# Enhancing Outbound Logistics Performance through Drone-Assisted Environmental Sensing and Intelligent Less-Container-Load (LCL) Optimization

Ts. Zety Shakila Binti Mohd Yusof[1, a *], Hasnieza Bt Mokhtar[2,b] and Suhaina Binti Mohamed Zaki[3,c]

[1-2]Politeknik Seberang Perai, Malaysia [3]Kolej Komuniti Pasir Gudang, Malaysia

[a]zetyshakila@psp.edu.my, [b]hasnieza@psp.edu.my, [c]suhaina@kkpg.edu.my

**Abstract.** Less-Container-Load (LCL) outbound logistics operations are frequently limited by ineffective container space use, restricted environmental visibility, and manual decision-making. These difficulties result in longer loading times, more handling errors and less-than-ideal logistical performance. To facilitate real-time decision-making in LCL operations, this study suggests a drone-enabled intelligent outbound logistics system that combines automated package profiling, simulation-based container loading and environmental sensing. Before allocating containers, the suggested solution uses unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to record the temperature and humidity levels surrounding loading environments. These measurements are then compared to specified logistics parameters. To create effective LCL loading configurations, package parameters including size, weight and quantity are digitally profiled and processed through a simulation-based optimization module. To synchronize digital logistics documentation with physical package handling, barcode-enabled synchronization is integrated. In comparison to traditional outbound loading methods, a scenario-based logistics simulation shows increased cargo traceability, decreased manual dependency and better container space utilization. By developing an integrated digital logistics framework that combines intelligent simulation and drone-based sensing to improve operational efficiency and decision support in outbound logistics systems, this research project contributes to the depth of knowledge on logistics management.

**Keywords:** Outbound logistics; Less-container-load (LCL); Drone-enabled logistics; Intelligent logistics systems; Container space optimization; Digital supply chains


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## 1 Introduction

Outbound logistics is essential to assess supply chain agility, cost efficiency and service reliability considering high shipment uncertainty and consolidation pressure. One such example is Less-Container-Load (LCL) logistics, where several consignments from different shippers are grouped together in the same container. Although LCL operations are economically favourable, they introduce high level of operational complexities including disintegrated decision-making, inefficient utilization of space and increased possibility of handling errors [1][2].

Although the situation of outbound container loading and package sorting has been improved with the assistance of WMS (warehouse management system) and digital logistics platforms, planning decisions are still largely dependent on operator experience. Loading plans on paper; visual inspection of cargo condition and several warehouse ongoing checks are part of the traditional ones. As reported in [3], such manual procedures are cumbersome, error-prone performed by human and insufficient for handling dynamically different shipment situations when environmental constraints, such as temperature or humidity must be maintained to ensure the integrity of the cargo.

The growing use of Industry 4.0 technologies led researchers and practitioners in logistics to explore levels of warehouse and transportation operations automation, sensing technology deployment and intelligent decision-support systems developments. In [4] and [5], it is demonstrated that UAVs can be used to perform warehouse surveillance, barcode scanning and inventory taking. At the same time, container loading and space packing problem are studied in a few simulation-based models and heuristic methods to account for contradiction between weight distribution balance and volume utilization maximization [6].

Nevertheless, most of the existing related works focus on the technical aspects independently. Most literature around UAV-based logistics focuses on indoor navigation and inventory observation, however, few studies are done to address outdoor container loading selection or cargo consolidation approach. As a second example, algorithms in container loading optimization rarely consider operational uncertainties and fails to incorporate real time environmental conditions during the loading process.

Furthermore, the digital link between physical freight handling and logistics paperwork remains broken. RFID and barcode technology is often used for tracking, but its use focuses on identification and not closing the operation circuit in view of loading decision, verification of shipment or creation of delivery order [7]. This gap restricts the instantaneous decision making and the advantages to be exploited by digitalization of logistics.

This paper proposes a drone based intelligent outbound logistics system integrating automatic package synchronization, simulation-based LCL container optimization and ambient sensing towards solving these limitations. The proposed framework enhances situational awareness before container loading stage through UAV-based real-time temperature and humidity monitoring. _Package attributes such as size, weight and number are digitally profiled and passed through a simulation engine to establish ideal LCL loading mixes. Barcode-based syncing reduces manual intervention and provides improved traceability by integrating digital logistics records with physical package handling.

