



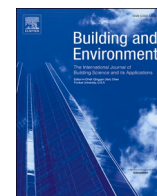
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Ventilation strategies and indoor air quality in Swedish primary school classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the effects of ventilation strategies on indoor air quality (IAQ) in schools. Measurements of thermal environment and IAQ were performed over 5 school days in 45 primary school classrooms in Gothenburg, Sweden, grouped into three categories according to their ventilation system: category A) natural or exhaust ventilation, or automated window opening; category B) balanced mechanical ventilation systems with constant air volume (CAV) and category C) balanced mechanical ventilation systems with variable air volume (VAV). The classrooms performed equally well with respect to temperature and relative humidity regardless of the ventilation system. The concentrations of the air pollutants in all classrooms were generally below the respective guideline values. The concentrations of CO₂, formaldehyde, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5} were lower in the B and C category classrooms with higher ventilation rates than in the A category classrooms. Indoor Air Pollution Index integrating concentrations of multiple pollutants was significantly higher the A category classrooms, reflecting poorer IAQ. Majority of the classrooms had lower ventilation rates than the Swedish ventilation requirements. The periodically reduced ventilation rates in the classrooms with VAV systems did not lead to substantial increase in the measured indoor pollutant concentrations.

1. Introduction

Children spend substantial part of their day in school buildings. Moreover, they are a population group, which is especially sensitive to environmental pollution due to the immaturity of their immune system [1]. It is thus important to ensure that the environments where they spend substantial time do not pose risks to their health and well-being. The thermal environment is relevant for the children's well-being and learning [2–4]. Indoor air with concentrations of hazardous pollutants below permissible levels also contributes to health and satisfaction of school children as well as to their performance of schoolwork and learning [5–7]. Yet, many school buildings experience various problems with thermal environment and indoor air quality [8,9]. A report from the Public Health Agency of Sweden showed that 15% of the Swedish schools had 'poor' or 'rather poor' IAQ [10].

Good IAQ can be achieved by means of ventilation. The primary function of ventilation is to remove or dilute pollutants in the air emitted by building materials, building occupants themselves and activities performed indoors. International and national standards and legal requirements exist for ventilation rates in various indoor environments [11–13]. Concentration of CO₂ is typically used as an indicator for ventilation adequacy and IAQ in the absence of other indicators for IAQ [14]. Low ventilation rates and high CO₂ concentrations belong to the most often reported problems in school buildings, particularly in buildings ventilated naturally [5,15–17]. The use of mechanical ventilation usually results in higher ventilation rates and lower CO₂ concentrations [18–20]. However, correlations between CO₂ concentration and other pollutants such as benzene or formaldehyde are generally weak [21]. Therefore, low CO₂ concentration does not always indicate good IAQ; other indicators are needed.

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An extensive review by Salthammer et al. [22] concluded that the challenges of ensuring high quality environments in school buildings partly lie in the absence of legally binding limit values for the majority of indoor air pollutants. Recommended guideline values exist for some of them such as particles (PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}), inorganic air pollutants nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ozone [23], formaldehyde [24] and total volatile organic compounds (TVOC) [25]. In 2021, WHO published updated global air quality guidelines, recommended for both ambient and indoor air, among others for particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), ozone and nitrogen dioxide [26].

Numerous studies measured various thermal parameters and air pollutants in schools. The studies with larger number of investigated schools focused on a single [27, 28, 29, 30] or a few parameters [7, 15, 19, 21, 31] while studies with smaller samples of schools tend to measure more parameters [32, 33]. One study provides typical values for multiple indoor environmental parameters in schools across Europe [34]. Other studied parameters relevant in school buildings are often related to various building characteristics including the type of ventilation system (natural, mechanical-exhaust only, mechanical -balanced) [20], energy performance (low-energy schools) [18], location (urban, industrial, rural) [35], construction period, or to the occupants (children's age [15], exposure routes [30], and health and well-being [30, 36, 37]). Parameters characterizing IAQ and thermal environment in school buildings have been shown to be related to several parameters characterizing the buildings or their occupants [27, 28, 30, 34].

In the present work, we investigate the impact of three ventilation strategies in primary school classrooms on thermal environment, indoor air quality and their perception by school children as assessed in a questionnaire survey. Results from the questionnaire survey and their associations with the measured indoor air quality indicators will be presented in a separate publication. The study contributes to existing knowledge by combining the assessment of measured and perceived indoor environmental parameters and the comparison of various ventilation strategies in a comprehensive way. The specific objectives of this article are 1) to evaluate the effect of ventilation strategies on thermal conditions and levels of individual indoor air pollutants, and 2) to calculate an aggregated indoor environmental index reflecting the measured conditions in the classrooms and explore its dependence on ventilation strategy.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Schools

The school buildings were selected in cooperation with the property manager of primary schools in Gothenburg - Lokalförvaltningen (LF) located on the west coast in southern Sweden. The primary selection criteria for school buildings were the ventilation system used in the building and the year of construction.

The selected buildings were grouped into three categories named as

category A, B or C, depending on the primary ventilation system and the type of system control used in the building (Table 1). The systems labelled as category A included natural ventilation, exhaust ventilation and automated window opening system. The common feature of these systems is that the outdoor air supplied indoors is untreated. The system labelled as category B was balanced mechanical ventilation with constant air volume (CAV) during daytime. The system labelled as category C included balanced mechanical ventilation with variable air volume (VAV). Neither the CAV nor the VAV systems have any recirculation of air. Instead, energy is recovered from the extract air to the supply air by means of a heat exchanger, typically a rotary heat exchanger (heat wheel) or a cross flow plate heat exchanger. This is the normal design of ventilation systems in Swedish schools and offices. Air recirculation is practically never used in such systems. Thus, the air supplied to the indoor environment is 100% conditioned and filtered outdoor air. Consequently, the room air was not filtered at all in any of the studied classrooms.

Typically, the ventilation systems in both category B and category C have been designed to meet the requirements set by the Swedish Work Environment Authority [38]. This requirement is based on the floor area and the number of occupants present (teachers and children), and it amounts to 7 L/s per person + 0.35 L/s per m². A typical classroom size is 60 m² with a ceiling height of 2.7 m. As an example, if such a classroom is intended to an occupancy of 20 people the ventilation rate requirement corresponds to an air change rate (ACR) of about 3.6 air changes per hour (h⁻¹). Many of the category A buildings are older than the legislative requirement described above. They were designed to rely on frequent breaks in combination with window airing.

