



Volunteers are not Volunteering to Sacrifice their Objectives

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Abstract

The retention of volunteers is a worldwide growing concern for non-profit organizations. It is relatively less explored in third-world countries, where working styles, norms, cultural issues, the attitude of people toward social causes, and labor policies are different from those in developed nations. This research is designed to address the problem, and interestingly, the results of the study guide to make an in-depth study to conclude valuable recommendations for volunteering organizations. The existing literature related to the reasons for volunteers' dissatisfaction is limited. The objective of this study is to explore the grounds for the discontentment of volunteers by not availing them of the desired objectives. Data was collected through qualitative interviews with volunteer workers, HR managers, and executives working in different non-profit organizations in Pakistan that are serving the local community in various areas, including medical, education, nutrition, environment, grooming the potential of youth, etc. The analysis of the data explores considerable causes pertaining to the dissatisfaction of volunteers that ultimately causes poor retention.

Keywords: Volunteering, motivation, learning and development opportunities, retention

1. Introduction

Volunteering is a planned activity carried out with free will for the betterment of the community and involves (little to) no monetary compensation (Rodell, 2013). It determines physical and mental health benefits for both the volunteers and the community (Stukas, Hoyer, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016). For-profit and non-profit organizations recruit volunteers for multiple objectives. Small, non-profit organizations are likely to recruit volunteers instead of permanent employees due to limited financial and human resources. Similarly, business organizations recruit volunteers to add new skills, renowned energy and excitement among the existing staff, and most probably also promote the community ownership (Hopkins & Dowell, 2021). In a similar vein volunteers also hold their own interests including learning, growth and intrinsic motivation rewards for joining non-profit organizations (Skoglund, 2006). Therefore, keeping in view their significance, it provokes considerable attention to understand and analyze the causative interests of volunteers and organizations (Cameron, Karen, Newton, Bell, 2014). Some of them expect support and recognition from the organization for their unpaid services, whereas the majority of them desire to gain experience, develop job skills, and improve their social networking for career advancement (Fallon & Rice, 2015). Furthermore, volunteering generates opportunities for youth to engage in personal and social growth by gaining relevant experience and skills that support their career advancement, which is the ultimate objective of offering volunteering services (Fényes, Markos & Mohácsi, 2021). Previous studies have discussed that volunteers offer services for various reasons, including values, understanding the world, social benefits, career opportunities, ego enhancement and protection (Clary et al., 1998). Researchers also claim that 84% of volunteers engage in volunteering for sheer value-related reasons that help them improve their learning abilities (Allison, Okun, & Dutridge, 2002).

Researchers advocate that non-profit organizations have been showing serious concern regarding the retention of volunteers (Cady, Brodke, Kim, & Shoup, 2018). They associate retention of volunteers with their motivation (Crall et al., 2017), satisfaction and expected outcomes of volunteering services (Clary et al., 1998). They also believe that human resource sustains their adherence to the organizational objective when they perceive that their motives are being appreciated by the organization (Arshad et al., 2021). Employee attitudes are formed and steered by their motives. Therefore, organizations are advised to scan employee objectives at the time of their recruitment (Arshad et al., 2022). Furthermore, researchers are also convinced that when the learning objectives of volunteers do not match with the workplace environment, it stimulates their dissatisfaction and turnover intention (Martellos et al., 2021; Walk, Handy, & Schinnenburg, 2013), whereas contented volunteers prefer to remain with organizations (Welty Peachey, Lyras, Cohen, Bruening, & Cunningham, 2014). Therefore, to meet the growing social service needs of society, volunteering organizations have started to perceive the objectives of offering volunteering services to keep them motivated (Robinsons et al., 2021). Academic literature also recommends further research to understand the motivation and willingness of volunteers to remain in the organization (Faletehan et al., 2021; Gaber et al., 2022). Therefore, this study is designed to explore the causative retention of volunteers in non-profit organizations.

