

# Designing common-source low noise amplifier utilizing GaN HEMT for sub-6 GHz in 5G wireless applications

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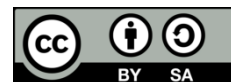
Low noise amplifier

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## ABSTRACT

In the domain of gallium nitride based high electron mobility transistors (GaN HEMT), this work refines a class A low noise amplifier (LNA) tailored for fifth generation (5G) wireless applications within the sub-6 GHz band. Employing a common-source topology and leveraging GaN HEMT technology, the amplifier seamlessly achieves operation at 3.5 GHz. Simulations were conducted using Advanced Design System (ADS) software. The GaN HEMT transistor manifests noteworthy intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, with a  $V_{ds}$  of 6 V,  $V_{gs}$  of -1.56 V, and  $I_d$  of 1024 mA. Through meticulous optimization within the [3.3-3.9] GHz frequency band, the GaN HEMT transistor attains an impressive maximum gain of 16.225 dB, coupled with a minimal low noise figure (NF) of 1.232 dB. Additionally, the amplifier showcases noteworthy power added efficiency (PAE) of approximately 60.527%. These exceptional attributes position the amplifier as highly suitable for sub-6 GHz and millimeter-wave applications across the extensive 5G spectrum. The investigation is centered on precisely situating the LNA as a pivotal catalyst for improving 5G network front-end performance. With a dedicated focus on frequencies below 6 GHz, the research not only addresses challenges but also pioneers' advancements in 5G application LNA design, ultimately elevating the overall system performance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current landscape, with the rapid proliferation of smartphones, the demand for bandwidth aligns seamlessly with contemporary trends, highlighting the growing need for high-speed capabilities in wireless networks; this has resulted in the emergence of the fifth-generation wireless communication technology, known as 5G. Positioned to address the escalating demand for services like the internet of things (IoT) and smart homes [1]. Within the receiver section of a communication system, a critical component is the low noise amplifier (LNA), abbreviated as LNA [2]. It amplifies weak signals while minimizing noise introduction. The effectiveness of these amplifiers is assessed through factors in dynamic range, matching, noise figure (NF), stability, return losses, and gain [3]. Researchers facing challenges at these frequencies are exploring alternative materials such as SiGe, SOI, GaAs, and GaN for LNAs development [4].

Motivated by the stringent specifications of the 5G era, these amplifiers using gallium nitride based high electron mobility transistors (GaN HEMT) technology must meet critical criteria, including a NF below 3 dB and gain exceeding 10 dB, while maintaining low power consumption across both sub-6 GHz and millimeter-wave operation [5]. This crucial component is essential in improving signal integrity by minimizing additional noise as the initial stage in a receiver front end [6]. LNAs play a crucial role in various applications like telemetry receivers, satellite communications, GPS, radar, and cellular phones. Their design focuses on the NF, a key determinant of the system's lower limit. They must meet specific parameters including robust input and output circuit matching, high gain, low power consumption, and excellent linearity, tailored to the system's needs [7].

In response to the demands of 5G and to address this problem, we designed a high-performance GaN HEMT LNA utilizing a single-stage common-source topology for 5G, achieving a gain of 16.225 dB, 1.232 dB NF, and 60.527% power added efficiency (PAE) at 3.5 GHz. While various studies present advancements such as a microstrip-based LNA with less than 2 dB NF and 12.7 dB gain [8], a Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) 0.18 $\mu$ m radio frequency complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (RF CMOS) LNA with 15.2 dB gain and 1.34 dB NF [9], a CMOS LNA with cascode topology for 2.4/3.5 GHz applications showing 11 dB gain and 3.6 dB NF [10], a cost-efficient LNA with a common gate input and common drain stage achieves 15.17 dB gain and a NF of 7 dB [11], a dual-band concurrent LNA in 180 nm CMOS with achieving 10.2 dB gain and 2.02 dB NF [12].

