

Assessment of Building Forms and Orientation Techniques that Enhance Natural Ventilation and Light for Improved Indoor Air Quality

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Abstract

This study investigates how building forms and orientation techniques enhance natural ventilation and daylighting to improve indoor air quality (IAQ) in sustainable architecture. Using a qualitative research approach, the study systematically reviews seven peer-reviewed journal articles and one international case study, with a focus on tropical and high-density urban contexts. Findings reveal that passive design strategies such as optimal building orientation, adaptive façades, and cross-ventilation can reduce cooling loads by up to 35.9%, improve daylighting by 69%, and lower indoor temperatures by an average of 2.2°C. Case study analysis of the Green School in Bali demonstrates the practical integration of low-cost, climate-responsive strategies such as open-air classrooms, stack ventilation, and natural shading. However, implementation in regions like sub-Saharan Africa remains limited due to policy, technical, and infrastructural barriers. The study emphasizes the need for targeted design education, policy reform, and simulation-based design tools to support the broader adoption of passive strategies in architecture and urban planning.

Keywords: Building Orientation, Passive Design Strategies, Indoor Air Quality (IAQ), Natural Ventilation, Sustainable Architecture, Tropical Climate.

Introduction

Particularly in urban settings where pollution and inadequate ventilation pose significant risks, indoor air quality (IAQ) is a crucial factor in determining occupant health, comfort, and productivity (Kajjoba et al., 2024). Building orientation has a direct impact on indoor air quality (IAQ) in architectural design by maximizing airflow patterns, lowering pollutant concentrations, and controlling indoor temperature. By improving natural airflow and reducing dependency on mechanical systems, passive design techniques such as cross-ventilation and thoughtful window placement enhance orientation (Bano, 2023). Together, these components provide indoor spaces that are healthier and use less energy.

One of the best ways to improve IAQ and lessen reliance on mechanical systems is to use natural lighting and ventilation. The building's design and orientation are essential for optimizing environmental factors like wind and sunlight in order to achieve these objectives. Using solar energy for passive heating and cooling promotes sustainability (Sharma & Dongre, 2024).

Techniques for building orientation are important in sustainable designs because they improve indoor air quality by optimizing environmental elements. By optimizing exposure to prevailing winds, lowering interior pollutants, controlling humidity, and lowering dependency on mechanical cooling systems, proper orientation promotes natural ventilation (Mba et al., 2022). Furthermore, it guarantees efficient utilization of natural light, reducing energy usage while preventing glare and overheating (Li et al., 2024). Adapting these tactics to regional climates supports the worldwide movement toward environmentally friendly and climate-responsive design by enhancing indoor temperature comfort, energy efficiency, and occupant health.

Statement of Problem

Building orientation approaches are known to improve natural ventilation and daylighting, but their practical use is hampered by a number of issues. One significant problem is the lack of technical know-how and awareness among developers and designers, particularly in areas where sustainable practices are not as prioritized (Omopariola et al., 2022). The implementation of passive techniques is made more difficult by climate variability and unpredictable weather patterns, necessitating more creative and adaptable solutions (Ozarisoy, 2021). Lastly, the challenge of incorporating these methods into standard construction practices is made worse by antiquated legislation and the lack of strong policies promoting climate-responsive design (Di Ingegneria, 2024).

Justification of Study

Building orientation techniques that enhance natural ventilation and daylighting are crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. In addition to reducing the need for artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation, which increases energy efficiency (SDG 7), they improve indoor air quality, reducing health risks associated with inadequate lighting and ventilation (SDG 3). Furthermore, these strategies promote sustainable urban environments by lowering carbon footprints and improving livability (SDG 11). They indirectly support climate action by encouraging low-energy design and lowering greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13). Using these techniques in architectural practice makes built environments healthier, more sustainable, and more resilient.

