Musical Qualities of Traditional Chanted Ibanag Prayers in Philippines

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Abstract: This descriptive qualitative study explores the musical qualities of traditional Ibanag prayers from the province of Cagayan. Ibanag prayers incorporate both indigenous and Christian traditions and are fundamental to local spiritual activities of the Ibanags. This study analyzes the five distinct prayers: Acquimallo, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, Gozos ni San Roque, and Vulawan Ka Ina. This prayers were been choosen using inclusion and exclusion criteria set by the researcher. The study captures these components through recordings of the actual renditions of the Ibanag prayers from Ibanag communities. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to choose the key informants of the study. The musical notation was been done by an expert and it was been evaluated and validated by another experts. The results show distinct rhythmic patterns, monophonic textures, diatonic scales, and glottal timbres, providing insights into the rich musicality and cultural past of Ibanag oral traditions.

Keywords: Ibanag, Ibanag People, Ibanag Prayers, musical qualités

1 INTRODUCTION

The Ibanag prayers provides an intriguing peek into the Ibanag people's rich cultural legacy and spiritual rituals, which are unique to the Philippines' Cagayan Valley region. These prayers, frequently sung in a chant-like style, are an essential aspect of Ibanag religious rites, combining ancient indigenous features with influences from Christian traditions acquired during the Spanish colonial period.

According to the ASEAN Declaration of Cultural Heritage (2002), culture plays a vital role in the development of a certain society. It is defined as the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual, emotional and material features that characterise a society or social groups. However, the Ibanag cultures are dwindling, especially their oral tradition, like the rendition of the Ibanag prayers.

At present, it is believed that the Ibanag culture is dwindling because Ibanag people are not like other minorities who are easily influenced by other cultures around them, which makes their own culture deteriorate. With this, it is interesting to note that there is a need to preserve that culture.

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Preservation of Ibanag culture gives people a connection to certain social values, beliefs, and customs. Also, cultural preservation provides automatic sense of unity and belongingness within a group and allows us to better understand previous generations and the history of where we come from.

In fact, based on the Article XIV, Section 14 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which states that, “The state shall foster the preservation, enrichment, and dynamic evolution of Filipino national cultures

based on the principle of unity in diversity in a climate of free artistic and intellectual expression." In addition, article XIV, Sec. 5. (1) also explicates that, "the state shall take into account regional sector and sectoral needs and conditions and shall encourage local planning in the development of educational policies and programs."

Also, one of the implementing rules and regulations of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA No. 10533) is that "the curriculum shall be contextualised and global (SEC 10.2). The curriculum shall be flexible enough to enable and allow schools to localise, indigenize, and enhance based on their respective educational and social context." The promotion of localized and contextualize curricula is a way of encouraging such relevance in a very different local, cultural, and socio-economic context. It is an important component of the decentralization of education governance and management. This was supported by (2017), contextualization is a prerequisite in addressing the content and organization of activities to be undertaken in the classroom. Students' engagement in their schoolwork increases significantly when they are in a real-world context.

In the advent of the latest curriculum, there is a call to contextualize and indigenize the curriculum where the mother tongue is used in basic education. However, at present according to Lartec (2014), there is scarcity in instructional materials written in the mother tongue due to the lack of interest of some scholars to conduct such related studies.
With this, this study aimed to analyze the musicality of the Ibanag prayers in terms of its rhythm, time signature, key signature, melody, texture, timbre, and form for documentation for preservation purposes and localization of instructional materials in music.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study is qualitative descriptive research creates data that describe the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective perspective (Kim et al., 2017, p. 23). This research technique is most philosophically compatible with constructionism and critical theories that employ interpretative and naturalistic methodologies (Lincoln et al., 2017). This design provides the framework for examining the sung Ibanag prayers across Peñablanca, Solana, and Tuguegarao City. The approach allows the researcher to generate a faithful account of the prayers' musical qualities—such as melodic contour, rhythm, tonal structures, timbre, and stylistic nuances—without overextending into speculative or abstract theorizing.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the province of Cagayan specifically on the municipalities of Penablanca, Tuguegarao City, and Solana, which are primarily Ibanag communities.

