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**APPLICABILITY OF THE ADAPTIVE THERMAL
COMFORT MODEL IN NATURALLY VENTILATED
HIGH-RISE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA**

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218006B

Degree of Master of Science

Department of Architecture
Faculty of Architecture

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

Signature:

Date: 2026/01/31

The above candidate has carried out research for the Masters thesis under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

Name of Supervisor:

Signature of the Supervisor:

Date: 31-01-2026

Dr. (Ms) Shaleeni Coorey

.....

Date: 31.01.2026

Prof. Narein Perera

DEDICATION

To Dr. Shaleeni Coorey, Prof. Narein Perera, and Dr. Renganathan, whose wisdom illuminated my path and whose unwavering guidance transformed obstacles into stepping stones. Their scholarly rigor, patience, and belief in my potential have left an indelible mark on both this work and my growth as a researcher.

To my family, whose boundless love and steadfast support have been my anchor through every storm and calm. Their quiet sacrifices, encouraging words, and unwavering faith in me gave strength when mine waned, this achievement is as much theirs as it is mine.

Together, these extraordinary individuals have shaped not just this thesis, but the person I have become in the process.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the applicability of the ASHRAE 55-2017 adaptive thermal comfort model in naturally ventilated high-rise residential developments in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where rapid urbanization and tropical climatic conditions pose unique challenges for low-income communities. While international standards like ASHRAE 55-2017 provide frameworks for thermal comfort, their relevance in resource-constrained, high-density tropical housing remains underexplored. To address this gap, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining longitudinal field measurements of indoor environmental parameters (temperature, humidity, air velocity) with detailed occupant surveys to capture subjective comfort perceptions and adaptive behaviors across five case-study buildings. The results reveal critical discrepancies between model predictions and lived experiences: occupants reported 94.5% dissatisfaction with indoor thermal conditions, despite employing adaptive strategies such as fan use and window adjustments. These differences are aggravated by vertical microclimatic variations, with upper-floor residents experiencing significantly different thermal conditions than lower floors, and socio-cultural constraints, such as privacy concerns that limit effective natural ventilation. Statistical analyses, including Spearman's rank correlation and ANOVA, further demonstrate that the ASHRAE model underestimates the adaptive capacity of residents in warm-humid climates, particularly during peak discomfort periods (e.g., midday, when 64% of respondents reported severe thermal discomfort). The study concludes that the ASHRAE 55-2017 model requires context-specific recalibration for tropical high-rises. It proposes revised adaptive comfort criteria and emphasizes targeted architectural interventions, such as optimized cross-ventilation and solar shading, alongside policy reforms to address thermal equity in low-income urban housing.

Keywords: Adaptive thermal comfort, naturally ventilated buildings, tropical architecture, high-rise housing, ASHRAE 55-2017, Sri Lanka.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgement.....	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	ix
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Abbreviations.....	xii
List of Appendices	xiii
Chapter 1	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Problem Statement and Justification.....	2
1.3 Aim and Objectives	3
1.3.1 Aim.....	3
1.3.2 Objectives.....	4
1.4 Research Question	4
1.5 Methodology	4
1.5.1 Methodology Overview	5
1.6 Scope and Limitations	6
1.6.1 Scope	6
1.6.2 Limitations	6
1.7 Significance of the Study	6
1.7.1 Research Frame Work.....	7
1.7.2 Research Strategy	8
1.8 Structure of the Thesis.....	8
Chapter 2	10
Literature Review.....	10
2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Thermal Comfort.....	10

