

Benchmarking study between capacitive and electronic load technic to track I-V and P-V of a solar panel

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Mar 14, 2021

Revised Jul 15, 2021

Accepted Aug 10, 2021

Keywords:

Arduino board
Capacitive load
Electronic load
I-V track system
Solar panel

ABSTRACT

To detect defects of solar panel and understand the effect of external parameters such as fluctuations in illumination, temperature, and the effect of a type of dust on a photovoltaic (PV) panel, it is essential to plot the $I_{pv}=f(V_{pv})$ characteristic of the PV panel, and the simplest way to plot this I-V characteristic is to use a variable resistor. This paper presents a study of comparison and combination between two methods: capacitive and electronic loading to track I-V characteristic. The comparison was performed in terms of accuracy, response time and instrumentation cost used in each circuit, under standard temperature and illumination conditions by using polycrystalline solar panel type SX330J and monocrystalline solar panels type ET-M53630. The whole system is based on simple components, less expensive and especially widely used in laboratories. The results will be between the datasheet of the manufacturer with the experimental data, refinements and improvements concerning the number of points and the trace time have been made by combining these two methods.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The production of photovoltaic technology has grown exponentially worldwide in recent years. The most crucial component of a solar system is the photovoltaic module, which can sometimes be relatively difficult to diagnose. Defects and the effect of external parameters such as fluctuations in illumination, temperature, and the effect of dust as partial shading [1], on the modules are generally not visible to the naked eye and their causes must also be found by indirect and special methods [2].

One of the most important parameters for the diagnosis, monitoring, or characterization of PV systems is the curve $I_{pv}=f(V_{pv})$ (or *I-V*) of the photovoltaic (PV) module. This *I-V* characteristic provides important information about the performance of the PV modules, such as the open-circuit voltage V_{oc} , the short-circuit current I_{sc} , the rated maximum power P_{MPP} , the current I_{mp} , and voltage V_{mp} of the maximum power point and the module efficiency. These parameters are extremely important for the operation, testing, calibration, commissioning, design, maintenance, and control of PV systems [3].

There are many methods to trace the *I-V* characteristic of a PV module under different operating conditions [4]. The easiest and method is to use a variable resistor to change the values of current and voltage, thus the *I-V* characteristic can be extracted. Such a method has been used in some previous research works [5], [6]. Another way to plot the *I-V* curve of a PV generator is to use capacitive charges as the capacitor charge increases, the current drops, and the voltage increases. When the charge is completed, the current supplied by the PV generator becomes zero and the open circuit condition is reached. Some research

in [7]-[9] have used capacitors as an automatic variable charge to vary the voltage V_{pv} and current I_{pv} during the capacitor charging operation, which has allowed them to obtain the I - V characteristic of the PV array.

Chen *et al.* [10] have designed a device based on an electronically variable load using the APL501J MOSFET transistor, covering the full range of the I - V characteristic. The electronic charging method uses a transistor (usually a MOSFET) as a load. The resistance between drain and source and the flow of the current supplied by the PV generator are modulated by the gate-source voltage. When this method is used to plot the I - V curve of the PV generator, the MOSFET must operate in its three modes (off, active and ohmic) to obtain the I - V characteristic of the PV array in a very short time

This article proposes a comparison and combination study between two methods to track the I - V output of a solar panel; capacitive and electronic loading, and for this reason, this paper is divided into 5 sections: The first one gives the introduction concerning the methods used to arrive at the I - V characteristic of a PV panel. Then in section 2, we give a brief mathematical description of the two methods used. Then, in section 3, we give details on the measurement bench, and section 4 summarizes and discusses the results obtained. We will end this article with a conclusion of this work.

2. SOLAR CELL MATHEMATICAL MODEL

There are many solar cell models that predict the electrical behavior of a solar panel. The single-diode model of a solar cell is the most frequently used model to simulate photovoltaic power generation [11]. For a solar cell whose electrical modeling is given in Figure 1, The electrical current I_{pv} is related to the voltage V_{pv} by (7) according to the 1 diode model as shown in Figure 1.

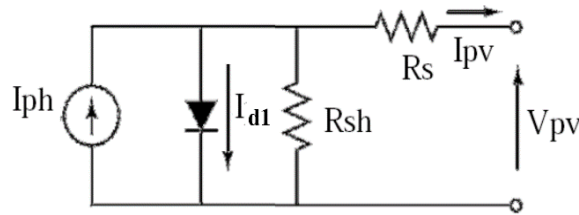


Figure 1. Equivalent circuit of a PV cell with 1 diode

The photo-current I_{ph} depends linearly on solar radiation G , but is also influenced by temperature, according to the following relation [12]:

$$I_{ph} = (I_{ph,ref} + \alpha_0 \cdot \Delta T) \frac{G}{G_{ref}} \quad (1)$$

In the standard test conditions (STC) ($G_{ref}=1000 \text{ W/m}^2$, $T_{ref}=298 \text{ K}$), the expression of $I_{ph, ref}$ is given by (2):

$$I_{ph,ref} = \left(1 + \frac{R_s}{R_{sh}}\right) I_{sc,ref} \quad (2)$$

Therefore:

$$I_{ph} = \left(\left(1 + \frac{R_s}{R_{sh}}\right) I_{sc,ref} + \alpha_0 \Delta T \right) \frac{G}{G_{ref}} \quad (3)$$

