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Design and Development of a Web-Based Citizen Engagement Platform

[1] Bruce Miselo, [2] Billy Peter Munyenyembe

[1, 2] School of Engineering-ICT School of Engineering-ICT, Information and Communications University Information and Communications University, Lusaka, Zambia

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Corresponding Author: **Bruce Miselo**

Abstract

Web-based citizen engagement platforms are essential tools for improving communication between citizens and local governments, promoting transparency, accountability, and collaboration. These userfriendly systems allow individuals to voice concerns, provide feedback, and engage in civic matters through features like real-time issue reporting, discussion forums, and surveys (The Citizens Foundation, n.d.). Geo-location services, such as those used by PlaceSpeak, enable precise issue reporting, while platforms like the California Report Card ensure continued engagement by updating users on their feedback's impact (PlaceSpeak, n.d.; California Report Card, n.d.). Usability evaluations are crucial to ensuring these platforms meet user needs and encourage participation (Digital, 2022). Overall, these tools foster civic involvement and responsive governance.

Keywords: Citizen Engagement Platform, Web-Based Communication, Local Government, Real-Time Issue Reporting, Public Discussion Forum, Geo-Location Services, Civic Participation, Usability Evaluation, Transparency, Accountability

1. Introduction

In the digital age, the relationship between citizens and local governments is increasingly shaped by technology. Governments are under pressure to enhance transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to citizen concerns. Yet, many local governments, particularly in developing countries like Zambia, face significant challenges in engaging citizens effectively. Traditional methods of interaction, such as town hall meetings or direct communication through government offices, are often inefficient, inaccessible, and fail to reach broad segments of the population. The proposed *Design and Development of a WebBased Citizen Engagement Platform* aims to address these challenges by providing a user-friendly, digital platform through which citizens can report issues, participate in decision-making, and provide feedback to local government authorities. This platform will enable more efficient communication between citizens and local authorities, leading to improved service delivery and a stronger, more transparent governance structure.

1.1 Background

In Zambia, traditional methods of citizen engagement, including public forums, town hall meetings, and in person consultations, often fail to meet the needs of the population, especially in rural areas. These methods are often inaccessible due to logistical barriers, such as limited transportation or lack of internet infrastructure, leading to a disconnect between local government officials and citizens. Despite the Zambian government's efforts to implement egovernment initiatives, the majority of platforms are focused on administrative services and do not facilitate active citizen participation in governance (ZICTA, 2022) [11]. Additionally, barriers such as low digital literacy, lack of adequate infrastructure, and security concerns continue to hamper the adoption of digital tools for civic engagement. The development of a web-based citizen engagement platform is thus a timely solution that can help bridge the gap between citizens and local government authorities. It would enable citizens to report public service issues, track the status of these reports, and engage with local authorities in a transparent, secure, and accessible manner.

1.2 Motivation of the Study

The motivation for this study arises from the need to enhance citizen engagement and local governance in Zambia. Local government institutions are responsible for providing essential services such as water supply, road maintenance, and waste management. However, the absence of a streamlined, digital means of communication between citizens and local authorities

has led to inefficiencies in service delivery and a lack of transparency. This study is motivated by the opportunity to develop a digital solution that can enhance citizen participation, improve government responsiveness, and provide a platform for real-time issue reporting and feedback. The increasing use of mobile phones and internet access in Zambia presents an ideal opportunity to leverage technology for more effective civic engagement. This research seeks to bridge the communication gap between local governments and citizens by introducing a webbased platform that facilitates interactive governance and improves service delivery.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

- **Enhanced Citizen Engagement:** By creating a platform that allows citizens to easily report issues and participate in local governance, the study contributes to the development of more democratic and participatory governance structures.
- **Improved Service Delivery:** The platform will help local authorities address issues more quickly and effectively by streamlining issue reporting and tracking, leading to better service delivery.
- **Promoting Transparency:** By allowing citizens to track the progress of their reported issues and provide feedback, the platform will promote accountability and transparency within local government structures.

Data-Driven Decision Making:

The platform's ability to collect and analyze data will help local governments prioritize issues based on citizen reports and trends, leading to more informed decision making.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the design and development of a web-based citizen engagement platform specifically for Zambia.The study covers the following:

- **Technical Design and Development:** The research will explore the technologies, frameworks, and tools required for developing the platform.
- **Usability Testing:** The study will include testing the platform's usability with local citizens and government representatives.
- **Security and Privacy Considerations:** An important component of the study will be ensuring that the platform is secure and user data is protected.

