

The Effectiveness Of National Service (NS): A Study On Perceptions Of Community Members And Staff Of Ns In Northernstates Of Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of NS from the perspective of community members and the staff training program. Such program specifically targets trainees from the northern regions of Peninsular Malaysia (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and northern Perak). Data were collected by interviewing the following respondents: Parents, community leaders, and the NSimplementers (coaches and facilitators).

The interview focuses on general opinions of the respondents about NS, its effectiveness which includes location, content, trainers, and facilities, suggestions for improving, their perceived effects on the trainees and the community, and the entire country. A total of 56 respondents were successfully interviewed, including 21 parents, 17 community leaders, and 18 trainers.

The findings revealed that majority of the interviewees agreed that the training program should be continued to develop discipline, patriotism, and nationalism. Although some of them never actually visited the camps, the interviewed parents and community leaders believed that the National Service Program provided were satisfactory level and the trainers have skills. However majority of the staff members wanted the camp infrastructure should be improved further. To improve the program, some parents suggested that NS has to deliver merit certificates which help trainees to apply for jobs. Some parents also realized that the program positively affected the trainees. Almost all community leaders suggested that the program be extended to troubled youth. They proposed the improvement of camp infrastructure and the modules of the program. In general, these findings reflect the awareness of parents, community leaders, and staff members of the importance of NS in fostering the patriotism of the younger generation.

Keywords: National Service, effectiveness, patriotism, nationalism, youth

Introduction

This report is part of the impact studies that assess the effectiveness of the National Service Training Program (NS) for the Malaysian youth after its implementation 10 years ago. This paper specifically examines the effects of patriotism and nationalism, which are the main elements in NS program.

Impact studies usually adopt a pragmatic methodology to evaluate a program (e.g., systematic training program) and to assess the scope and scale of its effects (e.g., value-for-money). This methodology is intended for the purpose of assessing the performance of such program and providing recommendations for further improvement.

This comprehensive impact study involves the parents and families of NS trainees and the community leaders and staff members of the program. Impact studies are often limited to parents, families, trainees, community leaders, and trainers residing in the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Northern Perak).

Objective of the Study

The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of NS from the perspective of community members and trainers of training program. Such program specifically targets trainees from the northern regions of Peninsular Malaysia (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and northern Perak). The sub-objectives are listed as follows:

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- (a) To identify the level of effectiveness of the NS program, this was implemented in 2004. The level of effectiveness is measured by focusing on the value of patriotism among adults and youth, which is among the basic targets of these training programs.
- (b) To assess the effect of patriotism on the trainees.
- (c) To assess the perceptions of community members and the secretariat of the executive training programs. Interviews are conducted in two groups to enhance the robustness and quality of the existing NS module and to ensure that the needs and interests of the state are achieved.

Literature Review

NS Program

NS was introduced for the first time on February 16, 2004. The introduction was then followed by a random selection of trainees who were trained using several modules, including the nationhood module, physical activities module, CSR service module, and construction of character module. This program aims to build and strengthen patriotism among the youth and promote national unity.

NS was coined in a cabinet meeting on October 30, 2002, during which the implementation of the requirements of the Energy employment was reviewed. A committee was formed under the chairmanship of the Minister of Defense, an advisor to the Prime Minister, and five Deputy Ministers. In the first meeting held on November 12, 2002, the committee changed terms, Deployment Force, to the NS.

This program is a mandatory activity for all Malaysian citizens aged 18 years or above and who have completed their Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). All selected Malaysian youths required to involve in the program for the duration of three months and should be located in 81 training centers throughout the country. The first program in February 2004 involved 85,000 trainees who were born in 1986. The Group 1 Series 10/2013 has trained 703,728 trainees as of July 2013 (JLKN, 2013).

The trainees undergo four different modules related to nationhood, physical training, character building, and community service, as required in the National Service. The first module emphasizes the knowledge of trainees about the country to increase their sense of patriotism. The second module builds the mental, physical,

The 2015 International Conference on the Future of ASEAN (ICoFA 2015) Special Issue

emotional, and spiritual attributes of the trainees.

The third module includes two components, namely, building up oneself and building up others. The fourth module emphasizes five components, namely, the neighborhood, social services, environment, public utilities, and placements in departments.

Interest Toward NS in Malaysia

NS has been implemented in the country for three reasons. Firstly, the Malaysian youth lacks knowledge about the history of their country and are mostly unwilling to learn about such history.

Secondly, the Malaysian youth is greatly influenced by global culture and modernization. The developments in foreign technology, entertainment, and reading materials have diminished the love of Malaysians for their country to some extent. Youngsters tend to adopt and assimilate with western culture and tend to ignore their origin.

