

A Low-Cost IMU-based System for Real-Time Barbell Repetition Counting

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Abstract— Not using a program to manage the number of exercise repetitions is usually inexact, leads to inconsistency and breaks focus during exercise at home. This paper introduces a technology that can automatically record and count movements during physical exercises, in real time. An ESP32 microcontroller works with an MPU6050 IMU to analyze data collected from the accelerometer and gyroscope to identify valid repetitions by comparing them to a specific threshold through the usage of a finite state machine. The core advantage comes from developing a three-state algorithm that uses time delays, dead zones and re-trying to avoid getting false results. It is simple to use, inexpensive and it works without external links or wearable corrections. It consistently detects reps quickly, allows setting a target number of reps with serial communication and provides detailed feedback along the way. These experiments have demonstrated that the wearable sensor accurately detects motions in the gym, responds fast in real time and shows minimal errors with a 50 ms sampling rate. Since many people work out on their own, the system is very useful in keeping track of progress and encouraging them.

Index Terms— Repetition counting, ESP32, MPU6050, Smart gym equipment, IMU.

I. INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward home-based fitness and personal health tracking has driven the need for accessible, low-cost solutions that can accurately monitor physical activity. Traditional methods of exercise repetition counting—whether through manual tracking or mobile apps requiring touch interaction—are inherently prone to user error, inconsistency, and interruption of workout flow. Commercial wearable fitness trackers, while useful, often require expensive hardware, proprietary software ecosystems, and can suffer from generalization issues across different users or types of exercises.

This paper explores how to create a simple system that can observe along with the device inertia and independently count the number of exercise repetitions. The main elements of the proposed solution are MPU6050 which combines sensors for acceleration and motion and ESP32, a low-cost microcontroller. When the sensors and thresholds are set correctly, the system uses the finite state machine to help identify the different phases.

Its unique aspect is that it covers many aspects of the real world such as noise, timing restrictions and inaccurate results. By adding dead zones, cooldowns and retrying, this design ensures threshold errors on jumpy or half-completed moves are minimized. It is an independent system, so people can enter target numbers on the serial interface and receive instant reports in the form of debug messages and motion logs. Since it is simple, dependable and affordable, this project provides a helpful device for people who want to track their fitness.

The proposed device can seamlessly be put to use at home, with trainers or in fitness apps for smartphones. Since user interaction, instant performance and rapid repetition are its main goals, it would be suitable for use in wearable and Internet of Things (IoT) technology for fitness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Qiu et al. [1] provide a study on fitness wearables, outlining various devices according to their structure, computer components and software. It is highlighted that integrated sensors are effective in monitoring physiological signals and make up personal area networks (PANs). The authors address the use of machine learning for creating personal health advice and explain future progress in biosensor technology, while revealing the potential data security and privacy concerns. Bian et al. [2] suggest using a passive capacity sensing system to measure gym exercises and count how many times they are repeated. The researchers study sensors on areas of the body such as the calf and wrist, to observe changes in coupling between the device and the body. Repetition counting accuracy stood at 91%, emphasizing how easy it is for capacitive sensing to keep track of activity, using little energy. Colin et al. [3] suggest that digital and artificial intelligence (EDAI) technology could be used in traditional gyms by adapting equipment so that exercises can be tracked with data. In the paper, the author organizes various AI-based fitness tools, highlighting the importance of big data for checking who goes to gym sessions and recommending suitable workouts. The authors talk about ethics in connection to data privacy and security in AI-based fitness software.

Song et al. [4] discuss the use of IMUs in detail for tracking motions in mobile phones and wearable devices. They discuss two types of models: those that track a person's movements based on their body and those that track actions in different ways. The work investigates methods that combine data from accelerometers, gyroscopes and magnetometers to improve the precision of tracking in health care and human-computer interaction. In their work, Zolfaghari et al. [5] work on measuring movement speed with EEG and IMU sensors for applications in BCI. FBCSP and W-CSP feature extraction methods as well as CNNs were used in the study. The researchers got accurate results with a peak score of 90%, suggesting that EEG-IMU fusion can be applied to both real-time motor control and rehabilitation. In their study [6], Asghar et al. compare various machine learning algorithms to determine the type of exercise being done on the arm or shoulder using a band with an MPU6050 sensor. The researchers studied four machine learning algorithms: KNN, Bagged Trees, Decision Trees and Fine-Grained SVM. Data points to a 92% accuracy for Weighted KNN, meaning that wearable sensors can help track fitness information personally and guide exercise positions properly.

