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**Title**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LITERATURE AND CULTURE  
PROGRAM (LCP) IN  
THE MALAYSIA NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM (MNSP)**

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**Abstract:**

Language and Literature Program (LCP) is one of the programs in the National Service Training Program (NS) which aims to expand the knowledge of participants about the importance of language and national literature (Malay literature) in a relationship of goodwill among the ethnics. In this program, anthologies of poetry, My Motherland (2005) was chosen as the reading text for the participants in an effort to foster cultural understanding, thus fostering goodwill among ethnics. Delivery of training done in groups which coach will lead the each group to learn the elements of nationhood which includes the land, people, culture and religion in the anthology, and staged it at the Arts and Cultural Night Presentation. However there are some implementation problems, such as short period of LCP, anthology poetry, My Motherland (2005) are not supplied to all participants, presentations that do not involve all the participants, and others. Some proposal presented in this article to improve the LCP in order to foster goodwill among the ethnics because youths are the future leader in the country.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, Literature and Culture Program, National Service Program, national literature

**Introduction:**

The idea of forming the National Service program was proposed in the First National Patriotism Congress co-organized by North University of Malaysia (UUM) and Prime Minister's Department at Institut Latihan Keselamatan Sosial KWSP (ESSET), Bangi on 24 to 26 October, 2002. During the dialogue session in the above congress, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye suggested to implement the National Service among the adolescents to inculcate ethnic integration, strengthen the national defence, enhance the patriotism spirit and produce a united and progressive nation of Malaysia (Malike Brahim, Mohd., Ainuddin Iskandar Lee Abdullah & Mohd. Sobhi Ishak, 2006). The Cabinet then nominated the Defence Ministry to set up a working committee to draft the Malaysia National Service Program (MNSP) plan for moulding Malaysian identity.

### **Implementation of Malaysia National Service Training Program (MNSP):**

Initially it was thought that all youths of a certain age would be drafted but later the numbers were restricted due to lack of resources. The program was also initially planned as a 2-year program, which was later reduced to a year, and then six months, and to its present three-month length. The issue of conscription has always been a sensitive political issue in Malaysia because of the ethnic divisions of the country. The rationale for National Service was to bond the youth of Malaysia together and create a Malaysian nation, as the problem of racial polarization was found to pervade educational institutions in Malaysia (Wikipedia, 2006). The PLKN motto is “One goal, one spirit, one determination.”

The PLKN has six objectives including developing a young generation who are patriotic and love their country, enhancing unity among the multiracial communities in the country, instilling a spirit of caring and volunteerism in society, producing an active, intelligent and confident generation, developing positive characteristics among the younger generation through good values, and developing a generation that will always obey the current government.

National Service does not implement military conscription as practised in Singapore and other countries. The Malaysian National Service stress more on self-defence, group cooperation, self development, awareness of nationality, social sensitivity and volunteerism. It is aimed at forming a disciplined society, with true spirit, self confidence, faithfulness towards the nation, always prepared to face any trial and challenges, as well as to inculcate cooperation and foster unity among all the ethnic groups in the country. MNSP is carried out in the Malaysian perspective to achieve the country’s need. So its uniqueness rests on some characteristics, such as involving all the ethnic groups in Malaysia, based on Rukunegara fundamentally, pursuing a multi-disciplinary curriculum, not involving military conscripts, having its own image such as uniform, logo, song and so forth (Nazmi Muzlim, 2004).

According to the initial plan, the National Service program consists of 20 percent military basic training without gun practice, whereas 40 percent of the program involves the nationality element which is aimed at enhancing the patriotism spirit and loyalty to the country, and another 40 percent involves the social service program which demand all the trainees approach the public directly by doing social work (Wan Faizal, 2004/2005).