In category C the ventilation rate is controlled with respect to the room temperature. The heating system is controlled by controlling the radiator supply temperature based on the outdoor temperature and by thermostatically controlled valves in the radiator system. The set-point for the heating system is typically 20 °C. Thus, no heat will be supplied through the radiators when the room temperature is higher than 20 °C. At room temperatures below 21 °C, the ventilation rate is at its minimum. The minimum value varies between schools, but typically it corresponds to about 0.35 L/s per m² floor area. When the room temperature increases above 21 °C, the ventilation rate increases. The ventilation rate is also controlled in order to limit the indoor carbon dioxide concentration. The set-point was typically chosen by school operators to be 1500 ppm, higher than suggested by most guidelines. For this reason, and due to normally lower CO₂ concentrations, the control with respect to CO₂ was rarely active in the classrooms.

The mechanical ventilation systems, both category B and C, are typically equipped with supply air filtration corresponding to a class around ISO ePM1 50% (class F7 according to the previous filter standard). According to REHVA Guidebook 11 [39] filters of this class can be expected to remove PM_{2.5} particles with an efficiency of roughly 70%. The corresponding value for particles of the PM₁₀ fraction is 90%. The applied maintenance strategy comprises annual replacement of the

Table 1
Categorization of the investigated classrooms according to ventilation system type.

Ventilation system category	Ventilation strategy	No. of school buildings	No. of classrooms	Age of the school building ^a	Classroom floor area ^a	Classroom volume ^a	Number of children ^a	Floor area per child ^a	Classroom volume per child ^a
				(years)	(m ²)	(m ³)		(m ²)	(m ³)
A	Natural ventilation, exhaust ventilation, automated window opening	7	14	107 ± 26	56 ± 10	191 ± 32	22 ± 3	2.7 ± 0.7	9.2 ± 2.1
B	Balanced supply-exhaust with constant air volume	8	15	61 ± 40	59 ± 6	175 ± 28	21 ± 3	2.8 ± 0.7	8.5 ± 2.2
C	Balanced supply-exhaust with variable air volume	8	16	38 ± 29	54 ± 6	157 ± 16	21 ± 4	2.7 ± 0.5	7.8 ± 1.6

^a The entries in the table are average ± standard deviation.

filters. Thus, the filters in the different schools investigated in this study were likely at different stages of their service life, but none of them were older than one year. No additional air cleaning devices were installed in the classrooms.

In each school building two classrooms were selected where the measurements were performed except for one building where only one classroom was available. The final sample consisted of 45 classrooms in 23 school buildings with an even distribution of ventilation system categories. The majority of the classrooms were fifth grade (11–12 years age) to enable comparable results from a questionnaire survey conducted among the pupils.

The majority of the selected schools were located in urban areas, *i.e.* in the city center or in the residential areas of the city. Two schools were located in rural areas (outskirts of Gothenburg), but still in close proximity to main traffic roads. The age of the school buildings spanned over 127 years, with four buildings built in the year 1889, six between 1900 and 1950, seven in the period between 1951 and 1999 and six between 2000 and 2016. Modern mechanical ventilation system was installed after year 2000 in ten older school buildings (Table S1). The available data on building characteristics included the year of construction and year of upgrade of the ventilation system (where applicable), as well as the classrooms' floor area, volume, and air change rate (see section 2.2). All classrooms were occupied roughly between 8:00–14:30 every day with 21 children (median; range 15–30). The median floor area and volume of the classrooms were 58 m² (range 40–76 m²) and 167 m³ (range 129–260 m³), respectively. The classrooms were mostly situated on ground floor or first floor. The classroom floor area-to-occupant ratio varied between 1.77 m²/child and 3.99 m²/child with a median of 2.73 m²/child, which was similar to the mean per child floor area of 2.35 m²/child reported for 64 Central European schools [33]. The median classroom volume-to-occupant ratio was 8.3 m³/child (range 5.4–13.7 m³) (Table S2).

2.2. Measurements

The measured parameters included indoor air temperature, relative humidity (RH), concentrations of carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ozone (O₃), total volatile organic compounds (TVOC), C₁–C₁₀ aldehydes (formaldehyde to decanal) and particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}). Hourly values of outdoor air temperature, RH, and concentrations of NO₂, ozone, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} were collected from the municipal ambient air monitoring station of the City of Gothenburg. For the outdoor monitoring, temperature and RH were measured using Rotronic HC2A-S3 sensor; NO₂ was measured using Teledyne T200 NO/NO₂/NO_x analyzer with chemiluminescence detection; ozone was measured using Teledyne T400 UV absorption analyzer; PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} were measured using TEOM Tapered element oscillating microbalance (Thermo Fisher Scientific TEOM 1405DF). The data are available in an open database [40]. Outdoor CO₂ concentrations were not available at the monitoring station. We have assumed a value of 400 ppm (2021 global average [41]).

Measurements were performed during the 2019/2020 heating season just before the pandemic broke out. The duration of monitoring in each classroom was 5 school days (1 school week). The measurements were launched on Monday morning after installation of the measurement equipment before the children entered the classroom and ceased on Friday afternoon after the children left the classroom. Monitoring equipment was moved each week between schools and placed on shelves or cabinets out of the children's reach and away from direct internal heat sources and direct solar radiation. The samplers of the air pollutants were placed 1.5–2 m above the floor and about 50 cm from the ceiling.

Air temperature, RH and concentrations of CO₂ were monitored using a Wöhler CDL210 (Wöhler Technik GmbH, Germany; calibrated according to the users' manual) with a 2-min time resolution. The accuracy reported by the manufacturer is ± 0.6 °C, $\pm 3\%$ and ± 50 ppm (or $\pm 5\%$ whichever is greater) for temperature, RH and CO₂ concentration,

respectively. Particles (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) were measured using an optical particle counter (TSI DustTrak DRX, model 8533, factory calibrated). The instrument was operated with a time resolution of 10 min and has an accuracy of $\pm 0.1\%$ of reading or 0.001 mg/m³, whichever is greater. The air change rate (ACR) was calculated from the exponential, first order decay curves of occupant-generated CO₂ concentration vs. time, in line with the standard procedure for determination of air change rate by means of a tracer gas decay method [42] once the children left the classrooms for breaks or at the end of the school day. The length of each analyzed concentration decay typically corresponded to at least the time for one air change (the nominal time constant of the ventilation). All investigated rooms were dedicated to school activities comprising teaching in full or half class. When class was over, the rooms were left empty. Consequently, the risk that the concentration decay was biased by any CO₂-generation during the decay is minimal. Moreover, the standard procedure in these schools is to keep the classroom doors closed and locked between classes. Thus, the concentration decay was not influenced by any substantial internal transfer of air through door openings. The reported air change rate values are an average of five measurements in each classroom, typically measured on different days. In category A classrooms, windows were operated by the teachers, in the same way during the monitoring weeks as during other weeks; windows were opened when the teacher determined that the air quality called for that. The window openings influenced the ventilation rate substantially. The individual ACR-values used for calculation of the reported average value spread over a wider range for category A (average relative standard deviation 46%) classrooms than for category B (12%) and C (13%) classrooms. The ventilation rate in each classroom (L/s) was determined from the air change rate and the room volume.

