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A PROGRAMMABLE LOGIC CONTROLLER (PLC) EMULATION SOLUTION TAILORED FOR WAREHOUSE AUTOMATION.

Dr. Manjunath Kotari
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
mkotari@gmail.com

Monika L R
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
monikahosmane14@gmail.com

Khushi V K
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
kushivk3@gmail.com

Priya D B
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
4al20cs098@gmail.com

Punya N
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
punyagowda.n29@gmail.com

Toshif Husen Patel
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
toshifpatil401@gmail.com

Mohamed Adnan A
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
mohammedakram7786@gmail.com

Mohammed Uzair P
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
mohammeduzair9625@gmail.com

Sanjeev Ramesh G
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Alvas Institute of Engineering and Technology
Mijar, Karnataka, India
sanjeevgadag2002@gmail.com

***Abstract*—Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs) have become indispensable tools in contemporary industrial settings, serving as robust mechanisms for orchestrating the operations of numerous machines and devices with precision. This project introduces a novel application of PLCs within the realm of industrial automation, envisaging a sophisticated control system capable of managing operations in an automotive manner with minimal human intervention. The paper delineates a series of experiential exercises meticulously designed to empower students with practical insights into the manifold industrial applications of PLCs. Additionally, the utilization of computer-based simulation software facilitates the seamless design and exploration of complex systems, thereby augmenting the learning experience. Embracing a holistic approach, this project encompasses the entire gamut of activities, from model design to rigorous simulation and subsequent stability analysis, thereby exemplifying a rigorous methodology for exploring and validating proposed models within industrial automation. The proposed PLC emulator emerges as a versatile and economically viable solution for testing and validating warehouse control systems, ultimately fostering heightened efficiency and dependability within warehouse automation frameworks. The empirical insights elucidated in this paper contribute substantively to the expanding discourse on simulation and emulation methodologies in warehouse automation, underscoring avenues for meaningful advancements in the field.**

Keywords: Warehouse Automation, Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), Simulation, Emulation, Material Handling, Storage and Retrieval Systems (AS/RS)

II. INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning landscape of warehouse automation has wrought a paradigm shift in contemporary logistics and supply chain management, ushering in an era of unprecedented efficiency and cost-effectiveness. At the heart of this revolution lie the Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs), which serve as the veritable linchpins of control systems in automated warehousing setups [9]. Facilitating a spectrum of operations ranging from inventory control to order processing and material handling, PLCs are indubitably indispensable in the orchestration of warehouse functionalities.

Simulation and emulation emerge as linchpins in the labyrinthine design, development, and execution of PLC-centric warehouse automation systems. These avant-garde methodologies proffer a virtual sandbox for the meticulous testing and validation of control logic and system comportment, mitigating the peril and pecuniary outlay associated with real- world deployment.[1] By virtue of simulation, engineers are empowered to scrutinize myriad scenarios, optimize system efficacy, and ensure seamless assimilation with extant warehouse infrastructure.

This paper unfurls an exhaustive treatise on the symbiotic interplay of simulation and emulation within the precincts of warehouse automation, with a particular emphasis on the conceptualization and instantiation of a PLC emulator. Engineered to emulate the idiosyncrasies of real-world PLCs, this emulator furnishes a virtual crucible for the iterative refinement of control algorithms and system operability. By immersing in the simulation of sundry warehouse scenarios encompassing inventory management, order processing, and material flow, engineers stand poised to gauge system performance and pinpoint potential bottlenecks [12].

The genesis of the PLC emulator germinates from a fertile bedrock of exhaustive research and incisive analysis of extant warehouse automation paradigms. A slew of case studies and simulations were meticulously orchestrated to vouchsafe the efficacy and reliability of the emulator across diverse warehouse milieus. The empirical findings bear testimony to the emulator's fidelity in replicating the comportment of real-world PLCs, thus constituting a quintessential tool for the design and testing of warehouse automation systems [7].

In summation, the integration of simulation and emulation has wrought a sea change in the efficiency and reliability of PLC-driven control systems in warehouse automation. The PLC emulator delineated herein stands as a vanguard in the realm of virtual testing and validation, proffering a frugal yet efficacious panacea for the design and implementation of warehouse automation systems [10]. This paper, thus, aspires to furnish a vade mecum for researchers and practitioners alike, elucidating the nuances of emulator architecture, functionalities, and performance metrics whilst proffering practical insights gleaned from the crucible of development [5].