Research Gap

Even though a number of studies have demonstrated how building orientation can improve natural ventilation, daylighting, and indoor air quality, there is still a clear lack of application of these techniques in mainstream architectural design. Theoretical advantages are the focus of most of the material now in publication, but little empirical study has been done on the difficulties architects and developers encounter when using these methods, particularly in settings with little technical know-how, awareness, or supportive regulations. Furthermore, there aren't many thorough evaluations that compare how well daylighting,

passive ventilation, and orientation work together to improve indoor air quality in different climates. This disparity highlights the necessity of conducting research in sustainable building design that connects theoretical understanding with real-world implementation.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- i. Assess how building orientation techniques enhance natural ventilation and lighting to improve indoor air quality.
- ii. Evaluate the impact of orientation on airflow and daylighting.
- iii. Identify passive design strategies for tropical climates.
- iv. Explore the integration of these strategies into sustainable architectural practices.
- v. Offer actionable insights for healthier and energy-efficient built environments.

Literature Review

Overview of Building Forms and Orientation Techniques

According to Ching (2023), building forms are the three-dimensional shape and arrangement of structures that affect how they interact with their surroundings. The goal of orientation is to maximize natural ventilation and illumination by placing structures about topography, prevailing winds, and sunshine. For natural heating, cooling, and lighting, site orientation maximizes a building's exposure to sunshine, wind, and other environmental elements (Gil-Ozoudeh et al., 2022). When combined, these methods lessen reliance on artificial systems while improving occupant comfort and energy efficiency.

Passive design techniques have historically been essential to architecture, particularly in areas with harsh temperatures, and they greatly reduce the risk of indoor warming (Gamero-Salinas et al., 2021). Long before the invention of contemporary energy systems, traditional methods like shaded verandas in tropical designs and wind catchers in Middle Eastern architecture demonstrated an awareness of natural ventilation and daylighting (Toroxel & Silva, 2024). These techniques were adapted to the cultural and climatic conditions of the area.

There are a number of methods for improving natural lighting and ventilation. Building orientations that face the prevailing winds allow for cross-ventilation, and courtyards offer shaded, well-ventilated areas (Zhu et al., 2023). Solar orientation techniques maximize daylight consumption while avoiding overheating, such as placing windows to catch winter sun and covering them in summer (Stevanovic, 2022). Indigenous knowledge of passive cooling adapted to hot temperatures is demonstrated by the central courtyards seen in traditional compounds in northern Nigeria, which are typical throughout West Africa (Peter, 2025).

In tropical climates like Lagos, Techniques like operable windows for cross-ventilation, reflecting materials to reduce heat input, and steep roofs for rainwater management work especially well in tropical climates like Lagos (Oluwatayo & Pirisola, 2021). These strategies

use modern materials and technologies to modify conventional techniques to meet modern demands.

Recent innovations in passive design include Parametric modeling which is used to enhance building form and orientation for maximum solar benefits. These trends highlight the growing emphasis on sustainability and resilience in architectural design worldwide (Manuel et al., 2024).

Enhancing Indoor Air Quality through Passive Design

Passive design strategies play a critical role in enhancing energy efficiency in green buildings by minimizing the need for mechanical heating, cooling, and lighting systems. These strategies utilize the building's architecture, site orientation, and natural resources to create comfortable indoor environments with reduced energy consumption (Gil-Ozoudeh et al., 2022). These sustainable approaches also support energy efficiency and environmental harmony. The importance of climate-responsive solutions in hot, humid climates is further supported by studies conducted in Africa, such as those by Toyinbo (2023), which demonstrate how passive ventilation systems considerably improve indoor air quality and thermal comfort in school buildings.

Natural Ventilation

Building orientation plays a crucial role in maximizing cross-ventilation and minimizing air stagnation. Aligning structures to prevailing wind directions allows natural breezes to flow through indoor spaces, reducing the need for mechanical ventilation (Ganjimorad et al., 2024). For instance, placing openings, such as windows and doors, on opposite walls facilitates cross-ventilation by enabling airflow to enter and exit freely. Courtyards and atriums can further enhance this by acting as air channels that draw breezes into interior spaces (Sun, 2024). Additionally, staggered building forms and open-plan layouts prevent pockets of stagnant air, ensuring even distribution of fresh air throughout the building.

