

A Comprehensive Study of Heat Exchangers with Experimental Investigation of a Shell and Tube Heat Exchanger

Kajal J. Sareriya

Lecturer

Chemical Engg. Department

Government Polytechnic Rajkot, Gujarat, India

Abstract

Heat exchangers are critical components in thermal engineering systems used to transfer heat between fluids without mixing them. They are widely applied in power plants, chemical processing industries, refrigeration systems, and automotive applications. The efficiency of these systems depends largely on the design and performance of heat exchangers. This research paper presents a comprehensive review of heat exchangers including classification, working principles, design methods, and industrial applications. Additionally, an experimental study of a shell and tube heat exchanger is conducted to evaluate heat transfer performance under varying flow conditions. The experimental results are analyzed using the Log Mean Temperature Difference (LMTD) method and the effectiveness-NTU approach. The results demonstrate that heat transfer rate increases with an increase in flow rate and temperature difference. The study highlights the importance of proper design and operation of heat exchangers for improved energy efficiency.

Keywords: Heat exchanger, shell and tube heat exchanger, heat transfer, LMTD method, thermal efficiency, experimental analysis.

1. Introduction

Heat exchangers are devices used to transfer heat between two or more fluids at different temperatures while keeping them physically separated. These devices are fundamental components in many engineering systems such as boilers, condensers, radiators, and evaporators [1]. In modern industrial systems, heat exchangers play a key role in energy conservation and process efficiency. For example, in thermal power plants they are used for feedwater heating and steam condensation, while in chemical industries they are employed for heating, cooling, and evaporation processes [2]. The design and performance of heat exchangers depend on several parameters including fluid properties, flow arrangement, heat transfer surface area, and overall heat transfer coefficient.

Analytical methods such as the Log Mean Temperature Difference (LMTD) and effectiveness-NTU methods are commonly used to analyze their performance [3]. Shell and tube heat exchangers remain the most widely used type in industry due to their robustness and ability to operate under high pressure and temperature conditions [4].

2. Principle of Heat Exchanger Operation

Heat exchangers operate based on the principle of heat transfer from a higher temperature fluid to a lower temperature fluid through a separating wall.

The heat transfer rate is expressed as:

$$Q = UA\Delta T$$

Where:

- Q = heat transfer rate (W)
- U = overall heat transfer coefficient (W/m²K)
- A = heat transfer surface area (m²)
- ΔT = temperature difference between fluids

Heat transfer occurs through:

1. Convection between the fluid and the wall surface
2. Conduction through the tube wall
3. Convection from the wall to the other fluid [5].

3. Classification of Heat Exchangers

3.1 Based on Construction

3.1.1 Shell and Tube Heat Exchanger

This type consists of a bundle of tubes enclosed in a cylindrical shell. One fluid flows inside the tubes while the other flows through the shell side around the tubes [6].

Advantages:

- High pressure resistance
- Suitable for large heat transfer duties
- Easy to clean and maintain

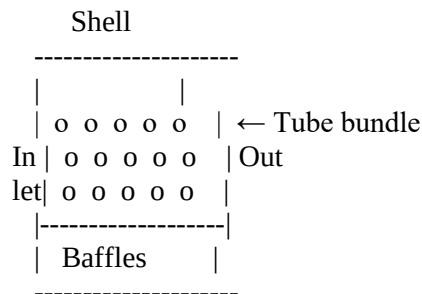
Main parts include:

1. **Shell** : Large cylindrical outer vessel, Contains the tube bundle.

2. **Tube Bundle:** Many small diameter tubes placed inside the shell, Provide a large heat transfer surface area.
3. **Tube Sheets:** Plates that hold the tubes at both ends.
4. **Baffles:** Plates placed inside the shell, Direct the shell-side fluid across the tubes, Increase turbulence and heat transfer.
5. **Inlet and Outlet Nozzles:** Allow hot and cold fluids to enter and leave.

