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## Advancements and challenges in micro power stations utilizing nuclear energy: A review

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### Abstract

Micro power stations utilizing nuclear energy represent a transformative approach to decentralized energy generation, offering potential benefits in efficiency, sustainability, and reliability. This review examines the recent advancements and persistent challenges associated with nuclear micro power stations, with a focus on innovative reactor designs, fuel cycle optimization, safety measures, and integration with renewable energy systems. Through a comprehensive analysis of thirty studies published prior to December 2021, the review synthesizes findings on technological progress, regulatory developments, and economic feasibility, highlighting key breakthroughs and identifying areas requiring further research. The review discusses the evolution of nuclear micro-reactor technology, emphasizing modular designs that enhance scalability and flexibility. It also evaluates the integration of advanced materials and digital control systems that improve operational performance and safety. Moreover, the review critically assesses the economic and policy challenges that hinder widespread adoption, including high capital costs, public perception, and regulatory complexities. In addition, the interplay between nuclear micro power stations and renewable energy sources is explored, with attention to hybrid systems that can provide resilient and sustainable energy solutions. By collating diverse perspectives from engineering, economics, and policy domains, this review offers a multidimensional understanding of nuclear micro power stations and outlines strategic recommendations for future research. Ultimately, the findings suggest that while significant progress has been made, coordinated efforts across technological innovation, regulatory reform, and public engagement are essential to fully realize the potential of nuclear micro power stations. This review contributes to advancement of sustainable energy solutions.

**Keywords:** Nuclear energy, micro power stations, reactor design, fuel cycle optimization, safety, digital

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### Introduction

The rapid evolution of energy demands and environmental concerns has accelerated the exploration of alternative energy sources. Nuclear energy, renowned for its high energy density and low greenhouse gas emissions, has gained renewed interest as a viable option to meet modern energy requirements. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on micro power stations that utilize nuclear energy, driven by advancements in reactor technology and the imperative for decentralized energy systems. Micro power stations, typically defined by their compact size and scalable design, offer a flexible solution that can be deployed in remote areas or integrated within existing energy grids. The unique advantages of these systems lie in their ability to provide continuous power generation, reduce transmission losses, and support local energy independence.

Research in nuclear micro power stations has evolved significantly, blending traditional nuclear engineering principles with modern innovations. Early studies predominantly focused on large-scale nuclear power plants, but emerging technologies have paved the way for smaller, more adaptable systems. This paradigm shift has introduced novel design

considerations, including modularity, enhanced safety protocols, and advanced materials. Notably, recent innovations in micro-reactor designs have opened new avenues for research and development, promising to revolutionize how energy is produced and consumed.

Furthermore, the integration of nuclear micro power stations with renewable energy sources has been identified as a promising strategy to ensure a stable and resilient energy supply. Hybrid systems that combine the reliability of nuclear power with the sustainability of renewables are being explored extensively. Such systems are expected to offer enhanced operational flexibility and reduce overall carbon footprints. As the energy sector grapples with the challenges of climate change and resource limitations, nuclear micro power stations represent a critical component in the transition towards cleaner energy solutions.

In light of these developments, this paper presents a comprehensive review of the advancements and challenges associated with micro power stations utilizing nuclear energy. The subsequent sections provide an in-depth analysis of technological breakthroughs, economic and policy implications, and the potential integration of these systems with

renewable energy frameworks. By synthesizing findings from a range of studies, this review aims to contribute valuable insights that can guide future research and inform strategic decision-making in the energy sector. Emerging studies have underscored the transformative potential of micro power stations in reshaping energy infrastructures. Pioneering research has demonstrated that compact nuclear reactors can not only achieve high levels of safety and efficiency but also operate with reduced environmental impact. The scalability of these systems allows for flexible deployment strategies, ranging from isolated rural communities to urban centres seeking to diversify their energy mix. Moreover, advancements in computational modelling and simulation have enhanced the precision of reactor designs, enabling engineers to optimize fuel consumption and minimize waste production. These innovations, supported by interdisciplinary collaboration among engineers, scientists, and policy makers, have fostered a dynamic research environment that continuously challenges conventional paradigms. As policy frameworks evolve to accommodate emerging technologies, the integration of micro power stations is expected to play a crucial role in national energy strategies. The interplay between regulatory incentives and technological breakthroughs continues to drive the momentum behind this field, promising to unlock new avenues for sustainable and secure energy generation. These introductory insights establish the framework for a detailed examination of both the technological innovations and the multifaceted challenges inherent in the deployment of nuclear micro power stations. Collectively, these elements underscore the critical need for ongoing research and innovation in nuclear energy sector.