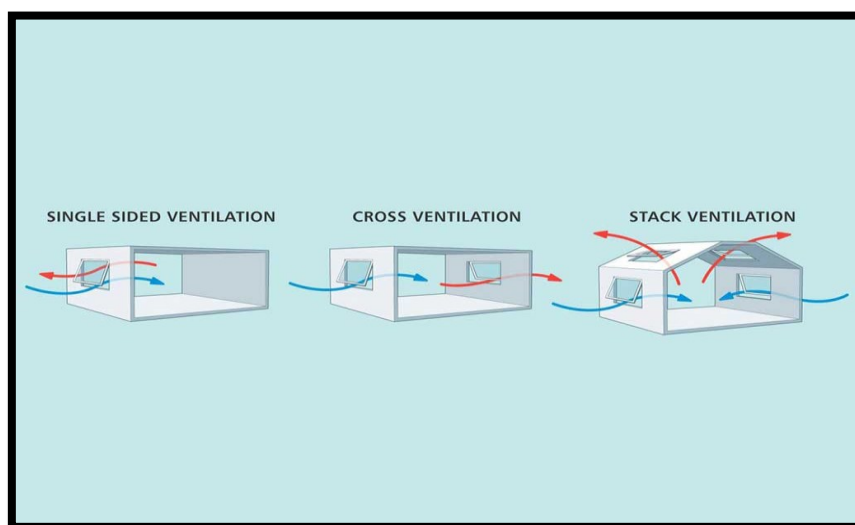


Figure 1.o: Ventilation Techniques

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/HfC49jNmYtvQS8wh8> (Retrieved 2024)

Daylighting

Optimal building orientation ensures effective daylight penetration while mitigating overheating risks (Kabanshi et al., 2023). Techniques such as orienting buildings along a north-south axis allow for even sunlight distribution, minimizing glare and heat gain (Wu & Zhang, 2022). Light shelves and reflective surfaces help bounce sunlight deeper into interior spaces without direct exposure, while strategically placed shading devices, like louvers and overhangs, protect from intense solar radiation during peak hours. Skylights and clerestory windows are also effective for bringing natural light into areas that are otherwise hard to illuminate, promoting a balance of brightness and indoor climate comfort.

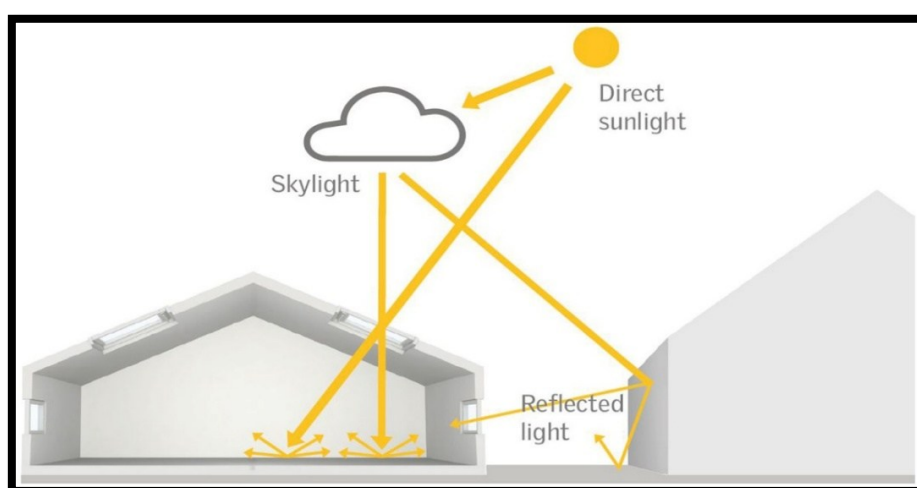


Figure 2.o: Daylighting

Source <https://images.app.goo.gl/6YsugxbAwBiS9W6S7> (Retrieved 2024)

