Design and Implementation of a Smart Solar-powered Microgrid Monitoring and Fault Detection System for Sustainable Energy Management

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Direct Research Journal of Engineering and Information Technology

Vol. 14(1), Pp. 112-121, April 2026,

Research Article
ISSN: 2354-4155
https://journals.directresearchpublisher.org/index.php/drjeit; https://www.ajol.info/index.php/drjeit

Received 17 January 2026, Accepted 5 April 2026, Published 15 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Decentralized solar microgrids are key to sustainable electrification, but they require robust monitoring and rapid fault detection to ensure reliability and protect equipment. This paper describes the design and implementation of a smart, low-cost microgrid monitoring and fault detection system using an ESP32 microcontroller, INA219 current/voltage sensors, voltage dividers for higher voltages, data acquisition modules, and edge/cloud analytics architecture. The system implements real-time monitoring, local rule-based fault detection covering overcurrent, islanding, and battery undervoltage conditions, and machine-learning-ready feature extraction for fault classification. A prototype was developed and tested on a small solar microgrid comprising a photovoltaic (PV) array, battery bank, inverter, and connected loads. Results demonstrate effective early detection of common faults and clear visualization via a web and Android dashboard. The system provides a replicable framework for rural and campus microgrids, enabling efficient monitoring and maintenance that enhances reliability and reduces downtime in similar energy systems.

Keywords: Microgrid monitoring, Fault detection, ESP32, INA219, Solar PV, IoT, Edge computing

Citation: Aigbodioh, F. A., Imonigie A. O., & Imafidon, S. (2026). Design and Implementation of a Smart Solar-powered Microgrid Monitoring and Fault Detection System for Sustainable Energy Management. *Direct Research Journal of Engineering and Information Technology*, 14(1), Pp. 112-121. https://doi.org/10.26765/DRJEIT36479933

INTRODUCTION

Reliable electricity is still out of reach for hundreds of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa and that's not a new problem; it's just one that keeps getting harder to ignore. The IEA put the number at over 600 million people across the continent as recently as 2023 (IEA, 2023), and the burden falls heaviest on rural communities. Extending the national grid to scattered villages sounds straightforward on paper, but in practice it's expensive, slow, and the grid itself isn't always dependable even where it exists. One failure can knock out power across entire regions. That's where solar microgrids come in. Instead of waiting for a grid connection that may never arrive, communities can get electricity from a local setup solar panels, battery

storage, and a small distribution network that runs entirely on its own. No national grid required. This approach has proven itself both technically and financially workable (Hirsch et al., 2018), and because these systems are modular, you can start small and expand as needed. Rural clinics, university campuses, remote industrial sites anywhere that cannot afford blackouts has good reason to consider one.

The catch? Running a microgrid well is harder than setting one up. The biggest gap is monitoring. Most operators simply don't have the tools to watch what's happening inside their system in real time voltage levels, current flow, battery charge, power quality. Without that visibility, small problems go unnoticed until they become expensive ones. A fault that could've been caught early turns into damaged equipment, a safety incident, or days without power overcurrent conditions, islanding, battery undervoltage, PV array anomalies, all of it (Lasseter, 2002). In communities where budgets are tight and replacement parts aren't around the corner, that kind of reactive firefighting can quickly erode the economic case for microgrid deployment. This is where low-cost IoT technology starts to look very promising. Microcontrollers like the ESP32 a small, cheap chip with built-in Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, dual-core processing, and a capable analog-to-digital converter make it genuinely feasible to build smart monitoring into a microgrid without breaking the budget (Kolban, 2017). Pair that with a precision sensor like the Texas Instruments INA219 and you've got accurate, real-time readings on current and voltage at a fraction of what traditional industrial monitoring equipment would cost.

Most existing fault detection systems weren't designed with these constraints in mind. They either depend on constant cloud connectivity for all their analysis, or come with price tags that rule them out entirely for low-income settings (Guo et al., 2020). A smarter middle ground is a hybrid edge-cloud approach: handle the basic, time-sensitive fault checks locally on the microcontroller itself, and send the more complex analysis machine learning, pattern recognition, trend data up to the cloud. That way the system stays responsive even when the internet goes down, but still gets smarter over time. In this paper, we describe how we designed and built an intelligent, low-cost monitoring and fault detection system for solar microgrids, using the ESP32 microcontroller as the backbone of the system. Our work makes four key contributions:

A complete hardware design that monitors a solar microgrid in real time covering PV array output, battery condition, and load-side metrics, all from a single integrated setup.

A local fault detection engine that runs rule-based checks directly on the device, identifying problems like overcurrent, islanding, and battery undervoltage in under 200 milliseconds fast enough to prevent most damage before it happens.

