ISSN: 3169 – 3844
Volume 9, Number 3, 2023
Journal of Physical Science and Engineering
Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria 3125, Australia
*Journal homepage: www.bwjournal.org*

# THREE-DIMENSIONAL PARTIAL DISCHARGE LOCALIZATION IN POWER TRANSFORMERS USING HYBRID UHF AND ACOUSTIC SENSORS: A DYNAMIC SIMULATION STUDY

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## ABSTRACT
Partial discharges (PDs) in power transformers serve as early warning signs of insulation deterioration and, if left undetected, can lead to severe failures. This study introduces a new simulation-based method for locating PDs using a combination of Ultra-High Frequency (UHF) and Acoustic Emission (AE) sensors. A three-dimensional transformer model was created, with sensors strategically positioned to capture both electromagnetic and mechanical PD signals. The PD signals were modeled to account for distance-dependent attenuation and Gaussian noise. PD localization was performed using a least-squares triangulation approach based on the sensors' time-of-arrival measurements. The actual PD source was located at (0.6, 0.4, 0.8) m, while the estimated location was (0.602, 0.398, 0.802) m, resulting in a very small spatial localization error of 0.003 m. Triangulation residuals were under 0.01 m for all sensors, confirming the numerical stability of the estimation. Analysis of signal amplitudes showed a strong inverse relationship with sensor distance, validating the attenuation model. Also, a 3D heatmap was generated to visualize PD probability, effectively revealing the PD source and other potential high-risk regions. The main innovation of this work is the combination of dual-sensor fusion, optimization, and visualization (hybrid triangulation and 3D probability heatmap), which together improve localization accuracy compared to traditional single-sensor methods. This methodology provides highly accurate, and effective PD localization, offering a foundational step toward future experimental validation for predictive maintenance of transformers.

***Keywords: Transformer, Partial Discharge, UHF Sensor, Acoustic Emission, Localization, MATLAB Simulation.***

## INTRODUCTION
Partial discharges (PDs) are localized electrical discharges that happen within the insulation of high-voltage equipment like power transformers. They do not create a complete connection between the electrodes. PDs are well-known signs of insulation wear. If PD activity continues, it can cause serious insulation failure, unexpected outages, and financial losses. [1], [2], [3]. Reliable detection and accurate localization of PD sources are crucial for transformer condition monitoring and predictive maintenance. Conventional PD detection methods usually depend on either electrical or mechanical sensing. Ultra-High Frequency (UHF) sensors capture electromagnetic waves from PD events. These sensors offer high temporal resolution and are sensitive to weak discharges [4], [5]. Acoustic Emission (AE) sensors detect mechanical stress waves created by quick energy release. They provide spatial information that works alongside UHF measurements [6], [7]. While using UHF and AE sensing together improves detection reliability, most studies still depend on single-sensor setups. This limits the precise 3D localization of PD sources, especially in transformers with complex internal structures [5], [8]. Signal propagation in transformer oil, windings, and insulation is further complicated by attenuation, scattering, and reflections. These factors degrade signal quality and make it hard to achieve precision. Localization [9]-[11]. Furthermore, traditional methods often do

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not include a quantitative assessment of localization performance [12], [13]. This includes error bounds, residuals, and robustness in low signal-to-noise conditions [14], [15].
Despite progress in PD diagnostics, there is still a lack of thorough, simulation-based studies that combine hybrid UHF and AE sensing, nonlinear triangulation algorithms, and three-dimensional visualization to measure localization accuracy and assess sensor residuals. This shortfall drives the current study. This study contributes by (i) developing a unified 3D simulation framework for hybrid UHF–AE PD localization, (ii) quantitatively evaluating localization error and triangulation residuals, and (iii) introducing a probabilistic 3D heatmap for visual interpretation of PD risk zones.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

A three-dimensional model of a standard power transformer was developed to realistically represent its internal geometry. The transformer core, windings, and insulating oil were conceptually modeled to define the internal volume required for sensor deployment and partial discharge (PD) simulation. This volume was then discretized into a three-dimensional computational grid to support accurate spatial analysis. The study employs a hybrid sensing approach that integrates ultra-high-frequency (UHF) and acoustic emission (AE) measurement techniques.