Health Implications

Passive design strategies that improve ventilation and lighting directly impact occupant health and well-being (Kujundzic et al., 2023). Enhanced airflow reduces the accumulation of indoor pollutants, such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), lowering risks of respiratory issues. Increased daylight exposure promotes circadian rhythm regulation, leading to better sleep patterns and mood stability (González-Martín et al., 2020). Research links well-ventilated and well-lit spaces to higher productivity, reduced stress levels, and lower rates of absenteeism (Parekh & Smith, 2024). Such designs create healthier environments, particularly in educational and work settings, by combining improved air quality with a pleasant and naturally lit atmosphere.

Case Study of Building Forms and Orientation Techniques

Building forms and orientation techniques are fundamental to optimizing indoor air quality and energy efficiency. Proper orientation enhances natural ventilation and daylighting, while well-designed building forms regulate airflow, minimize heat gain, and support passive cooling strategies. The following case study illustrates how these principles are applied in real-world settings, showcasing the impact of climate-responsive architecture on sustainable and healthy indoor environments.

Green School, Bali, Indonesia

The Green School in Bali, Indonesia, is a globally recognized model of sustainable architecture that integrates passive design principles with natural materials to create an environmentally responsive learning environment. Established in 2008, the school is constructed primarily from bamboo, a rapidly renewable resource that provides structural strength while maintaining a low environmental footprint.

The school employs several passive design strategies to optimize indoor air quality and thermal comfort. Its open-air classrooms, which lack walls, allow for constant airflow, eliminating the need for mechanical ventilation systems (Eldek et al., 2024). Thatched roofing further enhances thermal performance by insulating against heat while permitting hot air to escape naturally. The school also utilizes stack ventilation, where rising warm air exits through roof openings, drawing in cooler air from lower levels. Daylighting is maximized through carefully positioned skylights and bamboo shading, ensuring that natural light penetrates deep into the spaces while preventing glare and overheating (Eldek et al., 2024). In tropical West African schools, where energy constraints and indoor air quality continue to be significant design concerns, this case highlights the possibility of implementing low-cost, climate-responsive methods like stack ventilation and natural shading. The necessity to modify passive techniques inside more enclosed or controlled spatial configurations is highlighted by the fact that open-air learning spaces may be restricted in crowded urban environments like Lagos due to noise pollution, airborne dust, and security concerns (Adewale & Stephanie, 2022).



Plate 1.o: Green School, Bali, Indonesia.

Source: https://www.levistrauss.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSB_HED.jpg (Retrieved 2024)

Challenges and Limitations in Passive Design

While passive design offers numerous benefits for enhancing indoor air quality, its adoption faces significant challenges and limitations. Factors such as the high cost of implementation, lack of technical expertise, and contextual constraints like local climate and urban density often hinder its effectiveness (Juffle & Rahman, 2023). Furthermore, gaps in research and the absence of standardized guidelines exacerbate these challenges, creating barriers to widespread implementation. These challenges are especially common in poor nations like sections of Africa and Asia, where the use of passive architecture is severely constrained by a lack of resources, unofficial building methods, and a lack of legislative support.

Passive design strategies face significant adoption barriers, primarily due to financial constraints, lack of awareness, and technical expertise (Omopariola et al., 2022). Many developing regions struggle to allocate resources for implementing these techniques, especially when retrofitting existing buildings, which can be costly and logistically challenging (Iwuanyanwu et al., 2024). Additionally, limited infrastructure and knowledge among professionals further hinder progress in incorporating passive design solutions effectively.

Challenges of Passive Design in High-Density Urban Environments

While passive design strategies significantly improve IAQ, their effectiveness can be compromised in high-density urban areas (Mata et al., 2021). Tightly clustered buildings obstruct airflow (Cui et al., 2021), reduce daylight penetration, and create urban heat

islands, limiting the benefits of natural ventilation and passive cooling. Studies suggest that solutions such as elevated openings, atrium designs, and hybrid ventilation systems can mitigate these challenges (Hakim et al., 2025). Additionally, policy-driven urban planning measures, such as zoning laws favoring staggered building layouts and green corridors, can enhance the efficiency of passive design techniques in compact cities. However, in cities like Lagos, the application of such planning reforms is still limited because of uncontrolled expansion, inadequate infrastructure, and lax enforcement of policies, all of which continue to be obstacles to the integration of passive design into urban development.

Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research methodology that blends case study analysis with a methodical literature evaluation. The goal is to investigate how building forms and orientation strategies affect daylighting, natural ventilation, and indoor air quality (IAQ), especially in high-density and tropical environments.

Data Collection and Search Strategy

Peer-reviewed publications, scholarly databases, and institutional repositories were the sources of the evaluated material. ScienceDirect, Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR were important databases. The following search phrases were used: "climate-responsive design Africa," "natural ventilation in tropical architecture," "passive design strategies," "building orientation and IAQ," and "daylighting in sustainable buildings." To guarantee current and pertinent contributions, the search was restricted to publications published between 2019 and 2024. Only English-language publications were taken into account.

Criteria for inclusion: Research has to be conducted in tropical or high-density urban environments, involve empirical data or design simulations, and concentrate on the connection between building orientation/form and IAQ or daylighting.

Criteria for exclusion: Publications unrelated to architecture and environmental performance, opinion pieces, and articles lacking empirical data were not included.

Selection and Justification of Literature and Case Studies

Based on methodological quality, geographic diversity, and relevance to the study goals, seven peer-reviewed articles were chosen. Furthermore, one globally renowned case study—the Green School in Bali—was chosen because of its excellent use of passive design components and scholarly documentation. The case was selected to demonstrate how, in tropical environments, design and orientation can improve daylighting and IAQ. The selection process sought to strike a balance between replicable design techniques and local distinctiveness (climate zone, density difficulties).

Analytical Framework

Thematic synthesis was used to assess the chosen literature and case studies. This required determining recurrent tactics (such as daylight redirection, stack ventilation, and orientation to prevailing winds), their recorded results, and their applicability to various building types and climates. Based on claimed gains in energy efficiency, occupant comfort, and IAQ indicators (such as ventilation rates and lower pollutant levels), case effectiveness was evaluated.

Limitations

There are several restrictions on this study. Language bias could be introduced by the dependence on English-language literature, which could lead to the exclusion of regionally relevant non-English studies. Subjectivity in the choice and analysis of case studies and literature may also have an impact on how thorough the results are. There was also a lack of completely comprehensive case documentation, which can have an impact on how in-depth the empirical comparison is.

Results and Discussions

This study examines the goals, approaches, and main conclusions of seven peer-reviewed publications on building shapes and orientation strategies in sustainable design. It draws attention to the advantages and difficulties of using passive design techniques to improve occupant comfort, energy efficiency, and indoor air quality (IAQ). The review examines the effects of different configurations and methods on airflow, thermal performance, and daylighting results through case comparisons.

Summary of Reviewed Literature

Table 1.0: Summary of reviewed literature

S/N	Title of Article	Name of Author(s) and Year it was published	Aim and Objectives	Methodology	Results
1	The effect of building orientation on energy efficiency	Habibi (2023)	The study aims to analyze the effect of building orientation on energy performance, focusing on energy use intensity (EUI), cooling/heating loads, and ventilation efficiency. Objectives include identifying orientation's impact across different climates and optimizing energy efficiency through simulation	Simulations were conducted using IES VE and Rhino/Honeybee tools for warm and cold climates, considering factors like solar heat gain and ventilation exchange rates.	Building orientation influences cooling and heating loads, but its effect on EUI is minimal. The impact varies by climate and building size, emphasizing the need for optimized orientation strategies for energy-efficient design.
2	Effect of Building Orientation, Window Glazing, and Shading Techniques on Energy Performance and Occupant Comfort for a Building in Warm-Humid Climate	Karthick et al. (2022)	The study aims to evaluate passive cooling techniques—building orientation, window glazing, and shading—based on thermal performance, visual comfort, and energy savings in Chennai's warm and humid climate. Objectives include analyzing the combined effects of these techniques on cooling load reduction and thermal comfort parameters.	DesignBuilder simulations were employed to study the impact of passive cooling systems. Thermal comfort was assessed using Predicted Mean Vote (PMV) and Percentage People Dissatisfied (PPD).	The combined passive systems reduced cooling loads by 35.9% and improved thermal comfort levels, with average PMV at 0.4 and PPD at 7.9%, achieving electricity savings and better indoor conditions.

