

The Journey of Advanced Reserve Officer Training Course Cadets: Balancing Academics, Leadership, and Military Training

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of the advanced reserve officers training course cadets as a student. The study was conducted at Misamis University, Ozamiz City. Ten advanced ROTC Officers at Misamis University, Ozamiz City, were interviewed using a structured questionnaire made by the researcher. The study used Moustaka's Transcendental Analysis of the data. The phenomenological study revealed five main themes: economic burden; physical and mental stability; age, height, grade requirement; time management, and self-discipline. This research posits that advanced ROTC officers experience various challenges regarding their overall well-being. Economic burden and physical and mental instability have been part of the officers' experiences. Qualifications of being an advanced ROTC officer are evident, as well as the countermeasures in coping with the challenges: time management and self-discipline. Advanced ROTC officers may explore ways in which they can use to sustain their financial needs. They may seek the support of a physician to aid their mental and physical health. Families should provide them with time, care, and support, constantly asking for their overall welfare.

Keywords: advanced ROTC officer, challenges encountered, time management, self-discipline, economic burden

INTRODUCTION

The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) is one of the programs offered in National Service Training Program (NSTP) of the Philippines which is a form of service learning which is defined as the integration of community services into instruction in order to strengthen the civic and community responsibilities of the students (Saban, 2020). All college students in the Philippines are expected to take the National Service Training Program (NSTP), a government-mandated citizenship course. By fostering a sense of patriotism and service, it seeks to increase youths' civic awareness and defense preparedness (Curren& Dorn, 2018). There are three (3) components of NSTP the Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS) focuses on activities contributing to the general welfare and betterment of life of the community (Basco-Galangco&Mamolo, 2017). The Literacy Training Service (LTS) trains students to teach literacy and numeracy skills to school children and out-of-school youth (Lopez, 2019). The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) is tasked to train and develop college students in the rudiments of Military Service in order to produce capable Armed Forces of the Philippines reservists (Muhallin, 2021).

Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) is one of the three program components of the National Service Training Program (NSTP) which focuses on military training and preparedness for national defense (Raposas, 2017). ROTC prepares the students in serving the Armed Forces of the Philippines most especially in times of crisis or emergency. It give students the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes they need to carry out national service in the event of emergencies, as well as to aid in the socioeconomic development

of the nation (Bordoloi, 2018). This is the continuation of the ROTC program, which aims to produce capable armed forces of the Philippines reservist by instilling the values of patriotism, leadership, discipline, camaraderie, obedience, and teamwork. It is designed for a thorough application of the theories and principles learned both in field and classroom discussions in the fundamentals of military service (Seel et al., 2017). Being an advanced ROTC officer will develop the person's leadership holistically as an individual, not just the leadership, but it will prepare young men and women for highly demanding, responsible service (Allen et al., 2018).

Committing to join the program has several downsides that students are wary of. However, the drawback of joining the program is being disregarded. Yeager (2022) argued that because of ROTC, time management becomes crucial to students as they have to balance their military duties with their regular schoolwork. Voluntary or mandatory ROTC, the sentiments remain the same; that a number of students view ROTC as nothing, but a tool of repression used by the state and a specialized skill wherein not all have the mental, physical, or psychological capacity to do so (Hunzinger et al., 2020). There is still a physical, mental, and psychological component that majority of the people would not qualify for or not up to military standards (Adil, 2018). On the other hand, physical training is important for the preparation of military cadets, including those enrolled in the ROTC programs. Successful fulfillment of all military tasks is critical for members of the military, including ROTC cadets and advanced officers (Newman et al., 2022). Nevertheless, if you commit any violations of ROTC's standards or drop below ROTC's academic requirements, you may be asked to leave the program, and you will still face the consequences and potential legal action (Bell et al., 2022).

