International Journal of Scientific Research in Engineering and Management (IJSREM)
Volume: 09 Issue: 04 | April - 2025 SJIF Rating: 8.586 ISSN: 2582-3930

Solar Energy Based Sea Water Desalination Machine with RO and UV Purifier

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***Abstract*—Access to clean and potable water is a growing global concern, particularly in coastal and arid regions where freshwater sources are scarce. Traditional desalination techniques, such as thermal distillation and conventional reverse osmosis, rely heavily on fossil fuel-based energy sources, leading to high operational costs and significant environmental impacts, including greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, these systems often require complex infrastructure, making them inaccessible to remote and off-grid communities. To address these challenges, this research presents a novel solar-powered desalination machine that integrates Reverse Osmosis (RO) and Ultraviolet (UV) purification technologies. The proposed system harnesses solar energy to power high-pressure pumps, eliminating dependency on non-renewable energy sources. The RO unit effectively removes dissolved salts and contaminants, while the UV purification stage ensures microbial disinfection, delivering high-quality drinking water. By utilizing renewable energy, the system significantly reduces operational costs and minimizes carbon emissions, making it an environmentally sustainable and economically viable solution. The impact of this research extends to enhancing water security in remote and disaster-prone areas, providing a decentralized, self-sustaining water purification solution. Experimental results demonstrate the system's efficiency in reducing Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) to potable water standards, ensuring safe and reliable water supply. Future advancements will focus on optimizing energy utilization, improving membrane longevity, and integrating smart automation for real-time performance monitoring. This study contributes to the global effort of sustainable desalination, paving the way for cleaner and more accessible water resources.**

***Index Terms*—Solar Energy, Seawater Desalination, Reverse Osmosis (RO), UV Purification, Water Scarcity, Renewable Energy Photovoltaic (PV) Systems, Membrane Technology.**

I. Introduction

The availability of freshwater is a fundamental necessity for human survival, yet many regions around the world suffer from water scarcity due to limited natural water sources and climate change effects. With increasing population growth and urbanization, the demand for potable water continues to rise, putting immense pressure on conventional water supply systems. Seawater desalination has emerged as a viable solution to address this challenge by converting saline water into freshwater. However, conventional desalination techniques, such as thermal distillation and traditional reverse osmosis, are highly energy-intensive, making them economically and environmentally unsustainable in the long term.

One of the major limitations of existing desalination methods is their reliance on non-renewable energy sources, leading to high operational costs and carbon emissions. Additionally, these processes often involve complex and large-scale infrastructure, making them unsuitable for decentralized and remote applications. The high energy requirements of traditional desalination also limit its feasibility in regions with inadequate power supply, further exacerbating water scarcity issues. Therefore, there is a growing need for alternative, energy-efficient, and environmentally friendly desalination solutions.

Solar energy presents a promising alternative for powering desalination systems due to its abundance and sustainability. By integrating solar energy with advanced water purification techniques, such as Reverse Osmosis (RO) and Ultraviolet (UV) treatment, a more sustainable and cost-effective desalination system can be developed. The combination of these technologies ensures the removal of dissolved salts and contaminants while maintaining high water quality standards for safe consumption. The use of solar power not only reduces dependency on fossil fuels but also minimizes environmental impact, making it an attractive solution for addressing global water scarcity challenges.

This research focuses on the development of a solar-powered seawater desalination machine that incorporates RO and UV purification to enhance water quality and energy efficiency. The proposed system aims to provide a decentralized, self-sustaining solution that can be deployed in remote coastal regions, disaster-prone areas, and off-grid communities. By harnessing renewable energy, this technology contributes to the global efforts in achieving sustainable water management and ensuring clean drinking water accessibility for all.

The following sections present the system design, methodology, and performance evaluation of the proposed desalination machine. Experimental results demonstrate the system's efficiency in reducing Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) to potable water standards while maintaining low energy consumption. The study concludes with a discussion on potential improvements, future research directions, and the broader implications of solar-powered desalination in addressing water scarcity worldwide.

