

## Overview of the Main Benefits and Challenges of Different Ship Propulsion Systems

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### Abstract

*A ship propulsion system is a complex system that provides the necessary force to move a vessel through water. This system includes various components such as engines, propellers, gearboxes, and shafts. The type and configuration of the propulsion system depend on the size, speed, and purpose of the vessel. The current paper reviews the main benefits and challenges of different ship propulsion systems. There are several types of ship propulsion systems, including conventional mechanical, electric, and hybrid. Conventional mechanical systems use diesel engines and shafts to turn the propeller, while electric systems use electric motors powered by generators or batteries. Hybrid systems combine both conventional and electric propulsion technologies to improve efficiency and reduce emissions. The choice of propulsion system can have significant implications for a vessel's performance, fuel consumption, and environmental impact. Therefore, it is important to consider all factors when selecting the most suitable system for a particular vessel.*

**Keywords:** Ship emissions, mechanical propulsion, electric propulsion system, hybrid propulsion system

### Introduction

Ship emissions are a significant contributor to air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions globally. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has established guidelines and regulations to reduce ship emissions, including sulfur oxide (SO<sub>x</sub>), nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>), particulate matter (PM), and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). This section provides an overview of some recent studies on ship emissions and their impacts. A study by Corbett *et al.* [1] estimated that global shipping emissions accounted for approximately 940 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2015, or about 2.5% of global anthropogenic emissions. The study also found that shipping emissions are expected to increase by up to 250% by 2050, mainly due to the growth in global trade and lack of regulatory action.

Another study by Wang *et al.* [2] analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on shipping emissions and found that the lockdowns and reduced economic activity led to a significant reduction in emissions during the first half of 2020. However, the study also noted that emissions rebounded quickly as the economy recovered, highlighting the importance of long-term policies to reduce emissions. Several studies have also focused on the effectiveness of various technologies and measures to reduce ship emissions.

For example, a study by Lee *et al.* [3] evaluated the potential of using alternative fuels such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) and biofuels to reduce GHG emissions from ships. The study found that both LNG and biofuels could significantly reduce emissions, but their use may be limited by availability, infrastructure, and cost.

Similarly, a study by Su *et al.* [4] investigated the effectiveness of various emission control measures, including low-sulfur fuels, scrubbers, and energy efficiency measures. The study found that a combination of these measures could achieve significant emissions reductions, with low-sulfur fuels and scrubbers being the most effective. Overall, these studies highlight the significant impact of ship emissions on air quality and climate change, as well as the importance of implementing effective measures to reduce emissions from the shipping sector.

Electric and hybrid propulsion systems have gained attention in recent years as a potential solution to reduce ship emissions. This section provides an overview of some recent studies on the effectiveness of electric and hybrid propulsion systems in reducing ship emissions. A study by Chen *et al.* [5] evaluated the potential of using electric propulsion systems in container ships. The study found that the use of electric propulsion systems could significantly reduce GHG emissions, as well as improve energy efficiency and reduce operating costs. However, the study also noted that the high initial cost and lack of

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infrastructure may limit the widespread adoption of electric propulsion systems.

Similarly, a study by Mazza *et al.* [6] assessed the effectiveness of a hybrid propulsion system in a passenger ferry. The hybrid system consisted of diesel engines and batteries, which allowed for the use of electric propulsion in low-speed and short-distance operations. The study found that the hybrid system reduced fuel consumption and emissions, while also improving operational flexibility and reliability. Another study by Zhang *et al.* [7] analyzed the impact of hybrid propulsion systems on air pollution and GHG emissions from inland navigation vessels. The study found that the use of hybrid propulsion systems could reduce NOx and PM emissions, as well as improve fuel efficiency. However, the study also noted that the effectiveness of hybrid propulsion systems may vary depending on vessel size, operating conditions, and technology performance. Overall, these studies suggest that electric and hybrid propulsion systems have the potential to significantly reduce ship emissions and improve energy efficiency. However, the high initial cost, limited infrastructure, and varying efficacy depending on vessel type and operating conditions are important factors to consider in the adoption of electric and hybrid propulsion systems.