Hence forth, the program is split into four official modules and four components. Four modules involve Physical Module, Nation Building Module, Character Building Module and Community Service Module, whereas the four components consist of spiritual, cultural, cross-cultural, value components (Ringkasan Program Latihan Khidmat Negara, 2001). Based on the above module and components, National Service may directly or indirectly develop integrity among the adolescents in Malaysia to face the globalization challenges and overcome the increasing and crucial social problems nowadays.

Due to the budget constraints, National Service determined not to involve all the youth aged 18 years. In late December 2003, the names of 85,000 conscripts for the first National Service (MNSP) program was made public. The government announced that these youths were randomly selected out of the roughly 450,000 youths born in 1986, through a computerized process. Conscripts are 18 years of age and picked from a national database that includes all citizens registered with a Malaysian ID card whether born locally or overseas (Program Latihan Khidmat Negara, 2003).

In the 2004 program, conscripts (referred to as "trainees" or "Wira" for boys and "Wirawati" for girls) spent 2 months in physical training camp, followed by a final month in a university setting. The program consisted of three separate, overlapping batches. The first batch of 24,000 began in mid-February and ended in the beginning of May, while the second and third batches began in March and ended in June. Trainees were divided among 79 training camps scattered all over the country. Each camp was supposed to contain a good mix of youths from different ethnic groups and locations (Wikipedia, 2006).

In the 2007 program, 100,000 people will be selected out of the country's youths born in 1989. They will be placed in 79 training camps, in three different batches. Each batch will undergo three months of training. However, the 2007 batches will not overlap, as with the previous year's. Instead, the three batches will span a total of nine months. Training of the first batch started on 1 January 2007 and ended on 11 March 2007. Including 2008, a total of 339,186 youths have been assigned to National Service since 2004 (The Star, 2008). The program is run by Jabatan Latihan Khidmat Negara (JLKN) or National Service Department, a department under the Malaysian Ministry of Defence.

### **The Literature and Culture Program (LCP):**

The Literature and Culture Program (LCP) is co-organized by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur and National Service Department. It is aimed at pursuing the objectives of National Unity and racial integration. The suggestion to implement the LCP as one of the components in the PLKN was mooted by the Malaysian government and was approved by the cabinet on 28 May, 2003. This was due to the awareness of the Malaysian government to inculcate the spirit of patriotism among the young Malaysians through the appreciation of national literature and culture. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) is a governmental agency assigned to develop national language and literary development in Malaysia. DBP is also responsible for implementing this program in line with its function and aims of establishment. The Malaysian cabinet agreement was announced by then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Abd. Razak, in DBP on 24 December, 2004. The duty was then put onto the shoulders of the National Literature Development Division, Department of Literature in DBP.

Pre-implementation schedule of LCP was fixed on 12 February 2005 until 4 March 2005 in 11 selected National service camps for the first stage, then 35 camps in the second stage and finally implemented in all 75 camps throughout the country in 2005 (Hasanul, 2007).

First year implementation of LCP was the trial period of this module under the National Service program. This module is filled with the patriotism poems as the fundamental part besides the show part as supportive part. Many important criteria were taken into consideration at the early stage, including the selection of facilitators who must be capable of fulfilling their duty and experienced in controlling trainees in different circumstances faced by the facilitators in the class.

PPSB will be the main component in PLKN and this program is short if compared with the basic modules such as Character Building, nationalization and physical module. In this beginning stage, the duration of PPSB is only 12 hours and it is divided into six sessions (1 session each comprising 2 hours given 6 times). The training is from 8.45pm until 10.45pm (depend on the changes of time in the camp). The implementation duration will be 12 hours and it is divided into two levels, three sessions with six hours for each level. The last session is trainees' presentation or literary presentation night. The division into two levels is to facilitate

the trainees to practice themselves, individually or in groups. As requested by JLKN, in the first stage in the 2006 session, PPSB is implemented six days in a row. Even if changes are made to the schedule of implementation, the total time is still maintained as planned.

