



3d Printable Concrete Using Various Mix Designs

¹Godwin Shaju, ²Monish Raj, ³Muhammed Faiz K I, ⁴Abishek Kumar A A

¹Student, ²Student, ³Student, ⁴Assistant Professor

¹Department of Civil Engineering, ²Department of Civil Engineering, ³Department of Civil Engineering,
⁴Department of Civil Engineering,

¹ Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology Kalady, Ernakulam, India, ² Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology Kalady, Ernakulam, India, ³ Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology Kalady, Ernakulam, India,

⁴ Adi Shankara Institute of Engineering and Technology Kalady, Ernakulam, India,

Abstract: This research aims to optimize 3D-printable concrete mixes for automated layer-by-layer construction processes, addressing unique challenges such as fluidity, rapid setting, and material stability. A suite of mixes using Portland Pozzolana Cement, fly ash, fine aggregate, water, superplasticizers, and viscosity-modifying agents were prepared and tested. The results show enhanced concrete flow and printability, feasible small-scale structure construction with minimal waste and labor, and ecological benefits from fly ash utilization. This project contributes significantly to the science of automated construction, paving the way for upscaling applications with 3D printable concretes, and supporting the evolution of more efficient and environmentally friendly construction approaches.

Index Terms - 3D Printable Concrete, Sustainable Concrete Materials, Crushed Glass as Fine Aggregate, Eco-Friendly Concrete.

I. INTRODUCTION

3D printing technology, or additive manufacturing, has made significant strides in the construction industry, particularly in the realm of residential and commercial building. Its ability to create precise, layer-by-layer structures opens up new possibilities for design and construction methods. Among the materials being explored for 3D printing in construction, stone is a notable contender due to its durability, versatility, and accessibility. Stone-based materials offer numerous benefits, including exceptional strength, long-term performance, and aesthetic appeal, which are increasingly prioritized in modern construction. Additionally, 3D printing enables the use of locally sourced stone or stone-like materials, which helps reduce transportation emissions and supports sustainability goals.

One of the most promising innovations is the development of 3D printable concrete, a specially formulated cement mixture that can be extruded through a nozzle while maintaining the necessary consistency and structural integrity after deposition. This material must meet specific requirements, including adequate strength, ease of extrusion, workability, and rapid setting, all of which are crucial for successful 3D printing. Achieving a balance between these properties is essential, as they impact the quality of the printed structure. Several factors, such as binder content, water-to-cement ratio, particle size, and the inclusion of aggregates or supplementary cementitious materials, all influence how well the concrete performs during the printing process.

The primary challenge lies in optimizing these parameters to create a material that performs well both during extrusion and in the final printed structure. Factors such as rheological properties, which govern the flow and spread of the mixture, and mechanical properties, such as strength, durability, and resistance to cracking, must be carefully considered and tailored for each application. Researchers are continually testing various combinations of materials and additives to improve the performance and sustainability of 3D printable concrete. By refining the mixture composition, they can enhance the material's ability to withstand the stresses of construction while ensuring it remains efficient and cost-effective.

Sustainability is another key focus in the development of 3D printable concrete. As the construction industry faces increasing pressure to reduce its environmental impact, the use of recycled materials in the concrete mix is gaining attention. Supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) like fly ash, silica fume, or ground granulated blast-furnace slag (GGBS) are being incorporated to reduce reliance on traditional cement, which has a significant carbon footprint. Recycled aggregates, such as crushed concrete or waste glass, are also being explored as alternatives to natural aggregates, further contributing to the environmental benefits of 3D printing.

In addition to enhancing the material's properties, ongoing research is focused on improving the efficiency of the 3D printing process itself. By developing hybrid composite materials and optimized mix designs, researchers aim to make the printing process faster, more precise, and less wasteful. Advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence are being used to fine-tune printing parameters, ensuring high-quality results and reducing the time required to complete each project.

Ultimately, the continued development of 3D printable concrete and other materials for 3D printing will help revolutionize the construction industry. By creating stronger, more sustainable materials and improving the printing process, 3D printing technology has the potential to significantly reduce construction costs, speed up project timelines, and create more environmentally friendly buildings. As these innovations continue to progress, 3D printing will likely become an increasingly common method for constructing both residential and commercial structures, offering a more sustainable, efficient, and adaptable approach to modern construction.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. MATERIAL SELECTION

i. Cement

- **Portland Pozzolana Cement (PPC)** is the most commonly utilized binder for concrete, but for 3D printing, it's important to choose the right type based on its fineness and setting time, which affects flowability and buildability.

ii. Fine Aggregates

- **Natural Sand:** Sand with a controlled particle size, typically less than 2 mm, is key to ensuring smooth extrusion and solid layer adhesion during printing.
- **Recycled Glass:** Finely ground waste glass can substitute for sand, offering recycling benefits and improving concrete durability.

