

A Case Study on Reservist in Handling Reserve Officers' Training Corps Cadets

Janna Jane P. Andoy^{1*}, Lee Navales Astillero¹, Mie Gawahana¹, Humphrey Carpio¹, Elmie A. Allanic¹ & Jose F. Cuevas Jr.¹

Misamis University, College of Criminology, H.T. Feliciano St., Ozamiz City, 7200, Philippines.
Corresponding Author Email: jane.andoy54@gmail.com^{*}



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ABSTRACT

The ROTC program was created to help students become more disciplined, patriotic, and good leaders while also getting them ready to join the military as officers or reservists. The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which peer support, practical leadership exercises, and structured mentoring help to develop critical leadership traits like self-control, accountability, discipline, and moral judgment. The study also examined the psychological and emotional dimensions of leadership development, demonstrating changes in how leadership talents are perceived over time. These study involved 10 Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) reservist officers who are enrolled in one of the higher education institution in Misamis Occidental, These findings highlighted; Discipline and Responsibility as the Core of Leadership, Confidence and Resilience in Facing Leadership Challenges, Role Modeling and Value Formation, Guidance and Confidence Building, Application of Discipline and Responsibility in Professional and Personal Life, Effective Decision-Making and Adaptability in Challenging Situations. The study showed that accountability and discipline were the main pillars of leadership, which formed the foundation for ROTC reservist growth. To overcome challenges and foster growth, resilience and self-assurance were crucial. Role modeling and the development of values influenced the morals and character of cadets, which boosted trust. Leaders were better able to handle difficult situations because of feedback and mentoring, which increased their resilience and self-efficacy. Accountability and discipline were ingrained in both the personal and professional domains, and they promoted reliability. Resilience and focus under pressure also required effective decision-making and flexibility. All things considered, a thorough approach that integrated core values, adaptive skills, and resilience facilitated the growth and effectiveness of ROTC leaders. The importance of reflective practices, experiential learning, and resilient training methods was emphasized in an effort to enhance leadership competencies in ROTC programs. The information learned is meant to direct military training practices and leadership development processes, ensuring the production of competent, ethical leaders for future roles in the armed forces.

Keywords: Ethical Decision-Making; Experiential Learning; Leadership Challenges; Leadership Development; Mentoring; Military Training; Moral Judgement; Peer Support; Self-Efficacy; Resilience.

1. Introduction

The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) in the Philippines was established by Commonwealth Act No. 1 (National Defense Act, 1935) and further organized under Republic Act No. 7077 to develop college students into disciplined, patriotic leaders prepared for national defense and reserve service. ROTC fosters civic duty, disaster preparedness, and strengthens the reserve force. Under the National Service Training Program (NSTP) Law (Republic Act No. 10742), students also participate in community service through three components: Literacy Training Service, Civic Welfare Training Service, and ROTC, which collectively promote social responsibility and citizenship (Bonadonna, 2020; Pelkey, 2021; Salvador, 2021; Muhallin, 2021). ROTC officers gain military skills applicable in civilian life, enhancing operational readiness and leadership competencies for professions beyond the military (Crook, 2022; Luzipo, 2020; Walsh, 2023; Mattis et al., 2021). Their lived experiences reveal how challenges such as balancing training, academics, and teamwork foster resilience, adaptability, and communication, essential for effective leadership. ROTC cultivates leadership, discipline, and patriotism, preparing well-rounded individuals for national service and societal contributions (Gagnon, 2024; Merritt, 2022). This study fills a gap in empirical research by exploring how discipline, responsibility, confidence, and resilience evolve together in ROTC leaders using qualitative methods. It addresses limited studies examining these values in aggregate and how they are operationalized in leadership over time. There is also a lack of detailed examination on

how feedback, mentorship, peer support, and reflective practices deepen these leadership traits in reservists. Insights from this study aim to inform more effective training and mentoring within ROTC (empirical gap references). The study objectives include examining reservists' management of cadets, leadership strategies, challenges, discipline and confidence instillation, and their overall contribution to ROTC development. This research benefits ROTC cadets, instructors, educational institutions, and policymakers by highlighting leadership challenges and growth, guiding curriculum enhancement, and fostering leadership transformation to produce disciplined, responsible, and empathetic leaders for national progress (study objectives and significance section).

1.1. Study Objectives

1. Examine how reservists perform their roles and responsibilities in handling and managing ROTC cadets;
2. Identify the leadership strategies used by reservists in training, mentoring, and motivating cadets;
3. Explore the challenges encountered by reservists in supervising and guiding cadets during ROTC activities;
4. Analyze how reservists instill discipline, responsibility, and confidence among cadets through their leadership practices; and
5. Determine how the experiences and leadership practices of reservists contribute to the overall development and effectiveness of the ROTC program.

