



## Exploring factors having an impact on attitudes and motivations towards volunteering in the undergraduate nursing student population – A comparative study of the UK and Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores attitudes and motivations towards volunteering in nursing students in Ghana compared with nursing students in the United Kingdom (UK). Ghana traditionally follows a western model of nurse education, with students studying programmes commensurate in theory and practice, making Ghana a suitable location for a comparative study. We explored similarities and differences in attitudes and motivation towards volunteering to challenge and inform our common place practice towards nursing pedagogy. Ghanaian students displayed positive attitudes towards volunteering, although these did not translate into increased motivation to volunteer while at university. Students reported financial constraints as reasons for not volunteering as did UK students, although Ghanaian students used available resources for daily living expenses, whereas UK students prioritised available resources to pay down student debt. Structured volunteering was absent from both Ghanaian and UK nursing programmes, despite its potential to increase the variety of social groups or situations to which students are exposed, to increase self-confidence and to encourage greater reflection on practice through doing. Structural challenges within countries may provide a better explanation of variation in student motivation towards volunteering, than cross-cultural variation in attitudes towards volunteering between countries.

### 1. Introduction

Volunteering is a complex phenomenon, having permeable boundaries and spanning a wide range of activities, organisations and sectors (Hustinx et al., 2010). To capture the essence of volunteering Cnaan et al. (1996) ascribe four common dimensions to volunteering: (1) the extent to which the action is voluntary or freely chosen; (2) the nature of the reward associated with the activity; (3) the context under which the activity is performed; and (4) the identified beneficiary of the activity. Dekker and Halman (2003) include some of these dimensions when describing volunteering as work that is unpaid, work carried out for the benefit of others, society as a whole or for a specific organisation. Wilson (2012) also refers to volunteering as work that is unpaid, or more specifically work that results in the production of a public good. While most definitions refer to activities that are undertaken without payment the criterion of being unpaid for volunteering is not straightforward. Meijs et al. (2003, p. 3) accept the 'availability of tangible rewards' within the

remit of volunteering, while at the same time recognising the constituents of rewards range from reimbursement of expenses to material tributes of appreciation. Quantification of acceptable remuneration for volunteering is hence difficult to determine.

Without a precise definition it is difficult for academics and researchers to generalise from studies on volunteers, to measure with accuracy the incidence of volunteering, or to make policy recommendations (Handy et al., 2000). In addition, different activities and situations when aggregated into a concept of volunteering render a precise global definition problematic. Nevertheless, attempts at defining volunteering around the world have recognised several common themes including it is optional, vital, worthwhile in and of itself and of benefit to self and others (Segal and Robinson, 2019).

The National Union of Students (NUS) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) carried out research aimed at establishing the extent of volunteering in further education (FE) in England (**education in addition to that received at secondary school, that is distinct from the**

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higher education (HE) offered in universities and other academic institutions), to inform strategies for expanding the number of students volunteering and the number of volunteering opportunities. The report suggested that: (1) volunteering plays a significant role in students' lives; (2) students recognise that helping people and the community is a key aspect of volunteering, alongside gaining skills and future employability; and (3) a growing trend for linking volunteering to students' courses or academic qualifications (NUS, 2015). In English higher education, while there has been a long tradition of student volunteering, the situation is reported to be at a critical point, in that without evidence of impact, continued funding and an integrated approach to its development, student volunteering will not meet its full potential (Darwen and Rannard, 2011).

In terms of support for volunteering many governments have considered policy initiatives to encourage civic behaviour among young people, with student volunteering thought to be one way of doing this (Cnaan et al., 2010). While there has been some cross-party support to promote schemes to encourage undergraduate volunteering in the English higher education system, for example to strengthen the role of volunteering and to promote synergies between higher education and the voluntary sector (Holdsworth and Quinn, 2010), nevertheless it remains challenging to provide robust evidence on which nurse educators can incorporate volunteering opportunities into a congested undergraduate nursing curriculum.

## 2. Background and literature

### 2.1. Student volunteering: an international perspective

Globalisation and democratisation in many countries has led to a realisation that governments alone cannot provide all services and that citizen participation is important to the provision of services, in maintaining community and building trust and social solidarity (Hodgkinson, 2003). This citizen participation, in other words the contribution to society made by volunteers is connected to cultural, as well as political, religious and social contexts (Grönlund et al. 2011). Globally, the European Values Surveys (EVS) coordinated from the Netherlands and the World Values Surveys (WVS), coordinated from the US draws together survey data on membership and volunteering among nations. Hodgkinson (2003) examined EVS and WVS survey data from 47 nations completed between 1999 and 2002, comparing definitions of volunteering, volunteer rates and fields where volunteers are active, concluding variation between volunteer rates within countries is unrelated to levels of economic development or level of freedom. An alternative explanation is provided by the social resources theory, which sought to understand whether individual characteristics and behaviours (of volunteers) could explain various rates of volunteering among nations. While theories at the country level do not fully explain differences in aggregate levels of volunteering there are more consistent findings when individual characteristics of volunteers are compared across nations, with volunteers generally more likely to attend religious services more frequently, be members of associations, have more dense social networks and discuss politics more frequently than non-volunteers (Hodgkinson, 2003).

There are a limited number of international studies reporting on the extent or variability of volunteering in HE (Fényes and Pusztai, 2012), with few studies specifically examining student volunteering within specific subjects such as nursing programmes. This makes it difficult to compare attitudes and motivation towards volunteering between nursing students in different countries. In the UK student volunteering in local communities is generally organised either by the students' union or by the higher education institution (Student Volunteering England, 2004). In Africa while there is limited research on student volunteering, nevertheless service and volunteering has deep historical and cultural roots. Patel and Wilson (2004) suggest service and volunteering in the

African context is a growing social phenomenon and could make a significant contribution to social development in the region.

