Journal of Engineering, Technology & Applied Science
p-ISSN: 2721-7949, e-ISSN: 2721-8090

Original Research Paper

Coordinated Overcurrent Relay Development with Arduino and ACS712

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Article History
Received:
21.08.2023

Revised:
17.09.2023

Accepted:
28.09.2023

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Abstract: This study presents the design and evaluation of an overcurrent relay system using Arduino Uno, ACS712 current sensors, and electromagnetic relays. Conducted at the University of Negros Occidental–Recoletos, Philippines, from March 2023, the research focuses on developing a relay with accurate trip times and reliable performance. The designed relay features multiple characteristics including Standard Inverse, Very Inverse, and Extremely Inverse, with time delays ranging from 20 ms to 100 ms and time multiplier settings from 0.1 to 0.23. Testing results showed that the Extremely Inverse characteristic achieved the fastest trip time of 0.11 seconds at 9.3 A, while the Normal Inverse characteristic had a trip time of 1.04 seconds at 1.7 A. The relay's error margins were well within the 5% tolerance limit set by IEC 60255 standards, with errors ranging from 0.027 to 0.028. Effective coordination was achieved by adjusting the Time Multiplier Setting (TMS) values to ensure fault isolation without disrupting other system components. The results confirm that the relay design is both accurate and reliable, suitable for practical implementation in electrical protection systems. Future work could involve integrating additional functionalities and testing under diverse environmental conditions.

Keywords: ACS712 Current Sensor, Internet of Things, Inverse Time Characteristics, Overcurrent Relay, Protection Relay Coordination.

1. Introduction

Overcurrent protection is essential for ensuring the safety and reliability of electrical systems by preventing damage caused by excessive currents. The evolution of relay technology from traditional electromechanical devices to modern digital systems has significantly enhanced the capabilities and accuracy of overcurrent protection. Early mechanical relays, while effective, had limitations in flexibility and precision, necessitating advancements in technology [1]. The introduction of digital relays marked a significant shift, incorporating programmable features that allow for greater adaptability and accuracy [2]. These advancements have been further propelled by the integration of microcontrollers such as Arduino Uno, which provide a versatile and cost-effective platform for designing custom protection systems [3] [4].

Arduino Uno, known for its open-source nature and ease of programming, has become a popular choice for implementing innovative protection solutions [5]. Its ability to interface with various sensors and components makes it particularly suitable for developing sophisticated overcurrent relays [6]. Among these components, the ACS712 current sensor stands out for its accuracy and ease of integration, offering real-time current measurements essential for effective protection [7]. Additionally, user interfaces such as keypads and LCD displays play a crucial role in interacting with and configuring overcurrent relay systems, allowing users to set thresholds and monitor system performance [8] [9].

This study aims to design and evaluate an overcurrent relay system utilizing Arduino Uno, ACS712 sensors, electromagnetic relays, a keypad, and an LCD display. By focusing on the integration of these components, the research seeks to assess the system's performance, accuracy, and response times. The results will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of modern protection techniques and their practical applications [10]. Through this study, we aim to contribute to the advancement of overcurrent relay systems and enhance their applicability in real-world scenarios.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overcurrent

Overcurrent refers to an electrical current that exceeds the rated capacity of equipment or circuits, potentially causing overheating, insulation failure, or even fire hazards. Overcurrent is commonly caused by faults such as short circuits, ground faults, or overload conditions. It is critical to detect and manage overcurrent events promptly to protect electrical systems and prevent catastrophic failures.

In modern power systems, advancements in sensor technologies have improved overcurrent detection. For instance, current sensors like the ACS712 offer higher sensitivity and faster response times, which allow precise monitoring of current variations [11]. Additionally, microcontroller-based systems are increasingly used to detect overcurrent more accurately and respond quicker than traditional methods [12]. The development of overcurrent protection relays, incorporating both analog and digital technologies, enhances the reliability of detecting and addressing overcurrent situations [13]. Research highlights the integration of smart grid technologies and overcurrent protection, allowing remote monitoring and control of overcurrent events [14].

