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Energy Storage Systems for EVs: Technologies, Challenges, and Pathways toward Transportation Decarbonization

Ali Hesri [1*], M. Khaleel [2], Muftah Ali [3]
[1]Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department, Faculty of Engineering, Fezzan University, Murzuq, Libya
[2]Libyan Center for Sustainable Development Research, Al-Khums, Libya
[3]Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Karabuk University, Karabuk, 78050, Turkiye

أنظمة تخزين الطاقة للمركبات الكهربائية: التقنيات والتحديات والمسارات نحو إزالة الكربون من قطاع النقل

على هسري [1*]، محمد خليل [2]، مفتاح علي [3]
[1]قسم الهندسة الكهربائية والإلكترونية، كلية الهندسة، جامعة فزان، مرزق، ليبيا
[2]المركز الليبي لأبحاث التنمية المستدامة، الخمس، ليبيا
[3]قسم الهندسة الكهربائية والإلكترونية، كلية الهندسة والعلوم الطبيعية، جامعة كارابوك، كارابوك، 78050، تركيا

*Corresponding author: ali.hesry@fezzanu.edu.ly

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Abstract:
Energy storage systems (ESSs) are the technological foundation of electric vehicles (EVs) and a critical enabler of transport-sector decarbonization. This paper synthesizes key findings from a comprehensive review of ESS technologies for EV applications through five integrated perspectives: (i) the role of ESSs in reducing CO_2 emissions via electrified propulsion, regenerative braking, and compatibility with low-carbon electricity systems; (ii) comparative performance assessment of major storage options, including lithium-ion batteries, fuel cells, ultracapacitors, and emerging alternatives, across energy/power density, efficiency, lifecycle durability, safety, and cost; (iii) identification of prevailing technical and sustainability constraints, notably safety risks, thermal management demands, degradation mechanisms, charging limitations, packaging challenges, and lifecycle environmental impacts related to manufacturing and end-of-life treatment; (iv) evaluation of hybrid energy storage systems and the enabling function of advanced power electronics and control strategies in optimizing energy flow, improving efficiency, and extending component lifetime; and (v) articulation of future research and policy priorities required for next-generation ESS development. The review concludes that no single storage technology optimally satisfies all EV requirements, reinforcing the importance of application-specific selection and hybrid architectures. Continued progress in materials innovation, intelligent battery management, fast-charging and grid co-optimization, circular-economy pathways, and harmonized standards and policies is essential to deliver cost-effective, safe, long-lifetime ESSs that can support large-scale EV deployment and durable decarbonization outcomes.

Keywords: Energy Storage Systems; Electric Vehicles; Hybrid Energy Storage; Power Electronics Integration; Transportation Decarbonization.

الملخص:

تُعدّ أنظمة تخزين الطاقة (ESSs) الأساس التكنولوجي للمركبات الكهربائية (EVs) وعاملاً حاسماً في خفض انبعاثات الكربون في قطاع النقل. تُقدّم هذه الورقة البحثية ملخصاً لأهم النتائج المستخلصة من مراجعة شاملة لتقنيات أنظمة تخزين الطاقة لتطبيقات المركبات الكهربائية، وذلك من خلال خمسة محاور متكاملة: (1) دور أنظمة تخزين الطاقة في خفض انبعاثات ثاني أكسيد الكربون عبر الدفع الكهربائي، والكبح التجديدي، والتوافق مع أنظمة الكهرباء منخفضة الكربون؛ (2) تقييم الأداء المقارن لخيارات التخزين الرئيسية، بما في ذلك بطاريات الليثيوم أيون، وخلايا الوقود، والمكثفات الفائقة، والبدائل الناشئة، من حيث كثافة الطاقة/القدرة، والكفاءة، ومتانة دورة الحياة، والسلامة، والتكلفة؛ (3) تحديد القيود التقنية وقيود الاستدامة السائدة، ولا سيما مخاطر السلامة، ومتطلبات الإدارة الحرارية، وآليات التدهور، وقيود الشحن، وتحديات التغليف، والآثار البيئية لدورة الحياة المتعلقة بالتصنيع ومعالجة نهاية العمر الافتراضي؛ (4) تقييم أنظمة تخزين الطاقة الهجينة ودور الإلكترونيات المتقدمة للطاقة واستراتيجيات التحكم في تحسين تدفق الطاقة، ورفع الكفاءة، وإطالة عمر المكونات. و(5) تحديد أولويات البحث والسياسات المستقبلية اللازمة لتطوير أنظمة تخزين الطاقة من الجيل التالي. ويخلص التقرير إلى أنه لا توجد تقنية تخزين واحدة تلبي جميع متطلبات المركبات الكهربائية على النحو الأمثل، مما يؤكد أهمية اختيار التقنية المناسبة لكل تطبيق والهياكل الهجينة. ويُعدّ التقدم المستمر في ابتكار المواد، والإدارة الذكية للبطاريات، والشحن السريع، والتحسين المشترك للشبكة، ومسارات الاقتصاد الدائري، والمعايير والسياسات المتناسقة، أمراً ضرورياً لتوفير أنظمة تخزين طاقة فعّالة من حيث التكلفة وآمنة وطويلة العمر، قادرة على دعم نشر المركبات الكهربائية على نطاق واسع وتحقيق نتائج مستدامة في خفض الانبعاثات الكربونية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أنظمة تخزين الطاقة؛ المركبات الكهربائية؛ تخزين الطاقة الهجين؛ تكامل إلكترونيات الطاقة؛ خفض الانبعاثات الكربونية في قطاع النقل.

