

Article

Software Testing Techniques for Improving the Quality of Smart-Home IoT Systems

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Abstract: Software is present in any modern device and is one of the most important components of a new product. IoT systems for smart homes have become more popular in recent years, and testing these systems using advanced methods is very important because it should improve software quality from the beginning of development, resulting in a faster product development overall and a better user experience for the client. In this paper, we describe methods of how to build fast quality assurance software for automation testing in comparison with current trends. Those methods are applicable to teams that are using custom test automation frameworks and working in big projects. The methods have already been applied with success in testing infotainment systems in the automotive industry and our custom-made smart-home IoT system. We will present the system and testing techniques used for testing web interfaces, mobile applications, cross-platform mobile applications, and backend using a new design pattern, called 'Locate, Execute, Expect'. We compare this new design pattern against Page Object Model and will guide you on how to integrate it in an existing project or how to use it with Gherkin. In conclusion, we will see the main advantages of using this technique and how much faster it is in a real-life scenario, we will learn how it can replace Gherkin, and we will also see the main disadvantages.

Keywords: automation; custom automation framework; software testing; IoT; automotive; improve; quality assurance; API testing; smart home; embedded systems testing



Citation: Vadan, A.-M.; Miclea, L.-C. Software Testing Techniques for Improving the Quality of Smart-Home IoT Systems. *Electronics* **2023**, *12*, 1337. <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics12061337>

Academic Editor: Yeong-Seok Seo

Received: 6 January 2023

Revised: 8 March 2023

Accepted: 9 March 2023

Published: 11 March 2023



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1. Introduction

All modern devices contain pieces of software, and vendors are trying to decrease the development time of their products. Software testing is a very important component of the development process, and in order to achieve a fast development process with good quality assurance, we sometimes need to use custom automation frameworks and apply different techniques in testing. Those techniques are applied in each team differently and vary from project to project. In this paper, we will show you how to apply a new design pattern, Locate, Execute, Expect (LEE), for creating a custom automation tool or framework that can help teams to scale their testing project with ease and also help quality assurance engineers to write tests without coding knowhow. We started to use this technique in different projects in 2018. It was first applied in testing mobile applications using technologies such as UiAutomator or Espresso for Android and XCUITest for iOS. At this point in time, we are able to extend the applicability of this technique for web applications, application programming interface (API) testing, and embedded system testing.

Design patterns describe ways to solve different problems in programming. In the testing field, the industry standard is Page Object Model, also known as POM, which was first introduced in the early 2000s. In 2007, Martin Fowler wrote an article titled 'Page Object', in which he described a solution for separating the tests from the implementation details of the applications. At that point in time, the number of web applications was rising very fast, and their complexity also started to increase. Because the manual testing was very

time-consuming, test automation solutions started to appear. Selenium community adopted the POM design pattern quickly, and it became a standard technique. Since that moment, many design patterns have been created, but only a few of them were specialized for test automation. In general, in most automation frameworks for testing, we can use design patterns such as Page Object Model, Model-View-Controller, Test Data Builder, Object Mother, Singleton, Factory Method, and Decorator. In newer automation frameworks, it is more common to find different approaches such as Behavior-Driven Development (BDD) or Test-Driven Development. However, POM and BDD are the most common and the current state of the art.

One of our goals is to prove that there is room for improvement in the testing area and that we can use simple techniques to structure the code of a custom automation framework in a much simpler way, no matter what type of application we are testing. We try to explain how to use our design pattern in different scenarios, such as web testing, API testing, or mobile application testing since those are most common use-cases of automation testing. Another goal is to simplify testing of a system and use a common approach across all parts of the application or system. We will present the results of using this technique in real-life projects, used in testing mobile applications, embedded and IoT systems.

We choose to apply this design pattern in a system testing, like our smart-home system, to prove that it can be applied not only for testing an application but also for the entire ecosystem, using available programming languages that support object-oriented programming. We will try to describe main use-cases where a design pattern specifically for testing might apply. The results should prove that our design pattern can be easily applied in a project where POM was applied, that it is easy to adopt and replace POM, but also to extend it to API testing.

In future, we desire to monitor the efficiency of the new design pattern by comparing multiple factors such as time needed to implement a test case, time spent for maintenance, reusability of the methods, and whether we can apply this design pattern in already built programs for automation testing. Another point that we want to focus on in future is to investigate whether we can use this design pattern to write unit tests.

We will describe next our smart-home system in order to understand the level of complexity of the system being tested, while we will apply the Locate, Execute, Expect design pattern. We will demonstrate how to apply the design pattern in situations such as user interface testing for web, mobile, or desktop applications; in a combination with Gherkin; in cross-platform mobile applications; for API testing; and in embedded systems. Our system includes all these types of applications or scenarios. We created our own smart-home system using popular microcontrollers from different manufacturers, such as Raspberry Pi, Espressif (ESP), IP cameras, Nvidia Jetson, and Banana Pi. For our system, we choose all microcontrollers based on one important aspect: connectivity. In the era we are leaving, connectivity is very important, so most of our data from sensors are collected using microcontrollers that can send them to a central device wirelessly. An important thing to mention is the fact that in this article we are not referring to corrections applied to real data from sensors or any calibration methods for the sensors, and we will not get into details of how to replicate the system. We will present to you our smart-home system and how to test the software that is collecting and displaying data to the user. First, let us describe what hardware we chose for our project and then to look over the software architecture.

1.1. Hardware Required for Our Custom Smart-Home System

For our project, in the beginning, we chose only products from Raspberry Pi because there were cheap and easy to find. These microcontrollers offer great performance for the cost, and we can find a large number of sensors compatible with them. After a while, the semiconductor crisis appeared, and we were not able to find the initial hardware that we thought was a good choice. Additionally, we discovered that some sensors are very large, and if we want to create a slim design of the human-machine interface (HMI), we are also limited. From this point of view, we were very limited in what hardware we could choose.

In the beginning, we developed an API in Python. Some sensors should be monitored in real time and some just a few times per minute. From this perspective, our hardware must be powerful enough to support our requirements. At that point, we looked for a replacement for Raspberry Pi, and we chose Nvidia Jetson Nano. Later, we decided to try Banana Pi as the main hub. The heat generated by these microcontrollers has a significant effect on the temperature, humidity, pressure, and TVOC sensors; moreover, they are too big and expensive to be used solely for data reading. We chose Raspberry Pi Pico in the beginning, and for wireless data transmission, we selected ESP. Just a few months ago, Raspberry launched Raspberry Pi Pico W, which has a wireless module integrated. Our list of microcontrollers is shown in the following table, Table 1 [1–10].

Table 1. List of microcontrollers.

Microcontroller Type	CPU	Memory	Connectivity
Raspberry Pi Zero W	1 Ghz BCM2835	512 MB RAM, micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth
Raspberry Pi Zero 2 W	4 × 1 Ghz BCM2710A1	512 MB RAM, micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth
Raspberry Pi 3A+	4 × 1.4 Ghz BCM2838B0	512 MB RAM, micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth
Raspberry Pi 4 B	4 × 1.5 Ghz BCM2711B0	2,4,8 GB RAM, micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth
Nvidia Jetson Nano	4 × 1.43 Ghz	2 GB RAM, micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth optional
Banana Pi M5	4 × 2 Ghz S905X3	4 GB RAM, 16 GB EMMC and micro-SD card	40 GPIO pins, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth are optional
Raspberry Pi Pico	2 × 133 Mhz RP2040	2 MB	40 GPIO pins, USB-serial
Raspberry Pi Pico W	2 × 133 Mhz RP2040	2 MB	40 GPIO pins, USB-serial, Wi-Fi
ESP-8266	80/160 Mhz ¹ L106	4 MB	8 (26, 30) ² GPIO pins, Wi-Fi
ESP-32	2 × 160/240 Mhz ¹ LX6	8 MB	16 (or more) ² GPIO pins, Wi-Fi

¹ The frequency can be set during programming. ² The number of pins might be different based on the board maker.

We designed a web interface to display the data collected from sensors and installed it on all microcontrollers with 512 MB of RAM or more. Each system is equipped with a touch screen display, with screen size ranging from 4 to 10 inches. The screen resolutions vary from 840 × 465 pixels to 2560 × 1440 pixels due to different sizes and screen densities. We used multiple screen formats, such as 1 × 1 or 16 × 9, because we also studied how the performance of the microcontrollers is affected by the screen size, and we took into consideration what options we can offer to a real user. Customers usually have different budgets or wishes, so when we think about developing an IoT system, we need to imagine how the customer will use the final product and cover the most important aspects. In this case, we tried to use displays available on the market that can be used with our selection of microcontrollers, and the main characteristics are shown in Table 2 below.

The entire system can run headless or with a virtual display if a display is not attached. We can access the web interface based on the IP address of the microcontroller. Because the small microcontrollers do not have capabilities to run a complex application, the data are sent to a host wirelessly, or we can read the data output via a serial connection.

Table 2. List of microcontrollers and display configuration.

Microcontroller Type	Display	Resolution (pixels)	Connectivity
Raspberry Pi Zero 2 W	4 inches	720 × 720	HDMI + USB
Raspberry Pi 3A+	5 inches	840 × 465 (1920 × 1080) ¹	MIPI DSI
Raspberry Pi 3A+	7 inches	1024 × 600	HDMI + USB
Raspberry Pi 3A+	10 inches	1280 × 800	HDMI + USB
Raspberry Pi 4 B (8 GB)	5.5 inches	2560 × 1440	HDMI + USB
Raspberry Pi 4 B (4 GB)	5 inches	840 × 465 (1920 × 1080) ¹	MIPI DSI
Raspberry Pi 4 B (2 GB)	5 inches	840 × 465 (1920 × 1080) ¹	MIPI DSI

¹ Typical screen resolution is 840 × 465, but it can be forced to 1920 × 1080 pixels.

