

[Re]Introducing the Concept of 'Intra-Local Governmental Relations' for Proper and Future Usage in Public Administration Research and Education

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

This paper is conceptual in its orientation and seeks to caution emerging researchers (especially in public administration) against overlooking or demeaning important subjects or concepts to simple or ordinary ones. Specifically, we refer to 'intra-local governmental relations (ILGR)' as a concept that has suffered the exact cause of negation to argue for its proper usage in the future. This concept is found within the orbit of intergovernmental relations (IGR) and is a term of reference for various internal municipality relations within the local sphere of government. It is suspected that because of the inherent similarities and motherhood relationship between IGR and ILGR, researchers and policymakers have failed to draw differences between the two concepts, which is confusing. The extent of this confusion may lead to a suggestion that these concepts are inseparable and, therefore, can be used to explain each one's context. Such extrapolation is characterized as a divergent and generalist conceptual approach often unaware of governmental relations' important groupings (classifications). In response, this paper proposes ILGR as a proper terminology to explain various relationships between units or departments and officials within the same municipality in the local sphere of government. By collecting and unpacking data from the existing research outputs, books, journal articles, and government publications, the current paper finally realized its objective, which was to re-introduce ILGR into the academic discourse, and the anticipation is that emerging Public Administration researchers and scholars will use the concept properly and correctly.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, promulgating the "Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005" (2005) meant that various relationships between government spheres, organizations, and institutions are now officially governed. Phrases like 'inter' and 'intra' governmental relations also emerged in the process as they are used to explain different forms and levels of relationships in government. However, due to the concepts IGR (Intergovernmental Relations) and ILGR (Intra-local Governmental Relations) inherent similarities and motherhood relationship, their usage merits

conceptual lucidity. Two observations that triggered this study were made during the literature review.

Firstly, the review of authoritative literature revealed that the local government is the first culprit to add to the conceptual confusion and has continually misused the classification of IGR, wittingly or unwittingly (see Mopani District Municipality, IDP 2014/2015; Capricorn District Municipality, IDP 2016/2021). Some may argue that government officials or institutions are not necessarily designed to engage in conceptual discourses in that theirs is to deliver on the mandate. This is a fair point, but it is understood that many government documents are designed with the assistance of researchers and consultants to a larger extent. Despite that, they may not know everything well learned and are expected to help clarify terminologies and their related use.

The second observation from the public administration literature pointed to South African scholars like Mangwanya and Shava (2023), Pietersen (2017), Senoamadi (2014), Nzimakwe and Ntshakala (2015) whose studies, at least according to their research titles, have used IGR to stand for 'internal municipal relations' which is ILGR. For instance, in their study titled "Intergovernmental relations as an accelerator for the local government planning in South Africa," Mangwanya and Shava (2023) made a very explicit case for ILGR when they concluded that Buffalo City Municipality "needs to promote coordination and cooperation among various municipal departments, which is crucial in strengthening intergovernmental relations within the local government planning process."

To this end, this paper asks whether this apparent usage of the concepts (IGR and ILGR) by both government authorities and researchers in the academic sphere qualifies to be juxtaposed. Who is responsible for elucidating concepts for proper usage if the answer is no? Meanwhile, the government is not responsible for not feeding the public with misconceptions, and scholars carry the responsibility of knowledge creation and providing scientific solutions through quality research. As Hanyane (2015) reminisced, "... There is no substitute for quality research and critical writing in the field and discipline of Public Administration and Management." researchers are ceased with the responsibility to consistently "navigate the unchartered epistemological grounds" (Maserumule, 2012). Hence, the current study argues that utilizing ILGR from such a general and simplistic conceptual approach is responsible for the concept's continued bathos in the mainstream public administration literature. Essentially, such an approach is generally misleading in that it tends to negate relevant categorization of governmental relations, time, and place in which their occurrence can be properly studied.

This paper aims to re-introduce ILGR into the Public Administration academic discourse, anticipating that emerging researchers and scholars will use the concept properly and correctly. The paper further deconstructs ILGR from its mother body, IGR, for proper conceptual reconstruction. This process is guided by Deleuze and Guattari's (1991) conceptual approach, which argues that for concepts to be called 'concepts,' they should have more than one component that defines them, and this is consistent with history, components originating from other concepts, and relationship with other concepts (Jabareen, 2009). In so doing, an attempt is also made to ponder why researchers prefer to use the term IGR as a textual substitute when studying internal municipal relations.