The ensuing discourse unfolds thusly: Section II unfurls a panoramic vista of the Problem Statement vis-à-vis warehouse automation, with a specific focus on simulation and emulation techniques. Section III delves into the minutiae of implementation, expatiating upon the integration of the emulator with extant warehouse control systems, its design and architecture, including the salient components and functionalities [2].

In summative contemplation, this paper espouses a groundbreaking approach to warehouse automation through the aegis of a PLC emulator. By harnessing the tenets of simulation and emulation, the emulator emerges as a cost-effective and efficacious tool for the testing and validation of PLC-driven control systems. The insights and revelations unearthed herein are poised to galvanize the evolution of warehouse automation technologies, catalyzing a renaissance in warehouse operational intelligence, cost efficient, reduction in down time and efficiency [7].

I. ISSUE DESCRIPTION

In the tapestry of modern logistics, the symphony of warehouse automation systems orchestrates a melodious ode to efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Yet, amidst the harmonious cadence of stacker cranes and conveyor belts, lurk the enigmatic guardians of control – programmable logic controllers (PLCs). These arcane entities, weaving intricate webs of logic, wield their influence over the operational landscape with a potent blend of complexity and precision [13].

Enter the ethereal realm of emulation, where the boundaries between reality and simulation blur into obscurity. Here, amidst the virtual expanse, the PLC emulator stands as a spectral maestro, beckoning developers to partake in its enigmatic dance. In this digital waltz, the emulator promises salvation from the trials of physical hardware, offering a sanctuary for testing and validation [7]. Within its ephemeral embrace, the complexities of warehouse automation unravel, yielding to the allure of reduced development timelines and mitigated risks, as innovation blossoms amidst the ever-shifting currents of progress.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection:

In the labyrinthine journey of data collection, a myriad of sensors and monitoring devices were deployed within the warehouse automation system [8]. Strategically positioned, these sentinels diligently captured the vital metricsgoverning the system's machinations, from the graceful movements of stacker cranes to the rhythmic flow along conveyor belts [15].

- Stacker Cranes: Sensors meticulously monitor the dynamic nuances of stacker cranes' movement velocities and cargo capacities. Advanced algorithms, drawing inspiration from the illustrious reference [1], orchestrate the intricate dance of optimal speed and acceleration profiles for these cranes, finely calibrated to the gravitational pull of the loads they hoist.

- Conveyor Belts: Every pulse of the conveyor belts' rhythmic cadence is scrutinized by an array of sensors, meticulously tracing the ebb and flow of items through their serpentine paths. Drawing from the enigmatic depths of reference [2], algorithms weave a tapestry of optimization, deftly orchestrating the ballet of items to minimize the chaotic cacophony of congestion and maximize the symphony of throughput.

- Palletizers: Within the hallowed halls of palletizers, sensors stand vigil, bearing witness to the balletic artistry of stacking items upon pallets. Guided by the esoteric wisdom of reference [3], algorithms unfurl like ancient scrolls, deciphering the cryptic language of stacking patterns to sculpt a veritable masterpiece of stability and precision in palletization.

- Case-Wheeler Lifts: Sensors, akin to sentinels in the labyrinthine corridors of case-wheeler lifts, track the ethereal dance of trays and cases traversing their vertical domains. With reverence to the arcane scriptures of reference [4], algorithms sculpt the movements of cases with a delicate touch, choreographing a mesmerizing ballet of transitions between trays and conveyors, where the specter ofcollisions and errors fades into oblivion.

B. Emulation Algorithms:

Venturing into the ethereal realms of emulation, a symphony of algorithms was meticulously crafted to echo the intricate dance of real PLCs. The labyrinthine corridors of ladder logic interpretation and sensor simulation pulsated with an otherworldly energy, mirroring the enigmatic essence of warehouse automation [14].

- A Visual Language: Ladder Logic, often shortened to LD, is a picture-based language in PLC programming. It borrows ideas from circuit diagrams and relay logic hardware. Picture it like making a map for your PLC to follow. Instead of using words or numbers, it uses symbols and lines to show different actions and connections [4].

- Electric Inspired: Ladder Logic is closely connected to the world of electrical control wiring. It's like talking in the language of circuits. When you create a Ladder Logic program, you're basically explaining to the PLC how to deal with electrical signals and make decisions based on them [1].

- Symbolic Simplicity: This way of programming shares logical operations using symbols, meaning using symbols to show actions. Ladder Logic has ready-made functions, like a toolbox, each made for specific jobs. Think of it as having a set of building blocks to build your automation solutions [5].

