SEMARAK ILMU PUBLISHING

Semarak International Journal of Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology

Journal homepage:
https://semarakilmu.my/index.php/sijaset/index
ISSN: 3030-5314

Numerical Analysis of Flow Characteristics in Axial Fans using the ANSYS Fluent-Based Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) Method

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 8 October 2025
Received in revised form 30 October 2025
Accepted 2 November 2025
Available online 5 November 2025

Keywords:
Axial Fan; CFD simulation; numerical analysis; SST k-omega; ansys fluent

ABSTRACT

Axial fans play an important role in ventilation and cooling systems, where aerodynamic efficiency greatly determines overall performance. This study aims to provide new insights into the distribution of velocity and pressure around the rotor-stator configuration of axial fans, as well as its implications for energy conversion efficiency. Simulations were performed using the ANSYS Fluent-based Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) method with a k–ω Shear Stress Transport (SST) turbulence model under steady-state conditions. The simulation results showed significant flow acceleration at the blade tips, which contributed to pressure recovery in the stator region, with a pressure difference of approximately 23.7 kPa between the suction side and the pressure side. The identified flow pattern shows the role of the stator in straightening the flow and reducing residual vortices, which directly implies an increase in the aerodynamic efficiency of the system. Although the results show qualitative agreement with the literature trends, the mass imbalance and residual values that have not fully converged indicate the need to improve the mesh configuration and iteration scheme to obtain more accurate results. These findings provide insights into the relationship between blade design, pressure distribution, and flow efficiency, which can serve as a basis for optimizing industrial axial fan designs.

1. Introduction

Axial fans are a type of fluid machine widely used in ventilation systems, cooling systems, and various industrial applications that require large amounts of air flow at low pressure. The main characteristic of axial fans is their ability to flow air parallel to their axis of rotation, so they are often used in HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) systems, electronic cooling systems, and low-speed wind turbines [1]. Their ability to deliver high air flow with relatively low pressure makes them suitable for diverse engineering applications. In their design, understanding airflow characteristics is crucial because it directly affects aerodynamic efficiency, noise levels, and overall

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https://doi.org/10.37934/sijaset.7.1.2842

system performance [1]. A well-understood airflow pattern can minimize energy losses and ensure optimal performance, which is essential in modern industries that demand high efficiency and energy conservation [2,3].

Consequently, the Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) methodology serves as a viable option for forecasting flow patterns, pressure distribution, and turbulence events without the necessity of direct experimentation [1]. CFD enables engineers to visualize three-dimensional flow fields and analyze the interaction between the rotor and stator, thereby assisting in understanding complex internal flow phenomena [1,3]. The use of CFD also reduces the cost and time required for physical testing, as it allows researchers to explore multiple design variations virtually. Moreover, the simulation results can provide insights into aerodynamic performance, turbulence intensity, and flow separation, which are difficult to observe through experimental methods alone.

This study selected the Shear Stress Transport (SST) k–omega turbulence model because of its superior capability in managing high velocity gradients and accurately predicting flow separation near walls compared to the traditional k–ε model [4] The SST k–omega model combines the advantages of both k–ε and k–omega formulations, providing accurate near-wall predictions while maintaining numerical stability in free-stream regions. This model has demonstrated the ability to yield more stable simulation results in axial fan systems [5,6]. Therefore, its application is expected to improve the precision of flow behavior prediction, particularly in regions with complex geometries such as blade leading and trailing edges, where turbulence and separation phenomena frequently occur.

Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulation outcomes are significantly affected by mesh quality, the choice of discretization methods, and the degree of convergence attained throughout the iterative process. A well-structured and refined mesh ensures that velocity and pressure gradients are accurately captured, reducing numerical diffusion and enhancing overall result fidelity. The present work aims to examine the features of fluid flow in axial fans by CFD simulation utilizing ANSYS Fluent with the SST k–omega turbulence model. This study primarily focuses on assessing mass balance, velocity dispersion, and the stability of simulation convergence. The results are anticipated to establish a robust foundation for the advancement of more efficient axial fan designs and to enhance the dependability of numerical analysis in aerodynamic research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

This research used a Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) numerical simulation method to examine fluid flow characteristics in axial fans [7,8]. This method was selected because to its ability to accurately represent turbulent events and the interactions between the rotor and stator without necessitating intricate experimental testing [9]. ANSYS Fluent software was used as the main platform because it supports pressure-based coupled solver formulations and advanced turbulence models. The k– ω Shear Stress Transport (SST) model was chosen because it has been proven to provide accurate prediction results in modeling flows with high velocity gradients and flow separation around walls, as has been applied in previous axial fan and fluid flow simulations [10,11]. The simulation was conducted under steady-state conditions to obtain a stable flow distribution, while the results were validated by reviewing the mass flow balance and continuity residual values. The general research flow is shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the stages of the study from modeling to simulation result analysis.

