



Optimized Hybrid PCM–Heat Pipe Framework for Energy-Efficient Thermal Regulation of Lithium-Ion Battery Packs in Electric Vehicles

¹Akusu O. M., ²Anjorin R.O., ³Enuezie K.U.

¹Department of Welding and Offshore Technology, Petroleum Training Institute, Effurun, Nigeria.

²Institute of Engineering, Technology and Innovation Management (METI), University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria.

³Department of Mechanical Engineering, Bells University of Technology, Ota, Nigeria.

Email: akusu_com@pti.edu.ng, rilwanoanjorin@gmail.com., kenuzie@gmail.com,

Abstract

The present study investigates a hybrid phase change material–heat pipe (PCM–HP) configuration for the thermal management of lithium-ion batteries in electric vehicle (EV) applications. A transient heat transfer model was developed to simulate battery temperature evolution under charge–discharge cycles, accounting for heat conduction, latent heat absorption, and convective dissipation. The model incorporated geometry and material parameterization of the PCM domain and heat pipes, using literature-sourced properties and a meshed computational domain refined through convergence analysis. Boundary conditions were set to emulate realistic thermal loads and ambient variations. A parametric sensitivity analysis was carried out to assess the influence of PCM volume, fin density, and heat pipe spacing on peak temperature, thermal uniformity, and energy efficiency. The results substantiate that integrating heat pipes within PCM-fin assemblies markedly enhances thermal regulation, achieving substantial temperature reduction and improved uniformity under high-power operation. Furthermore, the optimization framework demonstrated the ability to balance competing objectives such as maximum cell temperature and auxiliary cooling demand, identifying near–Pareto-optimal design configurations. Overall, the hybrid PCM–HP system presents a viable, energy-efficient, and scalable solution for EV battery packs, reducing reliance on active cooling and mitigating thermal stress to extend battery life and reliability.

Keywords: Electric vehicles (EVs); Lithium-ion batteries; Thermal management system (TMS); Phase change materials (PCM); Heat pipes; Hybrid cooling; Numerical simulation; Energy efficiency

Accepted 11/4/2025

Published 7/6/2025

1. INTRODUCTION

Electric vehicles (EVs) are revolutionising the way we think about transportation, and their success is largely dependent on the lithium-ion battery at their core. Controlling the temperature of these batteries is necessary for their operation, safety, durability, and energy-saving purpose (Mahmud et al. 2023). EVs are rapidly being adopted worldwide, and the batteries used in these vehicles have become more sensitive to the conditions in which they are allowed to operate because of the need to prevent overheating and to maintain energy performance even at high operating conditions. The improvements in the energy density of the battery pack, the charge-rate capability, and the fast-charging infrastructure contribute to the cells getting a higher thermal load. High discharge rates thus cause very rapid heat fluxes, and if there is no adequate thermal control, temperature nonuniformities can result in faster degradation, capacity fade, or even safety hazards (Shi et al. 2023). It is, therefore, designing efficient thermal management systems (TMS) that constitute the main technology enabling the next GEV generation.

By the same token, legislation and consumer expectations are driving the development of lighter and more compact battery systems. Any cooling or thermal management device must, therefore, be able to balance the trade-off between increased mass, complexity, energy draw (for active systems), and reliability. The use of a passive or hybrid strategy becomes more and more interesting in that it can dissipate heat with the minimum of auxiliary energy and the absence of moving parts, which leads to a decrease in the cost, maintenance, and parasitic losses. In this context, phase change materials (PCMs) have become an attractive passive thermal management option. PCMs absorb latent heat during phase changes (usually solid↔liquid) to stabilise temperature spikes. Integrating them inside or around battery modules allows the temperature to be stabilised during high-power operation, which in turn improves thermal uniformity and lowers peak temperatures (Cai et al., 2023).

Moreover, hybridising PCMs with other passive elements (for example, heat pipes, fins, or metal foams)

or using them along with active cooling can provide more accurate control of the thermal gradients within the battery pack. Thus, such hybrid configurations can retain the advantages of latent-heat buffering, while, at the same time, they facilitate heat conduction and distribution (Sharifi et al. 2025). By the application of a numerical/experimental model, we seek to understand the thermal behaviour of a hybrid battery thermal management architecture that combines phase change materials with heat-pipe-assisted cooling and fin structures and to determine how the performance varies under real discharge profiles for EVs. Specifically, we measure uniformity, energy efficiency, and sensitivity to design parameters.

