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Characteristic Analysis and Generation of New Neighbor Solutions for Fuel Assembly Optimization

Byeong-hyeok Ha[a*], Tongkyu Park[a], Sung-kyun Zee[b]

[a] FNC Technology, Heungdeok IT Valley Bldg. 32F, 13, Heungdeok 1-ro, Giheung-gu, Yongin-si, 16954, Korea

[b] FNC Technology, Daeduk Tech Business Center, 1004-2, 593, Daedukdae-ro, Yusung-gu, Daejeon-si, 34112, Korea

*Corresponding author: haqualux@fnctech.com

Introduction

- Reactor core design technologies are being developed to provide innovative small modular reactors (iSMR) with the highest level of safety and economic efficiency.
- One of these core design innovations focuses on the optimization of fuel assemblies.
- The optimal design of fuel assemblies requires confirming core characteristics, such as how long it can be used and how stably it reacts, depending on the arrangement and type of fuel pins in the fuel assembly.
- This study examines the core characteristics of candidate fuel assembly configurations and evaluates which configuration excels in safety and economic efficiency when compared to other assemblies.

Methods

Generation of New Fuel Assembly Configurations

- Pin configurations in fuel assemblies can be changed in two main ways.
  - Modify: Changing the type of pin at a specific location.
  - Swap: Switching the locations of two pins of different types.
- Pins are classed as fuel rods, burnable absorber rods, and guide tubes.
  - Guide tubes and instrument tubes are fixed and cannot be altered.
  - Only the positions and types of fuel rods and burnable absorber rods are changed.
- Pin configurations typically use symmetries such as 1/2, 1/4, or 1/8.
  - When swapping pins located at symmetry boundaries, the total number must be considered.
  - Pins at boundaries should be exchanged either with other boundary pins or internally to maintain overall symmetry.

Selection of Core Characteristics

- The core characteristics to be evaluated were selected to identify configurations that offer higher safety and economic efficiency.
  - Safety is improved when the variation in multiplication factor due to burnup is limited, and the peaking factor is low.
  - Economic efficiency improves when the multiplication factor is higher when the core reaches equilibrium.
- The selected core characteristics were as follows:
  - KINF_EQ: The infinite multiplication factor (KINF) value at its peak during the burnup cycle, where higher values indicate better economic efficiency.
  - GRAD_SUM: The average difference in KINF from the beginning of the cycle to the inflection point, with smaller values indicating better safety.
  - GRAD_MAX: The maximum absolute slope of KINF within specific intervals, where smaller values indicate better safety.
  - FXY: The maximum planar pin peaking factor during the burnup cycle, where smaller values indicate better safety.

Generation of Candidates

- It is challenging to definitively compare configurations among multiple attributes, especially as economic efficiency and safety often contrast.
- The Pareto front was used to generate candidates, which are a set of solutions that are not dominated by others and are widely used for multi-objective optimization.
- Representative values were derived by standardizing the characteristics and adding them together in order to rank these candidates.
  - The maximum values were converted to minimizing values by multiplying them by -1.
  - Additionally, weights were assigned to the characteristics during the representative value calculation.

$$Obj = \sum_t w_t \frac{(X_t - \mu_t)}{\sigma_t}$$

Acknowledgements

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Analyses & Results

- The fuel assembly is 17×17 and has 1/8 symmetry.
- Pins are divided into five types.
  - (1) Fuel rods
  - (2) Guide tubes
  - (3) Instrumentation tube
  - (4) Low burnable absorber rods
  - (5) High burnable absorber rods
- Neighboring solutions were generated by swapping the positions of pins without altering their types, as changing the types would affect the number of burnable absorber rods.
  - This approach generated a total of 194 neighboring solutions.