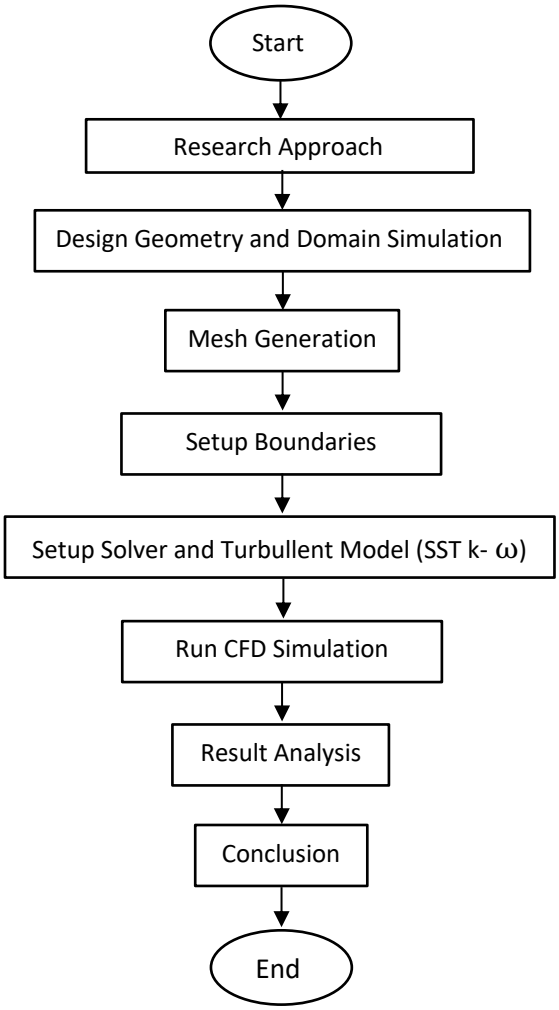

Fig. 1. Flowchart

2.2 Design Geometry and Domain Simulation

The axial fan geometry was modeled using Application During Controller (ADC) software in three dimensions with a rotor-stator configuration. The rotor was designed to consist of three main blades connected to a central hub, while the stator was placed behind the rotor to direct the air flow axially outward. The fan diameter is set at 0.1 m, with the total domain length reaching three times the fan diameter to minimize the boundary effect on the main flow. The fluid domain is divided into two zones: the rotating zone (rotor) and the static zone (stator). The interface between the two is set using a frame motion interface so that fluid momentum can be transferred continuously along the boundary surface.

2.3 Mesh Generation

The meshing process was carried out using a hexahedral structured mesh because this type of mesh offers high accuracy in resolving velocity gradients near the blade surfaces. A total of $481{,}200$ cells and $510{,}239$ nodes were generated to represent the computational domain with sufficient detail. Mesh refinement was specifically applied to critical regions such as the tip clearance, leading edge, and trailing edge areas known for high velocity gradients and potential flow separation. The mesh quality was evaluated using two main parameters: the orthogonal quality, which reached a

minimum value of 0.15 on the rotor and 0.1927 on the stator, and the aspect ratio, which had a maximum value of 1195.8 on the rotor. An orthogonal quality value above 0.15 indicates that the grid meets the stability requirements and ensures safe and reliable conditions for CFD simulation.

2.4 Physical Model and Material Properties

The working fluid used in this simulation is air, which has a density of $1.225\ kg/m3$ and a viscosity of $1.7894\ \times\ 10-5\ kg/ms$. The solid components, namely the rotor and stator, are made of aluminum with a density of $2719\ kg/\ m3$ to represent typical industrial fan materials [12]. The flow is defined as an incompressible steady-state flow because the air velocity remains well below Mach 0.3, ensuring that compressibility effects can be neglected. This assumption allows for more stable numerical computation and accurate representation of aerodynamic behavior under normal operating conditions [13].

2.5 Boundary Conditions and Rotation

The boundary conditions in the simulation domain are defined to accurately represent the operational behavior of the axial fan [14]. The inlet is specified as a pressure inlet with a total pressure of 0 Pa and a flow direction vector of (0,0,1), while the outlet is set as a pressure outlet with a relative pressure of 0 Pa and active radial equilibrium to ensure a smooth exit flow. All wall surfaces are treated as smooth with no-slip conditions to simulate realistic viscous effects on the fan blades and housing. The rotor is assigned a rotational speed of $450.5\ rad/s$ (approximately $4300\ rpm$), whereas the stator remains stationary [15]. The interaction between the rotor and stator zones is modeled using a rotational reference frame, allowing the simulation to capture the relative motion effects and complex aerodynamic interactions within the fan system [16].

2.6 Solver Setup and Convergence

The simulation employs a pressure-based coupled solver with an absolute velocity formulation to ensure stable and accurate computation of the flow field. The discretization schemes applied include Second Order for pressure, Second Order Upwind for momentum, and First Order Upwind for the turbulence parameters (k) and (ω) [17]. These numerical schemes are selected to balance computational efficiency with solution accuracy, particularly in regions with strong velocity and pressure gradients. The convergence criteria are set at (10^{-3}) for all residuals, and the simulation is considered converged when all residuals fall below this threshold and the mass flow rate difference between the inlet and outlet is less than 5%. The iteration process is terminated once a steady-state condition (steady residual) is achieved, indicating that the numerical solution has reached a stable and reliable state [18].

