

HIGH ACCURACY MEASUREMENT OF GOLD PURITY USING  
HYDROSTATIC WEIGHING SYSTEM

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HIGH ACCURACY MEASUREMENT OF GOLD PURITY USING  
HYDROSTATIC WEIGHING SYSTEM

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## DEDICATION

*To my beloved parents*

*Mohd Nor bin Jaafar*

*Fatimah bte Ithnin*

*Sulaiman bin Suhil*

*Siti Nor Sham bte Mohd Hayram*

*To my beloved wife and children*

*who always there for me*

*Noor Zarina bte Sulaiman*

*Ahmad Farhan bin Mohd FazrulHisyam*

*Ahmad Farihin bin Mohd FazrulHisyam*

*Khairun Naajihah bte Mohd FazrulHisyam*

*You are always in my mind...*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Currently, existing instruments have limitation to determine the purity of gold bar and the method used is not reliable to detect the existence of tungsten in bar. Therefore, a new technique with high accuracy and non-destructive method has been developed to determine the purity of gold bar. In this study, three approaches were considered in the construction of hydrostatic weighing system (HWS); establishment of location and environmental condition, establishment of the density measurement of distilled water and establishment the mass measurement of samples. The X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis was used to determine the surface purity, while the HWS was used to determine the density of gold bar. The standard sample of gold bar, tungsten bar and fake gold bar were used in this study. Experimental results show that the density of gold bar is proportional to the purity of gold bar. The purity of 99.99% and 99.9% gold has density of 19.293 g/ml and 19.268 g/ml respectively. However, for tungsten, the density of 99.9% tungsten was only 19.206 g/ml with the expanded uncertainty of the density of 0.006 g/ml. Thus, this study demonstrates that the developed HWS is capable to be used to measure the density of gold bar accurately and hence it could detect the presence of tungsten in gold bar.

## ABSTRAK

Pada masa ini, instrumen yang sedia ada mempunyai batasan untuk menentukan ketulenan jongkong emas dan kaedah yang digunakan tidak mampu untuk mengesan kewujudan tungsten dalam jongkong. Oleh itu, suatu teknik baharu dengan kaedah ketepatan tinggi dan tanpa-musnah telah dibangunkan untuk menentukan ketulenan jongkong emas. Dalam kajian ini, tiga pendekatan telah dipertimbangkan dalam pembangunan sistem penimbangan hidrostatik (HWS); penetapan lokasi dan keadaan persekitaran, penetapan pengukuran ketumpatan air suling dan penetapan pengukuran jisim sampel. Analisis pendarfluor sinar-X (XRF) digunakan untuk menentukan ketulenan permukaan, sementara HWS digunakan untuk menentukan ketumpatan jongkong emas. Jongkong emas piawai, jongkong tungsten dan jongkong emas palsu telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Hasil eksperimen menunjukkan bahawa ketumpatan emas adalah berkadar terus dengan ketulenan emas. Ketulenan emas 99.99% dan 99.9% masing-masing mempunyai ketumpatan 19.293 g/ml dan 19.268 g/ml. Walau bagaimanapun, untuk tungsten, ketumpatan tungsten 99.9% hanya 19.206 g/ml dengan ketidakpastian ketumpatan adalah 0.006 g/ml. Oleh itu, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa HWS yang dibangunkan mempunyai keupayaan untuk digunakan bagi mengukur ketumpatan jongkong emas dengan tepat dan dengan itu dapat mengesan kehadiran tungsten dalam jongkong emas.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAM	-	Bundesanstalt für Materialforschung und prüfung
BBC	-	British Broadcasting Corporation
EDXRF	-	Energy dispersive systems
HWS	-	Hydrostatic Weighing System
ICP	-	Inductively Couple Plasma
ICP-OES	-	Inductively Couple Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometry
KRISS	-	Korea Research Institute of Standards and Science
MINT	-	Malaysian Nuclear Agency
MyRM	-	Malaysian Reference Material
NMI	-	National Metrology Institute
NMIJ	-	National Metrology Institute of Japan
NIST	-	National Institute Standard and Technology
NMIM	-	National Metrology Institute of Malaysia
INPUT	-	Institute of Research and Consultancy YaPEIM
ISO	-	International Organization for Standardization
SI	-	Standard International
SKM	-	Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia
SRM	-	Standard Reference Material
UK	-	United Kingdom
WDXRF	-	Wavelength dispersive system
WB	-	Weighing balance with solid density accessories
XRF	-	X-ray Fluorescence
YaPEIM	-	Koperasi Yayasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Islam Malaysia