The aim of the present paper is to review ship propulsion systems to provide a comprehensive overview of the various types of propulsion systems used in ships, including their components, operation, and performance. In addition, the paper aims to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each type of system, as well as their environmental impacts in terms of emissions and energy efficiency.

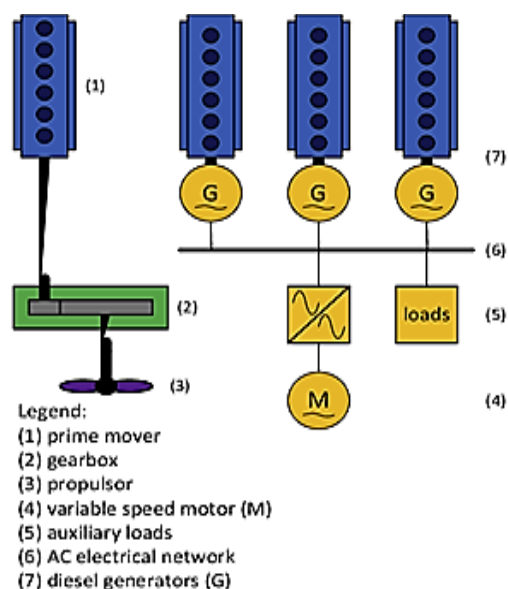
## 2. Mechanical ship propulsion systems

A ship mechanical propulsion system consists of several components that work together to convert the power from the engine into thrust to move the vessel through water as shown in Fig. 1. The main components of a ship mechanical propulsion are:

- **Engine:** The engine is the main source of power for the propulsion system. The type and size of the engine depend on the size and purpose of the vessel. Most ships use diesel engines, which are more fuel-efficient and have lower emissions compared to other types of engines [8].
- **Gearbox:** The gearbox connects the engine to the propeller shaft and allows the engine to operate at optimal speed while maintaining the desired speed of the propeller. The gearbox also enables the engine to run in reverse to provide astern propulsion [9].
- **Propeller:** The propeller converts the rotational energy from the engine into thrust that propels the vessel forward. The design of the propeller depends on the size and operating conditions of the vessel. Modern propellers are optimized for efficiency and reduced noise and vibration [10].

- **Shafting:** The propeller shaft connects the gearbox to the propeller and transmits the torque from the gearbox to the propeller. The shafting system includes bearings, couplings, and seals that support the shaft and ensure proper alignment and lubrication [11].

These components work together to form a ship mechanical propulsion system that provides the necessary force to move the vessel through water.



**Fig. 1.** Typical ship mechanical propulsion system components

Ship mechanical propulsion systems are used in a variety of vessels, from small boats to large container ships and cruise liners. Here are some examples of the applications of ship mechanical propulsion systems:

**Cargo Ships:** Mechanical propulsion systems are commonly used in cargo ships due to their reliability and efficiency. According to a study by Yan and Li [12], mechanical propulsion systems are preferred over steam turbine engines for cargo ships due to lower fuel consumption and emissions.

**Passenger Ships:** Passenger ships, such as cruise liners and ferries, also use mechanical propulsion systems. These systems provide reliable performance and efficiency while enabling the vessel to maintain a comfortable and safe environment for passengers [13].

**Fishing Vessels:** Mechanical propulsion systems are widely used in fishing vessels due to their cost-effectiveness and ease of maintenance. Many fishing boats use smaller diesel engines with simple shafting and propeller design [14].

**Navy Vessels:** Mechanical propulsion systems are also used in navy vessels, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, and submarines. These systems provide reliable performance and enable the vessel to maneuver in various scenarios [15].

Overall, ship mechanical propulsion systems have numerous applications across different types of vessels. They provide reliable and efficient performance, which is essential for the maritime industry.

The main benefits of ship mechanical propulsion system include the following:

- **Reliability:** Ship mechanical propulsion systems have a long history of reliable performance in various operating conditions. According to Koushan and Ashrafi [16], mechanical propulsion systems have a lower risk of failure compared to electric propulsion systems.
- **Efficiency:** Mechanical propulsion systems are generally more efficient than other types of propulsion systems, such as steam or gas turbine engines. A study by Yan and Li [17] found that a ship equipped with a mechanical propulsion system had lower fuel consumption and emissions compared to a ship with a steam turbine propulsion system.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Mechanical propulsion systems are typically less expensive to install and maintain compared to other propulsion systems. This is particularly true for vessels with lower power requirements [18].

