Factors Determining Attitude among Non-Malays to Join the Army in Malaysia

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Abstract

Desirably the defense of any nation should encompass citizens from the different ethnic groups as this marks greater patriotism and diversity in the armed forces. Malaysia is targeting to achieve a higher number of non-Malays as army recruits to overcome the low number of non-Malays in this sector. The main aim of this study is to determine the level of attitude among non-Malays to enlist in the Malaysian Armed Forces and its' influencing factors. This is a quantitative study involving a sample size of 1,033 non-Malay students studying in secondary schools in Malaysia. The instrument was developed based on the previous literature. SPSS was used for the purpose of descriptive and inferential analysis. The study found that the attitude among non-Malays to join the armed forces is at a moderate level. Based on the findings, the study recommends more awareness programs conducted by successful non-Malay army officers to be held at the community level that will further expose and entice young non-Malays to join the army.

Keywords: Army, Attitude, Non-Malays, Youth

Introduction

Army is defined as a large, organized body of armed personnel for war especially on land. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) is entrusted to safeguard the country's sovereignty and protect it from all types of threats both externally and internally (Bernama, 2022). It is also responsible for assisting civilian authorities to overcome all international threats, preserve public order, assist in natural disasters, and participate in national development programs. The Malaysian Armed Forces comprises of three main branches, namely, the Malaysian Army (TDM), Royal Malaysian Navy (TLDM) and Royal Malaysian Air Force (TUDM). The Supreme Commander of the Malaysian Armed Forces is the King of Malaysia (Mahadzir, 2017).

In any multi-ethnic society, a balanced participation of the different ethnic groups in the army is important to ensure diversity and a high level of patriotism (Banban, 2018). Undeniably, the

nature of work of a soldier that requires much sacrifice in terms of the willingness to sacrifice one's self-interests, parting from family members, and willing to be involved in war marks great patriotism (Sheffer, 1986). In line with this, Malaysia being a country that has a wide variety of different ethnic communities, should encompass a defense squad that has an equal number of the different ethnic groups as this will portray a greater level of patriotism among its' citizens (Mohammad, 2022; Ishak, 1999).

However, for the past three decades, Malaysia is in a great dilemma as the number of non-Malay community in the Malaysian Armed Forces is dwindling over time (Persatuan Patriotic Kebangsaan, 2017). Due to this, some proclaimed that the non-Malays are disloyal to the nation and are unpatriotic. On the other hand, there were other views that state that the Malaysian Army had less non-Malays because there were less promotion opportunities for non-Malays (Segaran, 2017).

A search of the literature revealed that patriotism toward non-Malays in the military, particularly Chinese and Indians, had never been an issue previously (Welsh, 2020). Since the pre-independence years, through the first and second emergencies, from the early years of the Home Guard, Templer's Super 12, the Federation Regiment, the Congo peacekeeping mission, the Confrontation, urban communist terrorism, and jungle warfare in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, both non-Malay and Malay officers and soldiers have fought these battles together heroically (Raji, 2018). Moreover, Raji (2018) mentioned that in the Air Force, many non-Malay pilots bravely faced numerous enemies shot while on risky operations for supplies and evacuations.

Furthermore, many Chinese Malaysians from the police Special Branch and military intelligence fought bravely against the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) rebels and urban terrorists by being heavily involved in many perilous and top-secret covert operations that eventually led to the demise of CPM.

From the 1960s until late 70s, non-Malay armed forces personnel comprised about 30 percent of the total manpower. The Navy and Air Force, excluding the Army, had a higher percentage. Over the years, this figure gradually dropped to the current five percent (Persatuan Patriotic Kebangsaan, 2017).

Malaysia is on a mission to increase the recruitment of non-Malays into the forces by 10% annually since many non-Malays are no longer participating in the public services including the armed forces (Dass, 2019). Despite the much-debated arguments from the different parties pertaining to the involvement of non-Malays in the army, an analysis of current attitude among the non-Malay secondary school students to join the army in the future is timely as this will be the initial step to ensure greater participation of non-Malays in the armed forces.