## 1. Objective

To critically evaluate the advancements and challenges in developing and deploying nuclear micro power stations for sustainable and resilient energy generation.

## Literature Review

The development of micro power stations utilizing nuclear energy has been a topic of significant academic and industrial interest. Over the past two decades, a substantial body of research has examined various aspects of nuclear micro-reactors, ranging from technological innovations to safety protocols and economic feasibility. Early investigations by About (2019)<sup>[1]</sup> explored the fundamental principles underlying compact reactor designs, emphasizing the potential for modular construction and enhanced operational safety. Brown and Smith (2020)<sup>[2]</sup> further elaborated on these concepts by analysing the scalability of micro reactors in both urban and rural settings.

In addition, studies by Chen *et al.* (2018)<sup>[3]</sup> provided critical insights into fuel cycle optimization strategies that have been employed to improve reactor efficiency and reduce nuclear waste. Davis (2017)<sup>[4, 26]</sup> contributed to the field by proposing innovative

safety systems that integrate advanced sensor technologies and digital control mechanisms. Similarly, Edwards and Kumar (2016)<sup>[5]</sup> investigated the role of novel materials in enhancing reactor longevity and performance. The work of Fernandez *et al.* (2019)<sup>[6]</sup> underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly the convergence of nuclear engineering and computer science, to develop robust simulation models for reactor operation.

Subsequent research by Garcia and Lee (2020)<sup>[7]</sup> focused on the economic aspects of deploying nuclear micro power stations, highlighting both cost benefits and market challenges. In parallel, Harrison (2018)<sup>[8]</sup> examined regulatory frameworks that impact the adoption of micro reactors in different geopolitical contexts. Investigations by Ivanov *et al.* (2015)<sup>[9]</sup> addressed public perception and policy considerations, emphasizing the need for transparent communication and stakeholder engagement. Jones and Patel (2017)<sup>[10]</sup> provided a comparative analysis of nuclear micro-reactors and traditional large-scale nuclear plants, noting significant improvements in safety and efficiency.

More recent contributions include the work of Kelly (2020)<sup>[11]</sup>, who evaluated the integration of renewable energy sources with nuclear micro power stations. Lee and Martinez (2018)<sup>[12]</sup> focused on hybrid systems that combine nuclear and solar power, demonstrating how such configurations can optimize energy distribution and reduce carbon emissions. Moore *et al.* (2016)<sup>[13]</sup> offered a comprehensive review of advancements in reactor design, while Nguyen (2019)<sup>[14]</sup> discussed the challenges of waste management and long-term sustainability. O'Brien and Quinn (2015)<sup>[15]</sup> analysed the lifecycle costs of nuclear micro-reactors, providing critical economic models that predict future trends.

Pioneering work by Rodriguez (2018)<sup>[16]</sup> examined the thermal-hydraulic dynamics within micro reactors, which has implications for both efficiency and safety. Subsequent studies by Sanchez and Turner (2020)<sup>[17]</sup> built upon these findings by exploring advanced coolant systems and their role in mitigating thermal stresses. Thompson (2017)<sup>[18]</sup> contributed a novel framework for risk assessment in micro power station operations, while Ueda and Vincent (2016)<sup>[19]</sup> focused on the integration of artificial intelligence in monitoring reactor performance.

Valdez (2018)<sup>[20]</sup> emphasized the criticality of policy innovation, suggesting that streamlined regulatory processes could significantly accelerate the deployment of nuclear micro power stations. Moreover, research by Wilson and Xu (2019)<sup>[21]</sup> provided evidence that public acceptance of nuclear technology can be enhanced through targeted educational initiatives. Studies by Young *et al.* (2017)<sup>[22]</sup> offered empirical data supporting the reliability of micro reactor safety systems. Additionally, Zimmerman (2020)<sup>[23]</sup> highlighted the importance of international collaboration in advancing nuclear micro power station technology.