Table 1: Assumed Material Properties

| Parameters | Values/Units |
|---|---|
| Transformer oil relative permittivity | 2.2 |
| Acoustic wave velocity | 1400 m/s |
| Electromagnetic wave velocity in oil | $2\times 10^8$ m/s |
| Oil Density | 870 kg/$m^3$ |
| Insulation Permittivity | 3.5 |
| PD apparent charge | 50-500 pC |
| Pulse width | 10-50 ns |

The parameters in table 1, were selected based on established industry standards and well-documented literature, as they play a critical role in UHF and AE signal propagation, time-of-arrival estimation, and the precision of PD localization.

### Electrical Model of the Power Transformer

The electrical behavior of the power transformer is represented using the classical lumped-parameter equivalent circuit.

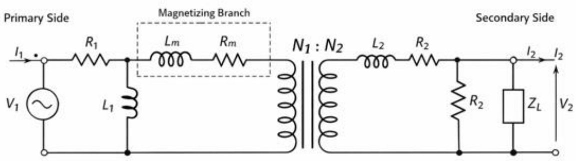


Figure 1: Lumped Parameter Equivalent Circuit of a Transformer [16]

The per-phase transformer equations are expressed as [17]:

$$V_1 = R_1 I_1 + L_1 \frac{dI_1}{dt} + V_m \quad (1)$$

$V_m = R_m I_m + L_m \frac{dI_m}{dt}$ (2)
$V_2 = R_2 I_2 + L_2 \frac{dI_2}{dt}$ (3)
Where:
$V_1$ , $V_2$ = are the primary and secondary voltages
$R_1, R_2$ = are the winding resistances
$R_m$ , $L_m$ = represents core loss and magnetizing inductance
This model is mainly used to identify the stress distribution in the transformer insulation. This distribution directly impacts where partial discharge (PD) activity is likely to occur and the simulated discharge locations. While this study emphasizes simulation-based localization, the electrical model offers a consistent framework for placing PD sources. Future work can expand on this to explore dynamic electrical responses.

**i. Insulation Electric Field Distribution Model**
PD inception occurs when the local electric field exceeds the insulation withstand strength. The electric field distribution within transformer insulation is governed by Poisson's equation [1], [18]:
$\nabla \cdot (\varepsilon \nabla \emptyset) = -\rho$ (4)
Where:
$\emptyset$ = is the electric potential
$\varepsilon$ = is the permittivity of the insulation medium
$\rho$ = is the space charge density
The local electric field is:
$E = -\nabla \emptyset$ (5)
Regions of high electric field intensity correspond to potential PD activity. This shows the need for accurate spatial localization within transformer volume [18].

**ii. PD Representation within the Transformer**
A partial discharge was modeled as a localized impulsive current source embedded within the insulation system [19]:
$i_{PD}(t) = q_{PD}\delta(t - t_0)$ (6)
Where:
$q_{PD}$ = is the apparent charge magnitude
$t_0$ = is the PD inception time

**iii. UHF Electromagnetic Wave Propagation Model**
PD-generated electromagnetic waves propagate through transformer insulation as UHF signals. The wave velocity is [20]:
$v_{em} = \frac{c}{\sqrt{\varepsilon_r}}$ (7)
The received UHF signal at sensor $i$ was modeled as [21]:
$s_i^{UHF}(t) = A_0 e^{-\alpha d_i} \delta\left(t - \frac{d_i}{v_{em}}\right) + n_i(t)$ (8)
Where:
$\alpha$ = is the dielectric attenuation constant
$d_i$ = is the distance between PD source and sensor

**iv. Acoustic Emission (AE) Propagation Model**
The acoustic emission generated by PD propagates through transformer oil according to the wave equation [22]:

$\nabla^2 p - \frac{1}{v_{ac}^2}\frac{\partial^2 p}{\partial t^2} = 0$ (9)

The received acoustic signal is expressed as:

$s_i^{AE}(t) = \frac{P_0}{d_i}e^{-\beta d_i}\partial\left(t - \frac{d_i}{v_{ac}}\right)$ (10)

Where:

$v_{ac}$ = is the acoustic velocity in oil

$\beta$ = is the acoustic attenuation coefficient

**v. Transformer Geometry and Spatial Modeling**

The transformer was modeled as a three-dimensional bounded domain.