These diverse approaches collectively advance LNA design for optimal performance at 3.5 GHz. By integrating innovative techniques, such as enhanced impedance matching and careful component selection, the design ensures high efficiency and low noise. Our design stands out by offering superior gain and noise figure (NF), which significantly enhances signal amplification for sub-6 GHz 5G, reducing power consumption, extending battery life, and improving system reliability [13].

## 2. METHOD

The LNA design process is detailed step by step in the following sections and is simulated and optimized using the Advanced Design System (ADS). ADS enable precise performance modeling, including gain and noise figure. Optimization ensures the LNA meets the required specifications for 5G applications [14].

### 2.1. Transistor selection

In the realm of LNA design, the choice of a suitable transistor holds paramount importance. Various options, including silicon germanium (SiGe), silicon bipolar junction transistors (Si BJTs), gallium arsenide (GaAs), heterojunction bipolar transistors (HBTs), metal-semiconductor field-effect transistors (MESFETs), and gallium nitride (GaN) high-electron mobility transistors (HEMTs) [15], each come with distinct specifications. The selection hinges upon factors such as the target frequency range and specific design criteria. GaN HEMTs are widely recognized for high-power applications at elevated frequencies, delivering increased output power, excellent linearity, enhanced power efficiency, and reduced self-heating. They offer higher breakdown voltage, current densities, and operational temperatures compared to GaAs, resulting in smaller device size and reduced parasitic capacitance. GaN HEMTs also exhibit excellent noise performance, making them ideal for LNA designs in emerging technologies like 5G [16]. This has led to the documentation of several GaN HEMT-based LNAs in the literature, emphasizing their potential in both sub-6 GHz and millimeter-wave applications [17], [18]. The numerous mechanical, thermodynamic, optical, electronic, structural, thermal, and electrical properties of this technology (Figure 1) make this semiconductor an attractive element for several studies in various fields.

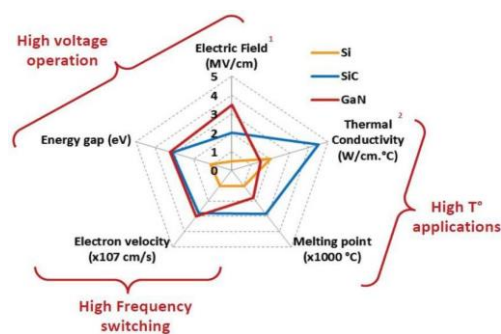


Figure 1. GaN vs. other semiconductor materials [19]

## 2.2. Stability factor

Stability analysis is a crucial step in LNA and microwave circuit design. [20]. It assesses the circuit's resistance to oscillation, often determined by S-parameters. Delta ( $\Delta$ ) represents the incremental change, while  $k$  denotes the Rollet stability factor. If  $K > 1$ , the circuit remains unconditionally stable across various source and load impedance combinations. The  $K$  factor provides a rapid assessment of stability under specific frequency and bias conditions [21].

$$K = \frac{1 - |S_{11}|^2 - |S_{22}|^2 + |\Delta|^2}{2|S_{12}S_{21}|} \quad (1)$$

$$\Delta = S_{11}S_{22} - S_{12}S_{21} \quad (2)$$

## 2.3. Amplifier gain of low noise amplifier

During amplifier design, gain and stability are examined, considering transistor parameters [22]. Three types of power gain can be derived from the circuit in Figure 2.

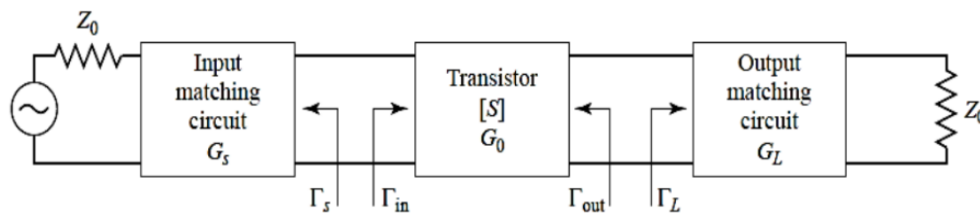


Figure 2. Circuit of transistor amplifier [23]