Finally, the younger generation prioritizes social affairs than patriotism. The facilities that are being provided by the government at present, such as daily necessities as well as economic and financial aid, may drive youngsters away from their responsibilities.

Hence the implementation of the NS program is expected to become catalyst for the government in developing and shaping highly patriotic generations that appreciates its historical culture. This program also indirectly maintains national sovereignty, strengthens integration among the people, and ensures national security.

Uniqueness of NS

The NS in Malaysia is different from that of other countries because this program is not in accordance with the national service models that are used by other countries. The trainees are educated on four main modules related to nationhood, physical training, character building, and community service. The trainees also undergo basic military training to improve their discipline.

According to the Director General of the National Service Department, Datuk Abdul HadiAwang Kecil, many interested foreign parties have requested to visit the camps and experience for themselves how NS develops the character and identity of adult Malaysians.

The trainees are also exposed to various elements of nationhood. NS does not promote classroom learning activities, leisurely and immoral activities, and other activities that may threaten unity among the participants.

Patriotism and Nationalism

Druckman (1994) defines patriotism as a commitment and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the nation. Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Muller, and Melewar (2001) examined the effect of the nature of patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism on the behavior of consumers in Turkey and the Czech Republic. They found that both patriotism and nationalism influence the behavior of consumers when choosing local products. For instance, consumers in Turkey choose local products based on their love for their country (patriotism), whereas consumers in the Czech Republic choose local products because they consider these products have better quality than foreign products (nationalism).

Li and Brewer (2004), who have investigated patriotism and nationalism in the post-9/11 incident, define patriotism as the love and pride of individuals for their country. However, they contended that nationalism is associated with arrogance, in which people believe that their country is much better than that of others. The above studies suggest that the main difference between patriotism and nationalism is emphasizes the relationship of people to their country, whereas the latter emphasizes the relationship of one country to other countries.

The Department of Special Affairs of the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia (2013) considers patriotism and nationalism as the essential, correlated elements of freedom. Nationalism emphasizes a sense of community, whereas patriotism emphasizes love for country and the willingness of individuals to defend their country from threats. These two elements are crucial in nourishing the soul of a country.

Self-Identity

Identity is a unique and special trait (in terms of culture, language, religion, etc.) that symbolizes the personality or identity of an individual or a nation. Battalion and Majid (2012) argue that 'identity' is closely related to morals. They argue that self-esteem cannot be fostered without moral character because morals greatly influence the behaviour and actions of an individual. In the same study, Chin and Majid show that identity is formed by the values that one obtains from reading. This study supports the same conclusion, which was also proposed in Nguyen and MohdAzwan (2005), Ulwan(1998), and Chin and Murphy (2012). Nurazmi (2008) suggests that values, such as respect, honesty, and faith, must be fostered to build character and self-esteem.

NS Experiences in Other Countries

Other countries, such as the US, also implement NS. Community service programs in the US are implemented by the Corporation for National and Community Service, which was established in 1993. NS was implemented in

Singapore in 1967. Upon reaching 18 years of age, all male Singapore citizens are required to participate in the program for the purpose of defense and national security.

Methodology

This study was conducted using qualitative methods. The data were collected through interviews with the parents of trainees and community leaders. The trainers were also interviewed, which included coaches and facilitators residing in the northern regions of Peninsular Malaysia (e.g., Perlis, Kedah, Penang, and Northern Perak).

Interviews

To strengthen the findings of this study, the data were collected by interviewing the following respondents:

- (a) Parents of former trainees
- (b) Community leaders
- (c) Trainers (coaches and facilitators).

Focus Issues

The interviews focused on the following issues:

- (a) The general opinions of the respondents about NS
- (b) Their opinions on the effectiveness of NS, including its location, content, instructors, and facilities
- (c) Their suggestions for improving any aspect of the program
- (d) Their perceived effects of NS on the trainees, the community, and the entire country.

Results

A total of 56 respondents were interviewed: 21 parents of trainees, 17 community leaders, and 18 trainers. Sample testimonial interviews are shown in Appendices 2, 3 and 4.

Some testimonials are cited in the following sections.

General Opinion on NS

The parents of trainees agreed that NS gave benefits and should be continued. Malay father A says: "The program is nice ..."

Malay father B claims: "Generally, the NS program is good, even if the trainee can only practice 10% of what s/he has learned..."

Chinese parents argue: "NS teaches my children how to become independent."

Majority of the community leaders came to an agreement that NS could foster discipline and patriotism. Female teachers realizes: "NS can identify those students who have a sense of patriotism..."