This study was carried out in Pakistan, where the majority of the population is Muslims with a rich historical background of volunteering (Abideen & Abbas, 2021). Partial formal volunteering exists in almost all spheres of life in Pakistan. That needs to be formalized for better outcomes. Scholars are convinced that volunteers are more satisfied with their lives than non-volunteers (Meier & Stutzer, 2008). One potential way to improve the motivational level of volunteers is the provision of learning and development opportunities (LDOs) by the volunteering organization (Cameron & Karen, Newton, Bell, 2014; Pages et al., 2018). However, when a volunteering organization fails to provide them with their expected learning objectives, the volunteers become dissatisfied and lose their interest in volunteering activities. In various situations, volunteers are also not interested in availing the opportunities offered by the organization. This study discusses the various dimensions of the reasons for dissatisfaction that

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may guide managers in the light of findings. It makes a theoretical contribution in terms of exploring the reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers for learning their desired learning. Practically it also guides volunteer managers of organization to design policies keeping in view the learning objectives of volunteers. Overall it also contributes to the betterment of the community.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Volunteering is playing a pivotal role in the development of a healthy community. The role of HRM in non-profit organizations has become a topical topic for government, scholars, management practitioners, and different circles of the community in recent research (Bartram, Cavanagh, & Hoye, 2017). The HRM ensures a quality relationship between paid employees and volunteers in profit organizations that produces far-reaching consequences for organizational support (Rimes, Nesbit, Christensen, & Brudney, 2017). Similarly, the organizational commitment of volunteers can be improved by HR practices via training and supportive relationships with paid staff (Arshad et al., 2020; Saksida, Alfes, & Shantz, 2017). The classic theories of attitudes (Katz, 1960) and (Smith, M. Brewster Bruner, Jerome S. White, 1956) highlighted the various motivational fundamentals for volunteering services by volunteers. These are knowledge skills for understanding the world, value expressive function includes helping people and ego defensive function, which means buffering people against undesirable and threatening truths. Furthermore, grand theories of psychology have presented a set of six motivational functions of volunteerism, where learning new skills and exercising knowledge and skills are important motivational functions (Clary et al., 1998).

Researchers, however, are still finding the reasons, whether volunteers add on meaningful work or compensate for their lack in that area (Rodell, 2013; Nisar et al., 2021). It is also yet unclear how volunteers' colleagues perceive volunteering service. For them, it is a really valuable service to the community and organization, or it is no more than distracting from work (Lynch, John W, Jeessica B, 2016). However, empirical research has proved that volunteers exhibit more organizational commitment than paid workers. Therefore, the organization demonstrates more reliance on volunteers than their regular workers (Laczo & Hanisch, 1999). Volunteers have different learning objectives, particularly young volunteers are often interested to learn skills and competencies that assist them in their future careers, whereas older volunteers, less qualified, are interested in improving their social network, experience, adventure, self-confidence, teamwork and future friends (Connolly & O'shea, 2015; Arshad & Ali, 2016). In spite of having diverse learning objectives, all categories of volunteers are valuable resources for the organization and community; therefore, organizations are also interested in motivating volunteers by addressing the learning objectives of volunteers for lengthening the retention period (Bartram, Cavanagh, & Hoye, 2017).

Understanding the learning objectives, motivation, and satisfaction is essential for organizations to better deploy volunteers (Wright, Underhill, Keene, & Knight, 2015). Four key lessons are applied to all, especially mission-oriented organizations, to gain competitive advantage. First is the need to increase resources as far as possible to meet the often conflicting expectations of volunteers; 2nd, the need to find creative ways to attract, keep and motivate the youth talent (volunteer); 3rd, to retain talent through the identification of learning objectives and as far as possible, the fulfilling their social needs and demands; and the need to cut 'red tape' and address the requirements of change (Cerdin, 2018). The dissatisfaction of volunteers can be gauged by the factors contributing to the dissatisfaction of volunteers offered by the organization and the personality of volunteers themselves. The excitement of volunteers starts diminishing when learning objectives are not fulfilled, and the organization fails to understand the reasons for volunteering service. This perception of volunteers gets strong when the organization persistently demonstrates indifferent behavior. In many cases, when the management practices of the organization confront conflict with the learning objectives of volunteers, the dissatisfaction of volunteers offers resistance in the execution of organizational objectives (Stephen L. Smith & Celatha J. Grove, 2017). Furthermore, HR practices, including the training of volunteers and supportive relationships with paid employees, may help them achieve their learning objectives (Saksida, Alfes, & Shantz, 2017).