Passive/diffusive samplers were applied to measure NO₂ and ozone [43]. Their concentrations were analyzed by wet chemical techniques using a spectrophotometric method (NO₂) and ion chromatography (O₃). The analytical procedures are accredited by the Swedish accreditation agency SWEDAC. The measurement uncertainty was 10% at 95% confidence level. The limit of detection (LOD) was 1 µg/m³ for NO₂ and 9 µg/m³ for ozone.

C₁–C₁₀ straight chain aldehydes (from formaldehyde to decanal) were sampled using DSD-DNPH Aldehyde Diffusive Sampling Devices (Supelco, Bellefonte, PA). The sampling period and the subsequent analytical technique (solvent extraction and high-performance liquid chromatography) followed the ISO 16000-4 standard [44]. The LOD was 0.1 µg/m³ for formaldehyde and between 0.5 and 2 µg/m³ for the other aldehydes.

Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were passively sampled on Tenax TA (PerkinElmer) adsorbent tubes and analyzed in compliance with ISO 16017-2 [45]. The Tenax tubes were thermally desorbed (Markes International, Unity 1 and Ultra, 5 min, 250 °C) and analyzed by gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (GC/MS). The gas chromatograph (GC) was an Agilent 6890 equipped with a mass selective (MS) detector (Agilent 5973 N) in electron impact mode for compound identification. The GC was equipped with a CP Wax 52C (Agilent) capillary column (Polyethylene glycol phase, 60 m, 0.32 mm i.d., 1.2 mm film thickness) and used helium as carrier gas. The GC oven temperature program was started at 50 °C and increased to 100 °C at 4 °C/min., then increased to 220 °C at 8 °C/min, which was maintained for 10 min. The VOCs were primarily evaluated as total VOC (TVOC), a sum of all individual compounds eluting between n-hexane and hexadecane (C₆ to C₁₆) and quantified as toluene equivalent concentrations using the uptake rate and the response factor of toluene. Additionally, eleven individual VOCs were quantified specifically: benzene, toluene, m-xylene, α-pinene, limonene and 2-ethylhexanol using their compound specific uptake rates and response factors, and n-hexane, ethylbenzene, o- and p-xylene and styrene in toluene equivalents. The LOD for the TVOC was 10 µg/m³ based on 3 times the signal-to-noise ratio, and between 0.1 µg/m³ and 1 µg/m³ for the individual VOCs.

The results obtained from the passive sampling (NO₂, ozone,

formaldehyde, TVOC) are the concentrations integrated over the whole sampling week (called “weekly average” throughout the article). Temperature, RH, CO₂ and particles from the time-resolved measurements were aggregated into weekly averages and weekly averages for occupied hours (8:00–14:30 during the school days; called “occupied time average” throughout the article). The values < LOD were replaced by ½ LOD; this was the case for ozone, benzene, toluene, α -pinene, limonene, 2-ethylhexanol, propanal, pentanal, hexanal and heptanal.

2.3. Indoor environmental index

The Indoor Environmental Index (IEI) proposed by Moschandreas and Sofuoglu (2004) [46] was calculated to characterize the conditions in the classrooms by aggregating the individual concentrations of indoor air pollutants (the weekly averages) into one parameter. Detailed description of the index can be found in the Supporting Information (text, Fig. S1, Table S3). IEI (Equation 1 in SI) is an arithmetic mean of the Indoor Discomfort Index (IDI) and the Indoor Air Pollution Index (IAP). IDI relates observed values of temperature and relative humidity to their optimal values and to upper and lower comfort limit levels (Equation 2 in SI). IAP is created by locating the observed concentrations of air pollutants within the range of the observed values (maximum and minimum) and relating them to their respective demarcation values, which are the recommended IAQ guideline values (Equation 3 in SI). The index is a unitless number between 0 (excellent IEQ) and 10 (worst IEQ). To consistently use only results from the same sampling period, weekly averages were used both for the gaseous air pollutants and the particles. The input values can be found in Tables S4 and S6–S8. WHO 2005 [23] and WHO 2021 [26] guidelines were used as the demarcation values for NO₂, ozone, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}.

2.4. Statistical analyses

Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine the differences in the measured parameters across the three different ventilation categories. Pairwise differences were tested for significance using Mann-Whitney *U* test. Spearman rank correlations were calculated to determine the correlations between the measured parameters, using the weekly averages, the indices and the building characteristics. Statistical significance was defined as $p \leq 0.05$ (2-Tail). Statistical calculations were performed with SPSS software.

3. Results

Results summarizing the measurements in all classrooms are presented in Table 2. Valid data were collected in all classrooms for all parameters except for the concentration of ozone (29 classrooms, 64%, with concentration > LOD). Further results are shown in the Supporting Information (Tables S4–S9). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests of differences in all variables by ventilation categories are shown in Table S10.

3.1. Temperature, RH, CO₂, ACR

Weekly averages and occupied time averages of air temperature, relative humidity and CO₂ concentration are presented in Table S4 and the Kruskal-Wallis statistics in Table S10. The median values of temperature and relative humidity (Table 2) were within the range defined by the EN 16798–1:2019 [12] standard (20–24 °C and 25–60% RH) and by the Swedish regulations (20–24 °C) [38,47]. The differences between the weekly averages and the occupied time averages of temperature (Mann-Whitney, $p = 0.11$) and relative humidity (Mann-Whitney, $p = 0.56$) across all classrooms were not significant. The differences in temperature and relative humidity between the ventilation categories (both weekly averages and occupied time averages) were not statistically significant either.

The median temperatures were lower and had a narrower range than those observed in the 64 Central European schools (median 22.8 °C, range 18.7–25.9 °C) [33], in the 70 schools in Southwestern US (average 23 °C) [7], in 40 schools in Midwestern US (average 22.4 °C) [48], in 115 schools across 23 European countries (median 22 °C, IQR = 3.0 °C) [34] and in classrooms in Portugal (median 21.9 °C, IQR = 3.6 °C) [32].

The median values of RH in our study were similar to those reported in Central European schools (median 35%, range 20–55%) [33], in other European schools (median 40%, IQR = 14%) [34], in Southwestern US schools (40%) [7] and in Midwestern US schools (average 40%) [48] but lower than in Portuguese classrooms (median 58%, IQR = 18.2%) [32].

