



## Optimizing Solar Dish Concentrator Efficiency with Nanofluids and Diverse Cavity Design

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### ABSTRACT

The quest for enhanced efficiency in solar energy systems has directed significant attention towards optimizing solar dish concentrators. This study investigates the performance enhancement of solar dish concentrators through the use of advanced nanofluid solutions and innovative cavity designs. The experimental setup includes various nanofluid concentrations and different cavity geometries to evaluate their impact on the overall efficiency of the system. Experimental and numerical results demonstrate a marked improvement in thermal performance, with nanofluid and cavity designs achieving up to 12% increase in efficiency compared to conventional systems. The results revealed that the hemispherical and the cubical cavities are the most effective designs, while the cylindrical cavity presents lower performance. The findings provide valuable insights into the potential of nanofluid-based solar dish concentrators and underline the importance of cavity design in optimizing solar energy harnessing. This study lays the groundwork for future research and development in high-efficiency solar energy systems, contributing to the advancement of suitable and renewable energy technologies.

## 1. Introduction

The increasing demand for renewable energy sources has intensified the focus on optimizing solar energy systems. Among various solar technologies, solar dish concentrators are highly efficient in converting solar energy into thermal energy. However, their performance can be significantly influenced by the type of working fluid and the design of the cavity receiver. In this context, the integration of nanofluids has emerged as a promising solution to enhance the thermal properties of

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the working fluid. Furthermore, innovative cavity designs can play a crucial minimizing heat loss and maximizing the absorption of solar radiation. Nanofluids offer superior thermal conductivity, higher heat transfer coefficients, and improved heat capacity compared to conventional fluids, making them ideal candidates for solar thermal applications. By dispersing nanoparticles, the heat transfer characteristics of the base fluid can be significantly improved. This enhancement leads to more efficient thermal energy absorption, storage, and transfer within the solar dish concentrator system. In parallel, the design of the cavity receiver, where the concentrated solar radiation is absorbed and converted into thermal energy, is critical for the overall efficiency of the system. Factors such as cavity shape, size, and material can influence the thermal performance and optical efficiency of the concentrator. Diverse cavity designs, including conical, cylindrical, and spherical shapes, offer varying degrees of thermal insulation and radiation trapping, impacting the efficiency of solar energy conversion. Some studies numerically have considered the nanofluid application in the solar collectors [1-3]. Edalatpour and Solano [4] numerically investigated a flat plate collector using Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/water nanofluid as the solar working fluid. The results indicated that the working fluid outlet temperature decrease with increasing Reynolds number at fix nanoparticle volume fraction. Mahian *et al.*, [5] numerically evaluated the first and second thermodynamic laws on the different water-based nanofluids (Cu/water, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/water, TiO<sub>2</sub>/water, and SiO<sub>2</sub>/water) in a minichannel-based solar collector. The results show the Cu/water nanofluid is the appropriate nanofluid for application in the investigated solar collector due to the highest outlet temperature and the lowest entropy generation. Kaloudis *et al.*, [6] numerically investigated the application of the nanofluid as the solar working fluid in a parabolic trough collector. Bellos *et al.*, [7] theoretically considered a parabolic trough collector using a nanofluid as the solar working fluid. They concluded that the thermal performance of the investigated collector can be improved by 4.25% using the nanofluid as the solar heat transfer fluid. Dugaria *et al.*, [8] numerically investigated a volumetric absorber in a concentrating direct absorption solar collector using the nanofluid application as the solar working fluid. Their simulated results show a good agreement with the experimental results. Application of nanofluid in the solar collector was experimentally investigated by many researches as [9-17]. The thermal performance of a vacuum tube solar collector using two nanofluids including water/TiO<sub>2</sub> and water/carbon nanotube, under sunny and cloudy weather conditions has been evaluated by [17]. They concluded that the water/carbon nanofluid shows higher performance compare to water/TiO<sub>2</sub>. Taylor *et al.*, [18] considered the influence of the nanofluid application in the concentrating solar thermal system. The results indicate the thermal efficiency of the based concentrating solar thermal system could be increased by 10% in the application of nanofluid as the working fluid. Mahian *et al.*, [5] studied the effect of the alumina/water-ethylene glycol nanofluid application as the solar working fluid in a flat plate minichannel-based solar collector. The influence of the different shape of nanoparticles on the energy and exergy analysis was evaluated. They concluded that the outlet temperature increased by application of the nanofluids independent of nanoparticle shape. Meibodi *et al.*, [19] experimentally considered a flat-plate solar collector using SiO<sub>2</sub>/ ethylene glycol–water nanofluids as the solar working fluid. The influence of the different parameters such as nanoparticle volume fractions, mass flow rate, and solar radiation was evaluated in their study. The results show the exergy efficiency is higher at higher nanoparticle volume fraction. Yousefi *et al.*, [14-16] experimentally evaluated the application of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/water nanofluid as the solar working fluid in a flat-plate solar collector. Mwesigye *et al.*, [20] numerically research the application of the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/synthetic oil nanofluid as a solar working fluid of a parabolic trough collector. The results reveal that the thermal efficiency of the investigated collector can be increased by up to 7.6% using nanofluids as the solar working fluid.

