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Instrumentation System for Liquid Drop Impact and Evaporation

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Abstract

//TODO rewriting

Droplet impact and evaporation presents a complex physical process worth investigating not only from a fundamental research perspective but also in its potential for industrial application. However, in order to extract usable data from this small scale, fast phenomenon in the lab producing a droplet of repeatable volume and position as well as accurately track and collect the data (temperature, impact, evaporation) is essential in order to extract reliable and study worthy results. This procedure form the basis of this project. This projects approach is to add motorised automation to droplet dispensing with aims to control for droplet volume, positional variation, contact angle and speed up the procedure and allow for greater flexibility in the experimental process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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1.1 Motivation

The investigation of droplet impact and evaporation is an area of interest and application to various industries. Examples of these include milk powder spray drying, ink jet printing, and applications of evaporative cooling. This project will continue on from a previous instrumentation setup, evaluating its shortcomings, and designing the next generation. This will improve the reliability and usability of the collected data from the previous setup, and introduce methods of automating the process.

Applications of interest

- Spray cooling
- powder (Milk) manufacture
- ink-jet printing
- ...

1.2 Goals

Goal: To characterise behaviour of a droplet impacting and evaporating from a given substrate.

- Increase Repeatability and Reliability of results
- Increase usability of process via automation
- Produce Extendible platform that can be built upon beyond this projects scope

Chapter 2: Background and Related Work

2.1 Droplet Impact & Evaporation

Cover consideration with this kind of instrumentation/experimental measurement system and how it applied to this experimental application.

2.2 Background on Stepper motor control

//TODO more passes for clarity.

This section will cover the background of controlling bipolar stepper motors via a step/direction style driver setup, as its concepts will be mentioned later in the report. This is a focused background on the key considerations and requirements when designing for and operating this specific subset, and by no means applicable to all driving and specific motor choices.

The stepper motors provide precise positioning and are capable of moving their rotor to a specified position and holding that position at a wide range of load torques. This capability makes the stepper motors popular in optics, medical instruments, factory automation, and industrial equipment.

The typical topology of a stepper driving system (based around the step/direction method) consists of a controller, driver, and stepper motor. The controller provides a direction signal and step pulses, while the driver converts these signals into actual electrical power and supplies them to the motor. The stepper motor moves in steps, each step covering one step angle, which can be described as the rotor displacement corresponding to one step pulse [1]. Stepper motors typically have a step size specification (e.g. 1.8° or 200 steps per revolution), which applies to full steps. Step/direction drivers usually provide a 'microstepping' mode which increases the resolution by allowing intermediate step locations, which are achieved by energising the coils with intermediate current levels [2].

The last major consideration in driving steppers is controlling the start-up and stopping speeds for the controller's provided pulse train to the driver. As the motor is a mechanical device in the real world, expecting a perfect impulse response will lead to driving failure. Inertia ratio is critical to stepper motor acceleration [2]. Too great a difference in inertia ratio between system and motor risks missed steps or stalling the coils. So when starting a stepper motor, acceleration and deceleration should happen through pulses to the motor that start slowly and gradually quicken in a process called ramping.

2.3 Other Approaches

//TODO: Go into greater detail to add context in the field of droplet instrumentation.

In literature, there exists a variety of rigs for similar experiments. These were explored to gauge a range of what factors were controlled (and measured) and with what approaches. In summary:

- Controlled environmental factors with basic box [2] or measured factors only [3].
- Controlled for droplet position and volume with hard mounted pump plus needle, but lacks environmental control or automation, and there is no top view camera [4] [5].
- Incorporated stepper motor driven automation, but no environmental control or monitoring [6].
- Full environmental chamber and fixed droplet pump, but single camera, has separate uncontrolled rig for top view [7].

Chapter 3: Initial Evaluation

3.1 Current Experimental Setup

Given that the express purpose of the project is the development of a new version of instrumentation, the first step is an examination of the prior system. This is to identify how it falls short and to determine the areas that the project will focus on.

