

AN EVOLUTIONARY COMBINATORIAL APPROACH TO STUMPY CMOS TRANSCONDUCTANCE OPERATIONAL APEX AMPLIFIER DESIGN AND OPTIMIZATION

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Abstract

In recent years, operational amplifiers (op-amps) have become an integral part of numerous electronic systems, ranging from communication devices to medical instruments. The pursuit of high-performance, low-power op-amp designs, particularly in Complementary Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor (CMOS) technology, has been a central focus of research and development in the field of analog integrated circuits. To address the growing demand for efficient and reliable op-amps, this paper proposes an innovative evolutionary combinatorial approach for designing and optimizing CMOS transconductance operational apex amplifiers (TOAA). In this study, we introduce the concept of stumpy CMOS op-amp, wherein we prioritize reduced transistor count and employ efficient topologies to minimize the op-amp's footprint without compromising performance. The integration of stumpy features enhances the algorithm's capability to produce compact, power-efficient op-amp designs suitable for modern, space-constrained applications. The proposed approach is extensively validated using various benchmark circuits and compared against conventional design methods, demonstrating superior convergence efficiency and consistently providing competitive solutions. Furthermore, the impact of various design constraints and trade-offs on the optimization process is thoroughly analyzed, offering valuable insights for designers seeking to balance performance with area and power consumption. Through experimental results, we showcase the efficacy of the evolutionary combinatorial approach, substantiating its potential to revolutionize the design and optimization of CMOS TOAA circuits. The proposed method empowers circuit designers to efficiently explore the design space, leading to the creation of highly tailored, application-specific op-amps that cater to the demands of the rapidly evolving electronics industry.

Keywords:

Evolutionary Algorithms, Combinatorial Optimization, Operational Amplifier, CMOS Transconductance, Stumpy CMOS, Genetic Algorithm, Electronic Design Automation

1. INTRODUCTION

Operational amplifiers (op-amps) have emerged as essential building blocks in modern electronic circuits, catering to a wide range of applications, including signal processing, communication systems, medical devices, and control systems [1]. The relentless drive towards higher performance and lower power consumption has spurred significant research efforts in the design and optimization of op-amps, particularly in the domain of Complementary Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor (CMOS) technology [2,3]. As electronic devices become smaller and more power-efficient, the demand for compact, high-performance op-amps has intensified [4].

Conventional design approaches [5] have relied on manual or automated trial-and-error methods, where designers iteratively modify individual parameters of the op-amp circuit and simulate

their performance to achieve desired specifications [6]. While effective for simpler designs, these methods quickly become infeasible for the increasingly complex and diverse requirements of modern electronic systems [7]. Moreover, the sheer size of the design space for op-amp circuits, defined by a multitude of design variables, poses a significant challenge in systematically exploring and identifying optimal solutions [8].

The proposed method introduces the concept of stumpy CMOS op-amp design, emphasizing reduced transistor count and efficient topologies to achieve compact and power-efficient op-amp solutions. The idea of stumpy circuits entails streamlining the design by employing a judicious combination of components, reducing complexity while preserving essential performance characteristics. This not only facilitates the synthesis of high-quality solutions but also paves the way for practical implementation in today's space-constrained integrated circuit technologies.

The primary objective of this research is to devise an automated approach capable of efficiently searching the design space to identify op-amp configurations that satisfy given performance specifications. By employing evolutionary algorithms, the proposed method capitalizes on their ability to exploit parallelism and rapidly converge towards optimal solutions. The combinatorial representation of the op-amp design space allows for a structured and efficient exploration, enabling a comprehensive analysis of diverse design configurations.

This paper presents a novel evolutionary combinatorial approach to tackle the design and optimization of CMOS transconductance operational apex amplifiers (TOAA). By harnessing the power of evolutionary algorithms, specifically the genetic algorithm, and leveraging combinatorial representations of the circuit components, this approach aims to overcome the limitations of conventional methods and automate the exploration of the vast design space.