A machine-learning-ready data pipeline for feature extraction and fault classification, designed so that trained models can be plugged in later without needing any changes to the hardware. A web and Android dashboard that gives operators a live view of system performance, manages alerts, and keeps a record of historical data for trend analysis. The rest of the paper is structured around these contributions. Section 2 looks at existing research in microgrid monitoring and IoT-based fault detection, setting the stage for where our approach fits in. Section 3 covers the materials and methods circuit designs, system architecture, and software. Section 4 presents our experimental results and what we found. Section 5 of the paper gives a summary of our conclusions and a look at future work on this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Microgrid monitoring and fault detection has attracted serious attention from both researchers and industry over the past two decades, and the body of work in this area has grown steadily. It arguably started with Lasseter (2002), whose early work laid the conceptual foundation for what we now call the modern microgrid defining it as a cluster of loads and micro-sources that can run either connected to the main utility grid or completely on its own. That idea of operational duality turned out to be central to everything that followed, because it immediately raised the question of how you monitor and protect a system that has to behave differently depending on which mode it's in. Table 1 showcases other works done on Microgrid and fault Detection by various author.

Research Contribution of the Proposed System

This paper provides the following contribution as compared to other existing works:

a. Unified Platform: Combines real-time monitoring and fault detection in one system, rather than treating them as separate functions, improving reliability and efficiency.

b. Hybrid Edge–Cloud Architecture: Critical fault checks run locally on the microcontroller for speed and resilience, while advanced analysis is handled remotely when connectivity allows.

c. Low-Cost Hardware: Built around the ESP32 microcontroller and INA219 sensors, making it significantly cheaper than industrial alternatives and viable for rural and small-scale deployment.

d. Remote Accessibility: A web and Android dashboard gives operators real-time visibility and control from anywhere.

e. Scalable & Future-Ready: The framework can be replicated across different environments (villages, campuses, small industries) and is designed to support future machine learning and IoT cloud integration.

Table 1: Summary of Related Literature on Microgrid Monitoring and Fault Detection.

Author	Year	System Type	Technology Used	Key Contribution	Limitation
Lasseter	2002	Conceptual Microgrid Framework	Theoretical analysis	Defined the microgrid as a cluster of loads and micro sources operable in both grid-connected and islanded modes; established foundational operational duality	No implementation or monitoring component; purely conceptual
Bollen & Gu	2006	Power Quality Monitoring	Digital Signal Processing (DSP), frequency-domain analysis	Demonstrated that frequency-domain analysis of voltage/current waveforms could reliably detect harmonics, voltage sags, and power disturbances	High computational demands; requires centralized processing or expensive dedicated hardware — unsuitable for edge deployment
Kuo et al.	2019	PV System Monitoring Platform	Raspberry Pi, cloud connectivity, real-time data acquisition	Showed that single-board computers could support real-time data acquisition and cloud connectivity for small-scale PV monitoring	Higher hardware cost and power consumption than microcontroller-based alternatives; less suited for battery-backed standalone systems
Kolban	2017	IoT Microcontroller Reference	ESP32 (Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, dual-core Xtensa LX6)	Documented the ESP32's capabilities for IoT applications, establishing it as a low-cost, low-power platform for embedded connectivity	Reference/documentation work only; no fault detection or energy monitoring implementation
Moraes et al.	2020	Smart Energy Meter	ESP32 microcontroller, precision sensing	Built an ESP32-based smart meter measuring active power, reactive power, and power factor with accuracy comparable to commercial equipment	Focused on energy metering only; did not address fault detection, islanding, or microgrid protection
Guo et al.	2020	ML-Based Fault Classifier	Support Vector Machine (SVM), time-domain & frequency-domain features	Achieved over 96% fault classification accuracy across five fault types in a simulated microgrid using SVM trained on current/voltage signals	Did not address deployment of trained models on resource-constrained edge devices; relied on offline/centralized processing
Zhang et al.	2022	Edge Intelligence for Microgrid Protection	TinyML, 8-bit quantized neural networks, ML accelerator hardware	Demonstrated that compact quantized neural networks could achieve >90% fault detection accuracy with inference times below 50ms on microcontroller-class hardware	Required purpose-built ML accelerator hardware not available in standard off-the-shelf microcontrollers, limiting replicability

Research Gap

There are many research works on solar microgrids, but a closer look at the existing literature reveals some consistent blind spots that this work directly addresses:

i. Late Fault Detection: Most existing research focuses on microgrid design, not ongoing monitoring, leading to faults being caught too late.
ii. Cost & Connectivity Barriers: Current solutions are either too expensive or too dependent on stable internet, making them impractical for low-income and rural settings.
iii. Lack of Integration: Few systems combine sensing, processing, communication, and user interaction into one cohesive, low-cost package.

iv. No Edge Intelligence: Edge-based fault detection is rarely implemented, despite being essential for fast response in areas with unreliable networks.
v. Limited Flexibility: Existing systems are rarely designed to adapt across different deployment contexts.