Most of the sensors are connected to microcontrollers via the I2C interface. Some of them have a proprietary interface using one wire or they use a serial communication. In Figure 1, we can observe a generic schema of sensor connection to a Raspberry Pi [11].

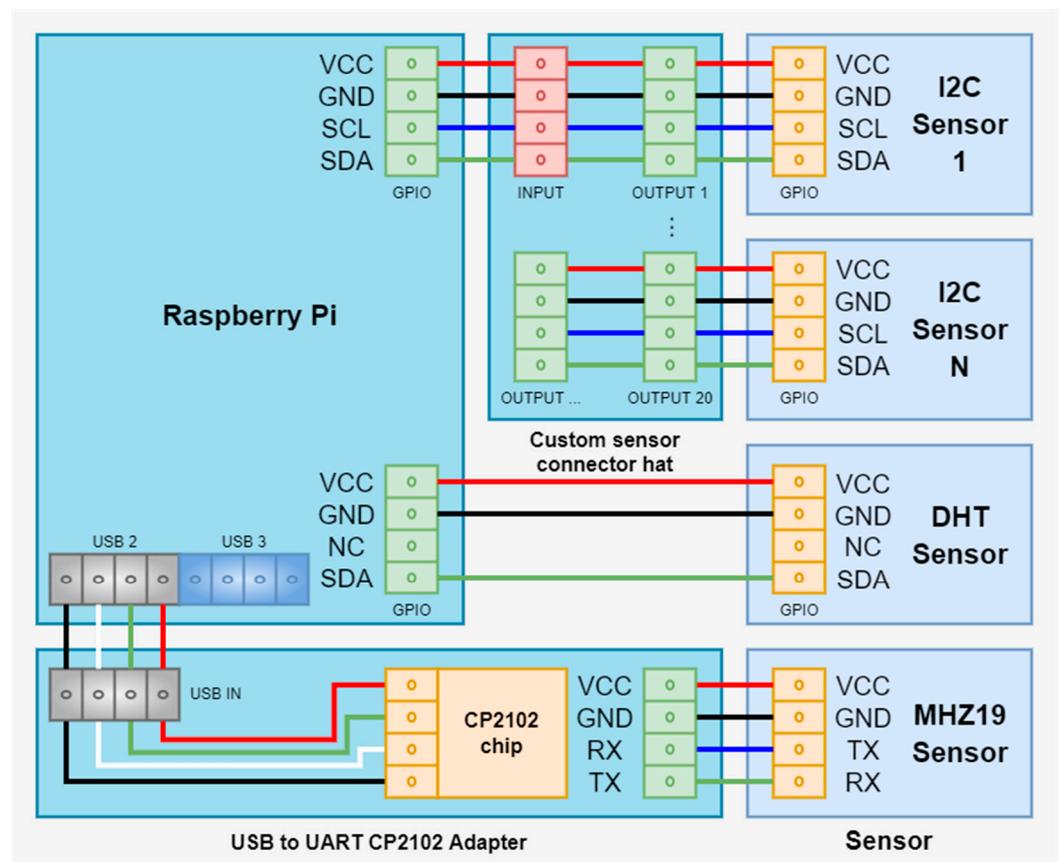


Figure 1. Example of sensors connection with a Raspberry Pi [11].

The schema can be applied to all microcontrollers, in general. For example, the ESP8266 that we are using is a small board and does not have a 5-volt VCC, and it has only two IO ports that can be used, so we can use only one type of interface at once. Some sensors require 5-volt VCC; they have the IO ports working with 3.3 volts, and in case of failure, they can burn the GPIO ports of the controller. In this case, is recommended to protect the GPIO ports with some resistors or you can use an adapter in case you are using a serial communication. As we can see in Figures 2 and 3, some sensor modules and adapters already have integrated protections.

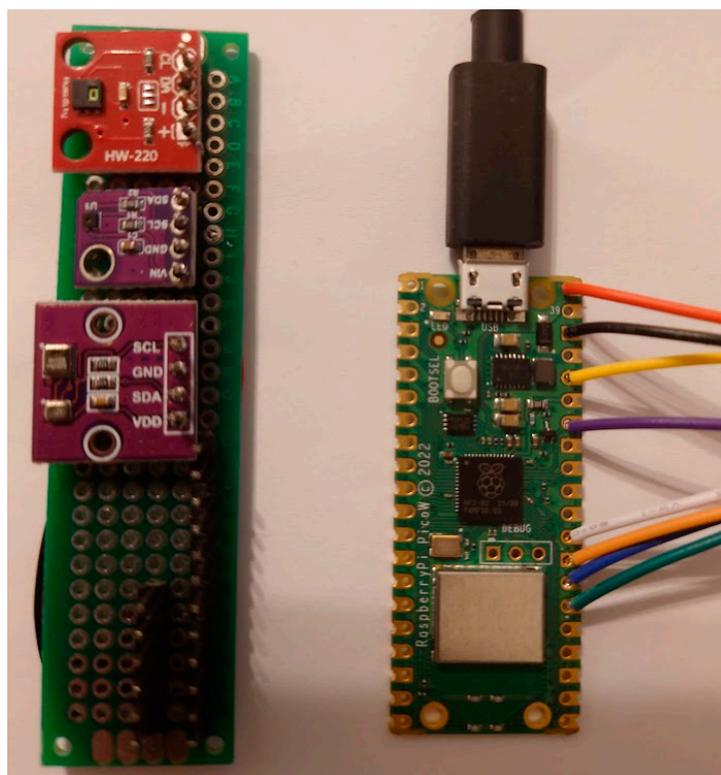


Figure 2. Example of sensor connection with a Raspberry Pi Pico W.

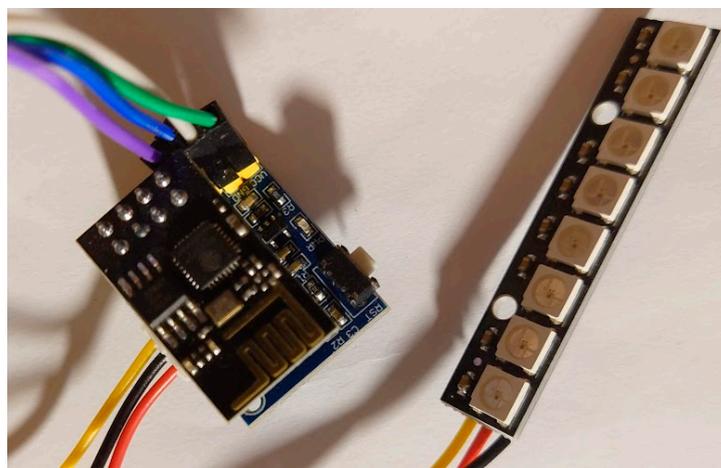


Figure 3. Example of ambient light LED matrix connection with an ESP8266.

In Figure 2, we can observe a picture of a Raspberry Pi Pico W and the custom adapter where we wired four temperature sensors. The sensors are arranged on three boards, the red board having an HTU21D sensor, followed by an SHT40, and the last board having two sensors, a BMP280 and an AHT20. We are using a module like this when we calibrate the temperature sensors attached to a single board computer such as Raspberry Pi due the fact that those powerful microcontrollers are dissipating heat, and the sensors attached to them are reading wrong values of the ambient temperature. The wiring allows us to move the sensors at about 20 cm away from the microcontroller. In this way, we make sure we can obtain relevant data, closer to reality. Moreover, we are using a combination of sensors because each sensor can have a small error, they are built by different manufacturers, and they use different technologies. In Figure 3, we have an ESP8266 with eight GPIO pins used to control the LED matrix. This ESP8266 can be found in different implementations, with eight pins like in this example or with more, in general with 26 pins if the board includes a

screen or up to 30 pins without a screen. Some boards integrate a camera connector, where you can plug in a camera with a resolution of up to 2 megapixels.

In Figure 4, there are three examples of cooling methods we tried to use for Raspberry Pi boards and the first version of the web interface running on a 5-inch screen [11].



Figure 4. Example of the web interface and cooling methods for a Raspberry Pi [11].

In our research, we noticed that the temperature readings are not closer to reality because our case design was wrong. We put the sensors closer to the Raspberry Pi, and because the CPU generates a lot of heat, the data can include errors of more than 5° Celsius in the case of temperature sensors. Some manufacturers split the cases into two modules, but they are still wrong. For example, we can find nice, small products that have a traditional size of a normal European wall switch or plug adapter, 86 mm by 86 mm. One part contains the relays and the power supply, while the other part contains the screen, the microcontroller, and the temperature sensor. The problem in this design is that the screen and the microcontroller generate enough heat to modify the output of the temperature sensor by 4° Celsius, depending of course by the ambient temperature. We studied this problem a little, and our final Raspberry Pi design includes the temperature, humidity, and pressure sensors in a separate compartment on the left or right side of the screen. The microcontroller is installed in a compartment which will be inside the wall, while the screen box is on top of the microcontroller box, and the left and right sides of the screen are not in contact with a heat source. In Figure 5, you can see the box containing the screen and sensor compartments. The temperature, humidity, pressure, and air quality sensor compartment must have a very good ventilation, so it must have holes on the right side. If we want to provide a good air flow for the microcontroller, we can have holes in the compartments marked in gray.

