MANTECH Publications

Recent Trends in Electrical Machines and Drives
Volume 6, Issue 3, September- December 2021

Multi-Objective Optimization of Converters for Efficiency, Cost, and Reliability

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of renewable energy sources and advanced power electronics in modern electrical systems has emphasized the need for high-performance converters. Multi-objective optimization (MOO) provides a systematic approach to simultaneously improve efficiency, reduce cost, and enhance reliability in converter design. This paper reviews current methodologies for multi-objective optimization in power converters, including classical, heuristic, and evolutionary algorithms. Converter topologies, design constraints, and performance metrics are analyzed with respect to conflicting objectives. Case studies on DC–DC, DC–AC, and multi-port converters demonstrate the trade-offs involved in optimization. Emerging trends, including AI-assisted optimization and predictive reliability modeling, are highlighted. The paper concludes with insights into future research directions to achieve cost-effective, reliable, and energy-efficient power electronic systems.

KEYWORDS: *Multi-objective optimization, power converters, efficiency, reliability, cost, evolutionary algorithms, renewable energy, DC–DC converters, DC–AC converters.*

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INTRODUCTION

Power electronic converters are the backbone of modern electrical and renewable energy systems. They provide voltage and current regulation, energy management, and interface control between generation, storage, and loads. Converter design must balance three critical factors:

1. **Efficiency:** Minimizing losses improves energy utilization and reduces heat dissipation.
2. **Cost:** Reducing material, manufacturing, and maintenance costs is crucial for commercial viability.
3. **Reliability:** Ensuring long operational lifetime and fault tolerance enhances system stability.

Traditional design often optimizes for a single objective, such as efficiency, leading to compromises in cost and reliability. Multi-objective optimization (MOO) allows designers to explore trade-offs among conflicting objectives and select solutions that satisfy system constraints. Recent advancements in computational methods and artificial intelligence (AI) have made MOO more practical and precise in converter design.

CONVERTER TYPES AND PERFORMANCE METRICS

Power converters are central components in modern electrical and renewable energy systems. They provide voltage and current regulation, interface different energy sources and storage systems, and ensure power quality for various loads. Each converter type has unique operational principles, design challenges, and performance metrics, which influence efficiency, cost, and reliability. This section elaborates on the key types of converters and the metrics used to assess their performance.

1. DC–DC Converters

DC–DC converters regulate the voltage level of a DC source to match the requirements of a load or another system component. They are widely used in battery charging systems, electric vehicles, solar PV systems, and portable electronics.

Common topologies:

- **Buck Converter:** Steps down voltage from a higher DC level to a lower one.
- **Boost Converter:** Steps up voltage from a lower DC level to a higher one.

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- **Buck–Boost Converter:** Provides voltage conversion with the ability to either step up or step down voltage depending on the input-output conditions.
- **Full-Bridge Converter:** Used for high-power applications, providing galvanic isolation and bidirectional power flow capability.

Key performance metrics:

1. **Efficiency (%):** Efficiency is the ratio of output power to input power. Losses occur due to conduction in semiconductors, switching losses, magnetic losses in inductors/transformers, and resistive losses in interconnections. High efficiency reduces thermal stress and improves system sustainability.
2. **Cost ($/unit):** Includes the cost of semiconductors, passive components (inductors, capacitors, transformers), and manufacturing complexity. High-performance materials like SiC or GaN devices increase efficiency but raise costs.
3. **Reliability (MTBF – Mean Time Between Failures):** Reliability reflects the expected operational life before a component fails. Factors affecting MTBF include thermal stress, overcurrent, voltage spikes, and environmental conditions. Predictive maintenance and redundancy can enhance reliability.

Additional considerations:

- Dynamic response and transient stability for load variations.
- Size and weight for portable or vehicular applications.
- EMI/EMC compliance due to high-frequency switching.

2. DC–AC Converters (Inverters)

DC–AC converters, commonly referred to as inverters, convert DC from batteries, photovoltaic panels, or fuel cells into AC for grid integration or load operation. Inverters are essential for grid-tied renewable systems, uninterruptible power supplies (UPS), and microgrids.

