

Advancing Malaysian Youth Development: Promoting Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda (The International Award by the Duke of Edinburgh)

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Abstract

The Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda program, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (hereinafter referred to as "The Award"), is a global initiative designed to engage young people in purposeful activities that promote personal growth, leadership, and community involvement. By focusing on an experiential learning model, the program aims to complement formal education, equipping participants with essential life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and resilience. This article examines The Award's structure, which is divided into three levels—Bronze, Silver, and Gold—each comprising four sections: Service, Skills, Physical Recreation, and Adventurous Journey. Operating in over 140 countries and territories, The Award's non-formal educational framework has been lauded for its comprehensive approach to youth development. Participants consistently report gains in confidence, improved interpersonal skills, and a greater sense of responsibility, ultimately leading to meaningful contributions within their communities. The significance of The Award will be explored in fostering holistic youth development, with a focus on its role in shaping future leaders, encouraging civic engagement, and connecting Malaysian youth to a broader international network. Through case studies and participant testimonials, the article will demonstrate how The Award empowers young people to realize their full potential and make a positive impact in both local and global contexts.

Keywords: Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda, Non-formal Education, Youth Development

Introduction

"Advancing Malaysian Youth Development" holds significant importance in today's socio-economic landscape, particularly in Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), the youth population in Malaysia, aged between 15 and 30, currently stands at 9.3 million, representing a vital resource for national growth. Youth are the catalysts for

innovation, leadership, and community engagement. As the backbone of society and drivers of future progress, they need to be empowered with the necessary skills, opportunities, and mindset to achieve success (Bernama, 2024). However, there is an increasing need to ensure that the essential requirements are met to support youth development by equipping them with foundational skills, self-confidence, and a growth-oriented mindset to excel in an increasingly globalized world. This underscores the importance of youth development programs that can address these challenges.

The relevance of research in this area is underscored by the various challenges faced by youth today. These challenges include globalization, rapid technological advancements, and socio-economic inequalities, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. While formal education provides a knowledge foundation, it is often insufficient in fostering holistic personal growth. Thus, non-formal education frameworks—focusing on leadership, life skills development, and community engagement—are crucial. Programs such as *Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda* (ARPRM) offer structured initiatives designed to enhance personal development and contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

Today's youth face increasingly formidable challenges that demand greater support to prepare them for a more demanding adult life. The individual challenges of developing personal skills, setting new goals, working in teams, and strengthening community spirit are part of the experiential learning model implemented through ARPRM. This youth development program encompasses various elements that, when combined, can equip young people with the leadership skills they need (Van Baren et al., 2015).

The Award is a youth achievement program that combines practical experiences and life skills to prepare young people for life. The program emphasizes individual challenge, personal skill development, goal setting, teamwork, and community spirit. It is open to young individuals aged 14 to 24, regardless of their background. The Award program is structured into three levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold, with participants setting personal goals in four sections: Service, Skills, Physical Recreation, and an Adventurous Journey. The Gold level also includes a Residential Project. These sections aim to provide a well-rounded personal development program focused on knowledge acquisition, expanding horizons, and gaining diverse experiences. The program follows an experiential learning approach, allowing participants to learn through practical engagement.

The Award operates in a dynamic landscape that is constantly evolving. The International Award Foundation recognizes the increasing challenges faced by young people today and emphasizes the importance of providing them with adequate support as they transition into adulthood. This is particularly crucial for youth in less developed regions, where issues like poverty and climate change have a significant impact. In such areas, formal education systems often fall short in preparing young individuals for their future roles in society. The Award aims to bridge this gap by equipping young people with essential life skills that complement their formal education, thereby empowering them to thrive in their communities (DofE, 2012).

The Award is adapting to a changing landscape, acknowledging the growing challenges that young people are currently facing. The International Award Foundation stresses the

importance of providing increased support to help young individuals prepare for the complexities of adult life. This need is particularly pronounced in less developed regions, where issues such as poverty and climate change disproportionately affect youth. In these areas, traditional education systems often fall short in adequately preparing young people for the economic, political, and social responsibilities within their communities. The Award aims to fill this gap by offering young individuals the necessary tools to develop essential life skills, complementing their formal education (DofE, 2012).

