

The Issues and Ethical Dilemmas of College Volunteers in Short-term Voluntary Teaching Projects

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Abstract. In recent years, with the continuous pursuit of self-worth by the public, more and more voluntary projects of non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations have emerged and developed. While these voluntary projects bring some positive effects, there are also some negative problems. This article will take short-term volunteer teaching of college students as an example to analyze the problems and moral dilemmas of volunteers in short-term volunteer projects. Through research, it can be found that volunteers in short-term volunteer teaching projects lack professionalism and vocational training, a lack of sustainable teaching mechanisms, and the moral dilemma faced by volunteers themselves. The research content of this paper will enhance the understanding of short-term voluntary teaching, and lead to practical implications for developing volunteer teaching programs in China. Meanwhile, it will provide theoretical support for the subsequent design and management of voluntary projects of Chinese non-profit organizations and also put forward feasible suggestions for the selection and training of volunteers, as well as the publicity and supervision of voluntary projects.

Keywords: Non-profit organization, Short-term, Voluntary teaching, Ethical dilemma.

1. Introduction

Voluntary service is a significant symbol of modern social civilization's improvement, and it is an important content to cultivate and practice the core socialist values. In recent years, non-profit organizations and universities have cooperated to carry out various forms of volunteer service activities, and they aim to strengthen the construction of spiritual civilization, promote social management innovation, maintain social harmony and stability, and improve the well-being of the people's livelihood. As a fast growing transitional economy, China has also been experiencing rapid social change. Its public and non-profit organizations face challenges that are both typical of their international counterparts and unique [1]. This shows that China's volunteer service project also has its unique problems worthy of studying. There are some issues in China's voluntary service industry, such as insufficient standards of voluntary activities, insufficient protection of rights and interests for both volunteers and objects, insufficient incentive mechanisms, etc. To encourage and standardize voluntary service activities, on August 22, 2017, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang signed a state council order to announce the "Voluntary Service Ordinance", which would be implemented from December 1, 2017. With the rise of short-term voluntary projects of non-profit organizations and the issue of the "Voluntary Service Ordinance", some schools and institutions have introduced related incentive policies for voluntary services, so college students are increasingly interested in short-term volunteer services and become the main participants in such projects. In this case, the shortages and defects of short-term voluntary activities will be exposed, and some ethical dilemmas of volunteers will arise. Based on these phenomena, this article will analyze the problems and moral dilemmas of volunteers in short-term volunteer teaching projects and provide feasible suggestions to improve voluntary activities. This will provide a theoretical basis for the subsequent research and design of volunteer projects in China. At the same time, it can standardize the behavior and ethics of college volunteers.

Existing studies have fully analyzed the advantages of short-term volunteer teaching programs, and at the same time, relevant analyses have been carried out on the current situation and existing problems of short-term volunteer teaching in non-profit organizations and university organizations. However, there is relatively little research on the moral dilemma and choice of volunteers, which

leads to insufficient comprehensive analysis of existing problems. For the volunteer teaching areas, college students come to poverty-stricken areas, which alleviates the shortage of teachers in local schools, brings more advanced teaching concepts and distinctive teaching methods, and broadens the horizons of local students [2]. For college students, short-term teaching has the characteristics of easy time control, flexible methods, and low teaching costs. It can enhance college students' spiritual pursuits, improve their social practice abilities, and sublimate their self-cultivation in a short period of time [3]. Meanwhile, the existing literature has conducted relevant analyses on the current situation and existing problems of short-term volunteer teaching in non-profit organizations and universities. Behind the huge wave of teaching support, the voice of questioning and criticism has always existed. For example, the society has questioned the motivation of college students to provide teaching support, the quality of supporting teaching, and the actual effect of supporting teaching. It is believed that some volunteer teaching activities are just "vanity projects" [4]. However, there are few studies on the ethical dilemmas and choices of volunteers themselves, which leads to insufficient comprehensive analysis of existing issues of short-term voluntary teaching support programs in China.

2. Existing Issues of Volunteers in Short-term Voluntary Teaching Programs

2.1. Practical and Operational Issues of Volunteers

2.1.1 Lack of professional knowledge and training

Short-term volunteers may face the teaching dilemma of lack of professional knowledge and experience, and lack of professional training. Many college volunteers are not education majors and have different personalities and knowledge levels. Therefore, in the actual process of volunteer teaching, they would inevitably make various mistakes, which may reduce the effect of voluntary teaching. Facing the situation of local students having different ages and different knowledge levels is also likely to make volunteers unable to perform teaching tasks and curriculum arrangements, and even disrupt the normal local teaching process which harms students. Since college students usually carry out short-term volunteer teaching during vacations, most projects lack professional training. This would also cause the volunteers rare of understanding of the local situation and could not smoothly carry out the teaching task. In addition, lack of training could even lead to language barriers and religious conflicts. There is still a huge difference in teaching levels between college students and teachers. The additional factors such as the rush to prepare short-term volunteer teaching courses and mismatched majors, college students are not well qualified for the position of voluntary teachers. Some college students lack of the skills to interact with children [5]. All these cases prove that there are indeed issues of volunteers lacking professional knowledge and experience, and lacking professional training. This problem would directly lead to the poor effects of the practical procedure, and would also cause the society to question the ability of Chinese university students. Moreover, it even would lead to the public's disapproval of voluntary service.

