

Empowered Through Service the Transformative Impact of Volunteering at the Dreams Day Care Center

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of volunteer teaching experiences on the development of essential skills, personal fulfillment, and career aspirations among seven volunteers. Participants included current students, recent graduates, and early-career teachers with diverse educational backgrounds, who engaged in structured, written interviews. Using thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: personal fulfillment, enhancement of teaching and interpersonal skills, and career trajectory influence. Findings revealed that volunteering fostered personal growth, strengthened teaching abilities such as adaptability, communication, and classroom management, and inspired a greater commitment to careers in education and community involvement. The experience enabled volunteers to apply learned skills, creating a supportive foundation for their professional identities. The study underscores the value of community-based volunteer programs in educator training, suggesting that early experiences in such roles can have a lasting impact on teaching practices and career satisfaction. Implications highlight the importance of integrating volunteer work into educational curricula to support experiential learning and community engagement. Future research should explore the long-term effects of early volunteer experiences and compare them with formal teacher training programs to identify the unique contributions of each to professional development.

Keywords: Volunteer teaching, Personal fulfillment, Career development, Early childhood education, Teaching skills

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering plays a significant role in personal and professional development, providing individuals with unique experiences that often shape their values, skills, and aspirations. In educational contexts, volunteer work enables participants to engage in hands-on teaching, build relationships with children and families, and gain insight into classroom management and pedagogy. This study aims to examine the transformative impact of volunteering on individuals who serve as educators at the center. Specifically, it investigates how volunteering affects their employability, teaching practices, and professional aspirations.

The DREAMS Day Care Center of San Pablo Colleges, known for its focus on early childhood development, provides a supportive learning environment where children acquire foundational skills essential for future academic success. It also offers volunteer educators an immersive experience in teaching, lesson planning, and working with diverse learners. Through this setting, volunteers encounter both rewarding experiences and practical challenges, fostering growth in their professional competencies and shaping their future career paths. Volunteers at DREAMS

are not only engaged in lesson delivery but also play a vital role in fostering social skills, emotional development, and early cognitive growth among the children. Research shows that volunteering in educational settings positively influences volunteers by enhancing their teaching-related skills, adaptability, and capacity for empathy and patience [1]. Moreover, volunteer teaching experience is often linked to an increased sense of purpose and clarity in career direction [2]. Given the relevance of practical experience in career preparation for educators, this study seeks to add to the literature by providing a focused exploration of the qualitative experiences of volunteers at the DREAMS Day Care Center. The objectives of this study are twofold: to explore the personal and professional impact of volunteering

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at DREAMS on educators, and to identify how these experiences influence their future goals and employability. This research aims to provide insights into the value of volunteer work in early childhood education, offering educational institutions a clearer understanding of how such programs can benefit both their students and the communities they serve. Through written interviews with 7 participants, this qualitative study examines the nuanced ways in which volunteering empowers individuals, enhances their teaching skills, and shapes their aspirations, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive view of the role of volunteerism in career development for aspiring educators.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the personal and professional impacts of volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center on volunteer educators. A qualitative approach was selected to capture the depth and complexity of the participants' experiences and perspectives, as well as to identify common themes that emerged from their narratives. Using written interviews allowed the participants to reflect deeply and express their thoughts and insights in their own words, providing rich data for thematic analysis. The study involved seven participants, each with unique backgrounds in education, varying levels of teaching experience, and different motivations for volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center. These participants were selected to represent a diverse range of perspectives, from seasoned educators to student teachers.

The participants were as follows:

Participant 1: A 25-year-old male elementary school teacher currently working as a Teacher I and pursuing a Master's degree in Educational Management. His motivation stemmed from a commitment to community service and a desire to deepen his understanding of early childhood education.

Participant 2: A female Grade 2 teacher with five years of experience, currently enrolled in a master's program. Initially hesitant to volunteer, her motivation grew from a desire to witness and contribute to the progress of young learners.

Participant 3: A 24-year-old female teacher working abroad who viewed volunteering as an opportunity to gain hands-on experience relevant to her career goals in teaching.

Participant 4: A 22-year-old fourth-year education student with a genuine interest in early childhood education. Lacking formal teaching experience, she saw volunteering as a way to develop practical skills.

