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Harvesting Insights: Combining the IoT and a WSN for Tomato Cultivation in a Greenhouse Farming Environment

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to simulate a wireless sensor network (WSN) and implement an internet-of-things (IoT) system to measure environmental variables, such as temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂ in greenhouse farming, and to compare the plant stem lengths of tomato crops cultivated in both soil-based and hydroponic systems. The research is composed of two main stages: design and simulation of WSN, which includes the optimal placement of sensor nodes and checking communication protocols for data exchange, and implementation of the IoT system in the greenhouse by deploying physical sensor nodes, configuring the gateway, and establishing communication channels. The novelty of the research lies in the design and simulation of a WSN under the TrueTime framework (MATLAB, Simulink) prior to implementation, allowing us to avoid data loss, latency, and unnecessary implementation efforts. In addition, the evaluation of the aforementioned variables in tomato crops cultivated simultaneously in soil-based and hydroponic systems within a greenhouse was conducted to determine the most suitable method for implementation under tropical weather conditions. The research showed results similar to those of other studies regarding the simulation of a partial or complete WSN using MATLAB/Simulink. Allowing identifying that, hydroponics initially accelerates growth but later faces limitations due to root space; meanwhile, soil-based crops exhibit more uniform growth and yield larger, faster-ripening fruits. Compared to other studies, this research minimizes device quantity, reduces cost and complexity, and also successfully achieved environmental measurements, corroborating findings from other studies that also highlight the use of MATLAB/Simulink for simulating a WSN and components. The study found a match between simulated data communication and real-world data exchange between sensor nodes and gateway nodes, which is crucial for the reliability and accuracy of the sensor network. This study found that soil-based crops experienced less temperature stress due to microclimate variations, leading to uniform growth, which is an essential finding for agricultural practices. In addition, evidence indicates that both hydroponic and soil-based systems showed variations in stem size, where soil-based crops had larger stems at the end of the study period.

Keywords: greenhouse, internet of things, wireless sensor network, Zigbee, crops.

收获见解：将物联网与 WSN 相结合，在温室农业环境中进行番茄种植

摘要： 本研究的目的是模拟无线传感器网络(WSN)并实施物联网(IoT)系统，以测量温室种植中的环境变量，例如温度、相对湿度和二氧化碳，并比较土壤和水培系统中种植的番茄作物的茎长。这项研究由两个主要阶段组成：WSN 的设计和仿真，包括传感器节点的最佳放置和检查数据交换的通信协议，以及通过部署物理传感器节点、配置网关和建立通信通道

在温室中实施 IoT 系统。这项研究的新颖之处在于在实施之前在真时框架 (MATLAB、Simulink) 下设计和仿真 WSN，使我们能够避免数据丢失、延迟和不必要的实施工作。此外，还对温室内土壤和水培系统中同时种植的番茄作物的上述变量进行了评估，以确定在热带气候条件下实施的最合适方法。这项研究的结果与其他使用 MATLAB/Simulink 模拟部分或完整 WSN 的研究结果相似。可以确定的是，水培最初会加速生长，但后来会因根部空间而受到限制；而土壤作物生长更均匀，果实更大、成熟更快。与其他研究相比，这项研究最大限度地减少了设备数量，降低了成本和复杂性，并成功实现了环境测量，证实了其他研究的结果，这些研究也强调了使用 MATLAB/Simulink 模拟 WSN 和组件。研究发现，传感器节点和网关节点之间的模拟数据通信与真实世界数据交换相匹配，这对于传感器网络的可靠性和准确性至关重要。这项研究发现，土壤作物因微气候变化而受到的温度压力较小，从而导致生长均匀，这是农业实践的一个重要发现。此外，有证据表明，水培和土壤系统都表现出茎的大小变化，其中在研究期结束时，土壤作物的茎更大。

关键词：温室、物联网、无线传感器网络、Zigbee、农作物。

1. Introduction

Tomato crops are important ingredients in many Colombian meals because of their high content of nutrients, such as calories, carbohydrates, and fiber, and are also excellent sources of calcium, vitamin C, potassium, etc. They are one of the vegetables most commonly used in Colombian meals. Therefore, their value in Colombian food security is high.

The IoT and WSNs appear as technological options for monitoring crops such as cassava crops [1], oil palms in Colombia [2], sago palms [3], tomato crops in Malaysia [4], and brinjal crops (eggplants) in India [5].

