Journal Homepage: www.ijarpr.com ISSN: 3049-0103 (Online)

International Journal of Advance Research Publication and Reviews

Vol 03, Issue 10, pp 866-871, October, 2026

CFD-Based Thermal Analysis and Performance Evaluation of an Air-Cooled Battery Thermal Management System for Electric Vehicles

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ABSTRACT :

Electric vehicles (EVs) have emerged as a promising solution for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on conventional fossil fuels. Lithium-ion batteries are widely used in EVs because of their high energy density, long cycle life, and superior energy storage capability. However, significant heat is generated during charging and discharging processes, which can adversely affect battery performance, safety, efficiency, and lifespan. Therefore, the development of an effective Battery Thermal Management System (BTMS) is essential for maintaining battery temperature within the recommended operating range. The present study investigates the thermal performance of an air-cooled battery thermal management system for electric vehicles using Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) analysis. A lithium-ion battery pack model was developed and analyzed using ANSYS Fluent software to evaluate temperature distribution, airflow characteristics, pressure variation, and cooling efficiency. The battery cooling system was designed with optimized airflow pathways to enhance heat dissipation and improve thermal uniformity among battery cells. CFD simulations were conducted under specified operating conditions, and the thermal behavior of the battery pack was examined through temperature contours, airflow streamlines, and pressure distribution profiles. The simulation results revealed that the proposed air-cooling configuration effectively reduced battery temperature and minimized thermal hotspots within the battery module. The optimized design achieved improved airflow distribution, lower pressure drop, and enhanced cooling performance compared to the initial configuration. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that CFD is a reliable and cost-effective tool for analyzing and optimizing battery cooling systems prior to physical implementation. The findings of this research contribute to the development of efficient thermal management solutions that can improve battery safety, operational reliability, energy efficiency, and service life in electric vehicle applications.

Keywords: Electric Vehicle (EV), Battery Thermal Management System (BTMS), Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), Lithium-Ion Battery, Air Cooling System, Thermal Analysis, ANSYS Fluent

1. Introduction

The transportation sector is currently undergoing a significant transformation as nations around the world seek cleaner and more sustainable alternatives to conventional vehicles powered by internal combustion engines. Growing concerns regarding environmental pollution, climate change, depletion of fossil fuel reserves, and rising fuel costs have accelerated the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). Unlike conventional vehicles, electric vehicles rely on electrical energy stored in rechargeable battery packs to provide propulsion. This transition has placed battery technology at the center of modern automotive development, making battery performance, efficiency, safety, and durability critical factors for the success of electric mobility.

Among various energy storage technologies, lithium-ion batteries have become the preferred choice for electric vehicles because of their high energy density, low self-discharge rate, lightweight structure, and relatively long service life. These characteristics enable electric vehicles to achieve improved driving range and operational efficiency. Despite these advantages, lithium-ion batteries face several technical challenges that can influence their performance under practical operating conditions. One of the most significant concerns is heat generation during charging and discharging processes. Battery cells continuously generate heat as a result of electrochemical reactions and internal resistance. If this heat is not effectively dissipated, the battery temperature may rise beyond the recommended operating range, leading to reduced efficiency, accelerated degradation, loss of capacity, and potential safety hazards.

Temperature plays a crucial role in determining the overall health and performance of lithium-ion batteries. Excessively high temperatures can cause thermal stress within battery cells, resulting in irreversible damage to battery materials and shortening the battery lifespan. In severe situations, uncontrolled temperature rise may initiate thermal runaway, a dangerous condition that can lead to fire or battery failure. Conversely, very low temperatures can negatively affect charging efficiency, power output, and energy utilization. Therefore, maintaining an appropriate and uniform temperature throughout the battery pack is essential for ensuring safe and reliable operation of electric vehicles.

To address these challenges, Battery Thermal Management Systems (BTMS) have become an integral component of electric vehicle battery packs. The primary purpose of a BTMS is to regulate battery temperature by removing excess heat and maintaining thermal uniformity among individual cells. An effective thermal management system helps improve battery efficiency, enhances safety, extends service life, and ensures consistent performance under

varying operating conditions. Various cooling approaches have been developed for battery thermal management, including air cooling, liquid cooling, phase change material cooling, and hybrid cooling systems. Each method possesses distinct advantages and limitations related to cooling efficiency, complexity, cost, maintenance requirements, and implementation feasibility.

