

From Symbolic Participation to Civic Agency: Developing the ADDA A Framework of Youth Governance in the Philippines

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Abstract. Youth participation is increasingly recognized as essential to democratic governance, participatory development, and the long-term sustainability of local political institutions. In the Philippine context, particularly in the province of La Union, Republic Act No. 10742 institutionalized youth engagement through the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) and the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK), positioning young people as formal actors in local governance. Despite these institutional mechanisms, youth participation in many barangays remains largely symbolic, often constrained by adult-dominated political structures, limited decision-making influence, and procedural tokenism. This study examined how KK members in La Union, Philippines construct meanings around participation, navigate institutional and sociopolitical constraints, and assert civic agency within barangay governance spaces. Anchored in participatory governance theory and civic agency perspectives, the study argues that meaningful youth engagement extends beyond mere representation and requires the active cultivation of political consciousness, autonomy, and accountability. Participatory governance emphasizes collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes, while civic agency perspectives highlight the capacity of young people to negotiate power structures and shape public outcomes despite institutional limitations. The study employed a qualitative design using Critical Discourse Analysis complemented by grounded thematic analysis. Data were gathered from twenty-five KK members through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and youth-related social media materials. Findings revealed that youth participation is a negotiated civic process shaped by structural barriers, political patronage, adult-centric governance cultures, and adaptive youth practices. The study developed the ADDA A Framework—Awareness, Discipline, Decision, Action, and Accountability—which explains how young people move from symbolic inclusion toward substantive and ethically grounded civic engagement. The framework offers a localized yet transferable model for strengthening youth participation, democratic citizenship formation, and grassroots governance in Philippine local communities.

Keywords: Accountability, civic agency, Katipunan ng Kabataan, participatory governance, Sangguniang Kabataan

Introduction

Across contemporary democratic societies, youth participation has increasingly become both a governance aspiration and a democratic dilemma. While governments, international organizations, and participatory institutions consistently promote youth inclusion as essential to democratic sustainability, many young people worldwide continue to experience political alienation, institutional distrust, and exclusion from meaningful governance processes. Recent global scholarship suggests that democratic institutions are facing a growing legitimacy crisis characterized by declining civic trust, weakening public participation, and increasing skepticism toward traditional political structures, particularly among younger generations. In both developed and developing democracies, young people are often rhetorically celebrated as future leaders while simultaneously remaining marginalized within present political decision-making systems.

Within the Philippines, youth participation occupies a unique yet paradoxical position in democratic governance. The 1987 Philippine Constitution recognizes the vital role of the youth in nation-building, while Republic Act No. 10742 or the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015 institutionalized youth participation through the Sangguniang Kabataan and the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK). Despite these mechanisms, meaningful youth participation within local governance remains uneven. In many barangays, participation often becomes procedural compliance rather than substantive democratic engagement, where

young people are invited into governance spaces yet remain excluded from actual agenda-setting and decision-making processes.

This contradiction reflects broader structural realities operating within local governance systems. Barangay governance in the Philippines remains shaped by localized political hierarchies, patronage structures, and socio-cultural expectations surrounding authority and seniority. Consequently, youth participation becomes not merely a matter of institutional access but a process of continuously negotiating legitimacy within adult-dominated governance environments. At the same time, young people are not passive recipients of these structural limitations. Participation extends beyond formal representation and becomes a dynamic process through which young people construct political identity, negotiate authority, and assert civic agency within everyday governance contexts.

This study addresses these realities by examining how members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan in La Union, Philippines construct meanings around participation, negotiate institutional constraints, and assert civic agency within barangay governance. By foregrounding youth narratives and discursive practices, the study moves beyond procedural understandings of participation and instead examines how democratic engagement is negotiated within local governance spaces.

Research Question

How do members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK) in La Union, Philippines construct and negotiate meanings of youth participation, civic agency, and political engagement within the institutional and discursive spaces of barangay governance?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study examined how members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK) in La Union, Philippines construct and negotiate meanings of youth participation, civic agency, and political engagement within barangay governance. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and grounded thematic analysis, the study gathered data from selected KK members through interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and youth-related social media materials. The study was limited to the experiences and discourses of KK members in selected barangays in La Union and did not include broader national-level youth governance structures or quantitative measures of participation.

