

## Factors of Youth Participation Capability in The Public Policy Making Process

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### Abstract

The issue of youth participation in the public policy-making process has been a topic of debate at the international level in recent years. Many studies have found that the participation of youths in the process of public policy formulation is not only able to influence a policy, but it also affects the development of youths in terms of consultation, planning, communication, and leadership. In Malaysia, studies related to youth participation in the public policy-making process are still very poorly implemented compared to studies on youth participation in politics. The findings of the study found that there are three factors that can explain the capability of Malaysian youth to participate in the process of public policy formulation which is (i) youth factors, (ii) policymaker factors, and (iii) program effectiveness factors. Therefore, in order to strengthen the capability of youths to participate in the public policy formulation process, the integration of the consolidation of these three factors must be emphasized.

**Keywords:** Youth Capability, Youth Participation, Youth Factors, Policy Making Factors, Program Effectiveness Factors, Public Policy

### Introduction

If youth participation is not taken into account when developing a youth policy agenda, it will be ineffective (Bessant, 2003). However, there are barriers to ensuring youth participation. According to Adu Gyamfi (2015), politicians perceptions of youths maturity level and lack of life experience contribute to the failure to include youths in the policy-making process. Furthermore, many studies on youth participation have discovered that youth are perceived as incompetent, passive, immature, incomplete, and highly fragile subjects whose participation is unreliable and vulnerable to adult suggestions (Mishna et al., 2004; Farrell, 2005; Laenen, 2009; Mason and Hood, 2011; Fisher et al., 2013). Youth participation is also important because it is directly linked to how their aspirations can be highlighted as a result of such participation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2016). Lybbert and Wydick (2018) discovered that youth's participation and aspirations in the decision-making process are motivated by their belief that such actions will result in future change for them.

In Malaysia, youth is defined as citizen aged between 15-30 years old (Malaysian Youth Policy, 2015). According to Hussain (1990), community groups or individuals who act as informal actors must be included in the policy-making process. The lack of youth participation in decision-making has the effect of not only denying these groups the opportunity to participate in the national development process, but also preventing them from improving their quality, skills, morals, and values (Suhaimi et al., 2018). According to Uzaini and Suhana (2018), the National Youth Consultative Council (NYCC) and the Malaysian Youth Parliament (MYP) are the official platforms for youths to express their opinions and discuss issues and problems related to youth development. Despite the fact that these two mediums serve as a bridge of communication between youths and the government, he believes that there is a significant challenge when NYCC and MYP only allows youths who are affiliated with the organization to participate. This creates a significant barrier to youth participation because they are divided into eight target groups: (i) school-aged youths, (ii) higher education youths, (iii) career youths, (iv) youth groups, (v) mass youths, (vi) international Malaysian youth, (vii) minority & marginalized youths, and (viii) at-risk youth (Malaysian Youth Policy, 2015).

### **Literature Review**

Youth participation in the public policy-making process is not a new phenomenon (Tisdall, 2014). Hart (1992) defines youth participation as a decision-making process in which the partnership has an impact on a person's or society's life. Crowley and Moxon (2017) cite a large number of researchers who agree that participation is a type of process rather than an activity. Larkins (2014) argues that youth participation in the policy-making process will provide policy makers with an understanding of the level of inclination of youth in political socialization. A study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) found that youth participation in the policy-making process is an action-oriented process that involves youth institutions by giving them space to make decisions that will affect their lives (UNDP, 2013). This situation enables youths to organize and chart a path toward solutions or improvements that can be made on issues that affect them, resulting in positive change (Checkoway, 2011). Youth participation leads to the active involvement and real influence of youth as citizens making decisions that are able to affect their lives (Murphy, 2017). Youth participation is also an important factor in determining a policymaker's ability to make effective decisions. The more youth participate in the policy-making process, the more effective it is (Franklyn & Ransford, 2013; Eldin, 2016; Hammock, 2019). According to Hammock (2019), effective youth participation is achieved by allowing youths to participate in the policy-making process because the opportunities provided to youths allow them to gain influence and contribute to policy development, as well as provide services in terms of energy and ideas in the government's programs. According to Kiilakoski (2020), active youth participation can provide youths with an understanding of how a policy works. This can further strengthen the sense of togetherness of the youths toward the government because it has taken into account their views. With this sense of belonging, the youth can increase their self-confidence and contribute more to whatever government agenda is placed on their shoulders, and the government will indirectly benefit from the youth's contribution.

