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Energy Storage in Low-Inertia Systems: A Pathway Towards Net-Zero

***Adebayo Adeyinka Victor*[1], *Pelumi Peter Aluko-Olokun*[2], *Aina Olumide*[3]**

[1]Electrical Department, University of Johannesburg, South Africa avadebayo@uj.ac.za
[2]Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, United Kingdom
[3]Network Planning & Administration Unit, Ibedc Headquarters, Ibadan, Nigeria Aina.olumide.a@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The transition to low-inertia power systems, driven by increased renewable energy penetration, presents critical challenges for grid stability due to the reduced capacity to manage frequency disturbances and power imbalances. This study explores the role of energy storage technologies in mitigating these challenges by enhancing system resilience and operational reliability. Key storage technologies such as lithium-ion batteries, supercapacitors, and flywheels are examined for their technical and economic capabilities to provide synthetic inertia and support renewable integration. Case studies from various regions highlight the effective deployment of energy storage solutions in addressing the unique demands of low-inertia systems, particularly in renewable-dominant and off-grid settings. Additionally, the research underscores the importance of decentralised energy solutions, advanced control systems, and innovative policies to promote sustainable energy storage deployment. This work provides critical insights into energy storage integration's technical, economic, and policy dimensions, offering a pathway toward achieving global net-zero carbon emission targets.

Keywords: Low-inertia systems, energy storage, renewable energy integration, synthetic inertia, lithium-ion batteries, supercapacitors, flywheels.

1. Introduction

People call for an energy system to deliver "net-zero" emissions by 2050. This entails the widespread deployment of renewable energy sources [1]. With high shares of renewable energy, energy systems need flexibility to deal with short-term uncertainty and variability, typically associated with electrical output from renewable sources [2]. Until recently, electricity systems with very high levels of inertia, like hydraulic or steam turbine systems, have been used in the frequency system. For these systems, grid frequency can be considered perfectly stable. This is because the kinetic energy stored in the mechanical inertia of the spinning parts of rotating electrical machines is large enough to compensate for the continuous change in electrical power between generation and load [3]. However, electrical systems with a very low rotational mass – so-called "low-inertia systems" – require special attention due to the low kinetic energy of the rotating machine. Thus, these low-inertia systems may be unable to effectively compensate for the imbalance between generation and consumption, making the inter-area grid frequency decrease or increase – in other words, making the system non-stationary. Therefore, the low-inertia system is a common characteristic of a transient grid phenomenon.

Energy storage can directly address this issue by adding more flexibility to the system. In this transient grid context, some grid operators have already considered implementing an energy storage system, including batteries [4]. Note that the energy storage system with a one- or two-way converter can adjust AC grid voltage and frequency, which means the capability of controlling the next load of renewable energy sources. That is, frequency control by voltage adjustment is also one example of an improved response to frequency events compared to the traditional expansion of the global cumulative capacity of grid-stabilising technologies. Nevertheless, many low-inertia systems already lead to a few critical problems. Firstly, a higher frequency transient power is injected into higher inertia systems, again causing grid interference. Secondly, due to intermittent renewable energy generation, most power would quickly trend below the Center of Inertia. In this case, a significant overfrequency event would threaten the entire system. These challenges are far more critical, and their prevention is more attractive, resulting in higher shares of renewable energy sources. The key objective of the essay is to present the state of the art of supply-side on- and off-engine and load-side energy storage for low-inertia systems with an emphasis on the low inertia of rotating electrical machines.

1.1. Background and Significance

Energy storage has gained momentum by integrating renewable energy sources [5]. A type of storage is required to balance the gap between generation and demand, given the uncertain output of renewables. By incorporating cost-effective energy storage into a power system, additional services, such as frequency regulation and voltage support, are also provided [6]. Energy storage and system stability are inherently interlinked and should be considered. The evolving context of modern energy systems reveals a transition towards low-inertia or even inertia-less systems, driven by the dominance of soft-chopper converters in the power electronic interface of renewable energy sources. This evolution presents the critical challenge of developing energy storage management strategies for HVDC (High Voltage Direct Current) and low-inertia systems [7]. Several countries and regions have set ambitious net-zero emission targets aligned with the global trend towards decarbonisation. Achieving this goal necessitates the development of an energy system characterised by a high share of variable renewable generation balanced against a continuously shifting demand profile. Significant progress in reducing costs, enhancing turbine and photovoltaic cell efficiency, and advancing power electronics have underpinned this transition. Consequently, fluctuations in demand will become more recurrent and more complex to manage. To address these challenges, the demand for energy storage solutions operating at both transmission and distribution levels is expected to grow. These storage systems, with capacities ranging from dozens of kilowatts to several hundred megawatts, are anticipated to play a pivotal role in stabilising transmission grids and ensuring the reliability of energy supply in renewable-rich systems. This narrative underscores the essential role of energy storage in achieving a sustainable and stable energy future, particularly in systems with a high share of renewable energy sources.