The Award Background

Andrew McNemin (2004) stated that the Award Program, initially known as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, was launched in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1956. Its primary objective was to motivate young individuals to engage in self-improvement initiatives that encompass a variety of voluntary activities, aiding them in their journey towards adulthood. The program was meticulously crafted by a dedicated team, spearheaded by His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, Dr. Kurt Hahn, a renowned educational expert and the founder of Outward Bound and United World Colleges, along with Sir John Hunt.

The program initially targeted boys aged 14 to 18, but in 1958, a similar initiative was introduced for girls as the Award gained more recognition. By then, 7000 boys had participated, with 1000 of them successfully completing the program (Cobb, 1986). The Award underwent changes over the years, culminating in 1980 when the age limits were adjusted to 14 and 25, and the program adopted the current four sections structure of Service, Adventurous Journey, Skills, and Physical Recreation.

The Award gained momentum through the enthusiasm of international institutions within the British Commonwealth. This led to the establishment of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association in 1988. By the following year, the Award had expanded its reach beyond the boundaries of the Commonwealth, operating in 48 countries. In some cases, it adopted slightly different names, such as 'The President's Award' in Kenya, 'The National Youth Achievement Award' in Singapore, 'The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Young American's Challenge' in the United States and "Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda" in Malaysia.

Over the past decades, the Award has experienced significant growth and development, impacting an increasing number of young people worldwide. Currently, it is being delivered in over 140 countries and territories, with a focus on engaging all youth, including those who have previously lacked opportunities for personal development. Recent projects associated with the Award have specifically targeted young offenders, individuals with disabilities, street children, and aboriginal communities. Despite the passage of time, the principles of the Award have remained steadfast, with both The Duke of Edinburgh and his son HRH Prince Edward, who have personally participated in the program, demonstrating unwavering commitment. Through continuous adaptation and evolution, the Award has tailored its activities and delivery to meet the evolving demands and needs of young people globally. As a result, it proudly claims to be recognized as the world's leading achievement Award for young individuals (DofE, 2012).

The Award in Malaysia

The Anugerah Remaja Perdana (ARP) program, also referred to as the award, was initiated in the early 2000s following a visit by HRH Prince Edward, Chairman of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, to the Malaysian Minister of Youth and Sports, Dato Seri Hishamuddin Hussein, and the Malaysian Prime Minister, His Honorable Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. The responsibility of implementing the program was then entrusted to Rakan Muda division unit in the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, who renamed it as the Anugerah Remaja Perdana Rakan Muda.

Malaysia joined the World Forum in South Africa on 6 November 2000, and subsequently became a full member of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association. The country is part of the Asia-Pacific regional office, along with 13 other member countries including Singapore, Australia, Fiji, and others. As of May 2024, a total of 223,610 Malaysian youth has taken part in the program, with 167,637 of them achieving accreditation at the three award levels between 2002 and 2024. The program's unique characteristics contribute to its effectiveness as a valuable social development activity (ARP Handbook, 2004). Additionally, this self-improvement initiative has successfully nurtured young leaders who possess leadership skills and credibility for the future.

The award program, also known as a self-development program, is designed to be a long-term endeavor. It is not a competition; instead, it allows participants to work at their own pace within specified limits, including a maximum age limit. Participants receive guidance and support from dedicated leaders who offer advice and assistance. Each participant is responsible for planning and executing their activities. To validate their accomplishments, all activities are documented in a record book, serving as evidence for accreditation. The program is administered by an independent organization authorized and licensed by the Award Authority (NAA), which falls under the Ministry of Youth and Sports. It is open to government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, clubs, or registered private companies. Each participant represents their respective operating body and is guided by leaders or mentors affiliated with that organization.

