

Testing aluminium and polytetrafluoroethylene as triboelectric materials for acoustic triboelectric nanogenerators

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ABSTRACT

Triboelectric Nanogenerator (TENG) is a green energy generating technology that can harvest energy from the surroundings such as ambient sound via contact-electrification and triboelectric effects. TENG works by exchanging electrons through different triboelectric materials to generate current flow. Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) and Aluminium were selected to be the triboelectric materials of an Acoustic TENG due to their good flexibility, lightweight, low cost, recyclability and great affinities of the materials to accept and donate electrons. A conventional speaker enclosed in an acrylic chamber was used to simulate the sinusoidal soundwave of the TAE. The TENG was tested with different sound frequencies to determine the optimum frequency for the electrical output of the system. The TENG can produce maximum and minimum open-circuit voltage of 2.36V and -2.76V at the sound frequency of 60Hz. At this frequency, the TENG can also generate 0.206 μ W using 7 M Ω load resistance. The triboelectric pair of PTFE-Al generated significantly lower electrical output when compared to other PTFE-Al based TENG in scientific literature. The unexpected low output of this study's TENG may occur due to poor contact and separation process between the active and the static layers of the TENG in this study. Further improvements need to be made to the design of the TENG to ensure proper separation of the triboelectric layers during the energy conversion process.

Keywords: Acoustic triboelectric nanogenerator, Triboelectric materials, PTFE, Aluminium, Frequency, Open-Circuit voltage, power

1. INTRODUCTION

Triboelectric Nanogenerator or (TENG) is an emerging technology that uses triboelectric materials to convert mechanical energy into electrical energy [1,2]. It functions by combining contact-electrification and triboelectric effects where triboelectric charges at two materials are exchanged or transferred after the materials have been separated from physical contact [3-6]. The TENGs are ideal at harvesting energy from the environment because they are most effective at converting irregular, low-amplitude and low frequency mechanical energy into electricity [7]. Recent studies show that the TENG can be applied in wearable applications [8-10], biological sensors [11-13], self-powered sensor systems [14-16] and blue energy/waves harvesting [17-19].

Ambient sound can also be the source of mechanical energy which can be harvested by TENGs [20]. These TENGs are called Acoustic Triboelectric Nanogenerators (A-TENG). Choosing triboelectric materials for an A-TENG is crucial for

efficiently converting acoustic vibration into electricity [21]. Different triboelectric materials had been used to enhance the surface charges and electrical output from an A-TENG [22]. Materials such as graphene which exhibit good electrical property, flexible, have high surface-to-volume ratio as well as great malleability due to its low atomic thickness, are a leading candidate for the active materials in A-TENGs and in conventional TENG [23,24].

Recent advancement in nanostructures and nanocomposites can also enhance the electrical output of the TENGs [25-29]. These advancements have helped to create TENGs that are lightweight and more efficient as well as increasing their durability and compatibility to complex environment [30]. For example, an A-TENG called Integrated Acoustic Metamaterial Triboelectric Nanogenerator (IAM-TENG) that integrates multi-walled carbon nanotube (MWCNTs) and Fluorinated Ethylene Propylene (FEP) membrane as its triboelectric layers, was able to generate 0.93 mW of power when operated at its optimal frequency and at acoustic excitation of 100 dB [31].

Polymers is also a popular choice to be the triboelectric materials for a triboelectric nanogenerator due to its lightweight, malleability, durability and anti-microbial features [32]. Advancement in manufacturing of Porous Polymer Materials (PPMs) made from hydrogels, aerogels, foams and fibrous media with different geometries and topologies has also been utilized to improve the performance of TENGs [33]. Furthermore, Biodegradable TENG (BD-TENG) using biodegradable polymers becomes an emerging energy harvesting device with the benefits of reducing pollution to the environment [34]. For acoustic TENGs specifically, polymers such as porous Polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF), Polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and Polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) are often used due to their compatibility and sensitivity to soundwaves [20].

