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“WE ARE MORE THAN JUST THE FUTURE!”

Youth Participation at Teach For All in 2035

Futures Studies, Turku School of Economics

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Youth participation gained growing recognition in recent years, with youth policy councils, youth boards at the United Nations (UN), and youth participation programs in national and international organizations. However, there is a gap between the theory of good youth participation and the awareness of enablers and barriers in practice. That leaves practitioners with many open questions as to how it can be implemented and what the path towards futures in which youth participation becomes the new normal would look like.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing enablers and barriers of successful youth participation with a special focus on the collaboration between youth and adults. Based on interviews conducted with students, fellows/alumni, and staff of Teach For All, an international education NGO, this research used qualitative content analysis and a futures table to create four scenarios of how preferable futures of youth participation in 2035 could look like. The four scenarios, *Growing Institutions*, *Connected Institutions*, *Systemic Integration*, and *Relational Integration* include aspects of six themes that mainly affect youth participation, namely (1) Environment, (2) Institutional Structures, (3) Interpersonal Cooperation, (4) Mindset, (5) Structure of Participation, and (6) Power Dynamics. All the insights move along the two axes of ‘structure of youth participation’ and ‘enablers of youth participation’.

The results of this study show that first, youth participation can differ in its structure from integration to inclusion. Second, it detected that whatever structure an organization chooses can be enabled through social and/or technical factors, depending on where the focus is set. Finally, youth participation and especially futures of youth participation need a lot more attention, including an awareness of global inequalities and the challenges youth face in futures visioning. The future of youth participation is collaborative, and therefore, youth and adults need to be enabled to plan and implement it together, which requires research and strategies to think outside the box and walk paths that are yet beyond imagination. Overall, this study contributes the perspective of the future of youth participation, which has so far received limited attention in Futures Studies. Thereby, it provides results that can not only be used for creating futures of youth participation in educational organizations but also to improve participatory processes in Futures Studies that include young people. Besides that, the study adds to the field of youth participation studies some guiding insights on how the path towards a preferred future state of youth participation can look like, as so far, the existing literature mainly aims to understand what youth participation is and how it should look like.

Keywords: Youth Participation, Youth-Adult Partnership, Collective Leadership, Scenarios, Youth Perception of Futures, Participatory Futuring

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“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

— Arundhati Roy

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List of Abbreviations

Bi_PoC: Black, indigenous and People of Color
CL: Collective Leadership
GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation of the EU
ICL: Intergenerational Collaboration and Leadership
ILM: Intuitive Logic Method
LP: French La Prospective
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCI: Problem Centered Interview
PMT: Probabilistic Modified Trends
SLAC: Student Leader Advisory Council
SVA: Student Voice Accelerators
TACL: Teaching As Collective Leadership
UN: United Nations
UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNGA: United Nations General Assembly
Y-AP: Youth-Adult Partnership

1 Introduction

In the past eight years that I have been working in youth participation programs, there is nothing I have been told more often than “children are the future”. I was a child myself when I first heard that sentence and quickly came to understand that I had to wait for my turn. However, children are here today. Their lives are shaped by decisions made at dinner tables, school board meetings, and in parliaments. Rooms where they are seldom welcome to speak or even personally present. And while it is true that children of today will carry the consequences of current actions for a much longer future than current adults and therefore are the future, the conclusion drawn from the opening quote is flawed for exactly that reason. Being affected by futures the longest should mean being the most involved in every decision that shapes those. So, aren’t children also the present? Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that the view of the child should be heard and taken into consideration in all matters that affect them (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989). Still, the opinion of children being heard and seriously considered in any decision-making process in education is far from the norm. There are individual examples on different policy levels and within educational organizations that implemented projects and structures specifically focusing on opportunities for participation for children; however, a structural implementation of this participation is yet mostly a longed-for utopia. One reason for that may be that participation is hard to narrow down into practical steps. Decision-making usually follows a certain process that focuses on the needs of adults, and while most children are yet to learn how to speak, act, and behave in these rooms, adults often unlearned how to effectively communicate with children.

There is an overall growing awareness that children and young people should be involved in decision-making processes whenever they are affected and especially when it comes to organizations that work with education and youth (Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 1). Therefore, adults need to understand youth as a source of knowledge that is valuable for their work and can improve the quality of the programs. While this is all rather vague, there are some more detailed concepts of what participation, involvement, and power sharing can look like, for example, the ‘Ladder of Participation’ by Roger A. Hart (1992), the Five Levels of Participation by Harry Shier (2001), and the Pyramid of Participation by Dana Mitra (2006).

In general, Checkoway (2011, 340) describes youth participation as a process that involves young people in decision-making and in the overall structures of institutions that directly or indirectly affect them. The starting point of many examples of youth participation across literature is in organizations connected to education, as these are spaces that largely affect their lives. Hart (1992, 37) describes

schools as the desired root of all participation and emphasizes the societal importance of participation to raise democratic citizens when stating that.

(p)articipation is an important antidote to traditional educational practice which runs the risk of leaving youth alienated and open to manipulation. Through genuine participation in projects, which involve solutions to real problems, young people develop the skills of critical reflection and comparison of perspectives which are essential to the self-determination of political beliefs. The benefit is two-fold: to the self realization of the child and to the democratization of society. (Hart 1992, 36)

With this knowledge of the urgency to create change and the insights and frameworks at hand, several organizations have started an endeavor to enable youth participation within their structures and the existing systems. But what if, in the future, young people were part of creating those structures? Anita Rubin, who has dedicated much of her life to study the future images of young people, including in education contexts, said

all education - that is, all that is taught, how it is taught, why it is taught, as well as the environment in which teaching takes place - originates from some social image of the future prevailing society. The social image - visions, preferences, shared goals, understanding of the educational mission - that determines educational decision-making, choices of policy, structures and attitudes derives from modernity, from the modern values and needs, while there are signs indicating that late-modernity claims new needs and structures. (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 270).

This emphasizes the need for new approaches, new systems, and new structures that are adapted to the rapidly changing conditions for education systems – and those paths should be paved side by side by youth and adults.

For youth participation to be successful, there are several enablers and barriers, including the need for resources, a supporting mindset, empowerment and support for young people, and a redistribution of power (Augsberger, Collins & Howard 2024, 8; Checkoway 2011, 343; Juliussen, Garmy & Olsson 2024, 1106). One important factor is the collaboration between youth and adults and how to implement structures that support it, which is addressed through concepts such as Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) and Collective Leadership (CL). And while all this is known, a gap between theory and practice remains.

The previously described lack of involvement of young people is a great loss, especially in education. In management, it is a non-negotiable standard that high-quality decisions need to involve all stakeholders. The growing trend of participation of youth shows that this is also a largely accepted truth in education organizations and institutions (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 613). To successfully implement youth participation in educational organizations, answers to the questions of what is possible, what do the people involved want as their participation structures, and what enables or

hinders the path to get there are needed. That includes an awareness of the ideas, needs, and struggles of all stakeholders, adults, and children. To learn those things and draw conclusions on possible and preferable futures, the best starting point is the perspective of an organization where the general idea that youth should be involved is already accepted and, to a certain degree, implemented. This allows to build on an existing knowledge base, look ahead from the pole position, and create paths and scenarios for futures that are truly novel.

In this study, I explore the phenomenon of youth participation (age 12 to early 20s) at Teach For All, an international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) working for educational equity. The focus is on the structures of youth participation within organizations and how they can be adapted to improve youth participation in decision-making and project execution in the future. Besides, enablers and barriers with a special focus on collaboration between youth and adults are addressed to identify paths that could lead to envisioned future states. The study is based on the single case example of Teach For All, who aims to support educational equity. Their stated purpose is “Developing collective leadership to ensure all children can fulfill their potential” (Teach For All n.d.-e), which indicates a high degree of commitment towards youth participation and partnership. For at least the past eight years, they have been working with youth as partners, collaborators, board members, and co-facilitators, especially through their youth participation programs, the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC) and the Student Voice Accelerator (SVA). Sanaya Bharucha, Global Head of Student Leadership and Voice at Teach For All, states in an article in the aftermath of a conference that “There’s an almost palpable energy, a unique kind of magic, that happens when we genuinely make space for students in conversations about their own learning and their own futures.” (Bharucha, 2025). Her statement further supports the understanding that Teach For All operates at the forefront of youth participation and, therefore, is a great starting point to look ahead.

Throughout the research, the following research question and sub-questions are addressed:

1. How can spaces in an NGO working for educational equity look like, that allow for real youth participation in 2035?
 - a. What works well and should be further developed to ensure successful youth participation in the NGO?
 - b. What are barriers to real youth participation in the NGO?
 - c. How can youth and adults create meaningful partnerships that enable successful cooperation and what needs to change for that to be possible in the context of the NGO?

The term ‘space’ in the research question refers to all virtual and non-virtual rooms, processes, and programs where youth and adults interact, for example, online meetings, events, and asynchronous collaboration on documents.

The proposed research questions are addressed through a qualitative approach in this study. The research data consists of 16 semi-structured interviews and written narratives. To have a clear picture of the perspective of different stakeholders, interviewees are current and former members of youth participation projects, their teachers who support and supervise their digital and in-person activities, and staff members of Teach For All. The content of the interview includes the participants’ previous experiences with youth participation and leadership, what they perceive as enablers or barriers, their vision for futures of youth participation within and beyond the organization, and lastly, what steps they consider necessary to reach this vision. The data is analyzed through Qualitative Content Analysis, and the derived themes and sub-categories are organized in a futures table, which serves as the basis for the scenario creation. The scenarios are organized in a four-quadrant matrix along two axes, namely ‘structure of youth participation’ and ‘enablers of youth participation’. The results of this study are displayed in four scenarios of preferable futures of youth participation at Teach For All, namely *Growing Institutions*, *Connected Institutions*, *Systemic Integration*, and *Relational Integration*. Scenarios in general are used to outline certain aspects of the future, in this case, the youth participation at Teach For All, and decisions and paths that lead to this future state (Amer, Daim & Jetter 2012, 23). Having scenarios, and therefore a dynamic view on possible paths and resulting future states, makes the output of the study more useful for organizations that aim to pursue similar paths, as this fills the gap between knowing where one wants to reach and how to get there.

The results of this study aim to enlarge the current knowledge about youth participation in educational NGOs, specifically regarding different stakeholders’ perspectives on enablers, barriers, and successful collaboration between youth and adults. Besides that, this research aims to understand the visions for youth participation in the future and the steps to bridge the gap between those visions and the present state to help other organizations understand their stand, the necessary developments, and the possible outcomes. Further, the aim is to initiate a dialogue between youth and adults involved in participatory processes and to help both sides understand the views and needs of the other side.

In the following chapters, I will first lay out the theoretical foundation of this study by introducing frameworks of youth participation and summarizing the current literature on enablers and barriers, and contextualizing the study within the field of Futures Studies. Then I will explain the process of the research and the reasoning behind the chosen methods, before presenting the findings from the data collection and ultimately the created scenarios. Finally, I will discuss all findings with the literature and draw conclusions for theory and practice.

2 Theoretical Background

This chapter aims to provide a structural overview of the current state of knowledge on the futures of youth participation, especially in educational contexts or organizations. To answer the research questions, this study will utilize insights from several fields. Mainly, this literature review is based on educational and youth sciences, research on citizen participation, organizational theory, participatory futuring, and youth perception of futures, as no single concept, model or field allows for drawing the needed conclusions to yield a sufficient answer to the research questions. Especially the very narrow field of futures of youth participation in educational NGOs is not yet heavily covered in literature. Therefore, this project draws from examples and case studies of participation in school and university settings, participation on the policy level, youth councils and parliaments, and the inclusion of young people in participatory Futures Studies.

First, different models and frameworks that address and define real and meaningful youth participation are introduced. These models will build the foundation for the definition of real youth participation used in this research. Next, enablers and barriers of youth participation are presented, as well as concepts of collaboration between youth and adults. Finally, the frame of this study, Futures Studies, and especially participatory futuring, scenarios, and youth in Futures Studies is addressed.

2.1 Real Youth Participation

For the past couple of decades, the interest in and awareness of youth participation has been growing in science and education contexts. Several scientific frameworks have been introduced that directly address or at least touch upon this topic. What most of them have in common is their perception of youth participation as a right of the child and the positive outcomes they see for the children and the democratic society as a whole when implementing it (Hart 1992). Democratic participation needs practice, and therefore it is necessary to give young people the opportunity to grow their confidence and competence in democratic processes in a safe environment (Hart 1992, 5). The following paragraphs will argue in favor of the relevance of youth participation and introduce several frameworks to understand the concept.

2.1.1 Why Youth Participation?

Youth participation plays a growing role in many different academic fields and societal sectors, including education, climate change, policy making, urban planning, and research in all fields affecting youths' lives. The basic foundation for this development is often stated to be Article 12 and Article 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Augsberger et al.

2024; Bessel 2009; Black, Walsh, Magee, Hutchins, Berman & Groundwater-Smith 2014; Botchwey, Johnson, O’Connell & Kim 2019; Cavet & Sloper 2004; Checkoway 2011; Collins, Augsberger & Gecker 2016; Grace et al. 2024; Hart 1992; Hart 2008; Irabor-York et al. 2023; Juliussen et al. 2024; Kiili & Larkins 2018; Mager & Nowak 2011; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016; Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023; Shier 2001; Whitty & Wisby 2007; Wyness 2009; Zeldin, Christens & Powers 2013). Article 12 grants children the right to form their opinions and to have those opinions considered by decision makers on all matters affecting the child. Thereby, the age and maturity of the child should be (individually) considered. Article 13, in a broader sense, grants children the freedom to express their views and therefore receive sufficient information to form an opinion. (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989.)

One sector that certainly fulfills the criteria of being a matter that affects youths’ everyday lives is education, including all formal, informal, and non-formal settings in which education takes place (e.g. kindergarten, school, university, youth clubs, NGOs, youth parliaments). Participation is an integral part of any democratic society, and youth participation is therefore the first step of a young person on their way to becoming an active member of a democratic society. The child-rights academic Roger Hart (1992, 37) describes schools as a starting point of participation while acknowledging that even in democratic nations, participation in schools is far from standard and calling out the hierarchical structures that make up most education systems.

Participation is frequently understood as the “meaningful involvement of children in decision-making processes concerning those political matters which affect them with the goal of exchanging views between children and public officials.” (Juliussen et al. 2024, 1097). Similar standards are often used in other areas than public policy, such as organizations or schools.

While the UNCRC is one of the main sources that is used to argue in favor of the ethical necessity of including youth in decision-making, there are several other researchers and organizations that support this argument. A group of organizations, including Salzburg Global Seminar, WISE, Learning Planet Institute, Cambridge Partnership for Education, Teach For All and others state in a common guide that was published in 2023 “All young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Uniting generations and sharing power to transform education is not an option but a necessity.” (Irabor-York et al. 2023, 3). Wallin (2003, 57) emphasizes that constitutional rights also count for young people, and Hart (1992, 15) and Augsberger et al. (2024, 2) argue that youth, as an often marginalized and disadvantaged group, should be enabled to participate in order to balance power dynamics and achieve social justice. Black et al. (2014, 17) and Perry-Hazan and Somech (2023, 1208) understand youth participation as an end in itself and support the recognition of youths’ legitimate perspectives. Support for broader participation can also be found in the realm

of participatory Futures Studies, where researchers state that participatory processes emphasize social needs, community and personal wellbeing, and allow a focus on power relations and systems of oppression (Neuhoff, Simeone & Laursen 2023, 6). While this does not explicitly address youth as a target group, the focus on power relations, forms of discrimination, and the aim to gain a holistic understanding of any researched issue allows for the conclusion that this would also include the participation of youth in all instances where their lives and realities are affected.

2.1.2 Frameworks and Concepts of Youth Participation

Youth participation is often understood in several ways and lacks an agreed-upon definition. Sometimes, alternative terms such as children participation, and student participation, leadership, and voice are used to describe similar concepts. For coherence, in this study, the term ‘youth participation’ is used to describe all these models, as this aligns with the age group this research set out to study and does not limit members of this age group to their profession as students. In very broad terms, youth participation is mostly understood as young people being included in decision-making processes of institutions and organizations of any kind that affect their lives. It can therefore include several activities that affect the processes and is built on the assumption that young people are competent, active citizens. In most kinds of youth participation, there is a certain degree of collaboration between young people and adults. (Checkoway 2011, 341–342.) The focus is often on providing meaningful (long-term, effect-oriented) and equitable (strength-based, interest-oriented, equal standards) opportunities (Teach For All n.d.-a, 22). The following subchapter will introduce three frameworks of youth participation: (1) the Ladder of Participation as a basic framework of (youth) participation based on Roger Hart, (2) Shier’s Five Levels of Participation, and (3) Mitra’s pyramid of youth participation.

2.1.2.1 *The Ladder of Participation*

A frequently used model for youth participation is the Ladder of Participation of Children by Roger Hart from 1992. This model is based on the earlier ideas of the Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry R. Arnstein from 1969. Arnstein bases her model on the belief that participation without redistribution of power is meaningless, however, she also includes forms of participation that do not meet her own criteria of real participation. Her proposed original ladder consists of eight rungs, of which the first two are classified as non-participation, the next three as tokenism, and only the top three as real participation. (Arnstein 1969.)

In 1992, Roger Hart used the basic idea of Arnstein to adapt the ladder model and create the Ladder of Participation of Children. He defines participation as the “process of sharing decisions which affect

one's life and the life of the community in which one lives." (Hart 1992, 5). He agrees with Arnstein that real participation requires a redistribution of power and emphasizes that children, especially in industrialized countries, rarely experience participation in a sense that they hold power to make decisions outside of situations of play. There are three main factors that affect the success of children participation. First, the 'social and emotional development' of children, which includes the developed social competencies from play environments and the self-perception as an individual who is capable to impact change. Second, the 'development of perspective-taking ability' describes the basic ability of a person to imagine another person's feelings and perceptions of reality. Lastly, Hart describes social class variations and especially the risk of middle-class bias (seeing the middle class as the norm and basing programs on their needs) as a potential threat to successful children participation. He emphasizes the difference in opportunities and abilities for children from marginalized backgrounds and the different treatment that girls and boys experience in their everyday life regarding participation, all based on biases and different forms of discrimination. (Hart 1992, 31–33).

As Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, Hart's ladder of children participation has eight rungs, whereby he classifies the first three as non-participation (see Figure 1).

1. Manipulation: children are used for certain tasks and activities, for example, carrying posters at political events. In this case, the adult has all decision-making power and the child neither the understanding nor the power to impact their participation in the overall issue that is addressed.
2. Decoration: children are used for marketing or publicity purposes, for example, when they are present at political events.
3. Tokenism: children seem to have choices and actively do something in any given context, however, children are neither informed about the purpose of the event, the issue discussed, or their role in it, nor do they have any power to influence either of them. Examples of tokenism are children who are specifically chosen to perform a certain task or tell a pre-determined story at an event. Chosen children are often those who excel at social skills and articulation.
4. Assigned but informed: children understand the intentions of the project and know who made the decisions about the project itself and their role in it. They are aware of the purpose of the project and play a meaningful role. Only after all these things have been made clear to the child does the child volunteer for the participation. An example of this is the children participation at United Nations (UN) conferences, when children are working as assistants for delegates.
5. Consulted and informed: children are asked for their perspective by adults. While adults are the ones making the final decisions, and designing and implementing the project, the child is informed about all important aspects, and their feedback is considered in a valuable way.

6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children: children share decision-making power with adults on projects that they fully understand and are aware of the decision-making processes, their role, the role of the adults, and the impacts of the project. Hart considers this the first rung of true participation.
7. Child initiated and directed: children initiate and carry out projects, mostly for children, with the support of adults as needed. These situations mostly happen in times of play, however, they can occasionally also happen in other contexts.
8. Child initiated, shared decisions with adults: children initiate, design, and manage a project in which they actively engage adults for certain roles. Children are the ones deciding to share decision-making power with adults. In most situations, this only occurs with older children or teenagers. (Hart 1992, 8–14.)

While the ladder image does trigger hierarchical ideas regarding the value of different levels of participation, Hart emphasizes that children participation does not always need to happen according to the standards of the highest rung and that the participation should be adapted to the individual situation. For children participation in general, he points out that it is important to consider that children have different skills and styles of communication, which requires an adaptation of rooms and methods to enable them to participate, especially if the aim is to reach the higher rungs of participation. (Hart 1992, 8–14.)

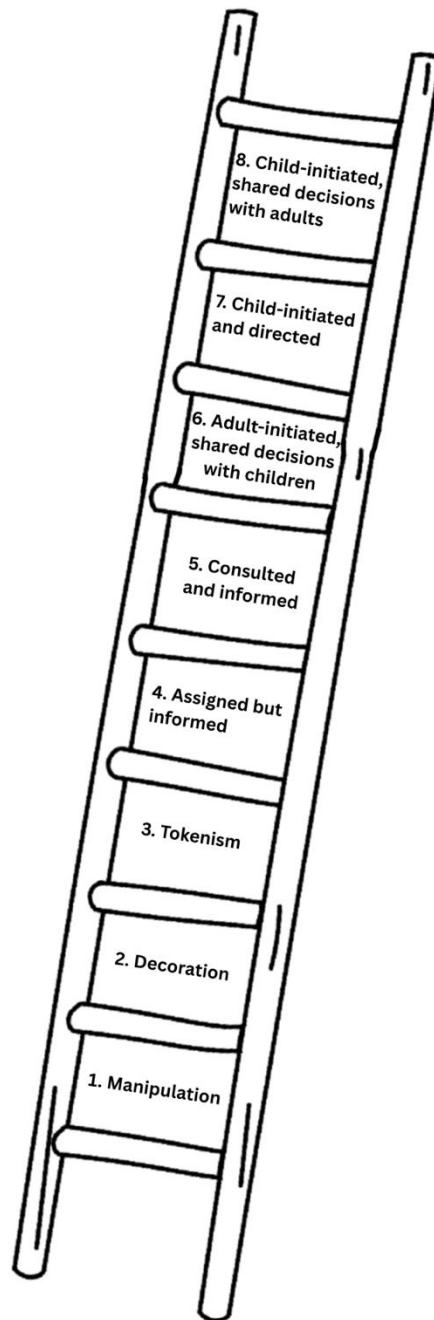


Figure 1. Ladder of Participation of Children

Adapted from Hart (1992, 8)

The ladder model, in general and with focus on children, has been frequently criticized and contextualized throughout the years. The first critique came from Arnstein herself, who, already in the original presentation of the model, notes that the ladder is a simplified image for a much more complex reality. Besides that, the model is seen as simplified because it treats both groups, those in power and those without power, as homogenous groups, which is far from reality. Lastly, she points out that there are several barriers to reaching participation in both groups: For the power-holder side, she names racism and resistance to power redistribution as main factors, and for the non-power

holders, she names inadequacies of the poor communities' political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge base, and difficulties in organizing a representative group as main problems. (Arnstein 1969, 217.)

More specifically, for the ladder of children's participation, 16 years after his initial presentation of the model, Roger Hart published a book chapter to contextualize and criticize the model and its use. For him, the main purpose of the ladder was to help professionals to rethink how they work with children, as the individual rungs describe how children perceive themselves in participatory contexts. Besides that, it could be used as a monitoring but not an evaluation tool. Some researchers have criticized that the actual highest rung (as in the highest degree of participation of children) should be that children make decisions alone. According to Hart, the highest degree of participation is achieved when children as well as adults have the feeling that they can initiate change and invite others into projects and decision-making spaces. The main critique that Hart has towards his own model is the Western-centric¹ perspective of it due to the connected examples and the research upon which it is based. He assumes that there are great examples of youth participation in the Global South and overexploited countries, however, he does not see them translated into models and frameworks. (Hart 2008, 22–27.)

Botchwey et al. (2019, 257) found numerous barriers for youth in participation projects, also on the higher levels of the ladder, and criticize a lack of discussion about privilege and different kinds of discrimination that affect youths' ability to participate. This is especially the case for Bi_PoC² youth, immigrants, and youth from low-income backgrounds, who are probably even less involved than the generally marginalized group of young people. Botchwey et al. (2019, 265) suggest three additional rungs for children participation that are located between Arnstein's fifth and sixth rung: First, *consent* describes how adults invite youth to share their visions and ideas on a project and work on them directly, but only in those areas of the project that adults gave them consent to participate in. Second, *advocacy* describes youths' "ability to support, argue or plead in favor of a policy, systems, or built environmental change" (Botchwey et al. 2019, 265). And last, *incorporation* describes how youth and adults unite or work together in already existing projects, where youth advise or are part of the planning process. Botchwey et al. consider this the closest possible approximation to partnership. (Botchwey et al. 2019, 256–263.)

¹ The capitalized 'W' indicates that the term describes a social construct rather than a geographical fact

² The term Bi_PoC stands for Black people, indigenous people and People of Color. The capital 'B' indicates that it describes a social and political construct rather than a color or biological fact. It further is a symbol of the resistance against racism and a way of self-empowerment. The lower-case 'i' acknowledges that indigenous is a global umbrella term that does neither include all people nor is self-chosen by those people it is meant to describe. As the term BiPoC does not include all people, the underscore '_' holds space for all people who are not *white*, belong to a marginalized group or identify differently (see: teacherlife.me et al. 2025)

Despite criticism for the model, Hart's Ladder of Participation of children has been widely used and referenced by other researchers in the field of youth participation and education (Akiva, Cortina & Smith 2014; Bessel 2009; Black et al. 2014; Checkoway 2011; Mager & Nowak 2011; Mitra 2006; Shier 2001; Whitty & Wisby 2007; Wyness 2009).

2.1.2.2 *The Five Levels of Participation*

The Five Levels of Participation is a model developed by Harry Shier in 2001, largely based on Hart's Ladder of Participation of children, with the purpose of being an addition to Hart's work and a tool for practitioners to assess different aspects of the process of youth participation. The main difference to Hart's ladder model is the reduction of the first three rungs that Hart called non-participation, and the addition of different stages within one level. (Shier 2001, 109–110.)

The five levels are (1) children are listened to, (2) children are supported in expressing their views, (3) children's views are taken into account, (4) children are involved in decision-making processes, and (5) children share power and responsibility for decision-making. At each level, an organization can have different degrees of commitment to the participation process, which Shier differentiates in three stages. At the opening stage, the workers of the organization have the needed mindset and make a personal commitment towards this level of participation. At the opportunity stage, all the prerequisites to actively engage in this level of participation are met. Lastly, at the obligation stage, the level of participation becomes an organizational policy and the guideline that all staff should follow. (Shier 2001, 110.)

The full model with all levels and the respective stages of commitment can be seen in Figure 2. On the first level, *Children are listened to*, the organization does not engage in active information seeking but commits to listening to children whenever they start to speak up for themselves out of intrinsic motivation. The second level goes a step further, as it requires the organization to actively support children in expressing their opinions. On this level, the organization has an awareness that children have several reasons not to speak up that can be connected to (societal) power dynamics, previous personal experience or skills. Adults on this level empower children to overcome these barriers and generate ideas and activities to support them. On the third level, the organization is obligated not only to seek children's perspectives but also to take their opinion into account when making decisions. This is described as the basic level that is needed to fulfill the requirements of the UNCRC. It is important to state that *taking into account* does not equal to implementing everything children suggest, but that there is honest consideration and ultimately transparency towards the children about the decision-making processes and the reasons that led to the final decision. The fourth level describes the transition from children as consulted participants to active participants in the

decision-making process. This can, for example, mean that children work side by side with adults on a project and are present in the room while decisions are made. Several of the benefits youth experience when participating start to fully unfold on this level. On the final level of participation, children and adults share the power of decision-making in an equal manner. The main difference from the fourth level is that the organization not only has children as participants on their team but also actively shares power with them. However, on this level, it is important to critically reflect alongside the children on how much responsibility the children should have, also regarding age, previous experience, and their individual confidence. (Shier 2001, 111–115.)

