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Review Article

3D printing technology; methods, biomedical applications, future opportunities and trends



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ABSTRACT

3D printer technology is one of the innovations brought by the industrial age. It has been in our lives for many years. It is rapidly developing and used in many sectors like aviation and defence industry. This miracle manufacturing method has been frequently preferred for medical applications in recent years. In this study, 3D printer technology is introduced, various method of 3D printing are mentioned and the use of this technology in biomedical applications is referred. The use of 3D printing in surgery, pharmaceutical industry, disease modelling, development of customized implants and prostheses, organ printing, vet medicine and tissue engineering applications have been explained and this new method compared with traditional methods that used in the biomedical field. In addition, this study includes future opportunities that are expected to become widespread and developed in the future.

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1. Introduction

3D printing is to manufacture any 3D data designed with CAD programs using a printer, by adding layers of material to a 3D physical part. 3D printing can be defined as additive manufacturing (AM) or layered manufacturing [1,2]. 3D printing which has some techniques like selective laser sintering (SLS) material jetting, stereolithography (SLA), material extrusion and binder jetting etc. can be used for different materials and areas. It is interesting for many areas due to its success in the production of complex parts and the saving of material and time thanks to high-speed production [3–7]. The effects of the developing technology can be seen in every field, from medicine to industry. 3D printers have become a part of

this developing technology. Although it is thought to be a very new technology for us, what is actually new is that they are now more accessible and affordable than before. It is thought that 3D printing will move forward day by day thanks to the different facilities that provides for many different sectors [8–10]. This technology, which is preferred especially for many applications in the field of health, provides great benefits especially for medical imaging [11,12] and dental imaging [13,14], since it can largely manage studies such as medical device design and production that define the patient-specific anatomical structure. Applications using biocompatible materials such as the creation of tissue without any damage with living cells [15,16], blood vessel production [17], dental implants [18,19] and special medical prostheses [20,21] are just some of the contributions of the 3D printer to the biomedical

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field. In addition, this technology is also being researched in order to fix or replace defective organs such as kidneys, heart. Moreover, with this technology, organs that will perform the same biological functions as the original organs can be created. Thanks to this technology with organ and tissue printing, the future will be provided for many patients [22,23], and there is now a growing research effort focussing on the use of its research in a variety of biomedical applications [24,25]. 3D printer technology has become a preferred application in many sectors, especially in recent years its use in biomedical applications has attracted attention. In this study, 3D technology is introduced and various 3D method are referred. The superior properties of the method and its use in biomedical applications are mentioned. The use of the method in surgical applications, medical imaging, pharmaceutical industry, production of patient-specific medical prostheses and implants, vet medicine applications, skin engineering and stem cell studies and organ printing were explained. In addition, this study includes the benefits of this technology which is expected to become widespread in the biomedical applications, the current challenges that need to be developed, trends and future opportunities.

2. 3D printer technology

It can be expressed with many definitions such as “additive manufacturing” and “layered manufacturing”. Although it has more than one definition, as we explained in our previous study, it is the method of adding main materials to layers that usually overlap to produce parts [26–29]. Printing process basically has some steps, and the first step is modelling. Generally, computer-aided (CAD) software is preferred in 3D modelling of the part to be manufactured. The object to be manufactured can be prototyped on the computer. If, it was previously prototyped by someone else, it could be downloaded to the computer or if the part to be produced is an existing object, it can be produced after scanning. After the modelling step, the model of the part is sliced into printable layers. The last step is printing. During the printing step, an object is manufactured by adding another layer on top of layers. Thus, production takes place in a layered structure. Thanks to this technology, prototyping which takes several months using traditional methods, can be reduced to a few days or hours, saving time and costs, as the requirements of traditional manufacturing such as moulds, a long production line are not needed. In addition, it provides design freedom that enables designers to create parts with geometric and structural complexity, as it is feasible to produce objects that are impossible to produce using conventional methods. Moreover, some limitations in traditional methods are not valid for the technology so the removal of various limitations, the method offers a different way of thinking and the ability by removal of various limitations to directly address people's imagination has been effective in the day-to-day development of this technology [20–32]. In the printing process an idea, a need is first transformed into a model and then into an object and thanks to this system, manufacturing can be performed easily and fastly. Fig. 1 shows the modelling and slicing steps for the printing of the humerus bone, which forms the bone

structure of the arm region between the shoulder and the elbow [33,34]. To define the surface of the bone model and send it to the 3D printer in order to print, it must be converted to an STL file. The stereolithography file format, abbreviated as “STL”, is obtained by dividing the surfaces of 3D designed models into many triangles in a mathematical order. STL format identify surfaces as a collection of triangles. The surface is created with simple triangles that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Thus the step-by-step printing process is performed [33,35–38].