### 2.2. Study context

Ghana is a multilingual country where around eighty languages are spoken. Of these, English, inherited from the colonial era is the lingua franca. In Ghana, as in other African countries with similar histories, the colonial influence on nursing programmes shaped the development of nurse education generally, followed over time by a period of Africanisation and a focus on the needs of indigenous populations (Klopper and Uys, 2013). In terms of the country's health system most health care is provided by the government. However, while urban centres are well served by hospitals, pharmacies and clinics, rural areas often have no modern health care. Consequently, volunteering is essential in community health planning and service delivery despite not being prioritised by the Ghana health service and other health sector stakeholders (Kweku et al., 2020). In contrast in the UK, volunteering is framed as an integral part of the health and care system (Naylor et al., 2013) and increasingly recognised as crucial to the vision for the future of health and social care (NHS England, 2021).

While there is evidence to suggest the benefits of volunteering are well endorsed, nevertheless there are wide variations in uptake of volunteering within and between countries (Southby et al., 2019). In countries where English is the predominant language similar values system are often seen, including attitude towards civic engagement (Inglehart, 2003). However, structural challenges within countries disproportionately effect volunteering prevalence. Higher incomes countries allow more discretionary spending, affording people a greater stake in society and more opportunities to volunteer, whereas in countries where individuals are less wealthy, participation in activities of citizenship are more difficult (Berliner, 2013).

## 3. Methods

Using a consistent approach to research design we set out to compare attitudes and motivation towards volunteering among undergraduate nursing students in Ghana with those of similar students in our earlier UK study (Dyson et al., 2017). The strength of the study was using mixed methods to integrate quantitative and qualitative approaches (Tariq and woodman, 2013). Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in research design and data collection improves the validity and reliability of the resulting data and strengthens causal inferences by providing the opportunity to observe data convergence or divergence (Abowitz and Toole, 2010). To ensure rigour in mixed methods research we describe quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis separately before combining interpretation and integration in our discussion. Any inferences we make are based on our research questions (Brown et al., 2015).

A sequential mixed model design with two phases was undertaken. First, quantitative data were collected by our Ghanaian researcher using the original survey instrument comprising of a 28-item questionnaire. The survey was based on a literature review and pre-tested with nursing academics for readability, acceptability and face-validity. Second, emergent questions from the analysis of survey data were used to construct the semi-structured interview guide focused on students' attitudes and motivation towards volunteering. Using mixed methods in this way helped to explain connections or contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data (Shorten and Smith, 2017).

### 3.1. Ethical permission

The study was approved by the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, which is a constituent of the University of Ghana. Permission to distribute the questionnaire to nursing students was granted from programme leaders. Participant consent was assumed on

completion and return of the questionnaire. All participants were recruited during lectures delivered between May and June 2016. Students who indicated a willingness to be interviewed by including their email addresses on returned questionnaires were contacted by our Ghanaian researcher, invited onto campus, provided with a detailed information sheet about the research and consented into the study.

### 3.2. The survey

A total of 500 students, studying in the School of Nursing, University of Ghana were asked to participate voluntarily in our survey. The survey questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section collected biographical data about respondents, comprising of four questions: (1) type of programme; (2) programme start date; (3) mode of study (full or part-time); and (4) year of study. The subsequent section comprised of twenty-eight multiple-choice and open-ended questions concerned with volunteering experiences. 276 students completed the survey and of these 20 were excluded for reasons of incomplete data leaving 256 responses, a 51.2% response rate. The sample size for the survey was not predetermined (i.e., no power calculations took place). Our objective was to obtain as many responses as possible from the relatively small student populations available to us at the University of Ghana and therefore all eligible students (i.e., all pre-registration students) were sampled. The survey was of an explorative/descriptive nature. Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated using SPSS for Windows (IBM SPSS 22).

### 3.3. The interview

Survey findings were used to develop an interview schedule for use in semi-structured interviews focused on experiences and thoughts about volunteering. The sample size for the interviews was determined by the number of survey respondents who indicated their consent to be contacted for interview by including their contact details on returned questionnaires. In total 10 Ghanaian students agreed to be interviewed, were subsequently approached by our Ghanaian researcher, and agreed to be interviewed on the University of Ghana campus. Participants were assigned a number to protect anonymity and consented into the study. Interviews took place between January and April 2018 and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were semi-structured with questions focused on ascertaining students' motivation and attitude towards volunteering.

### 3.4. Quantitative data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated using SPSS for Windows (IBM SPSS 22). Differences between the two cohorts were tested using chi-square or Fisher's exact test (for tests involving two categorical variables) and the Mann Whitney test (for tests involving one categorical independent variable and an ordinal/scale dependent variable). Nonparametric tests were used because criteria for parametric tests (such as a normal distribution) were not met. Statistical significance was defined as  $p < 0.05$ . Where differences between UK and Ghanaian students have not been tested for statistical significance this is because they are multiple response questions which are not usually considered suitable for inferential statistics.

### 3.5. Qualitative data analysis

Data were analysed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). First, the research team undertook a preliminary read-through of each interview transcript to become familiar with the data. Second, the extensive raw data were condensed into an agreed summary format. Third, the research objectives were revisited to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings and to develop a theory about the underlying structure of student experiences

evident in the raw data.

## 4. Survey results

### 4.1. Respondent's characteristics

Most Ghanaian respondents were under 24 years (85.4%,  $n = 216$ ), with ages ranging from 17 to 40 years. Most were female (70.9%,  $n = 180$ ), with most (88.2%  $n = 224$ ) describing their relationship status as single. 25% of respondents ( $n = 64$ ) were in the first year of their programme, 21.5% ( $n = 55$ ) were in the second year, 18.4% ( $n = 47$ ) were in the third year of study and 35.2% ( $n = 90$ ) were in the fourth year of study. Ghanaian respondents were predominantly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity (94.10%  $n = 241$  Black, 5.10%  $n = 13$  Mixed) (Table 1).

