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Performance analysis of a K_2CO_3-based thermochemical energy storage system using a honeycomb structured heat exchanger

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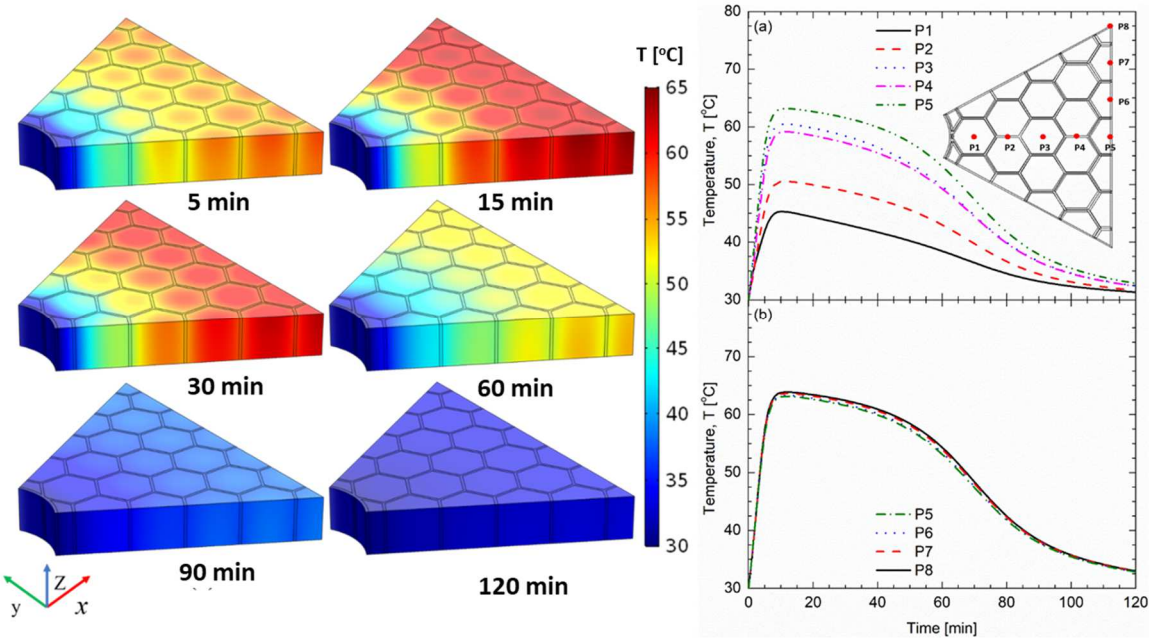
Graphical Abstract



ABSTRACT

The application of thermal energy storage using thermochemical heat storage materials is a promising approach to enhance solar energy utilization in the built environment. Potassium carbonate (K_2CO_3) is one of the potential candidate materials to efficiently store thermal energy due to its high heat storage capacity and cost-effectiveness. In the present study, a 3-dimensional numerical model is developed for the exothermic hydration reaction of K_2CO_3. The heat produced from the reaction is transferred indirectly from the TCM bed through the

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walls of the honeycomb heat exchanger to a Heat Transfer Fluid (HTF). A parametric study is conducted for varying geometrical parameters of the honeycomb heat exchanger. The obtained results indicate that the reaction rate and heat transport in the TCM bed strongly depends on the geometrical parameters of the heat exchanger. Reducing the cell size of the honeycomb heat exchanger up to a certain level provides better thermal transport as well as improved reaction rate of the TCM bed. The results of this study provide detailed insight into the heat release processes occurring in a fixed bed of K_2CO_3. The study is useful for designing and optimizing thermo-chemical energy storage modules for the built environment.

Keywords: Thermochemical; Hydration; Thermal Energy, Reaction; Energy Storage.

Nomenclature

C	*concentration [mol]*
C_p	*heat capacity [J/kgK]*
D_g	*water vapor diffusion coefficient* $[m^2/s]$
d_p	*particle diameter [m]*
k	*thermal conductivity [W/mK]*
L_C	*honeycomb cell length [m]*
M_v	*molar mass of water vapor [kg/mol]*
p	*pressure [Pa]*
p_{eq}	*equilibrium pressure [Pa]*
R	*ideal gas constant* $[J/mol\ K]$
$t_{gap,HTF}$	*distance between two HTF tubes [m]*
T	*temperature* $[^oC]$

u	*Darcy velocity [m/s]*
ε_{eff}	*effective bed porosity*
δ_{fin}	*honeycomb fin thickness [m]*
δ_b	*bed height [m]*
χ	*stoichiometric coefficient*
ρ	*density [kg/m^3]*

1. INTRODUCTION

Buildings are responsible for approximately 40% of the total energy consumption and for 36% of the total CO_2 emissions in the EU, ranking them at the top in terms of energy requirements. [1]. As stated by the European Commission [2], about 75% of the heating and cooling demand is still generated using fossil fuels while only 19% is generated from renewable energy sources. To achieve the EU's climate and energy goals, the heating and cooling sector must sharply reduce its energy consumption and also decrease the usage of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are not only depleting but are also responsible for global climate change because of their induced rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, there is an urgent need to focus on renewable energy sources for the heating purposes of buildings. The application of renewable energy sources in the built environment is highly affected by the mismatch between the demand for energy and the supply of energy by renewable resources like solar energy and wind energy. The seasonal mismatch, particularly in the case of energy demand for heating applications, can be resolved up to a large extent by utilizing seasonal heat storage. The main idea is to store thermal energy in summer (high supply, low demand) and utilize it in winter (high demand, low supply). This can be achieved by developing technologies that can efficiently store thermal energy for a longer period with minimal losses. The basic mechanism for developing such technology lies in the property of certain materials that release heat when they ad/absorb water. This mechanism can be utilized to store heat from the sun by using solar heat to dry the material after water is absorbed. The energy stored can be released later by simply adding water vapor to the material.

The thermochemical energy storage (TCES) materials as introduced above are promising materials to store thermal energy utilizing a reversible chemical reaction [3–9]. In this reaction, a thermochemical energy storage material (C) absorbs external heat (e.g. solar energy, industrial waste heat) through an endothermic reaction, decomposing into A and B. Products (A and B) are separated by physical means and stored in separate containers. When materials A and B are combined again, an exothermic reverse reaction, generation of C, and release of stored thermal energy occur [10–14]. Although much work has been done in the direction of material characterization, identification, and improvement, as well as process integration and application, little effort has been put into closed thermochemical reactor modelling and process design [15–17]. Funayama et al. [7] suggested the thermal decomposition of calcium hydroxide ($Ca(OH)_2$) into calcium oxide (CaO) and water vapor as

a reversible gas-solid reaction suitable for TCES. The study focused on the development of composite honeycomb support composed of silicon carbide and silicon to enhance the heat transfer in a reaction bed. The results suggest that the heat transfer through the reaction bed was enhanced by the Si-SiC honeycomb support. Zhou et al. [18] developed a numerical model for TCES involving the energy balance and reaction kinetics describing the redox reaction of cobalt oxides (Co_3O_4/CoO pair), to simulate the phenomena of thermochemical storage. Metallic redox pair oxides such as BaO_2/BaO, Mn_2O_3/Mn_3O_4, CuO/Cu_2O and Fe_2O_3/Fe_3O_4 have been studied for CSP plants [19,20]. Ranjha and Oztekin [21] performed a numerical analysis of a three-dimensional bed with $Ca(OH)_2/CaO$ as the reaction pair. The results of the study provide detailed insight into the heat release processes occurring in a fixed bed of $Ca(OH)_2/CaO$ reaction pair. The study helps designing and optimizing high temperature thermo-chemical energy storage modules for power generation applications. One of the most promising chemical reaction systems for energy storage is the reaction utilising potassium carbonate and water vapor [22]:

$$\mathrm{K_2CO_3(s) + 1.5H_2O(g) \rightleftharpoons K_2CO_3 \cdot 1.5H_2O(s) + 1.5\Delta H_r}$$

Gaeini et al. [22] summed up the advantages of a $\mathrm{K_2CO_3 - K_2CO_3 \cdot 1.5H_2O}$ system with a storage capacity up to 96.015 kJ/mol (reaction enthalpy of ΔH_r,= 64.01kJ/mol of water) corresponding to a maximum energy density of 1.30 GJ/m^3 [23,24]. It features high material energy density and the reaction shows good reversibility. The drawbacks are that thermochemical energy storage materials, in general, have low thermal conductivity. The dehydration and hydration kinetics of the reactions involved are relatively well-identified.

This literature assessment indicates that numerical analysis, as well as experimental investigations of the TCES reactive materials and reactor design, has attracted considerable interest during the past few decades. Although sensible and latent heat storage systems have made their way into commercial applications, TCES (currently at the laboratory stage, mainly due to technical challenges) could be applied in many applications [20,25,26]. Therefore, numerical simulation tools to model the thermochemical reactions, understand the reaction kinetics, and optimize the system performance, are very essential. In the recent past, bionics based tools have been realized to be one of the advanced tools, especially in the field of fluid flow and heat transfer applications including chemical reactors [27], biomedical equipment [28,29], and electronic cooling [30–34]. The fin structures made by natural assortment

encourage the improvement of the TCES device. By realizing natural structures, the fins with bionic structures, for instance, tree-shaped fins [34,35], Koch fractal fins [36], and snowflake-shaped fins [37,38], have been proposed by researchers for their enhanced heat transport, subsequently increasing the thermal transport effectiveness of TCES devices. With the existence of honeycomb meshed structures in nature, the idea surfaced to solve the problem of thermal transport in a TCES device with the use of such a structure as a reactor bed. Therefore, the present work focuses on the performance analysis of TCES based on potassium carbonate (K_2CO_3) filled in a honeycomb heat exchanger structure.

