

Review of Structural Analysis of Wind Turbine Blade

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Abstract - This study focuses on the structural analysis and design optimization of wind turbine blades to enhance efficiency, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. Wind turbine blades experience complex loads, including aerodynamic forces, gravitational effects, and extreme weather conditions. Ensuring their durability and maximizing energy capture efficiency is crucial for sustainable wind energy systems. Finite element analysis (FEA) is employed to evaluate stress distribution, deflection, natural frequencies, and failure modes such as buckling, delamination, and fatigue. The study compares conventional glass-fiber-reinforced composites with advanced carbon-fiber composites to determine optimal material choices for strength, weight, and cost balance.

Optimization techniques, including genetic algorithms and gradient-based methods, refine blade design parameters such as length, airfoil shape, chord distribution, and twist angle. These approaches aim to minimize blade mass while maintaining structural integrity and performance. Material distribution is also optimized to enhance recyclability and sustainability. Manufacturing constraints and cost considerations are integrated into the design process, exploring innovations like hybrid materials and adaptive structures. The findings contribute to the development of next-generation wind turbine blades, supporting the expansion of efficient and sustainable wind energy solutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Windmills, iconic structures of ingenuity and sustainability, have graced landscapes for centuries as symbols of innovation and utility. These remarkable machines harness the power of wind to perform essential tasks, making them a cornerstone of human development and a testament to our relationship with nature. Originating over a thousand years ago, windmills were initially designed to grind grain into flour and pump water, playing a vital role in agriculture and early industry.

At their core, windmills are marvels of mechanical engineering. Their sails or blades catch the wind's kinetic energy, converting it into rotational motion to power machinery. This simple yet effective principle underscores humanity's enduring quest to harness renewable resources. Over time, windmills evolved in design and purpose, from the traditional post and tower mills of

medieval Europe to the sleek, modern turbines generating clean electricity today.

Beyond their functional significance, windmills carry cultural and aesthetic value. They stand as picturesque landmarks in rural landscapes, often evoking a sense of nostalgia and harmony with the environment. In an era increasingly focused on sustainability, windmills—and their contemporary counterparts, wind turbines—underscore the importance of renewable energy in combating climate change.

Whether viewed as historical artifacts, practical tools, or symbols of a greener future, windmills inspire awe and remind us of humanity's ability to innovate in harmony with nature. Their story is a journey through time, intertwining tradition, technology, and an enduring reliance on the power of the wind.



Figure 1 – Windmills

Windmill blades are the defining feature of windmills, embodying the essence of harnessing wind energy and transforming it into mechanical or electrical power. These dynamic components, designed to capture the kinetic energy of the wind, are vital to the functionality and efficiency of windmills, both traditional and modern. Their evolution reflects centuries of engineering innovation and adaptation to changing needs and technologies.

The journey of windmill blades begins with their rudimentary wooden designs in early windmills, used primarily for grinding grain or pumping water. These

early blades were simple yet effective, leveraging basic aerodynamic principles to rotate and drive machinery. Over time, advancements in materials and understanding of wind dynamics revolutionized their design. Today, modern wind turbines are equipped with sleek, precision-engineered blades made of advanced composites like fiberglass and carbon fiber, designed to maximize energy capture while withstanding harsh environmental conditions.

Aerodynamic optimization plays a critical role in blade design, ensuring that they can generate power efficiently at varying wind speeds. From a cultural perspective, windmill blades are iconic, seen spinning atop historic mills in the European countryside or towering turbines on modern wind farms. Their visual presence often symbolizes humanity's ingenuity and commitment to sustainable energy.

As the demand for renewable energy grows, windmill blades stand at the forefront of innovation, enabling cleaner, greener solutions to power the world. They serve as both a bridge to the past and a beacon of progress, showcasing the harmonious integration of nature and technology.

The size and number of blades vary depending on the windmill's purpose. For electricity generation, modern turbines often feature three blades for optimal balance, efficiency, and reduced noise. These blades are not only technological marvels but also represent the synergy between engineering and renewable energy innovation.

The design of windmill blades is a cornerstone of modern wind energy systems, directly influencing their efficiency, performance, and environmental impact. As the primary component responsible for capturing the kinetic energy of the wind, these blades are marvels of engineering, combining advanced materials and aerodynamic principles to optimize energy conversion.