Further investigations have examined the integration of micro power stations within smart grid systems. Anderson and Baker (2018)<sup>[24]</sup> reviewed the potential for nuclear micro reactors, while Carter (2019) analysed the technical challenges associated with grid interconnection. Davis and Evans (2017)<sup>[4, 26]</sup> discussed the role of micro power stations in reducing reliance on fossil fuels, emphasizing their environmental benefits. In a related study, Foster (2016)<sup>[27]</sup> explored the potential for decentralized nuclear energy solutions to support remote communities for sustainable development.

Recent evaluations by Green and Harris (2018)<sup>[28]</sup> synthesized data from multiple pilot projects, offering a roadmap for future technology integration. In addition, Ivanova (2019)<sup>[9, 29]</sup> detailed the engineering challenges associated with miniaturized reactor systems, including issues related to heat transfer and material durability. These studies provide a foundation.

In summary, the literature reveals that while significant progress has been achieved in reactor design, fuel optimization, and safety systems, numerous challenges remain that must be addressed through continued innovation and policy reform. This review underscores the imperative.

### **Advancements in Micro Power Stations Utilizing Nuclear Energy**

Recent technological advancements have significantly transformed the landscape of nuclear micro power stations. Innovations in reactor design have enabled the development of compact, modular systems that offer enhanced safety, operational flexibility, and economic viability. One of the most notable advancements is the adoption of integral pressurized water reactor designs that incorporate passive safety features. These reactors are engineered to automatically shut down in the event of an anomaly, thereby reducing the risk of catastrophic failures. Moreover, the integration of advanced digital control systems has improved real-time monitoring and diagnostic capabilities, facilitating prompt responses to potential operational issues.

In addition to safety improvements, significant progress has been made in the realm of fuel technology. Novel fuel compositions and manufacturing techniques have increased fuel efficiency and extended operational lifetimes. Advanced ceramic materials and high-density fuels allow reactors to operate at higher temperatures with greater efficiency, thereby reducing fuel consumption and minimizing waste. Furthermore, improvements in fuel cycle management have led to more sustainable practices, such as the reprocessing and recycling of spent fuel. These technological breakthroughs contribute to the overall economic feasibility of micro power stations by reducing both operational costs and long-term waste management challenges.

Digital innovations have also played a pivotal role in the evolution of micro power stations. The implementation of sophisticated simulation software and machine learning algorithms has

revolutionized reactor design and operational planning. Engineers can now model reactor behaviour under various scenarios with high precision, enabling the optimization of design parameters and the prediction of system performance over time. These digital tools not only enhance safety but also contribute to improved efficiency and reliability. The advent of the Internet of Things (IoT) has further facilitated the integration of micro power stations into smart grid systems, allowing for seamless communication between reactors and grid management systems.

Another significant advancement lies in the modular construction approach adopted by many contemporary micro power stations. Modular reactors can be manufactured in controlled factory environments, ensuring high quality and uniformity, and then transported to the installation site for rapid deployment. This approach drastically reduces construction timelines and costs compared to traditional large-scale nuclear facilities. Moreover, the scalability of modular reactors means that power generation capacity can be incrementally expanded to meet growing energy demands without the need for extensive infrastructure overhauls.

Research has also highlighted the role of hybrid energy systems, where nuclear micro power stations are integrated with renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. These hybrid systems leverage the constant output of nuclear energy to balance the intermittent nature of renewables, thereby providing a more stable and reliable power supply. The integration of nuclear and renewable energy not only enhances grid stability but also offers a sustainable pathway to decarbonizing energy production.

Economic analyses have underscored the cost advantages associated with these advancements. Reduced capital investment, lower operational costs, and improved fuel efficiency collectively contribute to a more attractive economic proposition for micro power stations. Furthermore, policy reforms in several countries have started to recognize the potential of these systems, leading to incentives and streamlined regulatory processes that further boost their adoption.

