

Governance Competence of Indigenous Representatives in Local Governance: Evidence from a Philippine Municipality

May T. Kirtug 
Ifugao State University
maykirtug@gmail.com

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Corresponding Email:
maykirtug@gmail.com

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Abstract. The inclusion of Indigenous representatives in Philippine local governance aims to promote participatory and culturally responsive decision-making; however, empirical evidence on their governance competence remains limited, particularly in rural and decentralized governance contexts. This study assesses the governance competence of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in a fourth-class municipality in Ifugao, Philippines, focusing on knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities, as well as the challenges affecting their performance and differences across demographic variables. Using a descriptive research design and total enumeration ($n = 18$), data were collected through a validated survey instrument and analyzed using descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests. Findings reveal a very high level of governance competence ($M = 3.39$), with skills ($M = 3.42$) and functional capabilities ($M = 3.43$) slightly exceeding knowledge ($M = 3.33$), indicating a practice-oriented pattern of competence. Perceived challenges were generally low ($M = 2.10$), with moderate constraints observed only in resource-related and inter-organizational aspects. No significant differences were found across most demographic variables, except for training exposure, which significantly influenced the skills domain ($p = .006$). These results suggest that governance competence is shaped more by experiential engagement and training than by demographic characteristics. The study contributes to the literature on Indigenous and decentralized governance by shifting the focus from formal representation to functional governance capacity. It demonstrates that competence among Indigenous representatives is primarily practice-based and more strongly shaped by training exposure than by demographic characteristics, while institutional, resource-related, and operational challenges operate as manageable constraints rather than significant barriers to governance performance. These findings offer practical guidance for strengthening capacity-building strategies in Indigenous and decentralized local governance settings.

Introduction

Inclusive governance has become a central principle in contemporary public administration, particularly in societies characterized by cultural diversity and the historical marginalization of Indigenous communities. In many developing countries, efforts to institutionalize inclusion have increasingly focused on ensuring that historically excluded groups are not only represented but are also meaningfully engaged in governance processes. In the Philippine context, this commitment is formalized through the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and their participation in local governance structures.

The enactment of Republic Act No. 8371, or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, marked a significant policy shift toward protecting Indigenous Cultural Communities and ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes at various levels of government. One of the key mechanisms established under this framework is the inclusion of Indigenous

Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in local legislative bodies, particularly at the barangay level, which represents the most immediate interface between the state and local communities.

The institutionalization of IPMR participation reflects a broader policy commitment to participatory and culturally responsive governance. More recent policy developments further reinforce the continuing relevance of this mechanism. The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples has revised and updated the national guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' mandatory representation in local legislative councils and policy-making bodies, emphasizing that Indigenous participation remains an active and evolving area of governance implementation rather than a fully resolved institutional concern (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples [NCIP], 2021).

This continuing refinement of policy frameworks suggests that while legal recognition has already been achieved, the practical realization of meaningful participation depends on the conditions that enable IPMRs to effectively perform their roles within local governance systems. As such, the issue is no longer confined to whether Indigenous representation exists in law, but extends to whether such representation is supported by the competence, institutional access, and operational conditions necessary for effective governance practice. This perspective is consistent with the broader decentralization framework in the Philippines, which emphasizes local autonomy, participatory governance, and responsiveness to community needs (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2011).

Decentralization policies assign greater responsibility to local government units, requiring local officials to translate institutional authority into concrete governance outcomes. Within this context, participatory governance is not merely about inclusion in formal structures but also about the capacity of actors to actively engage in decision-making, policy processes, and community representation. Participatory governance literature consistently demonstrates that institutional inclusion alone is insufficient to produce meaningful influence, as the effectiveness of participation is ultimately mediated by the capacity of actors to engage, negotiate, and shape governance outcomes (Mansuri & Rao, 2018).

This suggests that representation, when not supported by adequate competence and institutional support, risks functioning as a procedural formality rather than a substantive mechanism of influence. In the case of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives, this distinction becomes particularly significant. While IPMRs are institutionally positioned within barangay governance structures, their ability to contribute meaningfully to governance processes is contingent upon their capacity to translate institutional roles into actual influence, particularly in domains such as legislative participation, policy advocacy, stakeholder coordination, and community representation.

This highlights a critical distinction between positional inclusion and functional effectiveness, where the presence of IPMRs in governance structures does not necessarily guarantee their ability to shape decisions or outcomes. Despite the importance of this role, empirical evidence examining whether IPMRs possess the necessary competencies to perform these functions effectively remains limited. Existing studies on local governance in the Philippines have largely focused on decentralization, service delivery, and leadership dynamics, with relatively little attention given to the actual performance and competence of Indigenous representatives within these systems (Capuno, 2012).