By application of the meshes law, the I_{sh} current in the shunt resistor R_{sh} is expressed by (4):

$$I_{sh} = \frac{V_{pv} + R_s I_{pv}}{R_{sh}} \quad (4)$$

The diode current I_{di} is given by (5),

$$I_{di} = I_{01} \left[\exp\left(\frac{V_{pv} + R_s I_{pv}}{n_1 V_{th}}\right) - 1 \right] \quad (5)$$

with (6),

$$I_{01} = \frac{I_{sc,ref} + \alpha_0 \Delta T}{\exp\left(\frac{V_{oc,ref} + \beta_0 \Delta T}{V_{th}}\right) - 1} \quad (6)$$

and $V_{th} = \frac{kT}{q}$ is the thermal voltage of the module, α_0 temperature correction coefficient for current ($^{\circ}\text{C}^{-1}$), β_0 temperature correction coefficient for voltage ($^{\circ}\text{C}^{-1}$), I_0 reverse saturation current (A), n_1 first diode ideality factor, and R_S series resistance (Ω). So, the current supplied by the solar cell in 1 diode model is given by the following relation [13].

$$I_{pv} = I_{ph} - I_{01} \left[\exp\left(\frac{V_{pv} + R_S I_{pv}}{n_1 V_{th}}\right) - 1 \right] - \frac{V_{pv} + R_S I_{pv}}{R_{sh}} \quad (7)$$

Many approaches for determining the performance of solar panels can be adopted based on the data sheet of the parameters specified by the manufacturer or measured. The performance of a solar panel is normally evaluated under standard test conditions (STC), where an average solar spectrum at AM 1.5 is used, irradiance is normalized to 1000 W/m^2 , and the cell temperature is set at $25 \text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ [14]. The panels used in this work are polycrystalline type SX 330J, and monocrystalline type ET-M53630, whose electrical characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Electrical characteristics of the PV module SX330 and ET-M53630 at STC [15]

Symbol	Value (SX330 panel)	Value (ET-M53630 panel)
P_{max}	30 W	30 W
V_{mp}	16.8 V	17.72 V
I_{mp}	1.78 A	1.69 A
--	27 W	28.5 W
I_{sc}	1.94 A	1.80 A
V_{oc}	21.0 V	21.52 V

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The proposed measurement bench for the real-time characterization of the PV panel, is realized by using an Arduino UNO board, as acquisition, and data transfer unit of I_{pv} and V_{pv} values to a personal computer via PLX-DAQ tool as shown in Figure 2. PLX-DAQ from Parallax is a complementary data acquisition tool for Microsoft Excel, which acquires up to 26 channels of data from any microcontroller and allows simple analysis of spreadsheets of data collected in the field [16]. The values of the PV array's current intensity I_{pv} and voltage V_{pv} are measured using two Arduino-compatible voltage sensors, one measuring the voltage and the other used as a current sensor. The PV array temperature is measured using a thermocouple, while the irradiance is evaluated using the FI 109SM solarimeter [17].

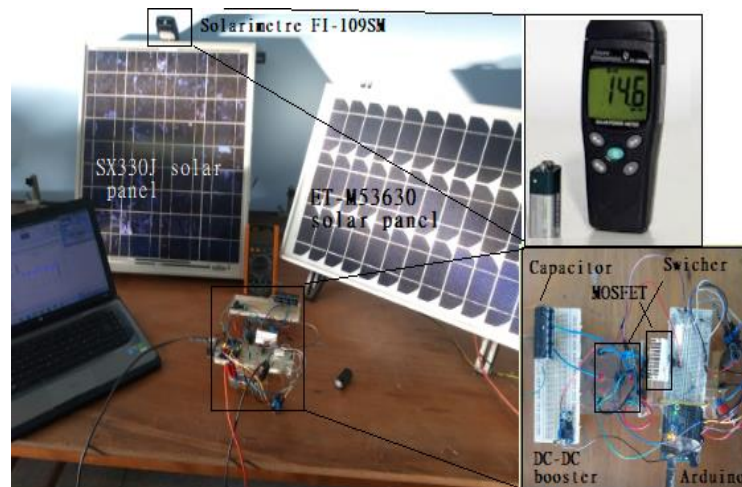


Figure 2. Prototype version used for the developed experimental campaign

3.1. Instrument cost

In this paper, the objective is to realize a low-cost solution of simple instrumentation to provide *I-V* & *P-V* characteristics, to analyze the influence of real operating conditions, such as temperature, illumination, dust shadowing effect, and real-time observation of PV module performance, based on simple components, and less expensive. Table 2 present the partial and total cost (USD) of the electronic components used in each technique, capacitive or electronic load.