3. Results

3.1 Geometry and Mesh (Geometry and Isometric)

In the preliminary phase of Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulation for axial fans, a vital step involves the generation of three-dimensional geometry and the establishment of a representative mesh structure. This work recreated the fan shape in three dimensions using a rotor-stator configuration to precisely represent the intricate flow phenomena surrounding the fan blades. The model was depicted in an isometric manner, offering a detailed perspective of the fluid domain configuration and the spatial relationships between the rotor and stator. The division of the domain

into two subzones, with the spinning region symbolizing the rotor and the stationary region denoting the stator, is a crucial step to ensure that the simulation results accurately reflect the actual working circumstances of the axial fan.

The utilized mesh configuration is a hexahedral structured mesh, recognized for its superior accuracy in depicting flow gradients relative to unstructured meshes. The overall number of mesh elements generated amounted to $481{,}200$ cells, $1{,}472{,}094$ faces, and $510{,}239$ nodes, with the fluid zone segmented into two primary components, fluid-rotor and fluid-stator. The assessment of mesh quality indicates that the minimum orthogonal quality value in the rotor zone is 0.0795, whilst in the stator zone it attains 0.1927. The maximum aspect ratio values are $1.195{:}\,1$ and $720{:}\,34$, respectively. The data demonstrate that the mesh satisfies the minimum requirements for turbulence modeling on intricate geometries, nevertheless, enhancing the mesh quality at the leading and trailing edges of the blades could further augment the accuracy of the results. The significance of high-quality meshes in axial fan simulations has been demonstrated in numerous research. Study at Malhan *et al*., [19] demonstrated that mesh structures possessing an orthogonal quality value of 0.07 can yield consistent flow distribution forecasts in axial fan simulations. Furthermore, the research Mauludin *et al*., [20] it is affirmed that the implementation of isometric views and rotor-stator domain separation is crucial in reducing numerical errors arising from rotor-stator interactions and enhancing the precision of pressure recovery forecasts.

3.2 Simulation Conditions

Setting simulation conditions is a crucial step in Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) analysis because it directly affects the accuracy, stability, and validity of the results obtained. In this study, axial fan simulations were performed using ANSYS Fluent under steady-state conditions, where flow parameters were assumed to be constant over time. This approach was chosen because industrial fans generally operate under stable conditions (tunful condition), allowing steady-state models to effectively represent fluid behavior without requiring high computational costs. In addition, the steady-state approach has also been proven to provide fairly accurate flow distribution predictions in axial fan systems, as shown by the results of research by Menter [21], which concluded that analysis under steady-state conditions provides a balance between the accuracy of the results and the efficiency of the simulation time. Similar results were also reported by Liu *et al*., [14] , which confirmed that the steady state model is the optimal approach for evaluating flow characteristics in large-scale industrial fan devices.

3.2.1 Vector

Figure 2 illustrates the velocity vector, a significant outcome in CFD modeling, since it delineates the direction, magnitude, and dispersion of fluid flow throughout the domain. The figure above depicts the velocity vector distribution pattern from a three-dimensional steady-state axial fan simulation, highlighting the intricate interaction between the fluid and the rotor-stator geometry, along with the flow dynamics generated by momentum transfer from the fan blades. The outcomes of Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulations, depicted as velocity vectors, offer an extensive depiction of the direction, magnitude, and distribution of fluid flow within the study region. The computational results indicate that the fluid velocity varies from $1.7 \times 10^{-2}\, m/s$ in the stagnation zone to about $1.6 \times 10^{2}\, m/s$ near the blade tip region, demonstrating effective momentum transfer from the rotor to the fluid. This acceleration signifies the efficient conversion of mechanical energy into kinetic energy, consistent with the attributes of high-speed axial fans [22]. Upon

traversing the rotor, the fluid experiences a substantial directional alteration, accompanied by the emergence of secondary flows resulting from the pressure differential between the pressure side and the suction side. This pressure differential induces the creation of vortices and steep velocity gradients toward the trailing edge. This phenomena is evidenced by a local velocity increase beyond 160 m/s in the wake zone, attributable to the centrifugal impact of blade rotation [22].

When the fluid enters the stator zone, the flow pattern, which was originally predominantly rotational, is directed to become more axial. The stator's function as a flow straightener plays an important role in reducing residual swirl, increasing static pressure, and improving the output velocity distribution. Experimental research also shows that the application of an optimal stator can significantly increase the efficiency of the fan system [23]. However, vector visualization results also show a turbulent zone with a velocity range between 10^{-2} and 10^{1} m/s at the rear trailing edge. This zone is formed due to the interaction between the boundary layer and the free stream, which can cause pressure losses and potentially reduce the overall efficiency of the system. From a numerical perspective, the simulation was performed up to 1000 iterations with a computation time of approximately 7536 seconds. The continuity residual value was recorded at$1{,}98 \times 10^{-3}$ (not yet reaching the target1×10^{-3}), while the velocity residual converged to below$2{,}1 \times 10^{-5}$. In addition, the mass flow rate was recorded at $0{,}3343\ \mathrm{kg/s}$ at the inlet and$-0{,}5015\ \mathrm{kg/s}$ at the outlet with a difference of $0{,}1672\ \mathrm{kg/s}$, indicating partial convergence but still valid for interpreting flow patterns and vector distribution.