The experimental method concerns depositing a liquid droplet upon a heated substrate. The data of note is the temperature evolution of the substrate directly under the drop, as well as image data capturing the point of impact and how the droplet changes over the cause of the evaporation.

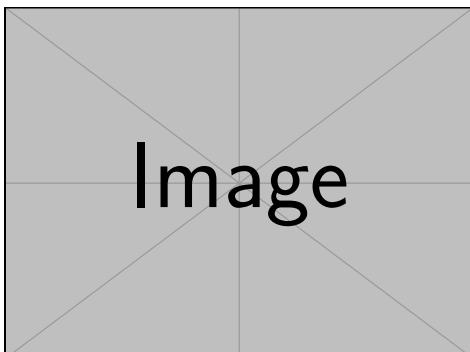


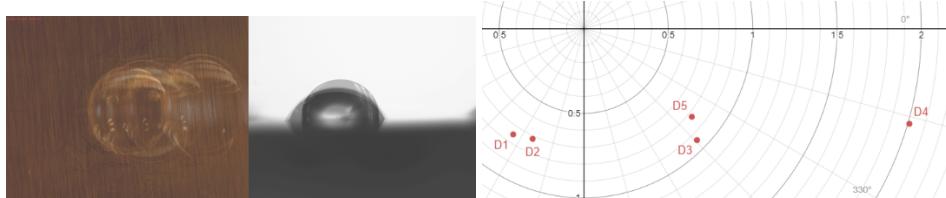
Figure 3.1: Current Experimental Setup (labelled/annotated to be included) a:diagram b:syringe stage

The prior system uses an optical breadboard and micrometer adjustable stages as mounting platforms and positional control. A central stage holds the substrate stack, consisting of a aluminium heat-spreader, Peltier heater, and metallic substrate (copper, stainless steel, etc) with internally mounted thermocouple. To capture the image data, a pair of manual focus cameras are positioned/suspended in profile and top down view and are controlled via a USB connection. The thermocouple is sampled with LabVIEW via a USB DaQ. To dispensing the droplet itself is done by hand using a syringe mounted to another optical stage [3.1:b] with XYZ+R controls. It is rotated above the substrate and pressed to dispense a drop. This would be perfectly fine, however the results this manual process yields had a level of inconsistency. Thus motivating the design of a new system to control for a the experiments variation.

3.2 Repeatability and Reliability

To identify more precisely the drawbacks in the performance of the prior setup and inform the requirements of the project, previously collected data was first analysed.

The data was taken from a series of five droplet runs, and was analysed to quantify the systems repeatability and reliability and to compare the affect of the drop morphology and position with the resulting temperature evolution.

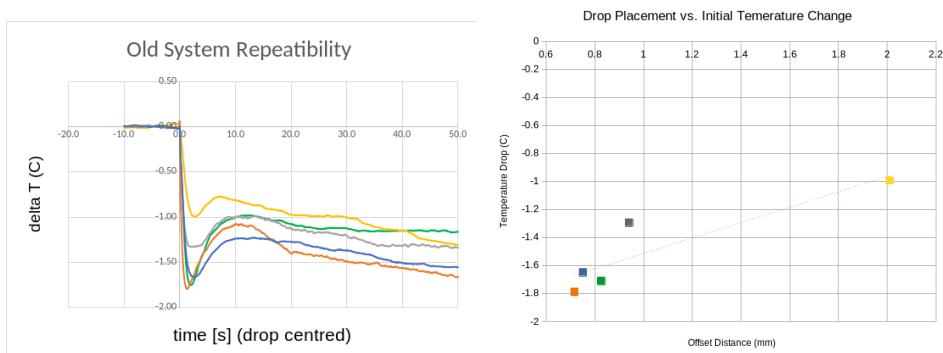


First analysis is the image data. The substrate itself has a mark to represent the position of the thermocouple, this is used as a the main reference to quantify the droplet position. Reference images set calibration at 120.14 pixels/mm and 109.2 pixels/mm for the top down and profile cameras respectively, and was used to measure the droplet centre offset and angle (from reference point) as well as the height, width and contact angles of the droplet on the substrate.