Under this concept, it is possible to monitor several microclimate environmental conditions in greenhouse farming, such as temperature, oxygen, relative humidity, and light intensity, among others [6], [7], which is performed remotely by website platforms or mobile apps.

In addition, researchers have been implementing several technologies within the IoT or a WSN to monitor the mentioned variables in greenhouses. For instance, for wireless communications (TX/RX), they used Zigebee [8], LoRaWAN [9], and NB-IoT [10]; each offers its advantages and disadvantages, such as range, packet loss, and cost.

To measure environmental parameters, researchers have used DHT and SHT series sensors for relative humidity and temperature [11], [12], SP Lite2 pyranometers for solar radiation [12], and MSP-6 sensors for oil moisture sensors [13], among others.

According to previous research, microclimate conditions in a greenhouse affect any crop cultivated within these structures; therefore, it is essential to

measure, visualize, and regulate fundamental environmental factors, including temperature, relative humidity, CO₂ levels, and soil moisture, to cultivate and harvest high-quality fruits and vegetables, regardless of the conditions outside of the greenhouse.

There are countries around the world that are developing research to optimize the automation process within greenhouses to improve the harvest of fruits and vegetables. Some of these countries are India, Colombia, and China [14].

The importance of agriculture in China is highlighted because of its impact on China's economic activity and national food security [15]. In this regard, The cultivation of tomato plants in greenhouses has been optimized to increase productivity and reduce environmental impact through the use of technological innovations, including microprocessors (e.g., Raspberry Pi platforms) and cloud technologies. These advancements have been made with the understanding that tomato plants can thrive in temperatures ranging from below 0°C to above 30°C.

Advancements in agricultural technologies have led to the exploration of innovative methods for enhancing crop production and environmental monitoring. The present research endeavored to explore the operationalization of WSNs and the IoT technologies within a greenhouse context, while simultaneously examining the growth performance differential of tomato plants cultivated in soil-based and hydroponic systems.

Hypothesis 1: Implementing a WSN and the IoT systems in a greenhouse environment will result in accurate and reliable measurements of environmental variables (temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂)

with minimal data loss and latency when simulated under the TrueTime framework (MATLAB, Simulink) prior to physical deployment.

This hypothesis is based on the premise that advanced simulation tools, such as the TrueTime framework in MATLAB, Simulink, can effectively model the performance of WSN and IoT systems.

Hypothesis 2: Tomato crops cultivated in soil-based systems will exhibit more uniform growth, larger stem size, and less temperature stress than those grown in hydroponic systems, under the same greenhouse conditions and tropical weather, because of better microclimate regulation and root space availability.

This hypothesis is based on the understanding that soil-based systems provide a more stable microclimate and greater root space, which are essential for healthy growth of tomato plants.

This research was conducted to examine tomato plants cultivated in both soil-based and hydroponic systems under controlled climate stress in a greenhouse. The measurement of environmental variables, such as temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂, was automated through the use of technologies such as the IoT WSN and Zigbee.

The simulation of a WSN was achieved through the TrueTime Framework software, which was applied to simulate communication between WSN nodes as they measured the aforementioned variables. The implementation of the entire system was then carried out to compare the plant stem lengths of tomato crops cultivated in both systems.

The academic community aspires to facilitate cooperation between academia and the quadruple helix stakeholders, including industry, government, and society, through initiatives such as this project [16].

2. Materials and Methods

A flow chart of this project, describing the methodology used, is shown in Fig. 1.

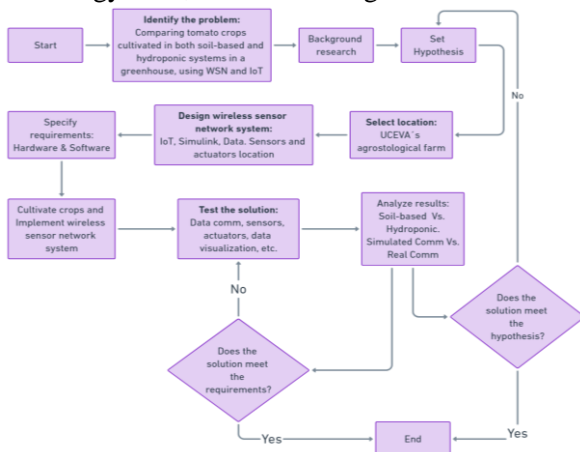


Fig. 1 Flow chart of the project (The authors)

2.1. Characteristics and Conditions of Tomato Crops under Study

This investigation examined the cultivation of the

tomato variety *Solanum lycopersicum* in a greenhouse situated in Colombia using two systems. Specifically, the researchers compared the growth of tomatoes cultivated in a soil-based system with those grown in a hydroponic system.