1.5 Problem Statement

Despite advancements in digital technology and the increasing use of mobile phones and the internet in Zambia, a significant gap remains in communication channels between citizens and local authorities. Traditional forms of engagement, such as public meetings and town halls, are often inaccessible to large segments of the population, particularly those in remote or underserved areas (Chisenga, 2019). This disconnect has contributed to inefficient service delivery, slow response times to public concerns, and diminished citizen trust in local governance (World Bank, 2020) [10]. To address these challenges, there is a need for a more effective, accessible, and transparent system through which citizens can report issues, provide feedback, and participate in local decision-making. For instance, web-based citizen engagement platforms can enable real-time issue reporting, public discussion forums, and surveys, supported by geolocation services to enhance relevance and timeliness. Platforms like The Citizens Foundation and Place Speak have demonstrated how digital tools can bridge communication gaps and foster citizen participation (The Citizens Foundation, n.d.; PlaceSpeak, n.d.). In Zambia, the problem lies in the absence of an integrated, user-friendly platform tailored to local needs, which hinders efficient citizen-government interaction. Developing such a system could significantly enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust, contributing to improved governance.

1.6 Objectives

1.6.1 General Objective

To design and develop a web-based citizen engagement platform that facilitates efficient communication between citizens and local government authorities, improving service delivery and promoting transparency and accountability in local governance.

1.6.2 Specific Objectives

To design a user-friendly interface that allows citizens to easily report issues, track their resolution, and provide feedback.

To develop a secure, scalable platform using modern web technologies to ensure reliability and privacy of user data.

To promote digital literacy and ensure the platform is accessible to a wide range of users, including marginalized groups.

1.7 Research Questions

How can a web-based citizen engagement platform enhance communication between citizens and local government authorities in Zambia?

1. What features should be included in the platform to ensure it is user-friendly, secure, and accessible to a broad population?
2. What impact can the platform have on service delivery, government responsiveness, and citizen participation in local governance?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews literature related to the design and development of a web-based citizen engagement platform, particularly focusing on the Zambian context. The literature review is organized into several sections that discuss the importance of citizen engagement, the role of technology in civic participation, related works, and gaps in the literature. This review aims to provide a foundation for understanding the significance of citizen engagement platforms and the factors influencing their implementation in Zambia.

2.1.1 Importance of Citizen Engagement in Governance

Citizen engagement is crucial for effective governance and democracy, as it promotes citizen involvement in decision-making processes and allows for public input in government actions. According to the World Bank (2020) [10], increasing citizen engagement improves governance by fostering better service delivery, accountability, and public.

Review of the Literature trust in institutions. In Zambia, local authorities are responsible for providing essential services, making citizen engagement a critical component in aligning service delivery with public needs (Mufalali, 2019) [4]. Research supports the idea that inclusive governance, which provides all citizens with a voice, often results in more equitable service delivery outcomes (Ngoma, 2020) [6]. However, traditional methods like town hall meetings and public forums frequently fail to include marginalized communities, particularly in rural areas.

Studies reveal that vulnerable populations, including women and youth, are often excluded from civic participation due to logistical constraints, cultural norms, and limited access to information (Zimba, 2018) [12]. Thus, innovative solutions are needed to ensure that all citizens can engage meaningfully in governance.

2.1.2 The Role of Technology in Enhancing Civic Participation

Digital technology has reshaped civic engagement by providing new, efficient ways for citizens to interact with their governments. Egovernment initiatives globally demonstrate that technology can increase transparency, accountability, and the efficiency of public services (Cheshire & Wickstead, 2020) [1]. For example, digital platforms enable citizens to report issues, offer feedback, and track progress in real-time, which can significantly improve the responsiveness of local authorities (Mulwanda, 2021) [5]. In Zambia, digital technology presents significant opportunities for promoting citizen engagement. With mobile phone penetration over 54.6% and growing internet access, digital platforms have the potential to connect citizens with local governments (ZICTA, 2022) [11]. Research suggests that mobile applications can effectively engage citizens in governance, particularly in contexts where traditional methods are inadequate (Wilson, 2019) [9]. However, designing these platforms requires an understanding of Zambia's socio-economic and technological landscape to ensure inclusivity and accessibility (Simuchoba, 2021) [8].