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1. Introduction

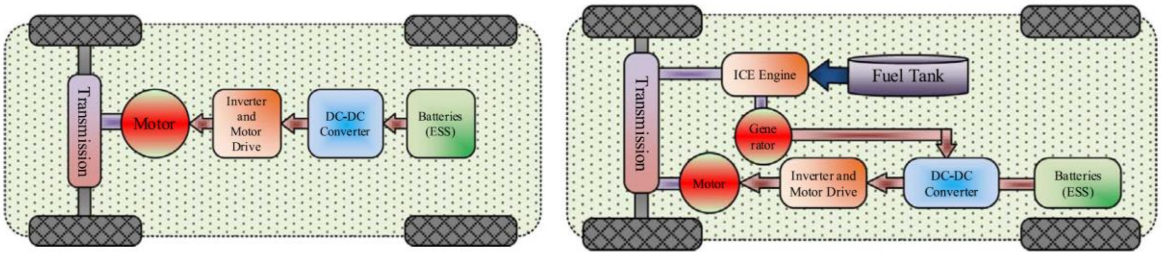
Global electric car sales surpassed 17 million units in 2024, lifting EVs to more than 20% of worldwide new-car sales. The incremental increase of about 3.5 million additional electric cars sold in 2024 versus 2023 exceeded the total global EV sales recorded in 2020, underscoring the accelerating pace of market expansion [1,2]. Regionally, China preserved its market leadership, with electric cars representing nearly half of all new-car sales in 2024; more than 11 million units were sold domestically, exceeding total global EV sales from just two years earlier, meaning that roughly one in ten cars on Chinese roads is now electric. In Europe, EV sales growth stalled in 2024 as purchase subsidies and other supportive measures weakened, yet the overall EV sales share remained around 20%, with stronger performance in some markets offsetting slower demand elsewhere. In the United States, electric car sales increased by around 10% year-on-year, reaching a level of more than one in ten cars sold [3,4].

Electric vehicles (EVs) have emerged as a cornerstone of global strategies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating the environmental impacts of the transportation sector. At the heart of EV technology lie energy storage systems (ESSs), which enable the replacement of internal combustion engines with electrically driven powertrains and determine vehicle range, efficiency, safety, and cost [5-6]. As transportation electrification accelerates worldwide, the performance and sustainability of ESSs have become decisive factors in achieving meaningful decarbonization outcomes. Consequently, understanding the technological landscape and systemic role of ESSs is essential for guiding both industrial development and policy formulation.

A wide range of ESS technologies has been developed and adapted for EV applications, each exhibiting distinct performance characteristics and trade-offs. Lithium-ion batteries currently dominate the market due to their high energy density, favorable efficiency, and technological maturity, making them suitable for most passenger EVs [7,8]. Fuel cells offer complementary advantages, particularly in long-range and high-duty applications, owing to their high specific energy and rapid refueling capability. In addition, ultracapacitors and other high-power devices are increasingly integrated as auxiliary storage elements to support transient power demands and regenerative braking. Emerging technologies such as metal–air and sodium-based batteries further expand the research frontier, offering potential cost and resource advantages despite their limited commercial readiness [9,10].

Despite substantial progress, current ESS technologies face several technical and sustainability challenges that constrain their large-scale deployment. Safety risks associated with thermal runaway, stringent thermal management requirements, degradation and aging mechanisms, long charging times, and high upfront costs remain critical concerns [11-14]. Moreover, the size and mass of ESSs influence vehicle efficiency and design flexibility, while environmental impacts related to material extraction, manufacturing, recycling, and disposal raise important lifecycle sustainability questions. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that EV adoption delivers net environmental benefits rather than shifting emissions and resource burdens upstream [15-17].

Hybrid energy storage systems (HESSs), supported by advanced power electronics and intelligent control strategies, have emerged as an effective approach to overcoming the inherent limitations of single ESS technologies [18-20]. By combining high-energy and high-power storage devices, such as batteries with ultracapacitors or fuel cells-hybrid configurations enable optimized energy management, improved efficiency, and enhanced reliability of EV powertrains [21,22]. Power electronic converters and battery management systems play a pivotal role in coordinating energy flow, protecting storage components, and extending system lifetime [23-26]. Figure 1 outlines EV architectures: a) battery powered EV and b) series-parallel full HEV.



a) b)

Figure 1. EV architectures: a) battery powered EV and b) series-parallel full HEV [27].

In this direction, the decarbonization potential of EVs can depend on sustained innovation across materials science, system design, control algorithms, and policy frameworks [28,29]. Future pathways include the development of next-generation battery chemistries with higher energy density and improved safety, AI-driven battery management systems for lifetime optimization, fast-changing technologies compatible with grid constraints, and circular-economy approaches for sustainable manufacturing and recycling. In parallel, supportive policies, harmonized standards, and clean energy integration are required to scale up ESS deployment responsibly [30-32].

Several studies have examined energy storage systems for electric vehicles, focusing on their underlying technologies, prevailing challenges, and their role in enabling pathways toward transportation decarbonization. The primary objective of this paper [33] is to provide a comprehensive review of state-of-the-art control and coordination approaches for managing distributed energy resources, energy storage systems, and electric vehicles within microgrids. Specifically, it surveys the latest developments in centralized and decentralized architectures, as well as multi-agent, model predictive, cooperative, and competitive control strategies that enable reliable and efficient microgrid operation.

In [34], This paper investigated multiple classification schemes for energy storage systems (ESSs), categorizing them according to energy conversion mechanisms, constituent materials, and operational techniques, including their average power delivery relative to capacity and the efficiencies sustained over their service lifetimes. The comprehensive review indicates that while existing ESS technologies are broadly applicable to electric vehicle (EV) applications, their optimal utilization for high-efficiency and sustainable EV energy storage has not yet been fully realized. The study therefore identifies key determinants, barriers, and unresolved challenges that limit the performance, cost-effectiveness, safety, and sustainability of current ESS solutions in next-generation EVs.

A major contribution of the study [35] lies in the optimal planning and siting of capacitors, RES units, and EV parking lots within distribution networks, which collectively reduce power-loss-related costs and improve voltage profiles. Quantitatively, the integration of capacitors, RES units, and EVs achieves a 76% reduction in the cost of power losses relative to the base case. In addition, the cost of active power purchased from the upstream network declines by approximately 24% in the third scenario, while the reported reductions are 0% and 20% in the second and third scenarios, respectively.

This manuscript provides a comprehensive, system-level contribution to the literature by synthesizing the role, comparative performance, prevailing limitations, and future development pathways of ESSs for EV applications in the context of transportation decarbonization. It consolidates evidence that batteries, fuel cells, and hybrid ESS architectures are not only essential to EV propulsion but also strategic enablers of broader energy-transition objectives through improved drivetrain efficiency, regenerative energy recovery, and compatibility with low-carbon electricity systems. By critically comparing major ESS options, the study demonstrates that no single technology simultaneously optimizes energy and power capability, safety, durability, and cost, thereby justifying application-specific technology selection and the increasing relevance of hybrid configurations. The manuscript further advances understanding by identifying the dominant technical and sustainability barriers, particularly safety, thermal management, degradation, charging constraints, cost, and lifecycle environmental impacts, and by clarifying how hybrid ESSs, enabled by advanced power electronics and intelligent control, can mitigate these constraints through optimized energy sharing, reduced component stress, and extended service life. Finally, it articulates an integrated research and policy agenda that links materials innovation, smart battery management, fast-charging readiness, circular-economy practices, and supportive regulatory frameworks, offering a coherent roadmap for developing cost-effective, long-lifetime ESSs that accelerate sustainable EV deployment and deliver durable decarbonization outcomes.