1.2. Custom Smart-Home Software Overview

We are using multiple types of microcontrollers, but we can categorize them into two categories: single-board computers (SBCs) and single-chip computers (SCCs). We use SCCs with sensors connected to transmit the data from sensors to a backend or to control the microcontrollers from the main SBC. For example, ESP8266 is used to send data from a Raspberry Pi Pico over Wi-Fi or to control ambient lights in a room, as we saw in Figure 3. It has a small configuration backend, where you can specify the Wi-Fi network and the main microcontroller to send data. If we use a USB-to-serial adapter, we can also configure it via serial interface.

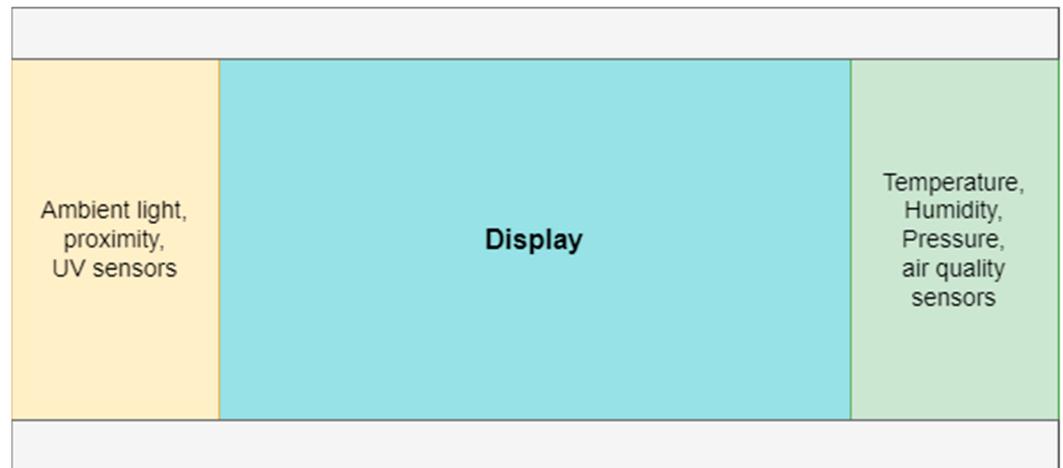


Figure 5. Display and sensor box arrangement.

The backend is written in Python, and it is responsible for all the communication between the main board, sensors, other microcontrollers, and client applications. We can observe in Figure 6 the main responsibilities.

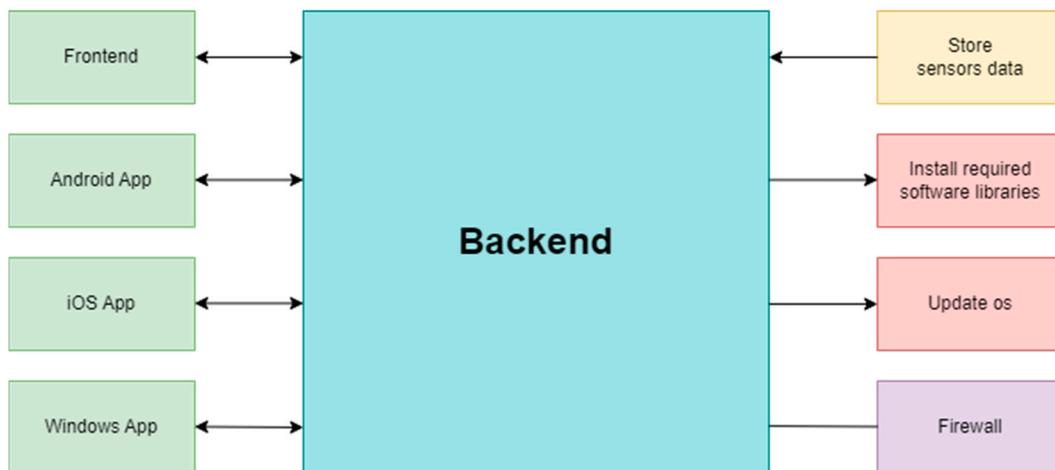


Figure 6. Main backend responsibilities.

On the left side of the diagram, in the green boxes, we have the frontend, which consists of a web interface launched directly when the SBC starts. The main screen of the interface is presented in Figure 7. We can see the rooms configured in the entire system and have an overview of sensor data. We can also see different parameters of the microcontroller, and in future the user will be able to configure it. At this point in time, the configuration of the microcontroller is possible only from other clients, such as Android, iOS, or Windows client. The architecture of the system can be considered a generic one and is similar to what other researchers are building in their IoT systems [12,13].

The Android, iOS, and Windows applications, exemplified in Figure 8, are built using Xamarin and interact directly with the main module, which we configure in the application itself. The main module can be represented by any SBC microcontroller. A microcontroller can be used to define multiple rooms, and since we can use wireless sensors, we can choose what sensors are present in a room. The backend has a redirect endpoint which is responsible for getting data from the correct module. Each module is automatically configuring sensors found on the I2C interface or directly connected via USB or serial at each startup. In configuration, we have a property that sets the I2C address of the sensor and IP address of the module where the sensor is connected, so in this way, we make sure that we retrieve data for correct sensor, even if we are using the redirect endpoint.

However, the configuration of the rooms is stored only on the main module. Under the 'Main device networking settings' section from the client application, you can define a web address, so you can access the backend via the internet. As a result, all endpoints that are not defined will redirect you to a 404 page. As a security feature, if someone tries bad endpoints multiple times, the connection to that machine is denied, and that person is no longer able to reach the module. In future, we plan to also encrypt the requests data for extra security.

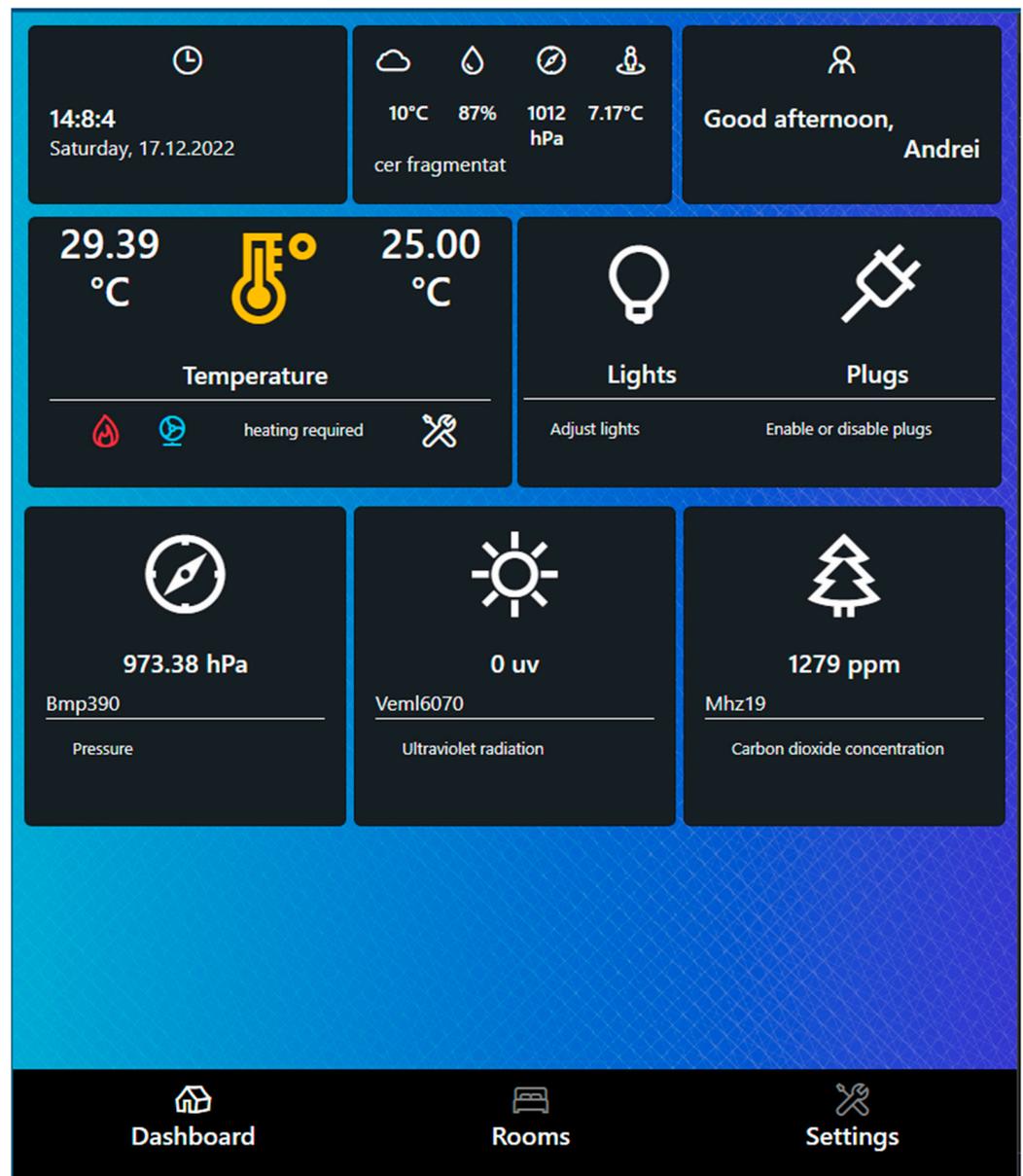


Figure 7. Main frontend screen.