2 INTRA-LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS – A DECONSTRUCTIVE DISCOURSE ON THE CONCEPT

As Manyaka (2018) cautioned, the poor conceptualization of concepts often leads to fruitless discussions. This is because concepts are tools of thinking. The effectiveness of concepts in shaping and enriching discourses can only be realized when they are used in their proper contexts. By this, the concept's power remains profound while relevancy is maintained (Maserumule, 2012). This is correct because concepts are generally used to advance various urgings, denoting that they can mean different things to different people. Therefore, this explains the present article's background. ILGR is an emerging concept that descends from IGR, a concept which was first put in print by the American Professor Clyde Snider around the 1930s in the article "County and Township Government in 1935-36," (Snider, 1937). Unarguably, the usage of IGR as a

concept has since gained support from academics, politicians, and policymakers alike in most contemporary governments around the globe (Wright, 1975; Hattingh, 1998; Mathebula, 2004). Mathebula (2011) concedes that "IGR is a universal phenomenon to be found wherever two or more governments (national or sub-national) and jurisdictions interact in the development and the execution of public policies and programs." The above explanation was extrapolated from the IGR definition coined by one of the intellectual fathers in this field, Professor William Anderson (Malan, 2005), in which he said, "[it refers to] all-important interactions occurring among government institutions and organs in all spheres of government." Understood from this version, IGR applies to any form of system, federalism, unitary, parliamentary, etc. (Wright, 1975).

However, before any move is made to unpack the discourse on ILGR, perhaps it is important to highlight some slight terminological exodus about its mother concept (IGR) as captured in South African literature. Reading from Hattingh's (1998) book titled "Governmental Relations: A South African Perspective" and "Intergovernmental Governmental Relations in South Africa" by Khan, Madue, and Kalema (2016), one can tell that an agreement has not been reached between these scholars on how various relationships existing between, among and within governments can be conceptualized. IGR, as viewed by Khan et al. (2016), appears to be limited to governmental institutions within one state. The latter is partly different from IGR as perceived by, for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This panel recognizes IGR as relations between governments (or states) (IPCC, 2014). On the other hand, Hattingh (1998) believes that 'governmental relations' is a more appropriate terminology because it can easily be extendable to limitlessly explain relations from the inside and outside of one state. So, this is one of the conceptual confusions in the discourse of IGR that requires further analysis from a study of the current article's nature.

Drawing from the definitions of IGR that emerged in the preceding sections and focusing on the organizational systems (closed and open) in South Africa, Hattingh (1986) raised possibilities of classifying these interactions according to hierarchies and levels of government, being inter-, intra-, and extra-governmental relations. This notion was sustained (Hattingh, 1998; Kanyane & Nazo, 2008; Khan et al., 2016), and the current article contends that such a move to classify governmental relations is important because it eradicates tangential misconceptions apparent from some existing definitions of IGR. As Hattingh (1998) articulates, "Although the study of governmental relations is essentially a study of government, it may also be regarded as a facet of government in that it is a phenomenon which comes into play whenever more than one governmental body is established within a certain governmental area.

Hence, the first problem necessitates careful demarcation of the field of study to avoid it escalating into a study of government in general". Accordingly, the following categories of IGR were identified:

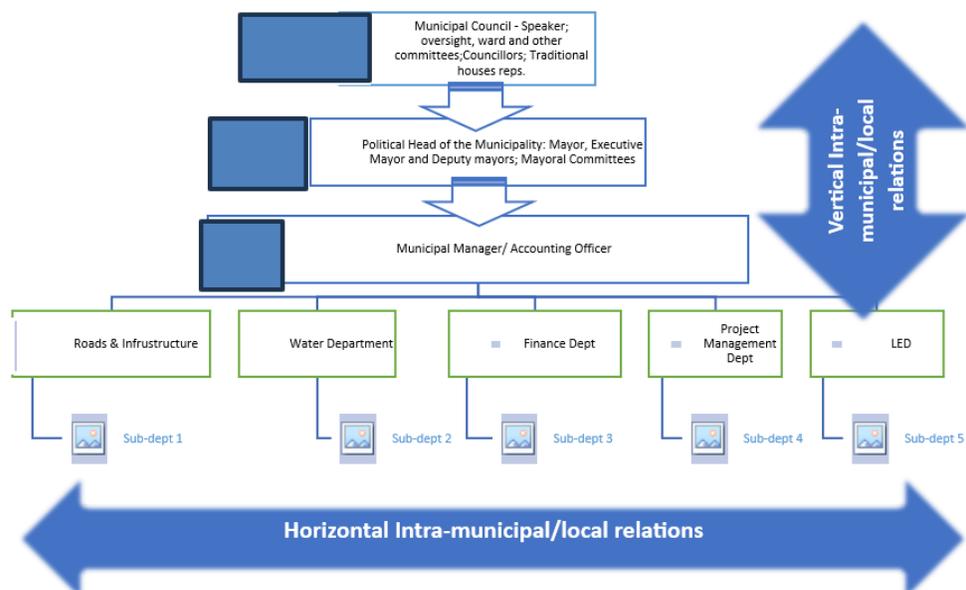
1. Intergovernmental relations - which are relations between governmental institutions;
2. Intra-governmental relations - which are relations within governmental institutions;
3. xtra-governmental relations - are relations between government and the community.

