Texas Journal of Engineering and Technology
https://zienjournals.com

ISSN NO: 2770-4491
March 2025

Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM) in Industrial Manufacturing: Challenges, Economic Aspects, and Prospects

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Annotation: Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM) has gained significant popularity in industrial manufacturing due to its cost-effectiveness, material diversity, and ease of implementation. Unlike other additive manufacturing technologies, FDM enables the creation of complex geometric shapes using various thermoplastic materials, including PLA, PETG, ABS, and advanced composites. This paper examines the industrial applications of FDM, focusing on the physical and chemical properties of these materials, the technical challenges associated with FDM, and the economic feasibility of implementing this technology in mass production.

The FDM process operates by extruding thermoplastic filaments layer by layer, forming a solid structure. The final part's properties depend on factors such as material composition, extrusion temperature, layer adhesion, and print speed. For example, PLA is widely used due to its biodegradability and ease of printing but lacks sufficient mechanical strength for industrial applications. PETG offers better impact resistance and chemical durability, making it suitable for functional parts exposed to environmental stress. ABS is known for its high strength and heat resistance, making it a common choice in the automotive and consumer electronics industries. More advanced materials, such as carbon fiber and polyamide composites, further enhance mechanical properties while reducing weight, making them ideal for aerospace and load-bearing structures.

Keywords: Fused Deposition Modeling, 3D Printing, Thermoplastic Materials, Industrial Manufacturing, Mechanical Properties, Economic Analysis.

Methodology

To analyze the physical and chemical properties of FDM materials and assess the challenges in industrial applications, several experiments were conducted using different 3D printers: Creality Ender 3 Pro, Creality Ender 3 V3 SE, and Flsun T1 Pro. The methodology included:

- Material Testing: Printing test specimens using PLA, PETG, and ABS under varying temperature and speed conditions to evaluate mechanical strength and interlayer adhesion.
- Shrinkage Measurement: Assessing the dimensional accuracy of printed parts by comparing CAD model dimensions with actual printed part dimensions.
- Interlayer Bonding Analysis: Examining the effects of extrusion temperature and print speed on layer adhesion using tensile and impact tests.
- Economic Feasibility Study: Estimating the cost-effectiveness of FDM production by analyzing material consumption, power usage, and labor involvement.

Physical and Chemical Properties of FDM Materials

Each thermoplastic material used in FDM possesses unique characteristics that determine its industrial applicability:

- PLA (Polylactic Acid): This biodegradable polymer has a tensile strength of about 60 MPa, making it suitable for lightweight structures. However, its glass transition temperature (Tg) is approximately 60°C, limiting its thermal stability.
- PETG (Glycol-Modified Polyethylene Terephthalate): Known for its high impact resistance (up to 50 kJ/m²), PETG combines strength with excellent chemical resistance. Its Tg is around 80°C, providing better thermal stability than PLA.
- ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene): With a tensile strength of 40 MPa and an impact resistance of approximately 20 kJ/m², ABS is used to manufacture durable parts. Its glass transition temperature reaches 105°C, allowing it to withstand high temperatures.
- Carbon Fiber Composites: These materials offer improved rigidity and strength due to embedded carbon fibers. Their tensile strength can exceed 100 MPa, making them ideal for aerospace and load-bearing structures.

The chemical resistance of these materials also varies: PETG is more resistant to solvents than PLA, while ABS is susceptible to degradation under UV exposure.

Challenges in Industrial Applications

One of the primary challenges of FDM in industrial settings is interlayer adhesion.