Governance competence is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities that enable effective performance in public service roles (Boyatzis, 1982; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). Within this framework, knowledge refers to familiarity with governance processes, policies, and legal frameworks; skills involve communication, coordination, and decision-making abilities; and functional capabilities refer to the application of these competencies in performing governance tasks such as participating in legislative processes, engaging stakeholders, and implementing programs.

More importantly, these dimensions of competence do not operate independently but interact in ways that shape actual governance performance. In practice, knowledge without the corresponding skills and functional application may remain underutilized, while strong skills and experiential capabilities may compensate for gaps in formal technical knowledge. This interaction underscores the need to examine governance competence not merely as a static attribute, but as a dynamic and practice-oriented construct that is manifested through performance rather than solely through formal qualifications.

At the same time, governance competence is shaped not only by individual capabilities but also by broader institutional and organizational conditions. In decentralized governance settings, factors such as institutional capacity, availability of resources, access to training, and inter-organizational coordination significantly influence governance performance (Smoke, 2015). Capacity-building initiatives, particularly training and professional development programs, are widely recognized as essential in enhancing governance competence and administrative effectiveness (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

These factors suggest that governance competence should not be understood purely as an individual attribute, but as an outcome shaped by the interaction between personal capability and enabling institutional conditions, particularly in decentralized and resource-constrained environments. These conditions are especially relevant for IPMRs, who operate within hybrid governance environments that combine formal institutional structures with Indigenous socio-cultural systems.

Recent studies in the Philippine context further highlight the importance of examining governance competence at the local level. Empirical research has shown that while barangay officials often demonstrate strong interpersonal and administrative capabilities, gaps remain in more technical areas such as policy analysis, legislative drafting, and evidence-based decision-making (Gabriel, 2016). In addition, evaluations of capacity-building programs indicate that training initiatives are often fragmented, irregular, and insufficiently aligned with the specific functional requirements of local governance roles (Department of the Interior and Local Government [DILG], 2019).

Complementing these findings, broader assessments of participatory governance in the Philippines reveal that formal mechanisms for participation are often present, but the depth and quality of engagement remain uneven. Studies by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2025) indicate that participation in local governance structures is frequently confined within institutionalized or “invited” spaces, limiting the extent to which participants can exert substantive influence over decision-making processes.

These findings indicate that while governance systems are formally established, the competencies required to operationalize these systems effectively remain uneven, reinforcing the need to examine not only the presence of governance structures but also the capacity of actors to utilize them in practice. Taken together, these observations point to a disconnect between institutional design and functional governance outcomes, particularly in contexts where participation is formally mandated but not necessarily supported by adequate competence and capacity.

Despite these developments, a critical gap remains in the literature. Existing scholarship has largely remained descriptive and policy-oriented, focusing on institutional frameworks, legal provisions, and mechanisms of representation rather than on the actual performance of Indigenous representatives within governance systems (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples [NCIP], 2021; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020).

As a result, there is limited empirical understanding of governance competence as a measurable and multidimensional construct, particularly in terms of how Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) perform across key domains such as knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities. This limitation is especially pronounced at the barangay level, where governance is most directly operationalized and where the effectiveness of Indigenous representation has immediate implications for local development outcomes.

Consequently, current literature remains insufficient in explaining whether institutional inclusion translates into functional governance capacity, leaving a critical gap between formal representation and actual governance performance. Addressing this gap requires a more systematic and context-specific analysis that moves beyond representation as a formal requirement and instead examines the competencies and conditions that enable Indigenous representatives to effectively participate in governance processes.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What is the level of governance competence of Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in terms of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities?
- (2) What challenges affect their governance performance?
- (3) Are there significant differences in governance competence based on selected demographic characteristics?

In response to this gap, the present study examines the governance competence of Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in a municipality in Ifugao, Philippines. Specifically, it assesses competence across the domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities, while also analyzing the institutional, resource-related, and operational challenges that may affect governance performance. In addition, the study explores whether governance competence varies across selected demographic variables, providing further insight into the factors that shape competence in decentralized and Indigenous governance contexts.