Just under half of Ghanaian students (49.2%,  $n = 126$ ) said that they had volunteered at some point in the past, with an average of 2.37 organisations. However, the percentage of Ghanaian respondents who had volunteered since joining the university decreased to 39.8% ( $n = 102$ ), with a further decrease to 19.5% ( $n = 50$ ) in students volunteering at the time of completing the survey. When asked how students heard about current volunteering opportunities 58.8% ( $n = 30$ ) said they heard through word of mouth (58.8%,  $n = 30$ ), with 37.3% ( $n = 19$ ) hearing about their volunteering opportunities through involvement with the organisation (Table 2).

When Ghanaian students were asked about the focus or role of the organisation where volunteering opportunities were accessed the most cited were organisations with a health and/or disability focus (76%,  $n = 38$ ). Education was also a common focus (46%,  $n = 23$ ), followed by volunteering with religious organisations (26%,  $n = 13$ ), organisations focused on children and young people (32%,  $n = 16$ ), on first aid (30%,  $n = 15$ ) and/or organisations centred on local community/neighbourhood/citizen groups (22%,  $n = 11$ ) (Fig. 1).

In response to a question regarding their volunteering activities Ghanaian students reported handling money (other than fundraising) (56%,  $n = 29$ ) and visiting people (50%,  $n = 25$ ) as the two most frequently cited roles in the current volunteering position. Fundraising was cited by 30% ( $n = 15$ ) of Ghanaian students, with 20% ( $n = 10$ ) describing their volunteering role as 'giving advice, information and counselling' and 20% ( $n = 10$ ) volunteering in an educational capacity (Table 3).

Ghanaian students were asked their reasons for starting to volunteer, with the most cited reasons being wanting to help people (74.5%,  $n = 41$ ). 54.9% ( $n = 28$ ) of students cited personal development, with 19.6% ( $n = 12$ ) citing to improve employment prospects and gain qualifications. 17.6% ( $n = 12$ ) of Ghanaian students said that 'cause was important to me' as a reason why they started volunteering. It should be noted that two items on the questionnaire mentioned counselling, which was an error on our part and we acknowledge it may have caused some bias in the responses obtained for this question (Table 4).

When asked about the perceived gains or achievements to be had from volunteering improved personal development (74%  $n = 37$ ), learning new skills (64%  $n = 32$ ) and improved general health and well-being (40%  $n = 20$ ) were most often cited by Ghanaian students. Whereas improving earning potential/career opportunities were among the least gains expected from volunteering (24%  $n = 12$ ). An improved sense of faith or religious identity was reported by 32% ( $n = 16$ ) of Ghanaian students as a direct benefit of volunteering. However, an improved sense of ethnic identity was least often cited as a perceived gain or achievement of volunteering (6%  $n = 3$ ) (Fig. 2).

When asked about reasons for not volunteering Ghanaian students most often cited too little time (86.4%,  $n = 178$ ), the demands of the course (80.1%,  $n = 165$ ) and a perceived lack of confidence to volunteer (79.6%,  $n = 164$ ). A previously poor experience of volunteering was also cited as reasons for choosing not to volunteer (63.1%,  $n = 130$ ). However, when asked about intention to volunteer in the future 85%

**Table 1**  
Respondent characteristics.

		Country					
		Ghana		UK		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	74	29.10%	16	12.30%	90	23.40%
	Female	180	70.90%	114	87.70%	294	76.60%
	Transgender	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	Total	254	100.00%	130	100.00%	384	100.00%
Age (bands)	17–20	81	32.00%	18	15.30%	99	26.70%
	21–24	135	53.40%	30	25.40%	165	44.50%
	25–28	14	5.50%	16	13.60%	30	8.10%
	29–32	18	7.10%	20	16.90%	38	10.20%
	33–36	3	1.20%	11	9.30%	14	3.80%
	37–40	2	0.80%	11	9.30%	13	3.50%
	41–44	0	0.00%	6	5.10%	6	1.60%
	45–48	0	0.00%	6	5.10%	6	1.60%
	49–52	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	53–56	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	Total	253	100.00%	118	100.00%	371	100.00%
Ethnicity	White	0	0.00%	40	29.20%	40	10.20%
	Mixed	13	5.10%	14	10.20%	27	6.90%
	Asian	0	0.00%	28	20.40%	28	7.10%
	Black	241	94.10%	53	38.70%	294	74.80%
	Other	2	0.80%	2	1.50%	4	1.00%
	Total	256	100.00%	137	100.00%	393	100.00%
Relationship status	Single	224	88.20%	76	59.80%	300	78.70%
	Married	19	7.50%	39	30.70%	58	15.20%
	Widowed divorced or separated	0	0.00%	7	5.50%	7	1.80%
	Prefer not to answer	11	4.30%	5	3.90%	16	4.20%
	Total	254	100.00%	127	100.00%	381	100.00%
Study year	First year	64	25.00%	37	27.00%	101	25.70%
	Second year	55	21.50%	42	30.70%	97	24.70%
	Third year	47	18.40%	58	42.30%	105	26.70%
	Fourth year	90	35.20%	0	0.00%	90	22.90%
	Total	256	100.00%	137	100.00%	393	100.00%

**Table 2**  
How students heard about current volunteering opportunity.

	UK		Ghana		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Word of mouth	2	25.00%	30	58.80%	32	54.20%
Volunteers' week	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Local newspaper or radio	0	0.00%	5	9.80%	5	8.50%
National/ local television	0	0.00%	5	9.80%	5	8.50%
Involvement with the organisation	1	12.50%	19	37.30%	20	33.90%
Local organisation event	1	12.50%	9	17.60%	10	16.90%
National newspaper or radio	0	0.00%	3	5.90%	3	5.10%
Through School of Nursing, MDX or University of Ghana other - numeric)	2	25.00%	20	39.20%	22	37.30%
	4	50.00%	4	7.80%	8	13.60%

(n = 219) of Ghanaian respondents said they would consider volunteering in the future ( Fig. 3).