Thus, there is no shortage of materials to be chosen as the triboelectric materials in a TENG. These triboelectric materials have undergone some kind of mechanical and chemical doping process which can greatly improve the performance of the TENG [35]. However, the doping processes come with its own set of challenges and can introduce complications in the manufacturing process as well as relatively costly to implement in a bigger scale [36].

Hence, the study aims to implement two simple triboelectric materials that are widely available to be implemented in an acoustic TENG. The results of this study may become a measuring stick or a reference point for future research on triboelectric materials in a TENG.

2. WORKING PRINCIPLE OF TRIBOELECTRIC NANOGENERATOR

One of the simplest types of TENG is a contact-separation mode consisting of two electrodes (metal conductor) and two dielectrics (polymers) [1]. The contact-separation mode TENG is depicted in **Figure 1**.

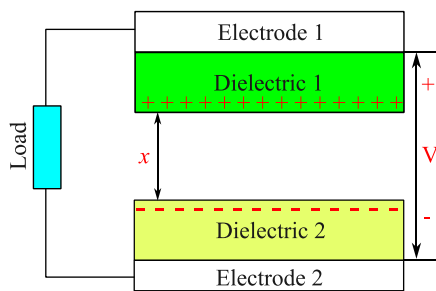


Figure 1. Contact-separation mode TENG consists of electrodes and dielectrics that is connected to a load

The electrodes and dielectrics form a pair of triboelectric materials named tribo-pairs. The electrode is usually made from metal conductor while the dielectrics is often made of polymers. When an alternating mechanical force is applied to the two triboelectric layers, the distance between the layers, x can be changed. If the distance between the tribo-layers keep changing, a potential difference, V will be induced due to the electric field generated from the flow of triboelectric charges between both triboelectric layers [37]. This process of electrical generation can be mathematically modelled using key equations [30]. According to these key

equations, the potential difference, V can be expressed as below:

$$V = -\frac{Q}{C(x)} + V_{oc}(x) \quad (1)$$

Where Q is the charge transfer between the dielectric layers, C is the capacitance of the dielectric layers, x is the distance between the two dielectric layer and V_{oc} is open circuit voltage of the TENG. The open-circuit voltage generated by the TENG follows the following governing equation:

$$V_{oc} = \frac{\sigma x(t)}{\epsilon_0} \quad (2)$$

Where ϵ_0 is the free space permittivity constant, $x(t)$ is the separation distance between the two TENG layers, and σ is the surface charge density.

Capacitance, C from equation (1) can be defined as:

$$C = -\frac{S\epsilon_0}{d_0 + x(t)} \quad (3)$$

Where S is the surface contact area of the dielectric material, ϵ_0 is the free space permittivity which is $8.8541878188 \times 10^{-12} \text{ Fm}^{-1}$, $x(t)$ is the separation distance between the two TENG layers. The effective thickness, d_0 is described as the summation of all thickness of the dielectric, t_i divided by their relative dielectric constant, ϵ_{ri} :

$$d_0 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{t_i}{\epsilon_{ri}} \quad (4)$$

By combining Equation (1) with Equations (2) and (3), The total voltage from the two electrodes in **Figure 1** can be further described as:

$$V = -\frac{Q}{S\epsilon_0} (d_0 + x(t)) + \frac{\sigma x(t)}{\epsilon_0} \quad (5)$$

2.1. Working Principle of Acoustic Triboelectric Nanogenerator

In an A-TENG, triboelectric layers can be divided into the active and the static layer. The active layer acts as a diaphragm that flexes due to acoustic pressure wave (soundwave) from the surrounding while the static layer remain stationary. The flexing of the active layer changes the separation distance, x . The changes of x will cause the triboelectric charge in the TENG's layer to be exchanged between the active and static layers, generating currents and potential difference in the process. This process is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

From **Figure 2**, before contact, no charge is transferred from the one active layer to the other static layer. Thus, no electric potential is generated between the layers. When acoustic waves reach the active layer, the active layer flexes towards the passive layer. The changes in separation distance creates electric potential which causes triboelectric charge in the passive layer to flow into the active layer until the two layers are in contact. When both layers are in contact, the total negative and positive charge

in both layers is equal resulting in no charge flow between them. Due to the elasticity of the active layer and the acoustic wave, the active layer will then flex away from the passive layer, generating an electric field. This causes the triboelectric charges to flow from the active layer into the passive layer or in the opposite direction from before. The flow stops until the active layer is at the maximum separation. Then, the active layer flexes towards the static layer again, repeating the entire cycle of alternating charge flow [38].

