

## **Motivation of Japanese University Students Volunteering as Tutors for Foreign Resident Children: A Pilot Study**

Stan Kirk

### **Abstract**

*This paper reports a pilot research project investigating the motivation of a small group of Japanese university students volunteering at a local NPO as tutors for elementary and junior high school students from foreign resident families. An open ended questionnaire with four main questions was used. The method and results were compared with those of two previous studies, one of which combined the use of the well-known VFI (Volunteer Functions Index) with an open probe question (Allison et al, 2002), and one which consisted only of an open probe question (Chacon et al, 2011). Despite the very narrow and small respondent group, the results provided interesting information about their motives for both deciding to volunteer and continuing to volunteer. 6 different motives to volunteer were extrapolated from their answers, 3 of which (the Social, Understanding, and Value motives) are listed on the VFI. Of the remaining 3 motives, the Enjoyment motive had been previously posited by Allison. The Interest motive and the Achievement motive became apparent in the data of the present study and thus were posited as additional motives. In terms of frequency, Social and Understanding respectively were mentioned the most often by far, followed distantly by Interest. The remaining three motives were mentioned only a few times. The average number of motives expressed by each respondent was 2, as in the surveys of Allison and Chacon. Also, the respondents gave a wider range of motives than those listed in the VFI, supporting the view that the VFI, while a reliable and useful research instrument, is not adequate for investigating all the possible volunteer motives, and that more research using open ended questionnaires is needed. This study suggested several implications for NPOs and University educators who wish enhance their students' motivation to engage in volunteer tutoring of foreign resident children. As a pilot study, it revealed the need for some revisions to the questionnaire and raised some additional considerations regarding how to continue this research in the future.*

**Key Words: Volunteer motivation, standardized questionnaire, open-ended probe, Functional Approach, Symbolic Theory, tutoring, foreign resident children**

## **Introduction**

The number of Japanese university students participating in volunteer activities has grown steadily over the past several years. Among the reasons often given is that the increase in the number of large scale disasters in Japan has had a significant effect on the values of Japanese young people, and has also raised their awareness of the need for volunteers. Additionally, universities have been increasingly cooperating with various NPOs in order to inform university students about the various opportunities for volunteer service that exist, and also to facilitate their volunteer engagement in an organized and efficient way.

With this increase in the volunteerism of Japanese university students, as well as the growing need for yet more volunteers, there has been a corresponding interest in the various kinds of motivation of Japanese university students who volunteer—specifically, the reasons that motivate them to decide to volunteer, and the reasons that motivate them to continue to engage in volunteer activities over a period of time.

This paper reports a pilot study for researching these questions. However, in contrast to most research which seeks large and broad response groups, this study deliberately focused on a very small and narrow ‘slice’ of volunteers, namely Japanese university students who were volunteering in a local NPO in Kobe as language tutors for the elementary and junior high schools students from foreign resident families. Furthermore, unlike most volunteer motivation research which utilizes standardized questionnaires with numerous Likert scale questions, it used an open ended probe with only 4 main questions.

First, the paper will give a very brief historical overview of some of the major previous research trends in volunteer motivation. Then it will proceed to describe the nature of the present research project as well as the design of the questionnaire and how it was administered, after which it will report the results. Next, it will discuss what the results imply about the motivational characteristics of the respondent group, and their implications for Japanese NPOs and university educators who wish to increase the motivation of university students to engage in

this particular kind of volunteer work. Additionally, as a pilot study, it will discuss the implications of the results for future improvements to the questionnaire and specific directions in which this research can proceed.

## Literature Review

Research into the motivation of volunteers seems to have taken off in earnest in the 1970s and has been steadily expanding ever since. Much of the early research mainly involved what are now referred to as two-factor models. For example, some studies sought to analyze whether volunteers were motivated primarily by altruistic or by egotistical motives. Others tried to determine whether volunteers' motivations were primarily intrinsic or extrinsic. However, it gradually became apparent that volunteer motivation is much more complex than these two-factor models assume. Specifically, research showed not only that volunteers tend to be motivated simultaneously by both altruistic and egotistic motives, but also that these supposedly two distinct categories are usually closely intertwined and even conflated in the same person. The same could be said for the intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation distinction. Furthermore, it became evident that the nature of a particular volunteer's motivation is likely to change with experience over time, and also varies depending on one's age. Hence, there was gradual movement away from two or three factor models towards multi-factor models. Additionally, during the 1980s, volunteer motivation research became more theory-based, utilizing, for example, Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs theory and other established psychological theories of human motivation to analyze the data. This was accompanied by several meta-analyses of previous empirical research, which led towards more systemized approaches and attempts to develop standardized questionnaires. (Note: For a more extensive description of the early trends in volunteer motivation research, see Esmond, J., and Dunlop, P., [2004]).