An experimental investigation was conducted over a two-month period to examine the simulation and automation of system control in a greenhouse that measured environmental parameters, including the temperature, relative humidity, CO₂, and tomato plant stem length. The greenhouse in the Valle del Cauca Department, Colombia, is situated in the municipality of Tuluá within the UCEVA agrostological farm, at coordinates 4°06'11.9" N 76°12'37.0" W. The climate of this region is characterized as tropical and warm throughout the year, with particularly high temperatures during the summer months in certain areas.

Fig. 2a illustrates the UCEVA farm's position relative to Tuluá's urban region to the northwest, while Fig. 2b displays Tuluá's influence area. It is evident from Fig. 2b that numerous square kilometers of natural vegetation exist within this region, where a variety of crops, such as sugarcane, potatoes, tomatoes, and avocados, are cultivated.

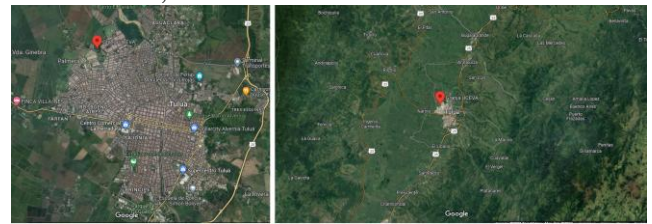


Fig. 2 Greenhouse location (Google Maps)

The research is composed of two stages: the first is the design and simulation of the IoT and WSN system using the TrueTime Framework software, and the second is the implementation of the entire system. Fig. 3 shows the greenhouse design and dimensions, with a total area of 47.1 m² and height of 3.6 mts.

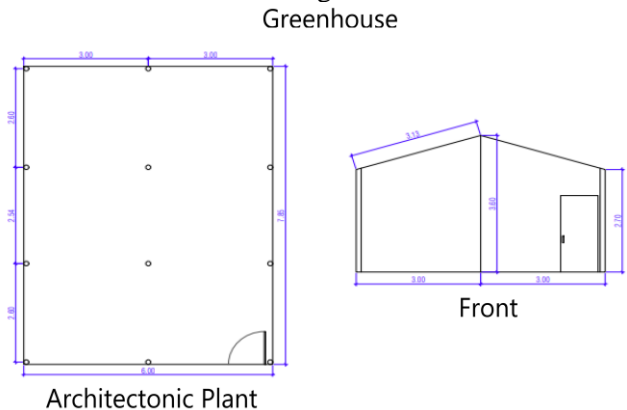


Fig. 3 Greenhouse design (The authors)

2.2. WSN Design and Simulation

It was necessary to select the environmental parameters to be measured and distribute the electronic

devices (five nodes) within the greenhouse, as shown in Fig. 4. Sensor nodes (four nodes) measured the temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂ (carbon dioxide) parameters for both soil-based and hydroponic systems, and all collected information was centralized by a gateway node and displayed on a website interface.

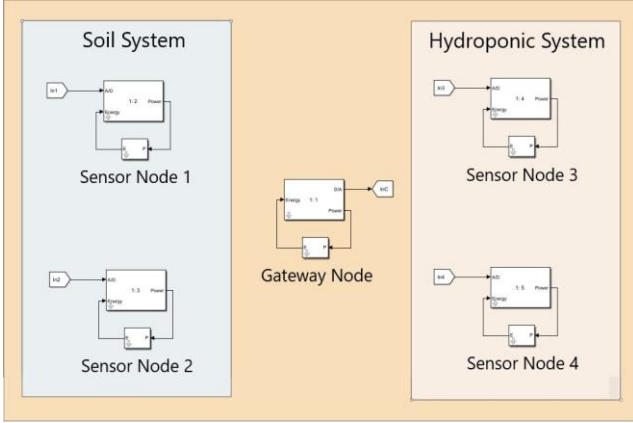


Fig. 4 WSN organization under simulation (The authors)

Each node is composed of one Xbee Module S2C, one MQ135, one DHT22, one XBIB-U-DEV module, and one Arduino Nano. The gateway node is composed of one Xbee Module S2C and one Raspberry Pi B+, which allows communication between the system and website platform. Once the components of the WSN were chosen, it was necessary to simulate the TX/RX data between the nodes. To accomplish this, the TrueTime Framework software was employed within the MATLAB/Simulink environment [17], [18] (Fig. 5).

