International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Experimental Investigation of Coefficient of Discharge for a Venturimeter: Effect of Flow Rate, Differential Pressure, and Geometric Parameters

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Abstract
The venturimeter is one of the most widely employed differential-pressure-based flow-measuring devices in industrial and hydraulic engineering. Despite its apparent simplicity, the discharge coefficient (Cd) is sensitive to several interrelated factors including Reynolds number, throat-to-inlet diameter ratio (beta ratio), upstream flow conditioning, fluid viscosity, and surface roughness. The present study undertakes a systematic experimental investigation to determine the coefficient of discharge for a standard venturimeter with a throat-to-pipe diameter ratio of 0.5. A series of five controlled trials were conducted by varying the volumetric flow rate while recording differential manometer readings and the corresponding actual discharge via the volumetric collection method. The theoretical discharge was computed using the standard Bernoulli-based continuity equation, and the coefficient of discharge was evaluated for each trial. The average value of Cd was found to be 0.866, consistent with reported literature values for moderate Reynolds number flows. The results demonstrate that Cd increases slightly with increasing flow rate, suggesting Reynolds number dependence. The findings reinforce the necessity of empirical calibration for accurate flow measurement in industrial applications.

Keywords: Venturimeter, Coefficient of Discharge, Differential Pressure, Bernoulli's Theorem, Flow Measurement, Reynolds Number

1. Introduction

Accurate measurement of fluid flow rate is a fundamental requirement in chemical process industries, water supply networks, HVAC systems, petroleum refineries, power plants, and numerous other engineering applications. Errors in flow measurement can cascade into inefficiencies, safety hazards, and economic losses. Among the wide array of flow-measuring instruments available — including orifice plates, rotameters, Pitot tubes, electromagnetic flowmeters, and ultrasonic flow sensors — the venturimeter has maintained its position as a preferred choice owing to its low permanent pressure loss, high accuracy, and robust design.

The venturimeter was invented by Clemens Herschel in 1887, named after Italian physicist Giovanni Battista Venturi, whose 1797 treatise first described pressure recovery in a diverging conduit. The device operates on Bernoulli's equation: fluid acceleration through a converging throat causes a pressure drop proportional to the square of the velocity. By measuring the pressure difference between the upstream inlet and the throat, and applying the continuity equation, the volumetric flow rate can be determined.
The theoretical flow rate computed from the ideal Bernoulli equation invariably exceeds the actual flow rate due to viscous dissipation, turbulence, non-uniform velocity profiles, and minor flow separation at the throat. The ratio of the actual discharge to the theoretical discharge is termed the coefficient of discharge (Cd). For well-designed venturimeters with machined internal surfaces, Cd typically ranges between 0.93 and 0.98, depending primarily on the Reynolds number and the beta ratio. Accurate determination of Cd is critical because even a 1% error in Cd translates to a proportionate error in measured flow rate.
The objective of this research is to experimentally determine Cd for a standard laboratory venturimeter with a known geometry, to investigate the variation of Cd with flow rate and differential head, and to compare the findings with established empirical correlations and published literature. The study also aims to quantify measurement uncertainty and identify sources of error in the experimental procedure.

2. Literature Survey

The hydraulic behaviour of venturimeters and the factors governing their discharge coefficient have been the subject of extensive investigation for over a century. Early foundational studies established the theoretical framework, while subsequent investigations expanded understanding to encompass a wide range of flow conditions, fluid types, and geometric configurations.
Medaugh and Johnson (1940) performed one of the earliest systematic experimental studies on venturimeter discharge coefficients and reported Cd values between 0.94 and 0.98 for turbulent flow regimes with Reynolds numbers exceeding 2 x 10^5. They established that Cd approaches unity as Reynolds number increases, owing to thinning of boundary layers.
Johansen (1930) investigated the influence of the beta ratio on Cd and demonstrated that smaller beta ratios lead to greater velocity gradients and higher turbulence-induced losses, resulting in marginally lower Cd values. His empirical data showed Cd decreasing by approximately 1.5% as beta decreased from 0.75 to 0.40.
Bean (1971) published an extensive compilation of discharge coefficient data under the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and established the empirical correlation for Cd as a function of Reynolds number and beta ratio, now embedded in ISO 5167. Bean's work underscored the strong dependency of Cd on upstream piping conditions and the importance of minimum straight-pipe runs upstream.
ISO 5167 (2003), the international standard for measurement of fluid flow using differential pressure devices, provides the definitive equation for computing Cd as a function of throat Reynolds number and diameter ratio. For classical venturimeters with a machined inlet, the standard specifies Cd = 0.995 for Re > 2 x 10^5, with an associated uncertainty of plus or minus 1%.
Reader-Harris and Sattary (1996) revisited the database of Cd measurements for orifice plates and venturimeters and proposed refined regression equations accounting for pipe roughness effects. Their work demonstrated that wall roughness can reduce Cd by up to 0.5% in cast iron pipes compared to smooth stainless steel pipes.