2. Energy Storage Systems (ESSs) in EV decarbonization

The transportation sector is one of the largest contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions, largely due to its historical dependence on internal combustion engine (ICE) technologies and fossil fuels [36,37]. In response to escalating climate concerns and international decarbonization commitments, electric vehicles (EVs) have emerged as a central pillar of sustainable mobility transitions. At the core of EV technology lie energy storage systems (ESSs), which enable the substitution of combustion-based drivetrains with electrically powered propulsion systems and facilitate the integration of transport with low-carbon energy infrastructures. Figure 2 illustrates dcarbonization role [38,39].

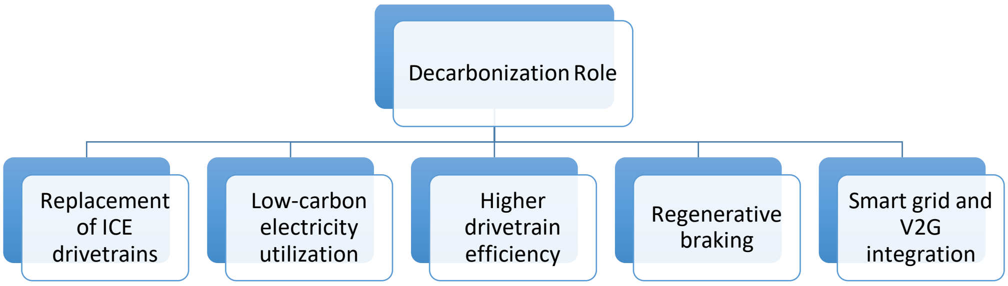


Figure 2. Decarbonization role

ESSs determine the operational performance, efficiency, and driving range of Evs, also critically shape their environmental footprint across the entire energy chain. Advanced storage technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries, hydrogen fuel cells, and hybrid storage configurations, enable high drivetrain efficiency, regenerative energy recovery, and flexible interaction with smart grids. Consequently, ESSs transform EVs from passive energy consumers into active components of broader energy transition pathways [40,41]. Table 1 discusses the multifaceted role of ESSs in EV decarbonization, highlighting their technical, environmental, and system-level contributions.

Table 1. Role of Energy Storage Systems (ESSs) in Electric Vehicle Decarbonization.

Ref.	Decarbonization Role	Mechanism	Decarbonization Impact	ESS Technologies	Key Notes / Constraints
[42]	Replacement of ICE drivetrains	ESS supplies electrical energy to traction motor instead of combustion-based powertrain	Eliminates tailpipe emissions and reduces local air pollution	Li-ion batteries, Hydrogen fuel cells	Overall benefit depends on grid carbon intensity
[43]	Low-carbon electricity utilization	Energy stored from renewable or low-carbon electricity sources	Reduces well-to-wheel greenhouse gas emissions	Grid-charged Li-ion batteries	Requires decarbonized power grid
[44]	Higher drivetrain efficiency	Electric powertrains operate at higher efficiency than ICEs	Lower energy consumption per kilometer	Li-ion batteries, hybrid ESSs	Efficiency influenced by driving cycle and vehicle mass
[45]	Regenerative braking	Recovery and storage of braking energy	Reduces energy losses and electricity demand	Li-ion batteries, ultracapacitors	More effective in urban driving conditions
[46]	Smart grid and V2G integration	Bidirectional energy exchange between EV and grid	Supports renewable integration and grid stability	EV batteries with V2G capability	Requires infrastructure, standards, and regulation

Energy storage systems enable the most direct decarbonization mechanism of EVs by replacing ICE drivetrains with electric propulsion powered by stored electrical energy. Unlike conventional vehicles that emit carbon dioxide and other pollutants during fuel combustion, EVs draw energy from batteries or fuel cells to drive electric motors, thereby eliminating tailpipe emissions and substantially improving local air quality, particularly in urban environments. This shift also reduces exposure to co-pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and particulate matter, generating immediate public-health co-benefits alongside climate mitigation. However, it is important to recognize that “zero-emission” at the tailpipe does not automatically imply zero emissions across the full energy chain, which depends on upstream electricity or hydrogen production pathways.

ESSs strengthen the decarbonization value of EVs by enabling operation on electricity that can be progressively decarbonized through renewable and other low-carbon generation technologies. When EV charging is supplied by low-carbon electricity, lifecycle and well-to-wheel emissions can be markedly lower than those of fossil-fuel vehicles, meaning that the same ESS-equipped EV becomes cleaner over time as the grid transitions. This characteristic makes ESSs strategically important because they allow the transport sector to “inherit” the decarbonization progress of the power sector. Conversely, in carbon-intensive grids, upstream emissions may partially offset tailpipe gains, which underscores the need for coordinated policies linking EV deployment with clean electricity expansion.

A key contribution of ESSs to decarbonization arises from the inherently higher efficiency of electric drivetrains compared with ICE powertrains, where substantial fuel energy is lost as waste heat. By storing electrical energy and delivering it to high-efficiency traction motors, ESS-enabled EVs typically consume less energy per kilometer traveled, thereby reducing total energy demand for mobility services. In practice, this efficiency advantage is amplified in urban driving cycles, where stop–go operation penalizes conventional engines but favors electric propulsion. Higher efficiency reduces the upstream electricity generation required to deliver the same transport output, which lowers associated emissions, especially when combined with grid decarbonization.

ESSs enable regenerative braking, one of the most impactful mechanisms for improving EV energy efficiency and reducing emissions indirectly. During deceleration, kinetic energy that would otherwise be dissipated as heat can be converted into electrical energy and stored back into the ESS for later use. This process decreases net energy consumption and reduces charging requirements, particularly in urban environments characterized by frequent braking events. High-power storage devices such as ultracapacitors can complement batteries by capturing rapid transients more effectively, improving recovery efficiency and reducing stress on the primary battery system. As a result, regenerative braking contributes simultaneously to lower energy demand and improved ESS durability, both of which support decarbonization across the vehicle lifecycle.

