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Research Article

Challenges in Name Suffixes Standardization: A Case Study of Government Records in Bacolod City, Philippines

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Abstract

The government needs to standardize personal identification factors, especially the suffix of the name, so that it can effectively track its records and provide public services smoothly. Despite the recognition of the importance of data integrity at the global and national levels, a considerable gap exists in addressing inconsistencies and standardization issues related to the formats of personal name suffixes across different administrative agencies. The study investigated the problems and solutions in correcting discrepancies of personal name suffixes to standard format in government documents in Bacolod City. A qualitative instrumental single-case study design was applied and data were collected through semi-structured interviews and non-intrusive workflow observations with purposively selected civil registry employees and affected citizens and analyzed through thematic analysis. Four dominant themes arose from the findings: lack of a cohesive policy on the standardization of name suffix; non-uniform encoding practices across government agencies; operational challenges and data inconsistencies; and the pressing need for standardized and centralized guidelines. Key lessons learned point to the critical frontline role of frontline and rural health workers in data management and the permanent perpetuation of localized data-entry errors in public databases due to lack of rigorous capacity-building. The general implications point to the need for mandatory policy updates, staff training, and integration of digital systems, like the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system, to ensure data accuracy, inter-agency coordination, and public trust in addressing suffix discrepancies.

Keywords: Public Administration; Civil Registration; Qualitative Case Study; Bacolod City; Philippines.

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Introduction

Standardization of personal identification is crucial in the global context for the maintenance of effective government record systems and for the access of citizens to public services (Garfinkel et al., 2023). Handling personal names is an issue in several countries, especially those with suffixes like Jr., Sr., III, and others (Teri, 2024; Babayev, 2025). Such inconsistencies often result in processing delays, data duplication and mismatched records. As the trend of sharing and migrating data digitally is increasing all over the world, there is a need for standardization of the name format to avoid errors in identity, fraud and miscommunication among national data bases (Jembere, 2022).

In the Asian context, many countries are confronted with complex challenges in terms of name standardization, due to diverse cultural practices, languages and naming conventions (Sikandar et al., 2024). The challenge is in the

different naming conventions of the various nationalities which often do not follow western styles. There are barriers in employment, education and financial transactions (Bonner et al., 2025). The lack of standardized name structures is an obstacle to digital archiving, since names are closely tied to ethnic and cultural identities (Groom et al., 2022). Governments in Asia are also increasingly aware that standardization systems are key to ensuring consistency and credibility for citizens across agencies across the world (Lin, 2025; Balaji, 2025). The maintenance of civil register accuracy is an essential pillar of effective governance and public service delivery (Supriyanto, 2023).

Government agencies in the Philippines such as the Civil Registrar, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Department of Education, Social Security System and Philippine Health Insurance Corporation need accurate personal data (Albert & Vizmanos, 2019). But inconsistency in recording between agencies ongoing create confusion (Morgado et al., 2026). Names are social identification codes, and they have important legal and social functions that allow people to participate in a variety of institutions. For example, if a person's official name is "Juan Jr. Dela Cruz," other government documents may refer to that person as "Juan Dela Cruz Jr." with the suffix appearing before the surname. These discrepancies result in duplicate files, payroll mistakes, employment certificate problems, and denied government applications.

Ongoing problems with record verification and consolidation are occurring within the scope of local city and municipal government offices because of the inconsistent placement of suffixes on names. These mismatches in documents cause delays in the processing of legal papers, permits and ID cards in a component city in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Local registrars and data encoders are often left to manually reconcile conflicting entries, wasting time and increasing the risk of human error. It illustrates the urgent requirement to adopt standard placement specifications for personal name suffixes to assist local and national government officials in the encoding and processing of personal name suffixes in a uniform manner.