This paper explores the optimization of solar dish concentrator efficiency through both experimental and theoretical approaches, focusing on the combined impact of nanofluids and varied

cavity configurations. This paper aims to explore the synergetic effect of using advanced nanofluid and optimizing cavity designs on the performance of solar dish concentrators. By conducting both experimental analyses and numerical simulations, the study seeks to identify the optimal combination of nanofluids and cavity configurations that maximize thermal efficiency and minimize energy losses. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of high-performance solar thermal systems, promoting sustainable and efficient renewable energy solutions.

## **2. Methodology**

The experimental setup includes a solar dish concentrator, cavity receivers and a hydraulic close cycle. Figure 1 shows a view of the dish concentrator with an aperture diameter of 1.9 m, the focal distance equal to 1 m and the tracking error to be up to  $1^\circ$ . The volumetric flow rate was 10 ml/s in all the cases. The reflectance of the concentrator was about 84%. Three shapes of cavity receiver including cubical, cylindrical, and hemispherical were designed and built based on the optimum dimensions. As seen from Figure 1, all of the incoming solar radiation at the dish aperture area was concentrated at the focal point where the cavity receivers were located. The focused solar irradiation hit the cavity tubes and absorbed with the solar working fluid which flows through the cavity tubes. The solar working fluid enters from the bottom of the cavity and exits from the upper side of the cavity receivers as a recommended way for increasing solar radiation absorption. Generally, the working fluid is pumped from the inlet tank to the cavity receiver. The volume flow rate of the working fluid is measured between the pump and the inlet of the cavity receiver by a volume flow meter FLUIDWELL model: F016-P. The solar irradiation is absorbed by the receiver and it is given to the heat transfer fluid. The temperature of the working fluid is measured at the inlet and outlet of the cavity receiver by using K-type thermocouples (Chromel-Alumel). The heated working fluid was entered in a heat exchanger system for rejecting the absorbed heat. Finally, the cooled working fluid enters in the inlet tank for another cycle. It should be mentioned that the environmental parameters including wind speed, solar irradiation and ambient temperature were measured using anemometer CT model: AM-4220, Hukseflux Pyranometer, model SR12, and K-type thermocouple, during the experimental tests, respectively. Also, an Omron data logger model: ZR-RX-45 was used for monitoring and storing measured temperatures. In this work, the investigated nanofluid is the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/oil. The nanoparticles Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (gamma, 99%, 30-40 nm) were provided by the US Research Nanomaterial Company in the American. Figure 1 (left) illustrates the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles preparation process.