Common inverter types:

- **Single-phase inverters:** Suitable for residential loads.

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- **Three-phase inverters:** Used in industrial and grid-tied applications for higher power requirements.
- **Multilevel inverters:** Reduce voltage stress on semiconductor devices and improve output waveform quality, particularly for high-voltage applications.

Key performance metrics:

1. **Total Harmonic Distortion (THD):** Measures the distortion in output AC voltage waveform. Lower THD indicates higher power quality, important for sensitive loads and grid compliance.
2. **Switching and conduction losses:** Losses due to semiconductors switching on/off and conduction resistance. Minimizing these improves efficiency and reduces thermal stress.
3. **Cost per kW and component life expectancy:** Includes semiconductors, passive components, control hardware, and cooling systems. Life expectancy is impacted by switching frequency, thermal cycles, and operating environment.

Additional considerations:

- Synchronization with grid voltage and frequency for grid-tied operation.
- Anti-islanding protection to ensure safety during grid outages.
- Adaptive control to handle variable renewable energy inputs and load fluctuations.

3. Multi-Port Converters

Multi-port converters (MPCs) are advanced power electronic interfaces that enable simultaneous connection of multiple energy sources, storage devices, and loads. They are widely used in hybrid renewable systems combining PV, wind, and battery storage. MPCs offer enhanced flexibility and allow optimized power flow between sources and loads.

Key benefits:

- Integration of multiple energy sources without the need for separate converters.
- Optimized utilization of renewable resources.
- Improved system scalability for future expansion.

Key challenges:

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1. **Complex control and power flow management:** Balancing power among multiple inputs and outputs requires sophisticated control algorithms, often incorporating predictive models or AI-based strategies.
2. **Thermal and voltage stress affecting reliability:** Sharing power between multiple sources can introduce uneven stress on components, leading to accelerated aging or failures. Thermal management becomes critical.
3. **Balancing efficiency and cost:** MPCs are inherently more complex and expensive than single-port converters. Optimization is necessary to achieve a compromise between performance and cost while ensuring reliability.

Performance metrics for MPCs:

- Overall conversion efficiency for all power paths.
- Reliability indices (e.g., availability, fault tolerance).
- Cost efficiency in terms of multi-source integration.
- Dynamic response under variable generation and load conditions.

Table 1: Comparison of Converter Topologies

Converter Type	**Efficiency (%)**	**Typical Cost ($/kW)**	**Reliability (MTBF hrs)**	**Application**
Buck	92–98	50–100	50,000–100,000	DC loads
Boost	90–96	60–110	40,000–90,000	Battery charging
Full-Bridge DC–DC	88–95	80–150	30,000–70,000	High-power systems
Grid-Tied Inverter	94–98	150–300	60,000–120,000	PV & wind integration
Multi-Port Converter	85–93	200–400	40,000–80,000	Hybrid renewable systems

MULTI-OBJECTIVE OPTIMIZATION TECHNIQUES

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Designing converters that optimize **efficiency, cost, and reliability simultaneously** is a complex task due to conflicting objectives. For instance, high-efficiency designs may use expensive semiconductor devices, increasing cost, while highly reliable systems may require redundancy, further raising both cost and losses. Multi-objective optimization (MOO) techniques provide a systematic framework to explore these trade-offs and identify solutions that balance multiple objectives.

MOO techniques are broadly categorized into **classical optimization methods**, **heuristic/evolutionary algorithms**, and **AI-based approaches**. Each approach has unique strengths and limitations, making them suitable for different converter design scenarios.

CLASSICAL OPTIMIZATION METHODS

Classical MOO methods convert multiple objectives into a single optimization problem, often using mathematical formulations. They are widely used in engineering design for their simplicity and well-understood properties.

