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Contribution of Adapted Physical Education Course to Promoting Volunteer Work with Omani Learners with Disabilities

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Abstract. Volunteer work (VW) is a fundamental pillar of societal values. It is a human practice associated with all goodness and collaborative work meanings. Therefore, VW is a positive human behavior, activity, and cultural phenomenon that enhances the values of collaboration, loyalty, compassion, and empathy among members of society. The culture of VW comes as one of the sources of competencies required to be developed among students by upbringing and cultural formation processes by educational institutions. Therefore, the university's role is highlighted in preparing students for VW by including academic programs and courses on topics, activities, and field experiences that enhance the culture of VW. The adapted physical education (APE) course at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) is one of the models that contribute to improving the culture of VW with Omani learners with disabilities. Accordingly, this study aimed to identify the contribution of the APE course in promoting VW with Omani learners with disabilities. 87 students from the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences (PESS) at SQU responded to the APE scale. The APE scale consisted of 34 items distributed into three domains: course instructor, course topics, and course teaching methods. The results indicated a high contribution of the APE course in promoting VW with learners with disabilities from the perspective of the APE course students. In other words, the course instructor, course topics, and educational methods and field activities contributed to promoting VW among APE course students. The study recommended including topics related to VW in university courses.

Keywords: adapted physical education; learners with disabilities; Oman; Sultan Qaboos University; university courses

1. Introduction

Volunteer work (VW) is a healthy social phenomenon that achieves the values of cohesion and social support among members of society. VW is a symbol of collaboration and social solidarity that positively affects the lives of individuals, societies, and nations. The heavenly religions, including the Islamic religion, encourage the inculcation of the values of collaboration and social support among people, as many verses of the Holy Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad indicate that Muslims should be together in their sympathy just like one body (Alghamdi, 2006).

The VW is considered a sublime human value and a social phenomenon that embodies the civilized behavior of societies (Parandhama & Babu, 2023). It is also considered an educational behavior that reflects the culture of the individual and the degree of his/her affiliation to the society to which he/she belongs. VW is allocating time and effort to accomplish work without financial compensation that serves society, the environment, or individuals (Salamon et al., 2011). VW contributes to enhancing citizens' participation in issues in their communities, linking governmental and private efforts to advance society, investing in youth's energies, and filling their free time (Mojza et al., 2011). In other words, VW establishes positive beliefs and values in young people, such as responsibility, collaboration, teamwork, giving, belonging, and loyalty.

VW includes formal and informal volunteering (Taniguchi, 2012). Formal volunteering refers to volunteer work under institutional organizations, such as voluntary and professional associations, youth centers, and unions (van Tienen et al., 2010). The volunteer is committed to carrying out specific responsibilities and duties to achieve the organization's goals for which he/she volunteers (Al-Bakar et al., 2017; Samar, 2022). In contrast, informal volunteering refers to the person assisting friends and civil society organizations independently, without any obligations on his/her part (Dean, 2021).

VW with persons with disabilities (PWDs) has appeared since ancient times, starting with individual and family efforts, and then distribution at the societal and international levels. At the international level, VW has received attention from international organizations, as it constitutes an essential means and driving force for the sustainable development of societies. In this regard, the United Nations was keen to encourage VW through UNICEF, UNESCO, and the International Labor Organization. Therefore, the United Nations declared that December 5th of each year is International Volunteer Day (Hechenberger, 2019). This celebration aims to acknowledge volunteers for their efforts and increase individuals' awareness of the significance of volunteering (Lough & Tiessen, 2017). As a result, the United Nations recognized the role of VW through its volunteer programs (Mishra & Memişoğlu, 2022). This program aims to mobilize volunteers from all over the world to address various problems and crises.

At the national level, VW is one of the noble values carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations in the Sultanate of Oman. There are many Omani VW associations. The credit for establishing these associations goes to the Omani people, who are characterized by noble Arab values and qualities. But what distinguishes these associations is that they include women, who influence VW. Omani women played a vital role in establishing the first women's association for VW in 1972. The Sultan Qaboos Award for Voluntary Work is a practical example of the Sultanate of Oman's belief in volunteer work. This award is the first Omani award concerned with VW, as it works to establish and improve the culture of VW among the family, individuals, and society to highlight the role of associations and institutions in serving society (Ministry of Social Development, 2020). In addition, the Omani Charitable Organization provides humanitarian and social services to those affected by wars and disasters (Al-Ani et al., 2017). In the Sultanate of Oman, many voluntary associations in special education provide health, social, emotional, educational, and financial support services, early intervention, and vocational rehabilitation programs in the categories of visual impairment, hearing impairment, Down syndrome, and autism spectrum disorder.

