

RESPONSIVENESS OF ELECTRONIC BUSINESS PERMIT AND LICENSING SYSTEM (EBPLS) IN A CITY LGU: BASIS FOR POLICY FORMULATION

HERBERT BAYUBAY BULWAYAN

Graduate School
St. Louis College of Bulanao
Tabuk City, Kalinga

Abstract - The study assessed the implementation of Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (eBPLS) in Tabuk City LGU. This study utilized a mixed-method approach to evaluate the responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS) and identify areas for improvement. The quantitative component assessed the system's responsiveness, while the qualitative component explored the issues and challenges encountered during its implementation, as well as potential policies to enhance its functionality. Findings revealed that the EBPLS is generally perceived as highly responsive. However, several challenges were identified, primarily slow internet connections and challenges in Digital Transformation. It was recommended that City must established comprehensive the support channels; collaboration with Internet Service Providers (ISPs); conduct regular training sessions to improve the digital literacy of LGU employees, regular system maintenance and data security; continuously gather user feedback through surveys and suggestion boxes will inform ongoing enhancements and engage to stakeholders and conduct benchmarking against best practices from other LGUs will help identify innovative solutions that can be adapted.

Keywords: *Streamlining government services, permits, licenses, business permits*

I. INTRODUCTION

Efficient and transparent licensing procedures are vital for creating a business-friendly environment and stimulating economic growth (World Bank, 2019). Across the globe, countries like Singapore, South Korea, and New Zealand have established exemplary practices and policies in licensing systems, setting standards for reform initiatives worldwide (World Bank, 2019). Singapore's Business Licensing Service (BLS) stands out as a prime example, providing entrepreneurs with a streamlined portal to apply for licenses and permits across diverse sectors (Singapore Government). This approach significantly reduces processing times and administrative burdens, fostering an environment conducive to business growth. Similarly, South Korea's Regulatory Reform Initiative has implemented measures to simplify licensing processes, including the introduction of online application systems and regulatory impact assessments aimed at minimizing barriers to business entry (OECD, 2019). In New Zealand, the Better Regulation Ministerial Group prioritizes regulatory simplification and transparency, leveraging digital platforms to

streamline licensing procedures and enhance regulatory compliance (New Zealand Government).

Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (eBPLS) is a digital platform or software application designed to streamline and automate the process of applying for business permits and licenses. It enables individuals or businesses to submit permit applications, renewals, and payments online, thereby reducing paperwork, processing times, and administrative burdens for both applicants and government agencies (dict.gov.ph).

As observed in other countries, LGUs, especially cities, play a vital role in driving national economic growth. Enhancing the Philippines' competitiveness, which stood at 144 among 183 countries according to the latest World Bank study on "Doing Business 2010 – Reforming through Difficult Times," requires involving LGUs in reforming the business registration process. To comply with processing standards, LGUs were directed to streamline the business permits and licensing system (BPLS), with past efforts by development partners like Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and International Finance Corporation (IFC) benefiting numerous cities and municipalities nationwide.

In his inaugural State of the Nation address, President Benigno Aquino III called on the local government units to "look for more ways to streamline our processes to make business start-ups easier". In keeping with this challenge, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) signed a Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) and an accompanying Joint Administrative Order on August 6, 2010, that set standards for processing applications for new businesses and business renewals. This initiative is envisioned to be the first project under the newly organized Sub-Working Group on Local Investment Reforms that aim to promote local economic development through improvements in the competitiveness of LGUs and the overall investment climate at the local level. For the first time, however, the government will be imposing service standards consistent with Republic Act No. 9485, otherwise known as the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 (ARTA) and the JMC. (BPLS Manual 2010)

Under the new joint circular, LGUs are directed to cut processing time to two days for new business registration and one day for renewals. There must also be a maximum of three steps for both new business registration and renewals in terms of procedure. All LGUs are likewise directed to use a unified form, both in print and

electronic form, with only two signatories required for business permits. Before the issuance of the new joint circular, a similar directive was issued by the DTI and DILG in 2010 to LGUs to facilitate business registration by streamlining transactions and set the processing time to five to 10 days, the maximum number of procedures at five, a unified application form and only two signatories to be able to register a business. According to the co-chair on the National Competitiveness Council for private sector, 75 % of the LGUs across the country was able to comply with the 2010 circular (Philippine Star, August 2018). Aside from streamlining, the new joint circular also urges LGUs to automate and computerize business transactions with the assistance of the DICT to be able to hasten front line services.