The backend is started at the system boot, via a 'cron' job which is executing a script. The script starts a browser with a loading screen and, in the background, checks for operating system updates and backend dependencies. If some requirements are not met, the script will automatically request an operating system update and will install the required updates. In future, we will also finish the automatic update of the system and backend. For this feature to be completed, we also need a backup mechanism. For future development, we would like to add features such as security cameras. The backend should be able to

save pictures from the security cameras. At this point in time, we are able to see a live feed from the security cameras using RTP protocol.

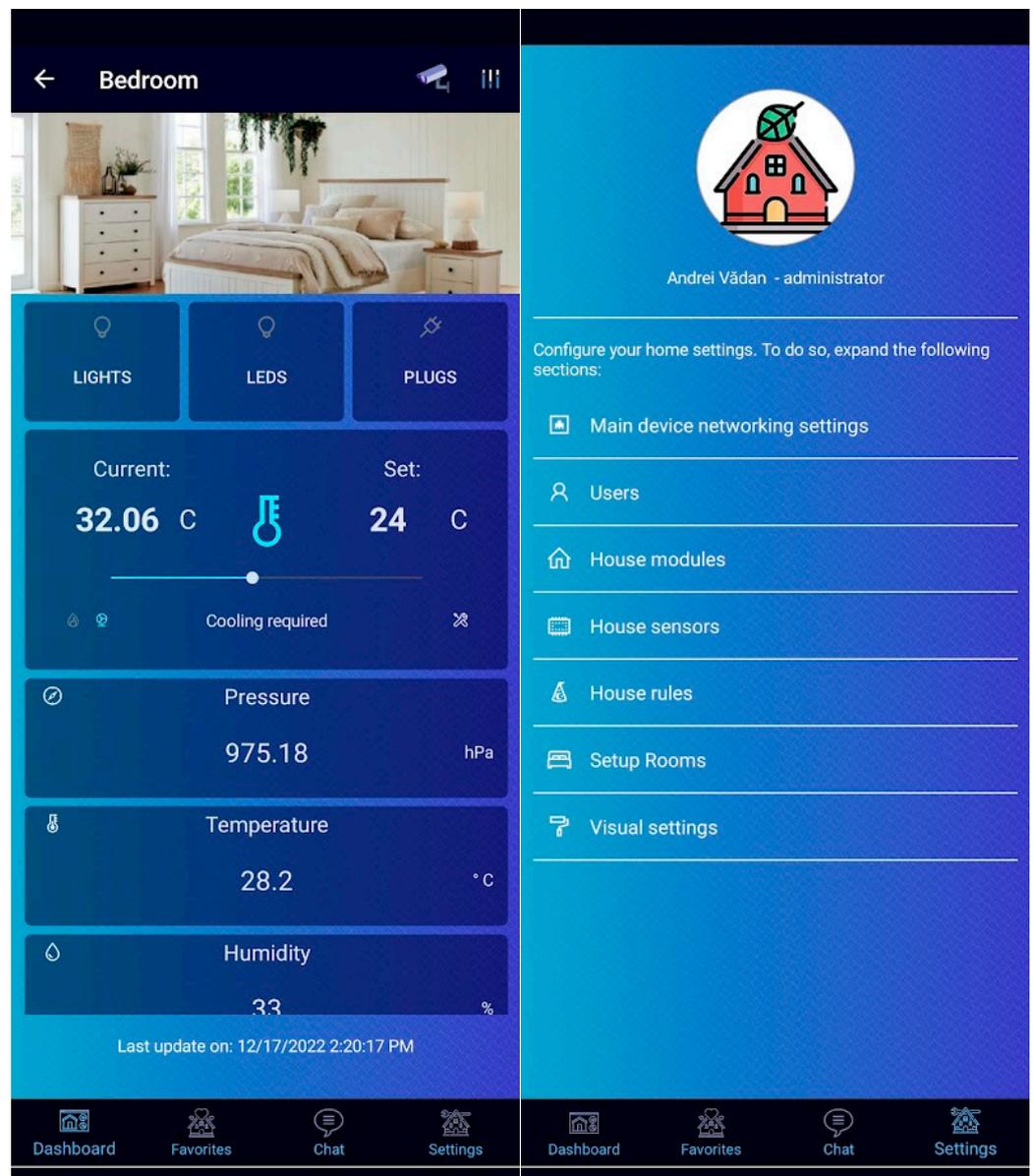


Figure 8. Android application room and settings screens.

1.3. Design Patterns and Automation Frameworks

In general, when we discuss testing an entire system, we must have automation testing in mind. Complex systems or applications require custom automation frameworks because current software testing solutions might not cover all requirements. For mobile applications, such as native Android or iOS applications, we can use built-in tools, which are more powerful and provide better results in general, and of course, we can benefit from white-box testing or, in a worst-case scenario, gray-box testing. When we discuss applications built for testing or testing a website or API, we generally use black-box testing techniques. Further on, we will describe how to build a custom testing framework using simple techniques that will simplify the work, reduce the development time, and provide faster results when testing, no matter what technology we use. Of course, there are multiple applications built for automation, and you can probably apply our methods using these kinds of applications, but we did not try them. We will continue to focus on custom

automation frameworks. We picked our smart-home system because it has a web interface, an API, and a mobile client, which means that we will present to you how we can apply this design pattern in testing a system with a complexity like ours. Because we are discussing a design pattern, we can choose any programming language that we desire, so we will show you some pseudo-code that should give you an idea about how you can apply the design pattern. When we refer to user interface testing, we are thinking about web, mobile, or desktop applications. First, we will present a small introduction about design patterns and Page Object Model, and then we will discuss Locate, Execute, Expect and its application in different scenarios.

When they design new applications or features, developers usually try to create an architecture of the application using design patterns. For the first time, the term design patterns appeared in building construction [14], and in 1994, for the first time, four developers wrote a book about design patterns in coding [15]. Since then, in building custom automation frameworks, automation developers have used the Page Object Model design pattern. This design pattern has multiple code layers and is very complex. An example diagram can be found in Figure 9.

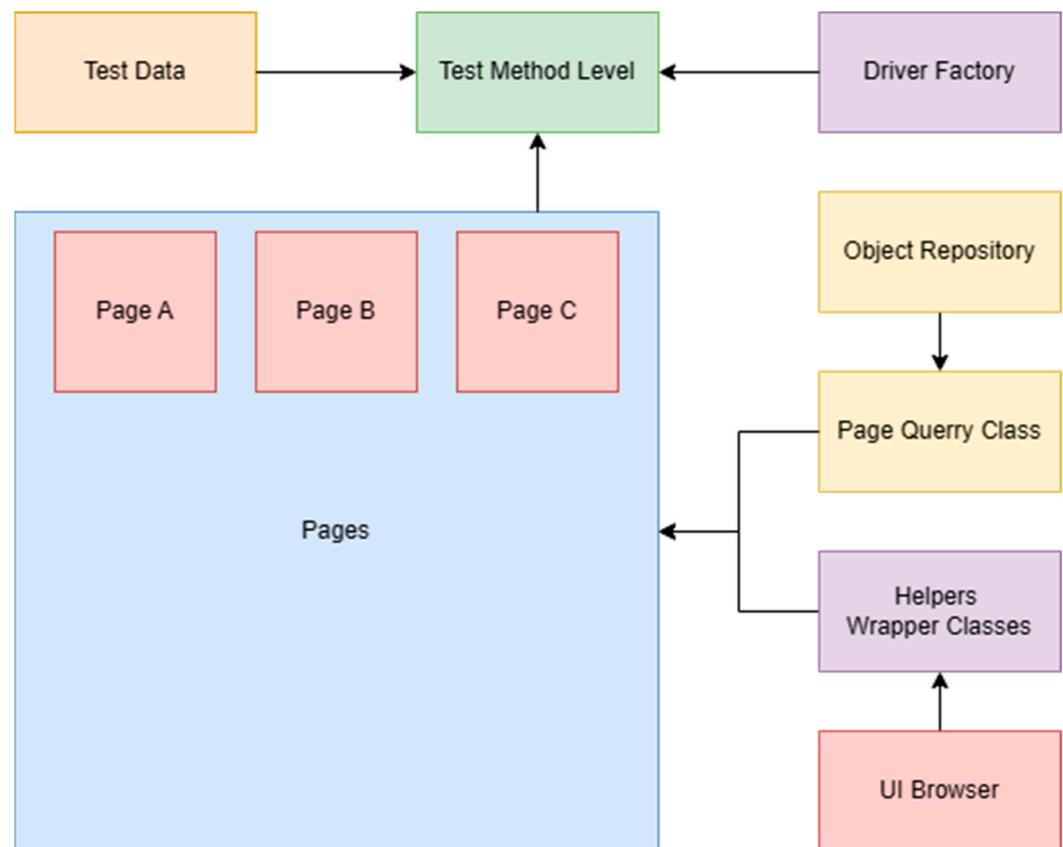


Figure 9. Page Object Model design pattern applied on a webpage testing.

The main issue with this design pattern is that most of the automation engineers implement it incorrectly, and instead of providing advantages, it usually ends up resulting in disadvantages. For example, on many occasions, we found people mixing object repository class with page classes and duplicate methods from Page A in Page B. Another issue is that these are also not able to create component pages. When a developer creates an application or designs it, he identifies the common components and defines them in code once, then he reuses them over and over again. The problem in automated testing is that a lot of automation quality assurance engineers are lacking in programming skills, especially the object-oriented programming ones. This means that they cannot identify correctly reused components by programmers and create a single page for the component, one class for

steps, etc. To give you an example from a real-life scenario, we should imagine a media player that can play music from different sources. You can find this kind of media player in cars for example. A tester tends to create a separate page for each media source page, even if most of the components and behaviors are identical. For this kind of issue, instead of using the Page Object Model design pattern, we are going to show you how to use the Locate, Execute, Expect design pattern. We will present how to apply it in testing a smart-home system such as the one presented in the introduction. We will discuss testing web applications, user interface testing, and use it to test the API. Before that, we will shortly discuss design patterns and describe in a few words both Page Object Model and Locate, Execute, Expect [16].