Literature Review

Youth Participation and Participatory Governance

Youth participation has become a central concern in contemporary participatory governance discourse, particularly amid growing concerns regarding democratic disengagement and declining civic trust among younger generations. Participatory governance scholarship argues that democratic systems become more responsive and sustainable when citizens, including young people, are actively involved in governance processes beyond electoral participation. However, recent studies suggest that many participatory institutions remain heavily procedural, limiting participation to consultation, attendance, and symbolic inclusion rather than substantive decision-making influence (Aghajani, 2024). Consequently, participation often becomes performative rather than transformative, particularly within institutional settings where power remains concentrated among established political actors (Bessant, 2022).

Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Youth Engagement

Existing literature further emphasizes that youth participation is deeply shaped by structural inequalities and socio-cultural expectations surrounding authority, age, and legitimacy. In many developing democratic contexts, governance systems continue to operate within adult-centered political cultures where authority is associated with seniority, political experience, and established social influence. Young people are frequently perceived as politically immature or insufficiently capable of meaningful governance participation. Emerging scholarship in Critical Youth Studies argues that youth exclusion is not solely institutional but also discursive, operating through language, interaction, and everyday social practices that subtly delegitimize youth voices within governance spaces.

Youth Participation in Philippine Barangay Governance

Within the Philippine setting, youth participation is formally institutionalized through the 1987 Philippine Constitution and Republic Act No. 10742 or the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015. The law strengthened the role of the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK) as the general youth assembly within barangays and sought to promote youth engagement through consultations, leadership development, and participatory governance mechanisms. Despite these institutional reforms, studies reveal persistent tensions between formal recognition and actual political influence. In many barangays, youth participation remains

procedural, where assemblies and consultations are conducted primarily for compliance purposes while substantive decision-making authority continues to rest among older political actors.

Civic Agency, Discourse, and Negotiated Participation

Recent participatory governance literature emphasizes that young people are not passive recipients of institutional limitations. Instead, youth continuously negotiate and reinterpret governance spaces through adaptive civic practices, community involvement, digital engagement, and discursive assertion (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). Participation therefore extends beyond institutional representation and becomes relational, cultural, and discursive in nature. The discursive dimension of participation is particularly important in understanding how young people negotiate legitimacy, visibility, and authority within governance interactions. Through discourse, interaction, and symbolic practices, youth construct political identities and assert civic agency despite structural constraints.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complemented by grounded thematic analysis. The design was appropriate in examining how members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK) construct meanings around youth participation, negotiate institutional constraints, and assert civic agency within barangay governance. Guided by Fairclough's CDA framework, the study analyzed discourse, interaction, and participatory practices to understand how legitimacy, authority, and political engagement are negotiated within local governance spaces.

Sampling Design

The study utilized purposive sampling to select participants who possessed direct experiences relevant to youth participation and barangay governance. Participants were required to be registered members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan who had engaged in barangay assemblies, youth consultations, civic activities, community programs, or governance-related initiatives within their respective barangays. Variation in gender, leadership involvement, governance exposure, and participatory experiences was likewise considered to capture diverse youth perspectives.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected barangays within the Province of La Union, Philippines. The locale included both urban and rural communities, including geographically peripheral and upland barangays, to capture varying socio-political and governance contexts influencing youth participation and civic engagement.

Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of twenty-five (25) members of the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK) from selected barangays in La Union. The sample size was deemed appropriate for qualitative inquiry as the study prioritized depth, contextual richness, and experiential diversity rather than statistical generalization.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding youth participation, governance engagement, institutional barriers, and civic legitimacy. Focus group discussion protocols, document analysis templates, and examination of youth-related social media materials were likewise utilized to supplement participant narratives and provide broader discursive context.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and examination of relevant social media materials associated with youth participation and barangay governance. Prior to data collection, permission and informed consent were secured from participants and concerned authorities. Interviews and discussions were conducted using English, Filipino, and Ilocano depending on participant preference. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent and supplemented by field notes. Documentary materials and online youth-related contents were likewise collected to contextualize participant narratives. Following data collection, interviews and discussions were transcribed verbatim, translated when necessary, and subjected to repeated familiarization prior to analysis.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, documentary materials, field observations, and youth-related digital discourse revealed that youth participation within barangay governance in La Union is neither uniform nor purely institutional. Rather than functioning as a straightforward democratic mechanism, participation emerged as a negotiated and evolving civic process shaped by structural limitations, socio-cultural expectations, localized political hierarchies, and the adaptive practices of young people operating within adult-dominated governance spaces. Across participant narratives, civic engagement was not simply experienced through formal attendance in assemblies or consultations but through continuous attempts to negotiate legitimacy, visibility, recognition, and influence within community governance structures. The findings demonstrate that youth participation frequently operates within a tension between symbolic inclusion and substantive engagement. While young people are institutionally recognized through the Katipunan ng Kabataan and the Sangguniang Kabataan system, participants repeatedly described situations where youth voices remained peripheral to actual governance decision-making processes. Participation therefore became a site of negotiation rather than automatic empowerment. Young people continuously navigated governance environments where legitimacy remained unevenly distributed according to age, political seniority, social hierarchy, and localized authority structures. Through iterative thematic and discursive analysis, the study generated the ADDA A Framework of Civic Transformation, which explains how youth participants gradually transition from symbolic participation toward more active and ethically grounded civic agency. The framework consists of five interconnected phases: Awareness, Discipline, Decision, Action, and Accountability. These phases do not operate as strictly linear stages but rather as overlapping civic processes shaped by context, governance exposure, and participatory experiences. The cyclical structure of the framework illustrates that youth participation is iterative rather than fixed. Experiences of accountability often deepen political awareness, while renewed awareness further reshapes future civic engagement practices. The framework therefore conceptualizes participation as an ongoing process of civic transformation rather than a singular institutional condition.

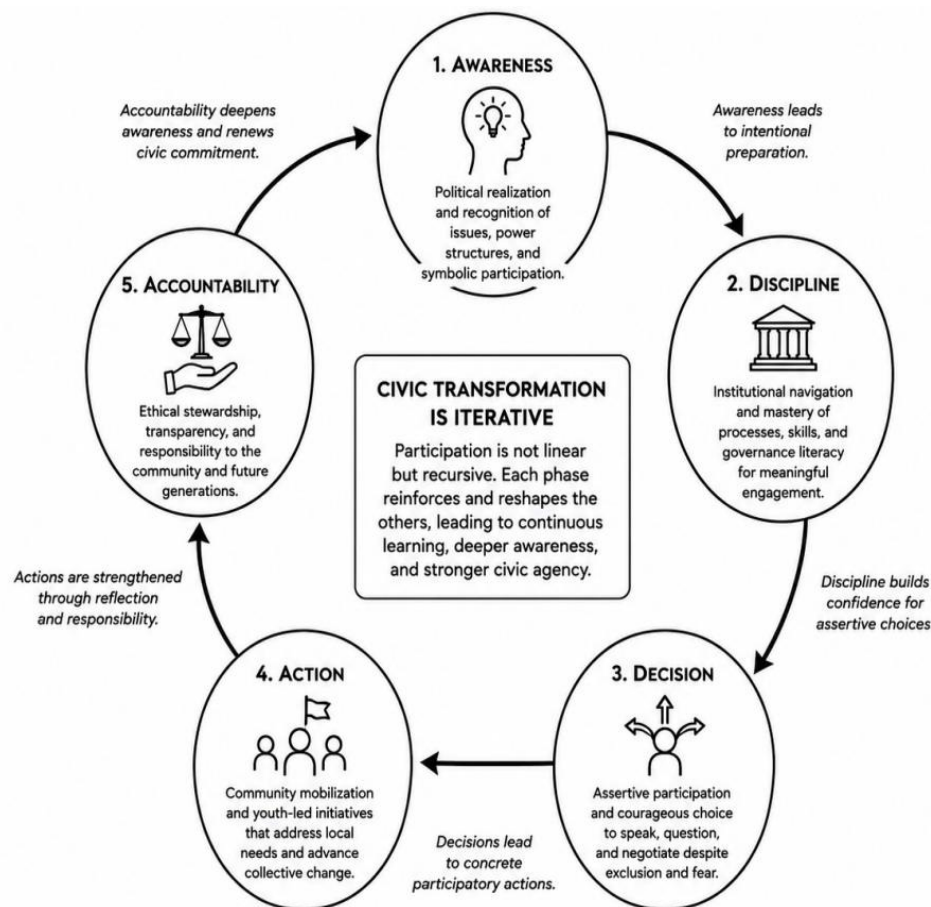


Figure 1. The ADDA A Framework of Civic Transformation

Table 1. Thematic Structure of the ADDA A Framework

Theme	Core Meaning	Sample Indicators
Awareness	Political realization and recognition of symbolic participation	Recognition of tokenism, exclusion from decisions, procedural participation
Discipline	Strategic institutional navigation and procedural engagement	Formal communication, governance literacy, adaptive participation
Decision	Assertive participation despite exclusionary conditions	Speaking during meetings, questioning authority, negotiated resistance
Action	Community-based civic intervention and mobilization	Youth-led initiatives, volunteerism, independent organizing
Accountability	Ethical stewardship and collective responsibility	Transparency practices, peer accountability, public reporting