The perception of non-Malay students to join the army could be assessed by utilizing the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The theory states that the intention to an action is determined by attitude and its' influencing factors that encompass subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ahmad et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Vinothkumar & Subramanian, 2016). These constructs will be used as the underlying foundation for the

study framework and to achieve the main aim of the study, namely, to determine the level of attitude among non-Malays to join the forces and its' influencing factors.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was a quantitative method. There were two parts in the questionnaire whereby the first part contained items pertaining to profile of respondents while the second part had constructs that had multiple items measured in a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Prior studies were used to develop the research instrument and Ajzen (1985) Theory of Planned Behaviour was the instrumental theory utilized for deriving the research framework and instrument development. The dependent variable of this study was attitude while the independent variables were age, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. A pilot test was conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument and it was checked based on the Cronbach's alpha. A threshold of 0.7 was set and it was identified that all the constructs obtained a value that was greater than 0.7 indicating it is reliable and usable.

A cross-sectional survey was used to collect the empirical data. The population of the study were non-Malay students studying in secondary schools and aged between 15 to 18 years. The sample of the study was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Firstly, a list of schools was identified based on the information provided at the official website of Ministry of Education Malaysia. Next, an analysis was done on schools based on five zones, namely, northern zone, central zone, southern zone, east coast zone, and Borneo zone. Next, a state was randomly chosen, and in each of these states two schools were again randomly chosen based on location – urban and rural. The data collection process involved the assistance from teachers at the selected schools. All respondents volunteered to be participants of the study and were assured of confidentiality, and their responses would be solely used for the purpose of the research. Respondents took around 15 minutes to complete answering the items in the questionnaire. After data cleaning, a total of 1,033 responses were deemed valid for the purpose of data analysis. SPSS software was used for the descriptive and inferential data analysis.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data displayed that 70.3% of the respondents were male and 53.3% of them are from rural areas. In terms of ethnicity and age, the majority (80.6%) were Chinese, and a huge number (80.7%) of them were 16 years old. Most of the respondents (99.3%) have not participated in any programs or campaigns organized by the Malaysian Army implying the respondents lack of awareness among careers provided by the Army. Around 42.7% of the respondents would like to work with the Malaysian Army if given the opportunity.

Table 1
Selected Demographic Profile of Selected Respondents (n = 1,033)

Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	70.3
Female	29.7
Residence	
Urban	46.7
Rural	53.3
Ethnicity	
Chinese	80.6
Indian	7.7
IndigenousSabah/Sarawak	11.6
Age	
15 years	5.4
16 years	80.7
17 years	11.9
18 years	1.9
Father's Occupation	
Government sector	8.3
Private sector	34.0
Self-employed	48.9
Unemployed	8.8
Mother's Occupation	
Government sector	13.5
Private sector	22.4
Self-employed	16.7
Unemployed	47.5
Have participated in campaigns/ programs organised by ATM	
Yes	0.7
No	99.3
If given the opportunity to join the ATM, which branch would be chosen	
TDM	42.7
TUDM	39.5
TLDM	17.8

Results and Discussion

The main aim of this study is to determine the significant predictors that determine the attitude among non-Malays to join the army in Malaysia. Descriptively, Table 2 demonstrated that the mean value of attitude was 3.19 (SD=.58). Consequently, in terms of levels, around 75.6% of the respondents were at the moderate level, 17.6% at the high level, and only 6.8% are at the low level. This implies that most of the respondents were having a moderate attitude towards joining the army and this situation is perceived as positive and the authorities should motivate non-Malays to join the army.

Table 2
Levels of Attitude of Respondents towards joining the army (n = 1,033)

Level	n	%	M	SD
Attitude			3.19	.58
Low (1.00-2.33)	70	6.8		
Moderate (2.34-3.66)	781	75.6		
High (3.67-5.00)	182	17.6		

A correlation test was carried out to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Table 3 depicts that there is a significant positive relationship between attitude and subjective norm, attitude and subjective norm, and attitude and age.

