Identifying the Missions of Iran's Supreme National Defense University and the Obstacles to its Realization from the Perspective of the Military Sector: from Idea to Reality

Amir. Shahsavari[1*]

[1] Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: am_shahsavari@sbu.ac.ir

A r t i c l e   I n f o

A B S T R A C T

National defense universities around the world have developed a joint philosophy on the importance of strategic and comprehensive understanding of national defense and security for military section commanders and senior managers of the national sector. However, there is a lack of consensus in our country, particularly in the national sector, which has resulted in inappropriate strategic training for division commanders of the army, especially the managers of the national sector in the field of defense and national security. In this regard, a study was conducted to identify the missions of The Supreme National Defense University (SNDU) of Iran and the internal and external obstacles to the realization of these missions from the perspective of several experts in the Division of Army. For this research, a qualitative survey research strategy was adopted, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 experts related to SNDU to collect data. The researchers analyzed the data by thematic analysis method and drawing of thematic networks. The Trustworthiness of the findings was assessed using four criteria. Accordingly, the findings of the research reveal a network of themes consisting of a global theme, including the "strategic training of national high managers and army based on comprehensive defense and national security" as the fundamental mission of the university, and four organizing themes, including missions, mission domains, internal obstacles, and external challenges. The implications of this research show the necessity of focusing more on the defense and national security sectors, based on the fundamental mission and the various missions under it. Subsequently, it is necessary to revise the architecture of education, research, counseling, discourse building, and diplomacy. The study of internal and external challenges indicated that the SNDU has a long way to go to achieve social authority in its mission. Finally, the research presented a set of suggestions to shorten this path and facilitate and accelerate the fulfillment of the fundamental mission of SNDU and its missions.

Keywords: *Strategic Training of Commanders and Senior Managers, National Defense, National Security, University Mission, Higher Education Policy.*

Introduction

Universities, as one of the main components of educational and research institutions of the society, are one of the most important factors in the future world. Some scientists and thinkers have described the university as subversive and the developer of libertarian ideas (Chomsky, 2014) and others, such as Kant, Humboldt, Weber, Heidegger, have described the university as the protector of the cognitive structure of society (Delanty, 1998). On the other hand, some others consider the university to be the engine of innovation and economic development (Etzkowitz Leydesdorff, 2000). In this regard, in the economic, social, cultural and political arenas of the society, important and diverse missions have been identified for universities (Shahsavari, 2020). But the role of universities in the field of defense and national security and communication between these institutions and the military sector has been among the most mysterious topics for contemporary researchers and historians (Geiger, 1992). Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the role of the university in the field of defense and national security through a case study of "Supreme National Defense University" as one of the most important universities in the field of defense and national security, in order to accurately identify its fundamental mission and missions and to determine internal and external obstacles to the realization of these missions.

A few research has been conducted regarding the relationship between the university system and the defense sector in general (Dadvar, Manteghi & Bagheri, 2016; Ranjbar, Salami, Tavakoli & Tahmaseby, 2015 & Tofighi, Nourshahi & Farasatkhah, 2012), as well as in relation to the universities of the military sector of the country in particular (Ghazizadeh fard, Naderi Khorshidi, Ahmadvand & Jalali Kutnaie, 2015; Hosseinpour & Arasteh, 2010 & Khorshidi, 2003). Regarding the situation of Iran's Supreme National Defense University in particular, published researches are much less (Shirazi, Assarianneghad & Safari, 2016; Moeinaddini & Mobini Dehkordi, 2015; Bagheri Heshi, Khadayar, Pourkarimi, & Narenji, 2020 & Motalebi, 2013). These studies have been conducted at two levels of macro and educational level. The first have focused their macro study on one of the faculties and not the entire SNDU. Also, the second have been defined as observing educational processes and educational colleges, and have less discussed the nature of the educational mission of the SNDU and its other missions. Therefore, it can be claimed that the missions of the National Defense University have not been independently investigated so far. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate and identify these missions and the internal and external obstacles facing its realization with the focus on the following questions:

(1)   What is SNDU's fundamental mission?
(2)   What are the missions of the SNDU?
(3)   Internally, what obstacles are there against the realization of these missions?
(4)   Externally, what obstacles are there against the realization of these missions?