The performance analysis has been achieved by studying heat and mass transfer through the reactive bed of $K_2CO_3 \cdot 1.5H_2O$ designed for a thermochemical heat storage system. The numerical model developed for the purpose has been solved using COMSOL Multiphysics software [39]. The study is performed to see the impact of the honeycomb heat exchanger on the recovery of the thermo-chemically-stored energy as well as the reaction rate in the TCM bed. Further, a parametric study has been conducted to investigate the effect of various honeycomb heat exchanger design parameters (i.e. honeycomb cell size $[L_c]$, honeycomb fin thickness $[\delta_{fin}]$, bed height $[\delta_b]$ and distance (denoted with subscript *gap*) in between two HTF tube $[t_{gap,HTF}]$) on the temperature variation, the reaction advancement and the recovery of the thermo-chemically-stored energy. These parameters are highly related to the heat exchanger design of the honeycomb structure. It is explicitly noted here that the material properties of potassium carbonate are considered to be constant during the reaction and that resulting effects like swelling/shrinking are not taken into account.

The work performed as presented in this article is organized in the following manner. Firstly, in the introduction section, the general background and the aim of this work are presented. After the introduction, the numerical model as developed in the present work is discussed including the mathematical formulation of the heat and mass transport equations employed in the TCM bed, the computational procedure, and the model validation. Further, the results of the numerical simulations and a parametric study for the hydration of the TCM bed are analyzed. Finally, a summary along with the key conclusions of the present work is presented in the last section.

2. GEOMETRY AND MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

The working pair of the material considered in the present study is potassium carbonate and water vapor. Olives and Mauran [40] showed that heat transfer in TCM bed through thermal radiation can be ignored as the working temperature of the thermochemical heat storage system considered here is in the range of 10 °C to 90 °C only. They further showed that, for a system with water vapor, the prevailing heat transfer mode is conduction. Heat transfer by convection in the porous medium can also be neglected as the reaction between the potassium carbonate and the water vapor is supposed to be instantaneous and gets completed so fast that there is no temperature difference between the salt and the water vapor and single temperature equations can be used for the macroscopic description of the heat transfer processes in the porous medium. The vapor transport in the TCM can be of Knudsen, Darcy, or inertial flow type since it depends on vapor pressure and velocity at the porous media boundaries. The fluid is considered to flow through the TCM bed consisting of approximately spherical particles with global porosity. Water vapor is considered an ideal gas, due to its low concentration and partial pressure. A relatively low permeability value of the porous bed (Table 1) makes it possible to model mass transfer with Darcy's law. The sensible heat of the reactive bed is also taken into account in the energy balance considering the sensible heat of water vapor and the stored heat in the salt as one entity. We also assume that the thermal conductivity and heat capacity of the salt are constants. The thermo-physical properties of potassium carbonate, water vapor, and operating parameters that have been used in the model are given in Table 1. The following assumptions have been made in the present study: (i) the properties of the phases are isotropic and uniform. Unless specified otherwise the physical and chemical properties of the constituents are assumed to be constant; (ii) the water vapor is in thermal equilibrium with the solid phase; (iii) The porous medium is not deformable; (iv) The gaseous adsorbate adheres to the ideal gas law; (v) The effects of pressure work and viscous dissipation are negligible.

Table 1. The thermophysical properties of TCM and operating parameters considered in the present study [22,41]

Name	Value	Description
d_p	$0.5 \times 10^{-3} m$	particle diameter
ε_{eff}	0.4	effective bed porosity
D_v	$10^{-9}\ m^2/s$	water vapor diffusion coefficient
$C_{p,v}$	$1864\ J/kgK$	heat capacity of water vapor

$C_{p,s}$	$830\ J/kg\ K$	heat capacity of solid potassium carbonate
$C_{p,fin}$	$900\ J/kg\ K$	heat capacity of fin material
ρ_s	$2210\ kg/m^3$	the density of potassium carbonate
ρ_{fin}	$2700\ kg/m^3$	density of fin
k_{eff}	$0.44\ W/m\ K$	thermal conductivity of potassium carbonate
k_{fin}	$238\ W/m\ K$	thermal conductivity of fin
E_a	$46.22\ kJ/mol$	activation energy
M_v	$0.01802\ kg/mol$	the molar mass of water vapor
M_s	$0.138\ kg/mol$	the molar mass of K_2CO_3
χ	1.5	stoichiometric coefficient
ΔH_r	$64.01\ kJ/mol$	reaction enthalpy kJ/mol of water
R	$8.314\ J/mol\ K$	ideal gas constant
A_f	$3.0838 \times 10^6\ 1/min$	pre-exponential factor in reaction kinetics
T_i	30^oC	initial temperature
T_{eva}	15^oC	evaporator temperature
T_{HTF}	30^oC	cooling temperature of HTF
p_i	$425\ Pa$	initial pressure
C_i	$0.07\ mol/m^3$	initial concentration

The schematic of the honeycomb heat exchanger thermochemical reactor bed considered in the present study is illustrated in Fig. 1A. The system consists of several honeycomb heat exchanger beds filled with K_2CO_3 particles and separated at a distance to allow water vapor to reach the TCM material. The thickness of each honeycomb heat exchanger bed is indicated with δ_b. The heat transfer fluid (HTF) tubes are connected in the center to each heat exchanger unit in the system. The whole system is enclosed in a chamber where water vapor is injected from the evaporator and relatively cold water is flowing in the HTF tubes. An expanded side view of one honeycomb heat exchanger is presented in Fig. 1B, where hexagonal cells are connected to HTF tubes and the distance between two HTF tubes is given by $t_{gap,HTF}$. Further, the HTF tubes are arranged in such a way that they make a hexagonal pattern themselves. Because of the hexagonal pattern of the HTF tube distribution in each honeycomb heat exchanger bed, symmetry can be considered in the heat and mass transport processes. Due to this symmetry in heat and mass transport, a small element of the reactor

bed is considered in the present study (red dashed line in Fig. 1B). A three dimensional schematic of the computational domain is presented in Fig. 1C, where L_C is one edge of the hexagonal cell, δ_{fin} is the thickness of the hexagonal cell wall and R_{tube} is the radius of the HTF tube. The height of the computational domain is considered as half of the bed height because of the presence of symmetry in the heat and mass transfer at the center of each honeycomb heat exchanger bed as water vapor is transported from both sides of the bed. It is noted here with reference to Fig. 1C that the numerical simulations are carried out in a Cartesian coordinate system *x*, *y* and *z* because the system is not exactly cylindrical. However, the x-coordinate more or less corresponds to the radial position and the y-coordinate to the tangential position.

In the present study, the radius of the HTF tube is constant for all the cases and its value is taken 0.02 m. It is also assumed that the temperature gradient in the HTF flow direction is very small and can be neglected. The temperature at the internal surface of the HTF tube is set equal to the inlet temperature of HTF and its value is 30 ºC. The inlet of water vapor is considered at the top of the computational domain and the symmetry boundary at the bottom of the computational domain. At the top of the computational domain, the water vapor arrives with a fixed vapor concentration of 0.71 mol/m^3. This value is obtained based on water vapor properties as it is assumed that vapor is an ideal gas (hence we applied the gas law formula $\rho_v = M_v C$). The vacuum in the whole system is created at a pressure of around 1708 Pa. At t = 0, the concentration in the TCM bed equals 0.07 mol/m^3 and the initial temperature is set to 30 °C.

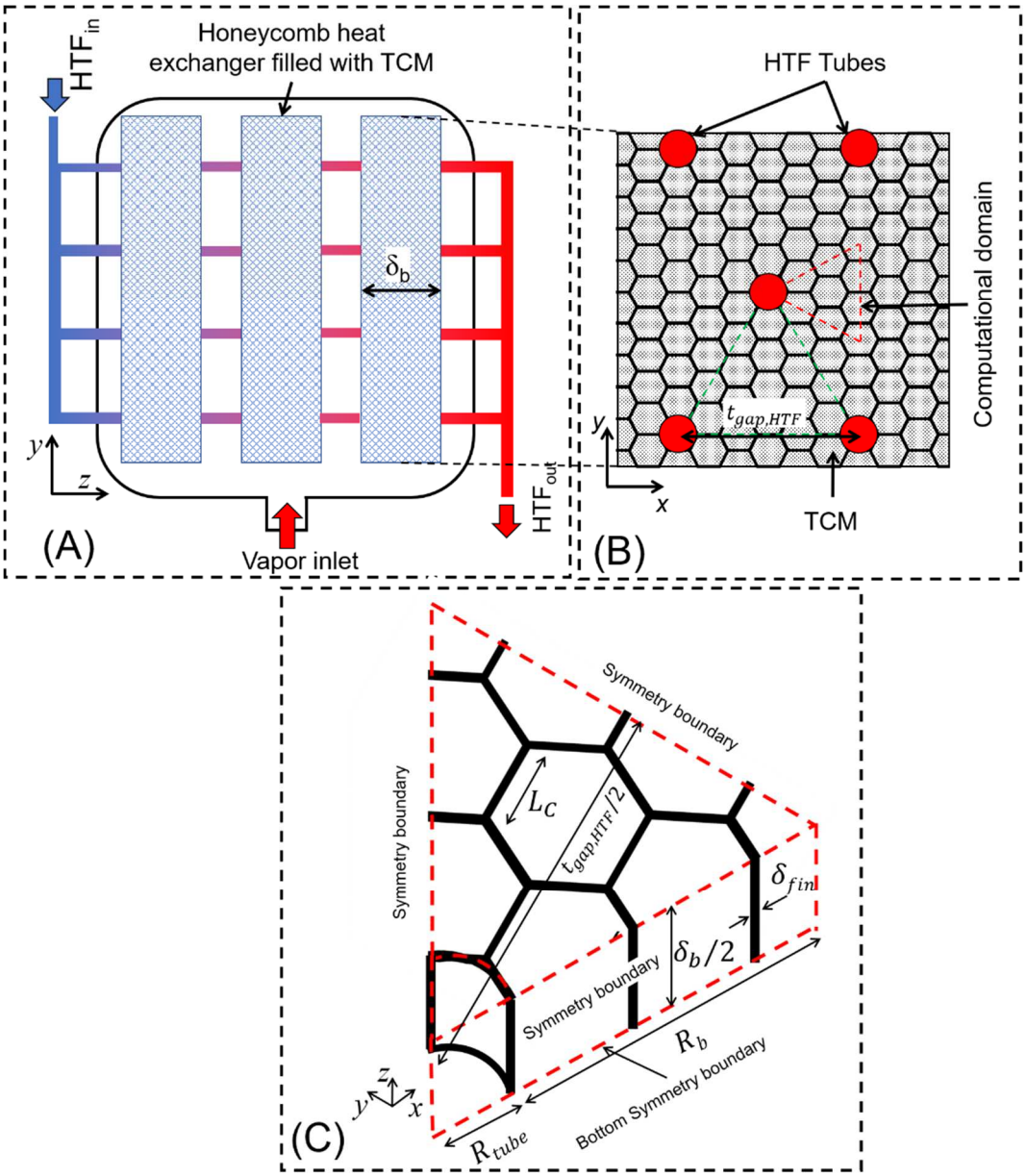

Fig. 1 Schematic of the geometry of the TCM bed and computational domain (a) TCM energy storage system, (b) side view of honeycomb heat exchanger filled with TCM, (c) computational domain.