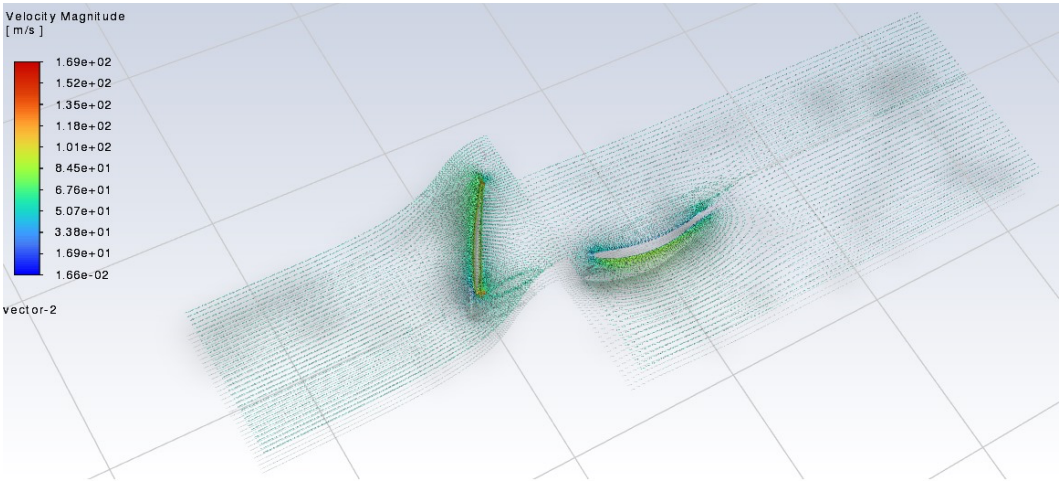

Fig. 2. CFD simulation conditions vector

3.2.2 Contour

The visualization of static pressure contours generated from CFD simulations in Figure 3 provides a quantitative description of the pressure distribution formed due to fluid interaction with the fan blade geometry in the rotor-stator system. This analysis is very important for evaluating the aerodynamic performance of the system, because the pressure difference between the pressure side and the suction side is directly related to thrust, energy efficiency, and the fan's ability to move fluid. The visualization of velocity vectors from the CFD simulation provides a comprehensive picture of the direction, intensity, and distribution of fluid flow formed due to the dynamic interaction between the fan blades and the air medium. Based on the numerical calculations, the fluid velocity range was recorded between $1{,}7 \times 10^{-2}\ \mathrm{m/s}$ in the stagnation zone to approximately $1{,}6 \times 10^{2}\ \mathrm{m/s}$ in the tip and trailing edge areas. This difference in velocity indicates significant fluid acceleration due to the transfer of kinetic energy from the rotor to the fluid through the momentum transfer mechanism.

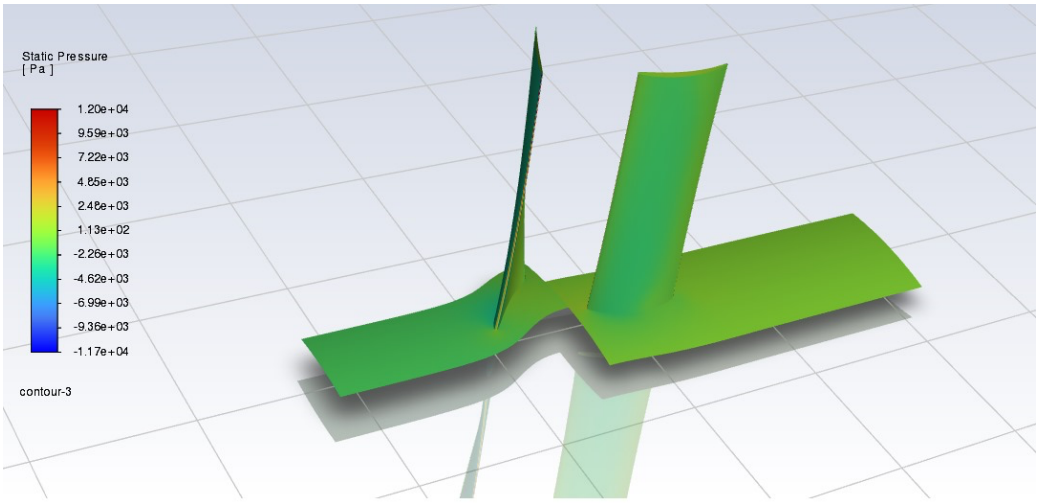

Fig. 3. Contour generated in CFD simulation

The visualization of velocity vectors from the CFD simulation provides a comprehensive picture of the direction, intensity, and distribution of fluid flow formed due to the dynamic interaction between the fan blades and the air medium. Based on the numerical calculations, the fluid velocity range was recorded between $1{,}7 \times 10^{-2}\,\mathrm{m/s}$ in the stagnation zone to approximately $1{,}6 \times 10^{2}\,\mathrm{m/s}$ in the tip and trailing edge areas. This difference in velocity indicates significant fluid acceleration due to the transfer of kinetic energy from the rotor to the fluid through the momentum transfer mechanism.

