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COMPARING VOLUNTEER SERVICE EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITIES OF CHINA AND KAZAKHSTAN: CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS, INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS, CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Volunteer service education is increasingly recognised as a key pathway for cultivating socially responsible undergraduates with global perspectives. This study compares university-based volunteer service education in China and Kazakhstan, focusing on cultural foundations, institutional mechanisms, curriculum integration, and educational outcomes. Drawing on document analysis and faculty surveys from six universities ($n = 144$), the findings show that China operates a centralised, policy-driven model closely aligned with ideological education, while Kazakhstan adopts a hybrid approach shaped by traditional *asar* mutual-aid values and international cooperation. China demonstrates stronger institutional frameworks and curriculum integration; Kazakhstan emphasises affective engagement and global partnerships. Despite these differences, both systems face common challenges such as limited resources, weak evaluation mechanisms, and short project durations. The study contributes to institutional isomorphism and service-learning theories by illustrating how local traditions, national priorities, and global norms intersect in shaping civic education. Practical recommendations are provided to strengthen policy support, curriculum integration, and cross-border collaboration.

Keywords: Volunteer service education, service-learning, institutional isomorphism, cross-cultural comparison, China and Kazakhstan.

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Қазақстан мен Қытай жоғары оқу орындарындағы білім беру саласындағы еріктілер іс-әрекетін салыстыру: мәдени негіздерді, институционалдық тетіктерді оқу бағдарламаларына кіріктіру

Еріктілік қызметі бойынша білім беру – жаһандық көзқарасы бар, әлеуметтік жауапкершілігі жоғары студенттерді тәрбиелеудің маңызды жолы ретінде танылып келеді. Бұл зерттеу Қытай мен Қазақстан университеттеріндегі еріктілік білім беру тәжірибелерін мәдени негіздерге, институционалдық механизмдерге, оқу бағдарламасына біріктіру мен білім беру нәтижелеріне сүйене отырып салыстырады. Алты университеттен ($n = 144$) құжаттарды талдау мен оқытушылар сауалнамасына негізделген зерттеу нәтижелері Қытайда идеологиялық біліммен тығыз байланысты орталықтандырылған, мемлекеттік басқарылатын модель қолданылатынын, ал Қазақстанда дәстүрлі «асар» өзара көмек мәдениеті мен халықаралық ынтымақтастыққа негізделген аралас модель басым екенін көрсетеді. Қытайда институционалдық құрылымдар мен оқу жоспарына интеграция күштірек дамыған; ал Қазақстанда эмоциялық қатысу мен жаһандық серіктестікке басымдық беріледі. Айырмашылықтарға қарамастан, екі жүйе де шектеулі ресурстар, әлсіз бағалау тетіктері және қысқа мерзімді жобалар сияқты ортақ қиындықтарға тап болады. Зерттеу институционалдық изоморфизм мен қызметтік оқыту теорияларына үлес қосып, азаматтық білім берудің қалай қалыптасатынын көрсетеді. Саясатты қолдау, оқу жоспарын интеграциялау және шекарааралық ынтымақтастықты нығайтуға арналған практикалық ұсыныстар берілген.

Түйін сөздер: ерікті қызмет, қызмет арқылы оқыту, институционалдық изоморфизм, мәдениетаралық салыстыру, Қытай және Қазақстан.

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Сравнение волонтерской деятельности в образовании вузов Казахстана и Китая: культурные основы, институциональные механизмы, интеграция в учебные программы

Образование в сфере волонтерской деятельности всё чаще признаётся важным инструментом формирования социально ответственных студентов с глобальным мышлением. Настоящее исследование представляет сравнительный анализ волонтерского образования в университетах Китая и Казахстана, с акцентом на культурные основы, институциональные механизмы, интеграцию в учебные программы и образовательные результаты. На основе анализа документов и опросов преподавателей из шести университетов ($n = 144$) выяснено, что в Китае действует централизованная, ориентированная на государственную политику модель, тесно связанная с идеологическим воспитанием, в то время как Казахстан использует смешанный подход, основанный на традиционной культуре взаимопомощи «асар» и международном сотрудничестве. Китай демонстрирует более сильную институциональную базу и интеграцию в учебные планы, тогда как Казахстан акцентирует внимание на эмоциональной вовлеченности и глобальных партнёрствах. Несмотря на различия, обе системы сталкиваются с общими вызовами: ограниченные ресурсы, слабые механизмы оценки и краткосрочные проекты. Исследование вносит вклад в развитие теорий институционального изоморфизма и service-learning, показывая, как местные традиции, национальные приоритеты и глобальные нормы формируют гражданское образование. Предложены практические рекомендации по усилению политической поддержки, интеграции в учебные программы и международному сотрудничеству.