Seen above, the quite substantial positional variation between the runs. Ranging [0.71:2.01]mm offset and [-16:-123]° angle.

$$\frac{1}{6}\pi h(3a^2 + h^2) : a \equiv \text{half width}, h \equiv \text{height} \quad (3.1)$$

From the data extracted from the profile camera (height, width, contact angle) the volume of the droplets could be estimated. The method chosen was of the represent the droplet as a spherical cap and use the above equation 3.1 to compute it.



Droplet	Offset(mm)	Volume(μL)
1	0.7506	16.55
2	0.7164	17.91
3	0.9402	17.89
4	2.0104	17.57
5	0.8258	16.21
Variance	0.2964	0.6288

3.3 Summary

Effector	Likelihood	Effect Strength
Position	HIGH	HIGH
Volume	MODERATE	HIGH
Contact angle*	MODERATE	HIGH
Humidity	LOW	HIGH
Temperature	LOW	HIGH
Pressure	MODERATE	MODERATE

*Contact angle is more a function of the surface cleaning of the substrate, and is only representative of the surface area of contact with the substrate

//TODO rewrite in prog The focus of the project is now twofold. Firstly on the automation of the process to allow for faster, pre-programmed runs to be carried out easier, and secondly to improve on the repeatability and reliability of the results by controlling the procedural factors of the experiment.

An electronic pipette will be used to dispense a precise volume, and motorised stages will be used to provide pre-programmed, repeatable motion. The environmental factors however are not to be ignored, though controlling them is outside of the scope of this project. They will, however, be monitored, and this project will implement data collection of temperature, atmospheric pressure and humidity so these factors can be correlated to any remaining variation in data.

Chapter 4: Design

4.1 Project Specifications and Justifications

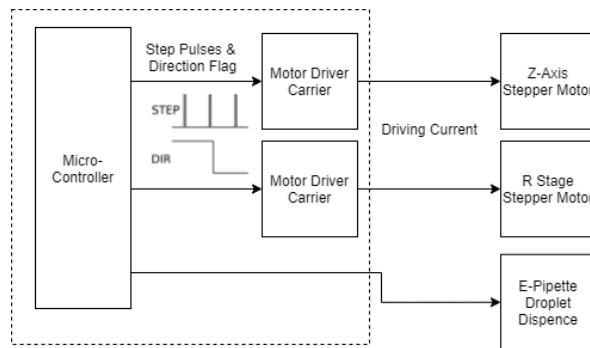
Given the results of the initial evaluation the project can now be constrained. Its main goals are to eliminate volume variation, control for droplet position, enable automation to reduced time between consecutive runs. It will not control, but provide data-logging for the environmental effectors; temperature, humidity, pressure.

From this there is a number of requirements to consider:

- **Mechanical Stability:**
- **Droplet Position Repeatability**
- **Consistent Volume**
- **Process Automation**
- **System Expandability:**

The project will be evaluated on how it meets the above Specifications, its ability to control for volume and positional accuracy and repeatability as well as how it adds/improves automation, provides environmental data and allows extension.