On the other hand, the main challenges of ship mechanical propulsion systems include the following:

- **Environmental Impact:** Ship mechanical propulsion systems can generate significant amounts of pollution, including greenhouse gases, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and particulate matter. Efforts are underway to reduce these emissions through new regulations and technology advancements [19].
- **Maintenance:** Mechanical propulsion systems require regular maintenance, including lubrication, alignment checks, and wear inspections. These tasks can be time-consuming and costly, particularly for larger vessels [20].
- **Noise and Vibration:** Mechanical propulsion systems can generate significant levels of noise and vibration, which can impact crew comfort and safety. Efforts are being made to reduce noise and vibration through propeller design and hull optimization [21].

Overall, while ship mechanical propulsion systems have several benefits, they also present certain challenges. Future developments in technology and regulations will likely address some of these challenges, while also improving the performance and sustainability of ship propulsion systems.

### 3. Electrical ship propulsion systems

A ship electrical propulsion system is another type of propulsion system that uses electricity as the source of

power as shown in Fig. 2. The main components of a ship electrical propulsion system include power generation, power conversion, propulsion motor, and control system. The power generation component is responsible for generating the electricity required to drive the propulsion system. Various types of generators, such as diesel-electric, gas turbine-electric, and fuel cell systems, can be used to generate electricity onboard ships [22]. The power conversion component converts the generated electrical power to a form that can be used by the propulsion system. This component includes transformers, inverters, and converters [23]. The propulsion motor is an electric motor that drives the propeller shaft directly or through reduction gears. Different types of motors, such as induction motors, synchronous motors, and permanent magnet motors, can be used based on the size and operating conditions of the vessel [24]. The control system monitors and controls the entire electrical propulsion system. It includes various subsystems, such as the propulsion control system, power management system, and monitoring system [25].

Ship electrical propulsion systems are becoming increasingly popular due to their efficiency, environmental benefits, and flexibility in operation. Here are some examples of the applications of ship electrical propulsion systems:

- **Cruise Ships:** Electrical propulsion systems are commonly used in cruise ships due to their lower emissions and reduced noise levels. The system can operate at variable speeds, thereby providing greater flexibility in maneuvering and reducing fuel consumption [26].
- **Ferries:** Ferries are also an excellent application for electrical propulsion systems. They provide a quiet and comfortable ride while reducing emissions. According to a study by Carlo Mazza *et al.* [27], hybrid electric propulsion systems can significantly improve the energy efficiency of ferries while reducing operating costs.
- **Offshore Support Vessels:** Electrical propulsion systems can be used in offshore support vessels, such as supply vessels or crew transfer vessels. These vessels need to maneuver safely and efficiently in close proximity to oil rigs or wind turbines, which requires a dynamic positioning capability that can be provided by the electrical propulsion system [28].
- **Naval Applications:** Electrical propulsion systems are also used in naval applications, including submarines and warships. These systems offer significant advantages in stealth, endurance, and flexibility in operation [29].

Overall, ship electrical propulsion systems offer numerous benefits and have applications across different types of vessels. They provide efficient and environmentally friendly performance while enabling the vessel to maneuver safely and comfortably.

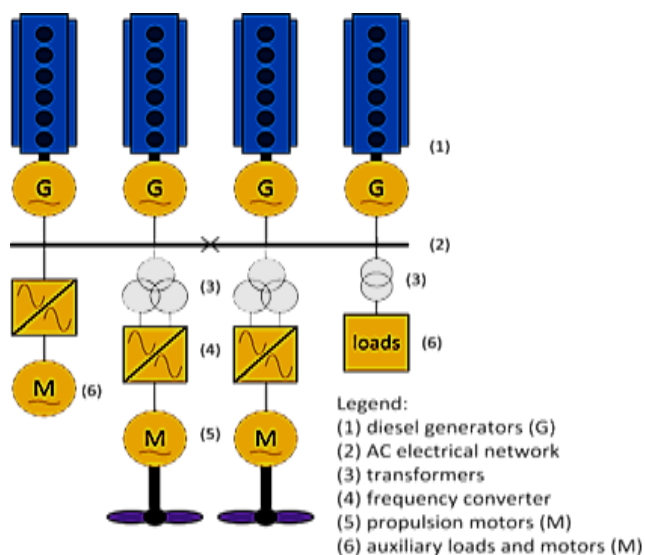


Fig. 2. Typical layout of ship electrical propulsion system.