1.2. Research Aim and Objectives

A key element for the transition towards clean power systems is energy storage. Moreover, the goals of energy storage systems are broad and can directly address the challenges laid out in the preceding section: they can complement the benefits of local inertia and frequency supports, probably extending them elsewhere on the network; they can be used to preserve the energy stored by distributed energy resources, prolonging restoration times; they can provide initial DC bus voltages in inverter-based microgrids, without needing a diesel generator; and, finally, act as a new service to increase the utilisation of distributed energy resources. Nonetheless, a lack of consensus prevails in this area, i.e., what are the appropriate and effective energy storage technologies in low-inertia systems?

Hence, the key aim of this manuscript, and the research as a whole, is to use a hybrid system based on various benchmark systems to combine the technical and socio-economic impacts, both positive and negative, of various topologies of energy storage, independently or combined with others, in multiple locations at different voltage levels on the system. Three objectives are set in alignment with the research aim:

1) To investigate the energy storage system technologies;

2) To quantify and evaluate the technical performance of different topologies of energy storage system technologies and

3) To examine and evaluate the economic performance of the different topologies of energy storage system technologies. Moreover, investigating the consequences of energy storage, technically and socio-economically, will be test-validated on a particular case study scenario.

2. Understanding Low-Inertia Systems

Low-inertia systems are electric power systems in which the equivalent system inertia is reduced by more than 30% compared to its highest possible value [8]. The inertia of a power system, defined as the kinetic energy stored in the rotating masses of synchronous generators, plays a crucial role in stabilising frequency during disturbances and governs the primary frequency response in all synchronous-based systems [9]. A low-inertia scenario arises when the level of synchronous generation is insufficient to stabilise the frequency or to provide an adequate response to real-world events. This deficiency leads to rapid frequency declines or increases during disturbances, posing significant risks to grid stability. A variety of factors contribute to low-inertia scenarios. The rapid proliferation of inverter-based generation is one of the primary drivers. Additionally, the high utilisation of interconnector capacities between systems and automatic disconnections can result in isolated (or "islanded") systems, which lack sufficient inertia to manage frequency stability. These conditions exacerbate the risks of instability, as low inertia increases the system’s frequency excitability and susceptibility to disturbances [1].

Integrating and exploiting energy storage systems (ESS) is an optimal solution to address these challenges. Both existing and future storage technologies can enhance energy management by storing surplus energy during periods of high renewable generation (e.g., wind) and dispatching it during periods of deficit. Moreover, the technical capabilities of these systems to provide synthetic inertia and a controlled rate of change of frequency are critical. Synthetic inertia allows storage systems to emulate the inertia of traditional synchronous generators by injecting or absorbing power in response to frequency deviations, thereby mitigating instability risks. An essential consideration is the capability of advanced energy storage technologies to decrease or increase the system’s rate of change of frequency during power imbalances, ensuring alignment with the reference points of non-inverter-connected generators. These advancements underscore the pivotal role of energy storage in stabilising low-inertia systems and facilitating the integration of renewable energy sources while maintaining grid reliability and efficiency.

Figure 1 illustrates the transition from traditional to modern power systems and its impact on grid stability, particularly in low-inertia environments. Conventional power systems, comprising thermal, nuclear, and hydropower plants, inherently possess high inertia due to the kinetic energy stored in rotating masses, ensuring grid stability by resisting rapid frequency changes. In contrast, modern power systems dominated by wind and photovoltaic (PV) power plants contribute minimal or no inertia, leading to low inertia systems. This shift necessitates integrating energy storage systems and synchronous compensators to provide synthetic inertia and maintain stability. In low-inertia systems, the frequency response is segmented into distinct stages. During the inertial response (0–5 seconds), the initial slope of frequency decline is determined by the system's inertia, with low-inertia systems exhibiting steeper slopes due to reduced rotational energy reserves. The recorded rate of change of frequency (RoCoF) quantifies the speed of frequency deviation, underscoring the vulnerability of these systems. Primary frequency control (5–30 seconds) involves automatic adjustments from generators or storage devices to stabilise frequency, while secondary and tertiary controls (20 seconds–10 minutes) gradually restore frequency to nominal levels.

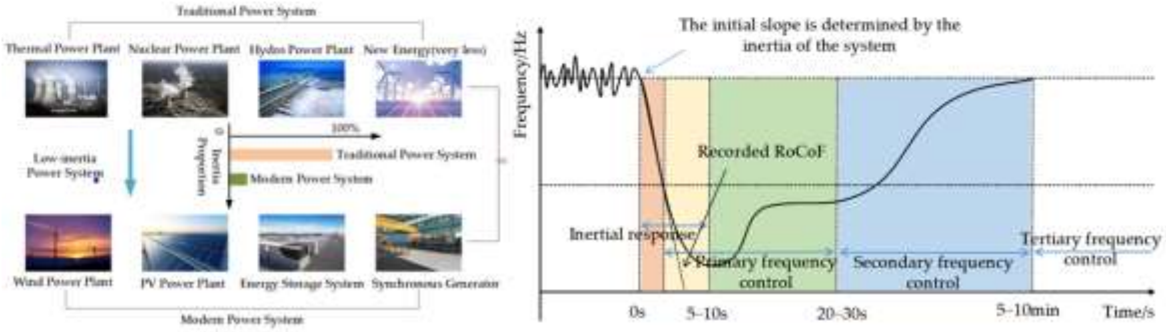

Figure 1: Frequency Stability Challenges and Solutions in Low-Inertia Power Systems

