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# Real-Time IoT-Integrated Multiphase Flow Modeling for Enhanced Flow Assurance and Leakage Detection in Offshore Pipeline Systems

Femi Adeoye Alabi[1]
Subsea Engineering, Offshore Technology Institute, University of Port Harcourt
falabious@yahoo.com
+2348035085305

Bamidele Stephen Omoyajowo[2] (Ph.D)
Department of Science Education, Faculty of Education Lead City University
omoyajowo.bamidele@lcu.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7824-2580
Phone: 09039287758, 07034563375

John Olufisayo Ajani[3] (Ph.D)
Department of Business and Administration, Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State
davidj@babcock.edu.ng
+2348032599005

## Abstract

Offshore pipeline systems are increasingly challenged by flow assurance issues such as undetected leaks, pressure surges, and inefficient maintenance practices, largely due to limited real-time monitoring and the difficulty of integrating traditional modeling approaches with modern sensing technologies. Many existing models, including mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) models, often lack the adaptability required to respond effectively to transient flow conditions in subsea environments. This study addresses this critical gap by exploring the integration of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies with multiphase flow modeling for improved flow assurance and predictive maintenance in offshore pipelines. A laboratory-based experimental system was constructed using a 3D rubber pipeline equipped with embedded IoT sensors. Water was used as the working fluid. Flow rates and leakage levels were recorded and analyzed via the ThingSpeak platform. Pressure pulses were monitored at different points to simulate fault localization, and data was visualized through heatmaps to track leakage severity over time. Results showed that stable flow rates between 185 and 205 indicated no leakage, while higher flow rates (208–239) led to significant increases in leakage levels—peaking at 100 during critical flow conditions. Pressure pulse analysis confirmed the accuracy of sensor placement in detecting anomalies based on distance and amplitude variation. The study concludes that combining IoT with flow modeling improves the accuracy of anomaly detection and enhances maintenance planning. It is recommended that offshore operators adopt IoT-integrated systems for real-time monitoring and ensure infrastructure is compatible with smart technologies for long-term operational efficiency.

**Keywords:** Multiphase Flow Modeling, IoT Monitoring, Flow Assurance, Predictive Maintenance, Offshore Pipeline Systems

## Introduction

In offshore oil and gas production, accurately predicting flow behavior is crucial for maintaining system stability and operational efficiency. Multiphase flow, involving the concurrent movement of gas, oil, water, and occasionally solids like sand or hydrates, does not occur in a uniform or predictable manner. These flows exhibit distinct flow patterns, which describe the spatial arrangement of the different phases within the pipeline. This concept differs from the notion of flow regimes, which refer more broadly to whether the fluid behavior is laminar or turbulent.

Flow patterns in multiphase systems—such as stratified, annular, slug, or dispersed flows—are known to shift rapidly in response to changes in operating conditions like velocity, pressure, or fluid composition. These patterns have direct consequences on pressure drops, heat transfer, and overall pipeline integrity. Therefore, the ability to correctly identify and predict flow patterns is essential to designing effective flow assurance strategies. Inaccurate predictions may result in blockages, pressure surges, or even equipment failure—consequences that are particularly costly in remote and deepwater operations (Zhou et al., 2021).

The classification of flow patterns has long been a subject of research. Mandhane, Gregory, and Aziz (1974) were among the first to develop a flow pattern map for horizontal two-phase flow, laying a foundational framework that remains influential. As offshore drilling expanded into deeper waters with longer pipelines and harsher conditions, researchers such as Oliemans et al. (1986) refined these models to account for high pressure, low temperatures, and inclined geometries typical of subsea systems. One of the most disruptive patterns—slug flow—has been extensively studied due to its potential to cause cyclic loading, pressure fluctuations, and operational instability. Shoham (2006) highlighted the severe impact of slugging on equipment performance and proposed empirical criteria for its prediction.

Traditionally, understanding and modeling these flow patterns relied heavily on laboratory experiments and static models. High-speed imaging and local phase measurement techniques (Fabre & Line, 1992), as well as flow loop experiments (Al-Safran & Kelkar, 2020), played a vital role in generating data to refine empirical and mechanistic models. However, translating these findings to real-world subsea conditions is challenging due to natural variability, changing

seabed temperatures, and the evolving fluid composition. Even minor changes in flow velocity or gas-liquid ratio can trigger a transition in flow regime, complicating predictions and potentially disrupting operations (Oyeneyin et al., 2017).

