Indonesian Journal of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
Vol. 43, No. 1, July 2026, pp. 1~6
ISSN: 2502-4752, DOI: 10.11591/ijeecs.v43.i1.pp1-6

Editorial

Electrical engineering in the era of autonomous intelligence: building sustainable, resilient, and self-evolving energy systems

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Article Info

Keywords:

Autonomous intelligence
Intelligent energy systems
Power electronics
Renewable energy integration
Smart grids
Sustainable infrastructure

ABSTRACT

Electrical engineering is entering a transformative era in which autonomous intelligence is becoming an integral component of modern energy infrastructures rather than merely an auxiliary computational tool. The convergence of advanced power electronics, renewable energy technologies, intelligent sensing, edge computing, artificial intelligence, and high-speed communications is enabling electrical systems to evolve from passive and centrally controlled networks into adaptive, resilient, and self-evolving ecosystems. This editorial discusses the emerging paradigm of autonomous electrical engineering, where future power systems are expected to perceive operating conditions, learn from historical and real-time data, predict disturbances, and autonomously optimize their performance while maintaining reliability, security, and sustainability. Beyond conventional objectives such as efficiency and stability, next-generation electrical systems must address increasing renewable penetration, distributed energy resources, electrified transportation, cyber-physical security, and climate resilience. The editorial also highlights several promising research directions, including AI-native power system operation, autonomous microgrids, digital twins, physics-informed intelligence, trustworthy and explainable AI, intelligent power electronic converters, and coordinated human–AI decision-making. These developments position electrical engineering as a foundational discipline for achieving sustainable development and future energy transition, while emphasizing that autonomous intelligence should augment engineering expertise to create safer, more reliable, and environmentally responsible electrical infrastructures.

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Introduction

Electrical engineering has long served as the technological backbone of modern civilization. From large-scale power generation and transmission to intelligent consumer electronics and industrial automation, advances in electrical engineering have continuously shaped economic development and societal progress. Today, however, the discipline is entering a new phase of transformation. The accelerating integration of artificial intelligence (AI), advanced sensing technologies, edge computing, high-speed communications, and distributed energy resources is fundamentally redefining how electrical systems are designed, operated, and maintained. Rather than functioning as passive infrastructures that merely respond to human commands, future electrical systems are increasingly expected to perceive their environment, analyze complex operating conditions, anticipate disturbances, and autonomously optimize their behavior in real time.

This transition represents more than the adoption of AI as an analytical tool. It signifies the emergence of autonomous intelligence as an intrinsic capability embedded throughout modern energy infrastructures. Autonomous intelligence combines machine learning, optimization algorithms, digital twins, distributed control, and cyber-physical integration to create systems capable of continuous adaptation without requiring

constant human intervention. Such capabilities are becoming essential as power systems grow increasingly complex due to the rapid deployment of renewable energy, electrification of transportation, distributed generation, and decentralized energy markets.

At the same time, the global energy transition presents unprecedented engineering challenges. Nations worldwide are pursuing ambitious decarbonization targets while attempting to maintain affordable, reliable, and secure electricity supplies. Variable renewable energy sources such as solar photovoltaics and wind turbines introduce significant operational uncertainties that conventional power systems were never designed to accommodate. Climate change further increases the frequency of extreme weather events, exposing vulnerabilities within aging electrical infrastructures. Simultaneously, increasing digitalization expands the cyber-attack surface of critical energy assets, making cybersecurity an inseparable component of power system resilience.

Against this backdrop, autonomous intelligence offers a promising pathway toward sustainable, resilient, and self-evolving energy systems. By enabling continuous learning and adaptive decision-making, AI-driven electrical infrastructures can improve operational efficiency, reduce maintenance costs, enhance reliability, and accelerate renewable energy integration. Nevertheless, realizing this vision requires addressing significant technical, ethical, and societal challenges. Future electrical engineers must not only master traditional principles of circuits, machines, power electronics, and electromagnetic systems but also embrace interdisciplinary knowledge encompassing data science, AI, communications, cybersecurity, and systems engineering. This editorial discusses the emerging paradigm of autonomous electrical engineering, highlighting current technological developments, research opportunities, and future challenges that will shape next-generation intelligent energy systems.

From Automated Systems to Autonomous Intelligence

Automation has been an essential element of electrical engineering for decades. Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems, programmable logic controllers, protective relays, and energy management systems have significantly improved operational efficiency and reliability. However, conventional automation primarily relies on predefined rules and deterministic control logic. Such systems perform effectively under anticipated operating conditions but often struggle when confronted with unexpected disturbances or highly dynamic environments. As modern power systems become increasingly decentralized and data-intensive, the limitations of rule-based automation become more evident, necessitating control architectures that can continuously adapt to uncertainty and operational complexity.