Incidents such as the 2019 Great Britain blackout and the "9.28" South Australia blackout highlight the risks associated with low inertia, emphasising the need for robust energy storage solutions and advanced grid management strategies. Mitigation strategies include deploying energy storage systems, such as batteries and flywheels, and synchronous compensators to provide synthetic inertia and rapid response capabilities. A comprehensive approach involving primary, secondary, and tertiary controls is critical to ensuring grid stability in low-inertia systems. This analysis underscores the essential role of inertia in maintaining frequency stability and highlights the importance of innovative technologies in addressing the challenges posed by modern low-inertia grids.

2.1. Definition and Characteristics

Low-inertia systems are networks characterised by insufficient kinetic energy available for rapid transfer to absorb sharp changes in load or generation unit operability [10]. Inertia, the kinetic energy stored during a specific state of motion, is a fundamental property of synchronous systems with traditional rotating masses. However, this concept becomes outdated in low-inertia networks as control actions shift to electronic and software-based mechanisms. Low inertia does not imply low energy production; annual energy output can remain high, even when dominated by conventional plants with basic governing systems and without active equipment [11]. Modern low-inertia grids increasingly incorporate turbines with electronic controllers and variable-speed pumps. These systems are designed to manage power dynamics without relying on frequency support from traditional synchronous generators. This shift aligns with the demands of grids featuring high levels of renewable generation, where integrating advanced electronic processes enables dynamic frequency regulation. Such networks are often characterised by lower speed droop in conventional generator units, reflecting a reduced dependency on synchronous machines for frequency stability [10]. In a low-inertia context, the dynamics of network frequency depend on the balance between power supply and demand. Unbalanced power can lead to oscillations of ±0.5–1 Hz from the nominal operating frequency. While synchronous generation has traditionally managed these fluctuations through its inherent inertia and primary frequency control, grids with high levels of renewable energy require alternative approaches. Here, integrating fast-acting storage devices capable of frequency-wave modelling and dynamic network topologies becomes critical. These tools enable precise frequency control, mitigating large deviations and enhancing system stability in renewable-rich, low-inertia grids [12]. This evolution underscores the increasing importance of advanced storage and control technologies in ensuring stability and reliability within future energy systems. By adopting these innovations, low-inertia networks can accommodate significant renewable energy shares while maintaining grid operability and preventing destabilising frequency oscillations.

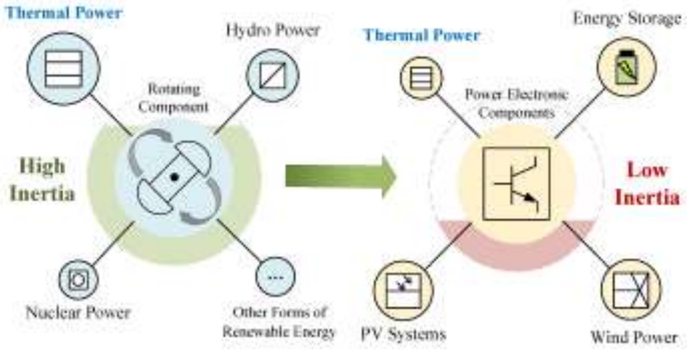

Figure 2: Illustrates the low-inertia attribute of a renewable energy power system with high penetration.

2.2. Challenges and Opportunities

Low-inertia systems introduce a distinct set of challenges highlighting the limitations of conventional energy storage solutions for ensuring reliable power system operation as renewable energy penetration grows [13]. One critical issue is the insufficient inertia response, which hinders the ability of low-inertia systems to address frequency disturbances or resource imbalances quickly. This inadequate frequency response, especially in systems where renewable resources generate a substantial portion of energy, compromises reliability and compliance with technical standards necessary for participation in regional balancing areas [14]. In addition to sluggish responses to frequency events, low-inertia systems are prone to instability caused by high power gradients. For instance, instability may occur when a renewable resource experiences a sharp ramp-up immediately before a drop in energy demand, triggering a rapid decline in the economic supply of electricity. This situation necessitates developing and deploying advanced, fast-acting energy storage solutions. These systems must be energy- and power-dense, capable of storing energy in innovative mediums, and able to discharge as electrical power to the grid at various scales [1]. Such storage systems would ideally be deployed to align with the spatial averaging of renewable energy penetration. They may also be integrated at varying grid locational prices, enabling utilities to offset the fluctuating demands currently managed by traditional grid-connected storage devices. Moreover, these advanced storage solutions could enhance microgrid and individual facility capabilities, allowing them to respond in real-time to market opportunities. For example, facilities generating excess renewable energy could sell it to the grid when locational marginal prices exceed the cost of generation. This would optimise energy use and maximise economic benefits [8]. Achieving these goals demands breakthroughs in energy storage science and system design. This research aims to characterise the technical challenges of low-inertia systems and explore potential solutions. By identifying key metrics and system characteristics, the study contributes to the broader understanding of how energy storage, demand response, and control strategies can address the reliability and stability concerns of power systems striving for net-zero carbon emissions. Table 1 summarises the technical and operational challenges of low-inertia systems and outlines innovative energy storage solutions to ensure grid reliability, stability, and economic optimisation in the context of increasing renewable energy penetration.