3. GOVERNING EQUATIONS

3.1 VAPOR TRANSPORT IN POROUS MEDIUM

The vapor transport in the TCM filled in the honeycomb cells is governed by the mass conservation equation of the reactive gas and can be written as [42]:

$$\varepsilon_{eff}\frac{\partial C}{\partial t} - \nabla\cdot(D_v\nabla C) + \nabla\cdot(\boldsymbol{u}C) - R_C = 0 \quad (1)$$

where C and D_v are the concentration and the diffusion coefficient of the water vapor, respectively. ε_{eff} is the effective porosity and its value is taken 0.4 in the present study [41]. The last term (R_C) in eq. (1) is the reaction term which will be discussed in the reaction kinetics section. The vapor transport in the porous medium occurs not only from diffusion but also from advection, where a difference in pressure causes the bulk motion of the gas. This leads to a viscous flow and therefore the vapor transport in the porous medium is governed by Darcy's law considering the acceleration due to gravity. The Darcy velocity $\boldsymbol{u}$ in the porous medium is given by:

$$\boldsymbol{u} = -\frac{\kappa}{\mu}(\nabla p - \rho_v \vec{g}) \tag{2}$$

where ρ_v is water vapor density and g is universal gravitational constant. The p is the gas pressure and given by gas law ($p = CRT$, where C is the molar concentration, R is the universal gas constant and T is the temperature). The permeability κ of the porous medium can be obtained from the semi-empirical Blake–Kozeny equation as:

$$\kappa = \frac{d_p^2 \varepsilon_{eff}^2}{150(1-\varepsilon_{eff})^2} \tag{3}$$

where d_p is the particle diameter and ε_{eff} is the bed porosity. The Sutherland law or the viscosity-temperature relation is often used to determine the dynamic viscosity μ in the range of -156 [°C] to 1787 [°C], where the ratio S/T_{ref} is empirically taken as 0.505 [43].

$$\mu = \mu_{ref}\left(\frac{T}{T_{ref}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}\left\{\frac{1+\frac{S}{T_{ref}}}{1+\frac{S/T_{ref}}{T/T_{ref}}}\right\} \tag{4}$$

with T_{ref} and μ_{ref} as reference temperature and viscosity respectively.

3.2. HEAT TRANSFER IN POROUS MEDIUM

For the phases existing in the reactor bed, the macroscopic description of heat transfer in a porous medium is often investigated by the use of a single temperature equation. Here, local thermal equilibrium is referring to the fact that the macroscopic temperatures of the three phases (liquid water in the salt, water vapour in the reactive gas and the solid salt itself) are close enough such that a single temperature description of the heat transport processes can be

used. Duval et al. [44] added that the assumption of local thermal equilibrium was acceptable in many cases of unsaturated porous media with liquid–vapour phase change, particularly for most thermal decomposition processes. Therefore the heat transfer in the porous thermochemical bed is governed by the heat transfer diffusion equation, which can be written as [42]:

$$\left(\rho C_p\right)_{eff}\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} + \rho_v C_{p,v}\boldsymbol{u}\cdot\nabla T - k_{eff}\nabla^2 T = Q \tag{5}$$

where $\left(\rho C_p\right)_{eff}$ is the effective volumetric heat capacity, k_{eff} is the effective thermal conductivity and its value is considered $0.4\,W/mK$ in the present study [41]. The Q is the heat generated due to the reaction of water vapour with K_2CO_3 and its value depends on the reaction term R_c and will be discussed in the reaction kinetics section. The effective volumetric heat capacity $\left(\rho C_p\right)_{eff}$ is calculated by the following equation:

$$\left(\rho C_p\right)_{eff} = \rho_v C_{p,v}\varepsilon_{eff} + \rho_s C_{p,s}\left(1-\varepsilon_{eff}\right) \tag{6}$$

3.3. HEAT TRANSFER IN FIN

The heat transfer in the fin can be calculated with the heat transfer diffusion equation [45]:

$$\rho_{fin}C_{p,fin}\frac{\partial T}{\partial t} - k_{fin}\nabla^2 T = 0 \tag{7}$$

where ρ_{fin}, $C_{p,fin}$ and k_{fin} is the fin density, heat capacity and thermal conductivity respectively.

3.4. REACTION KINETICS

Solving the intra-particle mass balance equations is often time-consuming. To avoid this problem, in practice often a lumped approach is followed as an approximation, which has proven to be physically consistent [14,46]. The reaction term in equation (1) is calculated, using the reaction advancement:

$$R_c = \chi\,\frac{\rho_s}{M_s}\left(1-\varepsilon_{eff}\right)\frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial t} \tag{8}$$

where ρ_s is the density of the solid TCM, χ is the Stoichiometric coefficient, M_s is the molecular weight of potassium carbonate and α is the reaction advancement. Since reaction kinetics deals with measurement and parameterization of the process rates, the rate can be parameterized using three major variables: the temperature T, the chemical conversion α and the vapor pressure p. Systematic studies have been performed about the different expressions of the kinetic rates [15] in heterogeneous kinetics and the global form of that rate can be presented as follows:

$$\frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial t} = k(T)f(\alpha)h(p) \tag{9}$$

The value of the conversion α in time-dependence reflects typically the progress of the overall transformation of a reactant to products, meaning the advancement of the reaction. Lu et al. [47] (1996), Mazet et al. [48] had shown that the pressure dependence for reversible solid-gas synthesis can be expressed as:

$$h(p) = 1 - \left(\frac{p_{eq}}{p}\right) \tag{10}$$

where p and p_{eq} are the partial and equilibrium pressures of the gas product respectively (here the water vapour). The value of equilibrium vapour pressure $p_{eq}[Pa]$ is given by [22]:

$$p_{eq} = 4.228 \times 10^{12} exp\left(-\frac{7337}{T}\right) \tag{11}$$

where T is the temperature in K. The ratio between equilibrium water vapor pressure (p_{eq}) and water vapour pressure (p) called the pressure ratio ($\frac{p_{eq}}{p}$), is an important parameter in reaction kinetics. Assuming that mass transfer and chemical reaction are sufficiently rapid so that equilibrium values of concentrations always exist at prevailing temperature, the equation linking the equilibrium pressure to the temperature for the decomposition is given by the Clausius-Clapeyron relationship. For this type of reaction, several authors [5,47,48] have shown that the reaction rate can be presented as follows:

$$\frac{\partial \alpha}{\partial t} = A_f exp\left(-\frac{E_a}{RT}\right)(1-\alpha)^{2/3}\left(1 - \frac{p_{eq}}{p}\right) \tag{12}$$

where A_f is the pre-exponential Arrhenius factor taking into account the kinetic effect, E_a the Arrhenius activation energy. The source term Q in the eq. (8) is the heat generated or consumed in adsorber bed which is given by:

$$Q = R_c \Delta H_r \tag{20}$$

where R_c is the reaction rate as introduced previously and ΔH_r is the reaction enthalpy (given in table 1).

3.5. INITIAL AND BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

The following boundary conditions are prescribed, see Fig. 1C:

- At the top of the computational domain, the water vapour pressure is fixed.
- At the bottom of the computational domain, the symmetry boundary condition is applied, for temperature and gas flux.
- At the surface of the honeycomb heat exchanger, the velocity field is zero ($-n\nabla u = 0$), there are heat continuity between porous TCM and honeycomb fin, therefore ($-nk_{eff}\nabla T = -nk_{fin}\nabla T$).
- At the HTF tube inner surface, a constant temperature boundary condition is applied ($T = T_{HTF}$).
- At the periphery (other than the HTF boundary) of the computational domain, the symmetry boundary condition is applied.

Initially, the temperature of the computational domain was ($T_i = 30^oC$) and the reaction advancement of the bed is fixed at zero (α = 0). The initial pressure is fixed at 425 Pa corresponding initial water vapor concentration is 0.07 mol/m^3.

3.6. COMPUTATIONAL PROCEDURE AND MODEL VALIDATION

The governing partial differential equations subjected to initial and boundary conditions are simultaneously solved using the commercial package of COMSOL Multiphysics 5.3a, which is based on the Finite Element Method (FEM). The expressions for the thermophysical properties of TCM and reaction kinetics are programmed in COMSOL through user-defined functions. The partial differential equations for heat and mass transport are programmed in the 'heat transfer in porous media' and 'transport of diluted species in porous media'

interfaces available in COMSOL [49]. With respect to the 3-dimensional model for the heat and mass transport study, free meshing with tetrahedral elements is used to create the overall mesh. The numerical simulation model is divided into two calculation domains i.e. the solid and the porous domain and each discretized using the Galerkin method. The mesh size and time step dependencies of the solutions are studied to check the accuracy of the numerical results and computation time. It was optimized with three progressive decreasing mesh sizes and final values are taken because further reducing mesh size did not significantly affect the final results. The mesh size was decreased near the interfaces of the solid with the porous medium to reduce the error in the calculations. The maximum and minimum mesh element size considered in the present study is 0.0013 m and 0.000132 m which is small enough to obtain accurate mesh independent solutions. An independent discretization of the time domain is applied using the method of lines and time-stepping algorithms automatically switch between explicit and implicit steps depending on the problem. The time step may vary in order and step length depending on the evolution of the solution with time. The maximum time step is defined as 1 min, however, at the initial stage of convergence, the time step is taken very small by the solver, in the order of 10^{-3} seconds.