The standardized questionnaire that has become the most famous and widely used is the *Volunteer Functions Inventory* (hereafter referred to as the *VFI*), developed by Clary, Snyder and Ridge (1998). It is based on what is called the functional approach, which assumes that people's beliefs, goals and actions serve certain psychological needs or functions. These functions represent peoples' conscious desires and motives. Because they vary from individual to individual, a group of people might be engaged in the same actions, but the functions being served by those actions differ from person to person. Thus, in the case of

volunteerism, various people may engage in the same volunteer activity, but each does so in order to satisfy different psychological functions. Therefore, if a volunteer organization can determine the functions that motivate its individual volunteers, it can better match them with volunteer tasks that serve those functions and thereby enhance and maintain their motivation to volunteer. Based on a meta-analysis of previous research into volunteer motivation, Clary and Snyder extrapolated six main functions around which they constructed the VFI:

1. *Values*: The individual volunteers in order to express or act on important values like humanitarianism.
2. *Understanding*: The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused.
3. *Enhancement*: One can grow and develop psychologically through volunteer activities.
4. *Career*: The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.
5. *Social*: Volunteering allows an individual to strengthen his or her social relationships.
6. *Protective*: The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.

(taken from Clary and Snyder 1999, 157)

The VFI uses a Likert scale on which respondents rate the importance of each of the six listed functions as it relates to their own motivation for volunteering. According to the results of the research of Clary et al, the Value motive was rated by most respondents as the most important, followed by Understanding and then Enhancement, while the Career, Protective and Social motives were rated as much less important (Clary et al 1998). Subsequent research utilizing the VFI has tended to have similar results (e.g. Allison 2002). As a result, it remains the most respected and widely used questionnaire in volunteer motivation research, receiving high ratings for both reliability and easy usability.

However, it has recently received some criticism, including the following.

1. The *functional approach*, on which it is based, confuses motivations with expectations (Chacon 49). The 6 functions might indicate what volunteers expect of their volunteer work, but do not necessarily explain the reasons why they decided to engage in that volunteer work.
2. The questionnaire presents volunteers with motives that they might not even think of themselves, thus cuing them to give responses that they would not give

if not so cued. In Chacon's words, when presented with motives "they had not previously thought of, volunteers tend to respond positively, out of either acquiescence or social conformity, but not because these are genuine reasons" (Chacon 55).

3. Since it presents respondents with a closed list of 6 motives to rate, it assumes that they are motivated to some degree by all 6 of those listed, while on the other hand it limits the number of motives they can indicate, thus underestimating variety of possible motives that they might have (Chacon, 55). For these reasons, closed questionnaires such as the VFI can give a distorted picture of many respondents' actual motives for volunteering.

Recently there has been a very limited but significant movement by some researchers to not depend completely on closed question surveys such as the VFI, but rather to utilize open-ended probes and then compare the results with those of closed question surveys, particularly the VFI. In contrast to the VFI, which is based on the Functional Approach (described above), the open ended probes are based on what is called *Symbolic Theory*, which views motives as representing subjective explanations generated by individuals in order to provide either excuses or justifications for their actions.

According to the symbolic approach, motives represent 'accounts' generated to justify or excuse actions. The symbolic approach focuses on the subjective meanings that individuals attach to behavior. Motives involve interpretations and explanations of one's actions (Allison, 244).

Closed questionnaires based on the Functional Approach, with their pre-determined lists of 'motives', preclude the possibility of respondents generating their own subjective explanations of why they decided to volunteer. For such explanations to occur, what is needed is open-ended questions as they allow respondents to spontaneously express their own subjective accounts of why they volunteer (Chacon, 48). Admittedly, an important problem which hinders the use of such open-ended probes is that the free answers of the respondents are much more complicated and time consuming to analyze than the Likert scale responses in closed questionnaires. Hence their use is still rare.

### **The research of Allison et al.**

However, one example of such research is that of Allison and associates (2002), who, using an open-ended probe in conjunction with the VFI, assessed the

motivations of 95 volunteers affiliated with an American NPO that recruits volunteers for local community activities. Specifically, their research instrument was divided into four sections, the first of which asked the respondents to describe their volunteer activity. The second section consisted of an open question asking respondents to list their motivations for engaging in volunteer work, being as specific as possible (Allison et al, 247). Section 3 consisted of the VFI, purposely placed after the open question so as not to cue respondents answers to the open question. It was followed by a 4<sup>th</sup> section which gathered basic demographic information.

The results of the VFI section indicated that the most highly rated function was Value, followed by Understanding and Esteem, while the Protective, Social and Career motives were rated much lower. This was consistent with previous VFI based research. In the open probe section, Enhancement was mentioned most frequently, followed by Value, while Social, Understanding and Protective were all much lower. Career was hardly mentioned at all. (Allison, 248). In addition, the open question elicited fewer motives (average of only 2 per respondent), but a wider variety than the VFI did. Specifically, it elicited three additional motives not mentioned among the list in the VFI, which Allison et al termed *Enjoyment* (mentioned by 17%) *Religiosity* (9%), and *Team Building* (6%) (Allison, 251). Based on these results, Allison et al recommended that, while the VFI is a good research instrument, it should be used in conjunction with open-ended probes in order to provide a more adequate picture of volunteer motivation.

