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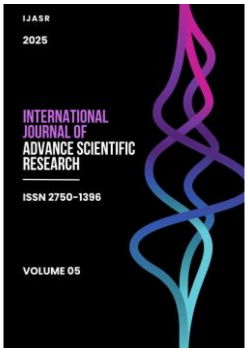

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Research Article

Structural Design Approaches for Omnidirectional Wind Energy Harvesting using Triboelectric Nanogenerators

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Dr. Aditya Prasetyo
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Bandung, Indonesia

Dr. Siti Nur Aisyah
Center for Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The development of efficient and robust wind energy harvesting systems is essential to meet the growing demand for sustainable and decentralized energy sources. This study explores structural design strategies for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting using triboelectric nanogenerators (TENGs). By leveraging the triboelectric effect and advanced material configurations, TENG-based systems offer significant potential for low-cost, lightweight, and scalable wind energy solutions. Various structural designs, including flutter-driven, rotary, and hybrid configurations, are analyzed with respect to their mechanical-to-electrical energy conversion efficiency, adaptability to multi-directional airflow, and environmental durability. The paper also discusses design optimizations that enhance charge transfer, frequency response, and energy output under fluctuating wind conditions. Experimental prototypes and simulation results demonstrate the feasibility and performance of these approaches, highlighting their applicability in powering small electronic devices, sensors, and microgrids, particularly in remote or urban environments with variable wind directions.

KEYWORDS

Omnidirectional wind energy, triboelectric nanogenerator (TENG), structural design, energy harvesting, renewable energy, flutter-driven generator, rotary TENG, multi-directional airflow, self-powered systems, micro-energy harvesting.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing global demand for renewable energy sources has spurred significant research into efficient and sustainable energy harvesting technologies [1]. Wind energy, as a ubiquitous and abundant resource, is a prime candidate for conversion into electrical energy [1, 2]. While large-scale wind turbines are well-established, there is a growing need for micro to small-scale wind energy harvesting solutions, particularly for powering distributed sensors, portable electronics, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices [2, 14].

Triboelectric nanogenerators (TENGs) have emerged as a promising technology for harvesting mechanical energy from various sources, including wind [16, 27]. TENGs convert mechanical energy into electrical energy through the coupling of triboelectrification and electrostatic induction [32, 33]. Their advantages include high energy conversion efficiency at low frequencies, cost-effectiveness, and versatility in material selection and structural design [16, 28, 30].

Traditional wind energy harvesting often relies on directional designs that require alignment with the prevailing wind direction. However, wind is often turbulent and can come from multiple directions, especially in urban environments or for mobile applications [25, 26]. Therefore, developing TENGs capable of harvesting wind energy effectively from any direction – omnidirectional harvesting – is crucial for maximizing energy capture and enhancing the practicality of wind-powered devices [25, 26]. This requires innovative structural design strategies that can respond to wind forces regardless of their origin. This article reviews recent advancements in the structural design of TENGs for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting, exploring various approaches and their impact on performance and applications.

METHODS

The design of triboelectric nanogenerators for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting involves several key considerations related to material selection, structural configuration, and coupling mechanisms. The fundamental principle relies on inducing relative motion between two materials with different triboelectric polarities under the influence of wind [32, 33]. This relative motion generates static charges on the surfaces, and the subsequent change in electrostatic potential drives electron flow in an external circuit.

Various structural designs have been explored to achieve omnidirectional wind energy harvesting. These designs aim to ensure that wind from any direction can effectively cause relative movement between the triboelectric layers. Common approaches include:

- Rotary Designs: These structures utilize rotational motion induced by wind. Examples include designs based on turbines or rotors where triboelectric layers are placed on the rotating and stationary parts [35, 36, 38, 42, 43]. The continuous rotation ensures energy harvesting regardless of wind direction, provided the wind can initiate rotation [35, 36]. Self-adjusting or auto-switching mechanisms can enhance efficiency across varying wind speeds [41, 38].