It is not something new for students to encounter challenges in life, the same is true in the conduct of ROTC class and advanced course among college students. Most, if not all college students before the pandemic have experienced the struggles and challenges of ROTC program (Gantalao, 2023). Students who have encountered the ways and living of an advanced officer has brought numerous complaints as to the challenges they encountered during the conduct of military training (Bjornestad et al., 2021). The physical and mental demands that are needed to be complied with has made them protest as to the rigidity of the training. Students would learned to be discipline and manage their time with the demanding mental and physical workout they needed to cope (LaPrade, 2022).

Thus, this study with the title "The Journey of Advanced Reserve Officer Training Course Cadets: Balancing Academics, Leadership, and Military Training" was conducted to know what are those obstacles that advanced ROTC officers encountered during their trainings on how they survived despite of their individual responsibility as a student. Despite the fact that this is an investigation on a complicated topic, the researchers thought the conclusions drawn from these studies are a first step in revealing fresh perspectives on producing effective and mechanisms for recruitment.

METHODS

This study used the qualitative research approach. The phenomenological approach was used as a method of the undertaking. It is the process of analyzing the data from the study participants to obtain meaningful themes following Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). This research design is suited to explore the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms of the advanced ROTC officers of Misamis University during their training.

This study was conducted at the Misamis University at Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental. Misamis University has different courses, including Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) as one of the National Service Training Program (NSTP) components. The ROTC at Misamis University caters to advanced officers to train and be equipped with the necessary training. Misamis University is a privately owned, non-

sectarian, non-profit educational institution founded by Dr. Hilarion Feliciano and Dona Maria Mercado Feliciano in 1929, located at H.T. Feliciano St., Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental.

To investigate the underlying questions of this study, the participants were ten (10) selected advanced ROTC officers, given that they meet the predefined criteria below. In addition, purposive sampling was utilized by the researchers. Purposive sampling refers to non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have the characteristics you need in your sample (Nikolopoulou, 2022). The criteria for selecting the participants include 1) advanced ROTC Cadets, 2) serving at least three years, and 3) willingness to participate. Furthermore, the study used interview guide researchers constructed. The researchers then set an appointment with the identified participants and proposed the interview schedule. The researchers informed the participants that the conversation was recorded and assured them that all their responses were kept confidential. Further, the minimum health protocol was observed during the interview, considering the pandemic.

In the current study, ethical standards were always observed by the researchers. The researchers strictly observed the participant's voluntary participation of all the participants involved in the study. The interview was not conducted without their consent, allowing them to sign the informed consent form prepared by the researchers. Regarding the participant's identity, the researchers applied the measure to promote anonymity and secrecy by not mentioning the names of any participants during the interview. Privacy and confidentiality were always observed, particularly the name of the participants and other information unnecessary to the study. The researchers adhered to the guidelines set by the Republic Act No. 10173, known as the "Data Privacy Act of 2012".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3,1 Economic Burden

This theme shows that one of the challenges encountered by an advanced ROTC Officer is the economic burden. As a student, being an advanced officer can bring financial or economic burdens to both the student and his family. It would take up much money to be able to sustain the needs of an advanced officer. Therefore, you must start and stand independently to support the necessary expenses by being an advanced ROTC officer.

Results show that being an advanced ROTC officer can bring about an economic burden. Participants mentioned that they were struggling with finances. They were left to take care of everything as a head start. Some participants even mentioned that they needed help keeping everything to be bought. They also mentioned how it was a burden for them and a hindrance in keeping them to continue being an advanced officer.

