Archives available at journals.mriindia.com

International Journal of Recent Advances in Engineering and Technology

ISSN: 2347 - 2812

Volume 14 Issue 02s, 2025

Feasibility of Hydrogen Blends as a Fuel for CI Engine

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Peer Review Information

Submission: 21 Oct 2025

Revision: 18 Nov 2025

Acceptance: 05 Dec 2025

Keywords

Hydrogen fuel, internal combustion engines, sustainable energy, alternative fuels, clean combustion, hydrogen storage, engine modifications, green technology.

Abstract

The transition to sustainable energy sources has intensified the exploration of alternative fuels for internal combustion engines (ICEs). Among these, hydrogen stands out due to its abundance, clean combustion properties, and potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This paper discusses the feasibility of hydrogen as a fuel for ICEs, highlighting its physical and chemical properties, storage challenges, and the modifications required in engine design for optimized performance. Furthermore, it evaluates the environmental benefits and economic implications of adopting hydrogen-based technologies in the transportation and energy sectors. While hydrogen presents significant promise, addressing its production efficiency, distribution infrastructure, and safety concerns remains crucial for its widespread adoption.

Introduction

The pursuit of cleaner and more sustainable energy sources has intensified in recent years, driven by concerns over climate change, energy security, and depleting fossil fuel reserves. Among the alternative fuels under consideration, hydrogen has emerged as a promising candidate due to its high energy content, near-zero emissions, and potential for renewable production. However, using hydrogen as a primary fuel in compression ignition (CI) engines presents unique challenges due to its properties and the fundamental operating principles of CI engines.CI engines, commonly known as diesel engines, operate on the auto-ignition of fuel under high compression. Hydrogen, with its high flammability and low auto-ignition temperature, requires careful consideration to prevent issues such as pre-ignition, knocking, and safety risks. One practical approach to leverage hydrogen in CI engines is through the use of hydrogen blends, [2] where hydrogen is mixed with conventional diesel or other fuels to enhance combustion characteristics and reduce emissions.This introduction explores the feasibility of hydrogen blends as a fuel for CI engines, addressing key factors such as:[1,.3]

Combustion Characteristics:
Hydrogen's high flame speed and wide flammability range can enhance the combustion process, leading to more efficient and complete fuel utilization. However, managing the injection timing and air-fuel ratio is crucial to avoid pre-ignition and ensure stable operation.[6]

Emission Reduction Potential:
Hydrogen combustion primarily produces water vapor, resulting in significant reductions in greenhouse gases and particulate matter when

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used as a blend. A small percentage of NOx emissions may arise due to high combustion temperatures, necessitating control technologies.[4]

Engine Modifications:
Modifications may include adjustments to the fuel injection system, compression ratio, and cooling systems to accommodate hydrogen's unique properties.Retrofitting existing CI engines for hydrogen blending may offer a cost-effective transition strategy compared to developing entirely new hydrogen engines.[5]

Literature Review
Hydrogen, as an alternative fuel, has gained significant attention due to its potential to improve combustion efficiency and reduce emissions. Researchers have extensively studied the implications of blending hydrogen with conventional diesel in CI engines. The following section provides an overview of the key findings from the literature, summarized in Table 1.

Key Findings from Literature

Combustion Characteristics:
Studies show that hydrogen's high flame speed enhances the combustion process, leading to improved thermal efficiency. However, managing hydrogen's low ignition energy is critical to avoid knocking.[7,8]

Emission Reduction:
Hydrogen blending significantly reduces CO2_22, CO, and particulate matter emissions. However, NOx_xx emissions may increase due to higher combustion temperatures.[7]

Performance Enhancements:
Most studies report improvements in brake thermal efficiency (BTE) and reduced specific fuel consumption (SFC) with optimal hydrogen blending ratios.