Taking a cue from the above and focusing on the second category, which is crucial for the current article, Hattingh (1998) clarifies that these relations are not necessarily synonymous with individual spheres. At the national level, relations between ministers, heads of departments, departments, and officials are the same as those at the provincial or local level. This is understandable because each sphere is constituted by various departments created on the will of that particular sphere's executive head or leader. Communication channels and organizational cultures are also not exclusive to the above as they may not be congruent (Khan et al., 2016; Woolman, 2009). Against this brief backdrop, it should be emphasized that the concept of 'ILGR' owes its textual traits to an intra-government class of relations. For this article, the terminology ILGR is coined to explain various relationships between units or departments and officials within the same municipality in the local sphere of government. As it is understood from the legislative definition in section 152 (1) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), local government or the local sphere of government is purely about municipalities and nothing more. Thus, the word 'local' in the ILGR represents a

'municipality' within the local sphere of government outside of the municipal categorical status as outlined in section 155 of the Constitution (1996).

Further, it is important to note that there are different forms of relations outside the ILGR yet within the local sphere of government. Based on legislative foundations, district-local municipal arrangement in the local sphere of government is a prime example (see White Paper on Local Government, 1998; Magagula et al., 2018). Therefore, a reflection of the correct reference terminology for these kinds of relations must be made. To achieve this, a deconstruction of intra-governmental relations and reflective traits is made later in the article. This far, and based on the deductions made from the above, this article defines ILGR as all internal relations, formal or informal, between units or officials within a single municipality. Subsequently, it is unarguable that its practice inherently resonates within a municipality's organizational structure. The typical municipality structure in South Africa is depicted in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. A typical organizational structure of a South African municipality



Despite the preceding, this article opines that the categorizations of IGR alone, although important, cannot be sufficient to draw inferences on the nexus between intra and inter-governmental relations. This is so because utilization of the concept ILGR, as observed in most research and official documentation, has always suffered [textual] rejection as scholars and policymakers prefer to use IGR in explaining internal municipal relations. For example, Senoamadi's (2014) study titled "Intergovernmental Relations: Sustainable Human Settlements in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality in Gauteng Province" is edifying. The focus is evident: It focuses on applying IGR within the Department of Housing and Human Settlements in Tshwane Municipality (Senoamadi, 2014: iii). However, the current article finds Senoamadi's study axiomatic because its analytical locus is ILGR instead of what its topic suggests. According to Anderson (1960), a local unit like a metro has its own "legal existence, rights, functions, powers and duties within its territory" distinct from other municipalities in the local government sphere. In other words, one dominant feature of ILGR is that the internal municipal departments are always created based on discretionary powers that only a city council can wield to create extra departments (Khan et al., 2016; Hattingh, 1998).

Against this backdrop, an immediate yet rhetorical question is, why are there classifications of governmental relations in the first place if they serve no purpose? These classes of governmental relations were identified so that various existing relations could be demarcated accordingly