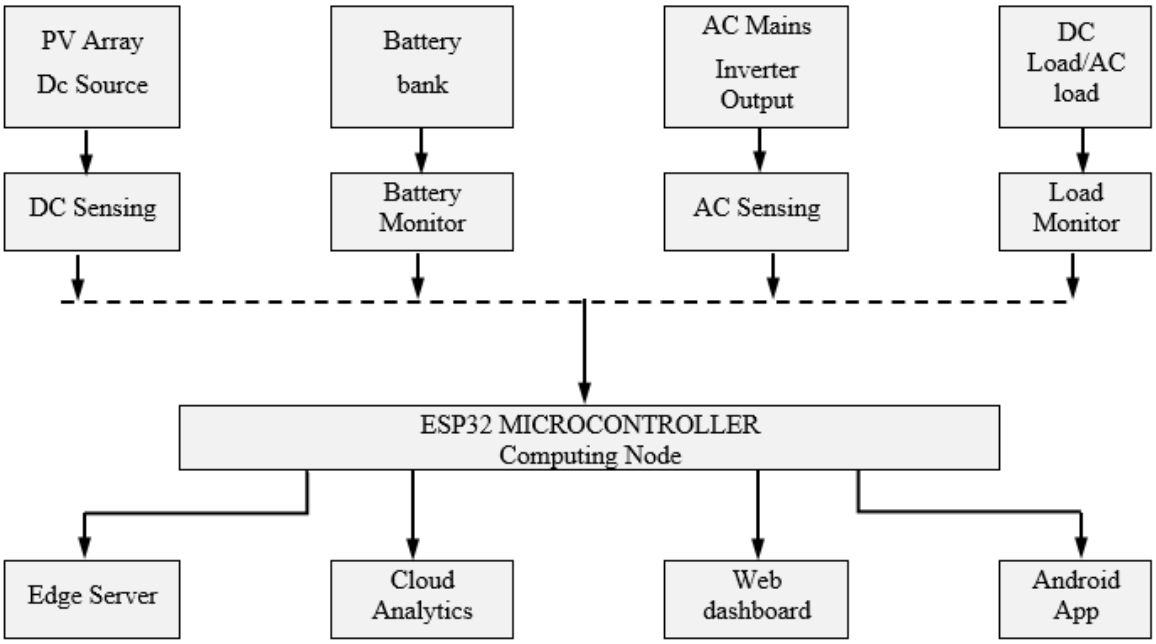

Figure 1: Block diagram of a Smart Solar-Powered Microgrid Monitoring and Fault Detection System

MATERIALS AND METHODS

System Overview

The proposed system is designed to monitor a small-scale solar microgrid consisting of a PV array, a 12V/100Ah lead-acid battery bank, a 1 kVA pure sine wave inverter, and a set of resistive and inductive loads. The monitoring system operates in parallel with the microgrid and does not interrupt power delivery to connected loads. Figure 1 illustrates the high-level block diagram of the system architecture. The architecture is organized into four functional layers: (i) the physical measurement layer, comprising sensors and signal conditioning circuits; (ii) the edge processing layer, implemented on the ESP32 microcontroller; (iii) the communication layer, providing MQTT-based data transmission over Wi-Fi; and (iv) the application layer, comprising a cloud analytics backend and user-facing dashboard. A key design principle is graceful degradation: the system must continue to perform real-time fault detection even when cloud connectivity is unavailable. This is achieved by implementing the fault detection logic entirely within the ESP32 firmware, with cloud connectivity reserved for logging, trend analysis, and ML-assisted classification.

Hardware Design

The hardware design consists of four subsystems: the microcontroller unit, current and voltage sensing, signal conditioning, and power supply.

Microcontroller Unit

The ESP32-WROOM-32 module serves as the central processing unit of the monitoring system. Its dual-core Xtensa LX6 architecture allows simultaneous execution of sensor polling routines on one core and Wi-Fi communication tasks on the other, eliminating the scheduling conflicts that arise in single-core implementations. The module integrates a 12-bit successive approximation register (SAR) ADC with 18 channels, an I2C master interface operating at up to 400 kHz, and a hardware real-time clock (RTC). Operating at 3.3V with a supply current of approximately 240 mA during active Wi-Fi transmission, the ESP32 is compatible with battery-backed operation (Figure 2).