Ключевые слова: волонтерское образование, обучение через службу, институциональный изоморфизм, кросс-культурное сравнение, Китай и Казахстан.

Introduction

With the rapid globalisation and internationalization of higher education, volunteer service education has become an important way to train socially responsible, competent, and globally-minded undergraduates. Volunteer service education was initially associated with the development of civil society, and now it is increasingly connected with national strategy and soft power. Under the Belt and Road Initiative in China, student volunteers offer language training and medical assistance along international corridors, and spread Chinese culture to target countries (Liu Wei, Yan Tingxing, Li Yan, Lv Weidong, 2024). Under the Nurlu Zhol Plan in Kazakhstan, student volunteers participate in UN programmes and cross-border projects. Generally, Central Asia is an open system to the world (Kukeyeva, Dyussebayev, 2019).

The role of university volunteer service can be described in two aspects. Educationally, it connects academic learning and community services. Within the framework of service-learning and Global Citizenship Education (GCE), the focus is on reflective learning and intercultural competence. It also contributes to achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Politically, in a state-driven system,

it is a form of soft power to project national values to the outside world, and student volunteers act as “grassroots diplomats” (Liu, Yan, Li & Lv, 2024).

The development of volunteer service education in China and Kazakhstan is rooted in different historical traditions. In Kazakhstan, it is based on a traditional mutual-aid practice of Asar and was formalised in the Volunteer Service Law (Akhmetova, Karipbayev, Shimshik, 2022). The rapid growth in 2020 “Year of the Volunteer” is remarkable: from 2019 to 2022, the number of active volunteers quadrupled while the number of organisations tripled. By 2023, the number of registered volunteers in Kazakhstan was 217,000 (43% were youth), active in 2,562 organisations in social, environmental, education, healthcare fields, and a growing number of international projects (71 UN-certified volunteers) (Kenzhebay, 2024).

In China, volunteer service began in the 1960s with the “Learn from Lei Feng” campaign, rooted in Confucian collectivism and altruism (Hu, 2021). Since the 1990s, it has been institutionalised through policy and legislation, becoming part of ideological and political education. By 2024, China had 232 million registered volunteers, 1.35 million volunteer teams, and over 11 million projects, with university students comprising 56.8% of all volunteers. The

Western China University Student Volunteer Programme has deployed over 500,000 students to more than 2,000 areas since 2003 (Tian, Wang, 2024).

Despite achievements, both countries face common challenges: limited resources, short project durations, weak training systems, and administrative complexity, all of which constrain programme impact and discourage student participation.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to address three interrelated questions:

(1) What are the differences between Chinese and Kazakhstani universities in cultural foundations, institutional mechanisms?

(2) How is volunteering integrated into university curricula in each country?

(3) How do educators perceive the impact of volunteering on student development?

Literature review

University volunteer service, as an educational mode that combines social activity and value education, has drawn increasing global attention over the past several years. Previous studies are inclined to conceptualize the double role of university volunteering as imparting crucial educational values and playing political and social roles of governance (Green, 2018). From an educational perspective, volunteer service is one of the major ways of implementing service-learning. Service-learning integrates academic learning and community service, enabling students to gain knowledge of subject matter while learning communication skills, critical thinking, and civic responsibility (Thelma, 2024). It is also one of the best ways of enhancing Global Citizenship Education (GCE), fostering intercultural awareness and global consciousness and facilitating local application of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to its educational value, volunteer service also plays a notable political role. In state-led societies, volunteer service is often utilized to shape national image and project soft power. Nye (2019) points out that soft power stems from a country's cultural appeal and the ability to disseminate its values. Under national strategies such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Nurlı Zhol, volunteer service has evolved beyond its educational function to become a strategic tool for promoting international image, fostering public diplomacy, and enhancing global communication. As a result, university volunteers are increasingly seen as "grassroots diplomats," taking on the role of conveying national values and shaping international

perception through transnational volunteer projects.