Organizational attitude and embedded values are also crucial to determining the satisfaction and dissatisfaction level of the volunteer (Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). The ambiguous task assigned by the organization is an example of poor management practices that offer resistance to achieving the desired learning objectives. Therefore, managers of non-profit organizations are keen to design the job description as transparent as possible to increase the retention period of volunteers. The ingredients of autonomous motivation, support of management and in-role performance in job characteristics influence the satisfaction of volunteers and facilitate volunteers for availing of learning opportunities offered by the organization (Millette, 2005). This view was also supported by the informal support of management, where volunteers' satisfaction was associated with appreciation by supervisors and vice versa (Aisbett & Hoye, 2015). The aptitude of volunteers contributes to the dissatisfaction of volunteers. The emotional, impassionate, and inexperienced volunteers soon got fed up in odd situations and were disappointed. The dissatisfaction of volunteers is positive if they are eager to make changes for the betterment of the organization and the organization is not implementing, but disaffection is not encouraging when it is due to not achieving the desired learning objective (Diamond, 2017), The young volunteers' offer unpaid services for learning, developing and empowering skills that they would not have some other way. The organizational constraints offered by organizations against these learning opportunities lead volunteers towards dissatisfaction (Gooch, 2004).

The above discussion highlights that the dissatisfaction of volunteers is a result of multiple HR practices of the volunteering organization and the attitudes of volunteers. However, the aptitude of the volunteers also contributes in achieving / not achieving the learning opportunities offered by the volunteering organization. The consistency and temperament of the volunteers matter a lot in acquiring the desired learning objectives (Figure 1: Conceptual Model).

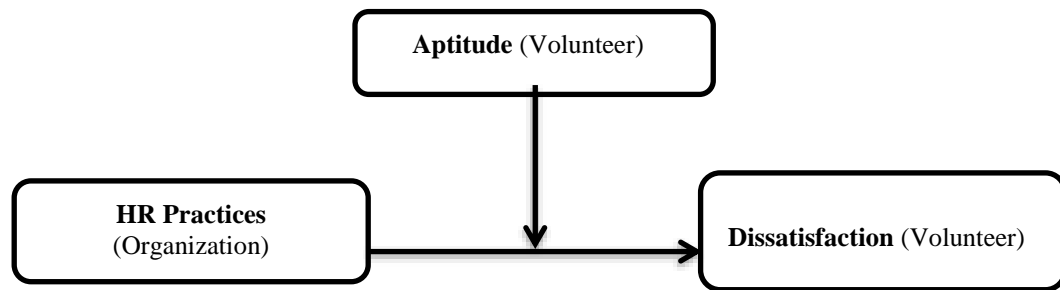


Figure-1: Conceptual Model

3. Developing Instrument

This study is exploratory in nature; therefore, to proceed further, semi-structured interview questions were developed after an extensive study of the literature and with the help of experts with relevant experience in the field of volunteering (Appendix A). Literature also supports the idea that predetermined questions are used in semi-structured interviews to facilitate the researcher seeking clarification if required while interviewing (Myers & Newman, 2007). In this study, the semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore the reasons for dissatisfaction with being unable to avail of learning opportunities by the volunteers. The respondents were social workers, including young volunteers and experienced HR volunteer's managers. The majority of young social workers were enrolled in various disciplines in Pakistani universities. The reason for targeting the young volunteers was to understand in depth the causes of their dissatisfaction, as they are more vocal than experienced social workers. Furthermore, young volunteers have certain reasons to offer free services because, at this age, human activities are career-oriented. Mature and experienced social workers who were serving as HR volunteer managers in those non-profit organizations were also targeted to countercheck the feedback of young social workers.

This strategy is particularly adopted in qualitative empirical research for the investigation of a particular theme and topic (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Furthermore, previous research also considered semi-structured and unstructured questions the best tool for qualitative research that captures the native hue of the issue (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The feedback from the social workers encouraged the researcher to move forward further with an in-depth study to explore the reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers. The interview questions were revised in light of feedback from the young and experienced volunteers. The questions were again discussed and revised in light of valuable inputs by the relevant experts. The finalized interview questions were divided into two categories. The first category pertains to the volunteers, whereas in 2nd category, respondents were HR volunteer managers to countercheck the feedback from the young volunteers (Appendix B).