As Tabuk City aimed to level-up its business registration program, it adapted and launched its Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System last January 8, 2021. Relative to this, it conducted its first user’s training of business permits for the EBPLS prior to its launching. The said training was in preparation of the EBPLS-Tabuk City launching. It was then facilitated and conducted by personnel of DICT. This project of the CLGU of Tabuk is part of its program on paperless transactions. With these, there was no study yet regarding the implementation of EBPLS in CLGU of Tabuk, thus the researcher sees a need to conduct one.

To further these reforms, Executive Order No. 41, Series of 2023, was issued, mandating the updating of the Citizen’s Charter in the registration of business permits. This order aims to enhance the efficiency and transparency of the business registration process across all LGUs. Additionally, the ARTA-DTI-DILG Joint Memorandum Circular No. Series of 2021 provided comprehensive guidelines for processing business permits, related clearances, and licenses in all cities and municipalities. This circular emphasizes the need for streamlined, efficient, and standardized processes in business permit issuance, which is crucial for improving the ease of doing business at the local level.

The objective of this study is to assess the responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS) in the local government unit (LGU) of Tabuk City. The findings will serve as a basis for the formulation of policies. This research will specifically examine the responsiveness of the eBPLS in meeting the demands of businesses during the permit application process, considering that business license registrations and tax collections are significant sources of revenue for the city. This study will offer useful insights to support the city’s continuous efforts to enhance revenue collection by identifying potential problems and inefficiencies in the system’s implementation. This research aims to deepen our understanding of the responsiveness and impact of the eBPLS system by thoroughly examining the experiences of businesses utilizing it. The findings of this study can guide policy decisions to improve the functionality of the system.

II. METHODS

The researcher employed a multi-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative designs to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study. The quantitative component focused on collecting numerical data to describe the demographic profile of respondents and assess the extent to which support services for Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners have been implemented, providing measurable insights into the reach and effectiveness of these services. The qualitative component explored the real-life experiences, challenges, and concerns of teachers and learners in implementing the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum and accessing support services. Through interviews, observations, and thematic analysis, the study captured the perspectives of participants, offering a nuanced understanding of the

practical realities of IPED implementation. By integrating these methods, the research balanced statistical findings with lived experiences, ensuring a well-rounded analysis. The study was conducted in the Eastern Tabuk District (ETD III) of the Schools Division of Tabuk City. Participants included Grade 5 learners and teachers, selected through simple random sampling based on age, ethnicity, knowledge of support services, and years of service. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire gathered demographic information from teachers, including age, sex, ethnicity, and length of service, and assessed the extent of IPED curriculum implementation in accordance with DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2015, which outlines the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework. The qualitative portion explored challenges encountered by teachers and learners, with video and voice recordings used (with consent) to ensure accurate representation of experiences. Ethical considerations included securing approval from the Schools Division Superintendent and school principals, obtaining written consent from participants, emphasizing voluntary participation, and maintaining strict confidentiality. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize respondent profiles, inferential statistics (t-test and ANOVA) to examine differences in support service implementation, and thematic analysis for qualitative responses to identify recurring challenges and patterns. A 4-point Likert scale was used to interpret quantitative results, ranging from “Not Implemented” (1.00–1.74) to “Fully Implemented” (3.25–4.00). This multi-method approach provided a thorough and ethical investigation into the implementation and effectiveness of IPED curriculum support services.