2.1.1	Fanger's PMV-PPD Model: A Static Framework	10
2.1.2	Physiological Foundations: Gagge and Höppe	11
2.1.3	Adaptive vs. Static Models: Sri Lankan Context	11
2.2	Adaptive Comfort Models: Evolution and Current Standards	12
2.3	The ASHRAE 55-2017 Adaptive Model	15
2.3.1	The Adaptive Model's Theoretical Shift.....	15
2.3.2	Operationalizing Adaptability: Global Applications and Limitations .	15
2.4	Empirical Studies on Adaptive Comfort of High-Rise Building Performance in Tropical Climates.....	16
2.4.1.	The Vertical Gradient of Thermal Comfort	16
2.4.2	Architectural Responses and Material Innovations.....	17
2.4.3	The Policy-Implementation Gap	17
2.4.4	Toward an Integrated Framework.....	18
2.5	Conclusion.....	18
Chapter 3		19
Research Methodology.....		19
3.1	Research Philosophy and Approach.....	19
3.2	Case Study Design and Selection	20
3.2.1	Case Study Selection and Description	20
3.2.2	Sample Group Profile: Methsanda Sevana Housing Development .	22
3.3	Instrument Development and Pilot Study	24
3.3.1	Pilot Study Overview	24
3.3.2	Key Findings from the Pilot Study	24
3.3.3	Implications for Instrument Refinement	26
3.3.4	Methodological Adjustments for Main Study.....	27
3.4	Main Study and Data Collection Framework.....	27
3.4.1	Sample Size and Sampling Strategy	27
3.4	Integration of Mixed Methods.....	27
3.4.1	Quantitative Data Collection Framework	28
3.4.2	Qualitative Data Collection Framework	28
3.4.3	Qualitative Data Analysis Protocol.....	30
3.5	Methodological Synergy and Triangulation.....	31

3.6	Evaluation Methods: A Comprehensive Framework for Thermal Comfort Assessment.....	31
3.6.1	Short-Term Comfort Evaluation	32
3.6.2	Long-Term Performance Assessment.....	32
3.7	Data Analysis Framework	33
3.9	Ethical Considerations.....	34
3.10	Methodological Justification	34
3.11	Conclusion.....	35
Chapter 4		36
ANALYSIS and findings		36
4.1	Introduction	36
4.2	Characterization of the Objective Thermal Environment	36
4.2.1	Baseline Thermal Conditions.....	36
4.2.2	Vertical Microclimatic Stratification	38
4.3	Occupant Perception and Adaptive Behaviour.....	40
4.3.1	Spatial Patterns of Discomfort	40
4.3.2	Adaptive Behaviour Inventory	44
4.3.3	The Privacy-Ventilation Paradox.....	47
4.4	Comparison with ASHRAE 55-2017 Model Predictions.....	48
4.5	Socio-Cultural and Architectural Mediators of Thermal Adaptation.....	51
4.6	Integrated Findings: The Triad of Constraint, Adaptation, and Comfort....	52
4.7	Validation of the ASHRAE 55-2017 Adaptive Model.....	53
4.7.1	Predictive Gap Analysis.....	54
4.7.2	Discrepancies by Floor and Orientation.....	54
4.7	Synthesis and Recommendations	54
Chapter 5		57
CONCLUSION		57
5.1	Summary of Key Research Findings.....	57
5.2	Contributions to Sustainable Thermal Comfort Research.....	57
5.3	Final Reflections on the Study's Practical Implications	58
5.3.1	Thermal Comfort as Socio-Technical System	58
5.3.2	Design Implications for Tropical High-Rises	58

5.3.3	Methodological Contributions	58
5.3.4	Policy Recommendations.....	58
5.4	Research Limitations and Areas for Further Investigation.....	59
	References	60