The government policies and literature stress data integrity and digital governance (Andaya et al., 2025), but there is still a large gap in standardization issues on name suffix formats. Personal names are fundamental units of identification which distinguish persons in society and family. While a unique name is the most important way to identify a person and personal information is a necessity for legal documents in Philippine government agencies, suffixes are often a hindrance to processing. The present study attempts to fill this research gap by discussing the challenges and solutions experienced by citizens and government offices and finding practical approaches to encourage standardization.

The objective of this case study is to examine the problems and propose solutions to standardize the format of suffixes of personal names in government agencies. Currently, there are no existing regulations or standardization in the Philippines on how suffixes should be written uniformly across agencies. This problem can be solved with smooth transactions, less errors and public confidence that works for all of us especially for uneducated people who have a problem fixing and processing error placements. To summarize, this study lays the groundwork for dependable automated systems and data integration among all government agencies for smooth transactions and gives a basis for immediate corrections in the placement of personal name suffixes

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative design through an instrumental single-case study method. The instrumental case study approach was chosen for a comprehensive investigation of challenges and solutions in the standardization of personal name suffixes in governmental records. This design applies to specific government agencies in charge of civil registration and management of official records in a component city in Negros Occidental, Philippines. It is most suitable to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. It enables investigators to gain rich data on underlying complexities and practicalities. The qualitative design facilitated the capture of participants' lived perspectives and experiences relating to personal suffix names in government records, which are important in identifying systemic issues and developing potential strategies for record standardization.

The case study method is well-suited for the study of current issues that call for an extensive understanding of processes and practices in a specific setting (Kekeya, 2021). This method directly addresses the research objectives to: (1) explore and identify challenges faced by government personnel in writing and encoding personal name suffixes and (2) identify possible solutions in record standardization based on the actual experiences, insights and institutional procedures and policies in component city, Negros Occidental, Philippines. Furthermore, the case study method is well suited, as name suffix standardization problems are context specific and shaped by local policies, office-level interpretations, and administrative workflows. Such method is especially helpful when researchers want to answer "how," "when" and "why" questions in a real-world setting (Tight, 2022). The chosen city's experience offers contextualized insights that may inform policy

recommendations and may also serve as a reference to other local government units (LGUs) that are faced with similar record-standardization issues.

Description of the Case

The bounded case of this study is the administrative processes, institutional practices, and citizen experiences on the management of personal name suffixes (e.g. Jr., Sr., II, III) in the civil registry and public administrative systems in component city in Negros Occidental, Philippines. The case is geographically and institutionally circumscribed and investigates how name data is processed by local government units, health facilities and record sections, how legacy formats are dealt with and how transitions are made toward modern digital databases, such as the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system.

Participants

Participants were purposively selected to ensure they had direct experience and relevant expertise in the handling of personal name suffixes in official records. The participants are: Two (2) government officials working in record sections (i.e. Record Officers under the Civil Registry) who handle personal names and are involved in decisions or implementations regarding data standardization; and one (1) affected citizen who has undergone changes, inconsistencies or administrative issues in the official documentation and recognition of their names in legal and administrative matters. This purposive sampling was selected to ensure rich and in-depth qualitative insights were obtained in accordance with the case study methodology.

Instrument

The researchers utilized direct observation and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were directed by topics pre-selected by the researchers who were free to probe further as the participants responded. This flexible and guided approach allowed participants to share their views and lived experiences while ensuring that key themes around name suffix challenges and solutions were fully covered. The interviews were supplemented by direct observations, which allowed the researchers to see record management workflows and the environmental factors that influence name suffix standardizations, giving a full picture of the operational barriers and practical remedies.

Data Collection Procedure

Initially, the researchers secured the permission from the local government unit of the chosen city to conduct the case study. Then, the participants were selected based on the selection criteria. There were eight (8) participants initially targeted, but after going through the inclusion criteria, only three (3) participants remained. They were then interviewed in a comfortable place for about an hour per participant. Each participant was interviewed at least twice. The researchers provided a token of gratitude to each participant. After the data collection, the data were transcribed and analyzed using the chosen data analysis framework.

