Improving the start-up parameters of a gas turbine engine by adaptation the air turbine starter

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Abstract. The paper describes the process of optimizing the blades of a starter air turbine for a gas turbine engine launch system. This task was initiated by the necessity to use an existing turbine when starting a new engine. During the study, it was found that the turbine, although it ensures the conditions for the joint operation with the auxiliary power unit turbine and meet the strength constraints, it does not allow to start the engine within the required time. As a result of studies using mathematical optimization methods involving commercial programs, a variant was found to modernize the baseline turbine, which provides an acceptable value of torque on the shaft with an adequate start-up time at all operating modes with minimal design changes.

1. Nomenclature

| Symbol | Description |
|--------|-------------|
| GTE    | gas turbine engine |
| APU    | auxiliary power unit |
| NGV    | nozzle guide vane |
| ATS    | air turbo starter |
| IGV    | inlet guide vane |
| KG     | mass flow parameter |
| Kn     | power parameter |
| P      | pressure |
| T      | temperature |
| G      | mass flow rate |
| αIGV   | IGV stagger angle |
| π      | pressure ratio |
| ΔG     | losses (of air flow in the aircraft |
| Δp*    | total pressure losses in the ducts |
| ΔT*    | total temperature losses in the aircraft ducts |
| N      | power |
| ph     | ambient pressure |
| th     | ambient temperature |
| n      | rotational speed |
| M      | torque |
| τ      | time |

2. Introduction

The start-up of an aircraft gas turbine engine is an important mode that largely determines the safety, operational efficiency and reliability of the engine and the entire aircraft. The gas turbine engine start-up system includes a set of various devices and units: a starter, auxiliary power unit, air and fuel communications, automatic control system, transmission, power supply system, ignition system, etc. For reliable engine starting, the operation of all these systems must be consistent with each other [1].

Currently, the civil aircraft engine starting system is often built based on an air turbine mechanically connected to the rotor of the gas turbine engine, receiving compressed air from the APU compressor (Figure 1).
The group of the paper’s authors is employed by the Department of Aircraft Engine Theory of Samara National Research University [2] and has extensive experience in studying and improving the working process of various components of a gas turbine engine [3, 4]. Currently, the scientific group takes part in joint work in the interests of various enterprises that are the part of the United Engine Corporation (Russia) [5]. In particular, one of the Customers set the task of assessing the feasibility of using an air turbostarter manufactured at the enterprise to launch a new turbofan engine of the same class. The design of the considered ATS is shown in Figure 2.

The team was assigned the following tasks:

1) the ATS operation must be coordinated with the operation of the APU at all operating modes (under various atmospheric conditions, flight speeds and altitudes);
2) startup time must be minimized (the minimum allowed time was set);
3) the torque on the output shaft must not exceed the maximum value according to the strength conditions of the reduction gearbox and gear box of the engine drives.

In other words, the main task was to modify the flow part of the existing ATS so that it would satisfy the above conditions when working in a modified launch system (another gas turbine engine and APU). Moreover, the design of the baseline turbine must be kept as much as possible to reduce costs. Thus, the task is a typical optimization problem in which the turbine geometry must be changed (considering various constraints: structural and strength) to improve the required criterion (start-up time).

In open scientific and technical sources, there are many publications on the modernization and optimization of the turbine workflow [6-8]. However, all of them are aimed at improving the efficiency of turbines or their reliability. In current case, the unusual optimization criteria take place and it is necessary to check the condition for the joint operation of the ATS and APU and to calculate the start-up time of the gas turbine engine during optimization.

To solve the problem, an algorithm was developed for matching the working process of the APU and the air turbine used to start the engine. This method was described in detail in [9].

The essence of the method is that the characteristics of the APU and ATS are converted to a general form of the dependence of the reduced flow parameter $K_G$ on the expansion ratio of air in the turbine $K_G = f(\pi_{ATS})$. The intersection of the lines of the APU and turbine operating modes suggests that the conditions for joint work are fulfilled at these modes. At the intersection points of the characteristics $K_G = f(\pi_{ATS})$ and $K_G = f(\pi_{APU})$, the parameters at the APU outlet $p_{APU_{outlet}}$, $T_{APU_{outlet}}$, $G_{APU_{outlet}}$ are calculated and with their help the characteristics of the turbine (in particular, the dependence of power on rotational speed) are determined under the found conditions. Then, using the power characteristics of the ATS, the start time of the gas turbine engine is determined. The algorithm for its calculation is described in [9]. The conformity of the maximum torque to the strength constraints is also checked.
Thus, based on the intersection points of the above characteristics, the physical characteristics of the ATS are found when working together with the APU at all its modes.