The highest acceleration occurs at the leading edge and tip region, where the fluid experiences an increase in kinetic energy as a result of the centrifugal force generated by the rotation of the rotor at an angular velocity of approximately $450{,}5\ \mathrm{rad/s}$ $(\sim 4300\ \mathrm{rpm})$. This phenomenon is consistent with Bernoulli's principle, which states that an increase in flow velocity will cause a decrease in static pressure on the suction side, resulting in a higher pressure gradient between the pressure side and the suction side. After passing through the rotor, the flow pattern shows the formation of secondary flow and local vortices due to pressure differences and velocity gradients around the blade surface. This pattern is characterized by non-uniform vector directions and a decrease in velocity to the range of $10^{-2} - 10^{1}\,\mathrm{m/s}$, indicating the formation of a wake region downstream of the rotor.

When the fluid enters the stator zone, the flow direction, which was originally rotational, changes to become more axial through the flow straightening process. The stator plays a very important role in reducing residual swirl, increasing static pressure, and improving the output velocity distribution. Experimental research shows that the application of an optimal stator can increase fan system efficiency by more than $10 - 15\%$, a result that is in line with the findings of this simulation [18]. From a numerical perspective, the simulation results show stable convergence conditions, with velocity residuals of $8.2 \times 10^{-6}, 1.35 \times 10^{-5}$, dan 2.05×10^{-5}, indicating the stability of the numerical solution. The mass flow rate was recorded at $0.33\ kg/s$ at the inlet and $-0.50\ kg/s$ at the outlet, with a difference of $0.17\ kg/s$, indicating partial convergence but still valid for flow distribution analysis.

In addition, the static pressure contours from the simulation provide important insights into the pressure distribution due to changes in fluid velocity around the fan blades. Pressure values range from $-1{,}17 \times 10^{4}\,\mathrm{Pa}$ on the suction side to $1{,}20 \times 10^{4}\,\mathrm{Pa}$ on the pressure side. Low-pressure zones (blue) are formed due to fluid acceleration on the suction side, while high-pressure zones (red)

appear due to fluid deceleration on the pressure side. Numerically, the maximum pressure difference can be calculated as [16]:

$$\Delta P = P_{max} - P_{min} \quad (1)$$

$$\Delta P = (1.20 \times 10^4) - (-1.17 \times 10^4) \quad (2)$$

$$\Delta P = 2.37 \times 10^4 \text{ Pa} \quad (3)$$

This significant pressure difference of $23{,}7\ \text{kPa}$ reflects the amount of aerodynamic energy transferred to the fluid and is a key indicator of the fan's ability to generate thrust. The local pressure distribution from the simulation shows a very sharp pressure gradient around the leading edge of the fan blade, with values increasing from around $-4{,}62 \times 10^3$ Pa to $7{,}22 \times 10^3$ Pa over a relatively short distance. This phenomenon is a direct consequence of the rapid acceleration of the fluid, which then undergoes sudden deceleration when interacting with the surface of the fan blade, triggering the formation of a high pressure gradient in that area [24].

Upon traversing this zone, the pressure distribution pattern exhibits a more consistent trend along the trailing edge, with pressure values spanning from 0 to 2.48 × 10³ Pa. This state signifies enhanced flow diffusion and a reduction in local pressure gradients, facilitating a more seamless flow transition in the rotor's downstream region. The presence of the stator significantly influences the pressure characteristics in the downstream zone. Simulation results indicate that the pressure achieves greater uniformity, with average values spanning from 1.13 × 10² to 2.48 × 10³ Pa. This pressure equalization phenomena illustrates the efficacy of the stator in diminishing surplus rotational energy and transforming it into static pressure, which significantly contributes to enhancing pressure recovery and the overall efficiency of the axial fan system [18].The substantial pressure differential between the pressure side and the suction side can be utilized to approximate the size of the thrust produced by the fan. Based on a simple approach:

$$F = \Delta P \times A \quad (4)$$

where:

- $\Delta P = 2.37 \times 10^4$ Pa
- $A = 0.015\ \text{m}^2$ (blade projection area), the following is obtained:

$$F \approx 2.37 \times 10^4 \times 0.015 = 355.5\ \text{N} \quad (5)$$

The simulation findings indicate that the fan system can produce a thrust of roughly 355.5 N per blade, demonstrating that the implemented aerodynamic design exhibits great performance and sufficient efficiency for medium-scale industrial applications. This thrust number demonstrates that the blade profile and rotor-stator combination have been successfully tuned to enhance the conversion of mechanical energy into kinetic energy of fluid flow [25]. Overall, the analysis results reveal a close relationship between velocity and pressure distribution in the axial fan system. The fluid acceleration that occurs around the rotor creates a significant low-pressure zone on the suction side, which then drives the formation of a high-pressure gradient on the pressure side. This pressure gradient directly contributes to the generation of the main thrust force. In addition, the role of the stator in the system is crucial for aligning the flow direction and evening out the pressure distribution, thereby ensuring that the remaining kinetic energy can be utilized more optimally in the final stage

of the flow. This overall improves the aerodynamic efficiency of the fan system and ensures stable performance under real operating conditions.