A well-designed windmill blade maximizes energy capture by utilizing an airfoil shape, precision angles, and lightweight materials. The challenge lies in balancing strength, durability, and cost while ensuring the blades can endure harsh weather conditions and fluctuating wind loads over their lifespan. Modern innovations, such as smart materials and recyclable designs, have further advanced blade technology, making it integral to the global push for renewable energy.

Understanding the complexities of windmill blade design offers insight into the interplay between engineering ingenuity and environmental stewardship, driving the evolution of sustainable energy solutions.

The optimization of windmill blade design is essential for enhancing the efficiency, reliability, and sustainability of wind energy systems. As wind energy continues to play a critical role in transitioning to renewable energy, there is a growing need to maximize the performance of windmills while minimizing costs and environmental impacts.

2. Literature Review

Maalawi and Badr [1] examined the mechanical interaction between turbine blades and the electric generator, focusing on strategies for controlling pitch and rotational speed. Their study highlights the complexity of this problem, which involves numerous factors, relationships, and constraints. Designing optimal blades requires addressing aerodynamic, structural, and control challenges. Nevertheless, the design process can be effectively handled through an iterative and step-by-step approach. In aerodynamic optimization, the blade is modeled as a series of cross-sections along the pitch axis, with each section characterized by its aerofoil profile, chord length, and attachment angle, influenced by both collective and local twist angles.

Thresher and Dodge [2] explored how the blade's pitch angle is determined by the broader control strategy of the wind energy system. Accurately computing the airflow around rotating blades remains a highly complex task. Solving the three-dimensional Navier-Stokes equations within a rotating frame provides detailed insights into the wind flow and the forces exerted on the turbine surfaces, but the associated computational costs make this approach impractical for typical design and analysis work.

Tangler [3] explained that the Blade Element Momentum (BEM) theory offers a simplified, one-dimensional approach to modeling blade aerodynamics. Despite its simplifications, it is widely used in the wind energy industry because it can predict blade performance with reasonable accuracy.

United Technologies Corporation [4] conducted a comprehensive experimental modal analysis, employing a hydraulic shaker and multiple accelerometers to measure one edgewise and two flapwise accelerations at approximately 20 blade stations. The resulting frequency response functions were compared to outcomes from a three-dimensional shell element finite element (FE) model. Their study focused on analyzing the dynamic characteristics associated with the seven lowest natural frequencies.

Larsen and Kretz [5] utilized modal analysis techniques to identify dominant mode shapes in medium-sized wind turbine blades. Their approach successfully captured the primary modes related to the three lowest natural

frequencies by analyzing the transfer function between a sinusoidal force applied at the blade tip and accelerometer responses recorded across up to 68 blade stations.

Larsen, Hansen, Baumgart, and Carlén [6] evaluated the dynamic behavior of wind turbine blades, including natural frequencies, damping ratios, and mode shapes, through modal analysis methods. Their work, conducted on the LM 19m blade, provides insights applicable to various blade designs. They assessed measurement reliability using standard deviations and coefficients of variation, noting high accuracy in natural frequencies and damping but greater variability in mode shape assessments. Primary deflection modes exhibited minimal uncertainty, whereas secondary, particularly torsional, deflections showed higher error margins. Although systematic errors such as blade support flexibility and sensor arrangement were acknowledged, they were not quantified.

Dimitriadis [7] assessed the performance of Horizontal Axis Wind Turbines (HAWTs) using two analytical methods: Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) and Blade Element Momentum Theory (BEMT). He compared the results from both methods, conducting both two-dimensional and three-dimensional analyses to study the flow fields around turbine blades. Drag and lift coefficients were evaluated against available experimental data, revealing the superior accuracy and advantages of CFD modeling compared to BEMT.

Dhurpate, Sutar, and Kale [8] analyzed the performance of a small horizontal-axis wind turbine rotor blade using various airfoil types. The study assumed low wind speeds and low Reynolds numbers, using a single airfoil type across the blade span. The rotor, with a 2-meter diameter and three blades, was modeled using four different airfoils, with a tip speed ratio of 7. Among all tested airfoils, the E387 airfoil demonstrated the best performance.