and based on their nature and place of occurrence. Stoker and Wilson (1998), in their study “Intra-Organisational Politics in Local Authorities: Towards a New Approach,” do not only support textual recognition for various existing categories of relations such as ILGR but also call for research into contextual issues that are unique to such relations. Once more, the current paper submits that the kind of actions, processes, and complexities that would usually impinge individual local units or municipalities, especially from the closed system perspective, in one way or another, justifies the term ‘ILGR.’ Therefore, it is important that the term ‘ILGR’ be recognized and sustained in public administration education. At the same time and notwithstanding the preceding context, the authors wish to emphasize that except using the research above reports to demonstrate the argument made about the textual [mis]usages of the concepts ‘inter’ at the expense of ‘intra’ governmental relations which affect some elements of these important concepts, the article does not seek to redo or judge otherwise the contents of the quoted research reports than to ask this question: Why researchers, when studying internal municipal relations, prefer to use the term IGR as a textual substitution to ILGR? An attempt to answer the above question is made later in the article. However, to this end and based on preceding discussions, it is safe to state that the concept has isomorphic and motherhood relations with IGR, and this is why the ensuing paragraph delves into the concepts of etymological similarities or unique traits.

2.1 Etymological resemblance – the ‘inter’ and the ‘intra.’

The word ‘inter’ is normally used to describe a relationship “between two (or more) things in time, place, order and character” (Mathebula, 2011). Also, viewed from the open-system perspective, Khan et al. (2016) posit that ‘inter-governmental relations refers to “mutual relations between all spheres of government and all organs of the state.” The significance of this definition lies in the word ‘between,’ which in certain circumstances will presume a different ontological shape, and this is when studied from closed systems – changes into ‘within’ and relentlessly evolves into intra (Smith, 2002). This is understandable because the word ‘intra’ as observed in the Online Etymological Dictionary, is a prefix and means inside or within a group. This means the group is now free from external interferences (Hodge et al., 1996). Hattingh (1998) believes that this prefix denotes officials’ relations within a government institution. This is not an isolated belief of Public Administration scholars. It is shared by organizational scholars who explained that when an arrangement such as this is conceived as an inter-departmental system, “the division of labor becomes the ultimate source of intra-organizational power, and power is explained by variables that are elements of each subunit’s task, it is functioning, and its links with the activities of other subunits” (Hickson et al., 1971). Based on this, Khan et al. (2016) defines intra-governmental relations which refers to “internal relations of governmental authorities,” as justifiable. Smith (2002) concurred that “individuals and institutions within any government institution cannot function independently without considering the function and activities of others within the same institution.” Because of this, all government institutions, including local government municipalities, are characterized by an extensive internal network of independent relations. Hence, the constitution, as seen in South Africa and Nigeria, provides general guidelines for creating internal structures. According to the current article, this move affirms the contextual existence of intra-[local] governmental relations.

3 INTER-MUNICIPALITY RELATIONS VS. INTRA-LOCAL RELATIONS

We are mindful of various inter-municipality relations within the local sphere of government, which may present a very peculiar dimension of intra-sphere governmental relations, particularly if viewed from the South African local government’s district system perspective, and this deserves clarity, too. Among South African scholars who studied and wrote about intra-governmental relations in the local sphere of government include Haurovi (2012), Raju and Van Niekerk (2013), and Magagula et al. (2018). According to Magagula et al. (2018), while the metropolitan municipalities are functioning as autonomous local government bodies, the district system is organized so that local and district municipalities share functions and responsibilities, establishing a compelling basis for relationships. This is true in that the Constitution (1996) in section 155(1)

(b) and (c) legally marries local and district municipalities. Such marriage, however, does not seek to holistically enclose nor internalize their operations other than offering technical support to one another. Additionally, section 153 (a) of the Constitution (1996) clarifies the legal status of each municipality as an independent government institution. Therefore, as correctly stated in the IGRFA, 2005, these forms of municipal relations are categorized as inter-municipality relations. We, therefore, contend that the mere fact that districts and local municipalities are legislatively established as separate organizations, as seen in the above-quoted prescripts and are based on the key different organizational features (mission, vision, culture, capacity, and internal arrangements) that are not reflective of organisationally canalized internal relations or intra-local governmental relations. In this regard, Raju and Van Niekerk (2013) agree with an appeal made in the current article that there is a need to textually and conceptually differentiate inter- from intra- to avoid confusion when studying intergovernmental relations practices in South Africa.