Ship electrical propulsion systems offer various benefits and challenges that need to be considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel. The main benefits of ship electrical propulsion systems are:

- **Energy Efficiency:** Electrical propulsion systems can achieve higher energy efficiency than traditional mechanical propulsion systems, resulting in reduced fuel consumption and operating costs [30].
- **Environmental Benefits:** Electrical propulsion systems produce fewer emissions than mechanical propulsion systems, making them an attractive option for vessels operating in environmentally sensitive areas [3].
- **Flexibility:** Electrical propulsion systems can operate at variable speeds, providing greater flexibility in maneuvering and reducing fuel consumption. They can also integrate with other energy sources such as renewables and battery storage [32].

On the other hand, the main challenges of ship electrical propulsion systems are:

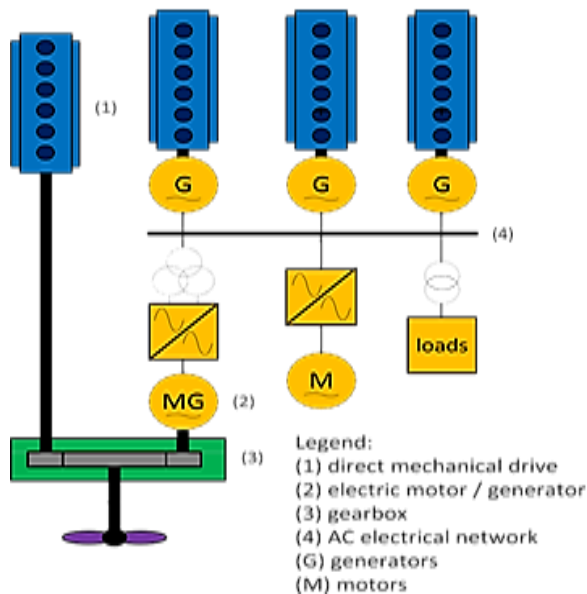
- **Initial Costs:** Electrical propulsion systems require significant upfront investment compared to traditional mechanical propulsion systems. This includes the costs of onboard generation and distribution systems, as well as the motors and controllers required for propulsion [33].
- **Maintenance Requirements:** Electrical propulsion systems require specialized maintenance and technical support, which may not be readily available in all ports and locations [34].
- **Power Management:** Electrical propulsion systems require careful power management to ensure reliable and efficient operation. This includes the monitoring and control of power generation, conversion, and storage systems.

In summary, ship electrical propulsion systems offer significant benefits in terms of energy efficiency, environmental performance, and flexibility, while also presenting challenges related to initial costs, maintenance requirements, and power management. These factors need to be carefully considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel.

#### 4. Hybrid ship propulsion systems

A ship hybrid propulsion system is a combination of different types of propulsion systems, such as diesel-electric or gas turbine-electric and mechanical systems as shown in Fig. 3. The hybrid configuration provides flexibility in operation and can offer improved energy efficiency and reduced emissions. The components of a ship hybrid propulsion system include power generation: energy storage system: power conversion: propulsion motor, and mechanical propulsion system. The power generation component of a hybrid propulsion system generates electricity to drive the electrical propulsion motor. Various types of generators, such as diesel-electric, gas turbine-electric, and fuel cell systems, can be used to generate electricity onboard ships [30]. The energy storage system stores excess energy generated by the power generation component for later use when required. Batteries, flywheels, and supercapacitors are common types of energy storage systems used in hybrid propulsion systems. The power conversion component converts the generated electrical power to a form that can be used by the propulsion system. This component includes transformers, inverters, and converters [31]. The propulsion motor is an electric motor that drives the propeller shaft directly or through reduction gears. Different types of motors, such as induction motors, synchronous motors, and permanent magnet motors, can be used based on the size and operating conditions of the vessel. The mechanical propulsion system comprises a diesel engine or gas turbine coupled with a gearbox and propeller shaft to drive the propeller directly. This system provides mechanical propulsion capability and redundancy in case of electrical systems failure [35].