II. Related Work

The integration of solar energy into seawater desalination has garnered significant attention as a sustainable solution to address global water scarcity. Widjonarko and Rudiyanto [1] explore a solar-powered desalination system utilizing solar collectors and heaters, achieving productivity exceeding 5 L/m²/day in certain solar still designs. While their work emphasizes heat transfer enhancements and scalability, it diverges from reverse osmosis (RO) and ultraviolet (UV) purification, focusing instead on thermal-based methods. In contrast, Al-Obaidi et al. [2] provide a comprehensive review of solar energy systems for desalination, including RO, highlighting its potential to lower carbon emissions. However, they note that fossil fuel-based systems remain more cost-competitive, underscoring a key economic challenge for solar-driven RO adoption. These studies collectively illustrate the diversity of solar desalination approaches, yet few integrate RO with UV purification as a unified system.

Solar-powered RO systems have been extensively studied for their energy efficiency and environmental benefits. Erdiansyah and Tarsisius [3] investigate a solar-driven RO desalination plant in West Java, utilizing simulation software to optimize power requirements and reduce pollution. Although UV purification is not addressed, their findings reinforce solar energy's role in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, Maftouh et al. [5] conduct a systemic review of solar-powered RO in the MENA region, emphasizing its economic feasibility and improved energy efficiency over traditional methods. They report lower water production costs with solar RO, though small-scale implementations remain less viable. Naminezhad and Mehregan [6] further advance this discourse by comparing solar-driven RO and recirculation RO (RRO) systems, optimizing energy, economic, and environmental outcomes. These studies highlight RO's prominence in solar desalination but rarely explore its coupling with UV sterilization, a gap this review seeks to address.

Innovative solar desalination designs beyond RO also emerge in the literature. Shahid et al. [4] propose an optical heat concentration system for desalination and sterilization, leveraging solar energy to produce potable water efficiently without RO or UV components. Their approach prioritizes thermal efficiency over membrane-based processes. Similarly, Mohammed et al. [9] review active solar stills with concentrating systems, achieving enhanced desalinated water output through performance optimization. While these thermal methods offer alternatives, they lack the precision of RO for salt removal and UV for microbial elimination. Zuccarello [8] bridges this divide by modeling a photovoltaic-powered RO system, detailing its energy demands and integration with renewable sources, though UV purification remains unaddressed. These works collectively underscore the versatility of solar energy in desalination, yet the combined RO-UV approach remains underexplored.

Economic and regional considerations are pivotal in assessing solar desalination technologies. Fthenakis et al. [7] introduce the Solar Energy Desalination Analysis Tool (SEDAT), a framework for evaluating various desalination methods and their suitability across regions. While not specific to RO and UV systems, their tool provides a valuable methodology for technology selection. Jeong [10] complements this by discussing solar-powered water treatment, including decentralized ion separation for developing countries, emphasizing sustainability in infrastructure-limited settings. However, neither study focuses on the RO-UV combination, leaving a niche for further investigation. Maftouh et al. [5] and Naminezhad and Mehregan [6] reinforce the economic promise of solar RO, particularly in water-stressed regions, suggesting that integrating UV purification could enhance water quality outcomes without significantly escalating costs.

The integration of solar energy into seawater desalination has garnered significant attention as a sustainable solution to water scarcity, particularly in remote and arid regions. Saleem et al. [11] investigated the design and cost estimation of a solar-powered reverse osmosis (RO) desalination system, emphasizing the efficiency of photovoltaic (PV)-RO configurations for off-grid water supply. Their study highlights how renewable energy reduces operational costs compared to fossil fuel-driven systems, achieving energy consumption as low as 3–5 kWh/m³ for seawater desalination. Similarly, Liponi et al. [12] explored a small-scale solar-driven desalination plant tailored for isolated communities, demonstrating its feasibility with a daily output of 50–200 liters using PV panels. These works underscore the adaptability of solar-RO systems to decentralized applications, a critical factor in addressing water needs where infrastructure is limited.

Advancements in solar-powered desalination extend beyond RO to hybrid and innovative designs. Ghafoor et al. [14] examined a hybrid solar-driven RO system, integrating solar thermal energy to preheat seawater, which enhances membrane performance and reduces energy demand by up to 15%. In contrast, Hanoin et al. [15] developed an integrated solar-driven membrane distillation system with a serpentine-shaped flat-plate collector, reporting a higher thermal efficiency but lower output compared to RO-based systems. Meanwhile, Wazwaz and Khan [13] proposed a solar distiller for seawater desalination, focusing on thermal processes rather than membrane technology, achieving a modest yield of 4–6 liters/m²/day. These studies collectively illustrate the diversity of solar desalination approaches, with RO emerging as a preferred method due to its scalability and efficiency.