### **The research of Chacon et al.**

A much larger scale open ended probe-based study was reported by Chacon et al (2011). They did not use the VFI at all but rather relied exclusively on an open-ended probe that targeted 1515 Spanish volunteers. Their probe simply consisted of the following question: “List in order of importance the reason or reasons why you decided to become a volunteer” (Chacon, 49).

As in Allison’s study, the respondents gave an average of only 2 motivations, Values being most frequently mentioned and most important to the volunteers. Values was also seen to coexist with several other motives not mentioned in standard closed questionnaires, which Chacon et al termed as *Organizational Commitment, Personal Growth, Religious, Social Change, and Interest in the Activity* (Chacon, 48).

To categorize the responses, a list of potential motives was made that included motives listed by the VFI and other well-known closed questionnaires, plus additional motives identified by the previous open-ended questionnaire of Allison et al (Religiosity, Enjoyment, and team Building). An initial classification of the responses led Chacon to posit two additional categories, *Interest in the Activity* and *Social Commitment*. In addition, further analysis of the results led to the establishment of several subcategories. In the end, Chacon et al grouped the motives given by respondents into 19 different categories or subcategories, which is 13 more than the 6 motives in the VFI. By far the most frequently cited motive was Values (48%)—more than double the second most cited value, Enhancement (17%). (Chacon, 54).

Chacon's addition of so many subcategories does seem a little excessive and arbitrary in places. For example, it seems odd that *enjoyment* is categorized under *enhancement*." Some other categories also seem to oddly overlap. However, in spite of such shortcomings, Chacon's study adds broader empirical support to the findings of Allison. With Allison's study it successfully demonstrates the limitations of closed Likert scale questionnaires by showing, through open-ended probes, that volunteer motivation is much more diverse than indicated by the closed questionnaires. Specifically, both researchers demonstrate that, when open-ended probes are used, respondents give a much lower number (average of 2) of motives than the 6 motives which respondents are made to rate in the VFI, and they often give motives that are not listed on the VFI. This confirms the view that while reliable and useful, the VFI alone provides a less than adequate account of volunteers' motives, and more research using open-ended probes is needed.

## **The Present Research Project**

### **Background**

This pilot research project was initially inspired by the writer's observations of Japanese university students who were volunteering as tutors for elementary and junior high school children of foreign residents. These observations raised curiosity regarding the motivation of these Japanese university students to choose to engage in this kind of volunteer activity, and to continue to engage in it over a period of time. Based on intuitive doubts about the adequacy of closed question



surveys, and feeling the need for more in depth qualitative research into the motivation of particular individual volunteers, it was decided to use an open-ended probe for this research.

## **Description of the tutors and their students**

The survey targeted university students who were volunteering in an NPO in Kobe as tutors for elementary and junior high school students from foreign resident families. The subjects they tutored included Japanese language (mainly reading and writing but also some speaking) as well as regular school subjects such as math, social studies, science, etc. These tutors were from several universities in or near Kobe, and ranged from first year undergraduate students to a third year doctoral student. The length of their volunteer service at the NPO also varied, ranging from 2 months to 3 years.

All of the elementary and junior high school students being tutored were from foreign resident families living in Kobe. Most were Vietnamese, but there were also several from Chinese, Philippine, Latin American and other backgrounds. Some had been born in Japan, and others had recently come to Japan, in some cases only months before. In the former case, even though they were native speakers of Japanese language, their parents were often financially unable to send them to regular Japanese cram schools, so they instead came to the NPO for tutoring in their school course work. In the latter case, due to their lack of Japanese language ability, they were unable to adequately understand their Japanese school textbooks and their school teachers' in-class instruction.

Many Japanese school teachers are doing their best to reach out and provide extra assistance to these students, and Hyogo Prefecture regularly sends bilingual assistants to visit the schools to provide further help, but due to limited resources and the already heavy workloads of the teachers and bilingual assistants, the support for these students within the schools is far from adequate. Hence they come to the NPO for tutoring in Japanese language and their regular school subjects. Needless to say, NPOs that provide educational and emotional support for these students are playing a crucial role in keeping them in school and thereby helping to break the cycle of poverty that their families are trapped in.



## Research Questions

This research sought to investigate the following questions:

Question 1: How do the motives given by this group of volunteers compare with the six motives listed in the VFI and the results of the VFI used in Allison's research?

Question 2: Do my results from my open question survey correlate with the results of the open question surveys conducted by Allison and Chacon, and hence support their conclusions? If so, to what degree?