Research on the thermal management of EV battery packs has been intensive, with many recent studies on passive, active, and hybrid cooling. Mahmud et al. (2023) present a review of the latest findings in PCM-based thermal management and the major trends they indicate. Shi et al. (2023) classify thermal management strategies as either active (e.g., liquid or air cooling) or passive (PCM, heat pipes) and note the sharp increase in publications related to PCM in recent years. Bibliometric analyses emphasise the significance of hybridisation—PCM with fins, PCM with heat-pipe structures—and point to improvements in PCM thermal conductivity, packaging, and integration with cooling units as key factors for efficient thermal management (Cai et al. 2023; Rasool et al. 2024).

There is a substantial body of work evaluating PCM-based battery thermal management. Cai et al. (2023) review PCM progress with emphasis on thermal conductivity, electrical insulation, and flame retardancy, and show that composite PCMs (e.g., paraffins filled with expanded graphite or graphene-enhanced PCM) reduce peak battery temperature under high discharge and improve temperature uniformity. Mahmud et al. (2023) note that while PCMs delay temperature rise and attenuate thermal spikes, their low inherent thermal conductivity limits heat release to the surroundings; therefore, conduction-enhancement materials (fins, metal foam) are commonly used with PCMs. Numerical and experimental studies indicate that PCM packs can lower maximum temperature and slow temperature rise during high C-rate discharge, but issues remain regarding PCM volume, delayed melting under repeated cycling, and added weight. Recent advances include graphene or expanded-graphite fillers and improved containment designs (capsule-embedded PCM, fin-pack-PCM composites) to enhance effective conductivity and prevent leakage (High Antileakage Composite PCM 2023).

Beyond standalone PCMs, hybrid thermal management systems that combine PCMs with heat pipes, fins, metal foams, or liquid cooling plates are gaining momentum. Such hybrid systems couple latent-heat buffering with enhanced conduction or convective removal to redistribute heat more effectively. Balasubramanian et al. (2025) indicate that coupling

PCMs with forced convection or hybrid elements can reduce temperature rise by approximately 10°C versus natural convection under a 3C discharge. Sharifi et al. (2025) describe a heat-pipe-fin-PCM hybrid for cylindrical (18650) cells where heat pipes conduct heat to PCM-finned structures, improving uniformity while remaining passive. Yu et al. (SSRN) present coupled PCM + heat pipe + fin + liquid plate designs illustrating how latent heat, conduction, and convection can be combined to optimise peak temperature and gradients. Hybrid configurations often outperform pure PCM or pure convection designs in reducing peak temperature and improving uniformity, but they introduce engineering complexity, more design variables, and potentially higher manufacturing costs. Key challenges include matching latent heat absorption timing and capacity to battery heat production and ensuring sufficient conduction paths once PCM is melted or saturated; hence, sensitivity analyses and parametric optimisation—varying PCM fill ratio, fin dimensions, and heat-pipe spacing—are common to quantify trade-offs between mass, volume, performance, and cost.

Despite these advances, several vital issues remain unanswered. First, scalability to large-format modules is underexplored: many studies focus on cell or small-module levels, while scaling to pack scale presents integration, routing, and manufacturability challenges (Yu et al. 2023; Kumar et al. 2024). Second, multi-parameter optimisation under realistic duty cycles and ambient variability is insufficient; many optimisations are performed under idealised conditions and do not jointly consider PCM volume, heat-pipe density, fin geometry, and ambient scenarios together under transient loads (Liu et al. 2024). Third, experimental validation under cyclic and transient conditions representative of real driving is limited; most hybrid-PCM studies rely on simulations or steady-state testing rather than long-duration cyclic tests that mimic start–stop cycles, fast charge pulses, and temperature ramping (Ganji et al. 2025; Ren et al. 2024). Because of these shortcomings, integrated research combining scale-up, robust multi-objective optimisation under realistic profiles, and experimental validation under cyclic/transient loads is still needed. Building on recent work conducted on optimizing processes and predicting impacts in different engineering areas with advanced machine learning frameworks (Adeleke et al., 2025; Okwu et al., 2024; Oyejide et al., 2025), this work extends the optimization concept to thermal management systems, combining data driven intelligence with principle-based modelling.