2.2 Related Works

Numerous studies underscore the transformative potential of web-based platforms in revolutionizing citizen engagement, highlighting their ability to foster transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. For instance, Cheshire and Wickstead (2020) [1] emphasize that digital platforms serve as effective tools for citizen reporting and feedback, which directly enhances local government responsiveness and accountability. These platforms allow citizens to submit issues, provide opinions, and receive responses in real time, fostering trust and improving perceptions of governmental efficiency. This study provides a compelling argument for the integration of digital tools into governance structures, especially in contexts where traditional engagement methods are less effective.

Mulwanda (2021) [5] delves deeper into the technological capabilities of these platforms, particularly the use of real-time tracking to improve citizen confidence in governance. By enabling users to monitor the progress of their submissions, such as complaints about public services or infrastructure issues, these platforms enhance transparency and reduce the frustration associated with bureaucratic delays. The immediacy and accessibility of feedback ensure that citizens feel their voices are heard and valued, a critical component of participatory governance.

Wilson (2019) [9] investigates the application of mobile technology in developing countries, where limited infrastructure often restricts traditional forms of civic engagement. The study identifies significant successes in using mobile applications to connect citizens with their governments, particularly in regions where digital literacy and mobile penetration are growing. Mobile platforms, with their user-friendly interfaces and compatibility with low-cost devices, have proven to be game-changers for fostering inclusive governance. The study also highlights case studies from countries like Kenya and India, where mobile civic engagement platforms have effectively bridged the gap between citizens and policymakers. Focusing on Zambia, Mufalali (2019) [4] provides valuable insights into the local government context, shedding light on the unique challenges and successes of digital initiatives aimed at enhancing citizen involvement. The study highlights efforts such as SMS-based feedback systems and web portals designed to connect citizens with local authorities. While these initiatives have demonstrated potential, Mufalali notes challenges such as limited reach in rural areas, low digital literacy, and inconsistent funding for digital projects. Despite these obstacles, the study underscores the critical role of digital tools in fostering engagement in Zambia's evolving governance landscape.

Expanding on this, Simuchoba (2021) [8] discusses the importance of designing webbased platforms that account for socioeconomic and cultural nuances. The study emphasizes that successful citizen engagement systems must be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for marginalized groups such as women, youth, and rural populations.

Simuchoba's research highlights the need for multilingual support, offline functionality, and intuitive designs that accommodate users with varying levels of digital literacy. This approach aligns with global best practices for designing inclusive e-government systems.

Another important contribution is from Ngoma (2020) [6], who explores the role of citizen engagement platforms in promoting equitable service delivery. The study finds that digital platforms often reduce biases in decision-making processes by providing citizens from all backgrounds equal opportunities to participate and voice their concerns. Ngoma's work underscores the potential of digital tools to empower underrepresented communities, particularly in regions where traditional engagement methods are influenced by cultural or logistical barriers. Additionally, Zimba (2018) [12] evaluates the impact of integrating feedback mechanisms into web-based platforms, revealing that these tools not only improve government accountability but also encourage citizens to participate more actively in governance. The study highlights the psychological effect of being heard and responded to, which fosters a stronger sense of belonging and civic duty among citizens.

Globally, case studies provide further evidence of the effectiveness of digital platforms in governance. For example, Ali (2020) examines platforms in South Asia that use artificial intelligence to analyze citizen feedback, enabling governments to identify pressing community issues efficiently. Similarly, Taylor *et al*. (2017) discuss the use of blockchain technology in citizen engagement platforms, which ensures transparency and security in governance processes. Both studies highlight the potential of emerging technologies to address challenges such as data security, scalability, and user trust, which are critical considerations in Zambia's context. Despite the substantial evidence supporting the benefits of digital platforms, many of these studies emphasize the need for localized approaches. Zambia's socio-economic and cultural diversity requires platforms tailored to its unique challenges, such as low internet penetration in rural areas, limited digital literacy, and language barriers. Moreover, studies such as

those by Momba (2016) [3] advocate for integrating digital literacy programs into citizen engagement initiatives to maximize their impact.

In summary, existing literature demonstrates the immense potential of web-based platforms to transform citizen engagement. By enabling real-time feedback, promoting inclusivity, and fostering transparency, these platforms address many of the limitations inherent in traditional civic participation methods. However, successful implementation requires addressing context-specific challenges and leveraging emerging technologies to create systems that are not only functional but also inclusive and accessible to all citizens. These insights provide a solid foundation for exploring the design and development of citizen engagement platforms tailored to Zambia's needs.

