

Thermal Performance Comparison of FPC Based Solar Thermal Water Heaters Using Hybrid Nanofluids (Composite Al₂O₃ & CuO-Water-Based) to Single Nanofluids for Varied Volume Fractions

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Abstract

This study compares the thermal performance of Flat Plate Collector (FPC) based Solar Thermal Water Heaters (STWH) employing hybrid nanofluids, namely Al₂O₃-CuO-water, to single nanofluids such as Al₂O₃-water and CuO-water. Combining Al₂O₃ with CuO nanoparticles in water for varied volume fractions of Nanoparticles enhances thermal conductivity, specific heat, and heat transfer efficiency. Numerical simulations using ANSYS Fluent Software, based on the Finite Volume Method (FVM) Modelling, show that hybrid nanofluids improve the overall thermal performance of solar thermal water heaters more effectively than single nanofluids, indicating a promising solution for efficient energy utilization in solar thermal applications.

Keywords: Solar Thermal Water Heater (STWH), Hybrid Nanofluids (NFs), Nanoparticles (NPs), Al₂O₃, CuO, Thermal Performance Analysis, Renewable Energy Technologies, Thermal Conductivity, Nanoparticle Concentration (NPC), Flat Plate Collector (FPC), Nanotechnology in Solar Systems

1.0 Introduction

The growing need for renewable energy has resulted in considerable developments in solar thermal systems. Solar thermal water heaters (STWHs) have grown in popularity due to their ease of use, low cost, and high energy efficiency. However, improving the thermal performance of STWHs remains an important topic of study in order to optimize their value we are using Flat Plate Collector (FPC) based STWH for study.

Nanofluids, or nanoparticle suspensions in a base fluid, have emerged as a promising alternative for improving heat transfer rates. Although single nanofluids like Al₂O₃-water and CuO-water have been widely investigated, hybrid nanofluids, which combine two or more types of nanoparticles, have synergistic effects that can further improve thermal characteristics.

This research analyses the thermal performance of FPC based STWHs utilizing composite Al₂O₃-CuO-water hybrid nanofluids and compares them to single nanofluids like Al₂O₃-water and CuO-water for varied volume fractions of NPs using ANSYS Fluent Software.

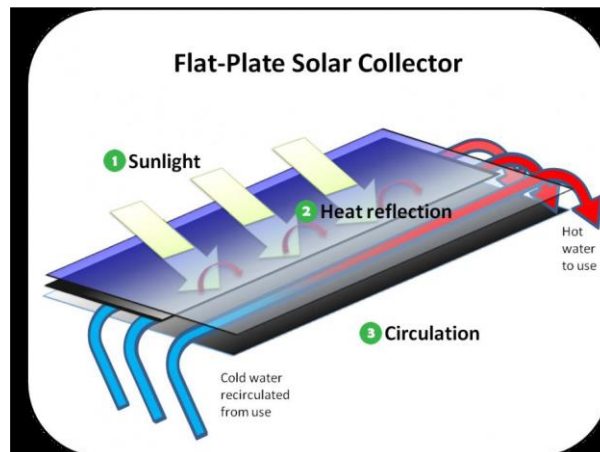


Figure 1 : Diagrammatic representation of Solar Thermal Flat Plate Collector

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Numerical Modelling

- **Software:** The simulations were performed using ANSYS Fluent. The governing equations for fluid flow and heat transmission were solved using the Finite Volume Method (FVM).
- **Geometry and Mesh:** A 3D model of a flat-plate solar water heater was built, which included an absorber plate, glass cover, and fluid flow channels. A structured mesh was employed to enhance numerical stability and precision.