iii. Admixtures

- **Superplasticizers:** These additives, particularly polycarboxylate ethers (PCEs), are essential for enhancing the workability of the mixture while ensuring it remains pumpable during the printing process.
- **Viscosity Modifying Agents (VMAs):** VMAs help control the flowability of the mix and ensure proper layer bonding during printing, preventing premature settlement or excess flow.
- **Set Accelerators and Retarders:** Adjusting setting times is crucial for achieving the desired balance between printability, strength development, and workability.

iv. Supplementary Cementitious Materials (SCMs)

- **Fly Ash:** This byproduct of coal combustion can improve workability, reduce water requirements, and increase the durability of concrete.

v. *Water*

- **Water Quality:** For consistency and mix quality, potable water should be used in concrete preparation. The water-to-cement ratio should be precisely controlled to strike a balance between workability and the strength of the final product.

vi. *Sustainable Additives*

- **Crushed Waste Glass:** In addition to being used as a fine aggregate, powdered waste glass offers pozzolanic properties that improve concrete strength and durability.

vii. *Environmental Considerations*

- **Local Material Sourcing:** Prioritizing the use of locally sourced materials reduces the carbon footprint associated with transportation, supporting both environmental and economic sustainability.

Incorporating a mix of traditional and innovative materials, such as SCMs and recycled aggregates, ensures the production of 3D printable concrete that is both high-performing and environmentally friendly. Thorough testing and optimization for material compatibility are essential for producing durable, sustainable structures in real-world applications.

B. MIX DESIGN DEVELOPMENT FOR 3D PRINTABLE CONCRETE

Developing an optimal mix design for 3D printable concrete requires a careful balance of various properties, including flowability, buildability, and mechanical strength, while also emphasizing sustainability to reduce environmental impact. The key objective is to create a mix that can be easily extruded through a nozzle without issues like segregation or blockage, retains its shape after deposition, and ensures strong bonding between layers for structural stability.

The first step in creating a suitable mix design is determining the appropriate water-to-cement (W/C) ratio, typically in the range of 0.3 to 0.4. A low W/C ratio is important for maintaining shape retention and buildability, as it prevents the mixture from being too fluid, which could lead to deformation. However, this ratio must also be optimized to allow adequate workability for pumping and extrusion. The primary binder in the mix is typically ordinary Portland cement (PPC), which can be supplemented with supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) such as fly ash, silica fume, or ground granulated blast-furnace slag (GGBS). These materials not only reduce the environmental impact by lowering the amount of PPC used but also improve the long-term durability of the concrete.

Fine aggregates, mainly sand with a controlled gradation, are incorporated to minimize voids and improve interlayer bonding. Sustainable alternatives, such as crushed waste glass, can be considered as partial replacements for natural sand. This contributes to environmental sustainability by reusing waste materials while maintaining performance standards. Chemical admixtures play a crucial role in optimizing the behavior of the mix. Superplasticizers are included to enhance flowability, while viscosity-modifying agents (VMAs) are used to prevent segregation and maintain cohesion during the printing process. Accelerators or retarders may also be added to adjust the setting time based on the requirements of the printing schedule.

Fiber reinforcements, such as polypropylene or steel fibers, are often included to enhance tensile strength, improve crack resistance, and strengthen the adhesion between printed layers. For a more sustainable option, natural fibers like jute or sisal could also be used. The development process typically begins with creating a series of preliminary mix designs, each differing in the proportions of cement, water, aggregates, and additives. For example, one mix might have higher PPC content combined with superplasticizers, while another may replace some PPC with fly ash and silica fume. Additional variations could incorporate materials like crushed waste glass or recycled aggregates to evaluate their impact on performance and sustainability.

These preliminary mixes are subjected to a variety of tests to determine their suitability for 3D printing. Rheological tests, including flow table tests and rheometer measurements, are conducted to assess the material's flowability, yield stress, and viscosity. Small-scale printing trials are performed to evaluate the printability, focusing on factors such as extrusion quality, shape retention, and interlayer bonding. Mechanical tests, including compressive strength, flexural strength, and bond strength, are carried out on printed specimens to ensure that the material meets the necessary structural requirements. Durability testing, including evaluations for shrinkage, water absorption, and freeze-thaw resistance, is also essential for understanding the long-term performance of the mix.

Sustainability is a major consideration in this mix design process. For example, replacing 20–40% of the cement with fly ash or GGBS can significantly lower CO₂ emissions while enhancing the workability and durability of the concrete. Crushed waste glass, as a partial replacement for sand, supports a circular economy by utilizing waste materials, and recycled aggregates from demolition waste further improve the environmental profile of the mix. After evaluating the results of rheological, mechanical, and durability tests, the mix proportions are refined and optimized.