4. Methodology

The questions for qualitative interviews are open-ended, clear, neutral and sensitive in nature (Doody, 2013). Therefore, all the ethical formalities describing the questions prepared would not aim to hurt the interviewee by any means except the sharing of experience regarding the topic, which was fulfilled by the researcher prior to conducting qualitative interviews. Therefore, the qualitative interview questions were designed by the researcher with the help of extensive literature study and experts who have extensive research in social work. The aims and objectives of the organization were to create awareness among the community in the areas of health, education, rights of transgender people, talent grooming in the musical field, etc.

Overall, 26 respondents, including 11 HR volunteer managers and 15 volunteers from the following six nonprofit organizations, were interviewed to understand the reasons for dissatisfaction. The details of the respondents are as follows:

These organizations are serving the Pakistani community in multiple dimensions, including education, medical, health, awareness campaigns regarding social responsibilities, and grooming youth potential. The bifurcation of population participation in studies includes 42% of volunteer resource managers who are occupying senior positions in their existing non-profit organization. The job description of HR volunteer managers includes the recruitment, orientation, financial management, data management, human resource management, research and development and training of the newly recruited and existing volunteers. They also had a lot of volunteering experience in different non-profit organizations, and the majority of them were of advanced age. 58 % were volunteers who were engaged in multiple volunteering activities assigned by the management of organizations. 20% had left or were going to leave the non-profit organization due to not availing their desired learning opportunities. The majority of the participants were male. It was assessed that a number of volunteers were gradually sliding towards dissatisfaction and disappointment, which indicates volunteers either will leave the organization or volunteer in the near future.

The HR Volunteers Manager expressed that they volunteered on a regular basis (90%), with 10% volunteering on an episodic basis. Respondents, both HR volunteer managers and volunteers, have been volunteering 7 hours per week ($SD = 7.54$) and reported their highest education level as master or below (51.4%), with 22.9% indicating that they had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. The majority of HR volunteer managers were predominantly in executive / administrative positions or line manager roles (92%), as volunteers (100%) were involved in the execution of assigned tasks / activities.

Table 1: Population

Sr.#	Name of Organization	No. of Respondents		Volunteering Programs
		HR Managers	Volunteers	
1	Al-Khidmat Foundation	3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Health Services • Orphan Care Program • Disaster management • Clean Water • Community Services
2	Green Growth Pakistan	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition • Environment protection
3	Rotary International	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Services • Education • Health awareness workshop
4	Preservators	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent hunting in music • Human rights campaign
5	Cancer Care Foundation	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Services • Awareness campaign • Health Services • Clean water
6	Help Foundation	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster management • Health services
Total		11	15	

Almost two weeks prior to conducting qualitative interviews, volunteers were informed that individual-level interviews would be conducted, and the researcher visited and spoke directly to volunteer resource managers and dissatisfied volunteers. The questions were forwarded one week earlier so that they may be well aware of the reasonable answers to the questions. The researcher also arranged a recorder for audio recording. Some notes and important points were also noted during the interviews. Volunteers received their questionnaires via an email link. Responses from all six organizations were combined to assess individual-level reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers. The interview questionnaires were prepared prior to visits to keep a smooth flow of information to be collected. The interviews of the volunteers and executives or nominees of the organizations were recorded so that the required information may be extracted time and again by listening to the recording.

The study is exploratory and qualitative in nature and based on interpretivism because the purpose of this study was to explore the reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers volunteering in non-profit organizations in Pakistan. Data was gathered from six different volunteering organizations by using qualitative interview tools and audio recordings. The data was collected from two different resources. There were HR volunteer managers who supervised the volunteers, and the volunteers joined the volunteering organization for their specific learning objectives and performed the tasks assigned by the management.

5. Data Analysis

By applying NVivo 12 software, different techniques have been used for qualitative data analysis i.e. coding and thematic analysis, word tag clouds, network combined diagrams, charts, word trees and tree maps. Different techniques such as Coding Nodes, Word Trees, Word Tag Cloud and TreeMap were used for the validation of different themes. Data was analyzed in different phases: first, all recorded data were transcribed into textual form. Various themes were identified from the textual data, and all related data were coded into related themes. Word Tag Cloud and Word TreeMap are used to collect more evidence for the strengths and validity of different themes.