Among these approaches, air cooling remains one of the most widely adopted thermal management techniques because of its simplicity, lightweight design, low manufacturing cost, and ease of maintenance. Air-cooled systems utilize ambient or forced airflow to remove heat from battery surfaces. These systems are particularly attractive for electric vehicle applications where reducing weight and system complexity is important. However, the effectiveness of air cooling depends greatly on airflow distribution, battery arrangement, cooling channel design, and operating conditions. Poor airflow circulation may result in uneven temperature distribution and localized thermal hotspots within the battery pack, reducing overall cooling performance. Consequently, optimization of airflow pathways and cooling configurations has become an important area of research in battery thermal management.

The advancement of computational technologies has enabled engineers and researchers to investigate battery cooling performance using numerical simulation techniques. Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) has emerged as a powerful analytical tool for studying fluid flow and heat transfer phenomena within battery systems. CFD allows detailed visualization of temperature contours, airflow patterns, pressure distribution, and thermal behavior without the need for extensive physical experimentation. By simulating different cooling configurations under controlled conditions, researchers can identify design weaknesses, optimize airflow channels, and improve thermal performance before prototype development. This approach significantly reduces development time, experimental costs, and design uncertainties.

The present study focuses on the thermal analysis and performance evaluation of an air-cooled battery thermal management system for electric vehicles using CFD simulation techniques. A battery pack model is developed and analyzed to investigate temperature distribution, airflow characteristics, pressure variation, and cooling effectiveness. Special attention is given to improving heat dissipation and minimizing temperature differences among battery cells. Through systematic thermal analysis and optimization, the study aims to contribute to the development of safer, more efficient, and thermally stable battery systems capable of supporting the growing demand for electric vehicle technology.

2. Literature Review

The increasing adoption of electric vehicles has generated substantial research interest in battery technologies and thermal management systems. Since lithium-ion batteries serve as the primary energy source for electric vehicles, maintaining their thermal stability is essential for ensuring safe and efficient operation. Battery performance is highly influenced by temperature conditions, and excessive heat generation can result in capacity loss, accelerated aging, reduced charging efficiency, and safety concerns. Consequently, researchers have focused on developing effective battery thermal management systems and advanced cooling techniques to improve battery reliability and operational performance.

Jaguemont et al. (2020) investigated the thermal behavior of lithium-ion batteries and highlighted the significance of maintaining battery temperature within an optimal operating range. Their study revealed that excessive temperature increases battery degradation and reduces overall battery efficiency. The authors emphasized that an efficient thermal management system is necessary for extending battery life and improving safety in electric vehicle applications.

Pesaran (2021) examined battery thermal management strategies used in electric and hybrid electric vehicles. The study discussed the importance of temperature regulation for maintaining battery performance and preventing thermal runaway. It was observed that battery cooling systems directly influence battery durability, charging capability, and operational safety. The author further emphasized the need for continuous improvement in cooling system design.

Fan et al. (2013) conducted an investigation on air-cooled lithium-ion battery modules and analyzed the effect of airflow characteristics on thermal performance. Their findings indicated that airflow distribution plays a vital role in maintaining temperature uniformity among battery cells. The study recommended optimized airflow pathways to improve cooling efficiency and reduce thermal gradients within battery packs.

Saw et al. (2020) explored the effectiveness of air-cooling techniques for battery thermal management. The study concluded that forced air cooling provides a practical and economical solution for managing moderate thermal loads. However, challenges associated with non-uniform airflow distribution and localized heating were also identified, indicating the need for design optimization.

Wang et al. (2021) reviewed thermal management solutions for lithium-ion batteries and highlighted the influence of temperature on battery electrochemical performance. The authors reported that efficient cooling systems significantly improve battery lifespan and reduce the likelihood of thermal failure. Their work emphasized the importance of balancing cooling effectiveness with energy consumption.

Kim et al. (2023) investigated airflow optimization in battery cooling systems and demonstrated that proper airflow channel design can significantly enhance heat dissipation. The study found that optimized cooling pathways improve temperature uniformity and reduce thermal hotspots within battery modules, leading to better thermal performance.

Chen et al. (2024) utilized Computational Fluid Dynamics techniques to analyze thermal behavior in electric vehicle battery systems. Their research demonstrated that CFD simulations provide detailed information regarding airflow patterns, temperature distribution, and pressure variation. The study confirmed that CFD is an effective tool for evaluating and optimizing battery cooling system performance.