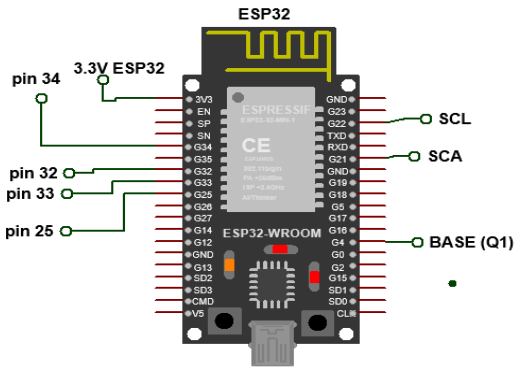

Figure 2: Microcontroller Unit

DC Current and DC Voltage Sensing

Current and voltage measurements are handled by the INA219 bidirectional current and power sensor a well-suited choice for this application because of its high-side shunt measurement topology, which allows accurate current sensing without interrupting the high-current path. The INA219 communicates with the ESP32 over the I²C bus and delivers 12-bit resolution measurements of both bus voltage and shunt voltage, from which current and power values are then derived. Two INA219 modules are used in this design one positioned at the PV array output to monitor the solar side of the system, and a second placed directly at the battery terminals to track charging and discharging behaviour in real time. For voltage measurement across multiple points in the system, the ADS1115 16-bit analog-to-digital converter was employed. This sensor was used to measure voltages at three key locations the PV panel output, the charge controller output, and the battery terminals. A voltage divider network was carefully designed using resistor values derived from the system's design calculations, ensuring that the voltages at each measurement point are accurately scaled down to a level safe for the ADS1115 input while maintaining proportional accuracy across the full operating range.

Voltage Divider Design

Design Parameters:

Vin_{max} = 48 V (maximum PV string Voc at 24V nominal)

$Vout_{max}$ = 3.3 V (ESP32 ADC full-scale)

Divider ratio required: $k = \frac{Vout}{Vin} = \frac{3.3}{48} = 0.06875$

Using the standard divider formula: $Vout = Vin \times \frac{R2}{R1 + R2}$

Select R2 = 10 kΩ (standard value, limits loading current)

→ Select nearest standard E24 value: R1 = 130 kΩ (or 33kΩ + 100kΩ series)

Verification with R1 = 133 kΩ, R2 = 10 kΩ:

$$V_{out} = 48 \times \frac{10{,}000}{133{,}000 + 10{,}000} = 48 \times \frac{10{,}000}{143{,}000} = 3.357\,V$$

For 12V input: $V_{out} = 12 \times \frac{10{,}000}{143{,}000} = 0.839\,V$ (within ADC range)

The DS18B20 temperature sensor is attached directly to the battery to monitor heat levels during charging. It detects overheating and responds automatically reducing charging current when the temperature exceeds 45°C and disconnecting the battery with an alarm if it goes beyond 50°C, preventing thermal runaway and protecting the overall system (Figure 3).The sensor connects to the microcontroller through three wires VCC, GND, and DATA with a 4.7kΩ pull-up resistor on the DATA line to ensure stable 1-Wire communication. The microcontroller reads the incoming temperature data and triggers the appropriate protective response**.**

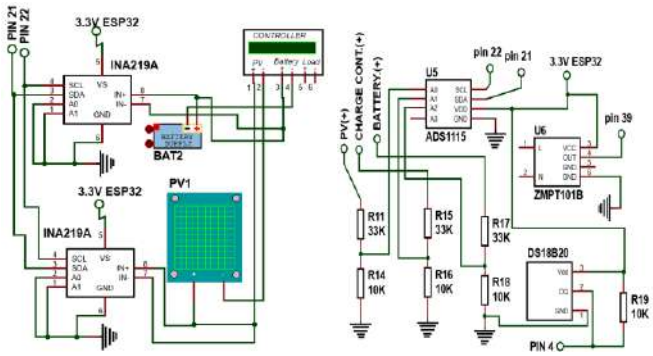

Figure 3: Temperture sensor with DS18B20

Current transformer Circuit for AC current sensing

This circuit shows two distinct sections working together an AC current sensing circuit on the left using a current transformer (CT) clamp connected to ESP32 pin 35, and a relay driver circuit on the right controlled by ESP32 pin 25. Together they form the AC load monitoring and switching subsystem of your microgrid protection system. Left Section AC Current Sensing Circuit This section interfaces the CT clamp (current transformer) output to the ESP32 analog input on pin 35.

Relay Driver Circuit for AC load protection

This section interfaces ESP32 pin 25 digital output to a 5V relay coil using a BC548 NPN transistor as the driver stage. This is necessary because the ESP32 GPIO outputs only 3.3V at 12mA maximum far too weak to directly drive a relay coil that requires 5V at approximately 70mA (Figure 4).

Relay Driver (NPN BJT) Calculation Using BC548 NPN transistor ($hFE_{min} = 110,\ V_{CE_{sat}} = 0.2V,\ I_{C_{max}} = 100mA$):

Relay coil: $V_{coil} = 5V, R_{coil} = 72\,\Omega \rightarrow I_{coil} = \frac{5}{72} = 69.4\,mA$

Required base current for saturation: $I_{B_{min}} = \frac{I_C}{hFE} = \frac{69.4mA}{110} = 0.631mA$

Apply overdrive factor of 10 for reliable saturation: $I_{B_{design}} = 10 \times I_{B_{mm}} = 10 \times 0.631 = 6.31\,mA$

Base resistor R_B: $R_B = \frac{V_{GPIO} - V_{BE}}{I_B} = \frac{(3.3 - 0.7)}{6.31 \times 10^{-3}} =$

$\frac{2.6}{0.00631} = 412\,\Omega$ Select R_B $= 390\Omega\ (E24\ standard, next\ lower\ value\ for\ margin)$