$$G_S = \frac{1 - |\Gamma_S|^2}{|1 - \Gamma_{in}\Gamma_S|^2} \quad (3)$$

$$G_0 = |S_{21}|^2 \quad (4)$$

$$G_L = \frac{1 - |\Gamma_L|^2}{|1 - S_{22}\Gamma_L|^2} \quad (5)$$

The total transducer gain of single-stage LNA can be expressed as (6) [24]:

$$G_T = G_S \cdot G_0 \cdot G_L \quad (6)$$

where,  $G_S$  is source gain factor,  $G_0$  is constant gain factor,  $G_L$  is load gain factor,  $\Gamma_L$  is load reflection coefficient,  $\Gamma_s$  is source reflection coefficient,  $\Gamma_{in}$  is reflection coefficient at the input, and  $\Gamma_{out}$  is reflection coefficient at the output.

## 2.4. Noise figure of low noise amplifier

The NF is a critical parameter for evaluating communication systems, especially LNAs. It represents the ratio between the signal-to-noise ratio at the input (SNR<sub>i</sub>) and at the output (SNR<sub>o</sub>) [25]. NF is influenced by the transistor's inherent noise properties, specifically represented by  $\Gamma_{opt}$  and  $R_n$  [26].

$$F = F_{min} + \frac{4R_n|\Gamma_s - \Gamma_{opt}|}{(1 - |\Gamma_s|^2) \cdot |1 + \Gamma_{opt}|^2} \quad (7)$$

For multi-stage amplifiers, NF is calculated as (8) [27]:

$$F = F_1 + \frac{F_2 - 1}{G_1} + \frac{F_3 - 1}{G_1 G_2} + \dots + \frac{F_n - 1}{G_1 G_2 \dots G_n} \quad (8)$$

The study focuses on designing an LNA using an active transistor in a single-stage circuit with a common source topology. This topology offers high voltage amplification, good impedance matching, and stability, making it versatile for electronic applications, especially below 6 GHz. The proposed LNA integrates the CGH35 transistor, utilizing GaN-based HEMT technology operating at 3.5 GHz in class A.

Specifically designed for sub-6 GHz 5G applications, covering frequencies between 3.3 and 3.9 GHz, the circuit underwent evaluation for parameters including S-parameters, gain, stability, and NF using ADS software. Analysis of the transistor’s characteristics identified optimal operating conditions:  $V_{ds}$  of 6 V,  $V_{gs}$  of -1.56 V, and  $I_d$  of 1024 mA as shown in Figure 3(a). Following the design of the DC bias circuit (Figure 3(b)), suitable input and output matching networks were integrated into the LNA. Further optimization of LNA performance within the specified frequency range is illustrated in Figure 4.

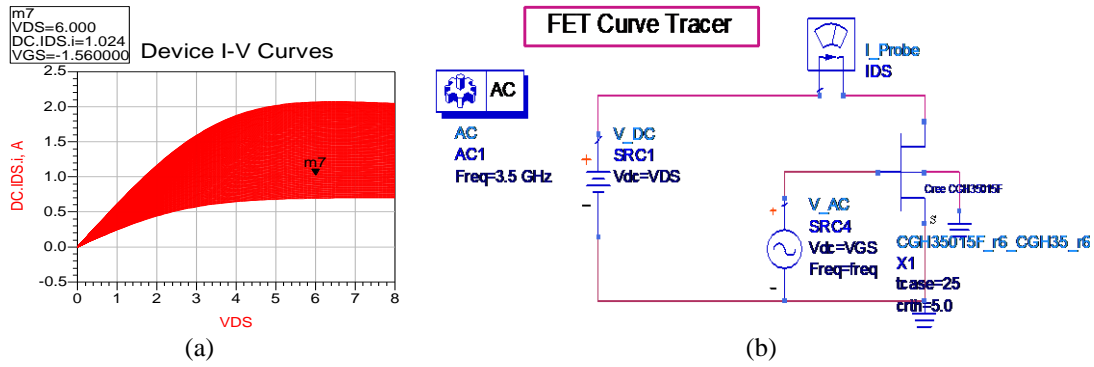


Figure 3. Transistor characteristics: (a) typical GaN HEMT DC characteristics and (b) DC bias circuit