- Flag or Fluttering Designs: These designs employ flexible triboelectric materials that flutter or oscillate in the wind [27, 28]. The movement of the flexible material against another surface or itself generates charge separation. These structures can respond to wind from a wide range of angles [27, 28].

- Cylindrical or Spherical Designs: Structures with cylindrical or spherical symmetry can interact with wind from any horizontal direction [25, 26]. This might involve a rotating or oscillating element within a stationary outer shell, both coated with triboelectric materials [25, 26]. Vortex-induced vibrations can also be leveraged in such designs [26].

- Hybrid Designs: Combining TENGs with other energy harvesting mechanisms, such as electromagnetic generators (EMGs), can create hybrid systems that are more efficient across a broader range of wind speeds and conditions [4, 22, 35, 40, 43]. These hybrid systems can leverage the strengths of both technologies [22, 35].

- Bio-inspired Designs: Mimicking natural structures that interact effectively with wind, such as leaves or flags, can lead to novel and efficient TENG designs for wind harvesting [24]. Bionic blade designs have shown enhanced aerodynamic performance [24].

Material selection is critical for maximizing the triboelectric effect. Materials with large differences in their position on the triboelectric series are chosen for the contact layers [32]. Common materials include polymers like PTFE, nylon, and PDMS, as well as textiles and composite materials [6, 7, 9, 12, 15, 19]. Micro- and nanostructuring of the material surfaces can significantly enhance the effective contact area and improve output performance [12, 19]. Nanocomposites incorporating materials like BaTiO$_3$ or hBN nanosheets can also boost performance [12, 19].

Characterization of wind energy harvesting TENGs typically involves:

- Output Performance Measurement: Measuring the open-circuit voltage (Voc), short-circuit current (Isc), and output power under varying wind speeds and directions [18, 20, 21].

- Structural Analysis: Evaluating the mechanical response of the structure to wind flow, often using techniques like high-speed imaging or simulations [17, 20].

- Durability Testing: Assessing the long-term performance and mechanical stability of the device under continuous wind exposure [37].

- Integration with Electronics: Demonstrating the ability of the TENG to power electronic devices or charge energy storage units [14, 34, 40].

These methods allow researchers to optimize the structural design and material selection for efficient and reliable omnidirectional wind energy harvesting.

RESULTS

Research into the structural design of TENGs for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting has yielded promising results, demonstrating various approaches to capture energy effectively regardless of wind direction.

Rotary TENGs have shown significant success in converting rotational motion from wind into electrical energy [35, 36, 38, 42, 43]. Designs incorporating multiple blades or specific aerodynamic profiles can achieve low start-up wind speeds and maintain consistent rotation [37, 43]. Studies have shown that optimizing the spacing and configuration of the triboelectric layers on the rotor and stator can lead to enhanced output power [35, 36]. Auto-switching mechanisms have been implemented to adapt the electrical output to varying wind speeds, improving overall efficiency [38].

Flag or fluttering TENGs, while potentially simpler in structure, have also demonstrated omnidirectional capabilities by responding to wind-induced vibrations and oscillations [27, 28]. The flexibility of the materials allows them to move and make contact with another surface or themselves, generating charge [27, 28]. These designs are often lightweight and scalable, making them suitable for various applications [27].

Cylindrical and spherical designs offer inherent omnidirectional response by presenting a consistent profile to wind from any horizontal angle [25, 26]. Researchers have developed structures where an inner element rotates or oscillates within an outer cylinder or sphere, generating triboelectric output [25, 26]. Leveraging vortex-induced rolling has also been explored for omnidirectional harvesting in externally motionless designs [26].