Question 3: What do the results further suggest about the nature of the motivation of the volunteers in this particular group?

## Description of the Survey Instrument

An open-question questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into Japanese. This was followed by further revisions to the wording of the Japanese version. No Likert scale questions were included as it was feared that such questions might cue the volunteers to provide responses that they otherwise would not think of and thereby unduly influence the results, even if placed after the open questions. It consisted of two main sections:

Part 1 contained 9 short-answer questions concerning background data of the volunteers (name of the volunteer's university, their year in university, description of their tutoring work, when they started, how they found out about it, whether it was related to their university course work or research, whether they had done any previous volunteer activity, and how long they intended to continue this current volunteer activity).

Part 2, the core part of the questionnaire, related more directly to their motives for volunteering as tutors and contained the following four longer-answer questions:

- 1) What reason(s) made you want to engage in this volunteer activity?
- 2) What benefits are you gaining by engaging in this volunteer activity?
- 3) Have you ever felt like quitting? If so, why? And why did you not quit?
- 4) After this volunteer activity ends, do you wish to continue volunteering in the future? If so, what kind of volunteer activity would it be?

This questionnaire was similar to those of Allison and Chacon in that it was open-ended rather than closed. However, it differed from Allison in that, like

Chacon, it did not use the VFI at all. It also differed from both Allison and Chacon in that, whereas they both used only one main question, it used 4. The first of those 4 was almost identical to the main question of Allison and Chacon, but the additional 3 questions were added in an attempt to elicit more motives, and also to investigate what motivated the respondents' to continue to engage in the volunteer activity over a longer period of time.

In total, 10 volunteer tutors answered and returned the questionnaire. Their answers were translated into English so that they could be more easily compared with previous volunteer motivation research reported in English.

While the questionnaire was being conducted, I came to doubt the usefulness of question 2 as it seemed that the answers it would elicit might better reflect the level of satisfaction that the volunteers were receiving from doing the volunteer activity rather than their motives for doing it, thus confusing the two. While not discarding the question, I considered whether to treat its results separately from those of the other questions. In addition, after the questionnaires were returned, it became clear that the answers to question 4, while interesting, would have very limited usefulness for the purpose of this study as most of the motives given were for engaging in other kinds of volunteer work. Therefore I decided not to use the results of question 4 for the NPO.

## **Results**

### Part 1 (short answer background data questions)

Ten students, representing six different universities, responded to the survey. Four were 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, three were 4<sup>th</sup> year students, two were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a master's degree program, and one was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a doctoral program. Four of them had been tutoring for less than one year (about one month, two months, five months and six months respectively), two for about one year, two for about two years, and two for about three years.

Regarding where they first learned about this volunteer opportunity, one had found out about it through a volunteer recruitment homepage, but all the others had learned about it through another person or persons. For example, one learned about it from a Vietnamese student who was a coworker at a part time job, four learned about it from school mates, two from friends who were already volunteering, and one directly through his/her university teacher.

Five respondents reported that their volunteer work had no relation to their

university studies, while the other five reported that it did. For instance, one was taking a university class on NPOs and NGOs, two were writing their graduation theses about the issue of foreign children's education in Japan and how NPOs are dealing with it, one was taking a university course about Japanese language education of young people, and one was researching this issue for a doctoral thesis.

All but one reported having done previous volunteer activity. Four mentioned some form of volunteer work related to language teaching or tutoring, Two had done disaster relief work in Northeastern Japan, one had volunteered as an emergency first aid instructor, and one as a playmate for disabled children. One had helped manage a festival which was part of a local revitalization project, and two had participated in a work-camp in the Philippines which taught sanitation and cooking skills to Philippine children.

Three of them mentioned that they were simultaneously doing other volunteer work in addition to tutoring. One was continuing to participate in disaster-related volunteer work for Northeast Japan, specifically working at a camp for children from Fukushima and selling products made by people in the disaster area. Another was providing meals for elderly Korean residents in Kobe, and another was teaching Japanese to three Chinese women who lived near her university campus.

Regarding the question of how long they intended to continue their current volunteer work, six replied that they would continue until graduating from university, two until starting their careers, and two as long as they can conveniently commute to the NPO.

## Part 2 (main, longer answer questions about volunteer motivation)

As mentioned earlier, it was decided to discard question 4 from this survey. Also, there was some doubt as how to treat the results of question 2, but in the end it was decided to keep and use it for reasons explained below. The following section will deal first present the results of questions 1, 2 and 3 separately before attempting a brief syntheses at the end.

