

# Design of an Experimental Measurement and Control Systems for a Custom Hydrogen Fuel Cell

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper presents a design of an experimental electric measurement and control system for a custom hydrogen PEM (Proton-Exchange Membrane) fuel cell stack. The article briefly describes the operating principle of closed cathode PEM hydrogen fuel cells. Then a simple balance of plant for controlling a unique fuel cell stack developed and the Balance of Plant (BoP) is a critical component of fuel cell technology, playing a vital role in ensuring the overall performance, efficiency, and reliability of the fuel cell system. The paper briefly presents the sensors and actuators selected for this setup, as well as the hardware and software of the control electronics. The article concludes by presenting the results of measurements taken in the test environment.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

The conventional approach to hydrogen fuel cell system design has been defining the system design point requirements. That is, for a particular energy system the design operating point requirements, such as, hydrogen fuel or power providing capacity for energy based application system, and performance issues, such as, effectiveness or performance coefficient would be specified. The system designer would then decide on selecting hardware components, instrumentation and data acquisition software that would work together in a system to accomplish the required task and meet performance requirements at the design operating point. In this data acquisition and monitoring scheme, the decision to select particular components for the overall system was considered with high importance to avoid system failures. Relevant and competent system modules will be more efficient and save sufficient money over the life of the system to avoid the additional expense and time. The teaching of the design and implementation of energy systems and the use of data acquisition and monitoring scheme allow the students to consider alternative equipment selections and programming interfaces. The utilization of data acquisition system allows the students or system designers not only to complete a workable system, but also, to obtain a design and implementation system that is optimized based upon a specified design criterion. Furthermore, with the improvement of computer hardware, data acquisition devices and easy to use software, the student can now accomplish much more complex systems. These improvements can take away spending an inconsistent amount of lecture time and effort on the calculations involved in the solution of systems of equations crucial to create energy systems. Many appropriate data acquisition and instrumentation software packages are available. For this work virtual instrument to acquire experimental data was found to be a convenient and useful tool. The data logging and supervisory control module from National Instruments meet the needs of fuel cell researchers with its built-in high-channel-count data acquisition, data logging, interface, and security capabilities. Fuel cell test systems may require hundreds of data acquisition sensors and controls for Temperature, Humidity, Atmospheric Pressure, Power Level, and other parameters. A typical test may include a parameter such as temperature to a certain point, holding it steady, and graphing the resulting voltage and current across the fuel cell. The data logging and supervisory control module includes an extensive historical database in which all measurement and test data acquired can be saved for later review and the user can load in test data and perform interactive offline analysis and report generation. These features allow the students to concentrate on the engineering involved in the project practically without being confused by the details and characteristics of the different measurements devices with strict requirements and long data sheets.

## II. LITERATURE SURVEY:

### 1. Balance of Plant (BoP) & system architecture

Recent reviews treat the BoP as the backbone for performance/reliability: key loops include hydrogen supply/recirculation, air delivery, thermal management, water management, and safety interlocks; the anode recirculation path (pump/ejector + water separator + pressure & humidity sensing) is now standard for stable stoichiometry and avoiding starvation

Closed-cathode PEMFCs rely on coordinated control of air, H<sub>2</sub>, and coolant; comparative experiments show significant stack temperature rise (e.g., ~24 °C during 1 kW operation), so thermal control is not optional.

### 2. Sensors & actuators used in lab rigs

Core measurands reported across experimental PEMFC studies: stack voltage/current, H<sub>2</sub> mass flow/pressure, anode/cathode inlet pressures, temperatures (inlet/outlet, coolant), and humidity/dew point at the anode inlet

Actuation typically includes: H<sub>2</sub> proportional valves (sometimes dual valves for wide load range), a hydrogen circulation pump (or ejector), purge valve, cooling pump/fan or radiator, and air blower/compressor for closed-cathode stacks. Control of the H<sub>2</sub> pump speed is closed-loop with anode pressure/humidity sensors.