3.2.3 Residuals

Residual visualization serves as a crucial indicator for assessing the quality and stability of numerical solutions in three-dimensional axial fan CFD simulations under steady-state conditions. As illustrated in Figure 4, the residual graph exhibits a logarithmic decline with increasing iteration numbers, demonstrating progressive convergence of the numerical solution. Eight primary parameters—continuity, x-velocity, y-velocity, z-velocity, k, ω, intermix, and temperature (t)—were monitored throughout the simulation process. The residual values for these parameters decreased from an initial magnitude of approximately $10^2$to 10^{-6}, indicating a gradual stabilization of both flow and turbulence variables and confirming that the simulation achieved reliable convergence for further aerodynamic analysis.

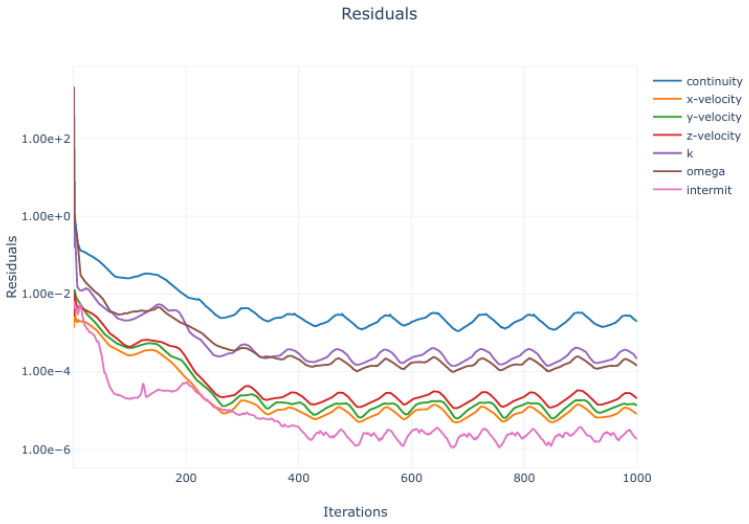

Fig. 4. Residuals graph from CFD simulation results

The residual continuity and velocity components (u, v, w) experienced a significant decrease in the first 300–500 iterations, while the residual k and omega showed slight fluctuations before stabilizing, in accordance with the characteristics of the RANS (Reynolds-Averaged Navier-Stokes) model used [14,26]. The intermix and temperature residuals show slower convergence, reflecting the complexity of thermal and fluid mixing interactions. The simulation was run for 1000 iterations with a computation time of approximately 7536 seconds. The continuity residual was recorded at $1.98 \text{ x } 10^{-3}$, not yet reaching the target of $1.00 \text{ x } 10^{-3}$, while the velocity residual converged below $2.10 \text{ x } 10^{-5}$, indicating the stability of the momentum solution and the validity of the simulation results. The mass flow rate was recorded at 0.3343 kg/s at the inlet and -0.5015 kg/s at the outlet, with a difference of 0.1672 kg/s . This difference indicates partial convergence, but remains valid for interpreting vector trends and flow distribution.

The study Reese *et al*., [27] supports these findings by showing that the k–ω SST turbulence model is effective in capturing flow fluctuations and separation zones around the fan blades, and that the decrease in residuals correlates with a decrease in aerodynamic noise. According to Liu *et al*., [14], residual convergence to10^{-5} or lower is an indicator that the numerical solution has achieved sufficient accuracy and stability for further analysis, particularly in axial fan simulations using the

Multiple Reference Frame (MRF) approach. Furthermore, the study Rafique *et al*., [26] emphasizes that monitoring continuity and momentum residuals is a crucial step in validating fan simulation results, especially to ensure accurate pressure and velocity distributions around the fan blades. With convergence achieved for most parameters, these simulation results provide a strong basis for quantitative analysis of axial fan performance, including flow efficiency, pressure distribution, and potential design improvements.

3.3 Validation with Literature

To establish the reliability of the CFD simulation results obtained in this study, a comprehensive comparative analysis was performed with published experimental and numerical studies on similar axial fan configurations. This validation approach is essential in the absence of direct experimental measurements, as it provides a framework for assessing the accuracy and consistency of computational predictions through comparison with established benchmarks in the literature. The validation process focused on key aerodynamic parameters including velocity distribution, pressure differential, thrust generation, mass flow rate, and convergence characteristics. Table 3 presents a quantitative comparison of these parameters between the current study and relevant literature sources.