In addition to the conceptual functions mentioned above, it is also essential to examine the specific policies and institutional frameworks that shape volunteer service education in China and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has established a multi-level legal foundation, including the Law on Public Associations (1996), the Law on Charity (2015), and the Law on Volunteer Service (2016), which collectively define the legal status, rights, and operational standards of volunteers (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019). The government designated 2020 as the "Year of Volunteering" and set a target in the State Youth Development Programme (2021–2025) to raise youth volunteer participation to 20% by 2025 (Kenzhebay, 2024). For administrative governance, Kazakhstan adopts a tripartite coordination model involving government bodies (e.g., the Committee on Youth and Family Affairs), national organizations (e.g., the Volunteer Alliance of Kazakhstan), and university volunteer units. The national digital platform QazVolunteer.kz facilitates volunteer registration, project matching, and service certification.

In comparison, China's volunteer service system developed earlier and is more centralized. The China Youth Volunteer Service Action Plan (1993) launched the systematic development of university volunteerism, followed by the Western China University Student Volunteer Programme (2003), which linked volunteer service to national development strategies. The Opinions on Deepening College Student Volunteer Service Activities issued by the Ministry of Education (2009) required volunteer service to be integrated into ideological and political education courses. The Volunteer Service Regulations (2017) provide comprehensive legal protection for volunteers' rights and organizations' responsibilities (Zhang, 2020). China implements a three-level "central–provincial–university" coordination system led by the Communist Youth League (CYL), and most universities have established Youth Volunteer Associations or Volunteer Service Centers. The national "Volunteer China" platform supports real-name registration, service hour tracking, and certification mechanisms (Xu, 2022).

At the operational level, China's coordination mechanism follows a top-down hierarchical structure: the Central Committee of the CYL issues national directives, provincial committees allocate resources and oversee implementation, and university youth volunteer associations organize specific activities, assign tasks to student volunteers, and collect

feedback through regular reporting channels. Information flows upward via activity summaries and performance evaluations, while resources (funding, training materials, certification certificates) flow downward. In Kazakhstan, coordination is more decentralized: the Committee on Youth and Family Affairs sets broad policy directions, the Volunteer Alliance of Kazakhstan provides training and cross-regional project matchmaking, and university volunteer units retain considerable autonomy, often negotiating directly with local NGOs and community organizations without strict hierarchical supervision. To guide the analysis, this study employs a multidimensional theoretical framework that integrates perspectives from cultural, institutional, and pedagogical research. Cross-cultural adaptation theory explains how individuals adjust to different cultural settings through internalizing local norms and values (Kim, 2017). In this study, it illuminates motivational contrasts in student volunteering: institutional incentives are more salient in China, while community traditions play a central role in Kazakhstan. Institutional isomorphism theory highlights how organizations conform to external pressures through coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms (Beckert, 2010). Applied here, it explains why Chinese universities respond primarily to state-driven and normative demands, whereas Kazakhstani institutions rely more on mimetic strategies of imitation. Service-learning theory links structured volunteering with academic outcomes, framing it as a form of experiential learning (Salam, Iskandar & Ibrahim, 2019). This study uses it to conceptualize volunteering as a pedagogical tool in higher education, providing a basis for curriculum integration and civic competence development.

In recent years, research on international volunteer service and university-based volunteer service education has grown steadily. However, many cross-cultural studies focus on horizontal comparisons among developed countries. For example, Smith (2010) examined differences in volunteer motivation and frequency across Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US, primarily addressing youth individualism and civic engagement patterns, while largely overlooking the educational systems and cultural foundations of non-Western societies. Even in transnational studies that include China, such as Hustinx's (2010) six-country comparison, researchers often reduce China to a "state-led" model and pay little attention to the cultural meanings, policy frameworks, and pedagogical integration underlying its volunteer service prac-

tices. Moreover, Lough (2020) in his review of International Volunteer Service (IVS), notes that global volunteer flows still follow a North–South model, where youth from developed nations serve in Global South communities. This has long marginalized South–South and South–North forms of collaboration. Although Lough calls for a more culturally sensitive framework to evaluate volunteering, systematic research is still lacking on how countries like China and those in Central Asia localize volunteer service education and construct non-Western narratives.