ESSs extend the decarbonization impact of EVs beyond the vehicle by enabling smart-grid interaction, including managed charging and V2G operation. Through bidirectional power flow, EVs can act as distributed storage resources that absorb excess renewable generation during low-demand periods and supply electricity back to the grid during peak demand, thereby supporting grid stability and reducing reliance on carbon-intensive peaking plants. In addition, aggregated EV fleets can provide ancillary services such as frequency regulation and voltage support, improving overall power-system flexibility. While these functions depend on enabling infrastructure, standards, and regulatory frameworks, they position ESS-equipped EVs as active contributors to energy transition pathways rather than merely end-use consumers.

By embedding significant storage capacity into the transport system, ESSs facilitate a deeper coupling between mobility and electricity infrastructures. Smart charging can function as flexible demand, smoothing load profiles and improving the utilization of renewable generation, while V2G can provide additional balancing capacity to accommodate intermittent resources such as wind and solar. This coupling reduces renewable curtailment, supports higher renewable penetration, and enhances overall system resilience, thereby enabling decarbonization at the system level rather than only at the vehicle level. Consequently, the climate value of ESSs is not limited to the emissions avoided by replacing gasoline or diesel consumption; it also includes the broader benefits of accelerating renewable integration and improving grid operability in low-carbon energy systems.

Despite the substantial decarbonization benefits enabled by ESSs, several concerns and constraints can reduce or complicate their net climate impact. First, the upstream emissions associated with electricity generation or hydrogen production can be significant when energy supply remains fossil-intensive, which can diminish well-to-wheel emission reductions. Second, battery manufacturing and material sourcing involve energy-intensive processes and critical minerals, raising sustainability, supply-chain, and geopolitical risks, as well as lifecycle emissions considerations. Third, safety challenges, such as thermal runaway in high-energy batteries, necessitate robust protection, thermal management, and monitoring systems, potentially increasing system cost and complexity. Finally, end-of-life management, recycling infrastructure, and circular-economy readiness remain uneven across regions, affecting the environmental performance of ESSs beyond vehicle operation.

3. Comparative Evaluation of Energy Storage Technologies for EV Applications

The rapid expansion of electric vehicle (EV) deployment has intensified the need for a rigorous comparative assessment of available energy storage system (ESS) technologies. Because ESSs fundamentally determine vehicle range, performance, safety, cost, and environmental impact, their selection represents one of the most critical design decisions in EV development [47,48]. Figure 3 illistrates ESS Technology.

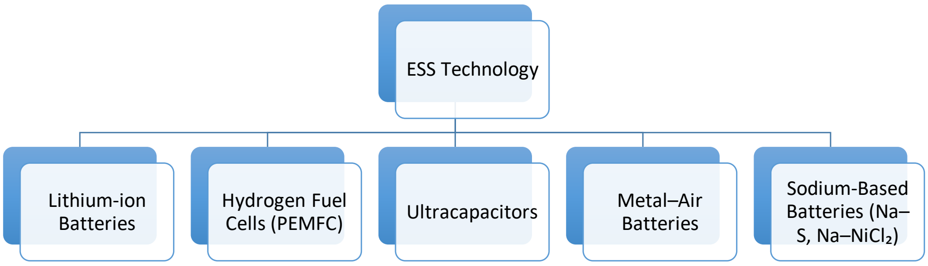


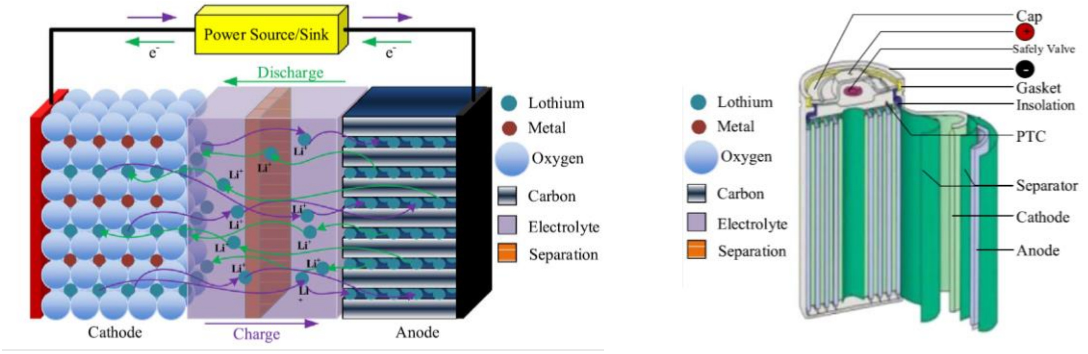
Figure 3. ESS Technology.

However, no single storage technology simultaneously optimizes all key performance metrics, including energy density, power density, efficiency, lifecycle durability, safety, and economic feasibility. Instead, each ESS technology embodies inherent trade-offs that influence its suitability for specific EV classes and operating conditions [49,50]. Consequently, a comparative evaluation of ESS technologies is essential to identify appropriate storage solutions for diverse mobility applications and to guide future research and policy directions. Table 2 shows comparative evaluation of energy storage technologies for EV applications

Table 2. Comparative evaluation of energy storage technologies for EV applications

Ref.	ESS Technology	Core Strengths	Key Limitations	Best-Fit EV Applications	Technology Maturity
[51]	Lithium-ion Batteries	High energy density, good efficiency, mature technology, declining costs	Thermal runaway risk, degradation at extreme temperatures, reliance on critical materials	Battery electric vehicles (BEVs), plug-in hybrid EVs (PHEVs)	High (commercially dominant)
[52]	Hydrogen Fuel Cells (PEMFC)	High specific energy, fast refueling, suitable for long-range applications	High cost, hydrogen storage challenges, limited infrastructure	Long-range EVs, buses, heavy-duty and fleet vehicles	Medium (commercial but infrastructure-limited)
[53]	Ultracapacitors	Very high-power density, fast charge/discharge, long cycle life	Low energy density, high self-discharge, not suitable as standalone storage	Hybrid ESSs for regenerative braking and peak power support	Medium–High (auxiliary storage technology)
[54]	Metal–Air Batteries	Very high theoretical specific energy, low material cost potential	Limited rechargeability, durability issues, low technological maturity	Potential future range extenders and niche EV concepts	Low–Medium (emerging technology)
[55]	Sodium-Based Batteries (Na–S, Na–NiCl$_2$)	Abundant materials, reasonable energy density, long cycle life	High operating temperature, thermal management and safety concerns	Specialized or niche EV and stationary energy storage applications	Medium (established but not mainstream)

Lithium-ion batteries currently dominate the EV market due to their favorable balance between energy density, efficiency, and technological maturity. Their high gravimetric and volumetric energy densities enable acceptable driving ranges for passenger vehicles, while continuous improvements in manufacturing scale and battery management systems have contributed to declining costs and enhanced reliability. Nevertheless, lithium-ion technologies face notable challenges, particularly with respect to thermal runaway risks, performance degradation under extreme temperatures, and reliance on critical raw materials such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel [56-59]. Figure 4 demonstrates Lithium-ion battery chemistry: (a) during discharging and charging and (b) cylindrical view of Li-ion battery.



a) b)

Figure 4. Lithium-ion battery chemistry: (a) during discharging and charging and (b) cylindrical view of Li-ion battery.