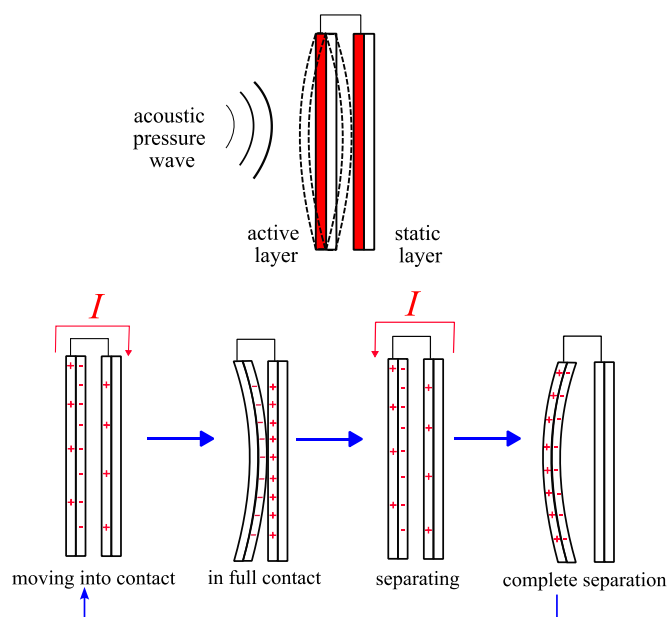


Figure 2. working principle of the acoustic TENG

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Selecting the Triboelectric Materials for the Acoustic TENG

Since TENGs generate electricity through contact-electrification and triboelectric effects, selecting materials for any TENGs must be based on the triboelectric series [39]. This is because triboelectrification is electron transfer between two materials in physical contact. The direction of the electron transfer depends on the difference in the electron affinities of the two materials. Higher electron affinities material will attract electron from the other. This material becomes the electron acceptor. The material that loses electrons is consequently become the electron donor. The affinities of the materials can generally be identified by their order in the triboelectric series. The first triboelectric series was published in 1757 by Johan Carl Wilcke [40]. However recently in 2019, a more reliable triboelectric series was built that quantifies the triboelectric charge density of different materials based on their triboelectrification with mercury when operating in contact-separation mode [41].

Furthermore, when selecting triboelectric materials for a TENG, the materials must have high charge density and high durability. High charge density materials allow for better output performance from the TENGs while high durability materials create more stable and long-lasting TENGs [7].

For an acoustic TENGs specifically, the materials especially the active layer in **Figure 2** must be flexible enough to harvest the energy from the acoustic wave [42]. One more consideration that is applied in this study is that the materials must be relatively low cost to be purchased and widely available within the commercial industry.

Based on these considerations, Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) was chosen to be the electron acceptor and the dielectric materials while Aluminium (Al) was picked as the electron donor for the acoustic TENG.

PTFE is one of the most popular choices as the electron acceptor because it is always one of the strongest electron acceptors due to the strong electron attractive force of fluorine element in PTFE [39,43]. Additionally, polymer materials have other traits such as great flexibility, machinability, low weight and scalability. [32-34,43]. Moreover, PTFE has large affinities for accepting electrons and possess high surface charge density according to the new triboelectric series from Zou [41]. The same triboelectric series also shows that PTFE has more charge densities than other popular polymer that is used in TENGs such as Polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS), Fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP) and Polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) [43]. Higher charge density allows for more surface charge to flow during the energy generation process of the TENGs. More importantly, PTFE strips can also be purchased off the shelf in commercial market and are low cost.