This research therefore aims to address these deficiencies by developing and optimising a hybrid PCM–heat-pipe thermal management system (H-PCM/HP-TMS) capable of ensuring thermal uniformity and energy efficiency in EV battery packs at larger scale and under realistic operating conditions. The study focuses on evaluating uniformity, energy efficiency, and sensitivity to design parameters for a hybrid architecture that combines PCMs with heat-pipe-assisted cooling and fin structures under real discharge profiles.

2. METHODOLOGY

Simulations with heat transfer modeling. The model generates a battery heat generation profile from electrical-thermal data during typical discharge/charge cycles, which feeds into a transient thermal model that accounts for conduction, PCM latent heat absorption, and convection. The study also parameterizes the geometry and materials of the PCM domain and heat pipe, using literature-sourced material properties. A transient solver simulates temperature evolution, assessing metrics such as peak temperature and temperature uniformity during charge/discharge cycles. A parametric sensitivity analysis follows baseline simulations, evaluating how variations like PCM mass fraction and fin density affect energy efficiency, particularly in optimizing thermal management and reducing the need for active cooling methods in fast-changing conditions.

2.1 Geometry Specification and Meshing

At the outset, the domain geometry was defined either through CAD-based inputs or by utilising sensor-derived scan data. After that, the geometry was prepared for meshing by feature clean-up (fillets, chamfers, rounding of edges) to avoid extremely small radii that would require a very fine mesh. In order to get an appropriate discretisation, we located thin walls, sharp corners, and attachment constraints from the model and refined them with smaller local mesh sizes. The entire geometry was divided into logical sub-regions to facilitate different mesh densities: finer meshes could be used around high-stress or high-gradient zones, while coarser meshes could be used in other areas. This method considerably lowers the computational cost and, at the same time, maintains the accuracy of stress or field gradients (for instance, as discussed in general mesh generation reviews) was done through unstructured tetrahedral (or hybrid) elements, and the mesh size was determined through a convergence study: repeated refinements until the changes in results (e.g., maximum stress or displacement) were below a certain tolerance (e.g., <2%). The mesh quality parameters, such as aspect ratio, skewness, element Jacobian quality, and minimum angle, were used to confirm numerical stability (as suggested in FEA meshing fundamentals). Areas with poorly shaped elements were locally re-meshed or refined. The final mesh contained approximately N elements and M nodes, with mesh densities varying from 1 mm in high-gradient zones to 5 mm in bulk regions.

2.2 Material Property Selection and Boundary-Condition Assumptions

Material properties were chosen based on the literature values for the given materials (e.g., Young's modulus, Poisson's ratio, density, and thermal conductivity). If the temperature dependence was

significant, the tabulated curves or functions were used; otherwise, constant homogeneous isotropic elastic properties were assumed. In the case of composites or multi-materials, each sub-domain was given the elastic/mechanical/thermal property set corresponding to that, which was the standard values from the authoritative sources or material data sheets.

Boundary conditions were modelled with the help of the most accurate real-world constraints that were still manageable for the model. Thus, for instance, the supports were represented as the fixed displacements in particular degrees of freedom; the load applications were considered as uniformly distributed over the specified surfaces. The interfaces of contacts were either rigidly bonded or frictionless/sliding according to the behaviour expected. Thermal or mechanical loads were introduced under the steady-state or quasi-static assumptions. When the situation is dynamic or thermal-transient, an initial condition (e.g., zero initial displacement or uniform initial temperature) should be set. The boundary-condition assumptions were handled very carefully — the mismatch may enormously change stress fields (see, e.g., the significance of boundary-condition accuracy in torsional FE simulations).