Hydrogen fuel cell technologies represent a compelling alternative, especially for long-range and high-utilization EV applications [60-65]. Fuel cells offer very high specific energy at the system level and rapid refueling times comparable to conventional vehicles, making them particularly attractive for buses, trucks, and fleet operations where downtime must be minimized. Figure 5 represnts HFC chemistry. However, their widespread adoption remains limited by high system costs, complex balance-of-plant requirements, hydrogen storage challenges, and insufficient refueling infrastructure. Moreover, the overall decarbonization benefit of fuel cell EVs is strongly dependent on the carbon intensity of hydrogen production pathways, underscoring the need for green hydrogen supply chains to fully realize their environmental potential [66-72]. Figure 6 illustrates technologies of different types of FCs.

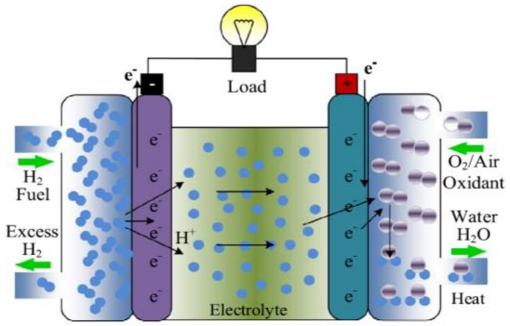


Figure 5. HFC chemistry.

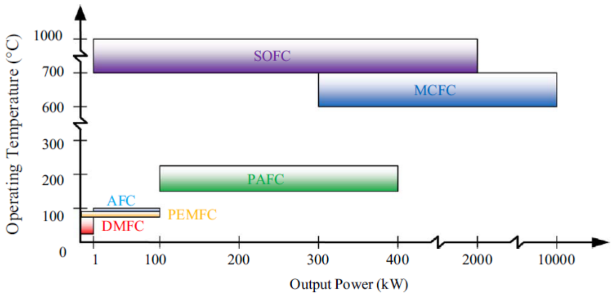


Figure 6. Technologies of different types of FCs.

Ultracapacitors exhibit fundamentally different performance characteristics compared with batteries and fuel cells, excelling in power density and cycle life rather than energy storage capacity. Their ability to deliver and absorb large amounts of power within short timeframes makes them ideal for capturing regenerative braking energy and supporting transient power demands such as rapid acceleration [73-77]. However, their inherently low energy density and high self-discharge rates render them unsuitable as standalone energy storage solutions for EV propulsion. As a result, ultracapacitors are most effectively deployed in hybrid ESS configurations, where they complement batteries or fuel cells by reducing peak loads and extending system lifespan.

Emerging storage technologies such as metal–air batteries and sodium-based batteries present promising alternatives but remain constrained by limited technological maturity. Metal–air batteries, particularly zinc–air and lithium–air systems, offer exceptionally high theoretical energy densities and the potential for reduced material costs [78,79]. Despite these advantages, practical challenges related to rechargeability, durability, air management, and system complexity have thus far prevented large-scale commercialization in EVs. Similarly, sodium-based batteries benefit from the abundance and low cost of sodium resources, yet their reliance on high operating temperatures or specialized thermal management systems limits their practicality for mainstream EV applications. Consequently, these technologies are currently more viable for niche applications or future deployment contingent upon substantial technical breakthroughs.

Overall, the comparative evaluation of ESS technologies highlights that optimal EV energy storage solutions are highly application-specific. Passenger vehicles prioritize energy density and cost, favoring lithium-ion batteries, whereas long-range and heavy-duty applications may benefit from fuel cell systems. High-power auxiliary functions are best supported by ultracapacitors, while emerging technologies may play a role in future hybrid or range-extender architectures. This diversity reinforces the necessity of technology-neutral design approaches, hybrid ESS configurations, and continued innovation to meet the evolving demands of sustainable electric mobility.

4. Technical Challenges and Limitations of Current Energy Storage Systems (ESSS)

Despite the rapid technological progress and increasing market penetration of electric vehicles (EVs), the widespread deployment of energy storage systems (ESSs) continues to face a range of technical, economic, and environmental challenges. ESSs are central to EV performance, safety, cost, and sustainability, yet their current limitations constrain further improvements in driving range, charging convenience, affordability, and lifecycle environmental benefits [80,81]. These challenges arise from the intrinsic electrochemical and physical characteristics of storage technologies, as well as from system-level integration issues related to thermal management, power electronics, and end-of-life handling. A comprehensive understanding of these limitations is therefore essential for guiding future research, informing design optimization, and ensuring that ESS advancements translate into genuine decarbonization gains. Table 3 discusses the key technical challenges associated with contemporary ESSs and evaluates their implications for EV performance and sustainability.

Table 3. Technical Challenges and Limitations of Current Energy Storage Systems (ESSs) [82-86].