Operational Challenges:
Pre-ignition, backfiring, and storage issues are commonly cited challenges, necessitating engine modifications and safety protocols.[6]

Table 1: Summary of Literature on Hydrogen Blends in CI Engines

Author(s)	Year	Study Focus	Key Findings	Limitations
Das et al.	2020	Effect of hydrogen-diesel blends on CI engines	Improved BTE and significant CO2_22 reduction with 10-30% hydrogen blends.	Increased NOx_xx at higher blending ratios.
Kumar & Sharma	2021	Combustion and emission characteristics	Hydrogen blends reduced CO and particulate matter by over 50%.	Challenges in maintaining stable operation.
Lee et al.	2019	Hydrogen injection in dual-fuel CI engines	Hydrogen injection reduced carbon emissions but required advanced injection timing.	Increased pre-ignition risk.
Zhang et al.	2022	Optimization of blending ratio	Optimal blend ratio of 20% hydrogen showed highest thermal efficiency without compromising safety.	Limited to laboratory conditions.
Ali et al.	2020	Safety and storage of hydrogen in CI systems	Highlighted the importance of robust storage solutions and safety protocols for hydrogen use.	Limited focus on practical applications.

Experimentation Procedure
The experimentation procedure to evaluate hydrogen-diesel blends in CI engines involves designing a systematic methodology to analyze performance, combustion characteristics, and emission parameters. Below is a detailed procedure:[9,10]

Objectives:
Evaluate the effect of hydrogen blending on engine performance metrics such as brake thermal efficiency (BTE), specific fuel consumption (SFC), and power output.
Analyze the combustion characteristics, including in-cylinder pressure, heat release rate (HRR), and ignition delay.
Measure emissions CO_2_22, CO, NOx_xx, and particulate matter) under varying hydrogen blending ratios.
Assess operational challenges such as knocking, pre-ignition, and safety considerations.

Experimental Setup:
Engine Specifications

i. A single-cylinder, four-stroke CI engine with direct injection.
ii. Equipped with a variable compression ratio mechanism and advanced fuel injection system.[9]

Instrumentation:
a. Engine Performance: Dynamometer to measure power and torque.
b. Combustion Analysis: Pressure transducer and crank angle encoder for in-cylinder pressure monitoring.
c. Emission Measurement: Gas analyzer and smoke meter for measuring CO_2, CO, NOx, and particulate matter.
d. Safety Systems: Hydrogen leak detectors and flame arrestors.

Fuel Supply System:
Diesel supply system with an additional hydrogen injection system capable of precise control over the blending ratio.

Procedure:

Step 1: Fuel Preparation
Prepare hydrogen-diesel blends with varying hydrogen percentages (e.g., 0%, 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% by volume).
Ensure hydrogen is stored in a high-pressure cylinder with appropriate safety measures.

Step 2: Engine Baseline Testing
Run the engine using 100% diesel under standard operating conditions.
Record baseline performance, combustion, and emission data.

Step 3: Testing with Hydrogen Blends
Gradually introduce hydrogen blends while maintaining a constant load and speed.

For each blending ratio:

Measure performance metrics (BTE, SFC, torque, and power).

Record in-cylinder pressure and calculate HRR.

Monitor emissions using the gas analyzer and smoke meter.

Assess knocking and pre-ignition through combustion analysis.

Step 4: Vary Operating Conditions
Repeat tests at different engine loads (e.g., 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%) and speeds (e.g., 1000 rpm, 1500 rpm, 2000 rpm).

Step 5: Safety Assessment
Evaluate hydrogen leakage, backfire, and safety concerns during the experiment.

Data Analysis:
Compare the performance and emission parameters for different hydrogen blending ratios.
Identify the optimal blending ratio with maximum efficiency and minimum emissions.
Analyze trends in combustion characteristics to understand the impact of hydrogen on CI engine operation

Expected Result And Discussion
Based on the experimental procedure outlined, the expected results and corresponding discussions can be categorized into engine performance, combustion characteristics, emission parameters, and operational challenges.