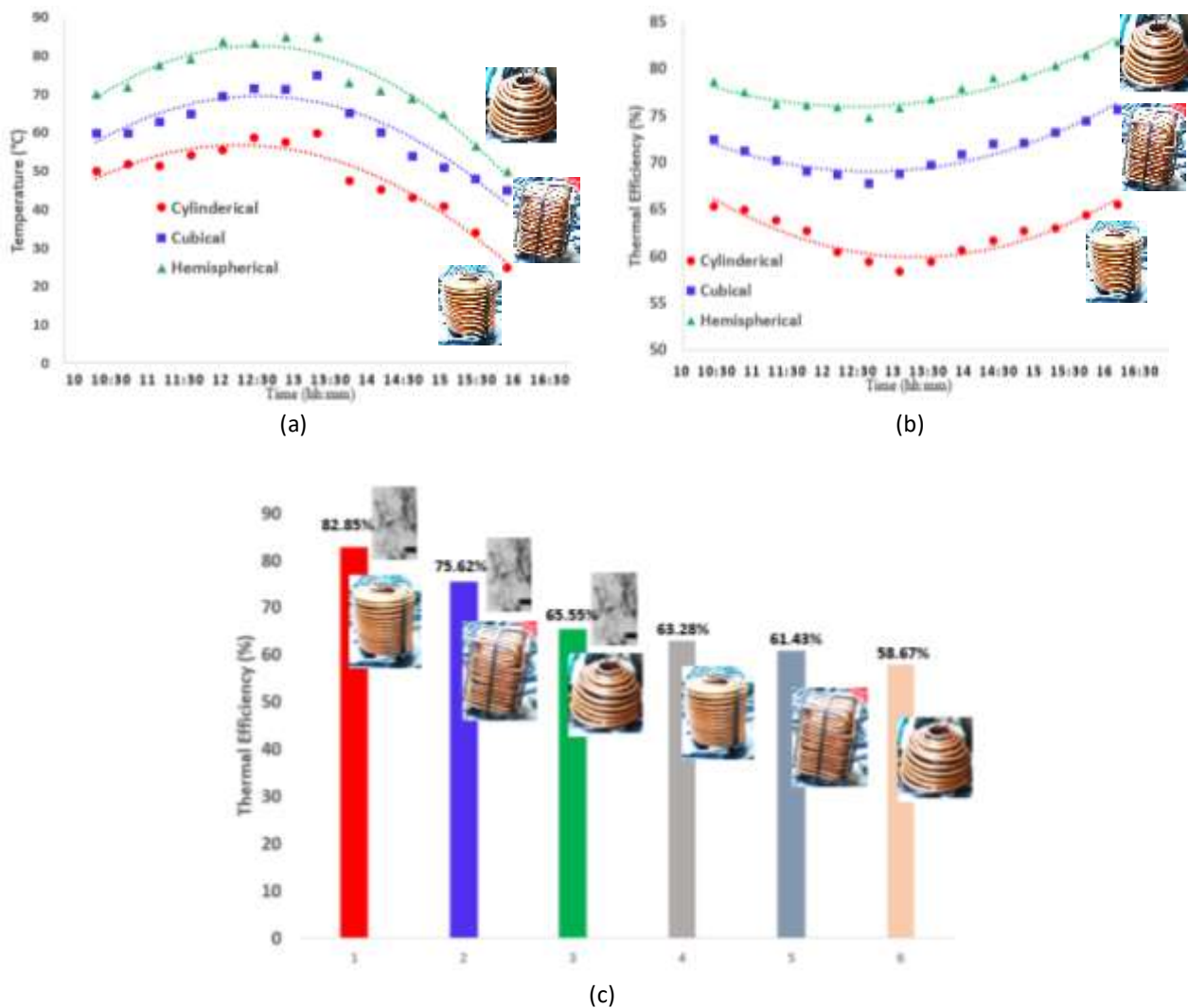


**Fig. 1.** (left) Process of the Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles preparation, (right) A view of the solar dish concentrator and the wounded cavity receivers with copper tube including a) cylindrical, b) cubical, and c) hemispherical cavity receiver