Under the flow parameter $K_G$ is meant a physical quantity that is calculated using the following expression:

$$K_G = \frac{G_{ATSinput} \cdot \sqrt{T_{ATSinput}^*}}{p_{ATSinput}^*},$$

(1)

where $G_{ATSinput}$ - the value of air mass flow rate through the ATS;

$T_{ATSinput}^*$ - the value of the total temperature at the ATS inlet;

$p_{ATSinput}^*$ - the value of the total pressure at the ATS inlet.

When calculating the flow parameter $K_G$ for the APU, leakages and pressure and temperature losses in the pipelines of the launch system on the way to the turbine are considered.

$$K_{G_{APU}} = \frac{(G_{APU_{outlet}} - \Delta G) \cdot \sqrt{(T_{APU_{outlet}}^* - \Delta T^*)}}{p_{APU_{outlet}}^* - \Delta p_{hydr},}$$

(2)

$$\pi_{APU} = \frac{p_{APU_{outlet}}^* - \Delta p_{hydr},}{p_h},$$

(3)

where $K_{G_{APU}}$ - APU air mass flow parameter determined at the inlet of the ATS considering losses in the pipelines;

$\pi_{APU}$ - pressure ratio in the ATS determined by the parameters of the air at the inlet to the ATS considering losses in the pipelines;

$G_{ATSinput}$ - the value of the mass flow rate of air taken from the APU considering losses in the pipelines, $[kg/s]$:

$$G_{ATSinput} = G_{APU_{outlet}} - \Delta G$$

(4)

$T_{ATSinput}^*$ - the value of the temperature of air taken from the APU considering losses in the pipelines, [K]:

$$T_{ATSinput}^* = T_{APU_{outlet}}^* - \Delta T^*,$$

(5)

$p_{ATSinput}^*$ - the value of the total pressure of air taken from the APU considering losses in the pipelines, $[kgf/cm^2]$:

$$p_{ATSinput}^* = p_{APU_{outlet}}^* - \Delta p_{hydr},$$

(6)

$p_h$ - atmospheric pressure for altitude in standard atmospheric conditions, $[kgf/cm^2]$.

Values of losses of mass flow rate, temperature and pressure in the system are set by the Customer according to the experience of operating an engine of a similar class. The dependence $K_{G_{ATS}} = f(\pi_{ATS})$ obtained for the used APU is shown in Figure 3.

Characteristics of the turbine of the form $K_{G_{ATS}} = f(\pi_{ATS})$ (Figure 4) were obtained by CFD modeling of the working process in the investigated turbine (Figure 2). Its mathematical model was created using NUMECA software system. The model included a structural grid of finite volumes of 92 thousand elements. The value of the parameter $y+$ did not exceed 1. The Spalart-Allmaras turbulence model was used. In general, the settings of the numerical model of an air turbine corresponded to the typical settings used in the calculation of the working process in turbines [10].
The calculation results obtained using the created calculation model were compared with the experimental data provided by the customer (Figure 5). The relative error in determining the ATS power was less than 2.5%, and the air mass flow rate was less than 2%.

The obtained characteristics \( K_G = f(\pi_{ATS}) \) for the ATS and APU were combined at one diagram (Figure 6).

![Characteristics \( K_G APU = f(\pi_{APU}) \) of used APU.](image1)

![Mass flow characteristics \( K_G ATS = f(\pi_{ATS}) \) of investigated air turbine.](image2)

**Figure 3.** Characteristics \( K_G APU = f(\pi_{APU}) \) of used APU.

**Figure 4.** Mass flow characteristics \( K_G ATS = f(\pi_{ATS}) \) of investigated air turbine.

**Figure 5.** Comparison of calculation results obtained with the created computational model with experimental data.

As can be seen from Figure 6, all the lines of APU and ATS operating modes intersect, which indicates that the condition for their joint operation is fulfilled at all operating modes. However, it was found during the calculation, that the start-up time of the gas turbine when using the ATS exceeds the value specified in the technical requirements by 12.6%. At the same time, the maximum torque on the turbine shaft did not exceed the permissible value. Thus, it is necessary to increase the turbine power (without exceeding its limit value) and the air flow through it in order to reduce the start-up time to use the turbine for a new GTE start system.