Participant 5: A 22-year-old third-year college student and tutor who was encouraged to volunteer by her dean. She found the experience valuable, particularly in terms of boosting her confidence in teaching.

Participant 6: A 23-year-old third-year education student motivated by a passion for interactive learning. Inspired by her classmates, she sought to engage young learners through creative activities.

Participant 7: A 24-year-old high school teacher with a background in Filipino. Familiar with the DREAMS program, she saw volunteering as a means of furthering her commitment to community involvement.

Data gathering was conducted from October 15 to October 30, using an online platform to administer the written interviews. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' motivations, challenges, rewards, and the impact of their volunteer experiences on their professional aspirations. This online format provided participants with flexibility and time to respond thoughtfully, contributing to the depth and quality of the data collected. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns and themes within the participants' responses. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and ability to produce insights into participants' experiences by systematically categorizing and coding recurring ideas and sentiments across the data set. Ethical protocols were adhered to throughout the study to protect the participants' confidentiality and ensure voluntary participation. Consent was obtained from each participant before data collection, with an assurance of anonymity in reporting the results. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The volunteering experiences of participants at the DREAMS Day Care Center offered significant professional and personal benefits, shaping them as educators and individuals. They developed critical teaching skills, gained practical experience that enhanced their employability, and grew in their understanding of social responsibility. This transformative journey underscored the lasting impact of community-centered volunteer programs on educators' career trajectories and personal growth.

Theme 1. "Empowerment Through Connection and Growth"

This theme reflects how the volunteer experience not only empowered participants by fostering their teaching skills and boosting confidence but also connected them deeply with the children, families, and community. Volunteers grew professionally and personally as they faced challenges, adapted to unique classroom settings, and felt the tangible impact of their contributions on the young learners' lives. This empowerment through service, connection, and mutual growth captures the transformative nature of their volunteer journey at the center. Participants widely reported an improvement in their teaching skills and classroom management abilities. Handling young children required

adaptability and patience, which proved essential in developing foundational teaching skills. Participant 1 shared, "My role includes developing their basic number sense and early reading skills, creating an engaging learning environment to foster foundational numeracy and literacy. "This reflects the need for structured yet flexible approaches in early childhood education, as supported by Boud [3] findings on the importance of adaptive teaching techniques in early education. Research by Furco [4] confirms that real-world teaching experience in supportive environments positively influences skill development and reinforces the confidence needed to manage young learners. This practice aligns with experiential learning theory, which highlights that active engagement in teaching practices enhances educators' skills [5]. Volunteering brought emotional satisfaction and an increased commitment to teaching for many participants. They shared sentiments about finding joy and fulfillment in working with young learners, regardless of the challenges involved. Participant 5 noted, "Their love, thoughtfulness, and dedication can make my co-pre-teachers and me boost energy." These feelings of fulfillment align with findings by Higgins [6] who observed that volunteering improves emotional well-being by instilling a sense of purpose. Moreover, these experiences provided participants with a renewed sense of commitment to teaching, as seen in Participant 7's reflections on gaining deeper empathy and patience. This outcome supports findings by Jones & Dexter [7] on how early exposure to teaching can foster intrinsic motivation and reinforce career choice. Volunteering experiences contributed to participants' employability by equipping them with practical teaching skills, confidence, and relevant experience. Participants indicated that their time at DREAMS enhanced their professional competencies and provided them with concrete examples to cite during job interviews. Participant 3 remarked, "With the help of DREAMS Day Care, I developed my teaching skills and gained more knowledge about classroom management."

This aligns with recent studies by Kolb [8] that demonstrate how volunteering in educational settings boosts employability by developing workplace-relevant skills. Additionally, participant comments reflect broader literature on career readiness, which emphasizes that hands-on teaching experiences foster the skills employers seek in education professionals [9]. Volunteering helped participants recognize the importance of social responsibility and community engagement. Several participants mentioned that working with underprivileged children made them more aware of social disparities and strengthened their commitment to service. Participant 7 shared, "This experience not only reinforced my passion and commitment for teaching but also taught me valuable lessons about courage, patience, empathy, sincerity, and the impact of community engagement. "These reflections resonate with studies by Thoits [10], who highlight that community-centered volunteer work fosters social awareness and civic

responsibility among educators. Literature emphasizes that educators who engage in community service develop a greater sense of empathy and social responsibility, skills that are increasingly valued in diverse educational environments [11]. The experiences in volunteering also had therapeutic effects on participants. Participant 4 noted, "I don't remember the pains that I am going through in life when I'm teaching children. Teaching them makes me feel better during my deepest down times. "This personal growth element, where teaching serves as a form of resilience-building, is backed by research from Collie, Shapka & Perry [12] who found that volunteering can act as an emotional buffer, promoting well-being and personal growth.