Disability is one of the humanitarian, social, and educational issues that have become a concern in different societies. Disability does not constitute a burden on the disabled and their families but rather extends to different sectors of society (Al-Mamari et al., 2021; Maghrabi, 2015). The philosophical and theoretical foundations of disability are based on social and medical models. In the social model, the responsibility for disability is transferred from the person to society through society's efforts to overcome the obstacles that limit the ability of PWDs to live without barriers (Hyassat et al., 2016). In other words, the disabled person is not disabled because of his/her disability, but rather because society fails to arrange the surrounding environment to meet the needs of PWDs. In the medical model, the focus is on the shortcomings resulting from disability, and PWDs are viewed as patients (Bunbury, 2019). Their conditions require medical treatment, because disability is an individual problem specific to the disabled person, and he or she must seek treatment and adapt to society.

PWDs do not have equal opportunities with persons without disabilities in obtaining health and education services, and job opportunities (Mégret, 2008). They also suffer from social exclusion and civil society organizations' neglect of their needs (Al-Zoubi & Rahman, 2017; Al-Otaibi et al., 2015). Therefore, civil society organizations, including universities, must avoid the social exclusion of PWDs and enhance society's awareness of their rights. In other words, all barriers that prevent the participation of PWDs in various sectors of society must be removed. Consequently, VW contributes to understanding social participation between PWDs and volunteers (Winance et al., 2015), and overcoming the social and psychological problems of PWDs (Aljibri et al., 2023).

The educational institutions have a pivotal role in promoting the culture of VW among general and higher education students. Universities are among the pioneering institutions that contribute to promoting VW and making it a societal

culture (Wu & Tsai, 2017). Therefore, universities are required to encourage students to practice VW and conduct studies that help promote awareness of VW. In this regard, the Arab Women Organization recommended promoting the culture of VW among students by instructors in general and higher education (Kasnawi, 2019). Accordingly, the university seeks to provide students with knowledge about societal issues, through academic courses and social activities that enhance student awareness of VW. Therefore, university student participation in VW represents a kind of alignment between the university's educational outcomes and the needs and problems of society (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). As a result, VW opens up horizons for students to explore their society away from the internal university environment.

The university education stage contributes to constructing the personality of the university student by acquiring experiences, skills, and facing the requirements of society. The preparation of physical education students has become one of the strategic goals of the College of Education at SQU. As a result, the Department of PESS at SQU modified academic programs, study plans, and teaching methods to keep pace with contemporary trends, and national and international academic accreditation requirements. Therefore, university students' study of special education courses contributes to modifying their attitudes toward learners with disabilities (Al-Yahyai et al., 2020). In other words, studying these courses instills in the hearts of university students the values of VW. Consequently, the APE course is one of the courses offered by the Department of PESS at SQU. The APE course aims to provide students of the PESS Department with programs, activities, and sports games that are appropriate to the abilities of learners in different disability categories (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021). In addition, the APE course provides activities rich in field experiences aimed at providing the department's students with the techniques of practicing APE activities and VW with learners with disabilities in inclusive education schools and disability institutions and centers in Oman (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021). APE is one of the types of supportive services that meet the needs of PWDs, which is provided to them in the least restrictive educational environment or inclusive education (Downs et al., 2016).

APE achieves psychological security, emotional balance, and positive physiological, cognitive, and social benefits for PWDs (Li et al., 2016; Wong et al., 2015). Therefore, the APE helps PWDs overcome their health, psychological, and social problems. In this regard, Güvendi and İlhan (2017) concluded that practicing the APE contributed to improving emotional adjustment, self-management, and socialization among PWDs. Hence, McCubbin (2014) stressed the interest of educational institutions in APE because it achieves better physical, health, and psychological results for PWDs. On the other hand, practicing APE is considered an effective strategy to prevent obesity, improve empathetic skills, and integrate overweight students with their peers in physical education activities (Slimi et al., 2023).

Some previous studies have indicated the effectiveness of studying courses in improving university students' attitudes toward PWDs and developing the social values and civic behavior of university students (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021; Al-Sa'ub,

2016; Al-Yahyai et al., 2020; Abu Darwesh & Bsharah, 2007; Ergin, 2021; Obaidat et al., 2021; Salih & Al-Kandari, 2007). Meanwhile, other studies called for enhancing awareness of the culture of VW and society participation with PWDs (Al-Ashi, 2018; Al-Ajmi et al., 2022; An et al., 2023; Venema et al., 2018). While other studies recommended that universities play roles that promote VW among students by offering VW courses and practicing it practically in the social field (Belsharaf & Al-Abbasi, 2021; Al Rawashdeh et al., 2020). Maghrabi (2015) showed the positive impact of VW on the psychological, social, and economic aspects of PWDs. On the other hand, some obstacles that limit the practice of VW among university students related to the culture and society's view of volunteers, the students' lack of training programs on VW, and the absence of university curricula on topics related to VW (Al-Bakar et al., 2017; Shweihat et al., 2019). In this regard, Al-Otaibi et al. (2015) recommended that general and higher education curricula include topics on VW. Fényes and Pusztai (2012) stressed that religion and values were among the motivations that encourage higher education students to practice VW. However, university students have positive attitudes towards VW (Al Zyoud & Al Kubaisi, 2014). The current research is similar to previous studies in terms of methodology and enhancing awareness of VW among university students. However, this research is a new addition to previous research because it deals with the contribution of the APE course in enhancing VW with PWDs.