Compounding these difficulties are complex pipeline geometries—such as risers, subsea manifolds, and tiebacks—which influence phase separation and flow transitions. Operational challenges like wax deposition, hydrate formation, and sand production further disturb internal flow structures and raise the risk of obstruction. These complexities underscore the need for real-time flow monitoring and adaptive control systems, particularly those that can respond dynamically to changing conditions.

Recent advances in Internet of Things (IoT) technologies offer promising solutions to these challenges. IoT-based systems utilize networks of distributed sensors to continuously measure key parameters such as pressure, temperature, vibration, and acoustic signatures along the pipeline. This data, when analyzed through real-time computational tools, enables more accurate identification of flow patterns and early detection of anomalies. Zhang et al. (2019), for example, demonstrated that combining distributed pressure sensors with vibration monitoring allowed for classification of flow regimes—including slug and annular flows—with an accuracy exceeding 85%. Similarly, Liu et al. (2020) used distributed temperature sensing to identify early indicators of hydrate formation in long-distance subsea lines.

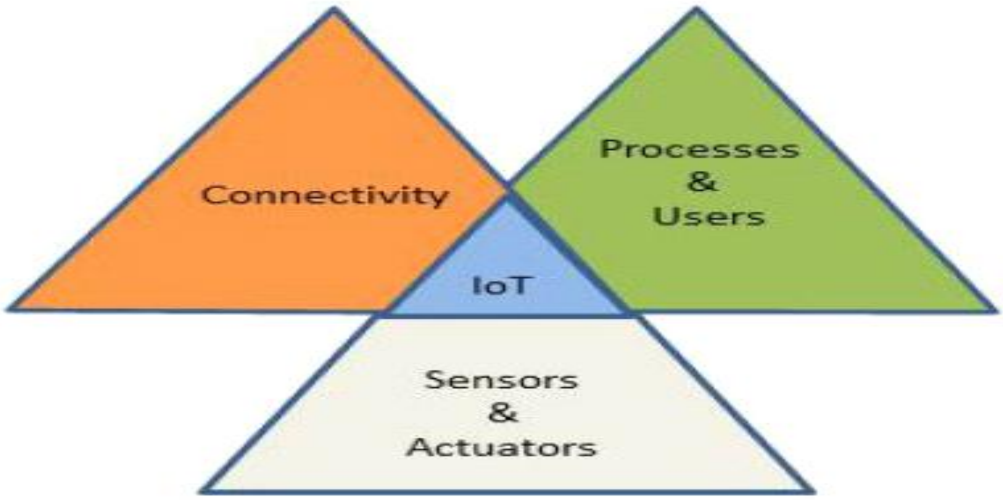


**Figure 1:** IoT Concept

The integration of IoT into flow assurance has shifted the industry from static forecasting to predictive and adaptive pipeline management. Ahmed et al. (2021) developed a real-time monitoring system capable of detecting early signs of slugging and emulsion build-up. Their prototype not only enabled early intervention but also extended equipment life and reduced downtime. This shift is further supported by edge computing technologies, which allow sensor data to be processed locally, reducing latency and enabling rapid decision-making in remote or hazardous environments (Li et al., 2018).

While these advancements are transformative, modeling flow behavior remains a fundamental component of flow assurance. Mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) models are still central to pipeline design, system optimization, and safety planning. However, their effectiveness depends largely on how well they predict real-world flow behavior—particularly in the presence of multiphase complexities and rapidly changing conditions.

Mechanistic models provide physically intuitive frameworks based on fundamental fluid dynamics principles, but they often oversimplify interactions and may struggle with unusual flow conditions. Empirical models are derived from observed data and offer computational efficiency, yet their predictive power declines outside the conditions for which they were calibrated. CFD models offer a more comprehensive simulation of multiphase systems but are computationally intensive and may not be suitable for real-time applications without significant computing resources.