While existing research has begun to explore volunteer service education in Southeast Asia (e.g., Thailand, the Philippines) and Africa (e.g., Ghana, Kenya), these studies largely emphasize grassroots community-based initiatives or the role of international NGOs (Yea, Sin & Griffiths, 2018; Tiessen, 2017). In contrast, China and Kazakhstan represent distinct models of state-guided, institutionalized volunteer service education, each rooted in a specific governance tradition: socialist in China and post-Soviet in Kazakhstan. Their inclusion offers an important comparative contribution that expands our understanding of how non-Western countries design, implement, and rationalize volunteer service education.

The uniqueness of these two models is also reflected in their different approaches to curriculum integration. In Kazakhstan, recent policy incentives have promoted the development of volunteer service courses. According to the Decree on the Approval of the Industrial Incentive System, university students can obtain credit exemptions or financial rewards for participating in volunteer services (Rymkhanova, 2020). Several universities have integrated volunteer service into disciplinary curricula: for example, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University organizes international students to conduct language teaching through its Confucius Institute; Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University offers the course Child Mentors for students majoring in preschool education; and Narxoz University cooperates with non-governmental organizations to provide social work internship opportunities. In addition, Kazakhstan has introduced volunteer service education in secondary schools, offering the course Fundamentals of Volunteer Service and Charity for Grades 10–11, which includes modules such as theoretical foundations, leadership development, practical actions, and information dissemination (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019).

Chinese universities have developed a more systematic model of curriculum integration. Since the University of Science and Technology Beijing formally incorporated college student volunteer service into undergraduate curricula in 2005 (Xu, 2022), many universities have established credit-based volunteer service programs. South China Normal University is a model of the professionalization-led model, characterized by its 9+1 training system and long-term capacity-building through projects such as the graduate teaching assistant group. South China Agricultural University adopts a “discipline-integrated” model, combining volunteer service management with agriculture and forestry disciplines through activities such as the doctoral student team technical assistance program. Guangdong University of Science and Technology implements a technology-enabled model, constructing a chain of “project design–competition selection–incubation and implementation” by using a volunteer management information system and annual project design competitions (e.g., We Volunteers) (Xu, 2022; Wang, 2013). These curriculum integration practices provide concrete institutional evidence for the different models mentioned above.

In terms of daily guidance and support for student volunteers, university teachers in China usually take a direct supervisory role. This includes assigning specific volunteer tasks, conducting pre-service training, monitoring students’ performance in activities, providing mid-term feedback, and evaluating outcomes through service logs or reflection reports. In many Chinese universities, supervisors are required to meet regularly with student volunteer teams and submit activity summaries to the Communist Youth League. In contrast, teachers in Kazakhstan act more as facilitators: they help students find suitable community partners, offer advice on project design, and provide emotional support, but rarely participate in daily task management or formal performance evaluation. This difference reflects broader cultural expectations regarding the role of teachers and institutional support structures in each country.

Moreover, Western service-learning theories such as Dewey’s experiential learning and Kolb’s learning cycle, highlight the transformative potential of reflection and action. However, the models emulated by China and Kazakhstan are inclined to prioritize political identity, communal obligation, and policy over personal growth or cognitive development. For instance, China’s integration of volunteering as ideological and political educa-

tion is quite different from the reflective, student-centered emphasis of Kolb’s cycle. Likewise, Kazakhstan’s blending of local *asar* values and international UN models produces a hybrid rationale that makes it difficult to apply universalist service-learning models.

Therefore, this comparative analysis of volunteer service education between China and Kazakhstan not only fills the theoretical gap in non-West contexts scholarship but also offers critical analysis to re-evaluate dominant theories of service-learning. It encourages the development of more culturally responsive and locally grounded theories to understand how volunteering supports civic learning, identity formation, and educational change across systems.