Table 2. Partial costs and total cost of the materials and components associated to the project

System components		≈ Partial cost	Total cost
RC capacitive load	Resistor	1 USD	25.8 USD
	Capacitor	2 USD	
	Voltage sensor	8.8 USD	
	Arduino UNO	15 USD	
Electronic load (MOSFET)	Resistor	1 USD	33.8 USD
	Resistor	2 USD	
	Capacitor	4 USD	
	Voltage sensor	8.8 USD	
	Arduino UNO	15 USD	
	DC/DC booster	4 USD	
	MOSFET	1 USD	

3.2. Instrument calibration

The developed instrument was subjected to a calibration process based on a DGM-360 digital multimeter. This calibration was performed by acquiring discrete values of the voltage and current applied by a solar panel under well-defined illumination and temperature conditions [18]. This instrument has a voltage resolution of 0.01 V in the range of 60-4 V, and a current resolution of 0.001 A in the measuring range of 6 A. The uncertainty given by the manufacturer is 0.02%. The process has been carried out over the entire operating range established for each measuring sensor, then, the calibration equations were obtained using a linear fit.

3.3. Experimental I-V curve tracer topology with capacitive load

The PV module I-V curve plotter proposed in this section is based on a fast and automatic variation of the capacitor charge, as shown in Figure 3, with $R=4 \Omega$, $C=4.7 \text{ mF}$. The maximum voltage value of the capacitor must be 20% higher than the V_{oc} of the solar module for safety reasons. The capacitance value C must therefore be calculated for each scenario [7]. After thorough analysis and experimental work, it is recommended to select the capacitance value C using expression (8):

$$C \approx 0.55 t \left(\frac{I_{sc}}{V_{oc}} \right) \tag{8}$$

where t is the capacitor charge time, which must be greater than 20 ms for I_{sc} and V_{oc} conditions close to standard test conditions (STC).

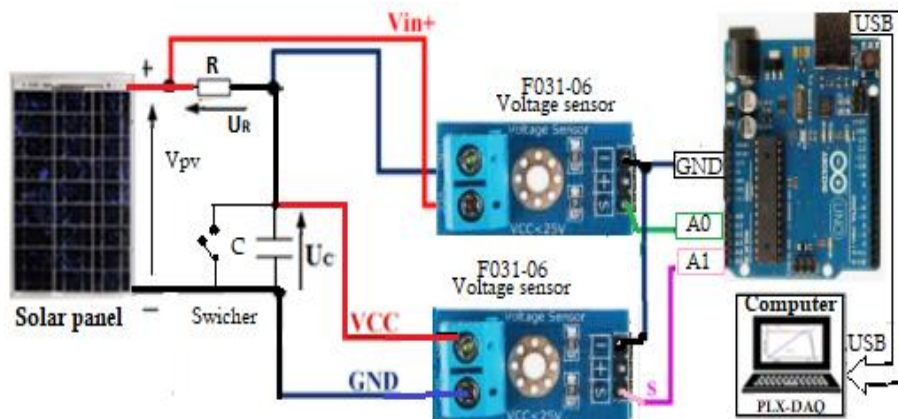


Figure 3. Synoptic diagram of PV characterization carried out with "RC" circuit method

In this case, theoretically according to the mesh-law applied to the circuit in Figure 3, we have:

$$V_{pv} = U_c(t) + U_R(t) \quad (9)$$

or:

$$V_{pv} = U_c(t) + RC \frac{dU_c(t)}{dt} \quad (10)$$

The solution of the differential equation appearing in (10) is given by (11):

$$U_c(t) = V_{oc} \cdot \left(1 - e^{-\frac{t}{RC}}\right) \quad (11)$$

where: V_{oc} Solar cell open-circuit voltage (V), so:

$$V_{pv} = V_{oc} \cdot \left(1 - e^{-\frac{t}{RC}}\right) + U_R(t) \quad (12)$$

and the intensity of the current $I_{pv}(t)$:

$$I_{pv} = C \frac{dU_c(t)}{dt} \quad (13)$$

Finally,

$$I_{pv} = (V_{oc}/R)e^{\left(\frac{-t}{RC}\right)} \quad (14)$$

3.4. Experimental I-V curve tracer topology with electronic load

Figure 4 shows the block diagram of the experimental I - V curve plotter for PV modules using the electronic charging method based on an IRF740 MOSFET transistor. The MOSFET is an electrical component that functions as an electronically controlled load, which changes the operating point of an I - V of PV generator [19]. When a V_{GS} control voltage is applied to its gate, it generates a fast and variable PV output current from 0 to I_{sc} (A) and a variable output voltage from V_{oc} to 0 (V). The Arduino board generates a continuous signal through pin $V_{cc}=5$ V, then amplified by a DC/DC booster XL6009E1, then this signal is injected into an RC filter ($R=440 \Omega$, $C=4.7$ mF), to vary the control voltage V_{GS} of the MOSFET in a progressive way, which also requires the R_{DS} resistor to evolve progressively [20].