Methodology

The present study is a qualitative and philosophically interpretive research (Saunders, Lewis Thornhill, 2016, pp. 136-137). To answer the research questions corresponding to interpretive researches, inductive approach and in-depth qualitative analysis of the obtained data from small samples were used. Survey strategy was used to collect data, which is one of the most common research strategies in the field of social and behavioral sciences (Julien, 2008). In this regard, the researcher referred to the research environment and used qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews to collect data. To select the interviewees, the current and former SNFU officials and some other experts, including 12 people who were in charge of the armed forces, were referred. After transcribing the data collected from the interview, the thematic analysis method was used by drawing thematic networks for data analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Accordingly, in the first round of coding, a total of 184 codes were identified and in the second round a total of 201 codes were identified. Then, the thematic analysis was performed based on Attride-Stirling model (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in four stages. To validate the findings, four criteria of trustworthiness were used in qualitative research including Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Conformability (Graneheim Lundman, 2004).

Findings

"Strategic training of military section commanders and senior managers of the national sector based on comprehensive understanding of defense and national security' was identified as the comprehensive theme and fundamental mission of SNDU, which is the spirit governing its missions. SNDU's missions as one of the organizing themes, include 'strategic and ethical education and training', 'strategic research, supporting education and useful in defense and security sciences', 'theorizing the field of defense, national security and strategic management', 'scientific diplomacy and development of international scientific relations', 'strategic consultancy services' and 'discourse and public enlightenment in defense and national security'. 'Mission Territory' was another organizing theme that emphasized the three categories of 'focusing on strategic affairs,' 'adopting a comprehensive approach to defense and national security', and 'inclusive audiences from commanders of the armed forces of the country to the managers of the Mostazafin World Front'. The realization of the basic mission of the SNDU and its missions is not without internal obstacles (related to the inside of the SNDU) and external obstacles (related to the SNDU environment). In this regard, the organizer theme of internal barriers in the form of nine categories and the organizer theme of external barriers in the form of three categories were also identified.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings of the study, it is expected that the basic mission of SNDU, i.e., training the military section commanders and senior managers of the national sector based on a comprehensive understanding of defense and national security, such as a single umbrella, will serve all SNDU missions and review the direction of these missions. The missions obtained for SNDU included almost all three types of interaction between universities and the military sector referred to in the theoretical foundations section, but were also more diverse. However, the study of internal and external challenges of the SNDU is far from achieving social authority in that fundamental mission. Some problems of SNDU's internal construction, along with some external challenges, have hindered the realization of SNDU's fundamental mission and its missions. According to the research findings, some of the most important suggestions of the research are as follows: 'Focusing on the defense and national security sector of the country by creating mission unity based on the fundamental mission and governing this unity on the plurality resulting from the various and hexagonal missions by reviewing the architecture of education, research, service, discourse and diplomacy', 'Architecture of the education system by focusing education on a specialized doctoral degree in the specialized topics of national defense and security, and development of short-term and professional trainings to deepen the defense and security understandings of other experts and managers of the country, as well as the systematic integration of expected spiritual and ethical education in these trainings', and 'architecture of research system and financing and scientific promotion required based on two main types of research in SNDU i.e. theorizing research, as well as problem solving research', and 'development of inter-university and trans-university cooperation at national and transnational levels with the aim of achieving a powerful network and avoiding introversion and self-sufficient in response to the needs of training of commanders and managers of the national and military forces'.

References

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for Qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, *1*(3), 385-405. https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307

Bagheri Heshi, M., Khadayar, A., Pourkarimi, J., & Narenji, F. (2020). Presenting a Conceptual Model of Reengineering Educational Processes of Universities and Higher Education Institutions Based on Lean Organizational Approach (Case: National Defense University). *Strategic Defense Studies*, *18*(80), 353-374. https://sds.sndu.ac.ir/article_986_en.html?lang=fa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chomsky, N. (2014). How America's Great University System Is Being Destroyed. http://newblankets.org/worth_a_look/chomsky_american_universities_destroyed.pdf

Dadvar, S. A., Manteghi, M., & Bagheri, A. (2015). Identifying the Critical Success Factors of Research Collaborations between Universities and Defense Industries in Iran. *Innovation Management Journal*, *4*(1), 25-52. https://www.nowavari.ir/article_14764_en.html

Delanty, G. (1998). The idea of the university in the global era: from knowledge as an end to the end of knowledge? *Social epistemology*, *12*(1), 3-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/02691729808578856

Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (2000). The dynamics of innovation: from National Systems and ''Mode 2'' to a Triple Helix of university–industry–government relations. *Research Policy*, *29*, 109–123. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(99)00055-4