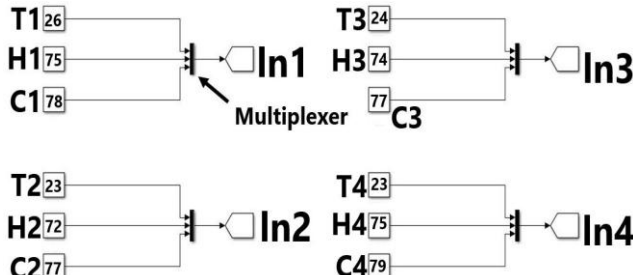


Fig. 5 Communication between sensors and nodes (The authors)

The framework capable of working with a wireless network block based on the IEEE 802.11 and IEEE 802.15.4 standards. The latter standard is used for Zigbee technology. Additionally, this framework allows for interaction with MATLAB functions, C++, and Python languages.

In the simulation diagram, each measured parameter was labeled as T1, T2, T3, and T4 for temperature; H1, H2, H3, and H4 for relative humidity; and C1, C2, C3, and C4 for CO₂, as shown in Fig. 5. Each block of variables (T, H, and C) was connected to a multiplexer that allowed the three values to be grouped into a single variable labeled as “In” (representing each Arduino Nano input).

Each “In” organizes the information at the input of

each sensor node; where “In1” collected data from T1, H1, C1; “In2” from T2, H2, C2, etc.

According to Fig. 6, the function of the gateway node labeled “InC” is to receive data (T, H, and C) from the sensor nodes (In1 to In4) via wireless communication and transmit them as output data.

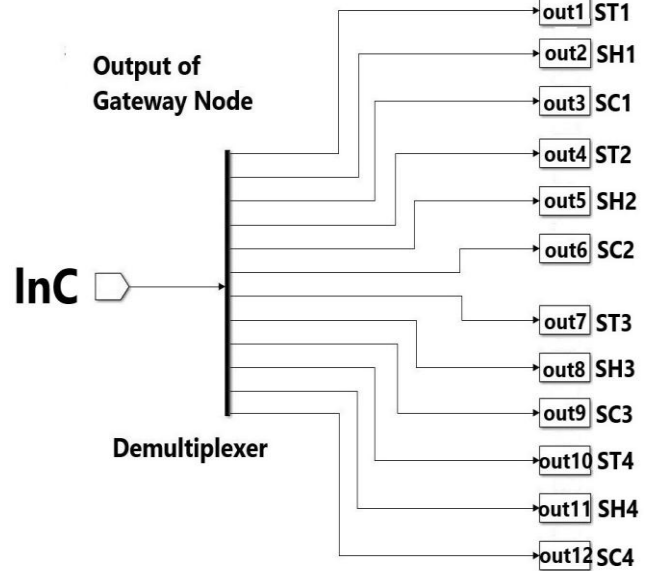


Fig. 6 Communication between the gateway node and Raspberry Pi (The authors)

It was necessary to demultiplex the data to organize and visualize them, and the output data were labeled as ST1, ST2, ST3, and ST4 for temperature; SH1, SH2, SH3, and SH4 for relative humidity; and SC1, SC2, SC3, and SC4 for CO₂ values. Thus, this information should be displayed on a website.

2.3. Control System Design and Simulation

To control crop growth, it was necessary to control the irrigation system, using the temperature parameter as a reference. The control system simulation was performed in the MATLAB/Simulink environment, as shown in Fig. 7.