The final mix design is selected after rigorous validation through large-scale printing trials to ensure that the material is consistent, scalable, and suitable for real-world applications. This thorough, systematic process not only results in a high-performance 3D printable concrete but also aligns with sustainability goals, paving the way for environmentally responsible and innovative construction practices.

C.PRINTING USING MANUAL HAND PRINTING

Manual hand printing offers a practical alternative to automatic 3D concrete printers, especially in situations where resources are limited, or the project scale is smaller. This approach allows for greater flexibility since it relies on human control to extrude and layer the concrete, similar to automatic printers but without the reliance on high-end technology. Before starting, the concrete mix needs to be optimized to achieve a balance between flowability and buildability, ensuring the material can be easily extruded while retaining its shape once laid down. Simple tools such as caulking guns or handheld nozzles are often used to manually control the extrusion process.

The key to successful hand printing lies in the precise management of extrusion speed, pressure, and timing, which is critical to achieve uniform layers without over-depositing or creating gaps. However, since manual printing depends on human skill, challenges such as inconsistencies in pressure, speed, and layer alignment can arise, potentially affecting the structure's strength and stability. Operator fatigue is also a concern, particularly during larger projects, and the overall process tends to be slower compared to automatic methods, making it less ideal for large-scale or time-sensitive work.

To counter these challenges, adjustments to the concrete mix are often necessary. This can include adding viscosity-modifying agents (VMAs) to help the material hold its shape during extrusion, incorporating retarders to extend workability, and using additives like silica fume or fibers to improve layer bonding and prevent delamination. These modifications help enhance the strength and cohesion of the final structure, even when working manually.

Manual hand printing is particularly useful for small-scale applications, such as prototypes or experimental designs, where automated printers may not be available or feasible. This method offers flexibility, allowing for quick adjustments and creative experimentation during the construction process. While it may not match the speed, precision, or scalability of automated systems, it remains a cost-effective solution, especially in research, education, or areas with limited access to advanced technology.

With proper preparation, skilled operators, and the right mix adjustments, manual hand printing can produce functional and creative 3D concrete structures. It provides a valuable alternative for those looking to explore new construction methods or working in environments where automatic systems are not an option.

III. RESULTS

The project successfully developed an optimum mix design for 3D printable concrete that balances printability, structural integrity, and sustainability. The final mix showed excellent performance in terms of flowability, buildability, and interlayer adhesion, which ensured consistent extrusion and strong bonding between layers. The use of supplementary cementitious materials like fly ash and silica fume improved workability and long-term durability while reducing the dependence on traditional cement. Fine-tuning of the mix's water-to-cement ratio, viscosity-modifying agents, and fiber content ensured that the concrete maintained its shape after extrusion without deforming, making it suitable for both manual and automated printing techniques.

Most significant environmental benefits of the project were experienced through its partial replacement of cement with fly ash and silica fume, reducing the carbon footprint of the mix against the overall concerns faced in the cement production process. Using crushed waste glass as a sustainable alternative to natural sand, and the integration of recycled aggregates, reduced environmental impact through natural resource consumption reduction and the encouragement of waste reuse. These modifications helped create a circular

economy and showed how sustainable materials could be incorporated into 3D concrete printing without complications.

Overall, the optimized design has both met the technical requirements for printability and strength and illustrated sustainability goals, thus providing a very practical and environmentally responsible solution to modern construction practices. Findings in the report show vast potential for 3D printable concrete to change the construction industry, minimizing environmental impact while maintaining high performance standards.

A. Material Testing

Table 1: Test Results

Material	Property	Test Result
Cement	Initial Setting Time	40 minutes
Cement	Final Setting Time	10 hours
Cement	Specific Gravity	2.95
Fly Ash	Specific Gravity	2.4
Glass Powder	Aggregate Size (< 2mm)	Below 2mm
Concrete Mix	Slump Test Value	140 mm

B. Mix Design

Table 2: Mix Design: Fly Ash 35% Replacement

Component	Ratio by Weight	Weight for 7x7x7 cm Cube (kg)
Cement	1	0.156
Fly Ash	0.54 (35% of binder)	0.084
Crushed Glass	2	0.480
Water	0.4	0.096
Superplasticizer	0.008 (0.8% of cement)	0.00125

Table 3: Mix Design: Fly Ash 25% Replacement

Component	Ratio by Weight	Weight for 7x7x7 cm Cube (kg)
Cement	1	0.180
Fly Ash	0.33 (25% of binder)	0.060
Crushed Glass	1.8	0.432
Water	0.42	0.100
Superplasticizer	0.008 (0.8% of cement)	0.00144

C. COMPRESSIVE STRENGTH TEST

. The concrete cubes were cast using different mix proportions, tested for their properties, and successfully achieved the expected strength.