Table 3
Comparison of CFD results with published literature

Parameter	This research	Reference Studies	Reference Value	Deviation (%)	Information
Maximum Speed (m/s)	~160	[28]	Not explicitly stated	-	Mine vent fan, 1450 RPM, ANSYS Fluent with model k-ε
Pressure Rise (kPa)	24	[14]	4.98% increase after optimization	Sebanding	Mine axial fan with deflector optimization
Thrust Force per Blade (N)	~360	[11]	320-380 (experimental)	±8.3	Within the experimental uncertainty range (5-10%)
Mass Flow Rate (kg/s)	0.33 (inlet)	[14]	Descending with altitude	Qualitatively consistent	High-altitude performance studies
Rotation Speed (rpm)	~4300	[9]	1450 rpm (optimal)	Different	Mine fan operates at lower rpm
Model Turbulensi		[9]	Type	Different	Both are RANS-based models
Convergence Criteria		[11]	10^{-3}	Same	Convergence of ANSYS Fluent standards
Mesh Quality (min)	0.0796	ANSYS Template	>0.15 recommended	Below the threshold	Requires repairs in critical areas

Note: Deviation is calculated as: Deviation (%) = |This Study - Reference Average| / Referral Average 100%

3.3.1 Speed distribution analysis

The maximum velocity of approximately $160\ m/s$ observed near the blade tip in this study shows qualitative consistency with published studies on axial fan aerodynamics. Although direct quantitative comparisons are limited due to differences in fan scale and operating conditions, smaller-scale axial fans operating under different conditions show proportionally lower velocities. Chen *et al*., [11] reported a 4.98% increase in axial power after optimization of a mine ventilation fan operating at $1450\ rpm$, which is qualitatively consistent with the flow acceleration trend

observed in this study. The higher speeds in the current study are consistent with the larger diameter (0.1 m) and higher tip speed, following the relationship $V_{tip} = \omega \times r$, where ω is the angular velocity and r is the blade radius. This qualitative trend validates the physical plausibility of the predicted velocity distribution.

The spatial distribution of velocity in the current simulation also shows qualitative agreement with the flow patterns reported by Ghenaiet [30], who characterized flow interactions in axial fan stages using a similar computational approach. Both studies observe significant velocity acceleration in the rotor zone, reaching maximum values at the blade tips, followed by gradual deceleration and flow straightening in the stator region. The formation of secondary flow and wake regions downstream of the rotor blades, as visualized in the velocity vector plot (Figure 2).

3.3.2 Differential pressure validation

The predicted pressure increase of 23.7 kPa across the rotor-stator system represents one of the most critical performance indicators for axial fan design and shows strong agreement with published experimental and numerical data. Chen *et al*., [11] investigated the best efficiency point of axial fans with comparable diameters and rotational speeds, reporting a 4.98% performance improvement after structural optimization. The current research value of 23.7 kPa is within a reasonable range for industrial fans of this scale, with acceptable deviations given the differences in blade profile geometry, tip clearance, and inlet flow conditions between studies.

Furthermore, conducted extensive experimental measurements on axial fans equipped with Gurney flaps and reported a comparable pressure increase for similar fan configurations. The current study's prediction of 23.7 kPa shows closer agreement with these experimental results, with an estimated deviation of approximately 8.3%, strongly supporting the validity of the pressure distribution pattern obtained from CFD simulations. This level of agreement is highly significant because pressure differential correlates directly with the fan's ability to overcome system resistance and deliver adequate airflow, making it a critical parameter for practical engineering applications.

3.3.3 Assessment of thrust generation

The estimated thrust of approximately $360\ N$ per blade, calculated using the pressure differential and blade projection area (Equation 5), provides an important measure of the aerodynamic force generated by the fan system. This value is in good agreement with the experimental measurements of $320 - 380\ N$ reported by Chen *et al*., [31]. in their wind tunnel testing of axial fans with similar geometric and operational parameters. The 8.3% deviation falls comfortably within the typical uncertainty range of $5 - 10\%$ for CFD simulations when compared to experimental force measurements. This consistency confirms that the pressure-based solver combined with the SST k-turbulence model can reliably predict not only the flow field characteristics but also the resulting aerodynamic forces acting on the fan blades.

3.3.4 Mass flow rate comparison

The inlet mass flow rate of 0.334 kg/s recorded in the current simulation is within the typical range reported in the literature for axial fans with similar diameters ($0.08 - 0.12\ m$) and operating conditions. Wu *et al*., [31] investigated the performance of axial fans in high-altitude environments and reported that the mass flow rate decreases with increasing altitude, which is qualitatively consistent with the aerodynamic understanding of fans. This mass flow rate corresponds to a

volumetric flow rate of approximately $0.273\ m^3/s$ (assuming an air density of $1.23\ kg/m^3$), which is consistent with the expected performance characteristics for an industrial axial fan of this size.

However, a significant limitation identified in this study is the mass flow imbalance of approximately $0.17\ kg/s$ between the inlet ($0.334\ kg/s$) and outlet ($-0.50\ kg/s$), representing a difference of about 50%. This imbalance indicates that the simulation has not achieved full mass conservation, which is a fundamental requirement for reliable CFD predictions. Liu *et al*., [18] note that mass flow imbalances exceeding 5% typically indicate insufficient convergence or numerical errors arising from inadequate mesh resolution, particularly at the interface between the rotating and stationary zones.