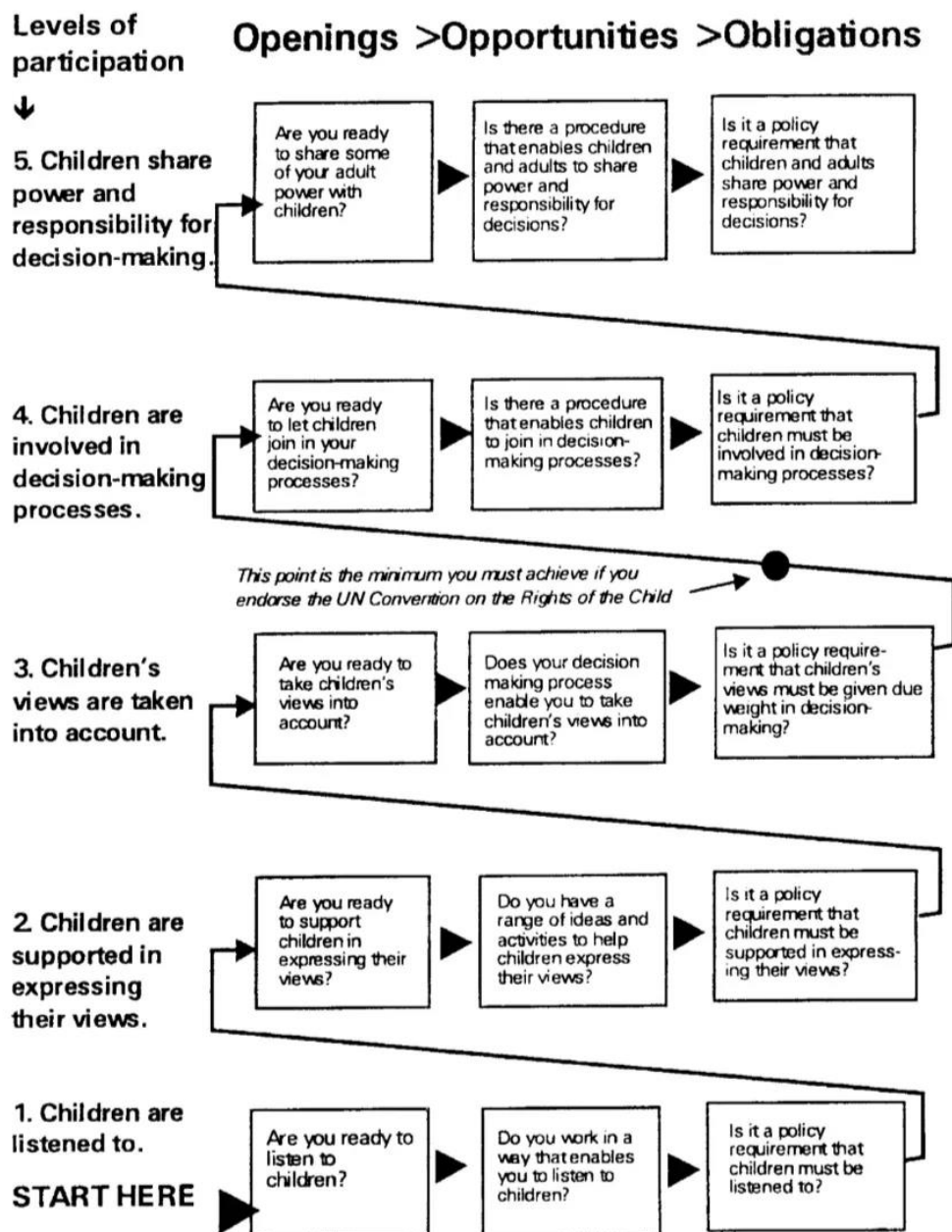


Figure 2. The Five Levels of Participation

Source: Shier (2001, 111)

2.1.2.3 Mitra's Pyramid of Participation

In the early 2000s, Dana Mitra created a framework for youth participation named the Pyramid of Student Voice. For her, the main youth development assets connected to participation are agency, belonging, and competence. Agency describes the young person's ability to have an impact on something in any given situation, which can happen in a way of sharing their voice, creating their own role as changemakers within the community, and developing leadership skills and a sense of responsibility. Mitra argues in favor of the need for youth participation and a more precise understanding of the underlying dynamics because of her observation that adults tend to misinterpret youth opinions, which negatively affect all action that is built upon a misunderstood situation. (Mitra 2004, 662.)

In her work, Mitra describes three different types of youth participation with different degrees of influence on the process. First, *passive* youth participation describes all situations in which youth are consulted and used as a source of information in adult-designed and implemented projects. Second, *active* youth participation describes projects in which young people work side by side with adults in the project as participants. In this case, the level of active participation can still vary, and hierarchical differences between youth and adults can occur. In the third type, *directive* youth participation, young people act as the designers of projects and are therefore the ones creating, taking ownership, and leading the process. (Mitra 2006, 7.)

Based on this understanding of youth participation, Mitra developed the Pyramid of Student Voice, which is shown in Figure 3.

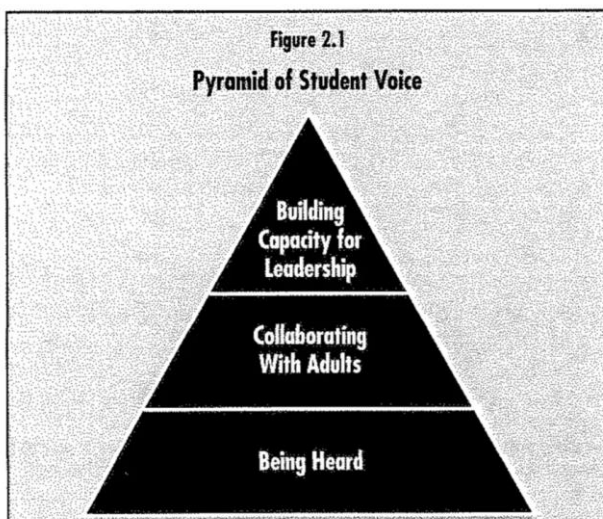


Figure 3. The Pyramid of Student Voice

Source: Mitra (2006, 7)

The ground level of the pyramid is *Being Heard* and is the case in processes where adults actively seek young people's opinion and use the collected data for interpretation. This level corresponds to what Mitra called passive youth participation. Youth voices on this level can, for example, be collected through surveys, interviews, or focus groups. Youth who are included on this level, especially if they are new to youth participation, often experience a high level of gratefulness for being consulted and heard by adults with decision-making power. The second level of the pyramid, *Collaborating With Adults*, describes situations of partnership where youth and adults work together on processes and therefore corresponds to active youth participation. Oftentimes, on this level, adults play an assisting role for the young people in the project as they provide informal guidance and support the youths' understanding of the process. Youth who participate on this level describe an increase in partnership and mutual understanding between themselves and the adults they are working with. The highest level of the pyramid, *Building Capacity for Leadership*, describes all processes where youth have ownership over the project, from the initial idea to final implementation, while adults play minor assisting roles as requested by the young people. This aligns with Mitra's definition of directive youth participation. Participation projects on this level are described as important because they give young people the opportunity to exert leadership and improve their skills in this regard, which helps them develop skills and competencies that are needed in adult leadership roles. (Mitra 2006, 8.)

In accordance with the previously described frameworks and models of youth participation, in the context of this study I defined 'real youth participation' as participation fulfilling the following criteria: (1) youth is aware of their role, the decision-making processes, and their impact, (2) youth volunteered for their position and the work they are doing, (3) youth have the opportunity to seek information and consult with peers or participating adults before and while engaging in participation, and (4) youth have a certain degree of influence on the spaces they work in and their own role. This definition serves as the basis of this study and was used as a guideline when deciding on a suitable case.

2.1.3 Structures of Youth Participation

Youth participation, in a sense of active engagement and youth having an impact on processes and outcomes (Checkoway 2011, 341), can have several approaches and styles of implementation, depending on the context, intended outcome, and the participating youth and adults. With these differences, the roles of youth also vary. Perry-Hazan and Somech (2023, 1211) describe youth participation in a range from formal structures, such as councils, to informal processes such as

discussions or roundtables. General examples for participation include formal youth-specific councils or advisory boards, youth forums, having seats for youth on general boards, political youth organizations, and involving youth in research endeavors and grant making as well as more informal participation through informal groups, volunteerism or economic activity (Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 2; Collins et al. 2016, 140; Ho, Clarke & Dougherty 2015, 53).

The most direct participation of youth in decision-making happens in school, even though many researchers describe participation in schools on a mainly consultative level with occasional participation in non-curricular projects (Black et al. 2014, 18; Mager & Nowak 2011, 40). Mager and Nowak (2011, 41) introduce five ways of youth participation in schools: (1) councils, (2) working groups, (3) class-level decision-making, (4) school-level decision-making, and (5) multiple-level decision-making. One of the most frequent and best researched examples of out-of-school youth participation are youth councils on the municipal or even national level (Bessel 2009, 302; Black et al. 2014; Cavet & Sloper 2004; Grace et al. 2024; Matthews 2001a; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016; Tisdall & Davis 2004). Activities of youth councils range from active project work within communities to lobbying and political advocacy (Augsberger et al. 2024, 3; Collins et al. 2016, 143–144; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 177–178). Besides these society-based examples, participation (not specifically youth-focused but youth-including) occasionally also plays a role in research and science, also in Futures Studies. Kettunen described in 2015 how the Finnish foresight system was criticized for a lack of inclusion of the public, which led to an extension of common practices (Georghiou, Keenan & Georghiou 2008, according to Kurki 2015, 2). Studies of participation within the research field frequently cite Arnstein's work and the Ladder of Citizen Participation, which also serves as the basis for large parts of the youth participation discussion. Ways to involve the public in research include discussions or questionnaires, which aim to gather a broader range of information. (Kurki 2015, 4, 11–13.)

2.2 Enablers of Youth Participation

Youth participation depends on a number of factors, and while some of them differ depending on the context and the aim, there are certain enablers that largely impact how successful any endeavor of youth participation can be. Augsberger et al. (2024, 8) very broadly describe four elements, namely having a space in which youth participation happens, having the voice of young people, having an audience that listens to this voice, and making sure that there is an actual influence. In more detail, current literature identified several factors that serve as enablers for real and meaningful youth participation, which are comprehensively displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Enablers of Youth Participation

The table summarizes the enablers of youth participation found in the literature, as described in this chapter.

Enablers
Positive mindset
Adults who care and listen / good relationships
Youth empowerment
Access to power / power redistribution
Institutionalization / implementation in org
Resources (time & money)
Know-how
Transparency / clearness about the role, expectations and limitations
Training for adults & youth / honest opportunities
Opportunity identification / communication between stakeholders
Diversity / inclusion
Y-AP, stakeholders
Youth co-designs

The first frequently stated factor is the *mindset of adults*. Adults in all education contexts need to be aware of the importance of youth participation and dedicated to implementing it, not just for ethical reasons but as a way to improve the overall work that is done (Bessel, 2009, 301; Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 2; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20; Juliussen et al. 2024, 1106; Wallin 2003, 71). That includes treating participating youth with the same respect as any adult member, scheduling meetings and events in accordance with the youths' timetable and acknowledging the skills and experiences that youth bring to the table (Collins et al. 2016, 141; Zeldin, 2004, 87). Adults with this mindset are more likely to encourage youth and their participation, see them as partners, and support their development of necessary skills (Serido, Borden & Perkins 2011, 56). This mindset does not only need to be present for each individual adult but also implemented in the organizational structure, vision and mission, and the policies and systems to ensure youth-adult partnership (Teach For All n.d.-a, 18). On the organizational level, this includes an overall supportive culture, a belief in the success of youth participation, values such as equity and trust between youth and adults, openness towards an active discourse on the issue, and a shared accountability (Teach For All n.d.-a, 26). To successfully build this mindset, organizations need to come up with individual strategies to overcome existing stereotypes (Zeldin 2004, 87).

Second, and connected to a positive mindset, numerous studies name *adults who truly care and listen* and overall *good relationships* between youth and adults as a strong supporter. The feeling of youth to be supported and listened to results in stronger participation and better connections between

youth and adults and is an encouraging factor for young people to engage in any form of participation (Serido et al. 2011, 56; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 565). Wallin (2003, 71) emphasizes the importance of open dialogue between youth and adult to build partnerships of trust and an honest interest in each other. This partnership is described as essential to allow for shared responsibilities, mutual respect, open dialogue and to ultimately create a feeling of belonging for all youth and adults who are members of the participation process, as this is the basic condition for any form of collaboration (Arkedis, Benavides, Dessein, Kniffin, Ospina & Priest 2023, 26; Lips-Wierma & Allan 2018, 243; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 561). Both aspects help youth to become more than just receivers of service and adults to let go of their lone control (Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 561).

Next, active *empowerment of youth* by adults on an individual, organizational, and community level helps young people to have an impact (Black et al. 2014, 12; Checkoway 2011, 343). This role can be supported by clear structures of the participation process (Matthews 2001a, 311). Adults who empower young people support them through guidance in processes, provision of opportunities to share their voices, and by holding youth to high expectations (Serido et al. 2011, 56; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert 2000, 7; Zeldin 2004, 81).

On a more structural level, successful youth participation needs *power redistribution* to allow young people to affect decision-making processes beyond tokenistic participation (Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 4; Hart 1992, 9–10). This power redistribution includes young people's access to institutions without adults working as gatekeepers in each individual instance and opening spaces where young people can discuss the issue of power distribution (Augsberger et al. 2025, 10; Wallin 2003, 71). The importance of power redistribution is not only mentioned in research on youth participation but also in general participation studies or the realm of participatory Futures Studies (Akavarapu 2025, 10).

Another frequently discussed aspect that supports youth participation is the *institutionalization of participatory processes* and the structural implementation in the organization. Black et al. (2014, 9) describe frameworks as enablers and promoters of youth participation, and Cavet and Sloper (2004, 616) emphasize the high level of bureaucracy connected with participation programs, which requires a certain degree of formalization. Furthermore, the institutionalization of youth participation leads to an independence of the programs from individuals who are committed to the issue as it implements it in the general structures of the organization (Blakeslee & Walker 2019, 6). The need for institutionalization is not specific to participation concerning youth but is also described by Akavarapu (2025, 10) with regard to participation in research.

A part of institutionalization, but an aspect that is frequently emphasized is the allocation of *resources* to youth participation. Resources include mainly time and commitment of staff and adults working in the program, as well as financial resources to ensure administration, implementation and

longevity of the program (Akavarapu 2025, 9; Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 5; Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617; Grace et al. 2024, 7; Kurki 2015, 15; Teach For All 2025-b, 17, Teach For All n.d.-a, 20).

A seventh aspect that was emphasized in participatory projects in Futures Studies, but also in youth participation, is the importance of *know-how*. This includes knowledge on participatory practices and an understanding of the processes, dialogue, learning support, and problem solving (Akavarapu 2025, 10; Arkedis et al. 2023, 26). Specifically in the context of youth, Zeldin et al. (2000, 45–48) found that adults need an understanding of youth and some degree of experience in working with them.

Connected to the know-how is the need for *training of youth and adults* involved in participation processes. For adults, this training should include building skills of partnership with young people, a supportive mindset of understanding youth as equals, and increasing confidence (Black et al. 2014, 12; Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617; Matthews, 2001a, 315; Zeldin 2004, 87). One way to approach this training and skill-building for adults is to create opportunities to experience collaboration and partnership with youth to develop an understanding of youth realities and perspectives, and to gain confidence in a real-life environment (Zeldin et al. 2000, 8). For youth, the training should include aspects such as leadership skills, communication skills, autonomy and voice sharing, building an awareness of the connection between knowledge and action, and citizenship and democracy skills (Black et al. 2014, 26, 31; Matthews 2001a, 310; Zeldin 2004, 87). For youth, building up these skills and being able to participate in a meaningful way depends on *authentic opportunities* to do so. These opportunities can be short- or long-term and include various types of participation in decision-making processes (Zeldin et al. 2000, 45–48; Zeldin 2004, 87). To create such opportunities, Black et al. (2014, 33) emphasize the need for stakeholder cooperation and communication to identify potential.

Once a youth participatory process started, *transparency and clarity about the roles* are important factors for successful collaboration. Blakeslee and Walker (2018, 5) state the need for clarity connected with consensus on why a certain partnership between youth and adult was established. Transparency includes information on who is in the group, what the processes are, who is allowed to speak, what language is expected, who is listening for what reasons, and who is not (Matthews 2001a, 314). When it comes to clarity about the roles, it does not just mean the role of the youth, but also the role of the adult, as it is important for youth to understand what they can expect, how decisions are made, how power is distributed, and what intended outcomes and possible limitations are (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617).

In every youth participation project, *diversity and inclusivity* are important drivers to ensure that youth voices from several backgrounds are represented and get equal chances, which ultimately benefits the project and organization (Black et al. 2014, 12). That requires awareness for marginalized

groups, as well as a certain degree of flexibility in style and implementation of the programs (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617; Orsini & Duque 2025, 2).

Penultimately, youth participation greatly benefits from the inclusion of all *stakeholders* and a structured approach to *youth-adult partnership*. Arkedis et al. (2023, 26) describe the need for a critical mass of stakeholders and capacities across systems to really drive collaborative leadership, one of the broader concepts that, in the context of education, also includes youth participation. In general, it is described as helpful if there is awareness, active coordination, and mobilization of stakeholders, as well as a structured approach to communicate examples and success stories among them (Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 5–6; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20). In the narrower context of individual participation projects, structured Y-AP and a good relationship help young people find their voice and create a collaboration where adults are not always teaching but the roles of teacher and learner switch flexibly between all participants based on their individual skills and backgrounds (Lips-Wierma & Allan 2018, 243; Serido et al. 2011, 56). To establish Y-AP, Blakeslee and Walker (2018, 5–6) describe it as important to create positive narratives, draw the attention of stakeholders to the issue, provide tools, skills, and best practices to the adults, and help all participants, youth and adults, to establish a shared sense of ownership regarding infrastructure and roles.

Finally, to reach a truly meaningful and successful level of youth participation, also according to the models by Hart, Shier, and Mitra introduced in chapter 2.1.2, youth need to be *co-designers* of the programs. This means that youth are included in every stage of the process and decision-making, not only occasionally or in the final phase when the program is conceptualized (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 615–616; Demneh & Zackery 2023, 1; Grace et al. 2024, 3). Wallin (2003, 71) describes that this already starts with including youth in early processes such as the creation of the code of conduct, critiquing existing practices of the institution (in their case school), and trying out alternative paths together. The final step of the co-design process of any participation program is a collaborative and co-designed feedback and evaluation process of the program, where youth are actively participating, part of the implementing solutions, working towards improvement (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617; Teach For All n.d.-a, 24; Grace et al. 2024, 7).

2.3 Barriers to Youth Participation

Successful youth participation is currently hindered by numerous barriers that, in many cases, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Some of them are the mere opposites or absences of the already described enablers, while others touch upon new areas that have not been discussed in this study yet. A comprehensive list of all detected barriers can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Barriers to Youth Participation

The table summarizes the barriers to youth participation found in the literature, as described in this chapter.

Barriers
Adultism / mindset
Risk of tokenism
Structures are adult-centric
Power asymmetries / structural marginalization
Lack of infrastructure / systems
Lack of resources
Insecurity / lack of know-how
Lack of representativeness of the group
Capacity restraints
Concern for youth security
Marginalization of certain groups
No lobby / lack of connection to decision-makers
Youth don't know what to ask for / youth don't believe in themselves

The first and by far most frequently mentioned barrier is the mindset of adults, or more specifically, a prevailing *adultism*. In many areas of the world, youth are generally perceived as a problem or as troublemakers and therefore not seen as able to participate (Checkoway 2011, 341; Kumi, Yeboah & Edudzie 2025, 1). This adultism shows in many instances through the adult perception of young people as disinterested, lacking the necessary skills, overall incompetent, or being unable to take responsibility (Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Kiili & Larkins 2018, 416; Matthews 2001a, 314; Zeldin 2004, 83–84). It also shows in the lack of active listening and honest interest in what youth share. Young people often describe that they do not feel adults take them seriously and show interest in their opinions and ideas (Harris, Wyn & Younes 2008 according to Black et al 2014, 41; Sloam 2007 according to Collins et al. 2016, 141; Mitra 2004, 652). Adults are also often described as overall not responsive, and controlling of the process and outcomes which research connects to their overall attitude (Grace et al. 2024, 4; Zeldin et al. 2000, 5). Black et al. (2014, 42) assume that this issue is based on commonly used pedagogical practices that are difficult to change. Besides that, the communication between youth and adults can be negatively impacted by the adults' lack of understanding of youth realities and willingness to overcome structural barriers which is a consequence of an adultistic attitude and can lead to misunderstandings (Arnot & Raey 2007, 321; Bessel 2009, 300; Mitra 2004, 662). Neuhoﬀ et al. (2023, 6) describe the issue of attitude in futures research projects in general and not only connected to youth and name challenges such as a risk of misuse, concern about authenticity and historical issues.

A second barrier that plays a major role is the *lack of infrastructure* and systems that target or at least include youth participation. This problem is twofold and has an organizational and a psychological component. First, due to the lack of infrastructure, there are only very limited opportunities for young people to share their voice and impact decision-making as they are not even in the room (Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Matthews 2001b, 155). The second and more psychological aspect is that even if youth meet adults with decision-making power, they often remain silent because there is no structure that legitimates their participation, and they are therefore unsure if adults will take them seriously or if they have a right to speak (Fielding & Rudduck 2002 according to Black et al. 2014, 4). According to Bessel (2009, 311), some NGOs describe the need to modify their internal processes and structures in order to allow for more youth participation.

Following, even if there are structures allowing for youth participation in some organizations, there is often the problem that mostly these *structures are adult-centric* and therefore hinder young people to make meaningful contributions and unfold their full potential of cooperation and leadership. One aspect here is that youth participation projects are often very close to adult decision-making organs and mimic them in structure, processes, and style, which makes them rather exclusive for many youths (Matthews 2001a, 311; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 561; Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023, 1211). One challenge that comes for many young people in these adult-centric participation programs is their struggle to understand jargon and the language used (Zeldin 2004, 86). Kiili and Larkins (2018, 409) conclude that this issue is especially dominant in participation structures where youth are only invited to, as the adults still hold the majority of power, which is described as a general challenge of participation projects also in futures research (Neuhoff et al. 2023, 5).

Furthermore, many researchers describe the risk of youth participation being *tokenistic* whenever organizations are hesitant to share power but only allow youth to share their voice for strategic purposes (see chapter 2.1.2.1 for a detailed explanation of tokenism). This can create an environment of disempowerment (Barendregt, Bendor & Van Eekelen 2024, 8; Bessel 2009, 311; Kiili & Larkins 2018, 409; Tisdall & Davis 2004, 132). Bharucha (2025) specifies this issue in an article, describing a young person's experience who often finds themselves speaking in decision-making spaces where the decision has already been made.

Within or even before youth participation projects are implemented, a frequent barrier is the *lack of know-how* and a *feeling of insecurity* about how to do it right on the adult side. This already begins with the aforementioned lack of a common definition (Black et al. 2014, 39) and is visible in organizations that find it difficult to come up with ideas for participation and different roles within projects that go beyond advisory boards (Grace et al. 2024, 4). It also includes ways of communication and ways information is shared (Tisdall & Davis 2004, 136).

Another barrier within youth participation that previous descriptions have already touched upon is the *power distribution and structural marginalization*. In general, the power distribution between adults and youth is often unclear or asymmetric, which limits youths' impact (Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Matthews 2001a, 313; Mitra 2006, 10). The issue begins with the selection of participating youth depending on adults (Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 564) and is further visible in the kind of decisions that youth get involved in, which is mostly content and format rather than staff and program governance (Akiva et al. 2014, 1853). The hierarchical power structures that are often based on patriarchal norms and geopolitical inequalities hinder participation, especially for young people, women, and Bi_PoC (Kumi et al. 2025, 8–9). The problem that power distribution is often a top-down process in projects that aim to be participatory is also frequently described in the context of Futures Studies, where it impacts whose voices are heard and what ideas are taken into consideration (Akavarapu 2025, 11–15).

A sixth barrier is the *lack of resources* in terms of time and money to successfully implement and support youth participation. Especially the effect of limited funding, but also a lack of human and institutional resources hinders youth participation as creating the rooms, overcoming stereotypes, and developing processes that work well for all involved need time, organizational change, and therefore ultimately financial capacities (Kumi et al. 2025, 2, 7–9; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 181; Matthews 2001a, 312).

A challenge that is often named in research regarding already implemented youth participation programs is the *lack of representativeness* of the participating youth. It is frequently described that youth participation projects have a rather homogenous group of participants that often lacks connection to the community (Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Checkoway 2011, 342; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 563–564; Tisdall & Davis 2004, 132). This leads to several challenges, namely the insecurity of youth about their own role and the loss of certain perspectives if staff understand the participating youth as representative (Matthews 2001a, 310; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 560, 566). Youth in participation projects are often found to be high-achievers, described as 'good kids' and from majority backgrounds, while especially the representation of minority voices and those who struggle in the system would be of utmost importance (Mager & Nowak 2011, 49; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 564; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 177). Wyness (2009, 547) describes high bureaucracy within the structures, limited familiarity of certain youth groups with the structures, and a lack of social and cultural capital as possible reasons for the homogeneity of participating youth.

Connected to the previous point, it is important to emphasize that the *marginalization of certain youth groups* poses a general challenge for successful youth participation. This affects mostly young people with a low socio-economic status or a lack of education (Black et al. 2014, 44; Checkoway

2011, 342). Besides that, several forms of structural and internalized discrimination negatively affect youth participation, which can be based on race, gender, age, nationality, family or community context (Checkoway 2011, 342). With a specific focus on the realm of futures research, Neuhoﬀ et al. (2023, 11) add that many projects are based in Western and Central Europe, which comes with additional bias and results in a lack of perspective, not only concerning youth voices.

A challenge that is especially often described by adults working in participation projects is the *concern for youths' safety and restrained capacities*. While Black et al. (2014, 42) state that adult resistance to youth participation can be based on valid concerns, Bessel (2009, 310) emphasizes that the line between support and protection on the one hand and paternalism and control on the other can be very fine. Furthermore, many adults describe the issue that schedules of adults working full-time in a project and youth who occasionally participate but may have other obligations do not always fit (Kurki 2015, 13; Matthews 2001a, 312). The issue of the capacity of youth is also described from a long-term perspective, as participation often requires learning and growing into the system and processes. Youths' quickly changing lives may result in frequent changes of the participants, which lessens the impact and results in more work for the adults working to integrate young people (Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 175; Matthews 2001a, 312). The issue of temporality is also described in participatory Futures Studies as occasional participation may result in a rather vague or in-the-moment perspective that may not be consistent (Neuhoﬀ et al. 2023, 11).

Penultimately, the *absence of a lobby for youth participation* and the very limited connection between youth and decision-makers is another important barrier. In the African context, Kumi et al. (2025, 7–9) observed a lack of institutional promotion of youth projects and a lack of connection with politicians and decision-makers. On a more general level, Nir and Perry-Hazan (2016, 180–181) describe the issue of adults not being willing to support youth beyond their role or fearing negative consequences from their next hierarchical level. If lobbying for youth participation occurs, it seems difficult to navigate the intra- and intergenerational dynamics, which can lead to a situation where adults aim to lobby for youth participation but end up lobbying for their own agendas (Kiili & Larkins 2018, 414).

A final barrier, which is named in research and addresses the youth perspective on youth participation, is the *lack of belief* that youth have in themselves, and that some *youth may not know their rights and the possibilities of participation*. When in the scope of a study young people were asked to suggest improvements and give feedback to the participation program, they seemed to be accepting of the limitations of their participation, had very few ideas for improvement, and were hesitant to demand things beyond a broader scope of participation or more funding. Some adults in the same research stated they wished for the youth to be more demanding, however, young people

seemed to be at a point where they are grateful to be included at all. (Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 178–179.) This lack of belief in their own capabilities and therefore lack of motivation to commit can be understood as a form of internalized adultism that hinders youth to unfold their full potential in participatory processes (Checkoway 2011, 342; Matthews, 2001b, 154; Zeldin et al. 2000, 5).

2.4 Collaboration between Youth and Adults

One important aspect for youth participation in organizational contexts is the collaboration between youth and adults. Regardless of the kind of participation, certain connections and interactions are necessarily part of it. Research and organizations that already emphasize youth participation in their work have published several frameworks, guides, and methods on how to successfully collaborate. In this study, I will present two of them, namely Collective Leadership (CL) and Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP).

2.4.1 Collective Leadership

Collective Leadership (CL) does not exclusively focus on youth participation but is mainly the idea that leadership is carried out by a group of people who work together towards a common purpose, which in the example of education can include teachers, families, policy makers, and youth (Teach For All 2025-b, 8–11). The main aim is to have the stakeholders involved as leaders who are committed, locally rooted, and bring different capacities and networks to the decision-making (Teach For All 2025-b, 22–25). Arkedis et al. (2023, 10–12) describe CL in the context of sustainable development as a group that exerts leadership towards the purpose of sustainable development from different levels of the system, working in collaboration despite different experiences and work contexts, while learning from each other's expertise and diverse backgrounds. In distinction to classical leadership, where the focus is on one or a few leaders and many followers, the idea of CL is to distribute responsibility and leadership among several people with different roles within the team, which ultimately impacts the overall structure of an organization (Arkedis et al. 2023, 14). Organizations that contributed to the development of the Collective Leadership concept are, among others, Teach For All, Ashoka, and the Building State Capability Program by Harvard University (Arkedis et al. 2023).

As the focus of CL is on the group of people that take over leadership roles collaboratively, it is important to note that this includes people who are not leaders in the classical or managerial sense but stakeholders who for example contribute a perspective that is closer to the issue (Arkedis et al. 2023, 12). In the case of education, this is especially important to achieve transformation, while acknowledging the interdependence of the diverse actors which comes with benefits as well as

challenges (Centre for Strategic Education 2023, 7). The inclusion of all these different stakeholders makes it more likely to overcome biases and inequities and therefore to be successful in the work (Teach For All 2025-b, 36). The Centre for Strategic Education (2023, 17) describes in their report the inclusion of youth as an integral part of CL with the aim of strengthening students and teachers.

The main characteristics of CL are the common challenge, a diverse group of actors who share power, an asset-based approach when it comes to who participates in what ways, leadership that is based on relationships, and a system lens that considers the overall effects of any given action (Arkedis et al. 2023, 15). To achieve that, contextual understanding, respect for diversity, clear communication and a shared vision, ownership and empowerment, local governance, community engagement, and spaces for listening are needed (Centre for Strategic Education 2023, 9). In the process, CL aims to support the effectiveness of the team and the organization through individual empowerment, fostering adaptability and innovation, leveraging diverse perspectives, promoting teamwork, and positive influence of youth achievements through adult motivation (Arkedis et al. 2023, 18–19).