Autonomous intelligence introduces a fundamentally different operational philosophy. Instead of following static rules, autonomous systems continuously observe their operating environment, learn from historical experiences, predict future states, and adapt their control strategies accordingly. In essence, electrical infrastructures evolve from rule-based automation toward learning-based intelligence, where decision-making is increasingly driven by contextual awareness, predictive reasoning, and continuous adaptation rather than predefined operational scenarios. This evolution is supported by several converging technologies:

- Artificial intelligence and deep learning for pattern recognition and forecasting.
- Edge computing for low-latency local decision-making.
- Internet of Things (IoT) sensors providing continuous situational awareness.
- High-speed communication networks enabling distributed coordination.
- Cloud computing for large-scale data analytics.
- Advanced optimization algorithms supporting real-time operational planning.
- Digital twins providing virtual representations of physical assets.

Together, these technologies establish the foundation for intelligent electrical systems capable of self-monitoring, self-diagnosis, self-healing, and self-optimization. Looking ahead, future electrical infrastructures may further evolve into self-evolving systems that continuously refine their operational strategies through accumulated experience, enabling greater resilience, sustainability, and adaptability while maintaining human oversight for safety, accountability, and strategic decision-making.

The Rise of AI-Native Power Systems

The future electrical grid is gradually evolving toward what may be described as an AI-native power system, in which artificial intelligence is embedded throughout every operational layer rather than serving as an external optimization module. In such systems, intelligence becomes an intrinsic characteristic of the electrical infrastructure itself, enabling continuous perception, reasoning, learning, and adaptation across generation, transmission, distribution, and end-user applications. Generation forecasting increasingly relies on deep neural networks capable of predicting solar irradiation, wind speed, and electricity demand with remarkable accuracy. Accurate forecasting reduces reserve requirements, minimizes operational uncertainty, and supports greater renewable penetration. Transmission networks benefit from AI-assisted congestion

management, dynamic line rating, and predictive stability assessment. Instead of relying solely on offline contingency analyses, intelligent algorithms continuously evaluate system conditions and recommend preventive actions before disturbances escalate, thereby enabling a transition from reactive system operation toward predictive and increasingly autonomous grid management.

Distribution systems are experiencing even more profound transformations. Bidirectional power flows introduced by rooftop photovoltaic systems, battery storage, electric vehicles, and flexible loads create operational complexities beyond the capabilities of traditional distribution management approaches. AI enables adaptive voltage regulation, feeder reconfiguration, demand response coordination, and decentralized optimization. At the consumer level, intelligent energy management systems optimize electricity consumption according to dynamic pricing, weather conditions, occupancy patterns, and renewable generation availability. Buildings increasingly function as active participants within energy ecosystems rather than passive electricity consumers. Looking ahead, AI-native power systems may evolve into collaborative energy ecosystems in which distributed assets—including microgrids, electric vehicles, intelligent buildings, and energy storage systems—autonomously coordinate their operation through real-time data exchange and distributed intelligence. Such capabilities have the potential to improve not only operational efficiency but also resilience, flexibility, and sustainability, allowing future electrical grids to continuously adapt to changing environmental conditions, market dynamics, and societal energy demands while maintaining human oversight over strategic and safety-critical decisions.

Autonomous Microgrids and Distributed Energy Systems

Microgrids represent one of the most promising applications of autonomous intelligence. These localized electrical networks integrate renewable generation, energy storage, controllable loads, and intelligent control systems capable of operating either in grid-connected or islanded modes. Traditional microgrid management often depends on centralized supervisory control. However, future autonomous microgrids will possess significantly greater operational independence. Intelligent agents embedded within distributed energy resources will negotiate energy exchange, coordinate power sharing, and optimize local generation while maintaining system stability. Rather than functioning as isolated energy islands, future microgrids are expected to become intelligent nodes within interconnected energy ecosystems, continuously exchanging operational knowledge and coordinating resources to improve both local and system-wide performance.