III. RESULTS

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	19	65.5%
Female	36	34.5%
Age		
20- 30	13	23.6%
31- 40	9	16.4%
41- 50	21	38.2%
51- 60	5	9.1%
61-70	6	10.9%
71- 80	1	1.8%
Classification		
EBOSS Member	10	18.2%
Business Proprietor	45	81.8%
Educational Attainment		
Elem Grad	1	1.8%
High School Grad	2	3.6%
College Graduate	48	87.3%
With Master’s Degree/ Graduate	4	7.3%
Types of Business		
Member(not business proprietor)	10	18.2%
Small	15	27.3%
Medium	15	27.3%
Large		

Majority of the respondents are female with 36 or 34.5%, under age grouped 41-50 with 21 or 38.2%, most of them are business proprietor with 45 or 81.8%, are college graduate with 48 or 87.3% and have small, medium and large business with 15 or 27.3%.

Assessment of the Respondents on the Level of Responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System

Table 2. Assessment of the Respondents on the Level of Responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System

Indicators	Mean	Des
1. Online Application Submission	3.85	HR
2. Document Upload and Management	3.69	HR
3. Payment Processing	3.62	HR
4. Application Status Tracking	3.51	HR
5. Automated Renewal Reminders	3.62	HR
6. Integrated Database	3.67	HR
7. Mobile Accessibility	3.65	HR
8. User Support and Assistance	3.49	HR
Total Average Weighted Mean	3.64	HR

The assessment on the level of responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System is highly responsive as shown by its obtained mean of 3.64. Among the indicators, “The process of submitting business permit and licensing applications online through the EBPLS platform “ got the highest mean of 3.85 or highly responsive, followed by “The feature enabling users to digitally upload and manage necessary documents within the EBPLS system “ with a mean of 3.69 described as highly responsive and indicator “The feature of EBPLS that maintains a unified database of businesses and licenses for efficient record-keeping.” With a mean of 3.67 or described also as highly responsive. On the other hand, indicator “The availability of user support and assistance options within the EBPLS platform” got a mean of 3.49 or described as highly responsive.

Significant Difference on the Assessment of the Respondents on the Level of Responsiveness on Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System

Table 3. Significant Difference on the Assessment of the Respondents on the Level of Responsiveness on Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System as perceived by the respondents when grouped according to profile

Profile	p- value	Interpretation
Sex	0.67	Not Significant
Age	0.31	Not Significant
Classification	0.053	Not Significant
Educational Attainment	0.84	Not Significant
Types of Business	0.11	Not Significant

The profile of the respondents does not have significant relation to the responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System when grouped according to profile. Sex, age, classification, educational attainment and type of business are not significant to assess the level of responsiveness on EBPLS. So, irrespective of sex, age, classification, educational attainment and type of business, the EBPLS is responsive as desired by the CBPL Office and the city government of Tabuk.

Issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of EBPLS

The thematic analysis results reveal that the implementation of Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (eBPLS) in Tabuk City LGU faced some issues and challenges. These challenges include internet connectivity issues, and Challenges in Digital Transformation.

Theme 01: Internet Connectivity Issues

Majority of the participants claimed that the number one in the implementation of E-BPLS is issues on internet connectivity issues. The responsiveness of the EBPLS is heavily influenced by internet connectivity, as it serves as the back bone of the systems’ operations. The explained that the lack of reliable internet infrastructure hampers the ability of local government units (LGUs) to fully implement eBPLS, as the system requires continuous and stable online access to function effectively.

EM4: “Slow internet connection.”

EM5: “The main issue that we encountered in the implementation of EBPLS is internet connection speed.”

EM7: “Regarding Issues and challenges which are encountered were primarily caused by slow internet connection.”

EM8: “The internet connection is unstable occasionally.”

SBO4: “Ang nagiging issue lang ay walang internet connection sa store namin, kailangan pang pumunta sa internet café.”(The issue is that we don’t have an internet connection in our store, so we still need to go to an internet café.)

SBO6: “Pag mahina ang internet kailangang maghintay para maipagpatuloy ang pagfillup.” (When the internet is slow, I have to wait before we can continue filling up)

MBO3: “Slow internet connection.”