Table 1: Challenges and Solutions for Low-Inertia Systems with Energy Storage Integration

Challenge	Description	Proposed Solutions	Impact
Insufficient Inertia Response	Low-inertia systems struggle to address frequency disturbances and resource imbalances due to reduced rotational energy reserves.	Deploy fast-acting, energy-dense storage systems capable of providing synthetic inertia and stabilising frequency.	Enhances grid reliability and compliance with technical standards in renewable-rich systems.
Frequency Instability	Sluggish responses to frequency events in low-inertia grids lead to reliability issues, especially in systems dominated by renewables.	Advanced control systems paired with storage technologies like batteries and flywheels provide rapid frequency correction.	It prevents grid instability and ensures stable operation under high renewable penetration.
High Power Gradients	Instability caused by sharp renewable energy ramp-ups followed by a drop in demand, resulting in economic supply issues.	Develop dynamic storage solutions capable of rapid charge and discharge to buffer sudden load variations and smooth power gradients.	Supports economic stability and mitigates the risk of power outages.
Alignment with Market Dynamics	Utilities require energy storage solutions that adapt to spatial averaging of renewable penetration and varying locational grid prices.	Integrate scalable storage systems that can operate across transmission and distribution networks, including batteries and hybrid storage systems.	Optimises energy use, balances supply and demand, and supports renewable energy integration.
Microgrid and Facility Capabilities	Enhancing real-time response to market opportunities for microgrids and individual facilities generating renewable energy.	Implement storage solutions for real-time trading of excess renewable energy based on locational marginal prices.	Optimises revenue streams for facilities and enhances local grid resilience.
Innovative Storage Design	Conventional storage solutions are inadequate for addressing the complexity of low-inertia challenges.	Research new battery chemistries, materials, and designs; focus on hybrid systems with high energy and power density capabilities.	Accelerates the development of cost-effective, high-performance storage solutions for low-inertia grids.
Sustainability Goals	Addressing technical challenges in low-inertia systems to meet net-zero carbon emissions.	Integrate energy storage, demand response, and control strategies while developing policies to incentivise investment in advanced storage technologies.	Contributes to achieving net-zero emissions through reliable renewable energy integration.

3. Energy Storage Technologies

Integrating renewable energy sources into the electrical grid necessitates reliable energy storage systems to maintain grid stability, particularly in scenarios with low inertia, imbalanced load generation, or rapid load variations [10]. Energy storage technologies are critical in addressing power imbalances, enhancing grid resilience, and supporting modern energy systems' flexibility. Batteries, for example, are characterised by their high energy density, making them suitable for various energy storage applications, including grid integration [8]. However, their large-scale implementation is limited due to deployment constraints and resource availability, especially for extended durations. Supercapacitors, or ultracapacitors, deliver instantaneous energy due to their high power density and lack of significant charging and discharging constraints. These make them ideal for emergency power supplies or short-term energy storage during primary power source failures. However, their low energy density limits their ability to serve as standalone solutions for prolonged energy supply [13].

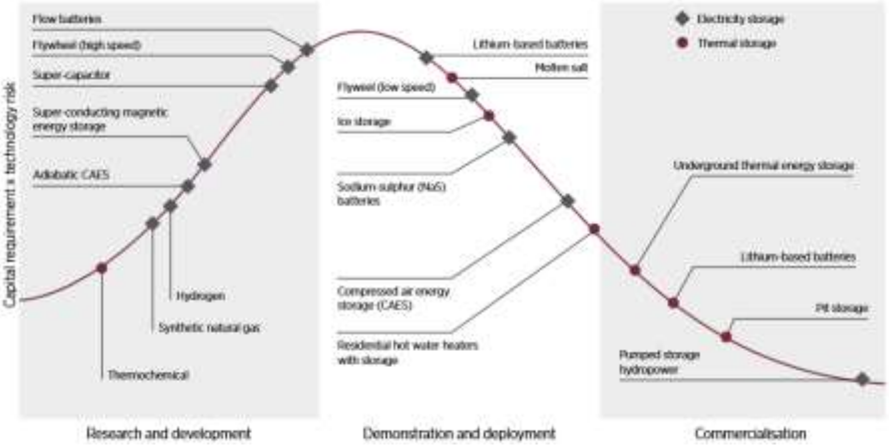

Figure 3: Maturity of Energy Storage Technology [13].