In any team or organization, CL can either emerge organically or be developed after a conscious decision (Teach For All 2025-b, 28). If an organization decides to aim for CL, it needs to focus on four things: (1) recruiting diverse people, (2) developing the purpose, vision, values, and leadership capacity, (3) building relationships among leaders, and (4) finally developing shared approaches to acting, learning, and adapting. For a successful implementation, it furthermore needs investment in the development of people on all institutional levels. (Teach For All 2025-b, 8, 17.) Throughout the implementation phase, it is described as important to focus on systems-thinking, wellbeing of the participants, creating a feeling of belonging, and overcoming differences. Once implemented, CL can enhance the community's resilience, improve the performance of the organization, and contribute to individual transformation. (Arkedis et al. 2023, 16, 26.)

A more concrete example of CL is the framework Teaching As Collective Leadership (TACL), which was established by a diverse group of stakeholders in a collaborative process led by Teach For All. They describe the framework as an "...actionable and locally customizable framework for teachers, teacher coaches, and program designers to grow students as leaders of a better future for themselves, for their communities, and for all of us." (Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future 2025, 1). The framework as shown in Figure 4 has the purpose of having "students as leaders of a better future for themselves, their communities, and all of us" (Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future 2025, 19) and suggests four different lenses to look at the education system and teaching. These lenses are (1) seeing students as leaders already today, (2) seeing teachers as learners and not only as those sharing knowledge, (3) seeing the surrounding community as a power, and ultimately

(4) seeing the work towards teaching as collective leadership as systemic. From these lenses, they derive five strategies, namely love & connect, listen & envision, learn & design, facilitate & challenge, and reflect & grow. (Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future 2025, 37–46, 51.) Finally, the suggested outcomes are wellbeing, connectedness, awareness, agency, and mastery. In this context, agency means that especially youth “...take independent or collective action toward shared goals to cause positive change in their own life or the lives of others. This includes specific constructs such as self-efficacy, creativity, problem-solving, curiosity, growth mindset, and collaboration.” (Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future 2025, 147).



Figure 4. Teaching As Collective Leadership Framework

Source: Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future (2025, 2)

2.4.2 Youth - Adult Partnership

The concept of Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) is mainly described in educational and pedagogical literature, but also by several organizations that already work in collaboration with youth. Zeldin et al. explain Y-AP as “(a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective (democratic) fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue” (Zeldin et al. 2013, 388). Teach For All adds in their slide deck on Y-AP that

In an authentic partnership, both youth and adults have roles to play based on their unique strengths, working together to reach common goals. The partnership reflects a balance between youth and adult voice and a mutual understanding of shared power, voice, and responsibility. Such partnerships create change ‘with’ youth as opposed to ‘to and for them.’ (Teach For All n.d.-a, 3).

Y-AP overall aims to create an environment of respect, goal-oriented focus, and shared leading and learning, which can ultimately support positive developments for the involved adults and the overall

organization (Zeldin et al. 2013, 285–286). The partnership is described as an important aspect because it comes with a change in organizational culture towards valuing youth with their knowledge and experience as active participants and gives them ownership over their own learning journey. To create this partnership, it needs more than just certain practices and processes, but a change in the relationship between youth and adults. (Matthews, Cook-Sather & Healey 2018, 24, 28.) Besides that, it needs youth who believe that they have authentic opportunities to impact decision-making and are understood as leaders by the adults (Zeldin, Krauss, Collura, Lucchesi & Sulaiman 2014, 340). Overall, Y-AP happens in all kinds of settings, from organizations to research and government participation (Akiva et al. 2014, 1844). Depending on the context, the processes and practices are adapted and therefore can look different (Zeldin et al. 2014, 345). Examples for practices within the scope of Y-AP are advisory boards, leading activities for younger youth, participating in fundraising, or making employment decisions. All kinds of Y-AP require a sense of community among the youth and adults involved, mentorship for the youth, and authentic decision-making procedures. (Akiva et al. 2014, 1844–1845.) Within the context of Y-AP, there can be different levels of adult involvement (Zeldin 2004, 80).

Y-AP is seen as extremely valuable, first because it supports positive youth development, especially for marginalized youth and in a time when our societies are largely segregated by age (Zeldin et al. 2014, 338, 343) and second, because it changes the energy among adults towards more reflection, learning and appreciation. In organizations that foster Y-AP, youth and adults contribute in different ways. For youth it is mainly the perspective of an under-represented group who has an inside experience on the youth-centered projects and a general open mind to challenge organizational norms. On the other hand, adults bring their often year-long experience in the field, skills to support and guide youth, and know-how about infrastructure and administration. (Zeldin et al. 2000, 7, 23, 25–30.)

When organizations or teams want to establish Y-AP, it is important to focus on active collaborations, having a long-term commitment, and choosing clear objectives (Zeldin et al. 2013, 389). Two of the most important enablers of Y-AP are having a youth voice in decision-making and having supportive adult relationships (Zeldin et al. 2014, 339). Other conditions that enable Y-AP in organizations are policies and systems that promote Y-AP, supportive organizational structures, meaningful and equitable opportunities for youth, continuous reflection and feedback, and a conducive culture. Supporting structures mean that the organization has data on people and organizations in their community who support Y-AP, and that they establish training for youth and adults, create platforms to give successful Y-AP an audience, and commit the necessary funding and staff. Meaningful and equitable opportunities consist of two parts: (1) being meaningful, which is the

case when opportunities are ongoing and across several functions, and (2) being equitable in the sense that leadership happens in key functions, work is allocated based on strengths, and youth and adults are held to the same values. For continuous reflection to have a positive impact, it is important to involve youth and the organization in a feedback loop that is ongoing, focuses on qualitative and quantitative aspects, and is followed by the implementation of solutions. Finally, the conducive culture describes an organizational culture in which the leaders of the organization believe in overall improved outcomes due to Y-AP and therefore a focus on values that promote Y-AP, such as equity, transparency, trust, and respect. Furthermore, this culture needs leaders to share accountability, accept being challenged, and encourage appreciation and growth along the journey of establishing Y-AP. (Teach For All n.d.-a, 17–26.)

One example that can be understood as a more condensed guide to how to implement Y-AP was published in 2023 by a group of organizations in ‘Uniting Generations and Sharing Power to Transform Education – A guide to more and intergenerational convening’. They emphasize the importance to understand and reflect power and power dynamics and explain different ways to look at power: (1) people have *power over* someone else if they are able to dominate or block their access to power, (2) people have *power to* do something if they have skills, knowledge or resources to initiate change, (3) *power within* describes a person’s relationship with themselves and their sense of empowerment, and (4) *power with* describes “Collective action, synergies, and community involvement, highlighting the strength that arises when individuals come together and work collaboratively towards shared goals.” (Irabor-York et al. 2023, 6). While the focus of the guide is on convening spaces, a lot of their insights can be easily transformed and used for projects of different kinds. To emphasize principles of intergenerational collaboration, they compare generational division (power is concentrated, age is seen as a line of division, tokenistic engagement), which is often the norm with intergenerational collaboration, where power should be shared equitably, age is understood as an axis of diversity, and engagement happens collaboratively. The overall mindset that is needed is the understanding that everyone can be a leader, follower, learner, and teacher regardless of their age. Age should simply stand beside other characteristics and not be the dividing factor. The authors emphasize the relevance of this kind of collaboration and state that “When power is collaboratively redefined and redistributed by practicing ICL³, we pave the way for an education transformation that is not just inclusive but also inherently relevant, resilient and adaptable.” (Irabor-York et al. 2023, 10). To make it graspable how this kind of collaboration between age groups can be implemented, they finish the guide with a checklist for convenings that includes aspects for before, during, and after

³ ICL: Intergenerational Collaboration and Leadership

a project. For ‘before’, the list includes aspects such as clear communication of goals, creating room for co-designing, and a focus on diverse representation. For ‘during’, they emphasize clear language, be aware of potential barriers, actively remove them, and have diverse formats and activities. And finally, ‘after’ there should be clear communication on what happens with the outcomes, sharing of output, and a collection of feedback. (Irabor-York et al. 2023, 6–14.)

2.5 The Lens of Participatory Futures Studies and Youth

The lens through which this research analyzes the phenomenon of youth participation is Futures Studies, and especially the aim to identify preferable futures from a youth perspective. According to Wendell Bell, the overall purpose of Futures Studies is to “maintain or improve the freedom and welfare of humankind” (Bell 1997, 73), which therefore includes the freedom and welfare of children and youth as addressed in this study. Futures Studies is based on the idea that there is not one future but many possible futures that could unfold from any present point in time and can only be known for sure once they become the present. While it is not possible to predict anything with certainty, Futures Studies is needed in times of rapid change to be prepared and create an awareness of what could happen, and it is an active choice to think about the future consequences of one’s present actions. (Masini 1993, 2, 8.) One important aspect and the basis of this study is envisioning preferred futures that can then be implemented, evaluated, revised, and re-envisioned (Dator 2009, 4).

By envisioning especially preferred futures and thinking out of the box, futurists overcome the barrier of conventional thinking that prevents to explore, try, and learn from opportunities that are currently seen as impossible. Different people have different images of the future, which depend on their environment, and in turn, the future as it unfolds depends on the images people have about the future, as that is the basis of all belief, behavior, and ultimately present actions. (Bell 1997, 77–86.)

The lens of Futures Studies in the context of youth participation allows to see beyond the scope of current theoretical and practical knowledge. It opens the door to think out of the box, include youth directly in the process of envisioning futures and therefore especially supports the improvement of youths’ freedom and welfare, as emphasized by Bell. Creating room to think about the effects of current actions on the future of youth participation allows for more targeted planning and the creation of structures that connect current best practices with future visions.

This sub-chapter summarizes insights on the current state of knowledge about the general youth perception of the future, participatory Futures Studies in general, and the scenario method in particular. The youth perception of the future is mainly addressed because asking young people about their ideas and visions is a major part of the data used to answer the research questions. Therefore,

understanding how youth think about the future and what biases may be present is important to contextualize the gained insights and the following chapters.

2.5.1 Youth Perception of Futures

The orientation of youth towards the future has been mainly researched regarding education, employment, peer relations, and housing. Overall, youth perception of futures is complex, goes further than just the career choice after graduation, and shows that ‘present futures’ and ‘future presents’ are often entangled. (Goring, Kelly, Carbajo & Browns 2023, 2, 9.) Carabelli and Lyon (2016, 1124) found that youth generally understand the relationship between present and future and the effects that the present has on the latter. However, research also clearly shows that while youth do understand these connections, their relationship to the future often depends on socio-ecological, political, economic, and cultural contexts (Jones 2023, 2, 9).

Overall, youth have ambivalent feelings and some anxiety about the future (Carabelli & Lyon 2016, 1124; Goring et al. 2023, 6). However, they also demonstrate hopeful and strategic approaches when planning the future and experience feelings such as optimism, wants, and desires besides despair, pessimism, and anger (Goring et al. 2023, 7, 9). In their research on youth relation to the climate crisis, Jones (2023, 3) found that young people are not in general apolitical when it comes to decision-making but feel unprepared and that “there are embedded structures of power that influence what young people can choose, and what options are available for which young people.” (Jones 2023, 11). In the context of the general complexity of the future and the systems of the present, youth seem to tolerate a scattered worldview better than adults do (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 300). Still, the images and ideas that young people have of the future are often influenced by adults, especially by their parents, in three different ways: parents set norms and standards that affect values and goals, parents are seen as role models, and parents shape family interactions that teach youth about the possibility to influence. Research shows that youth are mainly interested in the future of their education and occupation, and secondly in family, materiality, and relationships, while they mostly think ahead until their late 2nd decade or early 3rd decade of life. (Nurmi 1991, 11–12, 16, 27.)

A problem with youths’ ability to think about the future is their lack of knowledge and tools to engage in futures thinking (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 298), which improves with age and through educating young people on futures thinking (Nurmi 1991, 29). An outside challenge that young people face is the rapidly changing world and society, which comes with a greater need for images of desirable futures. At the same time, it gets even harder for young people to find out who they are and who they want to be. (Damhof & Gulmans 2023, 54; Rubin & Linturi 2001, 281.)

Finally, on a local and global level, the marginalization of certain groups affects their ability to depict the future (Goring et al. 2023, 10). Damhof and Gulmans (2023, 53) describe that it is harder for people who face power abuse, poverty, and racism to imagine the future, and Goring et al. (2023, 10) add that future orientation of youth is dependent on social, ecological, systemic, and educational aspects, as well as factors of housing and labor. The negative effect of marginalization not only impacts the quality of young people's futures thinking but especially the socio-economic status impacts how far into the future a young person thinks (Nurmi 1991, 31).

2.5.2 Participatory Futures Studies

Wendell Bell stated in 1997 that one goal of Futures Studies is to ensure and enable democratic participation. He is deeply convinced by the benefits of democratization of societies and processes in general and emphasized that democratic nations are less likely to go to war or accept the suffering of their people. Concluding, he points out the importance of democratic participation within Futures Studies processes, as also encouraged by the World Futures Studies Federation in the late 1980s. Examples for participatory approaches for Futures Studies could be already found in the 1980s, as for example Becker and Dator did lots of their work through workshops at the Honolulu Electronic Town Meeting. (Bell 1997, 93–95.)

In many aspects, Futures Studies focuses on expert and professional opinions. However, the concept of participatory Futures Studies aims to broaden the understanding of what expert knowledge is and whose perspectives should be included in research to get a more accurate understanding, which leads to a democratization of the field (Akavarapu 2025, 2; Barendregt et al. 2024, 2). Neuhoff et al. (2023, 2) describe participatory Futures Studies as a collaborative process that aims to create alternative ideas about the future from a broad range of actors. Actors in participatory Futures Studies can include decision makers, governance professionals, project-based representatives, stakeholders from the field, and the public (Akavarapu 2025, 7; Barendregt et al. 2024, 3; Tapio & Hietanen 2002, 602). Barendregt et al. (2024, 5) emphasize the validity of different types of knowledge for research and the importance of including non-experts for their own lived experience that holds more benefits than the ethical correctness of including people affected by research. Tapio and Hietanen (2002, 602) describe the public as a diverse group that can include NGOs, lobbying groups, as well as religious communities or individual citizens, and emphasize that in certain contexts this can include children.

While the focus of participatory Futures Studies is not necessarily on youth, the inclusion of stakeholders, the public, or project-based representatives due to the value of their lived experience in a specific context clearly indicates that in the field of education, youth are or at least should be considered. Barendregt et al. (2024, 5–6) explicitly state the importance of involving youth in

different areas, as they can be understood as the “protagonists of the future”, and the power that they will hold in that. They also emphasize youths marginalized position in research and practice, and how their future relevance and current power position are not in balance. Their argument is thereby based on Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, which is the basis for Hart’s Ladder of Participation of children.

While the stated benefits of participatory Futures Studies are the reason why they are often conducted in several contexts, challenges remain. This includes opposing expectations, conflicting short- and long-term needs, difficulties in balancing power dynamics, different understanding of the context, as well as generating a very “in-the-moment” picture of the participating groups. Lastly, it may pose challenges, especially in their context of urban futuring, the focus is largely on Western and Central European contexts. (Neuhoff et al. 2023, 5–6, 11.) As this is a general issue in academia and especially also in educational science, this challenge may be important to consider also in the context of this study.

2.5.3 Scenarios

Scenarios in Futures Studies describe a method that helps to explore and describe alternative possible future states based on the most important variables for any given context (Amer et al. 2012, 24; Blanckesteijn & Ghorbani 2025, 2) and therefore benefits greatly from participatory processes. While there is some confusion within the field of Futures Studies about what exactly scenarios are and how they are used, there is a growing popularity due to their benefits in practice (Dator, 2009, 1; Wright, Bradfield & Cairns 2013, 632). Dator (2009, 1) describes scenarios as a way to depict alternative futures with the aim of supporting public or private organizations and communities in their planning and to make informed decisions that ultimately lead towards a preferred future. Scenarios include a picture of certain possible future states and a set of decisions that lead to this future state and are therefore a picture in motion (Amer et al. 2012, 23). One important aspect is that scenarios do not predict one certain future but present several alternatives (Blanckesteijn & Ghorbani 2025, 2; Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 9). The purposes of scenarios include support in dealing with uncertainty due to short-term disruptions, technology planning, forecasting, and strategic analysis, and they are used in many different areas, such as education, health, climate, or management (Amer et al. 2012, 24; Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 1). One basic condition for creating scenarios and making use of them is the willingness to challenge the status quo (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 1), which, as stated in the previous chapter, can be frequently found in youth.

Organizations that engage in scenario planning benefit from scenarios as they enhance their understanding of their own environment, provide possible structures to deal with unavoidable

uncertainty, challenge conventional thinking, and can improve communication, especially if based on a participatory process (Wright et al. 2013, 633). The time horizon is often between three and 20 years and therefore the most important factors are uncertainty, innovation, change, and complexity. Scenarios can be approached quantitatively or qualitatively and can be prospective or predictive. (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 2, 9.) The process to generate scenarios is largely practitioner-driven (Amer et al. 2012, 25). To create scenarios and meaningfully use them, it is important to enable participation within the process and include stakeholders, as their ideas and mental models impact their image of the future and ultimately all future developments. Therefore, participation is important to ensure a complete image throughout the data collection process and overall internal consistency. (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 11–14, 17.) Dator (2009, 4) further emphasizes that it is important to involve everyone who may be impacted throughout the planning and execution of any process and outcome of scenario generation. The expertise of those making the final decision and working with the scenarios as a tool of strategic planning is needed to avoid bias and ensure usability (Durance & Godet 2010, 1489; Ratcliffe 2002, 30). Ratcliffe suggests around 12-20 participants in the process. Data collection happens through interviews or other interactive processes so that all insights heavily rely on interactions either among participants or between participants and researcher, which makes neutrality impossible (Ratcliffe 2002, 20, 23, 30).

When creating scenarios, they can be either exploratory in the sense that trends from the past and the present are analyzed to find likely future scenarios or normative in the sense that the scenarios focus on desirability (Durance & Godet 2010, 1489).

Within the field of Futures Studies, there are three approaches to scenarios: the Intuitive Logic Method (ILM), which is most common, the French La Prospective (LP), and the Probabilistic Modified Trends (PMT) (Amer et al. 2012, 26; Blankesteyn & Ghorbani 2025, 2; Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 2). The ILM assumes that business decisions are impacted by the dynamics between economic, political, technological, social, resource, and environmental factors (Amer et al. 2012, 26–27). They do not use a mathematical algorithm for the scenario creation but are based on a qualitative approach (Amer et al. 2012, 27; Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 10). Therefore, it relies heavily on the knowledge, commitment, credibility, and communication skills of the researcher (Amer et al. 2012, 27). The final scenarios are mostly described as narratives of a possible future (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 10). The ILM follows two main objectives, first to understand possible future states to support strategic planning, and second, to challenge conventional thinking (Wright et al. 2013, 631). The PMT is a quantitative approach to combine qualitative factors into scenarios. Lastly, the LP is based on the principle that the future is not predetermined but can be deliberately created

and modeled. It uses intuitive logic but adds quantitative analysis approaches to create descriptive or normative scenarios. (Amer et al. 2012, 27; Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 10.)

So far, there is no clear guideline as to how many scenarios should be created in any given context, but it is suggested to have at least two or at best between three and five scenarios, while the minimal approach to get there would be to have two key drivers on a four-quadrant matrix that guide the scenarios (Amer et al. 2012, 34). Dator (2009, 7) emphasizes that in an ideal setting, there should be no best- or worst-case scenario and also no more likely one, but all scenarios should have equal probabilities and be treated equally.

The validation of scenarios is built upon the categories of plausibility, consistency, utility, novelty, and differentiation (Amer et al. 2012, 36). The researcher needs to make sure that all these criteria are met by working close to the data and reflecting about the own position as well as these criteria constantly.

While scenarios are heavily used in Futures Studies and come with great benefits for the organization, they are also criticized for a potentially restricted range that they cover, a lack of possibility to test the internal logic of individual scenarios, and, in quantitative scenario methods, a lack of imagination (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette 2023, 15).

2.6 The Research Gap

With this study, I aim to address a research gap that consists of four main parts: the lack of shared understanding of youth participation, the gap between what is known in theory and what is done in practice, the lack of involvement of the youth perspective, and the limited coverage of youth participation in Futures Studies. All these aspects are deeply connected, as the lack of shared understanding (see Bessel 2009, 299; Black et al. 2014, 14; Mager & Nowak 2011, 50) makes it difficult to translate any theoretical insights into practical outcomes. Several studies describe how decision-makers and planners find it difficult to create programs of youth participation, especially with the aim of not making them tokenistic (Botchwey et al. 2019, 255). One reason for that is a lack of guidance and best practices, as well as a lack of methodological understanding on how to implement structures of youth participation (Augsberger et al. 2024, 1–2; Grace et al. 2024, 2). Another aspect indicating this gap is the often described feeling of insecurity of adults working in youth participation projects or aiming to implement such, about how to do it the right, meaningful, and for the young people safe way (Grace et al. 2024, 2; Juliussen et al 2024, 1098).

Paradoxically, the research gap in the area of youth participation includes the under-representation of the perspective of young people, as most studies focus on the experiences of adults involved in

youth participation or are at least conceptualized, analyzed, and written from an adult perspective. Therefore, participation of youth in research on youth participation remains largely within the scope of data production. Cavet and Sloper (2004, 616) and Wallin (2003, 55) criticize the general lack of knowledge about youths' experience in participation programs or youth versions of participation and leadership.

To address this research gap, I developed one main research question and three sub-questions:

1. How can spaces in an NGO working for educational equity look like, that allow for real youth participation in 2035?
 - a. What works well and should be further developed to ensure successful youth participation in the NGO?
 - b. What are barriers to real youth participation in the NGO?
 - c. How can youth and adults create meaningful partnerships that enable successful cooperation and what needs to change for that to be possible in the context of the NGO?

To address these, this study focuses (1) on a current best-practice example of youth participation in the context of Teach For All, an international education organization, and (2) the involvement of the perspective of youth (at least 50%) who participated in Teach For All's youth participation programs (introduced in detail in chapter 3.1).

2.7 Reflection on the Biased Presentation

This study is subject to several biases due to the presentation of the topic in the current literature and the position of the author.

First, young people in general are underrepresented in the research on youth participation, and therefore, the perspective presented in this literature review is adult-biased. Irabor-York et al. (2023, 4) summarize this problem saying, "With every education convening that excludes young people, existing power imbalances are perpetuated.". Several studies describe youth and children as generally marginalized and overlooked in research and policy or planning processes (Barendregt et al. 2024, 6; Botchwey et al. 2019, 255). Especially in research, the focus tends to be on the adult perspective (Akiva et al. 2014, 1845). The problem behind this is that youth generally have limited power in decision-making processes, agenda setting, and program planning and implementation (Tisdall & Davis 2004, 140; Wyness 2001, 194). Even if research involved the perspectives of youth, they are often understood as one homogenous group, which does not display the diverse reality of youth experiences (Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023, 1203).

Second, especially the perspective of marginalized children is underrepresented in research as well as in many participation programs. The structural discrimination especially affects youth from immigrant backgrounds, low-income families, and youth who struggle in academics or are younger than the others (Hart 1992, 7; Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617; Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023, 1211). As for example youth participating in councils are mostly from more privileged backgrounds (Whitty & Wisby 2007, 314), the perspectives of disadvantaged youth are largely underrepresented in research and in this study in particular in the literature review part.

Third, research in general suffers from a Western-centric orientation, which also applies to the topic of youth participation. Roger Hart addresses this issue when reflecting on his own framework, the Ladder of Participation of children and about education in general (Hart 2008, 26–28). Perry-Hazan and Somech (2023, 1213) state that the general assumption of a homogenous group based on Western ideas leads to the marginalization of several other groups. While it is worth mentioning that several of the concepts and frameworks used in this study, such as collaborative leadership, are known to some indigenous groups for centuries, the academic description and the terminology used remain a result of Western discourse (Arkedis et al. 2023, 16). A reason and a result of that is that there is a lack of data from the Global South, which is also described in Futures Studies and applies to most research fields (Akavarapu 2025, 15; Barendregt et al. 2024, 3). Orsini and Duque (2025, 2) describe a larger number of barriers for actors from the Global South when it comes to participation in international processes, which further manifests the divide.

Next, this study itself is written from the perspective of a *white*⁴, European, cis-gender, adult woman and therefore may replicate certain biases. While I engage in critical reflection and try to dismantle potential bias as much as possible, this background and the connected socialization need to be noted. Finally, for full transparency, I mention here that I was a member of Teach For All's inaugural SLAC cohort in 2018 and therefore, on the one hand, benefit from a deeper understanding and certain insights into the work and the organization, while on the other hand, I may be subject to biases that were repeatedly critically reflected throughout the research process.

⁴ The term 'white' is written in italics to acknowledge that it describes a social and political construct. Italics were chosen to differentiate from the capitalized 'B' that is also a symbol of resistance and self-empowerment (see: Glossar für diskriminierungssensible Sprache n.d.)

3 Methodology

The following chapter focuses on the methodological underpinnings, the context and case this research focuses on, and the procedure of the research. The aim of this study is to develop scenarios on how youth participation in educational organizations could look like in the future, which enablers exist, what barriers need to be overcome, and how youth and adults can work together in meaningful partnerships.

The study is based on qualitative research, qualitative content analysis, and primary data collected through interviews and written narratives that I collected in a single case study of the international NGO Teach For All. The focus on a single case was chosen to get an in-depth understanding of the perspective and ideas about the future from the position of those already working at the forefront of the field of youth participation in organizations. Through this approach, it was possible to gain an understanding of current best practices and future aspirations. The use of qualitative methods is especially beneficial to answer the research question and the three sub-questions, as it allows to build future scenarios directly on primary data while there is no extensive theoretical knowledge on the issue available (Charmaz 2012, 3). The primary data collected in combination with the literature research, as presented in chapter 2, will serve as a solid ground for building scenarios of youth participation, which is highly relevant for current and future work in this field.

3.1 The Case of Teach For All

To address the research questions, a single case study approach was chosen as this allows to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics within an individual setting. By going into one organization that already implemented youth participation in its structures, it is possible to collect specific data from the perspectives of those involved and create an understanding of the case that will later be compared to the previously presented literature. (Eisenhardt 1989, 534, 536–539.)

This study focuses on the case of youth participation within the international NGO Teach For All, a network organization that aims to globally achieve educational equity. As already touched upon in previous chapters, organizational culture largely impacts participation, especially through the level of individualism versus cooperation, power distance, and collectivism versus high power-distance (Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023, 1213). The case of Teach For All has been chosen on the one hand because I have known the organization through my participation in one of their youth participation programs, which results in a better understanding of the context and an already established connection. On the other hand, the case has been chosen because they have been working with youth

participation in different forms for over eight years and state that “At Teach For All, we believe that collective leadership is critical to transforming education systems.” (Teach For All 2025-b, 8).

3.1.1 The Organization

Teach For All is an international NGO that works as a global network of independent partner organizations (often named ‘Teach For [country name]’ – sometimes in the respective language) in more than 60 countries across six continents (Teach For All n.d.-i). Their organizational purpose is based on the awareness that many children lack educational support and opportunity, often due to circumstances such as poverty, hunger, discrimination, trauma, and insufficient support from the school system. Therefore, all network partners aim to develop collective leadership (see chapter 2.4.1), build relationships with the communities they work in, and create long-term progress for children. The main work of the national partner organizations is to recruit university graduates from different subjects to teach for two years in their country's high-need classrooms (Teach For All n.d.-e). On their website, Teach For All states that currently there are around 15,000 teachers (from now on called fellows) in their program reaching around 1.6 million students (Teach For All n.d.-k). Teach For All, as a global organization, mostly works to support the development of new national partner organizations, to foster connections within the network through virtual and in-person learning experiences, and to lobby for educational equity on the global stage, for example at the UN General Assembly (Teach For All n.d.-b). The Teach For All network, which consists of the independent national partner organizations and the global organization follows the core values of (1) a sense of possibility and belief in the potential of children, (2) being locally rooted and globally informed, (3) constant learning, (4) diversity and inclusiveness, and (5) interdependence and a work led by compassion and generosity (Teach For All n.d.-d). The global organization Teach For All addresses various topics that connect to their overall work towards educational equity by creating frameworks and learning insights, and establishing workgroups. Examples for such workgroups and created frameworks are the Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future, the Community Impact Lab, the Girls’ Education Initiative, the Education in Emergencies Initiative, the Climate Education & Leadership Initiative, the Future of Work Initiative, and the framework of Teaching As Collective Leadership (TACL) (Teach For All n.d.-c). Teach For All’s work is funded by foundations, private donors, corporate partners, and USAID (Teach For All n.d.-h)

Within their work towards educational equity on a global level, Teach For All has a general mindset of support and organizational emphasis on youth participation, which is already visible in their vision: “We envision a world where all children have the education, support, and opportunity to shape a better future” (Teach For All n.d.-i) and purpose statement: “Developing collective leadership to

ensure all children can fulfill their potential” (Teach For All n.d.-e). This, combined with several examples of how youth are enabled to participate in Teach For All’s work that will be described in more detail in this chapter, aligns with the definition of youth participation used in this study (see chapter 2.1.2). In summary, youth are aware of their role, volunteer for the position, have the opportunity to seek information and collaborate with peers and adults, and have a certain degree of influence on their work.