3	Optimising Daylight and Ventilation Performance: A Building Envelope Design Methodology	Rizi et al. (2023)	Develop an adaptive façade design method enhancing indoor air quality and daylighting for improved occupant comfort.	Used parametric simulation, CFD analysis, and optimization to balance visual and thermal comfort with airflow.	Achieved 69% improvement in daylighting (UDI) and 38% annual increase in ventilation (ACH). Highlights efficient and sustainable design practices.
4	A simulation study to analyze the impact of Integrated Passive Strategies on natural ventilation and daylighting in a slum house of Mumbai	Chaudhary et al. (2021)	Investigate the feasibility of a low-cost chimney design to enhance ventilation and daylighting in slum houses in Mumbai.	Conducted daylighting and CFD simulations to test chimney placement and height for optimizing air and light quality.	The optimal 0.8 m high central chimney improved ventilation rates (ACH) by 2–5 times, reduced indoor temperature by 2–4°C, and increased average illuminance from 75 lux to 300 lux.
5	Passive cooling design strategies as adaptation measures for lowering the indoor overheating risk in tropical climates	Gamero-Salinas et al. (2021)	To evaluate the impact of passive cooling strategies on reducing indoor overheating risk in tropical apartment dwellings under current and future climate scenarios.	Conducted 3,840 thermal simulations in two tropical cities (Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula) using metrics like hours of exceedance and indoor overheating degrees, applying fixed and adaptive thermal comfort limits.	Passive cooling strategies such as natural ventilation, wall absorptance, solar heat gain coefficient adjustments, and semi-outdoor spaces significantly reduced overheating risks. The study highlights the need to integrate these measures into tropical building codes.
6	The impact of passive design strategies on cooling loads of buildings in temperate climate	Mushtaha et al. (2021)	To evaluate the impact of passive design strategies—shading devices, natural ventilation, and thermal insulation—on optimizing thermal performance and reducing cooling loads in residential buildings in the Gaza Strip.	Simulation-based analysis using Climate Consultant and IESve software to assess the effects of passive strategies on indoor temperature and cooling load reduction.	The study demonstrates that integrating these strategies can reduce energy consumption by 59%, equating to a savings of 9.89 kW, showcasing their potential for energy efficiency in resource-limited regions.

7	The effects of passive design on indoor thermal comfort and energy savings for residential buildings in hot climates: A systematic review	Hu et al. (2023)	To evaluate the impact of 30 passive cooling strategies on indoor temperature, cooling load, energy savings, and thermal comfort in residential buildings.	A meta-analysis of 42 studies from 2000–2021, categorizing PCSs into three groups: design, building envelope, and cooling systems.	i. Indoor temperature decrease: 2.2 °C (average). ii. Cooling load reduction: 31%. iii. Energy savings: 29%. iv. Thermal comfort hours extended: 23%. v. The study highlights the five most effective strategies and variations in effectiveness between hot-dry and hot-humid climates.
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Source: Author (2025)

The findings demonstrate that passive techniques and orientation have a major impact on building performance. For example, Habibi (2023) notes that while orientation has a small impact on energy usage intensity (EUI), it does affect cooling and heating loads across regions. While Rizi et al. (2023) report a 69% improvement in daylighting and 38% in ventilation through adaptive façade design, Karthick et al. (2022) show a 35.9% reduction in cooling loads using integrated solutions.