CAC villager argue: "NS is great. At least those boys who finished their SPM are no longer wasting their time!"

Village head A: "NS trains the students to become more viscous than the angle of thought ..." Village head B: "NS helps the trainees establish their identities."

Majority of the program implementers argued that NS successfully established a disciplined and patriotic generation.

Camp commander: "NS has a positive effect on the trainees." Support staff: "This camp reflects the reality of people's lives." Coach A: "The effect of NS will not wear off soon."

Coach B: "NS helps alleviate social problems."

Camp Facilities

The parents of former trainees generally perceived camp facilities as satisfactory, although they never visited their children during the program.

Malay father A: "I have no complaints. The camp is all good and well."

Malay father B: "I never entered the camp, but my children told me that the facilities were fine."

Chinese parents: "We never went to visit our daughter during the training period, so we could not comment about the facilities and hostels. The transportation was alright."

Almost all community leaders argued that the camps provided basic facilities and skilled trainers. CAC villager: "The camp facilities are perfect and complete. They even have a television!" KRT leader: "There are no problems at the camps. They even have well-trained coaches." Chairman of the Board of Welfare: "I have no complaints about the facilities in these camps."

Majority of the staff members believe the camps had improved infrastructure.

Head physical coach: "The camp operator does not provide us with sufficient basic amenities." Deputy Commander: "The camp is safe and protected by a high fence."

Multi-skills coach: "Indian and Chinese coaches should

be recruited to escort all non-Muslim trainees to the church or the temple."

Improvement of NS

Two parents argued that NS provided their children with additional merits that helped them in their job search.

Malay father A: "Upon completing the program, my children received an NS certificate that they could present to employers when looking for work... I think that this program should include more spiritual activities."

Malay father B: "The trainees should be provided with training modules that they could take home."

Chinese parents: "I wish that the program facilitators would allow the trainees to check their phones at least twice a week so that they could update their families about their current situation. It would help alleviate the worries of their parents. "

Most parents agreed that the training program had affected their children to some extent. However, these effects depended on the trainee.

Malay father A: "The trainees were exposed to the history of the country."

Malay father B: "The effect of the training program depends on the trainee himself."

Chinese parents: "The training program can help younger generations become tough and make new friends."

Almost all community leaders suggested that the NS participants comprised troubled youth and that the camp infrastructures and training modules should be enhanced.

KRT chairman: "The modules should be reviewed so that more students could understand or relate to the program."

CAC villager B: "The camp facilities need to be improved."

Village head: "This program must be expanded to include all members of the Malaysian community."

Majority of the staff members suggested that the number of class modules should be reduced and that the number of outdoor activities should be increased.

Head multi-skill coach: "The effectiveness of the program was reduced over the past two years because of the inclusion of an additional foreign module."

Deputy Camp Commander: "The activities were mostly conducted in the classroom. These activities should be

conducted outside of the classroom instead."

Multi-skills coach: "The number of outdoor activities should be increased."

Proposal to Enhance the Effects of NS

A significant proportion of community leaders argued that the effects of NS were centered on improving local economy rather than on forming the identity of Malaysian youth.

Village chairman C: "The program had an economic impact on the locals."

Teacher B: "The program affected the consolidation of the ethnic communities."

Village head A: "The program is expanded to all members of the community."

CAC villager C: "I was never involved in the program, but they came to my village for CSR."

Majority of the trainers proposed that the training center or camps, outdoor modules, and training of coaches should all be improved.

Physical trainer: "The site was a lovely location. There were many welfare homes."

Deputy Head Coach: "The NS of Malaysia is different from that of other countries."

Camp Manager C: "Although only 10% of the Malaysian youth actually attended NS, the effects of the program will also be extended to the remaining 90%."

Discussion of Findings

- (a) Majority of the interviewees argued that the training program should be continued to establish discipline, patriotism, and nationalism among the current and former trainees.
- (b) Although some of them never actually visited the camps, the interviewed parents and community leaders believe that the services provided in these camps were satisfactory and that the coaches were skilled.
- (c) Majority of the trainers believe that the camp infrastructure should be improved further.
- (d) To improve the program, some parents suggested that NS should hand out merit certificates that could help trainees apply for jobs. Some parents also

argued that the training program positively affected the trainers.

- (e) Almost all community leaders suggested that the program be extended to troubled youth. They proposed the improvement of camp infrastructure and the modules of the program.
- (f) These findings reflect the awareness of parents, community leaders, and staff members of the importance of NS in fostering the patriotism of the younger generation.

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