Flywheel energy storage systems convert electrical energy into mechanical energy via rotating masses and magnetic bearings, offering infinite lifespan, recyclable materials, and low maintenance requirements [15]. They are suitable for standby power, rapid cycling, and isolated distribution systems, though achieving rapid line frequency adjustments can be challenging, which can be mitigated through advanced electronic converters. These energy storage technologies are at varying stages of maturity, ranging from research and development—such as flow batteries, high-speed flywheel systems, and hydrogen storage—to demonstration and deployment, which includes sodium-sulphur (NaS) batteries, ice storage systems, and compressed air energy storage (CAES), and finally, commercialisation, with lithium-based batteries, pumped storage hydropower, and underground thermal energy storage. Currently, pumped storage hydro dominates global installed grid-connected electricity storage capacity, as shown in Table 2. By leveraging the complementary strengths of these technologies—batteries for energy density, supercapacitors for instantaneous energy delivery, and flywheels for durable, low-maintenance applications—energy systems can optimise storage solutions to support renewable energy penetration, address the challenges of low-inertia grids and achieve more excellent grid stability while advancing net-zero carbon objectives.

Table 2: Global Installed Grid-Connected Electricity Storage Capacity

Technology	Installed Capacity (MW)
Pumped Storage Hydro	140,000 MW
Compressed Air Energy Storage	440 MW
Sodium-sulphur	304 MW
Lithium-ion	100 MW
Lead-acid	70 MW
Nickel-cadmium	27 MW
Flywheel	25 MW
Redox-flow	10 MW

3.1. Batteries

Energy storage is an essential solution for low-inertia systems with declining system strength, offering various applications to enhance stability and reliability [16]. Among the available technologies, electrochemical batteries, particularly lithium-ion and flow batteries, stand out as the most prominent choices due to their versatility and technological maturity. While electromechanical solutions remain cost-prohibitive, lithium-ion batteries possess the required characteristics for practical energy storage and integration into low-inertia systems. Their well-established status, scalability, and suitability for various renewable energy integration projects make them the preferred option in many applications [17]. Lithium-ion battery technology has been successfully deployed in numerous renewable energy projects and is well-suited for energy arbitrage, demand response, and frequency control tasks. These batteries are valued for their high energy density, long cycle lifespan, and efficient charge-discharge rates. However, challenges such as battery degradation and the environmental impacts of lithium extraction and processing must be addressed despite their advantages. Recycling and reusing materials remain critical to ensure lithium-ion technologies' sustainability [18].

Flow batteries represent another advanced and promising energy storage solution. These batteries offer exceptional recharging efficiencies and are expected to provide years of reliable service. Their scalability and performance make them strong contenders for integration into renewable-rich, low-inertia systems. Performance metrics for lithium-ion and flow batteries, such as energy density, round-trip efficiency, and capacity, are continuously being refined to meet the evolving demands of modern power systems [16]. Recent advancements in energy storage have also driven innovations in battery chemistries, materials, and designs. Scientists and engineers are exploring novel solutions to improve battery degradation forecasting and enhance battery-to-grid edge services. These developments align with the growing need for short-term energy storage solutions to accommodate the increasing variability in energy generation and demand [17]. Despite these technological strides, significant challenges remain, particularly concerning the lifecycle impacts of batteries. From resource-intensive lithium extraction to the complexities of metal recovery and refining, the environmental and economic sustainability of battery technologies must be prioritised. Enhanced recycling processes and the reuse of materials are crucial steps towards minimising these challenges [18]. In summary, while lithium-ion and flow batteries currently dominate the landscape of energy storage solutions for low-inertia systems, ongoing research and innovation are critical to addressing their limitations and unlocking their full potential. These technologies are poised to be pivotal in stabilising low-inertia grids and advancing the transition to renewable energy systems.

3.2. Supercapacitors

Supercapacitors are a widely researched energy storage technology characterised by their high power density, efficiency, and rapid charge and discharge capabilities. These properties make them particularly suitable for short-term energy storage applications. At the same time, their inherent longevity and stability enable them to complement long-term energy storage solutions such as batteries and mechanical storage systems [19]. Supercapacitors operate on the principles of electric double-layer capacitance, shared with traditional capacitors, but achieve significantly enhanced performance through tailored advancements in their materials and design. By optimising the electrolyte and electrode materials, supercapacitors achieve increased surface area and double-layer capacitance, directly boosting their energy storage capacity. In addition to double-layer capacitance, certain supercapacitors incorporate pseudocapacitance mechanisms, which store charge through reversible faradaic processes involving redox reactions. This additional storage mechanism contributes to their exceptional capacitance values and prolonged operational lifespans, often spanning tens of years [20]. The ability of supercapacitors to outperform traditional capacitors in volumetric charge density highlights their technical superiority. Capacitance values range from tens of farads to several kilo farads, with the highest observed in systems using advanced materials such as activated carbon, carbon paper, or carbon cloth. Lithium-based systems extend these values even further. Volumetric charge densities range between 1 and 100 F/cm^3 depending on the choice of electrode materials and electrolytes, enabling various applications. The operational power density and cycling stability over numerous charge and discharge cycles underscore their robustness and reliability [21]. Supercapacitors present a robust energy storage option, combining rapid response times and exceptional longevity with high specific capacitance. Their consistent performance across varying energy storage needs makes them an integral component of modern energy systems, especially in scenarios requiring swift response times or high cycling durability. These strengths position supercapacitors as a key technology for addressing energy storage challenges in both short- and long-term applications.