Awareness: From Symbolic Presence to Political Realization

The first phase of the framework emerged through participants' growing recognition that institutional participation did not necessarily translate into meaningful influence. Across narratives, youth participants described attending assemblies, consultations, and governance activities where their presence was formally acknowledged yet their perspectives remained largely excluded from actual decision-making processes. Participation was therefore experienced not as democratic empowerment but as procedural visibility.

One participant explained:

"We were always invited during assemblies, but most of the decisions were already finalized before we even arrived." (19, female, LGU12)

Another participant reflected:

"Sometimes they ask us to attend only because it is required, not because they actually want our ideas." (20, male, LGU3)

These narratives reveal how youth participation frequently operates within symbolic democratic structures where inclusion is institutionally performed without redistributing substantive governance influence. Discursively, participants framed participation using expressions associated with invisibility, silence, and procedural compliance, suggesting that youth often occupy peripheral positions within barangay political spaces. The repeated use of phrases such as "pinapatawag lang," "for compliance," and "nakikinig lang kami" reflected a broader perception that youth involvement remained conditional and secondary within governance interactions.

The findings further reveal that awareness emerged through political realization rather than immediate resistance. Participants gradually recognized that institutional recognition alone did not guarantee democratic inclusion. This realization became a critical turning point in the civic transformation process because it disrupted passive acceptance of procedural participation and initiated critical reflection regarding governance inequalities. Awareness therefore functioned as both political consciousness and discursive awakening.

Structurally, this phase reflects broader tensions within participatory governance systems where institutions formally expand inclusion while maintaining hierarchical power relations. Although youth participation mechanisms exist within barangay governance, authority remains concentrated among older political actors who continue to control agenda-setting, deliberation, and final decision-making processes. The findings therefore support critiques of participatory governance suggesting that democratic inclusion often remains performative when participation does not meaningfully redistribute political influence.

Discipline: Learning the Language of Governance

Following political realization, participants described developing more strategic forms of engagement through procedural adaptation and institutional navigation. Rather than responding solely through frustration or withdrawal, many participants learned to operate within governance expectations by mastering formal communication practices, documentation procedures, and culturally acceptable modes of participation.

One participant narrated:

"Before, we only complained online. Later we realized that if we wanted officials to listen, we needed formal letters, signatures, and supporting documents." (21, female, LGU9)

Another participant explained:

"You need to learn how to speak carefully because if you sound too emotional, they

will say you are immature." (22, male, LGU18)

These accounts reveal that youth participation frequently requires strategic self-regulation in order to achieve institutional legitimacy. Participants learned to adapt their language, behavior, and communicative style according to adult-centered expectations operating within barangay governance spaces. Discursively, participants repeatedly associated legitimacy with "professionalism," "respect," "formal process," and "proper communication," indicating that youth participation becomes socially acceptable only when aligned with dominant institutional norms.

This phase demonstrates how governance participation is shaped not only by access to institutional spaces but also by mastery of institutional discourse. Young people gradually learned the "language of governance" in order to avoid being dismissed as emotionally immature or politically inexperienced. In many cases, youth participants disciplined themselves communicatively before institutions became willing to recognize their participation as legitimate.

From a structural perspective, this finding exposes how governance systems subtly reproduce unequal power relations through discursive expectations. Rather than openly excluding youth, institutions often require young people to conform to procedural and communicative standards defined primarily by older political actors. Participation therefore becomes conditional upon institutional assimilation rather than genuine democratic openness.

Decision: Negotiating Voice Within Constrained Spaces

The third phase emerged through moments where participants deliberately chose to assert their perspectives despite fear, hesitation, or possible criticism from authority figures. Several participants described experiences where youth concerns were being discussed without youth representation, prompting them to intervene despite discomfort or uncertainty.