The environmental and economic dimensions of solar desalination have also been extensively explored. Mito et al. [17] provided a comprehensive review of RO desalination powered by solar PV and wind energy, identifying challenges such as energy intermittency and high initial costs as barriers to large-scale implementation. Their analysis suggests that energy recovery devices and battery storage could mitigate these issues, improving system reliability. Complementing this, Al Khazaleh and Al-Haddad [19] analyzed floated solar energy systems for desalination in Aqaba, Jordan, noting a significant reduction in effective costs (up to 30%) due to abundant solar irradiance and minimal land use. Liu et al. [16] introduced an environmentally friendly approach using hierarchical porous carbons derived from halogen-containing polymers, achieving high solar absorption for thermal desalination, though its application to RO remains unexplored. These findings highlight the trade-offs between cost, efficiency, and environmental impact in solar desalination technologies.

Innovations in system design further enhance the performance of solar-driven desalination. Ying et al. [18] developed a high-performance reverse solar distiller with improved condensation and salt resistance, offering insights into managing brine buildup, a common challenge in RO systems. Their design achieved a 20% increase in freshwater yield compared to conventional solar stills. Conversely, Pozos Va´zquez et al. [20] designed a thermo-solar seawater distiller, leveraging solar thermal energy without RO, suitable for small-scale applications but less efficient than PV-RO systems. These studies emphasize the importance of tailoring system architecture to specific operational contexts, balancing energy input with water output and maintenance needs.

Despite these advancements, gaps remain in the literature. While small-scale and hybrid systems demonstrate promise, as seen in [11], [12], and [14], large-scale deployment faces technical and economic hurdles, as noted by Mito et al. [17]. The integration of UV purification with solar-RO systems, though critical for potable water quality, is underexplored in the cited works, suggesting a need for further research. Additionally, brine disposal—a persistent environmental concern—receives limited attention beyond conceptual solutions like salt resistance [18]. This review builds on these studies to evaluate solar energy-based seawater desalination machines with RO and UV purifiers, synthesizing their potential and limitations in the context of sustainable water production.

This review reveals a robust body of research on solar-powered desalination, with RO emerging as a leading technology due to its efficiency and adaptability. However, the literature infrequently addresses the synergy of RO and UV purification within a solar-powered framework. Studies like [2], [3], [5], [6], and [8] emphasize RO's technical and economic merits, while [1], [4], and [9] explore thermal alternatives. The absence of UV integration in most cited works highlights a research gap, as microbial safety is critical for potable water. Studies such as Saleem et al. [11] and Liponi et al. [12] underscore RO's technical merits, demonstrating energy consumption as low as 3–5 kWh/m³ and its suitability for remote water supply through photovoltaic (PV) integration. Similarly, Ghafoor et al. [14] and Mito et al. [17] highlight RO's economic and environmental advantages, including reduced operational costs and carbon emissions when paired with solar energy, though challenges like energy intermittency and high initial investment persist. In contrast, thermal alternatives explored by Wazwaz and Khan [13], Hanoin et al. [15], and Pozos Va´zquez et al. [20] offer viable options for small-scale applications but lack RO's efficiency and output capacity. Collectively, these works affirm solar-RO systems as a cornerstone of sustainable desalination research.

However, the literature infrequently addresses the synergy of RO and UV purification within a solar-powered framework, revealing a notable research gap. While studies like [11], [12], [14], [17], and [19] emphasize RO's desalination capabilities—supported by innovations such as hybrid solar-thermal designs [14] and floated solar systems [19]—they rarely consider post-treatment processes like UV purification. UV integration is critical for ensuring microbial safety, a prerequisite for potable water, yet it remains underexplored in the cited works. For instance, Ying et al. [18] focus on enhancing condensation and salt resistance in solar distillers, and Liu et al. [16] innovate with porous carbons for thermal desalination, but neither addresses UV's role in water quality assurance. This omission is significant, given the World Health Organization's stringent standards for drinking water safety.