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Description	Page
Figure 1.1	Methodological Workflow Aligned with Research Objectives	5
Figure 1.2	Research Framework	8
Figure 2.1	Adaptive Comfort Ranges for ASHRAE 55	14
Figure 3.1	Research Framework	19
Figure 3.2	Theory Framework	20
Figure 3.3	Methsanda Sevana	21
Figure 3.4	Mihijaya Sevana	21
Figure 3.5	Laksetha Sevana	21
Figure 3.6	Siyapatha Sevana	22
Figure 3.7	Siyasetha Sevana	22
Figure 3.8	Methsanda Sevana	22
Figure 3.9	Photographic Survey – Inside the houses	24
Figure 3.10	Thermal performance variation by unit orientation and layout	25
Figure 3.12	Measurement points in the units, selected apartments and the section of the building	28
Figure 4.1	Most Thermal Discomfort times of the day	38
Figure 4.2	Summary of subjective thermal comfort responses	39
Figure 4.3	Solar exposure and vertical daylight variation across floor Levels	40
Figure 4.4	Inter-Unit Thermal Disparity	43
Figure 4.5	Most thermally uncomfortable spaces within housing scheme	44
Figure 4.6	Most thermally uncomfortable spaces within housing Unit	44
Figure 4.7	Most thermally uncomfortable spaces within house – Bedroom1	45

Figure 4.8	Floor wise most dissatisfied bedroom	45
Figure 4.9	Types of adaptive behaviours and preferences	47
Figure 4.10	Reasons for dissatisfaction	47
Figure 4.11	Thermal Sensation with the building height	51
Figure 4.12	Subjective Thermal Comfort with the Mean Age	52
Figure 4.13	Most Thermal Discomfort times of the day	52
Figure 4.14	Subjective Thermal Comfort with the Mean Gender	53

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
Table 2.1	PMV-PPD Parameters vs. Real-World Observations in Tropical Climates	11
Table 2.2	Milestones in Adaptive Comfort Model Development	13
Table 2.3	Theoretical Contrasts between PMV and Adaptive Models	15
Table 2.4	Microclimatic Disruptions in Tropical High-Rises	16
Table 3.1	Selected Housing Developments and Unit Distribution	21
Table 3.2	Instrumentation Matrix	21
Table 3.3	Methsanda sevana	21
Table 3.4	Qualitative Data Collection Matrix	28
Table 3.5	Qualitative-Quantitative Integration Framework	29
Table 3.6	Data Triangulation Framework	31
Table 3.7	Comfort Evaluation Criteria Matrix	22
Table 4.1	Thermal comfort level of the dwellings according to the ASHRAE 7.0 scale	38
Table 4.2	Thermal satisfaction of the temperature inside the house	39
Table 4.3	Correlation between, thermal satisfaction across the floor Levels	41
Table 4.4	Thermal comfort level of the dwellings according to the ASHRAE 7.0 scale	41
Table 4.5	Thermal satisfaction of the temperature inside the house	42
Table 4.6	Behavioral Adaptations in Response to Architectural Constraints	47
Table 4.7	Summary of behavioural adaptations or modifications in response to the basic needs and challenges of everyday life based on interview data and observations	48

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
NV	Naturally Ventilated
PMV-PPD	Predicted Mean Vote-Predicted Percentage of Dissatisfied
ASHRAE	American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers
PMOT	Prevailing Mean Outdoor Temperature
UHI	Urban Heat Island
EN 15251	European Standard for Indoor Environmental Input Parameters
CIBSE TM52	Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers Technical Memorandum 52
IMAC	India Model for Adaptive Comfort
TCI	Tropical Comfort Index
CFD	Computational Fluid Dynamics
PCM	Phase-Change Material
AI	Artificial Intelligence
EH	Exceedance Hours
NMBE	Normalized Mean Bias Error
CV(RMSE)	Coefficient of Variation of Root Mean Square Error
IPMVP	International Performance Measurement and Verification Protocol
ISO 8996 (2004)	International Standard for metabolic rate estimation
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ICC	Interclass Correlation Coefficient
κ (kappa)	Cohen's kappa (inter-rater reliability for categorical data)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
R Studio	Programming environment for statistical computing

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Description	Page
Appendix – A	Instrumentation Matrix	63
Appendix – B	Advanced Analytical Techniques & Triangulation Framework	50
Appendix – C	Triangulation Framework Implementation	63
Appendix – D	Sample Questionnaire	65