Aluminium (Al) is chosen because it can both act as an electron donor and as an electrode for the TENG. Aluminium foil or film are widely available, recyclable, low cost and had been implemented with polymers in many TENGs [44-46]. Furthermore, when aluminium is paired with PTFE, it can generate more potential difference according to the triboelectric series when compared to other conductive metal such as copper and steel [47-50].

3.2. Fabrication of the Acoustic TENG

The acoustic TENG made from PTFE-Al pairs was divided into two sides. One side serves as the active layers which acts as a diaphragm that's flexes and vibrate from the incoming acoustic wave while the other acts as the static layers. Each triboelectric material is 0.5 mm thick and were cut into a circle with 80 mm diameter as shown in **Figure 3**. The configuration of PTFE and Al films for the TENGs was depicted in **Figure 4**. **Figure 4** also shows that x is the separation distance for the triboelectric layers of the TENG.

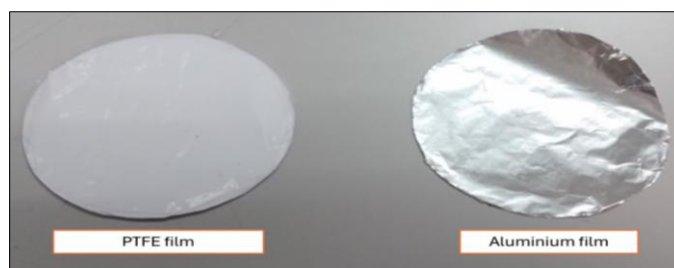


Figure 3. PTFE film and Aluminium film/foil were 0.5 mm thick and cut with diameter of 80 mm to be used in the TENG

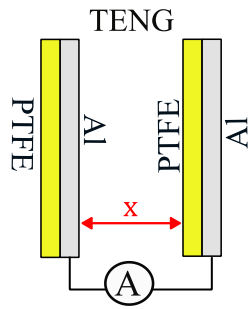


Figure 4. The PTFE and Al films was arranged in this configuration when used as the dielectric pairs for the TENG

3.3. Acoustic Test on the TENG

An experimental setup was made according to the schematic diagram shown in **Figure 5** to test the performance of the acoustic TENG in varying operating frequencies. A function generator (model type: MFG-8255A) provides a sinusoidal wave signal starting from the frequency of 10 Hz to 500 Hz for the loudspeaker. A conventional 6.5-inch loudspeaker (L.A. Power model LA-621 with peak power of 380W) acts as the acoustic driver, generating the acoustic wave to the TENG. The speaker is enclosed in a chamber made from transparent acrylics with the dimension of 169 mm × 169 mm × 169 mm. The acrylic chamber ensures that no sound coming from the speaker escapes to the surroundings and helps redirect the sound into the acoustic tube. Moreover, the speaker was connected to an acoustic tube which is made from a combination of PVC pipe fittings and a 3D printed PLA polymer. The 13.5 cm acoustic tube is tapered from a 16.51 cm (6.5-inch) diameter to a 3.8 cm diameter in the middle which then widened to a 6 cm diameter at the other end. The TENG was then mounted to the end of the acoustic tube. The TENG harvested the mechanical acoustic energy provided by the speaker and converted the mechanical energy into electrical energy. An ATEN ADS1062 Digital Oscilloscope was connected to two electrodes (Al) of the TENG to measure the open circuit voltage generated from the TENG. **Figure 6** shows the enclosed loudspeaker and the acoustic tube connected to the TENG.