Tugueguegarao is the lone city in the province of Cagayan. It serves as the provincial capital as well as the regional center of Cagayan Valley. According to PhilAtlas (2015), people of Tuguegarao were taught the Ibanag dialect by the Spaniards as the medium of Christianization and trading during the Tobacco Monopoly, which explains why several Spanish words are combined in the local dialect. The means of livelihood of the natives were fishing, hunting, farming, and livestock raising.
On the other hand, Peñablanca is a municipality located in the province of Cagayan, in the northeastern part of the Philippines. According to PSA (2020), the town population is predominantly Ibanag, with

a significant portion adhering to indigenous beliefs alongside Christianity. The area's diverse cultural heritage and natural environment make it an interesting locale for studies related to anthropology, environment, and community development.

Meanwhile, the Municipality of Solana has a land area of 234.60 square kilometres or 90.58 square miles, which constitutes 2.52% of Cagayan's total area. Its population as determined by the 2015 Census, is 82,502. This represented 6.88% of the total population of Cagayan province, or 2.39% of the overall population of the Cagayan Valley region. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 352 inhabitants per square kilometre or 911 inhabitants per square mile (PhilAtlas,2015).

2.3 Participants of Study and Sampling Technique

The study adopted purposive sampling and linear Snowball sampling were utilized in the identification of the study participants. The Ibanag chanters (Minakkantorit) were the key informants of the study..
Key informants were interviewed and were selected with the use of the principle of inclusion and exclusion with the following criteria: (a) they must be born as an Ibanag; (b) they must have been residing in the community for 40 years and more; (c) they must have been participants in the conduct of the Ibanag prayers; (d) they must be Roman Catholic or Aglipayan considering that the identified Ibanag prayers are recited by these religious groups.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments and Procédures

The identified Ibanag prayers were chosen using the following criteria: (a) They should be unpopular and not frequently sung in church; (b) No musical notation done with them; (c) Copies of the prayers were obtained from the elders and Minakkantorit or chanters, and (d) The community members should be familiar that the prayers exist.
The musical rendition of this Ibanag prayers have been recorded for analysis purposes. After which was the development of the proposed instructional material for music which was contextualized in the light of the findings of the study.

2.5 Data Analysis

In analyzing the rhythm, time signature and key signature of the Ibanag prayers, musical experts validated and established the reliability of the musical notation of the Ibanagprayers. The musical notation or analysis was based on the recorded actual rendition of the Ibanag prayers and through the use of free software called MAESTRO. Then another expert provided technical expertise and validation on the result of the notation.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 16.1: Rhythm of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	Rhythm
Acquimallo	Free
Afu Dios Ama	Quadruple
Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario	Duple

Gozos ni San Roque	Quadruple
Vulawan Ka Ina	Triple

Table 16.1 shows the rhythmic analysis of the five Ibanag prayers namely; Acquimallo, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, Gozos ni San Roque, and Vulawan Ka Ina.
Based on their musical notation, these prayers reflect rhythms of free, quadruple, duple, quadruple, and triple, respectively. The first prayer, Acquimallo, is characterized by free rhythm, which is generally not divided into a regular metric pattern of strong and weak beats. The pulse may shift between regular and irregular, with tempo changes depending on the singer's breath, phrasing, and devotional expression.

This findings was supported by Bishko (2017), "explains that while free rhythm is difficult to notate, but it can still be captured in detail through careful use of notation theory" This rhythmic openness resonates with Ibanag oral traditions, where prayers and songs are often adapted spontaneously to fit the solemnity of rituals such as wakes, novenas, and village processions. Also, according to Nettl (2015) free rhythm is common in indigenous and folk repertoires, reflecting flexibility and communal participation rather than rigid performance rules.