4 LOCATING INTRA-LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS – CONTEXTUAL EXPOSITIONS

To demarcate the layout of intra-local relations, the current section categorizes and deconstructs various intra-governmental relations. In a typical South African IGR design, distinctions between intra-national, intra-provincial, and intra-local governmental relations can be drawn, as depicted in Table 1. Vertical and horizontal intra-relations are also exposed. While intra-national and intra-provincial relations are also included in the table, it should be noted that they will not be subjected to analysis except where necessary. As indicated, the broader intention is to categorize, deconstruct, and analyze intra-local governmental relations in South Africa. Established in terms of section 151 of the Constitution (1996), local government is made up of municipalities. Although guided by the same service delivery mandates as expunged in sections 152 and 153, respectively, their fundamental differences lie in the categories in which each municipality falls. According to the Municipal Structures Act, 117 of 1998, Category A municipalities have exclusive municipal executive and legislative authority in their areas of jurisdiction; Category B municipalities share municipal executive and legislative authority in their areas of jurisdiction with the Category C municipalities, whereas Category C municipalities have municipal executive and legislative authority in the areas that include more than one Category B municipality. Typical municipality internal organizational arrangements are shown in Figure 1. Table 1 and Figure 1 are blended and reflect a complete picture of how power is separated between the council and administration interface. Regarding the total number of existing municipalities, there are currently 257 functioning in South Africa (Municipal IQ, 2020). Against this brief background and based on Table 1 below, vertical and horizontal intra-local governmental relations as the precept underpinning the identified municipal organization cannot be ignored.

Table 1. Deconstruction and categorization of intra-governmental relations

Name of concept	Intra-national governmental relations	Intra-provincial	Intra-local governmental relations
Description	Existing relations between departments at the national level	Existing relations between departments at a provincial level	Relations existing between officials within municipalities The city council, Mayor, municipal manager, and senior managers
Ontology	Parliament, Cabinet, and departments	Provincial legislature and provincial departments	

Reference	Minister to minister (horizontal) or Speaker of the National Assembly to the president (vertical)	MEC to MEC (horizontal) or speaker of PL a nd Premier.	Mayor to municipal manager (vertical) or manager to manager (horizontal).
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4.1 Contextualisation of vertical intra-local governmental relations

In line with Anderson (1960), individual municipalities in South Africa are characterized by “legal existence, rights, functions, powers and duties within [their] territory.” Using Figure 1 as a point to illustrate vertical relations, the hierarchy is as follows: Municipality council (all elected councilors), committees (ward, executive, mayoral, etc.), political office-bearers (mayors/executive mayors), and appointed officials (Accounting officer/municipal manager, functional/line managers). Hattingh (1998) cited in Khan et al. (2016) posits that these intra-local vertical relations exist for three purposes: maintaining a hierarchy of authority and establishing accountability and responsibility, enabling effective delegation of powers, and control over policy and allocation of resources. Put another way, it is under this form of relations that the dominating political party in the council decides on budget and policy direction in the municipality. Furthermore, this is also a concourse for the most debated relationship in the Public Administration discourses - political/administrative interface, otherwise known as the officer-councilor dichotomy, which is vital for the effective functioning of the municipality (Maserumule, 2007; Surty, 2010). Although characterized as informal, relationships between councilors and the appointed officials exist, particularly during IDP consultative forums and meetings whereby councilors, on a timely basis, will directly engage [outside of procedures] with any appointed officials perceived to possess relevant information necessary at that time. Because there is a certain degree of trust between the two sides and the possibility of continuation, such actions may change the relationship status to that of formal.

4.2 Horizontal intra-local governmental relations contextualized

Figure 1 is illustrative of horizontal organisational relations. This is the relationship between various executive departments on the same hierarchy level (Khan et al., 2016). Considering the municipal organizational structure in Figure 1, this refers to the relations between the municipality’s water and health department, electricity, IDP, and housing departments. Formally, coordination between these departments is done by the municipal manager, but this does not mean that departments cannot communicate without the knowledge of the municipal manager. Unlike the intra-provincial relations, which remained ungoverned within the new Constitution of 1996 and the IGRFA, 13 of 2005 (Woolman, 2009), disputes between units in the municipality can be contained and resolved without the involvement of courts of law. This is because relations at this level are guided by internal organizational policies and procedures, organizational vision and mission, and, most importantly, cooperation between the actors, with the municipal manager acting as the final dispute arbitrator.

Stoker and Wilson (1986) hold a view that. In contrast, horizontal intra-local relations are critical for this discourse; scholars must begin to analyze conflicts between officials and perhaps the apparent divisions between councilors and political parties in the council. This call also found expression in Hattingh (1998). Based on this, there is seamless convergence between vertical and horizontal as canalized organisationally, which is inevitable in terms of practice - making it difficult to separate the two as they unfold (Khan et al., 2016).