The numerical model for heat and mass transport in the porous medium as used in the present study is based on a model developed in our lab for the hydration of silica gel. First, the kinetics of silica gel is replaced with the kinetics of potassium carbonate, and then the heat transfer model for the honeycomb heat exchanger is added. The developed model for the reaction kinetics is validated with experimental results presented by Gaeini et al. [22] in terms of reaction advancement, see Fig. 2. In the experiments, the hydration isotherm is kept at 30 ^{o}C and hydration starts only when water vapor is introduced to the system while the isotherm temperature is maintained. The water vapor pressure was maintained at 1715 Pa. More details can be found in Gaeini et al. [22]. The comparative results present the validity of the developed model as results from the present study are in good agreement with the experimental results obtained by Gaeini et al. [22]. However, a minor shift compared to the experimental data is observed. This can be explained by a possible difference in some thermo-physical properties (effective thermal conductivity and effective porosity) of the porous K_2CO_3 sample as these values are not presented by Gaeini et al. [22]. In the present work, these properties are taken from the literature [41].

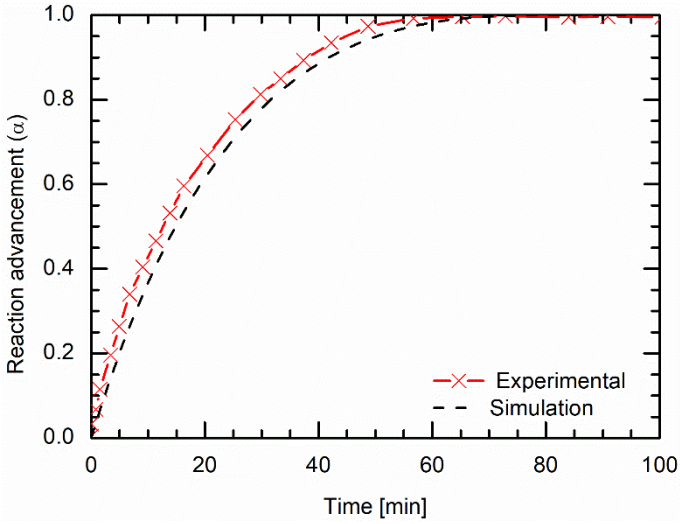

Fig. 2 Comparison of reaction advancement with experimental study of Gaeini et al. [22]

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study is conducted for the hydration of K_2CO_3 and the obtained results of the study are presented in two subsections. The initial and boundary conditions considered in the present study are listed in Table 1 and section 3.5. In the first subsection the heat transfer, reaction advancement and reaction rate are being discussed. In the second subsection, the results of the parametric study for different cell sizes (L_C), bed heights (δ_b), fin thickness (δ_{fin}) and the distance between two HTF tubes ($t_{HTF,gap}$) are discussed.

4.1. HEAT TRANSFER, REACTION ADVANCEMENT AND REACTION RATE

Figure 3 presents the temperature contour of the computational domain (i.e. TCM bed with honeycomb heat exchanger) at 5 min, 15 min, 30 min, 60 min, 90 min and 120 min considering $L_c = 0.01\ m, \delta_b/2 = 0.015\ m, \delta_{fin} = 0.001\ m\ and\ t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.090\ m$. For the given configuration, the actual volume of the porous K_2CO_3 sample is 52.43 cm^3 and the ratio of the porous bed to fin volume is 3.6. From Figure 3, it can be observed that the temperature in the computational domain for each time span is increasing with an increase in the distance from the HTF tube and also increases towards the center of each hexagonal cell of the honeycomb heat exchanger. Further, the temperature is higher at the top of the computational domain and starts decreasing with an increase in the distance from the top of the bed as the concentration of the water vapour is progressively decreasing with an increase in the distance which results in a reduced heat generation in the bed. The temperature

distribution in each hexagonal cell is not perfectly symmetric; its maximum value is slightly shifted away from the HTF tube. The temperature distribution in the y-direction of the bed (comparable to the tangential direction in cylindrical coordinates) is almost periodic because of symmetry in the hexagonal fin structure of the honeycomb.

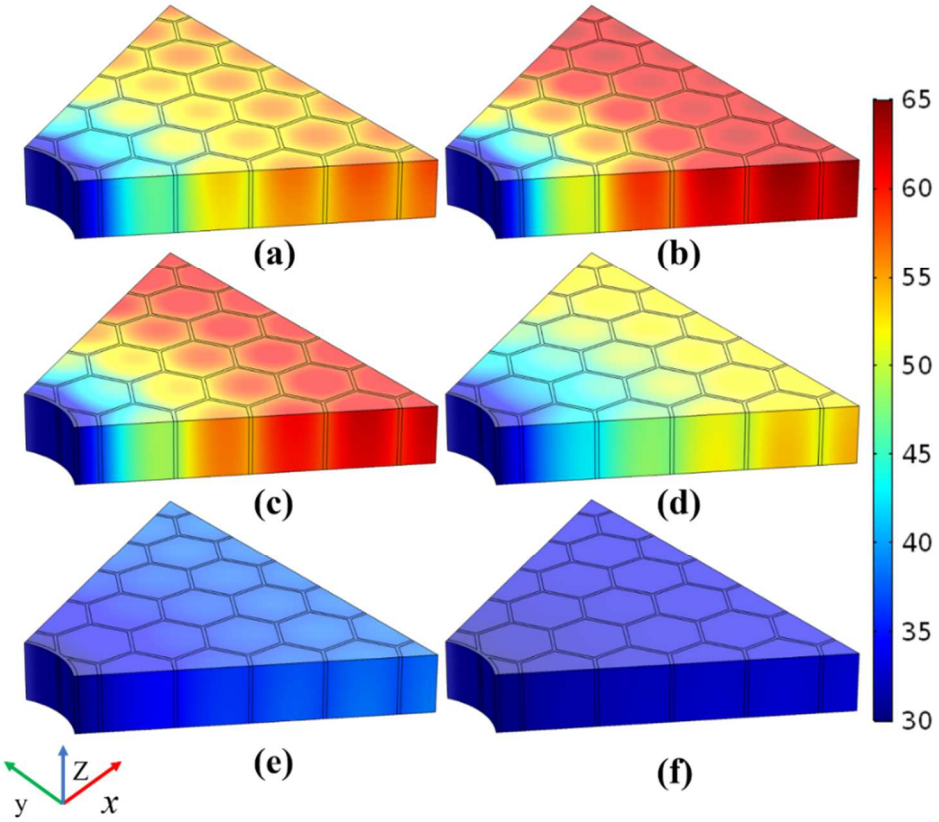

Fig.3 Colour contour of the temperature of TCM bed at different time levels (a) 5 min, (b) 15 min, (c) 30 min, (d) 60 min, (e) 90 min, (f) 120 min

Further, the temperature variations with time at different probe points in the computational domain are shown in Fig. 4. The probe points P1 to P5 are equally spaced at a distance of 0.02 m in the x-direction (radial direction) starting from the HTF tube and P5 to P8 are positioned at the center of each hexagonal cell and also space at an equal distance of 0.01732 m in the y-direction (tangential direction) from probe point P5. Further, all the probe points are positioned at the half-thickness of the computational domain ($z = \delta_b/4$).

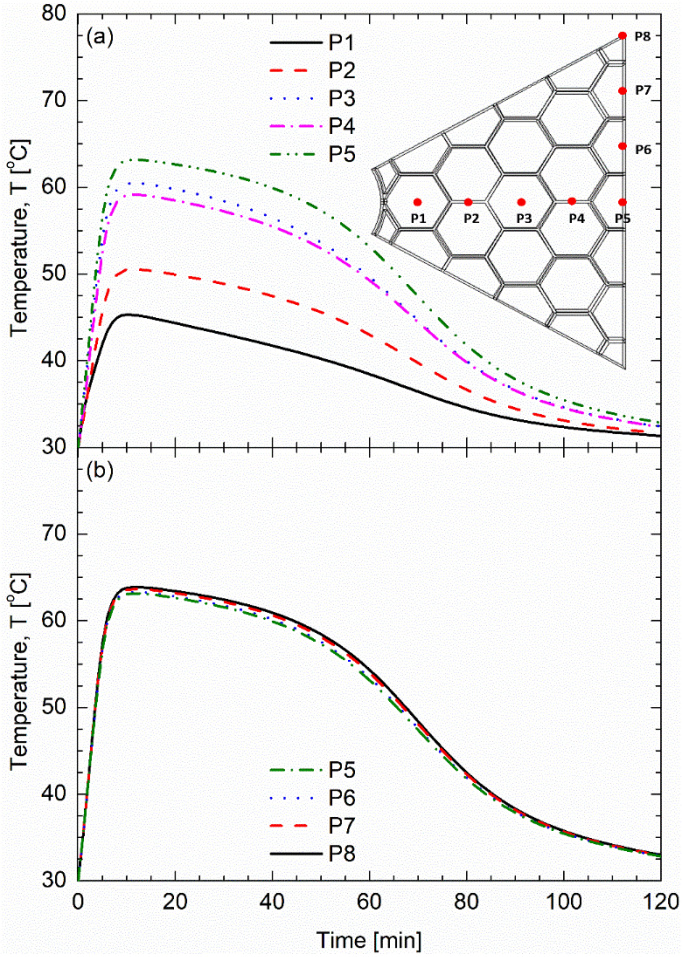

Fig. 4 Temperature variation at the different probe points (a) in the x-direction (radial direction), (b) in the y-direction (tangential direction)

Fig. 4 shows the honeycomb heat exchanger bed temperature variation at the above-discussed probe points (i.e. P1 to P8). The temperature of the bed at all probe points is increasing sharply at the initial stage of reaction and reaches its maximum value at around 10 min, further it starts decreasing gradually. Fig. 4(a) represents the variation of bed temperature with time at probe point P1 to P5. The minimum temperature is observed at probe point P1 as it is nearest to the HTF tube. The temperature of the bed is increasing with an increase in distance from the HTF tube, though, the temperature at probe point 4 is lower than P3 as P4 is positioned in the honeycomb fin and P3 is placed in the center of the hexagonal cell. Fig 4(b) represents the variation of temperature at different probe points (P5 to P8) in the y-direction (tangential direction). The temperature difference in probe points P5 to P8 is very small because of the presence of the honeycomb fin structure and symmetry considerations.