Based on the research conducted by Walker, Fay, Hughes, Oliphant, and Saldanha (2011), each participant in the program is provided with equal opportunities to explore their potential and talents, ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the award. The success of the program is attributed to a combination of strategic planning, leadership, and research. Studies indicate that the key factors influencing the program's outcomes include participant engagement, utilization of gained experience by the younger generation, and the achievements of program leaders. Moreover, the program's global expansion relies on the increase in the number of leaders, while volunteer service plays a crucial role in program delivery.

Regarding to Y Yacob et. al (2020), The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is a youth development program aimed at empowering adolescents aged 14 to 25 by fostering character development and promoting active, responsible citizenship, with the ultimate goal of achieving social cohesion. The program places strong emphasis on teamwork and group cohesion, encouraging participants to engage in activities and experiences that build social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills.

The Award Activities

The Award program is structured into three (3) advancing tiers - Bronze, Silver, and Gold - that participants can attain upon successful fulfillment. Each tier necessitates participants to establish personal objectives in four distinct categories: Service, Skills, Physical Recreation, and Adventurous Journey. The emphasis lies on personal growth and enhancement within each tier, and participants must maintain a logbook to monitor their advancements. Upon accomplishing each tier, participants are acknowledged with a certificate and either a pin or a medal at a dedicated event.

For the Bronze level, participants must spend a minimum of three (3) months in each section. Additionally, they must complete an extra three (3) months in either Physical Recreation, Skills, or Service. The Adventurous Journey for this level lasts two (2) days and one (1) night. Once participants reach the silver level, the duration for each section increases to six (6) months. Non-Bronze Award holders are also required to spend an extra six (6) months in either Physical Recreation, Skills, or Service. At the Silver level, the Adventurous Journey lasts three days and two nights. Finally, at the gold level, each section takes 12 months to complete, and the Adventurous Journey extends to four (4) days and three (3) nights. Non-Silver Award holders must spend an additional six (6) months in either Physical Recreation, Skills, or Service at this stage, along with a five (5) days Residential Project requirement.

The Award Principles and Objectives

The 2012 Award handbook outlines the core principles of the program and what is deemed beneficial for participants. While the Award does not explicitly define personal and social developments, they are central to the program. The key principles emphasize personal challenge and focus on individual growth through perseverance and accomplishment based on one's initial abilities (non-competitive), one's voluntary decision to participate, and one's personal choice of activities across the four sections (flexible). Additionally, the Award maintains a strict policy of non-discrimination based on gender, race, religion, political beliefs, or any other personal circumstances. Although the personal aspect may be more immediately noticeable, the social aspect is primarily highlighted through the importance of teamwork, interaction with others, and the commitment and responsibility to oneself and others (Maccariello, 2006). The participants in The Award program can enjoy a multitude of benefits. These benefits encompass various aspects such as behaviors, attitudes, and skills that can be easily transferred to different areas of life (DofE, 2012).

Firstly, the program places great emphasis on fostering self-belief and self-confidence in participants, recognizing their significance in personal development. By helping individuals recognize and accept their own strengths and weaknesses, The Award aims to positively impact their self-image and personal abilities. This, in turn, can lead to a greater awareness of their own potential.

Secondly, the program encourages an independent and self-motivating attitude while also highlighting the importance of a sense of responsibility to others. By instilling these values, The Award aims to cultivate a connection between participants and their broader society, fostering social development and a sense of inter-dependence.

Thirdly, young people involved in The Award can benefit from the development of new or improved interests, skills, and abilities. The program offers opportunities for participants to acquire essential life skills such as health management, negotiation, research, communication, problem-solving, and presentation skills.

Throughout young people participation in the award, individuals learn to effectively manage their time and devise strategies to successfully navigate their Award program. This process not only enhances their organizational skills but also equips them with the ability to formulate and execute plans.

Lastly, The Award program places great importance on the acquisition of team skills. By fostering collaboration and teamwork, participants have the opportunity to form new friendships and develop a willingness to explore new experiences.