## 2 Literature Review

The outbound logistics is the distribution of goods from a company to end-users, also known as customer-facing logistics. As mentioned in [1][2], outbound logistics complexity for LCL operation is substantially inflamed by the shipment diversity of consignments, container space sharing and close scheduling constraints between several consignments. Previous studies indicate that outbound logistics inefficiencies are typically triggered by manual planning, fragmented information and lack of real-time visibility [3][7]. Interestingly, loading decisions are often based on static shipment lists and supervisors experience with the crate loading, which reduces agility and increases the chance of misplacement, re-handling of material within a terminal as well as underutilizing container space. These challenges serve to demonstrate the need for decision support tools that enhance visibility, coordination and optimisation in outbound logistics especially under LCL conditions.

Managing outbound container loading and shipment consolidation when compared to inbound logistics, inventory management or order picking is relatively little considered topics in this genre of literature that is now in print [3]. Many logistics centres still rely on static placement plans which have been precompiled by a warehouse manager for outbound loading decisions. Forklift drivers are also used in loading the cargo into containers and they would load as directed by print blueprints or verbal directions, often times with no visual feedback of environmental status or physical clearance. There are significant risks of misplacement, underutilisation of space and non-compliance with handling regulations inherent in such methods, particularly where substantial environmental considerations apply to the goods being handled. Such barriers hinder visibility, reducing operational visibility and impacting outbound logistics performance as more time-critical and service-driven logistics networks emerge.

It is just within recent years that UAVs became a popular research topic in academia due to their ability to enhance logistics visibility and automation. Previous studies have reported UAV applications in inventory auditing, barcode scanning, indoor navigation and warehouse surveillance [4][8]. The mobility, flexibility and the capability to acquire real-time data from elevated or hard-to-reach locations fit for dynamic warehouse operation can be implemented by UAVs. However, in contrast to these benefits, the UAV logistics research is being conducted as an exploratory or functional level. Most of the studies concentrate on inventory accuracy or tracking efficiency, and little of them extend UAV functionalities to aid in outbound decision making nor container stacking optimization. In addition, environmental sensing (temperature, humidity) is seldom included in a UAV-based logistic solutions, even though it adds value for cargo integrity and compliance. This presents an opportunity to reposition UAVs as active data collecting entities in intelligent outbound logistics systems as opposed to passive monitoring instruments.

Container loading and trawling problems have been well studied in operations research. There are empirical formula, machine learning and modelling approaches based on different simulation's methods to achieve the maximization of volume utilization with load stability [6][9]. Such analyses are computationally beneficial in deriving useful information; however they usually depend on static predetermined input data such as fixed package size and existed loading constraints. From the point of view of a logistics manager, this assumption is too static to be relevant with real-world LCL operations in which profiles of shipments, environmental and loading priorities can change hectically. In addition, a lack of integration with real-time operational data and execution systems has made the class of container loading models less useful in practice. This lack emphasizes the need to integrate container loading optimization into digitally enabled outbound logistics workflows that consider operational variations and environmental limitations.

The traceability is one of the most important factors in successful logistics management, because it supports verification, responsibility and coordination among supply chain parties [7]. Barcode, as the major solution to connect physical items with their digital information. Nevertheless, it is commonly known that the traceability system is used scarcely as passive identification tools and not as a real-time data cooperation among active choices in production and documentation.

## 3 Research Methodology and System Design

This present research is built on a conceptual design-oriented approach and scenario-based analysis, which compare with the work on logistics management in digital enabled entire operation systems [7][10]. In contrast to an empirical device on the level of companies, this paper aims at constructing and demonstrating a holistically designed outwards logistics system which erases white spots in LCL performance by using digitalization and intelligent decision support.

The proposed system design employs a cyber-physical logistics prospective, and real-world outbound logistics activities are digitally mapped, tracked and optimised by interconnected technical components. As depicted in the conceptual framework, the system consists of four key elements – (1) drone-enabled environmental sensing; (2) digital package profiling; (3) simulation-based LCL container optimisation and operation by sync through barcode enabled documentation. It should be noted that it is meant as an integrated decision-support system and not individual technologies.

To demonstrate the feasibility of the proposed system, a realistic case is designed: A case study for outbound logistics based on a specific scenario typical to an LCL warehouse is set up. In the situation, many shipments of different sizes and handling requirements are prepared for shipment out-of-doors in the same container. Before container assignment, a drone containing environmental sensors (temperature and humidity) measures the temperature and humidity of the loading environment. Simulated, package-specific size dimensions of the packages in transit are also digitally profiled and stored within the system meanwhile.

A simulation-optimization component takes the profiled data as input and generates a LCL load plan with maximum contiguity for container loading that does not compromise its operational feasibility. The instructions are transmitted to warehouse staff through a digital interface, replacing the conventional paper-based load plan. Real-time receipt validation via barcode confirms physical handling of packages with digital shipping details and generates delivery paperwork automatically while tracking actions.