Fig 5 presents the variation of reaction advancement (α, eq. (12)) and reaction rate (R_c, Eq. (8)) of water vapor with K_2CO_3 at different probe points with time. The positions of probe

points are presented above. Because the probe points P2 and P4 coincide with the fin structure, they are left out of this analysis. Up to 55 min, the reaction advancement is the highest at probe point P1, from 55 min onwards probe point P3 shows the highest reaction advancement, as shown in Fig. 5(a). Minimum reaction advancement is obtained at probe point P8 because it is the furthest probe point from the HTF tube in the thermochemical reactor bed. The decreasing order of reaction advancement at different probe points before and after 55 min is P1>P3>P5>P6>P7>P8 and P3>P1>P5>P6>P7>P8 respectively. It should be noted however that the values for reaction advancement are quite close to each other for the points P5-P8 over the full-time interval. This applies to all points for times greater than 80 min. Besides, the reaction rate of water vapour with K_2CO_3 at the different probe, points are shown in Fig. 5(b). Initially, the reaction rate increases sharply and reaches its maximum value for all probe points and then it starts decreasing with different proportions. At probe point P1, the reaction rate continuously decreases after getting its maximum value, though, for other probe points, the reaction rate sharply decreases with time until reaches its minimum value (≈ t = 10 min). After reaching the minimum value of reaction rate it further starts increasing with time up to ≈ 35 min for P3 and t = ≈ 55 min for P5, P6, P7, P8. This can be explained as the water vapour seeps into the bed and reacts with TCM, which results in the temperature rise in the bed. The temperature rise in the bed causes a reduction in the reaction rate.

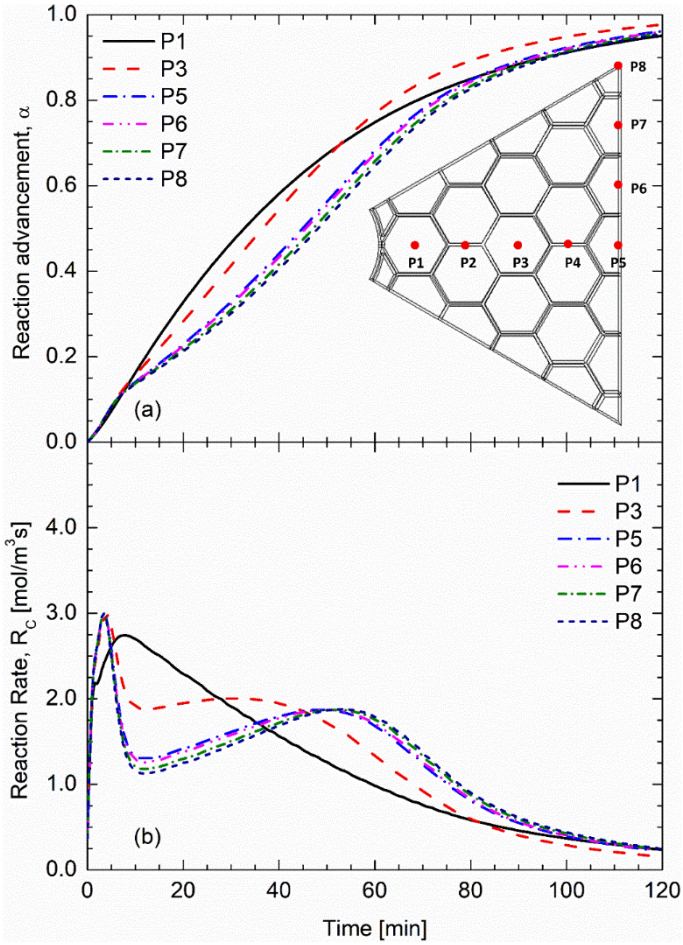

Fig. 5 Variation of (a) reaction advancement, (b) Reaction rate at the different probe points with time

4.2. PARAMETRIC STUDY

Below a discussion on the results obtained from a parametric study of honeycomb cell size, bed height, honeycomb fin thickness and the distance between two HTF tubes are presented. The results are presented in terms of temperature variation (T), reaction advancement (α) and power output (P_o). The power output P_o is obtained by integrating the heat flux over the HTF tube surface and is defined as:

$$\mathrm{P_o} = \oiint \vec{q}\, dS$$

with the heat flux $\vec{q}$ integrated over the surface S of the HTF tube.

4.2.1. Effect of honeycomb cell size

Fig. 6 shows the temperature contours of the computational domain for four different honeycomb cell sizes i.e. L_C = 0.005 m, 0.01 m, 0.015 m, and 0.02 m at 15 min. The default values of $\delta_b/2$, δ_{fin} and $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ for all the cell sizes are 0.015 m, 0.001 m, and 0.09 respectively. The volumes of the porous K_2CO_3 samples for L_C = 0.005 m, 0.01 m, 0.015 m, and 0.02 m are 52.43 cm^3, 59.49 cm^3, 61.95 cm^3 and 63.20 cm^3 respectively. Further, the volume ratios of the porous K_2CO_3 samples with respect to the metallic fin volumes are 3.6, 7.9, 12.25 and 16.57 respectively. The smaller honeycomb cell size increases the number of cells in the TCM bed and consequently also increases the fin material volume. The increment of the fin volume in the computational domain causes enhanced heat transport in the bed; however, it reduced the actual heat capacity of the bed. The temperature gradient in the computational domain is lowest for the smallest cell size of the honeycomb structure and vice versa, because of better heat transport from the TCM bed to the HTF.

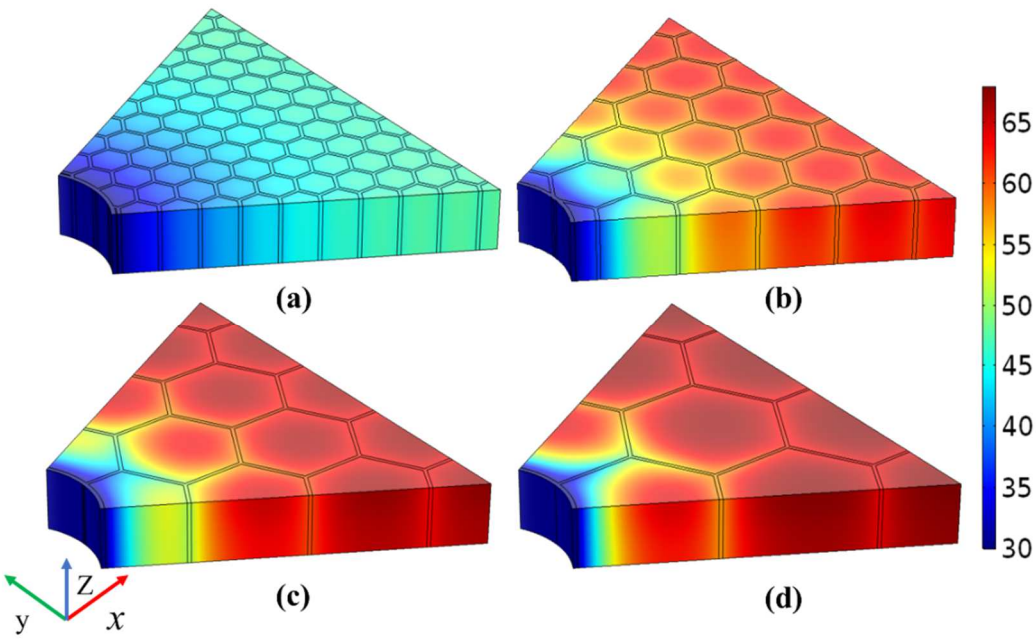

Fig. 6 Temperature contours at different cell sizes (a) L_C = 0.005 m, (b) L_C = 0.01 m, (c) L_C = 0.015 m, (d) L_C = 0.02 m at 15 min

Further, the temperature variation, reaction advancement and thermal power transported to the HTF with time are plotted in Fig. 7 at probe point 8 (as shown in fig 5a). The temperature at probe point P8 (the point furthest away from the HTF tube) increases sharply for all the

cell sizes and gradually starts decreasing after reaching its maximum value as shown in Fig 7(a). For the lowest cell size (L_C = 0.005 m), the maximum temperature at probe point P8 reaches 47 °C after 10 min. Further, the temperature gradually starts decreasing and reaches the lowest value of 32 °C at 120 min. For L_C = 0.01 m, the temperature at probe point P8 sharply reaches its maximum value and starts decreasing gradually until 60 min. Further, it sharply decreases and becomes 32 °C after 120 min. Fig. 7(b) shows the reaction advancement at probe point P8 for all cell sizes. For L_C = 0.005 m and L_C = 0.01 m, the reaction advancement at 120 min reaches around 0.95 however for L_C = 0.015 m and L_C = 0.02 m its value is 0.8 and 0.35 respectively.