Park et al. (2022) examined battery cooling systems under high charging conditions and reported that rapid charging operations generate considerable thermal loads. Their study highlighted the necessity of advanced cooling strategies capable of maintaining battery temperature within safe operating limits under varying operational conditions.

Zhao et al. (2023) reviewed advanced battery thermal management technologies and discussed the advantages of hybrid cooling approaches. Their findings indicated that combining different cooling methods can improve heat dissipation and temperature control, although increased system complexity remains a challenge.

Mahamud et al. (2022) focused on CFD-based thermal optimization of battery modules and demonstrated that numerical simulations are highly useful for understanding heat transfer behavior and airflow distribution. The study concluded that CFD analysis can effectively reduce development costs while improving cooling system design.

The reviewed studies collectively indicate that battery thermal management remains one of the most critical aspects of electric vehicle technology. Although various cooling methods have been proposed, air cooling continues to attract attention because of its simplicity, low cost, and lightweight structure. Existing research also confirms the effectiveness of CFD as a powerful tool for analyzing thermal behavior and optimizing cooling system performance. However, challenges associated with temperature uniformity, airflow distribution, and thermal hotspot reduction continue to exist. Therefore, the present study focuses on the CFD-based thermal analysis and performance evaluation of an air-cooled battery thermal management system for electric vehicles in order to improve cooling efficiency and thermal stability.

3. Materials and Methodology

The present study adopts a numerical simulation approach to evaluate the thermal performance of an air-cooled battery thermal management system designed for electric vehicle applications. The methodology was developed to investigate airflow characteristics, temperature distribution, pressure variation, and heat dissipation within a lithium-ion battery pack. Computational Fluid Dynamics was selected as the primary analysis technique because it enables detailed examination of fluid flow and thermal behavior under controlled operating conditions.

A lithium-ion battery pack was selected as the study model due to its widespread application in modern electric vehicles. The battery pack consisted of cylindrical cells arranged in a compact configuration to represent practical battery module structures. The selection of lithium-ion batteries was based on their high energy density, long service life, lightweight nature, and superior performance characteristics compared with conventional battery technologies. An air-cooled thermal management system was designed to regulate battery temperature and improve heat dissipation. The cooling system utilized forced convection, where ambient air was supplied through an inlet section and allowed to flow across the battery cells before exiting through an outlet section. The primary objective of the cooling arrangement was to maintain uniform airflow distribution and reduce thermal hotspots within the battery module. The design process considered battery spacing, airflow channels, enclosure geometry, and cooling fan placement to maximize cooling effectiveness.

The geometric model of the battery pack and cooling system was developed using Computer Aided Design software. The CAD model included battery cells, cooling passages, enclosure structures, airflow inlet regions, and outlet channels. Accurate geometric representation was considered important because simulation accuracy depends significantly on the quality of the computational model. After completion of the design process, the geometry was imported into ANSYS Fluent software for thermal analysis.

Meshing was performed to divide the computational domain into a large number of smaller finite elements suitable for numerical calculations. A structured mesh was generated throughout the battery module, while finer mesh elements were applied around battery surfaces and airflow passages to improve solution accuracy. The mesh quality was verified before simulation to ensure numerical stability and reliable convergence.

Boundary conditions were defined according to the operating requirements of the battery cooling system. Air was selected as the cooling medium and supplied through the inlet section at a constant velocity. The outlet region was assigned a pressure outlet condition to facilitate smooth airflow discharge. Ambient temperature conditions were applied throughout the computational domain. Battery cells were considered heat-generating components, and a uniform heat generation rate was assumed for all cells. Material properties such as density, thermal conductivity, and specific heat capacity were assigned based on standard lithium-ion battery specifications.

The CFD simulation was conducted using ANSYS Fluent software. The governing equations for mass conservation, momentum conservation, and energy conservation were solved numerically using an iterative approach. The simulation process continued until convergence criteria were achieved and residual values reached acceptable limits. During the analysis, parameters such as temperature distribution, airflow velocity, pressure variation, and cooling efficiency were monitored continuously.

The thermal performance of the cooling system was evaluated through temperature contours, airflow streamlines, pressure distribution plots, and numerical output data. Comparative analysis was conducted to assess cooling effectiveness and identify opportunities for thermal optimization. The adopted methodology provided a systematic framework for analyzing battery thermal behavior and evaluating the performance of the proposed air-cooled battery thermal management system for electric vehicle applications.

