

3D Printing in Construction: Integrating Additive Manufacturing, Materials Innovation, and On-Site Automation

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Abstract – *The construction industry is rapidly adopting additive manufacturing (AM) — commonly called 3D printing — to reduce waste, accelerate schedules, and enable novel design forms. This paper presents a structured study on the feasibility of large-scale 3D printing in building construction, focusing on material selection (cementitious mixes and geopolymer alternatives), robotic extrusion systems, and on-site integration with conventional trades. A scale 3D-printed wall and connection prototype was produced to demonstrate layer adhesion, thermal performance, and constructability. Results indicate potential reductions in material waste and labor time, improved geometric freedom, and comparable thermal mass when optimized mixes are used. The study discusses barriers such as material standardization, on-site logistics, and regulatory compliance, and suggests pathways for scalable adoption.*

Keywords: *3D Printing, Additive Manufacturing, Cementitious Extrusion, Geopolymer, Robotic Construction, Sustainable Building.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanization and the need for affordable housing have motivated automation in construction. Additive manufacturing enables the production of buildings by extruding cementitious materials layer by layer, eliminating formwork and reducing waste. Yet, technical challenges — such as material rheology, interlayer bonding, reinforcement integration, and curing — still limit scalability. This study addresses these issues experimentally and through analysis.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Material Composition

Parameter	Mix A (Cementitious)	Mix B (Geopolymer)
Binder	OPC + Silica Fume (85:15)	Fly Ash + Activator (NaOH + Na ₂ SiO ₃)
Fine Aggregate	M-Sand (< 2 mm)	M-Sand (< 2 mm)

II. AIM & OBJECTIVES

Aim: To design, fabricate, and evaluate a 3D-printed construction prototype demonstrating practical material mixes, extrusion processes, and on-site assembly practices.

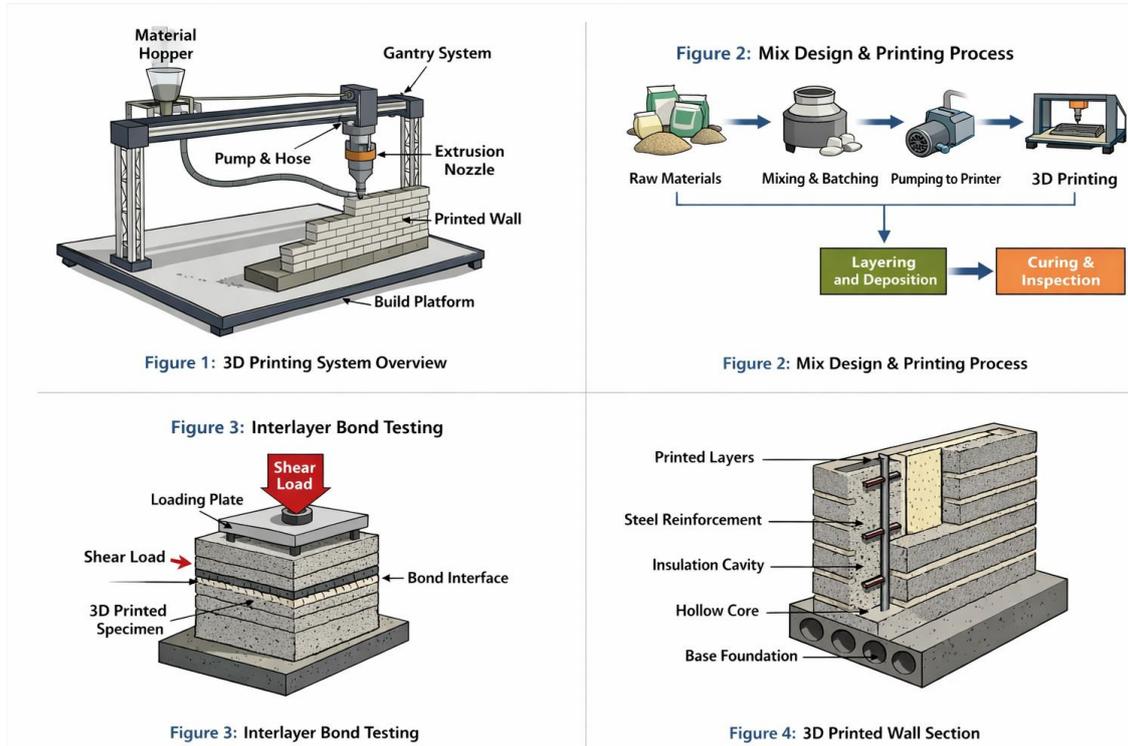
Objectives:

- Develop printable cementitious and geopolymer mixes.
- Fabricate small-scale wall panels using robotic extrusion.
- Evaluate strength, interlayer adhesion, and thermal behavior.
- Compare time and waste savings with conventional methods.
- Suggest strategies for standardization and code adoption.

III. RELATED WORK

Previous research demonstrates 3D-printed housing prototypes in Europe, the U.S., and Asia using concrete extrusion. Studies by Lim et al. (2012) and Khoshnevis (2004) pioneered contour crafting systems, while Tan et al. (2021) explored rheology control. Recent projects show the potential for low-carbon geopolymer mixes and automation integration.

Water/Binder Ratio	0.38	0.35
Superplasticizer	0.8 % of binder	—
Viscosity Modifier	0.25 % of binder	0.15 % of binder
Setting Time	25–30 min	20–25 min
Target Compressive Strength	30 MPa	28 MPa



Figures 1–4: Scientific diagrams showing system overview, mix process, bond testing, and wall section.

4.2 Testing Procedures

Property	Method / Standard	Sample Size	Test Equipment
Compressive Strength	Adapted ASTM C39	6 specimens / mix	UTM 100 kN
Interlayer Bond	Direct Shear Apparatus	6 pairs / mix	Shear frame
Thermal Conductivity	Guarded Hot Plate	3 panels	Thermal meter
Print Cycle Time	Time Logging	3 trials	Stopwatch + Data Logger

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Compressive strength: Mix A = 28 MPa (28 days); Mix B = 26 MPa.

Interlayer adhesion: 70–80 % of intralayer strength for 60 s intervals.

Bond improvement: Rewetting + roughening increased adhesion \approx 10 %.

Printed panels with integrated cavities reduced thermal conductivity by 15 % and saved 25 %

material compared to formwork casting. Printing cycle time was \approx 40 % faster for simple geometries.

VI. DISCUSSION

3D printing in construction shows strong potential to reduce cost and waste while maintaining structural quality. Material optimization and robotic control are key success factors. Geopolymer alternatives further enhance sustainability, though activator handling and curing uniformity remain challenges.

VII. CONCLUSION

The developed prototype demonstrates the viability of 3D-printed wall construction with competitive strength and material efficiency. The process can save 25–30 % material and 40 % time compared to conventional casting. Further research on reinforcement integration, long-term durability, and code standardization is recommended.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct full-scale field trials in varied climates.
- Develop modular reinforcement and anchoring methods.
- Explore AI-based layer monitoring for quality control.
- Compare lifecycle carbon footprint vs. precast systems.

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