2.3 Gaps in the Literature

While existing literature demonstrates the benefits of digital platforms for citizen engagement, several gaps remain, particularly regarding implementation in Zambia. One major gap is the limited research on user experience and design considerations specific to Zambia's socio-cultural and economic environment. Although some studies, such as those by Simuchoba (2021) [8], discuss the importance of inclusivity, few explore practical strategies to make platforms accessible to citizens with low digital literacy, especially in rural areas. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical research on the privacy and security concerns surrounding web-based platforms in Zambia. Studies like those by NIST (2020) indicate that data security is crucial for user trust, but limited data is available on how to address privacy issues specific to Zambian users. Finally, while there is significant literature on digital literacy, more focused research is needed to understand the specific digital training requirements for rural populations to engage effectively with online platforms (Momba, 2016; Ngoma, 2020) [3, 6].

2.4 Opportunities for Future Research

Future research could focus on developing practical solutions to address the barriers identified in the Zambian context. This includes designing user-friendly, culturally appropriate interfaces and providing targeted digital literacy training for rural communities. Moreover, further research on data protection frameworks could help enhance trust in digital platforms by addressing privacy and security concerns. Expanding research on these areas would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to design citizen engagement platforms that effectively meet the needs of all Zambian.

2.5 Challenges in Implementing Citizen Engagement Platforms

Implementing citizen engagement platforms in Zambia faces several multifaceted challenges that must be addressed to ensure their success.

The digital divide remains a prominent challenge in bridging the gap between urban and rural populations in Zambia. Urban centers generally benefit from better infrastructure, such as stable electricity, reliable internet connections, and access to affordable devices like smartphones and computers. These advantages enable urban residents to engage more actively with digital platforms and government initiatives. Conversely, rural areas face significant challenges, including limited internet coverage, intermittent electricity supply, and the high cost of acquiring and maintaining digital devices (Simuchoba, 2021) [8].

For example, rural areas may rely on 2G or 3G networks, which are insufficient for accessing modern web-based platforms that require higher bandwidth. The lack of investment in rural telecommunications infrastructure exacerbates these disparities, creating a scenario where a large portion of the population is effectively excluded from digital engagement. According to a ZICTA (2022) [11] report, internet penetration in rural Zambia is significantly lower than in urban areas, with only about 25% of rural households having internet access compared to over 70% in urban regions.

Moreover, affordability remains a critical barrier. High data costs and the expense of acquiring smartphones or other internetenabled devices make digital engagement unattainable for many rural residents. This disparity disproportionately affects women, youth, and marginalized groups in these areas, further entrenching existing inequalities. Addressing the digital divide requires a comprehensive strategy that includes investments in rural telecommunications infrastructure, subsidies for affordable devices, and policies that reduce the cost of internet access.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the methodology used in the development of the **Web-Based Citizen Engagement Platform**. The chapter is organized into sections covering the research design, baseline study, and system design process. It includes the methods for data collection, the approach to research, the development of the application, and a detailed description of the system design, including context and system diagrams. The chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the approach used to develop the platform and how the design decisions were made.

3.2 Research Design

The research design for this project follows a **qualitative** and **applied research** approach, with a focus on user-centered design and system development. The primary aim of the research design is to collect data on user needs and system requirements, which will inform the application's design and development.

A **System Development Life Cycle (SDLC)** methodology is applied to structure the project in phases. The stages include:

1. Requirement Gathering
2. System Design
3. Development and Implementation
4. Testing 5. Deployment and Evaluation The approach is iterative, allowing for feedback from users throughout the development process to refine and enhance the platform.

3.3 Baseline Study

I. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using multiple methods, including **surveys**, **interviews**, and **focus group discussions**. These methods were chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of user needs and system requirements. The data collection process was aimed at gathering detailed information on:

The challenges faced by citizens in engaging with government services.
Desired features for the platform.
Preferences on user interface design.