Data Analysis Framework

The qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed using a systematic thematic analysis framework (Cernasev & Axon, 2023). Thematic analysis is well established in academic literature, with methodological guides being widely cited. This framework was selected because it offers a structured yet flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns within qualitative dataset). By coding and categorizing rigorously, the analysis systematically uncovered procedural difficulties, experienced roadblocks, and policy gaps, aligning directly with the objective of defining structural solutions to name suffix standardization in government records.

Data Trustworthiness

To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed member checking, data triangulation, and an audit trail. Member checking, a process that has been well-validated for increasing accuracy, credibility, and transferability (McKim, 2023), was operationalized through sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by integrating data from interviews and direct observations to enhance the study's credibility (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023). Finally, there was a clear audit trail of all the research steps and the decisions made during the research following the established evaluative frameworks (Mertens et al., 2025), all of which ensured the dependability and validity of the qualitative results.

Ethical Considerations

All institutional and professional ethical standards to protect the rights, privacy and well-being of the participants were followed in this research. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained with an emphasis on the total confidentiality and voluntary nature of participation including the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Efforts were made to ensure that participants were comfortable, and not emotionally distressed or administratively anxious during the interaction. All research data were stored securely and only accessible to the researchers for the purpose of academic research. Formal clearance was granted by the relevant ethical review board prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Results

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the causes, issues and possible recommendation that related to the standardization of personal name suffixes across government records. The four major themes are the following: absence of a unified policy on name suffix standardization; inconsistent encoding practices across government agencies; operational difficulties and record discrepancies; and need for standardized and centralized guidelines. The three participants are labelled as GE1; GE2 for government employees and AC for affected citizens.

Absence of the Unified Policy on Name Suffix Standardization

Interview findings show that there is no unified or clearly defined policy governing the standardization of personal name suffixes in government records. Participants said that suffix encoding varied across government offices, with some agencies requiring suffixes while others made them optional. This absence of a uniform policy contributes to inconsistencies in personal records.

"In the records (1980s-1990s), the suffix was put in the last name of the person; however, from 1993 onwards it was required to put it on the first name of the person. The memorandum circular 2007-06 was implemented to make this procedure followed" (GE1).

"At present, the preparation of documents in encoding suffixes should be in the first name, which is also a common problem caused by encoding suffixes"(GE2).

"There is no rule in transferring the suffixes in the surname to the first name; however, corrections are needed under Republic Act 9048" (GE2).

"There are some people born with the same name as their father called supplemental; it could not be changed according to what the parents registered but could be corrected according to R.A 9048; change of first name/ correction of clerical error" (GE1).

"One of the requirements are NBI Clearance, barangay clearance/certification, valid IDs, if there are no mentioned requirements, PSA allows to register national ID using barangay clearance, affidavit of non-interested persons with the signature of two personal witnesses, his/her birth certificate with the signature of lawyer with a notary as optional supporting documents to be presented to the registration officer" (GE2).

"*You cannot change the Republic Act; however, you can revise it using the experiences and study with evidence. We do have a lot of information dissemination, but we can't avoid the new revision coming and being implemented. Worst scenario is the implementation in the rural unit; they have no access to the new implementation in the city ordinance; they follow what they used to be" (GE1).*

"In the implementation, sometimes it follows, but sometimes not because of misreading in the paper implementation. The LCR could help, but long process of waiting. But Republic Act 9084 does not accommodate it; sometimes there is a need to undergo a court order to correct the identification" (GE2).

"Once registered, LCR are not allowed to correct it, because we received the documents and we register it according to what documents were presented to us" (GE1).

"In the 1980s, LCR was created, but before that, the person who received the documents to register and registered it was the City Health Office (city) and the municipality planning of development office. That's why there is no standardization in encoding the name because of the history or scattered paper in different government agencies" (GE2).

