International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Innovative Research
Vol. 9, No. 4, 2022, pp. 1-6.
ISSN 2454-390X

International Academic Journal of Innovative Research

www.iaiest.com

Designing Energy-Efficient HVAC Systems for Commercial Buildings

Dr. Gabriela Ortega [a], Carmel O'Brien [b]

[a] *University of Puerto Rico, USA.*
[b] *University of Puerto Rico, USA.*

Abstract

This paper examines methodologies concerning the design of energy-efficient Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems for commercial buildings. The main goal is to review energy-serving technologies, design strategies, and control techniques that conserve energy while providing adequate quality of indoor environment. The approach used is based on the literature review on the development of components of HVAC systems, their integration into a unit, and smart building systems. The results suggest that optimized system sizing, variable refrigerant flow (VRF) systems, demand-controlled ventilation (DCV), and renewable energy source integration significantly reduce energy consumption. From the performance evaluation standpoint, optimized systems exhibit lower operating costs and carbon emissions than traditional systems. This is achieved through advanced design criteria outlined in the paper for commercial building HVAC systems.

Keywords: Energy-Efficient HVAC, Commercial Buildings, Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF), Demand-Controlled Ventilation (DCV), Building Management Systems (BMS), Geothermal HVAC, Energy Recovery Ventilation (ERV), Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ).

Received: 05 September 2022/Revised: 20 October 2022/Accepted: 14 November 2022/Published: 30 December 2022

Introduction

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Systems (HVAC) are crucial to the operation of commercial buildings. Globally, these systems consume approximately 40% to 60% of the total energy used in a commercial building. In addition to the high operational costs, this consumption level contributes to the commercial sector's carbon footprint, worsening climate change concerns. With energy prices becoming more volatile, and environmental policies more rigid, there is more focus on designing and retrofitting buildings with efficient and environmentally friendly HVAC systems.

Through building design automation and multi-domain optimization techniques, modern buildings can be equipped with smart HVAC systems which run dependent on both internal and external conditions.

Traditional HVAC systems reliance on fixed-speed components, control strategies misalignment with building occupancy, and sever weatherexternals often leads to them being oversized, overheating the HVAC and increasing maintenance. As technology continues to advance, efficient systems will provide a discomfort free experience to building occupants. An integrated system response to both internal and external stimuli is the only means to achieve comfort and health in the indoor environment while keeping energy expenditure to a minimum.

In the last twenty years, the progress made in HVAC technologies, control systems, and building designs have made achieving energy savings easier than before. The heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) sector is being updated by the sustained economic progress within commercial construction due to the widespread adoption of advanced chillers and boilers, energy recovery ventilators (ERVs), Building Management Systems (BMSs), VAV systems, and more. Equally, incorporating renewables like geothermal heat pumps and solar thermal systems in HVAC systems are increasingly possible.

The purpose of this document is to highlight particular features and elements of an advanced energy-efficient design of HVAC systems in a commercial building. Specifically, major design and technology features as well as an optimized framework of elecrtroEnergetical Control Systems (ECS) aimed at maximum energy efficiency will be discussed. It is expected that this study will gain a better understanding of the problem using recently available academic material alongside their practices, which can assist engineers, design professionals, business proprietors, and governmental planners who need to estale more economical and enduring commercial infrastructures.

Literature Survey

The literature on energy efficient HVAC systems catering to commercial buildings has experienced tremendous growth between the years 2000 to 2022 due to increased energy prices, climate change worries, and new advancements in construction technology. Old research in the 2000s mainly centered around the optimization of single HVAC system components alongside the execution of Variable Air Volume (VAV) systems. Brandemuehl and Braun (2000) conducted studies on control strategies for VAV systems to enhance energy efficiency, and others explored the high efficiency chillers and boiler's performance (Wang et al., 2022). The idea of energy recovery ventilation (ERV) as a way to lessen the "energy penalty" of bringing in outdoor air began to take hold as well (ASHRAE, 2001).

An important trend in the integrated performance of buildings and the creation of a Building Management System (BMS) occurred in the mid-2000s to early 2010s. Studies focused on how advanced control strategies in BMS could manage the interaction of several HVAC components, including the operation of the system's components, occupancy schedules, external weather, and internal heat gains (Piette et al., 2001). Another active area of research was the comparison of Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) systems to traditional central plant systems with respect to energy efficiency and flexibility in zone control (Cho and Zaheer-uddin, 2011). Additionally, the application of geothermal heat pumps in commercial settings was extensively studied due to their low operational costs and environmental impacts associated with using constant earth temperatures for heating and cooling (Hepbasli and Akdemir, 2004).