Challenge Category	Technical Description	Primary Causes	Impacts on EV Performance & Decarbonization	Mitigation Strategies
Safety Risks	Potential for thermal runaway, fire, or cell venting under abnormal conditions	Overcharge, internal short circuits, mechanical damage, high temperatures	Reduced reliability, increased regulation, and higher system cost	Advanced BMS, safer chemistries, improved pack and crash protection design
Thermal Management	Maintaining ESS operation within safe temperature limits	High current operation, fast charging, extreme ambient conditions	Efficiency loss, accelerated aging, safety risks	Active cooling/heating, thermal interface materials, predictive thermal control
Degradation and Aging	Capacity fade and increase in internal resistance over time	Deep cycling, high C-rates, elevated temperature, electrode stress	Reduced driving range and early replacement increases lifecycle emissions	Optimized charging strategies, thermal control, advanced materials
Charging Time Limitations	Constraints on fast charging without damaging ESS	Lithium plating, heat generation, charger and grid limits	Range anxiety and reduced EV adoption rate	Fast-charge capable chemistries, smart charging, pre-conditioning
Cost and Affordability	High upfront cost of ESS and associated electronics	Material cost, manufacturing complexity, safety requirements	Higher EV prices and slower market penetration	Economies of scale, alternative materials, recycling strategies
Size and Weight Constraints	Large mass and volume compared with liquid fuels	Limited energy density, structural and safety packaging needs	Lower vehicle efficiency and range	Higher energy density materials, structural battery integration
Environmental Impacts	Emissions and waste from ESS manufacturing and disposal	Energy-intensive mining and refining processes	Reduced net environmental benefit of EVs	Low-carbon manufacturing, lifecycle assessment, recycling

Safety remains one of the most critical challenges in current ESS technologies, particularly for high-energy-density battery systems. Under abnormal operating conditions, such as overcharging, internal short circuits, mechanical damage, or elevated temperatures, ESSs may experience thermal runaway, leading to fire or catastrophic failure. These risks necessitate extensive safety mechanisms, including robust battery management systems (BMS), thermal protection, and structural reinforcement, which add complexity, weight, and cost to EV designs. Consequently, safety considerations influence not only consumer acceptance but also regulatory frameworks and insurance requirements, shaping the pace of ESS deployment.

Thermal management represents a closely related and equally significant challenge. ESS performance, safety, and durability are strongly temperature-dependent, with deviations from optimal thermal windows accelerating degradation and reducing efficiency. High current operation, fast charging, and extreme ambient conditions exacerbate heat generation, requiring active cooling or heating systems to maintain stable operation. While such systems enhance safety and reliability, they impose additional energy consumption and design constraints, potentially offsetting some efficiency and decarbonization benefits if not carefully optimized.

Degradation and aging of ESSs pose long-term limitations on EV performance and sustainability. Repeated charge–discharge cycles, deep cycling, high C-rates, and elevated temperatures lead to capacity fade and increased internal resistance, gradually reducing driving range and power capability. Accelerated degradation shortens ESS service life and increases the frequency of battery replacement, which in turn raises lifecycle emissions, material demand, and total ownership costs. Addressing degradation therefore requires both advanced materials with improved electrochemical stability and intelligent control strategies that balance performance with longevity.

Charging time and fast-charging limitations remain a major barrier to user convenience and broader EV adoption. Although high-power charging can significantly reduce refueling time, it introduces risks such as lithium plating, excessive heat generation, and accelerated aging in battery systems. These constraints necessitate conservative charging protocols, infrastructure upgrades, and grid coordination, all of which affect system cost and operational complexity. As a result, charging performance reflects a trade-off between user convenience, ESS durability, and power-system limitations.

Economic factors, particularly ESS cost and affordability, continue to influence EV market growth. High upfront costs associated with materials, manufacturing, safety systems, and power electronics contribute substantially to EV purchase prices. Price volatility of critical materials and supply-chain concentration further exacerbate cost uncertainty. Although economies of scale and technological learning are gradually reducing costs, affordability remains a key concern, especially in developing markets where EV adoption is most sensitive to price.

Size, mass, and packaging constraints also limit ESS effectiveness in EV applications. Compared with liquid fuels, current ESSs offer lower energy density, requiring larger and heavier storage packs that negatively affect vehicle efficiency and design flexibility. Increased mass leads to higher energy consumption per kilometer, partially offsetting efficiency gains from electric propulsion. Innovations such as higher-density materials, structural batteries, and improved pack integration are therefore essential to mitigate these constraints.

Finally, environmental impacts associated with ESS manufacturing, recycling, and disposal present systemic challenges to sustainable deployment. Energy-intensive mining and refining processes, coupled with limited recycling infrastructure, contribute to embodied emissions and environmental risks at the end of life. Without effective circular-economy strategies, these impacts can undermine the net climate benefits of EVs. Consequently, improving ESS sustainability requires coordinated progress in low-carbon manufacturing, standardized recycling practices, and extended producer responsibility frameworks.

5. Hybrid Energy Storage Systems and Power Electronics Integration in EV Powertrains

The increasing performance demands placed on electric vehicle (EV) powertrains have exposed the inherent limitations of single energy storage system (ESS) technologies. While batteries, fuel cells, and other storage devices each exhibit distinct advantages, none can independently satisfy the simultaneous requirements of high energy density, high power density, fast dynamic response, long lifecycle durability, and cost-effectiveness. Hybrid energy storage systems (HESSs) have therefore emerged as a promising solution, combining complementary storage technologies to achieve balanced and application-specific performance as showing in Figure 7. Central to the successful deployment of HESSs is the integration of advanced power electronics, which enable controlled energy sharing, voltage regulation, and bidirectional power flow within EV powertrains [87-93].

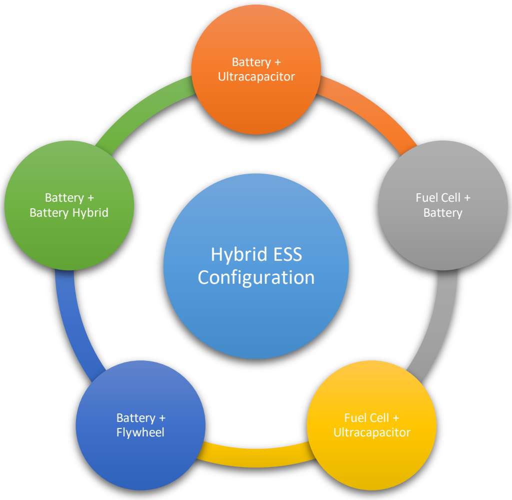


Figure 7. Hybrid ESS Configuration

Table 4. Hybrid Energy Storage Systems and Power Electronics Integration in EV Powertrains