4.2 System Overview



4.3 Mechanical Design

- Discuss requirements for minimising settling time, vibrations, oscillations. overshoot of the pipette motion

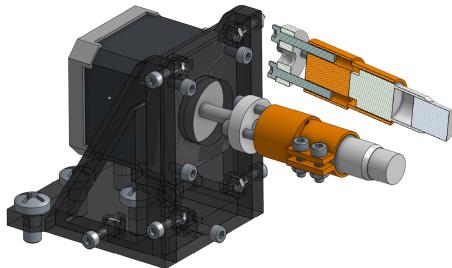
The electronic pipette formfactor is very 'organic', so the clamping mechanism to fit it to the tower plate itself was challenging to design to successfully restrict its rotation and backlash. The base design used to accomplish this was a 3D-printed ring clamp meant to be tightened and fit to the unique form of the pipette body. A variety of ring sizes and gap distance were printed and test fitted. From this I determined that a ring diameter of 32mm and a gap of 6mm fits and deforms to the shape of the pipette. However, there was still some rotation and slip so a notch was cut into the acrylic to slot the pipettes support rest and a second ring clamp attached lower down of the body.

4.3.1 Rotating Pipette Mount

- 3D printed pipette clamp
- Laser cut Tower mounted
- motor interface and stage fastening

4.3.2 Z micrometer Control

- Requirements: micrometer motion/extension as its turn
- Sliding motor shaft to knob required (2 passed)
- How it imposed restrictions on the system (freedom of motion)



4.4 Electronic Design

4.4.1 Motors

The motion required for the motors in this system is to provide rotation about the vertical axis to the mounted pipette, to swing from above the substrate to out of the camera view and over a refill reservoir, as well as continuous rotation to interface the Z axis control for droplet depositing and possible refilling.

Stepper motors allow for both precise position control without the need for a feedback system and are capable of continuous rotation. In comparison, brushed/brushless DC motors require encoders for positional control and servos may do either but not both continuous rotation and positioning.

NEMA17 standard sized steppers were chosen to best fit the dimensions of the XYZ optical stage (60mm plate to 40mm motor frame) with room for fastening hardware. That left two choices for the top R stage motor; full size 38mm high frame or shorter pancake frame. Even through the pancake frame would reduce the overall height of the system, the shaft length available for this motor is less only 7mm and would greatly restrict the mounting options of the tower to the motor. For this reason 2 NEMA17x38mm Stepper motors were chosen.

4.4.2 Motor Driving

The Requirements

To drive the selected stepper motors, discrete step/direction style micro stepping drivers were chosen. This allows for the design to be flexible with its electronics placed to accommodate the experimental needs. Allows for a fairly agnostic choice for controller to supply the control signals, and standardised pinouts allow for requirement flexibility and replacements.

	A4988	DRV8825	STPIN820	DRV8834
Step Res	1/16	1/32	1/256	1/32
Logic Level	3V3/5V	3V3/5V	3V3/5V	3V3/5V
Current Limit	1A	1.5A	0.9A	1.5A
Drive Voltage	8-35V	8.2-45V	7-48V	2.5-10.8

Table 4.1: Comparison of considered drivers

Main consideration for device choice are: micro step resolution, driving current limit (passively cooled), and configuration pinout.

The Choice

The DRV8825 was ultimately chosen.

- High microstepping resolution, lower than the STPIN820 but cheap high resolution driver are prone to step skipping [2]
- Highest driving current as torque requirements are unknown for this design the headroom is nice even if it isn't use, especially as it will run cooler at lower power draw.
- It ranked above the DRV8834 due to its configuration pins (to set microstepping mode) as it provides all 3 pins without the requirement to leave pins floating as a setting thus allowing for full software control.

