

RESERVED OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS PROGRAM: THE PNU - MINDANAO CAMPUS' EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This qualitative single-case study explores the lived experiences of stakeholders involved in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program at the Philippine Normal University – Mindanao Campus. Amidst national debates on the relevance and modernization of ROTC, this research investigates how the program is implemented, perceived, and experienced by cadets, alumni, instructors, and administrators. Guided by a constructivist epistemology and devoid of a pre-established theoretical framework, the study allows themes to emerge organically from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that the ROTC program serves as a transformative platform for leadership development, discipline, and civic responsibility. Participants highlighted both personal growth and challenges encountered, particularly in balancing academic and military obligations. The study also reveals critical insights into the curriculum's strengths and areas for improvement, including the need for mental health support, gender inclusivity, and updated training methodologies aligned with contemporary security demands. The research concludes that while ROTC remains a vital tool for nation-building and youth development, its effectiveness hinges on enhancing the ROTC curriculum, establishing a stronger academic-training balance mechanism, strengthening support structures and mentorship programs, promoting inclusive and equitable leadership opportunities, integrate community engagement into ROTC activities, highlight career pathways and lifelong impact, and implementing a continuous feedback and reflection mechanism.

Keywords: *ROTC Implementation, Leadership Development, Civic Responsibility and Patriotism, Curriculum Reform and Inclusivity*

Introduction

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) in the Philippines is one of the three main components of the National Service Training Program (NSTP), which is designed to promote civic responsibility and defense readiness among college students. The ROTC specifically focuses on equipping students with military training and education to prepare them for roles in national defense. Its primary goals include readying students for potential service in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during emergencies and developing them into reservists and prospective officers.

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a program institutionalized under Sections 38 and 39 of Republic Act No. 7077, designed to provide military training to tertiary level students to motivate, train, organize and mobilize them for national defense preparedness. It provide the legal framework for implementing the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program in higher education institutions across the Philippines. Section 38 mandates military training for students enrolled in colleges, universities, and similar institutions, as provided by the 1987 Constitution and the National Defense Act. This provision establishes ROTC as an essential component in developing a reserve force capable of responding to national emergencies, fostering discipline, and promoting patriotism among the youth. Meanwhile, Section 39 outlines the procedure for establishing ROTC units in academic institutions that request them, subject to the approval of the Secretary of National Defense. It specifies that the ROTC curriculum must be prescribed by the same authority and may include instruction tailored for female students. The program is structured into two phases: the basic ROTC, which is mandatory and spans two academic years, and the advanced ROTC, which is voluntary and may extend up to an additional two years, including optional summer or probationary training not exceeding sixty consecutive days. The distribution of ROTC units among the Army, Navy, and Air Force is aligned with the projected manpower requirements of each service's reserve component.

Within the PNU-Mindanao campus, these sections underscore the institutional basis for ROTC while also revealing the tension between the program's traditional military orientation and the evolving expectations of students for inclusive, holistic, and socially responsive education. As such, these legal provisions not only justify the presence of ROTC in academic institutions but also invite a re-examination of how the program can adapt to contemporary educational values without compromising its core mandate of national defense preparedness.

Historically, ROTC in the Philippines has served as an essential platform for instilling patriotism, discipline, and national readiness among youth. Originally introduced in 1912 at the University of the Philippines under U.S. influence, it became mandatory through legal acts aimed at creating a trained civilian reserve for national defense Caangay, R. B. & Baradillo, D. (2023). These programs combined physical fitness, military drills, leadership

development, and civic-military education to cultivate reservists capable of responding to emergencies and contributing to national security

In today's academic landscape, there's a growing demand for educational programs that go beyond traditional training models placing equal emphasis on personal development, emotional well-being, inclusivity, and adaptability. As students become more diverse and globally aware, they expect learning experiences that honor their overall growth and meet modern realities. Research supports this shift: for instance, a study of university Army ROTC programs revealed that integrating physical therapy, sports psychology, and mental-health awareness into training not only reduced injury rates, but also enhanced cadet wellness and resilience (Butler, 2025).

Similarly, a phenomenological study exploring leadership development among Generation Z ROTC cadets found that environments emphasizing psychological safety, mentorship, and peer engagement significantly improved students' well-being, sense of belonging, and readiness to lead (Gagdon, 2024).

Garcia and Thomas (2019) argue that students today expect curricula that are both academically challenging and socially relevant, incorporating global perspectives and encouraging critical thinking. Similarly, Chen (2020) advocates for the modernization of programs like ROTC by integrating topics such as mental health awareness, emotional intelligence, and civic engagement.