Multi-agent systems provide a particularly attractive framework for decentralized decision-making. Rather than relying on a single controller, autonomous agents collaborate through distributed optimization algorithms to achieve collective objectives such as minimizing operating costs, reducing emissions, or improving resilience. Such decentralized intelligence becomes especially valuable during natural disasters or grid outages. Autonomous microgrids can isolate themselves from failing transmission networks, maintain critical services, and coordinate restoration processes without requiring extensive human intervention. As communities increasingly adopt localized renewable generation and battery storage, autonomous microgrids may become fundamental building blocks of future resilient energy infrastructures. Looking ahead, networks of autonomous microgrids may evolve into self-organizing "grid-of-microgrids," where distributed intelligence enables neighboring communities to autonomously share energy, balance local supply and demand, and collectively respond to extreme events or market fluctuations. Such collaborative operation has the potential to transform conventional electricity distribution into a resilient, adaptive, and self-evolving energy ecosystem that enhances sustainability while preserving human oversight for strategic planning and operational governance.

Intelligent Power Electronics: The Digital Heart of Future Energy Systems

Power electronics have become indispensable components of renewable integration, electric transportation, industrial drives, and smart grids. Modern converters no longer simply regulate voltage or current; they increasingly function as intelligent cyber-physical devices capable of adaptive control and autonomous optimization. Artificial intelligence enables converters to continuously estimate operating conditions, predict component degradation, optimize switching strategies, and improve energy conversion efficiency. Machine learning-based controllers can outperform conventional proportional-integral controllers under nonlinear and highly dynamic conditions. As sensing, computation, and communication become increasingly integrated within converter architectures, future power electronic systems are expected to make context-aware decisions in real time, enabling faster responses to changing grid conditions while reducing reliance on centralized supervisory control.

Wide-bandgap semiconductor technologies such as silicon carbide and gallium nitride further enhance converter efficiency while enabling higher switching frequencies and increased power density. When combined with AI-driven control algorithms, these technologies facilitate highly efficient and adaptive energy conversion systems. Future intelligent converters may also support collaborative operation across distributed energy resources, collectively maintaining voltage stability, frequency regulation, and power quality throughout

decentralized electrical networks. Looking ahead, intelligent converters may evolve into autonomous energy agents capable of coordinating with neighboring converters, energy storage systems, electric vehicles, and microgrids through distributed intelligence. Such collaborative behavior could enable self-organizing power electronic networks that continuously optimize energy flow, improve fault tolerance, and enhance overall system resilience, positioning power electronics not merely as energy conversion devices but as foundational building blocks of future autonomous and self-evolving energy infrastructures.

Digital Twins and Physics-Informed Intelligence

Digital twin technology is emerging as one of the most influential innovations in electrical engineering. A digital twin provides a continuously updated virtual representation of physical infrastructure by integrating sensor measurements, operational data, simulation models, and machine learning algorithms. Unlike traditional simulation models, digital twins evolve alongside their physical counterparts. They enable engineers to monitor asset health, evaluate operational scenarios, predict equipment failures, and optimize maintenance strategies without interrupting system operation. As computational capabilities and real-time data availability continue to advance, digital twins are expected to evolve beyond passive simulation tools into intelligent decision-support platforms that continuously learn from operational experience, evaluate alternative control actions, and proactively recommend optimal responses to changing system conditions.

Physics-informed artificial intelligence further enhances digital twins by combining machine learning with established engineering principles. Purely data-driven models often require large datasets and may generate physically inconsistent predictions. Physics-informed learning incorporates governing equations and engineering constraints directly into AI models, improving accuracy, interpretability, and generalization while reducing dependence on extensive training data. This hybrid approach represents an important direction for future research because electrical systems inherently obey physical laws that should remain embedded within intelligent decision-making processes. Looking ahead, the convergence of digital twins, physics-informed intelligence, and autonomous learning may enable self-evolving digital ecosystems in which virtual and physical assets continuously exchange information, refine predictive models, and co-optimize system performance throughout their operational lifetime. Such cognitive digital twins could become indispensable components of future autonomous energy infrastructures, supporting predictive maintenance, resilient grid operation, and trustworthy human–AI collaboration while ensuring that data-driven decisions remain consistent with fundamental engineering principles.

Building Resilience in a Changing Climate

Climate change has elevated resilience from a desirable attribute to an essential design requirement for future power systems. Heatwaves, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, and severe storms increasingly threaten electrical infrastructures worldwide. Autonomous intelligence can substantially improve climate resilience through predictive situational awareness and adaptive response mechanisms. AI models trained on meteorological data, satellite imagery, and historical outage records can forecast weather-induced risks and recommend preventive actions before extreme events occur. By integrating real-time environmental sensing with predictive analytics, future power systems may increasingly anticipate climate-related disruptions and autonomously adjust operational strategies before system performance is significantly affected.

