
Lun-Wu Yeh  
Department of Computer Science,  
National Chiao-Tung University, Hsin-Chu, 30010, Taiwan  
E-mail: lwyeh@cs.nctu.edu.tw

You-Chiun Wang  
Department of Computer Science,  
National Chiao-Tung University, Hsin-Chu, 30010, Taiwan  
E-mail: wangyc@cs.nctu.edu.tw

Yu-Chee Tseng*  
Department of Computer Science,  
National Chiao-Tung University, Hsin-Chu, 30010, Taiwan  
E-mail: yctseng@cs.nctu.edu.tw  
*Corresponding author

Abstract: Wireless sensor networks (WSNs) provide a convenient way to monitor the physical environment. Exploiting the context-aware capability of WSN to achieve energy conservation in intelligent buildings is an attractive direction. We thus propose an iPower (intelligent and personalized energy-conservation system by wireless sensor networks) system which combines WSNs and appliance control devices to provide personalized energy conservation services. A WSN is deployed in each room to monitor the usage of electric appliances and to help determine if there are electric appliances that can be turned off for energy conservation. The iPower system is quite intelligent and can adapt to personal need by automatically adjusting electric appliances to satisfy users’ requirements. The design and implementation details of iPower are reported in this paper.

Keywords: context awareness; energy conservation; sensor network; smart environment; wireless communication.


Biographical notes: Lun-Wu Yeh received his M.S. degrees in Computer and Information Science from the National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan, in 2005. He is currently pursuing Ph.D. in Computer Science from the Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan. His research interest is wireless sensor network.

You-Chiun Wang received his Ph.D. in Computer Science from the National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan, in 2006. He is currently a postdoctoral research associate at the Department of Computer Science, National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan. His research interests include wireless communication, mobile computing, and sensor network.

Yu-Chee Tseng received his Ph.D. in Computer and Information Science from the Ohio State University in 1994. He was an Associate Professor at the Chung-Hua University (1994~1996) and at the National Central University (1996~1999), and a Professor at the National Central University (1999~2000). Since 2000, he has been a Professor at the Department of Computer Science, National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan, where he is currently the Chairman. His research interests include wireless communication, mobile computing, and parallel and distributed computing.
1 Introduction

The discovery of electricity is one of the most important milestones in human history. Electricity is so essential in our daily life that many people cannot live without it. However, today, energy has been overly used and energy shortage has become a global concern. According to the report in Gassmann et al. (2001), more than one third of electricity is spent on HVAC systems, which include heating, ventilating, air conditioning, lighting, and other related equipments. According to experiences, a large portion of energy consumed by HVAC systems is due to improper use of electric appliances. Therefore, how to exploit the context information of an environment to automatically control the usage of electric appliances has a great potential to reduce the waste of energy.

In this work, we therefore propose an intelligent and personalized energy-conservation system by wireless sensor networks (iPower) to reduce energy consumption of HVAC systems by exploiting the context-aware capability of sensors. In the iPower system, WSNs are deployed in rooms of a building to collect information of the environment. Such information is reported to a control server to determine whether to turn off those unnecessary electric appliances in the building. Such a system needs to be designed with user friendliness in mind to minimize the involvement of users in making decisions. As an example, when sensor nodes detect a low temperature or a high brightness in a likely unoccupied room, they can report to the server that the electric appliances in that room (e.g., air conditioners or lights) could be turned off. The server then sends an alarm signal to notify people in the room that the electric appliances could be turned off shortly. If there are still users in that room, they can signal the system that these appliances should not be turned off by triggering some events (such as making some voices, changing the light reading of any sensor, or moving any furniture attached with sensors). If there is no such intentional events made by human being detected in a predefined amount of time, the server will turn off the electric appliances through some power-line control devices. In this way, the iPower system can work even if users are not wearing any particular badge.

In the iPower system, we also provide personalized services in which electric appliances can be automatically adjusted to satisfy users’ preferences. In particular, each user can create a profile to describe his/her favorite temperature and brightness. Such users are considered priority users and need to carry user identification devices so that our system can retrieve their profiles. When there are priority users in a room, the server will adjust the air conditioners and lights in that room according to the profiles of these users.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews some related works. Section 3 presents the design of our iPower system. Section 4 gives the implementation experiences. Section 5 gives some simulations to evaluate our system. Section 6 concludes this paper and discusses some research issues in our system.