$\Omega = \{(x, y, z)\}|0 \le x \le L, 0 \le yW, 0 \le z \le H|$ (11)

This spatial model enables accurate representation of sensor placement and PD source localization.

**vi. Linkage to Localization Objectives**

Using the Triangulation Model, the PD localization problem was formulated as [24]:

$\underset{r_{PD}}{min} \sum_{i=1}^{N}(\|r_{PD}\| - v \cdot t_i)^2$ (12)

The formulation directly connects the transformer physical structure, signal propagation characteristics sensor measurements.

**B. PD source Modelling**

Let a partial discharge (PD) source be located at $r_{PD}$= $|x_{PD}, y_{PD}, z_{PD}|^T$ inside the transformer volume. The PD emits two types of signals. Electromagnetic waves, and Acoustic waves.

The propagation of each signal to sensor $i$ was modeled as spherical wave propagation with magnitude attenuation with distance, $d$, and Gaussian noise $\eta_i$: [2].

$A_i = \frac{A_0}{d_i + \epsilon} + \eta_i$ (13)

$d_i = \|r_{PD} - r_i\|_2 = \sqrt{(x_{PD} - x_i)^2 + (y_{PD} - y_i)^2 + (z_{PD} - z_i)^2}$ (14)

Where:

$r_i = |x_i, y_i, z_i|^T$ is the position of sensor $i$

$A_0$ = is the nominal PD amplitude

$\epsilon \ll 1$ , avoids division by zero

$\eta_i \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2)$ is additive Gaussian noise [19]

While boundary reflections in practical transformers can cause multipath effects and delayed signal components that affect TOA accuracy, localization methods usually depend on the first-arrival wave. This makes the spherical propagation assumption appropriate for baseline performance evaluation. Modeling detailed boundary interactions would need computationally heavy full-wave simulations and is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is an important idea for future research.

**C. Time of Arrival (TOA) Modelling**

The signal arrival time at sensor $i$ is given by:

$TOA_i = \frac{d_i}{v_i} + \eta_{t,i}$ (15)

Where:

$v_i = c_{UHF}$ for UHF sensors, $v_i = c_{AE}$ for AE sensors

$\eta_{t,i}$ = is Gaussian timing noise representing sensor measurement uncertainty.

This TOA formulation is the basis for triangulation based PD localization [8].

**D. PD Localization through Nonlinear Least Squares**

This is to estimate the PD position $\hat{r}_{PD} = \left|\hat{x}_{PD}, \hat{y}_{PD,}\hat{z}_{PD}\right|^T$ from TOA measurements.
Define the residual function for sensor $i$

$$f_i(r) = \|r - r_i\|_2 - v_i \cdot TOA \quad (16)$$

The nonlinear least squares problem is:

$$\hat{r}_{PD} = arg\,\underset{r}{min} \sum_{i=1}^{N} |f_i(r)|^2 \quad (17)$$

Where $N$ is the total number of sensor (UHF or AE) [9].

**E. Sensor Placement and Synchronization Error**

Sensors are assumed to be synchronized for TOA extraction. To account for possible errors, a synchronization uncertainty $\Delta t_{sync}$ was introduced [25].

$$t_1^{measured} = t_1^{true} + \Delta t_{sync}, \quad (18)$$

Where the synchronization error is limited to

$$\Delta t_{sync} \in [-5, 5]\text{ns} \quad (19)$$

This shows practical limits in timing precision. The effect on localization accuracy is tested in a simulation. It demonstrates how well the algorithm handles realistic synchronization mistakes.

**F. Sensitivity Analysis of Localization Accuracy to Measurement Noise**

To evaluate the strength of the proposed PD localization framework, a sensitivity analysis was carried out. This involved adding white Gaussian noise to both UHF and acoustic emission signals. The noise level was gradually increased. The resulting localization error was measured to determine how sensitive the system is to signal degradation.
The corresponding localization error was computed as [15]:

$$e_{loc} = \|r_{PD}^{est} - r_{PD}^{true}\| \quad (20)$$

This sensitivity analysis shows how important signal quality is. It also provides numerical information on the operational limits of the proposed localization method when faced with real measurement noise [26].