These components work together to form a ship hybrid propulsion system that can provide efficient and flexible performance while reducing emissions.



**Fig. 3.** Typical ship hybrid propulsion system.

Ship hybrid propulsion systems have become increasingly popular in recent years due to their energy efficiency, environmental benefits, and flexibility in operation. Here are some examples of the applications of ship hybrid propulsion systems:

- **Ferries:** Ferries are a common application for hybrid propulsion systems due to their high-energy demands and the need to operate in environmentally sensitive areas. Hybrid propulsion systems can significantly improve the energy efficiency of ferries while reducing emissions [36].
- **Offshore Support Vessels:** Hybrid propulsion systems are also used in offshore support vessels, such as supply vessels or crew transfer vessels. These vessels require reliable and efficient operation while minimizing emissions and noise levels [37].
- **Cruise Ships:** Cruise ships are another application for hybrid propulsion systems due to their high-energy demands and the need for efficient and environmentally friendly operation. Hybrid propulsion systems can offer greater flexibility in maneuvering and reduce fuel consumption, resulting in lower emissions [38].
- **Naval Applications:** Hybrid propulsion systems can also be used in naval applications, including submarines and warships [39].

Overall, ship hybrid propulsion systems offer numerous benefits and have applications across different types of vessels. They provide efficient and environmentally friendly performance while enabling the vessel to maneuver safely and comfortably.

Ship hybrid propulsion systems offer various benefits and challenges that need to be considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel. The benefits of ship hybrid propulsion systems are [36, 37]:

- **Energy Efficiency:** Hybrid propulsion systems can achieve higher energy efficiency than traditional mechanical propulsion systems alone, resulting in reduced fuel consumption and operating costs.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Hybrid propulsion systems produce fewer emissions than traditional mechanical propulsion systems, making them an attractive option for vessels operating in environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Flexibility:** Hybrid propulsion systems offer greater flexibility in maneuvering and provide backup power in case of electrical outages or failures. They can also integrate with other energy sources such as renewables and battery storage.

On the other hand, the challenges of ship hybrid propulsion systems are [38, 39]:

- **Initial Costs:** Hybrid propulsion systems require significant upfront investment compared to traditional mechanical propulsion systems. This includes the costs of onboard generation and distribution systems, as well as the motors and controllers required for propulsion.
- **Maintenance Requirements:** Hybrid propulsion systems require specialized maintenance and technical support, which may not be readily available in all ports and locations.
- **Complexity:** Hybrid propulsion systems are more complex than traditional mechanical propulsion systems, requiring sophisticated control and monitoring systems to ensure reliable and efficient operation.

In summary, ship hybrid propulsion systems offer significant benefits in terms of energy efficiency, environmental performance, and flexibility, while also presenting challenges related to initial costs, maintenance requirements, and complexity. These factors need to be carefully considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, selecting an appropriate ship propulsion system requires careful consideration of various factors such as the vessel's size, operating conditions, energy efficiency, environmental impact, and cost. The current paper reviews the main benefits and challenges of different ship propulsion systems. There are several types of ship propulsion systems, including conventional mechanical, electric, and hybrid. The main finding from the current paper can be summarized as follows:

- Ship mechanical propulsion systems have several benefits, they also present certain challenges. Future developments in technology and regulations will



likely address some of these challenges, while also improving the performance and sustainability of ship propulsion systems.

- Ship electrical propulsion systems offer significant benefits in terms of energy efficiency, environmental performance, and flexibility, while also presenting challenges related to initial costs, maintenance requirements, and power management. These factors need to be carefully considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel.
- Ship hybrid propulsion systems offer significant benefits in terms of energy efficiency, environmental performance, and flexibility, while also presenting challenges related to initial costs, maintenance requirements, and complexity. These factors need to be carefully considered when selecting the appropriate propulsion system for a vessel.

Finally, the selection of a ship propulsion system depends on the specific needs of the vessel and its operations. A thorough evaluation of the benefits and challenges of each system will help determine the best option for the vessel.

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