

# Expanding Views of Youth Leadership: The Key Attributes Contributing to the Success of Youth Leadership

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/22556>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/22556

**Published Date:** 17 August 2024

## Abstract

Research on youth attributes related to leadership is ongoing and requires further study to identify the key attributes and determinants of effective future leaders. Exploring these attributes is important because they can provide insights into qualities such as resilience, adaptability, communication skills, and ethical judgment, which are essential for navigating the complexities of today's world. The aim of this study is to explore the key attributes and determinants that contribute to the success of youth leadership among youth in Malaysia. This study will be carried out using a qualitative method, involving 33 informants, including youth leaders, NGO leaders, professional youth, higher education youth, volunteer youth, and stakeholders. The study will adopt semi-structured interviews as its primary method for data collection and will employ ARC technique for thematic analysis. The results of this study will be analysed using NVivo, which will categorize the important findings into themes. As an initial conclusion, understanding youth attributes is crucial for effective youth leadership, which acts as a catalyst for sustainable societal transformation. It brings fresh perspectives, innovative solutions, and a strong commitment to addressing the pressing challenges of our time. Engaging and empowering young leaders is essential for creating a more resilient and equitable world.

**Keywords:** Community Development, Leadership, Policy, Resilience, Youth.

## Introduction

In today's society, there's a pressing need to identify capable individuals who can chart strategic pathways to achieve specific goals (Podsakoff et al., 2018). A leader, whether guiding a group, organization, or nation, is entrusted with authority and the responsibility to influence

and guide others toward shared objectives (Northouse, 2012). Successful societies often exhibit a clear leadership approach that enables effective execution of responsibilities in pursuit of common goals. Similar to the imperative recognition of the youth as the future leaders of society, it is essential to bring forward their potential, skills, and aspirations to cultivate a generation of effective and visionary leaders who can steer our communities towards progress and prosperity.

The significance of youth leadership cannot be overstated. Young leaders inject dynamic perspectives, innovative approaches, and boundless energy into the leadership arena. These attributes, such as resilience, adaptability, and ethical judgment, are particularly vital for nation-building. They equip young leaders to navigate complexities, inspire others, and contribute meaningfully to shaping a brighter collective future (Ervin & Baghurst 2017).

Youth leadership encompasses a structured process wherein guidance and empowerment are provided to young individuals, facilitating their assumption of leadership responsibilities and engagement in initiatives spanning local communities (Ariffin et al., 2023), organizations, and broader societal contexts. This entails equipping young individuals with the essential skills, knowledge, and self-confidence needed to make positive and meaningful contributions across a variety of domains, including social, environmental, political, and economic spheres. When young people actively participate in leadership roles, they bring about transformative outcomes, fostering significant changes and addressing urgent societal challenges effectively (Rami et al, 2023). In this modern era, the active involvement of youth is indispensable. Their engagement not only fuels innovation and progress but also plays a pivotal role in addressing pressing societal issues, thus fostering development and sustainability within their communities and beyond. The passion and determination demonstrated by young leaders serve as catalysts for collective action within communities, inspiring others to participate in initiatives aimed at driving social change. Through mobilization efforts and grassroots movements, youth leadership empowers communities, creating a shared sense of purpose and unity.

Nonetheless, the facets of proficient youth leadership remain opaque, and a unanimous explication delineating the attributes constituting reliable youth leadership for cultivating prospective leaders remains elusive. Research concerning the maturation of youth leadership continues to exhibit deficiencies, warranting a more meticulous and targeted investigative approach. Anchored in the aforementioned foundation, this inquiry was undertaken with the objective of enhancing the comprehension of leadership dynamics, particularly highlighting the importance of youth engagement for community development in Malaysia. By examining the significant attributes of youth, this study aims to understand how these inherent qualities shape their ability to take on leadership roles effectively. Youth engagement is crucial for driving community development, as young leaders bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to address local challenges, fostering a more inclusive and progressive society (Ariffin et al., 2023).

Within the context of Malaysia, the advancement of youth leadership holds a central position within the nation's developmental blueprint, as articulated through the Malaysian Youth Policy of 2015. Aligned with Malaysia's vision of attaining developed status, this policy endeavours to fortify the progression of leadership capabilities among young individuals, with

the ultimate goal of positioning the country among the world's leading nations in terms of economic advancement, the welfare of its populace, and pioneering innovation (Malaysian Youth Policy, 2015). The cultivation of youth leadership constitutes a focal domain within Malaysia's developmental framework, underscored by the delineations present in the Malaysian Youth Policy (2015) and the Youth Societies and Youth Development Act 668 (2019). This juncture is further accentuated by the official reclassification of youth, through governmental policy and legislation, encompassing those aged 15 to 30, a revision from the prior range of 15 to 40 years.