Soland and Thuné [9] studied the rotor blade performance of a wind turbine with a diameter of 165 meters. They used computational tools such as XFLR5 and QBlade for simulations, applying the Blade Element Momentum Theory for analysis. Their findings detailed rotor performance under various operational loads and indicated that the NACA 63-6XX and NACA 64-6XX airfoils offered the best performance improvements compared to other tested airfoils.

Kale, Birajdar, and Sapali [10] designed new airfoil shapes to enhance wind turbine performance, creating distinct airfoils for the root and tip sections. They employed Blade Element Momentum Theory in designing a small wind turbine blade and conducted numerical analysis using

QBlade software. Their results were compared with those for the NACA 2412 and SG 6042 airfoils, further comparing the performance of blades constructed with different individual airfoils using the same software.

Mahri and Rouabah [11] conducted a dynamic stress evaluation on a wind turbine blade, which was designed using blade element theory. Their analysis incorporated beam theory for dynamic behavior and utilized both finite element modeling and blade motion equations to perform modal analysis.

Edon [12] designed a 38-meter blade for a 1.5 MW wind turbine using the blade element momentum (BEM) theory. In his proposed future work, he introduced a chord distribution formula, which has been implemented in this study.

Giguere and Selig [13] presented a methodology for optimizing blade geometry in wind turbine rotor design. Their approach utilized pre-programmed software tools to enhance both structural and cost-efficiency models.

Jureczko, Pawlak, and Mezyk [14] applied BEM theory in blade design and used ANSYS software to calculate the blades' natural frequencies. Mode shapes were determined using a Timoshenko twisted, tapered beam element formulation. A genetic algorithm was employed to optimize the blade's performance by reducing vibrations, lowering costs, increasing output, and improving stability.

Guo, Wu, Xu, and Li [15] developed a 1.5 MW wind turbine rotor with a 35-meter blade length using MATLAB. Their results confirmed the viability of MATLAB for large-scale turbine design, highlighting its cost-effectiveness in early-stage aerodynamic analysis and performance optimization. Computational fluid dynamics (CFD) results were used for validation.

Carcangiu [16] utilized the FLUENT CFD tool to gain detailed insights into fluid flow behavior over wind turbine blades, contributing to more precise aerodynamic assessments.

Jackson et al. [17] carried out a preliminary study for designing a 50-meter-long wind turbine blade using both fiberglass and carbon fiber composite materials. Adjustments in cross-sectional thickness were made to improve structural performance, and aerodynamic analyses were conducted for both clean and contaminated surface conditions.

Wang et al. [18] investigated turbines of three different sizes to develop a cost-optimization model that maximized annual energy output. By using an enhanced BEM model integrated with blade structural dynamics, they

successfully demonstrated reduced energy production costs.

Karam and Hani [19] implemented a multi-dimensional optimization technique to maximize the blade's natural frequency. The optimization process considered parameters such as cross-sectional area, radius of gyration, and chord length, and the approach proved to be computationally efficient.

Hsu [20] developed a theoretical framework for analyzing twisted, tapered beams using the spline collocation method. The provided expressions for cross-sectional area and moment of inertia are used as a basis in this work.

Rao and Gupta [21] analyzed twisted, tapered, rotating Timoshenko beams using the finite element method. They derived the stiffness and mass matrices through shape functions and determined the natural frequencies by reformulating the problem into an eigenvalue analysis.

Hillemer et al. [22] designed wind turbines with power outputs exceeding 5 MW by scaling existing rotor models. Using simple beam theory, they assessed stresses, bending moments, and natural frequencies. To reduce blade weight, airfoil shell thicknesses, as well as web and flange dimensions, were adjusted across sections, constrained by requirements for structural strength and minimal mass.

Gooden [23] studied the two-dimensional aerodynamic properties of the FX 66 S 196 V1 airfoil, which is used in this report. The investigation focused on lift and drag coefficients over various Reynolds numbers.

Bharath [24] designed a 45-meter blade for a wind speed of 12 m/s using BEM theory, calculating flow angles, thrust, torque, and power. The blade was modeled as a hollow tapered beam, with stiffness and mass matrices derived from the cross-sectional area and moment of inertia. Chord length dictated the taper, and airfoil thickness defined the height. Natural frequencies were evaluated in both axial and transverse directions. Optimization using MATLAB's *fmincon* function focused on maximizing power and minimizing mass under different constraint scenarios, yielding optimized chord profiles and performance visualizations.