Figure 7 shows setup of the acoustic experiment. From **Figure 7**, The function generator provided sinusoidal electric signal to the loudspeaker. The loudspeaker then converted this electric signal into the corresponding sinusoidal acoustic wave. The TENG was subjected to sinusoidal acoustic waves ranging from 10 Hz to 100 Hz with 10 Hz intervals from the loudspeaker. The open circuit voltage generated by TENG due to the mechanical vibration of the soundwave was then measured by the digital oscilloscope at 0.08 ms interval for 1 s. This frequency range was purposely selected to determine the practicality of the acoustic TENG when operating at a low operating frequency as predicted in [30]. Results for the effect of the frequency of the soundwave on the output open-circuit voltage were collected and processed for analysis. The experiment was then repeated with different ranges of frequency beginning from 100 Hz to 500 Hz with 100 Hz intervals to determine the best operating frequency for the TENG. The TENG was then connected to an external load resistor to generate power. The power generated by the load was measured

using the value of input sound frequency that can generate the highest open-circuit voltage

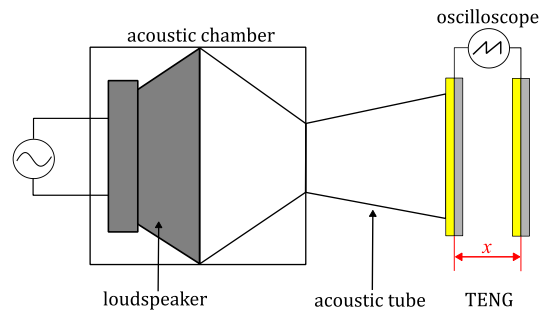


Figure 5. Schematic diagram of the experimental setup

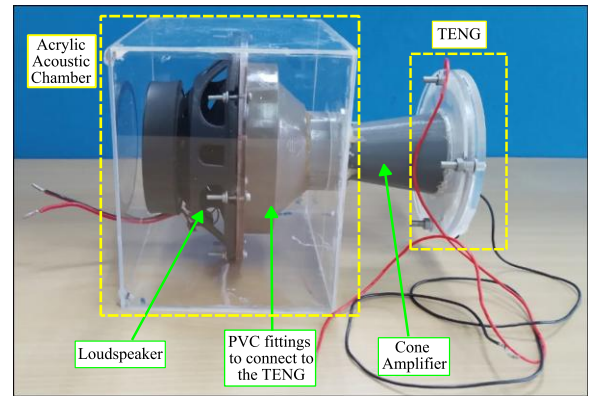


Figure 6. Photograph of the enclosed speaker connected to the TENG

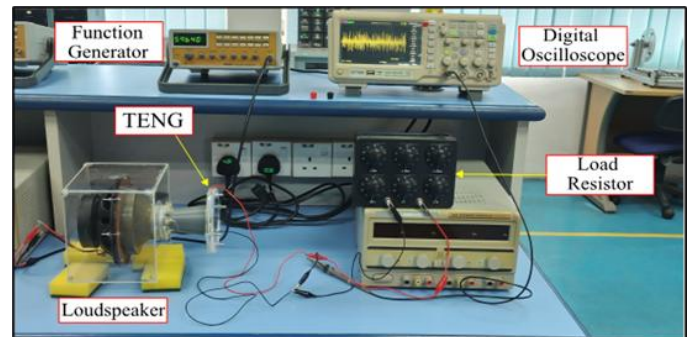


Figure 7. Photograph of the Experiment Setup

4. RESULTS OF THE ACOUSTIC TEST

4.1. Open-Circuit Voltage Analysis

The result from the acoustic test shows that the triboelectric pairs of PTFE and Aluminium manage to generate an open circuit voltage during the experiment. This means that the triboelectric pair can become a viable triboelectric material for an acoustic TENG. The TENG's triboelectric layers were able to convert the sinusoidal acoustic wave from the speaker into an electrical output. The effect of the frequency of the soundwave on the electric generation is studied by plotting the maximum and minimum open circuit voltage, V_{OC} produced by the TENG is shown in **Figure 8**. From **Figure 8**, the V_{OC} generated from the TENG fluctuates when the frequency is lower than 100 Hz. Then, the V_{OC} remains relatively constant beyond the frequency of 100 Hz. The current result shows that the PTFE and Aluminium layer is

not able to generate more V_{OC} at frequency higher than 100 Hz which suggests that the acoustic TENG in this study is more suitable for operating in sound frequency lower than 100 Hz. At sound frequency of 60 Hz, the maximum and

minimum V_{OC} of 2.36 V and -2.76V respectively were generated by the acoustic TENG.