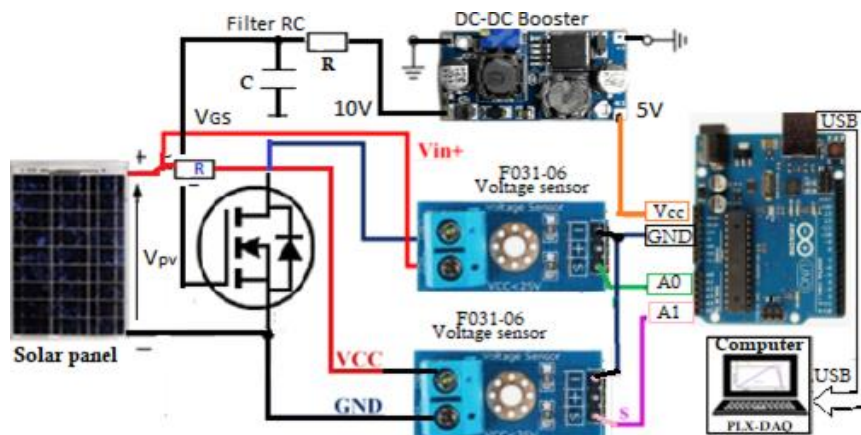


Figure 4. Synoptic diagram of electronic load technic

The three operating modes of the MOSFET that describe the relationship between I_D as a function of V_{GS} and V_{DS} are [21].

Cutoff mode if:

$$V_{GS} < V_{th} \text{ alors } I_D = 0A \tag{15}$$

Ohmic mode if:

$$V_{GS} - V_{th} > 0 \ \& \ V_{GS} - V_{th} > V_{DS} \text{ alors : } I_D = K[2(V_{GS} - V_{th})V_{DS} - V_{DS}^2] \tag{16}$$

Saturation mode if:

$$V_{GS} - V_{th} > 0 \ \& \ V_{GS} - V_{th} < V_{DS} \text{ alors : } I_D = K(V_{GS} - V_{th})^2 \tag{17}$$

where K is the device constant and V_{th} is the transistor control threshold voltage. By changing the V_{GS} value within an appropriate range, measurement points can scan between I_{SC} and V_{OC} , with:

$$I_D = I_{pv} \tag{18}$$

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Time response comparison at 25 °C and $G=1000 \text{ W/m}^2$

The Figures 5(a)-(b) and 6(a)-(b) show the variation of I_{pv} and V_{pv} as a function with time, Figure 6(a) for electronic technic and Figure 6(b) capacitive technic, in the case of variation of R resistor and C capacitor, to evaluate the response time by the two previous technics: Capacitive and electronic load. From Figures 5 and 6 we can observe that if the value of R and C increases, the time required to plot the I - V or P - V characteristic increases, using both techniques. But the technique using MOSFET is faster than the capacitive one in the response time.

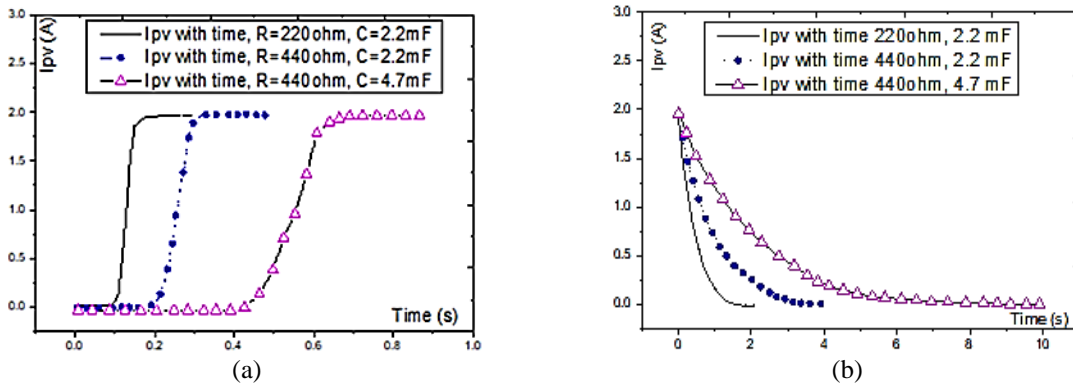


Figure 5. I_{pv} with time at different values of R and C; (a) with electronic load, (b) with capacitive load

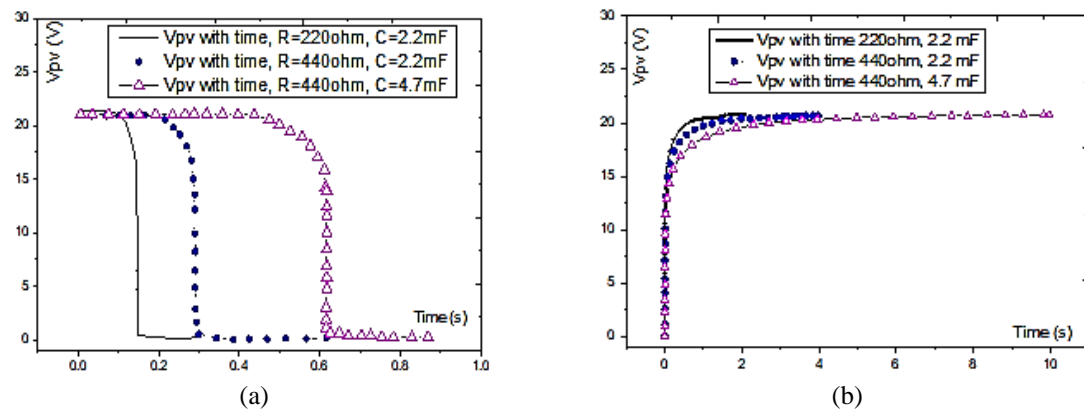


Figure 6. V_{pv} with time at different values of R and C; (a) with electronic load, (b) with capacitive load