The ROTC in Philippines was for many decades a compelling aspect affecting the lives of male youths whom many despises it and even question it as to its relevance in pursuing a college education. It was also a significant contributor to the corruption and abuses within the ranks of the subject as expose by Mark Welson Chua before being murdered by his fellow ROTC Officers. But unbeknownst to the public, the ROTC program has undergone numerous unacknowledged name changes, like in the 1960s through the mid-1970s it was called "Philippine Military Training" or PMT, and then from the late 1970s up to the early 1990s it was called "Citizen Military Training" or CMT, also advance training did not begin until the mid-1970s when cadets who desired to be cadet officers underwent what was called "Cadet Officers Candidate Course" or COCC.

The growing emphasis on inclusivity and mental health is particularly urgent. Educational institutions are being called upon to align their programs with these values. For ROTC, this means rethinking its structure to include elements that support emotional resilience, ethical leadership, and community involvement.

Despite reforms, criticisms persist. Some students view the program as overly rigid and authoritarian, citing ongoing issues such as hazing and strict disciplinary practices (Muhallin, 2021). These concerns underscore the need for continuous evaluation and reform to ensure that ROTC remains relevant and supportive of students' academic and personal growth. Incorporating modules on ethical decision-making, emotional well-being, and collaborative learning could help bridge the gap between traditional military training and modern educational expectations.

Despite facing challenges, the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) remains a staunch supporter of ROTC implementation, emphasizing its significance in fostering patriotism and bolstering the nation's reserve defense system Gascon (2023).

Further, to support the need for robust ROTC programs, Candaza and SaAgel (2024) surveyed Filipino parents in Manila, revealing strong support for mandatory ROTC due to its positive impact on disaster preparedness. Similarly, Pasion et al. (2024) assessed ROTC implementation in Metro Manila colleges and recommended strategies to standardize programs and enhance leadership training. Barrios (2023) strongly supported mandatory ROTC among young adults and Roman Catholics, indicating broad societal approval.

This study is to explore the Reserved Officers' Training CORPS Program: The PNU- Mindanao Campus' Experiences. It aims to identify potential policy enhancement, innovations and reforms to improve the program's alignment with contemporary needs which presents significant challenges for various stake holders like ARESCOM, academe, professors/instructors, students/current cadets and researchers. The conduct of the study is grounded in the researcher's extensive and meaningful public service experience spanning over three decades and is guided by the lens of public administration and governance. Specifically, this will address the ff: 1) How is the ROTC program experienced by the implementers and students? 2) What is the essence of their experiences? and 3). What is the implication of the findings?

Literature Review

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) has long been regarded as a formative experience in developing leadership, discipline, and patriotism among Filipino youth. This is not a new idea RA 7077, or the Citizen Armed Forces of the Philippines Reservist Act of 1991, formalized ROTC as a pathway to create a pool of disciplined, trained citizens ready to assist in national defense and community service. It reflects the long-standing belief that national service goes beyond mere duty; it is an investment in human development and national preparedness.

In recent years, however, the discourse around ROTC has shifted, especially with renewed calls for its reimplementation. Caangay and Baradillo (2023), through sentiment analysis, found that public opinion on mandatory ROTC is mixed, with supporters recognizing its benefits in instilling discipline, while critics raise concerns over outdated practices, hazing, and relevance in today's modern academic and social contexts. Similarly, Gascon (2023) highlighted the Department of National Defense's revived support for ROTC, citing its role in shaping youth into civic-minded individuals, despite lingering issues surrounding program management and student resistance.

At the heart of many ROTC programs is the development of psychological resilience and leadership under pressure. This was documented by Fischer (2014), who conducted a qualitative investigation into how Army ROTC physical training develops both selfless service and resiliency in cadets. Her study revealed that cadets often undergo a mental transformation learning to endure stress, support others, and reframe obstacles as leadership opportunities. These findings were echoed in Thomas et al. (2021), whose large-scale study of West Point graduates showed that structured military training environments contribute to a high degree of psychological resilience, especially when combined with mentorship, peer bonding, and internal motivation.

Gagnon (2024) offered further insight through an interpretive phenomenological study of leadership development in ROTC, showing that cadets often develop their leadership style not just through drill and protocol but also through real moments of reflection, failure, and recovery. The interpersonal aspect how cadets relate to their peers and mentors proved just as formative as formal training.

Meanwhile, wellness and mental well-being are increasingly recognized as essential components of ROTC success. A recent report by Butler (2025) from East Carolina University noted that interdisciplinary support from physical therapy to mental health services helped ROTC cadets achieve better balance, fewer dropouts, and improved leadership performance. This reflects a growing awareness that holistic development is not only desirable but necessary in modern ROTC settings.