2. Methods

This qualitative case study explored the lived experiences of advanced ROTC officers in a higher education institution in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, focusing on their leadership development, emotional resilience, and personal growth. Ten advanced ROTC officers participated, selected based on their role as reservists with at least six months of service and willingness to share experiences. Data was gathered through in-depth, face-to-face interviews using an interview guide covering demographics, leadership experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, with the guide reviewed by the College Research Committee for ethical compliance. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with recordings deleted post-transcription. Permissions were secured from university authorities and local officials. The phenomenological data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) steps: bracketing to minimize researcher bias, horizontalization to highlight key statements, clustering into themes, and developing textural and structural descriptions. A final textural-structural synthesis provided a comprehensive narrative of leadership growth. NVivo software assisted in organizing and identifying themes, ensuring systematic analysis of the officers' leadership experiences.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Confidence and Resilience in Facing Leadership Challenges

ROTC helps build confidence by encouraging cadets to step out of their comfort zones, make decisions under pressure, and trust their abilities even when mistakes seem inevitable (Farris, 2020; Centola, 2025). Through these

challenges, they also develop resilience—the strength to recover from setbacks and continue moving forward (Mehmood, 2024; Walsh, 2020). Confidence and resilience are essential qualities that define capable leaders (Gagnon, 2024; Longoria, 2025).

The experiences of reservists reflect this development. R1, struggled with self-doubt when he first led others but learned to overcome fear through experience. R2, emphasized learning to make quick, confident decisions under pressure and taking responsibility for their outcomes. Meanwhile, R3, shared that mentorship and determination helped him stay focused despite challenges. These accounts show that confidence grows through practice and persistence, while resilience is built by adapting to and overcoming difficulties (Masten, 2021; Shamsuddin, 2020).

“One of the biggest struggles I faced in ROTC was building confidence as a leader. When I was first put in charge of others, I felt nervous and worried about making mistakes in front of my squad. Sometimes I even doubted whether I was meant to be a leader at all. But what helped me was practice and support from my mentors. I started to push myself to speak up more, give clear instructions, and listen to feedback. Slowly, I realized that leadership isn’t about being perfect it’s about learning and improving along the way.” (Reservist 1)

“The most crucial skill was learning to make decisive decisions under pressure, often with incomplete information, and then owning the outcome. This ability to assess, decide, and act, while prioritizing the mission and the well-being of my subordinates, is indispensable. In my career, whether in uniform or in any civilian leadership role, this translates directly into effective problem-solving and the ability to inspire confidence in those I lead.” (Reservist 2)

“Yes, I faced a lot of difficulties, especially balancing academics and ROTC duties. But instead of giving in to negativity, I chose to stay positive. I overcame challenges by managing my time well, setting priorities, and asking guidance from my seniors.” (Reservist 3)

Confidence allows leaders to communicate clearly, take initiative, and inspire trust, while resilience enables them to recover from mistakes and remain focused under stress (Jerab, 2023; Kouzes & Posner, 2023). Mentorship, feedback, and teamwork reinforce both traits, helping leaders stay grounded and motivated even during setbacks (Paine & Prochnow, 2022; Ivey et al., 2023). Together, confidence and resilience form the backbone of effective leadership—empowering individuals to lead with determination, adaptability, and a steady commitment to growth and responsibility.

3.2. Role Modeling and Value Formation

Role modeling and value formation are central to leadership development, as they allow individuals to learn through the examples set by their mentors (Basri et al., 2024; Voegtlin et al., 2020). Leaders who display integrity, fairness, and discipline inspire others to internalize these same principles, shaping their character and leadership style (Kadir, 2025; Zarghamifard & Danaeefard, 2020). In the ROTC setting, role modeling and values serve as the moral foundation of leadership, guiding cadets beyond technical skills toward ethical and responsible conduct (Bergh, 2023; Maytles et al., 2025).

The experiences of reservists highlight this process R1, was inspired by mentors who balanced authority and fairness. R2, emphasized how the Army Values Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage became the basis of his leadership. R3, credited his instructors' guidance and feedback for strengthening his confidence and sense of accountability. These experiences demonstrate that mentorship not only transfers skills but also molds the moral and ethical foundation of leadership (Zachary & Fain, 2022; Deng & Turner, 2024).

