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Control systems in renewable energy: A review of applications in Canada, USA, and Africa

Onyinyechukwu Chidolue [1,*], Cosmas Dominic Daudu [2], Valentine Ikenna Illojianya [3], Adetomilola Victoria Fafure [4], Kenneth Ifeanyi Ibekwe [5] and Bright Ngozichukwu [6]

[1] *Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St Johns, Canada.*
[2] *Nigeria LNG Limited, Bonny Island, Nigeria*
[3] *Mechanical Engineering, The University of Alabama, USA.*
[4] *Department of Physics, Kenyatta university, Nairobi, P.O.Box 43844-00100, Kenya.*
[5] *Independent Researcher, UK.*
[6] *Artie McFerrin Department of Chemical Engineering, Texas A&M University, USA.*

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Abstract

This research explores the applications of control systems in renewable energy across Canada, the United States, and Africa. It underscores their pivotal role in optimizing efficiency and reliability by examining supervisory, predictive, and adaptive control strategies. The literature review delves into global and regional renewable energy landscapes, emphasizing unique challenges and opportunities. Technological innovations, including advanced monitoring, artificial intelligence, and blockchain, are investigated, highlighting their transformative impact. The paper anticipates prospects such as quantum computing, decentralized systems, and heightened cybersecurity measures. The findings contribute to understanding the nuanced interplay between control systems and renewable energy, offering insights for policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders as they navigate the evolving landscape of sustainable energy solutions.

Keywords: Renewable Energy; Control Systems; Technological Innovations; Regional Variances

1. Introduction

The global pursuit of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources has led to an increased focus on renewable energy solutions (Ewim, Abolarin, Scott, & Anyanwu, 2023; Omer, 2008; Owusu & Asumadu-Sarkodie, 2016). Control systems stand out as a critical aspect in optimizing their performance among the various factors influencing the efficiency and reliability of renewable energy systems (Bazmi & Zahedi, 2011; Shaikh, Nor, Nallagownden, Elamvazuthi, & Ibrahim, 2014). Control systems play a pivotal role in regulating and managing the diverse and dynamic nature of renewable energy sources, ensuring seamless integration into existing power grids (Jones, 2017; Rehmani, Reisslein, Rachedi, Erol-Kantarci, & Radenkovic, 2018). As nations strive to transition towards cleaner energy alternatives, understanding the applications of control systems becomes imperative.

The geographical context of this study is particularly significant, considering the varied energy landscapes of Canada, the United States, and Africa. Each region presents unique challenges and opportunities in harnessing renewable energy, and implementing sophisticated control systems promises to address these intricacies. The vast expanses of Canada, the well-established energy infrastructure of the United States, and the diverse yet often underserved energy needs of Africa offer a rich backdrop for exploring the various applications of control systems in renewable energy (Awan, 2021;

* Corresponding author: Onyinyechukwu Chidolue

Liuksiala, 2014). The overarching objective of this paper is to conduct a comprehensive review of the applications of control systems in renewable energy within the specified regions. By delving into the existing literature, this study aims to elucidate the fundamental mechanisms through which control systems contribute to the efficient operation and integration of renewable energy sources. Additionally, the paper highlights regional variations in adopting control systems and their impact on the respective renewable energy landscapes.

Renewable energy technologies are evolving rapidly, and control systems are crucial in ensuring optimal utilization (Onyinyechukwu Chidolue & Iqbal, 2022; Ellabban, Abu-Rub, & Blaabjerg, 2014). The spectrum of control mechanisms is vast, from supervisory control strategies that oversee the entire renewable energy system to predictive algorithms that enhance efficiency and adaptive controls that address dynamic changes. Moreover, integrating advanced monitoring systems and incorporating machine learning and artificial intelligence further contribute to the sophistication of control strategies (Arinez, Chang, Gao, Xu, & Zhang, 2020). As we embark on this exploration, it is essential to consider the technological aspects and the regulatory frameworks governing renewable energy adoption. The policies and regulations in Canada, the United States, and Africa significantly influence the deployment and effectiveness of control systems in renewable energy applications (Carley, Baldwin, MacLean, & Brass, 2017; Sawin, 2012). By examining these regulatory landscapes, this paper sheds light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in integrating control systems into renewable energy initiatives.