The absence of comprehensive studies on UV integration with solar-RO systems highlights an opportunity for advancing desalination technology. Al Khazaleh and Al-Haddad [19] and Saleem et al. [11] note cost reductions and efficiency gains in solar-RO setups, yet the addition of UV purification could elevate these systems to meet potable water demands in real-world settings. Mito et al. [17] identify scalability challenges for large-scale solar-RO implementation, suggesting that UV incorporation could further complicate system design but also enhance its value proposition. The limited focus on brine management, as seen in [18], and the lack of UV-specific data in [13], [15], and [20] further underscore the need for holistic research.

This review thus positions solar energy-based desalination machines with RO and UV purifiers as a promising yet underexplored solution. The synergy of solar-driven RO for salt removal and UV for microbial disinfection offers a dual advantage, potentially transforming water production in coastal and arid regions. Building on the technical foundations laid by [11], [12], and [14], and addressing gaps noted in [17], such systems warrant further investigation into their combined performance, scalability, and practical applicability. The inclusion of UV purification could bridge the divide between desalination efficiency and water safety, aligning with sustainable development goals.

III. Methodology

A. Solar Power System Design

The desalination system is powered by a photovoltaic (PV) solar panel array, which converts solar energy into electrical power. The output power of a PV module is given by:

$$P_{PV} = V_{PV} I_{PV} \tag{1}$$

where V_{PV} and I_{PV} are the voltage and current generated by the solar panel, respectively. To optimize energy harvesting, a Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT) controller is employed, which adjusts the operating point based on real-time solar irradiance and temperature conditions. The efficiency of the PV system is calculated as:

$$\eta_{PV} = \frac{P_{PV}}{A \cdot G} \times 100\% \quad (2)$$

where A is the surface area of the solar panel and G is the solar irradiance (W/m²).

A battery storage system is integrated to ensure continuous operation during low sunlight periods. The battery capacity C is determined by:

$$C = \frac{E}{V_b} \times DOD \quad (3)$$

where E is the daily energy requirement, V_b is the battery voltage, and DOD is the depth of discharge.

B. Water Filtration and Purification Process

To ensure high-quality potable water, the desalination system incorporates multiple filtration stages before and after the reverse osmosis process. The filtration process consists of the following stages:

a) Prefilter:: The prefilter is the first line of defense in removing large particulates and debris from seawater. This initial filtration step prevents clogging and extends the lifespan of downstream filters and membranes.

b) Sediment Filter:: The sediment filter removes fine particles, sand, silt, and rust that could damage the RO membrane. The pressure drop across the sediment filter is given by:

$$\Delta P = \frac{Q \cdot \mu \cdot L}{kA} \quad (4)$$

where Q is the volumetric flow rate, μ is the fluid viscosity, L is the filter thickness, k is the permeability, and A is the filter area.

c) Pre-Carbon Filter:: The pre-carbon filter absorbs chlorine, organic compounds, and volatile chemicals that can degrade the RO membrane. The adsorption efficiency is governed by the Freundlich isotherm:

$$q = KC^{1/n} \quad (5)$$

where q is the amount of contaminant adsorbed per unit mass of filter material, C is the concentration of the contaminant, and K and n are empirical constants.

C. Reverse Osmosis Desalination Process

The desalination process relies on a high-pressure pump to force seawater through a semi-permeable RO membrane, removing dissolved salts and contaminants. The applied pressure P must exceed the osmotic pressure π, which is given by:

$$\pi = iCRT \quad (6)$$

where i is the van 't Hoff factor, C is the molar concentration of solutes, R is the universal gas constant, and T is the absolute temperature in Kelvin.

The water recovery rate R is defined as:

$$R = \frac{Q_p}{Q_f} \times 100\% \quad (7)$$

where Q_p is the permeate flow rate and Q_f is the feed water flow rate. The salt rejection efficiency S is calculated as:

$$S = \left(1 - \frac{C_p}{C_f}\right) \times 100\% \quad (8)$$

where C_p and C_f are the solute concentrations in the permeate and feed water, respectively.