We can classify design patterns into three types: behavioral, creational, and structural. The behavioral patterns describe interactions between objects and focus on how objects communicate with each other. They can reduce complex flow charts to mere interconnections between objects of various classes. Behavioral patterns are concerned with algorithms and the assignment of responsibilities between objects. Behavioral patterns describe not just patterns of objects or classes but also the patterns of communication between them. These patterns characterize complex control flow that is difficult to follow at run-time. They shift your focus away from the flow of control to let you concentrate just on the way objects are interconnected.

Behavioral class patterns use inheritance to distribute behavior between classes. The most common design patterns are the Template Method and Interpreter pattern. Creational patterns are used to create objects for a suitable class that serves as a solution for a problem. They support the creation of objects in a system and allow objects to be created in a system without having to identify a specific class type in the code, so you do not have to write large, complex code to instantiate an object. Structural patterns define how classes and objects form larger structures. Structural class patterns use inheritance to compose interfaces or implementations [17–19].

1.4. Page Object Model Design Pattern

There are many conceptual maps of what Page Object Model looks like, and in the following sentences, we will briefly describe its components or code abstraction layers, which were shown in Figure 9 above. The Test Method level is the layer where test case is described using action and validation steps. This file handles all inputs and is responsible for data source binding. Page Factory is an optional layer, and it is used if you want to 'pre-initialize' the UI elements before run-time. This is done using Selenium 'FindBy' annotations. To do so, you need to create properties for elements of a page class and use an attribute to set the identifier that will be used to find the element. In this way, you will make an alternative of the 'driver.FindElement(s)' function from Selenium. In our opinion, the 'FindElement' function gives you more flexibility, and it is easier to find, wait, try to validate that an element is not in the page, or iterate through a list of elements. Page object classes and their methods represent each logical division of an application. For example, each page from the application should have its own page class. Of course, if we have multiple reused components, we can divide them into subcomponents, so we create a page for each subcomponent of a page. An example of this kind of usage is if we have a media player. The main controls are the same; instead of creating a page for music and a page for videos, we can reuse the player buttons, and we define a class for that. Driver Factory initializes the driver to provide support for testing. In Selenium, it is used to initialize the browser or to connect to a remote browser. For Appium, it can be used to connect to device for example. Object Repository is not always implemented by automation engineers, but it is useful. In this layer, you abstract the automation identifiers from the page class and keep all the UI element properties in a file that can be queried from an object repository class. This reduces maintenance time in case of application updates. Having an object repository adds another level of modularity to your solution and separates the object locators from the page classes. Helper or wrapper classes are very useful to create a class where you

write wrappers or different functions. Implementing wrappers can help users to manage error handling, create smarter waits, timeouts, fail safes, or retries, but can also help with logging steps or errors. In the test data source layer, you can define a data source for the test method and use test data from a file such as a CSV, XML, Excel, or even a SQL database. Data-driven testing is vital to cover more terrain by executing multiple test iterations of the same test case with different data scenarios, saving code and time [17,18].

1.5. Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern

The Locate, Execute, Expect design pattern has less code layers than POM. We have a layer called Locate, where we define the methods to identify the UI elements and the automation identifiers of the UI elements. It is recommended that you create files for each page and define identifiers in a page or create nested dictionaries for UI elements. To give you a concrete example, if you go back to Figure 8, you will see some of the mobile application screens. The application has four main screens, 'Dashboard', 'Favorites', 'Chat', and 'Settings'. When we click on a room on the 'Dashboard' page, we open a page that displays information collected from sensors, and we can perform different actions and open other pages. For each page in the application, we create a page class in code, and we describe the automation identifiers. For menu, we can create a separate page as we will normally do using POM. In the 'Locate' class, we will create a nested dictionary, where the main dictionary will have multiple sub-dictionaries. The 'Execute' layer contains a class which should contain main methods that perform actions or handle waits. If we are testing systems and we have a large number of methods, we can split the code into multiple classes based on the pages we are using or applications. The 'Expect' layer is similar to 'Execute', but here we put just the verification steps. One important thing to mention is that the verification layer does not include methods from the action layer, but the 'Execute' layer can include methods from 'Expect'. In this way, we avoid circular dependencies. In Figure 10, we can notice the generic diagram of the LEE design pattern [16].

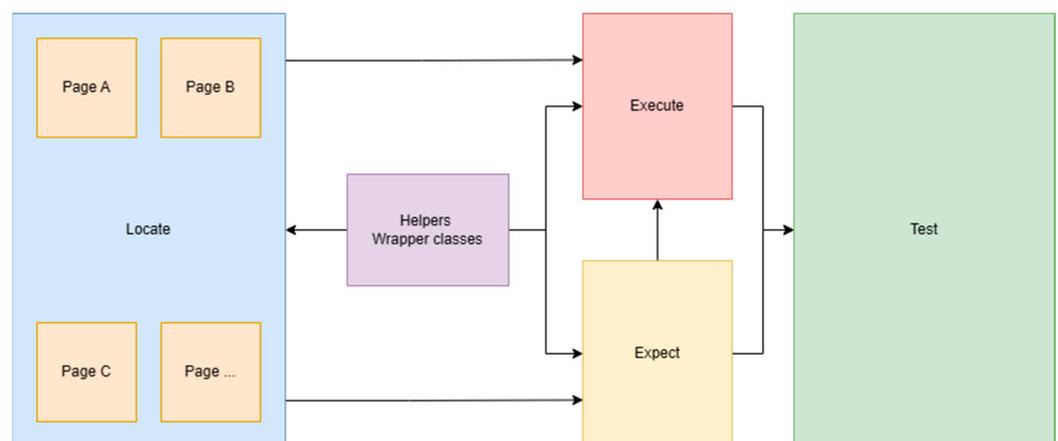


Figure 10. LEE design pattern diagram.

If it is a must, we can include helper classes, but those are not considered a part of the LEE. If we want to combine this design pattern, we can also use it along with POM without any problem. This is because the 'Locate' layer is basically represented by the object repository and page classes, we need to reuse methods defined in an action and verification class. In this way, the methods from page object classes are using generic methods and the maintenance of the code is much simpler. Having a combination of those design patterns is not ideal however, because when used with a combination of wrappers, they can result in a lot of problems, especially with interpreted programming languages. Additionally, when we try to debug, we go from method to method, and for beginners, it can be a hassle.

2. Testing the System by Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern

2.1. Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern for UI Testing in General

In this paragraph, we will demonstrate how to apply the Locate, Execute, Expect design pattern in a generic framework for testing UI in general. For this example, we should imagine a simple login page of an application. What should be visible on a login page? We must have a text box input for the username and password and a login button at the least. We tried to give a basic example in Figure 11. When we click on the 'Login' button, if the credentials we provide in the test work, we should be redirected to another page, and if these credentials are not correct, we should see a pop-up with an error message [16].

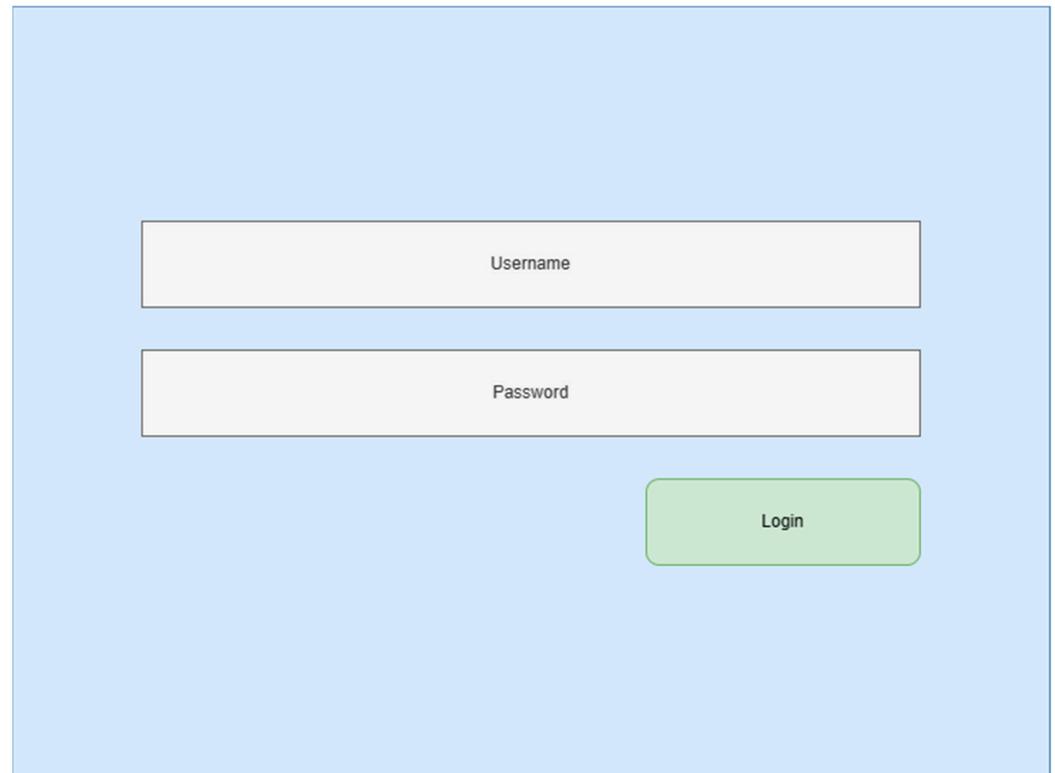


Figure 11. Login page example.