Teach For All sees students as leaders who play an active role in their personal lives and the communities they live in (Teach For All n.d.-k). This especially includes education as an area of society that largely impacts a student’s life. Throughout the years, Teach For All has therefore not only worked with youth in the school context through the national partner organizations but also actively engaged young people in its work on different levels and through a diverse range of platforms. Teach For All states that they are committed to working in partnership with students and believe they are capable leaders and changemakers today as “those who have themselves experienced the inequities we are working to address, should guide and lead this work.” (Teach For All n.d.-a, 2). In a blog post published after an international youth inclusive convening, Sanaya Bharucha, Global Head of Student Leadership and Voice at Teach For All, describes that students especially value when participation feels like partnership with a shared sense of ownership and is not merely performative or tokenistic (Bharucha, 2025). In a later blog post that Bharucha published together with youth leader Raquel Jardim, they highlight the importance of including students in transformative processes, as young people are best equipped to challenge the status quo and prove in several examples around the world that they are already doing so (Jardim & Bharucha, 2026). Teach For All appears to recognize how rare ongoing and authentic integration of youth participation still is, even in the context of education, which shows in this reflection about one of their events:

Lindsey from Peru recalled her initial reaction to an invitation to participate in a global event: ‘WOW, is this real?’ Her infectious enthusiasm also cast light on a critical reality she later shared: ‘Spaces like these, where students are genuinely listened to, are still way too rare.’ It’s a statement worth pausing to consider. How much creativity, how much insight, how much potential remains untapped because we haven’t yet made these authentic, inclusive spaces the norm rather than the exception? (Bharucha, 2025).

Apart from numerous project- or event-based initiatives such as student participation during their conferences or sending a student delegation to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Teach For All organizes two more formalized and long-term youth participation projects, which will be introduced in more detail, namely the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC) and the Student Voice Accelerator (SVA). Several of the students interviewed for this study have been participants

of either of those programs, and staff members have been working with those students or programs directly or indirectly through their work.

3.1.2 The Student Leader Advisory Council

Teach For All has several advisory boards, such as the general Board of Directors and the Europe Board. Besides that, they implemented a student board to include student voice in their work. (Teach For All n.d.-b.)

This Student Leaders Advisory Council (SLAC) is an example of a youth council that is formally connected to the organization it is aiming to impact (Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 175), as already described in more detail in chapter 2.3.1. The SLAC was created in 2018 with a first cohort of students from across the network that remained in their role for two years, which became the regular length of a cohort. The main purpose of the SLAC is to include the students' perspective, as they are the ones mainly impacted by Teach For All's work. The students who are members of the council are currently or formerly taught by fellows or alumni of the respective national partner organization and are supported by them throughout their involvement. The council members collaborate with the global organization and the partner organizations on a regular basis in several projects and work with other advisory boards of Teach For All to contribute to their overall mission. Besides that, the students represent the national partner organizations and the network and frequently share their experiences and perspectives on various platforms in virtual and in-person speaking engagements. (Welcome Teach For All's 2026 Student Leader Advisory Council 2026.) Examples for that include (co-)facilitating workshops, holding keynote speeches, writing for Teach For All's student blog, or representing Teach For All's student delegation at conferences within and beyond the network (e.g. Teach For All's Global Conference, UNGA, etc.) (cf. Teach For All 2025-a; Teach For All n.d.-j). In early 2026, the fifth SLAC cohort was introduced, which consists of twelve students from nine different countries with ages ranging from 15 to 19 years old (Welcome Teach For All's 2026 Student Leader Advisory Council 2026).

3.1.3 The Student Voice Accelerator

Based on learnings and insights collected through seven years of SLAC and many more with youth participation in general, Teach For All started the Student Voice Accelerator (SVA) program, which is another student participation program of bigger scale on the global level. With this additional program, they aim to solve the problem that students should have a say about their future, deserve an opportunity to speak for themselves, and need to be included in decision-making and action, all of which they are often denied. (Teach For All n.d.-g, 1.) The SVA is a six-week-long program that aims

to (1) help organizations identify student changemakers, (2) help students to develop communication and leadership skills, (3) create a community of student leaders and student leader advocates around the world, and (4) support participating organizations and students to find and participate in local and global advocacy opportunities (Teach For All n.d.-f). The program targets students who care about the world and want to create change, teachers who are aware of the inequities present in their education systems and are willing to work towards changing the status quo, and organizations that believe in youth leadership and want to act as supporters. The SVA consists of four stages. The first one is the selection stage in which participating students are selected, and people to lead the program within the participating organizations are identified. During the second stage, students are supported to find their voice, connect with other participating students from across the world, and reflect on issues and global challenges they care about. Simultaneously, the program leads of the participating organizations learn how to amplify student voice and enable student contribution within their work. The third stage provides students with opportunities to share their voices, as opportunities identified by program leads are matched with students. Besides that, Teach For All identifies virtual and in-person opportunities for students to share their voice in speaking and writing, for example, students speaking at workshops, panels, and events, or contributing to blog posts, social media, and articles. In the final stage, participating students are part of a global community of young leaders. The students who participate in the SVA program are usually between twelve and 16 years old. Teach For All provides most of the necessary resources and leads the project to keep the effort for participating organizations as low as possible. (Teach For All n.d.-g, 2–3.) The cohort of 2025 consisted of 350 students and 150 educators from 20 countries across all regions and was co-created with over 35 students, teachers, staff members, and other stakeholders. To enable a wide range of students to participate, the material as well as the calls were delivered in eight different languages. (Teach For All n.d.-f.)

3.2 Data Collection

To answer the research question and the connected sub-questions, I conducted 16 interviews and collected written narratives, which were later analyzed in a multi-step coding process and served as the foundation for the derived future scenarios. Of the 16 interviews, eight were conducted with current or previous members of youth participation programs at Teach For All, two with chaperones who worked as fellows in a partner organization and supported a student during their participation, and the remaining six with staff members of Teach For All. At the time of the interview, interviewees were based on five different continents, and their ages ranged from 15 to 50 (age was assessed in a

five-year range). The age of students specifically ranged from 15 to 25. A more detailed description of background information regarding specific countries, exact age, or gender is not possible to ensure full anonymity of all interviewees, especially in a way that also prevents people familiar with youth participation at Teach For All from identifying individual participants. All interviews were conducted between the 12th of November 2025 and the 13th of January 2026 and lasted between 36:56 minutes and 01:22:12 hours. The details are shown in Appendix 2.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 3), which allowed to set certain foci within the topic of youth participation while leaving a large degree of freedom for interviewees to lead the conversation and open up new aspects (Ratcliffe 2002, 21). The guide was based on a combination of Andreas Witzel's (2000) Problem Centered Interview (PCI) and the seven-question approach by Ratcliffe (2002). One week prior to the interviews, all interviewees received a narrative question guiding the participants on a time travel to 2035 and asking them to imagine youth participation at Teach For All from their current position (e.g. a student leader is still a student leader in 2035, but 10 years have passed in which Teach For All worked to improve youth participation). Participants were free to choose whether to answer this question in a written or recorded style, or to add an extra 15 minutes to the interview and discuss their thoughts before the interview started. The data was collected with students, fellows, and staff members who currently are or recently have been involved in youth participation programs at Teach For All (e.g. SLAC or SVA, see chapter 3.1). This group of interviewees made it possible to gain an understanding of the perspectives and needs of different stakeholders involved, who may have different priorities when it comes to the future of youth participation within the organization (Döringer 2021, 266). The interviewees were contacted through a contact person at Teach For All, who, based on my research proposal, connected me to the interviewees.

The literature review, as presented in chapter 2, was used to narrow the focus of this research and identify keywords, topics, and questions of the interview guide, as well as the framing of the narrative question (Scheibelhofer 2005, 22; Witzel 2000, 2). The combination of a semi-structured interview and the narratives was well-suited, as it allowed to gain insights into every participant's experience, ideas, and wishes for the future of youth participation while initially being as free as possible with what aspects to focus on. Throughout the data collection process, the interviewer should remain open and flexible towards the process, which can be best achieved in a face-to-face setting (Döringer 2021, 268). As the interviewees were based in different parts of the world, 15 interviews were conducted using the video conference tool Zoom, and one interview was conducted via WhatsApp's video call function due to technical difficulties. The interviews started with a short general questionnaire to allow an understanding of some of the context and background from which the interviewee is

speaking, and for an overall easy and trust-building beginning of the conversation (Witzel 2000, 4). After that, the actual interview began either with the interviewee answering the previously shared time-travel question or, in the case of the three interviewees who shared their thoughts beforehand, follow-up questions to better understand or go deeper into their vision. The overall purpose of the narrative time-travel question was to invite interviewees to freely think about and envision a future based on whatever they deemed most important while not being influenced (even subconsciously) by the researcher. It also gave them some more time to consider, which increased the depth and quality of the answers. (Scheibelhofer 2005, 22; Witzel 2000, 5.) From the 16 participants, three sent their thoughts on the time-travel question beforehand. The remainder of the interview was guided by an overall open structure that allowed the interviewees to share their experiences and ideas about the present and especially future versions of youth participation, enablers, barriers, and the collaboration between youth and adults (Witzel 2000, 5–6). To ensure that the interview kept its open structure, the interview guide was merely used as a memory aid and flexibly adapted during the interview based on the flow of the conversation (Scheibelhofer 2005, 22). Throughout the conversation, I asked follow-up questions directed towards creating a better understanding, getting into details, validating the researcher's understanding, and re-focusing on the future (Döringer 2021, 268).

The language of all interviews was English, as this was the common language between the interviewees and me. It is important to note that this is not the first language of most of the interviewees and me, which may be a barrier for clear and detailed expression of ideas and visions. To create a well-informed analysis, all interviews were recorded and transcribed (Ratcliffe 2002, 26; Witzel 2000, 4). Based on the data protection and privacy policy declaration that was shared in a written style prior to the interview and again in shorter form verbally during the interview, all interviewees have agreed to this procedure. For transcription, the tool UTU Transcribe was used for 15 interviews, and one interview was transcribed with MAXQDA. All transcripts were later corrected for misunderstandings by the program and grammar errors, as well as anonymized prior to the analysis process. To ensure easy understanding and readability, repetitions and fillers were deleted. Gender neutral language is used in the transcripts to ensure anonymity of all people that interviewees may have referred to. The transcripts and the written narratives, as well as the notes taken during the interview were used as a primary source of data for this study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Considering that the literature on futures of youth participation is so far limited, the data-based approach of qualitative content analysis was chosen to structure and simplify the collected data. The

results of this multi-level coding process were then fed into a futures table to create four scenarios. In qualitative research, it is not possible to address large numbers of variables and cases (Tapio, Varho & Heino 2013, 53), and therefore, this study focuses on the most relevant aspects to answer the research questions.

3.3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is an analysis method that aims to generate a data-based understanding of the deeper meaning of text-based data, such as interview transcripts or narratives (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 105; Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1278, 1285). With qualitative content analysis, it is possible to use different kinds of text-based data and reach different depths of interpretation (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 105).

Within qualitative content analysis, there are several approaches to the process, which mainly differ in their coding scheme, namely the directed approach, the summative approach, and the conventional approach. For this study, the conventional approach to qualitative content analysis was used to derive six themes directly based on the data. In this approach, the coding scheme is derived from the data with no pre-determined categories, as all categories, initial as well as final themes, are based on the text and the participants' responses to open-ended questions. During the analysis process, the researcher reads all texts repeatedly to gain an overall impression, highlights important key thoughts, and then creates labels that become the initial coding scheme. The initial codes are sorted and organized into categories that allow meaningful clusters that can, depending on the number of clusters, be further organized into sub-categories, which are supported by direct quotes. Throughout this process, it is important to identify relationships among the codes and categories and follow a coherent process of systemic analysis to ensure trustworthiness. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1277–1279, 1285.) To ensure trustworthiness of the analysis, the qualitative content analysis borrows concepts from quantitative analysis, such as validity and reliability, and adds credibility, dependability, and transferability (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 109–110). This was addressed in this study through the selection of participants and by having a constant focus on the research aim and question (credibility), and through coding close to the data on the first level but aggregating to the general context for the final themes (transferability). The advantage of this approach is that it allows to gain information from the participants while reducing the risk of literature bias. One major challenge with this approach is the risk of failing to develop a complete understanding of the context and therefore failing to create categories that represent the data. The results of this analysis can be used to develop concepts or models. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1280–1281.) Or, as in this case, futures scenarios.

The conventional approach was chosen mainly because of the lack of literature on the precise issue under research. As stated in chapter 2, the literature used for this study borrows from familiar fields, and therefore, basing the analysis on that could have posed a threat of significant literature bias. Furthermore, the results of this approach support the argument that the used literature is relevant in the context of this study, as they largely align. The codebook that resulted from this analysis includes 196 codes, 26 sub-categories, and six themes and can be found in Appendix 4.1.

3.3.2 Futures Table

To create scenarios based on the gathered data and the themes that were derived through the qualitative content analysis, a futures table was used.

The method of the futures table is based on field anomaly relaxation and was created in the 1970s (Tapio, Varho & Heino 2013, 52). Field anomaly relaxation is a way to create alternative future scenarios in an ordered and transparent way (Rhyne 1995, 659). To create the scenarios, the different states of one theme, that was derived in the coding process, are structured in table form and then combined to create coherent, whole scenarios (Tapio et al. 2013, 52). Field anomaly relaxation suggests creating six to seven themes that are described in qualitative terms. Within one theme, it is important that the scope is neither too broad, as that would include too many factors within one theme to make sense of it, nor too narrow, as that can lead to a lack of possible future states. (Rhyne 1995, 665–666.)

Once the futures table with the themes is created, the individual cells are reorganized so that the table is structured based on the scenarios. To help visualize the themes and factors within the scenarios, the alternate future states can be color-coded. In the beginning, it can be easier to start based on one important theme that guides through the process. If the number of alternatives within one theme is smaller than the number of created scenarios, some alternatives can be used more than once. Irrelevant factors or factors that go beyond the scope of the research may be left out. (Tapio et al. 2013, 54.)

Once the scenarios are created, the ultimate step is to name and describe them (Tapio et al. 2013, 54), for example, by creating narratives or short stories. Thereby, it is important to explain the reasoning behind each scenario and for whom in particular it is supposed to be helpful, as the impact of every scenario depends on the awareness and belief in it (Rhyne 1995, 673).

For this study, the themes that were identified during the coding process were implemented in a futures table, and those factors that (1) were irrelevant for the research question, (2) would broaden the scope beyond the intended scope of this study, and (3) did not add any new factors for a future scenario were sorted out. The final futures table before sorting it based on scenarios can be found in

Appendix 4.2. The futures table was then used to create scenarios along two axes, namely ‘structure of youth participation’ on the x-axis from ‘inclusion’ to ‘integration’, and ‘enablers of youth participation’ on the y-axis from technical factors to social factors. The resulting diagram can be found in Figure 6 and in more detail as the sorted futures table in Appendix 4.3. The scenarios were created using a qualitative and prospective ILM approach (see chapter 2.5.3). Based on the futures table, four scenarios were created in a four-quadrant matrix that show different aspects of the six themes *Environment*, *Institutional Structures*, *Interpersonal Cooperation*, *Mindset*, *Structure of Participation*, and *Power Distribution*.

The decision to display the final results in the form of scenarios was made to increase the usability of the findings for organizations and institutions working with youth participation, as this approach adds to the envisioning of a future state the possible paths and decisions that could lead to this state. This especially shows in the findings connected to the y-axis of ‘enablers of youth participation’. Including these aspects is also beneficial for all further research endeavors, as it directly addresses the research gap that is also targeted in this study, namely the gap between the current practices, the theoretical knowledge of how youth participation should ultimately look like, and the insecurities and open questions on how to get from the former to the latter.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the data gathering and analysis process, ethical considerations were addressed. This is required for every research endeavor, however, of utmost importance whenever human participants are involved, as is the case in this study. The study is based on the ethical standards of the Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (TENK 2019) and the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU (GDPR, EU 679/2016). All followed measures for ethical research conduct are based on the principles of respecting the dignity and autonomy of human participants, and strictly avoiding any significant risks, damages, or harm (TENK 2019, 8). Individual participants, as well as Teach For All as an organization were informed about the aim and context of this study, as well as the collection, use, and storage of data, and gave their consent.

All collected data was handled and stored with utmost care. To create an open environment with the participants, all data was anonymized and strictly kept confidential. Prior to every interview, the participants were informed about the purpose and structure of this study, as well as the data collection, usage, and storage in a written (see Appendix 5) and oral way. All participants gave their consent to the interview being recorded for internal transcription purposes. Furthermore, they were aware that the recordings and full transcripts will at no point be published or available for anyone else but the

researcher. Individual quotes from the transcripts are used in this study in an anonymized way that does not allow any identification. Participation in the interview was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from their participation at any point without having to fear negative consequences. Recordings and transcripts were saved on my local device and the personal Seafire, the cloud provided by the University of Turku. The transcripts were stored and further worked on using the tools Microsoft Word and NVivo. All data was generally used and stored in accordance with the EU GDPR, and the exact collection, usage, and storage were planned in advance and communicated to the participants. (TENK 2019, 9–10, 14.) All personal data will be deleted by 2027 at the latest.

The student participants were all at least 15 years old. This minimum age requirement was chosen to ensure that all participants are able to fully understand and consent to the participation. Through this minimum age, no additional consent for the student's participation through a parent or guardian was required (TENK, 2019, 11).

4 Findings

The following chapter presents the insights gained through the multi-level coding process and the developed coding scheme. The discovered themes were used to create four scenarios and answer the research question ‘How can spaces in an NGO working for educational equity look like, that allow for real youth participation in 2035?’ and the sub-questions (1) ‘What works well and should be further developed to ensure successful youth participation in the NGO?’, (2) ‘What are barriers to real youth participation in the NGO?’ and (3) ‘How can youth and adults create meaningful partnerships that enable successful cooperation and what needs to change for that to be possible in the context of the NGO?’. The full codebook that was used for all further analysis and the creation of the scenarios can be found in Appendix 4.1.

Before presenting the developed scenarios, the detected themes of the coding process are introduced to allow a better understanding of the overall process as well as the structures and axes of the four-quadrant matrix that were detected. The categorization of codes into themes also allowed data-based insights into the three sub-questions. The presentation of findings of the sub-questions and the presentation of the scenarios are based upon the axes ‘structure of youth participation’ and ‘enablers of youth participation’, and the themes to ensure an easy-to-follow structure and emphasize the topics that were found to be of prime importance for the analysis of youth participation in the future.

4.1 Main Themes Affecting Youth Participation

During the coding process and the following categorization of first-level codes, six main themes were detected: (1) Environment, (2) Institutional Structures, (3) Interpersonal Cooperation, (4) Mindset, (5) Structure of Participation, and (6) Power Dynamics. The listing is in alphabetical order and no indication of relevance or occurrences in the data. Every main theme has several sub-categories, as can be seen in Table 2.

The first theme, *Environment*, describes the structures outside of the researched case that still impact youth participation within Teach For All. The second theme detected was the *Institutional Structures* that affect youth participation and includes resources, the collaboration of the global network, the structure of spaces, and the overall system and policies. The third theme is *Interpersonal Cooperation* and focuses on different aspects of human interaction, communication, relationship and community building. The fourth theme that emerged is *Mindset* and includes youth’s and adults’ current belief systems as well as ideas on how to get people ready for youth participation in the future. The penultimate theme is *Structure of Participation*, which mainly describes the way students are engaged, the kinds of projects they work on, the roles of students and adults, which students are

involved, and how students and adults collaborate. The final theme that was derived during the coding process is *Power Dynamics* and includes aspects of how power is distributed internally in the organization and how decisions can be made collectively.

Table 3. Themes and Sub-Categories

Source: own

Themes	Environment	Institutional Structures	Interpersonal Cooperation	Mindset	Structure of Participation	Power Dynamics
Sub-Categories	Discrimination & Inequality	Resources	Clarity & Transparency	How to get people ready	Projects Students are Involved in	Decision-making spaces
	Education System	Role of Partner Organizations & Accelerating	Communication	Student & Adult Belief Systems	Roles of Students & Adults	Power Sharing
	International Collaboration	Structure of Spaces	Community Building		Ways to Contribute	
	Societal & Legal Aspects	System Changes at the Organizational Level	Relationships		Which Students and How to get in Y-AP & Collaboration	

4.2 Enablers and Barriers

Looking at the future of youth participation in educational NGOs requires a critical analysis of what works well and what barriers exist in the present. During this research, different stakeholders, including students, fellows, and staff members, shared their perspectives and experiences, which allows to answer the sub-questions (1) ‘What works well and should be further developed to ensure successful youth participation in the NGO?’, (2) ‘What are barriers to real youth participation in the NGO?’. A full table of all detected enablers and barriers, categorized based on the previously introduced themes and sorted based on occurrence can be found in Appendix 6.1 (Enablers) and Appendix 6.2 (Barriers). Besides these insights generated from the overall data, the final interview question addressed what interviewees would change within the next ten years if they had all the power. The resulting list of wishes and ideas reflects the detected enablers and can be found as ‘Participants Wishlist for the Future’ in Appendix 6.3.

Enablers and barriers were found in all themes and most categories. Organizing them showed that they can be found on an axis of ‘enablers of youth participation’ that ranges from technical factors to social factors. These factors do not contradict each other, nor are they mutually exclusive, but they decide whether the focus of enabling youth participation lies on aspects of structure, resource, and skills (technical) or on aspects of communication, mindset, and networking (social).

4.2.1 Technical Factors

Environment: Discrimination and inequality were named as barriers to youth participation, especially different forms of structural discrimination, such as racism, sexism, or classism, but also the overall tendency that within participation structures certain characteristics, such as being extroverted, are favored. This was for example described by one student: “I feel like any problems of class, gender and race of students typically tend to play a big role, and I feel like there are many initiatives trying to foster student leadership and trying to make it a reality as fast as possible, they fail to acknowledge the ways in which that leadership can be stifled.” (Student 8). Besides that, participants mentioned structural barriers. Here, the inequality of visa provision was mentioned frequently, and many participants shared stories of missing out on opportunities because the time for visa applications was insufficient, or their country faced general issues getting visas, for example for events in the US or EU countries. When it comes to external influences on international collaborations, participants emphasized connectivity issues, especially in overexploited countries, and the language barriers in a context that is mainly English-speaking, while many people do not have English as their first language. Some participants also described societal and legal aspects as barriers. They pointed out a

societal norm that does not include young people in decision-making on any level or describe cultural barriers regarding the position of girls in society. On the enabling side, participants stated the need for equity (category of discrimination & inequality) and specifically envisioned a future in which all students have an enabling environment with quiet places and the necessary resources, as explained by one student:

Those points about having a space at home wherein you could join the meetings and share your ideas. Just think about this household where the student is sharing one room with five other members, six other members of the family. Where is the space for the student to sit? And there is no space. There is no freedom to talk as well, because as soon as they are going to unmute themselves to talk, there will be a lot of background noise, and student gets interrupted, the whole meeting flow gets interrupted, and then also student will feel unconfident, they wouldn't want to share, they will feel embarrassed about it. (Student 2)

When it comes to the education system, participants pointed out the positive effect it would have to implement participation from a young age in formal education.

Institutional Structures: One frequently named enabler was resources, including budget, organizational capacity (time), the time of participating students, and the need of students to have access to opportunities to participate. However, participants addressed the issue that these resources always exist in tension. When it comes to the structure of spaces, participants emphasized the benefits of having youth in physical spaces, as a member of staff shared an experience from a past conference: “I remember there was the [...] conference [...]. We had a student participating in a session and they shared their work really, really strongly. And we had positive feedback.” (Staff 5). An idea that a participant envisioned would have a very positive effect in this regard was the creation of local Teach For All hubs around the world to allow for more in-person connections:

I just imagine that regardless of where you are in the world, there is a physical hub connected to Teach For All that you can go to, contribute or work on whatever initiatives that you're in. So, let's say that a year from now, or actually in 2035, I'm still in (country), there is a Teach For All hub that I can go to on a given day and contribute in-person. (Student 8).

Additionally, participants acknowledged the benefits of virtual spaces that allow for cheap and easily accessible connections. Furthermore, one repeatedly named enabler was the use of technology and AI to overcome language barriers and to be more inclusive. On the other hand, participants identified the challenge that involving students requires extra-time during the onboarding process and greater logistical effort to bring students to in-person events. On a system level, participants pointed out that policies and structures, often impacted by external regulations, may not always be made with the idea of youth participation in mind. They concluded that sometimes there is a gap between knowledge and implementation, as one member of staff stated: “So, this is what I mean by the policies, the structures,

the systems underlying it because I feel like at an individual level, honestly, we're doing a lot and as much as we can do with what we have, but it's then still one person's fight against the system as opposed to the system being designed for this.” (Staff 6).

Interpersonal Cooperation: To enable youth participation, several participants pointed out the positive effects of a network that goes beyond the scope of Teach For All and includes outside stakeholders, such as external organizations, schools, and families of participating students. These networks can be seen as an additional human resource and social capital.

Mindset: To overcome insecurities and support a positive mindset towards youth participation, especially for adults, participants suggested engaging in active preparation and training, and emphasized the need for certain skills and a necessary background knowledge. Connected to that, participants described it as a challenge that students need a certain degree of background knowledge before being able to meaningfully contribute.

Structure of Participation: Some participants suggested new forms of participation that they imagined would be enabling for the impact of youth participation, namely, to make the participation a paid experience, for example in the form of internships or apprenticeships. Furthermore, they presented the idea of creating a student fund for student-led projects or student community projects. Overall, participants emphasized that in the future they would like to see more students involved from all across the network: “So, I feel that it's important to guarantee that every background is represented and that every country is there because every country is facing different problems and it's important to bring those problems to that table in order to co-create something together maybe.” (Student 3). Finally, participants emphasized the importance of actively unlearning tokenism, which was perceived as a societal norm and therefore may affect the mindsets of people and result in adults subconsciously behaving differently when working with students, as described by one member of staff: “And so we're building our students belief in themselves, how do we build our adults belief in themselves and help both of them unlearn these ideas of hierarchy and age and power that are so ingrained in all of us through our education, through our life, through everything we go through.” (Staff 6).

Power Dynamics: In power dynamics, participants emphasized the benefits of having students in policy decision-making spaces, as one member of staff stated, “for me one of the biggest enablers of youth engagement, youth leadership within the work I do, with people like the UN, with the OECD is the budget to be able to bring young people to those rooms” (Staff 1). Concerning the power distribution within the organization, participants envisioned that students have power and work in leadership roles, while adults are supported along the way to share power. This was described by another member of staff when envisioning a day in the future:

in 2035, I see the students leading that meeting, one of them is chairing it, they're setting the agenda, they're holding us accountable to deadlines and actions. And I'm no longer the holder of the space. I'm just one resource among many. (Staff 6)

Participants emphasized that there are currently no or very few mechanisms for students to engage in decision-making and that students, especially if underage and not employed by the organization, are not legally protected to make decisions. Furthermore, they perceived it as a barrier that decisions sometimes need to be made rather fast which makes it difficult to involve students who have other full-time obligations.

4.2.2 Social Factors

Institutional Structures: Participants envisioned a positive effect when partner organizations increase youth participation on the national level, for example through student councils or an overall closer collaboration with the participation structures at Teach For All. Participants also stated that youth participation on the Teach For All level would benefit from an acceleration of participation through fellows and an increase in support and appreciation for fellows working in a participatory manner by their national partner organization. This domino effect was mentioned by one student when saying, “the moment the teacher feels they're not supported, that trickles down to the students not feeling supported. So, it is a large domino effect because we have to remember the teachers are just human too.” (Student 7). Regarding the overall system, participants saw it as enabling to have a room in which all voices are heard, also through feedback mechanisms, and ground realities that are actively involved, as described by another student: “Students bring what nobody else can: the current perspective on the current system; students don’t need all the expertise, they bring their expertise and THAT needs to be valued” (Student 4). Participants described how spaces and processes should be student-centered and therefore need to be adapted for youth participation in different ways:

So, when you are working on a project, right, with the adults who are familiar with all the terminology or the formality that is there, or the formal concepts that are there, you can just dive into it. And when you're working with a student, you have to break down everything on every single step. It's not like once you do it and then everything is fine, you have to do it again and again, right?” (Student 2)

This change of structure includes everyone being aware of youth participation and addressing the participation processes already during the onboarding of new staff members. Furthermore, it could include the creation of more student-led spaces or the creation of student-style spaces for adults.