The median CO₂ concentration across all classrooms (Table 2) was well below the recommended guideline value of 1000 ppm. [49] It was below the medians observed in European schools (1284 ppm and 1370 ppm) [33, 34], in French elementary schools (1123–1329 ppm) [20], in Southwestern US schools (average 1780 ppm) [7] and in Midwestern US schools (average 1171 ppm) [48]. The classrooms in this study were well ventilated, with median air change rate of 3.2 h⁻¹, which is much higher than in the French (0.11–0.12 h⁻¹) [20], European (0.40 h⁻¹) [34] and Central European (1.49 h⁻¹) [33] schools.

Table 2
Summary of the measurements in all classrooms.

Parameter	Median	Interquartile range	Min	Max	Recommended guideline values	Reference
Temperature, °C, all week	20.8	1.4	18.7	23.4	20–24	EN 16798–1:2019 [12], AFS 2020:1 [38], FoHMFS 2014:17 [47]
Temperature, °C, occupied time	21.2	1.2	19.4	24.0	20–24	EN 16798–1:2019 [12], AFS 2020:1 [38], FoHMFS 2014:17 [47]
RH, %, all week	34	9	22	54	25–60	EN 16798–1:2019 [12]
RH, %, occupied time	35	9	20	57	25–60	EN 16798–1:2019 [12]
CO ₂ , ppm, all week	520	170	450	960	1000	FoHMFS 2014:18 [49]
CO ₂ , ppm, occupied time	690	190	540	1630	1000	FoHMFS 2014:18 [49]
Air change rate (ACR), h ⁻¹	3.2	1.7	0.31	5.1	^a	AFS 2020:1 [38], FoHMFS 2014:18 [49]
NO ₂ , µg/m ³	9.7	0.48	2.9	32	40/10	WHO, 2005/2021 (annual mean) [23,26]
Ozone, µg/m ³	10	0.25	4.5 ^b	56	100	WHO, 2005/2021 (8-h average) [23,26]
TVOC, µg/m ³	120	72	35	590	300	Fromme et al., 2019 [25]
Formaldehyde, µg/m ³	9.4	6.5	1.7	27	100	WHO, 2010 [24]
PM ₁₀ , µg/m ³ , all week	10	7	2	28	20/15	WHO, 2005/2021 (annual mean) [23,26]
PM ₁₀ , µg/m ³ , occupied time	21	11	8	51	50/45	WHO, 2005/2021 (24-h mean) [23,26]
PM _{2.5} , µg/m ³ , all week	7	5	1	18	10/5	WHO, 2005/2021 (annual mean) [23,26]
PM _{2.5} , µg/m ³ , occupied time	13	8	5	29	25/15	WHO, 2005/2021 (24-h mean) [23,26]

^a Standards specify ventilation rates per floor area and number of occupants. Air change rate is a result of ventilation rate and size of a room.

^b ½ LOD.

The CO₂ concentrations measured in individual classrooms (averages during occupied time) are presented according to the ventilation categories in Fig. 1. The median CO₂ concentration of 1100 ppm in the classrooms with A category ventilation was much higher than in the classrooms with the ventilation systems B and C (median CO₂ 440 ppm and 480 ppm lower, respectively). Large variations in CO₂ concentrations were observed in the classrooms with the category A system; 64% of these classrooms had an occupied time average above 1000 ppm recommended by the Public Health Agency of Sweden [49]. In the classrooms with systems categorized as B and C the variation was very low, and the maximum measured levels were generally below 800 ppm. There were statistically significant differences in CO₂ concentrations between the classrooms with ventilation systems A and either B or C, but there was no difference between classrooms with systems B and C. The corresponding plot for the weekly average CO₂ concentrations can be found in the Supporting Information (Figure S2).

The ACR-values in the classrooms with different ventilation categories are shown in Fig. 2a; the raw data are presented in Table S5 and the median values in Table 2. The classrooms with ventilation category A had significantly lower ACR-values than those with the systems categorized as B and C; no significant difference was observed between systems categorized as B and C. On the contrary, the median ACR-values in classrooms without any ventilation system and classrooms with some ventilation system (exhaust or balanced ventilation used for limited time) in France did not differ significantly. These results may reflect the differences in construction practices of school buildings in the two countries, the type and operation pattern of the ventilation systems and occupant behavior such as window opening.

The ratio of the actual ventilation rates (expressed as L/s) in the classrooms (calculated from the ACR-values and the classrooms' volumes) to the ventilation rates required by the Swedish Work Environment Authority [38] based on the floor area and the number of children (7 L/s per person + 0.35 L/s per m²) is shown in Fig. 2b (data in Table S5). These ratios indicate that the ventilation rates were below the Swedish requirements [38,49] in all the A category classrooms and in 50% of both B and C category. The ratios for the category A classrooms were significantly different from both B and C category classrooms. There was no significant difference between B and C category classrooms (Table S10).

The median ventilation rate per person shown in Fig. 2c is 3.0 L/s per person for category A, while it is 6.6 L/s per person and 7.7 L/s per person for categories B and C, respectively (Table S10). Ways to ensure the required ventilation rates in category A classrooms are limited and verification of the ventilation rates in these classrooms is difficult. Category B and C classrooms with insufficient ventilation may have had

an increased number of children compared to the nominal system capacity and their systems were not properly adjusted to address the new loads.

Based on the tabulated values of CO₂ generation rates according to age and level of physical activity [50] we assume that the school children and teachers together generate carbon dioxide at an average rate of about 12–13 L/h per person. Together with the median ventilation rates shown in Fig. 2c, the steady state indoor concentration of CO₂ is estimated to be about 1500 ppm in category A classrooms and about 900 ppm in category B and C classrooms. These values can be expected to prevail towards the end of lectures when the concentration approaches steady state. The values are substantially higher than the values shown in Fig. 1, which represent the concentration expressed as an average during the whole working day including breaks. The calculated steady-state CO₂ concentrations can be compared to concentrations measured in the classrooms. It may be justified to assume that the 95-percentile of the measured CO₂ concentrations (occupied time averages) can be used as an estimate of the steady-state concentrations occurring by the end of each lecture. The medians of these percentiles were 1840 ppm for category A, 920 ppm for category B and 850 ppm for category C. These values correspond fairly well with the calculated steady-state CO₂ concentrations. The steady state concentrations can be even higher assuming higher CO₂ generation rates, as suggested in some literature [51, 52].

3.2. Air pollutants

Indoor concentrations of NO₂, ozone, TVOCs, formaldehyde, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} as well as outdoor concentrations of NO₂, ozone, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} and the corresponding indoor-to outdoor (I/O) concentration ratios are summarized in Table 2 and Table S6–S10. In the following subsections, the results from this study are presented and compared with recommended levels as well as with results from the literature. The results are then discussed in relation to the ventilation categories.

