

A Parallel Heat Exchanger Header Using CFD and Genetic Algorithm

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ABSTRACT

Mal distribution of refrigerant flow in parallel heat exchanger is one of the main reasons which reduces the thermal performance. This study demonstrates a numerical method to automatically evaluate the baffles height in order to optimize the flow distribution of two-phase flow refrigerant inside a heat exchanger header. This method couples the computational fluid dynamics (CFD) model and a genetic algorithm to generate the optimal dimensions of multi baffles simultaneously. The numerical results show that the maldistribution of flow could be reduced up to 9 times compare to original design. Furthermore, this framework also could expand the design space, thus it could be a useful tool to boost up the design of headers using in parallel heat exchanger.

KEYWORDS: refrigerant; computational fluid dynamics (CFD); parallel heat exchanger

INTRODUCTION

The flowmal distribution inside inlet header is one of the most important concern in designing air-cooled heat exchanger. The performance of the heat exchanger could be significantly reduced by the maldistribution of flow [1-2]. Thus, the behavior of flow inside the inlet header is necessarily analyzed as well as optimized to improve the efficiency of parallel flow heat exchanger.

In practical design, flow mal distribution in parallel inlet headers could be induced by both of the geometry and operating conditions [3]. Jiao et al. [4] reported that the flow distribution could be significantly improved by an optimal design of header configuration. The experimental results in this study also stated flow distribution in plate fin heat exchanger was affected by various geometry parameters including the inlet pipe diameter, the first header's diameter, and the second header's diameter.

A serious flow maldistribution problem in the heat exchanger using a conventional header is reported by Wen and Li [5]. To improve the uniformity of flow, they recommended to install a baffle with small-sized holes inside the header. Wang et al.

employed numerical method to evaluate the flow distribution. Using CFD model, Tonomura et al. [7] showed that the shape of manifolds, length and location of inside fins, and inlet flow rate strongly affect to the flow uniformity. The authors also proposed a CFD-based optimization method to find the optimal design of plate-fine microdevices. Wang et al. [8] investigated a different computational approach. The authors presented a Lattice Boltzmann method for shape optimization of the distributor. Recently, Facao [9] developed a correlation model to improve the uniformity of flow in a solar collector. The model was then validated by the CFD simulation.

In this study, we demonstrated a further step to enhance the uniformity of flow inside the header by deploying an automated design process. The procedure is established by coupling the CFD simulation and a surrogated based optimization method [10]. The approach presented in this study is used to optimize the baffle height of inside inlet header to maintain the uniformity of flow. On the other hand, by using this method, we could expand the design space effectively. Therefore, the uniformity of flow which depends on various parameters and has no general form for the specific applications, could be tackled.

NUMERICAL MODEL

Mathematical model

In present study, two-phase flow of refrigerant is simulated using the Open FOAM software. The working fluid is R-134a. Since the experimental test was taken under the adiabatic condition, the simulation will only solve the continuity and momentum equations. VOF method, therefore, has been implemented. In this work, VOF solver in Open FOAM calculates one momentum and one continuity equation for both liquid and gas phases of R134a. The physical properties of one phase are determined based on the volume fraction, α , of two phases in a cell. The continuity equation is defined as follow

$$\nabla \cdot U = 0$$

The momentum equation is determined as follow:

$$\frac{\partial \rho U}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot (\rho U U) - \nabla \cdot \mu \nabla U - \rho g = -\nabla p - F$$

where F_s is the surface tension force at free surfaces and is defined as:

$$F_s = \sigma \kappa(x) n$$

where κ is the curvature of the interface and n is a unit vector normal to the interface. κ and n are calculated as follow:

$$\kappa(x) = \nabla \cdot n$$

Volume fraction, α , in a cell is 0 if it is completely filled by vapor phase and, on the contrary, volume fraction equals 1 if cell is completely filled by fluid phase. Volume fraction is calculated by a transport equation as following:

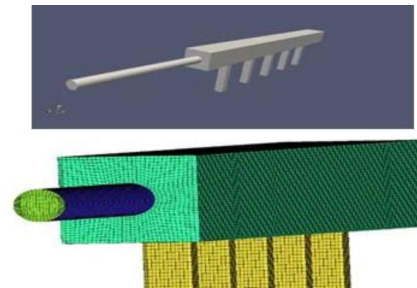


Figure 1. Geometry a

In this study, the original dimensions of the header is obtained from a report of Fei and Hrnjak [11].

In the first step, we set up a CFD model to validate the experimental data. A three-dimensional geometry was then created. The grid was generated with fully hexahedral elements to reduce the computational cost as well as to enhance the accuracy and stability of simulation

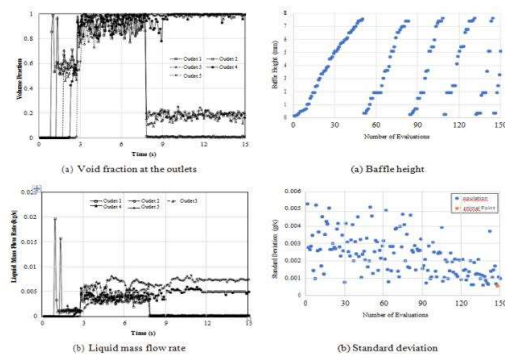
mesh were also made. The detail dimension of manifold is illustrated in Table. 1. The geometry and sample of a grid are shown in Fig. 1. And the properties of two-phase flow of R134a obtained in REFPROP 8 [12] are listed in Table 2.

In the second step, we applied the validated numerical model to the same dimension geometry but inserting the inside baffles between each outlet channel. Since the baffles divide the header to separated subsections, the geometry now can be expressed in 2D model. The geometry and grid are then generated using script. The structure of proposed header design is shown in Figure 2.

Optimization procedure

In present work, a surrogate-based optimization model and single objective genetic algorithm (SOGA) were implemented as the optimizers. The purpose of algorithm is to minimize the standard deviation of the flow rate at the outlets. The optimization block automatically generates baffle dimensions and other continues design space. CFD code, driven by a script, then runs and exports the results to sample-dataset. Total 120 samples were generated. The optimizer then runs evaluation processes bases on the data set and proposed the best results. In SOGA block, the fitness type was set as domination count. The cross over is 80%, the mutation scale is 10%, and the number of evaluations in this study was set as 150 [13-16].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



CONCLUSIONS

In current work, the CFD simulation and a novel optimization approach of two-phase flow distribution of R134a in an inlet header of heat exchanger have been investigated. The simulations were established using VOF model. An optimization procedure which used SBO-GA coupled with CFD simulation has been developed. The results from this study show that the optimal design could reduce the maldistribution of flow up to 9 times compared to the original one. In addition, this procure could be expanded its application to other design parameters that

help designers to saving time in deploying new structure of inlet header used in heat exchanger.

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