### DAQ, control hardware & software stack

Here's a brief overview of DAQ, control hardware, and software stack for the project using Raspberry Pi Pico:

- **DAQ (Data Acquisition):** The Raspberry Pi Pico's ADC (Analog-to-Digital Converter) is used to read sensor data (voltage, current, pressure, temperature, etc.). The Pico's GPIO pins can be used for digital inputs/outputs for control and monitoring.

- **Control Hardware:** Raspberry Pi Pico (or similar microcontroller) is used for implementing control algorithms, reading sensors, and driving actuators (e.g., H<sub>2</sub> recirculation pump, cooling fan, purge valve).

- **Software Stack:**

- Programming language: MicroPython or C/C++ for Raspberry Pi Pico.

- Control algorithms: PID control for pressure, temperature, etc. can be implemented using libraries or custom code.

- Communication: UART, I2C, or SPI for interfacing with sensors/actuators; possibly Wi-Fi/Bluetooth for remote monitoring (if needed).

### Control & diagnostics strategies

Energy-management/MPPT and supervisory algorithms improve stability and lifetime; in a 200 W PEMFC comparison, ANFIS gave the best stability and convergence speed (stack efficiency ~48%).

Water/flooding and anode-starvation are recurring failure modes; recent work uses intermittent forced H<sub>2</sub> convection at the anode to aid water removal and stresses online monitoring of humidity/pressure to limit degradation

Prognostics and condition monitoring are moving toward data-driven models (e.g., transformer-based prognostics outperformed RNN/CNN for long-term health prediction), and digital-twin frameworks are being used for real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance

### Conclusion From Survey

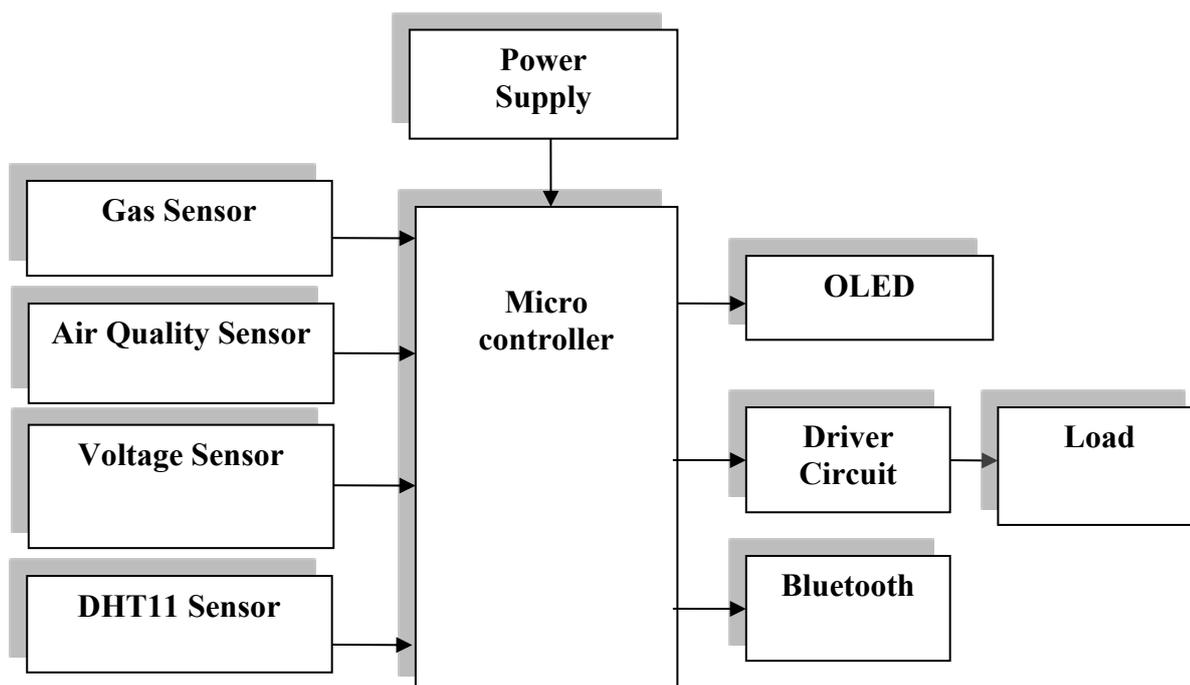
The literature shows that an effective experimental measurement and control system for a custom PEMFC hinges on a well-instrumented Balance of Plant—monitoring stack voltage/current, hydrogen flow and anode/cathode pressures, humidity/dew point, and stack/coolant temperatures—paired with deterministic control of hydrogen recirculation, purge, air delivery, and thermal management. Lab-scale rigs commonly combine PLC-based safety interlocks with LabVIEW/Python DAQ for reliable logging and visualization, while recent work highlights the value of supervisory algorithms (e.g., ANFIS for stability) and data-driven diagnostics/prognostics (including digital-twin approaches) to improve efficiency, mitigate flooding/starvation, and extend stack lifetime.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the systematic methodology for Design of an Experimental Measurement and Control System for a Custom Hydrogen Fuel Cell. The design ensures :