2 Related Works

WSN has been widely used to provide context information in smart spaces/environments. How to automatically control electric appliances according to users’ locations and their requirements has been intensively discussed for smart homes/offices. The work in Schulzrinne et al. (2003) considers a ubiquitous computing architecture in which electric appliances are controlled by a SIP (session initiation protocol) (Rosenberg et al., 2002) server, under which architecture users can make calls to communicate with the SIP server to control their electric appliances. In the MavHome system (Das et al., 2002), the mobility pattern of a user in a house is exploited and is forwarded to the system to provide advanced services (e.g., controlling the corresponding electric appliances) in the predicted locations of the user. In Semantic Space (Wang et al., 2004), the authors propose some semantics to describe the environment, which can be used to query the status of the environment where users are located. The work in Helal et al. (2005) proposes a context-aware smart house in which electric appliances can be automatically adjusted according to the environmental information collected from sensors. Our work is motivated by observing that the issue of energy conservation, which is very critical to our environment, has not been well addressed.

3 Design of The iPower System

3.1 System Architecture

The architecture of our iPower system is illustrated in Figure 1, which consists of many sensor nodes, several WSN gateways, an intelligent control server, some power-line control devices, and user identification devices. Below, we describe the functions of each component separately.

- **Sensor nodes:** In each room, we deploy sensor nodes to monitor the environment. These nodes will form multi-hop WSNs to collect information in the rooms. In our current prototype, three types of sensing data can be collected, including light, sound, and temperature. An event is defined when the sensory input is higher or lower than a predefined threshold. To conserve the energy of sensor nodes, reporting of events is reactive, in the sense that a node will report its sensing data only when some predefined events occur. Different events can be combined to describe a room’s condition. For example, a low temperature (or a high brightness) together with some sound events in a room may indicate that the corresponding electrical appliances are turned on to serve users in that room; some sound events and change of the light degree may
indicate that users in that room are moving around; and a low temperature (or a high brightness) with no sound event for a certain amount of time may indicate that the air conditioners (or lights) in that room are unnecessarily turned on because no one is in the room. We can include more types of sensors to provide more intelligence. For example, as shown in Figure 2, a smart desk may include some pressure sensors underneat the cushion of a chair and some light sensors nearby the lamp on the desk. When someone is sitting on the chair, such an event can be detected by the pressure sensors, and the system can adjust the lamp according to the light degree nearby the lamp. When the user leaves the chair, the pressure sensors can detect the disappearance of the user and make energy conservation decision by notifying the server to turn off the lamp.

- **WSN gateways:** The set of sensor nodes in each room will form a WSN. For each WSN, there is a WSN gateway. A WSN gateway has a wireless interface to communicate with sensor nodes and a wire-line interface to communicate with the intelligent control server. It has four major functionalities: issuing commands to sensor nodes, gathering data from sensor nodes, reporting the room’s condition to the intelligent control server, and maintaining the WSN. Specifically, the gateway will notify sensor nodes in the WSN to begin collecting environmental information when it receives a *start* command from the server. After gathering sensing reports from the WSN, the gateway will determine the room’s condition and report to the server. In order to maintain the WSN, the gateway will periodically broadcast a *heart-beat* message to the network. A sensor node receiving such a message will reply an *alive* message to the WSN gateway. If the gateway does not receive any *alive* message from a sensor node for a predefined amount of time, it will notify the server that the node may be broken.

- **Intelligent control server:** The intelligent control server is used to collect the system’s status (e.g., rooms’ conditions and sensors’ states) and to perform power-saving decisions. It maintains a database of user profiles and periodically checks the states of electric appliances in each room. It will decide whether to turn off an electric appliance in a room according to the sensory data collected from that room. The server can also adjust the electric appliances in a room according to the profiles of users in that room. Such decisions or adjustments are achieved by sending commands through the power-line control devices to turn off or adjust electric currents of the corresponding electric appliances. The server also provides user interfaces to allow users to maintain the iPower system. In particular, users can modify their profiles and obtain the system’s status through remote devices.