This methodological choice allows to investigate how integrated sensing, optimization and synchronization mechanisms impact on the performance of outbound logistics. The findings provide theoretical understanding of intelligent outbound logistics systems and managerial implications for incorporating digital decision- support tools in LCL container level operations through the design of a system that considers an actual operational scenario.

## 4 Conceptual Framework

The presented conceptual framework sees drone-based environmental sensing as a prerequisite for the informed outbound logistics decision making. To achieve this, there are three parts of a weighted sum-based optimisation algorithm the real time environmental data and shipping package characteristic values shall be sent to: Simulation driven LCL optimisation module. These setups are enabled by barcode-based synchronization, linking packages' physical handling to its digital logistical documentation. Together, these strategies enhance outbound logistics performance through increased container utilization, reduced manual dependence and better traceability.

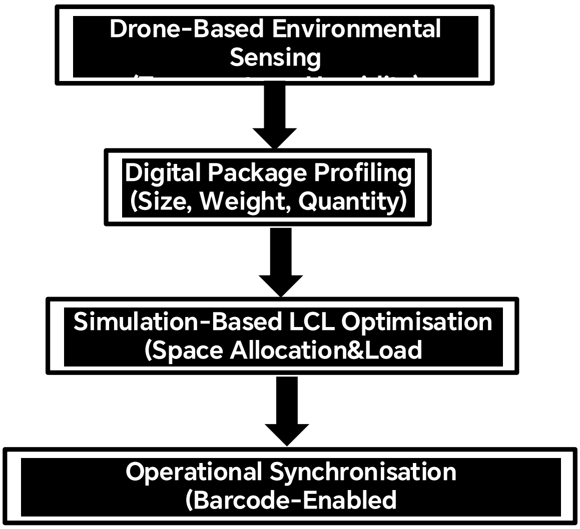


**Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework of drone-enabled intelligent outbound logistics**

The following elements are developed according to:

*Concept 1: Drone-enabled environmental sensing improves outbound logistics decision-making by providing real-time view into loading circumstances.*

Decisions about outbound logistics depend mostly on the current availability of operational data. Data processing theory asserts that an organization functions effectively when its information processing capacity matches the uncertainty of the operational environment. Noisy environn1ents, limited time of arrival and varying load conditions all add to the uncertainty in LCL operations.

Drone-based environmental awareness supports better decision-making through real-time, unbiased visibility of temperature and humidity in loading bays. Data acquisition through drone continues throughout the year and data enters directly into the logistics system instead of manual inspection, which is not uniform but more subjective. Enhanced visibility allows warehouse managers to take preventative action and make fact-based decisions, for example choosing to change loading sequences or put off container allocation where conditions are beyond acceptable thresholds." Accordingly, decision quality is enhanced while risks of damaged shipments or non-compliance are reduced.

*Concept 2: Digital package profiling improves the effectiveness of simulation-based LCL container optimization.*

The quality and quantity of the input refers to the importance of simulation support models in optimization. Physical package characteristics such as size, weight, volume number and handling requirements are digitalized into structured machine-readable data using a digital profiling of the package. This technique helps in refining the data quality and reduces fluctuations during optimization.

In LCL cases where several items need to be loaded together, the package information is often insufficient or inaccurate, and one would make overly conservative or wasteful decisions. Applying digital package profiling allows the optimization module to more accurately investigate various loading configurations. It improves the simulate results, makes the space utilize better, weight distribute in equilibrium and decrease the conflict because of loads. Thus, digital profiling is a key enabler in enhancement to the LCL optimization based on simulation.

*Concept 3: Simulation-based LCL optimization improves outbound logistics performance by increasing container space utilization and loading efficiency.*

Logistics professionals can virtually test multiple container loading arrangements before go-live, using simulation-based optimization. This feature is of specific interest in LCL logistics where manual planning might be guided by estimations and operator experience.

The optimisation module determines possible triplets based on various loading cases that maximise the use of container space and are operationally feasible. More effective use of space also reduces the number of containers required, drives down transport costs and enhances load consolidation efficiency. At the same time, clear loading arrangements save handling effort and prevent from loading mistakes and save loading time. Thus LCL optimization promoted from a simulation perspective directly enhances the performance of outbound logistics and particularly in efficiency and resource utilization.