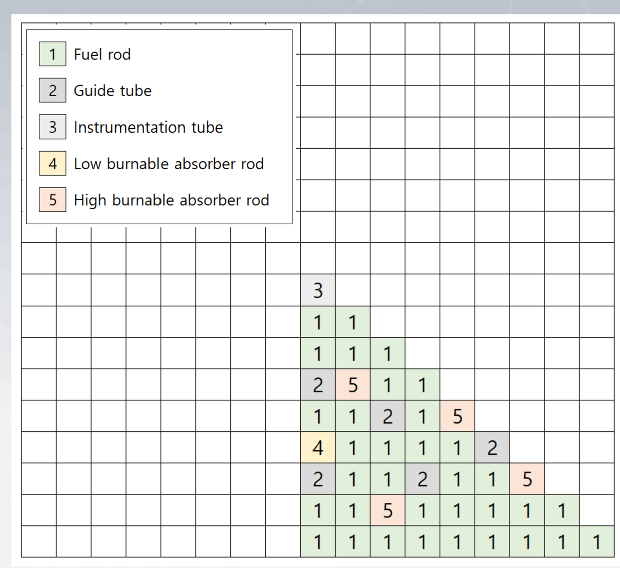

Fig. 1. The pin configuration of the reference fuel assembly

- Core characteristics were calculated using the KARMA code. Results for the reference configuration indicated that:
  - The extreme point occurred at 28 MWD/kgU (red mark).
  - The inflection point appeared at 33 MWD/kgU (green mark).
  - The maximum FXY was 1.155.

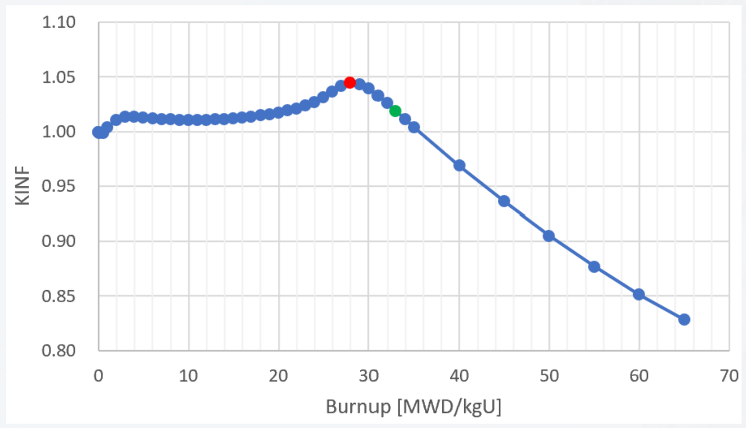

Fig. 2. KINF graph of the reference FA

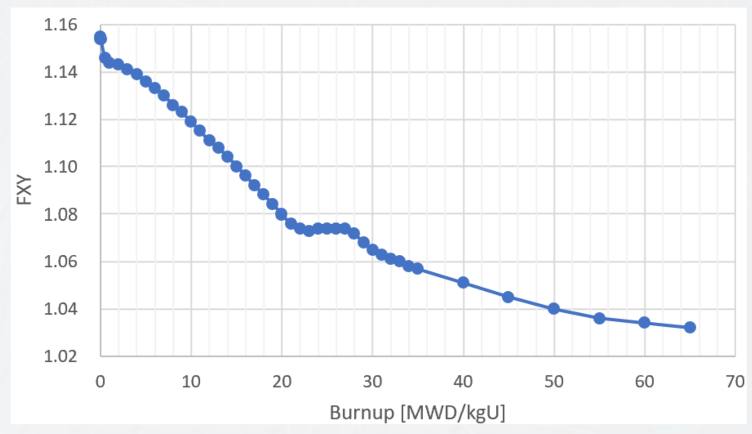

Fig. 3. FXY graph of the reference FA

- The Pareto front and representative values were calculated.
  - Weights of 1, 0.5, 0.5, and 1 were assigned to KINF_EQ, GRAD_SUM, GRAD_MAX, and FXY, respectively.
  - 69 solutions formed the Pareto front.
- On the Pareto front, 12 solutions, including the reference, were selected as candidates based on the lowest representative values.
  - Swap 84, Swap 92, Swap 109, and Swap 102 showed better safety.
  - Swap 32 and Swap 31 exhibited better economic efficiency.