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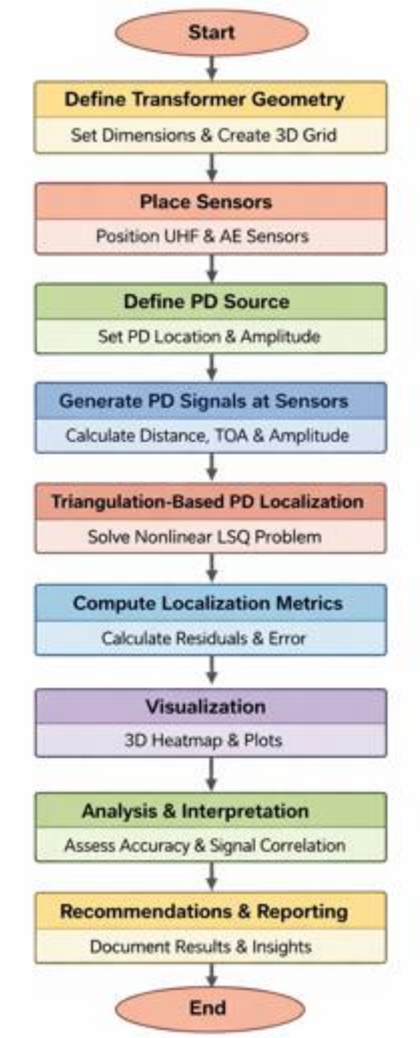


Figure 2: PD Localization Modelling and Analysis Approach Flowchart.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Table 2: Parameters for Analysis Simulation

| PARAMETERS | VALUES/UNITS |
|---|---|
| Transformer length | 1.2 m |
| Transformer width | 0.8 m |
| Transformer height | 1.5 m |
| PD source location | [0.6, 0.4, 0.8] m |
| Number of UHF sensors | 4 |
| UHF sensor positions | Corners of base, (m) |
| Number of AE sensors | 4 |
| AE sensor positions | Corners of top, (m) |
| Signal amplitude constant | 1 AU |
| Amplitude smoothing constant | 0.01 m |
| Grid resolution | 0.05 m |
| Initial guess for localization | [0.5,0.5,0.5] m |

The selected parameters for the simulation analysis of this study are summarize in table 2.