Materials and methods

This study adopts a mixed-method design to ensure both theoretical depth and empirical validity. Three research methods were employed: document analysis, questionnaire surveys, and comparative analysis.

Three representative universities from each country were selected to ensure diversity in geography, institutional type, and ownership. In Kazakhstan, these included Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, and Narxoz University. In China, the selected institutions were South China Agricultural University, South China Normal University, and Guangdong University of Science and Technology. The sample covers comprehensive and teacher-training institutions, as well as both public and private universities.

Participants were frontline university faculty with experience in teaching or supervising volunteering activities. An on-line survey, made available in Chinese, English, Russian, and Kazakh, was administered to guarantee linguistic and cultural accessibility. A total of 160 questionnaires were administered with 144 valid responses obtained (76 from China, 68 from Kazakhstan), which also ensured a balanced distribution according to country, institution type, and region.

Document analysis was also done for developing the theoretical background and policy context, and government policy documents, literature, and university websites were surveyed. National volunteering platform data, including registration numbers, project categories, and social impact indicators, were also examined. The questionnaire

consisted of four sections: (1) demographic information; (2) policy support and resource availability; (3) integration of volunteering into curricula; (4) perceived educational outcomes. Data were cleaned using Excel 2024 and analysed with SPSSAU (Smart Statistical Analysis for Users) to produce descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and cross-tabulations. The comparative analysis systematically assessed the cultural foundations, institutional mechanisms, curriculum integration, and educational outcomes of volunteer service education in the two countries.

Results and discussion

The survey results (Table 1) indicate that in both countries, altruistic motives specifically helping others and giving back to society constitute the primary driver for student engagement in volunteering (Kazakhstan: 42.3%; China: 40%). However, notable differences emerge in secondary motivations. Kazakhstani students are more inclined to view volunteering as a means of expanding social networks and are more strongly influenced by cultural traditions or societal expectations. In contrast, Chinese students place greater emphasis on the role of volunteering in enhancing personal skills and career competitiveness and in gaining formal recognition or award. These findings suggest that while altruism is a shared foundation, the underlying motivational structures are shaped by distinct socio-cultural and educational contexts in each country.

Table 1
Main motivation for student participation in volunteering (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Cultural traditions or societal expectations	13.5	6.3
Helping others and giving back to society	42.3	40
Meeting new friends and expanding social networks	18.7	10.5
Enhancing personal skills and increasing career competitiveness	20.1	28
Gaining honors, awards, or recognition	5.4	15.2

Source / Note: This table was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

In terms of students' preferred types of volunteer organization, the survey results (Table 2) indicate that in China, the most common choice is participation in activities organized by official university bodies (58%), followed by collaboration with community organizations or NGOs, student-initiated projects, and activities organized by enterprises or other social institutions. In Kazakhstan, official university organizations are also the top choice (40%), but a notably higher proportion of students prefer community- or NGO-led activities and student-initiated projects, while enterprise- or institution-led volunteering remains the least preferred option.

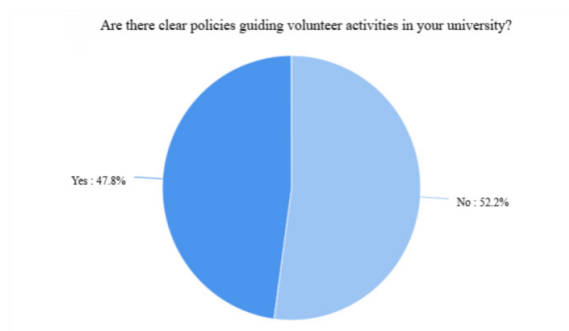
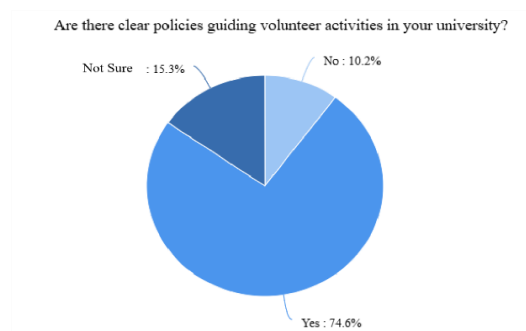
Table 2
Students' Preferred Types of Volunteer Organization (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Organized by government or official university bodies (e.g., youth league, student union, volunteer associations)	40	58
Initiated and managed by students themselves	25	12
Activities in collaboration with local communities or NGOs	28	20
Organized by enterprises or other social institutions	7	10