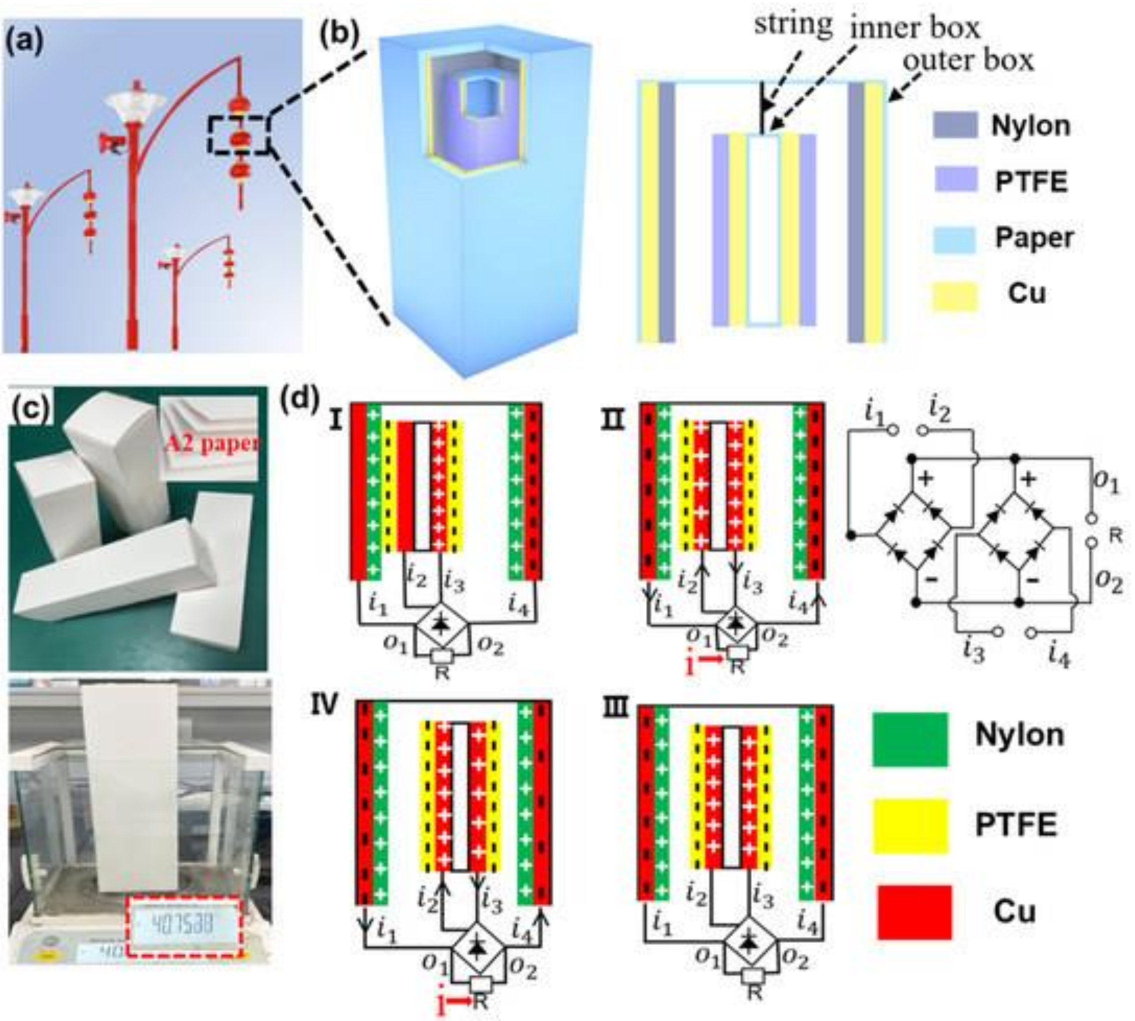

Figure 1. (a) Diagram of CS-TENG application scenarios. (b) Detailed structure of CS-TENG. (c) Photo images of the as–fabricated CS-TENG. (d) Schematic working process of CS-TENG. (I–IV) Charge distribution and current direction during the movement of the inner box from left to right. (d-I) The inner box is on the left. (d-II) The inner box is away from the left friction layer. (d-III) The inner box is in the middle position. (d-IV) The inner box is close to the right friction layer.

Hybrid TENG-EMG systems have shown enhanced performance, particularly in capturing energy across a wider range of wind speeds and frequencies [4, 22, 35, 40, 43]. The TENG component is often more efficient at lower wind speeds and frequencies, while the EMG excels at higher speeds [22, 35]. Combining these mechanisms in a single device allows for more comprehensive energy harvesting [22, 35].