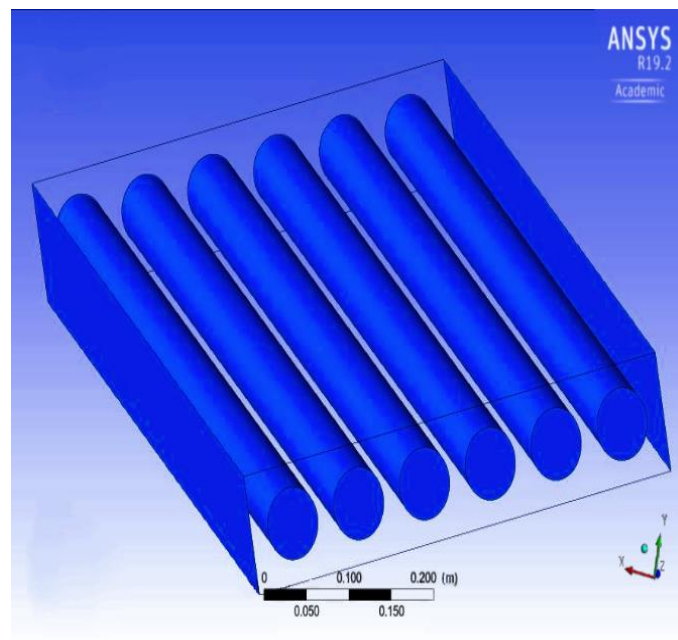


Figure 2 : Geometry of FPC

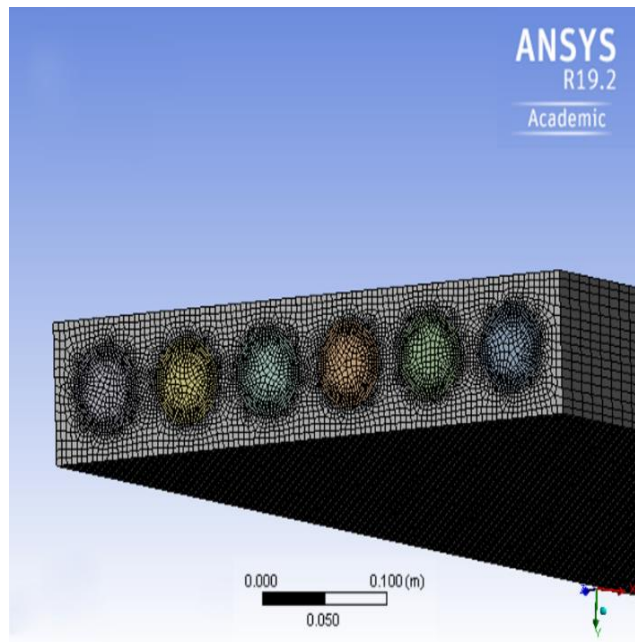


Figure 3 : Meshing

- **Boundary Conditions:** A constant heat flow of 1000 W/m^2 was delivered to the absorber plate to imitate solar irradiation. The working fluid's input temperature was fixed at 300 K, and the flow velocity was uniform.

2.2 Nanofluid Properties

- **Hybrid Nanofluid Composition:** Al_2O_3 and CuO nanoparticles were mixed at a 1:1 volume ratio. The thermophysical characteristics (thermal conductivity, specific heat, and viscosity) were determined using proven empirical correlations.
- **Single Nanofluids:** We compared the characteristics of Al_2O_3 -water with CuO -water.

2.3 Raw Specifications of Solar Thermal Collector's Design Conditions

Solar thermal water heater capacity	60-70 Litres/day
Minimum attaining temperature of heated water	60-80°C (expected)
Collector's Inclination based on location: Banswara, Rajasthan	23°-27° (According to UNDP and MNRE date handbook)
Absorber plate	
Absorber / Collector area	1 m ² (Experimental), 2-4 m ² (Domestic)
Collector's Shape	200cm X 50cm (Rectangular)
Covering	Low-iron tempered flat glas, 4-6 mm thick

Thickness	0.2-0.5 mm
Cover's Transmissivity	90-95 %
Absorptivity	91-96 %
Emissivity	0.06-0.15 (Etched copper)
Tubes	
Number	6, (6-12 depending on the collector size)
Outside Diameter	60-70 mm
Thickness	2-3 mm
Inside Diameter	45-54 mm
Tube Clearance	20 mm
Tube and Side walls Clearance	20 mm
Insulation	
Back Insulation Thickness	20-30 mm
Side Insulation Thickness	15-20 mm
Thermal conductivity	0.04-0.06 W/m-K (for glass-wool material)
Thermal conductivity	385-400 W/m-K (Copper)
Depth of whole assembly	100 mm (excluding insulation)

2.4 Governing Equations The following equations were solved:

Continuity Equation:

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \rho v = 0$$

For Steady Flow

$$\frac{\partial \rho}{\partial t} = 0$$

$$\nabla \cdot \rho v = 0$$

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial v}{\partial y} + \frac{\partial w}{\partial z} = 0$$

Momentum Equation:

$$\int \rho \frac{Dv}{Dt} d = \Sigma F$$

X-momentum equation

$$\left(u \frac{\partial u}{\partial x} + v \frac{\partial u}{\partial y} + w \frac{\partial u}{\partial z} \right) \rho = - \frac{\partial p}{\partial x} + \mu \left(\frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u}{\partial z^2} \right)$$