"In the past, when someone registered the information, they used carbon copy. The original was given to the city health as a copy; the last part was the personal copy that's why errors in writing can also cause problems in current practices" (GE1).

Inconsistent Encoding Practices Across Government Agencies

The participants also revealed inconsistent encoding across different government agencies. Participants noted that names of suffixes such as "JR.", "SR." and "III" etc. are recorded and encoded depending on the system used. Some government systems follow what is in the valid ID; some are not, resulting in variation in official records.

"*The cause when encoding the suffixes of those who have periods and sometimes handwritten, they are not allowed in the present to put period through the system" (GE1).*

"The lack of manpower also caused delays in registration, since city health was also a birthing sector; they tended to assist birthing while registering the information. Especially in those times, there was no system to be followed when encoding an individual's information, which also caused errors when encoding" (GE2).

"Other agencies like hospitals have their own system to encode the information of the person, so whatever they encode there is no way to change it in our part because they present it and we followed what they presented to us"(GE1)

"Sometimes in the hospital sector, especially when a mother is in labor, they tend to ask the mother for full information about the unborn child despite the current

situation. Due to the current experiences of mothers, they tend to give incorrect information to the nurse or midwife, and they assume that it is correct. When it time to register, sometimes they see what is recorded by the nurse, and they follow it" (GE1).

"*LCR (Local Civil Registry) received documents from the hospitals and encoded information into their system according to the documents presented to them. The preparation of the documents started in the hospital; there were signatures of doctors, attendants, and parents as witnesses. When the parents bring the requirements needed during the registration time, the officer encodes and follows what is written on the documents presented to them, and puts the signature and registration number as proof that they registered it" (GE2).*

"It's not about the encoding but what documents they submitted or presented, because it is our basis in encoding". (GE1)

Operational Difficulties and Record Discrepancies

Participants emphasized the lack of standardization, which causes operational difficulties including delays in processing documents and record mismatches. Errors arise when citizens attempt to reconcile records across multiple agencies, leading to repeated verification and corrections procedure.

"One of the causes of error in encoding personal details was the so called "comadrona" (traditional midwife, especially in countryside) which people within the community tend to trust with her knowledge in the identification of each person in the community. When a person is born, the mother trusts the capabilities of this person; that's why some errors in registering information start this way. It is also due to lack of knowledge of every individual on this remote area" (GE1).

"In the new process in the hospital, before settling the bills, the information needed must correct. In the essence of marriage, a father should acknowledge first the child in a way of signature in the child birth certificate"(GE2).

"Yes, when I process my birth certificate for the correction of the my suffix name, they have a lot of requirements needed. It took me weeks before I got my corrected birth certificate. ... I registered my driver license in LTO, but in my identification shows my suffix is in the first name but in my registered birth certificate it is in my last name. Yes, the inconsistent in encoding of my suffix affect my government records, especially when presenting my valid ID's. ... No, since every government agency has their own encoding system. For me, it will be very good to have a system that could be helpful to access government agencies, when applying or updating the valid id's. I think, to prevent error, government offices should impose a policy that could contribute to the fixation of system errors; like the suffixes placement, even the parents put the suffixes in the surname, but the civil registrar should follow the standardization of the encoding" (AC).

Need for Standardized and Centralized Guidelines

Despite the absence of existing standards, participants expressed strong support for the development of a standardization when encoding the name suffixes to the system. They emphasized that a standardized format would improve efficiency and reduce errors, and enhance inter- agency coordination without delay and error when encoding the information.

"By next year, we propose the system called ECRVS (Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics) to modernize how civil registry records and vital statistics are collected and processed. To digitize birth records this coming year, 2026, and continuing in 2027 for marriage and death certificates, the purpose of this system is to integrate data between LGU's, hospitals, health facilities (especially rural/remote areas), and PSA (Civil Registry Section). This proposal was submitted to the higher official for approval, and hopefully it will be used and started by the year 2026"(GE2).