Interpersonal Cooperation: One enabler that came up repeatedly was the overall clarity and transparency when it comes to value and effects of the work, but also the understanding of the student role among all stakeholders. This was emphasized when one student explained the need for clarity:

“if we were more informed or if it had been explained to us where that goes or what is done with our opinions and our results of work, then it would be a clearer perspective for us as students on our role, on our participation.” (Student 1). On the other hand, they currently identified it as a problem that students may not know what they can do to participate. Some described a lack of communication between students and adults as a reason for that. One student shared: “I think it would be better to communicate more, because as I mentioned most of the times, we are not aware of the opportunities that we have in Teach For All.” (Student 5). Later they added: “I didn’t know I can reach out to someone just from Teach For All network and we can do something together if they are basically willing to do that but as I mentioned, I think Teach For All is kind of this huge network and this huge opportunity and especially us students, we need to use that opportunity as much as possible, even for students who are in that network.” (Student 5). Concerning collaboration within spaces and projects, the need for a general level of transparency came up repeatedly to ensure students know why certain decisions were made, what their contribution was, and why there may at times be limits to how they can contribute. Overall, participants shared that a lack of communication and adults not always being ready to listen to students is a societal problem that has implications for youth participation at Teach For All, even though all participants perceived the communication within Teach For All as above societal standards. That was for example described by one student:

things that I appreciate: when they [Teach For All] do reach out and ask for your opinion, they do take it [seriously] which I really appreciate, because sometimes I feel like there have been spaces [outside Teach For All] that I’ve been in in the past, but they’re like ‘oh, do you have any opinions on this?’ and that was it. And I would have many opinions on it, and then they would ignore it. (Student 8)

Furthermore, participants emphasize that students and staff need a common understanding and need to learn how to successfully communicate intergenerationally:

And adults giving them training on how to engage with young people, don’t ask them questions about ‘what do you want to major in?’ ‘what do you want to do after graduation?’, I mean, asking them important question, right? Like ‘how do you envision a good future of education?’ or something like that, related to the topic itself, not about the future of just the person. (Student 3)

Half of the participants described the enabling effects of community building, which was further divided into connecting individuals and creating systems for a long-term community. Connecting individuals included the need to connect students in participation programs, but also stakeholders in general, and especially giving students the opportunity to network. The aspect of long-term community came up when one participant, for example suggested the establishment of a SLAC alumni network. Connected to that is the enabling effect of relationships, where participants described

the need for adults to be willing to learn from students, create a feeling of safety and trust, and make space for vulnerability and connection beyond the professional work. A special emphasis was on the overall positive impact that supporting adults can have, as one student described their experience:

And I think truly there's no other way of saying it, I just think it made me the person I am. So, it would be the greatest thing for me to see other kids and young people, students, to feel the same way because, I don't know, it's truly just I don't know I'd be the [...] I am if it weren't for Teach For All and the things I learned and the people I met. I think it's a big one, the people I met is a huge one. (Student 7)

Mindset: When it comes to belief systems, participants stated the need for a positive and open mindset to allow for youth participation to become normal and see students as leaders and able to create system change. Connected to that, many participants emphasized the importance of adults, but especially students, believing in themselves and the benefits that come with youth participation. When asked what currently hinders the development of this belief system, students and adults observed a problem of adults being scared and insecure about students' general ability and their own ability to create a safe and supportive environment for students to participate. One member of staff described the wish to have under-confidence of adults removed in the future:

one thing I'd want to change is for the adults to stop being afraid of working with students. I think there's genuine fear, both in terms of, I don't know what the students can contribute, I don't know if this is going to be a good use of our time, as well as I don't know, if I have the skills to be able to work well with them; I don't know, if I can create meaningful enough spaces and opportunities for the students, and so I think just to in some way remove that fear and the barrier and that segregation and separation, which is why in my envisioning, I see all of us as partners of different ages, from different places, but we're all in it together, some people are older and some are younger, but we're all in this together. (Staff 6)

and later adds "I also think the fear is coming from a good place, where they want to do it well and they're worried they can't." (Staff 6). On the student side, participants described that participation initially often happens outside of the comfort zone of students. These insecurities also showed in the interviews, where many open questions and insecurities came up, including how to upscale participation to a Teach For All level, how to involve younger students, and overall, how to envision something where there is so little pre-knowledge and experience on. Finally, especially the students agreed that within Teach For All, there is a great level of awareness of youth participation and willingness to increase and improve collaborations with students, which they perceive as an important enabler. When asked how to get people ready who may still be insecure about youth participation, participants emphasized creating awareness and spaces to experience participation. One student reported the benefits of experiencing youth participation:

I think the people will learn how to interact with students through experience and through exposure. I think exposure is really important in all these situations. You're going to learn with time. You're not going to expect everything to be perfect from day one. And that's normal. (Student 4)

Structure of Participation: Regarding the role of students and adults, 14 participants envisioned that having students and adults collaborate on the same level would be a great enabler, as for example envisioned by one member of staff:

one big thing is that the distinction between who's an adult, who's a student, who's a learner, who's a teacher is a lot more blurred. It's almost irrelevant. And we're all working as partners together. Some partners are adults, some partners are students, but we're all in this together. And I think that's the overall theme of it. (Staff 6)

More specifically, the role of the adult should include empowering and supporting the student, listening actively, and overall acting as a guiding mentor whenever needed:

I think that a lot of confidence in the students to participate comes from the adults around them. So, that is very important. We need more adults. I think we have adults in Teach For All right now as well, who have been the support system for the students. (Student 2)

Furthermore, adults need to act as a translator and backend supervisor when students may lack knowledge on terms or organizational processes, and as a gate-opener to enable students to participate in existing opportunities. Students were envisioned in different roles, ranging from negotiators, sources of expertise, and consultants to active participants who are held accountable, are involved in the whole process, and participate in the everyday work of the organization. Next, participants emphasized that successful youth participation means that students decide what to say without the adult trying to influence the message. Students especially appreciated that their current involvement includes being able to challenge processes and adult decision-making, which was described as valuable also for the future:

I feel, yeah, they did a very good job of making us feel we could question even what we were being taught, you know. Not just be silent participants in the whole thing, I feel like we could actively question them about things, and they would give us their perspective. And we would say our perspective, and even if we didn't agree everything was, all opinions would be valid and respected. (Student 7).

On the other hand, participants described it as a challenge that there is a lack of representation among the participating students, which results in a quite homogenous group, as one student stated:

I'm also thinking about that representation issue. We were different, but in terms of our profiles of what we were good at, we were quite similar, I would say. We had similar strengths and similar skill sets in a way. (Student 1)

Therefore, they wished for the youth group to be diversified to ensure more representation in the future. Participants also emphasized the importance of good and ongoing collaboration between students and staff where there is room to fail and learn together while having fun, as envisioned by one student: “Students are not invited in as an exception or an act of public recognition – they are already there, shaping the agenda, challenging assumptions, and co-owning the outcomes alongside adults.” (Student 1). One aspect that was described as an enabler several times on the way to reach this collaboration was overcoming the age lens, as another student describes it:

You know, because also the way you present yourself, you introduce yourself in a conference matters, right? You know when you're given the badge with your name, so like ‘Dewina Leuschner’, and on the other side it says ‘student’. In Teach For All conference, that is what happens, you will only see student. But when you see ‘young leader’, that's better, right? That's more encouraging for students because they feel ‘wow, I have transitioned from being a student to being a young leader, now I'm doing change in my community’. So, the way you are perceived by yourself and by others is important too. (Student 3)

Power Dynamics: Participants emphasized the need to make decisions collectively to make participation meaningful and create collaboration that is based on equal partnership. Concerning the power distribution, participants envisioned a change that allows students to take ownership and have a certain degree of power, especially in the future, while some even envisioned them in leadership positions. Overall, participants described a tension between responsibility and sharing power, and some students and adults emphasized that students should not carry too much responsibility. Finally, several participants state the wish that decisions should be made collectively, with the final call being made by the person who works closest to the decision, which could be a student. In concrete terms, one member of staff stated “I think we should make decisions collectively, including today's adults and today's youth and so that's how I think in terms of participation in projects and whose voice should be prevailing” (Staff 2) and another member of staff explains “Now if the students came with an idea and they were like ‘I want to own this project, I want to do this’ they can ask me or anyone else ‘what do you think?’ and it's the same thing and I can tell them ‘no this is horrible’ and they can take it or leave it because at the end it's their call.” (Staff 4).

4.3 Collaboration Between Youth and Adults

As youth participation by definition includes the cooperation of youth and adults, the third sub-question (3) ‘How can youth and adults create meaningful partnerships that enable successful cooperation and what needs to change for that to be possible in the context of the NGO?’ was addressed directly and indirectly throughout the data collection process. The results regarding the structure of this can be organized on an axis of ‘structure of youth participation’ that ranges from

inclusion to integration. Inclusion hereby refers to a style of participation in which a certain group, in this case students, is included in the work and organization but remains a closed group with its own mechanisms and clear borders towards the rest of the organization. Integration, on the other hand, refers to the students being integrated into all existing structures and processes within the organization without general or structural lines between traditional members of the organization and the newly integrated students. The differentiation between inclusion and integration is visualized in Figure 5.

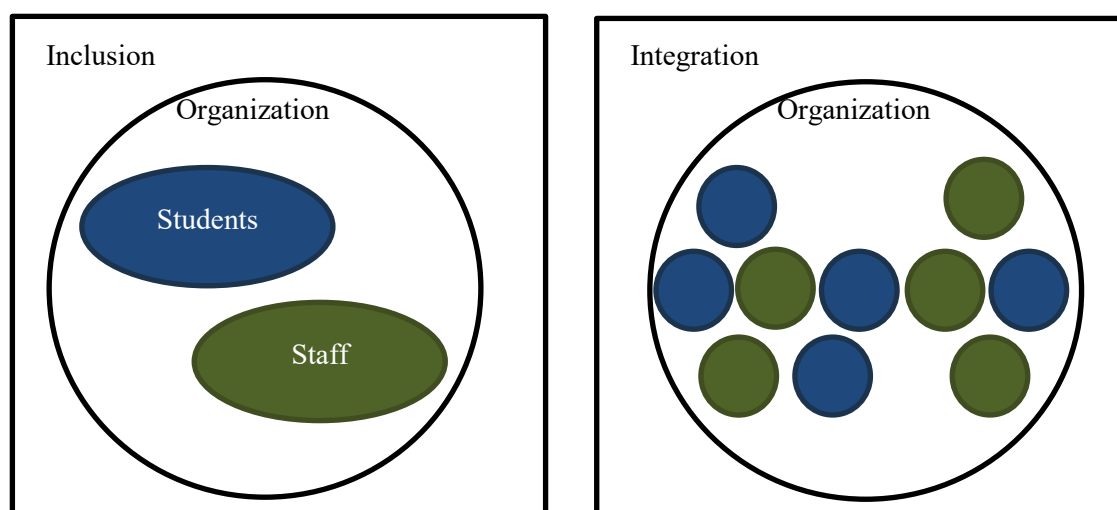


Figure 5. Inclusion vs. Integration

Source: own

For some participants, these two approaches could go hand in hand with students being part of a student body that is then integrated into existing teams based on projects. Others described the two options as mutually exclusive.

4.3.1 Inclusion

The inclusion-based participation was described as having students mainly involved whenever they are directly impacted or in programs that are specifically designed for students. When asked about the future of youth participation and the collaboration between youth and adults at Teach For All, some participants preferred to grow and create established mechanisms, such as SLAC or SVA, like for example one student stated “So, first of all like continuing SLAC, it's such a good initiative, I imagine SLAC to be there.”(Student 3) and one member of staff explained “I mean today we have a mechanism like SLAC but SLAC is small and limited. How can we see SLAC, for example growing and having representation not only in terms of voice but also into implementation, into all these spaces, including the initiative I lead.” (Staff 2). Another student emphasized the success of SLAC in comparison to several other modes of participation they experienced: “Because I think the best thing

was that we were able to work through SLAC, like SLAC was working great for us. SLAC was working the best” (Student 2).

4.3.2 Integration

The integration-based approach to participation was described by participants as having students as part of the core team, on all projects and all spaces, based on their interests and strengths, with no general formalized structure of youth participation. Participants who favored this approach saw it as enabling to integrate students fully into existing projects and adult groups, as described by one member of staff “it wouldn't be like a SLAC, like this is a separate student council that we bring in when we need to or want to. It would be like students are pervasive in all of these spaces.” (Staff 3) and one student added

The adults don't only need to give us instructions, tell us what to do, make us do things, and stuff, but there needs to be more communication between the adults and the students [...]. Let's say something, it's just a collaboration between the students and adults. Other than just the adults telling me what to do, we should be making a change together and co-creating, co-connecting, or co-leading together, and not just them leading with us behind. (Student 4)

When asked about specific projects that students should be involved in, participants named funding, priority planning, recruiting, research, and advisory boards as spaces in which students should be present. One member of staff described a normal day at Teach For All in 2035 like this:

The difference between 2035 and today is that today we consult students when we are designing the projects. And we consult them when we are implementing an activity. In 2035, I think, they will be part of the core team. So, when I reach out to the project teams, they will be included, when we collect feedback, we collect it from adults who are involved in the organization or in the implementation of the project. So, practically, I think they will be part of these agile project teams rather than just being consulted, and we reach out to them occasionally when there's an event or something. (Staff 2)

One specific example that was mentioned repeatedly was the use of shared documents, where students and adults agreed that in their vision for the future, these are co-created and co-designed to plan and exchange ideas, as one student stated

I would love someone to reach out to me and say, ‘hey, would you like to make the Google Docs?’, you know? Like, ‘would you like to think about this from scratch?’ and not just like ‘hey, here's a link to this five page google docs, do you have any thoughts? Do you want to do this for us?’, you know? So, I would love to get a blank page at some point (Student 8)

and a member of staff envisioned a day in 2035 as

maybe in the afternoon, I'm planning something, I don't know, maybe we're working towards the next Global Conference, whatever it is. And I open up a planning document, and it's not me creating that document, but I see coursers from students and adults from across diverse places in it, working together. Not students being consulted on our work, but actually from scratch, building that skeleton and that strategy together with us. (Staff 6)

Also, the same member of staff later emphasized that in the future there should be no room if youth are not present:

But in 2035, I want us to be in a room that doesn't function without young people. Like, there is no room if there's no young people in it. And really, it shouldn't be a fight to say 'oh, no, we can have two kids at the event' and staff 6 is saying 'no, please, can we have five kids at this thing?'. But anything we do doesn't get done if we're not doing it in partnership with our students. (Staff 6)

To successfully make integration happen, students, fellows, and staff described the need to blur the lines between students and adults and overcome the age lens, as one student explained: "It doesn't matter what your age is, just as your ethnicity doesn't matter, just as your race doesn't matter, just as your gender doesn't matter, your age shouldn't matter as well. It should matter what you're bringing to the table and its value." (Student 4). Students and fellows also emphasized that being in spaces does not always need to be connected to having an active role, but they wished for students to be welcome to observe, listen, and learn, as one student suggested:

(if) they're organizing a new initiative and they want to have a student there, reaching out to that student and being like 'hey there's this thing I'm working on, I really want you to contribute to this part, I think that you can really help co-facilitate it, but I would also like to invite you to be in the early stages of it as an observer if you'd like to see how we're making initial decisions about it and then if you have any thoughts, feel free to voice them as well but no pressure to', almost like a low stakes entry into whatever it is that they're doing. (Student 8)

Overall, the most important aspects for Y-AP to be generally successful, regardless of whether they are organized in an inclusive or integrated manner, are positive and trustful relationships between youth and adults, transparent and open communication, supporting structures and policies, organizational capacities, collective power and decision making, and the belief of youth and adults in themselves, each other, and the shared work. Details on these factors can be found in sub-chapter 4.2.2 on social factors.

4.4 Scenarios of Youth Participation in 2035

Based on the six themes of *Environment*, *Institutional Structures*, *Interpersonal Cooperation*, *Mindset*, *Structure of Participation*, and *Power Dynamics* (for details see chapter 4.1-4.3) and with

the help of a futures table (see Appendix 4.2 and Appendix 4.3), four scenarios were created. A four-quadrant matrix was used to reorganize the sub-categories, which is displayed in Figure 6. On the x-axis is the ‘structure of youth participation’ with inclusion on the left side and integration on the right side. On the y-axis is ‘enablers of youth participation’, ranging from technical factors in the lower part to social factors in the upper part. The differentiation between the different parts of one axis is not necessarily mutually exclusive, however in this scenario model, they show where the focus lies. Parts of the individual scenarios could also overlap or be adapted in various ways however organizations see fit. The four scenarios that were created within the matrix are *Growing Institutions*, *Connected Institutions*, *Systemic Integration*, and *Relational Integration*. All four of them are generally based on what participants described as preferable futures and are therefore equally good or bad in accordance with Dator (2009, 7). All four of them come with certain benefits but also challenges. Their preferability largely depends on the context and the person looking at them. Some scenarios may include aspects that already describe a status quo at Teach For All but were described as preferable also for all future endeavors. All scenarios describe a future state in 2035, connected with certain foci, chosen paths, and strategic decisions that have been made between 2025 and 2035.

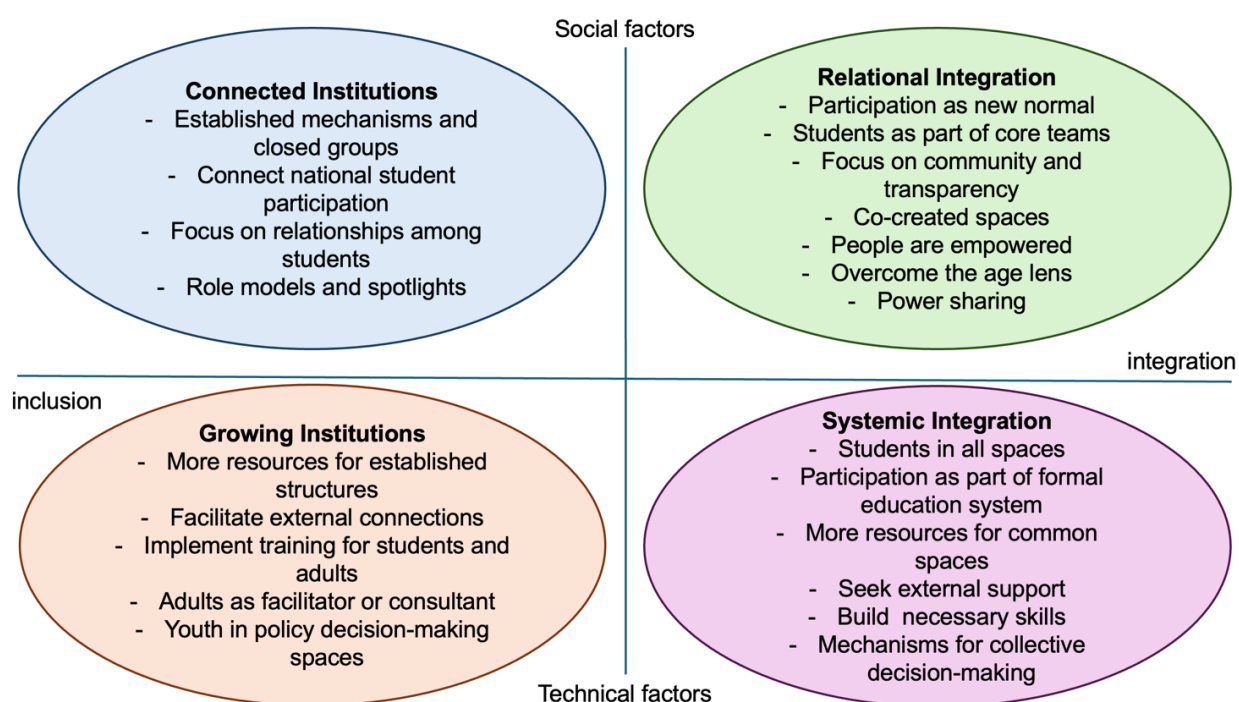


Figure 6. Four Quadrant Matrix of Scenarios

Source: own

4.4.1 Scenario A: Growing Institutions

Growing Institutions aims towards a future state in which the overall focus is on more participation projects and bigger scopes of participation. Participation in general is organized in the style of

established mechanisms and clear structures. Key elements are that the organization will step by step put more resources of organizational capacity and budget into developing established structures and including more young people. Ultimately, in 2035, the SLAC and the SVA still persist in a similar structural way as they do right now but reach a far greater number of students. Besides that, Teach For All decided to focus on connections with external stakeholders of youth participation and educational equity to create a network and exchange skills and best practices. With the help of these external connections and by using the existing internal expertise, Teach For All made the choice to implement training sessions for students and adults working in participation projects, so that the needed skills are actively built up. In 2035, all students and adults working with the participation projects receive these trainings. The overall structure of the participation is in the hands of staff members, however, depending on the exact project, adults can either be facilitators of spaces or consultants of student-owned projects. Teach For All used their external connections and the growing budget to increase the presence of their student body in policy decision-making spaces, so that by 2035, their appearance at UNGA, OECD events, and many more became standard.

Environment: The external environment shows overall developments in equity on a social and political level. That includes that visa processes are much easier, the effects of several forms of discrimination have declined, and all students benefit from an enabling environment, regardless of where they are based. International external barriers have been overcome, such as connectivity issues, and new regulations are in place that make it easier to work across time zones. Furthermore, through negotiation processes and awareness campaigns, legal and cultural barriers were overcome so that the participation of students is legally and culturally supported across the network.

Institutional Structures: Throughout the years, Teach For All has increased the budget for youth participation, especially for SLAC, SVA, and other programs, significantly. This was possible because they actively sought and found a champion donor for the youth participation. The youth participation happens in roughly pre-determined formats where students are involved in projects and collaborate on the details (e.g. Teach For All facilitates SLAC, but there are certain parts within SLAC that are co-designed by students). The flow of information within the network is flawless, so that students across the network are aware of all the opportunities to participate at Teach For All. Thanks to the higher budget, there are more in-person spaces that students can attend, for example, at least one student conference per year. Besides that, virtual spaces are still used for regular communication. The use of different technical support systems expanded, so that in 2035, live translation at all virtual and in-person events is standard in any given language, and transcripts and protocols are fully AI-generated. Teach For All also used the budget to invest in research about best practices of youth participation to constantly learn and improve its work.

Interpersonal Cooperation: The focus of cooperation since 2025 has been heavily on external connections. Teach For All strengthened ties with other international organizations that work with youth participation, for example at the UN. They use these to create more opportunities and include their students in different spaces. Besides that, they started to actively address the families of participating students and their schools in information campaigns and include them in their work to achieve a stable support network for their students. All these connections increased the necessity of protection mechanisms, which were developed and implemented to ensure that students are safe while working with different international institutions.

Mindset: Teach For All did a skill-need assessment and based on that prepared formalized training sessions. By 2035, all students and adults receive formalized training to prepare them for the work in a youth participation project. That may include general leadership, intergenerational communication, critical thinking, and others.

Structure of Participation: In 2035, there will still be the SLAC and the SVA, as well as several students-only programs that aim to help students develop certain skills or are connected to certain projects and campaigns. Students and adults have different but clearly defined roles. Especially in student-led spaces, the adult has the role of a consultant and is responsible for the back-end work. In adult-led spaces, the adult works as a facilitator, expert, and supporter of the students. The student's role depends on the exact project but is clearly defined at the beginning of the project. Overall, established mechanisms have been growing throughout the years, so that by 2035 SLAC, SVA, and other projects reach significantly more students. Still, the number of students participating will be fixed, and participation decided through a rigorous application process.

Power Dynamics: By 2035, students are a normal and expected presence in all policy decision-making spaces that Teach For All has connections to, such as the UNGA and several OECD forums. Within Teach For All, student decision-making is limited to the projects that students work on as part of their participation in the established structures and projects.

4.4.2 Scenario B: Connected Institutions

Connected Institutions does not focus on having more or bigger participation structures but on improving the efficiency of the existing structures and connecting those, especially within the network. By 2035, Teach For All has established mechanisms for youth participation, such as SLAC and SVA. Beyond that, Teach For All has focused on connecting youth participation projects in the national partner organizations and empowered and supported them to increase their efforts in this regard. Another focus has been on developing and supporting lasting connections among the students who participate in their programs. To encourage students to participate, they established portals,

forums, and other mechanisms to introduce role models and spotlight students and projects that successfully engage in youth participation across the network.

Environment: The environment has largely stayed the same as it was in 2025, which means that issues of inequality, especially regarding visas, connectivity, and language barriers, persist.

Institutional Structures: Teach For All realized that youth participation should accelerate through all levels of the network and therefore started to collaborate closely with all partner organizations. They have supported and encouraged them to implement inclusive participation structures on the national level, so that by 2035 all partner organizations have a national student council, similar to SLAC. All these councils, as well as SLAC, are connected to each other and work together on projects. Within the Teach For All participation projects, there is an emphasis on student-led spaces, which means that students create and design their own projects and processes and sometimes also create student-style spaces in which they invite adults, based on examples such as the Kids Education Revolution (KER)⁵. Not all adults work directly with students on a regular basis but there is one (or some) staff members who work on the participation projects as their main work. To make sure that within these projects all ideas and voices are heard, there are feedback mechanisms for the students that include regular reflections, problem identification, solution seeking, implementations of solutions, and ultimately improvements.

Interpersonal Cooperation: Teach For All has engaged in analysis and conceptualizing of the roles of students and adults, and by 2035, everybody is aware of their own role, the role of other students and adults they work with, as well as what these roles do and do not include. Because not all adults work with students regularly, there may be a lack of communication in certain projects, as adults who are not used to collaboration may not be aware of the student's state of knowledge and therefore expect certain knowledge that the student does not have or communicate in ways that leave the student feeling unseen. Overall, Teach For All focused on networking with and for their students, especially by creating a vibrant and well-connected student community. Students from all across the network who are members of participation projects on the national or global level are connected through groups and forums. That also includes the alumni, for whom Teach For All has built a SLAC alumni group that by 2035 connects former members and supports them in using the network of experts around the world.

Mindset: To establish an awareness and a positive mindset towards youth participation, Teach For All focuses on presenting role models and spotlighting students and projects who are members of participation projects, as well as adults who support those students. This helps adults to understand

⁵ Youth-led organization in India (see: <https://www.kidseducationrevolution.org/>)

the kind of guidance that students may need along the way and gives students a clear idea of what is possible and what is expected of them.

Structure of Participation: Students are involved in established youth participation structures that include regular meetings and occasionally in projects, mainly when they are impacted. The role of the adult in 2035 is to facilitate spaces, empower students, listen to student voices, and take their contributions seriously for the projects they are involved in. Adults never speak for young people. The student's role is to share their own perspective and the expertise they gained through experience. Students are consultants and give feedback on certain aspects of projects and the work of Teach For All and partner organizations. This mostly happens when students are invited to share or present in certain spaces. Participating students are often rather extroverted and keen to speak in virtual rooms or at in-person events, which matches their role. Within these characteristics, the group of participating students is diverse. Due to the collaboration with national partner organizations, by 2035 there is at least one student from every partner organization involved also in participation projects on the global level. All participation projects focus on students feeling respected and everyone having fun along the way.

Power Dynamics: Teach For All makes sure that students do not carry more responsibility than they feel comfortable with. Still, students are empowered and supported to take ownership of their own student-led projects that they initiate and implement at Teach For All.

4.4.3 Scenario C: Systemic Integration

Systemic integration focuses on integrating students into existing spaces and processes at Teach For All, mainly through structural adaptations, resource provision, and policies that are actively made to allow students to be active participants. By 2035, students are in all spaces across Teach For All. Students are ready to contribute in a meaningful way because participation became a part of their formal education journey. Besides that, more resources are allocated towards common spaces. To support the implementation of the integration and to improve the process constantly, Teach For All has connected with external organizations working in similar ways. These connections are also used to help students and adults build the necessary skills. Throughout the years, Teach For All has worked out a set of mechanisms and guidelines that allow for collective decision-making in all spaces and projects.

Environment: The external environment is more equitable thanks to overall societal and political developments that led to a decrease in discrimination, easier access to visas for people regardless of their backgrounds, and an enabling environment for all. Participation is now a normal and integrated part of all formalized education and starts from a young age across all institutions and levels.

International external barriers, such as connectivity issues, language barriers, and incompatible time schedules have been overcome through technical or political solutions. Similarly, legal and cultural barriers have been overcome so that all students can safely and legally participate.

Institutional Structures: Teach For All focused on providing more organizational capacity to ensure that youth participation can be integrated into the day-to-day work. By 2035, all staff members have the time to involve students. Besides that, students have the needed time to participate as it has become part of their formalized education to engage in participatory projects, for example through electives. Students are involved in all physical events, either as general participants or as part of their project groups. While the logistics of having students there, especially for underaged students who require a chaperone, are big, the organization commits to making this investment, which is possible thanks to a champion donor. In all other cases, virtual spaces are used for everyday work that includes students and adults. Technical support and AI are used in virtual and in-person spaces to increase inclusivity and overcome language barriers. Teach For All started to build physical hubs all across the network, so that by 2035 it is a normal practice for students, fellows, alumni, and staff who are currently in the same region to meet in person and work together on projects or simply to connect. Between 2025 and 2035, there has been an audit of all policies and structures within the organization so that by 2035, youth participation is enabled and supported by all policies and became a normal practice. To constantly improve youth participation, Teach For All invests in research about new ideas and best practices.

Interpersonal Cooperation: Teach For All focuses on a broad network and community, starting with empowering alumni from across the network to take the positive mindset on youth participation into all other spaces and institutions. They also established connections with other youth participation projects, for example from the UN, to create a support network for the students who work in Teach For All teams. Furthermore, they integrated the schools and families of the students through awareness campaigns and active cooperation to ensure the students have an overall supportive environment. With all these connections, Teach For All has established protection mechanisms to ensure that students are safe when working within and beyond the network.

Mindset: The mindset of students and adults was gradually built and supported in an iterative process and through training. Teach For All especially started to support skills such as resilience, creativity, and critical thinking.

Structure of Participation: The integrated participation has been growing throughout the last decade, so that by 2035 there are at least one or two students on all teams within Teach For All. Generally, there are no rooms anymore in which students are not present. Examples of where students are now integrated into the work teams include but are not limited to advisory boards, priority

planning, recruiting, funding, and research. The adult role is to act as a translator whenever necessary, which means they break down organizational language to ensure the students understand and translate student contributions back to organizational terms, mainly for external communication. The student's role is to be involved in the whole process, especially throughout project implementation. Having the student in the project early on results in better communication and collaboration and ultimately wastes fewer resources, as discussions are held together, and no decisions need to be reassessed later in the process. Teach For All created opportunities for students to participate in paid roles, such as apprenticeships and internships. Overall, participation does not follow any formalized structures. While there may be spaces in which students do not feel comfortable to actively contribute, they are still welcome to join, observe, and learn. In all situations, students and adults are aware of the agreed-upon role. The overall number of students involved has gradually increased, and students who want to participate can do so. As students work on everyday projects at Teach For All, it may happen that students within the project change, for example when one student graduates or doesn't have the time to work in the project any longer. A new student can be onboarded in these cases, as it is important that there is always a student present in the project. In the past decade, Teach For All has invested time and budget to support adults to unlearn tokenism and adultistic behavior, and in 2035 regular awareness campaigns and events are happening.