Just like the intra-sphere conflicts between director-generals at the national level (Maserumule, 2007), conflicts or disputes are also investable in intra-governmental relations. In cases where disputes arise in this space, relevant municipal committees consisting of managers, directors, and delegated councilors for relevant portfolios (mayoral committee members) would arbitrate. This much was attested during personal correspondence with one official from Mopani District Municipality who referred to the IDP unit vs. Office of the Municipal Manager case as an example

(the researcher had sight of the Council Resolution. Due to confidentiality issues, it could not be referenced).

As the article draws towards a conclusion, it is important to highlight that the local government system in South Africa is designed to recognize the existence of traditional leaders within municipal areas. Traditional authorities are considered important mostly during municipal or ward planning, especially where they own land. The role and participation of traditional leaders in municipal affairs are advising and providing the council with peculiar needs or information regarding the communities they represent (Shopola, 2020; Sirovha & Thornhill, 2017). In addition, it should be emphasized that these are two different institutions that are not necessarily governed by the same laws, each having its own organizational structure. Thus, can the relationship between traditional authorities and municipalities be regarded as intra-local governmental relations? This could be yet another area of research that requires a conceptual lucid.

5 INTRA-LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS - IMPLICATIONS RELATED TO TERMINOLOGICAL CONFUSIONS IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Hill, Kern, and White (2012) make an important observation about the consistent employment of terminology in research. To establish clarity, “the construct must be defined unambiguously,” meaning that there is a need to be clear and precise about what is meant when using a term about a construct. While this is undoubtedly a standard practice in every field, it is vital to note that terminological confusions and their continued usage immensely impact blurred and confusing research outcomes. This part of the paper outlines the possible implications of ILGR as a negated concept in the study of IGR within the field of Public Administration. Two affected areas are identified, and implications are summed up as follows:

Firstly, terminological confusion has implications for Public Administration education or field of study. As shown in the discussion, the [mis]reference of ILGR to IGR stems from the researchers’ inertia to separate relations between the government spheres as established in section 40 of the Constitution (1996) and those existing within the respective individual spheres. Consequently, researchers refer to every form of ‘intro-relations as IGR, rendering the important IGR classifications meaningless and impotent. Considering this, the paper argues that using different terminology for a construct such as ILGR prevents “clarity, and rather “produces confusion – confounding effects – that impede the ability of members of [Public Administration community and students thereof] to communicate with each other or to accumulate knowledge” (Suddaby, 2010). In that score, it is further suspected that had the IGR classifications been observed from literature materials such as Hattingh (1998), Anderson (1960), and Wright (1975), some of the conceptual bathos on IGR could have been avoided. Nevertheless, Brynard, Harnekom, and Brynard (2014) reminded the research community that research should also have some utility, emphasizing the significance of revising existing conclusions to arrive at new facts and practical application of theories. The mission of the current paper was not far from the above emphasis.

Secondly, as seen in this paper, the terminological confusion on ILGR and IGR has implications for public administration . The review of official documentation showed that even municipalities are entangled in this confusion. They refer ILGR to IGR. Subsequently, we argue that emerging researchers will likely fall into the ‘conceptual trap or blunder’ because the government is a recognized authority. As an authority, the government represents “the ruling material force in society, [and] is at the same time its intellectual force” (Maserumule, 2012). In other words, government is the source of influence in the discourse on the concept of IGR. Hence, researchers tend to operationalize their research based on the adopted conceptualizations by the government through public policy and legislation. Suffice it to mention that researchers have a role in shaping discourses, including providing conceptual lucidity and meanings for proper usage that enables sound and proper diagnosis of problems in public administration.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, to suggest that ILGR may be used in juxtaposition with its mother concept, 'the IGR' is misleading. This paper proved that such a proposition would not only dismiss the textual significance of the concept but also dislocate the ontology on which the concept is based. The paper was conceptual and sought to understand why researchers use the phrase 'inter-governmental relations' to mean the opposite. The opposite, in this case, is 'ILGR'. Scholarly reflections about IGR, particularly by Hattingh (1986; 1998), Smith (2002), Mathebula (2004), and Khan et al. (2016), have sharply anticipated this apparent confusion and thus maintained that government relationships should be classified into identifiable categories namely, inter-, intra-, and extra-governmental relations. It is largely through these categories, therefore, that the current article was set to advocate for the correct usage of ILGR among scholars and upcoming academic researchers.

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