3D Printing Filament Making Machine with use of Waste Plastic Water Bottles

Vyankatesh Shivaji Patange[1] Viresh Basavraj Shimpi[2] Samruddh Sainath Thengil[3] Abhishek Subhash Rathod[4] Prof. Abhijit Rajiv Malekar[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]Department of Mechanical Engineering

[1,2,3,4,5]A.G.Patil Institute of Technology, Solapur, India

Abstract — The proliferation of plastic waste, particularly Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) bottles, poses a significant environmental challenge. This research paper presents the design, development, and evaluation of a cost-effective and environmentally friendly machine capable of transforming waste PET plastic water bottles into high-quality 3D printing filament. The proposed system integrates a mechanical cutting mechanism, a precisely controlled extrusion unit, and a filament winding system. By repurposing plastic waste into a valuable resource for additive manufacturing, this project aims to promote circular economy principles, reduce reliance on virgin plastics, and offer a sustainable solution for both waste management and 3D printing material accessibility.

Keywords: Plastic Waste Management, Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), 3D Printing Filament, Additive Manufacturing, Recycling Technology, Sustainable Manufacturing

I. Introduction

The rapid growth of the 3D printing industry, also known as Additive Manufacturing (AM), has revolutionized various sectors, from prototyping to customized product fabrication. However, this growth is accompanied by an increasing demand for filament materials, primarily sourced from virgin plastics like PLA (Polylactic Acid) and ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene). The production of these virgin materials contributes to resource depletion and environmental pollution. Simultaneously, the global accumulation of plastic waste, especially single-use PET bottles, presents a pressing ecological crisis.

Addressing these interconnected issues, the concept of recycling plastic waste into 3D printing filament offers a promising solution. PET, commonly used in water and beverage bottles, possesses suitable mechanical properties for 3D printing, including good strength, temperature resistance, and ease of printing. This research focuses on bridging the gap between plastic waste and 3D printing by developing a practical and efficient machine for filament production from waste PET bottles.

The objective of this study is to:

- Design and fabricate a compact, user-friendly 3D printing filament making machine specifically for waste PET plastic bottles.
- Optimize the machine's parameters (temperature, extrusion speed, strip width) to produce consistent and high-quality filament.
- Evaluate the mechanical properties and printability of the recycled PET filament compared to commercially available filaments.
- Contribute to a more sustainable and accessible approach to 3D printing by utilizing readily available waste material.

II. Literature Review

Several studies have explored the potential of converting various plastic wastes into 3D printing filaments. Early research focused on the general concept of plastic extrusion for filament production, often using virgin pellets. With increasing environmental awareness, the focus shifted towards recycling plastic waste.

PET has emerged as a particularly attractive material for filament recycling due to its widespread availability and favorable properties. Researchers have investigated different approaches to processing PET bottles, from shredding into granules to cutting continuous strips. The latter method has gained traction for its simplicity and efficiency in direct feeding into an extruder.

Existing filament extruders, both commercial and open-source, provide a foundation for this project. These machines typically consist of:

- Material Preparation: Cleaning, shredding/cutting of plastic.
- Extrusion Unit: A heated barrel with a screw mechanism to melt and push the plastic through a nozzle.
- Cooling System: To solidify the extruded filament.
- Winding Mechanism: To collect the finished filament onto a spool.

Challenges highlighted in previous works include maintaining a consistent filament diameter, dealing with impurities in recycled plastic, and achieving mechanical properties comparable to virgin filaments. Some studies have experimented with different nozzle designs, temperature profiles, and screw geometries to optimize the extrusion process for recycled PET.

III. Methodology

The development of the 3D printing filament making machine from waste plastic water bottles involves several key stages:

A. Material Collection and Preparation

- Source: Used PET water and beverage bottles of various sizes (e.g., 250ml to 2 liters) will be collected.
- Cleaning: Bottles will be thoroughly washed with soap and water to remove any residues (labels, glue, liquid). They will then be completely dried to prevent moisture-induced degradation during extrusion.
- Cutting: A specialized bottle cutter will be designed and fabricated. This cutter will transform the cylindrical bottle into a continuous, uniform strip of plastic. The width of the strip will be a critical parameter, influencing the extrusion process and final filament diameter. Experiments will be conducted with strip widths ranging from 8mm to 12mm to identify the optimal dimension.

B. Machine Design and Components

The filament making machine will comprise the following main modules:

1) *Bottle Strip Cutter:*
   - Mechanism: A manually operated or semi-automated system using sharp blades (e.g., sharpened 608 ball bearings) and guides to create a consistent plastic strip from a flattened PET bottle.
   - Adjustability: The design will allow for adjustment of the strip width.
   - Safety: Consideration for user safety during operation.
2) *Extrusion Unit:*
   - Heating Block: A ceramic band heater or cartridge heaters will be used to provide precise temperature control. A PID (Proportional-Integral-Derivative) controller will regulate the temperature, typically in the range of 220°C to 260°C for PET. A thermocouple (e.g., K- type) will provide real-time temperature feedback.
   - Barrel: A hardened steel or brass barrel will house the heating elements and the extrusion screw.
   - Extrusion Screw: A custom-designed or modified single-screw extruder will be employed to melt, compress, and convey the plastic strip towards the nozzle. The screw geometry (e.g., feed, compression, and metering zones) will be optimized for PET.
   - Nozzle: A brass or stainless steel nozzle with a specific diameter (e.g., 1.75mm or 2.85mm, drilled out from a standard 3D printer nozzle) will shape the molten plastic into a filament. The nozzle geometry will be designed to minimize pressure drop and ensure smooth extrusion.
3) *Cooling System:*
   - Fans: Multiple cooling fans positioned immediately after the nozzle will rapidly cool the extruded filament, preventing deformation and maintaining dimensional stability.
   - Water Bath (Optional): For higher cooling efficiency and better dimensional control, a small water bath might be incorporated after the initial air cooling.
4) *Filament Winding System:*
   - Spool Holder: A rotating spool will collect the extruded filament.
   - Motor and Gearbox: A DC motor with a suitable gearbox (e.g., 1:10 ratio) will drive the spool rotation.
   - Speed Control: A PWM (Pulse Width Modulation) controller will regulate the winding speed, which is crucial for maintaining consistent filament diameter and preventing stretching or breakage.
   - Tensioning Mechanism: A simple tensioning system will ensure the filament is wound tightly and evenly onto the spool.

C. Control System and Electronics

- Microcontroller: An Arduino-based system (e.g., Arduino Mega or ESP32) will serve as the central controller.
- Temperature Control: A PID algorithm implemented in the microcontroller will manage the heating elements based on thermocouple readings, ensuring stable extrusion temperature.
- Motor Drivers: Stepper or DC motor drivers will control the extrusion screw speed (if applicable) and the winding spool motor.
- User Interface: An LCD display and push buttons will allow users to set parameters, monitor temperature, and control the machine's operation.

D. Experimental Setup and Procedures

1) Parameter Variation: Experiments will involve varying key parameters:
   - Extrusion Temperature: Investigating the optimal melting temperature range for PET (e.g., 220°C, 230°C, 240°C, 250°C).
   - Strip Width: Testing different input strip widths to assess their impact on filament diameter and consistency.
   - Winding Speed: Adjusting the winding speed to control the filament tension and diameter.

2) *Filament Characterization:*
   - Diameter Measurement: Using a digital caliper to measure filament diameter at multiple points along its length to assess consistency and tolerance.
   - Mechanical Testing: Tensile strength, Young's modulus, and elongation at break will be measured using a universal testing machine (e.g., according to ASTM D638 standards). Test specimens will be 3D printed using the produced filament and a standard FDM printer.
   - Printability Assessment: The recycled PET filament will be used to 3D print various benchmark objects (e.g., calibration cubes, torture tests) to evaluate print quality, layer adhesion, bridging capabilities, and overall print success.
   - Visual Inspection: Observing the filament for bubbles, inconsistencies, or surface defects.

IV. Results and Discussion

Expected results include:

- Machine Functionality: Successful demonstration of the machine's ability to process waste PET bottles into continuous filament.
- Optimal Parameters: Identification of the ideal extrusion temperature, strip width, and winding speed that yield consistent and high-quality filament with a target diameter (e.g., 1.75mm ± 0.05mm).
- Mechanical Properties: Comparison of the mechanical properties of the recycled PET filament with those of commercial PETG or PLA filaments. It is anticipated that while the recycled filament may have slightly reduced mechanical properties due to reprocessing, it will still be suitable for many 3D printing applications.

- Print Quality: Evaluation of 3D printed objects to demonstrate the printability of the recycled filament, highlighting potential challenges (e.g., warping, stringing) and solutions.
- Environmental Impact: Quantification of the potential reduction in plastic waste and carbon footprint through the use of recycled filament.

The discussion will delve into the challenges encountered during the development, such as maintaining consistent heating, preventing nozzle clogging, and achieving uniform filament diameter. Solutions implemented and future improvements will also be discussed. The economic viability of the machine, considering material cost savings and potential for community-level recycling initiatives, will be a key aspect of the discussion.

V. Conclusion and Future Work

This research will conclude that the development of a 3D printing filament making machine from waste plastic water bottles is a feasible and impactful solution for sustainable additive manufacturing. The machine provides a practical method for converting readily available waste into a valuable resource, reducing environmental pollution and promoting resource efficiency.

A. Future work will involve:

1) Long-term Durability Testing: Evaluating the machine's performance and component lifespan under extended operation.
2) Advanced Material Characterization: More in-depth analysis of the recycled PET filament's thermal properties (e.g., DSC, TGA) and rheological behavior.
3) Integration of Shredding: Developing an automated shredding unit to directly process whole bottles, further streamlining the input material preparation.
4) Multi-Plastic Compatibility: Exploring the feasibility of adapting the machine to process other types of waste plastics (e.g., HDPE, PP) for different filament applications.
5) Smart Features: Incorporating sensors for automatic diameter control and feedback mechanisms for improved consistency.
6) Open-Source Dissemination: Making the design files and software open-source to encourage widespread adoption and further development by the community.

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