

Real-time indoor air quality monitoring association with humidity, temperature, and carbon monoxide level in the residential environment

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Abstract

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) is the air quality in or around a building that can affect the comfort and health of building occupants. Polluted air contains toxic gases emitted by industry, vehicle emissions, and increased concentrations of harmful gases and particles in the atmosphere. The use of IoT can monitor IAQ reading levels and update IAQ real-time information parameters at different locations in the residential environment for the comfort and health of the occupants. The focus of this work is to measure the level of carbon monoxide (CO) as well as other important parameters such as temperature and relative humidity (RH) as recommended by ASHRAE 55-1992 and MS:1525. The developed system was built using NodeMCU as a microcontroller, MQ-7 to measure CO levels, and DHT22 sensor to measure the humidity and temperature levels. The experiment was conducted in a residential building located in Paya Jaras Tengah, Sungai Buloh, Selangor. The developed system was measured in three different locations, namely the living room, kitchen, and bedroom. In the morning, as the RH increased, the temperature also increased. Since the living room is located nearby the main road, the CO reading was higher than the other two locations, in which the highest value of 12 ppm was recorded. The results obtained showed that the system works well and can record the readings of RH, temperature, and CO level in the residential environment. Therefore, a reliable system can be developed to help the residential occupants monitor the level of IAQ in the house.

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1.0 Introduction

Appropriate indoor air quality (IAQ) is necessary for healthy environment (Yu & Kim, 2011). Several short-term and long-term problems regarding health and productivity are associated to poor IAQ that is caused by inappropriate levels of temperature, humidity, air velocity, lighting, noise, and CO₂ (Kumar & Mahdavi, 2001). In Malaysia, Industry Code of Practice for Indoor Air Quality (ICOP-IAQ) 2010 of the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) addresses the recommendation on the allowable limit for the concentration of indoor bioaerosols (DOSH, 2010). Bad IAQ can lead to sick building syndrome (SBS), a condition where people experience uneasiness such as headache, sleepiness, or inability to concentrate. SBS is caused by the presence of high concentrations of indoor air pollutants, especially biological agents (Takigawa et al., 2009). In recent years, IAQ has been the focus of

attention by the scientific community, governments, and international organizations (Abdul-Wahab et al., 2015). It is a known fact that we spend more than 90% of our time indoors, and that the levels of the observed factors associated to air quality are often higher than those recorded outdoors. Thus, the health risks from exposure to indoor air pollution may be larger than those associated with outdoor pollution. Poor IAQ can be especially detrimental to vulnerable groups such as children, young adults, the elderly, or those suffering from chronic respiratory and/or cardiovascular diseases (Cincinelli & Martellini, 2017). However, lately, the environment factors such as air movement, humidity and indoor air quality have captured research interest. Humidity is a factor that is related to thermal comfort. The raising of relative humidity reduces the ability to lose heat through perspiration and evaporation, and hence, the effect is similar to the temperature raising (Jayamurugan et al.,

2013). Extreme humidity can also create other IAQ problems. Excessively high or low relative humidity can both produce discomfort. In addition, high relative humidity can promote the growth of mould and mildew. Temperature and humidity influence both the comfort level of individuals and their wellbeing. If the temperature continues to rise, discomfort increases and symptoms such as fatigue, stuffiness, and headaches can appear (Fang et al., 1998). Effect of humidity and temperature on individual comfort in a building such as hospital (Azizpour et al., 2013; Sattayakorn et al., 2017), universities (Zaki et al., 2017; Alves et al., 2013; Wardhani et al., 2020), schools (Salthammer et al., 2016), and residential houses (Abdul-Wahab, 2017; Amir et al., 2019; Vilčeková et al., 2017; Mlakar & Štrancar, 2013) have attracted many attentions.

Real-time indoor air monitoring based on Internet of Things (IoT) platform is widely used to measure airborne particles in the environment and have become increasingly important in various monitoring applications especially for IAQ monitoring (Chanthakit & Rattanapoka, 2018; Benammar et al., 2018; Ha et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2016; Tran et al., 2020; Hojaiji et al., 2017). Thermal comfort might be occasionally achieved at very high indoor air temperatures and humidity levels under hot-dry climate conditions like Malaysia. Humidity could affect thermal comfort in a residential house. Due to the increasing industrialization and the massive urbanization at Sungai Buloh, the IAQ is one of the major concerns to the residential occupants. In addition, the residential buildings have been occupied for more than 10 years. Due to the humid tropics of Malaysia, the aim of this work is to develop and monitor the IAQ environment based on measurements of three factors: temperature, relative humidity (RH), and carbon monoxide (CO) level in an identified residential house during Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Field measurement