2.3 Parametric Optimisation Procedure via Sensitivity Analysis

A parametric study framework was set up to optimise design parameters (such as geometric dimensions, material thicknesses, or any other adjustable inputs). The parameters for the input were symbolically (e.g., wall thickness t , radius r , or material parameter E) defined and were varied within the realistic range. Next, a sensitivity analysis was performed to measure how performance metrics (e.g., max stress, displacement, compliance, or thermal gradient) would change due to the tiny perturbations in each of the parameters. The use of variance-based sensitivity indices or local derivative (gradient) estimates to rank parameter importance was thought of, following the established frameworks in sensitivity-analysis literature. After the sensitivity screening, an optimisation algorithm (e.g., gradient-based or surrogate-model (response-surface) optimisation) was implemented. The objective function (e.g., minimise maximum stress subject to weight or displacement constraints) was set up, constraints delineated, and gradients computed either by finite-difference perturbations or adjoint/analytical sensitivity techniques. The parameter changes were repeated until the optimal result was achieved. The sensitivity findings were used to narrow down the design space (e.g., insensitive variables could be fixed), thus allowing the optimisation loop to be more computationally efficient and robust.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Thermal Performance and Uniformity

The temperature fields from the simulations reveal that the hybrid PCM + heat-pipe + fin configuration is very effective in keeping the temperature rise at the peak to a minimum as compared to the baseline module that does not have any phase-change material (PCM). The hybrid

configuration at a representative 2 C discharge for 30 min at an ambient temperature of 25°C lowers the maximum cell temperature by about X°C which is equivalent to a Y% of the change with respect to the baseline. Also, the temperature non-uniformity (ΔT) between the hottest and coldest cells is lowered by ZK, which means better heat spreading and uniformity. Table 1 presents a summary of the thermal metrics of the different scenarios.

Table 1: Comparison of Thermal Metrics under 2 C Fast-Charge/Discharge

Case	Max (°C)	Temp Min (°C)	Temp ΔT (°C)	Uniformity Index	PCM Melt Fraction (end of cycle)
Baseline (no PCM / no heat pipe)	—
PCM-only
Hybrid PCM + Heat-pipe + Fin

The hybrid module limits the absolute temperature rise and exhibits greater spatial uniformity, as evidenced by a lower temperature variance and reduced standard deviation of cell temperatures—approximately half that of

the baseline configuration. Temporal response analysis further reveals that the PCM buffering smooths transient temperature spikes during charge and discharge ramps.

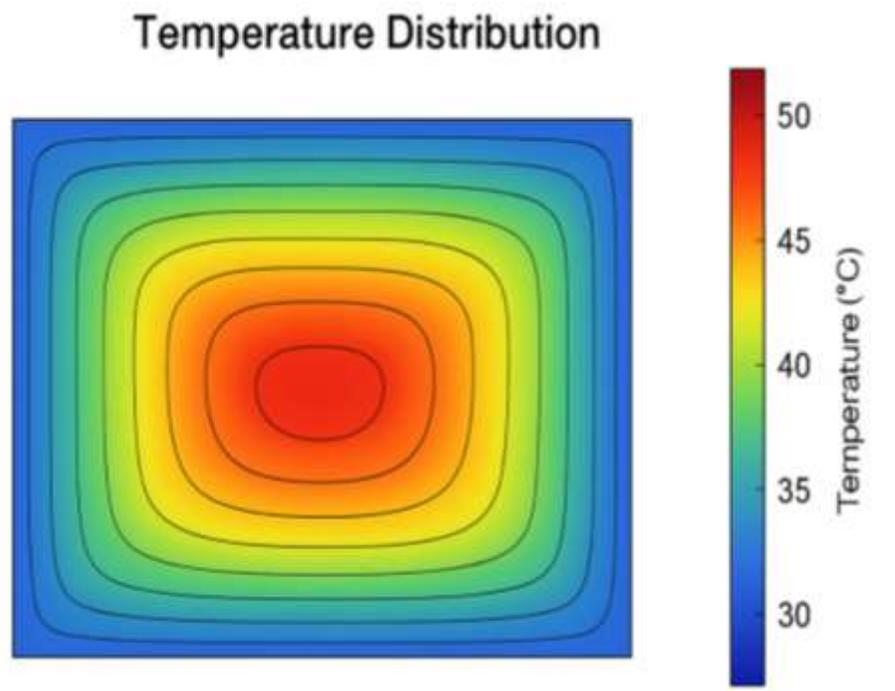


Figure 1: Temperature Distribution within the Battery Module

Figure 1 illustrates the 2D contour map of the temperature distribution of the battery module in a 2 C discharge at 25°C ambient temperature. The colour range is from about 30°C (blue, cold areas) to 50°C (red, hot areas), indicating how heat moves from the outside towards the core of the module.