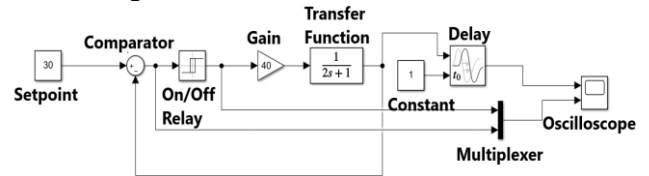


Fig. 7 Control system for the temperature variable (The authors)

The control system was composed of controller elements, such as Raspberry Pi B+ and a 5V 4-channel relay module, and controlled elements, such as electrovalves, nebulizers, and a water pump. The setpoint (sp) was fixed at 33°C as a standard operating value, and a temperature range of 20-35°C was established, which corresponds to the optimal temperature range for the crop. The hysteresis (h) value was calculated using the following equation:

$$h = \frac{h_s - h_i}{2} \tag{1}$$

According to Equation (1), it is possible to determine the value of h provided that $h_s = 35$ and $h_i = 20$, resulting in $h = 7.5$. This means the setpoint may vary between 20 and 35°C. To control the irrigation system, it is necessary to set several values, including the process variable (pv).

$$pv = sp - h \quad (2)$$

According to Equation (2), the value of pv is determined by substituting the values of sp and h , resulting in a value of 25.5. The irrigation system was managed when the following equation was fulfilled:

$$\begin{aligned} pv < sp - h & \dots \text{Irrigation off} \\ pv > sp - h & \dots \text{Irrigation on} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. System Performance

It can be observed from Fig. 8 that the simulated communication between the sensor nodes and gateway node matched the real data behavior, which indicates the effectiveness of using the TrueTime framework for this purpose.

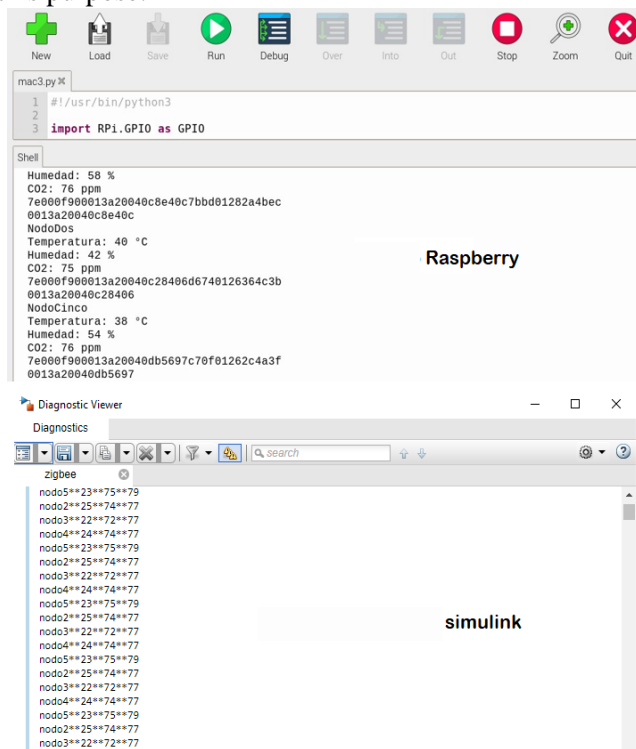


Fig. 8 Simulated and real data of the WSN (The authors)

3.2. IoT System Implementation

According to the system design previously described, Fig. 9 illustrates the positions of the sensor nodes, gateway node (that is, the WNS), and tomato crops for both hydroponic and soil-based systems (located on the right and left sides of the figure, respectively).

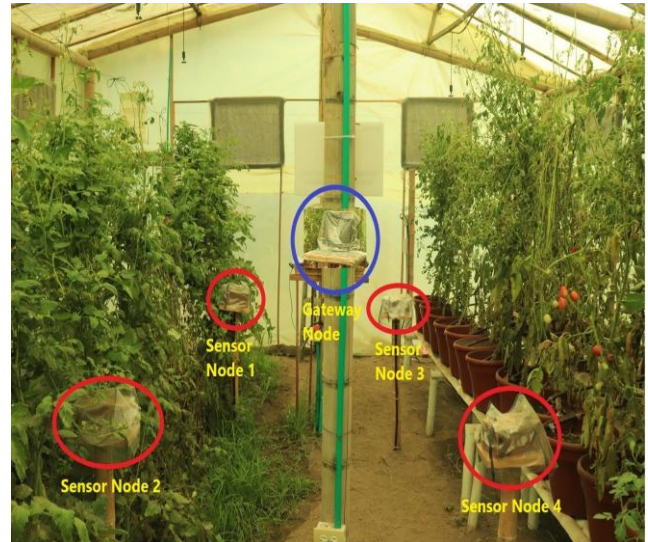


Fig. 9 IoT implementation (The authors)

Each node was protected with a plastic cover to preserve the electronics; each was placed over stacks to prevent any malfunction due to irrigation and any other environmental conditions.