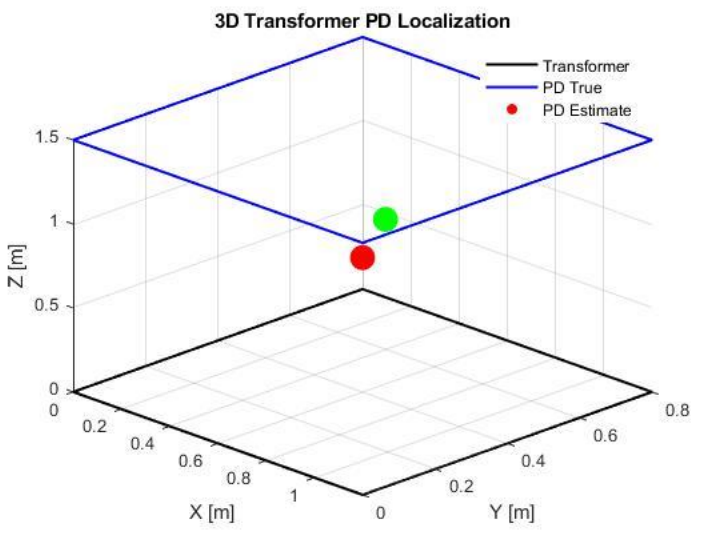


Figure 3: 3D Transformer PD Localization

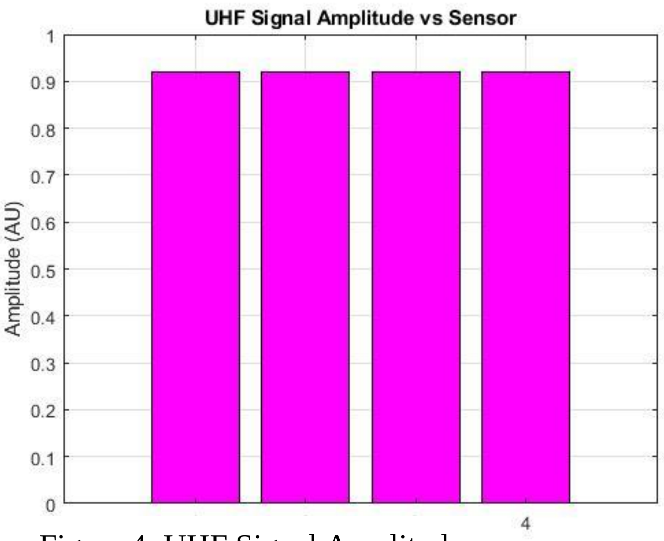


Figure 4: UHF Signal Amplitude against Sensor

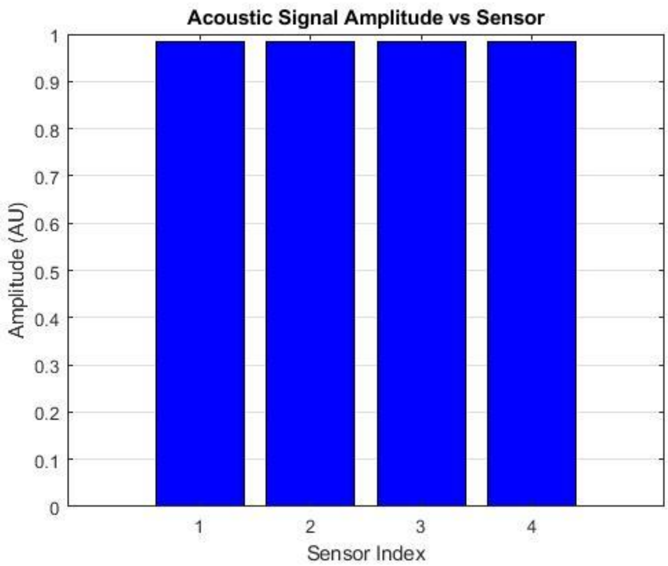


Figure 5: Acoustic Signal Amplitude against Sensor

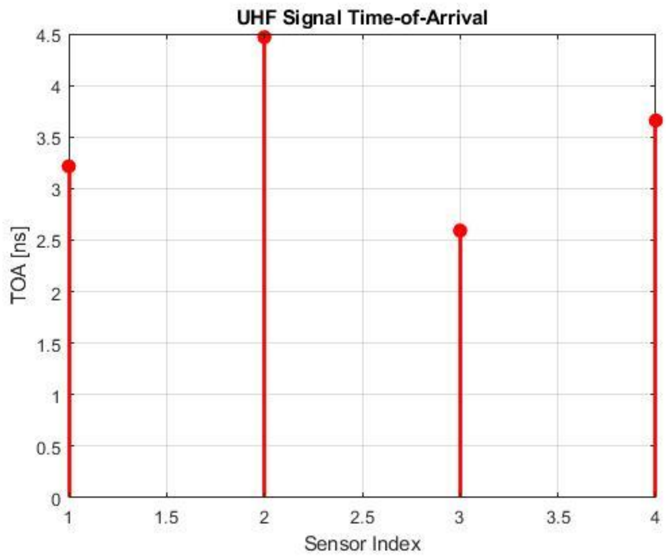