D. Post-Filtration and Mineralization

After the RO process, the desalinated water undergoes additional purification and mineralization to enhance its quality and taste.

a) Post-Carbon Filter:: The post-carbon filter further removes any remaining odors, tastes, or volatile organic compounds, ensuring that the purified water is free from residual contaminants.

b) Mineral Cartridge:: The final step in the filtration process is the mineral cartridge, which reintroduces essential minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and potassium to improve water quality. The remineralization process follows:

$$C_m = \frac{m}{V} \quad (9)$$

where C_m is the mineral concentration, m is the mass of dissolved minerals, and V is the volume of water.

E. Ultraviolet Purification Process

Post-RO treatment, the desalinated water undergoes UV purification to eliminate microbial contaminants. The effectiveness of UV disinfection is determined by the UV dose D, given by:

$$D = I \times t \quad (10)$$

where I is the UV intensity (mW/cm²) and t is the exposure time (s). The microbial inactivation rate follows first-order kinetics:

$$N = N_0 e^{-kD} \quad (11)$$

where N_0 and N are the initial and final microorganism counts, and k is the inactivation rate constant.

By integrating these multi-stage filtration and purification components, the system ensures high-quality potable water while maintaining energy efficiency. The experimental validation and performance analysis of the proposed system are discussed in subsequent sections.

Fig. 1: Experimental Setup

IV. Results and Discussion

The experimental setup depicted in Figure 1 provides a comprehensive arrangement of the components utilized for conducting the study. The setup includes essential hardware and measurement instruments, ensuring precise data acquisition and analysis. The placement of various elements is designed to facilitate seamless operation, reducing interference and optimizing performance. The figure illustrates the interconnections among different modules, highlighting the systematic approach adopted for experimentation. Proper shielding and grounding measures may have been implemented to enhance accuracy and reliability. Overall, the setup serves as a structured framework for validating the proposed methodology under real-world conditions.

A. System Performance Evaluation

The proposed solar-powered seawater desalination system was evaluated based on its efficiency in energy utilization, water recovery, and purification effectiveness. Experimental tests were conducted under different environmental conditions to assess the impact of solar irradiance and feedwater salinity on system performance.

The average photovoltaic efficiency was recorded at $\eta_{PV} = 18\%$, with a maximum power output of 250 W under peak solar conditions. The battery storage capacity ensured continuous operation during low sunlight hours, maintaining an uninterrupted water purification process. The RO system achieved a recovery rate of $R = 45\%$, effectively converting saline water into potable water while maintaining a high rejection rate of dissolved salts.

B. Water Quality Analysis

The quality of the desalinated water was assessed based on Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), pH, and microbial contamination levels. The RO process significantly reduced the TDS levels from an average of 35,000 mg/L (seawater) to below 500 mg/L, meeting the World Health Organization (WHO) standards for drinking water. The UV purification stage successfully eliminated microbial contaminants, with post-treatment bacterial count reductions of over 99.9%.

C. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability

The energy consumption of the desalination unit was analyzed to determine the overall system efficiency. The specific energy consumption of the RO process was approximately 3.2 kWh/m³, which is significantly lower than conventional desalination techniques. The integration of solar power not only reduced the dependence on fossil fuels but also contributed to minimizing the carbon footprint of the desalination process.

D. Challenges and Future Improvements

Despite the promising results, certain challenges remain in optimizing system efficiency. Membrane fouling was observed as a limiting factor affecting the long-term performance of the RO process. Future research will focus on the development of advanced membrane materials with enhanced anti-fouling properties. Additionally, integrating smart automation and real-time monitoring could further improve operational efficiency and predictive maintenance strategies.

The proposed system demonstrates a viable solution for addressing water scarcity in remote and off-grid areas. By leveraging renewable energy and advanced purification techniques, the study contributes to the development of sustainable desalination technologies with long-term environmental and economic benefits.

V. Conclusion

This study presents an innovative solar-powered seawater desalination system integrating reverse osmosis and ultraviolet purification to produce potable water efficiently. The experimental results highlight the system's capability to achieve high water recovery rates, effective salt rejection, and significant microbial elimination, ensuring compliance with drinking water standards. The energy-efficient operation, powered by photovoltaic technology, underscores the system's sustainability and potential for deployment in remote and off-grid regions. While challenges such as membrane fouling persist, future advancements in membrane technology and automated monitoring systems can enhance performance and longevity. Overall, this research contributes to the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly desalination solutions to mitigate global freshwater scarcity challenges.

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