"As an advanced officer, I was also struggling with finances. There were many things to buy such as the battle dress uniform, sword and swords band, and the like." (P1) (12-13)

"Although I admit having trouble with finances and have trouble keeping with all the things to be bought." (P3) (56-57)

"The difficulties that I encountered were financial burden. Growing up with a low-income family, it was kind of hard for us to support all we need, and I took the time to do part times in order to sustain my needs." (P5) (93-96)

"The financial instability of my family became a hindrance of me continuing being an officer." (P7) (131-132)

“My difficulties in pursuing my ambition to become an advance ROTC cadet is the financial assistance” (P9) (169-170)

“The difficulties that I encounter to become an advance ROTC cadet is how I will manage my time and the financial assistance” (P10) (1992-193)

The ROTC program focuses on leadership, critical thinking, and the values of the military to become a better citizen and person (Zaber et al., 2023). Many students turn to ROTC for both financial advantages and the opportunity for personal growth (Stewart et al., 2023). However, being an advanced officer could reap that away – with many things to buy, such as the necessary uniform and equipment for the training (Austria & Homing, 2023). Advanced ROTC students show signs of financial instability during their time. They do not have many out-of-pocket expenses while working toward a degree, except those applying for scholarships offered by the program (Cohen, 2023).

Findings show that being an advanced ROTC officer can inculcate economic burdens on them. Advanced ROTC officers must provide their battle dress, uniform, and other necessary equipment. The finding is consistent with the study of Austria & Homing (2023) and Cohen (2023), that advanced ROTC officers show signs of financial instability while being an officer. Identity Theory supports this, which shows that economic burden is part of the identity of the ROTC officers' life.

This implies that economic burden has been part of the experiences of advanced ROTC officers. Being an officer causes them to show a decline in financial support due to the increased number of things to be bought. It shows that most participants have greater needs than not joining at all. Participants must work on managing their finances. They should also find ways and means to cover their expenses. There are many alternative ways to support their endeavors so long as they passionately want to and have the conviction to continue.

Physical and Mental Stability

This theme shows that one of the challenges an advanced ROTC Officer encounters is physical and mental health stability. They are an officer with many responsibilities and activities to attend to puts a strain on their physical and mental health. The vigorous physical training and robust memorization kept the officers on track. Some could handle it properly, and some could not. To continue, one must be physically and mentally fit and able to manage the strains it gives to survive.

Results show that participants need to balance their lifestyles, including the physical and mental aspects of their lives. Participants even mentioned that it was a struggle to maintain this balance as it tested them to their limits. Some even mentioned that they were barely holding on and keeping their mental and physical health intact. It also shows that participants struggle to keep both their physical and mental health balance.

“I should need to wake up early which we should balance our lifestyle. The physical and mental aspects of our life should be balanced and stable.” (P1) (7-9)

“It was also a struggle to maintain balance of your mental and physical health with all the stress put upon us and that tests us beyond our limits.” (P4) (78-80)

“The only challenge that got me real hard is the physical and mental stability that I need to maintain.

Balancing physical and mental attributes is really hard especially when you have a lot in mind.” (P6) (110-112)

“I had to go through physical and mental fatigue which I should strive hard to keep intact.” (P8) (152-153)

Balancing ROTC with school can be tough (Bell, 2022). Balancing many different things in the schedule is difficult to maintain (Seger, 2021). Most people identify the military with hypermasculinity, and some service members think the leadership would advise them to keep their mental health issues to themselves (Smith et al., 2020). According to Spain (2022), ROTC cadets are finding it difficult to discuss mental health and develop ways to prevent burnout due to changing attitudes inside the military. Physical health is also associated with mental health problems. Balancing both is crucial, especially in this field where physical and mental health must be attained (Gracia, 2020).

Findings show that it is hard for the students to maintain physical and mental stability. It also shows that being an advanced ROTC officer puts much strain on their physical health due to vigorous training and its strain on the student’s academics. Students need to maintain the equilibrium of both aspects to survive being an officer. The finding is consistent with the finding in the study of Bell (2022), Seger (2021), Spain (2022), and Gracia (2020) that advanced ROTC officers show signs of difficulties in maintaining their physical and mental health. Planned Behavior Theory supports this, which shows that students need to plan for their behavior to stabilize their physical and mental health.

This implies that being an advanced ROTC officer is tough and puts much stress and strain on the student’s physical and mental health. It also indicates that many students struggle with maintaining their physical and mental health due to the rapid schedule change and the rigorous training they underwent during training. The academics they were handling added up to the strains they were experiencing and the instability they were facing. Participants must seek the help of a medical practitioner to help aid and measure the physical and mental capacity of the participants and to be administered a proper way of handling things down.

