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**UNDERSTANDING YOUTHS' SELF-VALUES TOWARDS
ACHIEVING NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS**

Pramela Krish (a)*, Ramalinggam Rajamanickam (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, pramela@ukm.edu.my

(b) Faculty of Law, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, rama@ukm.edu.my

Abstract

Malaysia aspires to be in the top 20 nations in the world though the national agenda. In achieving this aspiration, every segment of society plays a pivotal role. Youth being a major segment of a nation and future leaders and decision makers must be shaped in all aspects to meet these aspirations through upliftment programmes. Currently, many programmes have been conducted for youths without actually studying their self-values. Hence, it is important to study self-values of this group of individuals before planning such suitable programmes. This paper reports on the preliminary data collected from Indian youths through a survey to investigate the general self-values in relation to interaction, togetherness and teamwork. The findings are generally positive for all the constructs but there are still some aspects of self-values of youths, specifically this group, that need to be enhanced through upliftment programmes for achieving the national agenda.

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1. Introduction

As Malaysia continuous to grow economically, youth development and empowerment have become vital factors in ensuring a bright future for the nation. Reducing unemployment, eradicating poverty, providing a quality education and the right opportunities are central to nurturing young people and unleashing their potential. This will allow them to achieve their aspirations and lead a rewarding and fulfilling life. Our youths are the assets of our nation; hence, educating these youths is of utmost **importance** to a nation's well-being. It is important to note that young people are the major category of population in Malaysia, comprising about 42.4 percent of the total population (Nga & King, 2006).

Youth in Malaysia are defined as those not less than fifteen years and not more than forty years (Section 2 of Youth Societies and Youth Development Act, 2007). Youth are certainly an important and valid element in national development (Nga & King, 2006). Youth (also known as young people) in every country are viewed as major human resources for development and are recognized as key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation (National Youth Policy Bhutan, 2010). They are the greatest source of hope for a nation's future (National Youth Policy Bhutan, 2010). It is thus imperative to prepare young people as future guardians and custodians of the country by addressing their current and future needs. In recognizing this, Bhutan, like many other members of the global community has invested immense resources to ensure that all young people are provided with opportunities to grow, develop and prosper as fully engaged, responsive and productive citizens (National Youth Policy Bhutan, 2010). In Malaysia too, many youth programmes are planned to benefit this group and millions have been spent to educate our youth. Despite the financial commitment, we are still confronted on daily basis with issues of youth in crisis. Youths in crisis can be termed as those facing risks due to peer pressure, living in unhealthy conditions, single parenting, financial problems and are usually underachievers at school.

To address these social ills, there have been several Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Foundations who are committed to uplifting these youths at risk. Despite such commitment, this predicament cannot be solved if there are no proper and tailored programmes to guide and transform such youths. It is evident that Malaysia lacks effective transition programmes for underachievers and school dropouts to integrate into the main society through market relevant skills training that would ensure sustainable employment.

Upliftment programmes must be planned and conducted to ensure that the youths are developed as resources for the country to achieve its vision. Proper youth programs provide youths with the skills and values needed to develop those youths. Programmes conducted without understanding the backgrounds of the youths involved in the programmes will defeat the purpose. Programmes should fulfil this vision of understanding that our youths are resources to be developed; they are not be seen as problems to be managed (Lerner et. al, 2005 cited in the Report of the Findings from the First Seven Years of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development).

The Malaysian Indian community especially the youths also play a vital role in driving the nation to achieve the national aspirations. They also play a role in the development of Malaysia as a whole. Any upliftment programmes conducted for Indian youths must consider their special needs, characteristics and challenges so that fruitful programmes can be tailored for them.

By understanding self-values of these youths, it will contribute to the development of upliftment programme which may be more beneficial to them. Self-values play an important role in one's life as the values form our thoughts, words and actions. They help us grow, develop and make decisions. Decision made are a reflection of our value and beliefs and they are always directed towards a specific purpose.

Self-values can be categorized as individual values, relationship values organization values and societal values: Individual values include enthusiasm, creativity humility, personal fulfilment; relationship values include openness, trust, sincerity, and being caring; organization values include teamwork, productivity; and societal values include betterment of future generation, environment awareness, and sustainability (Barret Values Centre, n. d.)

For development of such values positive engagement with young people it is important to develop meaningful relationship with them, whether it involves with issues that are affecting their lives, to learn new skills and accept access opportunities that can help them learn and develop their personal lives or contribute to their communities.

This paper is focused on understanding self-values of our youths in relation to interaction, togetherness and teamwork.

2. Problem Statement

Many upliftment programmes conducted for youths at risk are mainly structured to correct them as they are seen as a problem to be corrected. Most programmes are on leadership skills, upscaling academic performance, entrepreneur skills etc. Such programmes are open to all and they are usually taken up by youths to fill in their free time. These programmes are planned without actually studying the self-values of the youths. Self-values play an important role in one's life as the values underpin our thoughts, words and actions. Malaysia lacks effective transition programmes for underachievers and school dropouts to integrate into the main society through market relevant skills training that would ensure sustainable employment. The question arises as to the relevancy of the programmes as they are not tailored to the needs of the youths.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1.** What are self-values of the Indian youths?
- 3.2.** Why is the understanding of self-values of Indian youths important?
- 3.3.** How are self-values of Indian youths related to the national aspiration?