3.2.1. Inorganic air pollutants NO₂ and ozone

The median NO₂ concentration of 9.7 µg/m³ across all classrooms (Table 2) was below the World Health Organization's (WHO) recently recommended annual mean NO₂ concentration of 10 µg/m³ [26]. It was also below the median NO₂ concentration of 21.1 µg/m³ (range 6.0–68.5 µg/m³) reported in the review that included 47 scientific publications examining indoor NO₂ samples from >960 classrooms in 354 school buildings around the globe [27]. The weekly averages were all below the 2005 guideline value of 40 µg/m³ [23] but exceeded the 2021 guideline value in 47% of the classrooms.

The median ozone concentration of 10 µg/m³ across all classrooms (Table 2) was well below the WHO guideline value of 100 µg/m³ for maximum 8-h mean ozone concentration [23,26]. It was comparable with the median ozone concentration of 8.5 µg/m³ (range 0.8–114 µg/m³) reported in the review that included 13 studies examining 525 indoor ozone samples in 91 school buildings in European countries, Mexico and China (Shanghai) [28]. Ambient ozone concentrations peak during late spring/early summer. For this reason, the reported median ozone concentration would likely be higher if the measurements in the classrooms were performed outside the heating season.

Traffic-related and industrial emissions are the major outdoor sources of NO₂, and higher concentrations are observed during winter. Ozone is produced photochemically through a complex set of gas phase reactions involving organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and sunlight, thus the elevated outdoor levels are frequently observed in polluted areas with much sunshine during spring and early summer. With negligible indoor sources, outdoor to indoor transport is the major source of indoor NO₂ and ozone. The rather low indoor concentrations of NO₂ and ozone in this study were likely caused by the low outdoor levels (Table S6).

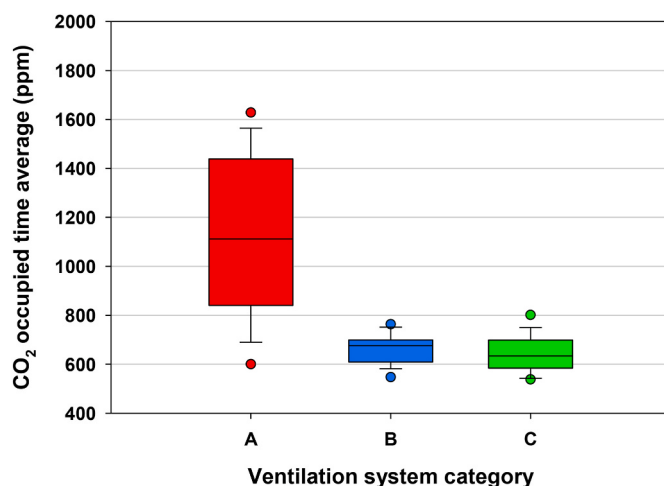


Fig. 1. CO₂ concentration during occupied time in the classrooms with the three ventilation categories.

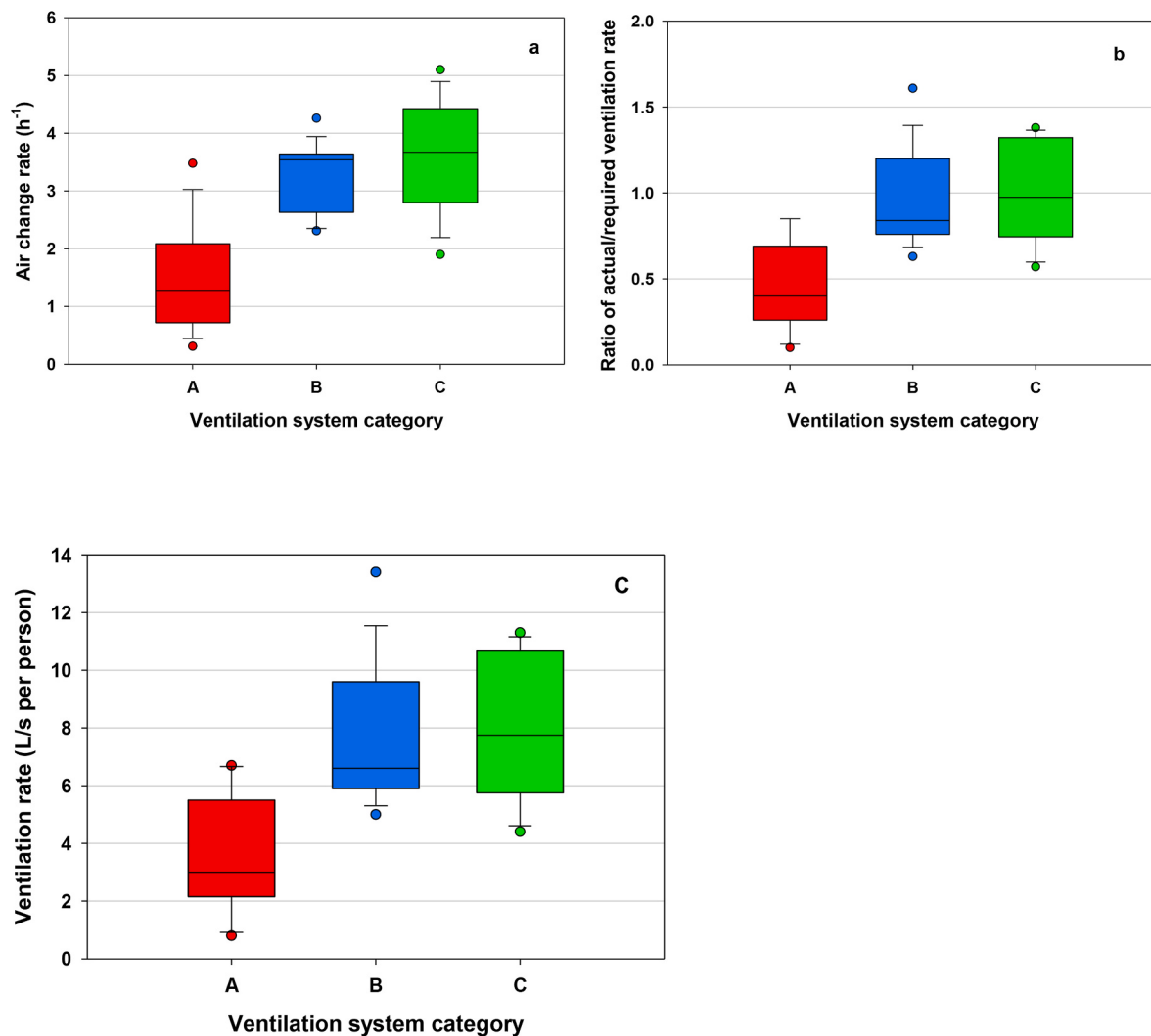


Fig. 2. a) Measured air change rate; b) ratio of actual-to-required ventilation rates in the classrooms with the three ventilation categories; c) actual ventilation rates per person.