This technology includes many methods in itself. Some of the frequently preferred techniques are powder bed fusion (Selective laser melting, selective laser sintering etc.), material extrusion, SLA etc. The differences between the techniques are on account of the method of processing the layers, the material used. When choosing one of the 3D technology methods, the material and used method properties used should be considered and the most suitable method should be selected [39,40].

3D printing methods can be classified according to the physical state of the main material, solid, liquid or powder. Different methods are used for different types of materials. This classification is shown in Table 1. The advantages and disadvantages of 3D printing methods and the materials that uses in the methods are shown in Table 2 [41–43].

3D printing technology can be applied to metal, ceramic, composite and polymer materials. The most commonly used metal materials are stainless steel [44,45], titanium [46–48], magnesium, aluminium [49–51], Cr–Co [52–54] alloys. In addition, the processing of unique materials such as titanium aluminides can be achieved with EBM. In addition to the benefits it provides, it is thought that the use of more metal alloys will increase in different applications. Metal materials, especially Ti and Cr–Co alloys, are preferred in biomedical applications, mostly because of their mechanical properties, biocompatibility, thermal, magnetic and electrical conductivity and generally high temperature resistance. Although metals have many advantages compared to polymers and other materials due to their properties such as laser absorption power and stability at higher temperatures, it can be said that this method is new for metals, while polymer materials have been used for 3D printing for years [55–59]. Polymer is the first material group produced with this technology and still constitutes a large part of the materials today. Polymers

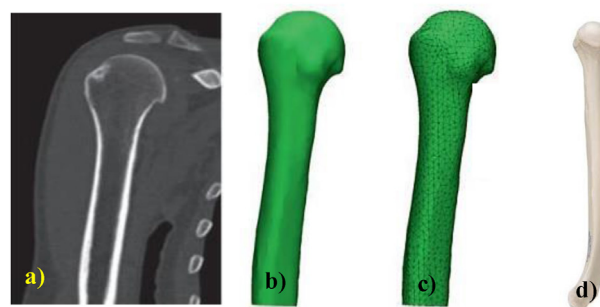


Fig. 1 – Production stages of humerus bone with 3D printer; a) imaging of humerus bone with the help of computerized tomography, b) modelling, c) slicing the model for printing, d) printed humerus bone [33,34].

Table 1 – Classification of 3D printing methods according to the material used and the solid, liquid and powder form of the material [41,42].

3D printing method	Material type			Material			
	Liquids	Powder	Solid	Metal	Ceramic	Polymer	Photopolymers
Powder bed fusion	SLS	x		x	X	x	x
	SLM			x		x	
	EBM			x	X		
VAT- polymerization	SLA	X			X		x
Directed energy deposition	DED			x			x
Material jetting		x					x
Binder jetting		x		x	X	x	

are preferred in various 3D printing technologies, just like using resin as the necessary supporting structure in the SLA method. Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS), polyamides, polylactic acid (PLA), polycarbonates (PC), resins are the most commonly used polymer materials with this technology. Especially in medical applications, SLA method is preferred for poly(ethylene glycol) diacrylate (PEGDA) and periodontal ligament (PDL) polymers while material extrusion for ABS, polycaprolactone (PCL), polycarbonate (PC), polylactic acid (PLA), poly(lactic acid). SLS technique is preferred for acid-coglycolic acid (PLGA), polyvinyl alcohol (PVA), polyether etherketone (PEEK), and binder spraying methods are preferred for polyvinyl and silica [60–64].