Energy Equation:

$$\rho c_p \left(u \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} + v \frac{\partial T}{\partial y} + w \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \right) = \lambda \left(\frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial z^2} \right)$$

2.5 Thermo-physical Properties**2.5.1 Thermal Conductivity (k_{nf}):** Maxwell's model for nanofluids:

$$\frac{k_{nf}}{k_b} = \frac{k_p + 2k_b - 2\phi(k_b - k_p)}{k_p + 2k_b + \phi(k_b - k_p)}$$

where:

- k_b : thermal conductivity of the base fluid (water)
- k_p : thermal conductivity of nanoparticles (Al_2O_3)
- ϕ : volume fraction of nanoparticles

2.5.2 Density (ρ_{nf}):

$$\rho_{nf} = \phi \rho_{np} + (1 - \phi) \rho_{bf}$$

where:

- ρ_{np} : density of nanoparticles
- ρ_{bf} : density of the base fluid

2.5.3 Specific Heat Capacity ($C_{p,nf}$): Pak and Cho's model:

$$C_{p,nf} = \frac{\phi \rho_p C_{p,p} + (1 - \phi) \rho_f C_{p,f}}{\rho_{nf}}$$

where:

- $C_{p,p}$: specific heat of nanoparticles
- $C_{p,f}$: specific heat of the base fluid

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Known Thermal Properties of Nanofluids

Phase/NPs	Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	Density (kg/m ³)	Specific heat (J/kg-K)	Viscosity (Pa-Sec.) at 25°C
Water at 25°C	0.607	997.2	4182	0.0008904
Al ₂ O ₃	36	3970	765	-
CuO	20	6500	540	-
Al ₂ O ₃ &CuO	1.50782	1010	4100	-

3.2 Determined Thermo-physical Characteristics of composite Al₂O₃-Water Nanofluid for varied volume fraction of NPs

NFs (NPC volume %)	Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	Density (kg/m ³)	Specific heat (J/kg-K)
0.1	0.6147	999.97	4168.89
0.2	0.6165	1002.95	4155.86
0.5	0.6217	1011.87	4117.22
1.0	0.6305	1026.73	4054.32
1.25	0.6349	1034.16	4023.55
1.5	0.6393	1041.60	3993.22
2.0	0.6483	1056.46	3933.83

3.3 Determined Thermo-physical Characteristics of composite CuO-Water Nanofluid for varied volume fraction of NPs

NFs (NPC volume %)	Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	Density (kg/m ³)	Specific heat (J/kg-K)
0.1	0.6147	1002.50	4158.39
0.2	0.6164	1008.01	4135.03
0.5	0.6214	1024.51	4066.47
1.0	0.6300	1052.03	3956.98
1.25	0.6342	1065.79	3904.35
1.5	0.6385	1079.55	3853.07

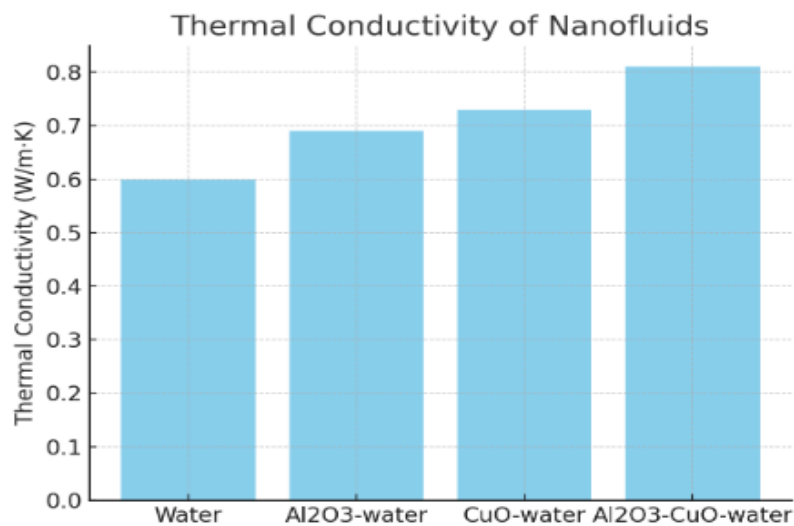
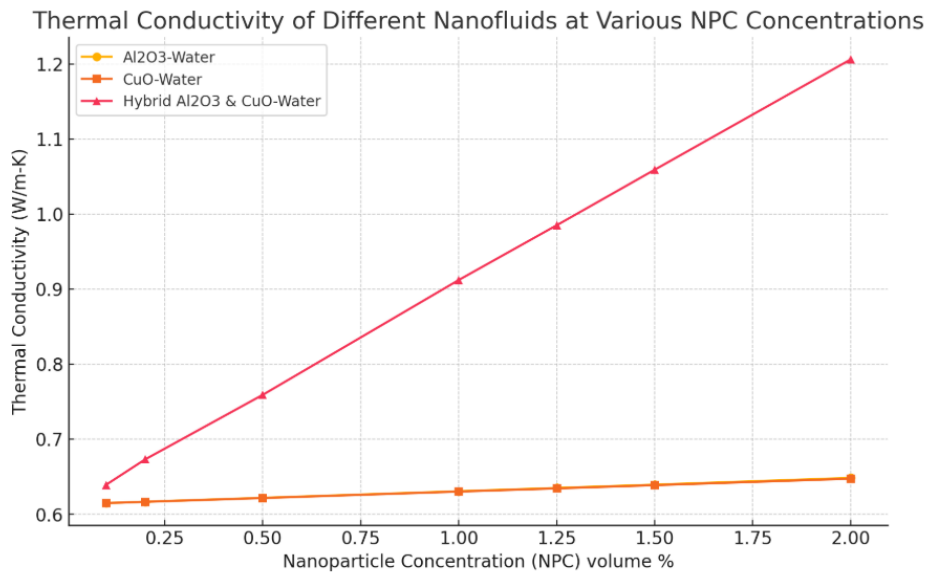
2.0	0.6472	1107.06	3754.33
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3.4 Determined Thermo-physical Characteristics of composite Al₂O₃&CuO-Water Nanofluid for varied volume fraction of NPs