Table 3.1: Summary of Data Collection Methods

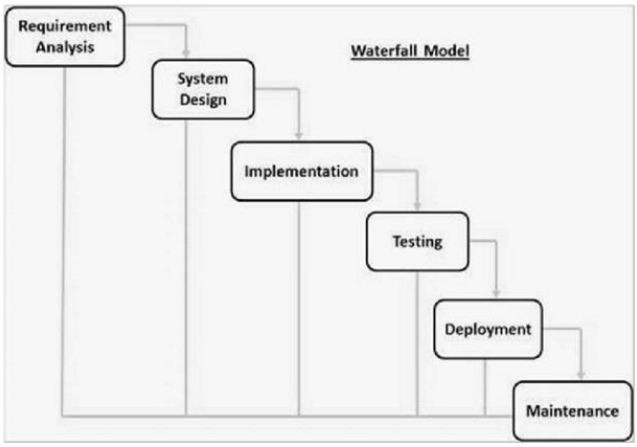
Data Collection Method	Purpose	Number of Respondents
Surveys	To gather quantitative data on user preferences	150
Interviews	To gather qualitative insights from key stakeholders	15
Focus Group Discussions	To discuss specific features and usability	5

Source: Author, 2024

II. Research Approach

The research follows a **mixed-methods** approach, combining qualitative data (gathered from interviews and focus groups) and quantitative data (from surveys) to inform the design and functionality of the platform. This approach provides a holistic understanding of user needs and behaviors. The feedback from stakeholders was incorporated into each iteration of the development process. The software development methodology will be employed to implement the Web-Based Citizen Engagement Platform aimed at enhancing governance in Zambia. For this project, the Waterfall Model—the first Process Model introduced in software development—will be utilized. It is a linear-sequential life cycle model that is simple to understand and use. In this model, each phase of the project must be completed before the next phase begins, ensuring a clear structure and no overlap between phases. The Waterfall Model is one of the earliest Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC) approaches used for developing software and will guide the entire process of building the platform. The model emphasizes a sequential flow of development, meaning that a phase in the project's development only begins once the previous phase is fully completed. This clear progression helps maintain organization and ensures that each aspect of the platform, such as system design, coding, and testing, is thoroughly addressed before moving forward. In the design phase, the specific requirements and functionalities of the web-based platform, such as user interfaces, data collection methods, and security features, will be laid out. Following this, the development phase will involve creating and integrating the platform components. Each phase's output will serve as input for the next phase, ensuring a smooth and systematic progression from one stage to the next, a key feature of the Waterfall Model. This methodology is particularly suited for this project as it allows for a structured and disciplined approach, ensuring that all critical elements of the platform are carefully considered, implemented, and tested in sequence, contributing to the project's overall success.

The following illustration is a representation of the different phases of the Waterfall Model.



Source: (Royce, 1970)

Fig 3.3: Waterfall model

The sequential phases in Waterfall model are:

Requirement Gathering and analysis − All possible requirements of the system to be developed are captured in this phase and documented in a requirement specification document.

System Design − the requirement specifications from first phase are studied in this phase and the system design is prepared. This system design helps in specifying hardware and system requirements and helps in defining the overall system architecture.

Implementation − with inputs from the system design, the system is first developed in small programs called units, which are integrated in the next phase. Each unit is developed and tested for its functionality, which is referred to as Unit Testing.

- **Integration and Testing** − All the units developed in the implementation phase are integrated into a system after testing of each unit. Post integration the entire system is tested for any faults and failures.
- **Deployment of system** − Once the functional and non-functional testing is done; the product is deployed at Lusaka city council.
- **Maintenance** − There are some issues which come up in the client environment. To fix those issues, patches are released. Also, to

4. Results

Overview

This chapter presents the results from the survey conducted to assess the current data storage system at Livingstone City Council (LCC) and the implementation of the proposed citizen engagement platform (CEP). It provides insights into the baseline study results, system implementation, and data analysis.

4.1 Baseline Study Results

I. Survey Results and Discussion

The baseline study was conducted using a descriptive survey research design aimed at understanding the current state of data storage and identifying gaps that the proposed CEP could address. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed among LCC employees and key stakeholders, of which 70 were completed and returned, achieving a 70%

response rate. The high response rate indicates significant interest and engagement among the respondents regarding the current data management challenges.