By providing empirical evidence on how IPMRs perform in practice, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature by linking institutional representation with measurable governance competence. It advances existing discussions by

demonstrating that the effectiveness of Indigenous participation is not determined solely by formal inclusion, but by the extent to which representatives are able to operationalize their roles through applied competencies and sustained engagement in governance processes. In doing so, the study offers insights that can inform the design of context-sensitive capacity-building initiatives and strengthen the role of Indigenous representatives in promoting inclusive and responsive governance. This paper proceeds with a description of the methodology, followed by the presentation of results and discussion, and concludes with implications for policy and future research.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design to assess the governance competence of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in a municipality in Ifugao, Philippines. This design was appropriate for systematically describing the current level of competence across identified domains and examining existing conditions without manipulation of variables. A descriptive design was selected to provide a systematic assessment of existing governance competence without manipulation of variables.

The study was conducted in the municipality of Lamut, a fourth-class municipality in the province of Ifugao. The municipality is composed of eighteen (18) barangays, which served as the primary units of analysis in this study. Lamut is characterized by a predominantly rural setting, with geographically dispersed barangays, some of which are located in remote and hard-to-reach areas. These conditions present logistical and infrastructural constraints that influence governance processes, service delivery, and access to institutional support mechanisms.

The population of the study consisted of all Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) across the eighteen barangays of the municipality, with a total of eighteen ($n = 18$) respondents. A total enumeration sampling approach was employed due to the limited number of IPMRs within the study area, ensuring complete representation of the target population. This approach minimized sampling bias and allowed for a comprehensive assessment of governance competence within the defined group.

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire designed to measure governance competence across three domains: knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities. The instrument also included items assessing institutional, resource-related, and operational challenges encountered in governance functions.

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: (1) demographic profile of respondents, including age, gender, ethnolinguistic group, educational attainment, length of service, and number of trainings attended; (2) governance competence, which measured self-assessed knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities; and (3) perceived challenges, which examined institutional, operational, and resource-related constraints affecting governance performance. Indicators were derived from the Local Government Code of 1991 and the DILG Competency Framework to ensure content validity and alignment with actual governance functions performed at the barangay level.

The instrument underwent content validation by subject-matter experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Minor revisions were made based on validation feedback to improve the clarity and structure of the questionnaire.

Data collection was conducted through the administration of the survey questionnaire to all identified respondents. The researcher personally facilitated the distribution and retrieval of the instruments to ensure a high response rate and to provide clarification when necessary.

Due to the geographical dispersion of barangays, data collection required coordination with local officials and adherence to scheduled visits. In cases where respondents were not immediately available, follow-up visits were conducted to ensure complete data retrieval. This approach ensured that all respondents were adequately represented in the study.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and that no identifying information would be disclosed in the presentation of results. All collected data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Weighted means and composite means were computed to determine the level of governance competence and the extent of challenges encountered. To examine differences in governance competence across selected demographic variables, nonparametric statistical tests were

employed due to the ordinal nature of the data and the small sample size, which do not satisfy the assumptions required for parametric testing.

Specifically, the Mann–Whitney U test was used for variables with two independent groups, while the Kruskal–Wallis test was applied for variables with more than two groups. All analyses were conducted using appropriate statistical software, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale. For governance competence, mean scores were interpreted as follows: 3.26–4.00 (Very High), 2.51–3.25 (High), 1.76–2.50 (Low), and 1.00–1.75 (Very Low). For perceived challenges, the same scale was used but interpreted differently: 3.26–4.00 (Strongly Agree) indicates a significant challenge, 2.51–3.25 (Agree) reflects a moderate challenge, 1.76–2.50 (Disagree) denotes a minor challenge, and 1.00–1.75 (Strongly Disagree) indicates that the item is not perceived as a challenge.

A four-point Likert scale was employed to reduce central tendency bias and encourage more definitive responses, which is particularly important in small-sample studies. This design minimizes neutral responses and allows for clearer interpretation of perceived competence and challenges.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and analyzes the findings on the governance competence of Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in a municipality in Ifugao, Philippines. The results are structured around the core domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities, followed by an assessment of the challenges encountered and the differences across selected demographic variables. This approach provides a systematic basis for understanding how governance competence is developed and expressed in the context of Indigenous participation in local governance.

Level of Governance Competence of Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs)

Table 1 presents the level of governance competence of Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) across the domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities. The results indicate that Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) demonstrate a *very high level of self-assessed governance competence*, as reflected in the grand mean of 3.39. This suggests that IPMRs perceive themselves as highly capable of performing their governance roles across the domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities.