Source: compiled by the authors

In terms of policy support, 74.6% of Chinese faculty reported that their universities have clear guidelines for volunteer service, compared to only 47.8% in Kazakhstan (see Figures 1 and 2).

Regarding managerial support improvements for volunteering, analysis of Table 3 shows that both Chinese and Kazakhstani respondents identified increased funding and resources for volunteer programs as the primary improvement priority (China: 75%; Kazakhstan: 57%). Notable cross-country differences were also observed: Chinese faculty reported a substantially higher demand for formal recognition and incentives, clearer policies and guidelines, and regular training and workshops for staff and faculty. By contrast, Kazakhstani faculty showed relatively closer levels of demand in areas such as enhanced collaboration with external organizations and improved communication and promotion of volunteer opportunities.

Figure 1*University volunteer service guidance policies (Kazakhstan)***Figure 2***University volunteer service guidance policies (China)*

Source / Note: This figure was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

Table 3

The effective improvements in managerial support for volunteering (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Increased funding and resources for volunteer programs	57	75
Regular training and workshops for staff and faculty involved in volunteering	26	61
Clearer policies and guidelines for organizing and managing volunteer activities	26	75
Enhanced collaboration with external organizations and communities	35	63
Formal recognition and incentives for student and faculty participation	13	71
Improved communication and promotion of volunteer opportunities	17	37

Source: compiled by the authors

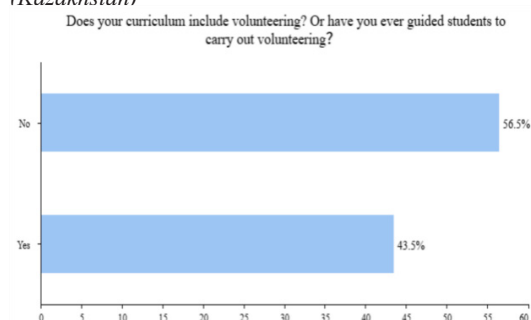
Regarding curriculum integration, 74.6% of Chinese faculty reported integrating volunteering into their courses, compared to only 43.5% in Kazakhstan (see Figure 3 and 4).

Regarding the barriers to curriculum integration (Table 4), faculty from both China and Kazakhstan generally identified “resource shortages,” “institutional resistance,” and “curricular constraints” as the primary bottlenecks. However, notable differences emerged in relation to “policy gaps,” “assessment challenges,” and “cultural factors”: Chinese faculty were more concerned with policy implementation and institutional feedback, whereas Kazakhstani faculty placed greater emphasis on the lack of institutional and organizational infrastructure to support curriculum integration of volunteering.

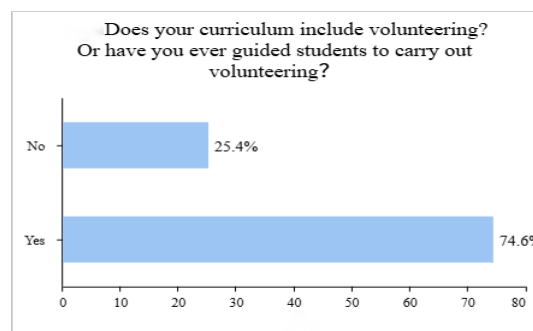
In terms of teaching methods, faculty from both countries recognized service-learning projects and problem-based case studies as most effective (see Table 5). However, Kazakhstani faculty utilized reflective journals and academic writing less frequently, preferring task-oriented practices closely.