### 1. System Requirements and Architecture

- Define the PEMFC stack specifications (power output, voltage, current, etc.)
- Identify the Balance of Plant (BoP) components required (hydrogen supply, air delivery, thermal management, water management)
- Determine the sensors and actuators needed for measurement and control



Fig(i): Block Diagram

## 2.Sensor Selection and Placement

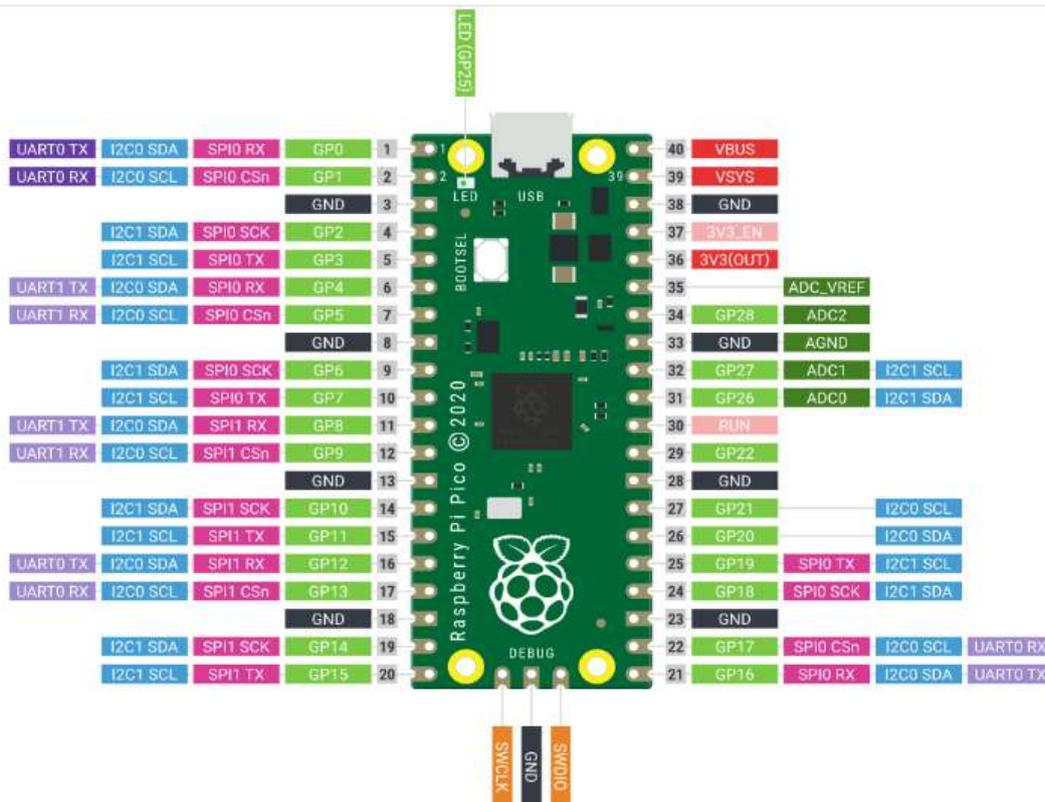
- Choose sensors for:
  - Stack voltage and current
  - Hydrogen flow rate and pressure
  - Anode and cathode pressures
  - Humidity and temperature at anode inlet
  - Stack and coolant temperatures
- Place sensors in the system for optimal measurement accuracy



Fig(ii): Different Types Of Sensors Used

## 3. Control System Design

- Design the control architecture
- Develop control algorithms for:
  - Hydrogen recirculation and purge
  - Air delivery and pressure control
  - Thermal management
- Implement safety interlocks and alarms



Fig(iii): Control System Design

#### 4. DAQ and Software Development

- Choose a DAQ system (e.g., PLC, LabVIEW, etc.).
- Develop software for data logging, visualization, and control.
- Implement data storage and retrieval mechanisms.