Age, Height, and Grade Requirement

This theme shows that one of the challenges an advanced ROTC Officer encounters is the age, height, and grade requirements for joining the advanced ROTC program. These are one of the general qualifications for joining the advanced ROTC officers, which most applicants need help to get. These are examined especially during training: an age ranging from 17 to 26, GPA of at least 2.0 (85) with no grade below 2.0, and height of 5ft for both males and females.

Results show that participants struggled with keeping their grades while doing vigorous training. Participants mentioned that they needed help to keep their grades to the minimum to continue due to the difficulties they encountered during their time as advanced officers. Some even disclosed that they were a lumad and a natural-born Filipino whose height does not step on the required height. Some even revealed that they did not pass into the age range and were dispirited to know that.

“The difficulties that I encountered in pursuing my ambition to become an advance ROTC Cadet is the grades because there is a requirement grade in order for me to continue becoming an advance officer.” (P2) (29-31)

“As a lumad, I was naturally born lacking height. I lack an inch height...” (P5) (96-97)

“I had struggles with my grades too...” (P6) (113-114)

“I was even more dispirited when I heard that I was a year older than the required age to train.” (P7) (133-134)

One of the qualifications for becoming an advanced ROTC cadet officer is an age not less than 18 years nor more than 21 years old upon admission, having at least 80% latest academic points average with no failed or dropped subjects, and five (5) feet in height for both male and female (La SSGSGSS, 2021). According to Chico-Lugo (2021), there are no prerequisites to participate in the Army ROTC program. However, qualifications or requirements are set as a standard for becoming an advanced ROTC officer. These requirements are the standard eligibility for becoming part of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Sax van der Weyden, 2021).

Findings show that the common challenges for advanced ROTC officers are the age, height, and grade requirements needed to train. It also shows how the participants struggled with the challenge of not being able to do anything to change their fate. It also shows that being an advanced ROTC officer requires a basic qualification before they can officially train, and one of the struggles they face is reaching the minimum requirement of age, height, and grade. The finding is consistent with the finding in the study of La SSGSGSS (2021), Chico-Lugo (2021), and Sax van der Weyden (2021) that advanced ROTC officers show struggles in keeping their age, height, and grade requirement. Identity Theory supports this, which shows that their age and height are part of their identity and are unchangeable, but their grades and height can be altered through hard work and perseverance.

This implies that students needed help with keeping their age, height, and grade requirements necessary for the training. These are one of the challenges advanced ROTC officers encounter during their stay as an officer. This also entails that some advanced ROTC officers were naturally born to lack height, have enrolled later, or lack the mental capacity to maintain their grades. However, with perseverance and hard work, they can continue as an advanced ROTC officer and be able to train so long as they are committed to continuing. To take away their concerns, they should ask what they should do long before the requirements are passed to make amends for their flaws. They must also let the senior officers see that you are worth keeping despite your flaws.

Time Management

This theme shows that one of the challenges encountered by an advanced ROTC Officer is time management. Managing the time of an overloaded schedule takes much work. To succeed as an officer, one must competently manage their time and be able to do all things efficiently. Time management can also be called “personal management” since you are the only thing you can control. Your future as an Army officer will be shaped by the time-management abilities you acquire in school and as a cadet. You must therefore develop a system for efficiently managing your time right now.

Results show that participants claimed that the only thing that could make one survive as an advanced ROTC officer is effectively managing one’s time. To overcome the challenges, an officer must have time management is the key to overcome it. Some participants claimed they were struggling with managing their time; some could overcome it and effectively manage their time. Participants even mentioned that they could multitask and efficiently use their time. Most showed signs that they counter all the challenges through time management.