Although the benefits of passive design are supported by this research, their approaches, simulation tools, and climate conditions vary. For instance, Chaudhary et al. (2021) concentrate on inexpensive chimney systems in informal settlements, whereas Rizi et al. employ parametric optimization and computational fluid dynamics (CFD). This variation emphasizes how building type, context, and intervention complexity all have a significant impact on design outcomes.

Comparative Insights

The most prevalent ways to improve ventilation across studies are to use courtyards, align buildings with the prevailing winds, and strategically arrange windows. Climate zone,

however, is important. For example, Mushtaha et al. (2021) concentrate on thermal insulation and envelope design in temperate zones, but Gamero-Salinas et al. (2021) find excellent efficacy of passive cooling in tropical locations.

Findings vary in scope, despite steady improvements in thermal comfort and IAQ. While some research, such as Hu et al. (2023), is restricted to simulation-based outputs, others offer more comprehensive meta-analytical insights (e.g., 2.2 °C average interior temperature reduction, 29% energy savings). There is a need for more empirical, field-based research, particularly in actual African urban situations, as seen by the paucity of studies reporting statistical confidence ranges or long-term performance validation.

Practical Relevance and Limitations

The results support the usefulness of passive design techniques in lowering mechanical cooling loads and enhancing passenger well-being. Using technologies like CFD to replicate natural airflow and solar gain, this confirms for planners and architects the need to include orientation and form in early-stage design. These insights could be used by policymakers, particularly in areas like Nigeria, to update building rules and promote passive solutions through incentive programs and zoning.

However, obstacles still exist. Implementation issues such as the availability of building materials, restrictions on policies, and socioeconomic limitations in tropical developing nations are not covered in many of the examined research. A study vacuum in context-specific assessments of the efficacy of passive design is also highlighted by the underrepresentation of regional data, especially from sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research under consideration confirms the vital role that passive design techniques—like adaptive façades, natural ventilation, shading devices, and building orientation—play in improving interior air quality, thermal comfort, and energy efficiency in a variety of climate zones. Results show that integrated strategies can enhance daylighting performance, increase thermal comfort hours, and significantly reduce cooling loads. The scalability and adaptability of passive techniques in resource-constrained situations are notably highlighted by context-specific interventions such as inexpensive chimney systems in congested urban slums. Additionally, sophisticated design technologies like computational fluid dynamics (CFD) and parametric modeling give architects data-driven ways to maximize the performance of building shape, orientation, and envelope.

These findings highlight the necessity of using passive design on a systemic level as a standard practice for healthier indoor environments, as well as a sustainability measure. However, policy gaps, a lack of technical expertise, and uneven regional adaption of design standards continue to restrict widespread implementation.

Practical Recommendations for Architects, Urban Planners and Policymakers

- i. Policy Integration: National building codes should include standards for passive design, especially in places that are quickly urbanizing and heavily dependent on mechanical systems. According to evidence from reviewed studies (e.g., Rizi et al., 2023; Karthick et al., 2022), passive techniques can reduce cooling demand by more than 30%. Widespread adoption might be aided by incentives like tax breaks or accelerated permitting for projects that comply.
- ii. Holistic Architectural Design: During the design stage, architects are encouraged to use daylight simulation and CFD techniques. Such technologies allow for exact orientation and envelope options that enhance ventilation rates and lower energy consumption, as demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Hu et al., 2023). It is important to incorporate passive methods from the very beginning to the end.
- iii. Urban Planning Considerations: Zoning frameworks need to be adjusted by planners to provide ventilation channels in crowded metropolitan areas. According to research by Hakim et al. (2025) and others, ventilation zones, green corridors, and staggered building heights greatly improve airflow and lessen the impacts of urban heat islands.
- iv. Educational Programs: Climate-responsive design should be given top priority in the curricula of architecture and engineering colleges. Passive systems design courses should be a part of continuing professional education because of the identified knowledge gaps in the field (Omopariola et al., 2022). This will allow practitioners to use evidence-based, site-sensitive techniques.

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