Several studies focus on optimizing overcurrent protection strategies to enhance fault detection and system reliability. The introduction of real-time monitoring systems in overcurrent protection ensures prompt identification of transient and permanent faults [15]. Researchers are also developing machine learning algorithms to predict overcurrent scenarios and adjust protection settings dynamically, improving the system's resilience against faults [16]. Another significant advancement is in the coordination of overcurrent protection with other protection devices, which ensures seamless fault isolation without disrupting the entire system [17].

2.1.1. Overcurrent Relays

Overcurrent Relays are devices that detect overcurrent conditions and initiate disconnection of the faulted section of a power system. These relays play a critical role in preventing equipment damage and maintaining the stability of electrical networks. Overcurrent relays can be classified based on their response time and operational characteristics, such as instantaneous, time-delayed, and inverse time relays.

Advances in relay technology have significantly improved the performance of overcurrent relays, particularly in terms of accuracy and reliability. Digital relays, which use microprocessors to analyze current signals, have largely replaced traditional electromechanical relays [18]. These digital relays provide enhanced fault detection and faster response times. They also offer better flexibility in setting and adjusting protection parameters, making them more adaptable to modern power grids [19]. Research shows that digital relays also have self-diagnostic capabilities, allowing for automatic fault detection and system recovery [20].

Another significant development in overcurrent relays is the use of communication protocols such as IEC 61850, enabling relays to interact with other devices in a networked environment [21]. This allows for better coordination of protection schemes across different sections of the power grid. Additionally, the integration of overcurrent relays with renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, has been a growing area of research, as these energy sources require specific protection strategies to handle fluctuations in power generation [22].

Recent studies emphasize the importance of adaptive overcurrent relays that can adjust their settings dynamically based on real-time operating conditions [23]. These adaptive relays are particularly beneficial in systems with varying load conditions and intermittent renewable energy sources. Furthermore, research into hybrid relays, which combine both overcurrent and distance protection capabilities, highlights their potential in enhancing system reliability [24].

2.1.2. Inverse Time Overcurrent Relays

Inverse Time Overcurrent Relays (ITOCR) are designed to operate with a time delay that decreases as the current increases, allowing for faster tripping under higher fault currents. This characteristic makes ITOCRs ideal for coordinating protection between different layers of the electrical network. The inverse time characteristic ensures that minor overcurrent conditions do not cause unnecessary tripping, while severe faults are cleared rapidly.

In recent years, there has been significant progress in the development of inverse time relays, particularly in their algorithmic design and digital implementation. Advanced algorithms now allow these relays to operate with more precision, adjusting the tripping curve dynamically based on system conditions [25]. These relays can also be programmed to follow different time-current characteristics, such as moderately inverse, very inverse, and extremely inverse, depending on the specific protection requirements of the system [26].

2.2. Protection Relays

Protection relays are essential devices in power systems, responsible for detecting faults such as overcurrent, under-voltage, or frequency disturbances and isolating faulty sections of the network. The primary goal of protection relays is to safeguard the power system and its components from damage by responding swiftly to abnormal conditions. The evolution of protection relays has seen a shift from traditional electromechanical designs to modern digital and microprocessor-based relays, which offer enhanced accuracy, flexibility, and reliability.

Modern digital protection relays are equipped with self-diagnostic features, communication capabilities, and adaptive settings, making them ideal for complex power systems. These relays are designed to monitor electrical parameters in real-time and initiate corrective actions when faults are detected. They can be programmed to coordinate with other relays, ensuring selective tripping of only the faulty part of the system while keeping the rest of the network operational [27]. Additionally, the integration of protection relays with SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) systems has significantly improved their effectiveness by allowing remote monitoring and control.

Recent advancements in protection relay technology focus on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) for predictive maintenance and fault detection. These techniques can analyze large amounts of data collected by relays and predict potential failures before they occur, enhancing the reliability and efficiency of power systems. Moreover, the integration of protection relays with smart grid technologies has enabled more dynamic and responsive protection schemes that can adapt to changing network conditions, such as the integration of renewable energy sources [28].

2.2.1. Coordination of Overcurrent Protection Relays

Coordination of overcurrent protection relays is a critical aspect of power system protection. The coordination ensures that relays operate in a specific sequence, allowing only the relay closest to the fault to trip, while others remain inactive. Proper relay coordination prevents unnecessary outages in unaffected parts of the network and minimizes disruption.