4.4.3 Volume Control: ePipette

4.4.4 Environmental Monitoring

- What will be measured?
- Power (battery?)
- Sleep the conserve

Chapter 5: Implementation

//TODO rename sections to reflect work done

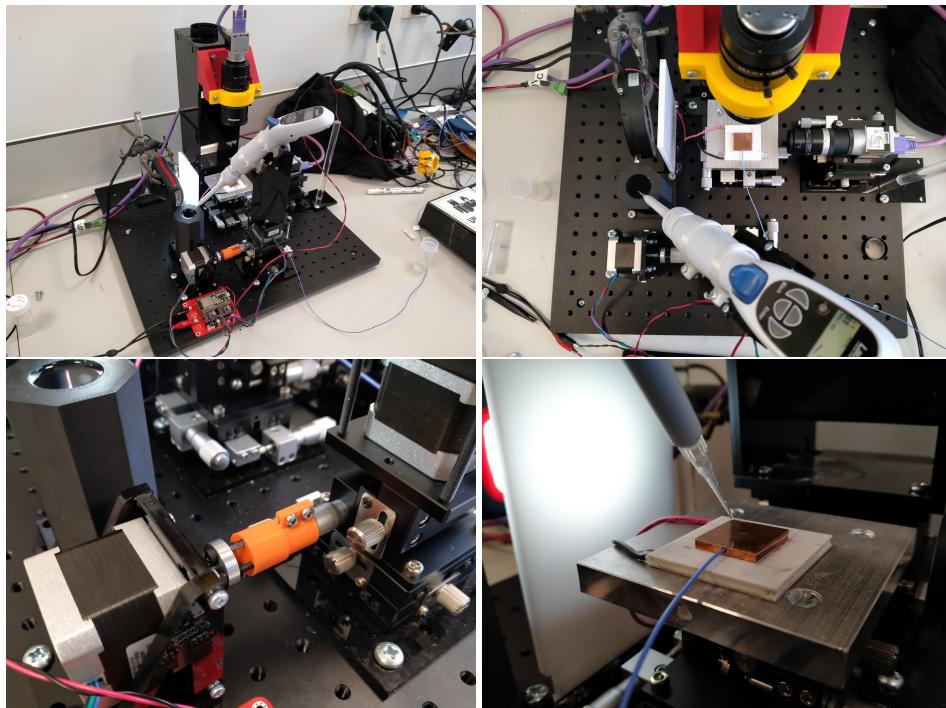
5.1 Mechanical Design

- Go into 3d printing/laser cutting refinement, testing and adjustment
- Tolerance and dimension adjustment
- Noted changed and drawback from design

5.1.1 Rotating Pipette Mount

5.1.2 Z micrometer Control

- Note initially large vibrations as z decreases, caused by loose tolerance, too small coupler. Caused droplet to prematurely detach at larger values.



5.2 Software

//Insert Serial Command Table (maybe only appendix)

5.2.1 Motorised Dispensing Controller

ESP32 based system controller with serial interface for issuing commands. Provides functionality to:

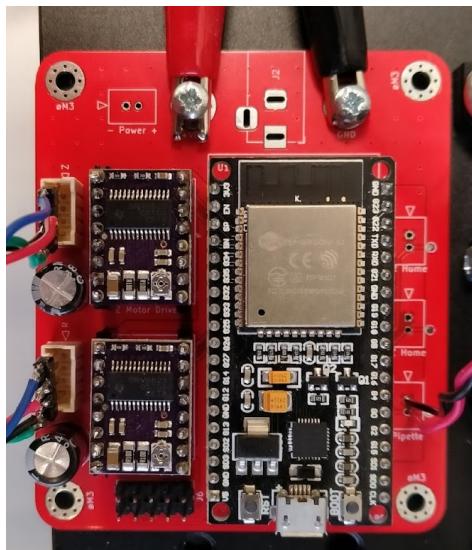
- Motorised stages, height and angular position
- e-Pipette droplet dispensing

5.2.2 Environmental Monitor

- Auto sleeping, button wake upon
- Circuit-Python implementation

5.2.3 LabView Temperature Logger

5.3 Electronic Design



- full circuit
- pcb
- any and all adjustment found and made during implementation

5.3.1 Motor Driving

5.3.2 Setup and Requirements

- characterised skipping issue at 100Hz, 180Hz-200hz in single step
- implemented micro stepping to solve

//TODO rewrite

Driving firmware was implemented on an ESP32 to validate its ability in producing the required pulse train step signal. The controller was required to produce N steps (pulses) at a set average speed, and ramp up and down that pulse speed at the head and tail of that signal.