### 3. Results

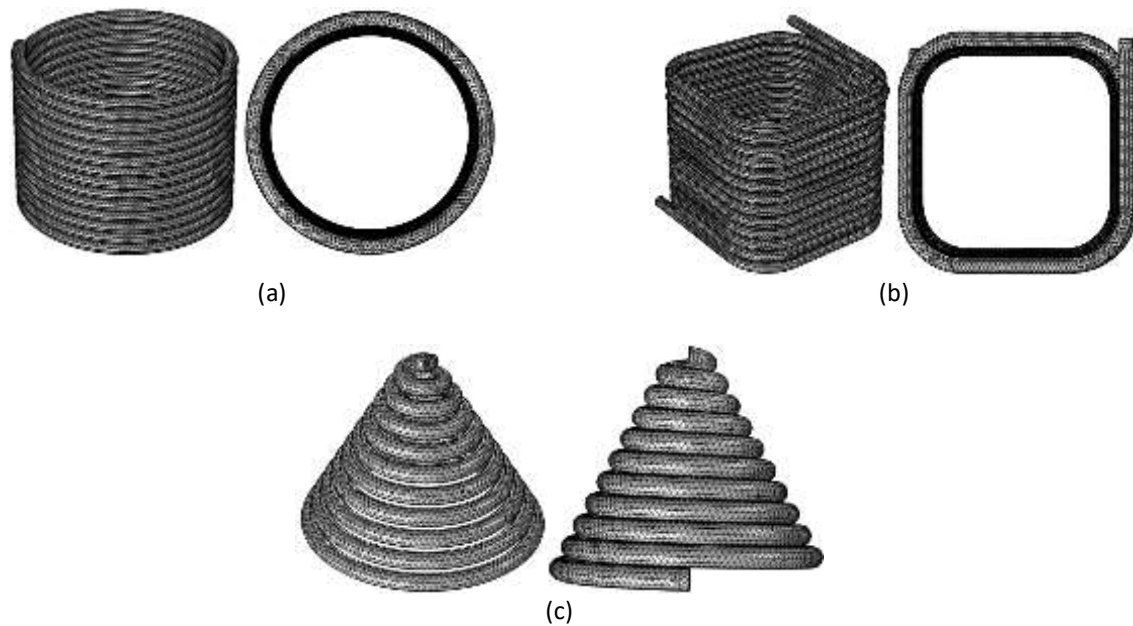
As it has been described at Figure 2(a), using nanofluid reduced the solar dish surface temperature. Experimental results approved that using nanofluids reduces the solar dish surface temperature due to their enhanced thermal conductivity and heat transfer properties, nanofluids have a higher thermal conductivity compared to conventional fluids, this allows them to absorb and transfer heat more efficiently, leading to improved cooling of the solar dish surface. The addition of nanoparticles increases the heat transfer coefficient of the fluid. This enhances the rate at which heat is removed from the solar dish surface, thus reducing its temperature [12-18]. Nanoparticles increase the effective surface area available for heat transfer. This helps in dissipating more heat from the solar dish surface into the fluid. The presence of nanoparticles in the fluid reduces the thermal resistance between the solar dish surface and the cooling fluid. This results in more effective heat removal and lower solar dish surface temperatures [19-24]. Nanofluids enhance convective heat transfer due to improved fluid dynamics and thermal properties, this leads to better heat dissipation from the solar dish surface to the fluid. Overall, it can be concluded that the use of nanofluids helps in maintaining a lower PV surface temperature, which can improve the efficiency and longevity of the solar dish system [25-28]. The output power of the solar dish system increased with the use of nanofluids due to higher thermal conductivity of nanofluids compared to conventional fluids. This allows them to absorb and dissipate heat more efficiently, resulting in better cooling of the solar dish (Figure 2b). Cooler solar dish operates more efficiently, producing more electrical power [29-31]. The addition of nanoparticles to the fluid increases the overall heat transfer coefficient, this enhances the convective heat transfer from the solar dish to the cooling fluid, keeping the cells at a lower, more stable temperature and improving their performance. The output power of the solar dish was increased by 32% by utilizing nanofluid. The overall efficiency of the solar dish is increased by using nanofluids, using Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> increased the efficiency by 22%. It can be said that the temperature increase, which is obvious through the horizontal axis parameter, leads to a small reduction in the thermal efficiency. This result indicates that the solar dish collectors are ideal for high-temperature applications. The use of nanofluid leads to higher thermal efficiency compared to the pure oil, the fact proves that the nanofluid is beneficial for the collector performance. However, the useful heat production with the pure oil is higher because of the higher solar potential during the experiments with the pure thermal oil. The thermal efficiency is higher for the hemispherical case with the cubical

and the cylindrical to follow respectively. During the solar noon, the hemispherical and the cubical present approximately the same performance, the fact that makes them both optimum designs. The solar heat gain is higher for the hemispherical design due to the higher solar potential the day of its experimental investigation. The use of nanofluid leads always to better performance than the pure thermal oil. Moreover, the hemispherical design is better than cubical and the cylindrical is the worst case. Generally, the performance has been found between 58% and 83%, high values which proves that the solar dish concentrator is an efficient solar technology. The hemispherical cavity not only has the highest performance but also it is enhanced more than the others with the nanofluid. The cubical case is enhanced about 5.84% which is a promising value. Moreover, it is useful to state that the thermal efficiency enhancement is higher in greater inlet temperatures (Figure 2c). This is a very important result because the high temperatures are very interesting for solar dishes.