Analysis of the turbine working process showed that the required increase in the turbine power and mass flow rate can be achieved with minimal changes in the initial design only by modernizing the shape of the nozzle guide vanes. In the other words, the modernization of the existing ATS to the new
requirements can be performed while substantially preserving the design. In fact, only one part will be changed that is the nozzle block.

3. Parametric studies

As noted above, it is necessary to increase the turbine power in order to meet the requirements for starting time. This can be achieved by increasing the flow rate through the turbine. The element limiting the flow in the turbine is NGV. Therefore, the flow rate can be increased in two ways: by changing the stagger angle and by trimming the trailing edge.

To search for a possible solution, parametric studies were conducted on the influence of these parameters on the startup time.

3.1. Changing the NGV stagger angle

During the study of the influence of the stagger angle of NGV on the flow rate of the working fluid and the power of the turbine, the angle varied in the range of $+2^\circ$ relative to the initial value. In total, five points were considered (including the initial geometry) with a step of $0.5^\circ$. A larger change in the angle will lead to a change in the design of adjacent parts and a significant amount of alteration of the original design.

The obtained dependences of the mass flow parameter $K_G$, start-up time and torque on changes in NGV stagger angle are shown in Figure 7. It can be seen that with a maximum increase in the NGV stagger angle, the start-up time of the gas turbine engine was reduced by only $7.6\%$. This value is $5.7\%$ higher than the limit value (i.e., such a turbine does not satisfy the requirements). The maximum value of torque was $27.5\%$ less than the maximum allowable, which meets the requirements of the technical specifications. Thus, changing only the stagger angle within the existing constraints on the axial length of the NGV part is not enough to increase the turbine power and to reduce the start-up time of the GTE.

![Figure 6. Combined flow characteristic of the APU and ATS.]

![Figure 7. Dependences of the parameters of the starter turbine and the start-up time of the gas turbine engine on the stagger angle of the ATS NGV.]
3.2. Trimming the trailing edge of NGV
Five variants for trimming the trailing edge of the NGV were considered (Figure 8). The dependences of the flow rate parameter $K_G$, start-up time and torque on the value of trimming the NGV trailing edge are obtained. They are shown in Figure 8. It can be seen from the presented results that, the start-up time was reduced by 10.7% by trimming the NGV trailing edge, which is 2.1% more than the maximum allowable $\tau_{\text{max}}$. The maximum torque value was 21.8% less than the maximum allowable $M_{\text{torque\_max}}$.

Thus, trimming the NGV trailing edge also does not provide the GTE start-up time specified in the technical task. During the study, it was found that the proposed modernization options cause significant deviations of the inlet flow angles for the rotor blade, which are the reason of significant dynamic stresses in it.

Thus, none of the considered variants of ATS modernization satisfies the requirements of the technical specifications with its design is preserved to the maximum. For this reason, it was decided to use mathematical optimization methods to find an acceptable variant.

4. Optimization Algorithm for Starter Air Turbine
A further search for a new shape of ATS NGV was carried out using multicriteria mathematical optimization methods. For this, an algorithm was developed that is built around the IOSO optimizer program [11]. The choice of the IOSO program is due to the large number of its successful application in the tasks of aircraft engine field, including by the authors of the paper [12-17]. The specified program was used as a finished commercial product. No upgrades were made to optimization algorithms. A description of the algorithms used in the program can be found on the website and publications of the program developer.

The schematic diagram of the developed ATS optimization algorithm is shown in Figure 10. At each optimization step, the IOSO PM optimizer generates a vector of input parameters $x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots, x_n$. The values of the input parameters describe the geometry of the nozzle guide vanes in a parametric form. The vector of variable parameters is transferred to the reprofiling unit, in which the Numeca AutoBlade program [18] converts the blades and saves them as geometry files in the *.GeomTurbo
format. Then, *Numeca AutoBlade 5* creates a mesh model using new blades. At the next step, CFD calculation is performed with the new mesh model. Processing the results of CFD modeling is performed by a special script using *Numeca FineTurbo* [19] and small applications from the NET Framework library. As a result, several output files are created containing the ATS operation parameters of interest in the text format. Then these parameters are transferred to the IOSO optimizer, where the results are processed and the current optimal variant of the ATS NGV is selected, and a new set of input parameters $x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots, x_n$ is created. This process is iterative and runs until the desired extremum is found, taking into account the given constraints.

The goal of optimizing the flow part of the ATS is to reduce the start-up time of a gas turbine engine while reducing the torque on the turbine output shaft (in order to increase the reliability). The presence of two optimization criteria ensures more stable operation of the IOSO optimizer [20].