2. Literature Review

The integration of control systems into renewable energy infrastructures has emerged as a critical area of study, reflecting the growing importance of renewable energy sources in the global energy landscape. As researchers and practitioners seek to optimize the performance and reliability of renewable energy systems, control systems have become instrumental in managing the complex dynamics associated with diverse energy sources.

The role of control systems in renewable energy is multifaceted, encompassing supervisory control, predictive control, and adaptive control strategies (Bordons, Garcia-Torres, & Ridao, 2020). Supervisory control, acting as the overarching management layer, orchestrates the various components of a renewable energy system to ensure optimal performance. Predictive control algorithms leverage forecasting techniques to anticipate changes in renewable energy sources, allowing for proactive adjustments (Garcia-Torres et al., 2021). On the other hand, adaptive control mechanisms dynamically respond to variations and uncertainties, enhancing the resilience of renewable energy systems. A comprehensive understanding of the applications of control systems in renewable energy requires a contextual exploration of the global renewable energy landscape. The current status and trends in renewable energy adoption worldwide provide a backdrop for evaluating the effectiveness of control systems. With a focus on Canada, the United States, and Africa, it becomes apparent that each region presents unique challenges and opportunities.

Canada's vast geographic expanse and abundant renewable resources, such as hydropower, necessitate sophisticated control systems to manage distributed energy sources effectively (Brinkman et al., 2021; Jones, 2017). In the United States, the well-established energy infrastructure and diverse mix of renewable resources demand tailored control strategies to optimize the integration of wind, solar, and other sources (Ellabban et al., 2014; Jones, 2017). Meanwhile, Africa, characterized by diverse energy needs and varying levels of infrastructure development, presents a complex terrain where control systems can play a transformative role in ensuring reliable and sustainable energy access (Broto, Baptista, Kirshner, Smith, & Alves, 2018; Welsch et al., 2013).

Supervisory, predictive, and adaptive control strategies form the backbone of control systems in renewable energy. Supervisory control ensures the coordinated operation of various components, optimizing the overall system performance (Khan et al., 2023). Predictive control algorithms enhance efficiency by anticipating changes in renewable energy generation. In contrast, adaptive control mechanisms address uncertainties in real time, ensuring resilience in dynamic environments. Beyond conventional control strategies, technological innovations such as advanced monitoring systems, machine learning, and artificial intelligence significantly contribute to the evolution of renewable energy control systems (Sankarananth, Karthiga, Suganya, Sountharrajan, & Bavirisetti, 2023; Serale, Fiorentini, Capozzoli, Bernardini, & Bemporad, 2018). Advanced monitoring systems provide real-time data for informed decision-making. At the same time, machine learning and AI algorithms enable adaptive and self-learning control mechanisms, improving the overall efficiency of renewable energy systems (Cheng & Yu, 2019). The regulatory environment is pivotal in integrating control systems into renewable energy initiatives. Understanding the policies and regulations governing renewable energy in Canada, the United States, and Africa is essential to discerning the challenges and opportunities for control system implementation. Policymakers' receptivity to innovative control technologies can influence the pace and extent of adoption in each region.

3. Types of Control Systems in Renewable Energy

Integrating renewable energy sources into the power grid necessitates sophisticated control systems to effectively manage the variability and intermittency inherent in these sources. Control systems play a pivotal role in ensuring the reliability and efficiency of renewable energy systems. This section explores the control systems commonly employed in the renewable energy sector.

