

## Factors Influencing Youth Participation in Decision Making in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore factors that determine youth participation in decision making in the youth development programmes as a means of participation of young people in the creation and involvement of their own destinies. A survey has been conducted among youth in Malaysia to investigate their perception of their ability to participate in decision-making for the youth development programmes. The study is based on a quantitative approach. The data were collected through a survey among 340 respondents. It offers to understand characteristics of factors that influence youth to participate in decision-making about youth development programmes. The study found three factors which measure the elements that lead youth to participate in decision-making related to youth development programmes contexts. Moreover, scores on the scale developed to measure the factors influencing youth to participate in decision-making yielded excellent validity and reliability estimates.

**Key words:** Youth, participation, decision-making, youth development, excellent, influencing

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### INTRODUCTION

Youth are invaluable asset for the nation, indeed as a main backbone of the nation in both social and economic development as well as political force that will create a new design to the social, economic and political scenario (Azmi, 2012; Abdullah *et al.*, 2015). Data on the world population also indicates that young people within age 15-40 years are among the largest generation in the world. They comprise around 2.8 billion or 39% of the world population. In Malaysia, with the population of 30 million, over 12 million or 40% people aged between 15 and 40 (Azmi, 2012; Yeon *et al.*, 2016). The data reflects the significant roles of youth as valuable assets for the development of the country as well as empowering them to participate in decision making is needed.

According to Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006), youth participation in the decision making has been under-utilized for decades not until recently the concept of youth participation in decision making was rarely harnessed. However, as an emerging paradigm, scholars and researchers have begun to shift perspective of seeing youth participation in decision making as problems to viewing them as resources for participatory action and research. Youth need to face with many challenges including socio-economic and political constraints such

as unemployment, social security, violence and crime, education, health, accommodation and high cost of living that undermine their rights (Abdullah *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, it is crucial to engage youth as young decision makers of tomorrow in the development decisions of today. Thus, youth participation in decision making is gaining recognition as a viable approach not only to preventing youth problems but to also enhancing positive development of youth and the community. With this notion, this study will then explore on factors that may influence youth to participate in decision making on youth development programmes as their concern to involve in creating their own destiny. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to provide initial information on factors that will courage youth to participate in decision making related to the youth development programmes.

**Literature review:** It was argued that youth become more resourceful to influence communities for positive development for themselves and for others when they were provided with opportunity to influence decision-making settings (Brookmeyer *et al.*, 2005). When youth are actively involved in the deliberations from close tie and instrumental partnerships with adults, this is likely to influence community positively (Camino, 2000). In as much a trending perspective of viewing young people as societal assets thrives, intergenerational and inclusive

public policies and practices in community and organizational settings are required. As the perspective steadily gaining wider acceptance, Flanagan and Christens (2011) concluded that the more young people are given chance to participate and contribute in meaningful ways, the likely societies become better off/enhanced.

Potential of young people to influence positive development of community nonetheless, impending critical issues continued to affect the existing theories, models and practices of youth participation in development program (Flanagan and Christens, 2011). Such issues include systematic injustices and consequential possibilities for building power among marginalized groups including solidarity across lines of difference, turning around theories of the majority world to embracing youth civic participation as symbol of hope and strength. It is therefore, urged that action-oriented research and development programs be tailored towards engaging young people in the task of addressing social and political challenges faced by marginalized groups in both the youth and adult (Flanagan and Christens, 2011). This brings to the fore, the relevance of youth organizing as an effective tool to channel the potentials of youth participation in community progress.

Everyone benefits when young people are actively engaged in the decisions that directly affect their lives. Youth, families, adults, organizations, policymakers and communities as a whole benefit when young people have a voice that is listened to respected and utilized. Engaging youth in program and decision making is essential to their overall of youth development (Alexander, 2008). According to Balsano *et al.* (2009), relatively few youth tend to engage in youth development programmes alone. However, when they have opportunity to engage with such programmes, they tend to involve with two to three other programmes. Besides, there are some obstacles that cause youth to apart from society. According to Hipskind and Poremski (2005), youth often did not speak up during meetings or participate in the activities and did not understand much of the content of the meetings which affect the primary goals to legitimize youth's voices and to facilitate a process whereby youth can impact their community in positive ways. Due to that, they have proposed several new program components to address these limitations such as youth engagement in the board meeting adult training or mentoring system that allow mentors to partner with youth to encourage youth participation during their board meeting and community resources where participating board and commissions help youth to access community resources which is they are not familiar.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This is an exploratory analysis related to the perception of youth on the factors influencing them to participate in decision making of youth development programmes. The research used a quantitative method through survey by distributing questionnaires to among 340 youths during the state of Kedah Youth Day 2014, at Alor Setar and National Youth Day celebration 2014 at National Youth Day Celebration 2014 at Kuala Lumpur and Youth Volunteers Carnival 2014 Putrajaya. Factors influencing youth participation in youth decision making related to youth development programmes for youth are measured based on the questionnaire using scale that consists of 'strongly disagree (1)' to 'strongly agree (10)'. Exploratory factor analysis has been performed to analyse the data and principal component analysis method with the orthogonal rotation (varimax) has been utilized to execute the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As mentioned earlier, this study use Factor Analysis (EFA) to analyse factors influencing youth participation in decision making related to the youth development programmes. Prior from performing the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), all the 17 items are being tested for the internal consistency. The result of internal consistency shows that the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.835 which is considered has a good reliability level (DeVellis, 2012; George and Mallery, 2003; Kline, 1999). The number of respondents used as a sample in performing the EFA is considered appropriate ( $n = 340$ ) with the sample to the variable ratio is 20:1 (Hair *et al.*, 2006). For factor analysis purposes, the principal axis factoring with the oblique rotation (Promax) was employed. The value of Kaiser-Mayer-Okin Measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) for the data set was 0.844. The higher value of KMO means that the data set used is applicable for the EFA while the Bartlett's test of Sphericity indicates a significant resulted (2844.158,  $p < 0.001$ ). This significant test statistics indicates that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). In term of the extraction of the factors, this study using the K1 rules extraction heuristic with eigenvalues greater than based on the eigenvalues, it executed three factors solution in determining the construct of 'Youth participation in decision making'. From the analysis, 4 items are been eliminated sequentially due to the issues of low factor loadings. The items are: youth aware to involve in making decisions about social matters) youth can indirectly give opinions regarding youth activities to the youth