2.1. Selective laser sintering

SLS produces solid parts by solidifying powder-like materials layer-by-layer. Parts are produced by laser or another high energy beam on the surface of the powder bed. The method uses laser energy as an energy source to fuse powdered materials into a solid part. In the beginning, the powders are stacked on top of each other, and the powder starts to heat up with laser energy, the powder combines to form a solid object as shown in Fig. 2. The advantage of the method is that it enables the production of parts with a density near to full density. In this way, long postprocessing steps are avoided. Quality and properties of materials and some parameters of a method such as a laser energy density, laser scanning speed, scanning strategy, distance between layers, and bed temperature influence the mechanical properties of the product which manufactured by SLS [65–68]. SLS is similar to SLM process in terms of material addition technique and the energy input it uses. The main difference in the SLS process compared to the SLM process is that the powder material is sintered instead of full melting [69,70]. Since the materials with low heat conduction do not spread the heat around them, their sintering is successful. Therefore, it can be preferred for this method. When the powder properties and system parameters are considered, the process is successful. In addition, the SLS method can be used not only for polymers but also for metals such as Ti, Al, Co, Cr, ceramics or composites [71,72].

2.2. Selective laser melting

SLM is PBF method like SLS and EBM methods and powder bed fusion methods contain at least one thermal resource to induce

fusion between the powder particles. In SLM method, the part is created layer by layer out of a powder which is heated by a laser source. When the temperature decreases, the molten material begins to solidify. The molten material forms the object while the unmelted powder portion supports the structure. When the process completed and part is built, the residual powder is removed [73]. In the process, the powder layer is shaped by laser scanning, and the object is manufactured owing to laser energy [74]. The machine system that ensures the process is shown in Fig. 3 [75]. SLM process is a printing method commonly used for metals such as Ni, Al, and Ti [76,77]. Especially when compared with the SLS method, it can be said that the SLM method is mostly preferred for metal materials. SLM like other AM techniques provides almost unlimited geometry and flexibility with the optimization of parameters like powder material, powder size, laser energy input, scan strategy scan speed and morphology. In addition, SLM has some advantages such as the use of different materials, relatively low cost [31,78,79]. All printing methods, including SLM, have many advantages. Thus they are accounted for the production of scaffolds and orthopaedic implants. Scaffolds and orthopaedic implants are produced by casting, forging and machining. While these techniques are a standard that is approved to safely and successfully produce scaffolds and implants 3D printing technologies are gradually affecting the production dynamics of customised implants and scaffolds. 3D printing enables the manufacture of complicated parts with hollow structures that cannot be achieved with other traditional methods [80–82].

2.3. Stereolithography

SLA is a frequently used variant of VAT polymerisation and is also an important technology for AM. In general, parts are produced using thermoset photopolymer material. Photopolymer is a polymer that changes its mechanical properties and chemical properties by a chemical reaction when exposed to light. Although the light is in generally invisible wavelengths such as ultraviolet (UV) or infrared, that can also be in visible wavelengths. The schematic working principle of SLA is shown in Fig. 4. Its parameters are usually predetermined, not changed. The height of the layer and the resolution of the light source are important parameters for the surface quality. Although it is a preferred method due to its high surface quality and its success in producing detailed parts, it has some disadvantages. Photopolymers are brittle, so their low impact

Table 2 – Materials used in some 3D printing methods, advantages and disadvantages of the various methods [43].

Methods	Materials	Advantages	Disadvantages
Fused deposition modelling	ABS, PLA, Wax blend, Nylon	High speed, high quality, used for a wide range of material	Porous structure for the binder, weak mechanical properties, often required support
Stereolithography	Resin (Acrylate or Epoxy based with proprietary photoinitiator)	Large parts can be built easily, high accuracy and surface finish	Expensive, not well-defined mechanical properties due to the usage of photopolymers
Selective Laser Sintering	Metallic powder, polyamide, PVC	High resolution, high strength	Only metals can be printed, post-processing required due to its grainy roughness
3D Inkjet Printing	Photo-resin or hydrogel	Very good accuracy, very high surface finishes	Fragile parts, poor mechanical the properties