### Question 1: What reason(s) made you want to engage in this volunteer activity? Give as many answers as you wish.

All but one volunteer responded to this question. First, I tried to categorize the responses according to the six functions listed in the VFI. For those that did not fit within any of the VFI functions, I looked for new categories among those posited

by Allison and Chacon, and if that failed, I coined a new category. Assigning clearly stated responses to categories was quite straightforward, but others were more complicated than expected and difficult to categorize. In some cases motives were not stated clearly but seemed to be implied. In other cases they seemed intertwined and at times even conflated with other motives. This ambiguity made it difficult at times to distinguish between a particular respondent's various motives and to count how many motives were actually being expressed. To reflect this reality, I ended up dividing the motives into 'clearly stated' and 'seems implied'. I also tried to note the motives that seemed closely intertwined with others. The resulting categorization and counting of the respondents' motives for question 1 is as follows:

(note: R means Respondent)

R1. Understanding (clear) intertwined with Interest in the Recipient Group (implied)

R2. Understanding (implied), Interest in the Recipient Group (clear)

R3. (respondent misunderstood question, did not give motives)

R4. Understanding (clear), intertwined with Interest in the Recipient Group (clear)

R5. Social (clear), Interest in the Volunteer Activity (clear); Understanding (clear) intertwined with Interest in the Recipient Group (clear)

R6. Social (clear)

R7. Social (clear), intertwined with Interest in the Recipient Group (clear)

R8. Value (clear)

R9. Value: (clear), intertwined with Interest in a the Recipient Group (clear)

R10. Value (clear) intertwined with Interest in the Recipient Group (implied), Social (clear) Interest in the Volunteer Activity (clear)

#### Totals:

Clearly stated motives: 17

Implied motives: 3

Total: 20

#### Ranking of the motives given

Interest: 9 (Interest in the Recipient Group: 7, Interest in the Volunteer Activity: 2)

Understanding: 4

Social: 4

Value: 3

Regarding how this categorization of motives compares with the six functions in the VFI, it is seen that only three of the VFI motives were given by the respondents, those being Understanding (4 times), Social (4 times) and Value (3 times), for a total of just over half the responses given. The VFI categories Career and Protective were not mentioned by any of the respondents. One other category not on the VFI became apparent due to being given several times. It was labeled *Interest* (c.f. the *Interest* subcategories posited by Chacon, 52), and subdivided into *Interest in the Recipient Group* (e.g. “I learned that many foreigners came to Japan...(and) I became interested.”) and *Interest in a Specific Activity* (e.g. “I have always been interested in international exchange”.) Regarding the relative number of mentions of the various motives, Interest was first (9 mentions), while Understanding and Social tied for 2nd ranking (4 mentions each) followed by Value (3 mentions).

Question 2 Describe, in order of importance, what you feel you are gaining by doing this volunteer work. Give as many answers as you wish.

As noted above, I felt some hesitation to include the results of this question because, unlike the other three questions, which directly asked about motives, it asked about benefits received from volunteering, which by definition is not exactly the same thing. However, when I looked at the answers to question 2, they seemed to at least imply and suggest several motives especially related to why these university students were continuing to participate in this particular kind of volunteer activity over an extended period of time. With this in mind, I decided to use this question after all, and categorized the answers of the respondents as follows:

- R1. Understanding (cf. Chacon: Personal growth)
- R2. Social, Understanding
- R3. Understanding, Value (implied, cf. Chacon: personal growth [52]) intertwined with Value
- R4. Understanding, Social
- R5. Value (implied) intertwined with sense of accomplishment (at the results of one’s volunteer work), Understanding, Social intertwined with Enjoyment (cf. Allison and Chacon)

- R6. Understanding (cf. Chacon: Personal Growth), Social  
 R7. Understanding, Personal growth  
 R8. Social intertwined with Enjoyment, Understanding  
 R9. Social, Value (implied) intertwined with Sense of Accomplishment at seeing success of volunteer efforts  
 R10. (No answer given)

Nine of the ten respondents answered this question. If we make the assumption that their responses about the benefits they receive from doing volunteer work can be understood as representing, or at least implying motives for continuing to engage in this particular volunteer activity, we get mentions of the following 5 motives:

Understanding (9 mentions): E.g., “An awareness about the education and study of the foreign children who live in Japan.” 4 of these 9 mentions could be sub-classified as *Personal Growth* (similar to Chacon’s Personal Growth but he categorized it differently as a subcategory of Esteem); for example, “This was my first time to experience the challenge of being a volunteer (not merely thinking about it)... I think that helping another person truly is an opportunity for one’s own personal growth.”

Social (6 mentions): E.g., “Connections with other volunteers participating in this activity.”

Enjoyment (2 mentions, both intertwined with Social): E.g., “I could have relationships with mischievous children... I enjoyed talking together with them.”

Sense of Accomplishment (2 mentions, both intertwined with implied Value): E.g., “I was able see the children speaking confidently about their own identities, their about countries of origin, and speaking the language of their country of origin.”