“My instructors and mentors have played a huge role in shaping me as a leader. They didn’t just train me in drills or routines they showed me what real leadership looks like. They’ve been tough on me when I needed discipline, but they also encouraged me when I needed confidence. I look at them as role models, because they lead with both authority and fairness. Seeing how they balance those qualities has taught me to try to do the same in my own leadership.” (Reservist 1)

“They instilled in me the core Army Values Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage showing me how these aren’t just words, but the bedrock of effective leadership.” (Reservist 2)

“My ROTC instructors were a big part of my journey. They gave me valuable guidance, honest feedback, and the encouragement I needed to grow. They helped me build confidence, make better decisions, and understand what true responsibility means. Their influence helped shape the leader I am today not just in ROTC, but in life.” (Reservist 3)

Through observation, feedback, and consistent mentorship, cadets learn that leadership is not about authority alone it is about earning respect through competence and integrity (Lang, 2024; Lin et al., 2025). Value formation deepens this understanding by instilling core principles that guide decision-making and strengthen moral character (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2024). Together, role modeling and value formation nurture leaders who are both capable and principled leaders who can inspire trust, uphold responsibility, and lead with honor in any environment (Siahaan et al., 2023; Lumpkin, 2023).

3.3. Guidance and Confidence Building

Guidance and confidence building are essential components of leadership development, providing the foundation for growth, resilience, and effective leadership (Baker, 2022; French et al., 2020). Mentorship offers direction and support, helping cadets overcome self-doubt and develop confidence in their leadership abilities (Hunter, 2025; Lemas, 2025; Young-Brice et al., 2022). Through consistent feedback, encouragement, and trust, aspiring leaders gain the clarity and assurance needed to perform their roles successfully (McEwen, 2022; Subedi, 2025).

R1, shared that practice and mentorship helped him gain confidence in giving instructions and accepting feedback. R2, emphasized the importance of a supportive peer network that fostered accountability during difficult times. Meanwhile, R3, highlighted that mentorship and determination helped him manage his priorities and stay focused on his goals. These experiences show that guidance and support from mentors and peers create an environment where confidence and leadership skills can flourish.

“But what helped me was practice and support from my mentors. I started to push myself to speak up more, give clear instructions, and listen to feedback. Slowly, I realized that leadership isn’t about being perfect it’s about learning and improving along the way” (Reservist 1)

“I reminded myself why I joined ROTC, to serve, to lead, and to make a difference. Furthermore, I consistently sought feedback from my instructors and senior cadets, viewing every setback as a learning opportunity.” (Reservist 2)

“Yes, I faced a lot of difficulties, especially balancing academics and ROTC duties. But instead of giving in to negativity, I chose to stay positive. I overcame challenges by managing my time well, setting priorities, and asking guidance from my seniors.” (Reservist 3)

In the ROTC program, guidance helps cadets develop communication, decision-making, and leadership presence (Lipton & Wellman, 2024; Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2021). Mentors play a key role in offering constructive feedback, setting expectations, and encouraging cadets to view mistakes as learning opportunities (Nicholson, 2023; Noskeau et al., 2021). Likewise, peer collaboration strengthens accountability, motivation, and camaraderie (Evans, 2025; Jafarpour, 2025; Barber, 2022). Working with others fosters mutual encouragement and builds resilience (Twum-Antwi et al., 2020; Agarwal et al., 2020). Ultimately, guidance and confidence building go beyond technical training they cultivate inner strength, responsibility, and the ability to inspire and lead with clarity and purpose (Nzinga et al., 2021; Lintz, 2020; Hossain, 2023).

3.4. Application of Discipline and Responsibility in Personal Life

The practice of discipline and responsibility helps leaders remain consistent, reliable, and capable of managing various demands in both work and personal life (Sandua, 2024; Simorangkir et al., 2021; Newstead et al., 2020). By exercising self-control, honoring commitments, and leading by example, they build trust and foster accountability in every situation (Luscombe, 2025; Perez, 2021). Discipline and responsibility extend beyond training—they shape an individual’s overall character and daily habits (Hellison et al., 2025; Tull et al., 2023).

R1, shared that waking up early, following routines, and sticking to schedules became habits that strengthened his focus and consistency. R2, emphasized that ROTC’s physical, academic, and behavioral demands reshaped his discipline and influenced all aspects of his life. Meanwhile, R3, described ROTC as a challenging yet rewarding commitment that built his discipline, leadership, and self-awareness. These experiences show how discipline and responsibility serve as a foundation for reliability and balance (Gardner, 2021; Greenleaf et al., 2023; Code, 2020).