As a new generation of prospective youth leaders prepares to take on formal leadership roles within the nation, significant concerns arise regarding their readiness and aptitude for leadership responsibilities. Consequently, there is an opportunity for organizations and policymakers to carefully devise specific leadership advancement initiatives, interventions, and regulatory frameworks by thoroughly understanding the distinct leadership proficiencies crucial for the youth demographic. Such efforts have the potential to nurture leaders equipped with the necessary skills to effectively address community challenges, foster societal unity, manage resource allocation, and empower community members to actively shape the course of their collective effort.

### **Research Question**

The objective of this research endeavour was to enhance the comprehension of leadership dynamics, focusing specifically on the attributes and determinants of successful youth leadership within the Malaysia. Additionally, the study aimed to ascertain the potential transferability of these insights to the context of Malaysia.

The two main questions that the present study tries to explore are;

1. What are the key attributes contributing to the success of youth leadership?
2. How can the insights gained from the analysis of successful youth leadership to address the unique socio-cultural and developmental circumstances of youth leadership in Malaysia?

### **Literature Review**

Youth leadership development has become an increasingly significant area of research and practice in recent years (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). Leadership roles permeate virtually all facets of social existence and hold profound significance within society. Existing research has illuminated a constructive correlation between leadership attributes, encompassing knowledge, competence, and a willingness to offer guidance, and the advancement of community efficacy (Ervin & Baghurst, 2017). In this context, the role of youth leadership, characterized by its authentic cultivation of societal relationships, emerges as an intrinsic and acknowledged element (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). The disregard of grassroots leaders and active participants belies their pivotal influence as robust decision-makers and agents of social transformation, thereby compromising the very essence of community progress. Conversely, an acknowledgment of the presence and affiliations of rural leadership accentuates their substantial contributions to orchestrated transformative endeavours, thereby amplifying the impact of deliberate changes aimed at communal advancement for the collective societal welfare.

Moreover, the study undertaken by McNeish and Tran (2020) revealed a set of fundamental leadership attributes that contribute to the augmentation of community sustainability. These

attributes encompass personal vision, leadership imbued with values, a focus on nurturing relationships, leadership oriented towards tasks, and the fostering of leadership development. The proficient utilization of these strategic leadership approaches serves to fortify the communal capabilities by harnessing the potency inherent in these qualities. According to Kroll and Moreno (2022), they argued that the preparation of youth for leadership roles is underpinned by dual core objectives, aimed at enhancing their efficacy in contributing to societal betterment. The initial aim involves furnishing young leaders with indispensable cognition, competencies, and dynamism. Significantly, in regions characterized by limited leadership frameworks and constrained prospects for leadership exposure, the second objective centres on cultivating an intentional milieu that facilitates the refinement of leadership proficiencies and methodologies.

Moreover, the process of fostering youth leadership entails an educative approach characterized by active participation and the provision of exemplars worthy of emulation. The cultivation of youth leadership within communities can be effectively facilitated through aspirations centered around local law enforcement figures, affording a developmental trajectory imbued with participatory learning and role-model-driven guidance (Arshad & Hong, 2019). The development of youth leadership directed towards the establishment of a sustainable society emerges as a pivotal response to the multifaceted environmental, social, and economic challenges confronting the contemporary global landscape (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). Regarding action, the ability to inspire and motivate followers through high expectations and role modelling is fundamental to building a strong team and fostering youth leadership. Additionally, the development of perseverance and dedication is vital for any successful youth leader.

Enabling the active engagement of young individuals in leadership capacities not only instils a sense of accountability towards their communities and the environment but also engenders a framework conducive to sustainability, thereby envisaging an improved future for forthcoming generations. Several fundamental components attributes underpin the development of youth leadership for sustainability:

