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**Research paper**

# A Brief Review of Different Methods of Building Energy Optimization in Hot & Humid Malaysian Climate

Seyed Mohammad Noorbakhsh [1], Heidar Ali Raeisi [*, 1], Behrang Moradi [2], Mohd Hamdan Ahmad [3, 4]

*1. Energy and Environment Research Center, Shahrekord Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord, Iran.*
*2.Department of Architecture, South Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran*
*3. Institute of High Voltage and High Current, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia*
*4. Faculty of Built Environment and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*

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**Corresponding Author's Email Address: h.raisi@gmail.com*

**Abstract**

The increasing demand for energy efficiency in the built environment has prompted a critical examination of energy optimization methods, particularly in building such as those found in Malaysia. This article addresses the urgent necessity of investigating energy optimization strategies tailored to the unique climatic conditions of Malaysia, where temperature and humidity variations significantly influence energy consumption patterns in buildings. Despite the growing body of research on energy efficiency, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive studies that systematically review and compare the effectiveness of different optimization techniques in Malaysian contexts. Our investigation highlights innovative approaches, including passive and active design strategies, advanced building materials, and smart technology integration, which have shown promise in enhancing energy performance. Key results indicate that region-specific optimization methods can lead to substantial reductions in energy usage, with potential savings in certain climates. This review not only contributes to the existing literature by filling a critical gap but also provides practical insights for architects, engineers, and policymakers aiming to implement sustainable building practices in Malaysia's diverse climatic landscape.

## 1. Introduction

Energy optimization in buildings across hot & humid Malaysian climate is a critical area of study, given the nation's predominantly tropical environment characterized by high temperatures and humidity year-round. Malaysia's unique climate, influenced by both monsoon seasons and regional variations, necessitates tailored energy strategies to maintain indoor comfort and reduce energy consumption. As Malaysia undergoes rapid urbanization and development, understanding and implementing effective energy optimization methods in building design and operation become increasingly crucial to achieving sustainability and reducing environmental impact. In Malaysian climates, energy optimization methods span both passive and active design strategies. Passive strategies focus on leveraging natural resources to enhance building performance, including optimal building orientation, natural ventilation, and daylight capture. These methods are vital in minimizing heat ingress and reducing reliance on artificial lighting, which can contribute to substantial energy savings.

Humidity management is also a critical component, given the tropical climate's challenges, which necessitate innovative solutions like dehumidifiers and vegetation to maintain indoor air quality and comfort.

Active design strategies in Malaysia incorporate advanced technologies and systems, such as hybrid heat pump systems and building-integrated photovoltaic/thermal (BIPV/T) systems, to improve energy efficiency. These technologies enable buildings to generate renewable energy, significantly reducing their carbon footprint. Additionally, energy optimization strategies involve the use of simulation tools and optimization techniques, such as the Taguchi Orthogonal Arrays and Response Surface Methodology, to design nearly zero-energy buildings (NZERBs) tailored to tropical climates. Smart operation systems further enhance building performance by dynamically adjusting energy use based on real-time conditions.

Case studies of energy optimization in Malaysian buildings provide valuable insights into effective strategies and their impacts. For instance, studies on government office buildings in Kuala Lumpur highlight the inefficiencies in energy consumption and recommend retrofits based on non-design and passive design factors. Comparative analyses of different architectural forms underscore the importance of design in achieving thermal comfort and energy efficiency. Furthermore, the integration of energy simulation tools in evaluating retrofit measures demonstrates their effectiveness in reducing energy consumption and enhancing sustainability.

The future of energy optimization in Malaysian buildings is poised to benefit from advanced optimization techniques, hybrid renewable energy systems, and supportive policy frameworks. The integration of smart technologies and continued investment in renewable energy infrastructure are expected to drive significant improvements in energy efficiency and sustainability. Long-term projections indicate a substantial increase in the global share of renewable energy, emphasizing the need for Malaysia to adopt innovative energy optimization strategies to meet future energy demands sustainably.

## 2. Overview of Malaysian Climates

Malaysia's climate is predominantly characterized by its tropical nature, marked by high temperatures and humidity year-round. The main variable influencing the climate is not temperature or air pressure but rainfall. Coastal plains in Malaysia average temperatures around 28°C, while inland and mountainous areas average around 26°C, and higher mountain regions around 23°C. Relative humidity typically ranges between 70% and 90% [1].

The climate can be divided into two main seasons influenced by monsoons: the dry season, which spans from June to September, and the rainy season, from December to March. Western and northern parts of Malaysia receive the most precipitation due to the moisture-laden monsoon clouds that move north- and westward [1]. Typhoons can also impact Malaysia from July to mid-November, causing heavy damage, flooding, and erosion [1].