Set values of 200 steps forward and back, at a speed of 200 steps per second, with max acceleration or 800 steps per second per second:

These pulses were captured on a second microcontroller listening for falling edges to trigger an interrupt routine to record and display that data.

5.3.3 Results

Figure 5.1:a shows a successfully produced signal of 200 pulses with an inferred acceleration at its head/tail. This speed ramping is better illustrated in figure 5.1:b showing the stepping change in pulses per second over the course of the pulse train.

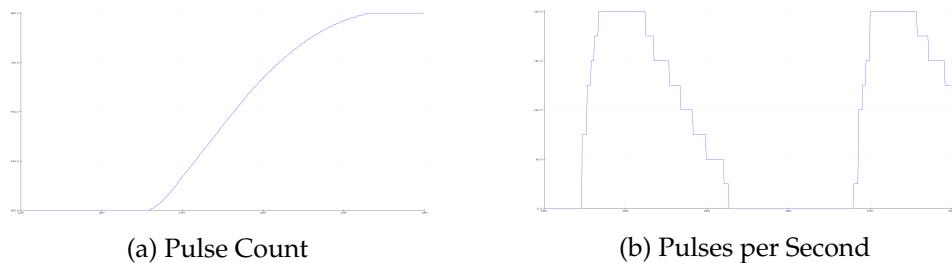
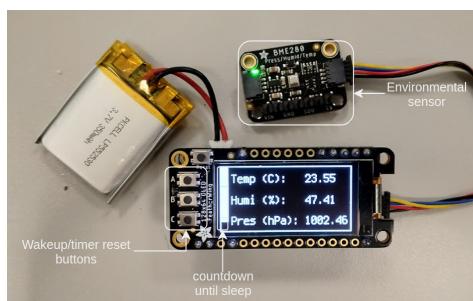


Figure 5.1

5.3.4 Pipette Triggering

//TODO

5.3.5 Environmental Monitoring



Chapter 6: Evaluation

6.1 Mechanical Stability

Perform Motor driving parameter sweep to optimise mechanical performance according to requirements; of minimising pipette tip overshoot and settling time.

6.1.1 Procedure

- Position tip at -1/4 revolution before zero point
- Set Speed/acceleration values
- Swing to zero position
- Repeat for value sleep=1rev/s, acc=1/rev/s/s → speed=2rev/s, acc=10/rev/s/s
- Note: acceleration is the ramp down at end/start of motion so is what we care most about
- Camera captured motion

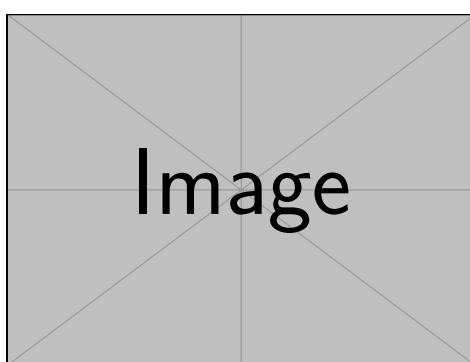
6.1.2 Results

```
//insert generated figures of tip position  
//generated trend lines/aggregated data (settle, overshoot) from data.
```

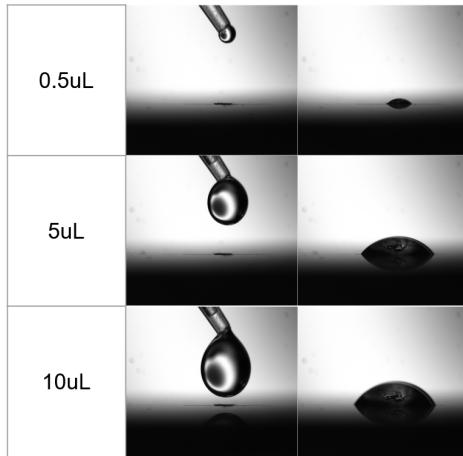
6.2 Droplet Volume

Something the previous system could not achieve was dispensing a variety of volumes. Use e-pipettes programmable volume to investigate the limits of this project.