MBO10: “Slow internet”

LBO1: “Mahina internet connection.” (Slow internet connection)

LBO10: “Internet connection is very poor.”

Theme 02: Challenges in Digital Transformation

Challenges in digital transformation is another problem of the participants as shown on their responses. Most of them explained that the challenges inherent in digital transformation have profound implications for organizations striving to modernize their operations and remain competitive. Resistance to change, often rooted in organizational culture, can impede the adoption of new technologies and processes, leading to stagnation and missed opportunities. Without

a clear strategy and effective change management, digital initiatives may lack direction and fail to achieve desired outcomes.

EM6: *“User’s acceptance on the new system.”*

EM8: *“Not all business owners know about this system.”*

EM10: *“Lots of complains from those who are not techy persons.”*

SB01: *“No experience yet, iprefer walk in and ask for assistance.”*

LBO15: *“Not all business owners are knowledgeable in accessing the internet so they have difficulties in renewing their business permits.”*

Policies to be Formulated to Improve the Implementation of the EBPLS

The proposed policies to improve the implementation of the E-BPLS in the City Government of Tabuk includes infrastructure enhancement policies, public awareness campaigns, cybersecurity measures, Regular System Maintenance and Upgrades and user feedback mechanisms,

Theme 01: Infrastructure Enhancement Policies

Participants stated that long queue of lines is being experienced because of slow internet connection and proposal for more computers to address these challenges they are experiencing. Moreover, there were also policies to be formulated to improve the implementation of the EBPLS solicited from the participants. One key policy that was consistently suggested is the infrastructure enhancement policies. Participants emphasized the importance of upgrading both the technological infrastructure, such as faster and more reliable internet connectivity, and the physical infrastructure, which includes improving hardware and network systems to ensure efficient system operations.

EM6: *“Additional Internet subscription for fail over.”*

SBO12: *“Maglaan ng pondo para sa pagpapabuti ng koneksyon sa internet at pagupgrade ng mga kagamitan.”* (Allocate funds for improving internet connectivity and upgrading equipment.)

EM10: *“To add more computer to be utilized to ease the burden of long queue of line to save more time for the business owners.”*

Theme 02: Public Awareness Campaigns

The participants emphasized the need for a public awareness campaign policy to enhance the adoption of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS). This policy should focus on educating the public about the system’s benefits, usage procedures, and accessibility. Effective campaigns could use local media, social media platforms, and community outreach programs to reach a wide audience.

This is the same with the findings of Shapira et al., (2019) that capacity building is another key factor, with studies emphasizing the need for technical training programs to enhance digital competencies. Without adequate skill development, adoption remains

difficult. This is consistent with the study of Al-Amaireh (2021). Public awareness campaigns are also crucial in fostering greater acceptance of EBPLS. Educating users about its benefits and processes is essential for ensuring inclusivity and stakeholder involvement.

MBO4: *“Magkaroon ng forum para maidiscuss kung paano ang tamang paraan sa paggamit ng EBPLS at ano ang Magandang maitutulong nito sa business.”* (Conduct a forum to discuss the proper way of using the EBPLS and how it can benefit businesses.)

MBO4: *“Conduct seminars on how to access the EBPLS to all businesses.”*

Theme 03: Cybersecurity Measures

The participants emphasized the need for a public awareness campaign policy to enhance the adoption of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS). This policy should focus on educating the public about the system’s benefits, usage procedures, and accessibility. Effective campaigns could use local media, social media platforms, and community outreach programs to reach a wide audience.

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SBO14: *“Magtatag ng matibay na mga patakaran para sa pamamahala ng datos upang matiyak ang integridad at seguridad naming mga business owners.”* (Establish strong policies for data management to ensure the integrity and security regularly conducting of us business owners)

MBO5: *“No assurance of data privacy.”*

Theme 04: Regular System Maintenance and Upgrades

It was shown that the responses of participants claimed that the City must update their system maintenance regularly to optimize the effect and security of data and transactions. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2022) underscores the importance of periodic system audits and updates to keep up with rapidly evolving technology. ITU notes that failure to maintain systems regularly results in higher operational costs and inefficiencies.