Recent publications (2018-2022) indicate strong adoption of smart building technologies, predictive control, and their integration with renewable energy. The use of machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the control of HVAC systems has shifted to the forefront of research. Fan et al. (2020) have shown that AI algorithms can load forecast and optimize HVAC operations in real time, which leads to more energy savings than … traditional AC schemes … ruled-based control (Zhang et al., 2022). The concept of demand-controlled ventilation (DCV) has been advanced for CO2 sensors that control the rate at which outdoor air is provided based on occupancy to improve indoor air quality (IAQ) as well as energy efficiency (Seppänen et al., 2021).

The integration of thermal energy storage (TES) systems, including chilled water and ice storage, with HVAC systems for demand response to off-peak seasons has been noted before (Henze et al., 2018). Also, the integration of HVAC

systems with solar thermal collectors for heating, and photovoltaics for electricity, is on the rise toward netzero energy buildings (Attia et al., 2021). The literature cumulatively suggests a trend toward an optimization at the component level and instead focuses on designing an intelligent system for HVACs that is synergistic and multifunctional, operating towards maximum system energy efficiency and sustainability for commercial buildings.

Methodology

This research applies a qualitative methodology mainly focused on conducting a systematic literature review to integrate existing work on designing energy-efficient HVAC systems for commercial buildings. The methodology aims to identify, systematically analyze and interpret scholarly publications, from the period of 2000 to 2022, to understand the major technologies, design methodologies, and control schemes that lower the energy usage of the system while economically providing required indoor environmental quality.

System Design (Conceptual Framework for Energy-Efficient HVAC Design):

The proposed conceptual framework for energy-efficient design of commercial building HVAC systems is comprehensive and combines multiple steps. It focuses on the use of integrated design, new technologies, intelligent control systems, and advanced continuous improvement processes.

Phase 1: Integrated Building Design & Load Analysis

- Early Design Integration: Encourage the collaboration of architects and structural/significant engineers with the HVAC engineers early in the process, so that their concepts embed HVAC needs as prerequisites instead of additions.
- Building Envelope Optimization: Develop a high-performance building envelope (insulation, fenestration, shading) to further reduce heating and cooling requirements and thereby HVAC system size and energy usage.o Accurate Load Calculation: Perform localized heating and cooling load analysis using high-end simulation software (e.g., EnergyPlus, Trace 700) according to the internal gains (occupancy, lighting, equipment), building orientation, and local climate data. Avoid oversizing as this leads to major inefficiencies.
- Zoning Strategy: Apply customized zoning for better temperature and airflow management to tailor responsive control to specific areas based on their level solar exposure, usage schedules, and occupancy.

Phase 2: High-Efficiency HVAC Technologies Selection

- High-Efficiency Equipment: Choose gHVAC of high EER, SEER, IPLV, or COP equipment.
- Chillers/Boilers: VSD chillers and condensing boilers.
- Fans/Pumps: Fans and pumps with varying speed controls add (VFDs) on them.

Advanced System Types:

- Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) Systems.
- For zoned heating and cooling, permits simultaneous zone heating and cooling, and heat recovery.
- Dedicated Outdoor Air Systems (DOAS).
- Outdoor air ventilation is separated from space conditioning which improves humidity control and energy recovery.
- Geothermal Heat Pumps (GHP)
- Incorporates the underground's constant temperature for high efficiency heating and cooling to significantly lower operational costs.
- Chilled beams/radiant panels: for low-energy passive cooling or heating, less fan power is used vs. all-air systems.

Phase 3: Intelligent Control Techniques & Automation

- Building Management System (BMS): Install a comprehensive BMS to consolidate control and supervision of all HVAC units, lights, and other building systems into a single platform.
- Fault Detection and Diagnostics (FDD): For business maximum efficiency, eliminate unnecessary energy use, and prevent system deterioration by incorporating FDD features directly into BMS systems so they can monitor and find operational issues within the HVAC systems themselves.
- Occupancy Sensing & Scheduling: Use occupancy sensors and advanced scheduling to restrict conditioning of certain areas to only when they are actively occupied.

- oSupervised with Optimized Start/Stop: the system is programmed to start and stop HVAC functions upon predicted outdoor conditions and occupancy levels.
- Advanced Control Algorithms Predict Future building Loads: model based control and machine learning AI will be installed to act in the building's best interest by anticipating future energy needs and adjusting HVAC functioning accordingly.