C. System Architecture:

Nestled within the digital pantheon, the PLC emulator stood as a spectral guardian, embodying the essence of its tangible counterparts. A trinity of emulators – PLC logic, sensor, and actuator – converged, weaving a tapestry of simulated reality. Within this hallowed domain, algorithms danced in harmonious cadence, heralding a new era of emulation- driven enlightenment [12].

- PLC Logic Emulator: A marvel of digital sorcery, the PLC logic emulator weaves a tapestry of control logic, akin to a conductor orchestrating an ethereal symphony. This enigmatic software module delves into the labyrinthine depths of ladder logic programs, breathing life into their binary whispers within a simulated realm. Drawing inspiration from the ancient tomes of reference [7], it traverses the esoteric realms of state machine models, unravelling the secrets of logic interpretation.

- Sensor Emulator: Behold the sensor emulator, a masterful illusionist in the grand theatre of warehouse automation. With a flicker of probability, it conjures simulated sensor readings, mirroring the capricious whims of their real-world counterparts. Its arcane arts are steeped in the mystic lore of probabilistic models, whispered secrets from the annals of reference [9].

- Actuator Emulator: Enter the realm of the actuator emulator, a virtuoso of simulated movement and operation. With a symphony of simulated commands, it directs the ballet of conveyor belts, stacker cranes, and palletizers with a deft hand. Rooted in the fertile soil of control logic models, its algorithms are imbued with the wisdom of reference [11], guiding its every move with precision and grace.

D. Performance Evaluation:

In the crucible of performance evaluation, the emulator underwent a baptism by fire, subjected to a gauntlet of simulated trials. Amidst the cacophony of data points and metrics, the emulator's prowess was scrutinized under the unforgiving gaze of scrutiny [7]. Yet, amidst the chaos, emerged insights and revelations, paving the path towards emulation nirvana.

1. Simulation Scenario: The emulator embarked on a kaleidoscope of simulation scenarios, from the mundane hum of normalcy to the chaotic frenzy of error conditions and high-load tumult. Designed as a crucible of trial and tribulation, these scenarios tested the mettle of the emulator [6], probing its depths for weaknesses and fortifying its resolve for the challenges ahead.

2. Performance metrics:
   Response Time: A fleeting measure of the emulator's agility, the response time danced upon the precipice of milliseconds, a testament to its prowess in swift decision-making [9].
   - Error Rate: A shadow lurking in the periphery, the error rate whispered secrets of the emulator's reliability, where each misstep echoed with the weight of imperfection [11].
   - Resource Utilization: A delicate balance of computational symphony, the resource utilization wove a tapestry of efficiency, where each thread bore the mark of scalability and optimization [2].
   - Comparison with Benchmarks: In the crucible of comparison, the emulator stood tall against the specter of benchmarks, a mirror reflecting the soul of real PLCs in its digital domain [10].
   - Algorithm Selection: Amidst the labyrinth of algorithms, the selection process was a dance of discernment, where each step carried the weight of accuracy and scalability [14].

E. Mathematical Model:

In the realm of abstract contemplation, a mathematical edifice rose, embodying the essence of the emulator's behavior. Equations and formulations danced in an intricate ballet, illuminating the nuances of emulation fidelity [9]. Through the lens of mathematical abstraction, the emulator's veracity was unveiled, casting light upon its efficacy and reliability.

- Input-Output Relationship: The model unfurled a tapestry of interconnectedness, tracing the delicate dance between input signals and the symphony of output signals. In the labyrinth of emulation, this relationship served as the North Star, guiding the emulator towards the elusive shores of fidelity to real PLC behaviour.

- Response Time: Like clockwork in the depths of time, equations sprung forth to calculate the response times of the emulator, measuring the heartbeat of its efficiency and performance. Rooted in the soil of algorithms, these equations were the compass guiding the emulator through the tempestuous seas of input and output signals.

- Error Rates: In the shadows of uncertainty, equations emerged to quantify the spectre of error rates, measuring the cadence of the emulator's missteps and faltering's. These equations served as sentinels, guarding the gates of reliability under the watchful gaze of different operating conditions.

- Performance Metrics: A tapestry of metrics unfurled, woven from the fabric of response time, error rate, andresource utilization.

F. Algorithm Selection:

Navigating the labyrinth of algorithmic selection, a pantheon of candidates vied for eminence. Compatibility, realism, scalability – these were but facets of the enigmatic prism guiding the selection process [5]. Amidst the tumult of choices, emerged a constellation of algorithms, each a testament to the emulator's fidelity and efficacy.:

- Block by Block Logic: Function Block Diagram (FBD) is like solving a puzzle. It uses different logical blocks to process input and output information [12]. The PLC (that's like the brain of the machine) follows these blocks step by step to perform tasks.

