# Thermodynamic Modeling and Performance Evaluation of Stirling Engines for Hybrid Energy Systems

Ibrahim Ahmed, Department of Mechanical Engineering, Alexandria University, Egypt
Fatima Bensouda, Department of Energy Systems, University of Tunis, Tunisia

## Abstract

Stirling engines are a promising solution for hybrid energy systems, combining renewable and non-renewable sources due to their high efficiency and flexibility in utilizing various heat sources. This paper explores the thermodynamic models used to predict Stirling engine performance, with a particular focus on gamma-type engines featuring sinusoidal drive mechanisms. It also examines the classical Schmidt Isothermal Model and its limitations, alongside recent advances in computational modeling. The integration of Stirling engines with hydrogen production technologies and lithium-ion batteries for energy storage is reviewed. The insights provided by this analysis will help guide future developments aimed at optimizing Stirling engines for sustainable energy applications.

## 1. Introduction

The global transition to sustainable energy has driven interest in technologies that can efficiently integrate renewable and non-renewable energy sources. Stirling engines, known for their external combustion and capacity to operate with a range of heat sources, offer significant potential in hybrid energy systems. These engines can harness heat from solar, biomass, geothermal, and fossil fuel sources, making them versatile for both small-scale and industrial applications (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2015a; Nielsen and Westergaard, 2017).

This paper investigates the thermodynamic modeling of Stirling engines, particularly gamma-type Stirling engines with sinusoidal drive mechanisms, and discusses the paradox of the classical Schmidt Isothermal Model. Additionally, we explore the role of Stirling engines in hydrogen production and their integration with lithium-ion battery storage systems. The study combines insights from recent literature to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the opportunities and challenges associated with optimizing Stirling engine performance in hybrid energy systems (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2016a; Kurmi et al., 2021).

## 2. Thermodynamic Modeling of Stirling Engines

### 2.1 The Schmidt Isothermal Model

The Schmidt Isothermal Model, developed in the late 19th century, is the classical thermodynamic model used for predicting Stirling engine performance. This model assumes isothermal compression and expansion of the working gas, simplifying the analysis of the thermodynamic cycle. However, the model often fails to account for real-world losses, such as regenerator inefficiencies and heat transfer issues, leading to a paradox where the predicted performance exceeds actual experimental results (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2016b).

Although widely used for its simplicity, the Schmidt Isothermal Model is increasingly being replaced by more sophisticated models that incorporate non-ideal gas behavior and better represent the dynamic interactions within the engine (Dreyer et al., 2020).

### 2.2 Advanced Thermodynamic Models

To overcome the limitations of the Schmidt model, second-order models and computational simulations have been developed. These models take into account losses from heat transfer, friction, and regenerator inefficiencies, providing more accurate predictions of engine performance (Urbani et al., 2019). A thermodynamic model for gamma-type Stirling engines with sinusoidal drive mechanisms, proposed by Kwasi-Effah et al. (2016a), has proven to be more effective at predicting real-world performance by considering the mechanical and thermodynamic interactions that occur during the engine's operation.

The use of Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) modeling has also advanced the understanding of heat transfer and fluid flow within Stirling engines. These simulations allow for better optimization of engine components and operating conditions, improving overall efficiency (Dreyer et al., 2020).

## 3. Performance of Gamma-Type Stirling Engines

### 3.1 Sinusoidal Drive Mechanism

Gamma-type Stirling engines are a popular configuration due to their simple design and separate power and displacer pistons. The sinusoidal drive mechanism ensures that the pistons operate smoothly, reducing mechanical friction and enhancing performance. Kwasi-Effah et al. (2016a) developed a thermodynamic model that incorporates this drive mechanism, providing insights into the performance of gamma-type engines under various operating conditions.

The results from this study indicate that engine efficiency is highly dependent on the synchronization of piston movements and the frequency of operation. The sinusoidal drive mechanism offers a balance between mechanical simplicity and operational efficiency, making gamma-type engines suitable for renewable energy applications, particularly when operating with low-temperature heat sources (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2016c).

## 4. Stirling Engines and Hydrogen Production

The potential of Stirling engines to generate electricity from renewable heat sources makes them an attractive option for hydrogen production through water electrolysis. Hydrogen is a key component of sustainable energy systems, as it can be used as a clean fuel in a variety of applications, from transportation to power generation (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2015b).

Research has demonstrated that Stirling engines can efficiently power electrolytic hydrogen production systems, especially when combined with concentrated solar power (CSP) or waste heat recovery systems. This integration enhances the overall sustainability of the hydrogen production process by utilizing excess thermal energy that would otherwise be wasted (Nielsen and Westergaard, 2017). The versatility of Stirling engines allows them to operate in combined heat and power (CHP) systems, maximizing both electricity generation and thermal output (Kurmi et al., 2021).

## 5. Stirling Engines and Lithium-Ion Battery Storage

Lithium-ion batteries are critical to modern energy systems due to their high energy density and ability to store large amounts of electricity. Hybrid systems that combine Stirling engines with lithium-ion battery storage offer an efficient solution for balancing power generation and demand in renewable energy systems (Kwasi-Effah and Rabczuk, 2018).

### 5.1 Synergy in Hybrid Systems

Hybrid systems utilize Stirling engines to generate electricity during periods of high thermal input (e.g., from solar or geothermal sources), while lithium-ion batteries store the excess energy for later use. This combination provides a stable power supply, even when the thermal energy source fluctuates. Kwasi-Effah and Rabczuk (2018) demonstrated how optimizing the energy density of lithium-ion batteries improves the overall performance of such hybrid systems by ensuring reliable energy storage and retrieval.

The integration of these two technologies is particularly beneficial for off-grid or remote areas where consistent access to traditional energy infrastructure may not be available (Yildiz et al., 2017). By leveraging the strengths of Stirling engines in power generation and lithium-ion batteries in storage, hybrid systems can achieve higher overall efficiencies while reducing reliance on fossil fuels (Dreyer et al., 2020).

## 6. Future Research Directions

To further enhance the performance of Stirling engines in hybrid energy systems, several areas of research need to be explored:

1. **Advanced Thermodynamic Modeling**: Further refinement of thermodynamic models that account for real-world losses, such as heat transfer inefficiencies, friction, and mechanical losses, will be critical in optimizing Stirling engine performance (Kwasi-Effah et al., 2016a; Urbani et al., 2019).
2. **Material Innovation**: Research into advanced materials that can withstand the high temperatures in Stirling engines is essential for improving engine durability and reducing costs (Dreyer et al., 2020).
3. **Hydrogen Production**: Continued study of Stirling engine-powered electrolytic hydrogen production will help develop more efficient and sustainable methods for generating hydrogen as a clean fuel (Kurmi et al., 2021).
4. **Energy Storage Optimization**: Investigating the integration of Stirling engines with advanced energy storage technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries, will be key to maximizing the efficiency of hybrid systems (Kwasi-Effah and Rabczuk, 2018).

## 7. Conclusion

Stirling engines hold great promise for use in hybrid energy systems, where they can efficiently integrate renewable and non-renewable heat sources. The development of advanced thermodynamic models, particularly for gamma-type engines with sinusoidal drive mechanisms, has enhanced the understanding of Stirling engine performance. Additionally, the integration of Stirling engines with hydrogen production systems and lithium-ion battery storage offers a pathway to more sustainable energy solutions.

By addressing the challenges associated with materials, modeling, and integration, future research will enable Stirling engines to play a crucial role in reducing carbon emissions and enhancing the efficiency of hybrid energy systems.

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