2.1.2 Lack of continuity and sustainability

Short-term volunteer teaching, as the name suggests, is the very short period of time, usually only a few days to more than ten days, which determines that support teaching inevitably has limitations [6]. Most of the college student volunteers in such projects participate in volunteer teaching during winter and summer vacations, and the short-term teaching time is usually a few weeks. The students and teachers of each batch of volunteers would be different, and the methods and concepts of supporting teaching are also different, which means that the continuity of volunteer teaching is poor. It is difficult for volunteers to understand the teaching progress of previous volunteer teachers and local teachers, and the teaching content mainly focuses on broadening their horizons. This results in local students being unable to obtain sustained and effective knowledge from volunteers and the learning content is fragmented, which has no practical help in building students' knowledge systems. Moreover, students' subsequent learning and mental health have not received enough attention. All parties lack effective communication and cooperation, and the long-term mechanism needs to be

improved [6]. When volunteers leave, students' learning will come to an abrupt end, which may result in a certain psychological gap and it is impossible to continue to explore the learning content that generates interest. This reflects the lack of continuity in volunteer teaching. There is no mechanism to promote the sustainable development of teaching and fails to realize and establish an effective follow-up service mechanism.

2.2. Ethical Dilemmas of Volunteers

2.2.1 The motivation dilemmas

Volunteer teaching generally means that volunteers go to underdeveloped areas to teach and help. There is no doubt that volunteer teaching is conducive to supporting education and teaching management in poor areas and helping poor children in China receive better education. At the same time, it is also necessary to analyze the motivation of volunteers for teaching, because some dilemmas might affect the development of volunteer teaching projects. Participants pay the most attention to the unique experience gained through this program. And the motivation behind participating in volunteer teaching can be either egoism or altruism [7]. College student volunteers have multiple motivations for participating in the project, some of them are positive, but there are also some ethical dilemmas. In the era of fierce social competition, more and more college students choose to participate in short-term volunteer teaching to enrich their experience and pursue their personal development. This choice is understandable, but some volunteers put the cart before the horse. They do not care about the teaching quality and actual effects of volunteer teaching but only care about the benefits of volunteer teaching on personal achievements. The social utilitarianism of volunteers continues to increase, and some people even just want to beautify their resumes, so that they are in a relatively advantageous position in the competition. In addition, many universities have implemented a lot of preferential policies to encourage this project, which makes the motivation of some college students to teach complete assessment indicators and strive for awards and excellence. Such negative motivations make it impossible to guarantee the quality of teaching, and they would even copy and download lecture notes and courseware directly from the Internet, without considering the learning progress and needs of local students.

2.2.2 The identity dilemmas

Another moral dilemma in China's short-term volunteer teaching is the volunteer identity. Local parents, students, and teachers are not familiar with the volunteers, so they lack recognition and trust in volunteer teachers. Correspondingly, volunteers lack psychological expectations for volunteer teaching life. These factors would cause the dilemma of identity and prevent college students from entering the role smoothly. It's difficult for them to build a role identity in teaching activities, thus leading to the loss of volunteers in short-term projects and the loss of motivation for long-term volunteer teaching [8]. Some of the volunteers believed that they did provide support and companionship to the children during their stay, even though they did not effectively promote the learning process and improve academic performance. However, a large number of volunteers could not find their identity, and they are worried that the teaching strategy used in the classroom and the equal relationship between volunteers and local students might disrupt the normal teaching pattern. They are concerned that their depictions of big cities could encourage more students to leave their hometowns and exacerbate the brain drain. As a result, volunteers are often caught in the ethical dilemma between what to do and what not to do. An example could help to understand this situation: a volunteer said "We wish to help local children build confidence and have the belief of diligence and persistence through organizing various activities. Yet, local principals and teachers take this disapprovingly and argued that helping the children with their homework and watching them playing outdoors would be enough for them" [8].

3. Suggestions

3.1. Ethical Dilemmas of Volunteers

Because of the lack of professionalism of volunteers, it is suggested that universities and non-profit organizations should establish strict selection mechanisms at the early stage of the project and formulate specific selection criteria according to the actual situation. Only enthusiasm for social service is not enough, so volunteers with low enthusiasm and poor performance can be eliminated through observation, and examination, which can effectively ensure the quality of volunteers and the quality of teaching. At the same time, training should also be strengthened, such as: Strictly clarifying the training projects and content, and incorporating the training of laws, regulations, and teaching skills into the regular training programs. Next would be promote the professionalization of teaching by postgraduate teaching team volunteers through the formulation of training standards and assessment mechanisms [9]. Adequate training could protect the service objects, and build the confidence of college volunteers. In addition, it would strengthen the public's enthusiasm and trust in public service. In general, strict selection and adequate training could effectively improve the quality and professionalism of volunteers. Before providing teaching support, it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of the learning basis and growth status of local students, make teaching plans and arrangements in advance, and actively recruit experienced volunteers.