3.3. Flywheels

Flywheels represent a robust alternative for energy storage systems, storing energy in kinetic energy. Energy is stored or released by varying the flywheel's rotational speed, allowing it to respond rapidly to grid stability demands. This capability makes flywheels particularly advantageous in low-inertia systems, where rapid response and resilience are essential [22]. A notable benefit of flywheel systems is their durability. Capable of enduring a high number of charge/discharge cycles, flywheels typically last 20 years or more with minimal maintenance. Unlike many batteries, flywheels are not sensitive to the depth of discharge or charge/discharge rates, making them highly reliable. Their limited energy density (1–6 Wh/kg) may initially appear to be a disadvantage. Still, this characteristic proves beneficial in applications such as buffering energy in renewable energy systems with small, slow variations. Additionally, their system efficiency, at around 85%, surpasses that of most battery technologies, while their maintenance requirements are significantly simpler due to their robust construction [23]. Flywheel systems have a straightforward and cost-effective design, comprising a rotor, a bearing, and a vacuum case. Energy is retained efficiently when the system is idle, as energy losses originate primarily from bearing and Coulomb friction. Advanced configurations employing electromagnetic bearings can further minimise these losses, extend system lifetime, and simplify maintenance. Electromagnetic bearings also allow precise centring and rotation of the flywheel, enabling stable and reversible operations. When properly designed, counter-rotating flywheels avoid torsional loads on the rotor axis, enhancing system stability and operational safety [24].

The performance and versatility of flywheels justify their initial investment costs, as they offer high-value features that make them an attractive option for grid support. For example, they provide high-quality frequency regulation in renewable-rich systems and can sustain motor starting during critical moments of the system load curve, preventing blackouts. Their ability to support black-start operations ensures operational continuity during outages, critical for mission-critical services and production facilities. Furthermore, the kinetic energy stored in flywheels can safeguard against reverse power swings, contributing to local and transmission grid stability [25]. In conclusion, flywheel energy storage systems offer a reliable, durable, and efficient solution for addressing the challenges of low-inertia systems. Their ability to provide rapid response, maintain operational stability, and ensure long-term resilience makes them a key technology for modern energy systems, particularly those integrating high levels of renewable energy. While further technical and economic analyses are needed to optimise their deployment, the intrinsic benefits of flywheels demonstrate their potential to play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable energy storage solutions.

4. Renewable Energy Integration

Energy storage technologies have played a critical role in improving the reliability of renewable energy generation, particularly in low-inertia systems. This chapter explores global case studies highlighting how energy storage solutions have been successfully deployed to support renewable integration. By analysing these examples, we uncover key lessons learned and examine the technologies—batteries, supercapacitors, and mechanical storage—used to achieve these outcomes [1]. A consistent finding from these case studies is that energy storage significantly enhances the reliability and stability of renewable energy systems. Embedded statistics illustrate its effectiveness in addressing intermittency and variability in renewable energy output. The data also reveal how the type of renewable energy targeted and unique market dynamics influence the success of energy storage integration. Technologies such as lithium-ion batteries, supercapacitors, and flywheels have proven their versatility, demonstrating distinct advantages depending on the application and system requirements [26]. A notable insight is the emphasis on decentralised energy solutions, particularly in underprivileged regions seeking to expand their renewable energy capacities. These solutions provide a critical pathway for integrating renewables into remote, low-inertia systems without requiring extensive centralised infrastructure. In these regions, the primary drivers for renewable integration are environmental rather than economic. Renewable deployment is often deemed successful once ecological objectives, such as reducing carbon footprints, are achieved. There is little incentive to expand renewable energy systems or connect to centralised grids, leading to a focus on low-cost, off-grid energy systems [27].

The case studies also highlight how energy storage facilitates the integration of renewable energy into off-grid systems, improving system resilience and energy access. These solutions enable communities to transition to sustainable energy systems while maintaining affordability and reliability. Furthermore, the studies emphasise the importance of aligning storage technologies with the specific operational characteristics of renewable resources and the unique demands of local markets. For example, batteries excel in high energy density scenarios, while supercapacitors and mechanical storage offer distinct benefits in rapid response and long-cycle applications [13]. In conclusion, the global deployment of energy storage technologies has revolutionised renewable energy integration, transforming how energy is generated, stored, and utilised. Decentralised solutions for low-inertia systems, particularly in underserved areas, underscore the transformative potential of energy storage. By tailoring technologies to meet the diverse needs of renewable systems and markets, energy storage has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable and resilient energy infrastructures. Continued research and innovation in this field will be indispensable for accelerating the global shift toward net-zero energy systems and expanding access to reliable renewable energy [14]. Energy storage has revolutionised renewable integration and is emerging as a cornerstone of sustainable energy systems. Continued research and innovation are vital to achieving net-zero goals and expanding access to reliable renewable energy globally, emphasising advanced battery designs and hybrid storage systems.