Working Principle

- One fluid enters the tube side and flows through the tubes.
- The other fluid enters the shell side and flows over the outside of the tubes.
- Heat transfers through the tube wall from hot fluid to cold fluid.
- Fluids leave through their respective outlets.



Fluid 1 → inside tubes

Fluid 2 → around tubes in shell

Advantages: Handles high pressure and temperature, Suitable for large heat transfer areas, Strong and reliable.

Applications: Power plant condensers, Petroleum refineries, Chemical industries, Boilers and cooling systems

3.1.2 Plate Heat Exchanger

A Plate Heat Exchanger consists of multiple thin metal plates placed close together to form channels for fluids. Heat transfer occurs through the plates separating the fluids [2].

Plates: Thin corrugated metal plates, usually stainless steel.

Gaskets: Rubber seals between plates, Prevent mixing of fluids.

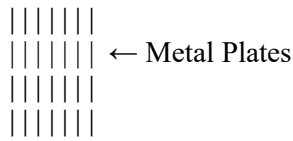
Frame and Pressure Plate: Hold the plate stack together.

Flow Channels: Created between adjacent plates, Hot and cold fluids flow alternately.

Working Principle

- Hot fluid flows through alternate channels.
- Cold fluid flows through other channels.
- Heat transfers through the thin metal plates.
- Corrugations increase turbulence and improve heat transfer.

Hot Fluid →



Cold Fluid ←

Alternate channels carry hot and cold fluids.
Heat transfers through the plates.

Advantages: High heat transfer efficiency, Compact and lightweight, Easy to clean and maintain, Plates can be added to increase capacity

Applications: Dairy and food processing, HVAC systems, Refrigeration plants, Pharmaceutical industries

3.1.3 Double Pipe Heat Exchanger

A **Double Pipe Heat Exchanger** consists of two concentric pipes (one inside another). One fluid flows in the inner pipe and the other flows in the annular space between the two pipes.

Inner Pipe: Carries one fluid (hot or cold).

Outer Pipe: Larger pipe surrounding the inner pipe.

Annular Space: Space between the two pipes where the second fluid flows.

Inlet and Outlet Connections

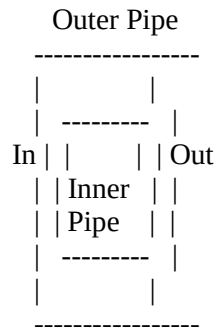
Advantages: Simple design, Suitable for small heat transfer requirements.

Working Principle

- One fluid flows inside the inner pipe.
- The other fluid flows through the annular space.
- Heat transfers through the wall of the inner pipe.

Two types of flow arrangements:

1. **Parallel Flow:** Both fluids move in the same direction.
2. **Counter Flow:** Fluids move in opposite directions (more efficient).