One participant recounted:

"They were discussing curfew policies for young people, but no youth were being asked. I finally stood up and said, 'You are talking about us without us.'" (18, female, LGU7)

Another participant explained:

"After questioning why youth projects were removed from the budget, some officials started calling me disrespectful." (23, male, LGU16)

These narratives illustrate that participation often involves negotiated resistance rather than passive collaboration. Speaking within governance spaces required not only confidence but also political risk-taking. Participants recognized that assertive participation could result in subtle punishment, social labeling, or strained relationships with local officials.

Discursively, participants frequently described fear using terms associated with embarrassment, disrespect, and confrontation. The repeated use of phrases such as "nakakatakot magsalita," "baka bastos ang tingin," and "masyadong maingay" reflects how governance participation is emotionally and socially regulated within barangay political culture. Youth voices become constrained not only institutionally but also culturally through expectations surrounding silence, deference, and obedience.

This phase reveals the relational nature of power within participatory governance systems. Participation is not simply granted institutionally but continuously negotiated socially. Young people therefore engage governance through strategic assertion, selective confrontation, and discursive negotiation rather than unrestricted democratic inclusion.

Action: Civic Participation Beyond Institutional Permission

Beyond discursive assertion, participants demonstrated agency through direct civic intervention, volunteerism, and youth-led community initiatives. Many participants described implementing projects independently when institutional support was delayed, limited, or absent. These activities included donation drives, youth outreach initiatives, environmental campaigns, peer support programs, and emergency response mobilizations.

One participant explained:

"We stopped waiting for approval all the time. When there was a fire in the barangay, we organized donations ourselves." (20, male, LGU10)

Another participant stated:

"Even if there was no budget yet, we still continued because helping the community should not always depend on politics." (21, female, LGU22)

These narratives reveal how youth participants repositioned themselves from passive beneficiaries toward active civic actors capable of initiating governance-related action independently. Participation therefore extended beyond formal representation and became embedded within everyday community intervention and collective responsibility.

Discursively, participants framed civic action using language associated with responsibility, initiative, and collective obligation. Expressions such as “kami na mismo,” “hindi na naghihintay,” and “responsibilidad din namin” suggest that youth increasingly perceived governance participation as shared civic ownership rather than institutional dependence.

At a structural level, this phase reflects the limitations of institutionalized participation mechanisms. The emergence of independent youth initiatives suggests that formal governance systems may not always respond adequately to community needs or youth priorities. Consequently, young people create alternative participatory pathways beyond institutional authorization, demonstrating that civic engagement frequently emerges through adaptive community practices rather than solely through formal governance channels.

Accountability: Ethical Stewardship and Civic Maturity

The final phase reflects the internalization of accountability as a central component of youth leadership and civic participation. Participants emphasized that legitimacy could not be sustained solely through visibility or activism but required transparency, ethical conduct, and responsibility toward community members.

One participant shared:

“Even small expenses were reported publicly because we wanted people to trust us.”
(20, male, LGU4)

Another participant explained:

“If one member fails to do their task, we try to guide them first instead of immediately removing them.” (23, female, LGU18)

These accounts reveal that accountability was understood not merely as compliance with institutional requirements but as ethical stewardship grounded in collective responsibility. Participants associated accountability with trust-building, transparency, mentorship, and organizational integrity.

Discursively, participants frequently used terms associated with responsibility, trust, openness, and fairness when discussing leadership practices. Unlike earlier phases where legitimacy was externally negotiated, accountability reflected the internalization of civic values within youth governance practices themselves.

This phase challenges stereotypes portraying youth participation as emotionally reactive or politically immature. Instead, the findings demonstrate that young people are capable of exercising ethical governance practices that contribute meaningfully to democratic participation and community trust. Civic maturity therefore emerged not through age alone but through participatory experience, reflexive leadership, and collective governance engagement.

Contextual Dynamics Shaping Youth Participation

Beyond the ADDA A Framework, the findings revealed several structural and contextual dynamics influencing youth participation across barangays.

Participants from urban communities generally demonstrated greater confidence in asserting their perspectives and identifying tokenistic participation earlier than participants from rural or upland barangays. In contrast, youth from geographically peripheral communities described stronger cultural expectations surrounding deference toward elders and local authority figures.

Adultism likewise emerged consistently across narratives. Participants repeatedly described situations where youth perspectives were dismissed primarily because of age rather than substance. Legitimacy therefore remained conditional and performance-based, requiring young people to continuously prove competence before receiving institutional recognition.