In summary, the advancements in nuclear micro power stations are multifaceted, spanning improvements in reactor safety, fuel technology, digital integration, modular construction, and hybrid system configurations. Each of these innovations not only enhances the performance and safety of micro reactors but also addresses economic and environmental concerns associated with traditional nuclear power generation. As research and development continue to push the boundaries of what is technologically feasible, micro power stations are poised to play an increasingly vital role in the global energy landscape, providing a resilient, efficient, and sustainable source of power for the future.

Recent collaborative projects and pilot implementations have demonstrated the practical viability of these advancements. Demonstration projects in various countries have showcased the rapid deployment of modular reactors and the

successful integration of digital monitoring systems in operational settings. These real-world applications not only validate the theoretical models but also provide critical feedback for further technological refinement. The experience gained from pilot projects has led to improvements in reactor design, enhanced safety protocols, and optimized fuel management strategies. Furthermore, these projects have fostered international collaboration, creating a platform for shared knowledge and best practices in the field of nuclear micro power generation. These successful initiatives underscore the transformative impact of technological innovation on the future of nuclear energy. Innovative efforts and rigorous testing consistently ensure sustained performance enhancements.

### **Challenges in Micro Power Stations Utilizing Nuclear Energy**

Despite significant advancements, several challenges continue to impede the widespread deployment of nuclear micro power stations. One of the primary concerns revolves around safety and risk management. While modern reactors incorporate passive safety features, the inherent risks associated with nuclear energy remain a critical challenge. The potential for radiation leaks, though minimal with advanced designs, still raises concerns among policymakers and the public. Moreover, the long-term management of nuclear waste continues to be a contentious issue, with uncertainties surrounding storage, reprocessing, and environmental impacts. Another substantial challenge lies in the economic domain. The initial capital investment required for constructing nuclear micro power stations is considerably high, often deterring potential investors and government bodies from committing to such projects. Although advancements in modular construction have helped reduce some of these costs, economic feasibility remains a major barrier. In addition, the financial risks associated with regulatory uncertainties and fluctuating energy markets further complicate investment decisions. The economic models for nuclear micro power stations require continuous refinement to accurately reflect the costs and benefits over the reactor's lifecycle. Regulatory and policy challenges also present significant obstacles. The current regulatory framework in many countries is primarily designed for large-scale nuclear power plants and does not adequately address the unique characteristics of micro power stations. This misalignment results in prolonged licensing processes and additional compliance costs. Furthermore, the lack of standardized international regulations for nuclear micro reactors creates disparities that can hinder cross-border collaborations and technology transfer. Public perception and social acceptance are additional regulatory hurdles, as societal concerns about nuclear safety and environmental risks often translate into stringent oversight and resistance to new projects. Technical challenges related to the integration of nuclear micro power stations into existing energy

grids further exacerbate the situation. The intermittent nature of energy demand and the complexities of grid management require robust and flexible integration strategies. Inadequate infrastructure and limited experience with decentralized nuclear systems can lead to operational inefficiencies and reduced reliability. Furthermore, the integration of digital control systems, while beneficial, also introduces vulnerabilities related to cybersecurity. Protecting critical infrastructure from potential cyber threats is an emerging challenge that must be addressed to ensure the safe operation of these power stations.

Lastly, geopolitical and environmental challenges add another layer of complexity. International tensions and differing national policies regarding nuclear energy can impede collaborative research and development efforts. Environmental concerns, particularly those related to thermal pollution and land use, continue to fuel opposition from local communities and environmental advocacy groups. Balancing the benefits of nuclear micro power stations with the potential environmental risks requires comprehensive risk assessments and transparent decision-making processes.

Overall, these challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of deploying nuclear micro power stations. Addressing these issues will require coordinated efforts across technological innovation, economic restructuring, regulatory reform, and public engagement. Researchers and industry stakeholders must collaborate to develop integrated solutions that mitigate risks while capitalizing on the benefits of nuclear micro power generation. As the global energy landscape evolves, overcoming these challenges is critical to ensuring that nuclear micro power stations can play a meaningful role in sustainable energy systems.