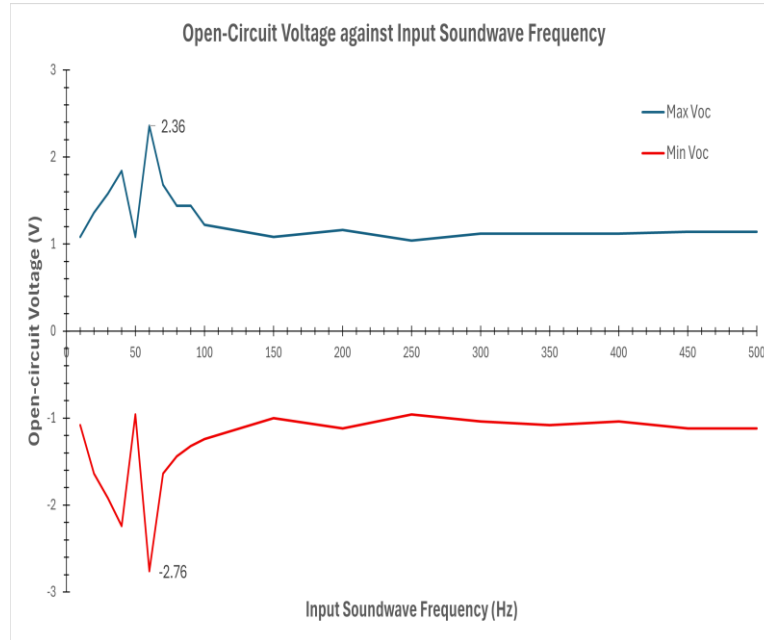


Figure 8. The maximum and minimum open circuit voltage produced by the acoustic TENG.

Similar PTFE-Al based TENG from other studies managed to generate significantly higher open-circuit voltage than the TENG in this study [44,51]. These PTFE-Al TENGs were aided with other factors to improve their performance. One of these aiding factors was Graphene. Graphene had been shown to enhance the power densities of the triboelectric materials, thus, increasing the power output and the efficiency of the TENG [23,28,51,52]. However, Graphene also significantly increases the production and manufacturing cost of the TENG. The TENG used in this study is more cost-effective because all materials used are simple materials that can be easily procured from its relevant commercial space.

A new design for the PTFE-Al using the “air-breakdown module” where aluminium electrode was made with crumpled aluminium foils was able to generate better charge transfer [51]. However, this design is ill-suited for acoustic energy harvesting and require constant high force input to generate good energy outcome from the TENGs.

There was a study that produced similar output when compared to this works’ PTFE-Al TENG [53]. The study used a free-standing mode TENG and was fabricated to be used in high-temperature environment. Although, the TENGs managed to generate significant open-circuit voltage at

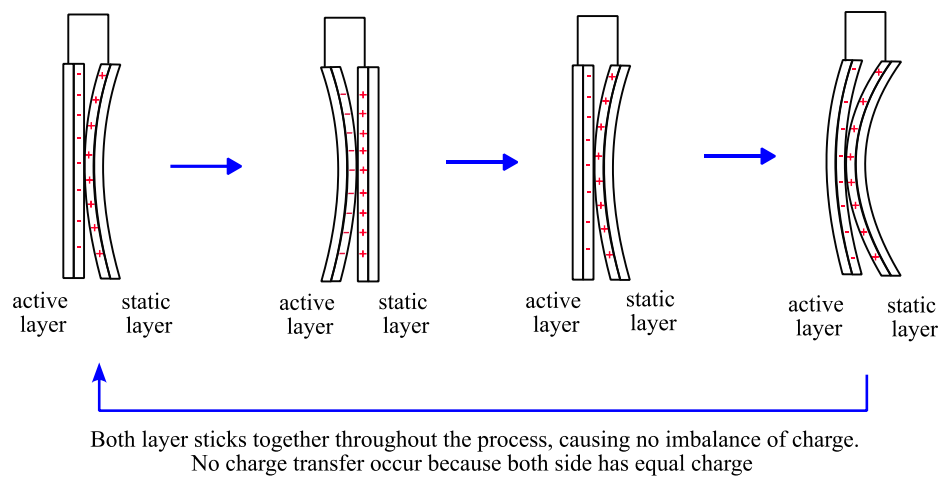
high-temperature, the TENG needs constant cooling from its’ water-based cooling system. The constant cooling condition limits the energy production of the TENG.