resistance can be a problem. In addition, as they experience loss of mechanical properties over time, their part life is limited. The coating can be done to prolong the service life, but it is still a method with some limitations. Despite these disadvantages, it has success in the production of complex parts owing to the supporting structures. On the other hand, one of the biggest advantages of the method is to ensure that detailed, small and complex parts are produced in the right dimensions and with a very good surface quality. Due to these features, it is used especially in the fields of automotive and medicine. It, is clear that its use will increase in the coming days [83–89]. SLA has been successfully applied to the field of orthodontics and has been used to produce specialised dental implants that can be applied to oral surgery. In addition to these applications, in the treatment of cardiovascular diseases, behavioural and tissue interaction tests and applications to get a better approach to the tissue, neurosurgery, spine surgery and traumatology [90,91].

2.4. Material extrusion

In general, the material extrusion process is shortened FFF (Fused Filament Fabrication). Thermoplastic is used as the main material, and as can be understood from the filament expression in the name of the method, the thermoplastic material is mostly in the form of the filament. Some of the critical processing parameters of the method are layer thickness and extrusion tip diameter. Initially used polymers are heated above their glass transition temperatures and are fed into the extruder in the form of a semi-melt filament and then pushed through a nozzle as shown in Fig. 5 [92–94]. The filament is laid on the ground with the movement of the extrusion head, it cools and solidifies. Meanwhile, the platform moves down, and the process is repeated. The filament is deposited on the solidified filament layer so that layered production occurs. When the hot filament is laid on pre-printed and cooled filaments, it heats them as well. Thus, the solidified filament layer melts again and merges with the last layer added. The layered structure is provided in this way. When processes are finished, postprocessing is usually required, and layers can be visible on the surface when the part is printed [42,95–98]. Especially promising for the biomedical industry in recent years, extrusion-based printing is also used for many different applications ranging from cell-loaded connections that mimic natural tissues [98].

2.5. Material jetting

The material jetting, which is a technology using photopolymers, is based on the curing of the photopolymers under the effect of light. In addition to photopolymer, the wax is also used. The method is to ensure that different materials are printed together. The supporting structures required in some applications are produced from different materials in this method [93,99,100]. Photopolymer or wax are jetted in droplets and cured by UV rays. Curing is the hardening of the base material by cross-linking polymer chains thus the first layer is created. Viscosity is an important parameter as the main substance form is a droplet. High viscosity will make flow difficult and therefore hard to obtain layers. On the other hand

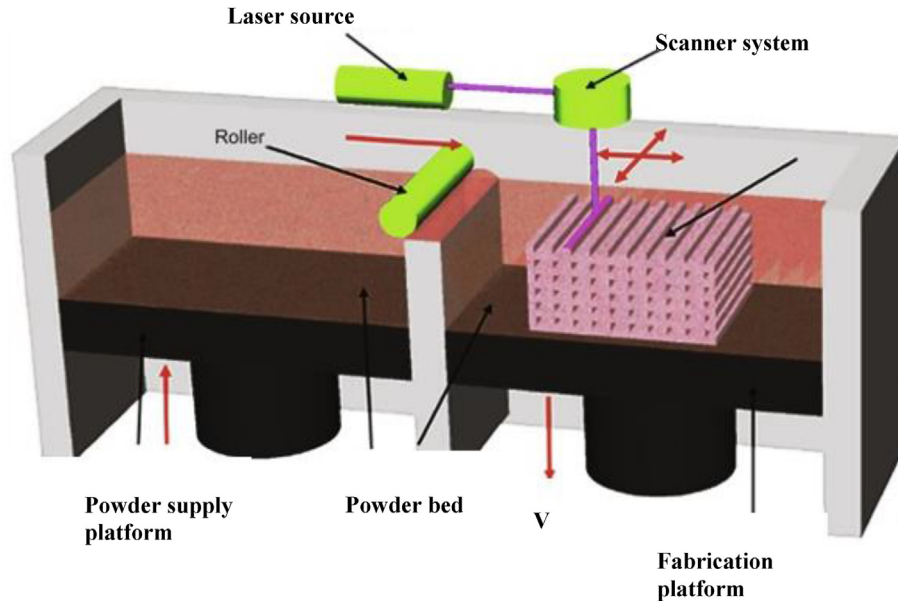


Fig. 2 – Model for SLS method [65].