#### 4.2. Interview findings

Interviews began by thanking students for agreeing to participate, followed by collection of biographical data relating to year of study, field of practice studied and experiences of volunteering prior to and during their time as an undergraduate nursing student. Table 5 shows the characteristics of the Ghanaian nursing students:

Ten Ghanaian students agreed to be interviewed for this study. Five had volunteered before studying at university, five had volunteered since studying at university, but only two students were volunteering at the time of our study. Students were asked to talk about their volunteering experiences and their thoughts on volunteering in general. The following four themes were generated from interview data: (1)

motivation to volunteer; (2) time to volunteer; (3) resources necessary for volunteering; and (4) academic support for volunteering.

#### 4.3. Theme 1: motivation to volunteer

Students talked about motivation to volunteer, which included the idea of selflessness, benefit to others and undertaking work requiring some personal sacrifice:

*“volunteering is about selfless activity, which an individual offers services for no financial or social gains but benefits others and if you are not prepared you do not have to take part” (1st year general nursing student)*

This student expressed the view that volunteering, while of benefit to others nevertheless required a sacrifice on the part of the volunteer, which should not be undertaken lightly. Volunteering was thought to come at a cost to some students. However, other students perceived volunteering as means to give back to less fortunate individuals:

*“At times I volunteer with a church group when they are organizing free health screening in the community where I join them to perform as a student nurse. On the negative experience, it is tiring, time consuming and even if you are sick you still have to go because you are on schedule to work with other people so when you absent yourself, there will problems. (3rd year general nursing student)*

Ghanaian students were motivated to volunteer through curiosity or interest in the subject or area of the volunteering, in addition to the object or recipient of the volunteering activity:

*No external factors are involved. Interest and curiosity are part of volunteering because you like to do something on your own to see how best people will benefit from your efforts and curiosity” (4th year community nursing student)*

### Focus of current volunteering opportunity Ghana (n=50) and UK (n=8)

Options chosen by less than 5% of respondents overall are omitted

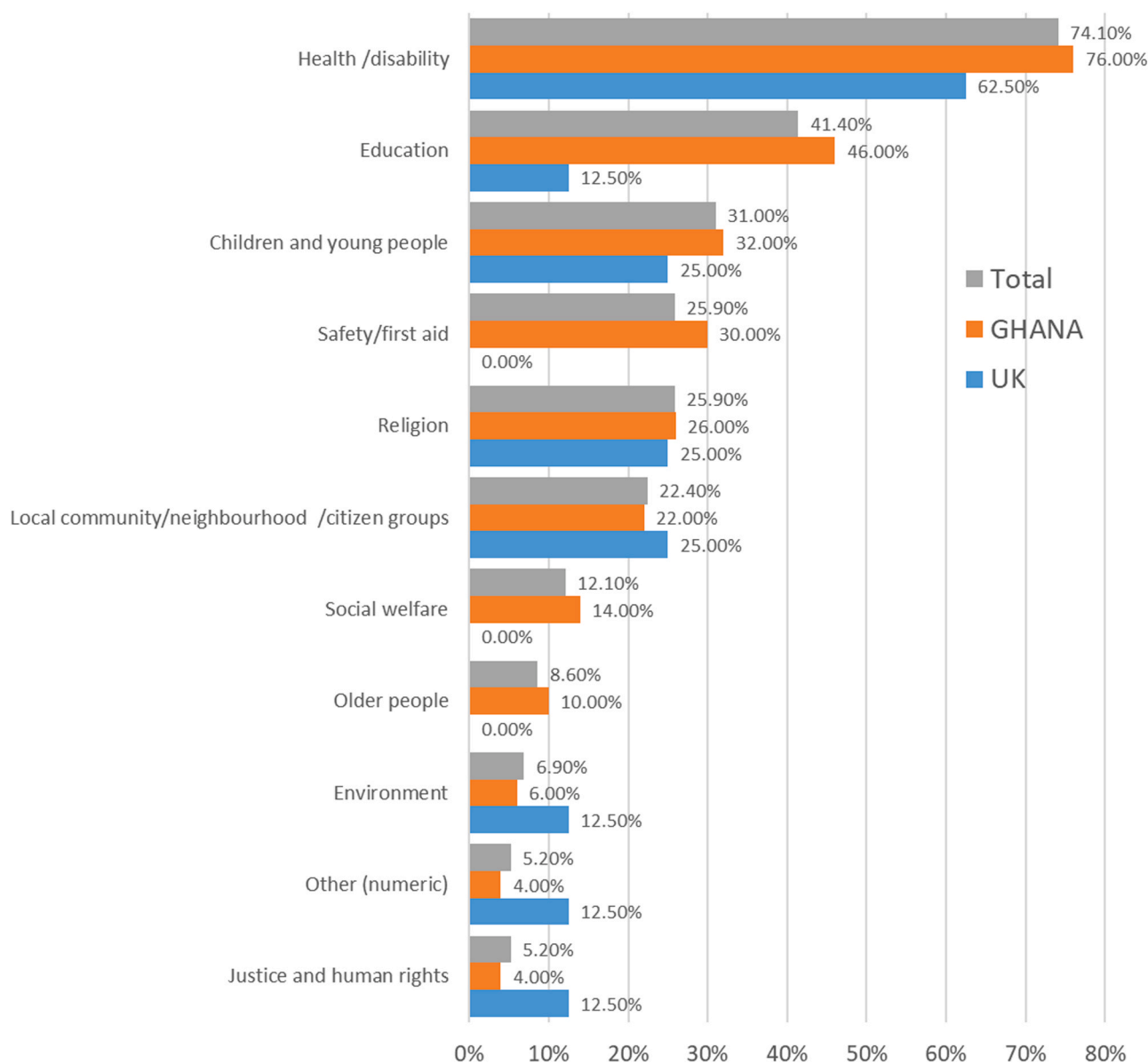


Fig. 1. Focus of current organisation.