- Connecting Functions: FBD is like connecting different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. You take individual functions and link them together in a logical sequence to create a program. It's a visual way of showing the PLC what to do [3].
- User Friendly Approach: FBD is designed to be simple and easy to understand. Learning it is like learning to put together a simple puzzle. It's a great choice for programming PLCs because it's straightforward and graphical [6].

G. Simulation Environment:

Within the digital crucible of simulation, the emulator found solace amidst the virtual expanse. A symphony of bits and bytes coalesced, conjuring a veritable simulacrum of warehouse reality. Amidst the pixelated tapestry, the emulator's mettle was tested, its efficacy and reliability scrutinized under the unforgiving gaze of simulation [9].

- Virtual Warehouse Model: Behold the virtual warehouse model, a digital tapestry meticulously woven to mirror the intricate dance of the real- world warehouse automation system. From the soaring heights of stacker cranes to the rhythmic hum of conveyor belts, every component was painstakingly replicated to ensure fidelity to reality [8].

- Commercial Simulation Software: Enter the realm of commercial simulation software, a veritable playground of digital sorcery where imagination knows no bounds. With a symphony of tools and features, this software breathed life into the virtual warehouse model, allowing for the creation of complex simulations with unparalleled accuracy[4].

- Integration of the PLC Emulator: In the heart ofthe virtual warehouse model, the PLC emulator found its sanctuary, seamlessly integrated to wieldits digital prowess. With the flicker of electrons, it danced among the simulated components, executing control logic and responding to events with the grace of a virtuoso [9].

- Realistic Testing Scenarios: Across the digital expanse, realistic testing scenarios unfurled like petals in the wind, each designed to push the emulator to its limits. From the tranquil rhythm of normal operation to the tempestuous fury of error conditions, every scenario tested the emulator's mettle under different circumstances [15].

H. Experimental Setup:

In the crucible of experimentation, the emulator was thrust into the maelstrom of virtual reality. Amidst the labyrinthine corridors of the virtual warehouse, it faced a barrage of test cases, each a crucible of challenges. Yet, amidst the chaos, emerged insights and revelations, guiding the emulator towards the pinnacle of emulation excellence [11].

III. OBJECTIVE

- **Increased flexibility:** PLCs can be programmed quickly. This makes modifying and adapting their behaviour to rapidly changing needs or process requirements easy. PLCs help eliminate the need for complex rewiring demanded by standard relay-based systems [12]. As such, PLCs are ideal for dynamic environments.

- **Improved reliability:** PLCs are rugged devices. Built for industrial environments, they can withstand harsh conditions, including extreme temperatures. Most PLCs today have built-in diagnostics and error-handling capabilities [5]. This makes them much more reliable than their relay counterparts.

- **Highly scalable:** Users can quickly scale PLCs up or down to meet the changing needs of the application. For example, they can add or remove I/O modules as needed [9]. Users can also leverage a single platform to control a machine or an entire production line.

- **Real-time operation:** As PLCs operate in real time, they can quickly and efficiently respond to changes in inputs and sensor data [13]. This can be vital to applications demanding precise timing and rapid reactions.

- **Efficient data management:** PLC users can monitor and analyse process performance, identify trends and make informed decisions by collecting and storing data from various sensors and devices [15].

- **Reduced costs:** Although the initial investment in a PLC is often significant, its ability to improve efficiency, reduce downtime and minimize maintenance costs can lead to substantial cost savings in the long term.

- **Enhanced safety:** PLCs programmed with safety features and interlocks can help prevent accidents and injuries in hazardous environments [9]. Organizations can benefit from added protection by integrating PLCs with safety devices like emergency shutdown systems.

- **Seamless maintenance:** PLCs simplify troubleshooting and maintenance processes.

The modular design of PLCs enables simple troubleshooting and maintenance [10]. For example, it's easy to replace faulty components, and diagnostic features can quickly pinpoint exactly where problems are, minimizing downtime.

- **User-friendly programming:** Modern PLCs boast user-friendly programming languages and software, so they're much easier to learn and operate than complex relay logic systems. This allows organizations to engage a broader range of personnel to be involved in system development and maintenance [4].

- **Longer lifespan:** Built to last in harsh environments, PLCsare known for their durability and long lifespan [1].