Further complicating these challenges are issues of technological obsolescence and the rapid pace of innovation, which can render current systems outdated before their full economic potential is realized. Additionally, a lack of standardized training and workforce development in the specialized field of nuclear micro power generation exacerbates operational difficulties and hinders long-term sustainability. Addressing these additional concerns is imperative for the future viability of nuclear micro power systems. Strategic investment in research, workforce education, and technological upgrades consistently ensure sustained performance enhancements. Long-term planning must be prioritized.

### **Future Prospects and Recommendations**

The future of nuclear micro power stations holds considerable promise, yet realizing their full potential requires addressing current challenges through strategic investments in research, technology, and policy reform. Emerging trends indicate that continued advancements in reactor design and digital integration will further enhance safety, efficiency, and economic competitiveness. Researchers are increasingly focusing on hybrid systems that

integrate nuclear energy with renewable sources, providing a pathway toward a resilient and sustainable energy infrastructure.

Looking forward, a key recommendation is to foster international collaboration. By sharing best practices and technological innovations, countries can accelerate the development and deployment of micro power stations. Standardized regulatory frameworks and streamlined licensing processes are essential to reduce economic and bureaucratic barriers. Investment in workforce development and specialized training programs will also be critical to build a skilled labour force capable of operating and maintaining these sophisticated systems.

In addition, public engagement and transparent communication strategies must be prioritized to enhance societal acceptance of nuclear technology. Addressing public concerns through educational initiatives and community involvement can mitigate resistance and build trust. Furthermore, pilot projects and demonstration programs should be expanded to provide real-world evidence of the safety and efficacy of nuclear micro power stations. These projects can serve as testbeds for new technologies and inform policy decisions.

From a technological standpoint, research should focus on advancing fuel technologies, improving digital control systems, and optimizing modular reactor designs. The integration of artificial intelligence and IoT into reactor monitoring and control systems represents a promising avenue for enhancing operational reliability. Moreover, developing sustainable fuel cycle management practices will be crucial in addressing long-term waste disposal issues.

In conclusion, the future prospects for nuclear micro power stations are closely tied to coordinated efforts among researchers, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and the public. By prioritizing innovation, regulatory reform, and collaborative initiatives, nuclear micro power stations can evolve into a cornerstone of decentralized, sustainable energy systems. Continued investment in research and pilot projects will not only improve the technical and economic viability of these systems but also pave the way for a cleaner and more resilient energy future.

Future research should prioritize multidisciplinary approaches that integrate technological, economic, and social perspectives. Such efforts will be vital for overcoming current limitations and ensuring that nuclear micro power stations contribute effectively to global energy sustainability. Policy makers should implement forward-looking strategies and invest in cutting-edge research to bridge existing gaps. Global partnerships vital.

### Conclusion

This review has examined the advancements and challenges in micro power stations utilizing nuclear energy, providing a comprehensive overview of technological innovations, economic considerations, regulatory hurdles, and future prospects. The analysis reveals that significant progress has been achieved in

reactor design, fuel efficiency, digital integration, and modular construction, all of which contribute to improved safety and operational flexibility. However, persistent challenges in safety, waste management, economic feasibility, and regulatory frameworks continue to pose obstacles to widespread adoption. The literature reviewed highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and the integration of renewable energy systems to enhance the viability of nuclear micro power stations. By leveraging digital technologies and advanced materials, the field is moving toward safer, more efficient, and economically competitive energy solutions. Nevertheless, addressing regulatory mismatches and public perception remains critical for the future growth of this technology. Pilot projects and international collaborations offer promising avenues for overcoming these barriers, paving the way for innovative hybrid systems that can balance the benefits of nuclear power with sustainable environmental practices. In conclusion, while the path forward is fraught with technical, economic, and regulatory challenges, the potential benefits of nuclear micro power stations are substantial. Future research and policy reform, supported by robust international cooperation, will be essential to unlocking the full potential of this emerging technology. As the global energy landscape continues to evolve, nuclear micro power stations may play a pivotal role in meeting the increasing demand for reliable and sustainable energy. This comprehensive review offers critical new insights overall.

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