The field measurement was conducted in a residential house located at Paya Jaras Tengah, Sungai Buloh, Selangor, Malaysia. Kampung Paya Jaras is one of the traditional villages in Mukim Sungai Buloh and has been around for more than 10 years. The residential house unit under study has nine windows and an air conditioning unit with five bedrooms, a

kitchen, a toilet, and a living room area of 173.70 m² where a length of 15.25 m and a width of 13.39 m. Fig. 1 shows the residential house of this type built near the main road. The sampling was done at three different areas in the house.

2.2 Hardware development

In this work, NodeMCU ESP8266 was used as the microcontroller. NodeMCU is an open-source firmware and development kit that helps to build IoT product. NodeMCU is developed to make the use of advanced API for hardware IO easier. The API can reduce redundant work for configuring and manipulating hardware (Durani et al., 2018). NodeMCU uses ESP 8266, which is the lowest cost Wi-Fi MCU. ESP8266 is the most integrated Wi-Fi chips. The size of the chip is 5 mm × 5 mm (Al-Kuwari et al., 2018). In this work, two types of sensors were used to measure the value of IAQ factors, i.e., the humidity, temperature, and CO level. Thermistor and capacitive humidity sensor used DHT22 to measure the surrounding air (Al Marouf et al., 2019). DHT22 enables users to read and measure a large range of temperature reading of -40 to 125 °C more accurately compared to DHT11 (Panghurian et al., 2018).

MQ-7 sensor was used to detect the level of the CO content in the indoor air. It has good sensitivity to CO in a wide range, and has advantages such as long lifespan, low cost, and simple drive circuit (Falohun et al., 2016). The concentration of carbon monoxide gas was measured using the MQ7 sensor produced by Sparkfun. This sensor takes 60–90 seconds to warm up before detecting gas with the required power of 350 mW at a 5 V supply voltage. The concentration of carbon monoxide that can be detected is in the range of 20 to 2,000 ppm with a slope rate of less than 0.5 (Muladi et al., 2018).



Fig. 1: The type of residential building used as field measurement

For calibration purposes, the MQ-7 CO gas sensor can detect CO gas concentrations from 20 to 2000 ppm. The MQ-7 sensor has sensitivity and selectivity to detect various types of gas such as carbon monoxide (CO), hydrogen (H₂), butane (LPG), methane (CH₄), alcohol, and air. However, in this work, only CO was measured.

The sensitivity characteristics of the MQ-7 sensor for various gases can be seen in Fig. 2 where the x-axis indicates the ppm value while y-axis indicates the ratio of R_s and R_o. Here, R_s is the sensor resistance at various concentrations of gases and R_o is the sensor resistance at 100 ppm CO in clean air.

The size of the prototype is 180 mm length, 95 mm width and 55 mm height. Fig. 3 shows the prototype of IAQ monitoring device used to monitor the levels of temperature, humidity, and CO. The weight of the prototype of IAQ monitoring device is 158.4 g. Table 1 shows the overall costing of this IAQ prototype of a total cost of RM 66.18.

CO can also be found inside any house at the level of 0.5–30 ppm because it can be produced from the combustion of household utilities such as heater,

stove, fireplace, and automobile exhaust in the attached household garage. As CO is a colourless and an odourless, CO detectors need to be installed to monitor the CO concentration in a working environment (Wang et al., 2010).

2.3 Indoor environmental standards

There are many standards for describing thermal comfort in indoor environment. The most frequently used standards are American Society of Heating, Air conditioning & refrigeration Engineers, US (ASHRAE) Standard 55-1992 (ASHRAE 55-192, 1992), and Malaysian Standard MS:1525 (DOSH, 2010). ASHRAE 55-1992 sets the maximum air relative humidity at 60%. Department of Standards Malaysia, 2007 has published a guideline for a standard indoor environment design for Malaysian climate, in which it recommends the indoor temperature to be in the range of 23 to 26 °C (DOSH, 2010)(Lee & Chang, 2000). For non-residential building, three elements have been chosen as a guideline in evaluating and monitoring of IAQ. The elements are heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), which make a system that reflects the thermal comfort of the building. On the other hand, for residential building, to date, there have been no specific elements being measured to test the IAQ.