Table 1 summarizes the significant differences of this study of TENG with other similar PTFE-Al based TENG in the scientific literatures.

The unexpected low output from this study’s PTFE-Al TENG may also occur because of the poor contact and separation between the active and the static layers of the TENG in the experiment which could severely reduce the generation of V_{OC} . **Figure 9** shows the actual contact and separation process of the triboelectric layers during the acoustic frequency test. During the test, it was observed that the triboelectric layers of the TENG stuck and oscillated together instead of separating after the initial contact of the active layer with the static layer. Since the triboelectric layer could not separate properly as illustrated in **Figure 2**, no charge imbalance exists. If there is no charge imbalance, no charge flow will occur during the process. Hence, no current is generated, and no potential difference is produced.

Table 1 . Significant differences between the PTFE-Al TENG from this study and from other relevant studies

Research	Dielectric materials in TENGs	Open-Circuit Voltage generated, V_{OC} (V)	Novelty/Significant of Research
(F. Ali et al. 2022)[44]	Plastic Waste Bottle (PTFE), Aluminium Foil, Graphene	1400 V	The presence of Graphene greatly enhanced V_{OC} .
(Son et al. 2023) [51]	PTFE, Aluminium (electrodes), and crumpled aluminium foil (charge transfer medium)	648 V	Crumpled aluminium foil combined with air-breakdown model were used for charge transfer between the aluminium electrode and PTFE layers
(Shoumik et al. 2024)[53]	PTFE and Aluminium	0.832	Free standing mode TENG was designed using PTFE and Al foils to be used in high-temperature environment
This work	PTFE and aluminium	2.36	Simple TENG that was designed to harvest acoustic energy using readily available and recyclable materials

**Figure 9.** The observed movement of the triboelectric layers during the acoustic test

The study hypothesised that improper separation of the triboelectric layers is perhaps caused due to high friction between the static PTFE layer and the active Aluminium layer. It has been reported that when selecting triboelectric materials for a TENG, the materials must have friction coefficient, μ that is lower than the threshold value of μ_{th} , which is estimated to be around 0.4 to reduce wear and heat during friction process [54]. The friction coefficient, μ of aluminium to PTFE maybe higher than the μ_{th} which may cause strong adhesion between the materials. Observation from other study also shows that when a PTFE pin was slid onto an aluminium disc, the materials have strong adhesion possibly because of the formation of carbon-metal bonds [55]. Thus, due to the strong adhesion between PTFE and aluminium, the materials may have not separated properly after contact.

Further test needs to be conducted to verify that adhesion is the main contributor to the poor performance of the TENG. A high-speed camera could be used to observe the oscillation of the active layer the acoustic energy harvesting process to have a more comprehensive understanding of the adhesion of the PTFE and Aluminium

layer. Moreover, the design of the TENG can be modified by adding an intermediate layer that can reduce the friction and mitigate the adhesion between the dielectric PTFE layers and the Aluminium electrodes.

4.2. Resistive Loading Analysis

Figure 10 shows that the voltage across the resistor increases rapidly at around 1 M Ω until it reaches a peak of 1.84 V at 70 M Ω . The root-mean-square (RMS) voltage then decreases slightly to 1.6 V at 100 M Ω and continue to increase to 1.92 V at 1 G Ω . The smallest value of the current is 1.92 nA at the highest load resistance of 1 G Ω while the highest current is 0.43 μ A at the lowest load resistance of 10 k Ω .