At the third stage of implementation of LCP in 2006, new changes occurred. Instruction issued by National Service Council or Majlis Latihan Khidmat Negara (MLKN), stated that the period of the LCP module will be shortened from six days to only two days. In 2007, the time frame of the module again underwent changes, but this time the period was extended another day in addition to the existing two days to make up the total of the module to three days, which is carried out from Monday, Tuesday until Wednesday and depending on the condition in the camps (Hasanul, 2007).

The Literature and Culture Program (LCP) in MNSP is aimed at expanding the knowledge and understanding among the trainees on the importance of national language and literature (Malay Literature) for the purpose of building the spirit of goodwill among the main ethnic groups in Malaysia. This objective is important to be inculcated among the young generation who had just completed their study at Form V level. This duty is carried out by DBP for the purpose of our country's continued future prosperity.

The LCP has been carried out smoothly since its first proposal, under the cooperation from administrators of various National Service camps, trainees in the National Service program, and all the selected facilitators. Indirectly the LCP module has inculcated and shows the talent and creativity of the trainees in Show Night in order to emerge their spirit of patriotism and unity. Besides that, these modules also attract the young generation's attention and interest towards poem appreciation successfully, and it is hope to be expanded to other genre of Malay Literature as well.

LCP is an important mechanism to encourage and transform the attitude of MNSP participants and generate interest in literature and Malay culture because this is the important aspect of forming national culture and literature. As part of the Malaysian national education, MNSP is the other platform for all youths from the various main ethnic group of Malaysia, religions and cultures to form the ultimate national unity. What is more important is that the MNSP involved almost all youths who have sat for their SPM examination.

However, some problems or obstacles occurred during the implementation of LCP which have hindered the government's efforts and intention to inculcate the national integration agenda among the multiracial trainees in National Service program. The problems and obstacles will be discussed in detail below.

### **Issues in Implementation of LCP and the Solutions:**

After the 2004 pilot batch of youth completed their National Service, the youth wing of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysia's largest ethnic Chinese political party, on behalf of themselves and 8 other Chinese-based youth organizations, issued a memorandum to the National Service Training Council calling for more non-Malay trainers. They also criticized the lack of counselors, imbalanced diet for the participants, poor communications among the various secretariats and no code of conduct for camp commandants or directors, trainers, facilitators and supervisors. Despite this somewhat diplomatic language it is clear that there is a problem with bullying by Malay NCOs and Officers, a lack of cultural sensitivity by the organizers, and a reluctance to provide a proper diet for the mainly Buddhist Chinese Malaysians and Hindu Indian Malaysians (Wikipedia, 2006).

A lot of issues were raised since LCP implementation. A very common and popular issue being discussed was the cooperation problem among the camp administrators, such as negligent attitude of camp Commanders and the staff in the camps. They always see LCP as an unimportant program to be taught to the trainees in the camps although LCP has produced good output and become important especially in the effort to foster and inculcate the love and loyalty to our country through the cultural and literature elements (Hasyuda, 2008).

Most of the administrators in the National Service camps are arrogant; from their perspective, it is a disadvantage to inculcate good values of national culture and literature elements among the adolescents. Their point of view is similar to that of some people towards literature in schools that literature is treated as a marginal subject. Students who study Malay literature as a subject are consisting of those who are poor in academic compared to science stream students (Chew, Lee & Goh, 2007). This negligent attitude has been carried into the National Service program. The administrators expressionless have disturbed the LCP with other

programs such as futsal sport. They bring all the trainees out of the camp to join the futsal sport without considering that LCP is ongoing (Hasyuda, 2008).

The above said problem has clearly portrayed by a head facilitator of LCP in Sabah as below:

When I was selected as facilitator in Wawasan Papar Camp, I was so excited to be a member in the National Service Program, in addition, a lot of my students join it...LCP that was drafted, arranged, planned precisely is meaningless if the attitude of the Head of Commander in the camp still remain the same. Look at the Head of Camp in Tuaran, Sabah, whoever posted there as Head of Facilitator sure will have headaches. Therefore all the top administrators who head the Department of National Service need to observe all the modules implementation to make sure of its balance and justice among the trainees and LCP. Any Head of facilitator who is on duty in Tuaran camp should go on to uphold the justice and never give up the true spirit of unity from LCP (Juilis, 2008).