3.2.2. Indoor-to-outdoor concentration ratios of NO₂ and ozone

The I/O concentration ratio of NO₂ (Table S6) depends on outdoor (traffic) and indoor combustion sources, season, ventilation rate and surface removal [27,53]. The reported mean ($\pm$ standard deviation) I/O concentration ratio of NO₂ was 0.83 ± 0.55 and 0.87 ± 0.19 in naturally and mechanically ventilated schools around the world, respectively [53] and 0.80 ± 0.55 in European schools [54]. The I/O concentration ratios of NO₂ in this study (Fig. S5, median 0.59, range 0.19–1.96) were mostly within the range reported in other studies. The I/O concentration ratios for ozone reported in the literature were most often in the range 0.02–0.9, with lower values in buildings with low ventilations rates [55, 56]. The I/O concentration ratios for ozone in this study (Table S6 and Fig. S6, median 0.20, range 0.10–1.00) were within the range of I/O concentration ratios for school buildings in the literature [28,54].

The type of ventilation system was associated with indoor NO₂ and ozone concentrations and with the I/O concentration ratios. Box plots of concentrations and I/O concentration ratios for NO₂ and ozone by the ventilation categories can be found in Figs. S3–S6. Median concentration and I/O concentration ratio of NO₂ was highest for category B. The difference was statistically significant compared to the classrooms with ventilation systems A and C. Median concentration and I/O concentration ratio of ozone was the highest in the classrooms with ventilation category C. The difference in concentrations was statistically significant between the classrooms with ventilation category A and C. The

differences in I/O concentration ratios were significant between all three categories. There were no differences in outdoor levels of ozone (Kruskal-Wallis, $p = 0.74$) and NO₂ (Kruskal-Wallis, $p = 0.95$) between the school buildings with different ventilation categories so the differences in indoor concentrations and I/O concentration ratios can be attributed primarily to ventilation and to transformations occurring either in the gas-phase or on surfaces. The indoor NO₂ concentrations and the resulting I/O concentration ratios were higher in two classrooms of one school compared with the rest of the schools (I/O concentration ratio close to 2) and one classroom of another school had an average ozone concentration identical to that outdoors. These cases reflect potential indoor sources or measurement errors.

3.2.3. TVOC and formaldehyde

The TVOC concentrations did not differ significantly between the classrooms with the three ventilation strategies (Fig. S7). The TVOC concentrations in all schools except one (median 120 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, Table 2) were below the recommended long-term guideline value [25] of 300 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ (Table S7). The TVOC levels from this study cannot be directly compared with results from other studies, as most other studies quantified sets of preselected individual VOCs [17,33,34]. The studies also differ in measurement methods, in the number of included VOCs and in the specific VOCs included. Our median TVOC level is similar to the median TVOC of 179 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ reported for 63 German day-care centres

[57].

The median formaldehyde concentration of $9.4 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ (Table 2) was well below the WHO guideline of $100 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for a 30-min mean concentration [24]. It is close to the long-term (one year) indoor guideline value of $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for formaldehyde suggested by the Public Health England [58]. The long-term guideline value of $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ was exceeded in 47% of the investigated classrooms (Table S7). The median formaldehyde concentration was half of the median value measured in 310 French nurseries, kindergartens and elementary schools ($19.7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) [16] and it was similar to the levels reported for 64 Central European schools ($7.95 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) [33] and 115 European schools ($11.3 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) [34]. Formaldehyde levels were statistically significantly higher in classrooms with ventilation category A than in classrooms with ventilation categories B and C; no differences were seen between classrooms with systems B and C (Fig. 3).

3.2.4. Particulate matter PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$

The medians of the weekly average PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations were $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and $7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively (Table 2). These levels are below the annual mean PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations of $20 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively, recommended by WHO (2005) [23] (Table S8). However, the median $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ is above the annual mean $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ recommended by WHO (2021) [26]. The weekly averages exceeded the guideline values in 18% (2005) and 22% (2021) of all cases for PM_{10} and in 24% (2005) and 73% (2021) of all cases for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, predominantly in the classrooms with ventilation category A.

The medians of the average PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations during occupied time (Table S9) were $21 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ and $13 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, respectively. These levels exceed the recommended WHO annual mean levels but were below WHO's recommended 24-h mean PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ [23,26]. The short-term guidelines were exceeded in 2% (2005) and 9% (2021) of all cases for PM_{10} and 9% (2005) and 31% (2021) of all cases for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, and this was the case only in classrooms with ventilation category A.

The median of the weekly average PM_{10} concentration ($10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) was well below the median of $102 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ reported in a review of indoor PM_{10} in schools around the world. The median weekly $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentration ($7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) was also significantly lower than the median of $23 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ reported for schools around the globe [29]. The median PM_{10} concentration during occupied time ($21 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) was much below the weighted PM_{10} mean of $182 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, and the median $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentration during occupied time ($13 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) was also below the weighted $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ mean of $50 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ reported in a review of 50 school studies during occupancy [30].

The ventilation strategies had a considerable effect on the indoor PM

levels. Both PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations during occupied time were significantly higher in the classrooms with ventilation category A compared with ventilation categories B and C. There were no significant differences between classrooms with ventilation categories B and C (Fig. 4). The same trend was observed for the PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ weekly average concentrations (Figs. S8–S9). The higher PM levels in the category A classrooms may be explained by the lower ventilation rates and thus less removal by ventilation of PM generated indoors and the lack of particle filtration in the air penetrating from outdoors. The median PM concentrations during the occupied time were approximately twice as high as the medians of the weekly averages for categories B and C; it was about 50% higher for category A. It indicates the importance and magnitude of indoor PM sources such as resuspension and particles brought in and generated inside by the occupants (e.g., on shoes, clothes, skin).

Typical time series of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations during the school week in classrooms with ventilation category A and C are shown in Figs. S10 and S11, respectively. These time series were similar across all classrooms of a given category. The time series of PM_{10} followed a similar trend, albeit at higher concentrations. In all cases, the concentrations of PM increased sharply in the mornings when the children entered the classroom and decreased in the afternoon when the children left the classroom. During the school days, the concentrations increased when the children were present in the classrooms and decreased during breaks and lunch. During the unoccupied hours, the concentrations were close to zero. As exemplified in Figs. S10 and S11, the time course of the PM concentrations directly correlated with the time course of the occupant-generated CO_2 concentrations. These findings support the hypothesis that PM was mostly generated indoors and was associated with the presence of occupants.