We will apply the following test case to test this page: the user will insert 'my_email@email.com' in the 'Username' field, 'mypassword' in the 'Password' field, and will press the 'Login' button. Because the credentials are not working, we should see a pop-up displaying this message: 'Sorry, your credentials did not work!'. This translated in code should result in 'Test variables' constant class, where we should see the username, the password, and the error message. The Locate layer should contain two classes, one related to the login page and one related to the error pop-up page. In these pages, we define the automation identifiers or locators. The Execute layer should contain a class, Actions, where we should define two methods, 'click_on_element' and 'type_text_into_textfield'. In the Expect layer, we can create a class Verifications, where we also need two methods, 'compare_text' and 'check_if_element_is_displayed'. In Figure 12, there is a pseudo-code of the implementation using a Selenium approach [16].

In our pseudo-code, in the test definition zone, you can notice the sequence of 'execute' and 'expect' keywords, followed by the methods. If we use correct keywords in method naming, the test itself becomes easy to read even for non-technical people. Another important thing to mention is the fact that a test should end with a verification, because we have an enumeration of steps, and the final verification should be the purpose of the test case. When using this approach, you create verification methods, and you make sure in the methods that a check is performed. Once a method was checked and used, we know that

the method is working correctly, and we can reuse it over and over again. For example, when we use POM, one of the common mistakes is that the automation engineer is copying the method from another class and duplicates code, and they usually make changes just in one place. This can be corrected by having LEE integrated with POM.

```

-----Test variables class-----
email_text = "my_email@email.com"
password_text = "mypassword"
login_error_message = "Sorry, your credentials did not work!"

-----Login identifiers class-----
email_textbox = webdriver.find_element(By.ID, "email_textbox")
password_textbox = webdriver.find_element(By.ID, "pass_textbox")
login_button = webdriver.find_element(By.ID, "login_button")

-----Pop-up identifiers class-----
popup_error_root = webdriver.find_element(By.ID, "popup_root")
popup_message = webdriver.find_element(By.ID, "error_message")

-----Execute layer / Actions class-----
def click_on_element(element: UiElement):
    element.click()

def type_text_into_textfield(element: UiElement, text: String):
    element.text = text

-----Expect layer / Verifications class -----
def check_if_element_is_displayed(element: UiElement):
    assert element.is_displayed(), "Element '{element}' is not displayed"

def compare_text(element: UiElement, required_text):
    assert element.text != required_text ,
        "Text on '{element}' does not match! \n
        Current text found: '{element.text}', \n
        Expected text: '{requiredtext}'"

-----Login test suite-----
#Assuming we start directly from login page
def test_login_with_bad_credentials():
    execute.type_text_into_textfield(LoginLocators.email_textbox, Constants.email_text)
    execute.type_text_into_textfield(LoginLocators.password_textbox, Constants.password_text)
    expect.compare_text(LoginLocators.email_textbox, Constants.email_text)
    expect.compare_text(LoginLocators.password_textbox, Constants.password_text)
    execute.click_on_element(LoginLocators.login_button)
    expect.check_if_element_is_displayed(PopupLocators.popup_error_root)

```

Figure 12. Pseudo-code of the login test example [16].

2.2. Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern with Gherkin

Previously we demonstrated what a simple login test looks like using pseudo-code. With LEE, we do not have limitations in terms of programming languages, and we can optionally use the current international BDD approach, Gherkin. This is widely used in most custom automation frameworks, and one of the reasons for this is because it makes reading a test case much easier. If we want to apply this to our test from Figure 12, we need to create additional files for step implementation and change the way we define the test case. We can reuse all other methods because they can remain the same. An example of this approach is displayed in Figure 13 [16].

```

-----Login steps-----
@step ('User inputs the credentials')
def input_credentials():
    execute.type_text_into_textfield(LoginLocators.email_textbox, Constants.email)
    execute.type_text_into_textfield(LoginLocators.password_textbox, Constants.password)
    ...
@step ("Check text: {required_text}")
def compare_popup_text(required_text):
    expect.compare_text(PopupLocators.popup_message, required_text)
-----Login test suite feature file-----
#Assuming we start directly from login page
Feature: Login functionality
Scenario: Test login with bad credentials
    Given User inputs the credentials
    Then The user checks the credentials
    When The user clicks on login button
    And The user checks the error popup is displayed
    Then Check text: "Sorry, your credentials did not work!"

```

Figure 13. Login test example using Gherkin [16].

When we test a system or a very complicated application, steps should be separated into two files, one containing the actions and one the verifications. Additionally, we should create files for steps based on what functionality we are testing. This will help reduce the number of code lines in files and also improve code quality. Instead of defining methods inside classes, we can create generic steps. One of the problems with generic steps is that we use them on different pages, and we need to provide the elements we interact with. In this case, we will have a few if–else conditions. From our point of view, combining the example from Figure 12 with Gherkin as it is exemplified in Figure 13 is the best approach because it keeps the code easy to read, the number of code lines minimal, and we can define specific steps. This will be better for junior test automation engineers.

2.3. Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern for API Testing

We explained how to use the LEE design pattern for user interface testing. We can apply this design pattern for API testing. When we look at an address of a website in our browser, we notice that most websites with multiple pages have a URL, and this is followed by a URI or by parameters. If we look at how requests work, when we execute a request, we expect a result, no matter of what type of request we are executing. If we look carefully, we can notice a few variables for our tests. We can define URL, URI, or parameters in the Locate layer, methods that are responsible for executing the request in the Execute layer,

and verification of the response in the Expect layer. In Figure 14, we exemplified a request test for our login test.

```

-----Locate class-----
url = "http://127.0.0.1"
uri = "/login"
-----Execute class-----
def perform_request(url, uri="", headers="", params="", data="", method=GET):
    return request.execute(method, url+uri, params, headers, data)
-----Expect class-----
def check_response_code_and_message(request_result, expected_response_code, expected_message):
    assert request_result.response_code == expected_response_code,
        "Response code is incorrect! \n" + Expected: { expected_response_code } \n" +
        "Result: { request_result.response_code }"
    ...
-----Login API test-----
def test_login_with_bad_credentials():
    response = execute.perform_request(url, uri, headers)
    expect.check_response_code_and_message(response, 200, "OK")

```

Figure 14. API test example for login with bad credentials test.

In our example from Figure 14, we create a method for checking the response code and message returned. In a real-world scenario, it is preferable to create a method for each thing we want to check. In our test, we have a variable ‘response’ which holds the response given by the request execution. If we want to have a sequence of Execute and Expect, we need to create a mechanism to get rid of this variable. One way is for example to create a global variable or a dictionary in the Execute layer and save data in that dictionary and provide the data to the Expect layer. If we use Python in combination with Gherkin to perform API testing with the LEE design pattern, we will not have this issue because we can use the context variable, which is available globally.

2.4. Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern for UI Testing of Cross-Platform Mobile Phone Applications

We can use this design pattern with success in testing mobile applications, no matter what programming language we use. We are not limited to white-box testing, we can also carry out gray-box or black-box testing, depending on the technology we are using for developing the application. For example, we created solutions for testing Android applications using Kotlin and Java, where we had a gray-box approach. For iOS testing, it is more like a black-box approach, because that is the way XCUITest works. In this case, however, we used Swift. In Figure 15, we have the Solution Explorer from Visual Studio, where you can see the main classes used to implement LEE. On the right-hand side of Figure 15 is a simple test implementation [16].

You can find out more details in ‘Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern’ [16], in chapter IV, section C. We can go further and use this design pattern in a complex way, where we test embedded systems using one solution, but we will explain how to do this in the next section.

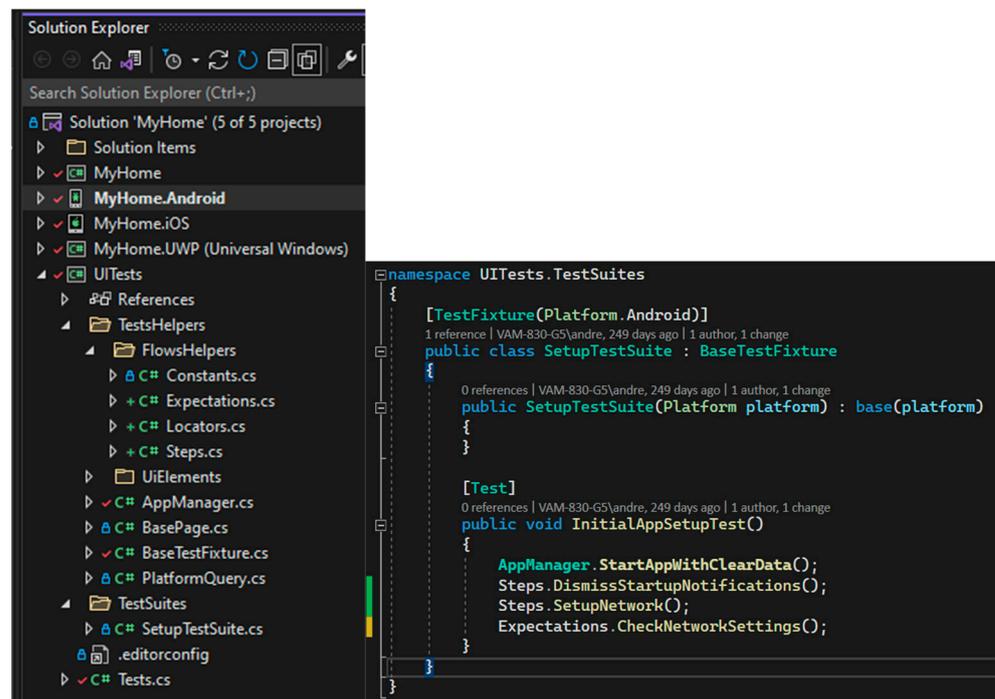


Figure 15. Example of applying LEE in Xamarin [16].