1. Weighted Sum Method

The **Weighted Sum Method (WSM)** combines multiple objectives into a single objective function:

F(x)=w1f1(x)+w2f2(x)+w3f3(x)F(x) = w_1 f_1(x) + w_2 f_2(x) + w_3 f_3(x)F(x)=w1f1(x)+w2 f2(x)+w3f3(x)

Where:

- f1(x),f2(x),f3(x)f_1(x), f_2(x), f_3(x)f1(x),f2(x),f3(x) are the objectives (e.g., efficiency, cost, reliability)
- w1,w2,w3w_1, w_2, w_3w1,w2,w3 are weighting factors satisfying w1+w2+w3=1w_1 + w_2 + w_3 = 1w1+w2+w3=1

Workflow:

1. Define objectives and constraints.
2. Assign weights based on priority.
3. Formulate the combined objective function.

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4. Solve the single-objective optimization problem using classical methods (e.g., gradient descent, linear programming).

Advantages:

- Simple to implement and understand.
- Computationally efficient for problems with few variables.

Limitations:

- Highly sensitive to weight selection; small changes in weights can produce significantly different solutions.
- Cannot identify **non-convex Pareto-optimal solutions**, potentially missing better trade-off designs.

2. ε-Constraint Method

The **ε-Constraint Method** focuses on optimizing one primary objective while constraining others: Minimize f1(x)subject to f2(x)≤ε2,f3(x)≤ε3\text{Minimize } f_1(x) \quad \text{subject to } f_2(x) \leq \varepsilon_2, \quad f_3(x) \leq \varepsilon_3Minimize f1(x)subject to f2(x)≤ε2,f3(x)≤ε3 Where ε2\varepsilon_2ε2 and ε3\varepsilon_3ε3 are allowable limits for cost and reliability.

Workflow:

1. Select one objective as the primary optimization goal.
2. Define acceptable bounds (ε\varepsilonε) for other objectives.
3. Solve using classical optimization techniques iteratively to generate a **Pareto front**.

Advantages:

- Capable of generating **true Pareto-optimal solutions**.
- Provides control over acceptable trade-offs for each objective.

Limitations:

- Computationally expensive, especially for high-dimensional problems.
- Requires careful selection of constraint limits to avoid infeasible solutions.

Example in Converter Design:

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- Minimize cost while ensuring efficiency > 94% and MTBF > 50,000 hours.
- Iterative solution produces a set of feasible designs representing different trade-offs between efficiency, cost, and reliability.

2. Heuristic and Evolutionary Algorithms

Classical methods may struggle with **non-linear, non-convex, or high-dimensional problems** typical in converter design. Heuristic and evolutionary algorithms provide flexible, population-based approaches that explore the solution space efficiently.

1 Genetic Algorithm (GA)

GA is inspired by natural selection and genetics.

Workflow:

1. Initialize a population of design solutions.
2. Evaluate fitness for each individual based on multiple objectives.
3. Apply **selection, crossover, and mutation** operators to create a new generation.
4. Repeat for several generations until convergence.

Advantages:

- Handles discrete and continuous variables.
- Can find multiple Pareto-optimal solutions in a single run.

Limitations:

- Computationally intensive for large populations or complex objectives.
- May require careful tuning of GA parameters (mutation rate, crossover rate, population size).

Example: Optimizing a DC–DC converter for efficiency, cost, and reliability by selecting component ratings and switching frequencies simultaneously.

2. Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO)

PSO is inspired by the social behavior of birds and fish schools.

Workflow:

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1. Initialize a swarm of particles representing candidate solutions.
2. Each particle adjusts its position based on **personal best** and **global best** solutions.
3. Iterate until convergence to a set of optimal or near-optimal solutions.

Advantages:

- Simple to implement and fewer parameters compared to GA.
- Good convergence for continuous optimization problems.

Limitations:

- Can get trapped in local optima for highly non-linear problems.
- Performance may degrade with an increasing number of objectives.

Example: Optimizing inverter switching patterns to minimize THD, maximize efficiency, and maintain low cost.

3 Multi-Objective Evolutionary Algorithms (MOEA)

MOEA extends evolutionary algorithms to handle multiple conflicting objectives directly. Examples include **NSGA-II (Non-dominated Sorting Genetic Algorithm II)** and **SPEA2 (Strength Pareto Evolutionary Algorithm 2)**.