The difference in PM concentrations between categories B and C were small, but a larger variability was observed in category C, highlighting the importance of effective operation and control of these more advanced systems.

3.2.5. Indoor-to-outdoor concentration ratios of PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$

The median I/O concentration ratio for weekly PM_{10} across all classrooms was 0.91, for occupied time it was 1.62. The corresponding I/O concentration ratios for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ were 1.37 and 2.21. The I/O concentration ratios for PM_{10} during occupied hours in schools reported in the literature are ~ 1 , slightly below our results. The reported I/O concentration ratios for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ are ~ 1.5 [30]. Indoor sources seem to contribute more to indoor PM levels in our study than in earlier ones. The I/O concentration ratios of the particle concentrations differed with the ventilation strategy (Figs. S12–S15). They were consistently and significantly higher in the classrooms with ventilation category A than in the classrooms with the two other ventilation categories; no difference was seen between classrooms with B and C category ventilation. Higher ventilation rates (removing indoor generated PM) and the presence of particle filtration in the ventilation system (removing PM from the incoming outdoor air) may explain the lower PM levels and I/O concentration ratios in the classrooms with ventilation categories B and C than in category A classrooms. Moreover, in the classrooms without mechanical ventilation with air filtration, higher ACR may lead to more transport of PM from the outdoors.

It should be noted that the concentrations of corresponding indoor and outdoor air pollutants were not measured using identical measurement techniques. Additionally, the outdoor values were obtained from one fixed monitoring station. It does not reflect the local variations given the different geographical location of the schools. These two facts may to some extent confound the results of our indoor to outdoor analysis.

3.3. Indoor environmental index (IEI)

No statistically significant differences in the Indoor Discomfort Index

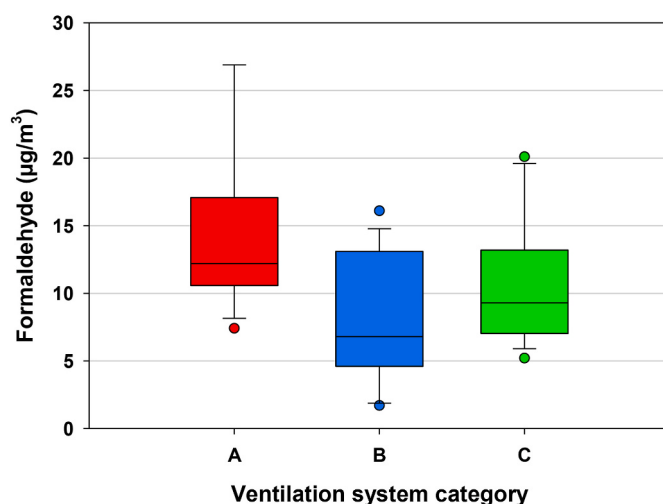


Fig. 3. Weekly average formaldehyde concentrations in the classrooms with the different ventilation categories.

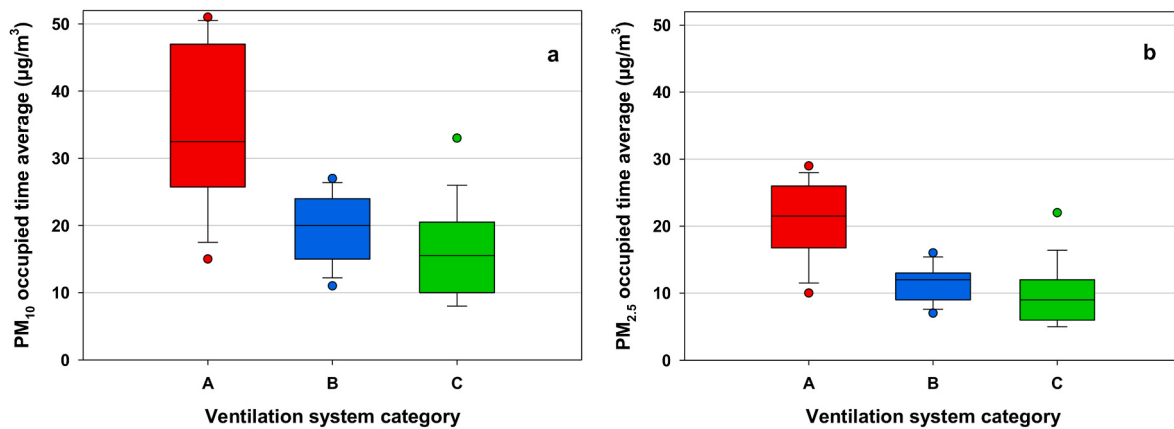


Fig. 4. Occupied time average a) PM_{10} and b) $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentrations in the classrooms with different ventilation categories.

(IDI) were found between the classrooms with different ventilation categories (Fig. 5, Table S10). The quality of the thermal environment was thus similar in the classrooms with the three types of ventilation systems. The Indoor Air Pollution Index (IAP) was significantly higher in classrooms with category A ventilation, reflecting poorer indoor air quality. The Indoor Environmental Index (IEI), which is the arithmetic mean of the other two indices, was highest in the category A classrooms, lowest in the category C classrooms (Fig. S16). The difference between the two was significant (Table S10).

Each index is a unitless number between 0 (excellent) and 10 (worst). The absolute values of the indices mirror the range of the measured values and the distance of the measured values from the corresponding reference values for each included variable. IDI becomes zero when the measured average values of temperature and RH (Table S4) equal the optimum values defined in corresponding standards or guidelines. The worst case for the IAPI ($\text{IAP} = 10$) occurs when the measured average concentrations of all included individual variables (Tables S6–S8) equal their respective reference (demarcation) values (Table S3). In this study, NO_2 , PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ above the reference values are the main contributors to the elevated IAPI.

The choice of the guideline values is critical for the absolute value of the IAPI. Figures S17 and S18 show the IAPI and IEI calculated using WHO's 2021 guideline values. The values of the indices increased as the 2021 guideline values for NO_2 , PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ are lower than the 2005 values. It did not, however, change the trend of the results. It should be noted that the indices are used here as comparative tools to assess the indoor environment across the classrooms with different ventilation systems within this study. A harmonized selection of the type of the air pollutants considered, the comfort limits (IDI) and the demarcation

values (IAP) is needed to make the indices comparable between studies. Moreover, the results of the chemical measurements, and thus the indices, reflect weekly average levels. Time-resolved measurements of the gaseous air pollutants are recommended in order to assess the children's exposure during school time and the true effect of the ventilation strategies on exposure.