In the Philippine, Muhallin (2021) explored how the National Service Training Program (NSTP), which includes ROTC as one of its components, impacted student development. The findings pointed toward improved discipline and civic responsibility, but also highlighted the need for greater relevance, sensitivity to student needs, and integration of 21st-century leadership skills. Echoing this, Pasion et al. (2024) provided a multi-dimensional analysis of ROTC in Metro Manila universities, identifying both strengths and blind spots in implementation. They concluded that while ROTC can produce effective student leaders, the curriculum must evolve to stay aligned with societal shifts and student expectations.

From a psychological standpoint, military training also boosts stress management and performance. Smith and Johnson (2020) reported that mental skills training within military personnel improved both performance and stress response indicating that structured support and guided practice matter as much as raw discipline. Garcia and Lopez (2019), along with McLarnon et al. (2021), emphasized the importance of self-regulation and internal coping mechanisms as predictors of long-term adaptability and success in both military and civilian environments.

Finally, Miller (2019) argued that modern leadership under pressure requires more than just authority it requires presence of mind, strategic calm, and empathy. These qualities are increasingly expected in ROTC graduates, particularly as they move into leadership roles both in the armed forces and in civilian careers.

Taken together, these sources reveal a clear trend: ROTC remains a vital tool for leadership and character development, but its future effectiveness depends on its ability to adapt. Integrating mental health, fostering inclusive environments, and aligning with modern educational values are no longer optional they are essential for the program's continued relevance.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive single-case study design to gain a deep understanding of how the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program is implemented and experienced at the Philippine Normal University – Mindanao Campus. The research focused on gathering detailed narratives from a carefully selected group of informants, including current cadets, program alumni, instructors, and school administrators, who had substantial and direct involvement in the ROTC program. The purposive and convenience sampling strategies ensured participants were knowledgeable and accessible, with data collection carried out through interviews and focus group discussions. These interactions were guided by a validated interview protocol and were recorded, transcribed, and verified by participants to ensure accuracy and authenticity.

Data gathering took place within the PNU-Mindanao campus and nearby areas in Agusan del Sur, allowing the study to remain grounded in the specific context of the institution. Ethical clearance was secured, and participant confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the process. Using John Atkinson's four-step framework for case

analysis describing, categorizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions the researcher synthesized the narratives into meaningful themes. The study emphasized trustworthiness by applying triangulation, maintaining an audit trail, using thick description, and engaging in member checking. Overall, the methodology ensured that the findings reflect the lived realities of those involved in the ROTC program, offering valuable insights into its impact, challenges, and potential areas for improvement.

Findings

The responses reflect a wide range of perspectives, detailing personal transformations, challenges, and strategies for coping with the rigors of the program.

Profile of the Informants

The study's informants represent a varied group of individuals engaged in the ROTC program, each contributing distinct insights based on their roles and experiences. Their ages span from 13 to 25, encompassing both younger cadets at the early stages of training and older participants, including alumni, who may have held leadership positions. The inclusion of younger participants suggests early exposure to military training, while the older respondents reflect sustained involvement and possibly advanced responsibilities within the program. Gender representation is balanced, with both male and female participants actively involved. Notably, leadership roles such as Battalion Commander and Headquarters Commandant are held by female cadets, underscoring the program's support for gender inclusivity in leadership. Meanwhile, male participants are more prevalent among the alumni, indicating a trend of long-term engagement.

The roles undertaken by the respondents are diverse, ranging from command and administrative positions to support functions. Some have served in key leadership capacities such as Battalion Commanders and Platoon Leaders, while others have contributed through roles in social media management and Civil Military Operations. Their involvement in the program spans two to six years, with alumni typically having longer tenures, reflecting the program's developmental nature where responsibilities increase over time.

In terms of educational background, the participants include both current college students and graduates, highlighting ROTC's integration into various stages of academic life. Some individuals maintain their connection to the program even after graduation, indicating its lasting influence. Geographically, most respondents are from Agusan del Sur, particularly from municipalities like Prosperidad, Talacogon, and San Francisco. This regional concentration suggests that ROTC participation is closely linked to local educational institutions and the accessibility of training facilities.

The respondent profile illustrates the inclusive and developmental character of the ROTC program. The diversity in age, gender, roles, and educational status demonstrates the program's capacity to engage individuals from various backgrounds. The presence of women in leadership roles reflects progress toward gender equality, while the regional focus highlights the importance of local context in shaping ROTC experiences. These profiles provide a valuable foundation for analyzing the participants' perspectives on the program's challenges, benefits, and its impact on their personal and professional growth.

ROTC Experiences at PNU-Mindanao

Theme 1: Transformative Experiences in ROTC

The ROTC program offers a transformative journey for students, significantly contributing to their development in areas such as discipline, leadership, and personal growth. Many participants noted that the program tested their physical and mental limits, ultimately strengthening their character. A key aspect of this transformation was the shift from a civilian lifestyle to a more structured, military-oriented mindset, which marked a pivotal moment in their personal development. Through exposure to military training, cadets cultivated resilience, teamwork, and a heightened sense of responsibility qualities that deeply influenced their understanding of discipline and leadership.