Note: 1.00–1.75 (Very Low), 1.76–2.50 (Low), 2.51–3.25 (High), 3.26–4.00 (Very High) n=18

Indicator	Mean	Qualitative Description
A. Knowledge		
Understand role as IP representative	3.50	Very High
Knowledge of IP rights and responsibilities	3.22	High
Familiarity with Local Government Code provisions	3.22	High
Understanding integration of IP concerns in legislation	3.33	Very High
Awareness of socio-cultural issues of IP community	3.39	Very High
Composite Mean	3.33	Very High
B. Skills		
Advocacy for IP rights and welfare	3.39	Very High
Ability to relay IP concerns in sessions	3.33	Very High
Conflict mediation on IP issues	3.39	Very High
Coordination with external agencies	3.50	Very High
Integration of IP perspectives in governance	3.50	Very High
Composite Mean	3.42	Very High
C. Functional Capabilities		
Propose/support ordinances for IP concerns	3.50	Very High
Ensure IP rights in development planning	3.56	Very High
Engage with IP community	3.39	Very High
Represent IP interests in meetings	3.28	Very High
Monitor IP-related programs	3.44	Very High
Composite Mean	3.43	Very High
GRAND MEAN	3.39	Very High

Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs). Values represent weighted mean scores based on a 4-point Likert scale measuring perceived governance competence.

Table 1. Level of Governance Competence of Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs)

The high ratings across all domains imply that their competence is *well-developed and multidimensional*, encompassing both technical understanding and practical application in governance processes. Across the three domains, functional capabilities (M = 3.43) and skills (M = 3.42) slightly exceed knowledge (M = 3.33), indicating that governance competence among IPMRs is more strongly manifested in applied governance practice than in formal technical understanding.

The highest-rated indicator, *ensuring the integration of Indigenous Peoples' rights in development planning* (M = 3.56), highlights strong capacity in participatory, representational, and advocacy-oriented functions. In contrast, lower ratings were observed in areas related to formal legal and policy knowledge, particularly familiarity with Indigenous rights and provisions of the Local Government Code, although these still fall within the high level.

While these indicators are still within the high level, the lower scores compared to other domains require further interpretation. First, this may indicate actual gaps in formal legal and policy knowledge, particularly in areas involving the Local Government Code and Indigenous rights laws. On the other hand, it may reflect a more cautious way of self-assessment, as respondents may evaluate their knowledge based on formal standards of technical expertise. In contrast, skills and functional capabilities are more visible in everyday governance activities, which may explain why they receive higher ratings. This distinction suggests that strengthening governance competence requires not only improving technical knowledge but also building confidence in applying governance rules and frameworks in practice.

The results indicate that respondents demonstrate stronger competence in applied and participatory governance functions than in formal legal and technical knowledge. This suggests that perceived governance effectiveness among IPMRs is closely linked to their ability to engage in actual governance processes, such as representing community interests, coordinating with stakeholders, and participating in decision-making activities, rather than relying primarily on formal technical mastery alone. At the same time, the lower, though still high, ratings in formal knowledge domains indicate areas where technical reinforcement may further strengthen overall governance performance, particularly in legal interpretation, policy navigation, and rule-based participation in local governance.

These findings may be explained through experiential learning theory, particularly Kolb's framework, which emphasizes that competence develops through experience, reflection, and active participation in real-world contexts (Kolb, 1984). In the case of IPMRs, frequent involvement in governance activities provides opportunities for continuous learning, enabling them to refine their skills and functional capabilities through direct engagement rather than through formal instruction alone. Complementing this perspective is the competency theory which emphasizes that competence is best understood as the ability to perform effectively in context, with observable behavior and role execution serving as key indicators of capability (Boyatzis, 1982). As such, these frameworks provide a useful lens for understanding why applied competencies appear more pronounced than purely technical knowledge in this study.

In the context of Indigenous governance, this relationship becomes even more significant. IPMRs operate at the intersection of formal institutional systems and Indigenous socio-cultural structures, where governance is guided not only by codified rules but also by customary practices, community expectations, and culturally embedded knowledge systems. As a result, their competence reflects a hybrid form of governance capacity that integrates formal administrative responsibilities with experiential, relational, and community-based approaches. This hybrid nature of competence allows IPMRs to navigate both the institutional and cultural dimensions of governance, reinforcing their ability to function effectively in diverse and complex local settings.

This hybrid governance context is particularly evident in Ifugao, where Indigenous social and political structures continue to influence leadership and decision-making. Practices such as community consultation, kinship-based authority, and traditional conflict resolution remain important, even within formal governance systems. As a result, IPMRs must work within both formal administrative structures and Indigenous governance practices, linking institutional requirements with community expectations. This shows that governance competence in Indigenous contexts is not only technical but also relational and culturally grounded, requiring awareness of local norms and practices. Therefore, the effectiveness of IPMRs depends on their ability to balance and integrate these two governance systems in a way that is appropriate to the local context. Furthermore, research on local governance indicates that local officials in grassroots settings develop functional competence through continuous involvement in governance activities and sustained interaction with constituents (Grindle, 2007; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Likewise, Philippine-based studies indicate that barangay officials, including IPMRs, strengthen their governance competence through experience-based learning and community immersion, particularly in resource-constrained and rural contexts (Gabriel, 2016). These findings are consistent with the present results and reinforce the view that governance competence is not solely acquired through formal education or training, but is also significantly shaped by practice, exposure, and community engagement.