Hybrid ESS Configuration	Rationale for Hybridization	Role of Power Electronics	Performance Benefits	Key Design Challenges
Battery + Ultracapacitor	Combines high energy density of batteries with high power density of ultracapacitors	DC–DC converters manage power split and bidirectional energy flow	Improved acceleration, enhanced regenerative braking, extended battery lifetime	Added cost, control complexity, ultracapacitor self-discharge
Fuel Cell + Battery	Fuel cell supplies average power; battery handles transient and peak loads	Power converters regulate fuel cell output and battery charging	Extended driving range, improved fuel economy, reduced fuel cell stress	Hydrogen infrastructure, high system cost, complex energy management
Fuel Cell + Ultracapacitor	Ultracapacitor buffers rapid power fluctuations protecting fuel cell	High-bandwidth DC–DC converters smooth transient loads	Fast dynamic response, improved regenerative energy capture	Low energy density of ultracapacitors, integration complexity
Battery + Flywheel	Flywheel supports high peak power while battery supplies sustained energy	Converters interface flywheel motor–generator with DC bus	High power capability, reduced battery stress under aggressive driving	Mechanical safety, standby losses, packaging challenges
Battery + Battery Hybrid	Combines high-energy and high-power battery chemistries	Multi-port converters and balancing circuits coordinate packs	Improved fast-charging and peak power performance	Balancing complexity, thermal integration, higher cost

Hybrid energy storage configurations address fundamental trade-offs between energy and power capability by combining storage devices with complementary characteristics. In battery–ultracapacitor systems, for example, the battery provides the primary energy required for cruising and range, while the ultracapacitor delivers high peak power during acceleration and absorbs rapid energy flows during regenerative braking. This division of roles significantly reduces peak current stress on the battery, mitigating degradation and extending service life. Power electronic converters are essential in this configuration, as they dynamically allocate power between the battery and ultracapacitor, ensuring efficient energy utilization under varying driving conditions.

Fuel cell–battery hybrid systems represent another widely studied HESS architecture, particularly suited for long-range and high-duty EV applications. In such systems, the fuel cell operates near its optimal efficiency point to supply average power, while the battery manages transient loads and stores regenerative braking energy. This arrangement improves overall system efficiency and reliability by avoiding rapid fuel cell load fluctuations, which can accelerate degradation. Advanced power electronics regulate fuel cell output, coordinate battery charging, and maintain stable DC bus voltage, thereby enabling seamless interaction between the two storage subsystems.

Fuel cell–ultracapacitor hybrids further emphasize transient power management by decoupling the fuel cell from fast load variations. Ultracapacitors, with their exceptional power density and rapid charge–discharge capability, act as effective buffers that absorb sudden power demands and regenerative energy. By shielding the fuel cell from dynamic stress, this configuration enhances durability and operational stability. However, the low energy density of ultracapacitors necessitates careful sizing and sophisticated power electronic control to ensure system efficiency without excessive mass or cost penalties.

Hybrid systems incorporating flywheels or superconducting magnetic energy storage (SMES) provide additional insights into the role of power electronics in managing high-power, short-duration energy flows. Flywheels and SMES units can deliver extremely rapid response and high cycle life, making them attractive for specific high-performance or niche applications. In these systems, power electronic interfaces manage bidirectional energy exchange between mechanical or magnetic storage components and the electrical drivetrain, maintaining synchronization and stability. Despite their technical advantages, mechanical complexity, safety concerns, and high initial costs currently limit their widespread adoption in mainstream EVs.

Battery–battery hybrid architectures, which combine high-energy and high-power battery chemistries within a single vehicle, represent a more incremental approach to hybridization. By distributing energy and power demands across different battery packs, these systems improve fast-charging capability and peak power delivery while reducing stress on the primary energy battery. Power electronics and advanced battery management systems are crucial for balancing state-of-charge differences, coordinating aging behavior, and ensuring thermal uniformity across packs. Such architectures highlight the growing importance of intelligent power electronic control in achieving reliable and efficient HESS operation.

Overall, hybrid energy storage systems significantly enhance EV powertrain performance by optimizing energy utilization, improving efficiency, and extending component lifespan. The effectiveness of these systems, however, is fundamentally dependent on advanced power electronics and control strategies that enable real-time energy management and protect individual storage elements. As EV performance expectations continue to rise, HESSs, supported by high-efficiency converters, intelligent control algorithms, and robust system integration, are expected to play a central role in the next generation of electric mobility solutions.

6. Future Research Directions and Sustainable Development of ESSs

Energy storage systems (ESSs) are the cornerstone of electric vehicle (EV) technologies and a decisive enabler of the global transition toward low-carbon and sustainable transportation. While current ESS solutions, dominated by lithium-ion batteries, have enabled significant progress in EV deployment, their limitations in terms of safety, cost, resource dependency, lifecycle durability, and environmental footprint highlight the need for continued innovation. Achieving large-scale, long-term decarbonization of the transport sector therefore requires a forward-looking research agenda that extends beyond incremental performance improvements. Future ESS development must integrate breakthroughs in materials and chemistries, intelligent management and control, fast-charging compatibility, and environmentally responsible manufacturing and end-of-life practices, all supported by coherent policy and regulatory frameworks. This section introduces the key research directions and sustainability considerations necessary to guide the evolution of next-generation ESSs capable of supporting widespread, affordable, and reliable EV adoption.

A. Next-Generation Storage Chemistries and Materials Innovation

Future research must prioritize the development of next-generation energy storage chemistries that overcome the energy density, safety, and resource constraints of current lithium-ion technologies. Promising directions include solid-state batteries, which replace flammable liquid electrolytes with solid conductors to enhance safety and enable higher operating voltages, as well as lithium–sulfur and lithium–air systems that offer substantially higher theoretical energy densities. In parallel, sodium-ion and multivalent battery chemistries are gaining attention due to the abundance and low cost of sodium and other alternative elements, offering pathways to reduce dependence on critical and geopolitically sensitive materials. Advances in electrode nanostructuring, interfacial engineering, and electrolyte formulation are essential to improve ionic conductivity, suppress degradation mechanisms, and translate laboratory-scale breakthroughs into practical, scalable ESS solutions for EV applications.

B. High-Safety Design and Thermal-Stability Engineering

Safety remains a central barrier to the widespread adoption of high-energy-density ESSs, particularly under fast-charging and high-power operation. Future research should focus on intrinsically safe cell designs, including non-flammable electrolytes, thermally stable cathode materials, and advanced separators capable of shutting down ion transport under abnormal conditions. At the pack level, innovations in thermal management, such as phase-change materials, embedded cooling channels, and multifunctional structural components are required to maintain uniform temperature distribution and prevent localized hot spots. These safety-oriented design strategies are critical not only for preventing catastrophic failure but also for enabling more aggressive operating regimes that improve charging speed and power performance without compromising reliability.