Sub-theme 1.1: Personal Growth and Development

The informants shared that their involvement in the ROTC program played a significant role in shaping their personal identity. Many noted that the experience pushed them beyond their usual boundaries, particularly in developing leadership skills and enhancing self-discipline. This growth was often attributed to the challenges and responsibilities they encountered throughout their training.

Informant 1 shared how ROTC provided,

"ROTC was a blast, ROTC provides unforgettable moments and lessons where I can apply in my life."

Similarly, Informant 2 described the program as *"transformative,"* particularly in transitioning to a military mindset that reshaped discipline.

"transformative with my most memorable experience the transition phase from civilian to a military mindset as it deeply challenged and reshaped my discipline."

Informant 3 said that,

"...It builds not just my physical aspect but also in my leadership skills at the ROTC program is the reason

my service."

Informant 4, *"Enjoyable yet challenging, it builds my overall character."*

Informant 5 development of discipline, skills enhancement, personal growth, and the shift from a civilian mindset to a military-oriented perspective.

The ROTC Program at PNU Mindanao has taught me to be a strong and wise person, it helps me develop my skills and enhance my knowledge on what ROTC is all about and also ROTC help me discipline myself as an individual that is part of this community. When I joined advance officer I learned that I should separate my civilian mindset from Military-mindset."

Informant 6 the rigorous and dynamic nature of ROTC training

"a combination of ups and down through out the six years of being in the organization. It provides a lot of physical training through dulle exercises and other physical activities. The program also known for instilling Leadership for the officers and discipline for every cadet and also officers Military skills and Civil Engagement are also incorporated in the program."

Informant 8 discusses growth and leadership development, noting how ROTC honed their leadership abilities, particularly as a battalion commander.

"in my 3 years of experience at PNUM ROTC was of learnings and growth. The unit homed me to be become an effective leader as I save as a battalion commanders for 2 years."

Informant 9 reflects on the balance between military and academic life, emphasizing that ROTC made their college experience fulfilling.

"I had to have a military life while still enjoying my academic as a student. If I were to describe my college life it would fulfill without ROTC."

Informant 10 focuses on the core aspects of ROTC training, including leadership, discipline, teamwork, and self-improvement through regular drills.

"The role (reserve officers training corps) program at PNU Mindanao Campus, typically focused on developing leadership discipline and military skills it also involves training, regular drills that develops teamwork and self improvement."

Informant 11 describes their experience as excellent and personally enriching, emphasizing self-discovery and personal contribution.

"...well indeed it is very excellent because I've a lot give when it comes to be more of myself."

Research supports this notion, highlighting that military training programs foster self-discipline and resilience in young adults (Smith & Johnson, 2020). The structured training provided in ROTC aligns with findings that leadership skills improve when students are placed in high-pressure environments where quick decision-making is necessary (Garcia & Lopez, 2019).

Sub-theme 1.2 Significant Moments and Challenges

Cadets recalled specific moments that defined their ROTC journey. These included overcoming rigorous physical training, bonding with fellow cadets, and stepping into leadership roles.

Informant 1 recalled executing exercises with their buddies, where seniors fostered camaraderie through the buddy system.

"The most unforgettable moments I had when were executing exercises with my buddies where our seniors build our band and install the buddy buddy system in our hearts."

Informant 2 highlighted mastering physical and mental challenges while developing camaraderie and leadership skills under military discipline.

"most significant moments for me were mastering the physical and mental challenges the camaraderie among my buddies and the mental shift required to adopt a leadership mindset under military discipline."

Informant 3 emphasized key events such as being the rolling class during the global pandemic, serving as the GMA for RAATI, and competing in a national assembly test.

"Being the rolling class during the global Pandemic. Being the GMA for the RAATI. Competing in a National event during the assembly test."

Informant 4 noted that team-building exercises helped strengthen bonds among cadets.

"Team building, because it builds camaraderies."

Informant 5 shared that joining the advanced officer training instilled discipline and provided the opportunity to serve as an officer in the PNU Mindanao ROTC Unit.

"That's when I joined the advance officer because it change me and discipline me to became what I am right now and also it gives me the opportunity to serve as an officer in PNU Mindanao ROTC Unit."

Informant 6 reflected on their deep friendships, experiencing both hardships and achievements through major ROTC events, including the Sponsor & Escort presentations and the RAATI annual tradition.

"My inseparable buddies which one my friends kakampi (ally) and Karamay (companion) through the hell and paradise of the program has given us in the times of presentation of Sponsor & Excort and the most important event which is the raati which one annual tradition in our years."