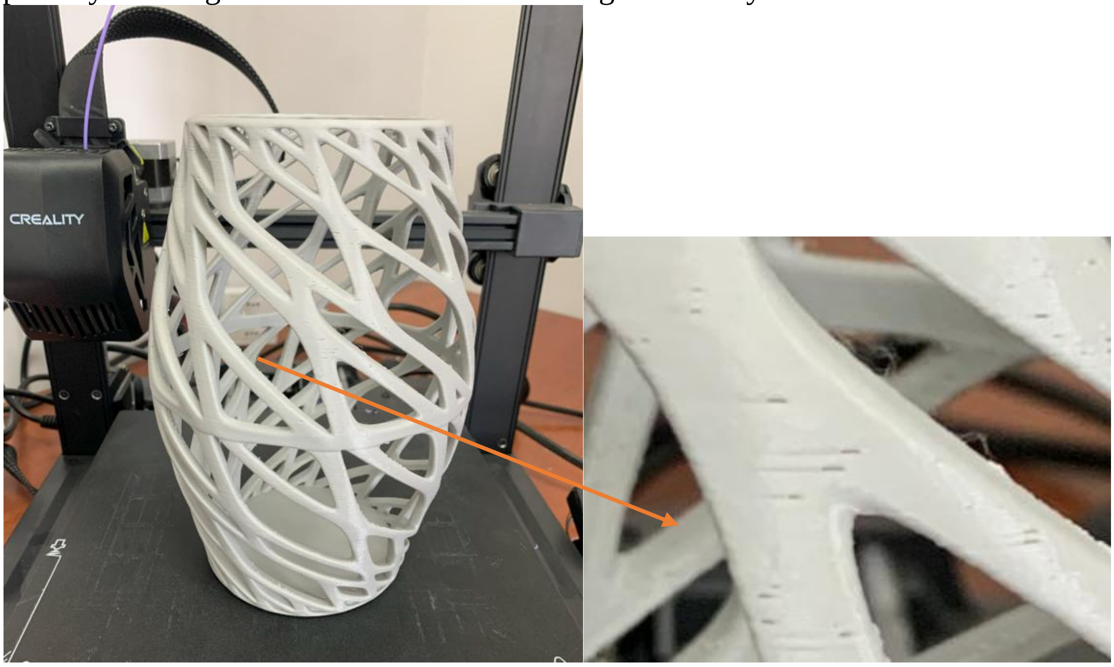

Fig. 1. Examples of printed components with varying interlayer adhesion

Weak bonding between layers reduces mechanical strength, which can be quantified using the formula:

$$\Sigma_{\text{bond}} = \frac{F}{A}$$

Where F is the applied force, and A is the contact area between layers. To optimize adhesion, it is crucial to control extrusion temperature, print speed, and infill density. Increasing the extrusion temperature promotes better material fusion, but excessive heat can cause polymer degradation. Print speed affects layer bonding and surface quality, while infill density directly influences the mechanical properties of the final part.

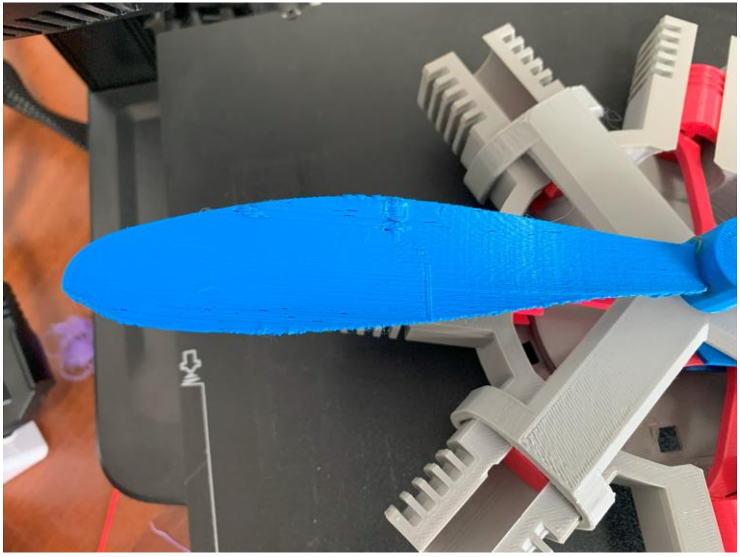

Fig. 2. Part deformation due to material shrinkage

Additionally, material shrinkage poses a challenge to manufacturing accuracy. Shrinkage is defined by the equation:

$$S = \frac{L_{hot} - L_{cold}}{L_{hot}} \times 100\%$$

where L_{hot} is the part length at extrusion, and L_{cold} is the final length after cooling. High shrinkage is characteristic of ABS (up to 8%), whereas PLA has minimal shrinkage (~1%). Heated chambers and optimized cooling profiles help mitigate shrinkage. For instance, maintaining a uniform temperature during printing reduces internal stresses, while controlled cooling prevents warping.

Economic Analysis of FDM Manufacturing

From an economic standpoint, FDM is most cost-effective for small to medium production volumes. The total cost of manufacturing a part using FDM can be calculated using the formula:

$C_{total} = C_{material} + C_{energy} + C_{labor} + C_{depreciation} + C_{postprocessing}$

where:

- $C_{material} = V_{part} \times \rho \times C_{filament}$ — cost of filament,
- $C_{energy} = P \times t \times C_{electricity}$ — energy consumption costs,
- $C_{lobar} = h \times C_{hourly}$ — labor costs,
- $C_{energy} = \frac{C_{printer}}{L_{printer}}$ — printer depreciation,
- $C_{postprocessing}$ — post-processing costs.

Conclusion

FDM continues to play a critical role in industrial manufacturing, providing a versatile and cost-effective method for producing complex components. However, its widespread adoption in mass production is contingent upon overcoming certain technical and economic challenges. Research into improving material properties, optimizing process parameters, and enhancing automation in FDM systems remains ongoing.

Advancements in polymer chemistry and composite reinforcement have led to the development of high-performance filaments that enhance mechanical properties, thermal stability, and chemical resistance. The integration of real-time monitoring and closed-loop feedback mechanisms in modern FDM printers enables precise control over extrusion conditions, significantly improving interlayer adhesion and reducing defects.

Economically, the viability of FDM for industrial-scale production depends on the reduction of material waste, energy consumption, and labor costs. The introduction of multi-nozzle systems and hybrid additive-subtractive manufacturing approaches can enhance efficiency, further lowering production expenses.

Additionally, the incorporation of machine learning algorithms for print path optimization and defect prediction has the potential to revolutionize the reliability and repeatability of FDM-printed parts.

Through continuous technological innovation, FDM has the potential to become a fully integrated and scalable manufacturing solution. By addressing existing limitations and leveraging computational advancements, FDM can serve as a competitive alternative to traditional manufacturing techniques, particularly in industries that require rapid prototyping, on-demand production, and customized geometries.

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