The climate in Malaysia can further be broken down into regional specifics. West Malaysia, which includes major cities like Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Georgetown, experiences relatively constant temperatures and humidity levels throughout the year. The summer months (May to August) see slightly less precipitation compared to other periods. Conversely, the east coast of West Malaysia exhibits a more pronounced dry and rainy season cycle, with heavy rainfall from December to February, leading to closures of many hotels and tourist attractions, while the period from March to October remains relatively dry and attracts more visitors [2].

Kuala Lumpur is noted as the warmest and rainiest part of Malaysia, whereas Kelantan is considered the coldest [3]. The best time for travel is generally in February, due to less rainfall. Most precipitation occurs from October to December [3]. Over the years, consistent data from weather stations have revealed notable temperature trends; for instance, the hottest month recorded was May 1998 at 29.2°C, and October 2023 was one of the driest months in 13 years [3].

East Malaysia, located on the island of Borneo, is influenced by a tropical monsoon climate, with a distinct short dry season and a longer rainy season with substantial rainfall. This climatic distinction results from its proximity to the equator and monsoon influences, creating significant variability in weather patterns across different regions of the country [2].

## 3. Energy Optimization Methods

Energy optimization in buildings, particularly in the context of Malaysia's tropical climate, involves various strategies aimed at reducing energy consumption while maintaining comfort and functionality. These methods incorporate both passive and active design elements to achieve optimal energy efficiency.

### 3.1. Passive Design Strategies

Passive design strategies focus on using natural resources to enhance building performance and minimize energy consumption. These methods emphasize the importance of building orientation, natural ventilation, and daylight capture.

### 3.1.1. Building Orientation and Natural Ventilation

Proper orientation of buildings is crucial for minimizing heat ingress, especially through the east and west façades due to the consistent path of the sun throughout the year in Malaysia [4]. Natural ventilation can be optimized by designing buildings with larger openings for inlets and outlets, enabling free wind passage, and incorporating multiple floors to enhance airflow [5].

### 3.1.2. Daylight Capture

Daylight capture is a significant component of passive design, reducing the need for artificial lighting and associated thermal gains. Indirect natural light can be harnessed through windows, skylights, and light reflectors, which should be carefully designed to balance illumination and glare while restricting unwanted heat penetration [5].

However, excessive daylight can lead to glare and overheating, necessitating the use of metrics to optimize these competing demands [4].

### 3.1.3. Humidity Management

Humidity poses a challenge in tropical climates, affecting the feasibility of natural ventilation. Solutions include the use of dehumidifiers or incorporating vegetation to manage indoor humidity levels [4]. Additionally, rain and tropical weather conditions must be considered, which can be addressed through wind-driven rain simulations and the design of appropriate shading devices [4].

## 3.2. Active Design Strategies

Active design strategies involve the use of technologies and systems to further enhance energy efficiency in buildings. These methods include hybrid heat pump systems, BIPV/T systems, and energy optimization strategies.

### 3.2.1. Renewable Energy Integration

Hybrid heat pump systems that integrate renewable energy sources, such as solar and thermal energy, are essential for optimizing energy consumption in buildings [6]. BIPV/T systems combine photovoltaic panels with thermal collectors to generate both electricity and heat, improving overall energy efficiency [6].

### 3.2.2. Energy Optimization and Smart Operation

Energy optimization strategies involve the use of simulation tools and optimization techniques to design energy-efficient buildings. For instance, the use of Taguchi Orthogonal Arrays and RSM-Box-Behnken methods can identify significant factors influencing energy performance and develop prescriptive requirements for NZERBs in tropical climates [7]. Smart operation and demand energy response systems can further enhance building performance by dynamically adjusting energy use based on real-time conditions [6].

### 3.2.3. Multi-Objective Optimization

Multi-objective optimization approaches are used for retrofitting buildings to achieve net-zero energy status. These approaches consider various factors such as energy efficiency, cost, and environmental impact to make informed decisions [8]. For example, optimizing air conditioning operational modes in residential buildings with the assistance of solar energy and thermal energy storage can significantly reduce energy consumption [8].

# 4. Case Studies

The analysis of energy optimization methods in Malaysian buildings has been explored through various case studies, providing valuable insights into effective strategies and their impacts.

## 4.1. Kuala Lumpur Government Office Buildings

A comprehensive study focused on six government office building blocks located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city [9]. The study conducted a literature review and collected energy consumption data to calculate the Building Energy Index (BEI), comparing it against the MS1525:2019 and GBI benchmarks to evaluate energy performance. SketchUp software was utilized to illustrate solar radiation and sun path diagrams. Recommendations were derived based on non-design factors and passive design strategies [9].