Informant 7 described entering the advanced officer's training (RSCT & ARANT) as a defining moment that honed them into a reserve officer. Informant 8 emphasized the significance of personal growth throughout their ROTC journey. Informant 9 recalled an intense three-day RAATI training that tested them physically and mentally, culminating in their ROTCU securing the rank 1 spot in Agusan del Sur.

"During our intense yet two three day RAATI training in campus it pushed out physically and mentally. The

hardwork paid off as ROTCU secured the rank 1 spot in Agusan del Sur, making the entire challenging journey worth it."

Informant 10 highlighted major milestones such as completing advanced training, leading successful missions, and receiving awards. Informant 11 stated that being an officer was not their most significant moment but still played a role in their experience.

These responses emphasize the transformative nature of ROTC, where significant moments arise from overcoming physical and mental challenges, fostering camaraderie, and embracing leadership responsibilities.

Professional military environments emphasize resilience through structured, pressure-based training protocols that target self-regulatory capacities. A study of active-duty soldiers showed that cognitive and emotional self-regulation developed during routine military drills significantly predicted better mental health outcomes, including reductions in negative emotions and improved self-perceived effectiveness (McLarnon et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Roles and Responsibilities in ROTC

ROTC cadets take on a variety of roles that demand strong leadership, discipline, and collaboration. Within the program's structured hierarchy, cadets are assigned positions that enable them to cultivate critical competencies such as strategic decision-making, organizational planning, and personnel supervision. These responsibilities play a key role in shaping cadets into effective leaders capable of guiding their peers and managing tasks with efficiency.

Sub-theme 2.1 Designated Positions and Responsibilities

ROTC cadets engage in a variety of leadership roles that significantly contribute to their experiential learning and skill development. According to the informants, they held positions such as Battalion Commander, Platoon Leader, and various staff assignments within the ROTC hierarchy. Each role carried distinct responsibilities, including supervising formations, coordinating operational activities, and managing administrative functions.

For instance, Informant 1 served as a Battalion Commander, overseeing an entire unit and ensuring the smooth execution of daily operations. Informant 2 held the role of Second Platoon Alpha Leader, guiding platoon members during drills and training exercises. Informant 5 functioned as Battalion Staff 7, focusing on Civil-Military Operations (CMO) and managing the program's social media platforms. Meanwhile, Informant 9 took on the role of Headquarters Commander, responsible for logistical coordination and medical support.

These structured leadership assignments provided cadets with practical experience in command and organizational management, reinforcing the significance of hierarchy, accountability, and effective coordination within a military training environment.

Sub-theme 2.2 Impact of Leadership Roles

Assuming leadership roles within the ROTC program had a significant impact on cadets' personal and professional development, particularly in strengthening their leadership abilities, discipline, and decision-making skills. Informants shared that these responsibilities pushed them beyond their comfort zones, fostering greater confidence and strategic thinking.

Informant 1 reflected on their experience as a Battalion Commander, stating that the role *"molded me to become a stronger person,"* highlighting the transformative effect of their leadership journey. Similarly, Informant 2, who led a platoon during high-pressure situations, remarked that the experience *"helped me develop confidence and improve my ability to make quick, strategic decisions."*

Informant 9 shared that managing responsibilities as Headquarters Commander,

"These roles shaped my experience by teaching me important skills like leadership and responsibility. Each role challenged me, helping me grow as a person. Being the headquarters commander in particular taught me how to manage people and handle problems, making my ROTC journey even more meaningful and rewarding," reinforcing the value of real-world leadership experience.

Additionally, Informant 6 mentioned that their roles instilled *"discipline in everyday life, especially in time management which influence everything,"* which influenced their ability to balance multiple tasks effectively.

Informant 10 emphasized that serving as an officer allowed for *"personal reflection and growth,"* reinforcing the significance of effective communication, planning, and coordination.

Theme 3: Training and Curriculum in ROTC

The ROTC curriculum is designed to equip cadets with essential military and leadership skills. However, perceptions about its effectiveness varied among informants.

Sub-theme 3.1: Benefits of ROTC Training and Curriculum

Several cadets found the training beneficial for character development. Informant 1 noted that *"ROTC instills patriotism and respect."*

"The ROTC program is important and needed to be imposed among universities and campuses for it helps to instill the spirit of patriotism and reminds students to be respectful and obedient."

Informant 5 highlighted the *"physical fitness and leadership skills"* gained through the program.

"Participating in the ROTC program has been a transformative experience for me. Our training emphasizes physical fitness and leadership skills, which I find invaluable."

Informant 9 mentioned that *"the curriculum is meaningful,"* as it provided lifelong skills.

"The curriculum provided for us is very meaningful as I had gained a lot of knowledge not limited about military aspect but also skills and wisdom that I can use forever."