Nebulizers and electrovalves were placed between the crops to optimize irrigation in a distribution similar to that shown in Fig. 10.

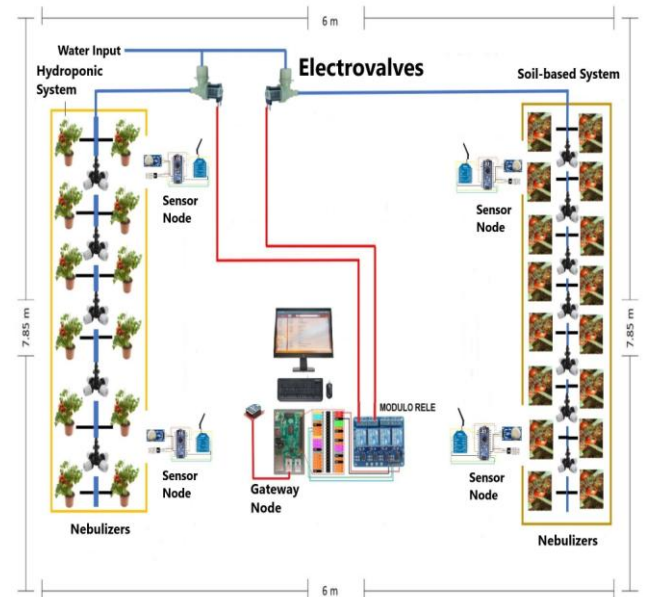


Fig. 10 Nebulizers and electrovalves' location (The authors)

An online graphical user interface (GUI) was developed to visualize the collected data from the sensor nodes (temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂), including the number of the nodes, date, and time.

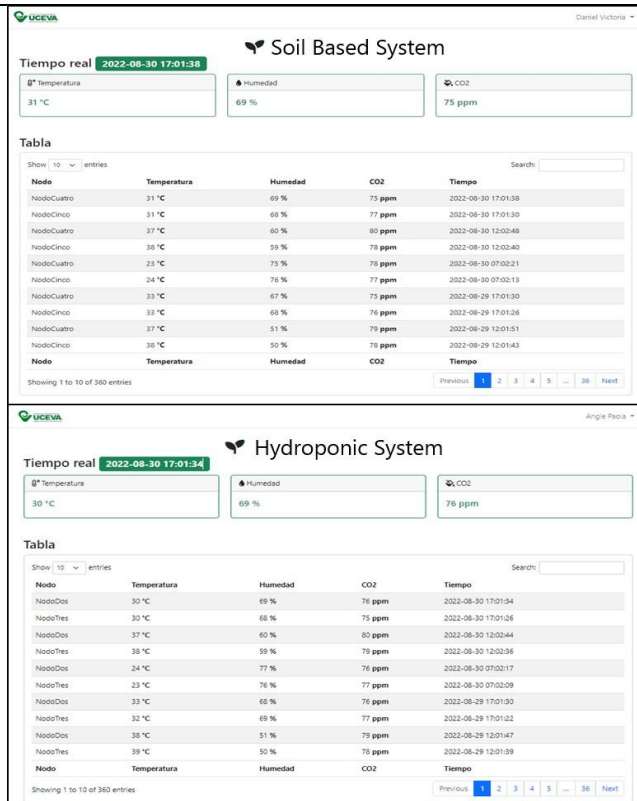


Fig. 11 Graphical user interface (The authors)

3.3. Raw Data

The environmental data obtained by the sensor nodes provided several insights into the microclimate of the greenhouse. Fig. 12 displays the fluctuations in environmental parameters, including temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂, at three different time points (07:00, 12:00, and 19:00) over a two-month period. Based on these results, CO₂ levels have low variation across the day (less than 10%), moving between 75 and 85 ppm.