- Supervisory Control: This comprehensive management layer oversees the entire renewable energy system. It involves real-time monitoring, coordination, and optimization of various components to ensure optimal performance. This type of control system facilitates decision-making at the system level, allowing operators to adapt to changing conditions and balance energy supply and demand. Supervisory control is crucial in large-scale renewable energy installations where multiple sources, such as wind and solar, must be integrated seamlessly (Camacho, Samad, Garcia-Sanz, & Hiskens, 2011; Uddin, Chidolue, Azeez, & Iqbal, 2022).
- Predictive Control: These strategies leverage forecasting techniques to anticipate changes in renewable energy generation. By utilizing weather forecasts, energy demand predictions, and other relevant data, these control systems optimize the operation of renewable energy systems in anticipation of future conditions. This proactive approach enhances the efficiency of renewable energy integration, enabling better utilization of available resources and minimizing disruptions. Predictive control is precious in scenarios where accurate prediction of renewable energy output can mitigate the impact of variability on the power grid (Yaramasu & Wu, 2016).
- Adaptive Control: Adaptive control mechanisms are designed to respond dynamically to variations and uncertainties in renewable energy systems. Adaptive control ensures real-time adjustments to maintain stability, as renewable energy generation is subject to fluctuations caused by weather changes or equipment failures. These systems employ feedback mechanisms to continuously monitor the system's performance and make instant modifications, enhancing the resilience of renewable energy installations (O. Chidolue & Iqbal, 2023). Adaptive control is crucial in addressing the inherent unpredictability of renewable energy sources (Fabri & Kadirkamanathan, 2001).
- Hierarchical Control: Hierarchical control structures organize control functions into distinct levels, each responsible for specific aspects of the renewable energy system. The levels typically include supervisory, decentralized, and local controls. Supervisory control manages the overarching strategy; decentralized control handles subsystem coordination, and local control deals with individual component operations. This hierarchical approach enables efficient management of complex renewable energy systems, allowing scalability and adaptability (Howell, Rezgui, Hippolyte, Jayan, & Li, 2017).
- Decentralized Control: Decentralized control distributes decision-making across various subsystems or components of a renewable energy system. Each subsystem operates independently based on local information, contributing to the overall coordination of the system. The decentralized control is precious when components can work autonomously and make local decisions based on real-time data. This approach enhances the robustness and flexibility of renewable energy systems (Colson, 2012).
- Model Predictive Control (MPC): Model Predictive Control is an advanced control strategy that utilizes dynamic models of the renewable energy system to predict future behaviour and optimize control actions. MPC considers system constraints and objectives over a predictive horizon, enabling it to make decisions that lead to optimal performance. This control technique is especially effective when accurate renewable energy system modelling is feasible, allowing for precise control actions (Maasoumy, Razmara, Shahbakhti, & Vincentelli, 2014; Mariano-Hernández, Hernández-Callejo, Zorita-Lamadrid, Duque-Pérez, & García, 2021).

In conclusion, the diverse types of control systems in renewable energy play complementary roles in ensuring the seamless integration of renewable sources into the power grid. The choice of control strategy depends on factors such as the scale of the installation, the characteristics of renewable resources, and the specific objectives of the energy system. As technology advances, innovative control systems are likely to emerge, further enhancing the efficiency and reliability of renewable energy generation.

4. Technological Innovations in Renewable Energy Control Systems

The evolution of renewable energy control systems is marked by continuous technological innovations aimed at enhancing efficiency, reliability, and adaptability. This section explores vital technological advancements shaping the landscape of control systems in renewable energy.

- Advanced Monitoring Systems: They represent a cornerstone of technological innovation in renewable energy control. These systems leverage sensors and communication technologies to provide real-time data on various parameters, including energy production, grid performance, and environmental conditions. Integrating advanced monitoring systems enables operators to make informed decisions, optimize energy generation, and promptly address equipment failures or fluctuations in renewable resource availability (Gharavi & Ghafurian, 2011).

- Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Machine learning and artificial intelligence have emerged as transformative technologies in optimizing the performance of renewable energy systems. ML algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data to identify patterns, predict energy production, and optimize control strategies. AI-powered control systems can learn from historical data, adapt to changing conditions, and autonomously make decisions to improve overall system efficiency. These technologies are precious in handling the inherent variability of renewable energy sources and optimizing system operation in real time (Cheng & Yu, 2019; Şerban & Lytras, 2020).
- Edge Computing: This involves processing data closer to the source, reducing latency, and enabling quicker decision-making. In renewable energy control systems, edge computing allows for decentralized data processing, enabling individual components or devices to analyze and respond to data locally. This approach enhances the responsiveness of control systems, making them more adaptable to real-time changes in renewable energy generation or grid conditions (Feng et al., 2021; Sittón-Candanedo, Alonso, García, Muñoz, & Rodríguez-González, 2019).
- Virtual Power Plants (VPPs): VPPs are innovative concepts that leverage advanced control systems to aggregate and optimize the output of distributed energy resources. These resources, including solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage systems, are coordinated through a centralized control system. VPPs enable the efficient utilization of diverse energy sources, improving grid stability and responsiveness. VPPs are particularly relevant in scenarios where many distributed renewable energy systems are interconnected (López Sáez de Argandoña, 2020).
- Blockchain Technology: Blockchain technology is finding applications in renewable energy control systems, particularly in managing decentralized energy transactions. Smart contracts powered by blockchain facilitate transparent and secure energy trading among consumers and producers in a distributed energy system. This innovation can enhance the efficiency of renewable energy markets, allowing for peer-to-peer energy trading and creating new economic models for renewable energy producers (J. Wu & Tran, 2018; Yang et al., 2021).
- Digital Twins: Digital twins involve creating virtual replicas of physical assets, including renewable energy systems, to simulate and analyze their behaviour. In renewable energy control systems, digital twins enable operators to visualize and optimize system performance in a virtual environment before implementing changes in the physical system. This technology aids in predictive maintenance, system optimization, and scenario analysis, improving reliability and performance (Agostinelli, Cumo, Guidi, & Tomazzoli, 2021; Rasheed, San, & Kvamsdal, 2020).
- Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS): CPS integrates computational algorithms with physical processes, creating interconnected systems that respond to real-world conditions. CPS enhances coordination and communication between control systems and physical components in renewable energy. This integration enables adaptive and resilient control strategies, ensuring the stability of renewable energy systems in dynamic environments (Darwish & Hassanien, 2018).

As technology advances, these innovations are reshaping the landscape of renewable energy control systems. The integration of advanced monitoring, machine learning, edge computing, virtual power plants, blockchain, digital twins, and cyber-physical systems collectively contributes to creating more intelligent, adaptive, and efficient renewable energy infrastructures. These areas' ongoing research and development promise further advancements, ultimately driving the transition towards a more sustainable and resilient energy future.

5. Future Prospects in Renewable Energy Control Systems

The future of renewable energy control systems holds exciting possibilities, driven by ongoing technological advancements, evolving regulatory landscapes, and the imperative to address global energy challenges. As we look ahead, several key trends and prospects emerge that are poised to shape the trajectory of renewable energy control systems.

The advent of quantum computing is a potential game-changer in renewable energy control systems. Quantum computing's unparalleled processing capabilities could revolutionize complex simulations, optimization algorithms, and data analysis, enabling more precise control strategies (Hassanzadeh, 2020). This technology can potentially address computational challenges associated with large-scale renewable energy systems, paving the way for enhanced efficiency and performance. The role of artificial intelligence in renewable energy control systems is expected to expand further. AI algorithms, including machine learning, will continue to evolve, offering more sophisticated predictive analytics, adaptive control strategies, and autonomous decision-making capabilities. This increased intelligence can optimize energy production, enhance grid stability, and improve the overall resilience of renewable energy systems (Duan, Edwards, & Dwivedi, 2019; Paudel et al., 2022).