Coordination is achieved by setting time delays for each relay in the system, based on their distance from the power source and their location relative to other protective devices. Typically, relays further away from the power source operate faster, while those closer to the source have longer time delays to allow the downstream relays to operate first. This selective tripping ensures that only the faulted section is isolated, maintaining continuity in other parts of the system.

Recent research in the coordination of overcurrent protection relays highlights the importance of using software-based tools for accurate and efficient relay setting calculations. These tools simulate various fault conditions and optimize the coordination of relays by adjusting their time-current characteristics. Additionally, advancements in communication protocols, such as IEC 61850, have improved relay coordination by enabling real-time data exchange between relays and other network devices. This allows for dynamic relay settings that adapt to changing network conditions, improving system protection and reliability [29]. Furthermore, integrating renewable energy sources into power grids has introduced new challenges for relay coordination, as fluctuating power generation can impact the operation of traditional relay settings [30].

2.2.2. Setting Overcurrent Relays for Coordination

Setting overcurrent relays for coordination involves determining the appropriate current and time settings to ensure that the relays function correctly and in coordination with one another. These settings are crucial for achieving selective tripping, where only the relay closest to the fault operates, thereby isolating the faulted section without impacting the rest of the system.

To achieve proper coordination, several parameters must be carefully configured, including the pickup current setting, time delay, and time-current characteristic (TCC). The pickup current setting defines the minimum current level at which the relay will operate, while the time delay ensures that relays farther from the fault trip before those closer to the source. The TCC defines the relationship between fault current magnitude and relay operating time. Different types of TCCs, such as inverse, very inverse, and extremely inverse, are used depending on the protection scheme's requirements.

In recent years, there has been a focus on using optimization algorithms to automate the relay setting process. These algorithms can analyze complex network topologies and calculate the optimal settings for each relay, ensuring precise coordination across the system. Furthermore, advancements in relay hardware and software have enabled dynamic relay settings that can adjust in real-time based on network conditions, such as changes in load or the integration of renewable energy sources [31]. These adaptive settings enhance system protection and reduce the risk of miscoordination, which can lead to unnecessary outages or equipment damage. Studies have also explored the use of machine learning techniques to predict optimal relay settings based on historical fault data and system configurations [32].

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Location

The design of the overcurrent relay was conducted at the University of Negros Occidental–Recoletos (UNO-R), a lesser-known university in the Philippines with an engineering faculty, from March 2023. UNO-R was chosen for its support in practical electronic engineering projects.

3.2. Tools and Materials

The following tools and materials were used in the design of the overcurrent relay:

1) Software:
    - Proteus 8.6: for circuit simulation.
    - Arduino IDE: for programming the Arduino Uno.
2) Components:
    - Arduino Uno (3 units): used for central microcontroller.
    - ACS712 Current Sensors (9 units): for current measurement.
    - Electromagnetic Relays (3 units): for switching control.
    - 4x3 Keypads (3 units): for user input.
    - 16x2 LCD Displays (3 units): for displaying data.

The Arduino Uno served as the main control unit, interfacing with the ACS712 sensors to read current levels and the electromagnetic relays to manage switching operations. The keypads and LCDs provided user interaction and data visualization.

3.3. Assembly

The assembly involved connecting the Arduino Uno to the ACS712 sensors, relays, keypad, and LCD. The sensors were wired to the Arduino's analog inputs, while the relays and keypad were connected to digital I/O pins. The LCD was interfaced via I2C.

3.4. Testing and Programming

The system was tested to ensure accurate operation. Programming was done in the Arduino IDE using C language. The code covered:

- ACS712 Sensor Integration: Code for reading current data from sensors.
- Electromagnetic Relay Control: Code to activate relays based on sensor input.
- LCD Display Functionality: Code to display current readings and relay status.
- Keypad Input Processing: Code to handle user inputs for setting relay parameters.

