LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT OF GLOBAL WARMING POTENTIAL IN PRECAST BUILDING COMPONENT

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A project report submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Science (Construction Management)

Faculty of Civil Engineering
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

JANUARY 2015

Special for

My Beloved Parents

W Zulkiffle Bin Wan Long

Rohaya Binti Ghazali

Siblings

Wan Zuhaili

Wan Zulaikha

Wan Zuhayra

Siti Sarah

Roas Aira Marissa

My Future Husband

Azman Bin Arbangi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"In the Mighty Name of Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful"

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and love to my dearly beloved parents, and my whole family for the consistent love, continuous support and non–stop guidance that were shown to me during the course of my study. To my fiancé, thank you for all the love, peace and serenity that you've brought into my life.

Secondly, my warm and deepest appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr Khairulzan Bin Yahya from whom I received the necessary guidance throughout my project study. With much valuable suggestion contributed lead me to achieving the set aims of the study. Patience however on his part and unfailing support leads to the successful complete of my study. Thank you very much.

Lastly to all my dear friends and lecturers whom I am lucky to have, thanks for all your contributions and support, both directly and indirectly towards by project study and the entire degree program. We will cherish this moment together. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

Concern regarding sustainability in the construction industry has grown and many researches were conducted to improve understanding on the matter. New technologies and methodologies, including Industrialised Building System (IBS) emerge as an alternative to conventional in-situ methods of construction. Nonetheless IBS technology is not comprehensively adopted in Malaysia, which is most likely caused by lack of awareness and understanding on its beneficial impact to the environment. This study investigates the Global Warming Potential of IBS, focusing on precast concrete production of a residential building through Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). Investigation was focused on the production of wall panel or façade for a multi-storey building in a precast factory located in Pekan Nenas, Johor. Moreover, the production process and quality assurance and control for precast concrete were also identified. The boundary of this research is measuring the direct and indirect energy demand and carbon emission of precast concrete from *cradle-to-gate* where data obtained was analysed using OpenLCA software. Direct data was collected from the precast factory that comprises on the information regarding on precast concrete production process. While indirect data which includes embodied energy and carbon for raw materials production process and conversion factors for energy and carbon emission were collected from previous researches. This study found that production of mould consumed the highest energy by 55% while cement production emit highest amount CO_2 by 92%. Embodied energy and carbon for this project are 11,790,968 MJ and 19,262,915 kg respectively while posing GWP of 4.4281 kg CO_2,eq ($x10^{10}$).

ABSTRAK

Penekanan mengenai aspek kelestarian dalam industri pembinaan telah berkembang pesat dan pelbagai kajian telah dijalankan bagi meningkatkan pemahaman mengenai perkara tersebut. Teknologi dan metodologi baru, termasuk Sistem Binaan Berindustri (IBS) muncul sebagai alternatif kepada kaedah konvensional pembinaan. Namun, teknologi IBS tidak diaplikasikan dengan komprehensif di Malaysia, berkemungkinan disebabkan oleh kurangnya kesedaran dan pemahaman mengenai manfaatnya kepada alam sekitar. Kajian ini mengkaji Potensi Pemanasan Global, memfokuskan kepada pengeluaran konkrit pratuang bagi sebuah bangunan kediaman melalui Penilaian Kitaran Hayat (LCA). Kajian ini tertumpu kepada pengeluaran panel dinding atau permukaan hadapan bangunan untuk bangunan berbilang tingkat di sebuah kilang pratuang terletak di Pekan Nenas, Johor. Selain itu, proses pengeluaran dan jaminan kualiti dan kawalan untuk konkrit pratuang juga telah dikenal pasti. Sempadan kajian ini adalah mengukur permintaan tenaga dan pelepasan karbon langsung dan tidak langsung daripada konkrit pratuang dari "*cradle-to-gate*" di mana data yang diperolehi akan dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian OpenLCA. Pertama, data dikumpulkan langsung dari kilang pratuang yang terdiri daripada maklumat yang berkaitan pada proses pengeluaran konkrit pratuang. Kedua adalah pengumpulan data tidak langsung yang merangkumi tenaga dan karbon untuk process pengeluaran bahan-bahan mentah dan penukaran faktor untuk tenaga dan karbon pelepasan dikumpulkan daripada kajian terdahulu. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa pengeluaran acuan "mould" menggunakan tenaga yang paling tinggi sebanyak 55% manakala pengeluaran simen mengeluarkan jumlah tertinggi CO_2 sebanyak 92%. Tenaga dan karbon termaktub untuk projek ini adalah 11,790,968 MJ dan 19,262,915 kg CO_2 manakala potensi GWP adalah 4,4281 kg CO_2,eqivalent ($x10^{10}$).

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The industrial sector is the second highest energy consumer next to transportation sector. Construction is the largest and most fragmented industrial activities which accounts for an estimated 40% of all resources consumption and produces about 40% of all waste including greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the production of a standard reinforced concrete beam was estimated to consume 109 MJ of energy and emit 79.4kg of CO_2 for every tonne of concrete produced.