4.2. I-V and P-V characteristic of the PV module

The Figures 7 and 8 shows the I-V & P-V characteristics for the SX330J and ET-M53630 solar panels, Figures 7(a) and 8(a) using electronic technic, Figures 7(b) and 8(b) using capacitive load technic (MOSFET). A comparison between manufacturer's datasheet and the experimental data was performed under the weather conditions $G=1000 \text{ W/m}^2$, $T = 25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$.

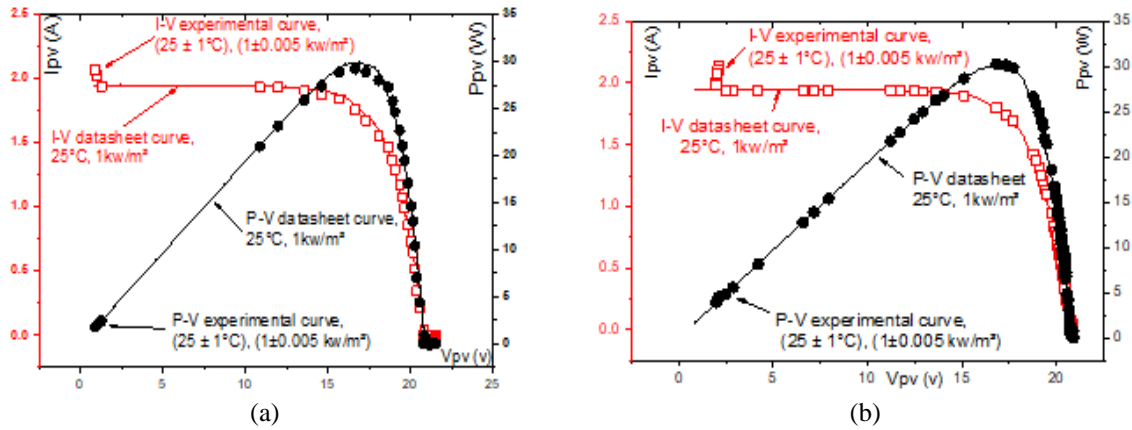


Figure 7. I-V & P-V characteristics of the SX 330J module; (a) with electronic load, (b) with capacitive load

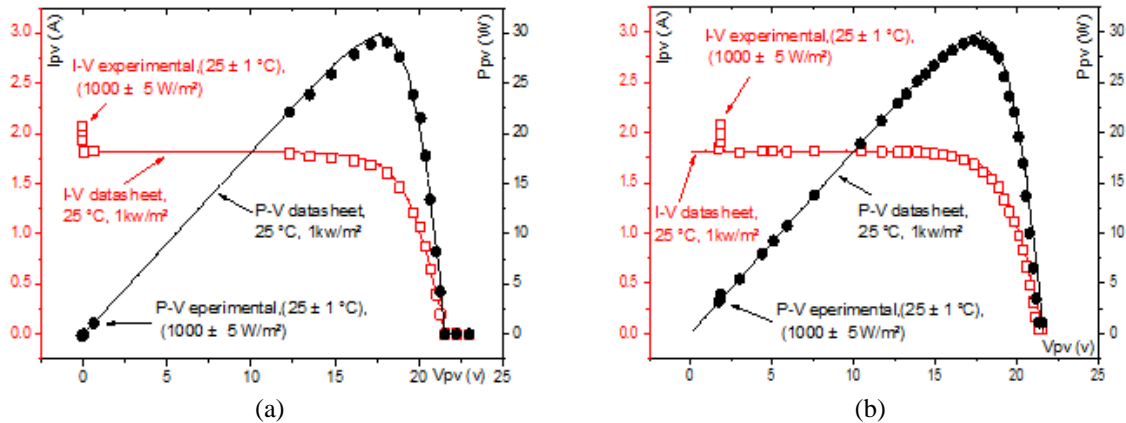


Figure 8. I-V & P-V characteristics of the ET-M53630 module; (a) with electronic load, (b) with capacitive load

4.3. Relative error between “capacitive” and “electronic” load technic:

The relative errors Er between $I_{pv,data}$ given by the manufacturer, and the $I_{pv,exp}$ data measured by the "Capacitive" and "electronic" methods under the weather conditions $G = 1000 \text{ W/m}^2$ with $T_{cell}=25 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, is given in the following relation (19), this parameter evaluated for various values of the panel voltage V_{pv} by [22]-[25]:

$$Er(\%) = 100 \left(\frac{|I_{pv,exp} - I_{pv,data}|}{I_{pv,exp}} \right)_{V_{pv}} \quad (19)$$

From Figures 9 and 10 and the results of the comparison of the relative errors Er of I-V characterization, we can conclude that the method using the MOSFET electronic charge is more accurate than the capacitive charge method, either based on a polycrystalline or monocrystalline panel, this results justifies the performance brought by the use of this "MOSFET" circuit method compared to the "Capacitive" circuit method, Table 3 summarizes all the positive points brought by the MOSFET method compared to the capacitive method.