Predictive maintenance further enhances resilience by identifying vulnerable components before catastrophic failures develop. Instead of relying on periodic inspections, intelligent monitoring systems continuously assess transformer insulation, cable degradation, circuit breaker performance, and transmission line conditions. Following major disturbances, autonomous restoration algorithms can prioritize critical loads, optimize repair scheduling, and coordinate distributed energy resources to accelerate service recovery. Ultimately, resilience extends beyond infrastructure hardening. It requires intelligent systems capable of adapting to uncertainty, learning from disruptions, and continuously improving operational strategies. Looking ahead, autonomous energy systems may evolve toward climate-adaptive infrastructures that continuously integrate operational experience, environmental observations, and predictive intelligence to enhance future preparedness. Such self-improving resilience could enable electrical networks to dynamically reconfigure resources, coordinate distributed energy assets, and sustain critical services under increasingly uncertain climatic conditions, thereby supporting a more sustainable, reliable, and adaptive energy future while maintaining human oversight for strategic and emergency decision-making.

Trustworthy and Explainable Artificial Intelligence

Despite remarkable advances in AI performance, widespread adoption within critical electrical infrastructures depends upon trust. Engineers and system operators must understand why intelligent systems recommend specific actions, particularly when safety and reliability are involved. Explainable AI seeks to improve transparency by providing interpretable reasoning behind algorithmic decisions. Rather than

functioning as opaque "black boxes," future AI systems should clearly communicate confidence levels, contributing variables, and underlying decision logic. Such transparency is essential for fostering operator confidence, supporting regulatory compliance, and enabling informed human intervention during safety-critical situations.

Trustworthy AI also requires robustness against adversarial attacks, uncertainty quantification, fairness, and compliance with engineering standards. Validation procedures must ensure consistent performance across diverse operating conditions. Human oversight remains indispensable. Autonomous intelligence should complement—not replace—the expertise of electrical engineers. Engineers provide contextual understanding, ethical judgment, and accountability that purely algorithmic systems cannot replicate. Human–AI collaboration therefore represents the most practical paradigm for future electrical engineering practice. Looking ahead, trustworthy AI is expected to evolve from an algorithmic property into a system-level design principle, where transparency, resilience, cybersecurity, and ethical governance are embedded throughout the entire lifecycle of intelligent electrical infrastructures. Future autonomous energy systems will likely rely on continuous collaboration between human expertise and machine intelligence, allowing AI to manage complex operational decisions while engineers retain strategic authority, safety oversight, and societal accountability. This human-centered approach will be fundamental to ensuring that increasingly autonomous electrical systems remain reliable, secure, and aligned with the broader objectives of sustainable energy development.

Cybersecurity in Intelligent Energy Systems

As electrical infrastructures become increasingly interconnected, cybersecurity emerges as a critical engineering challenge. Intelligent substations, smart meters, distributed energy resources, and IoT devices collectively expand the attack surface of modern power systems. Cyber attacks targeting energy infrastructure can disrupt electricity supply, compromise safety, manipulate operational data, or damage expensive equipment. Autonomous intelligence introduces both opportunities and challenges in this context. As power systems continue to evolve into highly distributed cyber-physical ecosystems, cybersecurity must become an integral component of system architecture rather than an additional protective layer deployed after implementation.

AI-based intrusion detection systems can continuously monitor network traffic, identify abnormal behavior, and respond rapidly to cyber threats. Machine learning algorithms excel at detecting previously unseen attack patterns that conventional signature-based approaches might overlook. However, AI itself introduces vulnerabilities. Adversarial attacks, data poisoning, and model manipulation may compromise intelligent control systems if appropriate safeguards are absent. Future research must therefore integrate cybersecurity directly into AI-enabled electrical engineering, adopting secure-by-design principles throughout system development. Looking ahead, intelligent energy systems may incorporate autonomous cyber-defense capabilities that continuously assess security risks, detect coordinated attacks, isolate compromised components, and support rapid system recovery with minimal operational disruption. The convergence of AI, distributed intelligence, and cyber resilience has the potential to create self-protecting electrical infrastructures that learn from emerging threats while maintaining reliability, safety, and operational continuity. Nevertheless, achieving such capabilities will require robust governance, continuous human oversight, and rigorous validation to ensure that autonomous security mechanisms remain trustworthy, transparent, and aligned with the operational objectives of future sustainable energy systems.