Table 3: The Role of Energy Storage Technologies in Supporting Renewable Integration in Low-Inertia Systems

Key Aspect	Description	Examples/Technologies
Reliability and Stability	Energy storage significantly enhances the reliability and stability of renewable energy systems by addressing intermittency and variability in renewable output.	Lithium-ion batteries, flywheels, supercapacitors.
Case Studies	Global case studies illustrate the effectiveness of energy storage in integrating renewable energy and stabilising low-inertia systems. Lessons highlight the importance of tailoring solutions to specific market dynamics and renewable types.	Renewable integration in Germany (pumped hydro), off-grid solar in Africa.
Decentralised Energy Solutions	In underprivileged regions, decentralised energy systems offer a critical pathway for integrating renewables without requiring extensive centralised infrastructure. These systems primarily address environmental rather than economic objectives.	Off-grid solar and battery storage in rural areas.
Off-Grid Energy Systems	Energy storage facilitates off-grid renewable integration, enhancing resilience and energy access while ensuring affordability and reliability in underserved regions.	Low-cost battery and mechanical storage systems.
Technology Versatility	Energy storage technologies offer distinct advantages based on application needs: batteries for high energy density, supercapacitors for rapid response, and mechanical storage for long-cycle applications.	Lithium-ion batteries, supercapacitors, flywheels.
Environmental Objectives	Renewable deployment is deemed successful in remote areas once ecological goals, such as reducing carbon footprint, are achieved. Economic drivers are secondary, leading to a focus on affordable, low-cost systems.	Low-cost solar PV paired with battery storage.

Market Dynamics and Alignment	Success depends on aligning energy storage solutions with the operational characteristics of renewable sources and local market demands.	Tailored energy storage solutions in India, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

4.1. Microgrid Applications

Microgrids are emerging as versatile solutions across diverse scenarios, technologies, and scales, providing a resilient and efficient approach to energy management. Their growing popularity stems from their ability to integrate various energy resources, including renewable energy, while ensuring stability and efficiency. Microgrids achieve enhanced load balancing and optimisation by incorporating advanced energy storage systems, making them critical components of modern energy infrastructures [28]. One of the primary advantages of microgrids is their capacity to provide reliable power in the face of disturbances, such as cascading blackouts, brownouts, and violations of load demand. This robustness is crucial for integrating renewable energy resources, which are often variable and intermittent. Without an adequate energy storage system, the services required by a microgrid—such as frequency regulation, load balancing, and peak shaving—cannot be fully realised. Energy storage thus plays a pivotal role in enabling microgrids to deliver uninterrupted power and maintain operational stability [29]. The adoption of microgrids is especially beneficial for remote and isolated areas. These systems, coupled with distributed energy resources and advanced storage technologies, present a sustainable solution for providing reliable electricity where conventional grid access is limited or unavailable. In such settings, microgrids improve energy access and foster resilience and sustainability by leveraging local renewable resources and reducing dependency on external energy supplies [30].

Microgrids offer a promising avenue for achieving comprehensive and sustainable energy solutions in urban environments. By integrating multiple energy resources, including solar, wind, and storage technologies, urban microgrids can meet the demands of densely populated areas while reducing environmental impact. These systems enhance energy efficiency and create opportunities for cities to adopt innovative energy management practices, such as demand-side management and energy arbitrage. Despite their benefits, the development of microgrids also presents challenges, including the need for advanced protection systems and thorough cost-benefit analyses. The growing availability of distributed energy resources and advancements in storage technologies are making microgrid implementation increasingly viable. However, ensuring affordability, scalability, and system reliability remains crucial for widespread adoption. In conclusion, microgrids represent a transformative approach to modern energy management, offering resilient and efficient solutions for both remote and urban settings. Their ability to integrate renewable resources and advanced energy storage systems positions them as key enablers of sustainable and reliable energy systems. As technological and economic challenges are addressed, microgrids will be increasingly important in advancing global energy resilience and sustainability.

5. Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

The deployment of energy storage technologies in the UK faces system-related barriers and significant policy and investment-related challenges. A lack of opportunity creation and insufficient investment in innovation, infrastructure, and supply chains risks undermining the UK's competitiveness in the global energy storage market. Recognising these risks, the UK government has proposed strategies to address these challenges, including introducing a two-year feed-in tariff (FiT) for small-scale electricity storage. This initiative aims to stimulate innovation, encourage investment, and demonstrate storage's economic and technological benefits while filtering out inefficient technologies. Such efforts are crucial to fostering a low-carbon future through scalable and cost-effective storage solutions [31].