Power Dynamics: Teach For All has actively worked on structures and mechanisms for how to include students in decision-making and overcame the problem that students were not legally protected to do so. Even in the fast-paced decision-making of Teach For All, students can now be included because they can contribute more time and are therefore more available through the integration into the formalized education system. Overall, students have power within the projects they work on. Besides that, it is possible for students to formally be in leadership roles, such as lead or co-lead of a project. This ultimately led to a change of power structures. The tension between adults having responsibility and being willing to share power has been overcome through new rules and policies to involve students. These policies were co-created with students and in accordance with national laws.

4.4.4 Scenario D: Relational Integration

Relational integration focuses on the integration of students in existing projects through community building and relationships. Participation is the new normal, and participating students are part of the core teams of Teach For All. The focus of all work is transparency and community. Spaces are co-created by students and adults, and people empower each other. Age does not play a major role

anymore, and students are called ‘young leaders’ instead. Within all projects, power is equally shared among all people working on the project.

Environment: The participation of young leaders became the organizational and societal norm and is implemented in all spaces. This also includes formalized education, where it starts from a young age and across all institutions and levels.

Institutional Structures: Teach For All has established and increased cooperation with the national partner organizations. All partner organizations have also established integrated participation models and have their own young leaders. Staff and fellows on all levels between the classroom and Teach For All are supported to and appreciated for enabling participation that ultimately accelerates from the classroom level to the global level. To achieve that, Teach For All has created awareness campaigns and cooperations to learn with, from, and for each other. All spaces and processes were co-created and adapted with the young leaders. Throughout the process, the spaces became more chaotic but also highly generative. Introducing the young leaders as new stakeholders took time but after it was implemented, there was a great benefit for all involved, and Teach For All keeps dedicating time to it in 2035. Overall, students are at the center of all work at Teach For All. Within projects and work processes, the voices of young leaders, staff, and fellows have equal weight. The young leaders are an integral part of all work, and everyone knows about their presence and what they do. This awareness became an important aspect of the staff onboarding processes to ensure that all staff members are ready to work with the young leaders. Teach For All decided to focus on involving the expertise from the ground reality in their work, which was one reason to introduce the integrated young leaders model. To ensure that the participation is constantly improved, Teach For All works on creating a positive feedback culture.

Interpersonal Cooperation: The integrated style of participation was rather new for everyone. To make sure that young leaders know what they can do, the organization emphasized transparency and clarity on their work and processes, as well as the opportunities for young leaders. This ultimately results in young leaders being able to see and understand what they contributed and what the resulting value is. Young leaders and adults within teams and projects have worked together to create best practices of intergenerational communication with the help of internal and external resources. Overall, there is a great emphasis on community building and connecting people across all age groups. That happens, for example through forums, internet pages, and networks that help people to understand the community and interact with whoever fits best into their project. This could look like a network-wide LinkedIn. Young leaders established a young leaders community across the network to empower each other. Partner organizations that have integrated participation models are connected among each other and to Teach For All. Projects on all levels and organizations create synergies to

learn from and with each other. In 2035, there is a general emphasis on interpersonal relationships between young leaders and staff. Teach For All actively supported a work culture that encourages adults to learn from, with, and for young leaders and vice versa. They created space for informal connections and made room for vulnerability through community events and team-building exercises that are a regular part of all work. Ultimately, this results in relationships of trust and young leaders feeling safe.

Mindset: Curiosity and openness were the key to getting all people ready for integrated participation. Teach For All started to create rooms and opportunities for youth and adults to experience the collaboration from the beginning, first in some small-scale projects, and in 2035 on all levels. To meaningfully participate, young leaders need a certain amount of background knowledge, which they acquire through the participation itself as they grow into the positions and teams they are part of. Through these experiences of participation, by 2035 the overall organizational mindset is supportive of the young leaders and sees their participation as the new normal. In the past decade, adults faced their fears and insecurities in the created small-scale rooms to experience participation. These rooms were designed as safer spaces where the adults gradually learned to believe in themselves and the young leaders. In 2035, adults see the benefits of having the young leaders for themselves and the organization, and all challenges or insecurities can be communicated and solved collectively. For the young leaders, this kind of participation was rather new but through the rooms of experience, they learned to step out of their comfort zone and grew in the process. Step by step, young leaders learned to believe in themselves and what it feels like to be a leader and part of system change, while remaining in a safer space where they can fail, try again, and be insecure at times.

Structure of Participation: Young leaders can be in all teams and projects as part of the core team, depending on their strengths and interests. In their work, adults and young leaders are on the same level. The role of adults is mainly to be connected to the young leaders and the mission. Teach For All knows that it is important for adults to understand the young leaders' realities and also potential structural barriers that they may have to overcome to participate. In the past, adults acted as gate-openers when they opened up their teams and spaces to fully integrate and include young leaders, and were willing to adapt and recreate those spaces. In 2035, adults guide and empower the young leaders in their work when necessary. In general, adults value, listen to, and take what young leaders say seriously, and empower them to speak for themselves. The role of the young leaders is to be involved in the whole process on a day-to-day basis. Just as their adult partners, they are held accountable for their work. Young leaders negotiate their position and regularly challenge adults, just as adults challenge each other. Whenever new students enter the project, those who have already worked in the project have a special role in onboarding the new ones and supporting them throughout their

experience. Because of the very flexible and integrated style of participation, there are as many ways a young leader can contribute as there are young leaders. All participation is based on the people and the project. Young leaders come from around the network, however, as the number of young leaders that can be integrated in the processes is limited, there may be a lack of representativeness as one young leader always speaks from their own perspective. Adults and young leaders have a positive mindset towards mistakes and errors and tackle all challenges together. One important aspect in all participatory project work is that all members have fun. The process to create this kind of participation was iterative throughout the years.

Power Dynamics: All decisions within projects are made collectively. Final decision-making power resides with the person who is closest to the work, which may be one of the young leaders, depending on the structure of the project. Adults were supported to share power as much as possible and educated about what works within the legal frameworks that may pose challenges. Therefore, they are now responsible for creating an awareness of the legal possibilities for the young leaders on their teams.

5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify barriers and enablers of successful youth participation, conditions for collaboration between youth and adults, and ultimately preferable paths towards the future of youth participation in education NGOs, based on the example of Teach For All. The four scenarios described in the previous chapter and the findings regarding the sub-questions suggest six themes that are important for the future of youth participation, namely (1) Environment, (2) Institutional Structures, (3) Interpersonal Cooperation, (4) Mindset, (5) Structure of Participation, and (6) Power Dynamics. Overall, the results show that the future of youth participation can have different foci regarding how the participation is implemented and what the main enablers are. Participation can either be implemented in the form of specific programs for young people (inclusion) or by integrating young people into existing projects and teams (integration). This can either be enabled through a focus on technical factors, such as budget, skills, time, and structures, or through social factors, including communication, intra- and interorganizational collaboration, and relationship building. Aspects of all six detected themes are also found in the literature review of this study (see chapter 2), which supports the initial argument that literature from participation in policy, school, and futures contexts can be borrowed as a foundation to research the case of youth participation in educational NGOs.

The following chapter will compare the findings from the data with existing literature, first focusing on enablers and barriers, and following focusing on Y-AP and collaboration. Finally, the created scenarios will be analyzed based on the frameworks and models presented in chapter 2.1.2.

5.1.1 Enablers and Barriers

Overall, the enablers and barriers found through the data of this study and the ones addressed in the literature largely align. Literature often used examples of youth councils and structured participation, which is similar to some current practices at Teach For All and is therefore also addressed in interviewees' futures visions (cf. Blakeslee & Walker 2018 2; Collins et al. 2016, 140; Ho, Clarke & Dougherty 2015, 53).

Several aspects addressed by the interviewees that cannot specifically be found in current literature are concerned with the international, organizational, or contextual focus of the case. First, the positive effects of having an equally enabling environment and physical spaces and events as parts of the participation have not been heavily covered in the literature. Furthermore, the hindering effects of working across languages, a lack of technical resources for online connectivity in certain parts of the world, and differences in societal and legal norms. This may be the case because all those aspects are

specific to the global scale of Teach For Alls work, which is a scope that is rarely considered in participation literature, as the focus is often on examples where participants collaborate in the same context (e.g. schools) and therefore under similar conditions. Second, the effects of some system changes at the organizational level, the option of student integration in existing teams and projects, and the challenge that comes with adults not being used to having a cooperative relationship with youth have been identified through this research but not addressed in the literature. One possible explanation for that is that Teach For All works in a very specific, organizational context. Most literature focuses on more structured environments where youth have a clearly defined space, such as schools and policy-making.

Environment: The interviewees' idea to implement participation in formal education to support youth from a young age to work collaboratively and make their voices heard (see chapter 4.2.1) is frequently supported by literature, where schools are described as starting points of participation (Hart 1992, 37). Global inequality and structural discrimination, which are barriers described in this study's data, are based on century-old belief systems that heavily impact youth participation and oftentimes become obvious in whose voices are heard and whose are not. That also includes challenges of visa provision and connectivity (see chapter 4.2.1), which mostly affect people from countries in the Global South and overexploited countries. Furthermore, it includes different forms of discrimination such as sexism, racism, and classism, which impact societal structures and therefore, organizational structures, as described in this study's findings. Especially the effects of structural discrimination pose a challenge to the overall aim of youth participation to achieve social justice and lead to a construct of youth participation that is heavily based on Western standards, which leaves out valuable perspectives, insights and experiences (Augsberger et al. 2024, 2; Botchwey et al. 2019, 256–257; Hart 2008, 26; Kumi et al. 2025, 8–9). The interviewee's description that youth participation favors extrovertism connects with the critique by several researchers that youth participation structures are oftentimes adult based. This leads to an overall system that favors a participation and leadership style coming from management and therefore young people who are best able to adapt and conform to that (cf. Matthews 2001a, 311; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 561; Perry-Hazan & Somech 2023, 1211).

Institutional Structures: The enabling effect of having sufficient resources in time and budget is a main criterion in both, data from this study and the literature and therefore can be understood as one important factor when it comes to successful youth participation (Akavarapu 2025, 9; Grace et al. 2024, 7; Kurki 2015, 15; Teach For All 2025-b, 17; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20). When it comes to the positive effects of networks and supporting institutions, the literature mainly addresses schools and families as important factors but does not address greater institutional cooperations (Hart 1992, 37; Nurmi 1991, 11). Meanwhile, the results of this research identified institutional collaborations as a

main hope for improving and upscaling youth participation in the future, which shows that collaboration should not be limited to internal processes but should be the overall guiding principle. Especially the positive effect of having youth as representatives of ground realities in projects concerning education, as emphasized by several interviewees, has been shown throughout the research and the literature (Augsberger et al. 2024, 1; Mager & Nowak 2011, 47). However, Augsberger et al. (2024, 1) as well as Mager and Nowak (2011, 47) mainly address this as a benefit for the adults working on the project and the outcomes, while this research also emphasizes the ethical need to create a student-centered culture within the organization that affects staff onboarding and ensures that all voices are heard, which requires research. Some participants describe a gap between knowledge and implementation and add the perception that not all structures and policies support youth participation. Shier's Five Levels of Participation directly address the different steps of implementing participation in organizations from the opening stage to the opportunity stage and finally the obligation stage. Applying this stage model to the case and the research leads to the assumption that currently, Teach For All is working within the opportunity stage, where the organizational commitment is there, and certain opportunities are created with slight variations depending on the project and area. The next step would be to expand these opportunities across the whole organization, including all members, and adapt structures and policies accordingly. (cf. Shier 2001, 110.)

Interpersonal Cooperation: The importance of clarity and transparency regarding roles, value of the work, and limitations of participation has been emphasized throughout the results of this study and in the literature (cf. Matthews 2001a, 314; Cavet & Sloper 2004, 617). Community building, similar to institutional networking, was emphasized in different ways by the interviewees, while the literature mainly addresses the family and school environment. According to this study's results, institutional networking can create a system of accelerating youth participation. In the context of Teach For All, this can mean having fellows enabling participation in classrooms, partner organizations enabling participation on the national level, and ultimately, Teach For All enabling participation on the global level (see Figure 7). In this example, the empowerment of people who enable participation works downward and youth participation accelerates upward, from the classroom to the global level. The positive effect of community on a personal and organizational level identified through this research contradicts the assumption that youth do not have a lobby (Kiili & Larkins 2018, 414; Kumi et al. 2025, 7–9; Nir & Perry-Hazan 2016, 180–181). This shows that either Teach For All is a special case that has already overcome this lack and created a network of organizations lobbying for young people, or that, in general, the theoretical insights are behind the practical norm. The challenge of youth not knowing what they can do as part of their participation and lacking a vision of

what may be possible in the future, as described by interviewees, is addressed by Augsberger et al. (2024, 6) regarding the power distribution but also in general by Nir and Perry-Hazan (2016, 178–179). This lack of awareness of what participation could include not only hinders current participation programs from reaching their fullest potential but also poses a barrier to the development of participation, as one participant described that it is hard to envision the next steps of something one knows so little about. One of the main barriers for youth participation addressed in literature is adultism, which shows in a way of adults not being open to listen and communicate with young people (Harris, Wyn & Younes 2008, according to Black et al. 2014, 41; Sloam 2007, according to Collins et al. 2016, 141; Mitra 2004, 652). This contradicts the findings of this study. All participants who talked about communication issues mentioned them as a theoretical barrier rather than something they had experienced or described situations where a lack of communication was more of a structural issue, with individuals not being aware of when more communication would have been needed. A resulting question from this difference is whether the experience of adultism in education organizations is, in some instances, rather a symptom of a lack of awareness of certain needs than a problem of an opposing mindset. While these two roots of the problem may require different solutions, they are not mutually exclusive, and both can be true depending on the context, organization, or individual.



Figure 7. Acceleration of Youth Participation

Source: own

Mindset: The combination of getting people ready for participation through training or through exposure and learning-by-doing is an aspect where the results of this study align with the literature. While some interviewees described these two options as mutually exclusive, Zeldin et al. (2000, 8, 45–48) describe exposure as one possible form of training and emphasize the benefit of learning in real-life environments, especially for youth. One barrier that was discussed in a slightly different way in the literature than it was described by interviewees is the effect of adultism on youth participation. While both agree that a supporting mindset of the adult is important, literature is heavily focused on the negative attitude of the adult towards having youth in participation processes (cf. Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Bessel 2009, 305; Kiili & Larkins 2018, 416; Matthews 2001a, 314; Zeldin 2004, 83–84). The results of this study suggest that the reason for a lack of a supportive mindset is mostly insecurity and a fear of not doing it well on the adult side, which is only occasionally suggested in the literature and not described as the main root of the problem (Black et al. 2014, 39; Grace et al. 2024, 4; Tisdall & Davis 2004, 136). The data of this study also suggests that one reason for adults not being ready is a lack of awareness of the student's position, background knowledge, and reality. Ultimately, this study's results and the literature describe different reasons for a lack of adult readiness, which requires different approaches to solve this issue (cf. Bessel 2009, 301; Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 2; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20; Juliussen et al. 2024, 1106; Wallin 2003, 71). On the youth side, the most important aspect mentioned by interviewees is for the young person to believe in their own voice and their ability to participate, which is also described by Checkoway (2011, 342) and Zeldin et al. (2000, 5).

Structure of Participation: The results of this study describe that the role of students and adults depends on the context of the collaboration and the project, mainly based on whether a project is youth-led or adult-led. Most contexts still have in common that adults play a technical supporting and social/emotional empowerment role. The results of this study and the literature align when emphasizing that the most meaningful level of participation is achieved when youth and adults co-design the projects and collaborate on all stages of the program (Cavet & Sloper 2004, 616; Demneh & Zackery 2023, 1; Grace et al., 2024, 3; Wallin 2003, 71). While this approach is envisioned by students, staff, and fellows in this study, in the literature it is mostly described as a theoretical idea of a final state of being, with little insights on how to get there. This could be an explanation for the high level of insecurity regarding this form of participation. Knowledge and experience about this form of participation seem to be either limited or not highlighted enough. Within participation processes, the results of this study confirm the importance of diversity and representation as it was described by Neuhooff et al. (2023, 2) and Black et al. (2014, 12). This also includes the barrier of having mainly already very active youth in participation processes, which results in a quite homogenous group and

poses a threat to representation (cf. Augsberger et al. 2024, 6; Checkoway 2011, 342; Matthews & Dollinger 2023, 563–564; Tisdall & Davis 2004, 132; Wyness 2009, 548). Finally, the results of this study and the literature align in pointing out the importance of Y-AP and good cooperation between participating youth and adults, especially emphasizing the importance of communication, flexibility, and relationships based on mutual trust and respect (Arkedis et al. 2023, 26; Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 7; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20).

Power Dynamics: The results and the literature emphasize the need to have young people in decision-making spaces, also concerning policy decisions. The data of this study shows that the current reality requires adults to work as gate-openers for decision-making spaces, as the reality for most is that they are adult-led. However, Augsberger et al. (2025, 10) and Wallin (2003, 71) state that youth should have access to those spaces without adult gatekeepers. The data of this study indicate that the preferred state from the literature needs to be enabled through policies and structures that formally include youth and give them the right to participate without depending on the goodwill of adults. Further, the results suggest the need for a redistribution of power in decision-making to achieve youth participation. While this is generally also addressed several times in literature (cf. Akavarapu 2025, 10; Augsberger et al. 2025, 10; Wallin, 2003, 71), interviewees differentiated here between an overall power distribution on the organizational level and the power distribution within certain projects and processes. In the latter, interviewees envision a future in which youth take ownership, hold leadership roles, and share power with adults. For the former, several authors describe the implementation of more equal power structures mainly as an issue of infrastructure and of the will of all stakeholders to adapt those. Meanwhile, interviewees pointed out that when it comes to decision-making on higher organizational levels, such as funding, finance, and structures, there are barriers regarding legal requirements that play an important role. That means for example that the organization and its employees are protected whenever they make decisions that also may have negative consequences, which is not necessarily the case for youth, especially minors. Ultimately, this leads to a tension between sharing responsibility and remaining on safe legal grounds and raises questions about how legal conditions can and should be adapted to make power sharing easier in the future.

5.1.2 Youth-Adult Collaboration

When it comes to ways of contributing, the results suggest two clearly distinct ways of participation, namely formalized institutions of youth participation, such as councils or boards (inclusion), or integrated participation in the existing structures of the organizations (integration). While interviewees mostly described either integration or inclusion as rather distinct options, in the

literature, formalization is described as an overall enabler of participation (cf. Black et al. 2014, 9; Cavet & Sloper 2004, 1). This suggests a third option of combining integration and inclusion by formalizing parts of the integration or having aspects of both in parallel structures. A combined approach raises the question of how to balance flexibility and adaptability to accommodate individual needs and preferences, which is more present in integration, while also using the enabling effect of having clear structures and policies that guide people through the process and ensure longevity of participation, which is a characteristic of inclusion.

In general, aspects such as diversity among the people, having shared values, building relationships, and having a common approach to the work have been emphasized by interviewees in various forms, which largely align with the concepts of CL and Y-AP as described in chapter 2.4. These aspects also show that especially the lenses, strategies, and outcomes of the TACL framework (see chapter 2.4.1) appear to be an overarching guide and belief system for the cooperation and participation at Teach For All today, and participants' vision for the future. The six themes and subcategories derived from the data overall align with the four lenses of TACL, (1) seeing students as leaders already today, (2) seeing teachers as learners and not only as those sharing knowledge, (3) seeing the surrounding community as power and ultimately (4) seeing the work towards teaching as collective leadership as systemic (Global Institute for Shaping a Better Future 2025, 29, 37–46). The final scenarios that were created based on the results of the research reflect the aimed outcomes of TACL, namely, wellbeing, connectedness, awareness, agency, and mastery. This indicates that overall, the models that Teach For All works with and develops are also a guide for their participatory processes.

In more detail, the data of this study emphasize the importance of authentic partnerships that seem to go deeper than mainly improving work outcomes and address the need for trust and mutual respect to support the development of students as leaders and help them to fulfill their potential through participation, which is also addressed in publications by Teach For All (cf. Teach For All n.d.-a, 3). This aspect aligns with the concept of Y-AP as described by Zeldin et al. (2013, 388). Furthermore, the results of this study and the literature emphasize the importance of allowing errors when establishing participation and Y-AP, sharing accountability and learning along the way (Teach For All n.d.-a, 26). Still, the results here indicate that while the awareness of the need for this approach is there, the implementation is something that several participants wished to improve in the future. This could be a result of the overall insecurity and fear of doing something wrong, mainly on the adults' side, which has been described in detail in the previous chapter. Connecting this to the vision of open communication, mutual empowerment, and clearer structures indicates a need for adapted policies and the courage to try new ways of participation. Next, the envisioned futures from this research emphasize the need to overcome the age lens and support a mindset that sees people based on what

they contribute rather than their age. Several interviewees suggest blurred lines between youth and adults and changing roles of leadership within projects, depending on expertise. This approach has been addressed mainly by Irabor-York et al. (2023, 9), who also point out that, depending on the context, everyone can be a leader, follower, learner, or teacher and suggest seeing age as nothing more than one characteristic among many. However, it seems to contradict most other literature, as already through a distinct wording, it is made clear that youth and adults are perceived as distinct groups.

Connected to institutional structures, the findings of this study support that Y-AP and CL require resources (Teach For All 2025-b, 17) and adapted policies and structures (Arkedis et al. 2023, 18–19; Teach For All n.d.-a, 17; Matthews et al. 2018, 24).

When it comes to interpersonal cooperation, the data of this study identified values, which are supported by CL and Y-AP frameworks, such as transparency (cf. Teach For All n.d.-a, 26), community and relationships (cf. Akiva et al. 2014, 1845; Arkedis et al. 2023, 18–19; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20), and common understanding (cf. Centre for Strategic Education 2023, 9). Interviewees also pointed out the importance of skills such as intergenerational communication to improve participation in the future. While the results of this study mainly identified intergenerational communication as a need but do not indicate next steps or further implications, resources such as the guide by Irabor-York et al. (2023, 13–14) can provide a narrower understanding of what that means and how it could look like. For example, the guide's checklist (Irabor-York et al. 2023, 13–14) could be used as a starting point to fill this gap.

To establish a mindset that is supportive of Y-AP and youth participation, the results suggest creating spaces to experience these kinds of participation, either in a safe and small environment or in a real-life context. This is especially supported by the Y-AP framework as described by Teach For All (Teach For All n.d.-a, 17–22). While the fact that their theoretical framework and the results align suggests that there is an overall awareness of the positive effect of these experiences, participants emphasized that this should be a much more common practice for all students and staff in the future. The importance of students and adults believing in themselves to enable Y-AP and CL is one frequent outcome of the analyzed data, while the literature on Y-AP and CL addresses this mainly regarding students (Zeldin et al. 2014, 340). Overlooking the insecurities and fears that adults bring to shared spaces seems to be an issue that affects many other aspects and hinders overall development. Adulthood and the structural discrimination of young people are inarguably a barrier that needs to be addressed and treated as such, however, in spaces that actively work on youth participation, the data suggest that there might be an awareness of this structural problem. Literature is heavily focused on this aspect

and while the results do not play this down, they open up the question of how to support adults in believing in themselves, overcoming their fear, and empowering them so they can empower students.

Power sharing is a basic condition for collaboration and effective partnership, as it is the baseline that enables youth and adults to work on the same level. The results of this study indicate that to make decisions collectively, leadership needs to be disconnected from its managerial definition and reinterpreted. Interviewees pointed out that experts and leaders must also include those stakeholders who bring an understanding and experience that is closest to the issue, which is also addressed in the literature (Arkedis et al. 2023, 12). Irabor-York et al. (2023, 6) emphasize that before a power redistribution can take place and a future state of equity can be achieved, it needs an understanding and critical reflection of current power dynamics, which seems to be the first step before the power redistribution, as suggested by the interviewees, can take place. Furthermore, the results of this study and the literature emphasize the importance of having youth in decision-making processes to enable Y-AP (cf. Zeldin et al. 2014, 339), however, the results of this study indicate that currently legal regulations may be a barrier to fully implementing this. The connection between outside legal barriers and inside collective decision-making points in two directions for further development: First, doing what is possible within legal regulations, and finding out how legal regulations can be affected to allow for more participation. And second, the importance of transparency along the way to make clear what decisions are made with which power distributions, where the limitations are, why they are there, and what happened with any input and feedback that participating youth gave for any decision. All of this enables youth to take ownership, not only of the projects they are working on but also of their role and participation in the process.

5.1.3 Scenarios – Real Participation?

After contextualizing all the individual aspects that make up the identified scenarios, including the enablers, barriers, and conditions for collaboration between youth and adults, the final scenarios are categorized according to the frameworks of youth participation introduced in chapter 2.1.2 and analyzed regarding the definition of youth participation used in this study. The criteria to define real youth participation used in this study are (1) youth is aware of their role, the decision-making processes, and their impact, (2) youth volunteered for their position and the work they are doing, (3) youth have the opportunity to seek information and consult with peers or participating adults before and while engaging in participation, and (4) youth have a certain degree of influence on the spaces they work in and their own role.

Before getting into the scenarios individually, it needs to be emphasized again that after a certain threshold that defines whether something is real participation at all, there is no objectively better or

worse participation, but the assessment depends on the context (Hart 2008, 23–24). Therefore, a higher rung on Hart’s Ladder of Participation, a higher level on Shier’s Five Levels of Participation, or a higher position in Mitra’s Pyramid of Participation is not necessarily the most favorable scenario.

The categorization of all scenarios is summarized in Table 3.

Table 4. Categorization of Scenarios

Source: own

Scenario / Model	Hart (1992)	Mitra (2006)	Shier (2001)
Scenario A: Growing Institutions	Sixth rung (occasionally seven or eight)	Second level (occasionally third)	Between third and fourth level, obligation stage
Scenario B: Connected Institutions	Sixth rung (occasionally seven or eight)	Second level (occasionally third)	Between third and fourth level, opportunity stage
Scenario C: Systemic Integration	Not addressed in classic model, ‘Incorporation’ according to Botchwey et al. (2019, 263)	Second level (occasionally third)	Between fourth and fifth , obligation stage
Scenario D: Relational Integration	Not addressed in classic model, ‘Incorporation’ according to Botchwey et al. (2019, 263)	Second level (occasionally third)	Between fourth and fifth, opportunity stage

5.1.3.1 Scenario A: Growing Institutions

Growing Institutions describes a future state in which participation at Teach For All is organized in formalized structures and closed programs specifically for students. Only a certain number of staff whose work touches upon the participation structures directly work with students. Over the last few years, the resources for youth participation in forms of time and budget have been increased, external partnerships have been built, and the skills of youth and adults have been developed through training (for details, see chapter 4.4.1).

According to Hart’s Ladder of Participation, the general concept of Growing Institutions is closest to the sixth rung of the ladder, ‘Adult initiated, shared decisions with children’. Within the projects that youth are involved in, they share the decision-making power with adults, and it is ensured throughout the participation that youth understand the project, their role in it, and the role of the adults they are working with. Occasionally, parts of Growing Institutions can be classified on the seventh or eighth rung of Hart’s ladder model. Individual projects that are initiated and carried out by the youth, with adults supporting only when necessary and asked for it, are on the seventh rung, ‘Child

initiated and directed'. This could for example be the case when youth come up with the idea of having a workshop for other students and plan, design, and carry out that workshop by themselves. Other projects could be initiated by youth but further co-designed and co-developed with adults, after the youth invited them in to join for certain roles, which would describe participation on the eighth rung 'Child initiated, shared decisions with adults'. An example for this could be a workshop that youth came up with and drafted but then invited adults in to fulfill certain roles, co-design, and co-facilitate the workshop. (cf. Hart 1992, 12–14.)

Based on Mitra's Pyramid of Participation, the scenario of Growing Institutions can be classified as mainly the second step, 'Collaborating With Adults', where youth and adults work together on certain projects. The collaboration is marked by clear roles of youth and adults, a partnership of trust and mutual respect, and the establishment of a shared understanding of the project and the process. Individual projects within the general participation program that are initiated by the youth can occasionally also belong to the third type of participation, 'Building Capacity For Leadership', as this is the case whenever young people take ownership of the process. Adults in those projects play a supporting role and are not the ones making decisions. (cf. Mitra 2006, 7–8.)

Shier's Five Levels of Participation add the perspective of where in the process an organization currently is, differentiating between the opening stage, the opportunity stage, and the obligation stage. As the scenario of Growing Institutions is heavily focused on formalization and adapting policies and structures as a way to enable youth participation, it can be argued that it has reached the obligation stage. Regarding the level, the scenario can be classified in between of the third and the fourth level, leaning more towards the latter one. On the third level, the perspective of youth is consulted and taken into account. The fourth level adds to this that youth are part of decision-making processes and are present when decisions are made. The exact level of participation in this scenario depends on the individual project. (cf. Shier 2001, 110–115.)