Summarily, The Award program offers a comprehensive range of benefits to its participants. These benefits encompass personal development, social awareness, skill acquisition, effective time management, and the development of teamwork skills.

The Award Sections

The Award program is structured around the principles of experiential education, as outlined by Kolb (1976). This approach emphasizes the importance of concrete experiences as the foundation for learning, in contrast to more abstract learning situations. By connecting experiences to theoretical concepts and using concrete examples, experiential education aims to motivate learning and highlight social issues (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Experiential education follows a four-step cycle of learning, as developed by Kolb (1976). This cycle involves connecting experiences to active experimentation, reflective observations, and abstract conceptualizations. It is believed that learning is most effective when participants engage in all stages of this cycle, including rigorous reflection activities following their experiences.

Reflecting on experiences is seen as a crucial aspect of learning, according to Greenway (1993). Joplin (1981) further argues that the reflection process is what transforms experience into experiential education. The Award program recognizes the educational value of reflection and emphasizes the importance of reviewing and reflecting on participants' activities to ensure they benefit from the program's intended impact (DofE, 2012). However, the ability to reflect upon and review experiences is not explicitly listed as one of the potential participant benefits.

The Service section focuses on the importance of giving back to others and the community. By engaging in regular service activities over time, rather than in a short period, the Award program aims to foster a lifelong commitment to voluntary service and community involvement.

The Skills section aims to stimulate new interests or improve existing ones. The activities within this section vary depending on the individual interests of the participants and can include sports, games, music, arts and crafts, nature and the environment,

communication, technology and more. The dedication of time and effort to progress in a skill can lead to a sense of achievement, well-being, and potentially improved employability.

Physical Recreation encourages participation in sports and other physical activities to improve health, performance, and fitness. The Award program also recognizes the additional benefits of physical activity, such as enhancing team skills, self-esteem, confidence, self-discipline, perseverance, and self-motivation. The handbook emphasizes that the requirements in this section apply to all young people, regardless of their physical abilities.

The Adventurous Journey section aims to provide participants with a distinctive, demanding, and unforgettable experience. The objective is to foster a sense of adventure and exploration while embarking on a journey as part of a small group. This particular section necessitates an unfamiliar and challenging environment, physically demanding activities, and teamwork. Prior to undertaking this journey, participants must undergo relevant training, which may include practice journeys, to ensure that they possess the necessary skills to be self-reliant and safe in their chosen environment.

Moreover, all journeys must have a clearly defined purpose and are supervised and evaluated by experienced adults. There are three types of journeys: exploration, expedition, or adventurous journey. An exploration is characterized as having a purpose intertwined with the journey itself, whereas an expedition is defined as a journey undertaken with a specific purpose in mind. During an exploration, more emphasis is placed on observing and gathering information relevant to the purpose, rather than solely focusing on reaching a destination. Conversely, an expedition primarily centers around the journey itself, with less emphasis on research and information gathering. Examples of explorations and expeditions include exploring the natural world, completing a challenging journey on foot, by bicycle, or by canoe, and kayaking the entire navigable stretch of a river. Other adventurous journeys, which involve additional elements of innovation, creativity, and challenge, encompass endeavours such as sailing across an ocean, climbing a high mountain, or cycling from one end of a country to the other.

To achieve the gold level, participants are required to complete a Residential Project. The aim of this project is to broaden their experience by engaging with others in a residential setting. According to the Award scheme, participants must collaborate with individuals who are not their usual companions, working together towards a common goal.

The Award Eligibilities

The Award is open to young individuals aged 14 to 25. Each level has a minimum starting age requirement: Bronze at 14 years, Silver at 15 years, and Gold at 16 years. Once participants reach these minimum ages, they can enter the Award at any level. To complete the bronze level, participants must be at least 14 years and 6 months old. Bronze level Award holders should be at least 15 years and 6 months old when completing their Silver Award, while direct entrants at this level must complete their Award by the age of 16. At the Gold level, silver level Award holders should complete their final Award by the age of 17, while direct entrants at the gold level should do so at 17 years and 6 months.