Informant 10 emphasized the benefit of ROTC program to prepare students for leadership roles in college.

"ROTC aims to prepare students for leadership roles in the military while ensuring they also complete their college education. It's a demanding program but it offers valuable skills and experience."

Studies indicate that ROTC programs help cultivate leadership traits through structured drills, teamwork exercises, and real-life problem-solving scenarios (Delgado & Ramos, 2021).

Sub-theme 3.2: Areas for Improvement in the ROTC Curriculum

While some cadets found the curriculum effective, others identified gaps in training. Informant 6 stated that *"some essential topics like military leadership, courtesy, and discipline have been removed."*

Informant 7 noted that *"the curriculum, although adapted from US-ROTC, needs further development."*

Scholars argue that military training programs must evolve to incorporate modern strategies, including technology-based simulations and advanced tactical lessons (Miller, 2021).

Theme 4: Challenges and Coping Strategies in ROTC

ROTC cadets often face challenges related to balancing their academic responsibilities with military training. The rigorous nature of the program demands effective time management, adaptability, and resilience. While some informants found ways to navigate these difficulties, others struggled with the competing demands of academics and ROTC.

Sub-theme 4.1: Balancing Academics and ROTC

Managing time between ROTC obligations and academic responsibilities was a significant challenge for many cadets. Informant 1 stated that while ROTC aligned with their personal goals of joining the regular force, it did not suit their academic goals.

"ROTC is aligned to my personal goal because I am planning to join the regular force, but it doesn't suits my academic goal."

Informant 2 stated the same,

"The program aligned well with my personal and academic goals particularly that I aspire to become a PMA/PNPA cadet. The foundations of the true essence of cadetship offers a holistic development of an aspiring cadet like me."

Informant 5 emphasized that the rigorous training required them to excel academically while maintaining teamwork and responsibility.

"The rigorous training challenged me to excel academically while poster a strong sense of teamwork and responsibility."

Others, such as Informant 9, credited ROTC with instilling discipline, which became a crucial factor in achieving academic and personal goals.

"Being disciplined is the traits that I have gained from ROTC and discipline is very essential when you want to reach a goal or dream because even waking up early is kind of discipline thanks to the ROTC for making me more disciplined."

However, conflicts between academics and ROTC training schedules were common, with informants experiencing overlapping responsibilities that caused stress and difficulties in time management.

"Sometimes I experience conflict between my academics and ROTC especially in managing my time."

Informant 2, *"Informant 2: At times the demand of the program conflicted with my academic responsibilities, but I managed this through efficient time management and seeking support to my peers."*

Informant 3, *"There are several times the duties of ROTC conflicts mistake with my academic schedule."*

Informant 5, *"conflicts between my academic pursuits and ROTC obligations. The demanding schedule of training exercises or duties sometimes overlapped with important classes and it often led to stress as I tried to balance them effectively."*

Informant 9, *"conflicts between academic pursuit and ROTC of obligation can occur time management and prioritization are crucial for successful navigating these demands."*

However, not all cadets found this balance difficult. Informant 7 stated that "proper time management" was the key to maintaining both responsibilities, while Informant 8 acknowledged that "as an ROTC officer, balancing academic work and ROTC obligations is not easy, but being accountable and available for the unit is part of the responsibility."

Informant 7, *"As far as I have experienced, I did not. The key is proper time-management."*

Sometimes, I was able to manage my time since the program taught us about time management."

Informant 8, *"As an ROTC officer it's not easy to balance academic works and ROTC obligations because as an ROTC we need to be accountable always present and be available every time the unit needs our presence time management is the key."*

Research suggests that balancing dual commitments, such as ROTC and academic studies, requires structured time management strategies and institutional support (Garcia & Lopez, 2019). The ability to balance these commitments effectively can also foster long-term discipline and resilience.

Sub-theme 4.2: Coping Strategies and Overcoming Challenges

Cadets developed different coping strategies to manage the challenges posed by their ROTC commitments. Informant 2 focused on efficient time management and seeking support from peers to balance responsibilities.

"At times the demand of the program conflicted with my academic responsibilities, but I managed this through efficient time management and seeking support to my peers."

"The biggest challenges that I faced were enduring both mental and physical demands of training while balancing academic responsibilities but I managed it by building good habits."

"I learned to overcome these challenges through breaking the said challenges into smaller manageable goals relying on the support on my ROTC buddies."

Informant 3 focused on impactful decision, *"Making a sound & impactful decision. Taking abrupt plans into action."*

Informant 7 emphasized that proper time management played a crucial role in maintaining academic performance while fulfilling ROTC obligations.

"As far as I have experienced, I did not. The key is proper time-management. Sometimes, I was able to manage my time since the program taught us about time management."