Overall, this scenario is real youth participation according to all models and the definition used in this study, with adults in charge of the external program design and collective decision making on details and internal projects and processes. Youth are aware of their role, volunteer for it, have the opportunity to consult peers and adults, and have an impact on internal decisions through the collective decision-making processes.

5.1.3.2 Scenario B: Connected Institutions

The scenario of Connected Institutions describes a state in which participation is organized through established mechanisms and in closed groups. The enabling factor that has been focused on is mainly

the connection among network members and stakeholders and the community building for participating students (for details, see chapter 4.4.2).

On Hart's Ladder of Participation, Connected Institutions would overall be on the sixth rung, just like Growing Institutions, as it is based on a similar structure. The external design in this scenario is mainly adult-initiated, while the youth share decision-making power internally and in specific projects with full awareness of all components. Some projects that are initiated by youth and either fully carried out by them or carried out collaboratively with adults can be classified on the seventh or eighth rung of the ladder. (cf. Hart 1992, 12–14.)

Similarly, the classification based on Mitra's Pyramid of Participation is also aligned with that of Growing Institutions. Generally, connected institutions can be categorized as the second step of the pyramid, 'Collaborating With Adults', as youth and adults co-design and co-facilitate the projects. Individual, youth-led and youth-implemented projects can be classified on the third level, 'Building Capacity For Leadership'. (cf. Mitra 2006, 7–8.)

Finally, Connected Institutions also describes the same level of Shier's Five Levels of Participation as the scenario of Growing Institutions, namely between the third and the fourth level, leaning more towards the fourth. Especially all internal projects and decision-making can be classified as the fourth level of participation, as youth and adults co-initiate, co-design, and co-implement projects and make decisions collectively. However, as the focus of this scenario is more on community and connections, which organically supports youth participation and less on structures and policies, this scenario would be on the opportunity stage of implementing participation, where participants are committed and aware of ways to include youth, without it being a binding regulation. (cf. Shier 2001, 110–115.)

The scenario of Connected Institutions can therefore also be classified as real youth participation, with a greater focus on the opportunity to seek information, especially through the close collaboration among peers. Besides that, the factors are similar to the scenario of Growing Institutions, with youth being aware of their role, volunteering for it, and being involved in decision-making.

The similarity in classification of the first two scenarios is based on the fact that the used frameworks analyze the structures and outcomes of participation models, without differentiating between main enablers and the paths chosen to get to those points. However, the scenarios Growing Institutions and Connected Institutions mainly differ in their enablers and ways of focusing their work, not in their structural frame.

5.1.3.3 Scenario C: *Systemic Integration*

Systemic Integration describes a future in which there are students integrated in all spaces and processes across the organization. Participation is a formal part of all education systems, and therefore

structurally supported and a societal norm. Teach For All invested time and budget in the process of developing this state of youth participation, helped youth and adults to acquire the necessary skills, and established mechanisms for collective decision-making (for details, see chapter 4.4.3).

A fully integrated way of participation in all structures of the institution, without general differentiation between the roles of youth and adults, is not described in Hart's original Ladder of Participation. The way towards this future state can be described as the sixth rung of participation, as in 2025, the power within the organization, all teams and projects mainly lies in adult hands, and therefore it needs an adult-initiated process to transform these practices. The final state of Systemic Integration is a state where youth and adults together left the ladder and created a new common ground. Within individual teams and projects, the participation can range from the sixth to the eighth rung, depending on whether it is initiated by the youth or the adults and carried out collectively or by the youth alone. However, projects can also be fully cooperative and therefore not on Hart's ladder at all. (cf. Hart 1992.) In the later adaptation of the ladder model by Botchwey et al. (2019, 263), they suggest adding three rungs, with the highest of those being the rung of 'incorporation' (for details, see chapter 2.1.2.1). This added rung describes the general concept of Systemic Integration best, as it represents the idea of youth and adults working together in existing projects and teams in equal partnership.

Based on Mitra's Pyramid of Participation, Systemic Integration can be classified on the second level of the pyramid, 'Collaborating With Adults'. In contrast to the previous two scenarios, here this does not only describe the structure of the participation program but the structure of the whole organization, as youth are integrated in all teams and projects and work alongside adults as equal partners. Individual projects can be on the third level, 'Building Capacity For Leadership', if the project is initiated and mainly carried out by youth. (cf. Mitra 2006, 7–8).

On Shiers' Five Levels of Participation, Systemic Integration can generally be categorized in between of the fourth and the fifth level, leaning more towards the latter. Youth are part of all teams and projects and therefore part of the regular decision-making processes in a way that they have a direct seat at the table. As Systemic Integration is mainly enabled through adapted regulations and policies, the foundation was built to share power with youth in equitable ways, which creates a collaboration that goes further than just working on the same team and corresponds with the fifth level. Furthermore, through the focus on policies and structures, Systemic Integration is in the obligation stage of this level, as participation became a norm and requirement rather than just a nice-to-have. (cf. Shier 2001, 110–115.)

Overall, Systemic Integration is on the upper levels of participation according to all used models and this study's definition of real youth participation. Through the integration into existing teams and

projects, there is a special emphasis on youth being aware of their role, youth consulting with other participants (youth and adults), and youth having the same influence on the spaces as all other team members.

5.1.3.4 Scenario D: Relational Integration

The scenario of Relational Integration describes a state in which youth participation is normal across the organization and youth can be part of all core teams. This structure has been mainly enabled through a focus on a growing community within and beyond the network and transparency regarding projects, roles, and limitations of participation. Power is shared as much as possible, and spaces are created collaboratively. The idea of age as a separation of groups has been overcome and roles depend on strengths and interests (for details, see chapter 4.4.4).

As already described in the previous scenario, the full integration of youth in existing projects has not been addressed in Hart's original model. However, the added rung of 'incorporation' can also be used for Relational Integration, as it describes the equitable cooperation between youth and adults on existing teams and projects (cf. Botchwey et al. 2019, 263). Individual projects can be classified on the sixth, seventh, or eighth rung, depending on whether they were initiated by youth or adults and implemented collaboratively or by youth only (cf. Hart 1992, 14).

Following, Relational Integration can also be classified on the second level of Mitra's Pyramid of Participation, 'Collaboration With Adults'. The overall structure of the participation in this scenario is based upon collaboration between youth and adults, while occasionally projects can be initiated and led by youth only and would then be on the third level of the pyramid. (cf. Mitra 2006, 7–8.)

Based on Shier's Five Levels of Participation, Relational Integration can be categorized in between of the fourth and the fifth level with a tendency towards the fourth. While youth can be part of all core teams and projects and their voice is considered, there is not necessarily a full adaptation of structures and policies that allows for equal power sharing, as the focus has so far been more on letting participation grow organically through connection and community building, instead of structural implementation. Some policies may have been adapted and regulations within teams may formalize the right of youth to participate, which is the reason why this scenario is classified in between of the fourth and the fifth level. However, when it comes to the stage at which the organization currently implements youth participation, Relational Integration describes the opportunity stage, mainly based on the focus on community and collaboration, hence opportunities, rather than regulations. (cf. Shier 2001, 110–115.)

Ultimately, Relational Integration can be categorized as real participation according to all models, as it is based on equitable partnership, developed through community and connection. Similar to the

scenario of Systemic Integration, the process of integration itself leads to high awareness of youth about their role and work, and youth having the same influence on the spaces as all other team members. The scenario of Relational Integration has an especially high degree of youth consulting with other participants (youth and adults) and collaborating closely, as the integration is mainly enabled through establishing closer connections and cooperation, regardless of age or role.

The distinction between Systemic Integration and Relational Integration is mainly what enables the future state of participation, which is a factor that is not heavily addressed in current frameworks. Therefore, the classification is rather similar, just as it is the case for Growing Institutions and Connected Institutions.

6 Conclusion

Youth participation, especially in the context of education, plays an important and growing role. While young people currently only have limited power over their education, there is a growing awareness that this needs to change. Schools, city councils, and educational institutions started to implement different forms of youth participation to ensure that young people have a voice in what affects them. Since the late 20th century, several researchers have addressed this topic and models such as Hart's Ladder of Participation of children (1992), Mitra's Pyramid of Participation (2006), and Shier's Five Levels of Participation (2001) were introduced. Furthermore, Futures Studies emphasizes time and time again the importance of including all stakeholders and valuing all kinds of expert knowledge in order to envision futures and engage in strategic planning (Akavarapu 2025, 2; Barendregt et al. 2024, 3–5). This study addresses the perceived gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementations by analyzing enablers, barriers, and the context of youth-adult collaboration to create preferable future scenarios, including decisions and paths to get there. The research is based on insights of Teach For All, one of the current frontrunner institutions regarding youth participation in education.

Ultimately, the results of this study answer the research question 'How can spaces in an NGO working for educational equity look like, that allow for real youth participation in 2035?' through the four created scenarios, *Growing Institutions*, *Connected Institutions*, *Systemic Integration*, and *Relational Integration* (see chapter 4.4). The sub-questions (1) 'What works well and should be further developed to ensure successful youth participation in the NGO?' and (2) 'What are barriers to real youth participation in the NGO?' have been answered in more detail with the findings presented in chapter 4.2 on enablers and barriers. Sub-question (3) 'How can youth and adults create meaningful partnerships that enable successful cooperation and what needs to change for that to be possible in the context of the NGO?' has been answered in chapter 4.3 through the presentation of inclusion and integration as different structures of youth participation. Additionally, overall aspects that are important for the collaboration of youth and adults are addressed in chapter 4.2 on enablers and barriers. All findings are based on the research data, which consists of 16 semi-structured interviews that were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The resulting codes were implemented in a futures table to create the four scenarios on a four-quadrant matrix.

The results of this study suggest that enablers and barriers of youth participation and youth adult collaboration move along the axes of how participation is done, from inclusion to integration, and what enables this participation, from technical to social factors (see Figure 6). The y-axis of the four-quadrant matrix gives a comprehensive answer to the first two sub-questions of this study, analyzing

enablers and barriers. The enabling factors address different foci that an organization can set and through which structurally similar participation processes can be achieved. These factors can either be technical (external environment, resources, and skills) or social (communication, network, and mindset). On the side of social factors, it stands out that this research found insecurity and a fear of failure, as well as a lack of awareness of youth realities, as main reasons for adults not being ready. Contradicting, literature suggests an opposed adult mindset as one of the main barriers to youth participation (Bessel 2009, 301; Blakeslee & Walker 2018, 2; Teach For All n.d.-a, 20; Juliussen et al. 2024, 1106; Wallin 2003, 71). While both aspects do play an important role, understanding why an adult is not fully ready for the implementation of youth participation is a basic condition to find the right measures to overcome this barrier. Furthermore, for the side of technical factors, it needs to be mentioned that while the final goal of youth participation is often described as having youth participate independent of adults' individual stand (Blakeslee & Walker 2019, 6), this study shows that the path to this future includes adults as gate-openers and emphasizes the long-term importance of them as mentors, supporters, and in roles of empowerment.

All detected enablers and barriers, as well as aspects of youth-adult collaboration, are categorized within the six themes of (1) Environment, (2) Institutional Structures, (3) Interpersonal Cooperation, (4) Mindset, (5) Structure of Participation, and (6) Power Dynamics.

The four created scenarios answer the main research question of what real youth participation could look like in organizations working on educational equity in 2035, based on the insights gained on the three sub-questions and organized along the two axes. Depending on the structure of participation that was aimed at, participation could either be organized through established mechanisms and participation programs (inclusion) or through full integration of youth in all processes and teams. The way to get there depends on a set focus on either technical or social factors to enable these participation structures. Growing Institutions hereby describes a scenario of inclusion mainly through technical factors, Connected Institutions describes a scenario of inclusion mainly through social factors, Systemic Integration describes a scenario of integration mainly achieved through technical factors, and Relational Integration describes a state of integration achieved through social factors.

6.1 Limitations

Before concluding, it needs to be acknowledged that the findings of this study are to be considered in light of this study's research design and context, as that poses certain limitations that affect the outcome. Fully understanding the phenomenon requires more extensive research in different contexts and based on the insights gained through this study.

This study is based on the qualitative study of the single case of Teach For All. While this enabled an in-depth analysis of possible and preferable future scenarios starting from the point of view of an organization that already works on the forefront of youth participation, the results may not be generalizable to all other contexts. To assess the validity of the study despite its small scale, it is recommended to conduct further research. As the findings are based on semi-structured interviews, they are based on the subjective visions and perceptions of experts in youth participation and my own subjective analysis. Many potential biases are addressed by following the coding strategies of qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004; Hsieh & Shannon 2005), however an effect of bias cannot be fully eliminated. Already the choice of participants and selecting an appropriate population that is representative of the phenomenon affects generalizability (Eisenhardt 1989, 537). This was tried to account for during the study by having fellows, staff, and at least 50% of students as participants, as they are a structurally marginalized group. In the realm of Futures Studies, limitations are posed by the limited ability of people to engage in creative visioning. This can lead to results that are closer to the status quo than they could be. Damhof and Gulmans (2023, 55) emphasize the importance of being capable of imagination to gain what they call radical hope as a main driver to create change in the present and for the future. Lastly, as mentioned before, this study is largely Western-centric. A lot of the literature on youth participation is carried out by Western researchers and institutions, and while I tried to include various perspectives, the availability was limited, which leads to the loss of certain invaluable perspectives and expertise. This was tried to address by choosing a case that operates in different countries around the world. Finally, my own perspective is also biased by my European background and the fact that I speak from the perspective of a *white*, able-bodied, Western, Cis-Women perspective, which globally comes with several privileges and therefore a risk of limited awareness for alternative realities and certain barriers to youth participation. While I did not encounter any direct challenges based on my background, it must be stated, as it poses a risk for overlooking certain realities and aspects of youth participation, as well as the risk of me misunderstanding insights shared by the interviewees. I tried to address this through critical reflection and a search for diverse literature and perspectives.

6.2 Implications for Theory and Further Research

Despite the limitations addressed in the previous chapter, this study provides valuable insights into the futures of youth participation in educational organizations. In the field of Futures Studies, this study especially adds insights on the future of youth participation in education, which has not yet been heavily covered. The results can therefore be adapted to improve participatory processes in Futures Studies that include youth or have youth as co-researchers. Besides that, the study contributes general ideas on futures of youth

participation in educational organizations to the field of youth participation studies. This includes guiding insights on how the path towards a preferred future state of youth participation can look like.

All these insights can be supported and expanded by further research. First, as this study is based on a qualitative study, further research should include a quantitative backup of the findings and indications of what is described as preferable and possible for futures of youth participation. Second, further research should address the roots of adultism and the question of why some adults are not perceived as or do not feel ready for youth participation. Current literature is often based on a lack of willingness or an adult perception of youth as incapable. However, this research suggests insecurity and a fear of failure or a fear of unintentionally harming children as reasons for adults to refrain from youth participation. Therefore, it should be researched how frequent this barrier is, what effects it has on people's mindset, potential power sharing, participation processes, and structural changes in organizations. Next, further research needs to address the effect of limited awareness of youth realities, background, and knowledge, ways to overcome this lack, and the connected need for communication to support and enable youth participation in the future. Regarding communication, the focus of further research should be futures of intergenerational communication and what exactly this concept includes, as this study indicates a lack of clear understanding and guidance on what that means and how the skill can be developed. Overall, this study found that many frameworks of youth participation mainly address the structures but rarely the paths to get there and connected to that the enablers that were utilized along the way. To support organizations in aiming for any future state, it is also important to provide frameworks and guidance regarding the way to get there. Following, additional research is needed on how to include paths, foci, and necessary decisions into existing literature and frameworks. Finally, as youth participation is an issue of little capitalistic interest, it needs to be mentioned that present and futures of youth participation is generally under-researched and therefore would benefit from extended attention. Research supports understanding and what is understood has better chances to receive funding, which is one important enabler of youth participation. More research would therefore directly and indirectly be a benefit for all future endeavors in youth participation.

6.3 Implications for Practice

This study also has numerous practical implications for organizations and institutions, especially in the education sector, aiming for successful youth participation. First, the research shows that creating a clear and long-term structure and plan of youth participation in a co-creation process with youth has positive effects on the path and the outcome. It helps participating adults and youth to gain an understanding of the process, their role, and the limitations of participation. The presented scenarios

can be a guideline to make decisions on what structure of youth participation an organization favors (inclusion, integration, or a combined model) and what enablers to focus on. Second, internally, organizations need to create spaces for youth and adults to experience participation. This helps to overcome bias and create a safe feeling when working in a process that is largely learning-by-doing and needs a positive mindset towards errors. To allow this development, organizations need to focus on communication and transparency within all processes. This also includes an increased building of connections and relationships of trust within and beyond the organization, including external stakeholders such as schools and families. Possible ways to support internal connections can be an internal website for networking and communication, for example like an organization-wide LinkedIn. Specifically regarding student connections, the creation of a SLAC or overall youth alumni group could support long-term relationships and empower future collaborations and projects across the network. Third, youth participation needs critical reflection and re-distribution of power. Organizations should engage in a reflection process and create space for youth to become equal partners, take ownership of processes, be in leadership roles, and be involved internally and externally in decision-making processes. Next, on a structural level, organizations should dedicate resources in time and budget to support participation with a special focus on participation in physical spaces, as that is invaluable to create the previously mentioned needed connections and partnerships. Ways to regularly connect in person, also for organizations working on the global level, could be the creation of local hubs. Structural implications also include revising and adapting policies and processes with a critical lens on whether existing policies support or hinder youth participation and how supporting policies could look like in the future. Finally, organizations that aim for youth participation and overall equitable structures should engage in a critical reflection process regarding structural discrimination in general (e.g. racism, ableism, sexism, etc.) and specifically regarding accessibility of spaces and processes for youth. That includes actively engaging in unlearning adultism and tokenistic behavior and aiming to overcome the age lens.

The final question of all interviews was ‘If you had the power to change three things to improve youth participation at Teach For All for the next 10 years, what would it be and why? Dream big, there is no wrong answer here!’. Therefore, one outcome of this study is a wishlist for the future of youth participation at Teach For All, which can be found in Appendix 6.3. While the insights of this list have been used and analyzed to answer the research questions and are therefore embedded in all results of this study, the full list can be an indicator for organizations on what they could do to improve youth participation in the future.

6.4 We Are More Than Just The Future

Ultimately, this study showed that even if people are convinced that youth participation is right, the path towards the future is not as clear. There are many open questions and numerous unsolved riddles, and while organizations and researchers present several ideas of what youth participation could look like, there is only limited guidance on how to get there. The results of this research show that there are numerous ways to do youth participation right – to make it real. It can be inclusion or integration or anything in between. And there are just as many paths to get there, either through focusing on technical factors, social factors, or a combination of both. Still, with little experience, it is difficult for youth and adults to envision a future that is out of the box and far beyond the current structures. It needs the courage to try. To say the crazy idea out loud, walk a mile, and then reflect and engage in a futures thinking process that allows for big ideas based on that. Together, youth and adults can fill all the gaps of current understanding with meaning and create a system that fits all needs. Youth are more than just the future. They are the present as well. In every decision and every step along the way to get there.

I just want to say one small thing: that we also need more kindness towards ourselves. In whichever position we are in the organization because implementing big things and shifting major principles of work in the organization and so on, that is challenging and we might fail a lot and we might learn a lot from that but if we are kind to ourselves and to the people we are paving that path with, that would be really helpful. Because if we allow ourselves to fail and to struggle and to not know what to do but also to learn actively, then it would be more effective than just sticking to what we know works well and changing nothing. Because the world shifts and it evolves, and we have to adapt. (Student 1)

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Declaration of AI Use

In the creation of this thesis, I have used generative artificial intelligence for one support task. The exact tools, their purposes, and verification measures are listed below. I confirm that I have used the AI tool with the necessary care and caution, have fully disclosed their use in accordance with university policy, and take full responsibility for all content presented in this thesis.

1. Tool: Grammarly

- **Stage of Use:** Editing
- **Purpose of Use:** AI-based correction of spelling and improvement of grammar and language were used in the final phase of editing this thesis to enhance readability.
- **Verification:** I carefully proofread all suggested changes to ensure that the original meaning of my statements was not affected and that the academic content remained accurate. I retained final control over the text.

Appendix 2. List of Participants

Participant code	Date of the interview	Length of the interview (hh:mm:ss)
Student 1	09.01.2026	01:04:12
Student 2	13.01.2026	01:22:12
Student 3	15.11.2025	00:57:48
Student 4	29.11.2025	00:56:59
Student 5	29.12.2025	01:06:34
Student 6	13.12.2025	00:50:37
Student 7	22.11.2025	01:05:43
Student 8	30.11.2025	01:01:19
Fellow 1	12.11.2025	01:10:59
Fellow 2	28.11.2025	00:59:11
Staff 1	20.11.2025	00:55:31
Staff 2	18.11.2025	00:51:43
Staff 3	18.11.2025	00:50:47
Staff 4	05.12.2025	00:36:56
Staff 5	26.11.2025	00:52:35
Staff 6	25.11.2025	00:41:40

Appendix 3. Data Collection Guide for students / fellows / staff

important keywords

1. (Future of) Youth participation / leadership
2. (Future of) Youth-adult cooperation / intergenerational leadership
3. (Future of) Power distribution / structural circumstances
4. (Future of) Mindset / behavioral circumstances

interview guide general

- I. Thank participant for being willing to do this!
- II. Explain the background of the research project → Master's thesis at UTU in Turku, Finland on the topic of the future of youth participation and leadership in education by 2035
- III. Explain my background: TFD student alumna, member of SLAC 2018
- IV. Aim of the study → research on supporting factors and barriers, images of the future of youth participation to generate scenarios of the future and analyze what the path to a preferable future could look like
- V. Is it okay if I record this interview for internal use and transcription?
 - a. Read out loud main points of the consent and privacy policy forms and get agreement
 - i. You participate voluntarily and can withdraw your consent any time
 - ii. I will record this interview only for the purpose of transcribing it later
 - iii. The transcripts will be anonymized, so that no identification will be possible at any time
 - iv. The transcripts and recordings will only be stored on my personal device and in the university cloud
 - v. All personal data will be permanently deleted by the end of 2027
 - b. I can stop the recording at any time, just let me know.
 - c. If happened written before: Thanks for the written consent
 - d. If any questions, feel free to ask at any moment!

Interview Guide

background questions

1. What are your pronouns?
2. How old are you?

3. What is your profession?
4. What is your connection to SLAC / student accelerator / other youth participation programs at TFAll?
5. when did you start your work with TFAll and especially youth participation projects within TFAll?
6. Do you have previous experience with youth participation projects from other organizations?
If yes, since when and what kind of?

Narrative question (shared beforehand, can be answered either written, audio, video or as a first question during the interview)

You are going on a time travel to 2035. You wake up on a random morning. You are in the same role at Teach For All as you are now (so if you are a 17-year old SLAC member now, you are still a 17-year old SLAC member). 10 years have passed in which Teach For All has worked to improve student leadership and participation at the organization. Please describe what a typical day at Teach For All looks like for you with a special focus on youth participation and leadership. Be as detailed as possible.

Guiding questions can be: How does the collaboration between students and adults look like? Where and how are students involved? How many students and adults are working together? Who is making decisions? What do rooms (digitally or in-person) in which people work usually look like? How is power distributed between people? How do you feel when you think about the youth participation projects you are working with in 2035? What is the biggest change you see compared to 2025? What has stayed the same?

interview questions (general and specific probing, ad-hoc question) that cover certain topics and include important keywords

1. What in your opinion is good / successful youth participation?
2. Please tell me a bit about the youth participation programs that you have experienced so far at Teach For All and your role in that.
 - a. digital or analog spaces?
 - b. who created those spaces?
 - c. who was in the room and who was missing?
 - d. who had decision-making power?

- e. What was the best moment of youth participation that you experienced so far at Teach For All? Why?
 - f. What was the most challenging moment of youth participation that you experienced so far at Teach For All? Why?
3. In what areas / projects / parts of Teach For All do you think youth participation should play an important role in 2035? Describe in detail how you envision that!
- a. at what point of the process are students involved? Who creates the spaces?
 - b. which students are involved? how are they connected to Teach For All? who chooses them?
 - c. what do the students do? what do the adults do?
 - d. how are decisions made?
 - e. How is the relationship between students and adults?
4. What are basic conditions, enablers and catalyzers for successful youth participation today and in the future?
- a. feeling of adults listening and caring
 - b. understanding the work and the own role as a student
 - c. institutionalization and formalization of processes
 - d. understanding of positive outcomes for the self and the organization
 - e. resources
 - f. students co-designing spaces
 - g. relationship of trust
 - h. respect and responsibility
5. What are the biggest barriers and challenges that you see for youth participation today and in the future?
- a. Adultism
 - b. organizational infrastructure and a lack of contact with decision-makers
 - c. lack of representativeness of students and only stereotypical “good kids”
 - d. lack of power, risk of tokenism
 - e. lack of knowledge and capacity from adults to support the implementation
 - f. students are overscheduled or underequipped
 - g. discrimination / marginalization / racism / sexism / classism etc.
6. How do you perceive the relationship between students and adults (staff and fellows) in youth participation programs at Teach For All? Has it changed due to the youth participation

programs? What do you think needs to change in the future? What should stay the way it is right now?

- a. do / should adults empower students? How could / should that look like?
 - b. should students and adults receive training in collaboration / youth participation? How would that look like?
 - c. should power (e.g. in decision-making) be re-distributed? How?
 - d. Who should decide how participation looks like? Who creates the spaces / moderates the spaces? How could these decision-making processes look like?
 - e. Do you feel adults are generally ready for youth participation? Are the students? What is at least one thing you feel both groups would need in the future?
7. Do you feel like you (or the students, if staff / fellow) have the power to influence things? How? Do you think the power students have should change in the future (e.g. students having more or less influence / power over what is happening at Teach For All)?
 8. How do you feel is the general attitude of adults towards students at Teach For All? How do you feel is the general attitude of students towards adults at Teach For All? How do you think that should change in the next 10 years and what should stay the same?
 - a. students are seen as valuable resource
 - b. adultism
 - c. students perceive adults as not listening / caring
 9. If you had the power to change three things to improve youth participation at Teach For All for the next 10 years, what would it be and why? Dream big, there is no wrong answer here!

Thank you for taking the time for this interview!

After recording: is there something you would like to say now? That comes to the mind or that you were uncomfortable on record?