5.1. Themes of Study

The main and sub-themes generated by data analysis by using NVivo are discussed here:

5.1.1. Dissatisfaction of Volunteers

The analysis shows the various reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers providing unpaid services to the volunteering organization. This figure shows poor assessment of learning objectives, non-provision of learning opportunities, and organizational constraints for achieving the desired learning objectives are major reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers. This dissatisfaction due to not achieving the desired learning objectives is the main reason for the retention issue of volunteers in the volunteering organization (Figure 1).

The other subthemes of dissatisfaction of volunteers were generated by the data analysis (Figure 3). The reasons for dissatisfaction expressed by the volunteer managers and the volunteers are discussed as follows:

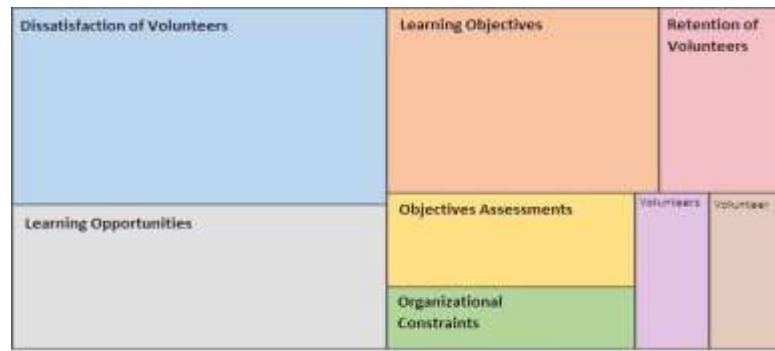


Figure-1: Volunteer Dissatisfaction

5.1.2. Poor assessment of volunteers' learning objectives

Literature suggests that understanding and investigating the reasons for the motivation and learning objectives of volunteers is rarely addressed in low-income countries (Dem, Rodríguez-Labajos, Wiemers, Ott, Hirneisen, Bustamante, & Settele, 2018). The results depict that the HR practices of organizations in Pakistan lack in providing significant space in the organizational structure. The reviews of the respondents, both volunteers and managers, highlight that the poor assessment of the learning objectives of volunteers at the time of recruitment is the root cause of volunteers' dissatisfaction. The executives / HR managers of volunteering organizations shared that in some situations, they failed to gauge the learning objectives of the volunteers, which may cause them to assign irrelevant responsibilities and, ultimately, their work engagement suffers. One of the HR managers admitted:

“Yes, they on some occasions, failed to assess the reasons for joining the volunteers”.

Another HR volunteer manager expressed:

“There is no formal mechanism at the time of recruitment of volunteers to ask them what learning objectives are for offering volunteering service.”

The volunteers particularly highlighted this issue. They expressed concern over the ineffective assessment of their desired learning objectives. One volunteer who has been serving in a couple of non-profit organizations expressed as:

“Organizations do not bother to explore the cause of offering free of cost services.”

5.1.3. Scarce funding

Most of the volunteering organizations face scarcity of funding. The major source of funding for volunteering organizations is donors. Therefore, meeting expenditures, including volunteering activities, event management, and miscellaneous expenditures, is difficult. The majority of volunteer managers expressed that one of the reasons for the dissatisfaction of volunteers is the non-availability of sufficient funds for the arrangement of training, entertaining tours, and functions to keep them motivated. According to HR managers, the lack of funding is the fundamental issue for arranging the activities pertaining to the learning objectives of the volunteers. Another manager acknowledged:

“due to insufficient funding, they are unable to arrange quality training for volunteering for improving their learning level”.

5.1.4. Ambiguous tasks

The volunteers expressed that volunteering organizations sometimes assign tasks to the volunteers without keeping in view their interests, acquired skills/potential and learning objectives. The ambiguity of assigned work demotivates the volunteers, and they start losing their interest in the assigned tasks and leave the organization (Rogalsky, Doherty, & Paradis, 2016). The ambiguity of tasks strengthens the notion that the organization is not taking an interest in the learning objective of volunteers. One volunteer complained:

“The management did not brief the assigned task in detail, which confuses them, and ultimately, their performance suffers.”

Another volunteer expressed:

“I was assigned worthless activity.”