2.5. Applying the Locate, Execute, Expect Design Pattern in Testing Embedded Systems

We developed a solution in Python for testing an HMI system for car infotainment. To succeed in this task, we designed small modules that are responsible for different tasks. For example, we designed a module for UiAutomator used for interaction with Android devices, one for the system backend, one for the user interface, which is web-based and a wrapper for Appium to interact with iOS devices. We can apply the same principle to IoT systems, no matter what technology we use to develop the user interface.

We created the structure in a very simple fashion; we created dedicated folders for Gherkin and Behave to support running the tests using those technologies, so we have a ‘features’ folder where the test cases in feature files are located. Additionally, this requires an ‘environment’ file, which is used by the test runner to trigger different events such as preparing the environment before test execution or after test execution. Feature files include the steps, and within the main folder, we need to create a folder for steps. In the diagram from Figure 16, we named them ‘Gherkin steps’. These steps can be named however we want, but we recommend using a naming convention based on functionality, and if you have many functions, you can split them into two types: one file should contain action-related steps and the other the verification steps. In the steps, you can directly use the generic methods defined for the ‘Execute’ or ‘Expect’ layers and implement only basic logic if it is needed. Outside of the ‘features’ folder, you can contain the structure how you desire. In our case, we made it very clear. We have a folder for constants, where we define different constants used across the project. Besides this folder, we have one with different helper classes, one with baselines for visual validation, and the actual ‘Object repository’ or the ‘Locate’ layer. In this folder, we have a small structure; for the embedded system, we create a dedicated subfolder, and we did the same also for mobile platforms. For example, things change from one Android version to another, and it is similar for iOS too. Because iOS users usually receive multiple updates over time, we support only the latest iOS version, and we update the automation identifiers constantly. The main problem is with Android, where we support all the systems from Android 10 to the latest one, Android 13. In this case, instead of creating a structure for each operating system version, we created a generic class which is used in general, and if the automation identifier is different, we know what version of Android is installed in our device, and we request

the variable from the class designed for that specific Android version. In our root folder, we have different utility scripts to sync the test results or set up the project for example and to interact with the backend.

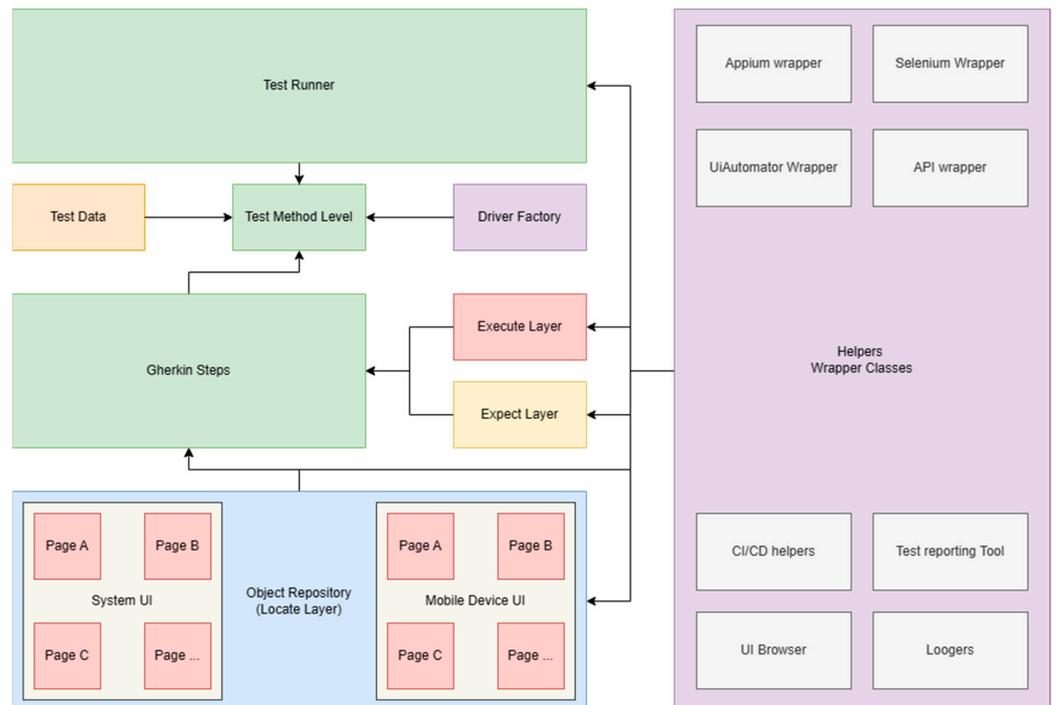


Figure 16. Example of a custom automation framework diagram.

In Figure 16, we exemplified the diagram of our automation framework. Because we use Python and virtual environments, the wrappers are actually installed in the ‘venv’ folder, but we can consider them as part of the project since these modules were developed specifically for this kind of activity, and without them, we cannot perform testing.

3. Results

In Figure 17, we exemplified the code of a page class from the ‘Locate’ code abstraction layer and in Figure 18 the same class using POM. Screenshots are taken at different stages of development of our automation framework and should clearly point out how the LEE design pattern reduces confusion about using POM correctly. Tidiness of the code after using LEE is shown in Figure 19. We had a similar approach with our smart-home system testing, and the efficiency of using LEE increases with the level of complexity of the project.

The main difference comes in the method definition inside the page class. Using LEE, this is avoided, and the code is much cleaner and easier to read. In Figure 18, we have four methods doing in essence the same thing, performing a click on a specific element. Imagine if we test a system with more than 100 views or pages, and we use the approach shown in Figure 18. This is a perfect example of how we can increase the reusability of methods using LEE. In Figure 19, you can notice how we applied LEE in one of our automation frameworks. However, to make sure that we have a good coding standardization, for example, the name of the first function should be renamed. Functions or methods describing actions must have in their name, in general, the type of action, the element, and where is performed. The verification methods must contain in general only verifications, and the second method is an example of bad usage. The ‘drag_element_by_text’ and ‘take_screenshot’ can be defined in two different steps rather than being included in the verification step. We can definitely agree that it is much easier to spot the mistakes in the step definitions when we apply LEE in a project.

```

9 class GlobalSearchResult(Component):
10     _root_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="GlobalSearchResultsScreen"]')
11     loading_spinner_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="HeadLine"]//pag3-loading-spinner')
12     cancel_in_speller_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"icon-delete-entry")]')
13     result_list_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="DetachedHeadLine"]')
14     ok_button_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"key--ok")]')
15     result_list_page_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"list__content-container")]')
16     first_result_in_speller = Locator(By.XPATH,
17                                     '//*[@id="SplitScreenContainerInteraction"]/div/pag3-speller/pag3-i18n-keyboard/div[1]/p[1]')
18     results_in_speller = Locator(By.XPATH,
19                                 '//*[@id="SplitScreenContainerInteraction"]/div/pag3-speller/pag3-i18n-keyboard/div[1]/p.')
20
21     @property
22     def cancel_in_speller(self) -> ElementProxy:...
23
24
25     @property
26     def result_in_speller(self) -> ElementProxy:...
27
28
29     @property
30     def result_list_headline(self) -> ElementProxy:...
31
32
33     @property
34     def ok_button(self) -> ElementProxy:...
35
36
37     @property
38     def result_page(self) -> ElementProxy:...
39
40
41     @property
42     def speller_result_list(self) -> Iterator[ElementProxy]:...
43
44

```

Figure 17. Example of a page class definition using LEE.

```

9 class GlobalSearchResult(Component):
10     _root_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="GlobalSearchResultsScreen"]')
11     loading_spinner_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="HeadLine"]//pag3-loading-spinner')
12     cancel_in_speller_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"icon-delete-entry")]')
13     result_list_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="DetachedHeadLine"]')
14     ok_button_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"key--ok")]')
15     result_list_page_locator = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@contains(@class,"list__content-container")]')
16     first_result_in_speller = Locator(By.XPATH, '//*[@id="SplitScreenContainerInteraction"]/div/pag3-speller/pag3-i18n-keyboard/div[1]/p[1]')
17
18     @property
19     def cancel_in_speller(self) -> ElementProxy:...
20
21
22     @property
23     def result_in_speller(self) -> ElementProxy:...
24
25
26     @property
27     def result_list_headline(self) -> ElementProxy:...
28
29
30     @property
31     def ok_button(self) -> ElementProxy:...
32
33
34     @property
35     def result_page(self) -> ElementProxy:...
36
37
38     def click_back_at_first_text_input(self):...
39
40
41     def click_the_first_result_in_speller(self):...
42
43
44     def click_the_result_list_headline(self):...
45
46
47     def click_ok_button(self):...
48
49
50     def save_current_page(self):...
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66

```

Figure 18. Example of a page class definition using POM.

We applied the LEE design pattern for testing several systems and applications since 2018. The initial work was conducted in testing mobile applications for Android and iOS using native solutions, implemented in Kotlin and Java, respectively, using Swift. On the initial project, there was a team of about five to ten quality assurance engineers for manual testing and two automation engineers. By applying the design pattern in the automation framework, at that point in time, we built an automation framework that can be used easily by the manual testers and help the managers to understand what we test and what the results are. Some of the manual testers started to write automation tests, and they were able to do it very easily. Some of them started to code for their first time and became independent in writing tests after 3 months. This was possible because we developed most of the methods needed, and the manual testers learned how to use them.