Engine Performance:

Expected Results:

Brake Thermal Efficiency (BTE): Hydrogen blends are expected to increase BTE due to hydrogen's high flame speed and energy density. An optimal hydrogen blending ratio (e.g., 20-30%) may achieve the highest efficiency.

Specific Fuel Consumption (SFC): SFC is anticipated to decrease as hydrogen contributes to a more complete combustion process, leading to better utilization of the fuel energy. [6]

Discussion:
Hydrogen improves the combustion process by enhancing the air-fuel mixture and reducing unburned hydrocarbons. However, excessive hydrogen blending (above 40%) might lead to unstable combustion and reduced efficiency due to potential knocking.

Combustion Characteristics:

Expected Results:

In-Cylinder Pressure and Heat Release Rate (HRR):
Hydrogen blends will likely cause an earlier and sharper pressure rise due to its high flammability and faster combustion. HRR is expected to increase with higher hydrogen ratios, indicating quicker energy release.

Ignition Delay:
Ignition delay may shorten with increasing hydrogen content, leading to a faster combustion phase.[7]

Discussion:
The faster combustion and higher pressure peaksenhance performance but require careful control of injection timing to avoid knocking and mechanical stress on the engine components. Adjustments to the injection system may mitigate these issues.

Emission Parameters

Expected Results:

Carbon Dioxide (CO2_22) and Carbon Monoxide (CO):
Significant reductions in CO2_22 and CO emissions are expected as hydrogen combustion does not produce carbon-based emissions.

Particulate Matter (PM):
Hydrogen blends will drastically reduce particulate matter emissions due to improved combustion and lower soot formation.

Nitrogen Oxides (NOx):
NOx_ emissions may increase with hydrogen blending because of the higher combustion temperature.

Discussion:
While hydrogen blending achieves notable reductions in greenhouse gases and particulate matter, controlling NOx_xx emissions is critical. Techniques such as exhaust gas recirculation (EGR) or selective catalytic reduction (SCR) can be used to mitigate NOx_xx formation.[8]

Operational Challenges

Expected Results:

Knocking and Pre-Ignition:
1. Higher hydrogen blends (>30%) may lead to knocking due to early ignition of the air-fuel mixture.
2. Hydrogen's low ignition energy and high diffusivity may pose risks of leakage and backfiring.

Discussion:
Operational challenges necessitate modifications to engine design, including fuel injection systems and cooling mechanisms. Implementing safety measures, such as hydrogen leak detection and flame arrestors, will be vital for practical applications.

Conclusions

The feasibility of hydrogen blends as a fuel for compression ignition (CI) engines presents a compelling opportunity to enhance engine performance, improve combustion efficiency, and significantly reduce harmful emissions. Hydrogen blending, particularly in the optimal range of 20-30% by volume, has been shown to improve brake thermal efficiency and lower specific fuel consumption while considerably reducing emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2), carbon monoxide (CO), and particulate matter (PM). However, challenges such as increased nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions due to higher combustion temperatures, as well as operational concerns like knocking and pre-ignition, necessitate the use of advanced control strategies and emission mitigation technologies. Furthermore, the safe storage and handling of hydrogen remain crucial considerations due to its high flammability and diffusivity.
Future research should focus on optimizing hydrogen injection strategies, developing hybrid combustion models, and integrating renewable hydrogen production methods to enhance the sustainability of hydrogen-powered CI engines. The advancement of hydrogen infrastructure, including safer storage solutions and improved distribution networks, will also be vital in ensuring the widespread adoption of hydrogen blends. As hydrogen technology continues to evolve, its integration into conventional engine systems represents a significant step toward achieving cleaner energy solutions and accelerating the transition to a low-carbon future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the G H Raisoni University Amaravati for allowing me to work. I acknowledge with thanks to my guide Prof.S S Karale and Prof. S S Gajghate for share their valuable knowledge and support.

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