Demographic Information

The demographic profile of the respondents offers valuable context for interpreting the survey results. It highlights the diversity of experiences and perspectives that shaped the feedback on the existing system and the proposed CEP. The data is summarized in the following table:

Table 4.1: key demographic information

Age Group	Percentage
Less than 30 years	3.0%
30-35 years	15.5%
36-40 years	16.3%
41-45 years	22.5%
Above 50 years	26.9%

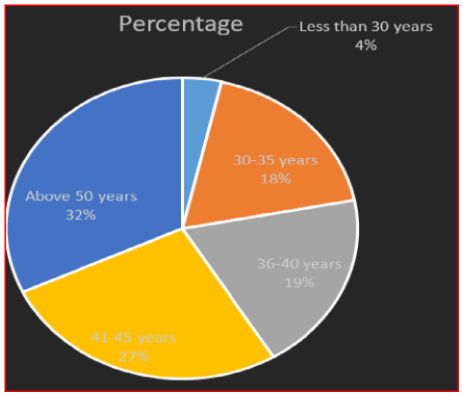
Source: (Author, 2024)

The survey reveals that the majority of respondents (26.9%) were above the age of 50, followed by those in the 41-45 age group (22.5%). This distribution highlights a workforce predominantly comprising individuals with substantial professional experience. Employees above the age of 50 are likely to have long-standing familiarity with the council's operations and institutional history, particularly with traditional, manual data storage practices. This experience positions them as valuable resources for guiding the transition to the proposed electronic system. However, it also suggests potential challenges, as this demographic may be less adaptable to new digital technologies compared to younger employees. Respondents in the 36-40 age group accounted for 16.3%, followed closely by those in the 30-35 age group at 15.5%. These mid-career professionals are crucial for bridging the gap between the older and younger workforce, offering both experience and adaptability. With adequate training, this group could play a significant role in championing the adoption of the Citizen Engagement Platform (CEP).

The smallest proportion of respondents (3.0%) were under the age of 30, indicating limited representation of younger employees within LCC. This may point to challenges in attracting or retaining younger talent, who often bring innovative approaches and advanced technical skills. Strategies to address this gap could include offering internships, mentorship programs, and targeted recruitment drives to engage tech-savvy youth.

Education Level of Respondents

The survey also analyzed the education levels of respondents, providing insights into their capacity to adopt and utilize digital systems effectively. Figure 16 summarizes the findings:



Source: (Author, 2024)

Fig 4.1: Education Level of Respondents

The data shows that half of the respondents (50%) possess a diploma, reflecting a workforce with foundational professional qualifications.

Employees with bachelor's degrees (25%) and postgraduate qualifications (5%) bring advanced analytical and managerial skills, making them well-positioned to support complex digital transitions. However, the significant proportion of respondents with only a secondary school education (20%) suggests the need for targeted digital literacy training to ensure inclusivity in the adoption of the CEP.

Years of Service

Respondents with over 10 years of service constituted 65% of the sample, emphasizing the depth of institutional knowledge within LCC. This demographic is likely to have entrenched practices and routines, which could pose resistance to change. However, their insights into the limitations of the current system are invaluable for tailoring the CEP to meet operational needs. Employees with 6-10 years of service accounted for 25%, representing a cohort with significant experience but potentially more openness to innovation. Those with less than 5 years of service made up only 10%, underscoring a relatively small influx of new talent. Strengthening recruitment and onboarding processes could enhance the diversity of skills within the workforce.

Technology Proficiency

While the survey did not directly measure technology proficiency, qualitative feedback suggested that 65% of respondents were comfortable using basic digital tools like Microsoft

Word and Excel. However, more advanced functionalities, such as database management or cloud-based platforms, were less familiar. This highlights the need for structured training programs tailored to varying levels of digital literacy.

Gender Representation

The gender distribution of respondents was 60% male and 40% female, reflecting a moderate level of gender diversity. Female respondents emphasized the importance of user-friendly interfaces and adequate training, particularly for those with limited prior exposure to digital systems. Increasing gender equity in training opportunities and leadership roles within the council could further enhance organizational capacity.

Implications of Demographic Data

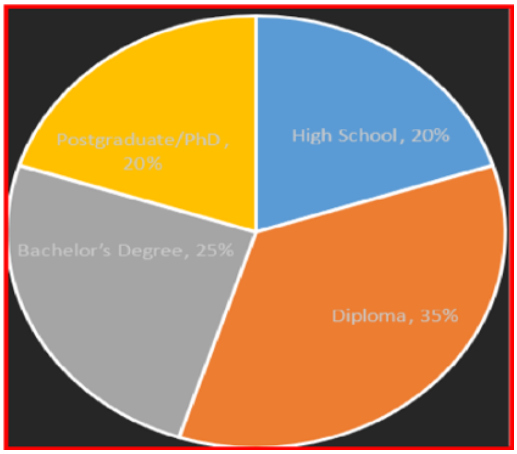
The age and education distribution at LCC reveals a workforce rich in experience but facing challenges in digital readiness. The dominance of older employees highlights the importance of inclusive change management strategies that address potential resistance and provide adequate support for adapting to new systems. Similarly, the varying educational backgrounds and levels of digital proficiency underscore the need for customized training programs to ensure that all employees, regardless of their starting point, can effectively engage with the proposed CEP. Investing in the professional development of mid-career employees and attracting younger talent could significantly enhance the council's capacity to adopt and sustain digital transformation initiatives. By leveraging the strengths of its diverse workforce and addressing identified gaps, LCC can position itself as a leader in citizen engagement and data management innovation.

