needs of various job markets and industries ensures that individuals are equipped with the skills most relevant to their chosen career paths. To emphasize the significance of core competencies in guiding individuals toward suitable career paths, and acquiring the essential skills for their chosen fields, the provision of career counselling services is crucial. A focus on core competencies during career counselling can result in better job matches, and contribute to long-term career satisfaction for individuals (Presti et al., 2022). Furthermore, fostering employer engagement is essential in this context. This will encourage employers to recognize and value core competencies in their hiring decisions. This will, in turn, create a demand for candidates with strong core competency profiles. Collaborative efforts between employers and educational institutions can facilitate the alignment of educational curricula with the skills that are in high demand, ensuring a more seamless transition from education to employment.

Additionally, job placement services can play a pivotal role in this process by concentrating on matching candidates with job opportunities that specifically value and require core competencies (Khang et al., 2023). This strategic alignment between candidates' skill sets and job requirements enhances the likelihood of successful job placement, fostering a more efficient and effective job market. The practical significance of these strategies lies in their potential to create targeted and impactful approaches to prepare individuals for the job market. Emphasizing the development of core competencies enables stakeholders to contribute meaningfully to improved employment outcomes and overall workforce productivity (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022). By implementing these practical implications, organizations, educational institutions, and employment agencies can collectively contribute to a more skilled, adaptable, and competitive workforce.

Professional Skills and Access to Employment

It was hypothesized that professional skills have a positive effect on access to employment. The findings suggest a significant positive relationship between *professional skills* and *access to employment*. This finding holds several practical implications for the enhancement of workforce development, and the refinement of job placement strategies. Skills development programs should take centre stage in the efforts of organizations, educational institutions, and employment agencies. Prioritizing the cultivation of professional skills among job seekers is crucial, and this can be achieved through the implementation of targeted training programs and courses (Dadzie et al., 2020). Such initiatives should aim to enhance a diverse set of skills—including technical expertise, project management, and communication—to ensure that individuals are equipped with the capabilities that align with the demands of the contemporary job market (El-Khatib et al., 2022).

Encouraging the acquisition of relevant certifications and credentials emerges as a pivotal strategy to significantly augment employability. Employers often place high value on specific professional qualifications, which serve as tangible indicators of an individual's specialized expertise. Encouraging job seekers to pursue and showcase these certifications can substantially enhance their competitiveness in the job market. In addition, résumé and interview preparation should be guided by a focus on effectively highlighting professional skills. Job seekers need assistance in articulating and showcasing their competencies on résumés and during interviews. Strategically emphasizing these skills can distinguish candidates from others in the job market, making them more appealing to potential employers.

Employer collaboration becomes paramount in aligning educational curricula with the evolving needs of the workforce. Employers can actively engage with educational institutions to ensure that academic programs are designed to instil the skills essential for success in the workplace (El-Khatib et al., 2022). This collaborative effort facilitates a more seamless transition from education to employment, as it enables graduates to be better equipped with the specific skills sought by employers.

Youth Formal Volunteering and Basic Skills

The significant positive relationship between *formal volunteering* and *basic skills* suggests that engagement in formal volunteering activities is associated with better basic skills. The practical implications arising from the identified relationship between formal volunteering and skill development encompass a range of strategies that can be employed by organizations, educational institutions, and collaborative efforts across sectors. These implications are crucial for leveraging formal volunteering as a platform for a comprehensive skill development.

Skill development through volunteering becomes a key avenue for organizations seeking to enhance individual skills. Encouraging individuals to participate in volunteer activities provides opportunities for the development of fundamental skills such as communication, teamwork, and time management (Robles, 2012). These skills, acquired through volunteering, hold a significant value not only within the context of volunteer work, but also in professional employment settings. Youth and educational programs should consider integrating formal volunteering into their curricula or extracurricular activities. This integration serves as a practical and experiential avenue for students to augment their basic skills (Alshammari et al., 2023). By linking formal volunteering with educational initiatives, institutions can provide students with hands-on opportunities to develop and apply essential skills in real-world scenarios.

Cross-sector collaboration emerges as a powerful strategy for creating a holistic approach to skills development. Collaboration between VIOs, educational institutions, and employers facilitates the alignment of skills gained through volunteering with educational and employment pursuits. This synergy ensures that individuals engaged in volunteer activities acquire skills that are directly transferable to broader aspects of their personal and professional development. Additionally, mentorship and training programs within volunteer organizations contribute significantly to skill enhancement. By providing mentorship and structured training opportunities, these organizations not only empower volunteers to contribute effectively to their chosen causes, but also improves their fundamental skill sets. This dual focus creates a mutually beneficial environment where individuals gain valuable skills, while making meaningful contributions to their communities.

By recognizing the skill-building potential of volunteering activities, organizations and educational institutions can collaboratively offer holistic skill development opportunities to volunteers (Bawica, 2021). By integrating volunteering into educational frameworks, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and providing mentorship and training, stakeholders can harness the transformative power of formal volunteering to cultivate a more skilled and versatile workforce.

Formal Volunteering and Core Competencies

The highly significant positive relationship between *formal volunteering* and *core competencies* suggests that individuals engaged in formal volunteering activities tend

to possess stronger core competencies. A research by Roose (2021) also supports the idea that volunteering fosters key competencies. Roose found that people who engage in structured volunteering activities are more likely to report higher levels of self-efficacy, communication skills, and leadership abilities: all of which are vital core competencies for career advancement (ibid.). Structured volunteer activities become a focal point for organizations aiming to intentionally foster core competencies such as problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership (Bhagavathula et al., 2021). By structuring volunteer activities to include components that specifically target these competencies, organizations can cultivate more well-rounded and capable volunteers. This intentional design aligns volunteer experiences with skill development objectives, thereby contributing to the growth of individuals beyond their immediate service roles.