Workflow:

1. Initialize a population of candidate solutions.
2. Evaluate all objectives simultaneously.
3. Rank solutions using **non-dominated sorting** to identify Pareto fronts.
4. Apply selection, crossover, and mutation to produce the next generation.
5. Continue until convergence criteria are met.

Advantages:

- Generates a **Pareto front**, providing a range of optimal trade-off solutions.
- Handles non-linear, non-convex, and discontinuous objective spaces.

Limitations:

- Computationally intensive for high-dimensional design spaces.
- Requires post-processing to select a single preferred design from the Pareto front.

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Example in Multi-Port Converters: Using NSGA-II to simultaneously optimize power flow efficiency, component cost, and thermal reliability under varying renewable energy inputs.

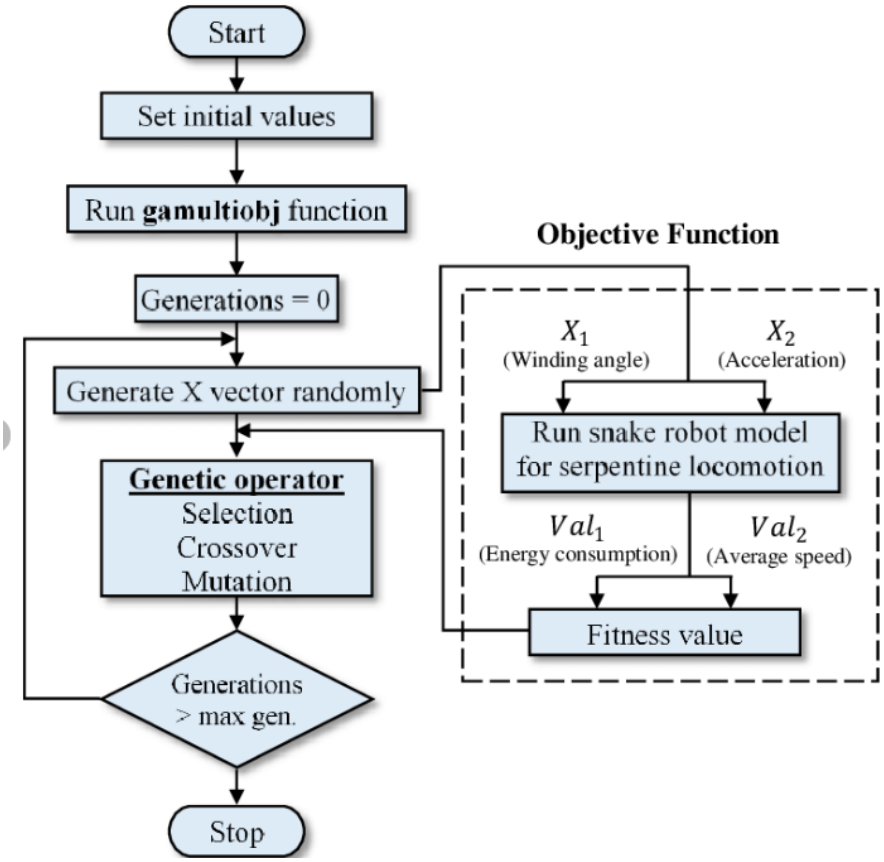


Figure 1: Flowchart of a Typical Multi-Objective Evolutionary Optimization Process

3.3 AI-Assisted Optimization

- Machine learning models predict converter performance metrics based on design variables, enabling faster optimization.
- Reinforcement learning can optimize real-time converter control for efficiency and reliability.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR MULTI-OBJECTIVE OPTIMIZATION

1. Efficiency Maximization

- **Switching Strategies:** Use soft-switching or zero-voltage switching to reduce losses.

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- **Component Selection:** Low-loss semiconductors (SiC, GaN) increase efficiency but may raise costs.

2. Cost Minimization

- **Material Choices:** Trade-off between high-performance components and economical alternatives.
- **Modular Design:** Reduces replacement costs and improves maintainability.