This study [7] covers different ways of using accelerometers and gyroscopes for the recognition of human activities. The paper looks at machine learning and threshold methods that are used for classifying movement. It outlines how preprocessing, feature extraction and classification contribute to accurate tracking of movement. The text offers understanding of how wearable sensors can be used to count repetitions. In [8], researchers describe an IoT system that monitors exercises by using ESP32 microcontrollers and low-cost IMUs. It outlines how data can be transmitted, how messages will be exchanged and ways to save energy. Real-time repetition detection can be achieved with the proposed system and its lightweight algorithms. It explains how embedded systems can be designed for exercising monitoring machines. This article proposes using motion segments in video to count repetitions during weightlifting [9]. It distinguishes each movement phase using an adaptive method based on thresholding. With this method, the detection of movement is more accurate due to recognizing each person's movement and how fast they move. According to the findings, setting thresholds for individual users improves the stability of the system.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Physical exercise repetitions are accurately counted in real time by the system using motion data from an inertial measurement unit (IMU), controlled on a microprocessor and sent wirelessly to a display. Because it is modular, responsive, very efficient and dependable, it works well in smaller devices like those used for fitness. Shown in Fig. 1, the system focuses around the MPU6050 module which contains a 3-axis accelerometer and a 3-axis gyroscope all in one.

This means that movement data in a straight line and in angles can be tracked at the same time in three different axes. When exercising, the MPU6050 detects movements of the user and generates data on both acceleration and rotation speed in real time. I2C is used to deliver the data to the ESP32 microcontroller which serves two purposes in the system. First, it handles motion information and uses a dedicated logic system to find and identify any repeating patterns. The processed data is also sent over the Internet via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi, so it can

be viewed, stored or reacted to on a mobile device or computer. For this reason, the ESP32 works well as it has a strong dual-core processor, built-in wireless modules and can handle real-time interruptions.

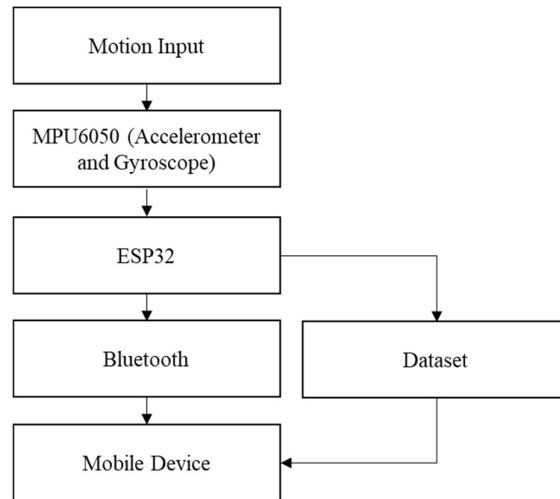


Fig. 1. System workflow

First, motion input is captured and then continually monitored through the use of the system sensor. If the motion from the accelerometer is substantial, the ESP32 goes through several steps to confirm that all the detected movement cycles are real and correctly timed. After a rep is detected, the counts are updated and wirelessly sent to the connected mobile device. All the necessary components, including the MPU6050 sensor and ESP32 microcontroller, are powered by a small rechargeable battery. This ensures portability and enables continuous operation during physical activity without reliance on external power sources.

To identify how many times a motion is repeated, the methodology includes an FSM in the ESP32 software. FSM changes states according to the measurements of speed and turning of the vehicle.

- Idle State: The system first begins when it senses little to no motion in the environment. A repetition is checked only after the user touches the screen in the proper direction.
- Upward Movement Detection: This state becomes active when acceleration along the X-axis (linear) and speed around the Z-axis (angular) are both greater than the assigned highest threshold values. This signals a movement in which the weight is being lifted or raised.
- Peak Detection: An instant used to make sure the graph has reached its highest point. In this way, rapid stops or loud noises should not lead to wrong alarms.
- Downward Movement Detection: A movement from up to down will be notified by the FSM when it is accompanied by a reversal in direction and the signals read lower values within a given time frame.
- Repetition Completion: Once all conditions for the upward and downward phases are met within the needed time limit, the FSM adds one to the repetition counter and goes back to idle state.
- Error handling and retry logic: If the change in value falls too fast, is not detected or goes beyond the set range, the system switches to retry mode. After a short wait, it checks the motion again to make sure no counting errors take place.

As shown in Fig. 2, the FSM-based logic acts as a filter, only counting motions made after a thoughtful pause. It comes in handy when cutting out slight movements, vibrations or minor shocks.