Verify GPIO load: $I_B = \frac{3.3 - 0.7}{390} = 6.67\,mA < 12\,mA$ GPIO limit

Flyback diode: 1N4007 across relay coil to suppress inductive kickback

$\therefore R_B = 390\,\Omega, Q1 = BC548$, D_flyback = 1N4007 (Figure 4)

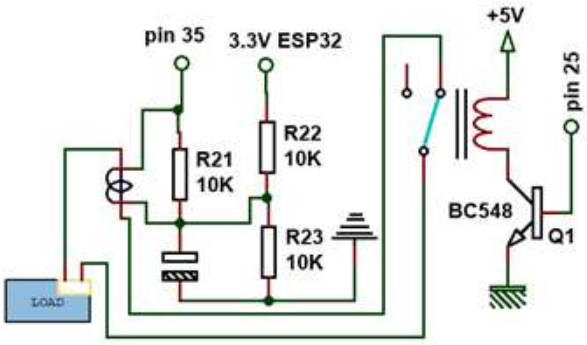

Figure 4: Relay Driver Circuit

IoT Communication: GSM module interface

The circuit features a SIM800L GSM module that is powered through an LM2596 buck converter, which steps down the 12V supply to a level the SIM800L can safely handle. A 1000µF capacitor is added across the power line to keep the voltage stable, especially during the brief but heavy current draws that happen when the module is transmitting. The SIM800L communicates with the microcontroller through its RXD and TXD pins, connected to PIN 32 and PIN 33 respectively. This serial link is what allows the system to send SMS alerts or trigger calls whenever a fault like overheating or overcurrent is detected. A simple voltage divider using a 10KΩ and 20KΩ resistor is included on the communication line to bring the microcontroller's output voltage down to a safe level for the SIM800L's input. The LM2596's ON/OFF pin is also tied to the microcontroller, giving it the ability to power the GSM module on or off as needed. When a fault like overheating, overvoltage, or battery failure is detected, the SIM800L instantly sends an SMS alert to the operator, enabling a quick response without needing anyone on-site. It also sends periodic updates on battery level, solar output, and load consumption, and in some cases allows the operator to send commands back to the system to perform actions like resetting or switching

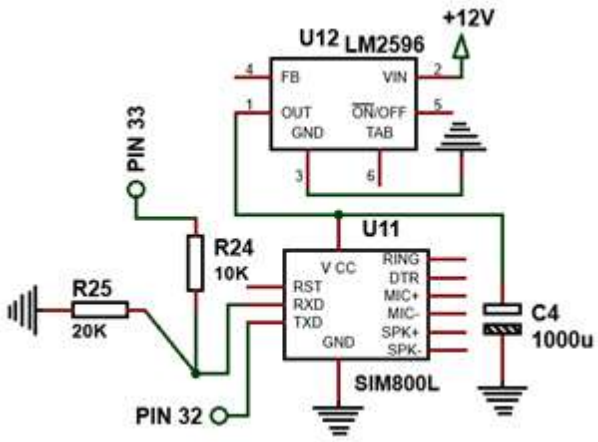

Figure 5: IoT Communication: GSM module interface

loads remotely.

Power Supply

The monitoring system draws its power directly from the battery bank through a DC-DC buck converter, which provides stable 5V and 12V outputs. A separate low-dropout regulator supplies 3.3V specifically for the ESP32 and the sensing modules. This approach keeps the monitoring system running even when the inverter develops a fault that would otherwise cut off power to the rest of the system (Table 2).

Table 2: Components Specifications.

Component / Module	Voltage Supply	Source
ESP32 Microcontroller	3.3V	LDO Regulator
DS18B20 Temperature Sensor	3.3V – 5V	LDO / Buck Converter
SIM800L GSM Module	3.7V – 4.2V	LM2596 Buck Converter
LM2596 Buck Converter (Input)	12V	Battery Bank
Current Sensor (ACS712)	5V	Buck Converter
Voltage Divider / ADC Input	3.3V	LDO Regulator
Relay Module	5V	Buck Converter
Solar Charge Controller	12V	Solar Panel / Battery Bank
Battery Bank (System Input)	12V	Solar Panel (Charged)
Inverter Input	12V	Battery Bank

Complete Circuit Diagram and its operation

The circuit is a smart solar-powered microgrid monitoring and fault detection system that revolves around the ESP32 microcontroller, which essentially serves as the brain behind everything happening in the system. Power comes from a 13.8V battery bank that gets continuously topped up by a solar panel (Figure 6). A buck converter handles stepping the voltage down to a level the GSM module can work with, while the ESP32 and all the sensors run comfortably on 3.3V. A large 1000µF capacitor sits on the GSM power line to smooth out the