After programming, the system was tested to confirm the functionality and reliability of the overcurrent protection features.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Performance Evaluation of Overcurrent Relay

The performance of the overcurrent relay was assessed based on its ability to trip under various fault conditions. The key parameters measured were the trip time and the current at which the relay activates. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Performance of Overcurrent Relay under Different Settings

Relay Characteristic	Fault Current (A)	Trip Time (s)
Normal Inverse	1.7	1.04
Extremely Inverse	9.3	0.11
Standard Inverse	3.0	0.25

From the results in Table 1, it can be observed that the overcurrent relay performs optimally under extremely inverse characteristics, achieving the fastest trip time of 0.11 seconds at a fault current of 9.3 A. In contrast, the normal inverse characteristic shows a longer trip time of 1.04 seconds at a fault current of 1.7 A. This variation in performance highlights the sensitivity of the relay to different settings and current levels. The findings are consistent with the expectations for inverse time characteristics, where the trip time decreases as the fault current increases.

4.2. Error Analysis

The accuracy of the relay was analyzed by comparing the actual trip times against the expected values based on the IEC 60255 standard. The error margins for each relay were calculated as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Error Analysis of Overcurrent Relays

Relay Number	Measured Error	Standard Error (IEC 60255)
Relay 1	0.027	5%
Relay 2	0.028	5%
Relay 3	0.028	5%

The error analysis reveals that the measured errors for all three relays are well within the acceptable range as specified by the IEC 60255 standard, which allows for a 5% timing error. This indicates that the relays are reliable and perform as expected under the given conditions. The low error margins underscore the precision of the design and calibration processes used in the relay development.

4.3. Coordination of Overcurrent Relays

The coordination of overcurrent relays was tested by adjusting the Time Multiplier Setting (TMS) for different relays to ensure proper selective tripping. The coordination settings and their effectiveness are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Coordination Settings for Overcurrent Relays

Relay Number	TMS Setting	Coordination Result
Relay 1	0.15	Effective
Relay 2	0.20	Effective
Relay 3	0.25	Effective

The results from Table 3 indicate that all relays were effectively coordinated with their respective TMS settings. Proper coordination was achieved, ensuring that the relay with the lowest TMS setting operated first, thus isolating the fault while minimizing disruption to the system. This coordination is crucial for maintaining system reliability and preventing unnecessary outages.

4.4. Practical Implementation

The practical implementation of the designed overcurrent relay involved integrating it into an operational system and testing its performance under real-world conditions. The relay's functionality was verified through a series of field tests, confirming its effectiveness in detecting and responding to fault conditions as designed.

The practical implementation confirmed that the relay performed as expected in real-world scenarios. The design specifications were met, and the relay successfully isolated faults, demonstrating its practical viability for overcurrent protection in electrical systems.

5. Conclusion

The overcurrent relay exhibited effective trip times across different settings. The extremely inverse characteristic showed the fastest response to high fault currents, with a trip time of 0.11 seconds at 9.3 A, while the normal inverse characteristic provided a longer trip time of 1.04 seconds at 1.7 A. These results confirm that the relay responds appropriately to varying levels of fault current, aligning with theoretical expectations.

The measured error margins for the relays were well within the 5% tolerance specified by the IEC 60255 standard. Relay 1, Relay 2, and Relay 3 all exhibited errors of 0.027, 0.028, and 0.028, respectively. These results indicate that the relay's accuracy is reliable, and the design meets industry standards for precision. Effective coordination of the relays was achieved with appropriate Time Multiplier Setting (TMS) values. Each relay was adjusted to ensure that it would trip in a coordinated manner, isolating faults without unnecessarily disrupting other parts of the system. The coordination results confirm that the relay design allows for effective fault isolation and system protection.

The practical implementation of the relay in a real-world setting confirmed its reliability and operational effectiveness. The relay successfully performed its intended function of overcurrent protection, validating the design approach and ensuring its suitability for use in electrical protection systems.

Recommendations for Future Work:

1. Future designs could benefit from integrating additional functionalities, such as remote monitoring capabilities, to enhance operational flexibility and ease of use.
2. It is recommended that relays be tested for durability under various environmental conditions to ensure long-term reliability.
3. Further development could explore the combination of overcurrent relays with other protective functions to create more comprehensive protection systems.

In conclusion, the designed overcurrent relay meets the required performance standards and provides effective protection for electrical systems. The study's results validate the design approach and offer a solid foundation for future enhancements in relay technology.

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