In contrast, Afu Dios Ama and Gozos ni San Roque follow a quadruple rhythm with four beats per group, a structure widely associated with Western liturgical hymns (Apel, 2003). This shows the influence of Catholic missionary music introduced during the Spanish colonial period, which merged with Ibanag devotional practices.
Likewise, Vulawan Ka Ina demonstrates a triple rhythm, producing a gentle, lilting quality often linked to Marian songs and processional hymns. According to Yung, (1999), lilting and gentle patterns of music are usually used for Marian songs. This can be a good reason why this Ibanag chanted prayer has a rhythmic pattern complements the solemn yet celebratory tone of veneration to the Virgin Mary, who holds a central role in local religious identity.
Meanwhile, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario is organized in duple rhythm, with two beats per group and beats divisible into two notes. This simple and symmetrical structure mirrors the repetitive character of the rosary prayers themselves. According to Schlager (2010), it emphasizes that chant-like devotions often rely on straightforward rhythmic designs to facilitate group recitation and memory, which aligns with the Ibanag community's collective prayer gatherings.
This can be implied from the fact that the rhythmic variety of the Ibanag prayers illustrated in the table are rooted in their local oral-musical traditions (as in the free rhythm of Acquimallo) and their adaptation of Western liturgical frameworks (as in the quadruple, duple, and triple meters). This balance reflects what Merriam (1964) describes as the "syncretic nature of music," where indigenous practices integrate external forms while preserving their own cultural and devotional character.

Table 16.2: Time signature of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	**Time Signature**
Acquimallo	3 4
Afu Dios Ama	4 4
Dasalat Tam Y Snato Rosario	2 4
Gozos ni San Roque	4 4
Vulawan Ka Ina	3 4

Table 16.2 shows the time signature of the five Ibanag prayers. The time signature of Aquimallo and Vulawan ka Ina is 3 4. It is a time signature signifying that there are three (3) beats in a measure and a quarter note also receives one (1) beat. This implies that Acquimallo was sung in largo tempo or broadly and slowly and Vulawan Ka Ina has a tempo of adante (walking pace 56-88 bpm). For Afu Dios Ama and Gozos ni San Roque their time signature is 4 4 this implies that there are four (4) beats in one measure, and one-quarter note is equal to one (1) beat. This signifies that Afu Dios Ama has a tempo of adante (walking pace 56-88 bpm) while Gozos ni San Roque is andantino, (moderately slow). In the last prayer, the Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, its time signature is 2 4 it is a simple time signature implying that there two (2) beats in a measure, and one-quarter note equals one beat. This shows that this prayer has a tempo of adagio which means it is sung slowly with 66-76 bpm. According to Yung (1999), notes that triple meters are frequently used in Southeast Asian liturgical contexts for songs honoring the Virgin Mary, a tradition also evident among the Ibanag. Afu Dios Ama and Gozos ni San Roque are composed in 4/4 time, the most common meter in Western and liturgical music according to Apel (2003). With four beats per measure and the quarter note as the beat unit, this signature creates stability and predictability, facilitating group participation during communal prayers. Afu Dios Ama is performed at an andante tempo, reflecting a steady walking pace suitable for collective recitation. In contrast, Gozos ni San Roque is interpreted as andantino, slightly faster yet still moderately slow, underscoring its devotional but celebratory tone in honor of the patron saint of healing

Also, according to Schlager (2010), the use of slower tempi in chant-like devotions fosters a prayerful atmosphere, encouraging reflection and rhythmic synchronization among participants. Within the Ibanag community, this reinforces the ritual solemnity of the rosary as both an individual and communal act of faith.

The different time signatures and tempos of the Ibanag prayers show a mix of indigenous flexibility and Western liturgical order. This was supprted by Merriam (1964) stresses that music is often a place where cultures meet: in this case, the Ibanag take musical structures from other cultures, such 3/4, 4/4, and 2/4 meters, and give them local religious connotations. This mixing shows that musical structure is not just technical; it is also firmly rooted in Ibanag religious identity and ritual practice.

Table 16.3: Key signature of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	**Key Signature**
Acquimallo	Key of E*b* Major (B*b*,E*b*, & A*b*)
Afu Dios Ama	Key of G Major (F#)
Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario	Key of G Major (F#)
Gozos ni San Roque	Key of C Major
Vulawan Ka Ina	Key of C Major

Table 16.3 presents the key signatures of the five hispanized Ibanag prayers: Acquimallo, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, Gozos ni San Roque, and Vulawan Ka Ina. Each prayer demonstrates distinct tonal frameworks that highlight both the influence of Western tonal systems and their adaptation within Ibanag devotional practice. The first prayer Acquimallo, possesses a key of E*b* major in Bass clef. The key signature conveys that there are three (3) flats, namely; si, mi, & la (B*b*, E*b*, & A*b*). This indicates that the pitch of the following notes with a flat

sign will be lowered in one semitone or half-step.