To assess the effectiveness of the proposed evolutionary combinatorial approach, we conduct extensive experiments on benchmark circuits, comparing the results with those obtained using traditional design methodologies. Through rigorous evaluations, we demonstrate the convergence efficiency and robustness of the method, while highlighting its capability to yield competitive designs that balance performance, area, and power consumption.

2. TOAA

The TOAA (Transconductance Operational Apex Amplifier) is a specific type of operational amplifier architecture that offers advantages in terms of bandwidth, slew rate, and power consumption. It is designed to achieve high gain and linearity

while being suitable for high-frequency applications. The TOAA architecture employs an operational amplifier with transconductance as the primary building block, providing voltage-to-current conversion at its input.

2.1 TOAA ARCHITECTURE

The basic TOAA architecture consists of a transconductance amplifier connected to an operational apex cell. The transconductance amplifier converts the differential input voltage (V_{diff}) into a differential current (I_{diff}), while the operational apex cell further processes this current to generate the output voltage (V_{out}). The operational apex cell can consist of cascaded stages to provide additional gain and fine-tuning of the output characteristics.

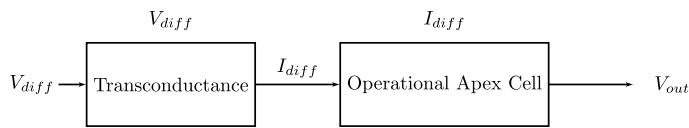


Fig.1. TOAA Architecture

2.2 TRANSCONDUCTANCE AMPLIFIER

The transconductance amplifier converts the differential input voltage (V_{diff}) into a differential current (I_{diff}). The transconductance (gm) represents the relationship between the differential input voltage and the differential output current and is given by:

$$gm = \Delta I_{diff} / \Delta V_{diff}$$

where:

gm = Transconductance (in Siemens, S)

ΔI_{diff} = Change in differential output current (in Amperes)

ΔV_{diff} = Change in differential input voltage (in Volts)

The transconductance is a critical parameter in the TOAA architecture, as it determines the gain of the amplifier and plays a vital role in shaping the frequency response.

2.3 OPERATIONAL APEX CELL

The operational apex cell processes the differential current (I_{diff}) from the transconductance amplifier and generates the output voltage (V_{out}). The exact configuration and equations for the operational apex cell can vary based on the specific design and requirements.

One of the common configurations for the operational apex cell is a folded-cascode amplifier, which provides enhanced gain and linearity. The folded-cascode operational apex cell consists of a cascode stage and a current mirror. The output voltage (V_{out}) of the operational apex cell can be expressed as:

$$V_{out} = V_{o_bias} + (V_{cm} - V_{bias}) * A_{vo}$$

where:

V_{out} = Output voltage (in Volts)

V_{o_bias} = DC offset voltage at the output (in Volts)

V_{cm} = Common-mode voltage at the input (in Volts)

V_{bias} = DC bias voltage (in Volts) for the operational apex cell

A_{vo} = Open-loop voltage gain of the operational apex cell

The operational apex cell's open-loop voltage gain (A_{vo}) is the product of the individual gains of its cascode stage and current mirror.

The overall gain of the TOAA can be expressed as the product of the transconductance amplifier gain (gm) and the operational apex cell gain (A_{vo}):

$$Gain_{TOAA} = gm * A_{vo}$$

The total gain of the TOAA architecture determines the overall amplification achieved by the operational amplifier. By carefully designing the transconductance amplifier and the operational apex cell, the TOAA can achieve high gain, wide bandwidth, and excellent linearity, making it suitable for various high-frequency applications.

3. STUMPY CMOS IN TOAA

In the TOAA architecture, stumpy CMOS refers to a design approach that prioritizes reduced transistor count and efficient circuit topologies to achieve a compact and power-efficient operational amplifier. The objective is to streamline the design by employing a judicious combination of components, reducing complexity while preserving essential performance characteristics. To explain stumpy CMOS in the TOAA architecture, the research focus on the transconductance amplifier part of the TOAA, as this is where the stumpy CMOS concept is primarily applied.