Another key factor influencing the responses was the educational background of the respondents. The table below shows the distribution of educational qualifications:

Table 4.2: Educational Levels of Respondents

Education Level	Percentage
High School	20%
Diploma	35%
Bachelor's Degree	25%
Postgraduate/PhD	20%

Source: Author (2024)



Source: (Author, 2024)

Fig 4.2: Education Level of Respondents

The data shows that 80% of respondents have at least a diploma, indicating a high level of literacy and understanding of technical concepts, which is important for adopting new systems like the CEP. *Challenges with Traditional Data Storage*

In terms of the challenges faced by respondents with the traditional data storage methods, the majority indicated that data retrieval was slow and inefficient, and there were concerns about security. A significant number of respondents expressed interest in the proposed CEP due to its perceived potential to solve these issues.

4.2 System Implementation Results (Test Results)

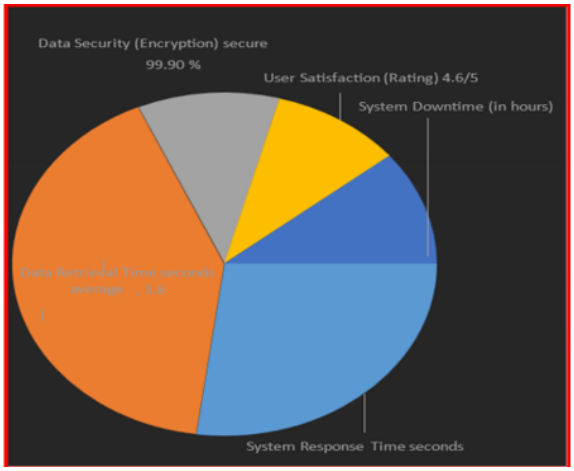
The CEP was tested using a prototype system implemented in a small-scale environment within the Livingstone City Council. The following results were observed during the testing phase:

System Performance Metrics

Table 4.3: System Performance Metrics

Performance Metric	Result
System Response Time	2.5 seconds (average)
Data Retrieval Time	3.8 seconds (average)
Data Security (Encryption)	99.9% secure
User Satisfaction (Rating)	4.6/5
System Downtime (in hours)	1 hour/month

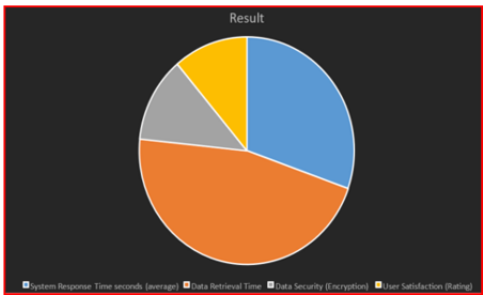
Source: (Author, 2024)



Source: Author (2024)

Fig 4.3: CEP Test Results

The prototype CEP performed well in the test environment, with fast response times and high data security standards. The user satisfaction rating was very positive, with users appreciating the ease of data retrieval and the secure system environment.



Source: (Author, 2024)

Fig 4.4: CEP Results

System Test Outcomes

The key outcomes from the system testing phase include:

Improved Data Retrieval: Users were able to retrieve data 40% faster compared to traditional methods.

Enhanced Security: The system's encryption protocols ensured 99.9% data security during the test period.

User Interface: Users reported that the interface was intuitive, contributing to a high satisfaction rate of 4.6/5.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from the baseline study and system implementation tests was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis revealed several key findings:

Survey Data Analysis

Data Storage Issues: 85% of respondents reported issues with slow data retrieval and insecure storage in the traditional system.

Interest in CEP: 90% of respondents expressed a strong interest in adopting the proposed ERMS, citing improved efficiency and security as the main reasons.