Appendix 4. Coding Matrix

Appendix 4.1 Full Codebook

Name	Sources	References
Environment	30	142
<i>Discrimination & Inequality</i>	19	45
colonization	2	2
discrimination	12	17
enabling environment for all	3	5
political will on visa	9	21
<i>Education System</i>	15	34
participation as part of formal education	8	12
participation needs to start from young age	4	7
youth participation as normal	7	15
<i>International Collaboration</i>	14	32
connectivity	7	11
language	11	19
same time zone for all	2	2
<i>Societal & Legal Aspects</i>	13	31
cultural barrier	9	18
legal barrier	4	8
societal normal	4	5
Institutional Structures	35	399
<i>Resources</i>	22	97
budget	12	31
needs organizational capacity	14	28
student need time	7	13
students need access to opportunities	12	25
<i>Role Of Partner Organization & Accelerating</i>	18	54
collaboration with network partners	4	10
network partners need to increase student participation	2	4
student councils in partner organizations	4	7
student participation accelerating through fellows	8	23
teacher needs to be supported and appreciated	7	10
<i>Structure Of Spaces</i>	31	137
adapt spaces and processes to youth participation	12	19
chaotic but generative space	2	2
create student-style spaces for adults	2	3
introducing stakeholders takes time	5	6

Name	Sources	References
local Teach For All hubs	2	3
logistics for students at in-person events are huge	1	1
more physical spaces	20	39
student-led spaces	16	38
technical support (e.g transcribe & language)	8	20
virtual spaces are cheap and accessible	4	6
<i>System Changes At The Teach For All Level</i>	29	111
adults don't directly work with students	5	10
being student-centered in the future	12	17
ensure all voices are heard	13	16
everyone knows about youth participation	4	5
feedback mechanisms	7	7
focus on youth participation in staff onboarding	3	5
have one staff coordinate and guide other adults in youth participation	10	14
important how to deliver opportunities	1	1
mission at the center, no power center	6	8
need for cultural change	6	6
needs involvement of ground reality	5	7
policies & structures need to be adapted	4	11
research on youth participation	2	2
Teach For All in classrooms around the world	2	2
Interpersonal Cooperation	32	252
<i>Clarity & Transparency</i>	20	76
adults need to understand student role	3	4
students don't know what they can do	3	9
students need to understand the value and connection of their work	12	28
students need to understand their role	7	10
transparency	10	24
youth participation is rather new	1	1
<i>Communication</i>	15	35
adults don't listen	8	14
lack of communication	7	12
learn how to communicate intergenerational	4	6
students and staff need common understanding	3	3
<i>Community Building</i>	21	52
connect individuals	12	20
connect people	3	4
connect students who are involved already	7	10

Name	Sources	References
connect students with others	5	6
long-term community	4	6
mission to get people with student as leader orientation everywhere	1	1
SLAC alumni group	3	5
support structures and institutional connections	14	26
connect partner organizations working on student participation	2	2
connect TFAI to other youth areas	3	3
learn from other projects within the org & create synergies	6	7
needs family support	7	7
needs support from school	5	7
<i>Relationships</i>	24	89
adult learns from student	11	15
create space for informal connection	11	24
focus on relationship among students	3	5
make space for vulnerability	6	8
protection mechanisms needed	5	8
relationship of trust	8	13
students feel safe	9	16
Mindset	33	375
<i>How To Get People Ready</i>	31	231
awareness & experience	24	67
adults closer to classroom level are more ready	6	10
create opportunities to experience being involved from beginning	21	37
create space for adult to experience benefit	11	20
platform & exposure	28	145
no formalized training	1	3
preparation and training	12	35
prepare student and adult	18	23
role models	6	6
spotlight youth participation	10	14
students need adult support	8	14
students need background knowledge	13	24
students need to be prepared	13	25
training from outside the network	1	1
skills	9	19
adults may lack necessary knowledge as well	4	7
build resilience	1	1
create technical ability	2	2

Name	Sources	References
critical thinking	6	9
<i>Student & Adult Belief Systems</i>	30	144
adult needs to belief in themselves and the student	7	8
adult needs to understand benefit for themselves	8	10
adults are scared	7	10
erase underconfidence	7	11
hard to motivate students	2	5
mindset needs to be developed to make participation normal	15	24
mindsets are opposed	15	24
students as leaders and system change	9	14
students need to believe in themselves	11	22
Teach For All mindset supports youth participation	7	9
tension between privilege and right	3	3
youth participation is outside the comfort zone	2	4
Participation	35	1020
<i>Projects Students Are Involved In</i>	29	144
involvement depends on interests and strengths	9	23
no room without youth	6	8
programme for students-only	6	12
students as part of core team	7	11
students in all spaces and projects	22	51
students in funding decisions	3	7
students in priority planning	2	6
students in recruiting	3	4
students in research	2	2
students involved when they are impacted	10	14
students on boards	4	6
<i>Roles Of Students And Adults</i>	35	501
adult role in the future	29	281
adult as consultant	2	5
adult as gate-opener	7	9
adult facilitates spaces	10	12
adult has expertise	3	3
adults adapt communication and translate	4	7
adults as guiding mentors	15	29
adults do backend stuff	5	5
adults empower students	22	63
adults listen and take seriously	16	46

Name	Sources	References
adults need to know about opportunities	3	5
adults should not speak for youth	5	9
adults support students	24	50
adults understanding students (realities) and barriers	9	16
adults value students	9	15
staff needs to be connected to students & mission	4	7
different roles of students and adults	4	7
student role in the future	29	167
having students as full participants late wastes resources	1	2
older students onboard younger ones	3	3
paid experiences for students	5	17
point of participation varied	1	2
share own perspective	6	10
students are negotiators	2	2
students as consultants and give feedback	17	27
students challenge adults	5	5
students held accountable	2	2
students invited for presenting	15	31
students involved day-to-day	4	7
students involved in implementation	7	15
students involved in the whole process	22	44
students and adults on same level	21	46
<i>Ways To Contribute</i>	31	128
being in spaces to learn	3	9
different ways of contributing	13	23
established mechanisms	14	27
growing the student leadership work	10	15
integrate students in existing projects and adult group	16	34
no formalized structure	4	5
regular meetings with students	9	12
SLAC needs to grow	3	3
<i>Which Student And How To Get In</i>	24	78
every kid should be able participate	8	10
lower entrance barrier	1	1
more students	11	21
no representation	3	3
not all students will be included	4	4
representation of diversity	10	17

Name	Sources	References
students from all around the network	6	9
students in projects can change	1	2
very active students & homogenous group	5	7
youth participation favors extrovertism	3	4
<i>Y-AP & Collaboration</i>	30	169
adults behaving different with students	8	14
allow errors	7	12
collaboration project based	10	12
get rid of age lens	10	23
get rid of student label	5	8
people not seen based on age	7	15
good cooperation between students and adults	18	37
ongoing collaboration	15	31
shared documents	3	6
students decide what to say	8	18
students feel respected	7	8
tackle challenges together	3	4
unlearning tokenism	1	2
youth participation needs fun	2	2
Power Dynamics	31	177
<i>Decision-Making Spaces</i>	24	75
bring youth to policy decision-making spaces	7	11
children are not protected to make decisions	3	4
decision making may be restricted by outside factors	1	1
decisions made closest to the work	5	18
decisions made collectively	18	32
fast decision-making	3	4
no mechanism for student decision making	5	5
<i>Power Sharing</i>	29	102
change in power structure	11	13
student in leadership role	8	12
students have power	12	16
students shouldn't carry too much responsibility	6	9
students take ownership	16	37
support adults to share power	4	5
tension of responsibility and power sharing	6	10

Appendix 4.2 Futures Table – Unsorted

This table shows the futures table before reorganizing the codes into scenarios. The colors are an indicator of the themes and used as a visual aid to keep an overview during the process of reorganization for the scenario creation

Scenarios

Environment	Institutional structures	Interpersonal cooperation	Mindset	Structure of Participation	Power Distribution
Discrimination & Inequality	Resources	Clarity & Transparency	How To Get People Ready	Projects Students Are Involved In	Decision-Making Spaces
colonization	budget	adults need to understand student role	<i>awareness & experience</i>	involvement depends on interests and strengths	bring youth to policy decision-making spaces
discrimination	needs organizational capacity	youth participation is rather new	adults closer to classroom level are more ready	no room without youth	children are not protected to make decisions
enabling environment for all	student need time	students don't know what they can do	create opportunities to experience being involved from beginning	programme for students-only	decision making may be restricted by outside factors
political will on visa	students need access to opportunities	students need to understand the value and connection of their work	create space for adult to experience benefit	students as part of core team	decisions made closest to the work
Education System	Role Of Partner Organization & Accelerating	students need to understand their role	<i>platform & exposure</i>	students in all spaces and projects	decisions made collectively
participation as part of formal education	collaboration with network partners	transparency	role models	students in funding decisions	fast decision-making
participation needs to start from young age	network partners need to increase student leadership	Communication	spotlight youth participation	students in priority planning	no mechanism for student decision making
youth participation as normal	student agency accelerating through fellows	adults don't listen	preparation and training	students in recruiting	Power Sharing
International Collaboration	student councils in partner organizations	lack of communication	no formalized training	students in research	change in power structure
connectivity	teacher needs to be supported and appreciated	learn how to communicate intergenerational	prepare student and adult	students involved when they are impacted	student in leadership role
language	Structure Of Spaces	students and staff need common understanding	students need adult support	students on boards	students have power
same time zone for all	adapt spaces and processes to youth participation	Community Building	students need background knowledge	Roles Of Students And Adults	students shouldn't carry too much responsibility
Societal & Legal Aspects	chaotic but generative space	connect <i>individuals</i>	students need to be prepared	different roles of students and adults	students take ownership
legal barrier	create student-style spaces for adults	connect people	training from outside the network	students and adults on same level	support adults to share power
societal normal	introducing stakeholders takes time	connect students who are involved already	<i>skills</i>	<i>adult role in the future</i>	tension of responsibility and power sharing
cultural barrier	logistics for students at in-person events are huge	connect students with others	build resilience	adult as consultant	
	more physical spaces	<i>long-term community</i>	create technical ability	adult as gate opener	
	student-led spaces	mission to get people with student as leader orientation everywhere	critical thinking	adult facilitates spaces	
	Teach For All hubs	SLAC alumni group	teachers may lack necessary knowledge as well	adult has expertise	
	technical support (e.g transcribe & language)	<i>support structures and institutional connections</i>	Student & Adult Belief Systems	adults adapt communication and translate	
	virtual spaces are cheap and accessible	connect partner organizations working on youth participation	adult needs to belief in themselves and the student	adults as guiding mentors	
	System Changes At The Teach For All Level	connect TFAll to other youth areas	adult needs to understand benefit for themselves	adults do backend stuff	
	adults don't directly work with students	learn from other projects within the org & create synergies	adults are scared	adults empower students	
	being student-centered in the future	needs family support	erase underconfidence	adults listen and take seriously	
	ensure all voices are heard	needs support from school	hard to motivate students	adults need to know about opportunities	
	everyone knows about youth participation	Relationships	mindset needs to be developed to make participation normal	adults should not speak for youth	
	feedback mechanisms	adult learns from student	mindsets are opposed	adults support students	
	focus on youth participation in staff onboarding	create space for informal connection	youth participation is outside the comfort zone	adults understanding students (realities) and barriers	
	have one staff coordinate and guide other adults in youth participation	focus on relationship among students	students as leaders and system change	adults value students	
	important how to deliver opportunities	make space for vulnerability	students need to believe in themselves	staff needs to be connected to students & mission	
	mission at the center, no power center	protection mechanisms needed	Teach For All mindset supports youth participation	<i>student role in the future</i>	
	need for cultural change	relationship of trust	tension between privilege and right	having students as full participants late wastes resources	
	needs involvement of ground reality	students feel safe		older students onboard younger ones	
	policies & structures need to be adapted			paid experiences for students	
	research on youth participation			point of participation varied	
	Teach For All in classrooms around the world			share own perspective	
				students are negotiators	
				students as consultants and give feedback	
				students challenge adults	
				students held accountable	
				students invited for presenting	
				students involved day-to-day	
				students involved in implementation	
				students involved in the whole process	
				Ways To Contribute	
				being in spaces to learn	
				different ways of contributing	
				established mechanisms	
				growing the student leadership work	
				integrate students in existing projects and adult group	
				no formalized structure	
				regular meetings with students	
				SLAC needs to grow	
				Which Student And How To Get In	
				every kid should be able participate	
				youth participation favors extrovertism	
				lower entrance barrier	
				more students	
				no representation	
				not all students will be included	
				representation of diversity	
				students from all around the network	
				students in projects can change	
				very active students & homogenous group	
				Y-AP & Collaboration	
				adults behaving different with students	
				allow errors	
				collaboration project based	
				good cooperation between students and adults	
				ongoing collaboration	
				shared documents	
				youth participation needs fun	
				students decide what to say	
				students feel respected	
				tackle challenges together	
				unlearning tokenism	
				<i>get rid of age lens</i>	
				get rid of student label	
				people not seen based on age	

Appendix 4.3 Futures Table – Sorted

This table shows the futures table after reorganizing the codes into scenarios. The colors are an indicator of the themes and used as a visual aid to keep an overview during the process of reorganization for the scenario creation.

Appendix 5. Data Protection & Privacy Policy Form

Appendix 5.1 Youth

Consent for participation in scientific research

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and the privacy policy. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences. The information collected of me until the withdrawal cannot be used as part of the research data.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers.

I consent that my interview can be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The written transcript must be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it. The recorded interviews will not be accessible for anyone other than the researcher and only used to create the transcripts.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature participant

☐ I have given oral consent and the researcher has documented it in a reliable way.

Contact information

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1 (5)
**PRIVACY NOTICE FOR
 SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**
 EU General Data Protection
 Regulation Art. 13 and 14

Date: 13.10.2025

Privacy Notice for the following research: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

You are participating in a scientific research study at the University of Turku. This privacy notice explains how your personal data will be processed in the research.

1. Data Controller

University of Turku

Contact person for research-related matters:

Name: Dewina Leuschner

Phone: +358 41 744 8621

Email: dewina.d.leuschner@utu.fi

Responsible supervisor:

Name: Sari Miettinen

Phone: +358 29 450 3873

Email: sari.miettinen@utu.fi

2. Data Protection Officer's Contact Information

The data protection officer of the University of Turku can be reached by email at dpo@utu.fi and by phone +358294503009.

3. Description of Research and Personal Data Processing

The above mentioned research project is a master's thesis in the programme of Futures Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. For the research, the researcher will conduct around 15 semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom and later transcribed. The transcriptions will be anonymized so that no identification will be possible. The recordings and transcripts will be stored in seafile (the internal cloud of the University of Turku), and stored and used according to the General Data Protection Regulation. The research results will be part of a master's thesis which will be published as an open access publication in UTUPub (the open institutional repository of the University of Turku). Furthermore, the master's thesis will be shared with Teach For All. Both does explicitly NOT include the transcripts, which will not be shared with anyone but the researcher and the supervisors of the thesis at any point.

13.10.2025

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research conducted as the final project (thesis) of a master's degree in the Programme of Futures Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. The thesis studies the future of student participation at Teach For All in 2035, focusing on best practices, opportunities and barriers. The insights gained through the study can benefit other institutions especially in the education sector to adapt their paths to more student participation and support more successful shared decision-making processes, intergenerational collaboration and the planning and implementation of structural changes. For this research, the researcher will conduct around 15 interviews with students, teachers and staff who have been working with student participation at Teach For All.

This information sheet describes the research and what participating in it entails.

You are asked to participate in this research because you have been part of a student participation and student leadership projects at Teach For All, such as the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC). To get a holistic overview of the student participation at Teach For All, participants of this research can be (1) students in one of the student participation programmes of Teach For All, (2) teachers (chaperones) who support a student who is part of a student participation programme at Teach For All, and (3) staff of Teach For All. Overall, the study will include around 15 participants.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the research. You can refuse to participate in the research, withdraw from the research or cancel your consent to participate in the research at any point without any negative consequences to your participation at Teach For All programmes. To withdraw from participation and cancel consent, please inform the researcher via email. The contact information are listed below.

If you withdraw from the research or cancel your consent, the collected interviews and transcripts of you will not be used as part of the research data.

Responsible persons and funder of the research

This research is conducted by Dewina Leuschner (researcher, master's student).

The research does not receive any additional funding.

Research process

The process of the research includes one interview. The interview will be conducted online via Zoom and recorded for the purpose of transcribing. The approximated duration of the interview is 1 hour. Prior to the interview, you will receive one narrative question. You are free to choose either ONE of the following options: (1) write your answer to the question and send it to the researcher prior to the interview, (2) record (audio or video) your answer to the question and send it to the researcher prior to the interview or (3) think about the question prior to the interview and come

Appendix 5.2 Fellow

Consent for participation in scientific research

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and the privacy policy. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences. The information collected of me until the withdrawal cannot be used as part of the research data.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers.

I consent that my interview can be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The written transcript must be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it. The recorded interviews will not be accessible for anyone other than the researcher and only used to create the transcripts.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature participant

☐ I have given oral consent and the researcher has documented it in a reliable way.

Contact information

Dewina Leuschner
Dewina.d.leuschner@utu.fi
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University of Turku / Turku School of Economics (TSE)
Rehtorinpellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku, Finland



1 (5)
**PRIVACY NOTICE FOR
 SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**
 EU General Data Protection
 Regulation Art. 13 and 14

Date: 13.10.2025

Privacy Notice for the following research: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

You are participating in a scientific research study at the University of Turku. This privacy notice explains how your personal data will be processed in the research.

1. Data Controller

University of Turku

Contact person for research-related matters:

Name: Dewina Leuschner

Phone: +358 41 744 8621

Email: dewina.d.leuschner@utu.fi

Responsible supervisor:

Name: Sari Miettinen

Phone: +358 29 450 3873

Email: sari.miettinen@utu.fi

2. Data Protection Officer's Contact Information

The data protection officer of the University of Turku can be reached by email at dpo@utu.fi and by phone +358294503009.

3. Description of Research and Personal Data Processing

The above mentioned research project is a master's thesis in the programme of Futures Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. For the research, the researcher will conduct around 15 semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted via Zoom and later transcribed. The transcriptions will be anonymized so that no identification will be possible. The recordings and transcripts will be stored in seafile (the internal cloud of the University of Turku), and stored and used according to the General Data Protection Regulation. The research results will be part of a master's thesis which will be published as an open access publication in UTUPub (the open institutional repository of the University of Turku). Furthermore, the master's thesis will be shared with Teach For All. Both does explicitly NOT include the transcripts, which will not be shared with anyone but the researcher and the supervisors of the thesis at any point.

13.10.2025

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS (CHAPERONE)

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research conducted as the final project (thesis) of a master's degree in the Programme of Futures Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. The thesis studies the future of student participation at Teach For All in 2035, focusing on best practices, opportunities and barriers. The insights gained through the study can benefit other institutions especially in the education sector to adapt their paths to more student participation and support more successful shared decision-making processes, intergenerational collaboration and the planning and implementation of structural changes. For this research, the researcher will conduct around 15 interviews with students, teachers and staff who have been working with student participation at Teach For All.

This information sheet describes the research and what participating in it entails.

You are requested to participate in this research because you have been a chaperone for a student who participates in a student participation and student leadership project at Teach For All, such as the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC). To get a holistic overview of the student participation at Teach For All, participants of this research can be (1) students in one of the student participation programmes of Teach For All, (2) teachers (chaperones) who support a student who is part of a student participation programme at Teach For All, and (3) staff of Teach For All. Overall, the study will include around 15 participants.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the research. You can refuse to participate in the research, withdraw from the research or cancel your consent to participate in the research at any point without any negative consequences to your work or your students participation at Teach For All programmes. To withdraw from participation and cancel consent, please inform the researcher via email. The contact information are listed below.

If you withdraw from the research or cancel your consent, the collected interviews and transcripts of you will not be used as part of the research data.

Responsible persons and funder of the research

This research is conducted by Dewina Leuschner (researcher, master's student).

The research does not receive any additional funding.

Research process

The process of the research includes one interview. The interview will be conducted online via Zoom and recorded for the purpose of transcribing. The approximated duration of the interview is 1 hour. Prior to the interview, you will receive one narrative question. You are free to choose either ONE of the following options: (1) write your answer to the question and send it to the researcher prior to the interview, (2) record (audio or video) your answer to the question and send it to the

Appendix 5.3 Staff

Consent for participation in scientific research

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and the privacy policy. I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can at any point withdraw from participating in the research without giving any reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences. The information collected of me until the withdrawal cannot be used as part of the research data.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask questions from the researchers.

I consent that my interview can be recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The written transcript must be modified in the research results and publications so that I cannot be recognised from it. The recorded interviews will not be accessible for anyone other than the researcher and only used to create the transcripts.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature participant

☐ I have given oral consent and the researcher has documented it in a reliable way.

Contact information

Dewina Leuschner
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+358 41 7448621
University of Turku / Turku School of Economics (TSE)
Rehtorinpellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku, Finland



1 (5)
**PRIVACY NOTICE FOR
 SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**
 EU General Data Protection
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Date: 13.10.2025

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1. Data Controller

University of Turku

Contact person for research-related matters:

Name: Dewina Leuschner

Phone: +358 41 744 8621

Email: dewina.d.leuschner@utu.fi

Responsible supervisor:

Name: Sari Miettinen

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2. Data Protection Officer's Contact Information

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3. Description of Research and Personal Data Processing

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13.10.2025

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR STAFF MEMBERS OF TEACH FOR ALL

Research project title: "We are More Than Just the Future!" Youth Participation and Leadership in Education NGOs in 2035

Place of research and person responsible for the research: Turku, Finland; Dewina Leuschner

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research conducted as the final project (thesis) of a master's degree in the Programme of Futures Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. The thesis studies the future of student participation at Teach For All in 2035, focusing on best practices, opportunities and barriers. The insights gained through the study can benefit other institutions especially in the education sector to adapt their paths to more student participation and support more successful shared decision-making processes, intergenerational collaboration and the planning and implementation of structural changes. For this research, the researcher will conduct around 15 interviews with students, teachers and staff who have been working with student participation at Teach For All.

This information sheet describes the research and what participating in it entails.

You are requested to participate in this research because you have been working with student participation and student leadership projects at Teach For All, such as the Student Leader Advisory Council (SLAC). To get a holistic overview of the student participation at Teach For All, participants of this research can be (1) students in one of the student participation programmes of Teach For All, (2) teachers (chaperones) who support a student who is part of a student participation programme at Teach For All, and (3) staff of Teach For All. Overall, the study will include around 15 participants.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in the research. You can refuse to participate in the research, withdraw from the research or cancel your consent to participate in the research at any point without any negative consequences to your work. To withdraw from participation and cancel consent, please inform the researcher via email. The contact information are listed below.

If you withdraw from the research or cancel your consent, the collected interviews and transcripts of you will not be used as part of the research data.

Responsible persons and funder of the research

This research is conducted by Dewina Leuschner (researcher, master's student).

The research does not receive any additional funding.

Research process

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Appendix 6. Tables of the Coding Process

Appendix 6.1 Full Table of Enablers

Structure: - Enabling Factor (Number of Interviewees : Number of References)

If at least half of the interviewees mentioned it, it is marked in bold

Theme	Category	Enabling Factor
Environment	Equity	- Enabling environments (quite spaces, connection, etc.) for all (2: 5)
	Education System	- Participation as normal in all educational spaces (6:15) - Participation as part of formal education (5:12) - Participation starts from a young age (4:7)
	International Collaboration	- Same time zone for all / having a time that fits for all (1:2)
Institutional Structures	Resources	- Organizational capacity (9:28) - Students have access to opportunities (9:25) - Budget (7:31)
	Role of Network Organizations & Accelerating	- Participation accelerating through fellows (7:23) - fellows are supported and appreciated (4:10) - collaboration with partner organizations (4:10) - student councils in partner organizations (2:7) - partner organizations increase student participation (2:4)
	Structure of Spaces	- Physical spaces / events (12:39) - student-led spaces (12:38) - adapt spaces and processes to student participation (10:19) - technical support (e.g. AI transcribe or translate) (5:20) - virtual spaces are cheap and accessible (4:6) - create student-style spaces for adults (1:3) - Create Teach For All Hubs (1:3)
	System Changes at the organizational Level	- all voices are heard (9:16) - being student-centered (8:17) - specific staff coordinate student participation (8:14) - mission at the center, no power center (5:8) - Cultural change (5:6) - feedback mechanisms (5:7) - involvement of ground reality (students and fellows) (4:7) - everyone knows about student participation (3:5) - focus on student participation in staff onboarding (1:5) - research on student participation (1:2) - how opportunities are presented (1:1)
Interpersonal Cooperation		
	Clarity & Transparency	- Students understand the value and connection of their work (9:28) - Transparency (6:24) - Students understand their role (5:10)

Theme	Category	Enabling Factor
	Communication Community Building Relationships	- Adults understand the students role (2:4)
		- Students and staff have common understanding (3:3)
		- External support and institutional connections (8:26)
		- Connect students and stakeholders (8:20)
	Relationships	- Adults learn from students (10:15)
		- Create spaces for informal connection (7:24)
		- Students feel safe (7:16)
		- Relationships of trust (6:13)
		- Make space for vulnerability (4:8)
		- Supporting adults can have a big impact (3:8)
Mindset	Get People Ready	- Create opportunities for students to experience participation from the beginning (14:37)
		- Prepare students and adults (11:23)
		- Create space for adults to experience benefits (10:20)
		- Platform and exposure for participation (8:35)
		- Spotlight student participation (5:14)
		- Spotlight role models (5:6)
		- Support critical thinking skills (4:9)
		- Training from outside the network (1:1)
	- Build resilience (1:1)	
	Student and adult belief systems	- Mindset that sees participation as normal (11:24)
- Students believe in themselves (8:22)		
- Adults understand benefits for themselves (6:10)		
- Organizational mindset supports student participation (6:9)		
Participation	Projects Students are Involved In	- Students in all spaces and projects (11:51)
		- Involvement depends on interests and strengths (6:23)
		- Students as part of core team (5:11)
		- Program (e.g. leadership training) for students only (4:12)
	Role of Students and Adults	- adults support students (15:50)
		- adults empower students (14:63)
		- students and adults on same level (14:46)
		- students are involved in whole process (14:44)
		- adults listen and take seriously (11:46)
		- adults as guiding mentors (8:29)
- adults value students (8:15)		
- adults understand students (realities) and barriers (7:16)		
- students involved in implementation (6:15)		
- adults as gate-openers (6:9)		
- staff is connected to students and mission (4:7)		
- paid experiences for students (3:17)		
- students involved day-to-day (3:7)		
- adults adapt communication and translate (3:7)		
- adults know about opportunities (3:5)		
- create student project fund (2:10)		
Ways to Contribute	- integrate students in existing projects and adult groups (11:34)	
	- established mechanisms (10:27)	
	- different ways of contributing (10:23)	

Theme	Category	Enabling Factor
Power Dynamics		- student volunteers (5:13) - regular meetings with students (5:12) - being in spaces to learn (2:9) - no formalized structures (2:5)
	Which Students and How to get In	- representation of diversity (8:17) - more students (7:21) - students from all around the network (5:9) - lower entrance barrier (1:1)
	Y-AP & Collaboration	- good cooperation between students and adults (11:37) - ongoing collaboration (10:31) - get rid of age lens (6:23) - students decide what to say (6:18) - allow errors (6:12) - students feel respected (5:8) - unlearn tokenism (1:2) - student participation is fun (1:2)
	Decision-Making Spaces	- Bring youth to policy decision-making spaces (5:9)
	Power Sharing	- Students take ownership (13:37) - Students have power (9:16) - Change in power distribution (8:13) - students in leadership role (6:12) - adults are support to share power (3:5)

Appendix 6.2 Full Table of Barriers

Structure: - Barrier (Number of Interviewees : Number of References)

If at least half of the interviewees mentioned it, it is marked in bold

Factors that were mentioned with no connection to Teach For All are marked with a *

Theme	Category	Enabling Factor
Environment	Discrimination & Inequality	- Structural discrimination (9:17) - Political will on visa (5:21) - Cultural barriers (5:18) - Student participation favors extrovertists (2:4) - Perspective of developing countries is missing (1:4) - Impacts of colonization (1:2)
	Education System	- Teachers are already overworked (4:8) - Lack of teachers* (1:1)
	International Collaboration	- Language barriers (5:19) - Connectivity issues (4:11)
	Societal & Legal Aspects	- societal norm does not include participation (3:5) - legal barriers (2:8)

Theme	Category	Enabling Factor
Institutional Structures	Resources	- tension between resources (1:3)
	Structure of Spaces	- Introducing stakeholders takes time (4:6) - structures shouldn't be replicated (1:2) - Logistics for students at in-person events are huge (2:2)
	System Changes at the Teach For All Level	- gap between knowledge and implementation (3:4) - Policies and structures do not support participation (2:11)
Interpersonal Cooperation	Clarity & Transparency	- Students don't know what they can do (3:9)
	Communication	- Adults don't listen* (7:14) - Lack of communication (5:12)
	Relationships	- Adults not used to this relationship with students (2:3)
Mindset	Get People Ready	- Open questions and insecurities (11:35) - Students lack background knowledge (9:24) - Adults lack necessary knowledge (3:7)
	Students and adults belief systems	- Mindsets are opposed* (9:24) - Adults are scared (4:10) - Tension between privilege and right (2:3) - Adults not sure about students abilities (2:2) - If it goes bad, adults may not want it again (2:2) - Hard to motivate students (1:5) - Student participation is outside their comfort zone (1:4)
Participation	Projects Students are Involved In	- Work on typical youth topics with no innovation* (1:1) - Student project lacked purpose (1:1)
	Role of Students and Adults	- Adults speak for youth (5:9) - Having students as full participants late wastes resources (1:2)
	Which Students and How to get In	- Only very active students and homogenous group (4:7) - No representation (2:3)
	Y-AP & Collaboration	- Tokenism (assigned tasks, don't really impact the work, students share advocacy message) (10:26) - Adults behaving different with students (6:14) - How to collaborate in big groups? (1:1)
Power Dynamics	Decision-Making Spaces	- No mechanism for student decision making (4:5) - Children are not protected to make decisions (2:4) - Fast decision making (2:4) - Decision making may be restricted by outside factors (1:1)
	Power Sharing	- Students shouldn't carry too much responsibility (5:9) - Tension between responsibility and power sharing (2:7)

Appendix 6.3 Participants Wishlist for the Future

- Teach For All connected to other areas of youth participation and youth work, connecting youth commitment
- Everybody is strongly focused on the end users
- More time, capacity and budget
- Learning experiences and having students involved from the beginning
- Incorporating students in priority planning
- Fundraising specifically for youth participation (having a champion donor)
- Having students in leadership roles within the organization
- Student-based spaces (like KER) everywhere and Teach For All as the catalysator
- students more present across different teams
- students in physical rooms and connect students to adults who haven't had this connection yet
- Student representatives as team members
- Student participation not seen as low-level engagement (students should be integrated)
- Remove adult fear from the adults, empowering adults to work with students
- Audit of all structures and policies with focus on student participation
- Mindset of every staff member to believe in effective student participation (through transparency, conversations, success stories, provide evidence, create experience of partnership)
- Broad student participation, opportunity to contribute for every willing kid and a student in every room at Teach For All
- Technical ability for staff to implement student participation (language, background knowledge,...)
- Having the same time zone for everybody, finding a time that works for all
- Erase underconfidence in students and adults
- Similarly enabling environment for all students, all students get the support and space they need, no student is more privileged
- Representation from each country (that ensures that each country engages in student participation)
- Invite more young people to talk about the future of education, co-create the conferences
- Training for students and adults

- One student on each team
- Shine more light on existing student projects
- Create an environment where people are not seen based on age
- More visibility of student participation (many students are not aware)
- Summit at least once a year (and having the necessary resources)
- Make the network more reachable (e.g. through a website for all network people to connect)
- Removal of all barriers (more communication, adults need to believe in students, spread the mindset, train the mentors)
- Students have a say in every action
- Teach For All reaches more classrooms
- Learn from one another (mix and match throughout classrooms)
- Focus on youths relationship with one another, support team spirit and community
- Create student-only run projects (which students get paid for)
- SLAC alumni network
- Giving more access to more students (in numbers and resources)
- More physical events (50/50) to enable people to build real relationships
- Funding for student projects in their home communities
- Every student gets access to Teach For All student participation but they have to work for that (so that students value the opportunity)
- Teacher not seen in hierarchy but as a partner
- Student participation as a continuous process (there is always another step after they participated in a project or where included in a process)