A study by Dhillon et al. (2020) highlights the critical role of regular system maintenance in preventing cybersecurity breaches. It emphasizes that outdated systems are more vulnerable to attacks, and consistent upgrades reduce risks while improving system efficiency.

EM9: *“To have a feature that can consolidate the arrears in business taxes on the tax order of payment.”*

LBO15: *“Makapagsubmit ng documents with e-signature na para hindi na kailangang pumunta sa munisipyo.”* (Submit documents with e-signatures so that there is no need to go to the municipal hall.)

Theme 05: User Feedback Mechanism

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring the continued functionality and efficiency of the system. They said that implementing a user feedback mechanism in the Electronic Business Permits and Licensing System (eBPLS) significantly enhances the system's effectiveness and user satisfaction. By actively collecting and analyzing feedback from business owners, applicants, and other stakeholders, local government units (LGUs) can identify system bottlenecks, usability issues, and areas requiring improvement. This iterative process ensures that the eBPLS evolves to meet the practical needs of its users, leading to more efficient and user-friendly services.

SBO15: *"Lumikha ng mga channel para sa aming mga gumagamit nito para makapagbigay ng feedback dito." (Create channels for us users to provide feedback on it.)*

MBO1: *"Create survey questions for client satisfaction."*

IV. DISCUSSION

The finding implies that the respondents are adult, most are male and finished college. They can pretty-well navigate the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS) for they are adult and college graduates. This is supported with the recommendation from OECD (2021) that educated individuals are more inclined to adopt e-services due to their perceived benefits and ease of use.

The responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS) of the City Government of Tabuk is "highly responsive." This is supported by the study of Monocay et al., (2020), which found that highly urbanized cities in the Philippines generally have a high level of governance performance, including in the provision of technology-enabled services, regardless of the socio-demographic characteristics of the population. This is consistent with the study of Niño et al.,(2024) who said that high satisfaction with the BPLS was also noted, which that the system is easy and efficient leading to improved compliance and more favorable business conditions. That is to say that the system is efficient in addressing user needs. Moreso, a study by Chan et al.,(2020) who asserted that e-government services including streamlined business process design characteristics contributed to their respective service perceptions that influenced perceived service quality that in turn influenced citizen satisfaction. The same result was found out by the study of Alindajao et al., (2023) that their respondents were very satisfied with digitizing business permits and licenses.

On the significant difference on the level of responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System as perceived by the respondents' profile, the results indicates that Sex, age, classification, educational attainment and type of business are not significant to assess the level of responsiveness on EBPLS. This finding is consistent with a study by Rivera (2023) that a demographic profile of an e-government service adopter is one who is likely educated, young (under 50 years old) and has high income.

On the Issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of EBPLS the thematic analysis results revealed that Tabuk City LGU faced some issues and challenges which include internet connectivity issues, and Challenges in Digital Transformation.

Participants claimed that slow internet connection is being experienced by business owners and EBOSS members. They claimed that the number one in the implementation of E-BPLS is issues on internet connectivity issues. The responsiveness of the EBPLS is heavily influenced by internet connectivity, as it serves as the backbone of the systems' operations. Based from the study of Choi, Y et al (2019), the Internet of Things (IoT) technology, which is currently considered the new growth engine of the fourth industrial revolution, affects our daily life and has been applied to various industrial fields. Studies on overcoming the limitations of scalability and stability in a centralized IoT operating environment by employing distributed blockchain technology have been actively conducted. This shows that connectivity issues hinder seamless transaction, causing delays in processing applications. Additionally, Ogotu et al (2024) showed that issues such as low bandwidth and intermittent access posing significant challenges. These difficulties are particularly pronounced in rural areas where connectivity infrastructure is limited. Globally, rural internet access lags significantly behind urban areas, with only 37% of rural households having internet access compared to 72% in urban regions. Lastly, the challenges that was identified is the challenges in digital transformation. Caseti (2022) argues that one key issue is resistance to change. Business owners may be hesitant to embrace new systems due to unfamiliarity which can delay the effective implementation of digital systems.