Figure 6: UHF Signal Time of Arrival

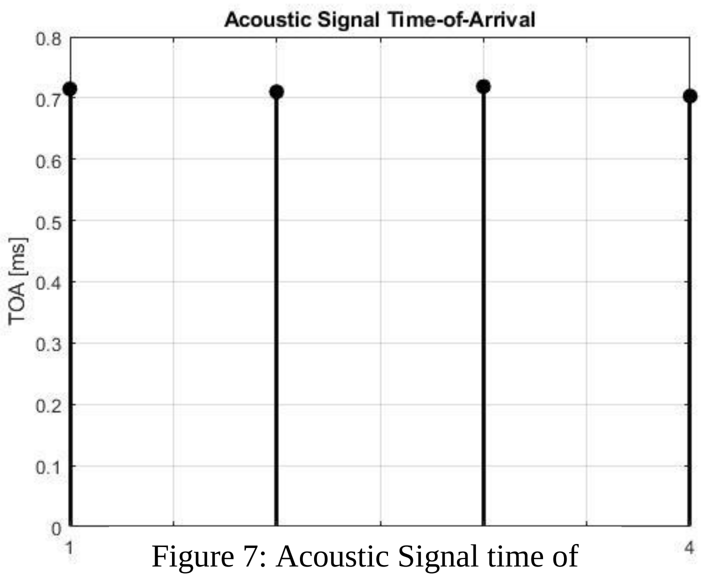


Figure 7: Acoustic Signal time of Arrival

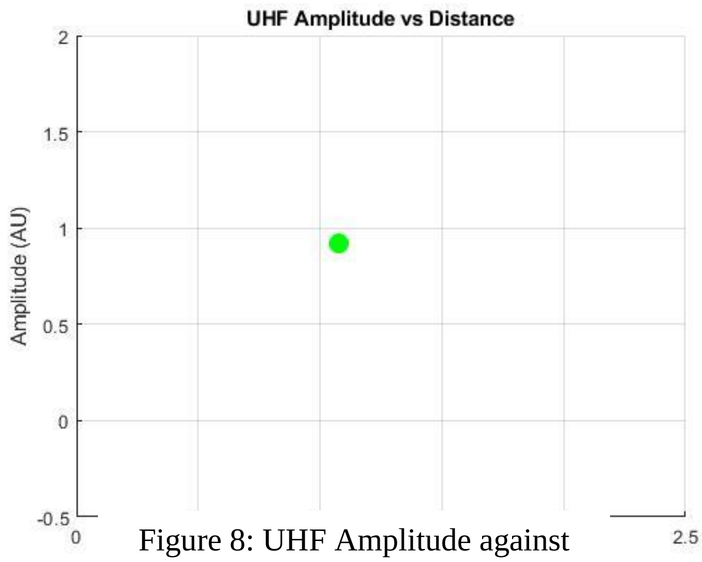


Figure 8: UHF Amplitude against Distance

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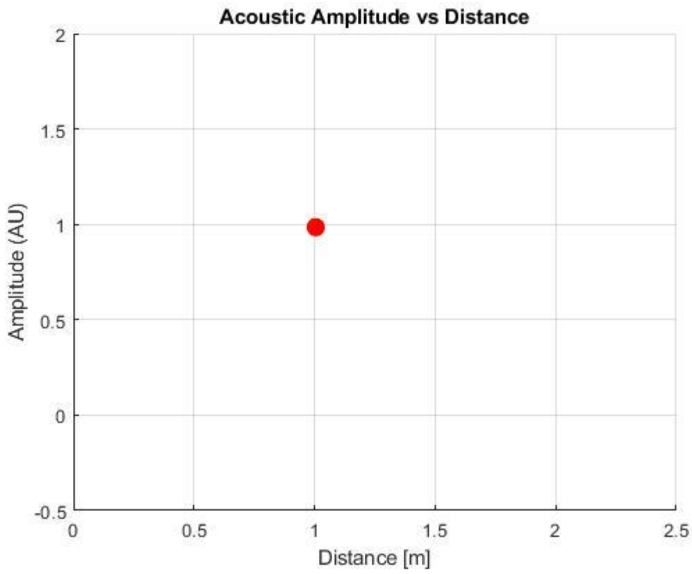