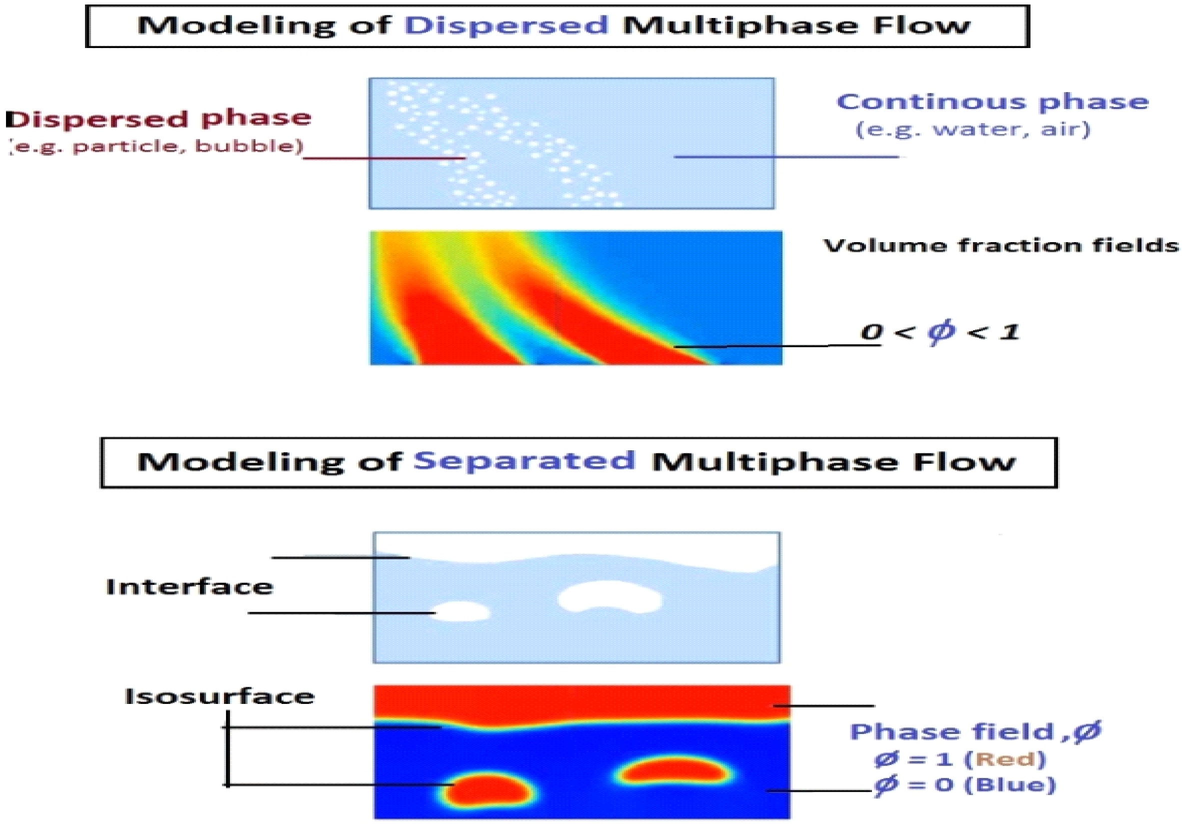


**Figure 2:** Multiphase Flow Modeling

The integration of real-time IoT data into these models marks a significant leap forward in modeling accuracy. Cai et al. (2018) demonstrated that real-time feedback from IoT sensors enhanced the fidelity of multiphase simulations, leading to more accurate flow regime predictions and timely responses to developing flow instabilities. However, managing and processing large volumes of real-time data from these systems remains a challenge. To address this, researchers have turned to machine learning techniques that can detect complex patterns and predict anomalies even with incomplete data (Dehghanian et al., 2017). These data-driven models, when combined with physical models, offer a hybrid approach that improves reliability and expands applicability.

Additionally, IoT-enabled systems support predictive maintenance by assessing equipment condition based on actual operational data. Nguyen et al. (2018) and Saxena et al. (2020) found that monitoring pressure and temperature in real time allowed operators to predict and prevent hydrate plugs, avoiding costly shutdowns through timely depressurization or chemical injection. Such predictive capability enables more informed maintenance scheduling, reducing unnecessary service intervals and prolonging system life.