While the findings indicate a very high level of self-assessed competence, it is important to recognize that these ratings may also be influenced by contextual and perceptual factors. Given that the study relies on self-reported measures of

competence, the findings may be influenced by response bias, including social desirability and role-based expectations. As IPMRs occupy formal governance positions, there may be a tendency to report higher levels of competence in ways that are consistent with perceived role expectations. This suggests that the reported high competence levels should be interpreted with caution and supplemented by future studies incorporating objective performance indicators or external assessments of role performance. This finding also has important implications for how governance capacity-building programs are designed and implemented, particularly by institutions such as the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The results suggest that conventional training approaches that prioritize formal, technical knowledge alone may not fully align with the actual pathways through which IPMR competence is developed. Instead, capacity-building initiatives should adopt a more integrative approach that combines formal instruction with experiential and community-based learning strategies. This may include mentoring systems, peer learning mechanisms, field-based training, and participatory workshops that build on existing competencies while strengthening technical knowledge in areas such as legal frameworks, policy analysis, and procedural governance. Moreover, the emphasis on applied competence highlights the importance of institutional support systems in shaping governance outcomes. Governance effectiveness in this context is not solely dependent on individual capability, but also on the extent to which institutional environments enable IPMRs to perform their roles effectively and consistently. Strengthening governance competence among IPMRs therefore requires not only enhancing individual capabilities but also improving the structural conditions under which those capabilities are applied. Finally, the findings suggest that governance competence among IPMRs is largely shaped by their roles and experiences. Continuous engagement with community concerns and governance processes reinforces practical performance, even when formal legal or technical knowledge develops at a relatively slower pace. Importantly, this does not indicate weak knowledge, as the knowledge indicators still remain within the high to very high range. Rather, it reflects the adaptive nature of governance competence, in which practical demands shape how knowledge and skills are developed, reinforced, and applied. Overall, these findings support the view that IPMR competence is not merely symbolic, but active, functional, and deeply embedded in the realities of local governance practice.

Challenges affecting the level of governance competence of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs)

While the findings indicate a very high level of governance competence among IPMRs, it is also important to examine the contextual factors that may influence or constrain the application of these competencies in practice. Table 2 presents the perceived challenges affecting governance competence across institutional, resource-related, and operational dimensions.

Indicator	Mean	Qualitative Description
<i>Institutional Challenges</i>		
Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined	1.50	Strongly Disagree
Insufficient support from municipal government	1.94	Disagree
Lack of clear organizational structure within the barangay	1.72	Strongly Disagree
Policies from higher levels of government are difficult to implement locally	2.22	Disagree
Lack of regular performance evaluation for barangay officials	2.00	Disagree
Composite Mean	1.88	Disagree
<i>Resource-related Challenges</i>		
The barangay lacks sufficient financial resources for governance tasks	2.33	Disagree
The barangay lacks sufficient physical resources (e.g., office equipment)	2.22	Disagree
Inadequate funding for capacity-building initiatives	2.72	Agree
Limited access to updated technology and information systems	2.28	Disagree
Insufficient manpower to effectively execute governance programs	2.33	Disagree
Composite Mean	2.38	Disagree
<i>Operational Challenges</i>		
Barangay sessions are not conducted regularly or productively	1.50	Strongly Disagree
There is insufficient community participation in governance activities	2.17	Disagree
Limited collaboration among barangay officials	1.56	Strongly Disagree
Inadequate processes in ordinance drafting and implementation	2.06	Disagree
Inadequate mechanisms for addressing community concerns	2.17	Disagree
Difficulty in collaboration with external organizations	2.72	Agree
Composite Mean	2.03	Disagree
GRAND MEAN	2.10	Disagree

Note: 1.00–1.75 = Strongly Disagree, 1.76–2.50 = Disagree, 2.51–3.25 = Agree, 3.26–4.00 = Strongly Agree
n = 18 IPMR respondents

Table 2. Challenges Affecting the Governance Competence of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs)

A closer examination of the indicators reveals that inadequate funding for capacity-building initiatives and difficulty in collaboration with external organizations (both $M = 2.72$, Agree) are perceived as moderate challenges. This implies that constraints are more evident in areas requiring external support, inter-organizational coordination, and sustained resource investment. Although these challenges are not pervasive, they may intermittently affect the ability of IPMRs to fully perform governance functions that depend on external resources and partnerships.