Leadership development within volunteer programs emerges as a powerful strategy. Encouraging volunteers to take on leadership roles provides them with opportunities to enhance core competencies. Leadership roles inherently demand problem-solving skills, adaptability, and the ability to guide others, contributing to a holistic development experience for volunteers (Vito et al., 2023). This approach not only benefits the individuals directly but also enriches the overall capacity of volunteer programs. Additionally, skill assessments offer a valuable tool for organizations to gauge the core competencies of volunteers (Stylinski et al., 2020). By conducting assessments, organizations can gain insights into areas where individuals may need improvement; and hence tailor volunteer assignments accordingly. This personalized approach ensures that volunteers receive targeted opportunities to develop and strengthen specific competencies, thereby maximizing the impact of their engagement.

Feedback and recognition play a crucial role in motivating volunteers to continue their engagement and growth. Providing constructive feedback and recognition for the development of core competencies reinforce the value of volunteer contributions (Di Rienzo, 2020). This positive reinforcement encourages individuals to persist in their efforts and invest further in their personal and professional development through continued volunteer engagement. By strategically structuring volunteer activities, fostering leadership development, conducting skill assessments, and providing meaningful feedback and recognition, organizations can leverage volunteer experiences to cultivate well-rounded individuals. These individuals, committed not only to community service but also equipped with vital problem-solving and adaptability skills, contribute significantly to the overall success and impact of volunteer programs.

Formal Volunteering and Professional Skills

It was hypothesized that formal volunteering positively affects professional skills development. The findings suggest a significant positive relationship between formal volunteering and professional skills. This finding is similar to that of the study by Brudney (2017), which found that individuals who engage in volunteer work often

take on roles that require them to manage tasks, work with diverse groups, and lead initiatives: all of which contribute to the enhancement of professional capabilities. This finding holds significant practical implications for both volunteers and the organizations they engage with. Skills transfer becomes a focal point for volunteer organizations aiming to capitalize on the professional expertise of volunteers. Actively promoting the transfer of professional skills to volunteering activities ensures that volunteers can apply their specialized knowledge, thereby magnifying the impact of their service (Keow, 2011). This intentional alignment of skills enhances the effectiveness of volunteer contributions.

Training and development opportunities within volunteer programs can be strategically offered, particularly in areas where professional skills are relevant. By providing targeted training, volunteers can refine and expand their skill sets, thus enhancing their marketability. This approach not only benefits volunteers by advancing their professional competencies, but also contributes to the overall effectiveness of volunteer initiatives. Additionally, recognition and certification of the professional skills acquired through volunteering offer powerful motivators for individuals to engage in volunteer activities. Acknowledging and certifying these skills not only validates volunteers' contributions, but also serves as a tangible recognition of their professional development. Such certifications may also be valued by employers, further enhancing the appeal of volunteer experiences on a résumé.

Employer engagement becomes a collaborative avenue for organizations and employers to leverage professional skills in community service. Employers can actively collaborate with volunteer organizations to offer opportunities that align with the professional skills of their employees (Puckering, 2015). This collaborative approach creates a mutually beneficial relationship where volunteers contribute their expertise to community causes, and employers foster a sense of corporate social responsibility. Volunteers not only contribute meaningfully to the community, but also have the opportunity to enhance their professional skills, rendering them more attractive to employers. By strategically promoting skills transfer, offering training and development, providing recognition and certification, and fostering employer engagement, formal volunteering becomes a transformative experience that benefits both individuals and the organizations involved.

Conclusion

The study findings highlight the relationship between different skill sets that are imparted by youth volunteering and their impact on accessing employment opportunities. While basic skills may not directly correlate with employability, the significance of core competencies and professional skills is underscored. Tailored skill development programs, which address the specific demands of various job markets and industries, are crucial. Moreover, comprehensive support systems, including job placement services and mentorship programs, are

essential for bridging the gap between skill acquisition and successful job placement, particularly for marginalized individuals. Formal volunteering emerges as a significant platform for skill development, with strong associations found between volunteering activities and both basic skills and core competencies. Strategic collaboration among stakeholders is emphasized to align skill development initiatives with the evolving needs of the workforce. By implementing targeted strategies such as skills transfer, training, and recognition, stakeholders can collectively contribute to nurturing a more skilled, adaptable, and competitive workforce; thereby fostering inclusive pathways to employment for individuals of diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations

In the light of the research findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance workforce development and improve youth access to employment opportunities. Firstly, organizations and policymakers should prioritize the design and implementation of tailored skill development programs that address the specific needs of different job markets and industries, focusing on core competencies and professional skills. Additionally, comprehensive support systems -- including job placement services and mentorship programs -- should be expanded and made more accessible, particularly for marginalized individuals.

Secondly, formal volunteering should be promoted as a valuable platform for skill development, with efforts being directed towards integrating volunteering activities into educational curricula and extracurricular programs. This integration can help volunteers gain practical experience, foster a sense of civic responsibility, and build a wide range of transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and communication. Moreover, partnerships with community organizations and businesses should be encouraged to provide structured and meaningful volunteer opportunities, ensuring that volunteers can contribute effectively while benefiting from mentorship and networking. To further enhance the impact, institutions should recognize and reward volunteer contributions through certifications, academic credits, or public acknowledgement; which will motivate more individuals to participate, and reinforce the value of volunteering as a pathway to both personal and professional growth.

Lastly, stakeholders should engage in strategic collaboration to align skill development initiatives with the evolving demands of the workforce, leveraging partnerships between educational institutions, employers, and volunteer organizations. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can collectively contribute to fostering a more skilled, adaptable, and inclusive workforce; ultimately improving employment outcomes for individuals across diverse backgrounds.

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