As flow assurance continues to evolve, the need to compare the predictive performance of different multiphase modeling approaches becomes more urgent. Each model type—mechanistic, empirical, and CFD—brings distinct advantages and limitations, particularly when integrated with IoT data in high-variability environments like deepwater pipelines. To optimize future pipeline design and management, it is essential to evaluate these models not only in terms of theoretical accuracy but also in their practical effectiveness in predicting real-time flow behavior.

This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by assessing and comparing the accuracy of mechanistic, empirical, and CFD-based models in predicting multiphase flow patterns in IoT-enabled offshore pipeline systems. By doing so, it seeks to guide operators and engineers toward the most suitable modeling approach for enhancing flow assurance under dynamic field conditions.

**Statement of the Problem**

In offshore oil and gas operations, maintaining uninterrupted flow through pipelines is essential for operational efficiency, equipment longevity, and overall system safety. However, the nature of multiphase flow—characterized by the simultaneous movement of oil, gas, water, and sometimes solids—introduces complex flow patterns that vary significantly with changes in pressure, temperature, velocity, and fluid composition. These patterns, including slug, annular, stratified, and dispersed flows, directly affect pressure drops, heat transfer, and the likelihood of flow assurance challenges such as wax deposition, hydrate formation, or sand accumulation.

Traditional modeling approaches—including mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) models—have been widely used to predict these flow behaviors. While each modeling technique offers unique strengths, their practical reliability in complex and dynamic offshore environments remains uncertain. Mechanistic models, though grounded in physical laws, often oversimplify the interactions between phases. Empirical models offer computational efficiency but are limited to the conditions under which they were developed. CFD models provide high-resolution simulations but are often too resource-intensive for real-time decision-making.

The growing adoption of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies in offshore operations presents an opportunity to enhance the accuracy of these predictive models. IoT-enabled systems now offer real-time data streams from sensors distributed along subsea pipelines, capturing critical parameters such as pressure, temperature, vibration, and flow rate. Despite this advancement, there remains a significant gap in understanding how effectively these real-time data inputs improve the performance and accuracy of traditional modeling frameworks in predicting real-world flow behaviors.

Furthermore, the inability to accurately anticipate flow transitions—particularly in high-risk conditions such as deepwater or extended tiebacks—can lead to serious operational disruptions, equipment damage, and costly downtime. As offshore production moves into deeper and more remote waters, the margin for error in flow assurance narrows considerably. Yet, there is limited comparative analysis of the predictive strengths and limitations of the different

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modeling approaches when integrated with real-time sensor data in such challenging environments.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to assess how well mechanistic, empirical, and CFD models perform under real operating conditions in IoT-enhanced systems. Without such comparative evaluation, operators may continue to rely on suboptimal models, risking inefficient operations and potential system failures. This study seeks to bridge that gap by systematically evaluating and comparing the predictive accuracy of these models, thereby guiding better-informed decisions in model selection and pipeline management strategies for enhanced flow assurance in offshore operations.

## Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to evaluate and compare the predictive accuracy of mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) models in forecasting multiphase flow patterns within IoT-enabled offshore pipeline systems, with the aim of identifying the most effective modeling approach for improving flow assurance under dynamic deepwater operating conditions. To evaluate the accuracy of different models—such as mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD)—in predicting multiphase flow behavior through a comparative analysis.

## Methodology

This study adopts a comparative analytical approach to evaluate how effectively different modeling techniques can predict multiphase flow behavior in offshore pipeline systems equipped with real-time monitoring capabilities. The methodology focuses on three main areas: system design and modeling, integration of real-time sensor data, and comparative analysis of modeling performance. To begin with, a simplified three-dimensional pipeline system is developed to reflect realistic offshore operating conditions. The model includes variations in pipe diameter, inclination, and fluid composition—typically oil, gas, and water. Within this framework, three widely recognized modeling approaches are applied: mechanistic, empirical, and computational fluid dynamics (CFD). Each model is used to simulate and predict flow patterns such as slug, annular, and stratified flow, which are commonly encountered in deepwater environments. To enhance the reliability of the simulations, the pipeline model is integrated with simulated real-time monitoring systems. These consist of virtual sensors strategically positioned along the pipeline to record key operational parameters such as pressure, temperature, and flow rate. The data captured from these sensors is continuously fed into each of the three models to reflect changing field conditions. This integration allows for a dynamic assessment of flow behavior, helping to determine how responsive and accurate each model is when exposed to fluctuating operational scenarios. Following this, a detailed comparison is conducted to evaluate the strengths and limitations of each modeling approach. The assessment focuses on how accurately each model predicts flow patterns, how effectively it incorporates real-time monitoring data, and how efficiently it performs under typical offshore constraints. The results are then analyzed using key performance indicators such as prediction accuracy, response time, and practical suitability for field application. Through this methodology, the study seeks to identify the most effective modeling approach for improving flow assurance in offshore pipeline operations, especially in systems supported by real-time monitoring technologies.