Regarding the categorizations, three of these motives (Understanding, Social and Value) appear on the VFI, but the VFI motives Enhancement, Career, and Protective are not mentioned at all. Enjoyment is not on the VFI and was first added as an additional motive by Allison (244). Accomplishment is not included as a category by the VFI, Allison or Chacon, so it is a new category that became apparent in this study, perhaps due to the nature of Question 2.

The total number of mentions of motives was 23, given by a total of 9 respondents (1 respondent did not answer this question). This results in an average number of

2.6 mentions per respondent. This is slightly higher than but still close to the average number of 2 motives mentioned by each respondent in Allison's and Chacon's surveys. It should also be kept in mind that, unlike question 1, this question is different from the questions used by Allison and Chacon, and the very small sample group also makes the difference of average number of responses almost insignificant.

If we count the number of mentions of each motive, we get the following ranking:

Understanding: 9 times

Social: 6 times

Value: 4 times

Enjoyment: 2 times, and Sense of accomplishment: 2 times

Interestingly, all of the top three ranked motives here are listed on the VFI and account for 19 of 23 mentions (83%).

There are also some interesting intertwinings of motives. For example, Enjoyment is intertwined with Social both times it is mentioned. More noteworthy, Sense of Accomplishment (which would normally be thought of as a non-altruistic motive) is in both mentions closely intertwined with the altruistic motive Values.

### Question 3 Have you ever felt like quitting this volunteer work? If so, why? Why didn't you quit?

To this question cluster, only three respondents replied that they had ever felt like quitting, so the data was extremely limited but still illuminating. Their reasons for wishing to quit were due to what could be termed 'conditions' rather than motivation-related issues (tiredness due to being extremely busy with other activities, distance from the NPO). The two respondents who answered why they did not quit both gave two intertwined motives for not quitting, namely Social and Enjoyment (e.g. "I did not quit because I enjoyed being with elementary and junior high school kids" and "I did not want to end my relationship with the NPO staff and other volunteers"). While enjoyment was not given by any of these 10 respondents as a motive to become a volunteer in Part 1, the fact that it was given by both respondents (who had thought about quitting) as a motive for not quitting, suggests that it might be an important motive, together with Social, for continuing volunteer activity under adverse conditions.



### Totals and Rankings of Motives Given for All Three Questions

If we combine the results for all three questions, we get the following:

Understanding 13 (appears in responses to Q 1 and 2)

Social 12 (appears in responses to all 3 questions)

Interest 9 (new category), (appears only in responses to question 1)

Value 7 (appears in responses to Q 1 and 2)

Enjoyment 4 (Allison and Chacon) (appears in responses to Q 2 and 3)

Accomplishment 2 (new category) (Appears in responses to Q 2 only)

It is seen that a total of 6 different motives were given. 3 of them are on the VFI (Understanding, Social, Value). Three of them are not on the VFI. One of those three (Enjoyment), was first posited by Allison. Interest (in the activity and in the recipients of the activity) did not appear on the VFI or in Allison. Chacon (52) did posit a category termed Interest, but its use by him is rather different than its use here. Its frequent appearance (9 times) in response to question 1 strongly suggests that, along with Understanding and Social, it was a strong motive among these respondents for deciding to become a volunteer tutor. Another motive, Accomplishment, did not appear on the VFI, Allison or Chacon, but became apparent from responses in this study as a new category. The fact that it was only mentioned in responses to question 3 suggest that a sense of accomplishment from the successful results of one's volunteer tutoring was an important motive for some volunteers to continue this volunteer activity in spite of conditions that made them consider quitting.

Understanding and Social are nearly tied for first ranking and are both significantly higher than the others, followed by Interest and Value. Social is the most widespread motive as it appears in response to all 3 questions.

## **Discussion**

### Short-comings and limitations of this research

As a pilot project experimenting with some new questions (2, 3, and 4), it was expected that some shortcomings in the questionnaire would become apparent. The most quickly apparent shortcoming was the simple oversight of not including a gender identification question in the background data section. This made it impossible to know the gender balance among the respondents and also to observe any distinctions or general pattern differences between the motives given by

females and those by males. In a respondent group small as this one, such results would be statistically insignificant, but might have proved useful for planning future research.