Geiger, R. (1992). Science,Universities, and National Defense,1945-1970. *OSIRIS*, *7*, 26-48. https://doi.org/10.1086/368704

Ghazizadeh Fard, S. Z., Naderi Khorshidi, A. R., Ahmadvand, A. M., & Jalali Kutnaie, F. (2015). The Strategic Management Model of Training and Education in the Irans Armed Forces Universities. *Defence Studies*, *13*(1), 33-77. https://ds.sndu.ac.ir/article_441.html?lang=en

Graneheim, U. H., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, *24*, 105-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001

Gupta, N., Sergi, B. J., Tran, E. D., Nek, R., & Howieson, S. V. (2014). Research collaborations between universities and Department of Defense laboratories. *International Development Agency Science and Technology Policy Institute*, 273-286. https://doi.org/10.21236/AD1008624

Hosseinpour, R., & Arasteh, H. (2010). Evaluation and Selection of a Base Model for Performance Evaluation for Defensive Research Centers *Quarterly Journal of Research and Planning in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 65-83. https://journal.irphe.ac.ir/article_702734.html?lang=en

Julien, H. (2008). SURVEY RESEARCH. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS* (pp. 856-848). SAGE Publications.

Khorshidi, A. (2003). Long-term planning for universities and military training centers. *Military management strategy*, *3*(5), 1-9.

Kingdom, D. A. o. t. U. (2023). *Defence Academy of the United Kingdom*. https://www.da.mod.uk/

Moeinaddini, M., & Mobini Dehkordi, A. (2015). Mission Statement of Strategic Management Faculty of Su-preme National Defense University Regarding Faculty's Prevalent Educational System. *Strategic Defense Studies*, *13*(61), 113-144. https://sds.sndu.ac.ir/article_785.html?lang=en

Motalebi, M. (2013). *Planning the strategic education of the university based on the management needs of the strategic levels of the country*.

Naghizadeh, R., Borumand Kakhki, A., Heidari, H., Bagherimoghadam, N., & Nazemi, A. (2021). Regional Policy models for implementing STI in higher education system; Fuzzy Cognitive Map based Scenario method. *Innovation Management Journal*, *10*(1), 9-44. https://www.nowavari.ir/article_132272_en.html

Safdari Ranjbar, M., Salami, S. R., Tavakoli, G. R., & Tahmaseby, S. (2015). Scientific and Technological Collaboration between Defense Industries and Universities: Casual Layered Analysis Approach. *Journal of Management Improvement*, *9*(4), 5-30. https://www.behboodmodiriat.ir/article_42886.html

Salimi, H., Vahidi, A., & Samdaliri, K. (2020). Identifying the factors influencing the system of training, education and employing agents of strategic levels of the Islamic Republic of Iran. *National Security*, *10*(36), 183-212. https://ns.sndu.ac.ir/article_1023.html?lang=en

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2003). Research methods forbusiness students. *Essex: Prentice Hall: Financial Times*. https://www.academia.edu/download/43825773/Research_Methods_for_Business_Students__5th_Edition.pdf

Shahsavari, A. (2020). *Developing a model for the university missions corresponding to Iran's ecosystem*.

Shahsavari, A., Alamolhoda, J., Zakersalehi, Q., Khorasani, A., & Khademi, M. (2020). Analysis of faculty promotion policies in the context of university role in development of innovation. *Strategic Studies of public policy*, *10*(34), 2-34. https://www.sid.ir/FileServer/JF/4023113993401

Shirazi, H., Assarianneghad, H., & Safari, S. (2016). The mission statement of the educational system updated national security strategy based on needs assessment levels. *National Security*, *6*(21), 9-34. https://ns.sndu.ac.ir/article_628.html?lang=en

Smit, W. (1995). Science, Technology, and the Military Relations in Transition. In *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (pp. 598-626). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412990127.n26

Tofighi, A. J., Nourshahi, N., & Farasatkhah, M. (2012). Analyzing the Relationship between Defense System and Higher Education from the Expert's Point of view. *Quarterly Defens Strategy*, *10*(36), 1-26.

University, N. D. (2023). *National Defence University*. https://english.nudt.edu.cn/

University, S. N. D. (2022). *History of SNDU*. https://sndu.ac.ir/en/page/1380/history

University, T. T. N. D. (2023). *The Turkish National Defence University*. https://www.msu.edu.tr/eng/