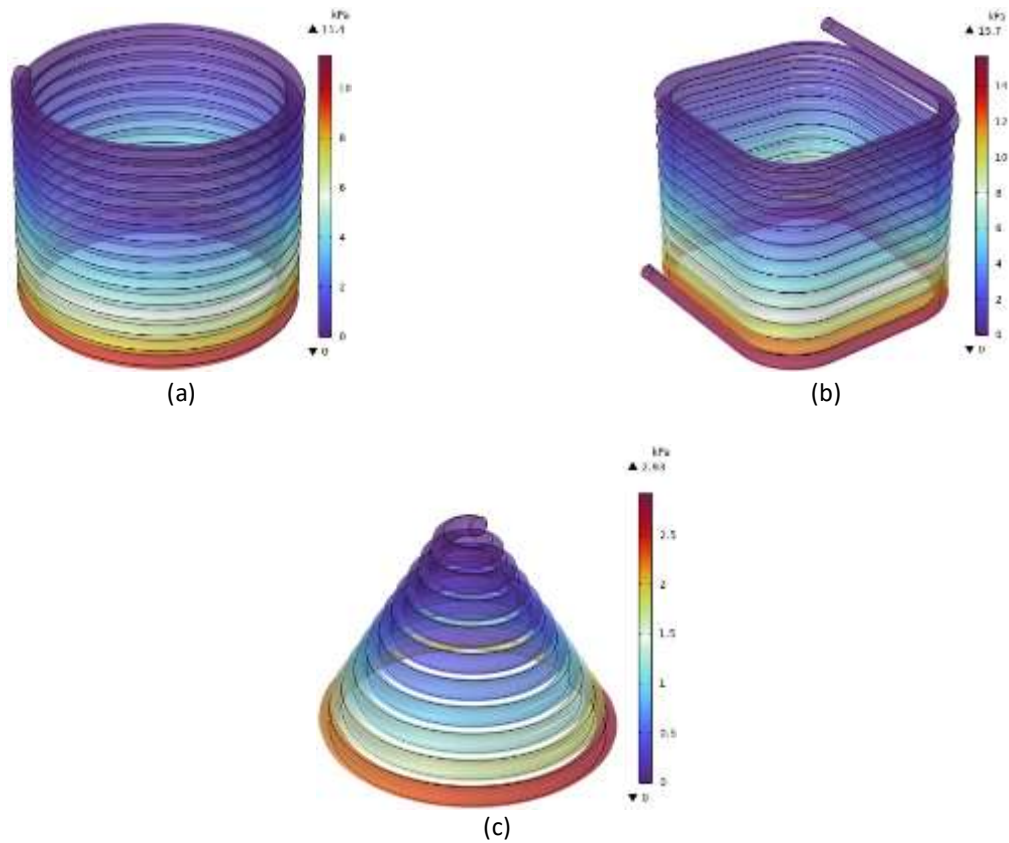
**Fig. 2.** (a) Thermal efficiency curves for all the cavities with nanofluid as working fluid, (b) Thermal efficiency curves for all the cavities with nanofluid as working fluid, (c) Final comparison of the efficiency curves for cylindrical, cubical and hemispherical cavities with and without nanofluids

The temperature gradient in the solar dish concentrator system was analyzed using COMSOL Multiphysics software to visualize the temperature distribution contours. Figure 3 displays the detailed gridded model of the solar concentrator system, utilizing fine grids for enhanced calculation precision.



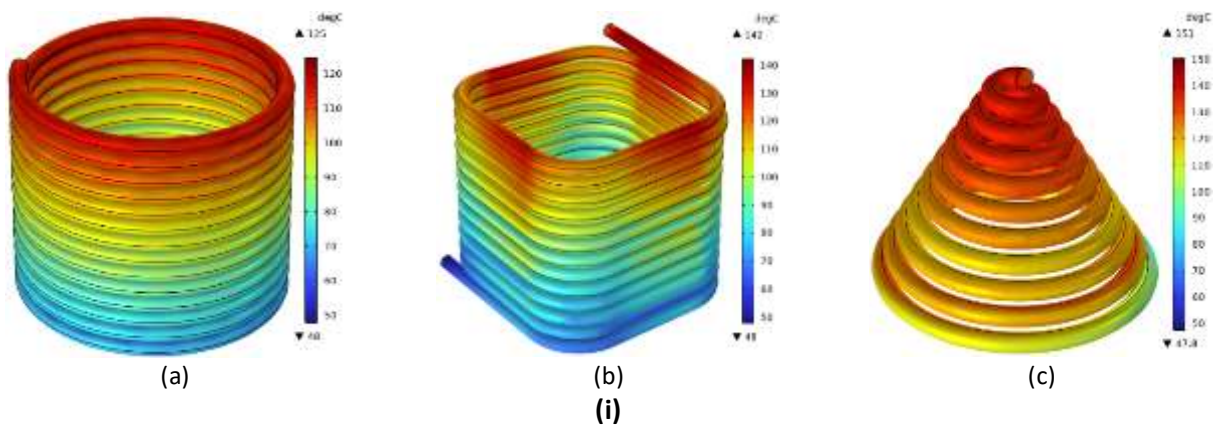
**Fig. 3.** Different solar cavities, (a) Cylindrical, (b) Cubical and (c) Hemispherical