The assigning of roles was not a meaningful activity for the manager. They believe every assignment has something to learn for the volunteers.

5.1.5. Poor teamwork

As the volunteers are from different backgrounds and offer the services without any financial or tangible benefit, they are not easy to adjust to the regular employees of the organization. Therefore, volunteers face resistance from paid employees, which offers hurdles in the smooth working and execution of the assigned project (Rimes, Nesbit, Christensen, & Brudney, 2017). On volunteer shared:

“the regular employees consider them a constant threat that offers resistance against teamwork”.

The poor teamwork also contributes to the dissatisfaction of volunteers. Results indicate this issue has not been handled properly by the managers and administration in non-profit organizations working in Pakistan.

5.1.6. Political culture

One of the volunteer HR managers accepted that:

“Political culture has been penetrated in the volunteering organization. Their management is entangled in acquiring certain executives' positions to gain certain benefits. Therefore, they, to gain personal benefit, ignore the volunteering objectives of the volunteers”.

5.2.1. Lack of seriousness on the part of volunteers

Some of the students join volunteering activities to fulfill their degree requirements as their respective institutes have imposed upon them to do social work in a non-profit organization for a certain period and submit a comprehensive report. The students and young volunteers are emotional and have short temperaments. According to Littlepage, Gazley, and Bennett (2012), young volunteers require more supervision and feedback than more experienced volunteers because they have their specific learning objectives, so when they feel their desired learning objectives are not achieved, they leave the volunteering organization. On the other hand, the volunteers who are professionals, including doctors, pharmacists, nurses, engineers, IT experts, business people, and public/private sector employees holding prestigious positions in their organizations, show consistency in their attitude and temperament. The reasons for the dissatisfaction of professional volunteers are different from those of young volunteers. The ratio of leaving volunteering services is low as compared to young volunteers (Figures-4-6).