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to investigate self-values of the Indian youths in relation to interaction, togetherness and teamwork, in achieving national aspiration.

5. Research Methods

A preliminary study was carried out among 50 Indian youths through a survey to understand Malaysian Indian youths’ self-values. The instrument measured self-values of the youths in relation to interaction, togetherness and teamwork. The instrument was largely built on literature review and informal discussion with youths of different age groups and several representatives from youth organisations. The findings are descriptively analyzed and reported according to constructs on interaction, togetherness and teamwork.

6. Findings

Youths who participated in the survey include those in the 7-12 years group (n=1), 13- 18 years group (n=1) and the 19-24 years group (n=48). Out of the 50 respondents, 31 were females and 19 males. One had UPSR qualification, six of them had SPM and 52% had diploma and 34% had a degree. The findings reported here are part of the findings from a larger study. For the purposes of this study, answers to only four questions were extracted from the main instrument to look at the constructs of interaction, togetherness and teamwork. Below are the findings for the four questions from the survey.

6.1. What do you usually do in a situation where someone’s views are different from yours?

Table 1 shows that 66.0% expressed that they would stand up for their own values. 58.0% would agree with other person’s opinions while 46.0% of respondents said they would go with majority views when someone’s view differed from theirs. The findings tell us that they want to be heard. This also tells us that youths want a voice in making certain decisions. Hence, they must be encouraged to think critically to voice out their opinions.

Table 01. What do you usually do in a situation where someone’s views are different from yours?

Statement	Positively responded (%)	Negatively responded (%)
Agree with the other person	58	42
Keep quite	44	56
Argue/stand up for your own view	66	32
Avoid these situations	52	48
Walk away	40	60
Fight	24	76
Go with what most people say	46	54

6.2. How do you feel in situations where someone’s views differed from yours?

To the above question, Table 2 shows that 76.0% said they would feel normal, 62.0% will not feel angry. 58.0% will not be embarrassed and 52.0% said they will not be offended. These findings tell us that they have a positive outlook to others’ views. This could also be a strong indicator to show togetherness.

Table 02. How do you feel in situations where someone’s views differed from yours?

Statement	Positively responded (%)	Negatively responded (%)
Unhappy	54	46
Angry	38	62
Uneasy	52	48
Offended	48	52
Embarrassed	42	58
Normal	76	24

6.3. How do you see yourself with people of different races and religions?

Table 3 shows that having meals together (84.0%) ranked the highest. Most of the respondents feel comfortable doing a project together (78.0%), playing sport/games (82.0%), joining outdoor activities (82.0%) and traveling (82.0%) with people of different races and religions. This is a good indicator that these youths can work as a team and this is an important component of self-values for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation like Malaysia to realise the national aspirations.

Table 03. How do you see yourself with people of different races and religions?

Statement	Positively responded (%)	Negatively responded (%)
Doing project together	78	22
Playing sports/games	82	18
Having meals	84	16
Doing outdoor activities	82	18
Travelling	82	18

6.4. Who is your role model?

The finding also indicates that 76.0% of respondents consider mother as a role model followed by their father (60.0%). This is an interesting finding as parents are respected and looked at positively in their lives. On the other hand, 40.0% looked at themselves as their role model. Although it is not so significant, this has to be studied carefully as to why they have no external role models. It is also important to understand as to why they value themselves as their own role mode. It would be interesting to find out what are the values they look for in other role models. There is also a fear if youths believe in themselves as role models as there is bound to be a mismatch with common values of the society.

The findings are generally positive for all three constructs but there are still some aspects of self-values of youths that need to be enhanced through upliftment programmes. Such findings on self-values will tell us more about these youths and help us on how to tailor programmes for them. **The majority of Malaysian youths have always worked in a multiracial setting from school to college and at work as Malaysia is a multi-racial country. As youths, they clearly have their own views and opinions. Parties such as NGOs who decide and plan upliftment programmes should take into consideration such values before planning and conducting any programmes for them.**

7. Conclusion

The youth of Malaysia have a critical role to play in the country's effort to achieve the status of a fully developed country by the year 2020 (United Nations, 1997). Youths are a valuable asset of the nation. They are the major segment of the community and play a significant role in driving a nation towards achieving its aspiration. They must be shaped mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually to meet with the national aspiration through upliftment programme. Inspiration, knowledge and skills are important elements that would take the future of the nation based on their worth and capabilities (Bhutan, 2010).

Proper upliftment programmes are vital for youth development. It is important to study the self-values of the youths before planning a suitable programme to uplift them. This will ensure that the programmes are run according to the issues at hand. Such programme can be a stepping stone for the target youths to be channelled in the right direction.

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