Furthermore, advancements in materials science have contributed to improved TENG performance. The use of textured or micro/nano-structured surfaces on triboelectric layers increases the effective contact area and enhances charge generation [12, 19]. Incorporating nanocomposites can also boost the dielectric properties and overall output [12, 19]. Textile-based TENGs have been developed for wearable applications, demonstrating the versatility of TENGs in different forms [6, 7].

The results indicate that various structural designs can effectively enable omnidirectional wind energy harvesting using TENGs. The choice of design depends on the specific application, desired output power, and environmental conditions. Ongoing research continues to refine these structures and explore new materials to improve efficiency, durability, and practicality [28, 29, 30].

DISCUSSION

The development of triboelectric nanogenerators for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting is a rapidly advancing field, driven by the need for self-powered devices and distributed energy solutions [14, 30]. The structural design plays a pivotal role in determining the efficiency and effectiveness of TENGs in capturing wind energy from any direction [27, 28, 25, 26].

Rotary designs, inspired by traditional wind turbines, are a straightforward approach to achieving omnidirectionality, provided the design allows for rotation regardless of wind angle [35, 36]. Optimizing the blade shape, number, and the triboelectric material placement are key factors in maximizing energy conversion [37, 43]. Challenges include reducing the start-up torque and ensuring efficient operation at low wind speeds [37].

Flag or fluttering designs offer simplicity and flexibility, making them suitable for lightweight and potentially wearable applications [6, 7, 27]. Their ability to respond to turbulent and unpredictable wind patterns is a significant advantage [27]. However, optimizing the material properties and structural constraints to ensure consistent and efficient fluttering across a range of wind speeds can be challenging.

Cylindrical and spherical structures inherently address the omnidirectional requirement by their geometry [25, 26]. Designs that utilize internal moving parts or leverage phenomena like vortex-induced vibrations can effectively capture energy from wind approaching from any horizontal angle [25, 26]. These designs might be more robust in certain environments compared to flexible structures.

Hybrid TENG-EMG systems represent a promising direction for enhancing overall energy harvesting performance [4, 22, 35, 40, 43]. By combining the strengths of both transduction mechanisms, these devices can operate efficiently over a broader range of wind conditions and provide higher power outputs [22, 35]. The integration and optimization of the two systems within a single structure are key areas of research.

Beyond the macroscopic structure, micro- and nano-scale design of the triboelectric surfaces is crucial for maximizing charge generation [12, 19]. Texturing or creating specific patterns on the material surfaces can increase the effective contact area and enhance the triboelectric effect [12, 19]. The development of new triboelectric materials with higher charge densities and improved durability is also an ongoing effort [15].

The application space for omnidirectional wind energy harvesting TENGs is vast, ranging from powering remote sensors in agriculture and environmental monitoring to providing energy for wearable electronics and small-scale urban applications [14, 34, 25]. Self-powered wind speed sensors based on TENGs are also being developed [31, 40]. Future research needs to focus on improving the output power, efficiency, durability, and scalability of these devices to enable their widespread adoption [28, 29, 30]. Addressing issues like moisture sensitivity and long-term stability of triboelectric materials in outdoor environments is also critical [15].

CONCLUSION

The development of triboelectric nanogenerators with omnidirectional wind energy harvesting capabilities is a significant step towards realizing self-powered systems and distributed renewable energy solutions. Various structural design strategies, including rotary, fluttering, cylindrical, and hybrid approaches, have demonstrated effectiveness in capturing wind energy regardless of its direction. These designs, coupled with advancements in triboelectric materials and surface modifications, contribute to improved output performance and broader applicability. While challenges remain in terms of optimizing efficiency, durability, and scalability, the progress in structural design and material science indicates a promising future for TENGs in harnessing wind energy from diverse and unpredictable environments. Continued research and innovation in this field will pave the way for the widespread deployment of self-powered devices for a sustainable future.

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