Many scholars highlighted the difficulties in estimating accurate environmental impact in their studies. Generally, the most common key to estimation of environmental impact is through measuring the production of greenhouse gases (GHG) emission. GHG emission includes carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides, and etc. which are commonly converted to CO_2 equivalent to measure their respective global warming potential, in comparison to carbon dioxide.

Global warming potential (GWP) is a measure of heat being trapped in the atmosphere due to greenhouse gases. There are various greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere and each has different potential of absorbing heat. Hence, as carbon dioxide is the most common and vastly produced greenhouse gas, the potential of heat absorption of other gases are converted to carbon dioxide equivalent ($CO_{2,}$eq) by the scholars. Greenhouse gases are the products of human activities that include the combustion of fuels for transportation, factories machineries, and electricity generation. The construction industry contributes a lot of greenhouse gases as it require high amount of energy to operate. However, comprehensive measures were taken by government bodies to retain its impact at a minimum level.

Industrialised Building System (IBS) is one of the many solutions to sustainability. Traditional construction methods will requires the materials to be cast on site where waste production is inevitable regardless of proper planning. Concrete is the most common materials for building construction due to its high strength which however requires a lot of formwork for casting. The most common formwork for concrete is wood where high demand of it will lead to serious issue of deforestation. This method is labour intensive, involving formwork fabrication, steel bending, and concreting. It requires many wet trades on-site, such as skill carpenters, plasterers, and brick workers.[1] This process can be hampered by quality issues, unfavourable site conditions, a skilled labour shortage, and bad weather conditions. On the other hand, IBS uses steel as formwork and can be reuse for a longer period of time. Although requires electricity to operate, the production of concrete using IBS is more energy efficient compared to the traditional method.

1.2 Problem Statement

Construction industry plays an important role in economic growth through contributions in the socio-economic development as well as in developing complementary industries. However, its high demand on building materials and energy poses a detrimental effect on the environment. Industrialised Building System (IBS) is one of the emerging technologies that act as a solution for a more sustainable construction development method. Other than its benefits toward faster construction, fire protection, and productivity improvement, IBS is also known to have low energy consumption and carbon emissions.

Previous research on comparison of carbon emission between two construction methods which are conventionally reinforced concrete and precast concrete panels, revealed a total emissions reduction of 26.27% through the selection of a precast wall panel system.[2] According to Omar et al. (2013), other research that highlight the benefits of prefabricated building system was conducted by Monahan and Powel (2011) whom assessed the embodied energy and emission of a construction low energy building using prefabricated panellised timber framed system. Compared with more traditional methods of construction, this system has resulted 34% reduction in embodied carbon. Similarly he also mentioned a study founding that a steel-framed prefabricated system resulted in reduced material consumption of up to 78% compared to conventional concrete construction.[3] on the other hand, previously conducted research studies to quantify the carbon emissions of precast concrete columns but failed to address the influence of indirect emissions which subsequently underestimated the results for the LCA. However none of these researches estimated the embodied energy of the system.

Carbon dioxide (CO_2) is a significant greenhouse gas and the emissions are inextricably linked to energy consumption when energy is produced through the combustion of fuels.[4] Hence, this research will study the significant influence of precast concrete in terms of both embodied energy and carbon. Moreover, there are various precast concrete systems being applied in the industry such as skeletal and load bearing system. In addition, a building construction also consist of many components; beam, column, slab, and etc. The emission of carbon and energy consumed by each system is not yet critically identified.

Research on the environmental impact of IBS system in Malaysia is considered limited which consequently causes lack of data to promote its benefits to the industry. Therefore, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology is chosen to quantitatively convey its benefits. Other than application of IBS in Malaysian construction industry, Green Building is another approach to promote sustainable development. However, the green certification system such as Green Building Index (GBI) and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating systems were criticized by researches for not including life cycle perspective to its assessment. For instance, a research argued that the LEED system “does not provide a consistent, organized structure for achievement of environmental goals” from a life-cycle perspective.[5] They recommended incorporating life-cycle assessment (LCA) for further development of the LEED system. LCA includes the entire life cycle of products; extraction of raw materials, manufacturing, transportation and distribution, operational, and demolition. This research aim is to quantify the GWP through embodied energy and carbon emission of precast concrete system using the LCA methodologies.

1.3 Objectives

The aim of this study is to estimate the Global Warming Potential of precast products which was achieved by following the objectives of the study;

i. To identify the manufacturing process involved in precast system
ii. To investigate the energy consumption and carbon emission in manufacturing process
iii. To calculate the energy and carbon life cycle inventory of precast system
iv. To estimate the embodied energy and carbon and Global Warming Potential of precast products

1.4 Scope

This study was conducted on a precast concrete factory located in Pekan Nenas, Johor. The boundary of life cycle assessment is measuring the direct energy consumption and carbon emission from extraction of raw materials to the production of precast concrete wall facade of residential building (*cradle-to-gate*). OpenLCA which is one of the many LCA-based tools will be utilised to analyse the data. Information sources for materials and energy consumption data will be obtained from the precast concrete factory, and references from previous literatures.

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