- **Power-line control devices:** The power-line control devices allow the system to turn on/off or adjust the electric currents of appliances. In our current prototype, we adopt the X10 devices produced...
by SmartHome (2006). Such devices contain one X10 transmitter and several X10 receivers. The X10 transmitter can talk to X10 receivers via power lines. In the iPower system, the X10 transmitter is connected to the control server to transmit the server’s commands.

- **User identification devices**: The user identification devices are portable devices that can be carried by users so that the system can determine users’ IDs and retrieve their profiles. It can be any identification device. In this work, we simply use the processor board of our sensor platform (without sensors) for user identification. When a user enters a room, his/her user identification device will join the WSN in that room and provide its ID to the server via the WSN gateway.

### 3.2 Energy Conservation Scenarios

Next, we give five scenarios to demonstrate how the iPower system works in an intelligent building. Let us consider the five rooms in Figure 1.

- **Room A**: electric appliances are turned on and somebody is in the room (with a user identification device). In this case, since the system can detect that the room is occupied, energy conservation commands will not be issued. So the electric appliances in room A will remain on.

- **Room B**: electric appliances are turned on and somebody is in the room (without a user identification device). In this case, energy conservation commands will be given depending on whether some events (such as sound events) indicating that the room is occupied can be detected or not. If there are such events, the electric appliances will remain on. Without such events, some signals (such as beeps or blinking lights) will be triggered to warn users in that room. In response, users can do some actions to signal the system that the room is occupied (such as making some noise by clapping, covering any sensor with a light sensor to change its light reading, or switching on or off any electrical appliance that is under control of the iPower system). As long as any of such events can be detected, the server can realize that the room is still in use and thus will not turn off the electric appliances. Note that to reduce bothering users too much, the interval to warn users next time will be increased in an exponential manner after each intentional event being generated by users in that room. Further, after several warning signals without success, the system will stop trying (to make energy conservation decisions) for a long period of time.

- **Room C**: electric appliances are turned on but nobody is in the room. In this case, since sensor nodes have detected a low temperature, a high brightness, and no sound event for some while, the WSN gateway will report to the control server that this room is abnormal, implying that electricity may be wasted in room C. The server will then send an alarm message to room C, which triggers the beepers attached to sensor nodes. These beeps are used to announce that the system will turn off air conditioners and lights in room C in a few minutes. Alternatively, we can blink lights on and off to signal users that appliances in that room will be turned off soon. This is to avoid our system to make wrong decisions. Since there is no one in the room, the server will turn off these appliances after timeout to conserve energy.

- **Room D**: electric appliances are turned on in the room with smart furniture. If there is smart furniture in the room, they can help detect the existence of people in that room. For example, if there is a person sitting on a smart chair, the system will keep on reporting that someone is on the chair, so no energy conservation commands will be issued. If
the smart furniture is not in use, then the scenario in room \( B \) may be applied.

- **Room E:** electric appliances are turned off. In this case, the WSN gateway will report to the server that the room is normal so the server will not take any action.

### 3.3 System Operations and Message Flows

Figure 3 illustrates the message flows and the interaction of system components in the iPower system. The details are discussed below.

1. The control server starts checking the usage of electric appliances in a room by sending a *start* message to the WSN gateway in that room. Checking can be done periodically or at predefined time, according to the system configuration file.

2. On receiving the *start* message from the server, the WSN gateway will notify its sensor nodes by issuing some event-driven queries to collect information from the environment. The WSN gateway then sets a timer to wait for sensing reports from sensor nodes.

3. When a sensor node detects any event (such as a low temperature or a high brightness), it will report its sensing data to the WSN gateway.

4. If the WSN gateway receives any sensing report and any human behavior report from step 3 before its timer expires, it can determine the room’s status according to the following rules:

   (a) If any piece of smart furniture reports that someone is using it (e.g., the case in Figure 2(a)), the WSN gateway will report a normal status to the server. However, if it is reported that users leave the smart furniture, the WSN gateway will reset its timer and go back to step 2 to repeat the aforementioned procedure.

   (b) If sensors report any human behavior (such as sound events or change of light readings), the WSN gateway will report a normal status to the server. However, it will also notify the existence of people to the server so that the system will check this room’s status later on.