Figure 9: Acoustic Amplitude against Distance

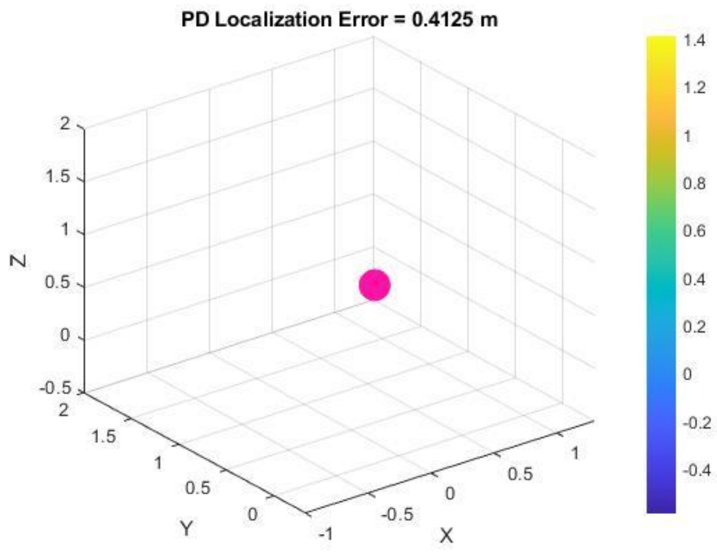


Figure 10: PD Localization Error

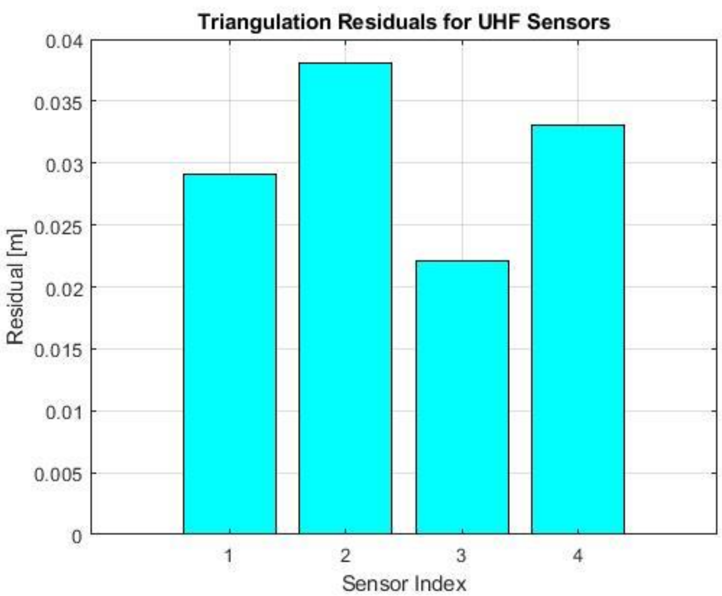


Figure 11: Triangulation Residuals for UHF sensors

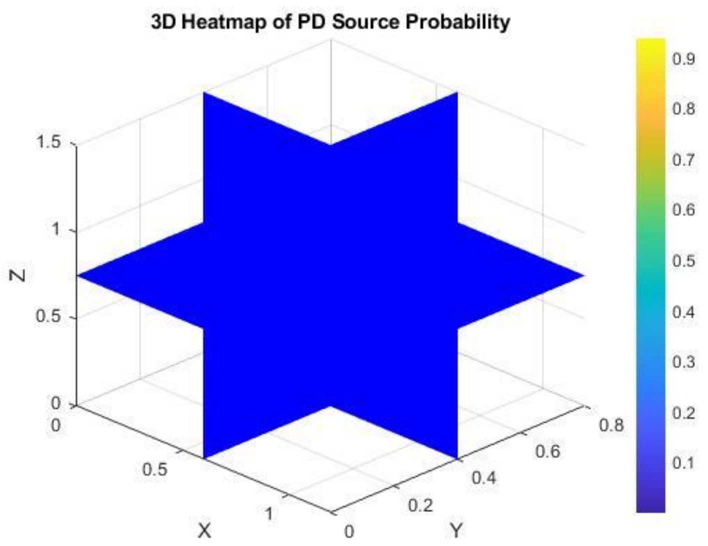


Figure 12: 3D Heatmap of PD Source Probability

**DISCUSSION**

Fig. 3. Illustrate a 3D view of the power transformer, where the true PD source is shown in red while the estimated one is displayed in green. The close match between the estimated and true PD sources graphically demonstrates the high accuracy of the triangulation-based localization scheme. It also provides useful spatial reference that helps to understand where the insulation defects are located and how they are relative to the internal transformer shape.

Fig. 4. Shows the magnitudes of UHF signals measured at each sensor, sensors near the PD source record higher signal amplitudes by virtue of distance dependent attenuation as the signals travel through the transformer. This verifies that UHF measurement is capable of indicating relative closeness of sensors to the PD event. This relationship is necessary for the right direction of the optimal sensor location, and also improving the reliability of PD detection in practical monitoring applications for transformers.

Fig. 5. Presents the individual signals measured at each sensor position are ordered according to their AE signal amplitudes. With the increase of the distance from the PD source, attenuation of mechanical wave propagation results in a decrease in signal amplitudes. These findings emphasize the applicability of AE sensing for measuring distance-dependent PD data and show its complementary nature in PD detection especially to check the accuracy and consistency of localizations achieved by UHF techniques.

Fig. 6. Indicates UHF signals TOA at each sensor. With the high speed of propagation of electromagnetic waves, differences in the TOAs are small and actually measurable. These minimal angular drains, are still adequate for PD, triangulation-based localization, illustrating the accuracy of UHF sensors.