- **Flexibility:** PLC systems can be programmed to perform a wide range of tasks, from simple on/off control to complex motion control and process automation [7]. They are highly adaptable and can be easily reprogrammed to meet changing requirements.
- **Scalability:** PLC systems can be easily expanded by adding additional modules or controllers, making them highly scalable [8].
- **Data Logging**: PLC systems can log data on machine performance, which can be used for troubleshooting and predictive maintenance [12]. This helps to reduce downtime and improve overall efficiency.

IV. FUTURE SCOPE

Integration with Emerging Technologies: PLC automation in warehouses is poised to integrate with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and Internet of Things (IoT). This integration will enable smarter decision-making, predictive maintenance [1], and real-time monitoring of warehouse operations.

Enhanced Flexibility and Adaptability: Future PLC systems will be designed to offer greater flexibility and adaptability to changing warehouse requirements. This includes modular architectures that allow for easy expansion and reconfiguration, as well as adaptive algorithms that can optimize operations in real-time [7].

Improved Efficiency and Productivity: Continued advancements in PLC technology will lead to further improvements in efficiency and productivity within warehouses [14]. This includes faster processing speeds, optimized task scheduling, and enhanced coordination between different components of the warehouse automation system.

Enhanced Safety Features: Future PLC automation systems will prioritize safety with the integration of advanced safety features such as collision detection, proximity sensors, and predictive analytics to prevent accidents and ensure worker safety [6].

Cloud Integration and Remote Monitoring: PLC automation in warehouses will increasingly leverage cloud computing and remote monitoring capabilities. This will enable warehouse managers to monitor and control operations from anywhere in the world, leading to improved decision- making and responsiveness [5].

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency: With a growing focus on sustainability, future PLC automation systems will prioritize energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. This includes the integration of renewable energy sources, energy-efficient algorithms, and smartenergy management systems to reduce carbon footprint and operating costs [3].

V. RESULT

PLCs have sparked a revolution in warehouse automation, ushering in an era of unparalleled efficiency, accuracy, and safety. As the demands of modern logistics soar ever higher, integrating PLCs into warehouse systems becomes paramount, especially in the age of Industry 4.0. The adaptability of PLCs to synchronize tasks, manage diverse inventories, and ensure utmost safety empowers warehouses to streamline operations, slash costs, and deliver exceptional services to customers [10]. Moreover, the consolidation of control into a single system promises to reduce workforce requirements significantly. As technology continues to advance, the role of PLCs in warehouse automation will evolve and innovate further [4]. Embracing this technology isn't just necessary; it's an opportunity for warehouses to thrive in the dynamic world of logistics.

In a landscape where efficiency, accuracy, and safety are non- negotiable, PLCs offer the keys to staying ahead of the curve. So, if you're seeking to enhance your warehouse operations and steer your business towards greater efficiency and success [10], harnessing the power of PLCs is the way forward. Prepare to witness the transformative impact they bring to your automation endeavours [7].

As we journey into the future, the union of technology and automation will reign supreme in warehouses. And at the heart of this transformation, PLCs will stand tall, facilitating operations that are not just efficient but also cost-effective. Validation against real-world data affirmed its effectiveness, showcasing a close match in behaviour. Robustness was tested under various conditions, proving its adaptability in complex scenarios [5]. Benefits abound with the PLC emulator, speeding up development and mitigating risks. Yet, limitations exist, urging future enhancements for greater accuracy and realism in emulation.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, the creation of a PLC emulator for warehouse automation addresses critical needs and challenges in the field. The emulator provides an efficient testing and development tool as warehouse automation systems become more complex. Results indicate its capability in replicating real PLC behaviour, aiding in testing and refining automation logic without costly physical tests [10]. It overcomes barriers by offering a virtual environment for testing, reducing risks associated with deploying new systems, and accelerating development while minimizing costs. Overall [1], the PLC emulator signifies a significant advancement in warehouse automation, facilitating faster development, cost reduction, and risk mitigation for researchers and developers in the field.

Continual technological advancements suggest that PLCs' role in warehouse automation will evolve further. Embracing this technology is not only necessary but also an opportunity for warehouses to excel in the dynamic logistics realm. As the world demands more efficiency, accuracy, and safety, PLCs offer a means to stay ahead [7].

To enhance warehouse operations and ensure success, consider harnessing the power of PLCs. Their transformative impact can revolutionize automation efforts. Moving forward, it's clear that the fusion of technology and automation will define the warehouse of the future [8], with PLCs leading the way toward more efficient and cost-effective operations.

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