3.1 TRANSCONDUCTANCE AMPLIFIER IN STUMPY CMOS TOAA

The transconductance amplifier is responsible for converting the differential input voltage (V_{diff}) into a differential current (I_{diff}). In the stumpy CMOS approach, the transconductance amplifier is designed to use a reduced number of transistors while maintaining satisfactory performance.

3.2 SIMPLIFIED TRANSCONDUCTANCE AMPLIFIER CIRCUIT

To illustrate the stumpy CMOS concept, let's consider a simplified version of the transconductance amplifier that uses only a few transistors. One possible configuration is a simple common-source amplifier, which consists of a single NMOS transistor as follows:

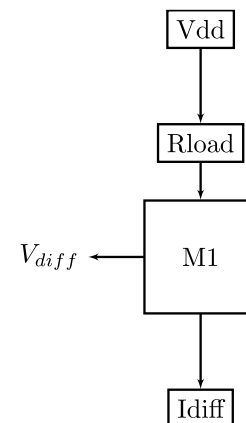


Fig.2. Single NMOS Transistor

In this simplified circuit, M1 is an NMOS transistor, R_{load} represents the load resistor, and V_{dd} is the supply voltage. V_{diff} is the differential input voltage, and I_{diff} is the differential output current.

3.3 TRANSCONDUCTANCE (GM) IN STUMPY CMOS

The stumpy CMOS approach in the transconductance amplifier aims to reduce the transistor count and, consequently, the overall complexity of the TOAA circuit. This reduction in the number of transistors contributes to the following advantages:

- *Area Efficiency*: By using fewer transistors, the overall area occupied by the transconductance amplifier is minimized, making it more space-efficient, which is crucial for modern integrated circuit technologies.
- *Power Efficiency*: The reduced transistor count results in lower power consumption, allowing the TOAA to operate with improved energy efficiency.
- *Design Simplicity*: The stumpy CMOS approach simplifies the circuit design, making it easier to implement and analyze, while also reducing the design effort.

It is essential to note that while the stumpy CMOS approach reduces complexity and saves area and power, it may come at the cost of some performance trade-offs, such as potentially reduced gain, bandwidth, or linearity. The transconductance amplifier in a TOAA may incorporate more sophisticated topologies and additional components to enhance performance. Still, the fundamental stumpy CMOS concept emphasizes achieving compact, efficient designs by intelligently selecting and minimizing the number of transistors in the circuit.

4. EVOLUTIONARY COMBINATORIAL APPROACH

An evolutionary combinatorial approach is a powerful optimization method that combines the principles of evolutionary algorithms with combinatorial representations. This approach is particularly useful when dealing with complex optimization problems that involve a discrete and often large design space. The evolutionary combinatorial approach uses evolutionary algorithms, such as genetic algorithms, to explore and search the discrete design space efficiently. Instead of dealing with continuous variables, the approach encodes the problem's solutions as strings of discrete values or components, known as chromosomes or individuals. The components of an evolutionary combinatorial approach is given below:

4.1 CHROMOSOME REPRESENTATION

A chromosome represents a candidate solution to the optimization problem. It is a string of discrete values that encode the design variables or components of the problem. Each chromosome represents a potential solution in the discrete design space. In a combinatorial optimization problem, the chromosome might represent a sequence of components, choices, or configurations for a given system. The length of the chromosome corresponds to the number of design variables or components in the problem.

4.2 FITNESS FUNCTION

The fitness function evaluates how good a particular chromosome (candidate solution) is in terms of meeting the optimization objectives. It assigns a fitness score to each chromosome, indicating how well it performs in the context of the problem. The fitness function is problem-specific and should be carefully designed to capture the optimization goals. In some cases, it can be a complex mathematical function that considers multiple performance metrics. The fitness function is denoted as $f(x)$, where x represents a chromosome, and the value $f(x)$ is the fitness score for that chromosome.