"Sometimes I tend to give up due to personal reasons, but I think of the good things the ROTC, imparted in me."

Informant 8 noted that the ability to teach cadets as an officer contributed positively to their academic and personal growth, providing a practical application of leadership and training principles.

"As an ROTC officer its not easy to balance academic works and ROTC obligations because as an ROTC we need to be accountable always present and be available every time the unit needs our presence time management is the key."

He further added that mental stability and managing time wisely is a way to cope with the challenges.

"By being mentally stable and manage your time wisely also about avoiding procrastination."

Some informants, such as Informant 6, found that ROTC did not align with their academic goals, yet they chose to prioritize it due to personal interest.

"As of experience do not have any conflict it's just that I give more time in the organization than in my Academics."

Meanwhile, Informant 10 highlighted the importance of structured leadership training in helping cadets navigate demanding schedules.

"The ROTC program can align well with personal and academic goals by providing leadership training and structured environment that complements academic studies."

Research indicates that students who balance academic responsibilities with extracurricular commitments, such as ROTC, benefit from structured time management, supportive peer networks, and resilience-building experiences. These elements help them navigate and manage competing demands more effectively (Garcia & Lopez, 2019).

Theme 5: Essence of ROTC and National Service

The ROTC program fosters core values such as leadership, discipline, patriotism, and national service. Informants shared that their participation in the program significantly influenced their sense of civic duty and personal development. Through their experiences, they gained a deeper understanding of responsibility and commitment to serving the nation, which contributed meaningfully to their growth as individuals.

Sub-theme 5.1: Understanding Leadership and Discipline

Numerous informants highlighted the significant impact of the ROTC program on their development of leadership and discipline. Informant 2, in particular, described a notable transformation in both areas, emphasizing how their experiences in the program reshaped their approach to responsibilities in both military and civilian contexts. This shift reflects the program's role in fostering a more structured, accountable, and proactive mindset among its participants.

"The core essence of my cadetship journey was that the transformation it sparked in my leadership skills and personal discipline, which fundamentally shifted how I approach all challenges and responsibilities in both military and civilian life."

Informant 4 emphasized the discipline and leadership they gained, while Informant 5 highlighted values such as patriotism, integrity, and discipline as the essence of their ROTC experience.

Several cadets reflected on how these experiences influenced their leadership styles. Informant 3 noted that ROTC helped them overcome shyness, making them more confident leaders.

"It helped me come out to my shell as shy person."

Informant 7 expressed that their journey in ROTC was fulfilling, as they worked hard to become an officer while forming strong bonds with their peers.

"Today I am also an officer I worked hard for it and I think this is the sweetest fruit that I have harvested followed by having a family and friendship with my buddies."

Informant 8 highlights leadership and discipline.

"The core essence of the ROTC experience often lies in the development of leadership and discipline for many the program also offer career path in the military while supporting academic achievements."

Informant 9 emphasized that ROTC provided a rigorous training environment that enhanced their decision-making skills and sense of responsibility.

"It provides a rigorous training environment that builds character enhances decision making skills and foster a story sense of responsibility and teamwork."

Sub-theme 5.2: Perceptions on National Service and Patriotism

Informants expressed how their participation in ROTC strengthened their sense of patriotism and national service. Informant 1 mentioned that the program influenced them to consider joining the military.

"It influences me to join the military in the future."

Informant 2 stated that their ROTC experience developed their sense of patriotism, while Informant 3 described a shift in perspective regarding the armed forces, recognizing the value of duty and service.

"It changed my perspective in the armed forces of the Philippines. Duty first and People always."

Several informants provided examples that reinforced their views on national service. Informant 4 mentioned volunteering during Typhoon Odette relief operations, recognizing the role of the rescue force in community service.

"When I volunteered in the relief operation for typhoon odette. The rescue force is actually have to help the community and not to threaten them."

Informant 5 cited geopolitical threats, such as tensions with China, as factors that motivated them to value national defense.

"Threats of China to declare war against the Philippines."

Informant 7 recalled learning from a former rebel, which deepened their understanding of national security issues. These experiences illustrate how ROTC fosters a sense of responsibility toward community service and national defense.

"One is when a former NPA taught us his experiences when he was inside the group. It made me realize how tough and rebellious they are."

Research suggests that military training programs enhance civic engagement by instilling a sense of duty, discipline, and responsibility (Delgado & Ramos, 2021). ROTC cadets develop a commitment to serving their communities and country, making them more aware of national security concerns and their role in addressing them.