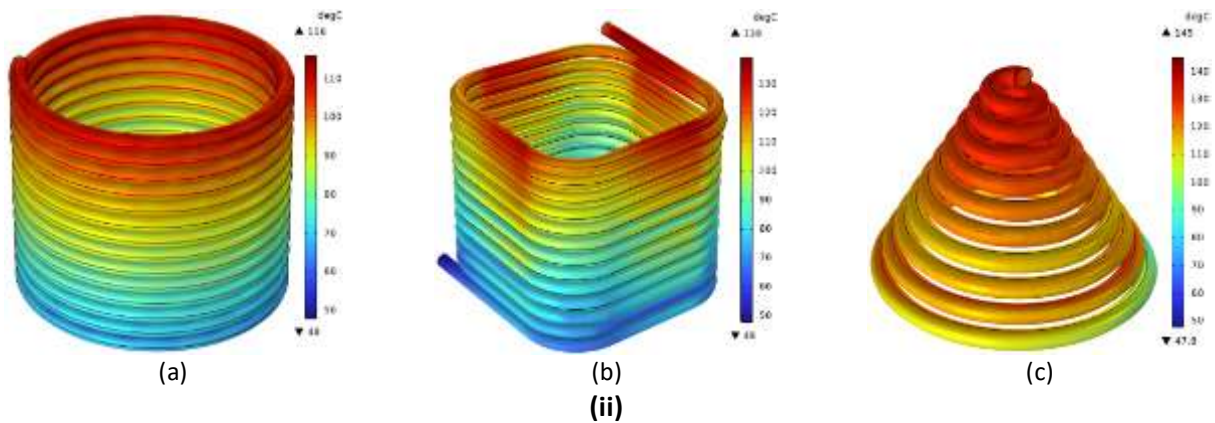
The number of elements has been selected in such a way that the grid independence operation has been carried out with high precision so that in addition to reducing the time and cost of computation, the results of the simulation are made with the least impact of the number and type of the grids. In this research, triangular grids have been used, which include a higher number of elements than other types. Figure 4 shows the pressure drop of the system in different types of cavities. The pressure contour at the entrance of different cases shows higher values, so that as the path increases and approaches the end of the fluid circulation path, the fluid pressure is lower and as a result the pressure drop increases. Because with the increase in the length of the thermal coil, the friction of the wall with the thermal fluid increases [32-40]. Also, the highest inlet pressure is related to the cubical case because it has more path curves, as a result, the pressure drop increases more. Also, in the cubical case, the inlet pressure increases more. While the hemispherical case shows the lowest pressure drop and the lowest input pressure, because the length of the heating coil is shorter and the desired path is smoother and softer.



**Fig. 4.** Pressure drop of three cases of solar cavities at volume flow rate of 10 ml/s where a) Cylindrical, b) Cubical, c) Hemispherical