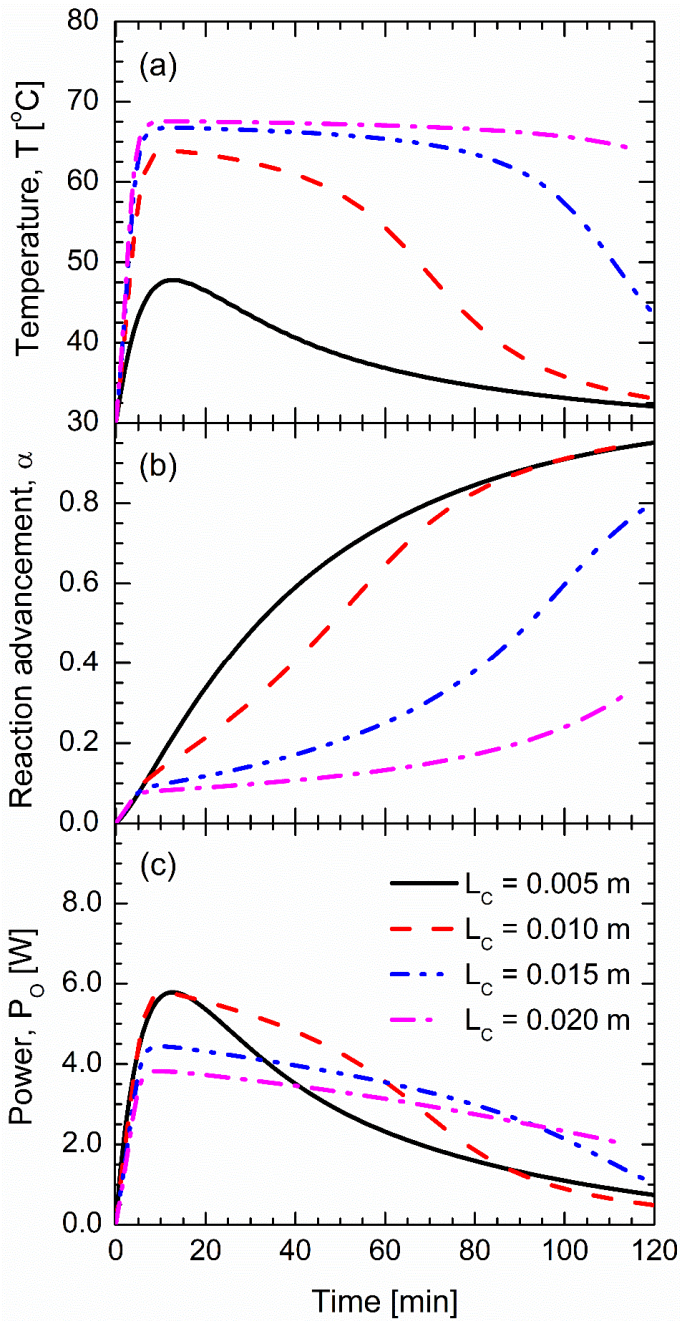

Fig. 7 Variation of (a) Temperature, (b) reaction advancement and (c) power output with time for different cell sizes; temperature and reaction advancement are presented for probe point P8

The lowest reaction advancement is obtained with the highest cell size because of the higher temperature which causes a reduced reaction rate of water vapour with K_2CO_3. Fig. 7 (c) presents the variation of power output with time at the HTF tube surface in the computational domain. The power output (P_O) reaches its maximum value at the same time when the temperature at probe point P8 is maximum. For L_C = 0.015 m and L_C = 0.02 m, there is a gradual reduction in power output after reaching its maximum value, however, it is sharper for L_C = 0.005 m and L_C = 0.01 m. The smaller honeycomb cell size leads to a higher number of cells in the computational domain which reduces the actual volume of the reacting material in the computational domain. The reduction in the volume of reacting material reduces the heat storage capacity of the reacting bed.

4.2.2. Effect of bed height

The temperature contours of the computational domain for four different bed height ($\delta_b/2 = 0.005\,m$, $\delta_b/2 = 0.01\,m$, $\delta_b/2 = 0.015\,m$, and $\delta_b/2 = 0.02\,m$) at 15 min are presented in Fig. 8. The fin thickness, honeycomb cell size and the distance between two HTF tubes are considered 0.001 m, 0.01m and 0.09 m respectively. The volumes of the porous K_2CO_3 samples for $\delta_b/2 = 0.005\,m$, $\delta_b/2 = 0.01\,m$, $\delta_b/2 = 0.015\,m$, and $\delta_b/2 = 0.02\,m$ are 19.83 cm^3, 39.66 cm^3, 59.49 cm^3 and 79.32 cm^3 respectively. The ratio of the porous K_2CO_3 sample volume to the metallic fin volume is fixed at 7.9. At 15 min, the temperature gradient in the computational domain is almost the same for all bed heights (Fig. 8 (a)-(d)), however, its value is slightly higher for the computational domain with the lowest bed height as compared to the higher bed height (Fig. 9). For the smaller bed height, the water vapour easily seeps into the bed and reacts with the TCM, which enhances the reaction rate and results in a higher temperature.

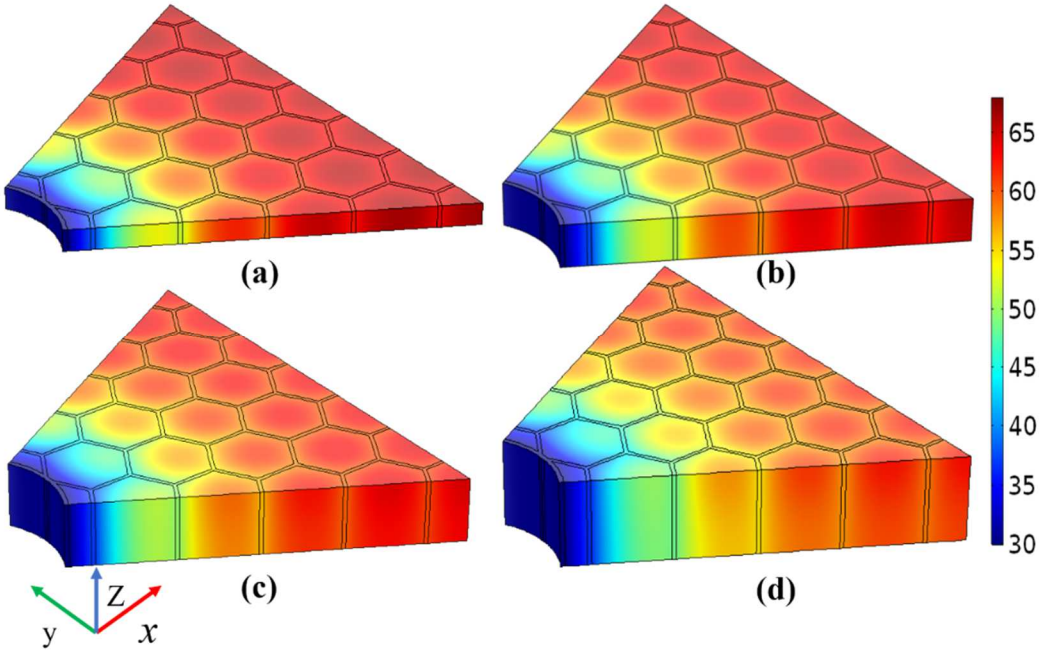

Fig. 8 Temperature contours at different bed height (a) $\delta_b/2 = 0.005\ m$, (b) $\delta_b/2 = 0.01\ m$, (c) $\delta_b/2 = 0.015\ m$, (d) $\delta_b/2 = 0.02\ m$ at t=15 min

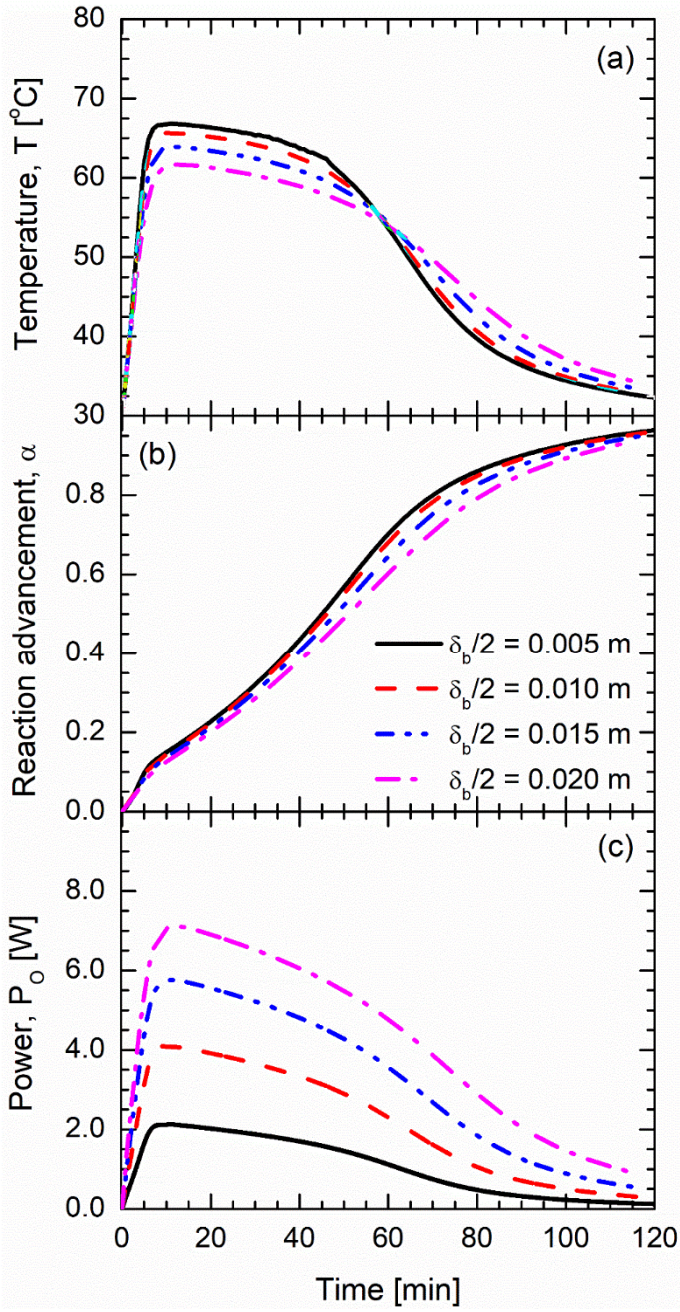

Fig. 9 Variation of (a) Temperature, (b) reaction advancement and (c) power output with time for different cell sizes; temperature and reaction advancement are presented for probe point P8

The temperature at probe point P8 (discussed in the previous section) is presented in Fig 9 (a) for different bed thicknesses. At this probe point the bed temperature is higher for the lowest bed thickness until t = 60 min and vice versa after 60 min. Further, reaction advancement is always higher for the lowest bed height (i.e. $\delta_b/2 = 0.005\,m$) because of the lower flow resistance and lower uptake of vapor in the bed which results in better accessibility of and higher concentration in the computational domain. Further, the power output from the

computational domain to the HTF surface is presented in Fig. 9(c). The maximum power is obtained with the maximum bed thickness simply because of the presence of more TCM in the computational domain. However, it is interesting to see that the power output is linearly increasing with the bed height for the 2 smaller values ($\delta_b/2 = 0.005\,m$ and $\delta_b/2 = 0.01\,m$) but slightly decreases for the 2 larger values ($\delta_b/2 = 0.015\,m$ and $\delta_b/2 = 0.02\,m$). There is a progressive attenuation in power with time for higher bed height because the fraction of hydrated TCM increases and subsequently reduce the reactant volume with time, which results in lower power production.