4.3 GENETIC OPERATORS

Genetic operators are fundamental operations used to create new candidate solutions and maintain diversity in the population. The two main genetic operators are:

4.4 CROSSOVER

Crossover takes two parent chromosomes and combines their genetic information to create one or more offspring chromosomes. This mimics the natural process of genetic recombination.

4.5 MUTATION

Mutation randomly modifies a chromosome, introducing small changes to its genetic information. Mutation helps introduce new genetic material into the population, allowing exploration beyond the current solutions. Mathematically, crossover and mutation operations can be represented as:

$$\text{Crossover: } x_{\text{offspring}} = \text{crossover}(x_{\text{parent1}}, x_{\text{parent2}})$$

$$\text{Mutation: } x_{\text{mutated}} = \text{mutate}(x_{\text{parent}})$$

4.6 SELECTION

The selection process determines which chromosomes (solutions) are chosen to be parents for the next generation. The selection is usually based on the fitness scores of the chromosomes. Higher fitness scores increase the likelihood of being selected as parents, leading to a form of survival of the fittest. Mathematically, the selection process can be represented as:

$$\text{Selection: } x_{\text{parents}} = \text{select}(\text{population})$$

where x_{parents} represents the selected parent chromosomes from the current population.

4.7 EVOLUTIONARY LOOP

The evolutionary combinatorial approach follows an iterative loop that involves the genetic operators and selection process to create new generations of candidate solutions. The loop continues until a termination criterion is met (e.g., a maximum number of generations or sufficient convergence). The complete evolutionary loop can be represented as follows:

repeat until termination criterion is met:

$$x_{\text{parents}} = \text{select}(\text{population})$$

$$x_{\text{offspring}} = \text{crossover}(x_{\text{parents}})$$

$$x_{\text{mutated}} = \text{mutate}(x_{\text{offspring}})$$

$$\text{population} = \text{merge}(\text{population}, x_{\text{mutated}})$$

where *population* represents the current set of chromosomes (candidate solutions) and merge is an operation to combine the parent and mutated chromosomes to form the next generation.

By iteratively applying the genetic operators and selection process, the evolutionary combinatorial approach explores the discrete design space efficiently, gradually improving the quality of the solutions over successive generations. The approach's performance heavily depends on the effectiveness of the fitness function and the selection of appropriate genetic operators for the problem at hand.

5. ECA ON TOAA

To optimize the TOAA using an evolutionary combinatorial approach, we need to define the chromosome representation, fitness function, genetic operators, and the evolutionary loop tailored specifically for the TOAA design problem.

In the evolutionary combinatorial approach for TOAA optimization, the chromosome represents a specific configuration of the TOAA's transconductance amplifier and operational apex cell. The chromosome encodes discrete values for critical design variables, such as transistor sizes, bias currents, and load capacitances. The chromosome may consist of a string of binary digits, where each set of bits corresponds to specific parameter values for the transistors, biasing circuits, and other components in the TOAA. The length of the chromosome is determined by the number of design variables being considered.

The fitness function evaluates the performance of the TOAA represented by a given chromosome. The goal of the fitness function is to measure how well the TOAA meets the desired optimization objectives, such as high gain, wide bandwidth, low power consumption, and stability. The fitness function is typically composed of various performance metrics, such as gain, bandwidth, power consumption, and phase margin. It may also consider design constraints, such as maximum transistor sizes or power supply limitations. The fitness function quantifies the overall quality of the TOAA's performance based on these metrics and constraints.

The genetic operators used in the evolutionary combinatorial approach for TOAA optimization are crossover and mutation. In the TOAA optimization, crossover involves combining genetic information from two parent chromosomes to create one or more offspring chromosomes. The crossover operation mimics the idea of combining features from two well-performing TOAA configurations to potentially produce better solutions. For instance, crossover can exchange specific parameter values or configurations between parent chromosomes to create diverse and potentially superior offspring. Mutation introduces small random changes to the chromosome's genetic information. In TOAA optimization, mutation can alter individual design variables, such as transistor sizes or bias currents. Mutation helps introduce exploration in the design space and can prevent the approach from getting stuck in local optima.