low viscosity facilitates flow, so layers quickly deposit on top of each other and optimum structure cannot be achieved. In order to obtain a successful structure, the parameters must be optimum [101–105]. The process of solidification of drops is also important for the success of the technique; the improper solidification of the drops can cause unwanted results such as strength loss, deformity. Just as these parameters are important in the successful production of the part, the impact of postprocessing on the surface quality of the part is major. In addition to its success in producing the complex, detailed parts in the desired form and in the correct dimensions, the surface quality of the produced part is high. The printed parts can be coloured as desired, and colouring processes are easier and less costly than other methods. The process can be accelerated. Besides the advantages, the main material of resin is brittle thereby the mechanical properties of the produced product are low. Also, the type of material used is

limited. However, these disadvantages are expected to be improved, and the method developed [105,106].

2.6. Binder jetting

The binder jetting process takes place in the powder bed, as the method name suggests, the binder is used. The reason for using the binder is to ensure that the powder particles are connected. New layers are created on top of the structures that are connected to each other and become layers. Thus, layered manufacturing is realised. This process has the advantages of the previously mentioned powder bed fusion techniques. The parts produced in the powder bed do not require supporting structures owing to the physical support of the powder. Therefore, in this method, the supporting structures are not needed. Also, unused powders can be recycled so that unused powders can be recycled just like in powder bed fusion methods. The functioning of the method also depends on the material. As it was used for the first time, gypsum-based powder and water-based binders can be used. Also, different materials and different binders can be used. In addition, it is possible to manufacture coloured parts like material jetting technology. The powder bed has the advantages of fusion, as well as some advantages in the material jetting method. For example, faster parts can be produced, and material limitation is less. High-quality parts can be produced in metal and ceramic materials. It has many advantages, so the method can be used in many sectors [105–109].

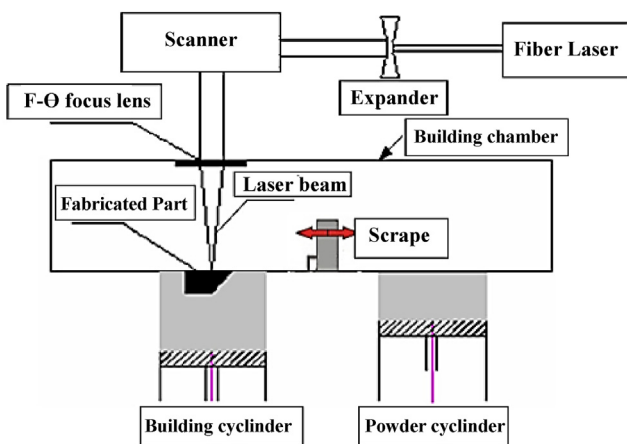


Fig. 3 – SLM working system [75].

3. 3D printing technology in biomedical applications

Recently the use of 3D printing in the biomedical applications has been interesting for lots of researches, and many

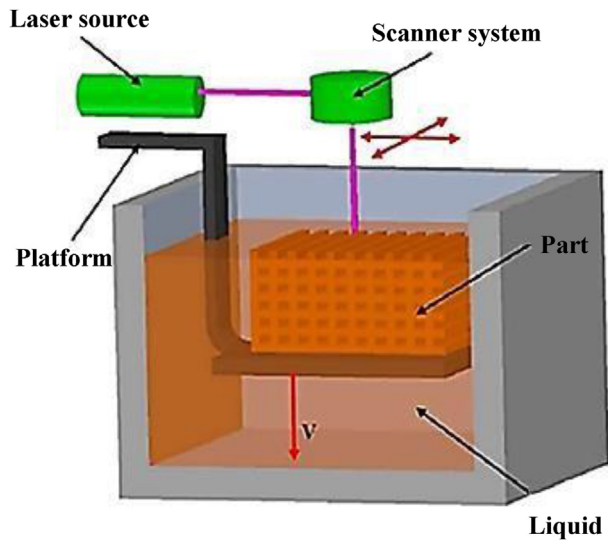


Fig. 4 – Working principles of the SLA method [89].