3.2. Establishing the Long-term Sustainable Development Mechanism

Establish a sustainable development mechanism for volunteer teaching and turn short-term volunteer services into regular long-term activities. To ensure the continuity of information on the volunteer teaching activities and improve the efficiency of the teaching, college volunteers in the same teaching location should leave images and text materials for the next group of team members. This approach could solve the problem of non-sustainability to a certain extent, and these volunteers and organizations could accumulate more experience and skills through long-term cooperation. In addition, universities and non-profit organizations could establish stable and long-term cooperative relations with supporting teaching sites, establish bases, and innovate service content. Actively exploring the new multi-channel volunteer teaching models could make the teaching effect development towards the long-term direction. For example, Online voluntary teaching of college students has become a significant way for precise poverty alleviation in rural education. Volunteer college students are connected to the primary and secondary school students in rural areas through the Internet, and Cloud classroom can become a powerful carrier of college students for online volunteer teaching [10]. Meanwhile, volunteer teaching projects should also encourage volunteers to keep in touch with local children and their teachers through social media, telephone follow-up visits, etc. after the completion of volunteer teaching, and to care about children's learning, growth, and mental health.

3.3. The Parallelism of Incentive and Supervision Mechanisms

The motivations of volunteers to participate in the project are multiple and varied. Both egoistic and altruistic motives are allowed. However, we should avoid Chinese college volunteers falling into the motivation dilemma, that is, they only care about themselves' benefits brought by volunteering. Faced with the possible ethical dilemmas of motivations, universities, and non-profit organizations should establish multiple supervision and incentive systems. Firstly, positive incentives could guide the correctness of motivation, the government may provide policy, material, and spiritual incentives, the general public and the media may give incentives through public opinions, and assistance receiving parties may actively assist volunteers in their works, which is an indirect motivation [8]. For example, the media could disseminate the realization of personal value and the spirit of dedication, which could effectively establish the correct values and participation motivation of volunteers. It could also be affirmed and inspired in contact with the local people, to establish the benign motivations. Secondly, the perfect supervision system is also necessary, because it could solve the

motivation dilemma to a certain extent and improve the quality of public services. One important thing to note is that the key to supervision is fairness. The parallelism of incentive and supervision mechanisms could both promote and constrain the positive motivation of volunteers to participate.

3.4. Creating the Harmonious and Caring Cultural Atmosphere

Regarding the dilemmas of identity, volunteers need to realize that everyone is the volunteer and everyone is the recipient. They could both contribute and gain from short-term volunteer teaching activities, so their role identities are not uniquely fixed. Many came to acknowledge that they were learners, not saviors, and that passion alone would not solve rural China's problems. Some suggested that the local people were the ones who were facing the problem and would be the ones who ultimately solved the problem; outsiders, however, needed to be humble, open, and ready to learn from local residents [11]. Therefore, in the face of ethical dilemmas, volunteers need to do their best to realize the value of the role and, at the same time be prepared to fail. Universities and organizations should create a cultural atmosphere full of caring for volunteers, and strengthen mental health education. Volunteer project design is people-oriented and respects the psychological characteristics of college students. Voluntary programs should encourage college students to start from the small things around them, start from their characteristics, and start from practical projects and social issues. In addition, it is necessary to guide Chinese college volunteers to face difficulties and setbacks rationally and actively and help them resolve possible negative effects promptly.

4. Conclusion

This article analyzes the problems and ethical dilemmas faced by Chinese college student volunteers in short-term volunteer teaching projects and puts forward specific suggestions to address the issues. Firstly, the article lists the problems in the practice and operation of volunteer projects from the perspective of volunteers: lack of professional knowledge and professional training and lack of continuity mechanism. Many college volunteers do not have enough experience and professional knowledge to handle the teaching, which leads to poor teaching effects. For this, a strict selection system and sufficient early training should be applied. Due to the short and concentrated teaching time, there is no continuity in the works of volunteers, resulting in poor learning results and fragmented knowledge for local students. To solve this problem, universities and non-profit organizations should establish long-term continuity mechanisms to ensure that the teaching content of volunteers in different periods can be delivered and that there will be continued educational support and mental health care in the future. Secondly, the paper studies the ethical dilemmas of volunteers, starting from the aspects of motivation and identity. Some college students' participation motivations are utilitarian, and they have no way of being responsible for local students. In this regard, parallel incentive and supervision mechanisms should be introduced to help volunteers establish positive participation motivation. Another moral dilemma is the identity dilemma. Volunteers could not enter the role of teachers well, and local people have conflicting psychological expectations with the volunteers' identity psychological expectations. The project should establish a harmonious and caring cultural atmosphere to solve this dilemma. To a certain extent, this article fills the gap in the ethical dilemmas of volunteers in short-term volunteering activities in China. However, most of the research is based on secondary data, and I will collect primary data for continuous research. As the public's interest and enthusiasm for volunteerism continue to increase, volunteer service in China will become more standardized. Future research should address the design of volunteer service projects; the establishment of training, supervision, and sustainable mechanisms, and evaluation of the effectiveness of these systems.

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