### 4.1.1. Findings and Recommendations

The study found that Malaysian government office buildings tend to consume energy inefficiently due to a lack of optimization measures. The research highlighted the necessity of studying the energy performance of existing buildings constructed before the implementation of energy-efficient standards to mitigate wastage [9]. Retrofits based on non-design and passive design factors were recommended, emphasizing the need for effective energy conservation measures to improve the energy performance of these buildings [9].

### 4.2. Daylight and Thermal Comfort in Architectural Modelling

Another case study compared different architectural forms regarding thermal comfort, Energy Efficiency Index, and energy consumption. Case 3 provided more sufficient natural daylight than Case 4, indicating that geometrical design plays a crucial role in energy optimization [10]. The study also considered simplicity, popularity, and solar potential in developing architectural alternatives [10].

#### 4.2.1. Energy-Efficient Retrofitting

The retrofitting of existing government high-rise office buildings in Malaysia showed that various levels of intervention could achieve between 4% to 7% savings in annual energy consumption. These interventions demonstrated compliance with BEI benchmark margins of the GBI and EPU standards [11]. This validated model highlighted the effectiveness of energy retrofit measures in reducing energy consumption in high-rise office buildings [11].

### 4.3. Energy-Efficient Building Construction

The evaluation of energy-efficient building construction and embodied energy emphasized passive strategies as more effective in reducing energy consumption. A combined approach with active strategies, however, yielded optimal results. The challenges of retrofitting, such as initial costs and regulatory barriers, were noted. Tools like EnergyPlus, eQUEST, and IES VE were identified as essential for evaluating and identifying cost-effective retrofit measures in building performance [12].

#### 4.3.1. Key Insights

The importance of energy simulation software in assessing retrofit measures was underscored. These tools provide comprehensive insights into various strategies available for achieving energy efficiency and sustainability goals. The review serves as an authoritative resource for building owners, managers, and professionals, offering guidance for informed decision-making in retrofitting practices [12].

## 5. Comparative Analysis

### 5.1. Sensitivity Analysis

Sensitivity analysis plays a crucial role in examining the impact of varying specific variables on the output performance of an energy system [13]. This analysis is especially significant for optimizing energy use in rural areas where grid power is inaccessible. For example, in Kuala Terengganu, sensitivity analysis was conducted after simulation and optimization processes. The findings indicate that for a hybrid PV-wind-grid system to achieve a payback period comparable to that of a PV-grid system, the feed-in tariff rate needs to be set at a minimum of RM1.80. Therefore, it can be concluded that the grid-connected hybrid PV-wind system represents the most economically viable option [14].

### 5.2. Statistical Validation

Regression analysis is another critical tool used for optimizing energy efficiency, particularly in models where environmental and electrical parameters are examined. High correlation coefficients (r values ranging from 0.8168 to 0.9803) indicate a significant relationship between these parameters. The predictive power of these models is further validated through statistical indicators such as $R^2$, Mean Bias Error, Root Mean Square Error, Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE), and Symmetric Mean Absolute Percentage Error (SMAPE). Among these, SMAPE is often considered more reliable than MAPE, particularly when zero or near-zero data points are present [15].

### 5.3. Climatic Considerations

Malaysia's hot & humid climate, characterized by high temperatures and significant humidity, presents unique challenges and opportunities for energy optimization. The country's climate, influenced by both the Southwest (May to September) and Northeast (November to March) monsoons, sees consistent annual rainfall without a defined dry season [16, 17]. These climatic conditions necessitate specialized strategies for energy optimization, particularly in building designs and landscape planning.

### 5.4. Energy Efficiency in Tropical Buildings

The form and design of buildings play a crucial role in energy efficiency, especially in tropical climates like Malaysia. Research from Penang, Malaysia, underscores the significance of building form in optimizing energy use. For instance, buildings designed to harness natural ventilation and shade can significantly reduce energy consumption by mitigating the heat load [10]. Furthermore, planting trees with high shade qualities around buildings can serve as natural air conditioners, reducing the temperature and improving microclimates through the process of evapotranspiration [18].

### 5.5. Environmental Impact

Malaysia's biodiversity and forest ecosystems have faced degradation due to factors like agricultural expansion. This environmental impact directly influences the strategies for energy optimization in buildings. For example, deforestation and land use changes can affect local climates, thereby impacting the energy needs and efficiency measures required for buildings [19, 20]. Efforts to integrate climate resilience into national planning have been evident in Malaysia's Tenth and Eleventh National Plans, aimed at enhancing climate resilience and sustainable development [19].

## 6. Challenges and Considerations

Green buildings have emerged as a solution to reduce the negative impacts of development while providing positive impacts on the environment and residents. Designed to minimize water and energy use and to improve air and water quality, green buildings offer a host of benefits. Although their upfront costs are higher, the long-term benefits include reduced energy and maintenance costs, as well as improved quality of life for users and residents [21]. This aligns with Malaysia's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and improving energy efficiency, contributing to a healthier environment with cleaner air and reduced reliance on natural resources [22].