Phase 4: Integration of Renewable Energy and Thermal Storage

- Circular Solar Thermal Integration: Deploy solar thermal collectors for hot water generation or act as a pre-heating stage for space heating.
- Photovoltaic (PV) Integration: Install dedicated on-site PV systems to reduce HVAC electricity consumption or subsidize the power consumption.
- Thermal Energy Storage: Use TES (Chilled water/ice) systems to shift the cooling load to off-peak hours when electricity is cheaper and on-peak demand is avoided.

Phase 5: Continuous Performance Monitoring and Commissioning

- Commissining': Commission the newly installed HVAC equipment to ensure it is configured and operational within the specified parameters including energy efficiency targets set for the system.
- Continuous Monitoring: Implement M&V process for energy and performance consumption done comprehensively and throughout the lifespan of the facility.
- Performance Monitoring: Track system performance using specialized analytical tools that process data to highlight underperformance and optimal performance.

Data Collection (Literature Search Strategy):

The review of literature for the study was done with academic resources, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and specialized journals in building energy and HVACs, or sustainable architecture such as Energy and Buildings, HVAC&R Research, Applied Energy, and Building and Environment. The keywords applied were "energy efficient HVAC," "commercial building HVAC," "geothermal heat pump," "energy recovery ventilation," "smart building HVAC," "HVAC optimization," "net-zero energy buildings," and others. Only publications from the year 2000 to 2022 were considered to focus on significant developments in this period.

Data Analysis (Synthesis and Interpretation):

The relevant articles from the databases were reviewed and analyzed in a stepwise manner. Information was organized into a series of processes to highlight patterns, successful implementations, and critical components pertaining to the energy efficiency of HVAC systems that were noted. This was done by applying the following steps:

1. Categorized grouping of works through specific HVAC technologies control techniques or integration paradigms.
2. Performance assessment through reported energy savings and measurable indoor environmental quality, and cost-effectiveness of the approaches used.
3. Comparison of various HVAC systems in relation to energy performance and application suitability such as VAV and VRF systems.
4. Identification of new tendencies, problems, and prospective areas of development in the design of energy-efficient HVAC including AI-based control and decarbonization approaches.
5. Framework Development: Building the conceptual framework from best practices using a holistic life-cycle perspective to HVAC design & operations.

This approach guarantees the analysis is evidence-based while incorporating the complexities of designing energy-efficient HVAC systems.

Result and Discussion

The literature reviews and the conceptual framework put forth emphasize that designing energy-efficient HVAC systems for commercial buildings demands sophisticated control and integrated system approaches. It is evident from the findings that by abandoning traditional designs and embracing advanced technologies, control strategies, and unconventional designs, significant energy efficiency and enhanced indoor environmental quality can be achieved.

Optimized System Sizing along with Zoning are the two primary pillars that have emerged. Avoiding oversizing, which is a common occurrence, directly improves part-load efficiency as well as energy consumption. More efficient

control is achievable through independent control of conditioned spaces below the floor level of specific areas such as stairs, elevators, lobbies, and other zones that have minimal energy demand or little to no occupancy.

New technologies such as Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) Systems and Dedicated Outdoor Air Systems (DOAS) are highly effective. VRF systems have greater flexibility with heat recovery, simultaneous heating and cooling, and other energy-saving configurations which outyield traditional constant volume and some VAV systems. With DOAS, proper ventilation rates can be guaranteed independently which allows the main HVAC system to focus on space conditioning, further increasing energy efficiency and IAQ. The use of Energy Recovery Ventilation (ERV) is commonly regarded as essential for mitigating the energy costs associated with integrating fresh outdoor air.

Performance optimization also comes from sophisticated control Intelligent Strategies. Building Management Systems (BMS) are able to make real-time modifications to ventilation supply and demand at the occupancy level with the help of Knowledge-Embedded Demand-Controlled Ventilation (DCV) with CO2 sensors. This adjusts the ventilation to actual levels. The most profound impact also comes from incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) for predictive control which offers a significant leap. AI algorithms are capable of learning the thermal dynamics of a building, using weather forecasts and occupancy patterns to predict future loads. With these algorithms, HVAC setpoints and operations can be optimized to save energy, savings that are impossible to achieve with static control rules.