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$f$	-	Frequency of the ultrasonic wave
$v$	-	Velocity of the material
$\lambda$	-	Wavelength of the ultrasonic wave
$\rho_{gold}$	-	Density of gold
$\rho_l$	-	Density of liquid
$m_a$	-	Mass in air
$m_l$	-	Mass in liquid
$\rho_{24Carat}$	-	Density of pure gold
$F_b$	-	Buoyancy force
$F_g$	-	Gravitational force
$g$	-	Acceleration of gravity
$m$	-	Mass of the sample.
$\rho_a$	-	Air density
$\rho_m$	-	Density of the sample
$V$	-	Volume of the sample
$F$	-	Vertical force
$F_A, F_L$	-	Force on balance
$R_1, R_2$	-	Balance reading
$\rho_w$	-	Density of distilled water
$\rho$	-	Density of material/sample
$t_w$	-	Distilled water temperature
$V_g$	-	Volume of the sample
$a$	-	Length
$b$	-	Height
$c$	-	Width
$V_1, V_2, V'$	-	Volume of the sample
$\Delta t$	-	Temperature difference
$\gamma$	-	Volume thermal expansion
$\alpha$	-	Linear thermal expansion
$x$	-	Mean measured by NMIM

$X$	-	Mean measured by reference laboratory
$U_{lab}$	-	Expanded uncertainties of NMIM
$U_{ref}$	-	Expanded uncertainties of reference laboratory
$E_n$	-	Reliability of the measurements
$s$	-	Standard deviation of a measurement
$\bar{x}$	-	Mean value
$n$	-	Total number of measurement reading
$u_A$	-	Standard uncertainty for Type A
$\nu_{eff}$	-	Effective degree of freedom
$U$	-	Expanded uncertainty
$k$	-	Coverage factor
$U_c$	-	Combined standard uncertainty
$BS$	-	Bath stability

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background

Precious metal is a rare metal and has a high value. Gold, silver, platinum and palladium are types of precious metals (Cayumil, Khanna et al. 2016; Ding, Zhang et al. 2019). Gold is one of the world's most precious commodities and it remains to be a secure investment. A gold with high purity is the most expensive metal. Therefore, inspection and verification of the gold content in gold trading is significant due to gold price is based on gold purity (Bardi, Niccolai et al. 2008). Therefore, pawn broking industry have to measure the gold purity due to requirement to pay the same value of gold to borrower by the pawn broker (Ali, Johari et al. 2017).

The gold purity must be analyzed through highly accurate and precise method (Jotanovic, Memic et al. 2012). Carat is a unit for gold purity and it use in document standard such as Malaysian Standard and Indian Standard (IS2790 1999; MS1247 2005). The gold purity of 99.9%, 91.6% and 75.0% are of 24 Carat, 22 Carat and 18 Carat respectively. Other alloys or elements such as silver, zinc, copper, palladium and nickel must also be known. The different elements in gold will effect to gold colour (Cretu 1999).

The value of gold is depending on its purity; therefore, it is important to determine its purity. The density of 24 carat gold is 19.3 g/ml (Mercer 1992). Gold also can be easily bought and sold around the world (Kinneberg, Williams et al. 1998). Hence, some people can produce fake gold due to gold is universally accepted and valuable.