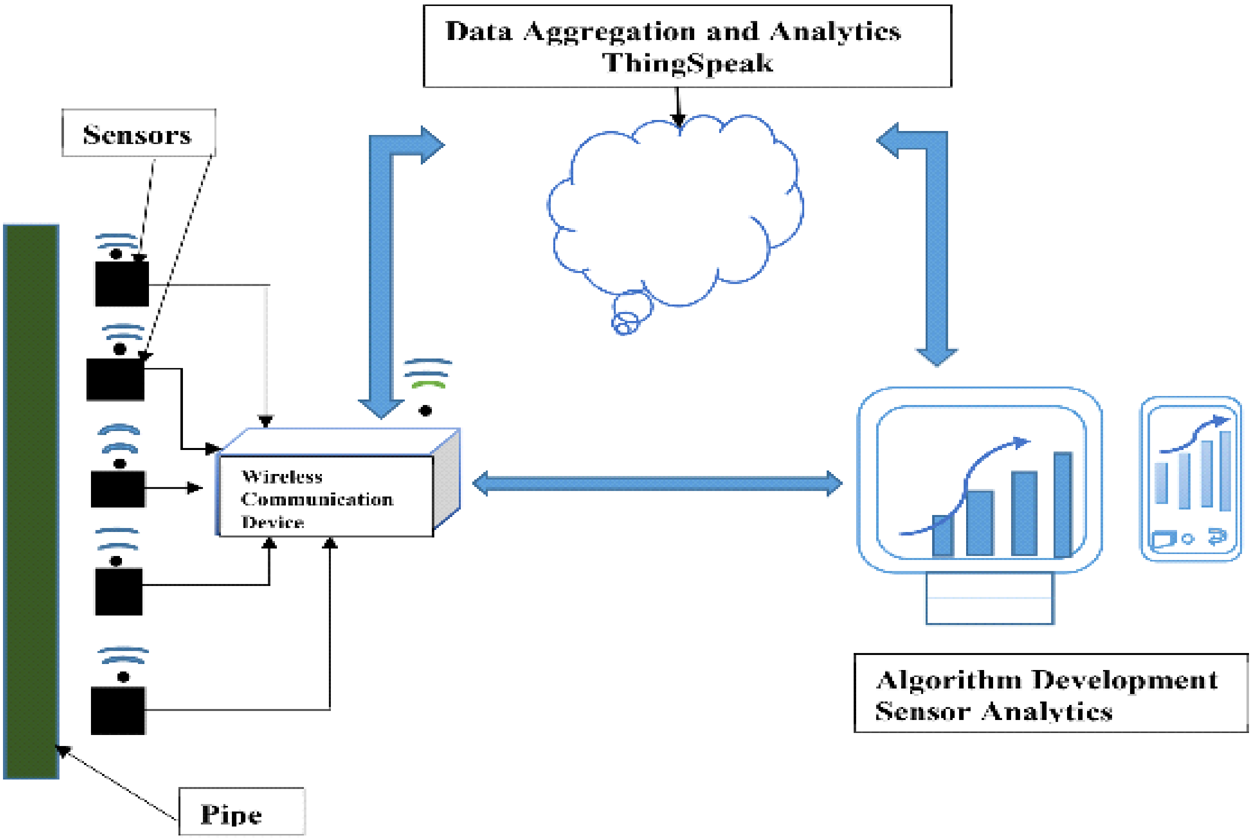


**Figure 3:** Pipe and Sensor model

### Multiphase Modelling Model Equations

**Mass conservation:**

$$\frac{\partial(\rho A)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho U) \;=\; 0\frac{\partial(\rho A)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho U) \;=\; 0$$

(3.1)

Equation 3.1 represents the mathematical expression of this principle for multiphase flow.