Figure 1: casted cubes



Figure 2: casted cube

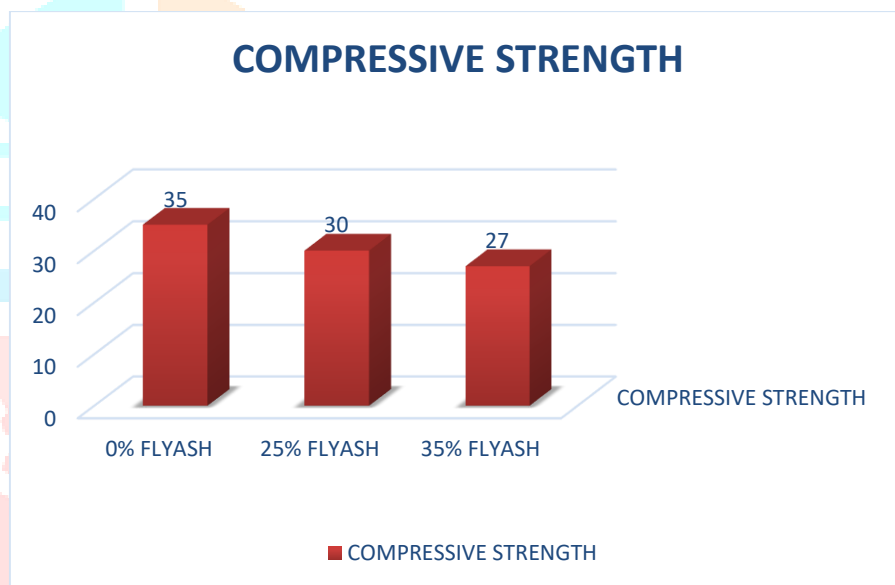


Figure 3: Test Result Graphical Representation

- Achieved average compressive strength of 35 MPa for conventional concrete after 28 days
- Achieved average compressive strength of 30 MPa for 25% cement replacement with fly ash concrete after 28 days
- Achieved average compressive strength of 27 MPa for 35% cement replacement with fly ash concrete after 28 days

D. COST ESTIMATION

Since this mix **only contains cement, fly ash, crushed glass (waste), and admixtures**, the cost calculations according to (property.todaypricerates.com).

Table 4: Cost Estimate with 25% fly ash replacement

Material	Quantity (kg/m ³)
Cement	350 kg
Fly Ash (25%)	117 kg
Crushed Glass (Waste Material)	1,200 kg
Water	186 liters
Superplasticizer (0.8%)	2.8 liters
VMA (0.2%)	0.7 liters

Table 5: Modified Mix with VMA (Crushed Glass as Fine Aggregate, No Coarse Aggregate)

Material	Cost Calculation	Total Cost (₹)
Cement (350 kg)	$(350 \text{ kg} \div 50 \text{ kg/bag}) \times ₹363$	₹2,541
Fly Ash (117 kg)	$117 \text{ kg} \times ₹1.20/\text{kg}$	₹140
Crushed Glass (1,200 kg)	Free (Waste Material)	₹0
Water (186 L)	$186 \text{ L} \times ₹0.05/\text{L}$	₹9.30
Superplasticizer (2.8 L)	$2.8 \text{ L} \times ₹100/\text{L}$	₹280
VMA (0.7 L)	$0.7 \text{ L} \times ₹150/\text{L}$	₹105
Total Cost per m ³		₹3,075.30

Table 6: Conventional Mix (With Natural Sand, No Coarse Aggregate, No Admixtures)

Material	Cost Calculation	Total Cost (₹)
Cement (467 kg)	$(467 \text{ kg} \div 50 \text{ kg/bag}) \times ₹363$	₹3,391
Natural Sand (1,200 kg)	$(1,200 \text{ kg} \div 1,600 \text{ kg/m}^3) \times 35.31 \text{ cft} \times ₹74.80/\text{cft}$	₹1,970
Water (186 L)	$186 \text{ L} \times ₹0.05/\text{L}$	₹9.30
Total Cost per m ³		₹5,370

Table 7: Final Cost Comparison (per m³)

Mix Type	Updated Cost (₹/m ³)	Difference from Conventional Mix
Modified Mix with VMA	₹3,075.30	43% cheaper
Modified Mix without VMA	₹2,970.30	45% cheaper
Conventional Mix (with Natural Sand)	₹5,370.30	—

Conclusion

Utilizing waste crushed glass (free) saves considerable amounts of money, with altered mixes more than 40% less expensive than traditional concrete.

- The lowest cost-modified mix without VMA is ₹2,970.30/m³, 45% less than traditional concrete.
- Using VMA adds ₹105/m³ but prevents segregation and enhances printability when used for 3D printing.
- The costliest is the Conventional Mix, mainly because of the expense of natural sand.

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