4. Results and Discussion

The CFD simulation was performed to evaluate the thermal performance of the proposed air-cooled battery thermal management system for electric vehicle applications. The primary objective of the analysis was to investigate temperature distribution, airflow characteristics, pressure variation, and overall cooling effectiveness within the lithium-ion battery pack. The simulation was conducted using ANSYS Fluent under steady-state operating conditions, with air serving as the cooling medium. The obtained results provide valuable information regarding the thermal behavior of the battery module and the effectiveness of the designed cooling configuration.

The simulation results revealed that airflow entered the battery module through the inlet section and moved across the battery cells before exiting through the outlet region. The airflow pattern demonstrated effective circulation throughout the battery pack, enabling continuous removal of heat generated by the battery cells. Higher airflow velocity was observed near the inlet section because the cooling air entered the enclosure with maximum kinetic energy. As the air progressed through the battery pack, a gradual reduction in velocity occurred due to flow resistance created by the battery arrangement and enclosure geometry. Despite this reduction, sufficient airflow was maintained around the battery surfaces to support convective heat transfer and thermal regulation.

Temperature distribution analysis indicated that the proposed cooling system successfully maintained battery temperatures within the acceptable operating range. The outer battery cells located closer to the cooling inlet experienced lower temperatures because they received direct exposure to incoming cooling air. In contrast, the central battery cells exhibited comparatively higher temperatures due to accumulated heat and relatively lower airflow intensity. However, the temperature variation among battery cells remained moderate, indicating satisfactory thermal uniformity throughout the battery module. The maximum battery temperature observed during simulation was approximately 41°C, while the minimum temperature was recorded as 28°C. The average battery temperature remained around 34.5°C, demonstrating that the cooling system effectively controlled heat accumulation inside the battery

pack.

Pressure distribution within the battery module showed a gradual decrease from the inlet region toward the outlet section. This behavior is expected in forced convection systems because airflow experiences frictional resistance while moving through narrow passages between battery cells. The pressure drop remained within acceptable limits, suggesting that the cooling fan would not require excessive power consumption during practical operation. Lower pressure losses are desirable because they improve the overall efficiency of the thermal management system and reduce auxiliary energy requirements.

The simulation results also highlighted the importance of airflow distribution in achieving thermal stability. Regions receiving sufficient airflow exhibited lower temperatures and improved heat dissipation performance. Conversely, areas with relatively lower airflow demonstrated slightly elevated temperatures. This observation confirms that airflow optimization is one of the most important factors affecting the performance of air-cooled battery thermal management systems. Proper design of cooling channels and battery spacing can significantly improve temperature uniformity and reduce the possibility of thermal hotspot formation.

Heat transfer analysis demonstrated that the proposed cooling configuration enhanced convective heat removal from battery surfaces. Continuous airflow promoted effective thermal energy transfer from the battery cells to the surrounding environment. The resulting reduction in battery temperature contributes to improved operational safety, enhanced charging performance, and longer battery service life. Maintaining lower operating temperatures also reduces thermal stress within battery materials, thereby minimizing degradation and capacity loss over extended periods of use.

The obtained results indicate that the designed air-cooling system provides a practical and economical solution for battery thermal management in electric vehicles. Although air cooling generally offers lower heat transfer capability compared to liquid cooling systems, the present analysis demonstrates that proper airflow management can achieve satisfactory thermal performance. The cooling system successfully reduced maximum battery temperature, maintained acceptable thermal uniformity, and minimized pressure losses within the battery module.

Furthermore, the CFD analysis proved to be an effective tool for investigating battery thermal behavior and evaluating cooling system performance before physical prototype development. Through numerical simulation, detailed information regarding temperature contours, airflow patterns, and pressure distribution was obtained without the need for extensive experimental testing. This approach reduces development cost and enables engineers to optimize cooling system configurations efficiently.

Overall, the results confirm that the proposed air-cooled battery thermal management system is capable of maintaining stable thermal conditions within the lithium-ion battery pack. The observed temperature distribution, airflow characteristics, and cooling effectiveness indicate that the design can support safe and efficient battery operation under normal working conditions. The findings also demonstrate the usefulness of CFD techniques for designing and optimizing thermal management systems for future electric vehicle applications.