2.4 Data collection

The measurements were conducted at three different rooms of the residential house under study to measure the three IAQ parameters. The rooms were the kitchen, bedroom and living room, indicated by red circles in the house layout shown in Fig. 4. The parameters were recorded at an interval of 100 ms using the IAQ prototype. Data collection started from the 5th of May 2020 and ended on the 16th of June 2020. The measurement was taken in the morning (8:00 a.m.), afternoon (12:00 noon) and at night (8:00 p.m.) in every two days for 20 min in each measurement session. Air-conditioning is only installed in the living room area. The picture in Fig. 5 shows the data collection in the living room area.

3.0 Results and discussion

3.1 Indoor temperature

Referring to Table 2, temperature is higher in the afternoon compared to the morning and night. Based on standard (ASHRAE 55-1992), the range of acceptable heat comfort is from 23 to 27 °C. Since

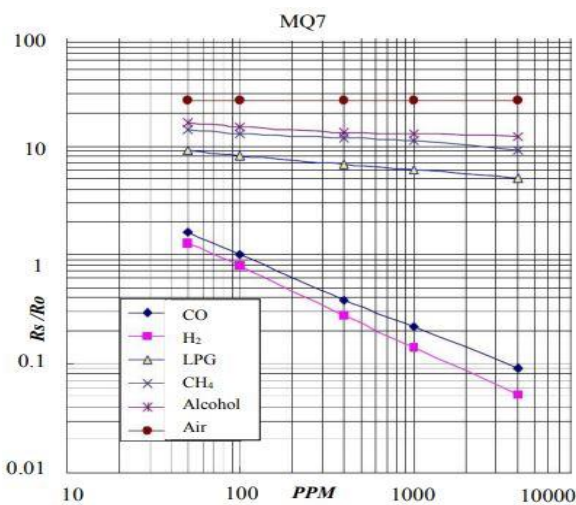


Fig. 2: Data sheet of MQ-7 sensor sensitivity chart

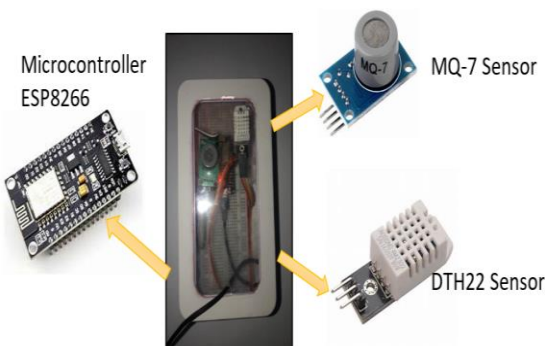


Fig. 3: Prototype of IAQ monitoring devices

Malaysia is one of the tropical countries, the range of house temperatures will usually be higher than in the standard ASHRAE environment, which is at 26 to 30.7 °C. From the results obtained, the average indoor temperature was from 24 to 31 °C, which was slightly higher compares to the range of MS:1525 that is of the range of 23 to 26 °C.

3.2 Relative humidity

From Table 3, the living room, the kitchen, and the bedroom environment can be categorised as non-humid. ASHRAE Standard 55-1992 recommends maintaining the indoor RH level between 30% and 60%, while according to MS:1525, the recommended

RH is between 55% to 70%. If RH is below 30%, it is considered unacceptable because it can give effect of dry air on the eyes and skin. On the other hand, if RH is above 60%, it may support the growth of pathogenic or allergenic microorganisms in the environment. Based on the values in Table 3, the average RH is very high which is $\geq 75\%$ in average.

3.3 Carbon Monoxide

The average concentrations of CO obtained in the three locations are given in Table 4. During the data collection, there were only two people in the living room with the windows open and the air-conditioning was on switch-off mode. The maximum CO level

Table 1: Total cost of IAQ prototype

Item	Material	Quantity	Unit Price (RM)	Total (RM)
Microcontroller	NodeMCU ESP8266	1	19.90	19.90
Humidity & Temperature Sensor	DHT22	1	17.70	17.70
Carbon Monoxide Sensor	MQ-7	1	7.50	7.50
Breadboard	MB-102	1	4.20	4.20
Wire Jumper Cable	Duport Wire Jumper	6	0.28	1.68
USB Cable	Micro USB Cable	1	10.00	10.00
Total (RM)				68.18