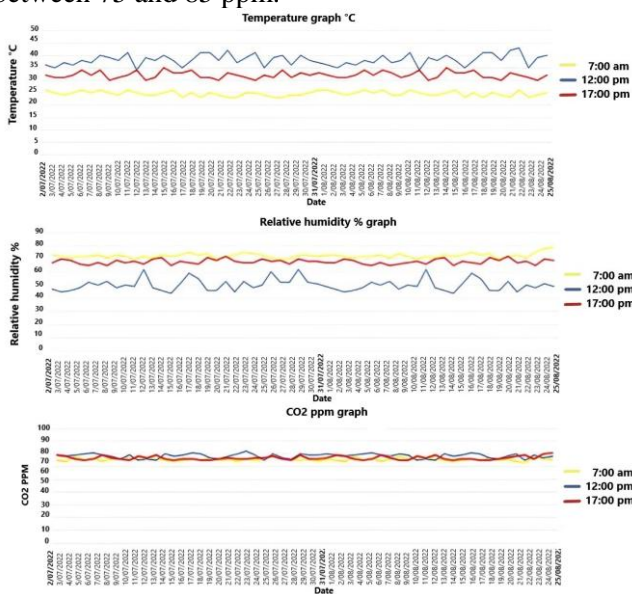


Fig. 12 Measured environmental variables (The authors)

The relative humidity showed the lowest values at noon (12:00) and the highest values in the morning

(07:00) and afternoon (17:00), with the greatest variations occurring at 12:00, varying between 42% and 62% during the same period. Temperature showed the greatest differences at each time point. As expected, the lowest temperature occurs in the morning, varying from 22°C to 26°C, and the highest temperature occurs at noon, oscillating between 35°C and 42°C.

Owing to variations in temperature and relative humidity within the greenhouse, it is necessary to protect the electronic devices to endure their lifetime.

During these two months, both the hydroponic and soil-based systems showed some variations in stem size, as shown in Fig. 13.

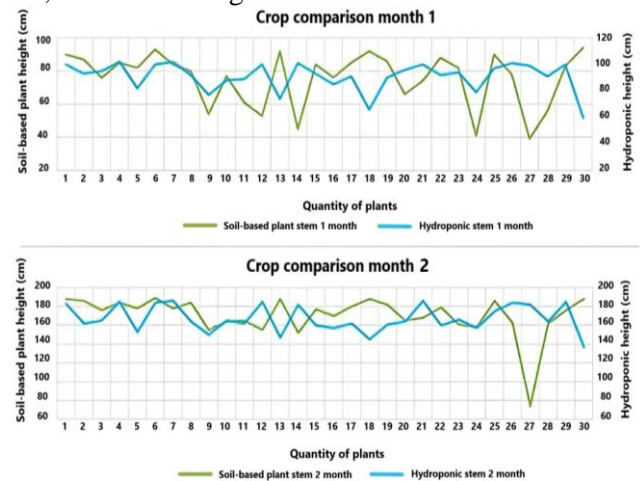


Fig. 13 Plant stem comparison (The authors)

These variations were more significant during the first month in the soil-based system than in the hydroponic system. During the second month of cultivation, the stem size of crops grown using the hydroponic method was found to be lower compared to those grown using the soil-based method. At the end of the study period, the stem size was larger in the tomato crops cultivated with soil-based structures.

WSNs were integrated with Zigbee technology, which operates under the IEEE 802.15.4 Zigbee communication protocol [19], to transmit and receive data on temperature, CO₂, and humidity variables [20]. Zigbee technology enables wireless communication with lower energy consumption than Wi-Fi, but it is not suitable for transmitting large amounts of data. Nevertheless, both technologies function within the same 2.4-GHz frequency band.

Based on these technologies, we designed and simulated a network based on star topology to match the distribution of nodes.

Due to the nature of the greenhouse and its internal environment, which includes temperature, an on/off control system with hysteresis was developed and simulated in the MATLAB/Simulink software [21]. This simulation was conducted to determine the optimal temperature variation range and setpoint for crops. The control system was designed to respond to the feedback conditions derived from the sensor-

measured variables.

According to techniques used for cultivating crops, such as hydroponics [22] and traditional techniques in soil, under the same physical conditions, hydroponic system crops showed faster growth during the first month than plants of the soil-based counterpart because hydroponics allows a controlled environment by taking advantage of plant resources and the recirculation of nutrients. However, it reached a point where its growth was limited because the roots no longer had room to grow, altering the development of the crop.

Soil-based systems are known to produce plants that are less affected by temperature and exhibit more uniform population growth. By the second month, the growth of these plants accelerated significantly, reaching a size comparable to that of hydroponic system plants. This allowed the soil-based plants to develop larger fruits that ripened faster, in contrast to the hydroponic crop, which produced a greater number of smaller fruits that ripened more slowly.