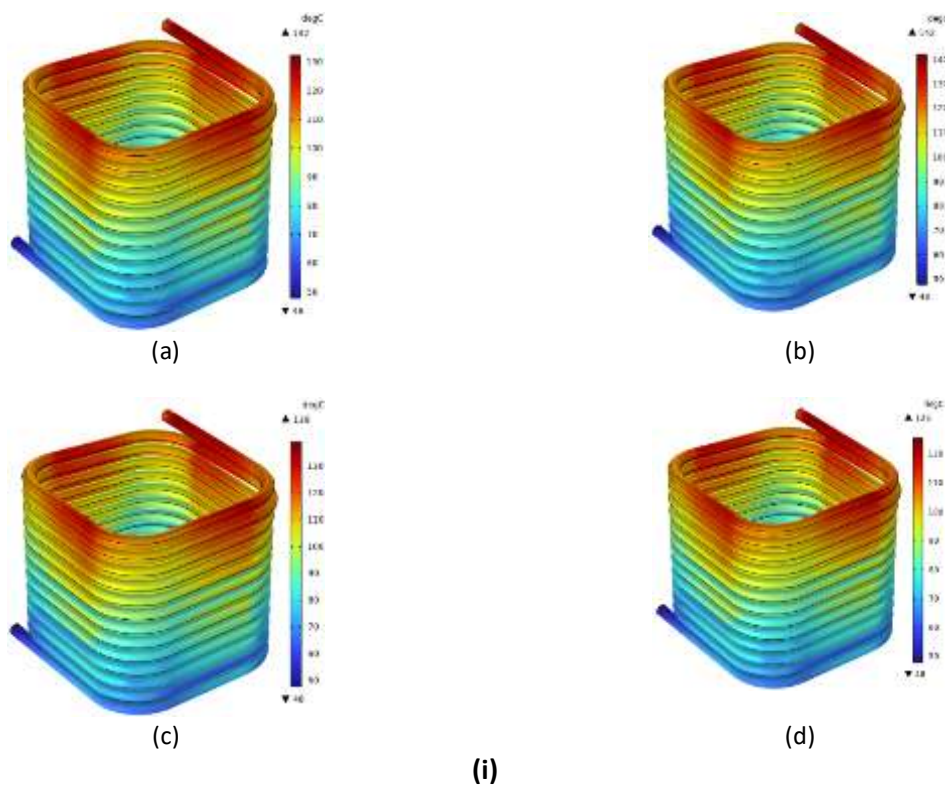
Figure 5 shows the temperature contour distributed on the surfaces of thermal cavities at 11:30 and 13:00. According to the desired shape, the hemispherical case shows the highest temperature gradient, and after that, the cubical and cylindrical cases performed better. Because in the hemispherical case, the end of the path and the conical head of the receiver can absorb more heat flux and the temperature is more concentrated at this point. On the other hand, the cubical case has a better performance than the cylindrical case because due to the increase in the corners of the fluid path, the amount of fluid retention time has increased



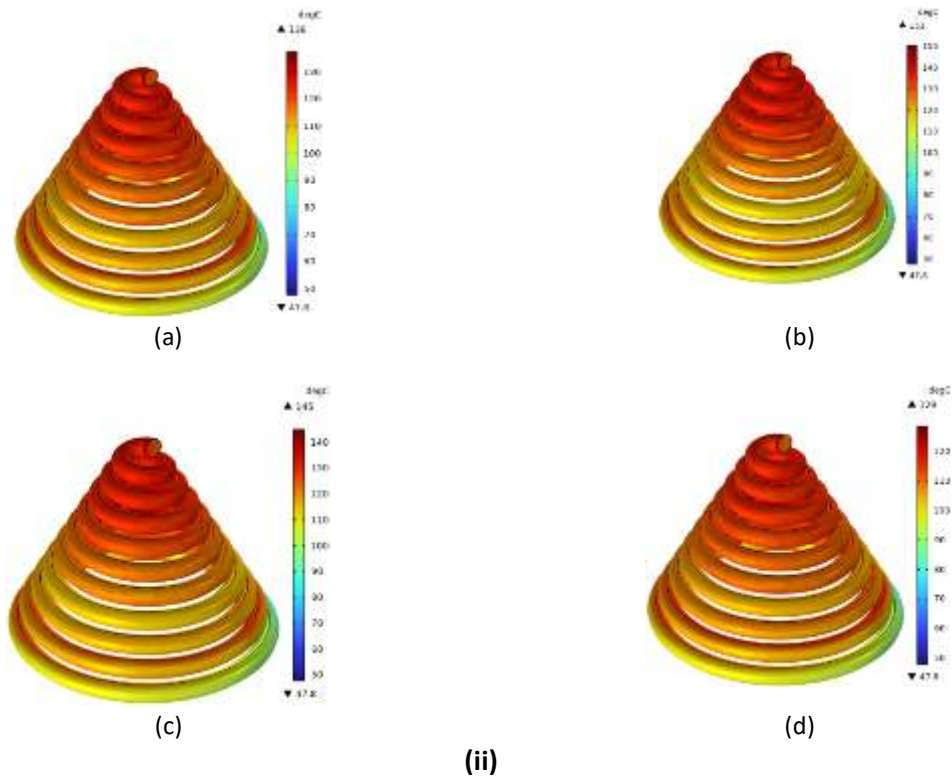


**Fig. 5.** Temperature gradient of the cavities at volume flow rate of 10 ml/s at (i) 11:30 and (ii) 13:00, for a) Cylindrical, b) Cubical, c) Hemispherical