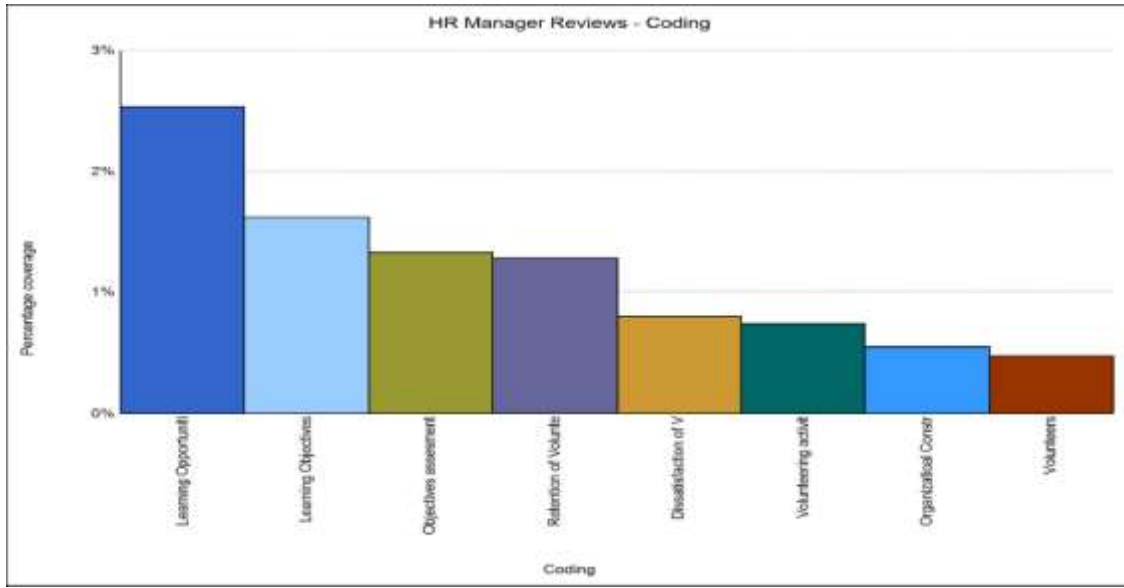


Figure-5: HR Volunteer Manager's Views

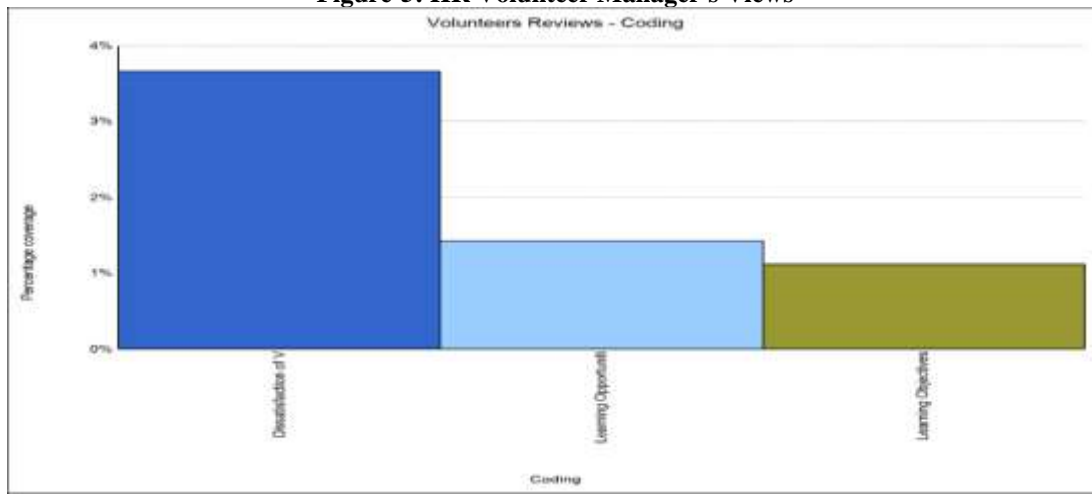


Figure-6: Volunteers Views

6. Discussion

The reasons explored by this study were related to both volunteers and organization. It also discusses the categories of volunteers. In the first category were young people who were students, and others were professionals, business people, and social workers. These young volunteers (students) join volunteering organizations for the sake of completing credit hours for their studies. Their objectives of volunteering were to gain confidence, hands-on experience, and managerial, IT and leadership skills. They lacked seriousness and temperament and left the organization in difficult situations, such as getting a job or after completion of their studies. Female volunteers got married, or they did not continue in the long run due to family or cultural constraints. Some volunteers also complained that their services were not respected and acknowledged. Feedback from volunteers was not appreciated and valued.

Furthermore, there were also issues related to the organizations. The learning objectives were not adequately assessed at the time of joining the volunteers. There were funding issues, a lack of training material, and other resources that offered hurdles in

achieving or making available the learning opportunities offered by the organization. So, the retention of volunteers was a critical issue in the context of Pakistani culture. The 2nd category of volunteers was professionals, including doctors, engineers, business people, IT experts, and social workers. These volunteers were advanced in age and had much professional experience. The retention issues were less in 2nd category as compared to young volunteers. These volunteers offer volunteering services for the sake of their satisfaction and social cause.

The results of previous research suggest that nonprofit organizations seeking to improve the retention of volunteers should invest time and resources that would develop employees as future leaders and foster a positive working environment (Arshad et al., 2021; Selden & Sowa, 2015). Keeping in view of discussion with HR volunteer managers, volunteers and understanding the utility of volunteers for the betterment of community and organization, the findings recommend that learning objectives of volunteers should be assessed at the time of joining/recruitment of volunteers, orientations and trainings should be arranged for the volunteer for better understanding the functions and organizational objectives, a database of volunteers should be maintained by the organization, wherein learning objectives should be recorded against each volunteers, objectives of assigned tasks should be cleared and aligned to the acquired skills/knowledge of the volunteers, cordial relationship by the management keeps volunteers motivated, appreciation and award of certification in respect of recognition of successful completion of assigned tasks to the volunteers, feedback of volunteers should be acknowledged and encouraged, guidance and counseling of young volunteers, and respect of volunteers.

7. Limitations and Future Recommendations

The first limitation is that this study is carried out in the context of Pakistani culture and the city of one province; therefore, if it is conducted in other provinces or other countries, the results might be different. Another limitation is that all the respondents are from non-profit organizations. Therefore, the feedback of the volunteers hired in the business organization may have been different. The future study may be carried out in other provinces of Pakistan or other countries. Furthermore, another future research could be related to volunteers offering their volunteering services to business organizations that had hired the services of volunteers due to their scarce financial or human resources.

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