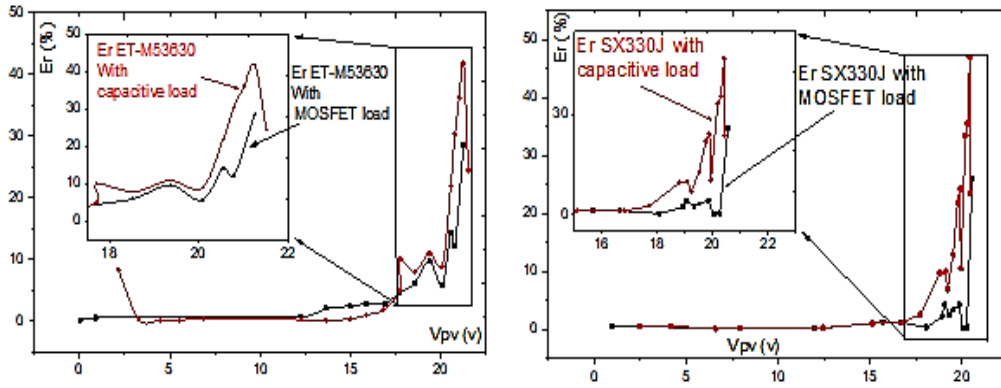


Figure 9. Relative errors E_r , evaluating the "capacitive" and "electronic load" circuit methods

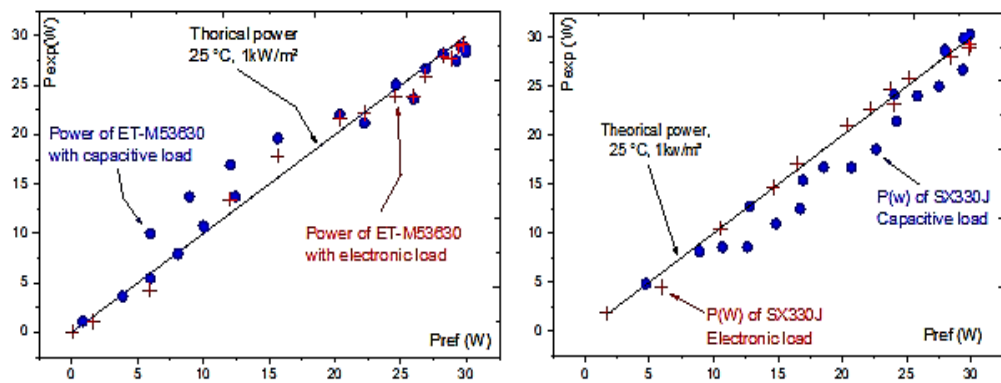


Figure 10. Experimental power, evaluating the "capacitive" and "electronic load" circuit methods

Table 3. Comparison between different methods

	Flexibility	Fidelity	time Response	Cost
Capacitive load	Low	Medium	high	low
Electronic load	High	Medium	low	Medium

4.4. Combining circuit between “capacitive” and “electronic” load technic

In this part, we have tested the combination between the capacitive method and electronic charging to plot the $I-V$ and $P-V$ characteristics of a solar panel. The basic circuit of this combination is illustrated in Figure 11. A capacitor of capacitance $C = 4.7 \text{ mF}$ is added to the terminals of the MOSFET transistor. The control signal is similarly produced by Arduino, amplified by DC-DC booster, and then injected into an RC filter ($R=440 \text{ }\Omega$, $C=4.7 \text{ mF}$), to vary the V_{GS} voltage in a progressive way.

4.4.1. Combining effect between “capacitive” and “electronic” load technic on I_{pv} and V_{pv}

As shown Figure 12 the effect of the combination between capacitor and the MOSFET on the Figure 12(a) $I_{pv}=f(t)$ and Figure 12(b) $V_{pv}=f(t)$ characteristics, in the case of $R = 440 \text{ ohm}$, $C=4.7 \text{ mF}$ and $R = 220 \text{ ohm}$, $C = 2.2 \text{ mF}$. From Figure 12 we observe that the variations $I_{pv}=f(t)$ and $V_{pv}=f(t)$ have two effects: capacitive and electronic effect of the MOSFET, which consequently increases the number of points displayed by the PLX-DAQ and also decreases the plotting time of the $I_{pv}-V_{pv}$ characteristics, i.e. $tr_p=0.5 \text{ s}$ for ($R = 440 \text{ }\Omega$, $C = 4.7 \text{ mF}$), thus 0.1 s less than the method which uses only the MOSFET without combination as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

4.4.2. $I-V$ and $P-V$ characteristic with the combined circuit “capacitive” and “electronic” load