Theme 2. "Building Foundations for Effective Teaching"

This theme underscores how the experience at the DREAMS Day Care Center provided volunteers with essential skills and strategies foundational to becoming effective educators. Through hands-on practice, they developed techniques in classroom management, adaptive teaching, and communication with young children and their families. Volunteering helped them refine their instructional approaches, gain confidence, and nurture a proactive attitude towards addressing the diverse learning needs of students. The experience at DREAMS Day Care Center equipped participants with essential teaching skills, including classroom management, lesson planning, and adaptability. These skills were consistently mentioned by participants as beneficial for both their current roles and future employability in education. Participants emphasized improvements in classroom management as one of the core benefits of their volunteering experience. Participant 1 noted, "I learned effective strategies to maintain a positive and engaging environment for young learners, which included establishing routines and using positive reinforcement. "This development aligns with existing research, which highlights classroom management as a crucial component in the effectiveness and confidence of new teachers [13]. The role required volunteers to adapt quickly to children's varied learning needs. Participant 2 highlighted, "I was able to think of solutions and provide alternatives to unexpected situations that I encountered...."Research shows that teachers who are adaptable and able to meet diverse needs in the classroom are better prepared to engage learners, manage unexpected situations, and foster inclusivity [14]. Effective communication emerged as another key skill enhanced through interactions with children and parents. Participant 7 shared, "My communication skills were enhanced... allowing me to convey ideas and situations clearly and effectively. "Communication is fundamental to creating a supportive learning environment, building trust, and establishing clear expectations-qualities that are shown to positively influence student engagement and learning outcomes [15]. Beyond skill development, volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center profoundly influenced

participants' teaching philosophies. This theme encompasses how participants' understanding of patience, empathy, and student-centered teaching evolved, shaping their approach to education as a vocation. Participants commonly mentioned an increased capacity for patience and emotional intelligence, especially in recognizing and responding to children's emotional needs. Participant 1 reflected, "This experience has encouraged me to adopt a more nurturing and empathetic teaching style..." According to Knight, Corrales & Hinojosa [16] teachers with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage classroom dynamics and build strong, supportive relationships with students, which can lead to more effective teaching practices. The experience also shifted participants toward a more student-centered approach. Participant 2 noted, "I am able to give attention to each child's needs for better understanding. "This perspective aligns with the broader movement toward student-centered education, where instruction is tailored to students' unique learning paces and interests [17]. Participants gained an understanding of the importance of involving families in the educational process. Participant 1 remarked on the dedication of parents at DREAMS, noting, "Their dedication reinforced my belief in the critical role family involvement plays in a child's learning journey."

This observation theory on family involvement, which posits that collaboration between teachers and families enhances student development and fosters a community-based approach to education [18]. Volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center also bolstered participants' confidence in their teaching abilities, which contributed to a stronger sense of professional identity. Participant 3 mentioned, "I became more confident in what I do," which is critical as research indicates that teacher self-efficacy positively impacts instructional quality and job satisfaction [19]. The findings of this study suggest that volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center had a notable impact on participants' employability and teaching practices. Through the development of classroom management, communication, and problem-solving skills, as well as a deeper understanding of empathy and collaboration, participants gained competencies valuable in education. These experiences not only enhanced their employability but also contributed to a reflective and student-centered approach to teaching.

Theme 3. "Fulfillment of Personal and Professional Transformation"

This theme reflects how volunteering at DREAMS Day Care Center not only fulfilled the participants on a personal level but also contributed significantly to their professional growth. Through service, they gained essential teaching and interpersonal skills and discovered or deepened their commitment to education. This experience became a transformative journey that clarified and inspired their future aspirations, highlighting the dual impact of volunteering on

both self-fulfillment and career development. Participants described a profound sense of personal fulfillment derived from their experiences at DREAMS. This included joy in witnessing the academic and social growth of their students and the emotional satisfaction of making a difference in young lives.