The Award emphasizes the importance of individual challenge, allowing participants to work at their own pace. While a mentor oversees their progress, participants have the freedom to take as much time as they need to complete their Award, as long as they do so within the specified age limits. The handbook describes the Award as a "marathon, not a sprint", meaning that it cannot be achieved in a shorter time frame by working more intensely. The objective is to foster a sense of commitment to a task over an extended period of time.

Significance of the Study

Leadership is an innate quality that enables an individual to lead and motivate others toward achieving specific goals (Cleland, 2004). This field is receiving increasing attention, especially from organizations committed to developing the next generation of young leaders (2024). Leadership skills and qualities must be cultivated from an early age and continuously developed to higher levels. Yulk (2002) in Azhari & Hassan (2024) defines leadership as a social influence process that enables a person to influence other individuals, groups, or organizations.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award exemplifies this approach by fostering leadership through experiential learning. By engaging young people in activities that require teamwork, goal setting, and self-discipline, the Award helps participants build essential leadership qualities. These experiences are structured to prepare youth for meaningful leadership roles in society, aligning with the Award's mission to equip young people with skills that contribute to their communities and future careers.

Research on youth development in Malaysia has significant implications at various levels of society. Firstly, it provides critical insights into how well-planned development programs can foster leadership, resilience, and social cohesion among youth (Smith & Isles, 2004). For researchers, this study highlights the role of non-formal education as a complement to traditional academic learning (Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation, 2012). Meanwhile, for policymakers, these insights can be used to develop and support youth as a crucial asset for future economic growth and national stability. Furthermore, for community organizations and non-governmental bodies, this study emphasizes the importance of experiential learning programs in fostering social responsibility and promoting civic engagement (World Health Organization, 1999)."

Methodology

This study analyzed the role and impact of youth development through participation in the youth development program. For a strategic research, researchers have analyses document based on previous research related to the The Duke of Edinburgh International Awards and also the other documents related. By applying the document analysis technique, asserted documents had been used to acquire the perspective of this study. According to Sabitha Marican, 2009:97; Babbie, 2010:332 in Che Ya (2018), document analysis is just what its name implies-the analysis of the written or visual contents of the document. Merriam (2002) in Rasul et al. (2015) also states that one of the strategies to gather information and analyze the data can be built by documents which the entire study can be perform. Participant observation is a data collection method in which researchers engage in daily activities related to a specific area of social life to study that aspect through observing events in their natural

context (McKechnie, 2008, p. 599). According to Corbetta (2003) in Shin & Miller (2022), the uniqueness of participant observation lies in the data being obtained through researchers' involvement and interaction with participants in their natural setting. This involvement is crucial for accurately documenting participants' perspectives and behaviors. In this study, the researcher acts as an award leader. By deeply immersing in the context and establishing psychological identification with participants, the researcher can effectively capture phenomena and gain insights from informants about their contextual realities (Corbetta, 2003; Spradley, 1979).

Benefitting the Young People

Commonly, researchers highlighted the holistic and experiential learning approach of the Award, emphasizing citizenship education. They have underscored the significance of experiential citizenship education in fostering genuine participation and active engagement among youth. Smith and Isles (2004) particularly point out the Service and Adventurous Journey components of the Award as effective in cultivating citizenship skills, facilitating personal development, and encouraging community engagement. In summary, young people acquired certain life skills out of their participation in the Award programme. Life skills is important as it helps young people to address everyday challenges and demands (World Health Organization, 1999).

Whilst, the significance of engaging in outdoor activities, as demonstrated in the Adventurous Journey section, in fostering personal and social growth is substantiated by various research studies (Bunyan, 1997). Numerous discussions have also been conducted on the impact of international expeditions on the positive development of young individuals (Grey, 1984). Results from a limited-scale investigation conducted by Hopkins (1982) indicate that many youths perceived the completion of this section as a significant challenge in their lives, leading to favourable changes in their self-esteem (Smith, & Isles, 2004). Smith and Isles (2004) discovered that participation in outdoor education activities offers young people the chance to cultivate fundamental leadership skills.