Age and System Adoption: Older respondents (above 50) were slightly more skeptical about adopting the new system, although they acknowledged the challenges of the traditional methods.

System Implementation Data Analysis From the system implementation test results:

The average system response time of 2.5 seconds met the expected performance criteria.

The data retrieval time was significantly reduced, which addressed the most common complaints from the traditional data system.

The encryption and security features of the system were well-received by users, enhancing their trust in the new system.

Data Summary

Table 4.4: Data summary

Key Findings	Survey Results (%)	Test Results
Data Retrieval Efficiency	85% identified as slow	40% faster retrieval time
Security Issues in Traditional System	90% identified as a concern	99.9% secure
Satisfaction with ERMS	90% interested in adoption	4.6/5 satisfaction rating

Source: (Author, 2024)

5. Discusion and Conclusion

Overview

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion on the findings, implementation, and anticipated impact of the Citizen Engagement Platform (CEP) within Livingstone City Council. It critically evaluates the challenges identified in the baseline study, the development process, and the CEP's alignment with the council's objectives. Comparisons are drawn between the CEP and other similar systems to highlight its unique features and advantages. Recommendations for future improvements are also presented, providing a roadmap for enhancing the platform and ensuring its sustainability.

Discussion

The Baseline Study

The baseline study revealed a range of inefficiencies and challenges associated with the traditional engagement and data management systems at Livingstone City Council. These include delays in processing feedback, data security concerns, and the heavy reliance on manual processes for record-keeping. Respondents expressed frustration with the time-consuming nature of these processes, which often resulted in poor service delivery and limited accountability. The dissatisfaction with the traditional system underscores the urgency of transitioning to a modern, technology-driven solution. The proposed CEP, which is designed to be web-based and internet-enabled, addresses these concerns by offering remote access, streamlined processes, and enhanced security features. Unlike the traditional system, where citizens had to visit city halls for services, the CEP allows users to engage with the council online, reducing time and resource constraints for both citizens and council staff. Moreover, the baseline study highlighted the importance of ensuring inclusivity in system design. For instance, older employees and citizens with limited digital literacy may require additional support during the transition. Recognizing these challenges, the CEP includes user-friendly interfaces, multilingual support, and training programs to facilitate adoption. These features are critical for ensuring that the platform is accessible to all stakeholders, fostering greater engagement and trust in the council's operations.

Development of the System as a Solution

The development of the CEP followed a usercentric approach, emphasizing ease of use, security, and scalability. The system automates key records management processes, such as creation, tracking, and disposal, ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory standards. This shift from manual to automated workflows represents a transformative step for the council, enhancing efficiency and accountability.

Key features of the CEP include:

Advanced Search Functionalities: These allow users to quickly retrieve records by entering keywords, metadata, or other identifiers, significantly reducing retrieval times.

Metadata Management: By tagging records with relevant metadata, the system improves organization and accessibility, enabling users to locate documents with minimal effort.

Audit Trails: The platform logs all actions performed on records, providing a transparent and tamper-proof history of user interactions. This feature supports internal audits and ensures accountability.

The CEP's adaptability to Livingstone City Council's unique needs is a defining strength. Unlike generic systems that offer basic functionalities, the CEP is tailored to integrate seamlessly with the council's infrastructure, addressing specific challenges such as fragmented workflows and data inconsistencies. This level of customization positions the CEP as a comprehensive solution for modernizing communication and governance within the public sector.

III. Comparison with Similar Works

When compared to other existing systems, the CEP for Livingstone City Council demonstrates several advantages. Many off-the-shelf solutions offer limited functionality, focusing primarily on document storage or basic tracking. In contrast, the CEP integrates advanced features such as automated workflows, compliance with retention schedules, and real-time reporting. These capabilities enhance operational efficiency and support better decision-making. For example, while similar platforms implemented in other local councils primarily address data storage, the CEP goes beyond by incorporating citizen engagement tools. Features such as a public-facing portal allow citizens to submit feedback, track service requests, and access information online. This functionality not only improves service delivery but also fosters transparency and trust between the council and its constituents.

Furthermore, the CEP leverages modern technologies such as cloud computing, which ensures data accessibility and scalability. Unlike traditional systems that require significant hardware investments, the cloud-based architecture of the CEP reduces costs and allows for seamless updates. These innovations position the CEP as a benchmark for other public sector organizations aiming to enhance their communication and data management systems.

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