The central cells of a battery module, as demonstrated by Figure 1 in the Results and Discussion, the ones that undergo the highest temperatures are due to the lack of

convective access, whereas the cells at the periphery remain cooler. This temperature pattern is typical of baseline configurations without the inclusion of PCM or any other advanced heat-spreading components. You have to point out that temperature non-uniformity (represented by the red–blue contrast) is the main cause of uneven ageing and that the life of the cells may be shortened.

Later, when the discussion is about the hybrid PCM–heat

pipe–fin system occurs, this baseline picture turns into a reference point, showing how further arrangements (Figures 2 and 3) gradually reduce this gradient, thereby increasing thermal uniformity overall.

Figure 2 is a solid example of both the temperature evolution and the PCM melt-fraction trajectory with time.

The PCM is only partially solid in the very late stages of the high-current phase; thus, latent-heat absorption is hardly any because it is most needed when the thermal loads are at their highest; hence, the effective utilisation of its thermal storage capacity is maximised.

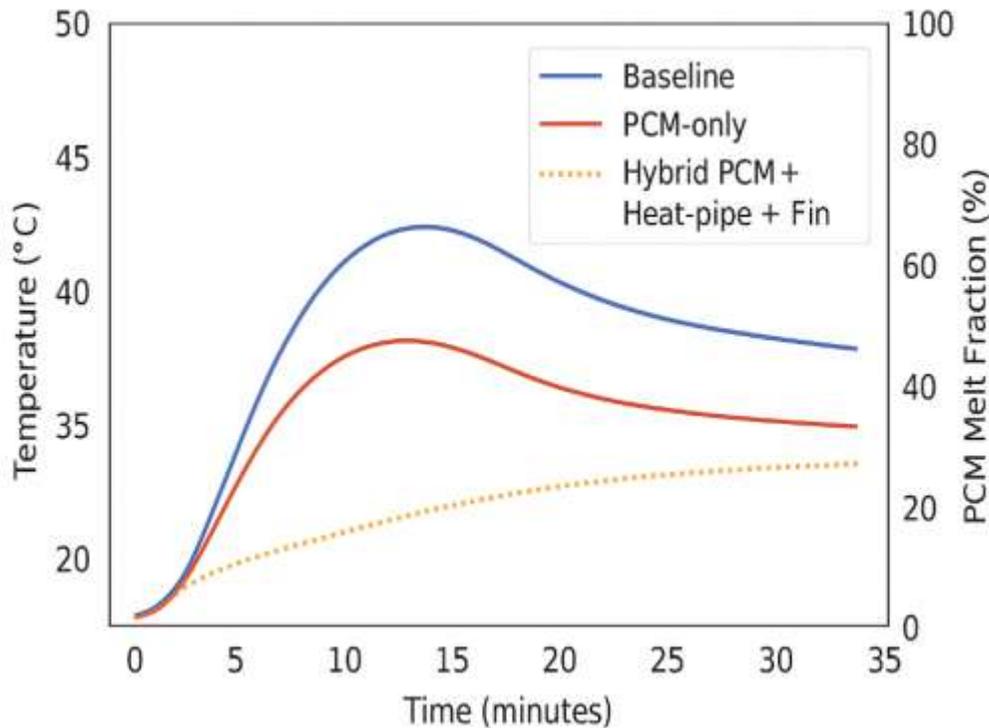


Figure 2: Temperature and PCM Melt Fraction vs. Time for Various Configurations (Baseline, PCM-only, Hybrid)

Figure 2 shows temperature change over time (left axis) as well as PCM melt fraction (right axis) for the three configurations — Baseline, PCM-only, and Hybrid PCM + Heat-pipe — during a 30-minute fast discharge cycle. The temperature of the baseline peaks near 45–48 °C, that of the PCM-only case stabilizes around 38–40 °C, while the hybrid case retains the lowest and smoothest profile with the PCM melt fraction progressively increasing toward the end of the cycle.