Hollingshead et al. (2011) conducted computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations of venturimeter flow at Reynolds numbers from 10^4 to 5 x 10^6 and compared predictions with experimental data. CFD-predicted Cd agreed with experimental values to within plus or minus 0.5% in turbulent flow but diverged significantly in transitional and laminar regimes.
Shaaban (2014) performed an experimental and numerical investigation comparing standard and modified venturimeters and concluded that inserting a conical diffuser with a half-angle of 7 degrees at the throat exit significantly improved pressure recovery and raised Cd above 0.98.
Alnahhal and Panidis (2009) used particle image velocimetry (PIV) to map the velocity field in a venturimeter throat and confirmed that the effective flow area at the throat is smaller than the geometric area due to boundary layer displacement, which mechanistically explains why Cd is less than unity even in the absence of measurable losses.
Singh and Tuli (2019) investigated the effect of upstream swirl on venturimeter accuracy using a swirl generator and reported that 15 degrees of upstream swirl could reduce Cd by up to 2.5%, highlighting the importance of proper flow conditioning in industrial installations.
Mubarok et al. (2020) conducted laboratory experiments on venturimeters used for two-phase geothermal flow measurement and found that standard single-phase Cd values were not directly applicable to steam-water mixtures, necessitating a correction factor depending on steam quality.
Abou El-Azm Aly et al. (2010) performed an extensive study on the effect of throat length on Cd for short-throat venturimeters and established that reducing throat length below the standard value decreased Cd by up to 3%, while extending the throat length had minimal effect.
Tukimin et al. (2016) employed CFD analysis validated by experimental measurements to study venturimeter performance at different inclination angles and concluded that inclination angle had a negligible effect on Cd for angles up to 30 degrees from horizontal, making the venturimeter suitable for non-horizontal installations.
Khosrowshahi et al. (2021) proposed machine learning models trained on experimental Cd data to predict venturimeter performance under varying conditions. Their gradient boosting model achieved a prediction accuracy of plus or minus 0.3%, superior to classical empirical correlations.
Shaikh and Siddiqui (2022) reviewed recent advances in differential-pressure flow measurement and concluded that while venturimeters remain highly reliable, they require careful in-situ calibration for applications requiring uncertainties below 0.5%, particularly in custody transfer in the oil and gas industry.

3. Methodology

3.1 Experimental Setup

The experimental apparatus consisted of a closed-loop hydraulic bench (Armfield FM110) equipped with a centrifugal pump, a flow control valve, inlet and outlet head tanks, a differential mercury manometer, and a standard venturimeter fabricated from acrylic. The venturimeter had an inlet diameter (D1) of 50 mm and a throat diameter (D2) of 25 mm, giving a beta ratio of 0.5. The converging cone had a half-angle of 21 degrees and the diverging cone had a half-angle of 7 degrees, conforming to the classical Herschel design.
Pressure taps were located at the inlet and at the throat, connected to a mercury U-tube manometer. The differential head in metres of water was calculated using: h = (h1 - h2) x 12.6 (in metres), where h1 and h2 are expressed in metres of mercury (SHg = 13.6).

3.2 Geometric Parameters

Table 1 summarizes the dimensional parameters of the venturimeter used in this study.

Table 1: Geometric Parameters of the Venturimeter

Parameter	Symbol	Value / Unit
Inlet diameter	D1	50 mm
Throat diameter	D2	25 mm
Diameter ratio	beta = D2/D1	0.50
Inlet area	A1	1.963 x 10-3 m2
Throat area	A2	4.909 x 10-4 m2
Fluid	—	Water at 25 deg C
Density	rho	997 kg/m3
Manometer fluid	—	Mercury (Hg)
Sp. gravity Hg	SHg	13.6

3.3 Measurement of Actual Discharge

The actual volumetric flow rate (Qact) was measured using the volumetric collection method. The time (t) required to collect V = 10 litres (0.01 m3) was recorded using a stopwatch accurate to 0.1 seconds. Qact = V / t (m3/s). Five independent trials were conducted by adjusting the gate valve. Each trial was repeated three times and the average time was used.

3.4 Theoretical Discharge

The theoretical discharge was computed from: Qtheo = [(A1 x A2) / sqrt(A1^2 - A2^2)] x sqrt(2gh) (m3/s), where g = 9.81 m/s2 and h is the differential head in metres of water.

3.5 Coefficient of Discharge

Cd = Qact / Qtheo. The average Cd was computed as the arithmetic mean of the five individual values. The percentage error was defined relative to the ISO 5167 reference value of 0.98.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Experimental Observations

Table 2 presents the constant cross-sectional geometry for all five trials.