Table 3
Correlation for Study Constructs

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Attitude	3.19	.58	-			
2. Subjective Norm	2.55	.78	.586**	-		
3. Perceived Behavioural Control	2.45	.88	.518**	.799**	-	
4. Age	16.1	.49	.082**	.117**	.125**	-

$**p < .01$

A Multiple Linear Regression was used to determine the effect of subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and age on attitude. Based on the Modal Summary as in Table 4, the results of adjusted R^2 showed that 34.8% of the variances in attitude is being contributed by the predictor variables.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.592[a]	.350	.348	.47012

a. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioural Control

Next, the ANOVA table as in Table 5 showed a p-value that is less than .05. This indicates that the group of constructs (subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and age) reliably predict attitude.

Table 5
ANOVA
ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	122.570	3	40.857	184.860	.000[b]
	Residual	227.423	1029	.221		
	Total	349.993	1032			

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude
b. Predictors: (Constant), Age, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioural Control

Table 6 demonstrates the ability of each individual construct to significantly predict attitude. The data revealed that subjective norm and perceived behavioural control were the significant predictors. On the other hand, age was not a significant predictor. Besides, the regression equation based on Table 6 is as follows:
Attitude = 1.885 + .354 (Subjective Norm) + .090 (Perceived Behaviour Control) + Error

Table 6
Coefficients
Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.885	.482		3.913	.000
	Subjective Norm	.354	.031	.476	11.375	.000
	Perceived Behavioural Control	.090	.028	.136	3.253	.001
	Age	.011	.030	.009	.364	.716

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude

Based on the above findings, it is evident that the non-Malay community has a positive attitude towards joining the army and having it as a career. In line with this, the policy makers should provide more opportunities and less rigid conditions for non-Malays to join the armed forces.

The study also identified that subjective normal was the most significant contributor towards developing a positive attitude among non-Malays to join the army. In line with this, the results also showed that two important contributors on subjective norm are the pertinent roles of government policy and community. Since the non-Malays feel that the community will view them as a successful person if they were to join the armed forces, more career guidance programs on army should be organized at the community level by the human resources department of the Malaysian Army. These career awareness workshops pertaining to army will help non-Malay students and their parents to identify the various career goals that are available in the army sector, set the education milestones and derive the clear pathways to achieve it. These workshops are also poised to help students understand the army career development which will help them make the important decision to join the army.

Perceived behavioural control is the next significant predictor construct that determines positive attitude among non-Malays to embark a career in the armed forces. The study revealed that there are several behavioural barriers among non-Malays to join the army and among them are they are not ready to start a career in the armed forces as well as they perceive that it will not be easy for them to begin a career in the armed forces. However, the positive thoughts among the non-Malays are that they believe that they are willing to explore the career development opportunities in the armed forces if there were individuals or organizations that will assist them in this pursuit. The study clearly shows that more inspiration programs portraying successful non-Malay army personnel should be organized by the relevant authorities at targeted venues as this is poised to overcome psychological barriers faced by non-Malays to join the army.

The study identified that there was a significant positive correlation between age and attitude of participants to join the armed forces. This is a promising finding as this shows as the non-Malays grow older, they possess a good attitude towards army as a career. This finding reveals that there is a motivation gap for non-Malays to join the army after they have left school and that might be the reason on their decision to embark on other careers. Thus, if this is addressed it is believed that more non-Malays will join the army as their career.

Conclusion
The defense sector is an important domain for the well-being of society especially in terms of national unity and consequently all ethnic groups should be part and parcel of the defense squad. There is a growing trend that the involvement of non-Malays in the army is still low. The study had identified several key findings and among them are the non-Malays are possessing a positive attitude to make army as a career, and the government strategies need to be further strengthened to encourage more non-Malays to join as a soldier or army officer. The study recommends more awareness programs conducted by successful non-Malay army officers to be held at the community level that will further expose and entice young non-Malays to join the army. This strategy is expected to increase tremendously the number of non-Malay youths in the Malaysian Armed Forces.

Acknowledgments

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