Gendered participation also appeared prominently within participant narratives. Female participants described hesitations surrounding public speaking and leadership visibility because assertiveness among young women was sometimes interpreted negatively within conservative community environments. Despite these barriers, many female participants likewise described governance participation as empowering and confidence-building over time.

Finally, digital spaces emerged as alternative arenas of civic engagement and visibility. Participants explained that online discussions, social media campaigns, and digital community interaction frequently generated broader public attention than formal meetings alone. Digital participation therefore functioned as a counter-space where young people negotiated visibility, legitimacy, and civic influence beyond traditional governance structures.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that youth participation within barangay governance is not merely institutional but deeply relational, discursive, and negotiated. The ADDA A Framework illustrates how young people gradually transform participation from symbolic inclusion toward substantive civic agency while continuously navigating structural limitations, socio-cultural expectations, and localized power relations within Philippine community governance systems.

The findings of the study reveal that youth participation within barangay governance extends far beyond procedural attendance or institutional representation. Rather than functioning as a stable democratic condition guaranteed by formal participation mechanisms, youth engagement emerged as a negotiated, relational, and discursive process shaped by localized power structures, socio-cultural expectations, institutional limitations, and adaptive civic agency. Although Republic Act No. 10742 institutionalized youth participation through the Sangguniang Kabataan and the Katipunan ng Kabataan, the experiences of participants demonstrate that institutional recognition alone does not necessarily translate into substantive democratic inclusion. This supports broader international scholarship arguing that contemporary democratic institutions increasingly struggle with the tension between symbolic inclusion and meaningful participation, particularly among young people operating within hierarchical governance environments (Aghajani, 2024).

The findings strongly suggest that youth participation in barangay governance is frequently characterized by procedural visibility without proportional political influence. Participants repeatedly described experiences where youth were formally invited into governance spaces yet remained excluded from agenda-setting, budget prioritization, and actual decision-making processes. Such conditions reflect what contemporary participatory governance scholars describe as performative participation, wherein democratic institutions symbolically expand inclusion while preserving existing power arrangements (Bessant, 2022). In this sense, participation becomes institutionally visible but politically constrained. The findings therefore reinforce global concerns regarding the crisis of participatory institutions, particularly within developing democratic contexts where institutional participation mechanisms coexist with deeply embedded socio-political hierarchies.

At the same time, however, the study demonstrates that youth are not passive recipients of institutional exclusion. Participants continuously negotiated legitimacy, adapted communicative strategies, constructed alternative participatory spaces, and asserted civic agency despite structural limitations. This finding aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing that contemporary youth participation increasingly operates through negotiated civic practices rather than purely formal political engagement (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). Participation therefore emerges not as a static institutional entitlement but as an evolving civic process shaped through interaction, negotiation, and reflexive engagement within localized governance systems.

The emergence of the ADDA A Framework represents the central theoretical contribution of the study. The framework conceptualizes youth participation as an iterative civic transformation process composed of Awareness, Discipline, Decision, Action, and Accountability. Unlike procedural models of participation that primarily measure institutional involvement, the framework emphasizes how young people gradually develop political consciousness, institutional navigation skills, participatory courage, collective civic action, and ethical stewardship through governance experiences. The findings therefore reposition youth participation from a purely administrative or electoral concern toward a deeper process of civic transformation and negotiated democratic engagement.

The Awareness phase reveals that civic participation frequently begins through critical political realization rather than immediate activism. Participants recognized that participation mechanisms within barangay governance often remained symbolic and procedural despite institutional recognition under RA 10742. This finding resonates with democratic participation literature suggesting that political consciousness frequently emerges through experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and institutional dissatisfaction (Checkoway & Aldana, 2022). Rather than weakening civic engagement, awareness of governance inequalities often intensified participants' desire to seek more meaningful forms of participation. Political awareness therefore functioned as both civic awakening and critical recognition of structural limitations operating within local democratic spaces.

The Discipline phase further demonstrates that participation within local governance systems requires strategic institutional adaptation. Participants described learning governance procedures, formal communication practices, and culturally acceptable modes of engagement in order to negotiate legitimacy within adult-centered political environments. This supports Civic Agency Theory, which argues that marginalized sectors often develop adaptive participatory strategies to navigate unequal governance structures (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Within barangay governance contexts, legitimacy was not automatically granted to youth participants but continuously negotiated through procedural competence, communicative discipline, and institutional literacy.