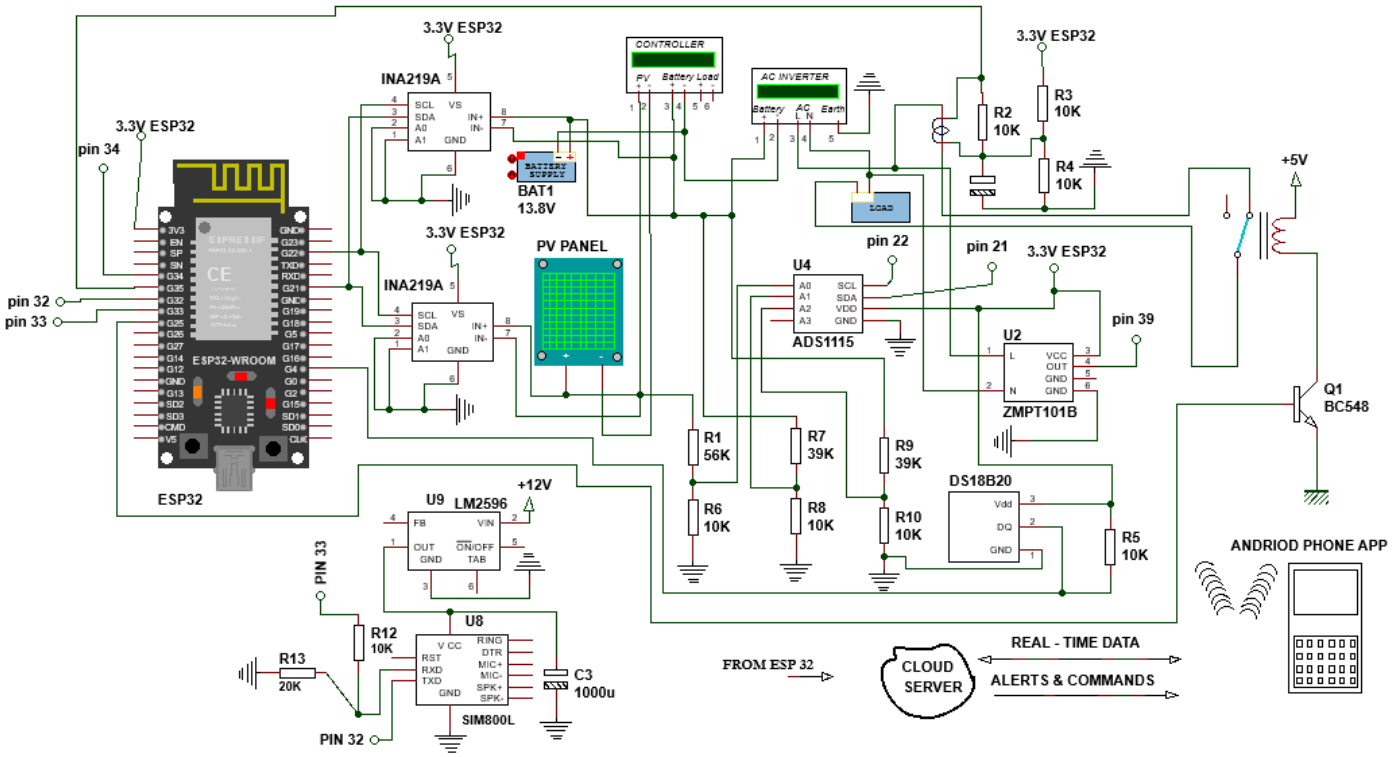

Figure 6: Complete Circuit Diagram

sudden current spikes that happen whenever the module starts transmitting. The solar panel's output voltage is scaled down through a voltage divider and read by the ESP32, while an INA219A current sensor keeps track of how much current the panel is actually delivering. A second INA219A does the same job for the battery, watching both voltage and current to figure out the state of charge and catch anything unusual. Both sensors talk to the ESP32 over the I2C bus. An ADS1115 external ADC is also on the same I2C line, offering 16-bit resolution across multiple analog channels giving the system much cleaner and more accurate readings than the ESP32's built-in ADC alone could provide. On the AC side, a ZMPT101B voltage transformer safely brings the inverter's output voltage down to something measurable, with a BC548 transistor and a couple of voltage dividers cleaning up the signal before it reaches the ESP32. The load connected to the inverter is also being watched for any signs of abnormal power draw. Meanwhile, the DS18B20 temperature sensor sits directly on the battery surface, sending temperature readings to the ESP32 over a single digital line. If the battery starts getting too warm and crosses 45°C, the system automatically pulls back the charging current, and if things get worse and it hits 50°C, the battery gets disconnected and an alarm fires off to stop any risk of thermal runaway. Whenever a fault shows up whether it's overheating, overvoltage, overcurrent, or an inverter problem the ESP32 kicks the SIM800L GSM module into action through a serial connection on PIN 32 and PIN 33. A small voltage divider on that line makes sure the SIM800L's input doesn't get hit with more voltage than it can handle. From there, the GSM module fires off an SMS alert straight to the operator's phone and pushes real-time data up to a cloud server, which then feeds everything through to an Android app giving the operator a live view of the entire system and the ability to respond to any issue from wherever they are.