In these excerpts motivation to volunteer was broadly described as going the extra mile or having to make a special effort without expecting anything in return, as much as what might be gained from the experience. Thus, it is important that students have a positive experience of volunteering including recognition of their efforts, to encourage them to continue to contribute time and energy to volunteering.

#### 4.4. Theme 2: time to volunteer

With respect to time to volunteer Ghanaian students experienced challenges such that even students who recognised the benefits of volunteering were challenged to commit the necessary time:

*There are no money or cash benefits so if you have to take transport that becomes a problem, but it should be selfless venture, that is all about volunteering” (2<sup>nd</sup> year general nursing student)*

Ghanaian students referred to their respective nursing programmes

as being difficult with respect to assignments and other programme requirements:

*“I will look at the seriousness of the logistics, distance to the place of volunteering, to travel so long from my house because it makes studying difficult” (4th year adult nursing student)*

Ghanaian nursing students reported the demands and subsequent commitment to the nursing programme had an impact on the time available for volunteering, such that a disconnect existed between an inclination towards volunteering and the realities of studying at university:

*“You know the nursing programme is not easy, we are always occupied, even during our short breaks, there are assignments and I am engaged all the time, there will be no time to do voluntary work” (2nd year general nursing student)*

**Table 3**  
Description of current volunteering role.

	UK		Ghana		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Fundraising	2	28.60%	15	30.00%	17	29.80%
Helping/organising an event/ clerical	1	14.30%	8	16.00%	9	15.80%
Transporting	0	0.00%	7	14.00%	7	12.30%
Visiting people	0	0.00%	25	50.00%	25	43.90%
Giving advice, information or counselling	3	42.90%	10	20.00%	13	22.80%
Befriending people	0	0.00%	3	6.00%	3	5.30%
Trustee (holding property or assets on behalf of a voluntary organisation)	0	0.00%	4	8.00%	4	7.00%
Handling money (other than fundraising)	1	14.30%	28	56.00%	29	50.90%
Educating	3	42.90%	10	20.00%	13	22.80%
Representing/advocacy	1	14.30%	9	18.00%	10	17.50%
Mentoring/Counselling	1	14.30%	5	10.00%	6	10.50%
Sales person (e.g. in a charity shop)	0	0.00%	4	8.00%	4	7.00%
Campaigning	1	14.30%	2	4.00%	3	5.30%
other_	2	28.60%	3	6.00%	5	8.80%

**Table 4**  
Reasons for starting volunteering.

	UK		Ghana		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I wanted to help people	3	42.90%	38	74.50%	41	70.70%
For my personal development	5	71.40%	28	54.90%	33	56.90%
Connected to my interests/ hobbies	2	28.60%	19	37.30%	21	36.20%
Use existing skills	1	14.30%	20	39.20%	21	36.20%
I wanted to improve things	1	14.30%	17	33.30%	18	31.00%
Part of my philosophy of life	2	28.60%	14	27.50%	16	27.60%
The cause was important to me	3	42.90%	9	17.60%	12	20.70%
Part of my religious belief	2	28.60%	10	19.60%	12	20.70%
Improve employment prospect/gain qualification	2	28.60%	10	19.60%	12	20.70%
To make me feel less stressed	1	14.30%	7	13.70%	8	13.80%
Social reasons	0	0.00%	6	11.80%	6	10.30%
To make me feel less selfish as a person	0	0.00%	6	11.80%	6	10.30%
Have received voluntary help myself	0	0.00%	5	9.80%	5	8.60%
No one else would do it	0	0.00%	4	7.80%	4	6.90%
To improve my physical health	0	0.00%	4	7.80%	4	6.90%
School/Dept of Education requirement	0	0.00%	3	5.90%	3	5.20%
To give me a position in the community	0	0.00%	2	3.90%	2	3.40%
Other (numeric)	0	0.00%	1	2.00%	1	1.70%

Volunteering appeared to be conceivable for Ghanaian students only in as much as it did not impinge on other priorities such as fulfilling course requirements. In this sense initial and continued engagement with volunteering may need to be supported by organisations offering flexible volunteering opportunities, while at the same time viewed as a flexible construct in the curriculum.

#### 4.5. Theme 3: resources for volunteering

Ghanaian students discussed the difficulties in accessing the resources needed to volunteer and talked of having to sustain themselves financially during a period of volunteering:

*“So, it entails a lot, feeding yourself (e.g., self-care), transport cost and others, so it is not that simple (1st year general nursing student).”*

Moreover, a student did indicate a personal view that the University

should bear some of the cost of volunteering:

*It is challenging to travel; I don't have transport so I can't just get out of the city. I think the University should help with cost then I will do what I can (3rd year community nursing student)*

Ghanaian students did point out however, that volunteering programmes embedded in the nursing programme provides some relief from the personal cost of volunteering:

*“The volunteering programme takes care of these, then I think it will be better opportunity for students like me to get experiences from it, if it is related to our programme of study (4th community nursing student)”*

The cost of engaging with volunteering activities was clearly an issue for Ghanaian students, so much so that there was an expectation the University should consider reimbursing any costs incurred. Convenience, accessibility, location and cost are all issues worthy of consideration to encourage, rather than deter students from volunteering.