3.4. Comparison with Other Studies

In the context of WSNs, numerous technologies are available for collecting and transmitting data from digital sensors to an online platform. In this study, we utilized a Raspberry Pi B+ and a ZigBee gateway to accomplish this task. Other researchers have used a variety of devices such as NRF24L01, ESP8266, and STM32 to achieve similar results in their projects [23]. This research minimizes the number of devices used in the project, thereby reducing cost and complexity.

Implementing a WSN based on Zigbee technology was chosen because of its advantages such as scalability, low power consumption, and security. It is possible to connect several devices (sensors) to measure several parameters such as temperature, CO₂, and PH conditions [24]. In this sense, this study attained the predicted environmental measurement and findings that align with those of [23] and [24].

Prior to implementing WSNs, a crucial step involves simulating communication between sensor nodes and gateway nodes. In this regard, the MATLAB/Simulink environment was utilized to verify whether data packages, including temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂ measurements, transmitted from the sensor nodes to the gateway node were in accordance with expectations and adhered to the IEEE 802.15.4 Zigbee communication protocol.

A more in-depth study was conducted by [25], in which the entire WSN was simulated and prototyped based on previous simulation results. This approach demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing the MATLAB/Simulink environment to save time and reduce costs while maintaining accuracy in decision-making for such systems.

On the other hand, [26] summarized several studies that used the MATLAB/Simulink environment to

partially or completely simulate a WSN network and its components.

4. Conclusion

The utilization of IoT technologies in crop management involves the deployment of WSNs employing technologies such as Zigbee and Wi-Fi, which are supported by the IEEE 802.15.4 and IEEE 802.11 standards. These networks are designed to monitor various parameters, including temperature, humidity, and pH, with the aim of reducing energy consumption in sensor devices. Therefore, Zigbee technology is best suited to these conditions.

With the design and simulation of the WSN in MATLAB/Simulink using the True-Time framework, the correct transmission and reception of the information based on Zigbee technology and the IEEE 802.15.4 standard are verified during the implementation stage under star topology, where the coordinating node receives the information from the sensor nodes without errors and latency, confirming hypothesis 1; then, it is processed and visualized by connecting a Raspberry Pi B+ and a PC.

In the greenhouse, there is an effective monitoring system for temperature, humidity, and CO₂ levels, which enables the use of an on/off control system to regulate temperature. By employing foggers, the temperature stress experienced by the tomato crops can be reduced, particularly in regions with high temperatures. This indicates that cherry tomatoes can be cultivated using both edaphic and hydroponic methods in such environments.

Through the examination of temperature, relative humidity, and CO₂ levels in edaphic and hydroponic cultivation methods, it was observed that edaphic cultivation demonstrated a better adaptation to greenhouse conditions, which supported Hypothesis 2. Conversely, although hydroponic cultivation exhibited faster growth compared to edaphic cultivation under similar conditions, the plants experienced greater deterioration. The entire process can be remotely monitored through a web application, utilizing various wireless and storage technologies, which aligns with the principles of IoT technologies.

The literature currently available indicates the use of simulation and development of WSNs and/or the IoT for monitoring crop variables, including temperature and humidity, both within and outside of a greenhouse environment. However, the present research employs the aforementioned technologies to compare two types of cultivation, namely soil-based and hydroponic systems, within the confines of a greenhouse. This may lead to identifying the cultivation methods best suited for various crop types and climates, which can result in significant cost and effort savings when growing and harvesting high-quality products.

5. Future Research

This research uses several technologies (MATLAB/Simulink, Zigbee, etc.) to measure environmental parameters within a greenhouse to study how these parameters may affect the stem size of tomato crops.

Improving this study may involve incorporating additional technological resources, such as cameras, to employ artificial vision in analyzing various parameters, including plant length and disease prevalence in both plants and fruits. By doing so, it may be possible to minimize crop loss and optimize time and financial resources.

Factors such as the level of incident ultraviolet (UV) radiation, soil temperature and humidity, fertilizer components, automated lighting, and ventilation can contribute to extending the life of crops and improving the quality of their fruit. When these factors are monitored, they can have a significant impact on the overall success of the crop. Thus, there is a need for extensive research to examine how all these parameters collectively influence a specific crop variety in a greenhouse located in the tropics, taking into account the effects of climate change and the continuous rise in global temperatures.

On the other hand, artificial intelligence can utilize the collected data to create predictive models and automate actions related to the management of the greenhouse system, including irrigation and light control.

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