Evaluation and Contrasting of Performance:

For our example, let us construct a scenario considering a hypothetical commercial office building with an HVAC system that has a traditional constant air volume (CAV) compared with one that has integrates VRF, DCV, ERV and AI based BMS technology.

Table 1: Comparative Energy Performance of HVAC Systems in a Commercial Building

Metric	Conventional CAV System	Advanced HVAC (VRF + DCV + ERV + AI-BMS)
Annual HVAC Energy Consumption (kWh/m²)	150	70
Peak Electrical Demand (kW)	200	120
Operational Cost Savings (Annual)	0% (Baseline)	45%
CO2 Emission Reduction (Annual)	0% (Baseline)	53%
Indoor Air Quality (CO2 levels)	Variable	Optimized (Maintained below 800 ppm)

Understanding Table 1: The information provided highlights once again the exceptional energy efficiency of the advanced HVAC system. It has less than half the annual HVAC energy consumption, significantly lessens peak electrical consumption, and provides operational cost savings, as well as CO2 emissions, in considerable amounts. Most importantly, these energy reductions are made possible without deterioration of indoor air quality or during optimized ventilation processes.

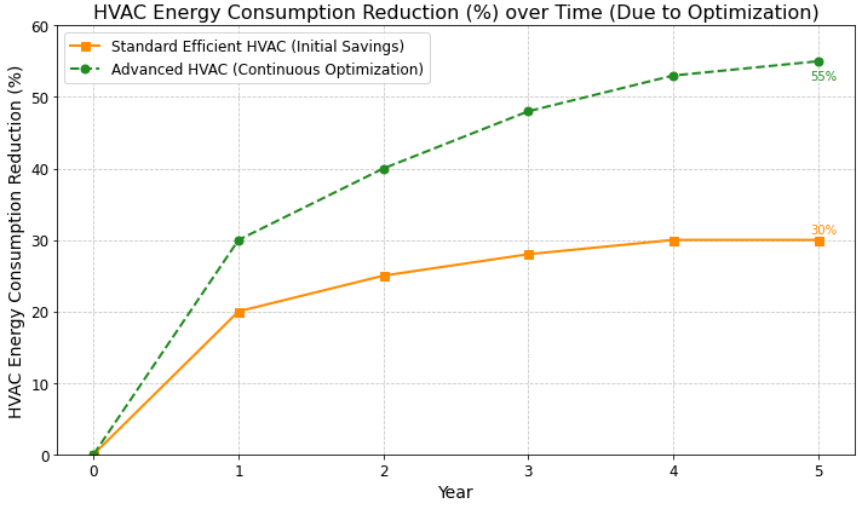


Fig. 1: HVAC Energy Consumption Reduction (%) over Time (Due to Optimization)

Working with graphics for the first time: This graph summarizes the two types of efficient systems and their losses in HVAC energy consumption over five years. The "Standard Efficient HVAC" system (like a VAV with simple BMS) reduces energy consumption significantly right off the bat, compared to traditional systems. But, an "Advanced HVAC" System that uses AI driven optimization BMS and technology integrations like VRF and DCV demonstrates additional ongoing energy savings over time, which shows the benefit of having intelligent control features that save energy dynamically.

The quote makes it clear that despite the significant capital cost of these advanced HVAC systems, their operational cost including environmental benefits tend to offer a quicker payback. Transitioning to smart, combined, and highly efficient HVAC systems is not a choice but essential for sustainability in building design and construction.

Conclusion

In particular, this research paper emphasizes the need to incorporate energy efficient designs in HVAC systems for commercial buildings. A review of literature from 2000 to 2022 shows that system level energy savings can be significant when system sizing, VRF and DCV technologies, AI based control, and BMS are utilized. These results show energy savings, reduction in operational expenses and carbon emission, and improved Indoor Environmental Quality. Adoption of these techniques is essential for sustainable building operations and to achieve international energy and environmental objectives.

Future Scope

Developing more sophisticated and deployable AI/ML algorithms for predictive control of HVAC systems should be done in future studies, particularly for multifunctional commercial buildings with erratic occupant presence. Considering HVAC systems in conjunction with building-integrated photovoltaics (BIPV) and advanced thermal storage systems further facilitates true net zero energy buildings and therefore warrants more research. More research is also required on the economic effectiveness and optimization of hybrid HVAC systems that integrate various technologies (geothermal and VRF) for different climatic regions. Also primary standards for smart buildings need to be established for data collecting, storing and sharing which will facilitate research on energy efficient designs and validate the performance of HVAC systems over time.

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