#### 4.6. Theme 4: academic support for volunteering

In terms of academic support for volunteering Ghanaian students intimated where nursing programmes accommodated volunteering or planned volunteering into programme activities the likelihood of participation increased:

*“If it is part of the programme then volunteering becomes a regular part of our work (3<sup>rd</sup> year general nursing student)”*

However, Ghanaian nursing students indicated the University would need to request support from parents to allow them to undertake extracurricular activities:

*“If the school or University wants to include volunteering in its academic programmes, they have to give letters to our parents so that it is recognized as part of academic work. My parents are not in agreement last time I got the chance to volunteer (1st year general nursing student)”*

The need to be supported by the University was clearly important to the nursing students, including having their efforts acknowledged and costs reimbursed where possible. Support for volunteering is integral to any effort to encourage and sustain a commitment to volunteering particularly in an arena of competing priorities.

## 5. Discussion

A major point facilitating an immediate comparison is a previously published study on volunteering by nursing students in the UK (Author et al., 2017). This study entailed a questionnaire to 250 UK undergraduate nursing students. The UK study used the same questionnaire as this more recent study in Ghana and both studies were based on mixed methods, combining interviews with several nursing students selected from those who agreed to be interviewed after completing the questionnaire. Unlike UK nursing students who undertake a three-year nursing degree, Ghanaian nursing students undertake a four-year undergraduate programme leading to a BSc in Nursing. Consequently, the UK study had less respondents (n = 137) compared with the Ghana study (n = 276).

In our UK study the median age of students was 26.5 years, compared with 22 years in the Ghana study and a range of ages for Ghana (17–38) which was much narrower than that of UK students (18–50). Ghanaian students were therefore considerably younger than those in the UK sample. This difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), but Ghanaian students were much more likely to be single (88.2% n = 224) than UK students (59.8%, n = 76). This difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, a much larger proportion of the Ghanaian sample were male (29.1%, n = 74) than the UK sample (12.3%, N = 90). This difference was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

## Perceived gains or achievements from volunteering, Ghana (n=50) and UK (n=7)

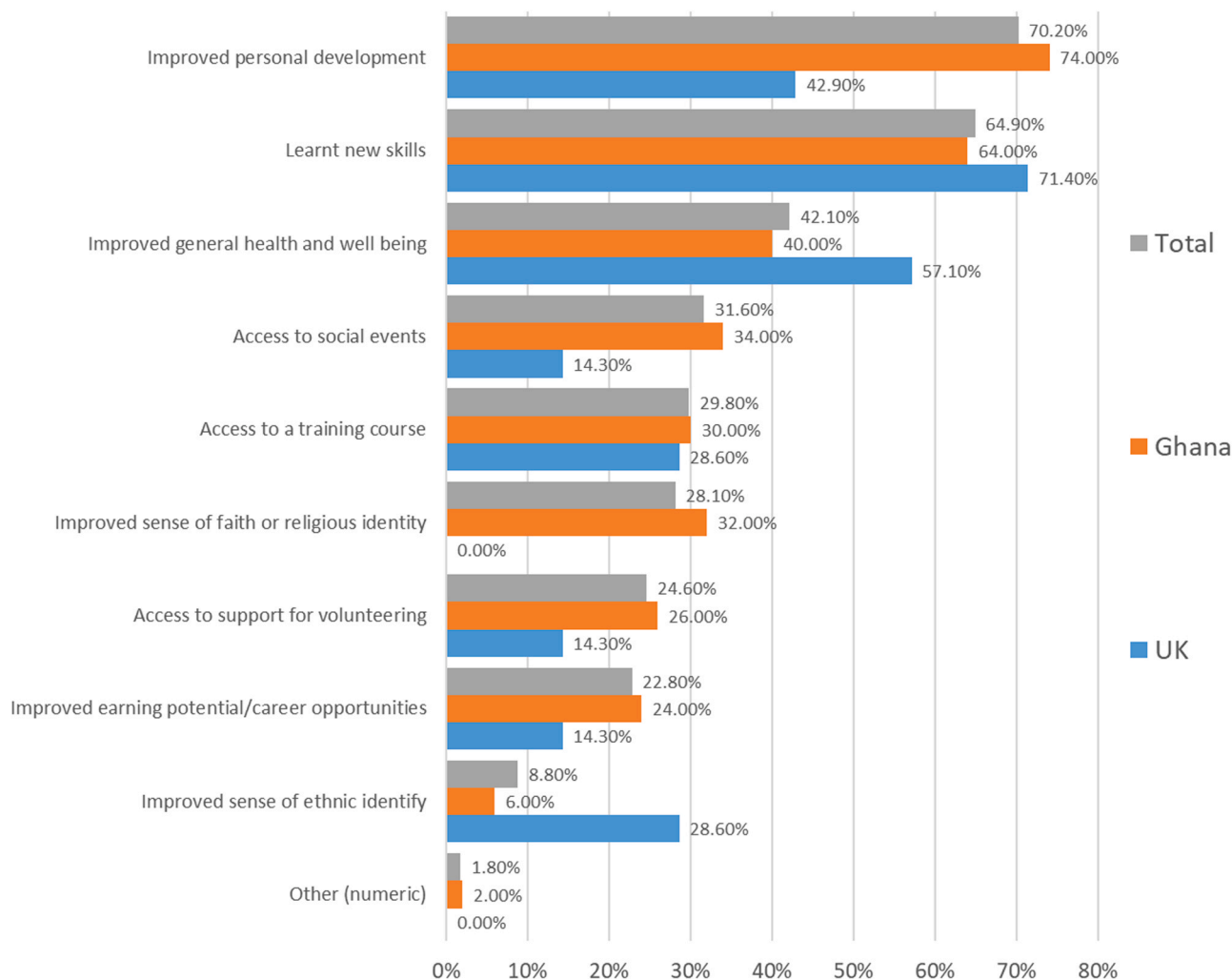


Fig. 2. Perceived gains or achievements from volunteering.