It refers to the fundamental principle that mass within a system remains constant, even if it changes form.

**Momentum conservation:**

$$\frac{\partial(\rho U)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho U \;\, x\, U) = -\nabla\rho + \mu\nabla^2 U\,\frac{\partial(\rho U)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho U \;\, x\, U) = -\nabla\rho + \mu\nabla^2 U$$

(3.2)

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States that energy within a closed system remains constant, although it can change forms (e.g., kinetic, potential, thermal). Equation 3.3 represents the energy conservation equation for multiphase flow.

**Energy conservation:**

$$\frac{\partial(\rho E)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho E U) = \rho U \nabla h + \mu \nabla U \nabla U \frac{\partial(\rho E)}{\partial t} + \nabla(\rho E U) = \rho U \nabla h + \mu \nabla U \nabla U \quad (3.3)$$

States that energy within a closed system remains constant, although it can change forms (e.g., kinetic, potential, thermal). Equation 3.3 represents the energy conservation equation for multiphase flow.

**Results**

The experimental setup, which utilized water as the transport fluid, demonstrated the effectiveness of real-time monitoring in detecting flow anomalies and supporting predictive modeling for flow assurance. Key findings emerged from the analysis of pressure pulse data, flow rate variations, and IoT-based leakage monitoring.

Firstly, the pressure pulse data captured by two sensors placed along the rubber pipeline confirmed the expected delay in pulse arrival times, validating the theoretical flow modeling applied in this study. The sensor located closest to the pulse generator—representing a simulated damage or leak location—recorded the highest amplitude signal, while the sensor positioned farther away detected a significantly lower amplitude. This difference in signal strength reflects the expected attenuation of pressure disturbances over distance in multiphase flow systems. The shape and waveform pattern of the pulses remained consistent across both sensors, reinforcing the system's sensitivity and reliability in identifying and localizing internal flow disturbances.

Secondly, the integration of Internet of Things (IoT) technology enabled continuous, real-time leakage detection, which was visualized through a heatmap and supported by numerical data. During the early portion of the monitoring period, flow rates ranged between 185 and 205, with no leakage detected (0%), indicating stable operation and no abnormalities. However, when the flow rate increased to between 208 and 235, the system began to detect leakage levels rising from 1 to 76, suggesting the onset of pressure-related issues or early-stage wear in the pipeline. A critical escalation occurred when the flow rate reached 239, at which point the leakage level spiked to 100—the maximum severity threshold on the system's risk scale. This sharp increase indicated a potentially hazardous situation requiring immediate attention.

The system's ability to flag these anomalies in real time demonstrates its usefulness for early fault detection. For example, the system first identified low to moderate leakage fluctuations shortly after the 24th time stamp, corresponding to the moment flow disturbances became significant. These fluctuations were automatically recorded and categorized by severity (Low, Moderate, High), enabling immediate alerts and potential interventions by the monitoring team.

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Moreover, the real-time data enabled predictive insights regarding the relationship between flow rates and leakage severity. As flow rate values rose, leakage levels increased in a directly proportional manner, highlighting a clear correlation between internal pressure and structural stress on the pipeline. This analysis supports the development of optimized flow assurance strategies by providing empirical evidence to guide pressure adjustments, flow control measures, or preemptive maintenance activities.

By identifying even subtle changes in flow behavior before they escalate into critical failures, the IoT-based system enhances pipeline safety, reduces environmental and operational risks, and prevents costly downtime. The incorporation of continuous monitoring not only improves predictive maintenance but also ensures energy efficiency and regulatory compliance in subsea operations.These results confirm that combining multiphase flow modeling with real-time IoT monitoring significantly improves the accuracy of flow behavior predictions and strengthens the overall reliability and safety of offshore pipeline systems.