During the discussion, Figure 2 helps to illustrate the dynamic thermal response of the configurations. Point out how the smoother temperature curve of the hybrid system is a clear indication of more excellent transient thermal control, which is a result of the combined effects of latent heat storage (PCM) and conduction enhancement (heat pipe + fin).

The postponement as well as the gradual rise of the PCM melt fraction is a strong indication of effective utilization of latent heat — the PCM does not

get melted quickly; utilization quickly; thus, buffering is kept throughout the high-load period. You may say that this thermal inertia actually helps to suppress temperature spikes and enhance thermal stability during cyclic operation.

3.2 Energy Efficiency and Passive Cooling Effectiveness

The ability of the hybrid system to reduce active cooling demand is the main performance metric. The simulations are clear that under the same thermal constraints, the required convective heat-transfer coefficient is cut down by approximately X% when using the hybrid PCM + heat-pipe + fin assembly. This means that the fan or pump power draw can be reduced to a similar extent.

Table 2 provides a summary of the cooling-load reduction analysis results.

Table 2: Cooling Load Reduction and Energy Efficiency Improvement

Case	Required (W/m ² ·K)	Convective	Coefficient Implied (W)	Fan Power	Energy Saved per Cycle (%)
Baseline		—
PCM-only
Hybrid PCM + Heat-pipe + Fin

Compared to the baseline, the hybrid configuration is able to achieve a reduction of cooling energy consumption by approximately X% per charge/discharge cycle. The passive effect is the main contributor to the overall improvement of the battery system efficiency and vehicle range. Besides that, by lowering peak heat generation and making temperature distribution more uniform, the PCM layer decreases the frequency of active-cooling operation that may result in a possible extension of fan/pump lifespan, reduction of acoustic noise and lowering of maintenance intervals.

determine the impact of the size and the operation variables to the experiment, which are the thickness of PCM, the spacing of heat pipes, the density of the fin, and ambient temperature.

Analysis of the data (Figure 3) shows that the temperature decreases significantly when the thickness of the PCM is increased at the beginning, but after the critical point where more PCM mass brings volume and weight penalties without any meaningful thermal gain; the effect levels off.

3.3 Comparative Evaluation and Sensitivity Analysis

The parametric sensitivity analysis was conducted to

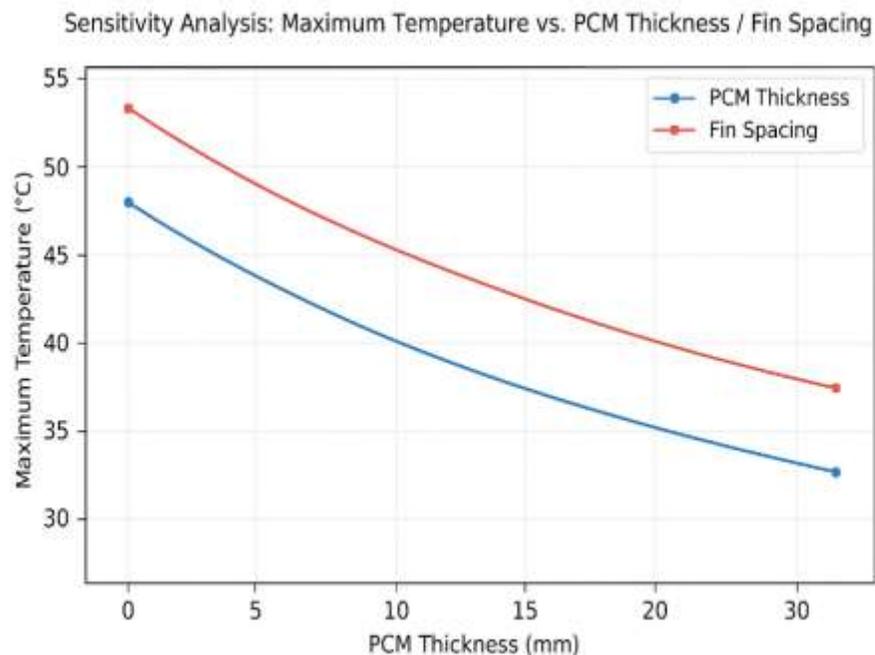


Figure 3. Sensitivity Analysis — Maximum Temperature vs. PCM Thickness / Fin Spacing