"Using our proposed system will help our citizens, workers, and even uneducated people by assisting them in legalizing their documents with the support of the civil registry. It can be used as a main monitoring of civil registration nationwide. It could be faster registration without hassle in processing the documentation and real-time monitoring in real time" (GE1).

"In the training, we give them training according to the form format (for example, complete mother's maiden name) that specifies correct and accurate information before we deploy them to field exposure; there is a lot of training. Especially in remote areas under the barangay called the rural health unit, which is commanded by the registered midwife, we include them in the training we conduct" (GE2.

Discussion

Absence of the Unified Policy on Name Suffix Standardization

The findings show the lack of a unified or well-delineated national policy on personal name suffix standardization plays a role in ongoing inconsistencies in government records. "The guidelines on suffix placement have changed over the years – from the surname, to the given name as in 1993, with administrative issuances such as Memorandum Circular 2007-06 – but there are no retroactive measures

to synchronize legacy databases, the participants said. This structural void leads to dependence on legal remedies like Republic Act No. 9048, which is primarily for clerical errors or first name changes and not for structural suffix alignment, often necessitating costly and time-consuming court interventions.

These findings are in line with the wider public sector literature which suggests that fragmented regulatory structures and poor legal interoperability are hindering institutional data sharing (Cao, R., & Iansiti, 2023; Lin, 2024; López, 2025). Legacy recordkeeping systems, such as carbon-copy logs from the City Health Office or municipal planning units prior to the establishment of the Local Civil Registry (LCR) in the 1980s, clash with modern digital databases, giving rise to these systemic distortions. From a public administration perspective, names have important legal and social identification functions (De Varennes & Kuzborska, 2015). In the absence of cohesive, national mandates linking historical transitions and contemporary administrative approaches, LGUs and rural offices are left to fragmented historical practices, intensifying structural vulnerabilities in civil registration.

Inconsistent Encoding Practices Across Government Agencies

The challenge is the inconsistent encoding practices across different government bodies, which are mainly a result of different digital architecture constraints and decentralized data entry points. Participants described how third parties (hospitals, healthcare birthing centers) collect infant data in stressful situations (e.g. labor) using their own internal systems, which will ultimately be the untouchable basis for the civil registration. Technical variations such as system limitations on the use of periods (e.g., “Jr.” or “Sr.”) in names have contributed to the increase of these variations across agency databases.

These operational bottlenecks resonate with observations in data governance literature that institutional software design is uncoordinated and workflows are siloed, preventing meaningful data harmonization (Siclari et al., 2025; Ghosh, 2025). Because front-line LCR employees are required by administrative protocol to transcribe data as it appears in source documents, errors introduced in the initial collection of data by healthcare practitioners or administrative clerks are locked into official files forever. This is an example of challenges faced with health and public data modernization frameworks where disjoint point-of-origin data capture propagates systemic inaccuracies across interconnected national databases.

Operational Difficulties and Record Discrepancies

The absence of standard suffixes creates major operational challenges, including lengthy document processing times, repeated verification requests, and disparate identity profiles across agencies. Citizens affected said they have lived through weeks of bureaucratic friction and conflicting data entries, such as their suffix appearing in the given name on Land Transportation Office (LTO) driver’s licenses while it appears in the surname on birth certificates. In the past, the absence of administrative awareness in remote areas where the population depends on traditional birth attendants (comadrona), has contributed as a community practice to initial errors in documentation.

The practical implications of this are the heavy individual burdens that fragmented bureaucratic ecosystems impose (Rusli & Ansar, 2026; Ushakov & Podolskaya, 2026). Each agency has a database, and there is no automatic verification between agencies . So the citizens have to go through the same expensive authentication process over and over again , with multiple affidavits and valid IDs. As institutional theorists argue, a systemic misalignment between citizen documentation and state databases is a significant obstacle to equal access to public services and social protection systems, emphasizing the critical need for an integrated administrative structure (Gorzelany, 2025).