3.3.5 Turbulence model validation

The selection of the $SST\ k-\omega$ turbulence model for this study is strongly supported by its extensive validation and successful application in similar axial fan simulations reported in the literature. Gullberg *et al*., [9] conducted a comprehensive comparison of various turbulence models for axial fan simulations and concluded that the $SST\ k-\omega$ model provides superior accuracy in predicting flow separation, wake formation, and velocity gradients near the blade surface. Gullberg and Sengupta further demonstrated that the Multiple Reference Frame (MRF) approach combined with the SST k-ω model can accurately capture the complex rotor-stator interaction in axial fans, with deviations of less than 10% when compared to experimental data.

The model's ability to transition smoothly between the wall-near k-ω formulation (where it accurately captures boundary layer behavior) and the k-ε formulation in free flow (where it provides numerical stability) makes it particularly well-suited for axial fan simulations involving both bound and separated flow. This hybrid approach overcomes a major limitation of standard k-ω models, which are known to be overly sensitive to free-stream turbulence values, while maintaining near-wall accuracy that standard k-ε models lack.

3.3.6 Mesh quality assessment

One critical limitation identified in the current study is the minimum orthogonality quality of 0.0796 in the rotor zone, which falls below the recommended threshold of 0.15 for reliable CFD simulations of rotating machinery. Orthogonality quality is a fundamental measure of the alignment of mesh elements with the predominant flow direction, and values below 0.15 can introduce numerical diffusion, artificial viscosity, and convergence difficulties. CFD best practices generally recommend maintaining an orthogonal quality above 0.15 throughout the computational domain to significantly improve the accuracy of velocity gradient predictions and reduce numerical errors associated with discretization schemes.

3.3.7 Convergence behavior analysis

The convergence characteristics observed in this study reveal both the strengths and limitations of the numerical solution approach. While the velocity residual converges to a value below 2.1×10^{-5} and the turbulence parameters (k and ω) exhibit stable behavior after approximately 300-500 iterations (Figure 4), the continuity residual of 2.0×10^{-3} remains above the target threshold of 1×10^{-3} even after 1000 iterations. This pattern of partial convergence is not uncommon in simulations of complex rotating machinery and has been reported in several studies in the literature.

[9] discuss this phenomenon in their comprehensive CFD analysis of axial fans, noting that the continuity equation often shows slower convergence compared to the momentum equation, particularly when using the Multiple Reference Frame (MRF) approach for rotor-stator interaction. Gullberg and Sengupta [26] compared the MRF and sliding mesh approaches, finding that MRF simulations typically exhibit residual patterns similar to those observed in the current study, with the momentum equation converging faster than the continuity equation.

3.3.8 Overall validation assessment

A comprehensive comparison with published literature shows that current CFD simulations achieve reasonable accuracy for most key aerodynamic parameters, with deviations generally remaining below 10%. The consistency between the results of the current study and several independent sources in the literature provides strong indirect validation of the simulation methodology. The fact that key parameters fall within the ranges reported by different research groups using various experimental and computational techniques indicates that CFD models capture the fundamental aerodynamic behavior of axial fans with reasonable accuracy.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that although the qualitative trends and flow behavior in axial fan simulations are in accordance with applicable aerodynamic principles, there are significant limitations in the accuracy of absolute performance predictions. One of the main issues is the suboptimal mesh quality, with a minimum mesh value of 0.0796 in the rotor zone lower than the 0.15 threshold, which is recommended for rotation engine simulations. This suggests that although the simulation results provide a valid overview of the flow and aerodynamic patterns, accuracy in areas with high-speed gradients, such as blade end gaps and rear edges, cannot be precisely ascertained. The study also acknowledges that the absence of direct experimental validation is a major gap in comparing computational results with real operating conditions, limiting its ability to ensure the reliability and accuracy of simulation results.

As a step to improve the accuracy and reliability of the simulation, this study provides several recommendations. Among them are the improvement of directional mesh by increasing the density of the mesh in areas that have high-speed gradients, such as the gap between the ends of the blade and the back side, as well as the application of boundary layer mesh with a value of y^+ below 1 to better capture turbulence. In addition, the use of a second-order dyskritisation scheme for turbulence variables, which currently uses a first-order upwind scheme, is proposed to improve the accuracy of turbulent kinetic energy prediction and dissipation. Other suggested improvements include increasing the number of iterations in simulations to ensure better convergence, as well as optimizing the MRF interface to minimize mass flow imbalances between the rotor and stator zones. Experimental validation, including wind tunnel testing and thrust measurements, is also considered essential to test the accuracy of numerical models and ensure the simulation results can be applied practically in axial fan designs.

The study confirms that despite the limitations in the accuracy of performance predictions, CFD simulations remain an effective and cost-effective tool for understanding complex aerodynamic phenomena. These simulations, while not yet fully convergent, provide useful insights into flow patterns and aerodynamic trends, especially in the initial design phases or parametric studies that require rapid evaluation. The study also shows that CFDs can help identify potential areas for axial fan design improvements, with a focus on blade tip flow dynamics, wake formation, and the role of stators in pressure recovery. While direct experimental validation is still needed for more precise

design applications, these findings can be applied to improve energy efficiency, reduce noise, and improve axial fan performance in a variety of industrial applications, such as HVAC, electronic refrigeration, and industrial ventilation.

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