4.2.3. Effect of honeycomb fin thickness

The temperature variation of the computational domain for four different fin thicknesses ($\delta_{fin} = 0.0005\,m$, $\delta_{fin} = 0.001\,m$, $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\,m$, and $\delta_{fin} = 0.002\,m$) at 15 min are presented in Fig. 10 considering L_C = 0.01 m, $\delta_b/2 = 0.015\,m$ and $T_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.09\,m$. The volumes of the porous K2CO3 samples for $\delta_{fin} = 0.0005\,m$, $\delta_{fin} = 0.001\,m$, $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\,m$, and $\delta_{fin} = 0.002\,m$ are 63.19 cm^3, 59.49 cm^3, 55.90 cm^3 and 52.43 cm^3 respectively. Further, the ratios of the porous K2CO3 sample volumes to the metallic fin volumes are 16.57, 7.92, 5.03 and 3.60 respectively. The highest temperature gradient in the TCM bed is observed with the lowest fin thickness due to the reduction in the thermal transport from the bed to the HTF surface (increased heat resistance because of a reduced cross-sectional area of the fin structure). Further, the increment in the fin thickness also reduces the actual volume of the TCM in the bed, which also results in reduced heat generation and causes a lower bed temperature.

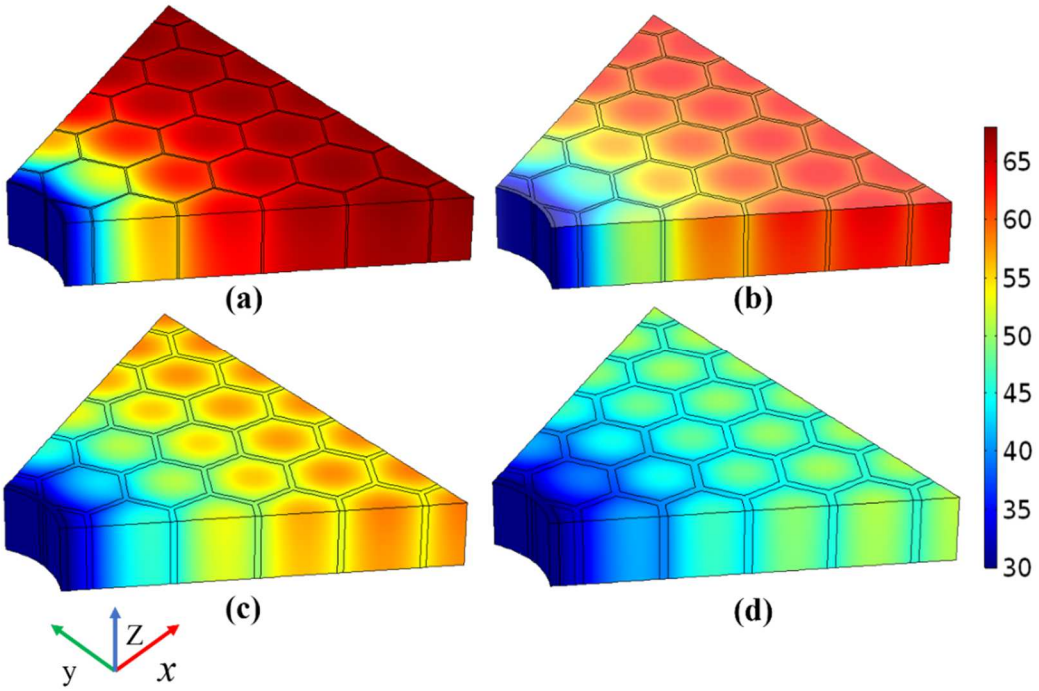

Fig. 10 Temperature contours at different honeycomb fin thickness (a) $\delta_{fin} = 0.0005\ m$, (b) $\delta_{fin} = 0.001\ m$, (c) $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\ m$, (d) $\delta_{fin} = 0.002\ m$ at t=15 min

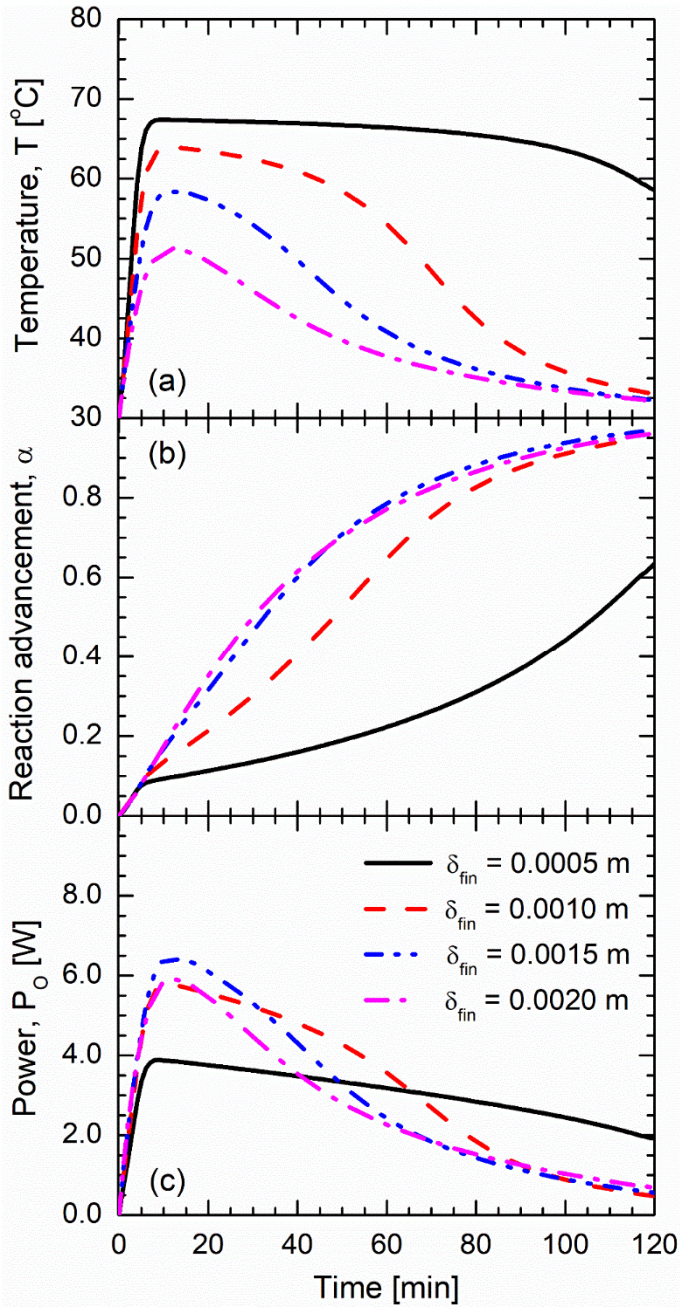

Fig. 11 Variation of (a) Temperature, (b) reaction advancement and (c) power output with time for different cell sizes; temperature and reaction advancement are presented for probe point P8

Further, the temperature variation, reaction advancement at probe point P8 and power output from the computational domain are presented in Fig 11 (a), Fig. 11(b) and Fig. 11 (c) respectively. The temperature for the minimum fin thickness is the highest and, vice versa, the temperature for the maximum fin thickness is the lowest which is understandable because it influences the thermal transport from the bed to the HTF as discussed above. For $\delta_{fin} = 0.001\,m$, $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\,m$, and $\delta_{fin} = 0.002\,m$ the temperature at 120 min reaches to 32 ^{o}C, slightly above its initial value of 30 ^{0}C, however for $\delta_{fin} = 0.0005\,m$ its value is still around 59 ^{o}C because the hydration reaction is still in full swing as can be concluded from the reaction advancement. The reaction advancement at probe point P8 is presented in Fig. 11 (b). From Fig. 11(b) it is observed that the reaction advancement reached around 0.98 at 120 min, for the fin thickness greater than 0.0005 m, however, it reaches 0.68 for fin thickness 0.0005 m. The power output from the TCM bed is presented in Fig. 11(c). Initially, the power output sharply increases and starts decreasing gradually after reaching its peak value. The maximum peak power is obtained for fin thickness $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\,m$, the minimum peak power for fin thickness of $\delta_{fin} = 0.0005\,m$. In Fig. 11 (c) it is also observed that the power output with $\delta_{fin} = 0.002\,m$ fin thickness is lower as compared to $\delta_{fin} = 0.0015\,m$ because a larger fin thickness results in a larger volume of fin material and reduces the actual volume of the TCM which causes lower power output. Finally, it is interesting to note that for a lower fin thickness the peak power goes down but the power is more constant over time than for a higher fin thickness.