In the Figures 13 and 14 benchmarking study between combination capacitive-electronic load and electronic load has been performed, Figure 13(a) and 14(a) show electronic load technic, and Figure 13(b) and 14(b) with the combined circuit under STC. From Figures 13 and 14 we can see an agreement between the datasheet and the combination results between capacitive and electronic load. Moreover, we have noted that this combination increases the number of points, in Figures 13(b) and 14(b). The relative errors E_r (%)

evaluated are shown in Figure 15. Figure 15(a) for ET-M53630 monocrystalline solar panel, and Figure 15(b) for SX330J polycrystalline solar panel. As shown in Figure 15, we can conclude that the combined circuit has a lower relative error E_r compared to the previous technic. This justifies the performances brought by this combination compared to the capacitive or electronic load method.

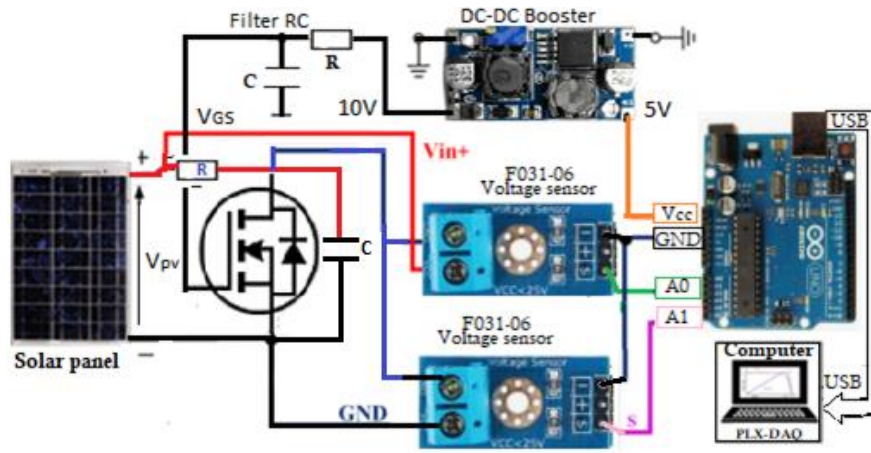


Figure 11. Combining between the "capacitive" and "electronic load" circuit

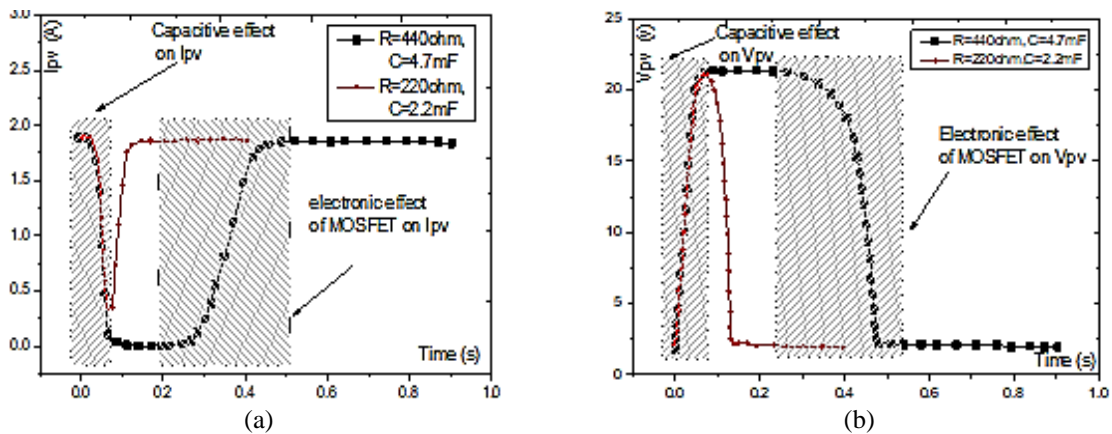


Figure 12. V_{pv} and I_{pv} with time at different values of the filter R and C; (a) $I_{pv} = f(t)$, (b) $V_{pv} = f(t)$

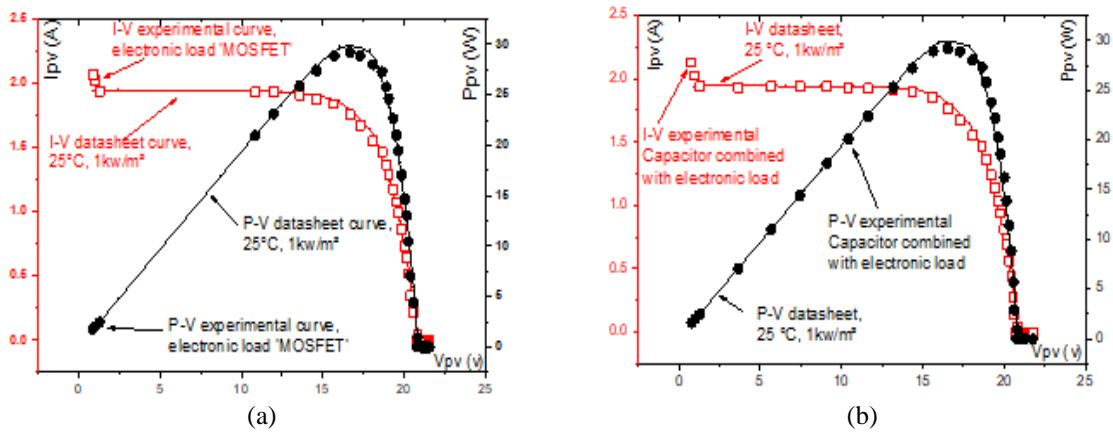


Figure 13. $I-V$ & $P-V$ characteristics of the SX330J module; (a) with electronic load, (b) electronic load combined with capacitive load