- How large a droplet can be held on to? (prelim: 8uL)



- How large (over above) can reliably self release (w/out touch down)
- How small a droplet can be dispensed (e-pipette has draw-back).



6.3 Repeatability and Reliability

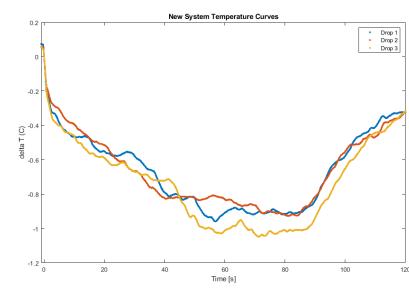
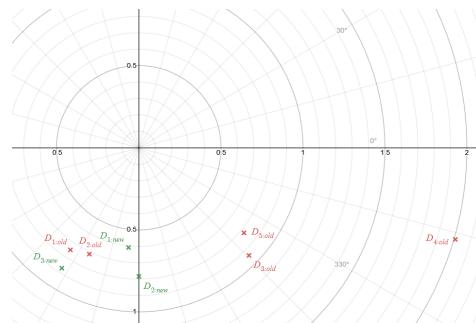
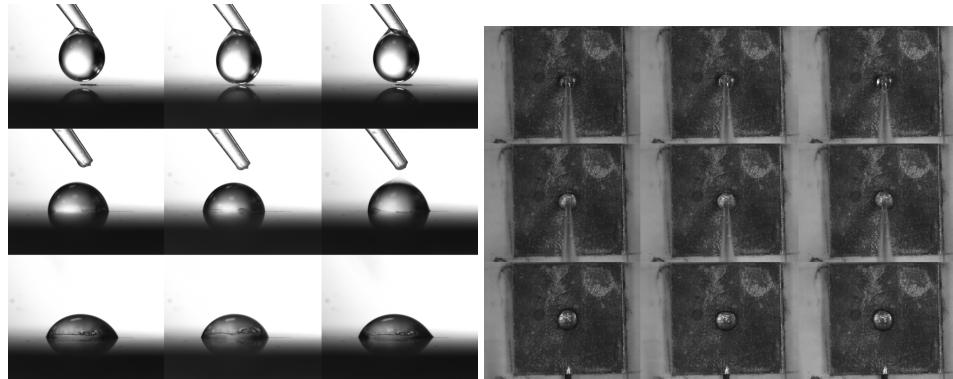
This section aims to produce the main set of comparable results for evaluating the projects produced system against the output of the previous setup. Thus justifying the success of one of main goals.

6.3.1 Procedure

- **Initial Setup:** Roughly Position substrate stage, reservoir platform and note angular positions as well as vertical clearance requirements.
- **Zero System:** Using overhead camera precisely position pipette tip above substrate centre
- **Data Acquisition:** Initialise cameras, collect pixel:mm calibration data for analysis, initial LabView temperature logger, and environmental monitor noted. Info: temperature data rate, camera frame rate
- **Automated Sequence:** Via the serial link, enter the procedures command sequence to represent → lower, draw up fluid, raise, position over substrate, dispense, lower, raise, clear camera view. With appropriate delays.
- **Capture:** Begin data collection and automated dispense.
- **Repeat:** Minimum of 5 times. Each time carefully cleaning substrate surface to minimised up measured factors.

6.3.2 Analysis and Results

To show the system successfully increases the consistency of droplet position and investigate whether this supports the hypothesis that this resulted in better temperature consistency.



Chapter 7: Conclusions and Future Work

Future work should not just be a list of things that you would have done if you had a little more time. Talk about new things that are possible now that you have finished your project. What projects could an ENGR489 student tackle next year if they started from your end point?

7.1 Conclusion

7.2 Future Work

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