- i. Knowledge: The provision of education encompassing sustainability, climate dynamics, ecological preservation, and ethical equity serves as the bedrock upon which conscientious leaders are nurtured. Disseminating an understanding of the intricate interdependencies among diverse global concerns empowers youth to make well-informed choices and execute efficacious measures. By being well-informed, young leaders can develop innovative solutions, advocate for sound policies, and drive meaningful change in their communities and beyond. Knowledge not only enhances their problem-solving abilities but also builds their confidence and credibility as leaders.
- ii. Resilience: Advocating for the active inclusion of young individuals in policy formulation and decision-making at local, national, and global levels is crucial for fostering resilience. Resilience is vital for youth as it equips them with the ability to adapt to challenges, overcome obstacles, and thrive in the face of adversity. Platforms like youth councils, forums, and conferences provide essential opportunities for young people to voice their perspectives and contribute to the development of robust, adaptable policies (Arshad et al., 2021). By involving youth in these processes, we not only empower them but also build their capacity to handle future uncertainties, ensuring they can lead effectively and sustain positive changes in their communities.
- iii. Training: Deliberate provisions of leadership-oriented training modules, with a concentrated emphasis on sustainability-related themes, endow young aspirants with

the requisite proficiencies to lead purposefully (Rami et al., 2023). This encompasses the refinement of communication aptitude, critical analytical acumen, adept problem-solving prowess, and adeptness in project administration.

- iv. Mentoring: The establishment of mentorship schemes, wherein seasoned leaders and professionals guide and scaffold the journeys of nascent leaders, assumes paramount significance (Arshad et al., 2021). The guidance and insights offered by mentors facilitate the navigation of challenges and equip young individuals with holistic acumen. According to Klar (2020), the study illustrates how the leaders' participation in the community increased their youth leadership capabilities through a combination of personalized learning, a focused improvement process, facilitation and coaching, and collaboration with other leaders
- v. Sustainability initiatives: Encouraging youth to instigate and oversee within their respective communities epitomizes a hands-on pedagogical strategy. This pragmatic methodology enables the application of theoretical knowledge, cultivation of practical proficiencies, and the concurrent facilitation of positive societal transformations (Ariffin et al., 2023).
- vi. Partnership and Networking: Fostering avenues for young leaders to forge partnerships with non-governmental organizations, governmental bodies, corporate entities, and other pertinent stakeholders bolsters their collective influence and resource accessibility, thereby amplifying the magnitude of their accomplishments.

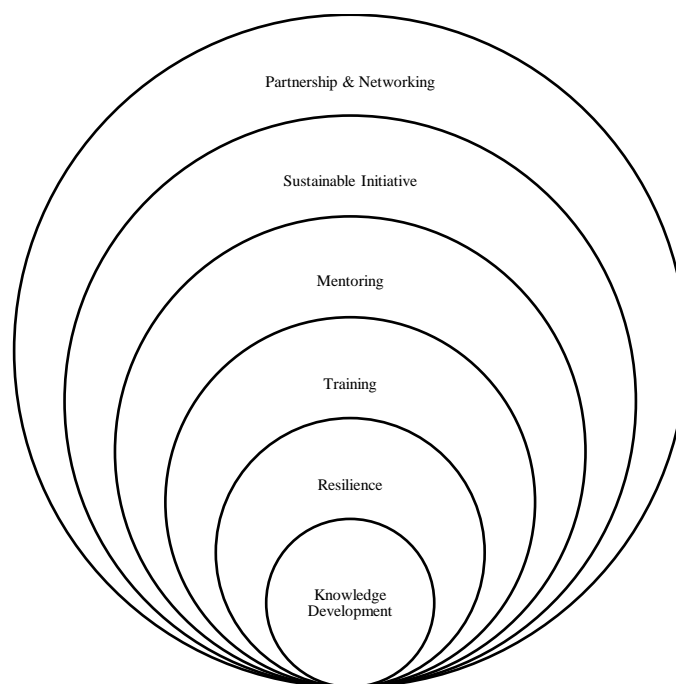


Figure 1: Key attributes for youth leadership

Source: Illustrate by authors

Expanding our view towards youth leadership as a solution for sustainable community development in Malaysia is commendable but oversimplified, overlooking the complexities and challenges involved. Relying solely on youth-led initiatives overlooks the systemic reforms needed and places undue burdens on young individuals. A nuanced approach to youth leadership development requires addressing structural barriers, ensuring equitable

access to resources, and challenging entrenched power dynamics, recognizing that sustainable change demands more than just the enthusiasm of youth.

### Methodology

Many past researches on leadership have used quantitative methods (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Musitha, 2020). In response, this study moved away from proving or refuting predetermined hypotheses by attempting to understand leadership styles and features of successful youth leaders through a detailed inquiry into the lived experience of youth. Correspondingly, a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate for this study (Taylor et al., 2015) as it offers raw inputs to reveal the subjective experiences of youth and leaders. Thus, this study employed a qualitative research approach to discussing the problems raised in this study. As a research method, qualitatively map how people are immersed in their experiences, conceptualisation, perception, and understanding of a phenomenon (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016).