Figure 3

Participation in volunteer service education (Kazakhstan)

**Figure 4**

Participation in volunteer service education (China)



Source / Note: This figure was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

Table 4
Barriers to incorporating volunteering into curricula (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Lack of resources	65	61
Institutional resistance	57	69
Curricular constraints	43	63
Low student interest	30	41
Policy and administrative gaps	9	58
Assessment challenges	22	53
Cultural and social factors	13	29

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 5
The effective teaching methods for integrating volunteering into curricula(%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Service-learning projects	74	81
Group-based assignments	52	49
Reflection journals or essays	0	46
Case studies and problem-based learning	65	66
Mentorship programs with community organizations	43	42

Source: compiled by the authors

In enhancing the educational potential of volunteering, the survey results (Table 6) indicate that Kazakhstani faculty place greater emphasis on aligning volunteering with academic objectives, integrating service-learning into the curriculum, and staff

training and support. Chinese faculty place greater emphasis on staff training and support, partnerships with community organizations, and formal recognition and incentives for students.

Table 6
Suggestions for maximizing the educational potential of volunteering (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Align volunteering activities with academic learning objectives	70	47
Integrate service-learning components into the curriculum	48	56
Provide formal recognition and incentives for student participation	26	64
Offer training and support for faculty and staff managing volunteer programs	43	71
Establish partnerships with community organizations to create impactful projects	17	69
Facilitate reflective activities to help students connect volunteering with personal and academic growth	35	49
Enhance accessibility and promotion of volunteer opportunities	22	44
Develop structured programs with clear goals and measurable outcomes	22	42

Source: compiled by the authors

Regarding perceived educational outcomes (See Figure 5 and 6), 95.7% of Kazakhstani faculty observed positive student changes following volunteer participation, compared to 83.1% in China.

Figure 5
Students experience positive changes through volunteering (Kazakhstan)

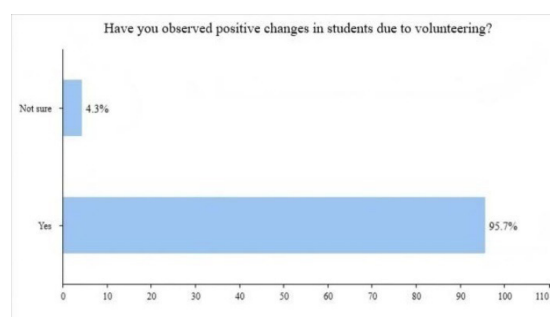
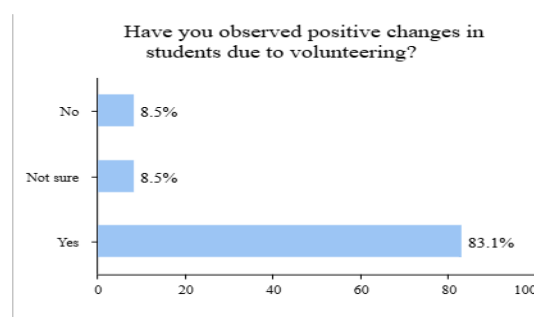


Figure 6
Students experience positive changes through volunteering (China)



Source / Note: This figure was compiled by the authors based on the analysis of materials

Regarding the core competencies enhanced by volunteering (see Table 7), faculty in both China and Kazakhstan identified communication skills, teamwork, and leadership as the three most significant attributes, followed by problem-solving, networking, and social awareness.

Table 7

Skills students most commonly develop through volunteering (%)

Options	Kazakhstan	China
Leadership	65	64
Communication	87	73
Teamwork	61	81
Problem-solving	52	66
Networking	48	68
Empathy and social awareness	39	51

Source: compiled by the authors

Based on the results of the foregoing findings, there are also key patterns and implications for the pedagogical, institutional, and cultural dynamics of volunteer service education for China and Kazakhstan. From the perspective of crosscultural adaptation theory, the differences between two countries in terms of motivation represent alternative models of institutional motivation. With regard to policy directed volunteerism and a higher proportion of mandatory participation, China presents a kind of institutional motivation in which students internalize their behavior in response to state and educational factors. This shows that Chinese students adapt to volunteer service education in a topdown manner according to proscribed norm. In contrast, Kazakhstani students are more motivated by affect and sense of community in response to Asar tradition. This kind of bottomup motivation is an organic adaptation to educational influences. These findings suggest that motivation to participate in volunteer service education is culturally sensitive and generalizing motivational theory based on Western contexts should be exercised with caution.