NFs (NPC volume %)	Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	Density (kg/m ³)	Specific heat (J/kg-K)
0.1	0.639	998.32	4177.32
0.2	0.673	999.64	4172.64
0.5	0.759	1003.2	4156.6
1.0	0.912	1009.4	4131.8
1.25	0.985	1012.9	4119.75
1.5	1.059	1016.4	4107.7
2.0	1.206	1023.6	4083.6

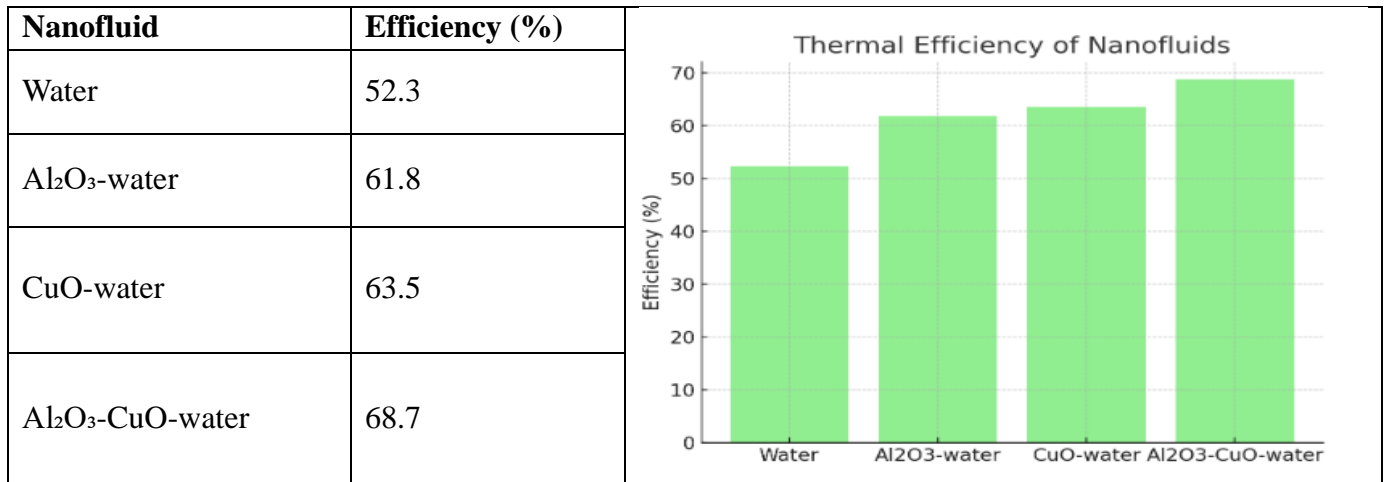
3.5 Thermal Conductivity Comparison of Al₂O₃-Water, CuO-Water and Hybrid Al₂O₃&CuO-Water for varied volume fraction of NPs