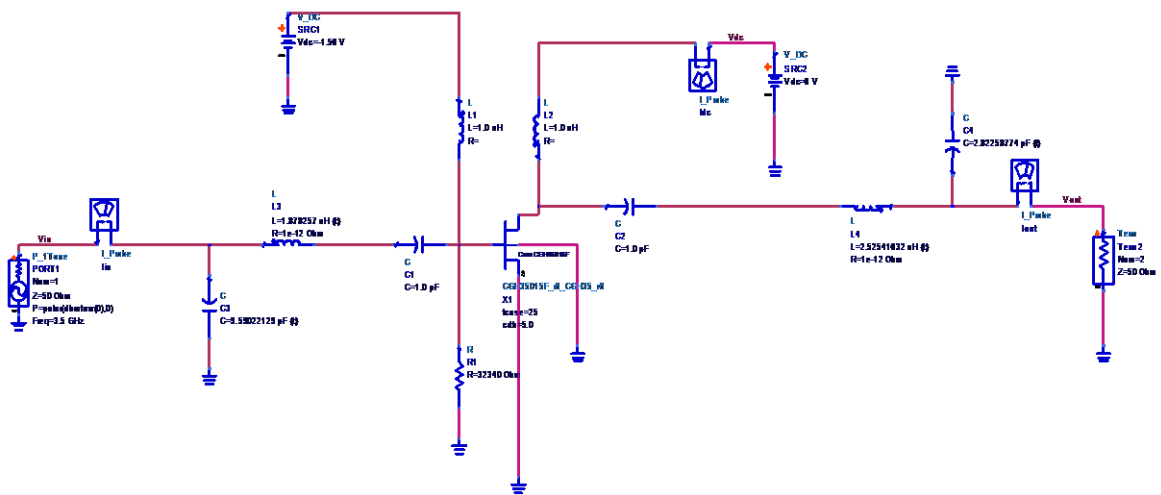


Figure 4. Schematic of the entire LNA circuit in ADS

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Significant results were obtained from our simulation, assessing the performance of our LNA for 5G applications in the 3.3 GHz to 3.9 GHz range. The simulation demonstrates that the LNA achieves excellent gain, low noise figure, and good matching, making it highly suitable for sub-6 GHz 5G systems. These performance metrics, summarized in Table 1, validate the effectiveness of the design choices and optimization strategies employed in the LNA.

Table 1. LNA design requirements and achieved performance

Parameter	Requirement	Achieved performance
K	>1	1.121
$\Delta$	<1	0.598
Gain	>10 dB	16.225 dB
NF	<3 dB	1.232 dB
S11	<-10 dB	-23.785 dB
S22	<-10 dB	-23.516 dB

The stability result, with  $K=1.121$  and  $\Delta=0.598$  (Figure 5(a)), that the LNA is unconditionally stable, as  $K>1$  and  $\Delta<1$  are indicative of such operation. The stability of the LNA is determined by various factors, including passive components design such as resistors, capacitors, and inductors. Through optimization, the circuit LNA successfully realized the intended performance goals. At 3.5 GHz, the circuit showed a gain (S21) of 16.225 dB and a NF of 1.232 dB (Figure 5(b)), confirming the stability of the LNA design.

The input reflection coefficient (S11) is approximately -23.785 dB, and the output reflection coefficient (S22) is around -23.516 dB at 3.5 GHz, as shown in Figure 5(c). This indicates effective matching, which is crucial for Optimizing power transfer and reducing signal loss. The PAE of approximately 60.527% (Figure 5(d)) demonstrates the LNA's efficient power usage. These outcomes confirm the LNA's applicability for 5G sub-6 GHz applications, Guaranteeing peak signal performance in systems of wireless communication.