Figure 6 has evaluated two cubical and hemispherical thermal cavities at different hours of the day and at equal volumetric flow rates. Thermal contours have shown that at 11:30 and 13:00 hours the output temperature of the heating coils increased more because the solar radiation received by the coils increased [41-45]. Also, the comparison of the two cases shows that the hemispherical coil has a better performance than the other case at all times, which is due to the geometry of the coil and the conicalness of the coil. For this reason, the amount of heat flux and solar radiation in the head of the cone has increased, which has caused an increase in the output temperature. On the other hand, hemispherical coils deliver more heat to the working fluid due to the concentrated design along the flow path.

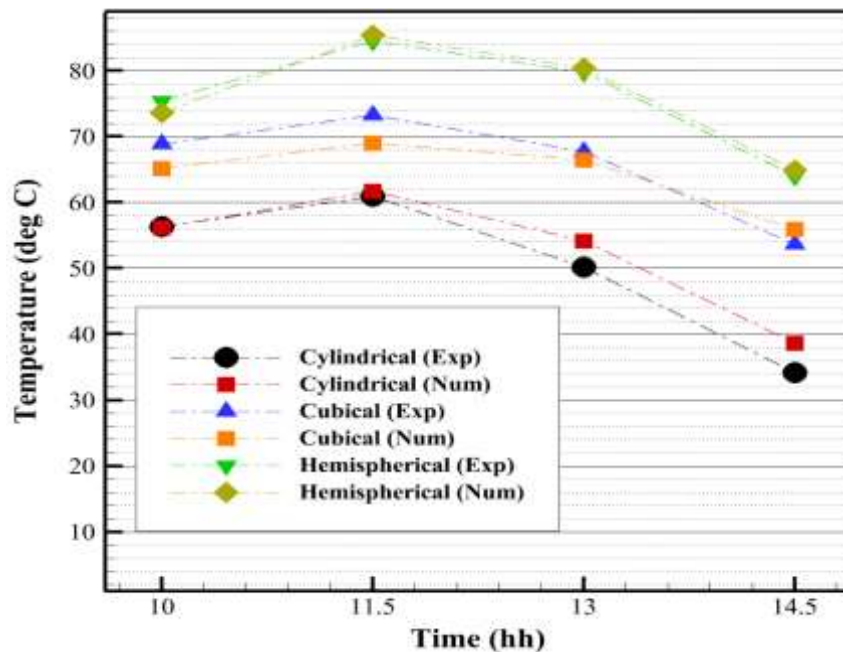






**Fig. 6.** Working fluid temperature variation of (i) cubical temperature and (ii) hemispherical temperature at a) 10:00, b) 11:30, c) 13:00, d) 14:30

Figure 7 shows the evaluation and comparison of the results between the experimental and numerical mode for different cavities during the day. According to the diagram, it can be seen that the results in different cases are in good agreement with each other, so that the maximum percentage difference between the numerical and practical results in different cases is less than 7%. Also, the most consistent results are seen in the hemispherical coil and the biggest error is related to the cylindrical coil by 6.5% [46-51].



**Fig. 7.** Validation between numerical and experimental results

## 4. Conclusions

In this study, a dish concentrator with two shapes of cavity receiver including a cubical and cylindrical cavity receiver was analyzed numerically and experimentally. Thermal oil was used as the solar heat transfer fluid. The use of nanofluid in the cubical receiver leads to higher thermal performance compared to the operation with pure thermal oil. The cubical and the hemispherical cavities are the most efficient cavities, while the cylindrical cavity presents the less efficiency. For all the examined cavities, the use of nanofluids is found to be beneficial for the thermal performance. The comparison of experimental and numerical results in different cases proved that they are in good agreement with each other, so that the maximum percentage difference between the numerical and practical results in different cases is less than 7%. Also, the most consistent results are seen in the hemispherical coil and the biggest error is related to the cylindrical coil by 6.5%.

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