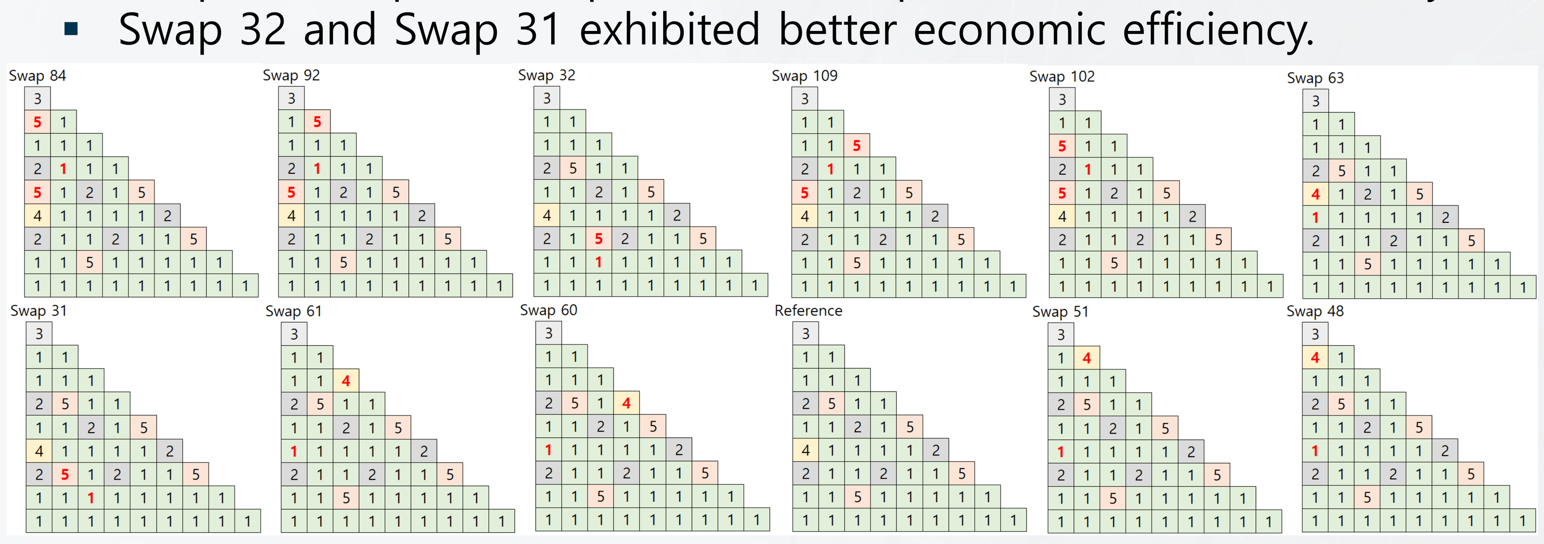

Fig. 4. Candidates of fuel assembly configurations

Table I: Candidates of fuel assembly core characteristics

	Representative	KINF_EQ	GRAD_SUM	GRAD_MAX	FXY
Swap 84	-2.771	1.0387	0.0020	0.0071	1.147
Swap 92	-2.588	1.0404	0.0021	0.0073	1.149
Swap 32	-2.520	1.0468	0.0024	0.0073	1.158
Swap 109	-2.508	1.0425	0.0022	0.0073	1.149
Swap 102	-2.454	1.0431	0.0022	0.0074	1.150
Swap 63	-2.402	1.0438	0.0023	0.0074	1.151
Swap 31	-2.363	1.0454	0.0022	0.0073	1.170
Swap 61	-2.289	1.0438	0.0023	0.0074	1.158
Swap 60	-2.252	1.0438	0.0023	0.0074	1.158
Reference	-2.242	1.0438	0.0023	0.0074	1.155
Swap 51	-2.207	1.0439	0.0023	0.0074	1.161
Swap 48	-2.156	1.0439	0.0023	0.0074	1.161

Conclusions

- The reference configuration is a good solution included on the Pareto front; however, alternative solutions with better economic efficiency or safety also exist.
- If economic efficiency is prioritized, Swap 32 is a suitable alternative, while Swap 84 is a viable option for enhanced safety.
- Although this study focused on neighboring solutions obtained by a single swap, additional iterations of this process could yield even better optimal configurations.