The proposed policies to improve the implementation of the E-BPLS in the City Government of Tabuk includes infrastructure enhancement policies, public awareness campaigns, cybersecurity measures, Regular System Maintenance and Upgrades and user feedback mechanisms. Majority of the participants stated that long queue of lines is being experienced because of slow internet connection and proposal for more computers to address these challenges they are experiencing. One key policy that was consistently suggested is the infrastructure enhancement policies. Participants emphasized the importance of upgrading both the technological infrastructure, such as faster and more reliable internet connectivity, and the physical infrastructure, which includes improving hardware and network systems to ensure efficient system operations. As stated in the study of Thacker et al.,(2019), Investment in infrastructure is at an all-time high globally. This can be undertaken by the Local Finance Committee of the city government of Tabuk to craft policies with regards to improving network system in preparation to its adoption to become a smart city. The participants also emphasized the need for a public awareness campaign policy to enhance the adoption of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS). This policy should focus on educating the public about the system's benefits, usage procedures, and accessibility. Effective campaigns could use local media, social media platforms, and community outreach programs to reach a wide audience. This is the same with the findings of Shapira et al., (2019) that capacity building is another key factor, with studies emphasizing the need for technical training programs to enhance digital competencies. Without adequate skill development, adoption remains difficult. This is consistent with the study of Al-Amairah (2021). Public awareness campaigns are also crucial in fostering greater acceptance of EBPLS. Educating users about its benefits and processes is essential for ensuring inclusivity and stakeholder involvement.

The participants suggested further the need for a public awareness campaign policy to enhance the adoption of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System (EBPLS). This policy should focus on educating the public about the system's benefits, usage procedures, and accessibility. Effective campaigns could use local

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It was shown that the responses of participants claimed that the City must update their system maintenance regularly to optimize the effect and security of data and transactions. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2022) underscores the importance of periodic system audits and updates to keep up with rapidly evolving technology. ITU notes that failure to maintain systems regularly results in higher operational costs and inefficiencies. A study by Dhillon et al. (2020) highlights the critical role of regular system maintenance in preventing cybersecurity breaches. It emphasizes that outdated systems are more vulnerable to attacks, and consistent upgrades reduce risks while improving system efficiency. Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring the continued functionality and efficiency of the system. According to Agranoff (2019), effective governance systems require active feedback channels to identify gaps and improve services. The study highlights that involving stakeholders in feedback loops strengthens decision-making and public trust in government systems. Republic Act 11032 or otherwise known as the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 mandates government agencies to provide grievance and feedback mechanisms as part of their citizen charters. This ensures that users can raise concerns and that these are acted upon promptly. Lastly, the Civil Service Commission (CSC) has guidelines on the establishment of feedback mechanisms in government offices, promoting transparency and accountability (CSC Memorandum Circular No. 19, s. 2020).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The over-all assessment on the level of responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System is highly responsive. Among the indicators, "The process of submitting business permit and licensing applications online through the EBPLS platform" got the highest mean, followed by "The feature enabling users to digitally upload and manage necessary documents within the EBPLS system" is highly responsive and indicator "The feature of EBPLS that maintains a unified database of businesses and licenses for efficient record-keeping described also as highly responsive. On the other hand, indicator "The availability of user support and assistance options within the EBPLS platform" described as highly responsive. It was shown that there is no significant relation to the responsiveness of the Electronic Business Permit and Licensing System when grouped according to profile. Sex, age, classification, educational attainment and type of business. It was also revealed that the challenges encountered in the implementation of EBPLS the thematic analysis results revealed that Tabuk City LGU faced some issues and challenges which include internet connectivity issues, and Challenges in Digital Transformation. It was also recommended that the City must update their system maintenance regularly to optimize the effect and security of data and transactions to improve the E-BPLS system.

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