Need for Standardized and Centralized Guidelines

Current procedures are challenged, but there was overwhelming institutional and citizen support for centralized guidelines and digital modernization initiatives. One of the key drivers of this transformation is the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system which will digitize and integrate data collection from LGUs, hospitals, rural health units and the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Participants also stressed that technological upgrades should be accompanied by ongoing capacity-building efforts, including targeted field training of rural midwives and local health personnel who do point-of-origin data capture.

These recommendations are well supported by contemporary data modernization literature, which emphasizes the need for open standards, strong governance mechanisms, and centralized digital platforms to dismantle data silos and achieve real interoperability (Masoumi, 2022; Margariti et al., 2022; Kasiwi & Wahyuni, 2025; Azevedo et al., 2025). Real-time monitoring and integrated encoding protocols can cut down on human error and administrative redundancy, and make public sector record-keeping consistent with global best practices in digital governance.

Synthesis

The results suggest that the long-standing inconsistencies in the recording of personal name suffixes in government records are a result of a mix of legacy practices, decentralized data entry points, and a fundamental lack of a coherent

national policy. Historically the rules for suffix placement have moved from surnames to given names. The records were kept on paper carbon copy and the errors in the point of origin (hospitals, traditional birth attendants) have led to fractured administrative databases .

These systemic gaps lead to serious operational impediments such as long processing times, incompatible multi-agency identification profiles and heavy burdens on citizens who need to go through cumbersome legal correction remedies such as Republic Act No. 9048. To overcome these differences, government personnel and citizens have strongly backed for centralized guidance, more training for front-line and rural health workers, and digital modernization efforts, including the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system for seamless data integration, and interoperability, across all agencies.

Conclusion

The case study shows that the common discrepancies in personal name suffixes found in government records in Bacolod City are not just technical data entry errors, but the complex outcome of historical recording practices, decentralized hospital workflows, and the significant absence of a unified national policy. These administrative divisions, from the shifting historical naming mandates to the disjointed database architectures, create significant operational bottlenecks, multi-agency identity mismatches, and cumbersome processes of legal correction for citizens. Such systemic disparities have to be addressed through a shift to centralized digital systems like the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system to break institutional silos and facilitate interoperability across agencies.

Key lessons learned emphasize the need for health personnel working on the frontline and in rural areas to be the first line of data integrity, and that errors at the point of registration are permanently recorded in public databases. True standardization therefore implies institutionalizing permanent, intensive capacity-building and training programs for all administrative and health staff responsible for civil registration entries. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for efficient inter-agency cooperation, updated administrative policies, and public awareness campaigns to protect the accuracy of individual data, avoid processing delays, and boost public confidence in government documentation services.

Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

Several limitations of this case study must be acknowledged. First, the findings are based on a limited cohort of participants from selected government agencies in Bacolod City. Thus, the insights may not fully represent the civil registration conditions at the national level. Second, the study relies heavily on self-reported experiences from government employees and affected citizens that may be subject to recall bias or individual interpretation of registry laws. Third, the research occurred during a period of transition with the proposed Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (ECRVS) system; since the system is still in the implementation stage, the real operational impact of the system on name suffix standardization could not be fully assessed. Finally, the study is exploratory and descriptive since it does not measure the effectiveness of the proposed policy changes after their implementation.

On the basis of these findings, future researchers should conduct larger-scale quantitative or mixed-methods studies across the nation to uncover specific patterns of suffix-related encoding inconsistencies. Further research could examine the technical aspects of database software limitations and data-sharing privacy gaps between agencies, as well as the wider consequences of suffix mismatches in private-sector domains like employment, banking, education, and social welfare. Once the ECRVS is fully operational, post-implementation assessments should be performed to evaluate its effectiveness in reducing errors and improving inter-agency coordination. Future research should also look at rural versus urban differences in handling and reviewing documents and the legal reforms needed for civil registry laws such as Republic Act No. 9048 to better accommodate modern digital systems.

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