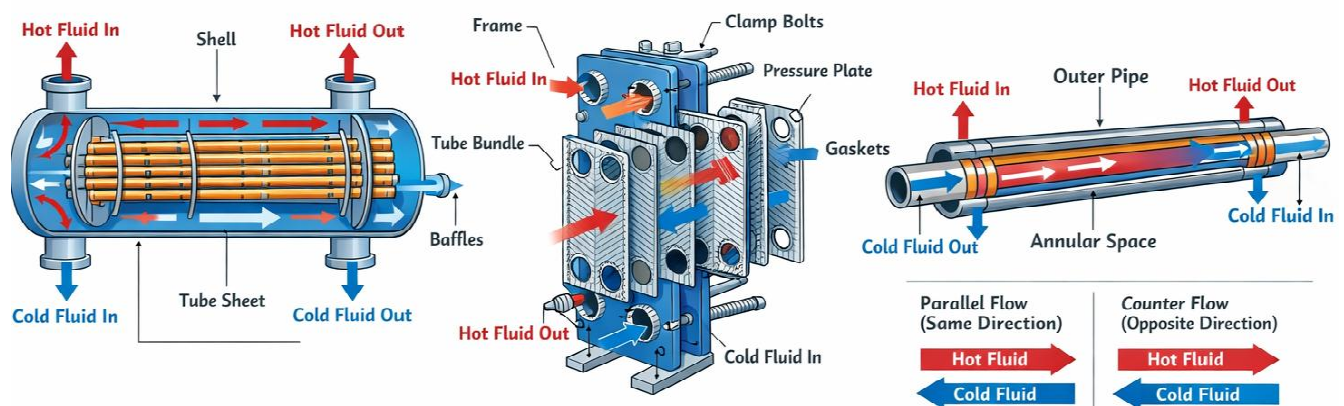


Fluid 1 → Inner pipe

Fluid 2 → Annular space

Advantages: Simple construction, Easy to design and maintain, Suitable for small heat transfer loads

Applications: Oil coolers, Chemical processing units, Small heating and cooling systems, Laboratory equipment, Power plants, Oil refineries, Chemical processing plants



Shell and tube heat exchanger

plate heat exchanger

Double pipe heat exchanger

Fig.1. Types of heat exchanger

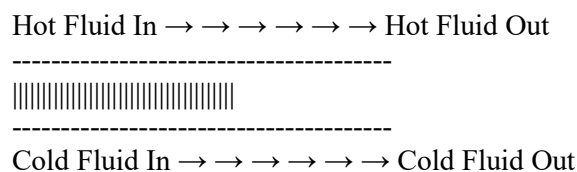
Table 1. Comparison of the Three Heat Exchangers

Feature	Shell & Tube	Plate	Double Pipe
Construction	Tubes inside shell	Stack of plates	Pipe inside pipe
Size	Large	Compact	Small
Heat transfer efficiency	Medium	Very high	Low-medium
Maintenance	Moderate	Easy	Very easy
Applications	Power plants, refineries	Food, HVAC	Small industries

4. Flow Arrangements in Heat Exchangers

4.1 Parallel Flow

In a Parallel Flow Heat Exchanger, both the hot fluid and cold fluid enter the heat exchanger at the same end and flow in the same direction.



Both fluids move side by side in the same direction.

1. The hot fluid enters at high temperature.
2. The cold fluid enters at low temperature from the same side.
3. Heat transfer begins immediately between the fluids.
4. As both fluids flow together:
 - Hot fluid temperature decreases.
 - Cold fluid temperature increases.
5. At the outlet, the temperatures of both fluids become closer to each other.

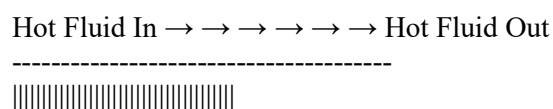
Advantages: Simple design, Easy to construct

Disadvantages: Low heat transfer efficiency, Cold fluid cannot reach the temperature of the hot fluid outlet, Large surface area required

Applications: Oil heaters, Small heat exchangers, Cooling systems

4.2 Counter Flow

Fluids enter from opposite ends and flow in opposite directions. This arrangement provides better heat transfer performance because it maintains a larger temperature difference along the heat exchanger length [1].



Cold Fluid Out ← ← ← ← ← Cold Fluid In

The fluids move in opposite directions.

1. Hot fluid enters from one end.
 2. Cold fluid enters from the opposite end.
 3. Heat transfer occurs continuously along the exchanger.
 4. The temperature difference remains nearly constant along the length.
- The cold fluid outlet temperature can become higher than the hot fluid outlet temperature.

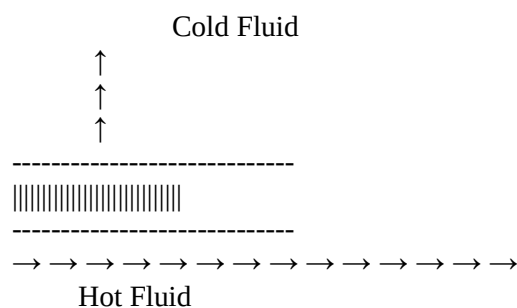
Advantages: Highest heat transfer efficiency, Requires smaller heat transfer area, Better temperature control

Disadvantages: Slightly more complex design

Applications: Shell and tube heat exchangers, Chemical plants, Power plants, Petroleum refineries

4.3 Cross Flow

The fluids flow perpendicular to each other. This arrangement is commonly used in air-cooling systems and radiators.