Software Architecture

The firmware is developed using the Arduino framework on top of the ESP-IDF, leveraging the Arduino-ESP32 hardware abstraction layer for peripheral access while retaining access to FreeRTOS primitives for task management. The key firmware modules are: (i) the sensor driver module, which manages I2C communication with the INA219 devices; (ii) the fault detection module, implementing the rule-based algorithms described in Section 3.4.1; (iii) the feature extraction module; (iv) the communication module, handling MQTT publish/subscribe operations via the PubSub Client library; and (v) the local indicator module, driving the RGB LED and relay outputs. The web dashboard is implemented as a React.js single-page application served from the edge server, with data

retrieved via a REST API from the time-series database. An Android companion application is developed using React Native, sharing the core dashboard component library. Both interfaces provide real-time readings updated at 1-second intervals, fault event history, configurable alert thresholds, and downloadable CSV exports of historical data.

Fault Detection Algorithm

The Fault Detection Algorithm provides a concise overview of a system-level approach to identifying faults within an engineered network, likely in the context of a microgrid or distributed energy system. The core focus is on a visual representation referred to as (Figure 7) which illustrates the operational logic of the fault detection algorithm through a flowchart. This diagram serves as a high-level abstraction of the sequential processes and decision-making steps involved in monitoring system conditions and detecting anomalies. The flowchart presumably encapsulates key stages such as data acquisition, condition evaluation, threshold comparison, and fault identification. By structuring the algorithm in a flowchart format, the document emphasizes clarity in system behavior, enabling easier interpretation of how input signals are processed and how fault conditions are determined. Such representations are particularly valuable in control systems and embedded applications, where real-time monitoring and rapid fault isolation are critical.

Figure 8 labeled as a "Microgrid Monitor," which suggests an application context for the algorithm. This implies that the fault detection mechanism is integrated within a broader monitoring framework, likely designed to supervise electrical parameters such as voltage, current, frequency, or power quality in a microgrid environment. The inclusion of this figure indicates a linkage between the algorithmic logic and its practical deployment within a monitoring interface or system architecture.

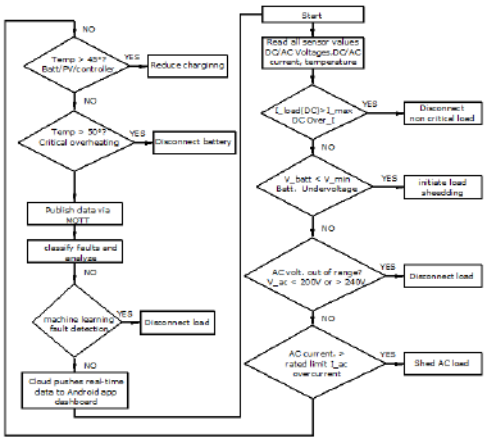

Figure 7: Fault Detection Algorithm

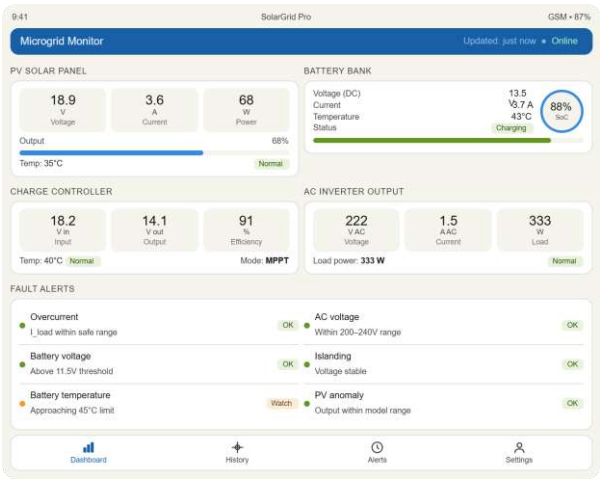

Figure 8: Microgrid Monitor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prototype Validation

The prototype system was assembled and tested on a bench-scale solar microgrid comprising a 200W monocrystalline PV panel; a 12V/100Ah sealed lead-acid battery, a 1 kVA pure sine wave inverter, and a set of resistive loads totalling approximately 600W. Testing was conducted over a three-week period under natural outdoor illumination conditions. Sensor accuracy was validated by comparing INA219 readings against a calibrated Fluke 289 multimeter and a Yokogawa WT310 power analyser at ten operating points spanning the full measurement range. Mean absolute percentage errors of 0.8% for voltage and 1.2% for current were observed, consistent with the INA219 datasheet specification of 1% full-scale accuracy. These accuracy levels are sufficient for fault detection purposes, where threshold margins of 20% or greater are typically applied.