*Concept 4: Barcode-enabled verification improves the correlation between optimization results and outbound logistics performance.*

Optimization results cannot guarantee performance benefits until they are executed successfully. Operational synchronization ensures the right number of planned loading spaces on the empty container is realized accurately.

This synchronization is heavily facilitated by barcode-embedded verification to interlink digital and material logistics records of the packages. As the pallets are being built, the system automatically validates the identity, position and sequence of the packages as they are scanned. This decreases discrepancies between forecasted and actual loads, reduces documentation errors and provides the ability to correct on-the-spot, when variances occur. Operational synchronization enhances the performance gains of simulation based LCL optimization with better synchronization between optimized results and implementation.

*Concept 5: Integrating sensing, optimization, and synchronization methods improves outbound logistics performance for LCL operations.*

The technical factors affect the performance of the outbound logistics operations in isolation but with link to each other they create synergy impacts. Operational synchronization ensures precise execution, while simulation-based optimization enhances the planning efficiency and environmental sensing generates high-quality decision input.

The outgoing logistics performance is not dependent on single actions but more a gathering of interdependent processes. The integration of sensing, optimising and synchronising effectuates a complete logistics system where the real time information (data) is used directly to plan and planning feeds execution while execution back-loops into the records. All above integration jointly enhance traceability, efficiency and reliability in one time thus it is very useful for dealing with the complexities and uncertainties in LCL operations.

## 5 Discussion

Outbound logistics performance is thus influenced by the integrated sensing, optimization and synchronization processes of an intelligent logistics system, as proposed in this study's conceptual model.

The model is a process orientated one where data propagate in real time from the environmental perception to decisions, actions and performance results (as Combining Digital Technologies are not seen as independent enablers).

The following dialogue links the study propositions with appropriate casual paths (arrows), examining how and why these mechanisms work together to enhance outbound logistics performance in Less-Container-Load (LCL) operations.

### 5.1 Research Propositions

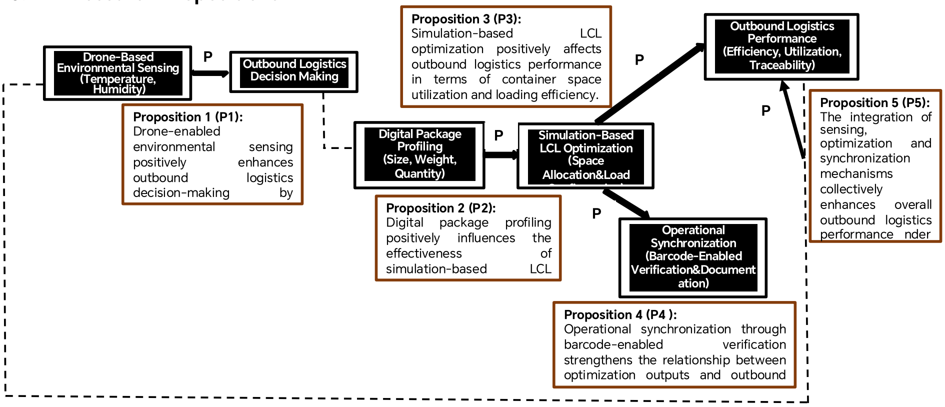


**Figure 2: Aligning research propositions to the conceptual framework of drone-enabled intelligent outbound logistics**

*Proposition 1 (P1):*

This is the first arrow in the proposition framework, joining drone-enabled environmental sensing to better decision-making regarding outbound logistics. This association is premised on information processing theory, which suggests that timely and accurate information will improve the quality of decision-making by decreasing environmental uncertainty [11].

In the system we design, drones function as mobile sensing agents for recording temperature and humidity when loading occurs. The real, on-the-ground view enables logistics planners to examine the practicalities of loading, create shipping priorities and make pre-execution corrections. Drone-based sensing helps to enhance the information basis of outbound logistics decisions, by substituting periodical and subjective manual checks and facilitating more robust response generation and risk mitigation.

*Proposition 2 (P2):*

Proposition 2 is the link between digital package profiling to simulation-based LCL container optimisation. The tuning effectiveness of optimization is thus also this connection depends on the quality of input data. As indicated in [6], the accuracy of tools that analyze and simulate the logistics process is limited to incomplete or wrong transportation data.

In digital package profiling, physical shipment characteristics such as dimension, weight and unit count are transformed into structured system accessible data. Because of such a structured input, the simulation system is capable to more reliably evaluate different loading situations and so also space availability as well as load viability. Thus, digital profiling acts as a facilitating tool for the enhancing of stability and reliability of LCL optimization solutions.