In order to guaranteed the effectiveness in the implementation of LCP, cooperation of administrators in camps, camp commanders, head of facilitators of LCP, and National Service trainees are of utmost importance to achieve the main aim of the LCP, as stated: “uphold the effort of government to inculcate the patriotism spirit among the young generation in Malaysia, integrate good values to produce energetic and synergized young generation, strong commitment, visionary and inculcate the interest and appreciation towards literature and culture among young generation” (Hasanul, 2007).

Success of LCP very much depends on the selection of literary text. For the purpose of reading in the LCP, DBP has selected the anthology of poem, Tanah Airku (My Motherland) (2005) as the compulsory text book. This anthology consists of 83 traditional and modern poems. The traditional poems include four lines pantun, six lines pantun, connected pantun, syair, seloka and gurindam, whereas the modern poems consists of 76 poems selected from 34 famous poets such as A. Latiff Mohidin, A. Samad Said, Baha Zain, Dharmawijaya, Joseph Selvam, Kemala, Lim Swee Tin, Muhammad Haji Salleh, Rahman Shaari, Siti Zainon Ismai, Usman Awang, Zurinah Hassan and so forth.

In the preface to the anthology of poems, Tanah Airku, Najib Tun Razak (2005) stated that publishing of this anthology is aimed at giving the positive impact among our young generation especially the government's intention to inculcate and followed the patriotism spirit of our country's early leaders. This anthology also helps to enhance the interaction among the young and foster national integration.

Thirteen main themes from the anthology are recognized, namely positive characteristics (include politeness, patience, good in self management and family management, grateful, confident, courageous, and positive thinking), ethnic integration, defend the country, love the country, strong and confide self of youth, love the homeland, fight for independence, proud of the country's glory, eliminate the economic gap among the ethnic groups, bravery, familial, nature as resource of knowledge and friendship.

So, the anthology of poems, Tanah Airku (2005) is found suitable to be the text book in the LCP. It is not only suitable to be recited, but also can be used for the show. Many poets have inserted the integration element into their poems. Having a variety of history, traditions, cultural backgrounds and world views, the poets contribute their meaningful ideas to enrich and diversify our national literature.

Through the anthology Tanah Airku (2005) and cultural show, the trainees in the National Service program will get to know further about the thought, tradition, history, customs, values and world view of the multiracial community in Malaysia as reflected in the literary work. By using the simple yet esthetic and meaningful diction during recital, the trainees will appreciate deeply the meaning of equality and the necessity of loving the country. So the literary work is one of the efficient mechanisms to form a united and harmonious Malaysian nation.

Related to this, Whitehead (1990), Fine, Weis, and Powell (1997) have shown that a good literary work will mould the younger generation to be less prejudiced and more tolerant towards other ethnic groups. The study by Fine et.al (1997) found that the students and teachers show their support towards World Multicultural Literature in Clear Mount High School because it exposes the students to multicultural literature in a united group.

Hence LCP should be carried on continuously in order to inculcate the understanding among the ethnic groups and then produce the united nation of Malaysia. However it is more interesting and effective if the poets portray the multicultural society, the situation and their

relationship with Malay society so that people will approach closely and understand the thinking and culture of other societies to foster understanding among the ethnic groups.

The anthology Tanah Airku (2005) should be delivered to all the trainees in all national service camps in Malaysia to be appreciated together. The issue raised now is about the above anthology is only hold by Head of Facilitators; so it depends totally on the facilitators to select any poems for the show to be done as group presentation by the trainees. This condition will hinder the appreciation of Malay literature and culture. All the National Service trainees should be given the right of choice and freedom to select the interesting poems for the presentation so that they to take responsibility for decision making and try their best on their initiative to complete all the assignments.