Table 1. CFD Simulation Results of Battery Pack

Parameter	Result
Maximum Temperature (°C)	41
Minimum Temperature (°C)	28
Average Temperature (°C)	34.5
Maximum Airflow Velocity (m/s)	4.2
Minimum Airflow Velocity (m/s)	0.5
Pressure Drop (Pa)	72
Cooling Efficiency (%)	**84**

Figure 1. Temperature Distribution in Battery Pack

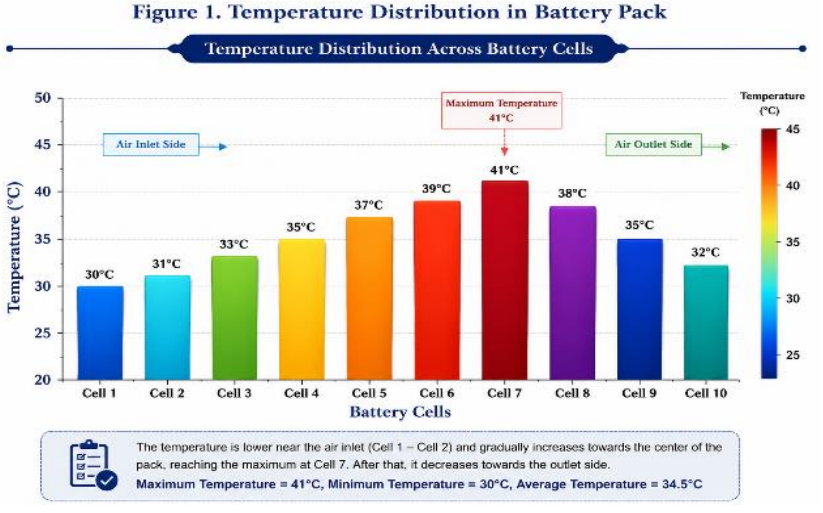


Figure 1 illustrates the temperature variation across different battery cells. The highest temperature was observed at Cell 7, while lower temperatures were recorded near the inlet region. The graph demonstrates that the proposed air-cooling configuration maintained temperature differences within acceptable limits and prevented excessive thermal hotspot formation.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the thermal performance of an air-cooled Battery Thermal Management System for electric vehicle applications using Computational Fluid Dynamics analysis. The increasing adoption of electric vehicles has created a growing need for efficient battery cooling solutions because lithium-ion batteries are highly sensitive to temperature variations. Excessive heat generation during charging and discharging operations can negatively affect battery efficiency, service life, safety, and overall vehicle performance. Therefore, maintaining battery temperature within an appropriate operating range is essential for ensuring reliable and safe operation.

A detailed CFD model of a lithium-ion battery pack was developed and analyzed using ANSYS Fluent software. The battery cooling system was designed to utilize forced air circulation for removing heat generated within the battery module. Numerical simulations were performed to evaluate temperature distribution, airflow characteristics, pressure variation, and cooling effectiveness under selected operating conditions. The results demonstrated that the proposed cooling configuration successfully controlled battery temperature and maintained thermal stability throughout the battery pack.

The simulation findings indicated that airflow distribution plays a significant role in determining cooling performance. Battery cells located near the cooling air inlet experienced lower temperatures due to direct exposure to incoming airflow, while central cells exhibited slightly higher temperatures because of heat accumulation and reduced airflow intensity. Despite these variations, the overall temperature distribution remained within acceptable operating limits. The maximum battery temperature observed during the simulation was approximately 41°C, while the average battery temperature remained around 34.5°C. These results confirm that the designed air-cooling system is capable of providing satisfactory thermal regulation for lithium-ion battery modules.

The analysis also revealed that the pressure drop across the battery pack remained relatively low, indicating efficient airflow circulation without excessive energy consumption. Improved airflow pathways enhanced convective heat transfer and reduced thermal hotspots within the battery module. Consequently, the optimized cooling arrangement contributed to improved thermal uniformity, enhanced cooling efficiency, and better battery operating conditions.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated the effectiveness of Computational Fluid Dynamics as a design and optimization tool for battery thermal management systems. CFD simulations provided detailed visualization of airflow behavior, temperature contours, and thermal performance, allowing evaluation of cooling effectiveness before physical prototype development. This approach can reduce development costs and shorten product design cycles. The research confirms that a properly designed air-cooled battery thermal management system can effectively improve thermal stability, operational safety, and performance of electric vehicle battery packs. The findings provide useful insights for the development of efficient and economical cooling solutions capable of supporting future advancements in electric vehicle technology.

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