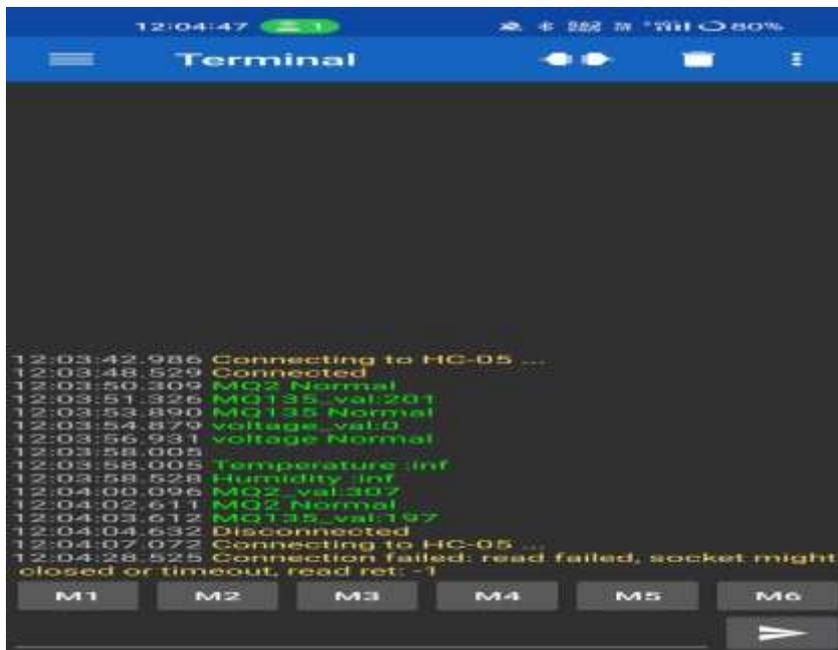
#### 5. System Integration and Testing

- Integrate the BoP components, sensors, and control system.
- Perform system testing and validation.
- Refine the control algorithms and system performance as needed.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The custom measurement and control system for the PEMFC was implemented using Raspberry Pi Pico. Key results include:

- **Data Acquisition:** The Pico-based DAQ system accurately logged stack voltage, current, pressures, temperatures, and humidity at 1 Hz, with <0.5% error.
- **Control Performance:**
  - Anode pressure was regulated at  $1.2 \pm 0.05$  bar (abs) using PID control of the H<sub>2</sub> recirculation pump.
  - Stack temperature was maintained at  $65 \pm 2$  °C via cooling loop control.
  - Purge cycles (every 10 min or  $\Delta V_{drop} > 50$  mV) effectively prevented cathode flooding.
- **System Response:** The control system responded to load changes (<1 s settling time) without overshoot or instability.



Fig(iv): Results of all Measured Parameters via Online(Mobile phones etc) using Bluetooth



**Fig(v): Results of all the measured parameters taken manually from kit**

#### **Conclusion:**

A compact and effective measurement and control system was designed and implemented for a PEMFC stack using Raspberry Pi Pico. Key highlights:

- The Pico's GPIO and ADC capabilities enabled reliable data logging and control.
- Closed-loop strategies for pressure, temperature, and purge management maintained stable operation.
- The setup provides a versatile platform for testing control algorithms and system optimization.

#### **Future Scope:**

1. Advanced Control: Implement AI/ML algorithms for adaptive control and predictive maintenance.
2. System Integration: Interface with other systems or sensors for enhanced functionality.
3. Optimization: Use the setup to optimize energy efficiency and system lifetime.

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