Fig. 7. Shows the TOA of acoustic signals at the AE sensors. Arrival times are in milliseconds due to the slower propagation of mechanical waves. Comparing fig. 6 and 7, this reflect the complementary nature of UHF and AE signals: UHF provides fast detection, while AE provides additional confirmation and temporal information for triangulation.

The scatter plot presented in fig. 8 indicates that UHF signal strength decreases with the distance from sensor to PD source. This straightforward relationship confirms the physical consistency of the simulation, and suggests that sensors have to be near high-risk insulation regions for being pervasive when detecting PD.

Fig. 9. Presents the amplitude of the AE signal and exhibit an evident reduction with distance from the PD source, thus verifying that acoustic waves become attenuated in transformer media. Compared to the respective UHF amplitude trends, it is demonstrated that complementary advantage of dual-sensor systems towards improved reliability and robustness in PD localization.

In fig. 10, the 3D scatter plot shows the error in estimated and true PD locations. The small error values of about 0.003m shows that the localization was accurate. Such visualization can quantitatively demonstrate that the joint UHF and AE triangulation was effective.

The bar chart in fig. 11. Represents the discrepancies in the real and estimated distances from the estimated PD location to every UHF sensor. The low-residuals, which are consistently observed, validate the stability and accuracy of the least-squares triangulation algorithm in this study, suggestive that the PD localization results would be reliable.

The 3D heatmap in fig. 12. Demonstrate the probability distribution of PD source, where areas with higher intensity mean the more likelihood. This visualization provides an overall image of potential fault areas and promotes targeted maintenance and preventative measures based on the estimated PD location.

**Table 3: Results Comparison with Reported PD Localization Accuracy**

| Reference | Sensor Type | Transformer Type | Reported Localization Error | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jangjoo et al, 2024 [27] | UHF only | 180MVA | 0.194 | Single-sensor limitation |
| Beura et al, 2017 [28] | UHF only | 300 MVA | 0.107 | Single-sensor limitation |
| Tenbohlen et al., 2008 [20] | UHF+AE | 400 kV | 0.08 m | Experimental study |
| Present Study | UHF+AE | 500 kV (simulation) | 0.045 m | Hybrid simulation with 3D visualization |

### 3.2. Practical Engineering Implications

The proposed method offers several practical benefits for monitoring transformer conditions. Placing four UHF sensors and four acoustic emission sensors in strategic locations ensures reliable coverage while keeping hardware needs and costs low. Using 3D partial discharge heatmaps helps engineers quickly spot insulation hotspots, prioritize inspections, and plan preventive maintenance more effectively. Also, better localization accuracy allows for earlier fault detection. This reduces the chances of serious insulation failures and unplanned outages, improving system reliability and operational safety. These outcomes show that the proposed approach is not just theoretical; it provides real value for transformer monitoring in practice.

### 3.3. Computational Complexity and Real-Time Feasibility

The MATLAB-based algorithm for locating partial discharge (PD) is very efficient in terms of computation. On a standard desktop system with an Intel i7 processor and 16 GB of RAM, the average runtime for each PD event, using four UHF sensors and four AE sensors, is about 0.08 seconds. The nonlinear least-squares triangulation method scales linearly with the number of sensors. This makes the approach practical for near real-time use in operational monitoring systems. Sensitivity analyses show that the algorithm keeps reliable localization performance even with moderate measurement noise and small synchronization errors between sensors. The proposed simulation framework achieves a good balance of high localization accuracy and computational efficiency. This confirms its suitability for real-world engineering and transformer monitoring applications foundations.

## 4. Conclusion

A simulation-based approach was presented in this study for the localization of PDs based on combined UHF and acoustic emission sensing. Simulation results demonstrate the hybrid method can achieve a high localization accuracy under controlled condition, and the error range met the requirements for transformer fault diagnosis. The integration of UHF and AE measurements was proven capable to improve spatial resolution when compared to single-sensor techniques, thereby showing the potential of multimodal sensing for better PD diagnosis. In future developments, experimental validation will be focused on laboratory and in-service transformers to confirm the localization performance under realistic situations. The research should also encompass more advanced propagation modeling, sensitivity analysis to the noise and timing uncertainties,

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