Then, we started to work on an IoT project, presented briefly in this paper, to study how we can apply this design pattern to other scenarios, such as backend and web user interface testing. The project also included a client application which is cross-platform, and

we successfully tested the design pattern using Xamarin technologies and C#, not only the web version and the API.

```

@step('the user taps {option} on right bar')
def tap_right_bar(context, option):
    right_launcher_bar = RightLauncherBar(context.locate)
    if option == "notification":
        context.execute.click_on_element(right_launcher_bar.notification_element)
        context.logger.info(f'Click BTN_notification.')
    elif option == "devices":
        context.execute.click_on_element(right_launcher_bar.devices_element)
        context.logger.info(f'Click BTN_devices.')
    else:
        context.logger.error(f'{option} was not found!')
        raise Exception(f'{option.capitalize()} was not found!')

@step("the user will verify that the {element} app is displayed on navigation bar")
def verify_element_displayed_navi_bar(context, element):
    context.execute.drag_element_by_text(element)
    context.execute.take_screenshot(name=f"{element}_mtb")
    context.expect.verify_shape(element=f"{element}_mtb")

@step("the user will verify that the amount of unseen notification are displayed on notification bar")
def verify_unseen_notification(context):
    launcher = LauncherPage(context.locate)
    counter = launcher.notification_count_element.get_text()
    notification_launcher_tile = int(counter)
    assert notification_launcher_tile >= 0, f"Notification with title: {notification_launcher_tile}

```

Figure 19. Example of correct steps definition with LEE.

While working on the IoT project, we applied the design pattern in testing automotive embedded system, to be precise, the infotainment system of a car manufacturer. In this project, previous engineers did not correctly apply the POM design pattern, and this generated a lot of duplicate code, which was hard to maintain. Because the project tests the entire system, there are more than 100 user interface pages, containing sometimes more than 20 elements and 10 methods. The manufacturer installs the same infotainment system in multiple types of cars, and the tests are executed for each car type. By using this approach, we managed to merge the code into just one piece and reduced the maintenance time significantly. One important aspect is that when a new test is automated, the time is reduced, and the test in most cases can be applied to all car types, so we reduced the development time by more than 50%. By applying LEE, we managed to make the code reusable and cleaner, integrate new colleagues more easily, and obtain smoother transitions from one software version to another. However, we had some challenges on this project, due to the wrappers created over generic functions of Selenium, Appium, and the fact that Python is an interpreted language, and we need to assure that we are using the correct type of objects. Overall, applying it to new projects or to existing projects can bring benefits on a longer term. We used the wrappers created initially on a second project, and the effect was that we had a mature framework built in a few days and reused the generic methods to implement more than 30 test cases in a month, everything made by just one automation engineer. This means that once you create your main structure using LEE, you can reapply it to any project using the same technology, no matter how sophisticated is.

One of the intrigues of the colleagues was that we can apply this principle to software development in general, but we could not identify a scenario where it excels and can be better than current design patterns that we already have at our disposal. You might encounter issues if you tend to create multiple code abstraction layers and you use interpreted languages like Python, but those issues rarely occur and can be fixed easily by specifying the type of parameters or correctly applying principles of object-oriented programming.

In Table 3, we wrote a comparison between LEE and POM and relevant points for a test automation framework and test automation team. Some of them are also noticed due to overtime usage and not necessary described in this paper.

Table 3. Result of using LEE in comparison with POM.

Main Points	LEE	POM
Used for testing of Types of application under test	User interface and API testing Almost any	User interface Almost any
Programming languages	Any object-oriented programming language	Any object-oriented programming language
Abstraction code layers	Only three	More than three, depends on project and implementation
Page class definition	Just automation identifiers and properties	Automation identifiers, properties, and duplicated methods
Steps definition	If project complexity is low, one file per feature is enough. If project complexity is high, one file for actions and one for verifications is required.	All steps are in one file in general, resulting in very long files. Design pattern does not describe how to split code in different conditions.
Code reusability	Because the methods defined in the execute or expect layer are all clearly defined and have just one purpose, we can easily reuse them as many times as we want.	In general, methods are strictly created for a page class and reused only inside that page class. Even if it is possible to create generic methods, people tend to copy and paste methods from one page class to another and duplicate methods over and over again. ¹
Code readability	In steps, we usually use keywords such as action, verification, execute, expect, and steps. This provides a standardization method and increases the readability in steps. Applying conventions to method definitions increases the readability of the code even more.	This is at developer disposal, and usually because there is no standardization or conventions, naming of methods is chaotic.
Code maintainability	A change applied in one place applies to all use cases, no matter how complex a project is. Sometimes, in very rare cases, this is not a desired situation, but is very easy to identify a situation like this.	A change is applied only to a method. It requires more effort to check all the places where a certain change is needed, and this increases by the complexity of the project.
Debugging	Much easier, due to a reduced number of abstraction code layers and increased readability of the code.	Much difficult when a lot of code abstraction layers are present.
Adoption in a new project ¹	Very easy to implement, and because the main functions are generic, these methods can be transferred easily into a library or a new project.	Methods are project-specific in general; everything should be created from scratch in case of a new project.
Ease to use ¹	Level of complexity is low, and based on feedback, this technique is very easy to use in general.	Level of complexity is higher and harder to be applied correctly, especially by junior test automation engineers. More difficult to integrate it due to an increased number of code abstraction layers.
Integration with BDD	Very easy and it can also replace it.	It cannot replace BDD. ¹
Test case creation ¹	Applying generic methods results in a high speed of test case creation.	Each page requires specific methods, resulting in reduced the speed of test case creation.
Framework stability ¹	Generic methods are proven to be reliable, and this provides higher stability for new test cases and also overall.	Poor stability and requires higher effort to create a stable framework overall.

Table 3. Cont.

Main Points	LEE	POM
Trust in results ¹	Level of trust increases due to reusability and robustness of the framework overall.	Level of trust can be decreased due to copy-paste errors or changes not applied in all places. Require an increased level of attention to details in order to have a high level of trust.
Applying the design pattern incorrectly ¹	We can end up with action steps in verifications ones. Bad naming of methods or functions can lead to confusion and duplicated methods.	A huge number of methods that are performing the same thing overall. What methods should be used creates confusion, especially when the project is complex, and testers usually duplicate steps and pages.
Our results from real-life usage in production ¹	In the first project where we tested native mobile applications, we constantly achieved 95 to 99% tests passing on 32 devices and even 100% in a few days in a row, considering having around 700 tests. In the second project, we tested an embedded system, we increased the percentage of passing tests from 40% to over 60% after first week of applying LEE. After some refactoring, we managed to achieve consistent results and more than 80% passes for more than 5000 tests. It required more than one month to perform the refactoring, and three automation engineers were needed.	In our first project, we never used POM. In the second project, using POM we managed to achieve only 40% to 60% of tests passing, with the value varying from one day to another. After a big system update, the percentage dropped under 40%. One automation engineer was required to conduct maintenance on a regular basis to maintain 50% of tests passing from day to day, considering having about 5000 testcases.

¹ These results are from overall experience with LEE and POM over time.

4. Conclusions

LEE design pattern is very good when applied in testing, especially on custom automation frameworks, because we are able to use it in most common scenarios, such as testing a website, a mobile application, or to test an API with high efficiency. It helps automation engineers to maintain clean code and ease the integration of newcomers. It can easily replace POM or other design patterns used in current projects and increases the reusability of common methods. Integration with the continuous integration or continuous delivery systems is very easy because it does not require additional plugins.

In future, we want to extend the main usage of the design pattern and study how it can be applied in unit testing for example. Additionally, to prove the efficiency of a framework using this design pattern, we would like to monitor some parameters in a team of test automation engineers. To do this, we must take in consideration the most important aspects, such as the time needed to implement a test case, the time spent for maintenance, and methods reusability, for example. We also want to study if there is an impact in what type of network we use in our smart-home automation, similar to what the authors of ‘Comparative Evaluation of the Performance of ZigBee and LoRa Wireless Networks in Building Environment’ [20] discovered, and there is an impact of what programming language we used for testing the same system, by trying to apply algorithms and methods presented in ‘Performance Evaluation of C/C++, MicroPython, Rust and TinyGo Programming Languages on ESP32 Microcontroller’ [21].

There are multiple automation testing programs on the market, and because of this, we want to study if we can apply this design pattern in an already built program for automation testing.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.-M.V. and L.-C.M.; methodology, A.-M.V.; software, A.-M.V.; validation, A.-M.V.; formal analysis, A.-M.V. and L.-C.M.; investigation, A.-M.V.; resources, A.-M.V. and L.-C.M.; data curation, A.-M.V.; writing—original draft preparation, A.-M.V.; writing—review and editing, A.-M.V.; visualization, A.-M.V.; supervision, L.-C.M.; project administration, A.-M.V.; funding acquisition, A.-M.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This paper was financially supported by the project ‘Network of excellence in applied research and innovation for doctoral and postdoctoral programs/InoHubDoc’, project co-funded by the European Social Fund financing agreement no. POCU/993/6/13/153437.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: This paper was financially supported by the project ‘Network of excellence in applied research and innovation for doctoral and postdoctoral programs/InoHubDoc’, project co-funded by the European Social Fund financing agreement no. POCU/993/6/13/153437.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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