Hot fluid flows horizontally, cold fluid flows vertically.

1. One fluid flows through tubes.
2. The other fluid flows across the tubes.
3. Heat transfer occurs where the flows intersect.

Two types exist: Mixed flow, Unmixed flow

Advantages: Suitable for gas-liquid heat transfer, Compact design

Disadvantages: Efficiency lower than counter flow

Applications: Air coolers, Radiators, Air conditioning systems, Gas turbines

Table 2. Comparison of Flow Arrangements

Feature	Parallel Flow	Counter Flow	Cross Flow
Flow Direction	Same direction	Opposite direction	Perpendicular
Efficiency	Low	Highest	Medium
Temperature difference	Decreases quickly	Nearly constant	Moderate
Common Use	Small exchangers	Industrial heat exchangers	Air cooling systems

5. Design Methods for Heat Exchangers

5.1 Log Mean Temperature Difference (LMTD) Method

$$LMTD = \Delta T_1 - \Delta T_2 / \ln(\Delta T_1 / \Delta T_2)$$

Where; ΔT_1 = temperature difference at one end, ΔT_2 = temperature difference at the other end

This method is commonly used when inlet and outlet temperatures of both fluids are known [3].

5.2 Effectiveness-NTU Method

Heat exchanger effectiveness is defined as:

$$\varepsilon = Q_{\text{actual}} / Q_{\text{max}}$$

where; ε = heat exchanger effectiveness, Q = actual heat transfer, Q_{max} = maximum possible heat transfer.

This method is used when outlet temperatures are unknown.

6. Experimental Study of Shell and Tube Heat Exchanger

6.1 Objective

To determine the heat transfer rate and effectiveness of a shell and tube heat exchanger by varying flow rates and inlet temperatures.

6.2 Experimental Setup

The experimental setup consists of a laboratory-scale shell and tube heat exchanger. The main components include:

- Shell with copper tubes
- Water pump for fluid circulation
- Electric heater for heating water
- Rota meter to measure flow rate
- Thermocouples to measure inlet and outlet temperatures
- Insulated piping system

A typical laboratory heat exchanger contains multiple tubes arranged in a triangular pattern with baffles to improve heat transfer by increasing turbulence [8].

Typical specifications:

Parameter	Value
Tube material	Copper
Number of tubes	19
Tube length	300 mm
Shell diameter	90 mm
Baffles	6 segmental baffles

Hot water flows through the tubes while cold water flows through the shell side [8].

6.3 Experimental Procedure

1. The heater is turned on to heat water to the required temperature.
2. Hot water is circulated through the tube side.
3. Cold water is circulated through the shell side.
4. Flow rates are adjusted using control valves.
5. Temperatures at inlet and outlet are measured using thermocouples.
6. Data are recorded for different flow rates.

7. Experimental Data

Parameter	Value
Hot water inlet temperature	70°C
Hot water outlet temperature	52°C
Cold water inlet temperature	30°C
Cold water outlet temperature	42°C

Parameter	Value
Mass flow rate (hot water)	0.1 kg/s
Mass flow rate (cold water)	0.12 kg/s

Observation Table

During the experiment, inlet and outlet temperatures of hot and cold water were measured at different flow rates. The following observations were recorded.