### Data Collection

This study will employ semi-structured interviews for data collection and used an inductive approach to conduct the analysis. According to Green and Thorogood (2018), ethical approval was not considered necessary, as this study is not stressful for participants and no interventions were performed, and interviewees voluntarily attended interview sessions. However, the research team will get ethical approval from institution approval. Purposive sampling methods were used, and all informants will be selected based on local and stakeholders connection and suggestions. Consequently, the study involved eight to twelve informants, including youth leaders, community, members of local communities, and local officers that engage with youth work.

Table 1

#### *Target Group of Informant*

Region	State	Group	No of informant
North	Kedah	Youth Association, University Representative and Professional Youth, Volunteers Youth.	6
East	Terengganu	Youth Association, University Representative and Professional Youth, Volunteers Youth.	6
Central	Selangor	Youth Association, University Representative and Professional Youth, Volunteers Youth.	6
South	Johor	Youth Association, University Representative and Professional Youth, Volunteers Youth.	6
Borneo	Sabah	Youth Association, University Representative and Professional Youth, Volunteers Youth.	6
Stakeholders	-	Government Agency, Local Representative and Youth Scholar	3
	<b>Total</b>		<b>33</b>

The selection of informants is crucial for addressing research questions and achieving study objectives. It's important to choose informants with relevant experience in youth activities and leadership. Before interviews, all informants must agree to participate in the study and understand that the results will be published.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers will compile, integrate, and synthesise field notes, debriefing notes, and the verbatim transcriptions of the eight interviews. The method of data collection in this study is through in-depth interviews. Each interview lasted at least 30 and up to 45 minutes. Using the ARC technique (Ask, Record, Confirm), the researchers will analyse the qualitative questions first without prior defined categories (Zairul. M, 2021). Next, the researcher compiles, analysing and makes the connection between the themes. Moreover, the triangulation of sources tested the accuracy of various data sources within the same method. The data was gathered from community leaders from three different communities. Besides, the study followed four steps of trustworthiness mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1985) by checking the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of output by two researchers or experts.

### **Ethical and Confidentially**

To ensure that this research was carried out with integrity and rigour, particularly given the close involvement required between the researcher and participants in qualitative research, the researcher spent considerable time immersing themselves in the scope areas. Detailed interviews, observations, and document analysis were conducted to gather in-depth data. The data collected from the respondents, including audio recordings and interview transcripts, were made accessible only to me and the research team. The original recorded interviews were stored on research team device, which is password-protected and entirely restricted from unauthorised access.

### **Implication**

The implications of this research are far-reaching, influencing policy formulation, educational programs, community development, corporate leadership, and youth engagement. Policymakers can leverage these insights to design and implement more effective youth leadership initiatives, enhancing the Malaysian Youth Policy to better support young leaders. Educational institutions can integrate these findings into their curricula, emphasizing sustainability, critical thinking, and community engagement, thereby preparing students to assume leadership roles. Community organizations and NGOs can use this research to empower youth, fostering innovative solutions and stronger community bonds. Corporations can develop young leaders within their ranks by incorporating these insights into their training programs, ensuring a pipeline of capable, socially responsible leaders. By highlighting the critical role of youth in sustainability efforts, the study encourages inclusive decision-making processes and proactive youth engagement in addressing societal challenges. Furthermore, the research paves the way for future studies to explore youth leadership in diverse cultural contexts, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of effective leadership development. Establishing mentorship programs and facilitating networking opportunities based on the study's findings can provide young leaders with the guidance and support necessary for success. This research underscores the importance of fostering youth

leadership to drive sustainable and equitable change, impacting various sectors and promoting the development of a new generation of leaders.

### **Conclusion**

Undertaking research focused on the development of youth leadership holds a pivotal significance in the realm of community sustainability, offering invaluable insights and guidance in the cultivation of adept future leaders capable of propelling constructive transformation and ensuring enduring communal well-being. The study emphasizes the need for a multi-faceted approach to youth leadership, incorporating education, active engagement in policy-making, leadership training, mentorship, and practical sustainability initiatives. By equipping young leaders with these tools, they can effectively contribute to societal betterment and drive sustainable change. Ultimately, fostering youth leadership is not just about leveraging youthful enthusiasm but also about creating structured opportunities and support systems to nurture capable and resilient leaders for the future.

### **Acknowledgement**

This paper, presented at the ICYOUTH, outlines an initial framework for our centre to expand research and initiatives in youth development and leadership studies. It serves as a foundational step toward a more comprehensive understanding of the key components that contribute to effective youth leadership. Future research and collaborations will be crucial in refining our approach and ensuring the practical application of our findings in real-world contexts.

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