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis (pattern matrix): items with loadings above 0.40 (n = 340)

Items	Factor 1-3		
	Ability to give opinions	Awareness and of opportunity involvement	Youth works better for youth
Aware that youth must be directly involved in making decisions about economic matters	-	0.804	-
The government has allocated sufficient opportunities for youth to be involved in making decisions	-	0.648	-
Aware that youth must be directly involved in making decisions about social matters	-	0.865	-
Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have provided opportunities for youth to be involved in making decisions regarding youth development	-	0.623	-
Enthusiastic in giving opinions on youth activities	0.611	-	-
Hold post (e.g., in youth society) and always give a direct opinion regarding youth activities	0.747	-	-
Indirectly give opinions regarding youth activities to the management of youth society/club/institution/organization	0.809	-	-
Use social network (online) to give my opinions regarding certain issues	0.744	-	-
Allocate time to discuss youth activities	-	-	0.694
Feel opinions on youth activities are always accepted by the youth society/club/institution/organization	-	-	0.740
Feel responsible for giving an opinion for youth benefit	-	-	0.815
Believe that youth can give better idea regarding youth development than other parties	-	-	0.508
Eigenvalue	4.990	2.106	1.125
Percentage of variance	38.237	14.414	5.720
Cronbach alpha	0.822	0.850	0.811

society/club/institution/organization) youth can use social network (online) to give opinions regarding certain issues and) youth feel that their opinions on youth activities are always accepted by the youth/society/club/institution/organization. The clean pattern matrix resulting for the final 12 items which for each 4 items are being distributed in 3 factors as shown in Table 1. Based on Table 1, the factor loadings are ranging from 0.508-0.865 and all these 3 factors explained 58.371 of variance for the ‘Youth participation in decision making’ construct.

For the first factor, it contained 4 items which related with the criteria of ability to give opinions for the development of the youth through youth activities. Criteria such as enthusiastic in giving opinions, hold the post and able to give direct opinions, indirect opinions as well as giving opinions on the social network make this contents as the factor that can be themed as ‘the ability to give opinion’s. This is in line with the notion that youth participation will helps to empower them and recognize youth roles in developing appropriate system that align with their needs (Michelsen *et al.*, 2002). This also acknowledges the important of youth engagement to represent their own interests (Hipskind and Poremski, 2005; DeVellis, 2012). Apart from that, the internal consistency for these 4 items of the ability to give opinions also gives a high result of reliability with the value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.822. Highest percentage of variance (38.24%) on this factor means that the abilities to give opinions were the dominant factor that determining for the youth to involve in the decision-making process.

The second factor also contained 4 items which is mixed with the aspects of youth awareness regarding the

socio-economics issues and the opportunities that were given by the government or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) to the youth. Thus, with the mixture of the issues, this factor can be considered to be themed as ‘the awareness and opportunity of involvement’. Youth tends to participate in decision making because they aware and have opportunity to involve. Based on the percentage of the variance explained, this factor determined 14.41% in influencing the youth to participate in the decision-making process. Internal consistency on these 4 items also indicates high reliability with the value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.850.

The third factor also contained 4 items which is each item are explained about youth feel appreciated and belief that their ideas are so, importance in developing the youth. Thus by this criteria, the third factor can be considered to be themed as ‘youth works better for youth’. Accordingly, this is in line with (Michelsen *et al.*, 2002) idea, that youth participation means giving them more opportunities to become engaged in programmes and activities such as leadership, entrepreneurship increases the likelihood that youth will become healthy and active citizens. This factor explained 5.72 of variance and was the lowest factor that determined for youth to be involved in the decision-making process. Even though with the lowest proportion of variance, it still one of the factors that can determine why the youth are being involved in the youth development. While a, for the internal consistency on this factor, all these 4 items of the factor have a good reliability with the value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.811.

## CONCLUSION

In order to uphold good governance practices, it is very important to engage youth in the decision making process related to their development programmes. This indeed will enhance their leadership skills while grooming them to become a competent future leader. Accordingly, the search for answers about the elements that influence the degree of youth involvement has been done in this study with the aim to help the government identify important factors that can lead to increase youth involvement in decision-making. Overall, from the analysis, it shows that youth intention to participate in decision making related to their development and future can be categorised into three factors that consist of ability to give opinion) awareness and opportunity of involvement and youth works better for youth. All these factors indicate that youth really like if their views are accounted for in the process of making a decision. They feel that they are trusted and appreciated in making important decisions related to the development of youth or for their own future development.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported in part by Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, under Niche Research Grant Scheme (NRGS) Grant Nos. 60973089.

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