Table 3: Experimental Observation Data

Trial No.	Hot Water Inlet Temp ($T_{h,in}$) (°C)	Hot Water Outlet Temp ($T_{h,out}$) (°C)	Cold Water Inlet Temp ($T_{c,in}$) (°C)	Cold Water Outlet Temp ($T_{c,out}$) (°C)	Hot Water Flow Rate (kg/s)	Cold Water Flow Rate (kg/s)
1	70	52	30	42	0.10	0.12
2	70	50	30	44	0.12	0.14
3	72	48	30	46	0.14	0.16
4	74	47	30	47	0.16	0.18
5	75	45	30	49	0.18	0.20

Heat transfer rate was calculated using:

$$Q = mc_p(T_{in} - T_{out})$$

Where; c_p for water = 4180 J/kg·K

Table 4: Calculated Heat Transfer Rate

Trial	Heat Transfer Rate (W)
1	7524
2	10032
3	14044
4	18057
5	22572

8. Calculation

Heat Transfer Rate

$$Q = mc_p(T_{in} - T_{out})$$

For hot water: $Q = 0.1 \times 4180 \times (70 - 52)$, $Q = 7524W$

Heat transfer rate = 7.52 kW

LMTD Calculation

$$\Delta T_1 = 70 - 42 = 28^\circ C,$$

$$\Delta T_2 = 52 - 30 = 22^\circ C$$

$$\Delta T_{LMTD} = 28 - 22 / \ln(28/22), LMTD \approx 24.8^\circ C$$

Temperature vs Flow Rate

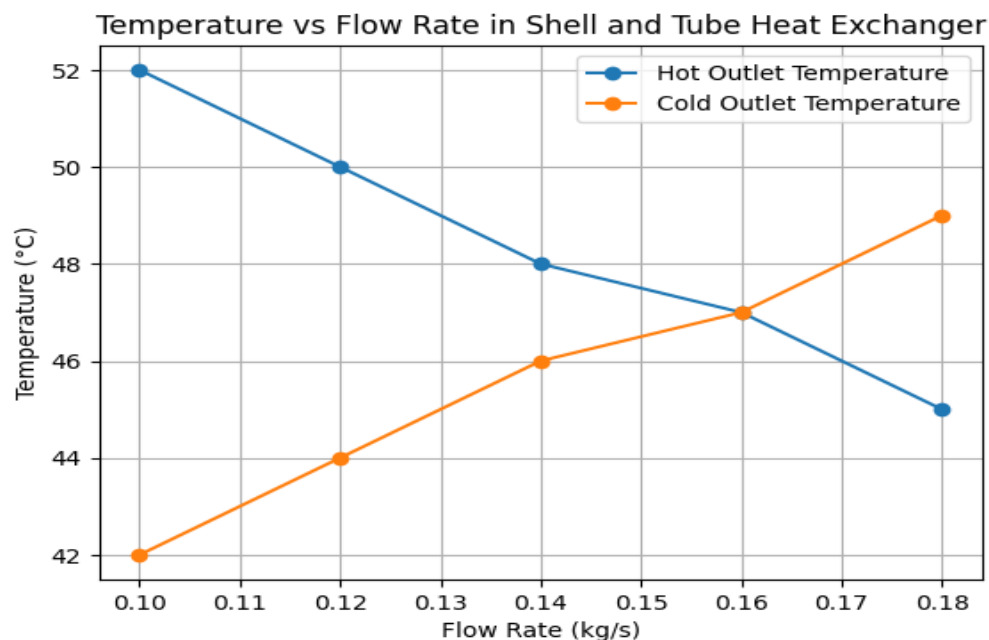


Fig. 2 Temperature vs Flow Rate

- Fig. 2 shows how hot outlet temperature decreases as flow rate increases.
- Shows how cold outlet temperature increases as flow rate increases.
- This indicates better heat transfer at higher flow rates.
- The graph of temperature versus flow rate shows that as the flow rate of the fluids increases, the outlet temperature of the hot fluid gradually decreases while the outlet temperature of the cold fluid increases. This indicates that a larger amount of heat is transferred between

the two fluids at higher flow rates. The increased flow rate enhances the turbulence inside the tubes and shell side, which improves the convective heat transfer coefficient and promotes better heat exchange between the fluids.