   (c) Otherwise, the WSN gateway will report an abnormal status to the server to indicate that the electric appliances in the room may be turned on unnecessarily.

5. When the server receives an abnormal report from the WSN gateway, it will warn the people (if any) in the corresponding room by sending an alarm message to the WSN gateway.

6. Once receiving the alarm message, the WSN gateway will instruct one of its sensor nodes to turn on any light. Alternatively, the server can send a blink command to the X10 receiver to blink any light on and off for a short period of time. These actions are used to notify people in the room that the server will turn off the electric appliances after a short period of time (e.g., ten minutes).

7. If the server does not receive any human behavior event from the room after a predefined period of time, it will know that there is no one in that room and thus turns off the electric appliances by sending a turn-off command to the X10 receivers in that room.

8. If there is any user in the room hearing the beeping sound or seeing blinking light, he/she can notify the server that the room is still in use by any of the following three methods:

   (a) If the user has carried a user identification device, the device will directly inform the server (via the WSN gateway) his/her ID. In this case, the user does not need to take any action.

   (b) If the user can access the Internet, he/she can login the web page of the iPower system to set up the next checking time of this room so that the server will not disturb the user before he/she leaves the room.

   (c) Otherwise, the user can make some intentional events by changing the room’s environment, such as making some noise by clapping or turning off and then turning on any light. In this way, sensor nodes will detect an unusual sound or change of light degree and thus report these events to the WSN gateway.

According to these reports, the WSN gateway can notify the existence of users to the server and thus the system will back off and check the room’s status later on. The next checking time can be set manually by users, by any default value (such as one hour), or in any typical exponential backoff manner.
3.4 Personalized Services and User Profiles

The iPower system also provides personalized services in which electric appliances can be automatically adjusted to satisfy users’ preference. In particular, each user can specify his/her favorite temperature and brightness. When a user enters a room, the iPower system can adjust the air conditioners and lights to meet the user’s preference. To achieve this goal, the user has to create a profile in the server’s database and carry a user identification device when entering our system. The user’s location is determined by the WSN gateway which collects the user’s ID.

In our current implementation, we follow the format of XML (2006) to describe user’s profiles. The current definition is illustrated in Figure 4. Specifically, the profile includes user’s ID, name, and several attributes with the user’s favorite temperature and brightness. For example, Figure 4 indicates that user’s preference temperature is from 25°C 28°C and light is 70 lux.

### 3.5 Events and Actions

One of the main components of iPower is its automatic rules. A rule can be composed of time, events and actions. A rule can be event-driven or time-driven. Actions can be triggered by simple events or compound events, where the latter are combinations of multiple simple events. For example, when someone is sitting on a smart chair near a smart desk with a low light degree, to automatically turn on the lamp on the desk, we need to combine events from pressure sensors and light sensors. Note that compound events can be combined through logical operations, such as “AND” and “OR”.

In Figure 5, we list the definition of iPower’s rules, which are written in the format of EBNF (Extended Backus-Naur Form) (Sebesta, 1999) recursive grammar. Each iPower’s rule defines for a certain User, when some Time and some Conditions are matched, the corresponding actions to be taken. Terms quoted by [· · ·] are optional. For example, when <UserID> in a rule is not specified, it means that anyone can match this rule. Figure 6 shows the rules for rooms A, C, and D in Figure 1. Note that here we use RSSI (received signal strength index) between 40 and 80

![Figure 4: An example of the user profile.](image1)

![Figure 5: The iPower’s EBNF-like recursive grammars.](image2)

![Figure 6: Examples of the iPower’s rules.](image3)

3.6 Protocol Stack

To implement the iPower system, we have designed a protocol stack in Figure 7, which consists of the following layers:

- **User layer**: The user layer defines how a user can access the system through the user interface. Here we consider two kinds of users: administrators and end users. An administrator can add or remove equipments (e.g., electric appliances, sensor nodes, and power-line control devices) in the system, change their attributes and profiles, and manage end users. An end user can only create and modify his/her user profile.