*Proposition 3 (P3):*

Proposition 3 relates simulation-based LCL optimisation with outbound logistics performance. Simulation-based planning has been proved to improve the efficiency through enabling decision-makers to design various arrangements before actual implementation, as stated in the previous work [9].

Performance attributes, such as container space utilization and vehicle loading efficiency are greatly influenced by optimization results of the framework. The simulation-based optimization helps to save time and cost by identifying the highly utilized loading configurations and reducing trial-and-error during execution. This is highlighting the importance of intelligent planning tools to translate digital insights into performance improvement.

*Proposition 4 (P4):*

Operational synchronization with barcode-enabled verification strengthens the link between optimization outputs and outbound logistics performance (Proposition 4, moderating arrow in the framework). We will make a loose connection between these two approaches through the well-known implementation gap in logistics systems, i.e. where apparent benefits of planning and actual realisation of such benefit does not match and are usually ignored at the practical level [7].

Barcode-based synchronisation links the physical package handling systems with digital data in real time to ensure that the best loading plans are carried out as planned down to the letter. The immediate detection of departure from the known configuration is used to perform correction therefrom. This synchronization reduces implementation errors, documentation cycle times and the gap between planning and execution, which also increases the performance impact of the optimization results.

*Proposition 5 (P5):*

The final arrow in the framework that serves as an assessment of the aggregate effects of integrated sensing, optimization, and synchronization devices on outbound logistics performance links to Proposition 5. This connection is found in [12] and is a system theory standpoint that performance as the integration of interdependent functions but not individual capabilities.

The closed-loop architecture enables on-line replanning from sensing through optimization and control by tightly integrating drone-enabled sensing, simulation-based prediction and optimization and through operational synchronization. By having all these functionalities, integration brings efficiency, reliability and traceability to the table when faced with the elemental complexity of LCL operations. In comparison with fragmented types of digital innovation, smart logistics systems would outperform in outbound logistics scenarios, thanks to the synergistic impact of integration.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper introduces an intelligent outbound logistics system using drones, intended to solve the operational problems that exist in LCL (Less-Container-Load) logistics. With the integration of drone-borne environmental sensing, digital package profiling, simulation-based container optimization and barcode-enabled operational synchronization, the presented framework realizes a unified decision-support system for outbound logistics planning and execution. Conceptual analysis results show that integrating real-time environmental visibility with simulation-based planning can bring about remarkable performance improvement on outbound container space utilization, manual dependency and the traceability of cargo during transportation.

In the theoretical perspective, our study contributes to the current literature of logistics management that emphasizes on single digital technologies by broadening to an integrated cyber-physical logistics system. In contrast to previous work where UAV deployment, container optimization or traceability systems are considered as the isolated implementations, we analyze synergistic performance benefits of integrating all solutions. Based on the information processing theory and systems theory, this conceptual model bridges real-time data acquisition, intelligent planning and coordinated execution to show how they jointly enhance LCL outbound logistics performance.

From a practical point of view, what is presented here enables logistics managers to improve outbound decisions in a structured manner without just depending on an operator's experience or static loading plans. The framework reveals how emerging Industry 4.0 technologies can be implemented in current logistics workflows for flexible, data-oriented and traceable outbound logistics processes. While the study is of a conceptual nature, it provides also practitioners with an excellent basis for upgrading, digitally, outbound logistics in complicated consolidation setups.

### 6.1 Future Work

Although the study provides conceptual and system-level groundwork for drone-enable intelligent outbound logistics, there are several research opportunities that exist. First, empirical validation from pilot applications or controlled experiments in the real warehouse contexts would increase the practical relevance of the proposed framework. To evaluate the effectiveness of the overall system under operating conditions, quantitative performance measures such as reduction in loading time, target container utilization rate, error frequency and cost saving could be calculated.

Second, the optimization aspect can be developed further by employing machine or adaptive learning algorithms based on historical loading and weather patterns. Consequently, when adapations could enable a system to change loading strategies over time in response to these dynamic changes, even the instances of large diversity in LCL scenarios highly would become more responsive. Furthermore, real-time risk indicators (e.g., vibration, shock or airflow conditions) might be incorporated in the system in order to generalize its applicability also for sensitive or high-value goods.

Finally, future works may investigate the scalability and interoperability aspects such as integration of the proposed framework with an enterprise-level logistics platform like WMS or TMS. Exploration of organizational, regulatory and human-technology interaction considerations would also be beneficial in facilitating widespread adoption. Overall, these research streams would contribute to the development of intelligent, resilient and fully digitalised outbound logistics systems in line with digital transformation targets for supply chains.

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