Heat Transfer Rate vs Flow Rate

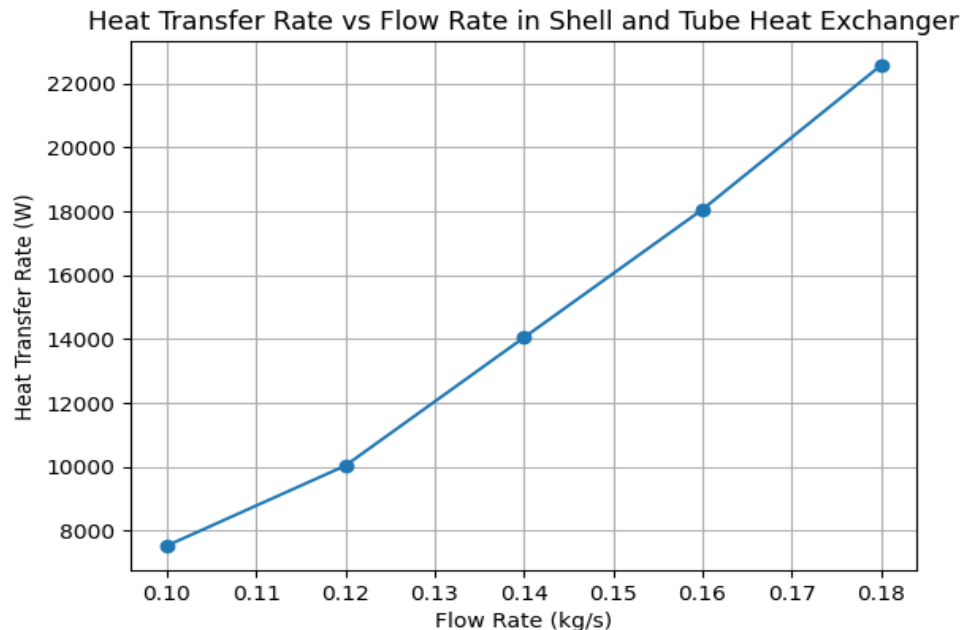


Fig. 3 Heat Transfer Rate vs Flow Rate

- Fig. 3 shows a steady increase in heat transfer rate with increasing flow rate.
- This happens because higher flow rates increase turbulence and convective heat transfer coefficient, improving thermal performance.
- The heat transfer rate versus flow rate graph shows a nearly linear increase in heat transfer with increasing flow rate. This behavior occurs because a higher mass flow rate allows more thermal energy to be carried by the fluid per unit time. Additionally, increased turbulence improves the heat transfer coefficient, which further increases the heat transfer rate. This result agrees with classical heat transfer theory and confirms that increasing fluid velocity enhances the performance of shell and tube heat exchangers.

9. Results and Discussion

The experimental results show that:

1. Heat transfer rate increases with increasing temperature difference.

2. Increasing the mass flow rate improves heat transfer due to higher convection heat transfer coefficients.
3. The presence of baffles increases turbulence on the shell side and improves heat transfer performance.
4. Counter-flow arrangement provides higher thermal efficiency compared to parallel flow.

Laboratory experiments demonstrate that shell and tube heat exchangers provide reliable performance and are suitable for industrial applications requiring large heat transfer rates [6]. Experimental studies also show that tube arrangement, flow rate, and baffle configuration significantly influence thermal performance [3].

10. Conclusion

Heat exchangers are essential devices in thermal engineering systems for transferring heat between fluids efficiently. This research paper presented a detailed study of heat exchangers including working principles, classification, and design methods. An experimental investigation of a shell and tube heat exchanger was also conducted. The results show that heat transfer rate depends strongly on temperature difference, flow rate, and heat exchanger design parameters. The study confirms that shell and tube heat exchangers remain one of the most reliable and widely used heat transfer devices in industrial applications. Future research should focus on improving heat transfer performance through advanced materials, enhanced surfaces, and nano fluids.

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