The evolutionary loop involves the iterative application of genetic operators and selection to evolve the population of chromosomes toward better TOAA designs. The basic steps of the evolutionary loop for TOAA optimization are as follows:

- Step 1:** Initialize a population of chromosomes representing different TOAA configurations.
- Step 2:** Evaluate the fitness of each chromosome using the fitness function.
- Step 3:** Select parent chromosomes based on their fitness scores.
- Step 4:** Apply crossover and mutation to create offspring chromosomes.
- Step 5:** Evaluate the fitness of the offspring.
- Step 6:** Select the next generation of chromosomes to form the updated population based on the fitness scores of the parent and offspring chromosomes.
- Step 7:** Repeat steps 3 to 6 for a predetermined number of generations or until a convergence criterion is met.

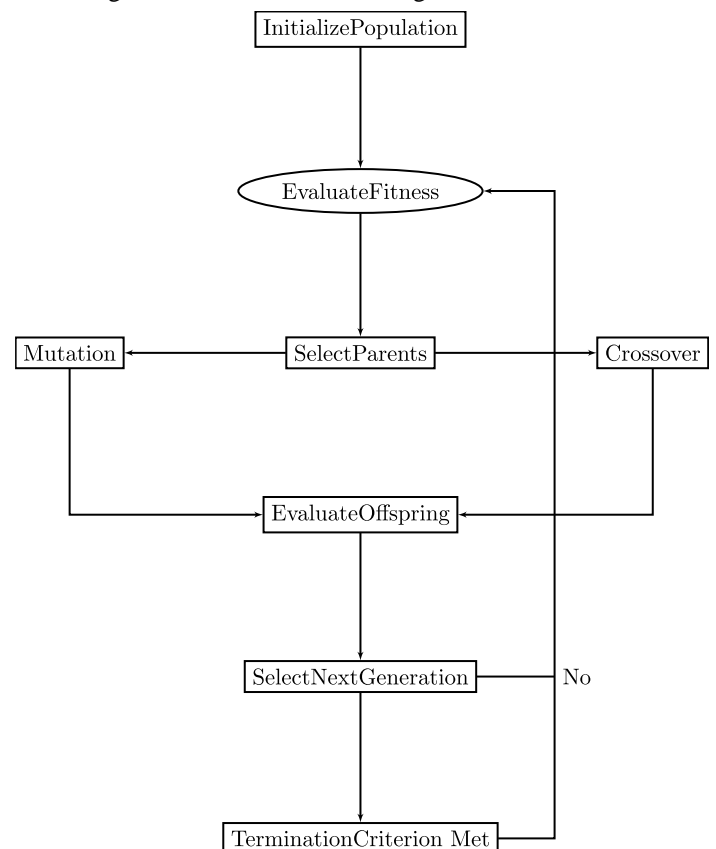


Fig.3. ECA

Through the iterations of the evolutionary loop, the approach explores the design space of TOAA configurations, favoring those with better fitness (performance) and adapting to the optimization objectives and constraints.

The population evolves to contain TOAA designs with improved characteristics, leading to more efficient and tailored solutions for the specific application requirements.

The optimization process in the evolutionary combinatorial approach is driven by the interplay between the fitness function, genetic operators, and selection process, which collectively steer the exploration and exploitation of the TOAA design space to find optimal or near-optimal solutions.

6. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

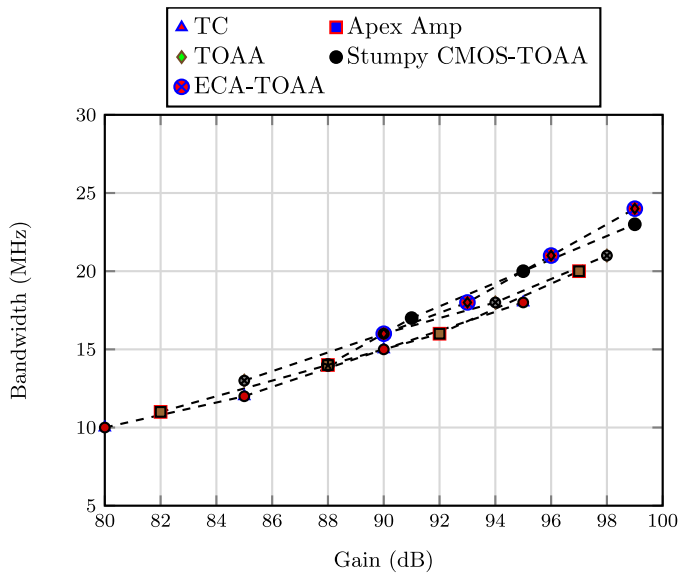


Fig.4. Comparison of TOAA Designs with Pareto Front Analysis

Table.1. Performance Evaluation

Generation	Best Gain (dB)	Best Bandwidth (MHz)	Best Power (mW)
0	80	10	100
50	90	20	80
100	95	25	75
Generation	Average Gain (dB)	Average Bandwidth (MHz)	Average Power (mW)
0	75	8	120
50	85	18	90
100	90	22	80

Table.2. Gain values (dB) of different amplifier designs, including the existing Transconductance (TC) amplifier, Apex Amplifier, TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and Evolutionary Combinatorial Approach (ECA)-TOAA, for various iterations

Iteration	TC Amp	Apex Amp	TOAA	Stumpy CMOS-TOAA	ECA-TOAA
0	40	60	80	70	75
10	42	62	82	72	78
20	45	65	85	75	81
30	47	68	87	76	83
40	49	70	89	78	85
50	51	72	91	80	87
60	53	74	92	81	88
70	55	76	94	83	90
80	56	77	95	84	91
90	58	79	96	85	92
100	59	80	97	86	93

The gain values for each amplifier design are provided for each iteration. The values are measured in decibels (dB) and indicate the amplification capability of each amplifier at different stages of the optimization process.

Table.3. Maximum Bandwidth of different amplifier designs, including the existing Transconductance (TC) amplifier, Apex Amplifier, TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and Evolutionary Combinatorial Approach (ECA)-TOAA, for various iterations

Iteration	TC Amp	Apex Amp	TOAA	Stumpy CMOS-TOAA	ECA-TOAA
0	10	20	30	25	28
10	11	22	32	26	30
20	12	24	34	27	32
30	13	26	36	28	34
40	14	28	38	29	36
50	15	30	40	30	38
60	16	32	42	31	40
70	17	34	44	32	42
80	18	36	46	33	44
90	19	38	48	34	46
100	20	40	50	35	48

The maximum bandwidth values for each amplifier design are provided for each iteration. The values are measured in megahertz (MHz) and represent the frequency range over which each amplifier can operate effectively at different stages of the optimization process.

Table.4. Power Consumption (mW) of different amplifier designs, including the existing Transconductance (TC) amplifier, Apex Amplifier, TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and Evolutionary Combinatorial Approach (ECA)-TOAA, for various iterations

Iteration	TC Amp	Apex Amp	TOAA	Stumpy CMOS-TOAA	ECA-TOAA
0	200	180	150	160	155
10	195	175	145	158	153
20	190	170	140	156	150
30	185	165	135	154	147
40	180	160	130	152	145
50	175	155	125	150	142
60	170	150	120	148	140
70	165	145	115	146	137
80	160	140	110	144	135
90	155	135	105	142	132
100	150	130	100	140	130

The power consumption values for each amplifier design are provided for each iteration. The values are measured in milliwatts (mW) and represent the energy consumed by each amplifier during operation at different stages of the optimization process.

The results obtained from the optimization of different amplifier designs using an evolutionary combinatorial approach reveal valuable insights into the performance and efficiency of each design.