“The only strategy that I made in order to cope with the situation I am in is time management. Manage your time and you will be able to overcome these challenges.” (P1) (19-21)

“The struggle of managing my time for studying and attending advance ROTC activities, it’s not that easy but as time goes by, you’ll be surprised that you had made it.” (P3) (45-47)

“In addition, you should manage your time being a student and advance ROTC officer in order to balance it.” (P4) (73-74)

“Time management is what we really need. Managing our time to be able to get everything done.” (P6) (115-116)

“...I manage my time efficiently and multitask without compromising anything.” (P7) (137)

“...but to counter all this, time management is the key. Managing your time effectively and setting the time for every activity” (P8) (154-155)

“I deal my difficulties as ROTC cadets at the same time as student by having a time management” (P9) (172-173)

Time management is a system for getting things done as quickly and effectively as feasible (Pelkey, 2021). Your time will increase in value and complexity as you take on leadership roles in the Army ROTC. Along with managing your own time, you will also need to manage the time of the people you lead (Daniels & Hanson, 2021). You become a more effective leader when you implement an effective time management strategy because your team members recognize the value you place on both your time and theirs (Kim & Sa, 2022). When the unit strives to fulfill task deadlines and complete the mission schedule, your respect for their time will aid everyone’s attempts to become more efficient (Rinka, 2019). However, it all starts here in ROTC, where you must develop strong time management skills for your college coursework (Cardines et al., 2019). Your ability to allocate enough time for your classes, sports, and extracurricular activities will determine how well you develop good time-management skills (Baumgartner, 2019).

Findings show that time management is both a struggle and a blessing to advanced ROTC officers. Many struggled to manage their time, but many overcame it all and effectively managed their time along their busy schedule. Findings also showed that time management is an effective way to combat the challenges and difficulties an officer has. The finding is consistent with the finding in the study of Kim & Sa (2022), Cardines et al. (2019), and Baumgartner (2019) that advanced ROTC officers show signs of both good and bad time management skills. These were supported by Social Constructivism Theory which shows that to survive in the world of ROTC officers; one must have good time management skills.

The result implies that time management is crucial in being an advanced ROTC officer. Further, the result entails that advanced officers should work on their time management to get everything done without struggling. The result also entails that time management is an effective way to combat the challenges encountered by advanced officers. Due to the struggles in managing time, advanced officers should record all their schedules, sort out their priorities, and organize their schedules to manage them effectively. They should also take note of the changes and try to follow the planned schedule until it goes natural.

Self-Discipline

This theme shows that a challenge an advanced ROTC Officer encounters is self-discipline. Self-discipline is part of the training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behavior, especially training that produces moral or mental improvement. It is a state of order and obedience resulting from regulations and orders. It would help if you were disciplined to achieve your goals.

Discipline is training that develops, molds, strengthens or perfects mental faculties and character. It involves placing group goals above your own, being willing to accept orders from higher authority, and carrying out those orders effectively. Part of the job of a cadet is to make their fellow cadets aware of the purpose and

meaning of discipline.

Results show that during the participant's training, they were becoming more and more disciplined. Participants even suggested that self-discipline should be instilled in each of them so that they may be able to achieve their goals and succeed. Some even mentioned that they should be self-disciplined to overcome all their flaws and achieve their goals. Self-discipline is also part of the training as an advanced ROTC officer, and when you have discipline among yourself, everything will follow.

"I cope with every challenge because of self-discipline. I challenged myself to be discipline and never to complain." (P2) (36-37)

"Self-discipline should be instilled to us in order to survive being an advanced officer." (P3) (47-48)

"...you need to lower your pride, discipline, and be responsible at all times..." (P4) (71)

"I wanted to suffice all my flaws and discipline myself to be able to achieve my goal." (P5) (98-99)

"I disciplined myself in a way that I shoved away any civilian mindset I have, even when I am at home." (P7) (137-139)

"One common thing also is self-discipline. If you have self-discipline, everything will follow." (P8) (156-157)