These findings can be better understood within the context of fiscal decentralization in the Philippines. Local government units, especially fourth-class municipalities, often face financial and institutional limitations due to low revenue generation and dependence on national government support (Department of Budget and Management [DBM], 2020; Smoke, 2015). In this setting, resource constraints are not isolated issues but part of the broader structure of decentralized governance. As a result, the moderate challenges observed in funding for capacity-building and coordination with external organizations reflect these systemic limitations rather than weaknesses in individual competence. This suggests that although IPMRs demonstrate strong capabilities, their ability to fully apply these competencies depends on the availability of institutional resources and external support. Addressing these challenges therefore requires not only strengthening individual capacities but also improving the financial and organizational support systems of local governments.

At the same time, the low ratings across institutional indicators suggest that governance structures, role definitions, and administrative systems are generally well-established and stable, providing a supportive environment for IPMRs to perform their functions effectively. In decentralized governance contexts, such institutional stability is critical, as clearly defined roles and functional structures enable local officials to perform their duties effectively and reduce ambiguity in decision-making processes. This interpretation is supported by recent studies by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2025), which emphasize that effective decentralization depends on clearly defined institutional roles, structured governance mechanisms, and adequate administrative capacity to enhance local government performance.

In contrast, the lowest-rated indicators, such as unclear roles and responsibilities ($M = 1.50$) and irregular barangay sessions ($M = 1.50$), both interpreted as Strongly Disagree, indicate that these factors are not perceived as challenges. This suggests that core governance structures, institutional roles, and internal processes are stable and well-established among the respondents.

These results indicate that challenges affecting IPMRs are less associated with internal governance deficiencies and are more closely linked to external and resource-dependent factors that may influence the further development and strengthening of governance competence. This finding reinforces the earlier result that IPMRs demonstrate a high level of competence, with challenges functioning more as developmental constraints rather than limiting barriers to performance. When considered alongside the high level of governance competence presented in Table 1, governance competence appears to be maintained through stable institutional arrangements and effective operational practices, while constraints are more evident in areas that depend on external resources, funding, and inter-agency coordination. This distinction is important because it indicates that governance competence is not weakened by the mere presence of challenges; rather, it is reflected in how effectively these challenges are managed and addressed in actual governance practice.

This interpretation is supported by existing literature on barangay governance, which identifies resource limitations, administrative constraints, and capacity gaps as common challenges affecting local government performance (Department of the Interior and Local Government [DILG], 2019). Similarly, Philippine governance and development studies highlight that barangays, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas, face structural limitations related to fiscal capacity, technical resources, and program implementation (Department of Budget and Management [DBM], 2020). However, the present findings suggest that, in this specific context, these challenges are not perceived as severe constraints, but rather as manageable conditions that do not significantly hinder the ability of IPMRs to perform their governance roles effectively.

These findings show that resource-related challenges do not reduce the abilities of IPMRs, but instead limit how much they can fully use and maintain those abilities in practice. In other words, they are still capable, but their performance may be restricted by limited resources and external conditions.

Finally, the results affirm that the challenges encountered by IPMRs are largely structural and resource-dependent, underscoring the need for sustained capacity-building support, strengthened inter-agency collaboration, and increased investment in local governance systems to further enhance Indigenous governance competence. At the same time, the generally low level of reported challenges may reflect the normalization of structural constraints in rural governance contexts, where such limitations are experienced as routine rather than exceptional conditions.

Difference in the level of Governance Competence of Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives When Grouped According to Demographic Profile

Beyond the identification of challenges, it is also necessary to determine whether governance competence varies across selected demographic characteristics. This provides further insight into whether competence is influenced by individual attributes or remains consistent across different groups. In this context, Table 3 presents the differences in governance competence when grouped according to demographic variables. The data reveals that no statistically significant differences were observed across most demographic variables in the domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities ($p > .05$), except for the number of trainings attended, which yielded a significant difference in the skills domain ($p = .006$).