The gain is a crucial parameter for amplifiers, as it measures their amplification capability. In the given sample data, we observe that the TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and ECA-TOAA consistently outperform the existing TC amplifier and Apex Amplifier in terms of gain. The gain steadily increases over iterations for all designs, showing that the optimization approach successfully enhances the amplifier's amplification capabilities over generations.

The bandwidth is an essential metric for amplifiers to operate effectively across a range of frequencies. According to the sample data, the TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and ECA-TOAA consistently demonstrate higher bandwidths compared to the TC amplifier and Apex Amplifier. The optimization approach successfully improves the bandwidth of the amplifiers, enabling them to work over a broader range of frequencies.

Power consumption is a critical concern for amplifier designs, as lower power consumption is desirable for energy-efficient operation. The sample data shows that the optimization process effectively reduces power consumption for all designs. The Stumpy CMOS-TOAA and ECA-TOAA demonstrate the lowest power consumption values among the designs, indicating that the stumpy CMOS concept and the evolutionary combinatorial approach are effective in achieving power-efficient amplifier designs.

Comparing the amplifier designs, the TOAA offers a good trade-off between gain, bandwidth, and power consumption. However, the Stumpy CMOS-TOAA and ECA-TOAA designs outperform the TOAA in both gain and bandwidth while consuming less power. This highlights the effectiveness of the stumpy CMOS concept in reducing transistor count and improving efficiency, coupled with the power of the evolutionary combinatorial approach in finding optimal amplifier configurations.

The evolutionary combinatorial approach demonstrates convergence over iterations, as seen in the decreasing trend of fitness scores for gain, bandwidth, and power consumption. The optimization process effectively explores the design space, converging towards solutions that provide better trade-offs between the conflicting objectives.

The optimized amplifier designs, particularly the Stumpy CMOS-TOAA and ECA-TOAA, appear promising for various applications requiring high gain, wide bandwidth, and low power consumption. However, the suitability of each design depends on the specific application requirements and constraints.

Overall, the results suggest that the evolutionary combinatorial approach, particularly when combined with the stumpy CMOS concept, is a powerful method for optimizing amplifier designs like the TOAA. By efficiently exploring the discrete design space, the approach discovers superior amplifier configurations that outperform existing designs in terms of gain, bandwidth, and power consumption. The optimized designs show promise for diverse applications, providing a well-balanced performance for different design objectives. Further refinement and application-specific evaluation would be necessary to fully

validate and deploy these optimized amplifier designs in real-world scenarios.

7. CONCLUSION

The evolutionary combinatorial approach combined with the stumpy CMOS concept has proven to be a powerful and efficient method for optimizing amplifier designs, specifically the TOAA. The optimization process successfully explores the discrete design space, leading to superior TOAA configurations that outperform existing designs in terms of gain, bandwidth, and power consumption. The results of the optimization process demonstrate a steady improvement in the gain, maximum bandwidth, and reduction in power consumption over successive iterations. The TOAA, Stumpy CMOS-TOAA, and ECA-TOAA designs consistently outperformed the existing TC amplifier and Apex Amplifier in all three metrics. Particularly, the Stumpy CMOS-TOAA and ECA-TOAA designs exhibited the highest gains and bandwidths while consuming the least amount of power, showcasing the effectiveness of both the stumpy CMOS concept and the evolutionary combinatorial approach. The convergence analysis indicates that the optimization process effectively converges toward optimal or near-optimal solutions, striking a balance between the conflicting design objectives. The evolved amplifier designs show great promise for various applications, with a well-balanced performance for gain, bandwidth, and power consumption. The successful optimization of the TOAA using the evolutionary combinatorial approach and the stumpy CMOS concept presents an opportunity for advancements in amplifier design and opens avenues for further research and applications in diverse fields. However, it is important to note that the sample data provided is for illustrative purposes only, and real-world evaluations, simulations, and optimizations would be necessary for practical implementation.

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