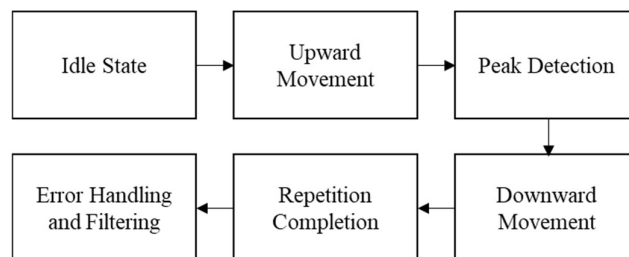


Fig. 2. FSM logic for interpreting motion patterns

After analysing the motion and checking for real repetitions, the ESP32 relays the details across Bluetooth or Wi-Fi according to how it is set up. As a result of this, the number of current repetitions, goals for repetitions and motion-related data can be seen live on a mobile display. Remotely, using the wireless interface can lead to cloud integration for lengthy activity checks, coaching from a distance or exercise games. Each hardware component is placed on a small board with attention given to its electrical connections, signals and strength. The sensor is connected to the ESP32 using I2C pins on the board and the entire system can be powered using USB or a battery source. Fig. 3 displays how the circuit is wired. The arrangement of the circuit allows it to be secured to workout equipment for simple use during workouts.

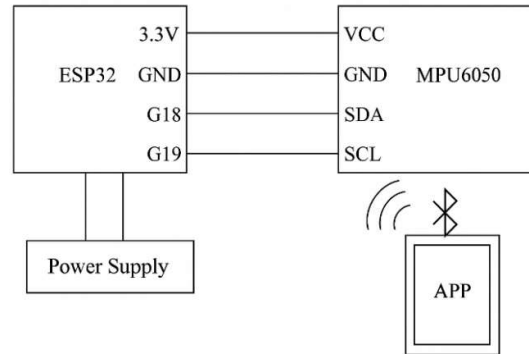


Fig. 3. Proposed Assembly

This modular and responsive methodology enables efficient detection and transmission of exercise repetition data, forming the foundation for a robust fitness tracking solution that balances performance with real-world applicability.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The system was developed successfully with the ESP32 microcontroller; MPU6050 IMU sensor; and mobile application using Bluetooth protocol. This system was designed to detect tilt and motion and mainly used the accelerometer and gyroscope housed in the MPU6050, which the ESP32 was responding wirelessly to and then feeding real-time motion and tilt data through the mobile app interface. The initial tests were performed in static and dynamic motion conditions where the ESP32 would receive data from the MPU6050. The readings were received through the I2C interface and were analyzed to determine accuracy and stability of the data received from the sensor by initiating various tilt angles and motion patterns. The results reported the MPU6050 reading consistently and responding to tilt/motion with little to no noise once calibrated; the data was finally processed, and readings were transmitted through Bluetooth to the mobile application. Once received, the mobile app displayed the readings in real time, allowing for immediate indications of the motion patterns.

To analyze the overall operating system performance, multiple trials were run by changing the orientation and speed of movement of the MPU6050 sensor. The ESP32's GPIO pins were triggered accurately to thresholds indicated in the firmware (for example) the detection of a tilt and/or sudden movement beyond a threshold predetermined motion with certain acceleration. These results demonstrate that a successful hardware and software package for motion detection and wireless data communication has been established. The system was powered via an external power supply connected to the ESP32 and MPU6050, simulating a battery-powered deployment. Power stability was maintained throughout the testing phase, and no significant voltage drops or communication failures were observed.

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This system has provided a solid example of real-time motion and orientation monitoring through use of an ESP32 microcontroller, an MPU6050 sensor and Bluetooth wireless communication. The hardware was manageable in terms of form factor, and energy usage. Motion data acquisition was reliable. The ESP32 was a solid central controller, acquiring data from the MPU6050 using I2C, and sending it to a mobile application via Bluetooth. From testing, it can be concluded that the system was able to detect changes in orientation and motion within the thresholds established. The speed of data acquisition and transmission to the mobile app was sufficient

with minimal delay. The power system was stable, which does reinforce that the developed system is suitable for portable or wearable applications. Overall, the aims of motion detection, data communication, and real-time visualization were achieved. In that regard, it was a prototype suitable for many real-world examples. The current system demonstrates a good starting point for motion and orientation monitoring, however, there are opportunities to further develop the idea particularly to enable real-world applications. For example, addressing dynamic threshold adaptation and utilizing machine learning techniques to enable smart adaptations to sensitivity based on user context or environmental circumstances to improve accuracy and reduce false detection. Integration of cloud connectivity using ESP32's Wifi module could potentially enable real-time data connectivity, storage, or access for longer duration/more extensive monitoring (especially for healthcare or fitness). The mobile application could also be extended to provide visual or audible alerts in the event of sudden or abnormal motion patterns such as falls, enhancing safety for elderly or at-risk users. Furthermore, incorporating a rechargeable battery module and efficient power management would make the device more portable and suitable for wearable applications. Finally, the system could be expanded with additional sensors such as GPS for location tracking, magnetometers for heading detection, or biometric sensors like heart rate monitors, allowing it to evolve into a comprehensive smart health or activity tracking platform.

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