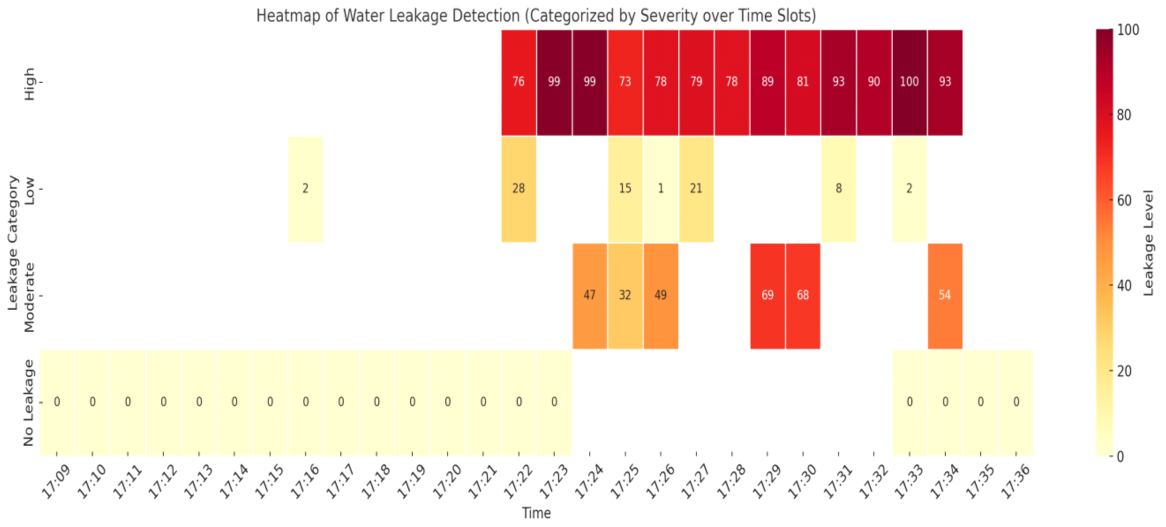


**Figure 4:** Heat Map Visualization

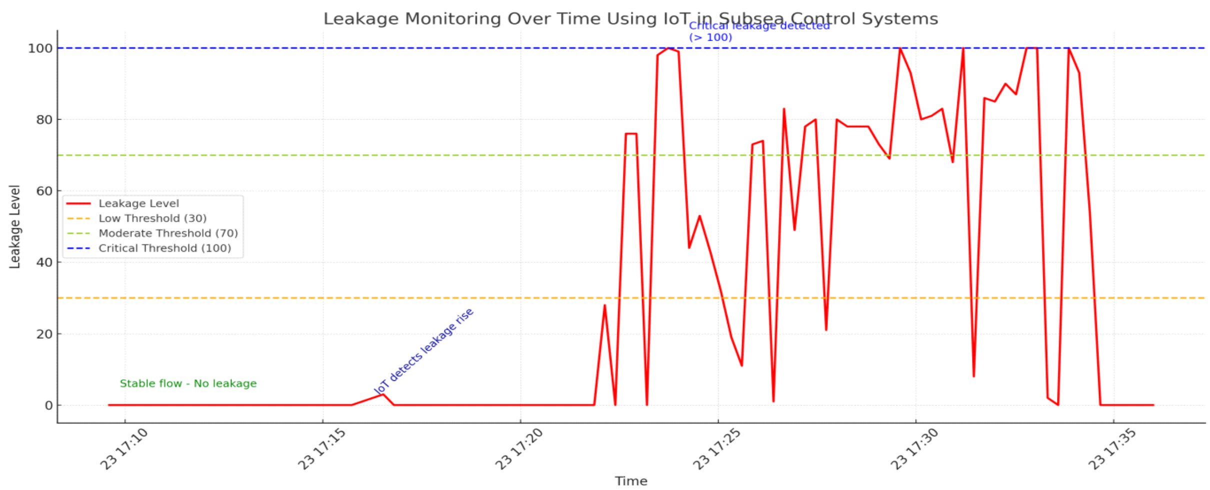


**Figure 5:** IoT Real Time Monitoring

## Discussion of Findings

The results of this study clearly demonstrate the value of integrating real-time IoT monitoring with multiphase flow modeling to enhance flow assurance and reliability in offshore pipeline systems. The experimental outcomes—such as the correlation between increasing flow rates and the rise in leakage levels, and the early detection of critical anomalies through sensor feedback—highlight the growing significance of predictive maintenance and data-driven decision-making in subsea operations.