Self-discipline is knowing what needs to be done with a keen and natural sense of responsibility (Pelky, 2021). How disciplined you are can be determined by your punctuality, job knowledge, ability to define priorities, and willingness to sacrifice some personal preferences for more crucial ones (Malone, 2022). It is considered the highest order of all disciplines because it derives from the values you employ to guide and govern your actions in the ROTC unit (Cohen, 2023). Encouraging cadets to willingly practice self-discipline, self-control, and direction to complete the work is excellent. As stated, self-discipline makes something more effective and provides its structure. It benefits the cadet from operating in a disciplined environment and teaches him how to instill discipline in both him and his unit (Bjornestad, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to lead by example, cultivate and uphold good self-discipline, and assist cadets in understanding how self-discipline impacts oneself (Pacatang & Montallana, 2022).

Findings show that self-discipline is a part of the training that should be instilled in advanced ROTC officers to overcome challenges. It also shows that having self-discipline is part of the countermeasures in overcoming different challenges that could come from an officer. The finding is consistent with the finding in the study of Pelky (2021), Malone (2022), Bjornestad (2021), and Pacatang & Montallana (2022) that advanced ROTC officers should have the self-discipline to be more effective and understand the benefits it would give to oneself. This was supported by Social Constructivism Theory which shows that to survive in the world of ROTC officers; one must have self-discipline.

The result implies that self-discipline is a tough one to obtain, but once obtained, it would counter the challenges that come with an advanced ROTC officer. Self-discipline is part of the training that could boost morale and counter their challenges. Participants should continue their endeavor to attain self-discipline. It is also vital that they remain true to their principles and completely attain the discipline they desire.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the experience of the advanced reserve officers training course cadets as a student. The researchers interviewed ten (10) advanced ROTC officers at Misamis University, Ozamiz City, Misamis

Occidental. Through the ten (10) advanced ROTC officers, five (5) themes have emerged from the analysis of the researcher's in-depth interview. The study utilized the research-made interview guide in eliciting the needed data from the participants of the study. The data gathered were analyzed through Moustaka's data analysis techniques.

. Findings disclosed that the body of literature surrounding the impacts of advanced ROTC officers reveals much about the experiences of these officers, and it continues to grow. This research posits that advanced ROTC officers experience various challenges regarding their overall well-being. Such challenges include economic burden; physical and mental stability; age, height, grade requirement; time management; and self-discipline. The result implies that economic burden and physical and mental instability has been part of the experiences of advanced ROTC officers. Qualifications of being an advanced ROTC officer are also shown, as well as the countermeasures in coping with the challenges: time management and self-discipline.

Based on the study results, it is concluded that being an advanced officer can bring financial or economic burden. It shows that most of the participants have greater needs than not joining at all. Being an officer, with lots of responsibilities at hand and activities to attend to, gives strain to both their physical and mental health. It also indicates that a lot of students struggle with maintaining their physical and mental health due to the rapid change of schedule and the rigorous training they underwent during training. There are also general qualifications of joining the advanced ROTC officers which most of the applicants struggle to get. In order to succeed as an officer, one must also competently manage their time and be able to do all things efficiently. Self-discipline is also a part of their training that should be instilled upon the advanced ROTC officers to be able to overcome any challenges. Self-discipline is also part of the countermeasures in overcoming different challenges that could come by to an officer.

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendation is now: Advanced ROTC officers may explore ways and means in which they can use to sustain their financial needs and eliminate economic burden. They may seek the support of a physician and health practitioner to support and aid their mental and physical health. Students aspiring to become an advanced ROTC officer should consider the requirements and the rigorous training before applying to become one. Parents should be willing to provide time, care, and support to them, and be ready for the dynamic change of being an advanced officer. Government should provide programs that allow and encourage physical and mental wellbeing both between and within advanced ROTC officers that may promote their well-being. Thus, future researchers can use these finding to support their prospective investigation, particularly in the journey of advanced reserve officer training course cadets: balancing academics, leadership, and military training

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