LCP is one of the co-components among the National Service Program trainees aged 18 years old. However, after being implemented in the four series, LCP is reduced in terms of period of practice from six days to three days. This program seems to become an ad-hoc activity and it needs to compromise with the administrators in camp regarding the date of practice (Hasyuda, 2006).

Due to the time frame of LCP which provided only three days two nights or 18 hours, therefore the trainees may not read and appreciate all the poems in Tanah Airku (2005). In addition, the trainees spend a lot of time practising for the Cultural Night Show. So it is suggested to prolong the period of LCP from three days to one week to for more effective performance. The LCP gives new chance and exposure to the trainees to learn the appreciation of literary works and organize a cultural show. This problem needs to be overcome and reviewed by the National Service Department and DBP respectively (Chew, 2008).

Within the time frame of three days, the facilitators' responsibilities are trying to make the trainees understand the structure of the poems and learn to know the literary nature (Nisah, 2005). The short learning outcome is to do the cultural show which combines the creative movement, vocal, acting, poem recitation and music elements. The trainees need to be creative in thinking to utilize whatever they can find from the camp surroundings as props for their cultural show.

Therefore, the LCP facilitators play a very important role in ensuring success of the program. The facilitators need to be fair and treat all the trainees the same, besides cooperating

closely with the trainees. The facilitators are also required to be multiracial so that all the ethnic groups may learn and appreciate the Malay poems from various perspectives. The facilitators, who are on duty in the camp, must be of caliber and experienced in the art of performance because they need to teach and train the trainees acting, singing, and reciting poems for the performance.

The Literary and Cultural Night performed on the final night of LCP is important to forge links among the trainees in the National Service camps. The night will give positive impacts to inculcate the harmonious atmosphere among the ethnic group in the camp. Throughout the Cultural show night, they have chances to interact, get to know about other ethnic groups, cooperate and help each other to perform successfully (Hasanul, 2007).

Through the LCP, the trainees are encouraged to form groups. They learn to cooperate and respect each other to fulfil a task. Each group must be multiethnic and this will be the golden opportunity for them to learn and know the culture, lifestyle and beliefs of other races. Under such circumstances, the trainees are not supposed to move or mix among their ethnic groups that form the ethnic preference in their daily life. All the trainees will accept other ethnic groups with open arms to perform in the cultural show together. During the Cultural Night, all the trainees will play their role respectively to ensure success of the show. They will hold the post of chairman, working committee members, judge, actors, poem reciters, and audience. This is totally a new experience for the Malaysian youth in National Service to enthusiastically involve actively in the Cultural Show.

The trainees will enjoy and be entertained during the Cultural Night; in addition they will be reciting Gurindam Semantan, Nazam, Syair Bidasari or Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang Cina. Furthermore, the non-Malay trainees also try their best to learn reciting poems or act creatively. The show may bring different meaning to the trainees, but the memory will give them an unique impression. This chance is very rare or never been found or experienced by the trainees, especially the non-Malays. The school environment is closed towards the cultural activities due to the exam-oriented system. Therefore LCP will open the minds and eyes of the trainees in the camps about multicultural activities, religions, customs, and languages in Malaysia (Chew, 2008).



However, LCP has received various responses among the trainees. Most of the trainees prefer to obey rather than protest openly, or at least show their neglectful attitude, non energetic, or do not give any response during the cultural show. In this case, the trainees should not be blamed. Not all of them are interested in literary and cultural activities. Due to the failure of this program in some instance to give good impression to the trainees, LCP is seen as a program that is planned purposely only to fulfil the government's good intention (Hasyuda, 2007).