C. Advanced Battery Management Systems and AI-Driven State Estimation

The long-term performance and durability of ESSs are increasingly determined by the sophistication of battery management systems (BMS). Future BMS research should move beyond rule-based control toward data-driven and artificial intelligence-enabled approaches capable of accurately estimating state of charge, state of health, and remaining useful life under real-world operating conditions. Machine learning and digital-twin frameworks can enable predictive diagnostics, early fault detection, and adaptive control strategies that dynamically balance performance and aging. By optimizing charging profiles, power allocation, and thermal control in response to usage patterns, advanced BMS technologies can significantly extend ESS lifetime, reduce lifecycle costs, and enhance overall system reliability.

D. Fast-Charging Capability and Charging–Grid Co-Optimization

Reducing charging time while preserving ESS health is a critical research priority for improving EV usability and market acceptance. This agenda calls for coordinated advances in electrode materials, electrolyte chemistry, and charging algorithms that mitigate degradation phenomena such as lithium plating and excessive heat generation during high-rate charging. In addition, fast-charging research must be integrated with power-system considerations, including grid capacity, peak-load management, and renewable energy variability. Smart charging, vehicle-to-grid (V2G), and vehicle-to-building (V2B) strategies offer opportunities to co-optimize charging infrastructure with grid operation, thereby enhancing renewable energy utilization and minimizing the carbon footprint of fast-charging networks.

E. Sustainable Manufacturing, Recycling, and Circular-Economy Pathways

Achieving truly sustainable ESS deployment requires a lifecycle perspective that encompasses material extraction, manufacturing, operation, and end-of-life management. Future research should emphasize low-carbon manufacturing processes, including the use of renewable energy in cell production and more efficient material synthesis routes. Recycling technologies must evolve to enable high recovery rates of lithium, nickel, cobalt, and other valuable materials while maintaining economic viability. Furthermore, second-life applications for retired EV batteries, such as stationary storage for renewable integration, can extend asset value and reduce overall environmental impact. Standardized pack designs and disassembly-friendly architectures will be essential enablers of circular-economy approaches in the ESS value chain.

F. Policy, Standards, and Market Mechanisms for ESS Scale-Up

Technological innovation alone is insufficient to ensure the sustainable and large-scale deployment of next-generation ESSs; supportive policy and regulatory frameworks are equally critical. Future research should assess the effectiveness of safety standards, recycling mandates, and extended producer responsibility schemes in promoting responsible ESS deployment. Policies that incentivize clean supply chains, domestic manufacturing, and ethical sourcing of critical minerals can mitigate geopolitical and sustainability risks. In addition, market mechanisms, such as carbon pricing, EV subsidies, and grid service remuneration for V2G participation, play a vital role in improving the economic attractiveness of long-lifetime, high-performance ESSs. Harmonizing technical standards and certification processes across regions will further accelerate innovation diffusion and global market adoption.

The future of electric mobility is inextricably linked to the advancement and sustainable deployment of energy storage systems. As highlighted in the proposed research agendas, no single technological pathway will be sufficient to address the multifaceted challenges facing ESSs; instead, progress will depend on coordinated advances across materials science, system design, power electronics, battery management, and circular-economy practices. Next-generation storage chemistries and safer cell architectures promise higher energy density and improved reliability, while AI-driven management strategies and charging–grid co-optimization can significantly extend ESS lifetime and operational efficiency. Equally important are sustainable manufacturing, recycling, and second-life utilization pathways that reduce environmental impacts and resource constraints. Finally, supportive policies, harmonized standards, and market mechanisms can be essential to translate technological innovation into large-scale, cost-effective deployment. Collectively, these efforts will enable the development of long-lifetime, high-performance ESSs that not only accelerate EV adoption but also reinforce broader energy transition and decarbonization objectives.

7. Conclusion

This manuscript has comprehensively examined the role, performance, limitations, and future prospects of energy storage systems (ESSs) in electric vehicle (EV) applications, highlighting their central importance in achieving transportation decarbonization and sustainable mobility. Batteries, fuel cells, and hybrid ESS architectures have been shown to play a decisive role in reducing carbon dioxide emissions by enabling the replacement of internal combustion engine drivetrains, enhancing energy efficiency through regenerative braking, and facilitating the integration of EVs with low-carbon electricity systems. As such, ESSs are not only key components of EV powertrains but also strategic enablers of broader energy transition and climate mitigation objectives.

The manuscript evaluation of existing ESS technologies reveals that no single storage solution can simultaneously optimize energy density, power capability, safety, lifecycle durability, and cost. Lithium-ion batteries currently dominate the EV market due to their balanced performance and technological maturity, while fuel cells offer attractive solutions for long-range and high-duty applications. Ultracapacitors and emerging technologies such as metal–air batteries provide unique advantages in specific operational contexts but remain constrained by energy density or limited maturity. These trade-offs underscore the necessity of application-specific ESS selection and the growing relevance of hybrid configurations.

The analysis further demonstrates that several technical challenges continue to limit the full potential of ESSs in EVs. Safety risks, thermal management complexity, degradation mechanisms, charging time constraints, and high costs remain critical barriers, while environmental concerns related to material extraction, manufacturing emissions, and end-of-life management pose additional sustainability challenges. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that the environmental benefits of EVs are maintained across their entire lifecycle.

Hybrid energy storage systems, supported by advanced power electronics and intelligent control strategies, emerge as a particularly effective approach to overcoming many of these limitations. By combining complementary storage technologies, hybrid ESSs enhance powertrain efficiency, improve dynamic performance, reduce stress on individual components, and extend overall system lifetime. The role of power electronics is pivotal in enabling efficient energy sharing, voltage regulation, and real-time energy management, thereby ensuring reliable and optimized EV operation under diverse driving conditions.

Finally, the manuscript emphasizes that the sustainable development of ESSs will depend on coordinated progress in materials innovation, battery management systems, fast-changing technologies, circular-economy practices, and supportive policy frameworks. Future research must adopt a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective that integrates technological advancements with environmental, economic, and regulatory considerations. Through such integrated efforts, next-generation ESSs can achieve higher performance, longer lifetimes, and lower environmental impact, ultimately accelerating the widespread adoption of EVs and contributing meaningfully to global decarbonization and sustainability goals.

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