Fake gold was happened in Hieron II, king of Syracuse era (Heath 2002). Archimedes was assigned to check purity without cutting or drilling the King Hieron II new crown (Reese 2000). King Hieron II wants to assure that his new crown made from pure gold. During his era, there were many alloy of gold and silver in the market (Hughes 2005). It is show that the fake gold existed a long time ago. In modern era, tungsten was found plated with thin layers of gold (Arbutine 2008; Abdullah, Samsudin et al. 2015; Ismail, Sani et al. 2018). Tungsten is the only metal that has a density similar to the density of gold. Furthermore, gold is more expensive compare with tungsten. Therefore, tungsten is always used to produce the fake gold because of its density and a lot cheaper than gold.

Pawnbroker Act 1972 was introduced and has been gazette in Malaysia stated that, the gold that want to be leased cannot be destructed (Act81 1972; Dakian 2005). Pawnbroker Activity Guideline for Islamic pawn also stated that the pawnbroker must protect the gold from any damage (SKM Guideline 2013; Sulaiman, Kassim et al. 2014). Therefore, the pawnbroker in Malaysia is prohibited from cutting or drilling any jewellery made from gold or the gold bar which has been leased by customer.

There are four categories of Islamic pawn-broking: financial institutions, corporation sector, private company and stated link company (Shah 2018). The regulatory body that coordinate and standardize the activities of financial institutions, corporation sector, private company and stated link company activities are Bank Negara Malaysia, Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia (SKM), Ministry of Housing and Local Government and SKM respectively. The main purpose of these regulatory bodies is to coordinate and standardize the Islamic pawn-broking activities to ensure the fair trade for public. However, the regulatory bodies do not have enough manpower and lack in technical knowledge to monitor the pawn activities especially in gold purity checking during the transactions.

There are destructive methods that can be used to detect tungsten in gold such as fire assay, Inductively Couple Plasma (ICP) or cutting cross the section of gold items (Hanrahan 1962; Brill and Wiedemann 1992; Brill 1997; Kinneberg, Williams et al. 1998; Karadjova, Arpadjan et al. 2000; Singh; Battaini, Bemporad et al. 2014). The method used to determine the gold purity are by using fire assay and Inductively

Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometry (ICP-OES) are also described in several International Standards and Standard Test Methods (ISO11426 1997; IS1418 2009; ISO15093 2015; ISO10378 2016). However, these methods will destruct the sample which against the Pawnbroker Act 1972 which clearly stated that the pawnbroker cannot cutting or drilling the gold items that wants to be leased.

All non-destructive methods can be determined the gold purity at the surface level, inside the sample or whole sample. It's difficult for instruments in non-destructive method to detect the presence of other metal in gold. X-ray Fluorescence (XRF), needle, chemical solution, tri-electronic and touchstone are the non-destructive methods which can only check at the surface level (Walchli 1981; Stankiewicz, Bolibrzuch et al. 1998; Khir, Badri et al. 2013). However, densimeter, weighing balance with solid density accessories (WB) and magnet can check for the whole gold sample.

Although the most commonly used instruments previously discussed have several advantages, there are still some major limitations and weaknesses such as inaccurate measurement, poor repeatability and not traceable to Standard International (SI) unit. Table 1.1 shows the limitation of non-destructive method instruments.

Table 1.1 Limitations for non-destructive method instruments

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Limitation</b>	<b>Reference</b>
XRF	Surface	%	Penetrate up 10 to 50 microns only	(Corti 2001)
Weighing balance	Whole	g/ml	Shows gold density similar with tungsten density	(Corti 2001)
Densimeter	Whole	g/ml	Shows gold density similar with tungsten density	(Abdullah, Samsudin et al. 2015)

There are difficulties to detect the presence of other metal in gold whenever instruments in non-destructive method are used. However, XRF and ultrasonic have limitations where XRF can only penetrate the gold sample within 10 to 50 microns (Corti 2001).

Research study on gold density measurement was conducted in 1992 (E.Mercer 1992). Hydrostatic weighing theoretical straightforward but their some practical difficulties such as analytical balance pan must be weighed first, air bubbles can decreased sample weight and water droplets on the wire holding the weighing tray can increase the sample weight. The evaluation of this study is hydrostatic weighing method unable to detect gold-plated with a metal that has similar density with gold.