Education for the Next Generation of Electrical Engineers

The emergence of autonomous intelligence necessitates a corresponding transformation in engineering education. Traditional electrical engineering curricula remain essential, providing foundational knowledge in circuits, electromagnetics, control systems, power electronics, machines, and signal processing. Nevertheless, these foundations must increasingly be complemented by interdisciplinary competencies that enable engineers to design, supervise, and continuously improve intelligent cyber-physical energy systems. Future electrical engineers will require not only technical expertise but also the ability to integrate engineering knowledge with data-driven decision-making, autonomous system design, and human-centered innovation. Future electrical engineers should develop expertise in:

- Artificial intelligence and machine learning
- Data analytics and visualization
- Edge and cloud computing
- Cybersecurity
- Embedded systems
- Communication networks
- Systems engineering

- Ethics and responsible AI.

Equally important are problem-solving, critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and lifelong learning. As intelligent technologies continue evolving rapidly, engineers must adapt continuously throughout their professional careers. Universities, research institutions, industry, and governments should strengthen collaborative ecosystems that facilitate technology transfer while preparing graduates to address emerging societal challenges. Looking ahead, engineering education may increasingly adopt AI-assisted learning environments, virtual laboratories, digital twins, and immersive simulation platforms that enable students to interact with realistic autonomous energy systems before deployment in real-world applications. Such educational transformation will prepare future engineers not only to develop intelligent electrical infrastructures but also to provide the ethical leadership, strategic oversight, and systems-level thinking necessary to guide the evolution of sustainable, resilient, and self-evolving energy systems.

Research Frontiers and Future Opportunities

Several promising research directions are poised to define the future landscape of autonomous electrical engineering. AI-native power system operation seeks to embed intelligence throughout planning, scheduling, protection, and control functions. Autonomous microgrids continue advancing decentralized energy management and community resilience. Intelligent power electronics promise adaptive energy conversion with enhanced efficiency and reliability. Digital twins combined with physics-informed AI offer unprecedented capabilities for predictive maintenance and system optimization. Federated learning may enable collaborative AI development without compromising sensitive operational data, while edge intelligence supports low-latency autonomous decision-making. Emerging research is also expected to focus on collaborative intelligence, where distributed autonomous agents coordinate across interconnected energy infrastructures to optimize system-wide performance while preserving local operational autonomy.

The convergence of quantum computing and AI may eventually address computationally intensive optimization problems currently beyond practical limits. Meanwhile, integrated cyber-physical security frameworks will become increasingly important as electrical infrastructures grow more interconnected. Importantly, sustainability must remain the guiding objective underlying these technological advances. Autonomous intelligence should contribute not only to improved efficiency but also to equitable energy access, reduced environmental impact, enhanced resilience, and long-term societal well-being. Looking further ahead, future research may increasingly explore self-evolving energy systems capable of continuously learning from operational experience, adapting to changing environmental and societal conditions, and autonomously improving their performance throughout their lifecycle. Achieving this vision will require close integration of electrical engineering, artificial intelligence, communication technologies, materials science, and human-centered system design. The ultimate objective is not merely to build smarter electrical infrastructures, but to establish trustworthy, resilient, and sustainable energy ecosystems in which autonomous intelligence and human expertise work synergistically to address the increasingly complex challenges of global energy transition and sustainable development.

Conclusion

Electrical engineering is entering an era in which autonomous intelligence becomes a defining characteristic of modern energy systems rather than an auxiliary computational capability. The convergence of artificial intelligence, advanced sensing, digital twins, power electronics, distributed energy resources, and high-speed communications is transforming electrical infrastructures into adaptive, resilient, and self-evolving ecosystems capable of continuous learning and autonomous optimization. These technological developments are particularly significant as the global energy transition accelerates. Increasing renewable energy penetration, widespread electrification, climate uncertainty, and growing cybersecurity challenges require power systems that are not only efficient but also intelligent, flexible, and resilient. Autonomous intelligence provides powerful tools for addressing these challenges through predictive analytics, adaptive control, decentralized coordination, and data-driven decision-making. Nevertheless, intelligence alone is insufficient. Future energy systems must also be trustworthy, explainable, secure, and aligned with fundamental engineering principles. Human expertise remains central to ensuring safety, accountability, and ethical responsibility in increasingly autonomous environments. Rather than replacing engineers, autonomous intelligence should amplify human capabilities by supporting more informed, timely, and effective decisions. The future of electrical engineering therefore lies not simply in smarter algorithms, but in the harmonious integration of engineering knowledge, physical understanding, and autonomous intelligence. By embracing interdisciplinary innovation while maintaining rigorous engineering standards, the discipline is well positioned to lead the development of sustainable, resilient, and self-evolving energy systems that support global decarbonization, enhance societal resilience, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development in the decades ahead.