“I’ve learned that discipline doesn’t only apply in training, but in everyday life too, like balancing schoolwork, personal responsibilities, and ROTC tasks.” (Reservist 1)

“I believe that ROTC training has greatly improved and developed my discipline. Before the training, I lacked self-discipline I would sleep whenever I wanted, eat whatever I liked, and follow no real structure in my daily life. However, through ROTC, I have not only trained my body but also shaped my mindset to become more disciplined and responsible.” (Reservist 2)

“ROTC has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. It wasn’t just an organization it was a serious commitment that taught me discipline, leadership, and self-awareness.” (Reservist 3)

Lessons learned through ROTC emphasize that discipline begins with small habits such as punctuality, routine, and perseverance (Cross, 2025; Ehn & Löfgren, 2020). Over time, these habits become a lifestyle that promotes organization, focus, and dedication in academics, work, and personal growth (Sadeghi et al., 2024; Ulfah, 2023). Responsibility complements this by teaching accountability, reliability, and concern for others (Stengel, 2023; Ciulla, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2024). In the workplace, these traits ensure that goals are achieved with consistency and integrity (Martin, 2022; Tracy, 2025), while in personal life, they cultivate maturity and self-awareness. Together, discipline and responsibility produce leaders who are dependable, ethical, and inspiring—individuals capable of balancing commitments while upholding trust and excellence (Modise, 2023; Covey et al., 2022).

3.5. Effective Decision-Making and Adaptability in Challenging Situations

Effective decision-making and adaptability are essential leadership skills that enable individuals to respond wisely under pressure (Jerab, 2023; Ohlsson et al., 2020; Rachmad, 2022). These abilities help leaders evaluate complex situations, adjust strategies, and guide their teams to success even amid uncertainty (Rimita et al., 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2023). In the ROTC context, these skills often develop as cadets overcome initial doubts and fears (Gagnon, 2024; Reitano III, 2023). R1, described his struggle to build confidence when first leading others. R2, emphasized the importance of making decisive choices under pressure and taking responsibility for outcomes. Meanwhile, R3, credited mentorship and determination as key to maintaining focus and overcoming challenges. These experiences reflect how adaptability and sound decision-making grow through practice, guidance, and perseverance.

“One of the biggest struggles I faced in ROTC was building confidence as a leader. When I was first put in charge of others, I felt nervous and worried about making mistakes in front of my squad. But what helped me was practice and support from my mentors. I started to push myself to speak up more, give clear instructions, and listen to feedback.” (Reservist 1)

“This ability to assess, decide, and act, while prioritizing the mission and the well-being of my subordinates, is indispensable” (Reservist 2)

“Their mentorship, along with my determination, helped me push through and stay focused on my goals.” (Reservist 3)

Decision-making requires analyzing risks, anticipating results, and making judgments even when information is limited (Phillips-Wren & Adya, 2020; Alexander et al., 2020; Reale et al., 2023). Adaptability, on the other hand, involves adjusting communication, strategies, and leadership styles to fit the needs of changing environments and diverse teams (Nasreen et al., 2025; Niemeyer-Rens et al., 2022). Guidance, mentorship, and self-reflection play vital roles in developing these competencies (Toh et al., 2022; Saranya et al., 2022), offering feedback and support that strengthen resilience.

Over time, consistent exposure to challenging and uncertain situations helps leaders build confidence, flexibility, and sound judgment (Moșteanu, 2024; Mei et al., 2024; Chandler, 2022). This combination allows them to remain composed, make informed choices, and adapt effectively—qualities that define strong, dependable leadership.

4. Conclusion

The ROTC program is key in shaping the leadership skills of reservists by instilling discipline, responsibility, confidence, and resilience. Through structured training and mentorship, cadets learn to manage responsibilities, make decisions under pressure, and face challenging situations. Mentors and peers act as role models, offering guidance and reinforcing values like integrity, loyalty, and accountability. These experiences help cadets internalize leadership principles and apply them in both military and everyday situations. Overall, ROTC produces leaders who are skilled, reliable, principled, and capable of inspiring trust in others.

4.1. Future Suggestions

1. Integrate innovative, problem-oriented training modules that focus on critical thinking, decision-making, and adaptability to meet the complex challenges of modern military and civilian environments.
2. Develop and formalize a cadre educator program to train ROTC instructors and mentors, ensuring consistent application of up-to-date leadership development methods across all institutions.
3. Increase experiential learning opportunities by expanding real-world simulations, practical leadership exercises, and multi-level peer leadership roles during training.
4. Incorporate advanced technology and digital tools in training to enhance learning engagement, situational awareness, and operational readiness.
5. Foster a culture of continuous feedback and reflective practice, encouraging cadets to regularly assess their progress and learn from experiences to build resilience and confidence.

5. Recommendations

To improve leadership development, ROTC programs should keep emphasizing structured mentorship and hands-on leadership experiences. Activities that mimic real-world decision-making under pressure can boost adaptability and confidence. Regular feedback and reflective practices should be included to help cadets learn from mistakes and improve their skills. Encouraging peer support and teamwork will promote accountability and build resilience. By combining these strategies, cadets can effectively use discipline, responsibility, and ethical leadership in both professional and personal settings.

Declarations

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this work.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing equally.

Availability of data and materials

Supplementary information is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable for this study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of the study.

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