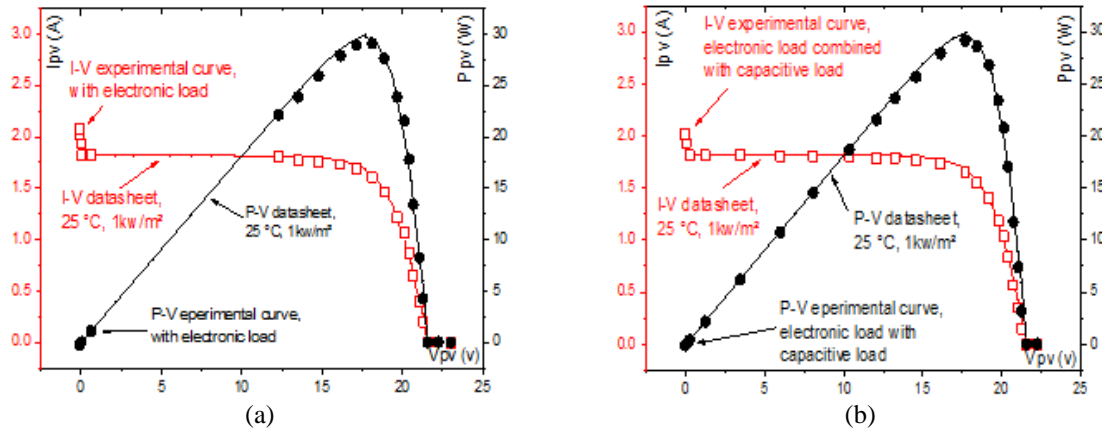


Figure 14. I-V & P-V characteristics of the ET-M53630 module; (a) with electronic load, (b) electronic load combined with capacitive load

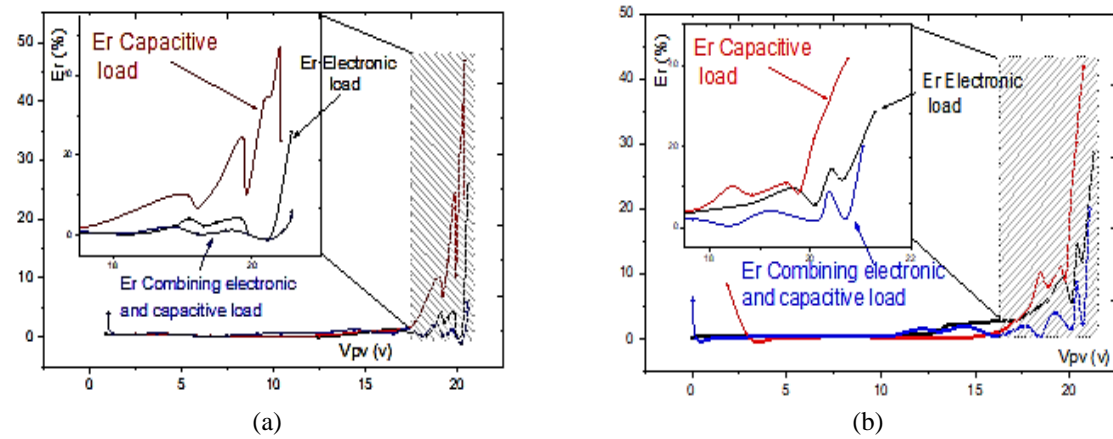


Figure 15. Relative errors E_r evaluating electronic load combined with capacitive load: (a) ET-M53630 module, (b) SX330J module

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, two low-cost solutions to provide the I-V & P-V characteristics of the solar panel have been proposed. As an improvement, a combination of these two techniques was carried out. The whole system is based on simple components, and especially widely used in laboratories, based on a simple circuit with electronic load "MOSFET", or capacitive load. The acquisition is done through low-cost voltage sensors in communication with an Arduino board, and the data is presented in real-time using the PLX-DAQ Spreadsheet data interface in Excel Macro. The experimental results are in agreement with the theoretical analysis. An improvement has been observed in terms of accuracy, response time, and cost of the instrumentation used. Experimental tests on a PV module of the type monocrystalline ET-M53630 or polycrystalline SX 330J have been carried out under real operating conditions. The proposed circuit is suitable for use in detecting solar panel defects and understanding the effect of external parameters such as fluctuations in illumination, temperature, and the effect of a type of dust on a PV system.





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