Participant 1 expressed this sentiment:

"The most rewarding aspect of volunteering at the DREAMS Day Care Center has been witnessing the joy and satisfaction of the parents after each class... seeing our learners start to read 2-3 syllable words. "This fulfillment aligns with findings from recent literature, which show that volunteer work provides emotional rewards and can enhance life satisfaction [20]. In educational settings, volunteers often find a renewed purpose in their work, motivated by the positive impact they observe in their students [21]. Volunteering at the daycare allowed participants to develop crucial teaching skills and techniques, such as patience, adaptability, and effective communication with diverse learners and their parents. This theme was echoed by several participants, who described initial challenges and how they adapted to address them.

Participant 4 noted:

"The only challenge I faced was figuring out what to teach, as there was no set curriculum. We focused on basics like ABCs and numbers, but I also had to think creatively about more strategies that could be effective, especially play-based learning. "These experiences reflect research by Scales, Roehlkepartain & Fraher [22] which indicates that hands-on, situational learning in volunteer roles promotes skill development crucial for teaching. Adapting to the needs of diverse learners and navigating parental expectations are common skills acquired through volunteer teaching, which enhance one's professional skill set and readiness for formal educational roles [23]. The participants consistently described how their volunteer experience influenced their career aspirations. Several expressed a desire to continue working in education, inspired by their transformative experience at the daycare.

Participant 1 shared:

"It has profoundly influenced my future career goals by reinforcing my belief that education is not merely a vocation but a calling... I now aspire not only to be an effective educator but also to advocate for early childhood education. "Likewise, Participant 7 highlighted: "This experience motivated me to advocate for educational projects supporting early childhood development, as they are crucial for shaping a brighter future for our youth. These responses align with research that suggests volunteering can shape career choices, instilling a sense of purpose and commitment to social change [23]. For many in education, volunteer experience provides an opportunity to test career aspirations and develop a long-term commitment to teaching and

community service [22,23]. The profound impact of volunteer work at DREAMS Day Care Center on the professional and personal growth of aspiring educators.

The themes of fulfillment, skill development, and career influence illustrate how volunteer experiences contribute to employability and enhance teaching effectiveness. These insights can serve to encourage educational institutions to promote volunteer programs, reinforcing the value of practical experiences for students pursuing careers in teaching and community services.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of volunteering in early childhood education settings like the DREAMS Day Care Center. The findings underscore several implications for educational institutions, volunteer organizations, and future educators, as well as directions for further research. The experiences of the volunteer teachers demonstrate that volunteering can serve as a powerful supplement to formal education, enhancing teaching skills, adaptability, and interpersonal capabilities. By engaging in diverse and often challenging environments, volunteers developed competencies that are essential for effective teaching, such as adaptability, communication skills, and empathy. Educational institutions might consider integrating structured volunteer opportunities into teacher preparation programs to enrich experiential learning and provide students with practical, real-world skills before they enter the workforce. Community-centered programs like DREAMS can be a significant resource for fostering growth and career clarity among volunteers. Through such engagements, aspiring educators can develop both personally and professionally while addressing the needs of underserved communities. Schools and other institutions could establish partnerships with similar organizations to facilitate volunteering as a standard component of academic curricula, thus creating mutually beneficial relationships that support community development while empowering future educators. The impact of volunteering on career trajectories is profound, as evidenced by the participants who reported increased motivation to pursue careers in education or community service. This finding suggests that service opportunities that highlight meaningful contributions can strengthen educators' commitment to their chosen fields, ultimately increasing retention and satisfaction within the teaching profession. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider investing in and promoting volunteer programs that support early-career teachers, as these programs can inspire sustained commitment to education. Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of volunteer experiences on professional practice. Longitudinal studies could provide a deeper understanding of how early volunteer experiences shape teaching methods, career satisfaction, and engagement in continuous professional development. Additionally, investigating the

effects of volunteering across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts could offer a broader perspective on its role in shaping educators' professional identities. Research comparing the experiences of volunteers with formal teacher trainees could also shed light on specific competencies gained through each pathway, helping inform best practices in teacher preparation.

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