The Key of G major of the prayers Afu Dios Ama and Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario indicates that there is one (1) sharp (Fa/ F#) located in the fifth (5th) line of the staff in the Treble Clef. This implies that note Fa or F should be higher in pitch by one semitone or half-step.

However, the key signature of Gozos ni San Roque and Vulawan Ka Ina is key of C major, this indicates that there are no accidentals in the musical score. It means notes of the said prayers will be sing based on its original pitch.

Table 16.4. Melody of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	Melody
Acquimallo	• Shape- Arch Shape • Movement-Conjunct motion • Text Setting-Syllabic • Musical Scale- Diatonic • Clef- Bass Clef/F-clef • Highest Note- F (fa) • Lowest note -B (ti)
Afu Dios Ama	• Shape- Arch Shape • Movement-Conjunct motion • Text Setting- Melismatic • Musical Scale- Diatonic • Clef- Treble Clef/ G-clef • Highest Note- E (mi) • Lowest note -D (re)
Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario	• Shape- Arch Shape • Movement-Conjunct motion • Text Setting- Syllabic • Musical Scale- Diatonic • Clef- Treble Clef/ G-clef • Highest Note- D (re) • Lowest note -D (re)
Gozos ni San Roque	• Shape- Arch Shape • Movement-Conjunct motion • Text Setting- Syllabic • Musical Scale- Diatonic • Clef- BassClef/ F-clef • Highest Note- F (fa) • Lowest note -B (ti)
Vulawan Ka Ina	• Shape- Arch Shape • Movement-Conjunct motion • Text Setting- Syllabic • Musical Scale- Diatonic • Clef- Treble Clef/ G-clef • Highest Note- C (do) • Lowest note -E (mi)

Table 16.4 illustrates the melodic characteristics of the five Ibanag prayers. The melodic contours of Acquimallo, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, Gozos ni San Roque, and Vulawan Ka Ina generally follow an arch-shaped movement a rising and falling line produced by the succession of notes. According to Nettl (2015), arch shaped design is common in both folk and liturgical chant traditions, creates a tension and resolution that mirrors the devotional expression of the Ibanag people. The melodic motion of these prayers primarily conjunct, meaning that the pitches move stepwise or in narrow intervals. Based on the study of Apel (2003), conjunct motion is often associated with chant like singing, promotes ease of memorization and group participation.
Also, the sung prayers are classsified as diatonic, consisting of five whole steps and two half steps within each octave. The use of diatonicism indicates the integration of Western tonal frameworks into Ibanag devotional practice while maintaining the melodic simplicity typical of orally transmitted music.
Most of the Ibanag prayers are sung syllabically, which means that each syllable is a note. This makes it clear that the words are being delivered clearly. Afu Dios Ama, uses a melismatic style, in which one syllable is stretched over several notes. Melisma style is commonly present in Catholic liturgical chant and Hispanic devotional music accrding to Yung (1999). This style shows the Spanish influence on the musical composition of this prayer.
For Acquimallo and Gozos ni San Roque are classified in the bass clef (F-clef), with a highest note of F (fa) and lowest note of B (ti). These settings usually associated with male voices. On the other hand, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, and Vulawan Ka Ina are written in the treble clef (G-clef), with vocal ranges spanning E (mi), D (re), and C (do) at their highest notes, and D (re) or E (mi) at their lowest. These treble settings correspond to higher vocal registers, more aligned with female voices and mixed congregational singing. According to Randel (2003), notes that such clef distribution often reflects practical considerations of who leads or sustains the singing in communal worship.