The input ( $V_{in}=0.312$  V) and output ( $V_{out}=1.965$  V) signals shown in Figure 5(e) indicate that the LNA amplifies, with sinusoidal waveforms suggesting that distortion or instability would be evident as deviations from these waveforms. Additionally, a harmonic spectrum analysis is presented (Figure 5(f)), which is crucial for assessing linearity across frequency components in the output signal. Optimal linearity is essential for distortion-free amplification, particularly in wireless communication applications.

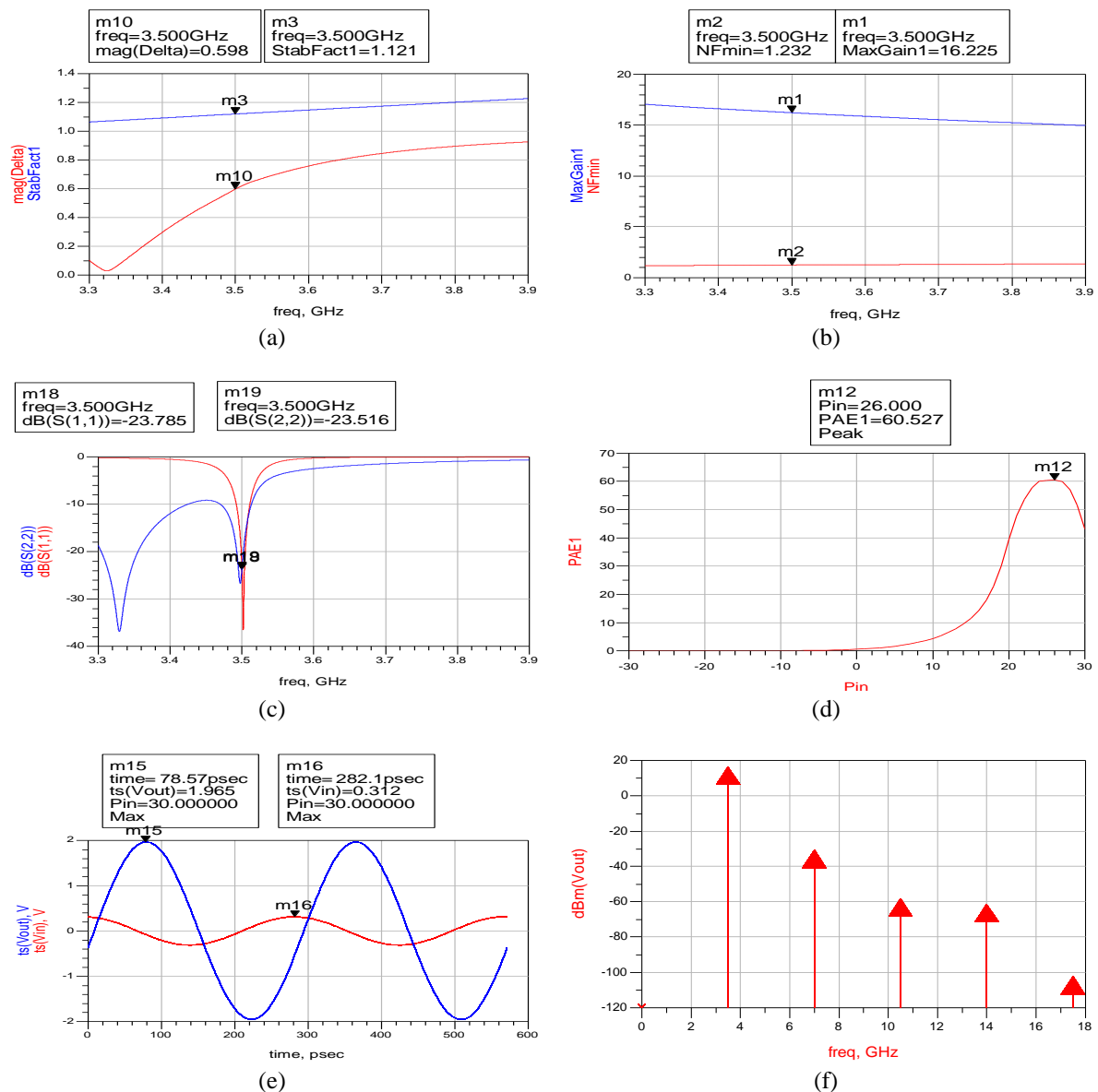


Figure 5. Performance metrics of the designed LNA: (a) stability factor  $K$  and delta  $\Delta$ , (b) NF and power gain, (c) S-parameters, (d) PAE versus output power, (e) output and input signals, and (f) harmonic spectrum

The key findings of this study demonstrate that our designed LNA achieves high performance in terms of gain, NF, and impedance matching, making it suitable for 5G applications. The gain of 16.225 dB and NF of 1.232 dB indicate that the LNA efficiently amplifies the signal while maintaining low noise levels, which is critical for high-quality wireless communication. Compared to previous studies [28]-[30], our LNA design shows improvements in both gain and NF. For instance, similar studies using different technologies have reported gains in the range of 10-15 dB and NF around 1-3 dB as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Performance overview and comparison of the present study with existing LNAs

Reference	[28]	[29]	[30]	This work
Technology	GaN HEMT	180 nm CMOS	GaAs FET	GaN HEMT
Frequency	3.5 GHz	3.5 GHz	3.5 GHz	3.5 GHz
Application	Cellular system	Sub-6 GHz of 5G	Sub-6 GHz of 5G	Sub-6 GHz of 5G
Transistor model	ATF-38143	UMC	s8834	CGH35
Gain [dB]	7.2	15	15.436	16.225
NF [dB]	1.2	3.2	1.908	1.232
S11 [dB]	-14.4	-10	-10.469	-23.785
S22 [dB]	-15.5	-	-14.190	-23.516