NFs(NPC volume %)	Al ₂ O ₃ -Water Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	CuO-Water Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)	Hybrid Al ₂ O ₃ &CuO-Water Thermal Conductivity (W/m-k)
0.1	0.6147	0.6147	0.639
0.2	0.6165	0.6164	0.673
0.5	0.6217	0.6214	0.759
1.0	0.6305	0.6300	0.912
1.25	0.6349	0.6342	0.985
1.5	0.6393	0.6385	1.059
2.0	0.6483	0.6472	1.206



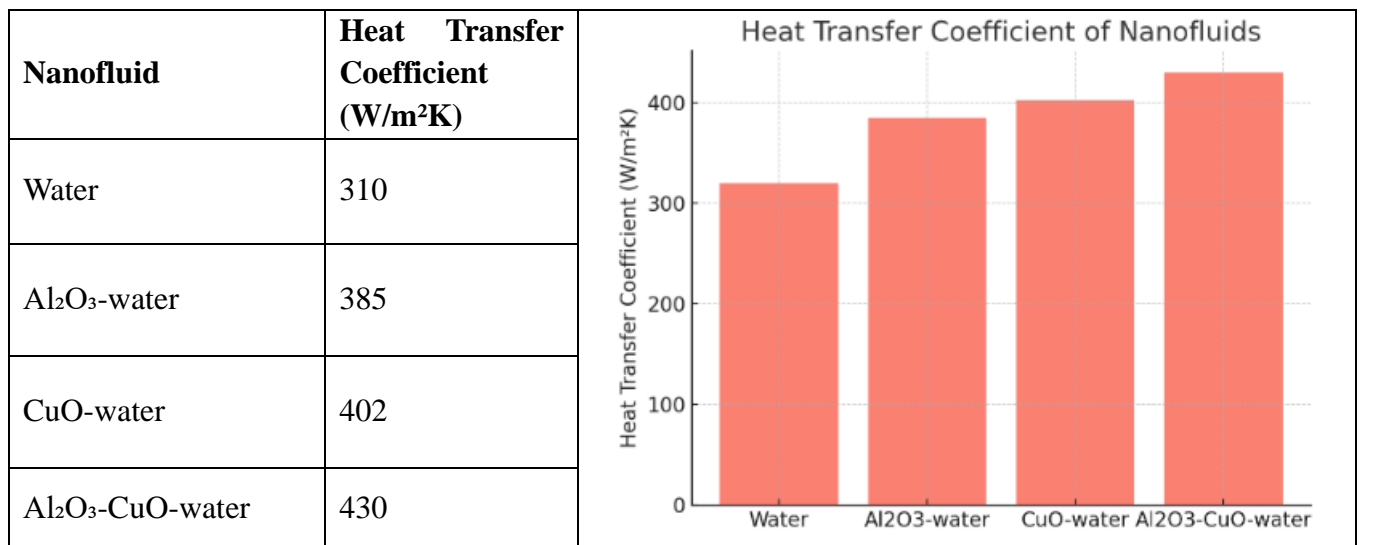
Here is the graph displaying the thermal conductivity of different nanofluids (Al₂O₃-Water, CuO-Water, and Hybrid Al₂O₃&CuO-Water) at various nanoparticle concentrations (NPC volume %). The x-axis represents the NPC volume percentages, while the y-axis shows the thermal conductivity in W/m-K. The hybrid nanofluid exhibited higher thermal conductivity compared to single nanofluids due to the synergistic interactions between Al₂O₃ and CuO nanoparticles.

3.6 Thermal Efficiency Comparison



The numerical analysis revealed that hybrid nanofluids significantly enhance the thermal efficiency of SWHs compared to single nanofluids.

3.7 Heat Transfer Coefficient Analysis



The hybrid nanofluid achieved the highest heat transfer coefficient, indicating superior convective heat transfer capabilities.

4.0 Conclusion

This work demonstrates that hybrid nanofluids, particularly Al₂O₃-CuO-water, perform well compared to single nanofluids in improving the thermal performance of solar thermal water heaters. In order to increase thermal efficiency, hybrid nanofluids' enhanced thermal conductivity, specific heat, and heat transfer coefficient verified by numerical simulations using ANSYS Fluent.

These findings demonstrate the potential of hybrid nanofluids as a practical working fluid for solar thermal applications. Future research should look at the optimization of nanoparticle volume fractions,

long-term stability, and economic viability in order to support the usage of hybrid nanofluids in real solar thermal systems.

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