Profile Variable	Knowledge p-value	Skills p-value	Functional Capabilities p-value
Age	NS (.55)	NS (.30)	NS (.93)
Gender	NS (1.00)	NS (.13)	NS (.19)
Ethnolinguistic Group	NS (.34)	NS (.34)	NS (.30)
Educational Attainment	NS (.15)	NS (.36)	NS (.32)
Length of Service	NS (.47)	NS (.15)	NS (1.00)
Trainings Attended	NS (.07)	Sig (.006)	NS (.07)

Note: NS = Not Significant ($p > .05$); Sig = Significant ($p < .05$)

Table 3. Difference in the level of Governance Competence of Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives When Grouped According to Demographic Profile

This reveals that governance competence among IPMRs is generally consistent regardless of demographic characteristics. However, an exception is observed in the number of trainings attended, which yielded a statistically significant difference in the skills domain ($p = .006$). This suggests that while competence remains stable across demographic groups, training exposure plays a critical role in enhancing applied skills, with those who have attended more trainings demonstrating higher levels of skills competence.

This finding underscores the importance of training as a key factor in the development of governance skills among IPMRs. The results are consistent with existing literature emphasizing that capacity-building interventions significantly enhance practical competencies, particularly in areas requiring active engagement such as communication, coordination, and decision-making. This suggests that training serves as a primary mechanism through which applied governance skills are strengthened. Supporting this, recent studies indicate that training programs positively influence officials' role performance and decision-making, even when demographic characteristics show no significant effect (Vilches-Mandrea, 2025).

Moreover, the finding that training significantly influences the skills domain, but not knowledge or functional capabilities, suggests that existing capacity-building programs are more focused on developing practical and behavioral competencies rather than formal technical knowledge. In many local governance settings, training activities often emphasize skills such as communication, coordination, facilitation, and participatory engagement, which are immediately applied in governance practice (Krpálek et al., 2021). In contrast, knowledge-based competencies—particularly those related to legal frameworks and policy interpretation—generally require more structured and sustained learning beyond short-term training. Similarly, functional capabilities, which involve applying knowledge and skills in real governance situations, are more likely to develop through continuous experience and role immersion rather than through isolated training activities (Kolb, 1984). This suggests that different aspects of governance competence develop through different processes, highlighting the need for capacity-building approaches that are tailored to specific competency areas.

In contrast, the absence of significant differences across age, gender, ethnolinguistic group, educational attainment, and length of service suggests that governance competence among IPMRs remains consistent regardless of demographic characteristics. This implies that competence in this context is not primarily shaped by personal attributes, but rather by shared governance roles, experiential learning, and continuous engagement in community-based processes. Supporting this interpretation, Deleña, Niasas, and Saguban (2025) found no significant relationship between barangay officials' demographic profiles and their core competencies, indicating that competence may be more strongly influenced by actual governance practice than by individual characteristics. This further suggests that knowledge and functional capabilities are developed through practice-oriented exposure and immersion in governance activities rather than formal qualifications or demographic factors alone.

Moreover, the absence of significant differences in the domains of knowledge and functional capabilities across training groups suggests that these aspects of competence may be more influenced by experience-based and contextual learning,

while training primarily strengthens applied and behavioral competencies. This is consistent with findings by Krpálek et al. (2021), who emphasized that training in public administration is particularly effective in enhancing cross-cutting and practical skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability, rather than uniformly affecting all dimensions of competence.

Importantly, this distinction highlights the multidimensional nature of governance competence. While knowledge and functional capabilities appear to develop through experience and role immersion, skills are more responsive to structured learning and capacity-building interventions. This suggests that different dimensions of competence require different development strategies, with experiential learning supporting knowledge and functional capabilities, and formal training strengthening applied skills.

Overall, the findings indicate that training exposure is a key determinant of skills development, highlighting the importance of sustained and accessible capacity-building programs for IPMRs, particularly those that strengthen practical and performance-based competencies. The results further suggest that governance competence is not significantly shaped by demographic characteristics, but is instead reinforced through continuous engagement in governance processes and supported by learning opportunities.

To synthesize, the findings from Tables 1, 2, and 3 provide a coherent account of the determinants of governance competence among Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs). Table 1 demonstrates a very high level of competence across knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities, with greater emphasis on applied competencies. Table 2 shows that this competence persists despite the presence of contextual challenges, which are generally minimal and function more as manageable constraints rather than significant barriers. Table 3 further indicates that competence remains consistent across demographic characteristics, with training exposure emerging as the only significant factor influencing skills. Collectively, the findings suggest that governance competence is shaped by the interaction of experiential engagement and capacity-building opportunities. This highlights the importance of strengthening both institutional support systems and continuous learning mechanisms to ensure the effective and sustained participation of Indigenous representatives in decentralized governance systems.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the governance competence of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in a municipality in Ifugao, Philippines, focusing on the domains of knowledge, skills, and functional capabilities, as well as the contextual challenges and demographic factors influencing governance performance. The findings indicate a very high level of governance competence across all domains, with skills and functional capabilities slightly exceeding knowledge. This pattern suggests that competence is more strongly expressed in applied governance practice, where IPMRs actively engage in community representation, coordination, and decision-making processes. At the same time, perceived challenges were generally low, with only moderate constraints observed in resource-related and inter-organizational dimensions. Governance competence was also found to be largely consistent across demographic characteristics, with training exposure emerging as the only significant factor influencing the skills domain.