### **Methodology**

This study chose case studies as the strategy. Case studies are in line with qualitative study design (Bryman, 2008; Chaparro, 2008). This strategy is also suitable for analyzing a single case because it can yield detailed and complete results (Bryman, 2008). This study uses a

single case analysis by taking only a study on the participation in youth policy making in Malaysia as the subject. The primary informant should be from someone who is considered to have a diversity of depth of knowledge about the research problem and who is willing to speak (Teye, 2008). Therefore, the researcher has selected the informants in table belows:-

Table 1

*List of Informants*

Num.	Designation	Department
1.	Head Director	Agency in the Ministry of Youth and Sports
2.	Chief Executive Officer	Agency in the Ministry of Youth and Sports
3.	Head of Policy Division	Ministry of Youth and Sports

Creswell (2013) stated case studies that use a qualitative approach can use a total of one to four informants. Purposive sampling method was used and those three (3) informants were selected based on their experience and designation in organizations which involved in the formulation of youth policy in Malaysia. An in-depth interview was conducted online using Google Meet. "What is the scenario of youth participation capability in the formulation of youth policy-making process in Malaysia" was the structured question asked to the informants.

**Study Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this study have identified three determining factors that can be taken into account to see the capability of youths to get involved in the process of public policy formulation in Malaysia. Those factors are youth factors, policy-making factors and program effectiveness factors.

*Youth Factors*

The findings of the study revealed that the youth themselves are the most important factor influencing their ability to participate in policymaking. The three informants agreed that if youths were more open and aware of the government's programs and initiatives, youth participation in policy-making would improve and they could have an impact on policy. Some informants also explained that not all youth target groups are capable of contributing scientific planning or thoughtful ideas to influence policy. Youth participation is also fraught with difficulties, as the policy-making process necessitates a high level of commitment and a desire to contribute, as well as the ability to provide feedback to the government thru the appropriate channels. The best channels are thru youth organizations, discourse programs, and other initiatives provided by the government, such as the National Transformation Youth Canvas 2050.

Youth organizations, on the other hand, face their own challenges in ensuring youth participation. The three informants agreed that youth organizations should be more aggressive in providing a platform to accommodate overall feedback from youth target groups and that they should act as facilitators in communicating the wishes and aspirations of youth to policymakers. Furthermore, there are informants who provide evidence of how the government has consistently prioritized youth participation thru various collaborations and initiatives. As a result, the youth themselves must take a more active role in seizing the opportunity that has been provided.

### *Policymaker Factors*

The three informants agreed that policymakers should never ignore the perspectives and opinions of young people when developing policies. From the perspective of governments in general and policymakers in particular, youth has been positioned as a valuable asset. Youth participation in the public policy formation process is also always prioritized by policymakers, who organize various forms of collaboration between the ministry and other stakeholders to get youths involved in the process. However, some informants stated that realizing the aspirations of the youth depends on policymakers' willingness and openness to receive input from them. Policymakers should be more open to hearing from youth from different backgrounds. In light of today's technological capabilities, youths' channels and access to communicate their aspirations must be expanded. The informant's opinion also confirmed that a group's or individual's credibility is directly proportional to how the government as a policy player provides for them.

### *Program Effectiveness Factors*

All of the informants stated that the government has implemented various programs to increase the credibility of the youth and their ability to contribute to their interests in the future. The programs are also a way for the government and the youth to form a network of cooperation so that youth involvement in the government's agenda has an impact. This collaboration also creates space and opportunities for young people to speak directly to the government about their hopes and aspirations. However, all informants agreed that there is a clear challenge of concern from policymakers about the programs being implemented, as most of them are still unable to meet the overall needs of the target youth in Malaysia, and this has an indirect impact on the government's efforts to obtain feedback and the overall voice of the youth for the purpose of improving a policy.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

In conclusion, all aspects of youth participation in the formation of public policy must be strengthened so that the benefits of such participation can create a sense of togetherness between the youth and the government in order to achieve the agenda. The findings of this study can also be used to describe a real phenomenon that occurs in Malaysia's ability to participate in the formation of public policy. As a result, it is hoped that the three factors mentioned above, namely youth factors, policymaker factors, and program effectiveness factors, can be seen as a whole and thus assist the government in developing an inclusive approach to increasing the participation of all youth target groups in the public policy-making process.

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