Ghanaian students were also less ethnically diverse than students in the UK, with 94.1% (n = 241) of Ghanaian students being of black ethnicity compared with 38.70%, (n = 53) in the UK. No Ghanaian students were Asian, while 20.4% (n = 28) of UK students were of Asian ethnicity. 29.2% of UK students (N = 40) were of white ethnicity; no Ghanaian students were of white ethnicity. These differences were not tested for statistical significance as it was not considered meaningful to do so, given the large and obvious differences.

The study found Ghanaian students held positive attitudes towards volunteering, with benefits noted for their personal development, for gaining work related experience and skills development. Overall Ghanaian students were more likely than their UK counterparts to identify gains or achievements from volunteering (i.e., Ghanaian students were more likely to identify most of the possible benefits as applying to them than were UK students, with exceptions of 'learnt new skills'; and 'improved general health and well-being'). This suggests that Ghanaian students perceive their volunteering as more rewarding for them, on several dimensions, than do UK students.

Ghanaian students particularly recognised and were more motivated than UK students by the potential for certain volunteering activities (improving numeracy skills, handling money) to have an impact on life chances beyond university. Skills associated with handling money, for example ledger balancing, knowledge of proper cash handling procedures and general money management, all of which are dependent on

strong mathematical skills are likely to be proportionately higher among the student population, such that student volunteers with money handling skills will be viewed as an asset by employers. In Ghana general educational attainment varies according to accessibility and locality with people living in rural areas having the lowest educational attainment and boys generally faring better than girls. Moreover, much needed educational reform has been beset with challenges of capacity and resources, resulting in varied access to and levels of educational attainment (Akyeampong et al., 2007). In countries where volunteering has the effect of positive signalling to a potential employer, volunteering rates are thought to be higher, whereas volunteering with the express purpose of building a CV is thought to lower intensity to volunteer (Rothwell and Charleston, 2013).

Ghanaian students reported financial constraints to volunteering more so than UK students, whereas time constraints and intellectual demands of the nursing programmes were reported consistently across both cohorts. Moreover, there was an expectation the university should remunerate students for costs occurred from volunteering. In Ghana, young people including university students are aware of the trade-offs between their present obligations and their goals for the future: in the short term, they face the financial pressures of surviving from one day to the next, which often impair their ability to work towards their future goals (Boateng and Löwe 2018). While Yawson et al. (2016) note that undergraduate and graduate students should be better involved in the

### Reasons for not volunteering, Ghana (n=206) and UK (n=119)

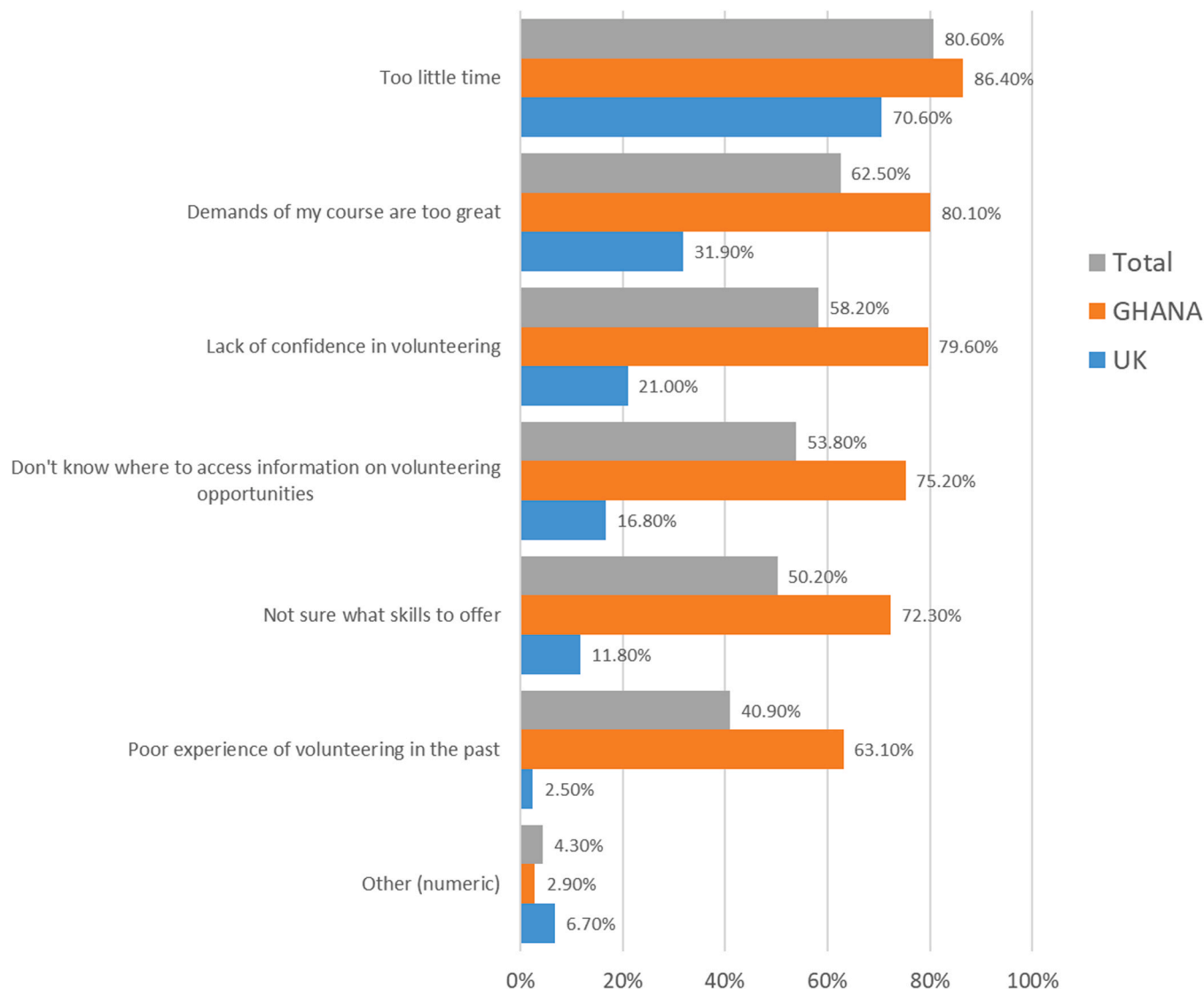


Fig. 3. Reasons for not volunteering.