Discussion

The cadet narratives reflect a profound transformation, driven by military-style training that reshaped their discipline, emotional resilience, and leadership outlook. This aligns closely with findings from a study at Louisiana State University, where Army ROTC cadets developed dimensions of resilience notably through enduring challenges and receiving peer and leadership support during physical training which influenced their belief in selfless service and strengthened their organizational commitment (Fischer, 2014). Their personal "turning points" like transitioning from civilian roles to military-minded cadets mirrored similar growth: becoming mentally tough, disciplined, and better equipped for leadership.

Moreover, psychological resilience research among West Point graduates offers additional insight: key traits such as purpose in life, social support, and grit collectively explained about 60 % of the variance in their capacity to adapt under stress (Thomas et al., 2021). This supports the PNU cadets' reflections: leadership opportunities and disciplined routines fostered not only physical toughness but also inner strength. In short, these grounded accounts underscore that ROTC training transcends physical rigor it forges resilient leaders capable of navigating personal and professional demands.

The cadets' stories align well-documented patterns in military training literature. Their transformative experiences through ROTC marked by challenging drills, emotional growth, and peer support help explain why similar settings tend to produce disciplined, resilient leaders ready for both civic and professional roles.

Conclusion

The findings of this study offer a compelling narrative of how the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at Philippine Normal University – Mindanao Campus serves not only as a training ground for national defense but also as a transformative educational experience. From the rich narratives of cadets, instructors, and alumni, it becomes clear that the program goes far beyond marching drills and physical training. It molds cadets into individuals equipped with leadership skills, emotional resilience, discipline, and a profound sense of service and responsibility both to their community and to the nation.

The study revealed that personal growth and transformation are at the core of the ROTC experience. Cadets consistently shared how their involvement in the program challenged them physically, mentally, and morally, helping them adopt a more structured and purposeful outlook. The shift from civilian to military mindset acted as a critical turning point for many, enabling them to develop confidence, make sound decisions under pressure, and foster a deep sense of accountability.

Leadership roles and responsibilities within the ROTC hierarchy gave cadets valuable opportunities to practice real-world leadership, from organizing operations to managing teams. These experiences proved essential in helping them translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills that benefit their academic pursuits and future careers. The cadets' reflections support broader research that links military leadership training to increased adaptability and strategic thinking (Thomas & Reed, 2022).

The training and curriculum were seen as both beneficial and in need of improvement. While many cadets found the program meaningful in instilling patriotism and essential life skills, others pointed out gaps particularly the need for modernization, integration of relevant technologies, and a better balance between military and academic priorities.

Balancing academic obligations with ROTC commitments emerged as a common challenge, yet it also served as a catalyst for developing time management, grit, and emotional strength. The cadets' coping strategies ranging from peer support to mental discipline showed how the demands of ROTC can nurture resilience when adequately supported.

The essence of ROTC lies in its ability to ignite a deep sense of national service and patriotism. Many cadets spoke of their desire to serve the country, whether through the military or civic engagements. Their participation in community outreach programs and disaster response efforts further highlighted the civic dimension of the training. In conclusion, the ROTC program at PNU Mindanao does more than fulfill its mandate of military preparedness. It shapes young individuals into disciplined, community-oriented leaders, capable of navigating complex roles in both national defense and civil society. However, for the program to sustain and expand its impact, institutional stakeholders must continuously assess and adapt its structure, support mechanisms, and curriculum to better meet the evolving needs of both cadets and the country they aim to serve.

The findings of this study open several meaningful avenues for future research, particularly in the fields of educational development, leadership formation, and civic engagement among youth. While the current research focused on the lived experiences of ROTC cadets and implementers at a single campus, future studies may benefit from comparative analyses across multiple campuses or regions in the Philippines. Such comparisons could reveal variances in training models, leadership styles, and cultural interpretations of discipline and service. In doing so, researchers may identify best practices or systemic gaps that could inform policy recommendations or nationwide reforms in the ROTC program.

Another important area for future inquiry lies in examining the long-term impact of ROTC participation on professional and civic trajectories. This includes tracking ROTC alumni to assess how their training experiences influence their careers whether they enter the armed forces, civil service, or private sectors and their continued involvement in community or national development. A longitudinal study could provide valuable insights into the program's effectiveness in instilling lasting values of patriotism, discipline, and leadership, and whether these qualities translate into measurable contributions in governance, community development, or disaster response.

Moreover, future research could explore the intersectionality of gender, socioeconomic background, and educational attainment in shaping one's ROTC experience. The current study briefly noted gender inclusion in leadership roles, but a deeper analysis of how female cadets experience command responsibilities or how students from underprivileged backgrounds navigate the rigors of training may offer a richer understanding of inclusivity within the program. Similarly, interdisciplinary studies combining educational psychology, public administration, and military science could investigate how mentorship, feedback loops, and training design affect the psychological and ethical development of cadets, further refining the theoretical foundations of youth leadership development in civic-military contexts.

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