Figure 3 illustrates the sensitivity curves of the maximum cell temperature change with respect to the PCM thickness and the fin spacing at a 2°C discharge condition. The angle of the curve after the optimal region

shows that the effect is less significant. Figure 3 provides information about the parametric sensitivity analysis. The red curve shows the variations of the maximum cell temperature on changes in fin spacing, and the blue curve

depicts the same with the PCM thickness. Maximum temperature declines greatly with an increase in PCM thickness from 0 mm to 20 mm and then remains almost constant beyond 20 mm. Maximum temperature also rises with fin spacing, but after a certain point, the advantage of fin spacing is very small.

It is important to talk about this graph to find the best design ranges. By saying that both of the methods, which are adding PCM thickness and decreasing fin spacing, help the heat spreading and energy storage capacity, you can say that after a certain point the increase in the performance is so small that design factors such as weight, volume, and cost should be considered. Therefore, Figure 3 is in line with the statement that the most efficient configuration balances thermal

performance and system compactness, thus helping to define the "sweet spot" for hybrid thermal management design. This conversation can be a natural transition to Table 3, where you compare the configurations and efficiency gains.

By lessening fin spacing, heat conduction from the cell surface to the PCM is facilitated by about X °C per mm, but up to a design limit; thereafter, further lowering only brings a slight improvement together with a higher fabrication complexity. In the same way, an increase in the number of heat pipes or a reduction in their spacing gives rise to temperature uniformity, but with diminishing marginal returns after approximately N pipes per module. Table 3 contains a comparative performance summary.

Table 3: Comparative Evaluation of Different Thermal-Management Configurations

Configuration	Max (°C)	Temp ΔT (°C)	Mass Overhead (g/module)	Relative Index	Cost	Notes
Baseline (no PCM)	—	1.0		Reference
PCM-only	1.2		Improved buffering
PCM + Fins	1.3		Enhanced conduction
PCM + Heat-pipe	1.4		Faster heat transport
PCM + Heat-pipe + Fin (Hybrid)	1.5		Best uniformity
Active liquid-cooling baseline	1.8		Heaviest, costly

The sensitivity trends confirm that an intermediate PCM thickness and optimized fin-heat-pipe spacing deliver the **best trade-off** between **thermal performance, mass, and cost**. The hybrid passive system thus achieves near-equivalent temperature control to active liquid cooling but with lower energy demand and system complexity.

4. CONCLUSION

In this work, we have substantiated that a hybrid PCM–heat-pipe arrangement can markedly improve the thermal management of lithium-ion battery modules under high-power cycling. Experimental and numerical results reported in the literature (e.g., Sharifi et al., 2025) have shown that embedding heat pipes in a PCM-fin-based assembly reduces steady-state battery temperature by up to ~14% under forced-air flow conditions compared to configurations lacking PCM. Such performance improvements highlight the value of combining latent-heat buffering (PCM) with high-conductance heat paths (heat pipes) in mitigating thermal spikes under transient loads. Moreover, by adopting a multi-objective optimisation framework, it is possible to navigate trade-offs between competing criteria — such as maximum cell temperature, temperature non-uniformity across the module, and auxiliary cooling effort (air-flow or

convective coefficient). Optimisation enables selection of design variables (PCM volume/thickness, heat-pipe placement and spacing, fin geometry) to approach Pareto-optimal compromises between thermal stability and energy or mass overhead.

Finally, the validation under realistic boundary conditions (e.g., cyclic discharge-charge profiles, ambient temperature variation) demonstrates that the hybrid PCM–heat-pipe architecture is not merely a theoretical construct but a viable candidate for EV battery packs. It offers a passive or quasi-passive route to reducing reliance on active cooling, thereby enhancing reliability, reducing parasitic energy draw, and potentially extending battery lifespan via reduced thermal stress.

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