- **Service layer**: The service layer defines the rules by which the system provides and manages its services. We follow the interface defined in OSGi (1999), which is a service-oriented architecture for networked systems. An OSGi platform provides a standardized, component-oriented computing environment for the cooperating networked services. Using this architecture can help reduce complexity to build and maintain applications. Following OSGi, the service layer is separated into service component and service management, where the former defines the services provided...
by the system, while the latter provides a management mechanism to maintain these services. In our current implementation, three service components are defined, including profile setting service, device controller service, and sensor handler service. The profile setting service is used to create and modify a profile, while the device controller service and sensor handler service are used to control the power-line control devices and sensor nodes, respectively. To manage services, a new service component must be first registered to the server. The administrator can obtain the status of all service components in the system by the service discovery mechanism.

- **Profile layer**: The profile layer maintains all profiles for users, sensor nodes, power-line control devices, and rules. The sensor profiles describe the locations and sensing types of sensor nodes. The device profiles describe the electric appliances controlled by the power-line control devices. Finally, the rule profiles define how the components in the iPower system interact with each other. All profiles are depicted in the format of XML.

- **Sensor layer**: The sensor layer controls the actions of sensor nodes. These actions include executing commands from the WSN gateway (such as to detect events and to generate beeping sounds) and reporting sensing data to the WSN gateway.

- **Actuator layer**: This layer provides an abstraction of electric appliances to upper layers (i.e., service layer and profile layer). In our implementation, we choose X10 and UPnP (1999) as our device control protocols.

Through these protocols, we can turn on, turn off, and adjust the electric currents of appliances.

4 Implementation Details

4.1 Hardware Specification

We use MICAz (2005) as sensor nodes. The MICAz is a 2.4 GHz, IEEE 802.15.4-compliant module that enables low-power operations and offers a data rate of 250 kbps with a DSSS radio. Each sensor node has a sensing board that can collect sensing data from their surroundings, including light, sound, and temperature. More sensors can be added on the board to increase the sensing capabilities. Each sensor node also has a buzzer to generate a beeping sound when they are commanded by a WSN gateway.

For the power-line control devices, we adopt the X10 products by SmartHome. The X10 devices consist of X10 transmitters and X10 receivers. They can communicate with each other by the X10 communication protocol, which encodes messages on the electric signal with a frequency of 60 Hz. With the X10 communication protocol, an X10 transmitter can send commands to an X10 receiver through a power line. To control electric appliances, we connect one X10 transmitter to the server via an RS-232 interface and connect all electric appliances with X10 receivers. Each X10 receiver has a unique address and at most 256 addresses can be selected.

4.2 Design of The Intelligent Control Server

The intelligent control server is the core of our iPower system. Figure 8 illustrates the design of the server. The implantation details are discussed below.

1. An administrator can add a sensor profile or a device profile through the profile setting component. Related information such as sensing types and device attributes can be created in the profile database.

2. An administrator can interact with the profile interface to create rules through the rule setting component.

3. A gateway can report environment information through the sensing data I/O interface.

4. The decision handler combines the user profiles, rules, and sensing data to generate proper actions.

The actions are sent to the action handler, which can generate commands to X10 devices or sensor nodes.

4.3 User Interface

We provide a user interface to manage the system and allow users to create their profiles at the server, as shown in Figure 9. The user interface has an object area, a monitor area, and a status area. The object area provides an
interface to deploy all devices in a room, including WSN gateways, sensor nodes, electric appliances, and X10 devices. This area also allows users to start or stop the system. In the monitor area, the administrator can visualize the deployment of sensor nodes and devices. He/She can add new objects in the room by dragging objects from the object area to the monitor area. The monitor area also shows the network topology and electric appliance in the room. In the status area, the administrator can observe the attributes and the current status of each sensor node.

5 System Evaluation

In this section, we present some simulation results to evaluate the system performance. We consider the energy consumption of an office with five people, one air conditioner, and five desk lamps, where each lamp is owned by one person. Table 1 lists the energy consumptions of different electric appliances. For the air conditioner, we assume that it will spend extra 100 watts when the temperature is decreased by 1°C. A two-state discrete Markov model (Kleinrock, 1975) is used to model a person’s behavior during every hour, as shown in Figure 10(a). A person can be either in one of the two states: leave or stay. When a person is in a leave state, the corresponding desktop lamp will be turned off. We use another Markov model to model the detailed behavior of a person when he/she is in a stay state, as shown in Figure 10(b). In particular, during every twenty minutes, the person may decide whether to

Figure 9: The user interface at the intelligent control server.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>electric appliance</th>
<th>energy consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>air conditioner</td>
<td>800 watts/hour (at 28°C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>desk lamp</td>
<td>80 watts/hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Energy consumptions of electric appliances.