Our design not only surpasses these values but also maintains stability, as indicated by the stability factors ( $K=1.121$  and  $\Delta=0.598$ ). The effective impedance matching ( $S_{11}=-23.785$  dB,  $S_{22}=-23.516$  dB) further highlights the superiority of our design. One of the strengths of this study is the use of GaN HEMT technology, which provides higher electron mobility and superior thermal conductivity compared to traditional silicon-based designs. However, one limitation is the conditional stability observed, which necessitates careful design of passive components to maintain stability across the operating frequency range. An unexpected result was the high PAE of 60.527%, which exceeded our initial expectations and indicates highly efficient power usage.

Finally, our LNA stands out itself with its combination of low NF, and high gain, establishing it as a component of preferred for applications of sub-6 GHz 5G. This significantly contributes to the overall optimization of system performance, highlighting the efficacy of the LNA in meeting the stringent requirements of 5G systems. Future work will focus on optimizing the cascade topology and integrating the LNA with other RF components to further enhance performance in terms of gain, noise, and linearity. Additionally, we plan to explore its adaptation for millimeter-wave 5G applications.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study presents a LNA optimized for sub-6 GHz 5G applications, utilizing GaN HEMT technology to achieve impressive performance metrics. The LNA demonstrates a NF of 1.232 dB and a gain of 16.225 dB at 3.5 GHz, addressing critical challenges in signal amplification and noise minimization. With a PAE of 60.527%, it not only meets but exceeds performance expectations, highlighting its efficiency in power usage. The design addresses key issues in LNA performance, including linearity and noise reduction, making it a valuable component for enhancing 5G wireless systems. Despite some challenges with potential instability, the LNA's competitive performance suggests that it is a strong candidate for sub-6 GHz 5G applications. Future research should focus on further optimizing the design, particularly by exploring stability improvements and integration with other RF components to maximize overall system performance. This work lays a solid foundation for advancing LNA technology and contributing to the evolution of high-performance 5G networks.




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