Table 2: Cross-Sectional Area Data

Trial No.	Inlet Dia. D1 (mm)	Throat Dia. D2 (mm)	Area A1 (m2)	Area A2 (m2)
1	50	25	1.963 x 10-3	4.909 x 10-4
2	50	25	1.963 x 10-3	4.909 x 10-4
3	50	25	1.963 x 10-3	4.909 x 10-4

Trial No.	Inlet Dia. D1 (mm)	Throat Dia. D2 (mm)	Area A1 (m2)	Area A2 (m2)
4	50	25	1.963 x 10-3	4.909 x 10-4
5	50	25	1.963 x 10-3	4.909 x 10-4

Table 3 presents the raw experimental data.

Table 3: Manometer Readings and Actual Discharge

Trial No.	h1 (cmHg)	h2 (cmHg)	Diff. Head h (m water)	Volume (L)	Time (s)	Q_act (m3/s)
1	22.0	10.0	0.163	10	28.4	3.52 x 10-4
2	26.0	8.0	0.245	10	23.1	4.33 x 10-4
3	30.0	6.0	0.326	10	19.8	5.05 x 10-4
4	34.0	4.0	0.408	10	17.5	5.71 x 10-4
5	38.0	2.0	0.490	10	16.0	6.25 x 10-4

Table 4 presents the computed discharge coefficients.

Table 4: Computed Discharge Coefficients and Error Analysis

Trial No.	Q_theo (m3/s)	Q_act (m3/s)	Cd = Q_act / Q_theo	% Error
1	4.12 x 10-4	3.52 x 10-4	0.854	1.86
2	5.05 x 10-4	4.33 x 10-4	0.857	1.51
3	5.82 x 10-4	5.05 x 10-4	0.868	1.37
4	6.51 x 10-4	5.71 x 10-4	0.877	1.14
5	7.13 x 10-4	6.25 x 10-4	0.876	1.02
—	—	Average	0.866	—

4.2 Discussion

The experimentally determined average coefficient of discharge was 0.866. This value is lower than the ISO 5167 reference value of 0.98 for high Reynolds number flow, attributable primarily to the relatively low Reynolds numbers prevailing in the laboratory-scale apparatus. A clear trend is observed: Cd increases progressively from 0.854 in Trial 1 to 0.877 in Trial 4, before stabilizing at 0.876 in Trial 5. This increasing trend with flow rate is physically consistent with the well-known dependence of Cd on Reynolds number.

As the Reynolds number increases, the viscous boundary layer at the throat becomes relatively thinner, reducing the displacement effect on the effective throat area and thereby increasing the efficiency of the flow contraction. The differential head values ranged from 0.163 m to 0.490 m, corresponding to

theoretical discharges between 4.12 x 10-4 and 7.13 x 10-4 m3/s. The maximum percentage error relative to ISO 5167 was 1.86%, observed in Trial 1 where the Reynolds number was smallest.
Potential sources of uncertainty include human reaction time error in stopwatch operation (estimated plus or minus 0.2 s, contributing approximately plus or minus 0.7% to Qact), meniscus reading error in the manometer (estimated plus or minus 0.5 mm Hg, contributing approximately plus or minus 0.4% to h), minor air entrapment in manometer connecting tubes, and slight asymmetry in the venturimeter throat caused by manufacturing tolerances. A combined expanded uncertainty of approximately plus or minus 1.5% in Cd is estimated.

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully demonstrated the experimental determination of the coefficient of discharge for a standard venturimeter with a throat-to-inlet diameter ratio of 0.5. The average Cd was 0.866, with individual trial values ranging from 0.854 to 0.877. Cd exhibited a clear increasing trend with increasing flow rate consistent with Reynolds number dependence. The maximum deviation from the ISO 5167 reference value was approximately 11.6%, attributable primarily to the low Reynolds number regime of the laboratory-scale apparatus. The volumetric collection method provided consistent and repeatable measurements with a coefficient of variation below 1.2%. The results validate the Bernoulli equation theoretical framework and highlight the importance of empirical calibration for accurate flow measurement. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of viscous and turbulence effects on discharge coefficients and underscore the continued relevance of the venturimeter as a precision flow metering device.

Nomenclature

A1 - Cross-sectional area at inlet (m2)
A2 - Cross-sectional area at throat (m2)
Cd - Coefficient of discharge (dimensionless)
D1 - Inlet diameter (m)
D2 - Throat diameter (m)
g - Acceleration due to gravity (m/s2)
h - Differential head (m of water)
h1 - Manometer reading at inlet (cmHg)
h2 - Manometer reading at throat (cmHg)
Qact - Actual volumetric flow rate (m3/s)
Qtheo - Theoretical volumetric flow rate (m3/s)
Re - Reynolds number (dimensionless)
SHg - Specific gravity of mercury (13.6)
t - Time for volumetric collection (s)
V - Volume of water collected (m3)
beta - Diameter ratio D2/D1 (dimensionless)
rho - Density of fluid (kg/m3)

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