4.2.4. Effect of distance between two HTF heat pipe

Numerical simulations have also been conducted to see the effect of the distance between two HTF tube ($t_{gap,HTF}$). The simulations have been performed for $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.045\,m$, $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.090\,m$, and $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.135\,m$. The volumes of the porous K_2CO_3 samples for $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.045\,m$, $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.090\,m$, and $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.135\,m$ are 12.78 cm^3 59.49 cm^3 and 137.34 cm^3 respectively and the ratio of the porous K_2CO_3 samples to the metallic fins volume is fixed at 7.92. The obtained temperature contours at 15 min are presented in Fig. 12(a), Fig. 12(b) and Fig. 12(c) respectively. The temperature gradient near the HTF tube in the computational domain is smaller for a smaller distance between two HTF tubes. The temperature gradient in each cell near the HTF tube is also higher for the higher $t_{gap,HTF}/2$. For maximum $t_{gap,HTF}/2$, when moving away from the HTF tube the

temperature gradient in each cell starts decreasing. At the maximum distance from the HTF tube, the temperature gradient is negligible. Further, temperature variation and reaction advancement at probe point 8 and power output from the TCM bed is presented in Fig 13(a), Fig. 13(b) and Fig. 13(c) respectively. It is evident that for higher values of $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ the temperature at probe point 8 is the highest. For $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.045$ m and 0.09m, the temperature increases to its maximum value and then it starts decreasing. For minimum $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ (0.045 m), the maximum temperature reaches 37.5 ºC at around 5 min and starts decreasing gradually with time and reaches 31 ºC at 120 min. For maximum $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ (0.135 m), the temperature reaches 68 ºC at 10 min and its value remains around 68 ºC over the whole time span. From the reaction advancement as presented in Fig. 13(b), it is observed that the reaction advancement is higher for the lowest $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ in the initial stage of reaction and becomes maximum for $t_{gap,HTF}/2 = 0.09\,m$ after 60 min. Further, the power output of the TCM bed is also presented in Fig. 13 (c) for different $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ values. For all its values the power output increases in precisely the same way. However, the smaller the $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ value, the earlier the maximum is reached. The maximum power output is achieved with the highest $t_{gap,HTF}/2$ because of the higher volume of the TCM bed.

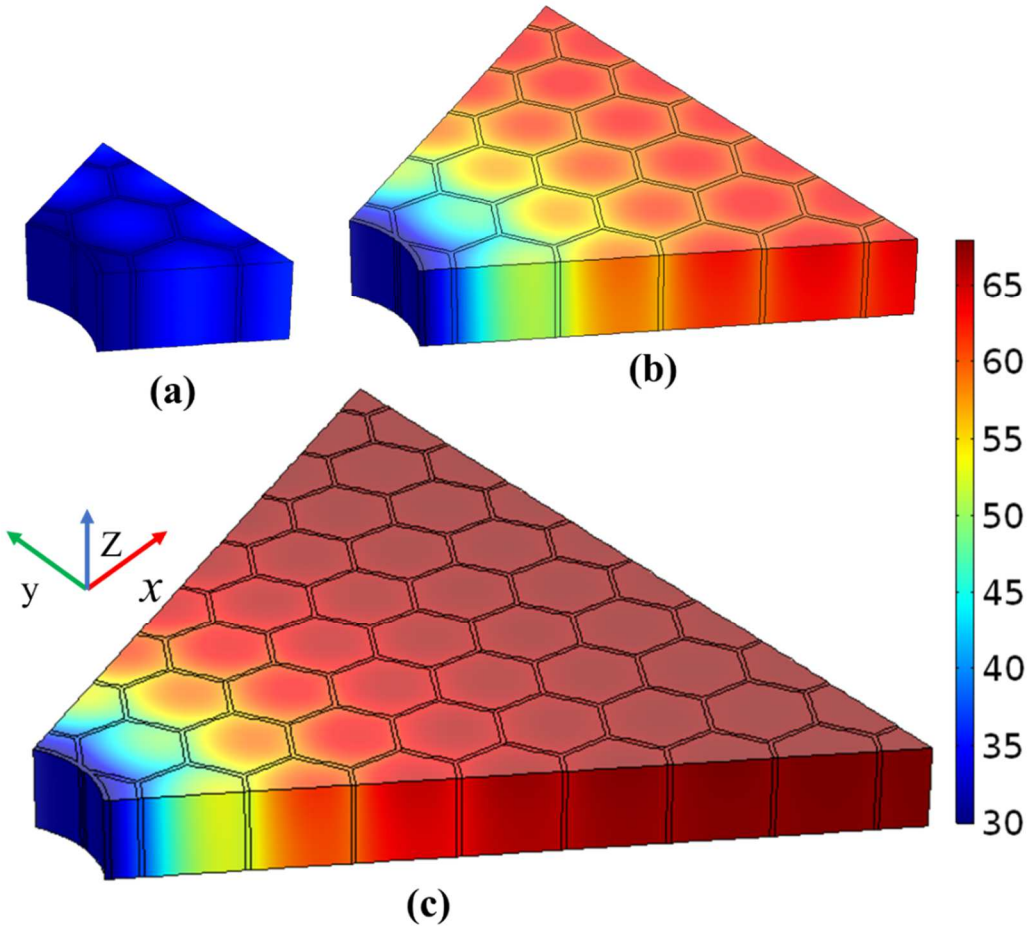

Fig. 12 Temperature contours for different distance values between two HTF tubes (a) $\frac{t_{gap,HTF}}{2} = 0.045\ m$, (b) $\frac{t_{gap,HTF}}{2} = 0.090\ m$, (c) $\frac{t_{gap,HTF}}{2} = 0.135\ m$ at t=15 min

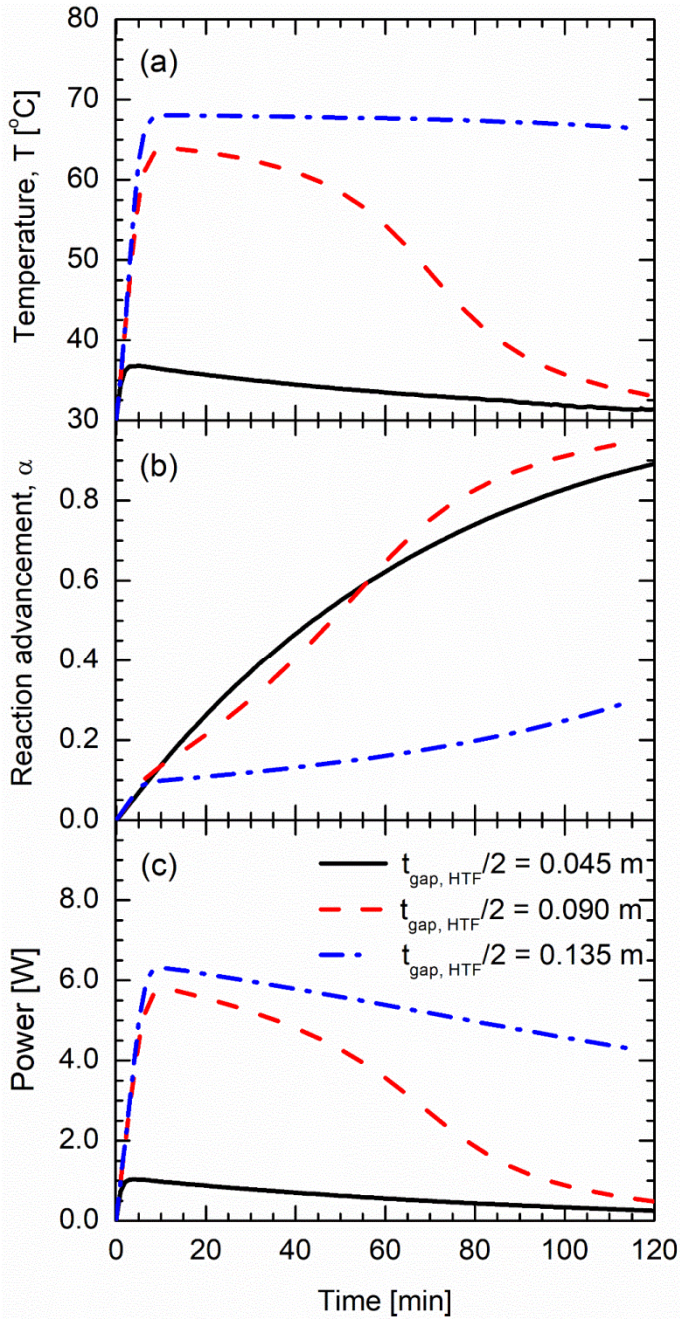

Fig. 13 Variation of (a) Temperature, (b) reaction advancement and (c) power output with time for different distances between two HTF tubes; temperature and reaction advancement are presented for probe point P8

5. CONCLUSIONS

A thermochemical energy storage system using potassium carbonate and water as the sorbent/sorbate reaction pair ($K_2CO_3/K_2CO_3.1.5H_2O$) is studied numerically considering a three-dimensional fixed honeycomb heat exchanger bed filled with K_2CO_3-particles. The

thermochemical bed is cooled from the center of the honeycomb heat exchanger by an HTF flow. The developed numerical model for the reaction kinetics of potassium carbonate is validated with experimental data in terms of reaction advancement. The results obtained provide detailed insight into the temperature variation and reaction propagation in the reactive solid TCM bed during discharging. A parametric study has been conducted to see the effect on the heat transfer of the honeycomb cell size, the bed height, the honeycomb fin thickness and the distance between two HTF tubes. It is concluded that an increase in bed height, cell size and fin thickness affect the discharge process to a great extent. Increasing the height of the bed will restrict the vapor flow within the bed whereas increasing the cell size and decreasing the fin thickness of the honeycomb heat exchanger will reduce the heat transfer to/from the bed due to poor conductivity properties. Increasing the distance between two HTF tubes will result in an increase of the temperature maximum and, therefore, will require heat transfer enhancement techniques if this temperature must remain below a certain value (to avoid dehydration during hydration for example).

It can be concluded that the developed numerical model is a very powerful tool in predicting all details of the physical phenomena taking place in the three-dimensional fixed honeycomb heat exchanger bed packed with K_2CO_3-particles. The model is also well suited for other applications utilizing different TCMs and different heat exchanger configurations. Changes in temperature, reaction advancement and power output with respect to geometry can easily be investigated using a similar approach. The next step is the design and the test of a prototype of the most optimal storage system equipped with honeycomb heat exchangers at a significant scale. The test of this prototype will allow us to demonstrate the feasibility of the potassium carbonate seasonal thermochemical storage process with a fixed bed honeycomb heat exchanger configuration functioning with water vapor for the built environment.

Acknowledgments

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