In general, the output voltage of a TENG increases as load resistance increases while the current output shows the opposite trend [56]. As reported in a published work in [57], a load in TENG exhibited three characteristics during resistive loading. In the first region, while the resistance is relatively small, the load is in Constant Current - Output Characteristic Region (CC-OCR). During CC-OCR, the

current that passes through the load will be large and relatively constant while the voltage increases linearly. As the resistance of the load increases, the load will enter the Maximum Power – Output Characteristic Region (MP-OCR) where the load voltage rapidly increases while the current quickly decreases. In this region, the maximum power generated by the load can be identified. By further increasing the load resistance, the load enters the Constant Voltage – Output Characteristic Region (CV-OCR) where the voltage approaches the value of the open-circuit voltage and stays almost constant, while the currents continue to decrease slowly.

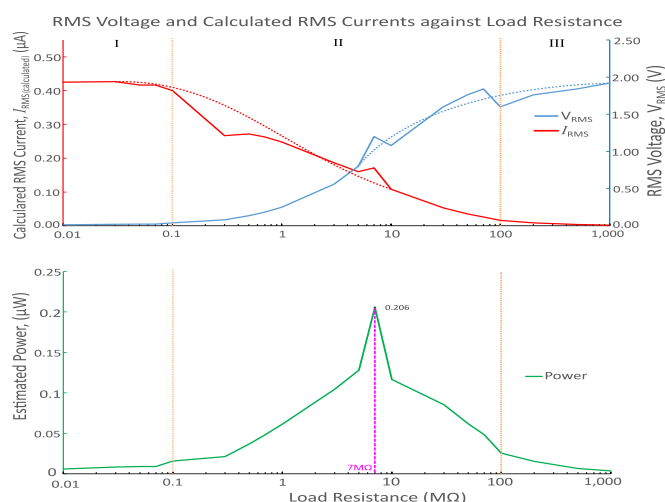


Figure 10. The voltage, current and instantaneous power generated from the load resistor

The results from **Figure 10** also showed that the TENG generated the highest instantaneous power of 0.206 μW at 7 MΩ load resistance. This means that the TENG's operating load resistance is at 7 MΩ because it can produce the highest power at this load. At this small power output, the TENG could power small electronic and portable devices such as LEDs as shown in other similar studies [44,53]. However, PTFE and Aluminium pairing provide a good starting base for the selection of the triboelectric pairs for an acoustic TENG.

Further improvement to the design of the TENG such as introducing an intermediate layer that reduces friction of the PTFE-Al layers could be implemented to increase the power generated by the PTFE-Al based TENG. Moreover, by introducing another triboelectric material to the PTFE-Al pair could potentially increase the performance of the TENG as well [28,44].

5. CONCLUSION

This study proposes PTFE and Aluminium as the triboelectric materials for an Acoustic TENG that can harvest and transform the mechanical energy from acoustic waves into useful electricity. PTFE was selected because it has great flexibility, machinability, scalability, low weight as well as large affinities for accepting electrons and possess high surface charge densities [32-34,41,43].

Aluminium was chosen because it can be both as an electron donor and as an electrode for the TENG. Aluminium foil or film are widely available, recyclable, and low cost [44-46]. When paired with PTFE, aluminium can generate more potential difference compared to other widely used metal such as copper and steel [47-50]. The study shows that the TENG can generate more open circuit voltage within the low frequency region of 10-100 Hz with the maximum and the minimum open-circuit voltages of 2.36 V and -2.76 V occurring at 60 Hz. The Acoustic TENG generated 0.206 μW at 7 MΩ load resistance. The open circuit voltage generated by the TENG is much lower than anticipated when compared to other similar studies [44,51]. The lower output of the TENG may occur possibly due to improper contact and separation of the TENG layers that perhaps severely decreased the open-circuit voltage generated by the TENG. Hence, to reduce the adhesion effect of the two layers in the TENG, the design of the acoustic TENG can be modified by implementing an intermediate layer between the active and passive layer or by testing other alternative electrodes. Furthermore, introducing more triboelectric materials such as Graphene, PDMS and PVDF to create a hybrid pairing to the PTFE-Al pairs could increase the electrical productivity of the TENG.

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