**Table 5**  
Summary of interviewee characteristics.

Programme of study	Level of study	Year of study	Number of students interviewed
General nursing	1	1st	3
General nursing	2	2nd	2
General Nursing	3	3rd	2
Adult Nursing	4	4th	2
Community Nursing	4	4th	1

development and delivery of public engagement activities in Ghana including volunteering activities, it is likely that younger Ghanaians primary concerns about work reflect the paucity of work opportunities available to them and the difficulty of achieving even the basic markers of adulthood.

Ghanaian students reported difficulties in accessing information and support for volunteering, which is often dependent on the presence of student unions and/or internet availability (Moore McBride and Lough, 2010). While structured volunteering was absent from undergraduate

nursing programmes in Ghana and UK nursing programmes, volunteering framed in the curriculum would provide some antidote to the practical challenges such as lack of available time for extra-curricular activities (Sheu et al., 2011). However, structured or supported volunteering would be less successful in addressing the implicit financial burden of volunteering in the Ghanaian context.

Ghanaian students experienced barriers to volunteering, namely access to `discretionary` spending, or the ability to use resources for the express purpose of volunteering. In so much as a country's wider economy has an impact on the lives of students, in times of economic growth it is likely student volunteering will flourish, whereas at times of low economic growth levels of student volunteering are likely to decline (Tyler et al., 2018). In a country such as Ghana where the economy is forecast to grow at a rate lower than predicted (Reuters, 2020), volunteering rates may decline among students. As such, structural challenges within countries provide a more likely explanation of variation in uptake of student volunteering, than variation in motivations and attitudes towards volunteering between countries.

The findings from this study are important for several reasons. First, Global challenges facing nursing are rapidly having an impact on the nature of nursing work and in what context nursing work occurs (Potter

and Bragadóttir, 2020). Environmental change, inequalities in health, poverty, mental health crises and more recently the global pandemic requires nurse educators to raise the critical consciousness of students through innovative and transformative pedagogies such as narrative pedagogy and feminist pedagogy (McAllister and Ryan, 2020). Volunteering is less well understood as a transformative pedagogy for nursing, although volunteering as a student activity has potential to harness students existing experience with newly acquired knowledge and skills (Leonard et al., 2013).

Second, critical examination of international nursing curricula, irrespective of the context of practice has potential to assist in the preparation of nursing students for an unpredictable and ambiguous future (Shishani et al., 2012). Since nurse education in university settings can provide students with opportunities to engage with a broad range of social networks it is reasonable to suggest nursing students are more likely to understand and consider the benefits of volunteering than individuals who cannot access university education. Widening access to university education in Ghana and the UK is therefore key to promoting volunteering among students.

Third, while the triggers for volunteering are thought to be complex and likely related to structural challenges within countries as opposed to being to being culturally determined between countries, nevertheless volunteering as a student activity has potential to harness students existing experience with newly acquired knowledge and skills.

## 6. Limitations

This research was conducted in two universities – one in the UK and one in Ghana. While we can be reasonably confident that the samples obtained are representative of students on nursing programmes at those universities, to establish how representative the universities are of their respective countries would require a much larger research project with random samples from several universities in each country. In the UK sample, the number of current volunteers was very small ( $n = 7$ ) and this means that it was difficult to meaningfully break these responses down across multiple choice questions. The quantitative part of the research relies on self-reported motivation and attitude in a survey. Such surveys can be subject to bias in terms of social desirability for example – that is respondents wishing consciously or unconsciously, to give responses which they think are likely to be viewed favourably by the researcher or perhaps by other people who will read the research findings. Further to that, when doing surveys in more than one country or culture while using standardised wording it is of course possible that questions can be understood differently in one or other of the countries. While time and resources precluded piloting of the questionnaire with Ghanaian students the research team tried to minimise this possible source of bias by taking great care with question wording and checking that wording, with nursing teachers in both countries.

## 7. Conclusion

There is evidence that economic development tends to produce rising levels of volunteering. Therefore, in a country such as Ghana where it is likely the economy will grow at a slower rate than predicted, volunteering rates may decline among the general population. A country's wider economy also has an impact on the lives of students making it likely that economic instability will have an impact on student volunteering. While structured volunteering provides a solution to the lack of available time for extra-curricular activities, it fails to address the financial strain of volunteering. Furthermore, this is likely to have an impact on Ghanaian nursing students' more so than their UK counterparts in that Ghanaian students reported having to travel some considerable distance to volunteer at their own expense. In Ghana at least, it seems unlikely reimbursement for volunteering will be prioritised in the current economic climate. For these reasons' structural challenges within countries provides a more likely explanation of variation in

uptake of student volunteering, than does cross-cultural variation in attitudes towards volunteering between countries.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Sue Dyson:** Conceptualization of project, Formal qualitative analysis, Funding acquisition (Middlesex small grants programme), Conceptualization of methodology, Project administration, Investigation, Draft writing, Rewriting, Review and editing. **Kwadwo Korsah:** Investigation, Drafting, Writing. **Liang Liu:** Investigation, Quantitative analysis, Writing, Editing. **Mike O Driscoll:** Quantitative analysis. **Olga van den Akker:** Methodology, Writing/editing.

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