Importantly, the findings also reveal how governance participation is discursively regulated. Participants repeatedly emphasized the need to sound "professional," "respectful," and "formal" in order to avoid dismissal by older political actors. Such findings demonstrate how adultism operates not only institutionally but linguistically through communicative expectations that subtly reinforce generational hierarchies. Critical Youth Studies scholars argue that youth exclusion frequently occurs through normalized discursive practices that frame young people as politically immature or emotionally incapable of governance participation. The findings strongly support this perspective, particularly within provincial governance

environments where age and political seniority remain closely associated with legitimacy.

The Decision phase highlights that youth participation often requires acts of negotiated resistance. Participants described moments where they deliberately chose to speak despite fear of criticism, embarrassment, or institutional backlash. These experiences illustrate that democratic participation within barangay governance is not always collaborative or invited but may involve challenging exclusionary structures embedded within localized political culture. Such findings align with recent scholarship on youth political identity formation, which argues that political agency develops through experiences of contestation, voice assertion, and negotiated belonging within governance systems (Theocharis et al., 2023). Participation therefore becomes both political practice and identity formation process.

The Action phase further expands contemporary understandings of civic participation by demonstrating that youth engagement frequently extends beyond formal governance spaces toward direct community intervention. Participants independently organized donation drives, outreach initiatives, environmental campaigns, and volunteer activities even when institutional support remained limited. These findings support international civic engagement literature positioning young people as active contributors to democratic and community development processes rather than passive recipients of state programs. More importantly, the findings suggest that youth legitimacy within local governance often becomes conditional upon visible community outcomes and demonstrated civic competence.

The Accountability phase represents one of the most significant findings of the study because it challenges stereotypical assumptions portraying youth participation as emotionally reactive, temporary, or politically immature. Participants emphasized transparency, public reporting, ethical stewardship, and collective responsibility as essential dimensions of leadership. Accountability therefore emerged not merely as institutional compliance but as an internalized civic ethic consciously practiced within youth governance initiatives. This finding contributes to broader participatory governance literature by illustrating that young people are capable of exercising ethical governance practices that strengthen democratic trust and civic legitimacy within community settings.

The cyclical structure of the ADDA A Framework further contributes theoretically by conceptualizing participation as recursive and continuously evolving rather than linear or fixed. Experiences of accountability deepened political awareness, while renewed awareness reshaped future participatory practices and civic identities. This cyclical interpretation advances youth civic engagement theory by recognizing participation as a dynamic process of continuous learning, reflexivity, and governance adaptation. Unlike traditional participation models focused primarily on representation or electoral engagement, the ADDA A Framework foregrounds civic transformation as an ongoing process shaped by discourse, institutional interaction, and community-based participation.

The study likewise contributes significantly to localized governance scholarship and Global South democratic studies. Existing participatory governance literature remains heavily dominated by Western democratic contexts where civic engagement is often examined within relatively stable institutional environments. By situating the study within Philippine barangay governance, the research highlights how youth participation operates within decentralized governance systems shaped by localized political cultures, kinship structures, patronage dynamics, socio-cultural hierarchy, and uneven democratic inclusion. The findings therefore contribute to Global South governance scholarship by demonstrating that participation in developing democratic contexts is deeply relational, culturally mediated, and structurally negotiated.

Within the Philippine context specifically, the study contributes to broader discussions regarding barangay-level democracy and youth governance under Republic Act No. 10742. While many Philippine studies focus on the administrative performance of the Sangguniang Kabataan, leadership competencies, or program implementation outcomes, relatively few studies examine how young people themselves construct meanings around participation and negotiate legitimacy within localized governance spaces. The study therefore extends Philippine youth governance literature by foregrounding discourse, lived experiences, and civic transformation processes rather than solely institutional compliance or organizational performance.

The findings additionally reveal the persistence of adultism as a structural barrier within barangay governance systems. Participants repeatedly described experiences where their ideas were dismissed because of age rather than substance. Such findings demonstrate that democratic inclusion remains uneven even within formally participatory governance structures. Youth legitimacy often remained conditional, requiring continuous demonstration of competence before recognition could be granted by older political actors. This contributes to broader democratic participation scholarship emphasizing that inclusion cannot be measured solely through institutional access because participation is also shaped by power relations, cultural expectations, and discursive legitimacy (Bessant, 2022).