Institutional isomorphism theory provides another perspective to examine governance and organizational practices in two countries. Owing to coercive and normative pressures, Chinese universities show a high degree of isomorphism in shaping volunteer service education in their curriculum

as well as in linking it with political education and ideological training. In this sense, universities adopt similar policies and practices not only for legitimacy but also for fulfilling state requirements. In contrast, Kazakhstan shows a mixed model. There are certain institutional pressures from national volunteer year campaigns and international partnerships; however, universities show more heterogeneity in terms of their policies and practices. This variation indicates that there is a weak form of isomorphism in two countries. That is, traditional values and external cooperation exist alongside state requirements. The comparison shows how volunteer education systems in two countries show institutional convergence but with different cultural and political logic.

At the level of curriculum integration, Chinese universities show more formal and structured practices in using credit courses, systematic assessment and reflective writing as journal and essay. These findings reflect the influence of service-learning principles in which experiential learning is accompanied by structured reflection and academic assessment. In comparison, adopting some elements of service-learning, Kazakhstani universities show more extra-curricular models and informal mentoring. The low adoption of reflective journals and writing based assessment shows that volunteer service education in these universities has less systematic integration of transforming learning components. This finding indicates a potential area for capacity building in these universities for strengthening faculty's ability in facilitating critical reflection and connecting practice with academic knowledge.

Besides institutional mechanisms, social and educational support plays a vital role in sustaining volunteer service education. In China, social support mainly takes the form of policy-driven resource allocation: government funding for key programs (e.g., the Western China Volunteer Programme), provincial and national recognition and awards, and the inclusion of volunteer experience in employment placement and graduate admission criteria. In Kazakhstan, social support relies more on partnerships with non-governmental organizations and international bodies: the Kazakhstan Volunteer League provides training and certification, the UN Volunteer Programme offers international opportunities, and local communities contribute in-kind support such as venues and equipment. However, both countries face shortcomings in systematic social support, including insufficient dedicated funding, low employer recognition of volunteer experience, and limited public awareness of the contributions made

by volunteers. Strengthening these social support systems is critical to advancing volunteer service education from fragmented projects to sustainable institutionalized practice. Both systems face similar challenges in terms of resource coordination, lack of monitoring and evaluation, and short project cycles. These structural factors contribute to the low level of sustainability and scalability.

In response to these issues, this study provides the following practical suggestions. First, universities in both countries should produce more detailed evaluation guidelines that extend beyond simple measures of participation to include learning, social and personal impact. Second, faculty development programs should be implemented to enhance service-learning teaching methods, such as reflective facilitation training, project design and interdisciplinary implementation. Third, national policy support should focus on long-term funding and cross-sectoral collaboration to enable sustained program implementation. Finally, increased collaboration between the two regions, through joint volunteer activities, academic exchange and comparative research, can help to promote learning from each other and build stronger global civic education.

Conclusion

Through a comprehensive analysis of cultural foundation, institutional mechanism, curriculum integration and educational outcomes, this study explores three research issues. First of all, the study reveals how the governance model and cultural traditions jointly shape the structure and management of university volunteer service. Secondly, the study compares the differences in the integration and formalization of volunteer services at the university

level, evaluation and the application of extracurricular activities. Third, the study compares educators' views on the effectiveness of volunteer service, as well as the common development advantages and the unique concerns of each country. The practical significance of this study is that it helps to understand the non-Western volunteer service education model. By revealing how national priorities, local traditions and global norms intertwine and affect volunteer services in higher education, this study provides practical suggestions for strengthening policy support, improving curriculum integration and promoting cross-border cooperation. These findings have direct guiding implications for policymakers, university administrators and international organizations, helping them to use volunteering as an educational strategy and cultural diplomacy tool.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

Author Contributions

Wei Tongyang – development of methodological research approaches, substantiation of theory and research tools, conducting a survey, interpretation of results, visualization and verification of conclusions, text editing.

A.A. Bulatbayeva – conceptualization of research, scientific guidance, coordination of research work, development of research methodology, conducting a survey, editing a manuscript.

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