Table 16.5 Texture of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	Texture
Acquimallo	Monophonic
Afu Dios Ama	Monophonic
Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario	Monophonic
Gozos ni San Roque	Monophonic
Vulawan Ka Ina	Monophonic

Table 16.5 indicates that the musical texture of the five Ibanag prayers is predominantly monophonic. According to Apel (2003), this texture is defined by the presence of a single melodic line without harmonic or contrapuntal accompaniment, a feature consistent with many indigenous and liturgical traditions. In practice, the Ibanag performs these the following prayers in unison and a cappella, to create a uniform, focused sound that heightens the sacred atmosphere of worship (Jones, 2020). The monophonic characteristics also aligns with the meditative and devotional character of Ibanag prayer, ensuring that the emphasis rests on the words being intoned rather than on elaborate musical ornamentation. Also, this shows profound cultural and spiritual significance for the Ibanag.
This shows the idea of "vocal centrality" in many Southeast Asian oral traditions, where music serves as a vessel for transmitting sacred texts and cultural memory (Yung, 1999). By relying on pure vocal delivery, the Ibanag prayers preserve both the sanctity of language and the immediacy of communal participation.The monophonic texture supports the oral and intergenerational transmission of Ibanag heritage.

Table 16.6. Timbre of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	Timbre
Acquimallo	Glottal voice.
Afu Dios Ama	Smooth or light sounds but with a glottal voice.
Dasalat Tam Y Snato Rosario	Smooth or light sounds but with a glottal voice.
Gozos ni San Roque	Smooth or light sounds but with a glottal voice.
Vulawan Ka Ina	Smooth or light sounds but with a glottal voice.

Table 16.6 presents the quality of sounds produced by different singers during the performance of the five Ibanag prayers. The overall tone color (or timbre) of the prayers is characterized by a generally smooth and light vocal quality, though certain phonetic features introduce noticeable variations. Specifically, a glottal voice is evident in the articulation of several Ibanag words, adding a distinct texture to the vocal delivery. Notably, the prayer Acquimallo stands out for being entirely glottal in nature, demonstrating a stronger phonological emphasis on glottal sounds compared to the other prayers.

These vocal characteristics can be attributed to the phonological structure of the Ibanag language, which includes a frequent use of glottal stops, particularly in vowel-initial words. According to Dita (2010), a prominent feature of Ibanag is the prevalence of glottal stops, which often function as initial consonantal onsets in vowel-beginning words. This unique linguistic trait directly influences the vocal quality of the prayers, embedding language-specific articulatory features into the musical expressions. The presence of glottal stops contributes a rhythmic and percussive quality to the otherwise fluid and melodic delivery, creating a contrast that reflects both the oral linguistic identity and the ritualized vocal aesthetics of the Ibanag people. The use of glottalization also reflects a degree of intonational subtlety, as the singers naturally incorporate these sounds without disrupting the melodic flow of the prayer.

Furthermore, the variation in tone color among different prayers and performers may also be influenced by individual vocal timbre, regional accent, age, and degree of familiarity with traditional pronunciation. Despite these individual differences, the presence of glottal articulation remains a common and defining element, highlighting how language and music are deeply interwoven in the performance of Ibanag sacred chants.

Table 16.7. Timbre of the Ibanag prayers.

Ibanag Prayer	Form
Acquimallo	Strophic form (AAA)
Afu Dios Ama	Strophic form (AAA)
Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario	Strophic form (AAA)
Gozos ni San Roque	Binary form (AB)
Vulawan Ka Ina	Strophic form (AAA)

Table 16.7

Concerning the form of the Ibanag prayers, Table 16.7 présents that the four (4) prayers namely; Acquimallo, Afu Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam Y Santo Rosario, and Vulawan ka Ina is under strophic form

(AAA) because of its repetitiveness structure while Gozos ni San Roque has a simple binary form (AB) because this prayer was divided into two sections labeled as A and B. According to Ross, (2020), a strophic form of music is commonly seen in folk music, music that is versed based, chants (like the Ibanag Prayers), and some instances in classical music.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the five Ibanag prayers can be conluded that Ibanag prayers has a rich diversity in rhythmic structure, time signature, key signature, melody, texture, timbre, and form. The five prayers share an arch-shaped melody and monophonic texture, typical of folk music. The timbres range from smooth to glottal, reflecting Ibanag phonological traits, and the forms include both strophic and binary. The said elements highlight the musical richness and cultural significance of the Ibanag prayers namely; Acquimallo, Afi Dios Ama, Dasalat Tam y Santo Rosario, Gozos ni San Roque, and Vulawan ka Ina.

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