**Figure 10.** Schematic diagram of the applied methodology for multicriteria optimization of ATS.

Based on the foregoing, the following criteria were selected for optimization:

1) GTE start time (it must be reduced);
2) the torque on the turbine shaft (it must be reduced).

The following parameters were set as constraints:

1) the torque at all modes must be less than the maximum allowable value;
2) the flow parameter $K_G$ must be within the range $K_G_{\text{min}}$… $K_G_{\text{max}}$, where the value $K_G_{\text{min}}$ corresponds to the minimum value of $K_G$ from all operating modes of the APU, and $K_G_{\text{max}}$ - to the maximum value of $K_g$ from all operating modes of the APU. This requirement is necessary to fulfill the conditions for the joint work of the APU and the ATS at all operating modes.

The parametrization scheme for the sections of the ATS nozzle guide vanes is shown in Figure 11. Changing the geometry of the first nozzle guide vanes was carried out in two control sections (hub and shroud). Each section was described by 14 independent variables (chord, inlet and outlet design angles, profile stagger angle, edge radii, position of control points of the spline of the pressure side and suction side, etc.). In total, 28 variables were used to describe the geometry of the ATS nozzle guide vanes.

Such a statement of the optimization problem makes it possible to find the Pareto front of optimal solutions in which each value of the gas turbine engine start-up time corresponds to the minimum torque at which it can be achieved (Figure 12). Then, in accordance with the task requirements, a variant is selected that provides the minimum start-up time, that can be achieved with a torque value acceptable under the conditions of transmission strength. Obviously, the requirement to reduce the start-up time will shift the selected point on the Pareto front to the left as far as possible, as much as the torque limitations allow.
5. Optimization Results

The optimization process was stopped after 200 calculation cycles. As a result, the Pareto front was obtained between the values of the start-up time of the gas turbine engine and the torque on the output shaft of the ATS (Figure 12).

For the current problem, the case with maximum torque and minimum start-up time is of the greatest practical interest. The start-up time of the gas turbine engine for the selected variant decreased by 13.7% relative to the variant with the baseline ATS geometry and was 1.3% less than the maximum permissible according to the technical requirements. The maximum torque among all the matched operating modes of the APU did not exceed the maximum allowable $M_{\text{torque\_max}}$ by 18.5%. The value of the mass flow parameter $K_G$ remained within the specified limits $K_{G_{\text{min}}}$...$K_{G_{\text{max}}}$ and was less than the value $K_{G_{\text{max}}}$ by 3.8%. The latter circumstance ensured the preservation of the coordinated work of the APU and ATS at all operating modes. Thus, the main practical goal of the study was achieved.

Figure 13 shows a comparison of the NGV cross-sections of the optimized and baseline ATS variants. The increase in the cross-sectional area and, accordingly, the flow parameter $K_G$, occurred due to a decrease in the blade thickness, and due to a decrease in the chord of the blade, especially in the shroud section. Since the shape of only the stator blades was adjusted, the strength of the most loaded turbine elements did not change significantly.

![Figure 11](image1.png)

**Figure 11.** Parametrization scheme for the sections of the ATS nozzle guide vanes.

![Figure 12](image2.png)

**Figure 12.** Pareto Front “Torque - Engine Start-Up Time” of the ATS variant at the most loaded operating mode.
6. Conclusion
This paper presents the results of the modernization of the flow part of an existing air turbine for starting system for application at another engine of the same class. It was shown that the initial turbine satisfies the requirements of working together with the APU at all operating conditions, provides satisfaction of strength requirements, but the start-up time when using it exceeds by 12% the maximum time required in the technical specifications. During the analysis, it was found that it is necessary to increase the power of the turbine by increasing air flow rate in order to fulfill the requirements. Changing the parameters of the turbine was carried out by changing the shape of the NGV. Conducted parametric research did not allow to find a solution. Therefore, the problem was solved using the original algorithm using a commercial optimizer program. As a result, a solution was found that made it possible to find such a configuration of the turbine flow path only by changing one element (NGV unit) that ensures that the technical requirements in terms of starting time are met with a margin of 2%. In this case, the maximum torque on the turbine shaft is 18% less than the permissible value and the conditions for the joint operation of the turbine and the APU are fulfilled at all operating modes.

The authors hope that the selected air turbine will be tested with a new engine in the near future in order to make sure the conclusions are correct.

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