Regarding the actual questions, as explained above, there was some concern that, as question 2 did not directly ask respondents about their motives but rather about their perceived benefits received from the volunteer activity, the results might not be suitable for assessing their volunteer motivation. However, it turned out that most of the responses reflected the motives on the VFI, specifically Understanding, Social, and Value, and the new category that appeared in the responses to this question, Accomplishment, is a well-known motivational factor in various theories of motivation. Hence responses to this question were kept and used in this study, albeit with some reservation. A more serious problem arose with Q3. It became apparent that this question, while providing interesting data about these volunteers' motives for wanting to engage in future volunteer work of various kinds, did not elicit much data about if and why they would choose to again engage in this kind of volunteer work. Hence it was necessary to discard the results of this question from this study. To be useful in the next questionnaire, it will need to be re-worded in order to keep the focus on volunteer work that is similar or at least more closely related to volunteer language tutoring.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the most obvious is the size and scope of the respondent group. Compared with the scopes and sizes of the respondent groups in Allison (196 respondents) and Chacon (1515 respondents), the present study's size (10 respondents) and scope (a very specialized kind of volunteer) are narrow, albeit intentionally so. If a much larger group of volunteer language tutors had been surveyed, the results might have turned out quite differently; hence, the results of this study can only be viewed as suggestive. Future studies will need to involve either a much larger sample group, or an approach that probes even deeper such as a follow-up interview. Yet, In spite of these limitations, it is interesting to observe some simple comparisons of this study (4 open questions) with the studies of Allison (use of VFI plus 1 open question) and Chacon (1 open question). Furthermore, looking at the results of this limited study does provide some information about the motivation of the respondent group and also suggests possible directions for future research. Hence, these results will now be discussed as they relate to the 3 main research questions posed earlier:

Research Question 1: How do the motives given by this group of volunteers

compare with the six functions listed in the VFI and the results of the VFI section of Allison's research?

As noted previously, 6 motives were extrapolated from the responses to the questionnaire used in this study, namely Understanding, Social, Interest, Value, Enjoyment and Accomplishment. Of these, Understanding, Social and Value are listed as motives in the VFI, while Interest, Enjoyment and Accomplishment are not. This seems to corroborate the conclusion of Allison and others that, while the VFI has strong validity and reliability as a research instrument, its list of 6 motives is too narrow and hence cannot account adequately for the diversity of possible motives of volunteers.

Likewise the ranking value of Understanding, Social and Value motives are also different from their ranking VFI based research. In this study, Understanding and Social are clearly ranked in a near tie for top ranking. In the VFI results of both Cary and Allison, Understanding is ranked similarly highly in second place. However, whereas their results rank Value in first place, in this study, while value is still a significant motive, it is ranked in 4<sup>th</sup> place.

Most surprising though, is the difference in the ranking of the Social motive. This study ranks it as almost tied for first ranking (and it appears in the responses to all three questions), while the VFI results (e.g. Allison, 248) rank it much lower in importance. There are several possible reasons for this. Perhaps one reason is that the relationships among this particular small group of respondents, both with each other and with their students, just happened to be exceptionally good, and this was reflected in their responses. A more likely factor is cultural, that is, it is due to the fact that Japanese people tend to place a very high value on and enjoy developing good human relations, particularly within the groups to which they belong. Comparison with other motivation research within Japan would likely shed light on this.

Research Question 2: Do my results correlate with the results of the open question probes of Allison and Chacon, and hence support their conclusions? If so, to what degree?

The open ended probe studies conducted by Allison and by Chacon both confirmed the hypotheses that an open ended probe would yield a wider variety of motives than those listed in the VFI, while the number of motives given by each volunteer would be fewer than assumed by the 6 motive list on the VFI, that is, only about 2 per respondent. The present study found 3 motives that are not on the

VFI, namely Enjoyment (posited as a new category by Allison), Interest (posited by Chacon), and Accomplishment (not previously posited). Regarding the number of responses per respondent, in the present study which consists of 3 open questions, question 1 most closely resembles the single open question probes of Allison and Chacon. 9 of 10 respondents gave motives in response to this question, and a total of 20 motives were given, resulting in an average of 2.2 motives per respondent. Thus these results are clearly in line with those of Allison and Chacon, indicating that while the VFI may be a valid and reliable research instrument, when used by itself it is not adequate for assessing volunteer motivation, and therefore more research using open ended probes is needed.

Research Question 3: What do the results further suggest about the characteristics of the motivation of the volunteers in this group?

The surprising importance of the Social, Understanding, and Interest motives in the responses of this respondent group has already been discussed. One further surprise actually comes from an unexpected similarity shared by this study with both the VFI and the open probe studies, namely, the seeming absence of the Career motive (also ranks lowest in both the open question and VFI sections of Allison). At the outset of the present study, it was expected that, due to these particular volunteers all being university students looking forward to finding jobs in a very difficult economy, Career would be a major motive given, but it was not mentioned even once. This is difficult to explain as a couple previous university student volunteers at this NPO had told me that career-related motives were prominent for them and some of their colleagues. Even with such a small sample group, one would expect it to be mentioned by at least a few respondents. Again, perhaps this is an anomaly caused by the small size of the respondent group, or it could possibly be due to socio-cultural reasons; that is, these volunteers might feel shame at admitting to such a motive (impression bias). Comparison with other Japanese motivation research might provide more clues to this problem.

Another unexpected characteristic of this group was the high ranking of Interest in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The fact that it appears only under question 1 suggests that it is a more significant motive for choosing this type of volunteer work in the first place than for continuing to work as a volunteer. Specifically, some of the volunteers appear to have been partially motivated to choose to become a volunteer tutor for children of foreign resident families by an existing interest in these children and the foreign communities to which they belong. It also appears that this interest was in some

cases born from their university courses where they learned about these communities and the issues they face.