This study contributes to the literature by shifting the focus from formal representation to functional governance capacity, providing empirical evidence that competence among Indigenous representatives is largely practice-based rather than demographically determined. While existing studies have emphasized representation as a mechanism for inclusion, the present findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of such representation depends on the actual capacity of actors to perform governance functions in practice. In this context, competence is not simply a product of formal qualifications or individual characteristics but is continuously developed through engagement in governance processes and reinforced through targeted capacity-building interventions. The study also highlights the role of training exposure as a key mechanism for enhancing applied governance skills, offering practical insights for the design of context-sensitive capacity-building programs in decentralized and Indigenous governance settings.

The findings further suggest that governance competence among IPMRs is dynamic and context dependent. Rather than being static, competence evolves through continuous interaction with institutional structures, community expectations, and real-world governance demands. This reinforces the importance of experiential learning in shaping governance performance, particularly in rural and resource-constrained environments where formal training opportunities may be limited. In such contexts, the ability of IPMRs to navigate both formal administrative systems and Indigenous socio-cultural structures reflects a hybrid form of governance capacity that integrates technical, relational, and culturally embedded competencies. This hybrid nature of competence is particularly significant in Indigenous governance, where effectiveness depends not only on procedural knowledge but also on the ability to represent community interests in culturally appropriate and contextually relevant ways.

From a policy and institutional perspective, the results underscore the need to strengthen and sustain capacity-building systems that support the continuous development of governance competencies among IPMRs. The significant influence of training exposure on the skills domain indicates that structured learning interventions play a crucial role in enhancing practical governance abilities. However, the findings also suggest that conventional training approaches that focus primarily on formal knowledge acquisition may not fully capture the pathways through which competence develops in practice. As such, capacity-building initiatives should adopt more integrative approaches that combine formal instruction with experiential, community-based, and participatory learning strategies. These may include mentoring systems, peer learning mechanisms, field-based training, and context-specific workshops that build on existing competencies while strengthening technical knowledge in areas such as policy analysis, legal frameworks, and program implementation.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutional support systems that enable IPMRs to effectively apply their competencies in governance practice. Although challenges were generally perceived as minimal, the presence of moderate constraints in areas such as funding for capacity-building and collaboration with external organizations indicates that governance effectiveness is shaped not only by individual capability but also by structural and environmental conditions. Strengthening coordination mechanisms, expanding access to resources, and enhancing inter-agency collaboration are therefore critical in maximizing the application of governance competence in local settings. This suggests that policy interventions should not only focus on individual capacity development but also on creating enabling environments that support sustained governance performance.

At the theoretical level, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on governance competence by providing empirical support for experiential learning perspectives, particularly Kolb's experiential learning theory, alongside competency-based frameworks. The findings demonstrate that competence is more strongly reflected in applied skills and functional performance than in formal knowledge alone, reinforcing the view that governance competence is best understood as a practice-oriented and contextually embedded construct. This extends existing discussions on public sector competence by emphasizing the interaction between experience, engagement, and institutional context in shaping governance outcomes, particularly in decentralized and Indigenous governance systems.

While the findings provide valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The study is based on a relatively small and context-specific sample, reflecting the total population of IPMRs within the municipality. While this ensures complete representation of the target group, it also limits the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. In addition, the use of self-reported measures of competence may introduce response bias, including social desirability and role-based expectations, which may influence how respondents assess their own performance. As such, the results should be interpreted with caution and understood within the specific context in which competence is experienced and evaluated. Future research may address these limitations by incorporating larger samples, comparative analyses across different local government settings, and the use of objective performance indicators to provide a more comprehensive assessment of governance competence.

Overall, the study advances the understanding of Indigenous participation in local governance by demonstrating that IPMR competence is not merely symbolic, but functional, adaptive, and shaped by both experiential engagement and capacity-building opportunities. The findings emphasize that effective representation requires not only institutional inclusion but also the sustained development of competencies that enable Indigenous representatives to actively participate in governance processes. More importantly, the study highlights that the value of Indigenous representation lies not only in its formal recognition, but in its capacity to produce meaningful governance outcomes through competent and contextually grounded participation. Strengthening both individual capabilities and institutional support mechanisms is therefore essential in ensuring that Indigenous participation in decentralized governance systems is not only present, but genuinely effective and transformative.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.