Hydrostatic weighing method have a limitation and some problems on gold density measurement (Corti 2001). First problem is difficulty to measure the density of metal more than 3 types of materials. Secondly, this method unable to measure accurately the hollow sample and air bubbles trapped on sample. Density of sample will be decreased when weighing sample in liquid. Thus, hydrostatic weighing method is a simple method and quick non-destructive method but inaccurate assay.

The gold density measurement for binary alloys such as gold-silver or gold-copper is easy to measure (Kraut and Stern 2000). The main reason is the existing density instrument able to differentiate the density of gold, silver and copper. Density of gold, silver and copper are 19.3 g/ml, 10.5 g/ml and 8.96 g/ml respectively (Chang and You 1997; Kim, Kang et al. 2007; Martina Ortigosa, Valenstein et al. 2012; Shah, Gentile et al. 2016). It means that the binary alloys for gold-tungsten is easy to measure if the density instrument capable to differentiate their densities.

There are several studies on fake gold related to tungsten. All of the studies are from South East of Asia such as Malaysia and Indonesia. The study on fake gold is difficult to find in other region due to implementation of the gold hallmarking system. First literature related to fake gold was published on 10th February 2015 (Abdullah, Samsudin et al. 2015). Malaysian Nuclear Agency (MINT) and Institute of Research and Consultancy YaPEIM (INPUT) are the organizations involved in this research where MINT is the government agencies involved in nuclear field while INPUT is a



company under Yayasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Islam Malaysia (YaPEIM) involved in research of precious metal assay especially in Ar-Rahnu YaPEIM's pawn shop. They used XRF technique focusing on gold earrings through their research.

Fake gold bar was commonly produced by mixing the gold bar with other material such as tungsten due to similar density value. (Prasetyo, Sihar et al. 2015). The purpose of their research is to develop testing method on gold bar purity through natural frequencies observation and Frequency Response Function of vibration response. However, this study is a propose concept and has not been validated through experimental result.

Fake gold was produced by gold plating with tungsten in different dimensions and weight (Ismail, Sani et al. 2018). Through their observation, the material covered by gold cannot be detected using XRF technique. They used ultrasonic method to detect fake gold. Several samples were used in this research such as bracelet, necklace and ear ring. It was complicated to detect fake gold due to shape and thin material of the sample.

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Nowadays there is no single non-destructive method that can check the gold purity precisely and accurately. Effect of this problem is the presence of many cases of fake golds in the market (Ahmad 2002; Shamsuddin 2011; Alias 2012; Shamsuddin 2016; Rahman 2018). Currently, there are several density instruments capable to check the purity of gold. WB and densimeter using hydrostatic weighing method are the density instruments. This method can determine the density of gold and it is not destructive, simple and economic.

The density of gold can be measured using densimeter or WB through conventional hydrostatic weighing method where it can also determine the gold purity. It is economical, simple and non-destructive method but less accurate of about 0.1 g/ml to 0.2 g/ml (E.Mercer 1992). The density of pure gold and pure tungsten are 19.30 g/ml and 19.25 g/ml respectively (Abdullah, Samsudin et al. 2015; Guo, Gu et al. 2019). Therefore, it will be ineffective for any measurement setup that will not

produce better uncertainty in order to differentiate pure gold and fake gold (Oddy 1983; Raw 1997; Corti 2001; Abdullah, Samsudin et al. 2015). This problem will give a bad impact to gold industry.

Secondly, standard weight 200 g as a reference standard was used to calibrate densimeter and WB (Hildebrand 1993). It is not suitable for calibration of densimeter and WB due to standard weight is a reference standard for mass. So, it can affect the accuracy of the densimeter and WB. It is supposed reference material with known density value as a reference standard to calibrate densimeter and WB.

Thirdly, type of liquid used also important where some of pawnshops did not replaced the distilled water to determine the gold purity. Density of distilled water is important to ensure that the gold purity measurement is accurate (Kochsiek and Glaser 2010; Jenkins 2012; Morris and Langari 2012).

Lastly, the problem arises due to surface porosity of gold sample (Choi, Woo et al. 2008). For both instruments, the sample needs to be taken out of the liquid and immerse again for the next measurement. The trapping of air bubbles on the surface of porous sample has caused inconsistency in the measurement by influencing the liquid temperature and thus, the uncertainty of the measurement.