3. Reliability Enhancement

- **Redundancy:** Parallel modules or backup converters improve fault tolerance.
- **Thermal Management:** Efficient heat sinks and cooling techniques prolong component life.
- **Predictive Maintenance:** Sensor-based monitoring predicts failures before occurrence.

Table 2: Trade-offs in Converter Design

Objective	Design Strategies	Potential Trade-offs
Efficiency	Soft-switching, SiC/GaN devices	Higher cost, complexity
Cost	Standard semiconductors, modular design	Slightly lower efficiency, reliability
Reliability	Redundancy, thermal control, predictive maintenance	Increased initial cost, larger size

CASE STUDIES

1. DC–DC Converter for Battery Storage

- **Objective:** Maximize efficiency, minimize cost, and improve MTBF.
- **Optimization Results:**
- Efficiency improved from 91% to 95% using GaN devices.
- Cost increased by 15% but MTBF extended by 30%.

2. Grid-Tied PV Inverter

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- **Objective:** Reduce THD, improve efficiency, and minimize cost.
- **Optimization Method:** Multi-objective GA with weighted sum and ε-constraint.
- **Results:**
- THD reduced from 4.2% to 2.5%.
- Efficiency increased from 94% to 97%.
- Slight increase in BOM cost (~12%).

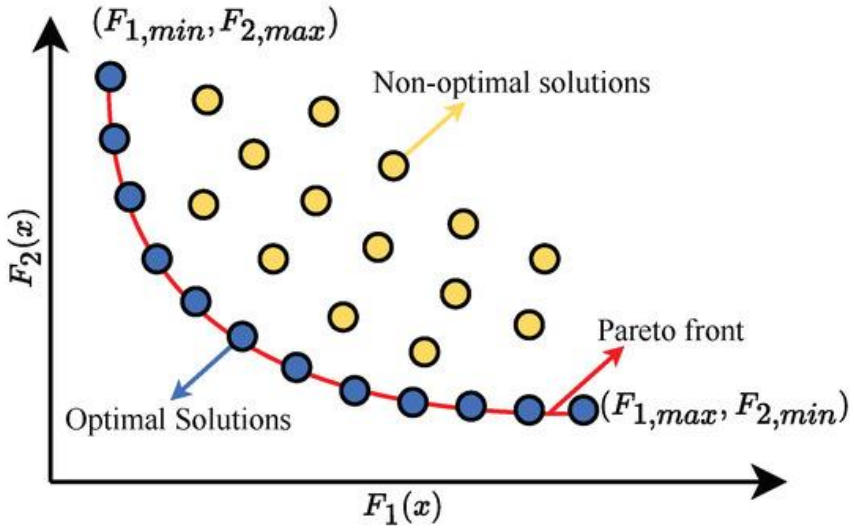


Figure 2: Pareto Front for Grid-Tied Inverter Optimization

3. Multi-Port Hybrid Converter

- Optimization includes balancing renewable source input, battery storage, and grid export.
- AI-assisted MOO predicted optimal switching patterns, reducing losses by 8% and improving reliability metrics by 25%.

EMERGING TRENDS

1. **AI-Driven Multi-Objective Optimization:** Real-time adjustment of converter parameters using reinforcement learning.
2. **Integration of Predictive Reliability Models:** Combining thermal, electrical, and environmental models for lifetime estimation.
3. **Modular Multi-Port Architectures:** Allow scalable, low-cost, and fault-tolerant designs.

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4. **Digital Twin Implementation:** Simulation-based optimization to predict performance under variable operating conditions.

CONCLUSION

Multi-objective optimization of converters is essential for modern renewable and industrial systems. Balancing efficiency, cost, and reliability involves trade-offs, requiring sophisticated computational techniques. Classical methods offer simplicity but may fail in complex scenarios. Evolutionary and AI-assisted approaches provide superior exploration of the design space. Emerging trends such as digital twins and predictive reliability models promise further advancements. Future research should focus on integrating real-time control, AI prediction, and modular design to achieve highly efficient, cost-effective, and reliable converters.

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