2. Research Problem

The university represents one of the social and educational institutions that contribute to learning and instruction, and instilling values and attitudes in students. Perhaps promoting the culture of VW and social participation is one of the values and principles that SQU is supposed to promote among students. At the Arab level, the contribution of universities to society VW and specifically with PWDs is still modest (Al-Bakar et al., 2017), on the other hand, Arab societies' practice of VW with PWDs is still weak (Al-Ajmi et al., 2022). In other words, there is a scarcity of studies and research that have addressed the contribution of Arab and Omani universities to VW or the contribution of university courses to VW with PWDs. The current research attempts to enhance the culture of VW among university students and highlight the role of field activities and experiences in the APE course at SQU in instilling positive values among students towards VW with PWDs. Field experiences are one of the main educational activities in teaching the APE course. The student registered for the course spends a period in inclusive education schools, centers, and institutions for PWDs, or in the Oman Paralympic Committee, or the Deaf Oman Sports Committee. During this period, this student watches how learners with disabilities train in one of the individual or group sports such as athletics, football, basketball, handball, eyeball, goalball, swimming, table tennis, and other adapted sports. Accordingly, this research aims to identify the contribution of APE course to promoting VW with learners with disabilities from the perspective of the students of PESS at SQU. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the contribution of the APE course to promoting VW with learners with disabilities?
2. Does the contribution of the APE course differ according to students' gender?

3. Does the contribution of the APE course differ according to students' class level?

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive method was used to determine the contribution of the APE course to promoting VW with learners with disabilities.

3.2 Participants

Eighty-seven students from the Department of PESS at SQU responded to the APE scale. Data for this research were collected electronically from students who registered for the APE course from December 2020 to December 2023. Table 1 illustrates the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1: Participants' demographic data

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	33	38
	Female	54	62
Class Level	years 1-2	45	52
	years 3-4	42	48

Table 1 shows the demographic data of participants. 62% of them are female and 38% are male. The table also indicates that 52% of them are in the first and second years, while 48% are in the third and fourth years.

3.3 Instrument

APE scale was adopted in this research (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021). APE scale consisted of 34 items distributed into three domains: course instructor (1 to 11), course topics (12 to 22), and course teaching methods (23 to 34). Al-Hadabi et al. (2021) used a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) to answer the items of the APE scale. To judge the contribution of APE course in promoting VW with learners with disabilities, the following criterion was used to calculate the mean of responses to items of the APE scale (Al-Hadabi et al., 2021): low (1:00 to 2.33), moderate (2.34 to 3.67), and high (3.68 to 5:00).

3.4 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the College of Education at SQU. The link to the APE scale was distributed by WhatsApp and email to all students registered in the APE course from December 2020 to December 2023.

4. Results

4.1 What is the Contribution of the APE Course in Promoting VW with Learners with Disabilities?

Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations according to the domains of the APE scale.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of APE course's contribution to VW

Scale domain	N	Mean	S.D.	Contribution
Course instructor	87	3.84	.273	High
Course topics	87	3.79	.326	High
Course teaching methods	87	3.75	.193	High

Table 2 shows that there are high levels of the contribution of the APE course to VW with learners with disabilities on all domains of the scale. Course instructor (M=3.84; S. D=.273), course topics (M=3.79; S. D=.326), and course teaching methods (M=3.75; S.D=.193). Below, the results of the second question of this study will be presented.

4.2 Does the Contribution of the APE Course Differ According to Students' Gender?

Table 3 demonstrates T-test results according to gender.

Table 3: T-test results according to gender

Scale domain	Gender	N	M	S.D.	df	f	Sig.
Course instructor	Male	33	3.90	.215	85	4.102	.128
	Female	54	3.81	.299			
Course topics	Male	33	3.80	.376	85	1.563	.721
	Female	54	3.78	.295			
Course teaching methods	Male	33	3.72	.210	85	.851	.221
	Female	54	3.77	.181			

Table 3 presents that there were no statistically significant differences according to gender. The results of the third question will be presented below.