The study also highlights important gendered dimensions of youth participation. Female participants described negotiating expectations surrounding silence, modesty, and deference while gradually developing confidence through governance engagement. These findings align with international scholarship suggesting that participatory governance may simultaneously reproduce structural inequalities and create opportunities

for empowerment among marginalized sectors (Wray-Lake et al., 2022). Governance participation therefore operates as both a site of exclusion and a space for identity formation, confidence-building, and civic empowerment.

Finally, the findings underscore the growing significance of digital participation within contemporary youth governance. Participants identified social media and online engagement as alternative spaces for visibility, advocacy, and civic negotiation, particularly when formal governance mechanisms remained unresponsive. This supports recent digital participation scholarship arguing that youth increasingly utilize online spaces to expand political discourse, mobilize civic support, and negotiate democratic influence beyond traditional institutional channels (Theocharis et al., 2023). Digital participation therefore functions not merely as technological communication but as an alternative democratic arena where young people reconstruct participation and visibility within evolving governance environments.

Overall, the findings reinforce the central argument of the study that youth participation within barangay governance is not simply institutional but deeply discursive, negotiated, and transformative. The ADDA A Framework contributes to participatory governance literature, youth civic engagement theory, localized governance studies, and Global South democratic scholarship by offering a contextually grounded explanation of how young people transition from symbolic inclusion toward substantive civic agency within Philippine local governance systems. More importantly, the study demonstrates that meaningful democratic participation cannot be reduced to procedural involvement alone but must be understood as an evolving process of civic transformation shaped by power negotiation, participatory learning, and adaptive agency within community governance contexts..

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly observed ethical principles throughout the research process to ensure the protection, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Prior to data collection, permission was secured from concerned authorities and informed consent was obtained from all participants. For participants below eighteen (18) years old, parental or guardian consent was likewise secured in accordance with ethical standards involving youth participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifiable information from transcripts and reports. Audio recordings, transcripts, and documentary materials were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. The study also ensured cultural sensitivity and participant comfort by allowing interviews and discussions to be conducted in English, Filipino, or Ilocano depending on participant preference. Furthermore, the researcher observed reflexivity, neutrality, and respect throughout the conduct, analysis, and interpretation of the study.

Conclusion

The study concludes that youth participation within barangay governance is not merely an institutional process but a negotiated and evolving civic experience shaped by discourse, power relations, and socio-cultural conditions. While formal mechanisms for youth inclusion exist through the Katipunan ng Kabataan and the Sangguniang Kabataan system, meaningful participation remains constrained by adult-centered governance structures, procedural participation practices, and localized political hierarchies. Despite these limitations, young people continuously demonstrate adaptive forms of civic agency by negotiating legitimacy, asserting participation, and engaging in community governance through both formal and informal spaces. The findings reveal that youth participation extends beyond compliance-oriented involvement and operates as a dynamic process of political identity formation, discursive negotiation, and democratic engagement. The study further concludes that the ADDA A Framework—Awareness, Discipline, Decision, Action, and Accountability—provides a contextually grounded explanation of how young people transition from symbolic inclusion toward more substantive and ethically grounded civic participation within barangay governance. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader discussions on participatory governance, youth civic transformation, and democratic inclusion within Philippine local governance contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, local government units and barangay officials may strengthen youth participation by creating more inclusive and participatory governance spaces where young people are actively involved in agenda-setting, planning, and decision-making processes rather than being limited to procedural participation activities. Mechanisms that encourage meaningful consultation and collaborative governance between adults and youth sectors should likewise be institutionalized. The Sangguniang Kabataan and Katipunan ng Kabataan may further develop leadership formation, civic education, and

participatory governance initiatives that cultivate critical awareness, accountability, and community engagement among young people. Programs that enhance civic agency and democratic participation, particularly within geographically peripheral and rural communities, may also be strengthened. Educational institutions and community organizations may implement capacity-building programs that promote political literacy, discourse engagement, and youth empowerment to encourage sustained civic participation beyond formal governance structures. Future researchers may further explore youth participation using comparative, longitudinal, or mixed-method approaches involving other provinces, governance contexts, or marginalized youth sectors to expand understanding of youth civic engagement in the Philippines. Further studies may also validate, refine, or apply the ADDA A Framework in other local governance and participatory settings.

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