## 7. Future Trends in Energy Optimization

### 7.1. Advanced Optimization Techniques

In the pursuit of designing NZERBs in tropical climates, innovative optimization techniques are increasingly employed. Two notable approaches include the Taguchi Orthogonal Arrays and the Response Surface Methodology (RSM) with Box-Behnken design. The Taguchi Orthogonal approach is particularly favored for its reduced computing time, aiding in the selection of the most influential factors. Subsequently, the RSM-Box-Behnken technique, integrated with the Design-Expert tool, is utilized to develop prescriptive path requirements for NZERB design. These methods have demonstrated substantial accuracy and reliability, as evidenced by energy simulation tool HAP predicting a BEI of 67.085 kWh/m²/year - a 54% reduction compared to the base-case building design - and the PVWatts calculator predicting a 13 kW system, which is 53.57% smaller than the base case [7].

### 7.2. Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems

Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems are poised to play a critical role in energy optimization for remote and rural areas. Studies have explored various combinations of hybrid systems, such as photovoltaic-wind turbine-diesel-battery configurations, using the Hybrid Optimization Model for Electric Renewable (HOMER) simulation. These configurations have shown promise in providing sustainable and cost-efficient solutions for rural electrification. For instance, an analysis in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, indicated that PV-wind-grid system has the lowest NPC which is approximately 16% lower than the NPC of PV-grid system configuration [14].

### 7.3. Policy and Regulatory Support

The future of energy optimization is also heavily dependent on policy and regulatory frameworks. The introduction of carbon pricing and improved carbon accounting practices are essential steps to incentivize renewable energy adoption and reduce carbon emissions. Governmental support through explicit and predictable policies can facilitate the transition towards low-carbon futures in sectors such as property and construction. Regulations, incentives, and improved governance are critical to reducing energy consumption, waste, and carbon emissions from construction materials. Furthermore, initiatives like the science-based targets initiative help differentiate genuine decarbonization efforts from corporate greenwashing, ensuring that real decarbonization is achieved across the economy [22].

### 7.4. Integration of Smart Technologies

The integration of smart technologies, such as BIPV/T systems and hybrid heat pump systems, is another promising trend.

These technologies enable efficient energy optimization strategies and support smart operation and demand energy response, making buildings more energy-efficient and reducing their overall carbon footprint [6].

### 7.5. Long-term Projections and Goals

Long-term projections indicate that the global share of renewable energy in total energy consumption is expected to rise significantly, from 16.6% in 2010 to 21% by 2030, with renewable energy sources accounting for 45% of global electricity generation by 2040. This growth is likely to be driven primarily by solar, wind, and hydropower technologies [13]. These trends underscore the importance of continued investment in renewable energy infrastructure and the adoption of advanced energy optimization techniques to meet future energy demands sustainably.

## 8. Conclusions

In summary, this investigation into energy optimization methods in building design within the Malaysian climate underscores the critical necessity of addressing energy efficiency in the face of rapid urbanization and environmental challenges. The unique climatic conditions of Malaysia, characterized by high humidity and temperature fluctuations, necessitate innovative approaches to building design that can effectively balance occupant comfort with energy consumption.

The exploration of both passive and active design strategies reveals significant opportunities for enhancing energy performance. Passive strategies such as optimal building orientation, natural ventilation, daylight capture, and humidity management provide foundational benefits, while active strategies—including renewable energy integration, smart operational techniques, and multi-objective optimization—offer advanced solutions for maximizing energy efficiency. The case studies conducted, particularly those focused on Kuala Lumpur's government office buildings and energy-efficient retrofitting practices, highlight practical applications of these strategies and yield actionable recommendations for future projects.

Despite the wealth of existing literature on energy optimization, a notable scientific gap remains in the application of these principles specifically tailored to Malaysia's tropical climate. This research uses a strong hybrid approach, combining the expression of different optimization methods and the review of qualitative case studies to fill this gap and provide a comprehensive understanding of effective strategies.

The results of this study demonstrate the potential for significant energy savings and improved environmental impact through the integration of innovative design practices. The comparative analysis reveals the importance of considering climatic factors in energy-efficient design while also addressing challenges such as regulatory support and technological integration.

Looking ahead, future trends in energy optimization must focus on advanced optimization techniques, hybrid renewable energy systems, and the incorporation of smart technologies to achieve long-term sustainability goals. As policymakers and industry stakeholders continue to navigate the complexities of energy efficiency in building design, this review research serves as a vital resource for fostering a more sustainable built environment in Malaysia. Ultimately, this review research advocates for a holistic approach that prioritizes both innovation and practicality, ensuring that the architectural solutions of today contribute meaningfully to the ecological and economic resilience of tomorrow.

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