a) ***Policy Context and Regulatory*** **Frameworks**: The success of energy storage deployment is highly influenced by policy and regulatory incentives, which shape market signals and investor confidence. For small-scale electricity storage in the UK, investor interest and funding availability depend significantly on perceived returns and regulatory certainty. Stakeholders have noted the importance of clear and committed policy frameworks in attracting a broader pool of developers and venture capital investors. Drawing parallels with the solar and wind sectors, it is evident that a firm commitment to energy storage policies can enhance competition and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy [32].

b) ***International Examples of Storage Innovation:*** Valuable insights can be drawn from international examples, such as developments in German-speaking countries. Advanced versions of pumped hydroelectric storage have been integrated with off-peak night-time electricity generation, illustrating how innovative approaches can optimise storage systems. These examples underscore the importance of aligning regulatory and planning frameworks with technological advancements to overcome financial and operational barriers [33].

c) ***Economic Viability and Market Dynamics*****:** Despite these initiatives, the economic viability of energy storage remains a significant challenge. In competitive financial terms, the cost of energy lost during discharge often exceeds the gains from arbitrage. Current data indicates that fewer than five storage projects are revenue-positive without additional income streams such as gate fees. Market dynamics, such as day-ahead price signals and intra-day trading opportunities, provide limited but critical avenues for improving the profitability of storage systems. These economic realities highlight the need for targeted policy interventions to bridge financial gaps and incentivise early adoption [34]. Addressing policy and regulatory barriers is essential for unlocking the full potential of energy storage technologies in the UK. Initiatives such as the proposed FiT for small-scale storage can catalyse investment and innovation, driving the development of a robust storage market. By learning from international examples and aligning economic incentives with technological advancements, the UK can position itself as a leader in energy storage. Continued efforts to refine regulatory frameworks and address financial barriers will be crucial for achieving a sustainable, low-carbon future. Table 4 summarises examples of policy and regulatory frameworks for energy storage in low-inertia systems as a pathway towards net zero in the UK. These frameworks demonstrate the UK's commitment to advancing energy storage as a key enabler of stability and reliability in low-inertia systems, paving the way towards achieving net-zero goals.

Table 4: Policy and Regulatory Frameworks Supporting Energy Storage in Low-Inertia Systems: UK's Pathway to Net-Zero

Policy/Regulatory Framework	**Description**	**Objective**	**Impact on Low-Inertia Systems**
Two-Year Feed-in Tariff (FiT) for Small-Scale Electricity Storage	A proposed FiT to incentivise the early adoption of small-scale electricity storage solutions.	Stimulate innovation and investment in storage technologies; create market signals.	Supports the integration of storage to provide synthetic inertia and stabilise low-inertia grids.
Electricity Market Reform (EMR)	Mechanisms such as Capacity Markets and Contracts for Difference (CFDs) ensure energy security while promoting low-carbon technologies.	Enable cost-competitive renewable energy generation and incentivise flexibility in the energy market.	Encourages storage deployment for balancing variable renewables in low-inertia grids.
Regulatory Sandbox by Ofgem	A framework allowing energy companies to test innovative storage solutions in real-world conditions without full regulatory obligations.	Foster experimentation with new energy storage business models and technologies.	Accelerates the development of storage systems suitable for grid stability in low-inertia systems.
Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) and Network Innovation Competition (NIC)	Funding mechanisms for innovative projects that enhance grid resilience, including storage technologies.	Support the development of technologies that address grid challenges.	Promotes grid-ready energy storage solutions to support low-inertia systems.
Smart Export Guarantee (SEG)	A policy enables small-scale energy producers, including those with storage, to sell surplus energy back to the grid.	Encourage localised renewable generation and storage adoption.	Facilitates decentralised storage systems that provide grid flexibility in low-inertia systems.
Energy White Paper 2020	A long-term strategy outlining the UK's transition to net-zero, emphasising storage and grid flexibility.	Decarbonise the energy system while maintaining reliability and affordability.	Strengthens policy focus on integrating energy storage to manage low-inertia challenges.
Support for Battery Innovation and Recycling	Investment in R&D for advanced battery technologies and sustainable recycling practices.	Improve the efficiency and sustainability of energy storage solutions.	Reduces environmental impact and ensures scalability of storage solutions for low-inertia systems.

Conclusion

Integrating renewable energy into low-inertia power systems poses significant technical challenges, particularly in maintaining frequency stability and operational reliability. This study highlights the critical role of energy storage technologies in addressing these challenges by providing synthetic inertia, dynamic frequency response, and energy balancing capabilities. Lithium-ion batteries, supercapacitors, and flywheels have effectively stabilised low-inertia systems while supporting renewable integration in diverse settings, from urban microgrids to remote off-grid systems. The findings also emphasise the importance of decentralised energy solutions and tailored storage technologies to meet renewable-rich grids' specific operational and market demands. Furthermore, policy and regulatory support, including targeted incentives and innovation funding, are essential to accelerating the development and adoption of advanced storage solutions. By leveraging these technologies and strategies, low-inertia power systems can transition toward a sustainable, resilient, and net-zero energy future. Continued research and innovation are imperative to overcoming remaining challenges and unlocking the full potential of energy storage in modern power systems.

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