This aligns with the findings of Nsidibe et al. (2021), who emphasized the benefits of combining IoT and multiphase flow modeling to reduce operational costs and improve system safety. Like the present study, their research showed that real-time data integration supports proactive pipeline management. However, they also acknowledged challenges in integrating IoT with older infrastructure, which underscores the importance of developing adaptable and cost-effective solutions for existing systems.

Similarly, the early detection of pressure build-up and leakage escalation in this study supports the work of Nikitin et al. (2020), whose integrated IoT sensors enabled real-time tracking of corrosion and material degradation. Both studies demonstrate that timely data collection and monitoring are essential for preventing small irregularities from developing into catastrophic failures. The ability of IoT systems to initiate alerts based on set thresholds allows operators to act promptly—thereby minimizing damage and maintaining operational stability.

The strong correlation observed in this study between flow rate increases and corresponding leakage levels also mirrors the predictive modeling insights described by Schmidt et al. (2020). His integration of IoT sensors with wax formation models enabled operators to adjust flow conditions before solid build-up restricted operations. This confirms that combining real-time sensor data with analytical flow models improves both preventive maintenance and flow assurance strategies.

Although this study focused on simplified experimental settings using water as the working fluid, the principle of delay in pressure pulse arrival and the effectiveness of heatmap-based leakage detection are well-supported in literature. For instance, Sultan (2018) developed a CFD-based model to predict pressure loss in multiphase flows, and while effective, such models often require extensive computational resources. In contrast, the real-time sensor feedback used in this study provides a more practical, lower-cost method for anomaly detection in field applications, especially when rapid decision-making is needed.

The study also supports Feng (2017), who reported that the reliability of offshore subsea-to-shore systems drastically reduces without consistent maintenance—showing a reliability level of just 0.58 after one year. Our findings reinforce the importance of predictive maintenance in improving system longevity and minimizing downtime.

Moreover, our study echoes the work of Weber et al. (2021) and Hoffmann et al. (2021), who tackled the power sustainability of IoT devices in subsea environments. While our experimental system did not directly address power constraints, the study affirms the need for low-power, long-lasting sensor solutions, especially in deepwater scenarios where accessibility for maintenance is limited. Their contributions on renewable energy-powered sensors and low-power protocols are critical to the future scalability of systems like the one developed in this research.

Additionally, the detection and categorization of leakage severity through heatmap visualization aligns well with Müller et al. (2022), who incorporated AI with IoT to detect anomalies within pipeline networks. Their use of machine learning for pattern recognition supports the idea that data gathered from sensors can be used not just for monitoring, but also for predictive insights and autonomous decision-making. Similarly, Patel et al. (2023) advanced this approach with hybrid AI models for real-time offshore anomaly detection—pointing toward a future where IoT systems evolve into intelligent, self-correcting networks.

Lastly, the study adds to the growing body of evidence from Richter et al. (2020) and Sorokin et al. (2019) on the importance of robust sensor network design. Signal attenuation in deepwater environments remains a known limitation, but the use of reliable sensor placement, redundancy, and data fusion—as these researchers have explored—can significantly improve performance, accuracy, and system coverage.

In sum, the findings of this study not only validate previous research on IoT and multiphase flow monitoring but also provide new practical insights into how real-time sensor data can be used to predict, detect, and manage pipeline anomalies. The demonstrated ability to identify early signs of leakage based on flow rate behavior is essential for modern subsea asset management, offering a path toward more efficient, reliable, and intelligent pipeline systems.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that integrating real-time Internet of Things (IoT) monitoring with multiphase flow modeling significantly enhances flow assurance and operational reliability in offshore pipeline systems. The results revealed that variations in flow rates directly influence leakage levels, with early signs of potential failure effectively detected through sensor data. By capturing subtle changes in pipeline behavior and visualizing leakage trends, the system enables timely intervention and supports predictive maintenance strategies. The approach not only improves safety and reduces the risk of pipeline failure but also promotes cost-effective and sustainable pipeline operations.

## Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that offshore pipeline operators should adopt integrated systems that combine real-time IoT monitoring with multiphase flow modeling to enhance flow assurance and operational efficiency. It is also advised that future designs of pipeline infrastructure consider compatibility with IoT systems to ensure scalability, sustainability, and improved monitoring accuracy.

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