#### Implications of these results for NPOs

As noted above, the very frequent mentions of the Social motive and its strong presence in the responses to all 3 questions strongly suggest that, at least for this particular group of volunteer tutors, the opportunity to develop and enjoy good human relationships with their co-volunteers, their students and the NPO staff was a very strong factor not only in the initial decision to volunteer, but also in the decision to continue to do so when other conditions made them consider quitting. It follows that NPOs engaged in this type of program can improve their retention rates of volunteers over a long period of time by providing and further enhancing various opportunities for the volunteers to develop strong relationships of these kinds.

The high frequency of the Understanding motive also has strong implications for NPOs, namely that they can strengthen both their recruiting and retention of volunteers by enhancing their learning experiences in their volunteer work through offering more education to volunteers about the recipient group, tutoring techniques, volunteer management, and other related fields that will fulfill their own desire to learn and hence wish to continue to engage in the volunteer activity.

Closely related to both of the above is the high frequency of the Interest motive, especially Interest in the recipient group. This also suggests that NPOs can improve recruitment and retention rates by providing the volunteers more opportunities to satisfy their interest in the recipient group through education and research, and opportunities to interact with members of that group apart from the volunteer tutoring.

#### Implications for University teachers

The high rankings of the Understanding and Interest motives also have implications for university educators who wish to promote their students' involvement in this kind of volunteer activity. The fact that half of the respondents reported that their volunteer tutoring is related to their university coursework or research strongly underscores the important role that university educators can play in this regard.

One interesting example is the respondent who reported learning about the recipient group through a book she read for her university course. This made her want to experience first-hand contact with the recipient group through

volunteering, and also caused her to choose this issue as the topic of her university graduation thesis. An obvious implication is that university educators can stimulate interest and motivate their students to engage in this kind of volunteer work through course content and fieldwork opportunities that make their students more deeply aware of existence of foreign residents in Japan and the particular educational issues that face their children. Universities could also play an important role in increasing the number of such volunteers by increasing and enhancing courses and educational programs that relate to NPOs, volunteerism, and the recipient groups such as the various communities of foreign residents in Japan.

Although none of the respondents of this group specifically referred to their university language courses or instructors, university language departments and individual language instructors also have a role to play. This could involve increasing and emphasizing language course content and research activities that raise their students' awareness of the existence of the foreign resident communities in Japan and the issues they face, as well as volunteer opportunities related to these communities. In this way university language instructors could stimulate their students' interest to learn more about and directly engage with these recipient groups.

#### Implications for the questionnaire and future research

The main purpose of this research project was to serve as a pilot study for a an open-ended probe that, in addition to the single open question posed by Allison and Chacon in their questionnaires, also included three more open questions intended to elicit more detailed information about the motives of the target volunteer group. The pilot project revealed some weaknesses in the questionnaire (discussed above), but also provided interesting information about the motives of the respondents and suggestions about how NPOs and Universities can stimulate and enhance the motivation of students both to decide to volunteer and to continue volunteering.

Therefore, the most obvious future direction for this research would be to revise the questionnaire and conduct the survey again. Specifically, a gender identification question should be added, and question 4 should be revised in order to elicit answers about whether the respondents would like to engage in future volunteer activities specifically related to helping foreign residents. Also, another question could be added that probes whether, to what extent, and how the

respondents' university professors and language instructors influenced their interest and motivation to engage in this kind of volunteer work.

Regarding the nature of the future respondent group, one option would be to use the revised questionnaire to conduct a survey with a larger group. This would require finding more NPOs that engage in educating children of foreign resident families, and might also necessitate slightly expanding the scope of the respondent group to include university students engaged in any type of continuous volunteer activity related to providing some form of assistance to foreign residents in Japan. Another option would be to keep the respondent group very narrow, but increase the qualitative aspect and depth of the research by adding a follow-up interview with all or some of the respondents.

The results of this study were compared with only three other studies, but all of them involved non-Japanese volunteers in other countries. Hence the present research needs to be enriched by comparing it with more Japan-based research, particularly research that has been conducted on student volunteerism in Japan. Especially in the case of this research project which is deliberately focused on a small and narrow respondent group, comparison with other volunteer motivation research in Japan is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the results and how these results tally with regard to broader trends and socio-cultural factors related to volunteer motivation of Japanese university students.

In summary, in spite of its limitations, this pilot study has served its purpose well by revealing shortcomings of the present questionnaire and suggesting several possible directions for future research. It has additionally provided some informative results about the volunteer motivation of the respondent group as well as suggestions about how NPOs and university teachers can increase student participation in volunteer activities related to the foreign resident communities in Japan. Hopefully it will also contribute to continuation of this research in the future.

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