Table 2: Summary of average indoor temperature at three different times

Location	Min (°C)	Average (°C)	Max (°C)	MS:1525 Limit value (°C)	ASHRAE 55-1992 Limit value (°C)
Kitchen					
Morning	26.0	27.6	30.5	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Afternoon	25.5	30.8	32.5	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Night	24.7	25.7	29.8	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Living Room					
Morning	26.1	27.3	29.5	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Afternoon	25.2	30.8	32.7	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Night	24.9	28.5	29.9	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Bedroom					
Morning	26.0	24.6	29.5	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Afternoon	25.6	30.6	32.8	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0
Night	24.6	28.2	29.6	23.0–26.0	20.0–26.0



Fig. 4: Layout plan of the house with IAQ device

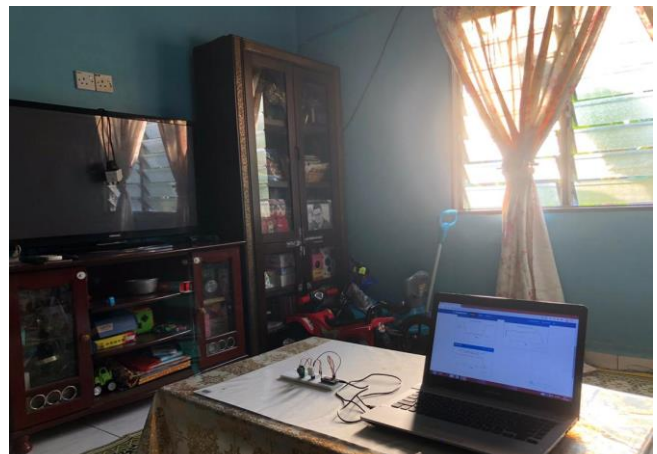


Fig. 5: Data collection in the living room area

Table 3: Summary of average relative humidity (%) at three different times

Location	Min (%)	Average (%)	Max (%)	MS:1525 Limit value (%)	ASHRAE 55-1992 Limit value (%)
Kitchen					
Morning	68.8	76.8	79.9	55–70	30–60
Afternoon	70.3	79.2	88.5	55–70	30–60
Night	78.1	83.3	88.2	55–70	30–60
Living Room					
Morning	68.2	76.0	79.3	55–70	30–60
Afternoon	69.5	78.3	87.4	55–70	30–60
Night	78.3	81.7	88.0	55–70	30–60
Bedroom					
Morning	69.3	77.2	80.5	55–70	30–60
Afternoon	70.9	79.7	89.0	55–70	30–60
Night	80.1	84.0	89.3	55–70	30–60

Table 4: Summary of average carbon monoxide at three different times

Location	Min (ppm)	Average (ppm)	Max (ppm)
Kitchen			
Morning	7.0	7.6	8.0
Afternoon	7.0	7.6	9.0
Night	7.0	9.7	12.0
Living Room			
Morning	9.0	10.6	12.0
Afternoon	8.0	9.9	12.0
Night	7.0	9.5	12.0
Bedroom			
Morning	7.0	8.0	9.0
Afternoon	8.0	8.1	9.0
Night	7.0	7.5	8.0

measured in the living room was 12 ppm, and in the kitchen and bedroom, the level was 9.6 ppm and 8.6 ppm respectively. The CO value was higher in the living room compared with the kitchen and bedroom due to the former's location nearby the main road, in which the poor-quality air containing higher CO content traveled into the house through the open windows. The recommended values for CO exposure based on indoor air quality standards set by DOSH (2010), Singapore (1996) and Hong Kong (1996) is 1000 ppm for an 8-hour period. It was measured that the average concentrations of CO in the three locations did not exceed the recommended standard level. The highest concentration of CO measured was in the living room (10.8 ppm), while the lowest concentration of CO was measured in the bedroom at night (7.5 ppm). However, all the CO levels recorded were in the acceptable range in the ASHRAE standard.

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the results obtained, it shows that the measurement of indoor air quality based on the temperature, relative humidity and CO level in the air

was successfully carried out in a-real time platform. The IAQ device was used to measure the said parameters in the kitchen, living room and bedroom of the selected residential house. Overall, the average temperature in the residential unit was in the range of 24 to 31 °C, indicating indoor temperature higher than the recommendation set by the standards. In addition, the average of RH was also higher than the recommended values set by the standard, whereby the RH was $\geq 75\%$ in all the three locations. The CO readings measured was lower than 20 ppm and therefore, was at safe level. It can be concluded that the IAQ in this residential unit was considered uncomfortable for its occupants based on the recommended values in MS:1525 and ASHRAE 55-1992. For future work, it is recommended to calculate the standard deviations and standard errors of the IAQ data for a more in-depth statistical analysis.

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