Fault Detection Performance

Each of the four fault types defined in (Table 3) was induced experimentally and the detection latency and relay response time were measured. Fault conditions were introduced by: (i) connecting a short-circuit load to simulate overcurrent; (ii) partially discharging the battery to simulate undervoltage; (iii) abruptly disconnecting the PV array to simulate an islanding condition; and (iv) shading 50% of the PV panel to simulate a PV anomaly. Table 3 summarizes the detection performance results across ten repeated trials for each fault type.Overcurrent and undervoltage faults were detected with 100% reliability across all trials, with mean detection latencies

Table 3: Fault Detection Performance Summary.

Fault Type	Mean Detection Latency (ms)	Relay Response Time (ms)	Detection Rate (%)
Overcurrent	112 ± 18	145 ± 22	100
Undervoltage	108 ± 14	138 ± 19	100
Islanding	187 ± 31	N/A	90
PV Anomaly	N/A (cloud)	N/A	85 (cloud)

of 112 ms and 108 ms respectively. These latencies are well within the 500 ms limit typically specified for protection systems in low-voltage distribution applications. The relay response adds an additional 30–40 ms mechanical delay beyond the detection latency, bringing total trip times to well under 200 ms. Islanding detection achieved a 90% detection rate across ten trials, with two false negative events recorded during periods of low irradiance when the PV output was already near zero and the voltage deviation criterion was not reliably triggered. This performance is consistent with passive islanding detection methods, which are known to exhibit a non-detection zone around the resonant frequency of the load. Active islanding detection methods, such as the Sandia Frequency Shift (SFS) algorithm, could be incorporated in future firmware revisions to eliminate this non-detection zone.

PV anomaly detection, processed through the cloud analytics pipeline, achieved a detection rate of 85% for 50% shading conditions. The lower detection rate compared to the rule-based faults reflects the inherent difficulty of distinguishing genuine anomalies from natural irradiance variability without a calibrated irradiance reference sensor. Incorporation of a GY-302 BH1750 light intensity sensor in future hardware revisions would provide the irradiance reference needed to significantly improve PV anomaly detection accuracy.

System Power Consumption

The total power consumption of the monitoring system in active mode, including all INA219 modules, the ESP32, and the communication circuitry, was measured at 2.1W. In deep-sleep mode with periodic wake-up for sensor polling, power consumption reduced to 0.38W. This power budget is modest relative to the capacity of the battery bank being monitored and does not materially affect the state of charge calculations.

Dashboard Performance

The web dashboard successfully displayed real-time sensor readings updated at 1-second intervals throughout the testing period. Fault events were logged with timestamps accurate to within 1 second of the MQTT publish time. The Android application performed equivalently to the web dashboard and was tested on three Android devices running versions 9, 11, and 13. Historical data exports in CSV format were generated correctly for all tested date ranges.

Dashboard accessibility over the internet was tested using a 4G LTE mobile connection with measured latencies between the ESP32 and the cloud MQTT broker averaging 180 ms. Under these conditions, the displayed readings lagged real-time conditions by approximately 1.2 seconds on average, which is acceptable for operational monitoring purposes. In offline mode, the edge server maintained full dashboard functionality without cloud connectivity.

Comparison with Related Work

Table 4 compares the key characteristics of the proposed system with selected related work. The proposed system compares favourably across all dimensions, offering edge fault detection, ML-readiness, offline capability, and a mobile dashboard at a hardware cost below USD 20. This positions it as the most suitable option among the compared systems for deployment in rural African microgrids where cost, connectivity, and maintainability are primary constraints.

Table 4: Comparison with Related Monitoring Systems.

Feature	Proposed	Kuo et al. (2019)	Zhang et al. (2022)	Moraes et al. (2020)
Hardware Platform	ESP32	Raspberry Pi	ML Accelerator	ESP32
Approx. Hardware Cost (USD)	< 20	~ 60	> 100	~ 20
Edge Fault Detection	Yes	No	Yes	No
ML-Ready Pipeline	Yes	Partial	Yes	No
Offline Operation	Yes	Partial	Yes	No
Mobile Dashboard	Yes	No	No	No

CONCLUSION

This work presented a low-cost smart solar microgrid monitoring and fault detection system built around the ESP32 microcontroller and INA219 sensors. The system is capable of monitoring PV panel, battery, and load parameters in real time, while detecting faults quickly and reliably, with response times under 250ms and impressive accuracy levels of 100% for overcurrent and undervoltage faults, and 90% for islanding detection. One of the key strengths of the system is its edge-cloud architecture, which allows it to keep running even when internet access is unavailable. This makes it particularly well suited for rural and off-grid communities where reliable connectivity cannot always be guaranteed. With an easy-to-use web and Android dashboard, the system is accessible even to users without a technical background. The system is also designed with the future in mind. It already supports machine learning integration, which means more advanced fault analysis, can be added down the line without needing any changes to the hardware. Looking ahead, planned improvements include better PV anomaly detection using irradiance and temperature sensors, the addition of TinyML for smarter fault classification, and expansion to cover monitoring across multiple microgrid nodes. Altogether, the system offers a scalable, affordable, and intelligent approach to sustainable energy management, with real-world deployment in Nigeria already on the horizon.

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