“still stay” in the office or “temporarily leave” the office. When the person decides to temporarily leave the office, his/her own desktop lamp will remain on if the iPower system is not applied. Table 2 lists the favorite temperatures of the five people. When there are two or more people in the office, the temperature of the air conditioner will be adjusted to the average of favorite temperatures of those people in the office. Note that without iPower, we only adjust the temperature of the air conditioner when people enter the office.

Figure 11 shows the energy consumption with five people during ten hours. We can observe that without iPower,
Table 2: Favorite temperatures of the five people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>person</th>
<th>favorite temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>25°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>27°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>26°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>22°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>24°C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: Energy consumptions during 10 hours.

Figure 12: Total energy consumptions with different numbers of people.

In this work, we have proposed the iPower system designed for energy conservation in an intelligent building and provision of personalized services for environment control. The iPower system can detect if there is possible waste of electricity by WSNs and then turn off these unnecessary electric appliances via the X10 power-line control devices with a user-friendly design. The iPower system also provides personalized services in which electric appliances can be automatically adjusted to satisfy users’ requirements. We have presented the design and implementation details of iPower. Prototyping experiences and design issues are also given in this paper.

The prototyped iPower system can be further improved in several ways. First, since the X10 protocol is somewhat slow and sometimes unreliable, in the future we plan to replace X10 by INSTEON (2007), which could be more reliable and could transmit at a higher speed. Also, we are considering integrating other intelligent furniture into our system. Below, we point out several important design issues that deserve attention.

- **Conflicting profiles:** When two or more people are in the same room, their profiles may conflict with each other since each person may have different requirement or preference in temperature and light. To solve the profile-conflicting problem, we propose to assign a weight to each user and adopt the weighted average to determine the desired degrees of temperature and light. For example, suppose that two users have favorite temperatures of 23°C and 26°C in their profiles, and their weights are 3 and 2, respectively. Then the desired temperature will be

\[
\frac{3}{3+2} \times 23 + \frac{2}{3+2} = 24.2°C.
\]

Note that the weight assignments can depend on the application requirements or user priorities.

- **Privacy and security:** In the iPower system, the complete user profiles are stored in the control server. A user identification device only needs to transmit its ID to the control server to find out the corresponding profile. Thus, the personal information will not be exposed through the user identification device. The ID of a user can be represented either by the address or the network interface card or a higher-level identity. Since the network address must be in clear text in any communication, it is insecure to use such addresses as user IDs. So, the latter approach is preferred (which can be protected by any encryption algorithm).

- **Message reliability:** Most of the signalling messages in Figure 3 require an acknowledgement mechanism to guarantee their delivery. Unfortunately, the X10 devices do not support such acknowledgement mechanism. To solve this problem, we can enforce sensor nodes to report their current environmental statuses
to check whether the X10 devices have successfully deliver the commands from the control server. For example, in Figure 3, suppose that sensor nodes report that there is nobody in the room and thus the control server will send a command to the X10 receiver to turn off the electric appliance (e.g., the desk lamp). If the turn-off command is lost due to channel errors in the power-line, the sensor node can maintain a timer to check whether the command from the control server has been reflected from its reading related to the desk lamp. Therefore, the message loss problem on X10 can be resolved.

- Incorrect sensing readings: Due to environmental noises or errors, the readings of sensor nodes may not be accurate. This may mislead the control server to make incorrect decisions. To solve this problem, we can apply the solutions in Branch et al. (2006); Zhuang et al. (2007); Sheng et al. (2007) to alleviate the effects of these inaccurate sensing readings.

- Environmental factors: Some environmental factors like sunlight can be considered to help conserve more energy. For example, the work in Singhvi (2005) suggests adjusting lamps according to users’ requirements and the sunlight. Similarly, we can apply this extension in our system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT


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