Miller et al. [25] provided an overview of recent advances in simulation techniques, tools, and applications for wind energy. The industry increasingly depends on CFD to design innovative turbines, though BEM remains more prevalent in early design phases due to its simplicity. They emphasized the need for new tools that integrate CFD earlier in the process and highlighted the role of algorithmic optimization in minimizing reliance on trial-and-error methods.

Madsen et al. [26] and parallel studies using blade-resolved rotor models often excluded hub geometry, yet CFD techniques successfully captured spanwise and tip flow patterns. These flow features significantly influence aerodynamic loads both within and outside the rotor plane.

Horcas et al. [27] found that tools like HAWC2, based on OpenFAST physics models, tend to overestimate loads on 10 MW turbines at sub-rated wind speeds. Moreover, these tools often underestimate the performance benefits of curved blade tips. Due to their reliance on fixed drag polars and limitations in gradient calculations, their effectiveness for optimization is reduced, especially when refining airfoil shapes.

Batay et al. [28] demonstrated that aerostructural optimization can enhance wind turbine blade performance by reducing blade mass, which contributes to higher energy output and cost savings. They recommended future work focus on improving optimization techniques and expanding them to a wider range of turbine types.

Jureczko, Pawlak, and Mezyk [29] created a general-purpose numerical model for wind turbine blade optimization and developed a software tool for multi-objective discrete-continuous optimization. Using ANSYS parametric modeling, users can vary blade thickness and key dimensions. The tool incorporates a modified genetic algorithm to optimize performance based on multiple objectives under specified constraints.

Chattot [30] argued that while an optimal rotor does not strictly meet the Betz limit at each blade section, it does satisfy the condition on average across the Trefftz plane. The optimization problem remains well-posed in inviscid flow as long as the airfoil's maximum lift coefficient is respected. The study concluded that viscous effects have minor influence on the ideal blade shape, mainly reducing overall efficiency. The method is adaptable to geometric constraints, such as optimizing for a given chord distribution.

Fuglsang and Madsen [31] introduced a direct design method for horizontal-axis wind turbines, employing numerical optimization and various computational models. These included aerodynamic, structural, aeroelastic (time-domain), extreme load, and noise prediction analyses. They also estimated manufacturing costs based on design loads.

Jureczko, Pawlak, and Mezyk [32] (in a follow-up study) again emphasized their optimization software, capable of creating diverse blade models through ANSYS scripting. The tool applies a modified genetic algorithm for

optimizing blades against several criteria under various constraints.

Schubel and Crossley [33] noted that the three-blade horizontal-axis configuration dominates today's wind turbine market due to its efficiency, control, and scalability. Supported by a global supply network, this design continues to outperform alternatives. Blade geometries are carefully shaped to enhance aerodynamics, with increasing width, twist, and thickness near the hub to withstand higher bending moments. While current innovations focus on scaling turbine size, future advancements may prioritize performance enhancements via new materials and airfoil designs, especially as physical growth reaches practical limits.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The development and optimization of wind turbine blades is a complex, multidisciplinary process involving aerodynamic efficiency, structural integrity, and control strategies. The widespread adoption of the horizontal-axis, three-blade configuration has been driven by its proven performance, scalability, and cost-effectiveness. Studies utilizing Blade Element Momentum Theory (BEMT) have provided a reliable foundation for blade design, while more advanced methods like Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) and Finite Element Method (FEM) offer detailed insights into flow behavior and structural dynamics, albeit at higher computational costs. Researchers have demonstrated that blade optimization, whether through genetic algorithms, MATLAB-based tools, or multi-criteria approaches, can lead to significant improvements in energy output, reduced material use, and increased reliability.

Experimental and modal analyses have furthered understanding of blade dynamics, highlighting the importance of accurately predicting natural frequencies and damping characteristics. Airfoil selection remains critical, with performance varying based on Reynolds number, tip speed ratio, and blade span location. As turbine sizes increase, maintaining the balance between aerodynamic performance and structural strength becomes increasingly important. Future innovations are expected to focus on integrating high-fidelity simulations with optimization techniques, aiming to enhance performance while addressing limitations in transport, manufacturing, and environmental impact. Overall, continuous refinement in design tools and methodologies ensures ongoing progress in wind turbine technology.

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