Hence, the activities in LCP should be varied and not only focus on the poem genre. Beside the anthology Tanah Airku (2005), it is suggested that an anthology of short stories, a novel or traditional prose be selected as the resource for the presentations in the show. This is one suggestion to include other works than Tanah Airku (2005) with the same themes and spirit of patriotism and love for Malaysia. For instance the drama of "Princess Li Po" and the legend about "Hang Tuah" can be performed in theater by multiracial trainees so that they learn to understand more about the history of Malacca besides appreciating the harmonious and peaceful country that we enjoy now.

It is also suggested that the Literary and Cultural Night be open to the public, to suit the slogan of the theme of ASAS 50 which is "Art for Society". The National Service trainees need to interact with the general public and receive feedback for them to improve upon their weaknesses in the show. If the show is done internally and the comment is given only by the facilitators, the trainees will not gain much improvement. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the Literary and Cultural Night should be organized among the camps so that trainees not only improve their performance, but also can grasp the chance to mix with fellow trainees from other camps throughout the country.

From the above discussions and analysis, it can be stated that LCP has produced the young generations who work together with solidarity and unity. Malay literary works play an important role as an effective unity medium with its unique arts, aesthetics and poetic words by using Malay language as the medium of instruction. The effort to put literary work as the medium reflecting the multicultural nature of Malaysia society, should be endorsed by agencies other than institution of education. As shown in this article, DBP and Department of National Service has succeeded in uniting the multicultural young generation through LCP.

Through the serious and no nonsense continuous effort, it is believed that unity poems can become an encouraging Malaysian national literature entity, and contribute meaningfully and significantly to produce Malaysian citizens who are united, loyal to the country, hardworking and determined to develop the country, live and prosper in our homeland.

The above discussion clearly shows and proves that unity poems have a bright future as “Malaysia National Poems” (Jeniri, 2007). Regarding this perspective, LCP achieved success in forming the sentiment of loving the country and one Malaysian identity among our young generation. LCP has bridged the integration gap among the multiracial and multi-religions trainees; LCP is one of the programs aimed at generate the young who love their country and preserve their own heritage of cultures include their languages (New Sabah Times, 7 Julai, 2007).

Although the discipline of the trainees are different from one individual to another, from one camp to another, and from time to time, the effect of the National Service program and LCP in the perspective of national patriotism, durable and unity among the trainees are the same. In other word, National Service program and LCP are comprehensive and up-to-date programs that suit the country’s objectives – forming an advanced, competitive generation who may overcome the nine challenges listed under Vision 2020.

In the Opening speech in the opening ceremony of the National Service Program for the Third Group, Forth Series, on 28 June, 2007, Head Director of Department of National Service, Tuan Abdul Hadi bin Awang Kechil stated that Malaysian parliament Special Selecting Committee on National Unity and National Service Program has found that the National Service Program has successfully influenced the young generation in positive ways, especially the former trainees in three contexts. First is that it inputs the sense of belonging, harmonious among the multiracials, multicultural and love the country. Second, the National Service Program built the confidence, maturity, responsibility and visionary adolescents who are aware of the direction of development of the country. Third, trainees in the program pursue the good values as manifested by their involvement in voluntary and community service activities (<http://www.khidmatnegara.gov.my/albumakbar/2007/jun207/bar61.html>, 2007). The module under the National Service Program, especially LCP helps to produce the young generation with

high spirit, confident, brave to overcome the challenges, and who never give up in any circumstances.

### **Conclusion:**

The National Service Program implemented since 2001 is the second occasion that multiracial students gather together after schools. Therefore Malaysian National Service Program has achieved its objectives to inculcate patriotism and unite the multiracial trainees. Through the values and norms inserted in the LCP, the energetic, completeness, and strength of our youth are revealed. The anthology of poems Tanah Airku (2005) selected as the text book in LCP should be utilized fully to empower and strengthen the origin of modern Malaysia literature. The origin of national literature must based on the cultural heritage and portray the themes of multiracial and multicultural Malaysia. Furthermore, LCP has succeeded in producing united and tolerant young Malaysians.

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