Future renewable energy control systems will likely focus on improving grid flexibility and resilience. Smart grids, enabled by advanced control technologies, will facilitate the seamless integration of renewable energy sources, energy storage systems, and demand-side management (Panda et al., 2022; Said, 2022). This holistic approach will contribute to grid stability, enable efficient energy trading, and enhance the resilience of the overall energy infrastructure. Decentralized energy systems, empowered by renewable energy sources and advanced control systems, are expected to gain prominence. Peer-to-peer energy trading, facilitated by blockchain technology, will enable consumers to directly engage in the energy market, promoting a more distributed and democratized energy landscape. This shift may reshape traditional energy models, fostering greater energy independence and community-driven sustainability (Burke & Stephens, 2018; Howell et al., 2017).

The "Energy Internet" concept envisions a highly interconnected and intelligent energy system. Interconnected renewable energy systems, facilitated by advanced control mechanisms, will enable seamless communication and coordination between various energy assets. This integration will optimize energy flows, support real-time decision-making, and contribute to a more adaptive and efficient energy ecosystem (Hussain, Narayanan, Nardelli, & Yang, 2020; Joseph & Balachandra, 2020; Y. Wu, Wu, Guerrero, & Vasquez, 2021). As control systems become more interconnected and reliant on digital technologies, there will be a heightened emphasis on cybersecurity measures. Future prospects in renewable energy control systems will involve robust cybersecurity frameworks to safeguard against potential threats, ensuring critical energy infrastructure's secure and reliable operation.

Policy support and standardization will play a crucial role in shaping the future of renewable energy control systems. Governments and regulatory bodies are expected to continue promoting policies incentivizing the adoption of advanced control technologies. Standardization efforts will contribute to interoperability and compatibility, fostering a more cohesive and efficient renewable energy landscape. Prospects in renewable energy control systems will align with broader sustainability goals, emphasizing a circular economy approach. This involves optimizing resource use, minimizing waste, and integrating renewable energy systems into circular economic models. Control systems will be pivotal in orchestrating these complex systems to achieve maximum sustainability benefits.

6. Conclusion

In pursuing a sustainable and resilient energy future, exploring renewable energy control systems has revealed a dynamic landscape marked by technological innovation, evolving regulatory frameworks, and a commitment to addressing global energy challenges. As we reflect on this review's essential findings and insights, several overarching conclusions emerge. Integrating control systems into renewable energy infrastructure represents a critical enabler in realizing the full potential of clean energy sources. The spectrum of control strategies is vast, from supervisory control optimizing entire systems to predictive algorithms anticipating changes and adaptive mechanisms addressing uncertainties. These systems enhance efficiency and contribute to the reliability and stability of renewable energy sources.

Geographical nuances underscore the importance of tailoring control strategies to different regions' specific challenges and opportunities. The vast expanse of Canada, the diverse energy landscape of the United States, and the unique needs of Africa all demand context-specific approaches. Understanding regional variations allows for the development of targeted control systems that can effectively navigate the intricacies of each energy ecosystem. Technological innovations play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of renewable energy control systems. Advanced monitoring systems, machine learning, artificial intelligence, and blockchain technology are revolutionizing how we manage and optimize renewable energy resources. These innovations enhance energy systems' efficiency and pave the way for decentralized, adaptive, and intelligent energy networks. Looking ahead, the prospects of renewable energy control systems are promising. Quantum computing, increased AI capabilities, and the rise of decentralized energy systems indicate a path toward more sophisticated, resilient, and interconnected energy infrastructures. The emphasis on cybersecurity, policy support, and sustainability underscores the holistic approach required to navigate the complexities of the evolving energy landscape.

As we embark on this journey towards a sustainable energy future, the collaboration of researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders becomes imperative. The findings of this review contribute to the growing body of knowledge, providing insights that can inform decision-making, policy formulation, and technological advancements in the field of renewable energy control systems. In conclusion, integrating control systems into renewable energy represents a technological imperative and a strategic pathway toward a more sustainable and resilient energy ecosystem. The collective efforts of the global community in advancing these technologies will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in steering humanity towards a future where clean, renewable energy sources are harnessed optimally, contributing to a greener and more sustainable world.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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