This study is conducted to explore and improve the hydrostatic weighing method by focusing on the method of density determination. The accuracy of hydrostatic weighing system will be improved to 0.01 g/ml because the density difference between gold and tungsten is only 0.05 g/ml. The establishment in measurement procedure of the hydrostatic weighing system is also important to obtain accurate result.

## **1.2 Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of this study is to develop a hydrostatic weighing system (HWS) to determine the density of gold and tungsten. This main objective was pursued through the following sub-objectives:

- a) To develop and optimize the HWS to measure density and volume of the gold and tungsten in order to improve the capability of density measurement to accuracy of 0.01 g/ml.
- b) To determine and verify the density of pure gold, pure tungsten and fake gold accurately and precisely to differentiate these materials and verify with existing instruments such as WB and densimeter.
- c) To identify and extent the factors effecting density measurement of gold and tungsten.

### **1.3 Scope of the study**

The scope of this study includes determining the volume of gold and tungsten in order to obtain the density and volume of thermal expansion. The uncertainty measurement of the density and volume thermal expansion of the sample will be calculated. This study covers for solid gold and tungsten but not hollow sample. There are many shapes of solid gold and tungsten in the market, however bar, coin and rod shape will be used in this study. Gold and tungsten with purity 99.9% will be used in this study. The minimum and maximum weight of sample are 5 g and 500 g respectively. This study focused on an improved hydrostatic weighing method complete with analytical balance and distilled water as a standard density which traceable to a standard solid density and it is calibrated by National Metrology Institute (NMI). Distilled water then will be used as a standard liquid density. It is much cheaper and stable compared to other standard liquid density such as tridecane (KH Chang 2004). This study also focuses on non-destructive method and it will be verified with existing non-destructive instruments and destructive method such as cupellation method or fire assay. Distilled water will be used as a standard liquid and its temperature is set from 20°C to 30°C.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Hydrostatic weighing method which uses either densimeter or WB is a reliable method and has been widely used to determine the purity of gold. It is a non-destructive method and offer more simple step. However, the measurement is highly depends on the instruments and procedures involved in order to get an accurate of gold purity.

The accuracy of both densimeter and weighing balance is 0.1 g/ml. The newly proposed system will be designed to get accurate purity results up to 0.01 g/ml and thus it can be used to differentiate between gold and tungsten. The function of this system is similar with other non-destructive method which will comply the Pawnbroker Act 1972 and Islamic Pawnbroker Activity Guideline that stated the pawnbroker cannot damage the gold. Furthermore, the system is able to determine the volume thermal expansion of gold. The used of dilatometer to determine the volume thermal expansion also can be avoided (Yamada, Abe et al. 2001). Therefore, this study has a great impact to public, gold industries and country as it will be able to resolve a fraud issue involving fake gold in Malaysia.

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## **LIST OF PUBLICATIONS**

### **Indexed Journal**

1. Mohd Nor, F., Tamuri, A.R., Ismail, A.K. (2019). "New Development Of The Metal Volume Thermal Expansion", Journal of Advanced Research in Fluid Mechanics and Thermal Sciences, page 106-110 (**Indexed by SCOPUS**)

### **Non-indexed Journal**

1. Mohd Nor, F., Tamuri, A.R., Ismail, A.K. (2019). "Fake Gold: Gold Purity Measurement Using Non Destructive Method", International Journal of Engineering & Technology, page 165-172

### **Indexed Conference Proceeding**

1. Mohd Nor, F., Tamuri, A.R., Ismail, A.K., Mazuki, A.A.M. (2019). "Verification of the hydrostatic weighing system with existing gold purity instruments", International Conference on Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering (**Indexed by SCOPUS**)

### **Non-indexed Conference Proceeding**

1. Rahmat, N.R., Mohd Nor, F., Othman, H., Zakaria, O. (2016). "Density Measurement of Solid Density by using Hydrostatic Weighing System", National Physics Conference 21-22 December 2016