These skills encompass the enhancement of self-assurance and the ability to take charge. Participants viewed the latter as a lasting advantage of participating in the program. Hahn (1957) posited that an individual self-confidence increases as they advance in physical capabilities. He also contended that the values acquired through outdoor education, or expeditions as he referred to them, form the foundation of education and can significantly contribute to the development of character strength (Hahn, 2004).

The impact of adventure programs on self-esteem appears to surpass that of other educational initiatives (Hattie, et al., 1997). Fleming (2003) and Sleight (2005) observed that Award recipients engaged in outdoor activities deeply value the knowledge and experiences gained. Common themes that have emerged from their reflections include challenge, teamwork, perseverance, thrill, and a sense of accomplishment upon completion (Macariello, 2006).

Smith and Isles (2004) conducted a study on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and its role in promoting citizenship. They found that participation in the Award helps develop personal skills and qualities associated with citizenship education. Young people who

participate in the Award engage in community service, which they found to be challenging yet rewarding.

Yaccob et. al (2023), discovered that active involvement in the Award programme enables young people to actively develop their potential. Their personality is greatly shaped by their active involvement, which also affects how they connect with the community and how they engage with the operating body they attached to. The study's findings indicate that the level of social cohesion within the Award program is notably high. To ensure the sustainability of the youth development program, additional activities will be implemented to boost youth involvement. Increasing the number of community activities is associated with enhanced social cohesion among youth. Additionally, embedded sites focused on youth development reveal that fostering behavior and self-esteem requires both internal and external support. Such encouragements contribute to a positive relationship between youth and their communities (Yaccob et. al, 2020).

The development of an individual's personality is greatly influenced by their behavior, particularly when they consistently engage in certain actions. Over time, these behaviors become ingrained as habits. The process of shaping behavior also involves the community or the operating body they are associated with, such as ARPRM. Through the incorporation of noble values and a sense of concern in every activity they partake in within ARPRM, positive behaviors are fostered.

Participating in the Award program yields favorable outcomes in terms of attitude and behavior development, which can be attributed to the personal growth of individuals involved in the program. Moreover, the journey towards achieving the gold level award serves as a prime illustration of how leadership skills are cultivated, leading to the formation of positive attitudes and behaviors. These experiences not only help participants develop crucial personal qualities but also make a positive impact on their communities, showcasing the wider influence of the ARPRM on individual growth and community well-being.

Evidently, team members in the award program exhibit a high level of social cohesion (Yaccob et. al, 2020). This is demonstrated through their shared commitments, collaborative activities, and consistent adoption of a unified approach within the team. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that an overwhelming 98 percents of young individuals engage in the award program with the aim of enriching their understanding and enthusiasm for youth development.

Conclusion

The Award is a unique program using a well-structured intervention resulting in a comprehensive non-formal experience-based learning scheme. The four (4) different sections and three levels make it both extensive and well-balanced, covering all areas of personal development for young people: increase their skills and talents, improve their fitness, work in a team and contribute to society in the form of voluntary service. The national Award authorities delivering the program are part of a large global network. The program has the potential to extend its reach in even more than the 140 countries and territories already taking part because it is flexible enough to meet the objectives of local and national youth policies. Although the significant and measurable impact on the lives of young people seems

to be apparent, future research will have to show which of the sections contribute the most and, furthermore, if the Award program as it is, proves to have a larger impact than other youth development programs.

Youth development programs such as the award serve as essential components of holistic youth education rather than mere extracurricular activities. These programs are vital for fostering life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership—areas often underemphasized in formal education settings [Hattie et al., 1997]. By engaging actively, young people develop a sense of responsibility, social awareness, and the confidence to make meaningful contributions to their communities, ultimately supporting long-term societal growth and cohesion (Yaccob Y., 2018).

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