4.3 Does the Contribution of the APE Course Differ According to Students' Class Level?

Table 4 demonstrates T-test results according to students' class level.

Table 4: T-test results according to students' class level

Scale domain	Class level	N	M	S.D.	df	f	Sig.
Course instructor	1-2 years	45	3.89	.238	85	2.069	.063
	3-4 years	42	3.79	.298			
Course topics	1-2 years	45	3.81	.376	85	3.258	.461
	3-4 years	42	3.76	.265			
Course teaching methods	1-2 years	45	3.72	.196	85	.043	.178
	3-4 years	42	3.78	.187			

Table 4 shows that there were no statistically significant differences according to students' class level.

5. Discussion

The results of this study showed that there were positive attitudes among physical education students and the APE course contributed to enhancing the culture of

VW with PWDs from their perspective. In other words, the results showed a high contribution of the course instructor, course topics, course teaching methods, and field activities in enhancing VW among students of the APE course. This result highlights the role of university courses in enhancing the culture of VW among students. In this regard, some studies have been concluded on the effectiveness of university courses in promoting the culture of VW, and the role of these courses in the personal, social, and professional skills of university students (Al-Huwaish, 2019; Basharaf & Al-Abbasi, 2021; Khasanzyanova, 2017). Therefore, universities bear the responsibility of establishing VW and enhancing its culture among students. These practices appear clearly in international universities, but in Arab universities, the level of contribution is still weak, which is limited to social and advocacy VW, and the lack of university students' contribution to VW (Al-Sulim, 2019). On the other hand, Kasnawi (2019) confirmed the effectiveness of including volunteer activities in university courses and contributing to improving academic achievement and students' attitudes toward VW. These volunteer activities help instill positive values represented in social participation, social responsibility, acceptance of others, and citizenship behavior (Aldegheiry, 2021).

APE promotes VW with PWDs. In this regard, Al-Sulaimani (2021) confirmed that pre-service physical education teachers have positive attitudes towards teaching students with disabilities. Also, PWDs are the groups that volunteers are most likely to work with to create appropriate conditions for them and enable them to adapt to the social environment (Sloukjian, 2016). The topics of the APE course have contributed to enhancing the culture of VW among the students of this course. The course included topics related to categories of intellectual, hearing, visual, physical, health disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder. On the other hand, activities and field experiences helped in forming positive attitudes among students of APE course towards VW with learners with disabilities. The field experiences received by students of the APE course while studying the course have contributed to direct dealing with various categories of disabilities in inclusive education schools and Omani special education centers and institutions. Therefore, training programs, activities, and field experiences enhance university students' VW with PWDs. In this regard, Lukoyenko et al. (2021) launched a training program to further assist volunteers in developing their skills while accompanying PWDs at the university. This program improved the level of skills of the trained students and increased understanding of the needs of PWDs and their characteristics. The program also helped attract new volunteers and increase the motivation of volunteers to work and deal with PWDs. Al-Sartawi et al (2017) also pointed out the effectiveness of a volunteer program in improving university volunteers' attitudes toward Emirati PWDs. Sports activities were one of the elements of the volunteer program that provided opportunities for volunteers to closely discover the physical and sporting potential of PWDs and form positive attitudes toward them. In this regard, Alhumaid et al. (2021) emphasized the effectiveness of training programs based on the APE activities in improving the self-efficacy of university physical education students and forming positive attitudes toward the integration of students with disabilities into physical education classes.

APE is important in the lives of PWDs, through recreation, filling the void, and creating a feeling of psychological security and that he/she is effective in society. Psychologically, An et al. (2023) concluded that there was a positive impact of VW on the well-being and psychological health of PWDs and the formation of positive social behaviors among volunteers. Health-wise, practicing physical activities contributes to reducing obesity and improving the level of physical fitness for PWDs (Wang et al., 2022). Socially, the group activities carried out by volunteers contributed to achieving social integration of Dutch PWDs (Venema et al., 2018), and APE activities helped develop personality traits (extraversion and emotional balance) for PWDs (Dardon & Lamtiwi, 2022).

6. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that studying the APE course contributed to creating positive attitudes among the course students towards VW with PWDs in the Sultanate of Oman. The course topics, activities, field experiences, and the course instructor have contributed to enhancing the culture of VW among students. Therefore, these results call on university faculty to include community issues in university courses. The university must raise awareness of the culture of VW among university students through activities and field experiences that enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical life situations. Field experiences and practices represent the basis of the education process, enhance students' role in educational situations, and develop collaboration skills with others. This study recommends including societal issues in university courses, enrolling students and faculty in workshops, and conducting studies dealing with VW with PWDs, due to the lack of studies that have addressed the role of university courses in improving awareness of VW with PWDs in Omani and Arab contexts.

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9. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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