3.4. Correlation between measured variables and building characteristics

Spearman rank correlation tests were performed on the measured variables and selected building characteristics. Two datasets were used. Weekly average concentrations of the gaseous air pollutants were used in both datasets. For temperature, RH, CO_2 , PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, weekly averages were used in one dataset and occupied time averages in the other dataset. The differences between weekly data and occupied time data were small. The Spearman rank correlation coefficients for the selected variables are presented in Table S12. Some of the stronger and significant ($p < 0.05$) correlations were as follows: ACR was the main driver of the concentrations of ozone, CO_2 , formaldehyde, PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$. Similar relationships were observed in 40 schools in Midwestern US, where ventilation rate was strongly associated with concentrations of formaldehyde and particulate matter [48]. The IEI was mainly driven by concentrations of TVOC, PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$. Additionally, the year of construction was strongly related to ACR and room volume and thus to the concentrations of ozone, CO_2 , PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$.

4. Discussion

Installation of balanced mechanical ventilation systems is especially

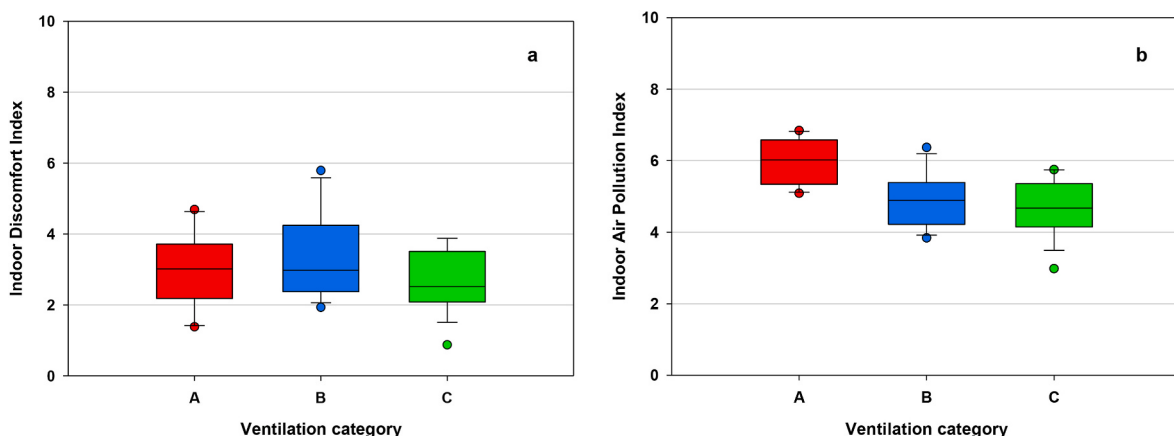


Fig. 5. Box plots of the a) IDI and b) IAPI in the classrooms with different ventilation categories. IAPI is based on the WHO's 2005 guideline values.

beneficial for the reduction of PM concentrations in the classrooms, which is an advantage in light of the recently lowered recommended PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} guideline values. The mechanisms providing lower PM concentrations in these classrooms are 1) reduced supply of particles from outdoors due to supply air filtration (in Sweden, typically corresponding to filter class MERV-13) and 2) maintained ventilation rate during occupancy, removing PM generated by people and their activities indoors.

Classrooms with natural ventilation or mechanical exhaust only ventilation will have higher PM concentrations due to the absence of supply air filtration and lower ventilation rates. One important reason for the lower ventilation rates in these classrooms is that the rooms become excessively cooled by the supply of outdoor air with low temperature (this investigation was conducted during the heating season in Sweden). Thus, the ventilation rate needs to be kept low in order to avoid uncomfortably low indoor temperatures and draught. Consequently, windows are kept closed more than motivated by air quality.

Our results showed no significant differences in indoor air quality between classrooms with the simpler balanced mechanical ventilation system with constant air flow rates and those demand controlled with variable air flow rate. This is actually the expected result since the main reason for installing demand-controlled ventilation is to save energy (electricity for fan operation and energy for heating - and sometimes cooling - of the supply air), not to improve indoor air quality. Instead of running the ventilation system at nominal capacity the entire workday regardless of the occupancy, the ventilation is reduced when there is no need for it. A demand-controlled ventilation system reduces the ventilation rate to a minimum when the temperature and the concentration of CO₂ are low (i.e., when there is no demand). Our results indicate that the periodically reduced ventilation rates in the studied demand-controlled ventilation systems do not deteriorate the quality of the indoor air during times of occupancy.

Based on the results, ACR appears to be a good proxy for indoor air quality. Higher ACRs are associated with lower CO₂ and the gaseous indoor air pollutants such as the carcinogenic formaldehyde and VOCs. Lower levels of CO₂ and VOCs are associated with improved cognitive function scores [59]. Therefore, achieving sufficiently high ACRs is confirmed to be important for children's performance at school.

Balanced mechanical ventilation systems with heat recovery are installed in many schools in Sweden which is not a case in many other countries. In addition, there is a requirement for all newly constructed school buildings to be equipped with demand-controlled ventilation, i.e. mechanical ventilation systems with variable air volume. However, the differences in IAQ among ventilation strategies have not been previously studied so comprehensively in Sweden. The findings from this work can be generalized to other schools and contribute with useful knowledge to other countries heading towards the same direction with respect to school ventilation.

5. Conclusions

The IAQ in the studied Swedish classrooms was, at median level, good regardless of their ventilation system. The concentrations of ozone, formaldehyde and TVOC in the majority of classrooms were below recommended guideline values. On the contrary, the concentrations of NO₂, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5} exceeded the latest WHO guideline [26] values in 47%, 22% and 73%, respectively. All classrooms with natural or exhaust ventilation and approximately 50% of the classrooms with balanced mechanical ventilation did not comply with the Swedish ventilation requirements. However, the results represent only one school week of measurements. Long-term measurements should confirm the findings.

The three ventilations systems performed equally well in providing comfortable thermal environment. The main difference in indoor air quality was observed between natural and balanced mechanical ventilation. Classrooms with natural and exhaust ventilation or automated window opening had significantly lower air change rates, higher

concentrations of CO₂, formaldehyde, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}, and poorer IAQ indicated by the aggregated Indoor Air Pollution Index, than classrooms with balanced mechanical ventilation with heat recovery and particle filtration. The balanced mechanical ventilation systems with variable air volume (VAV) did not perform significantly better regarding IAQ than the systems with constant air volume (CAV). The main differences between CAV and VAV systems include energy consumption for fan electricity, operational requirements and maintenance. These aspects should also be considered when choosing ventilation strategy.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Blanka Cabovská: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Gabriel Bekö:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Despoina Teli:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Lars Ekberg:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis. **Jan-Olof Dalenbäck:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Pawel Wargocki:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Theofanis Psomas:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Sarka Langer:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data are available in Supporting information file.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2022.109744>.

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