companies around the world have contributed to the increase in the use of this manufacturing method in the medicine with their laboratories and scientific researches. This technology offers significant benefits for biomedical applications and devices owing to the ability to manufacture the optional product according to specific patient needs. For example, many instruments used in surgery are currently produced by forging or casting methods and by using the mould required for the part, with special surface coating for desired surface properties and mechanical properties. These procedures need uneconomic machine and equipment, so distinct implants or patient-specific are unaffordable and seldom produced. Machining of titanium alloys is more difficult as it has low elastic modulus, high mechanical strength and low thermal conductivity compared to 316L stainless steel. For this reason, patient-specific implants are uneconomic to manufacture from these materials. These methods generate large material waste, and it is not possible to manufacture functional grade implants, so it is a miracle opportunity in order to the manufacturing of various functional biomedical equipment. Biomedical is a branch of technology that deals with the production of all material, apparatus and devices that can be used for diagnosis and treatment in medicine. Artificial kidneys, heart, dental implants, knee prostheses, lenses, pacemakers and hip etc. this includes biomedical applications. Printing for these medical applications allows the customised complicated geometry of implants and upon request production, which can result in a significant attenuation in expense and stock. Also, the unit cost remains constant for all product since any special tooling for any product not to be necessary for 3D printing. This expense assessment forms the basis and purpose of this method for biomedical orthopaedic implants. Since this technology has many advantages, its use in biomedical applications is increasing day by day. It is used in biomedical applications such as implants and tissue engineering. It is predicted that its use in these application areas will increase in the near future, as shown in Fig. 6. Today, it is preferred for many different applications, especially in the medical sector, as shown in Fig. 7. Despite some remarkable achievements, the development of

organs tissue with this method goes on pose important challenges [110]. From cancer treatment to patient-specific prostheses; In many areas of medicine, inventions strengthened with 3D printing are sought to improve the quality of life or save patients life [111–121].

3.1. Surgical applications

Since the 3D printing has an improved imaging system in surgical planning, it ensures a better visualisation of the patient's anatomical structure by surgeons. During surgery, a surgical template helps to precisely guide the surgical procedure, estimate appropriate angles and have a prior opinion of the direction and size of the bone. Under normal conditions, it is difficult to assess the location of blood flow and predict the structure of the bones. Therefore this technology is used today as a guide that provides correct planning and supervision during surgery to provide accurate imaging inside the body. In surgical applications, this method is often used as a surgical guide and surgical 3D modelling as mentioned. The use of this technology as a guide in surgical imaging is shown in Fig. 8. Surgical applications are only a broad definition, including cardiovascular surgery, neurosurgery, orthopaedic surgery, general surgery and plastic and aesthetic surgery so this method is preferred especially in vascular surgery, tumour resections, orthopaedic surgery and neurosurgery etc. Successful use of technology in these areas can improve surgical results and reduce medical errors, thereby increasing patient safety. In addition to these, it is anticipated that the application of this technique both during and before surgery will be beneficial in the training of medical students and surgical assistants. These benefits of technology have not been ignored; the use of 3D printers in surgical applications increases every year and investigations are accomplished to the development of this [121–129]. In one of the studies 3D printing models and rendered images were compared, and as an end of the investigation, it has been established that the use of the printers provides an obvious benefit in examining the patient's anatomy [130]. It enables the anatomical structure of the patient to be viewed during the preoperative planning stage, to simulate the surgical intervention, as well as to test surgical instruments with the help of a 3D model. In general terms, a common belief is that it is useful in surgical applications. It is expected that the number of studies carried out in the coming years, surgical application areas and this technology may improve.

3.2. Disease modelling

3D printing technology is used to create a copy of the patient's special anatomy before complex operations or to understand the disease. In this way, the copy of the organ can be examined much more clearly than imaging methods such as tomography, can be made practice before surgery, and the margin of error can be reduced. In addition, it can be adopted as an easy and fast method in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. A study is about modelling kidney diseases with printing. Kidney models are modelled with high accuracy, thus planning and simulating complex surgery is provided. This method makes it easier for medical students to understand the disease through

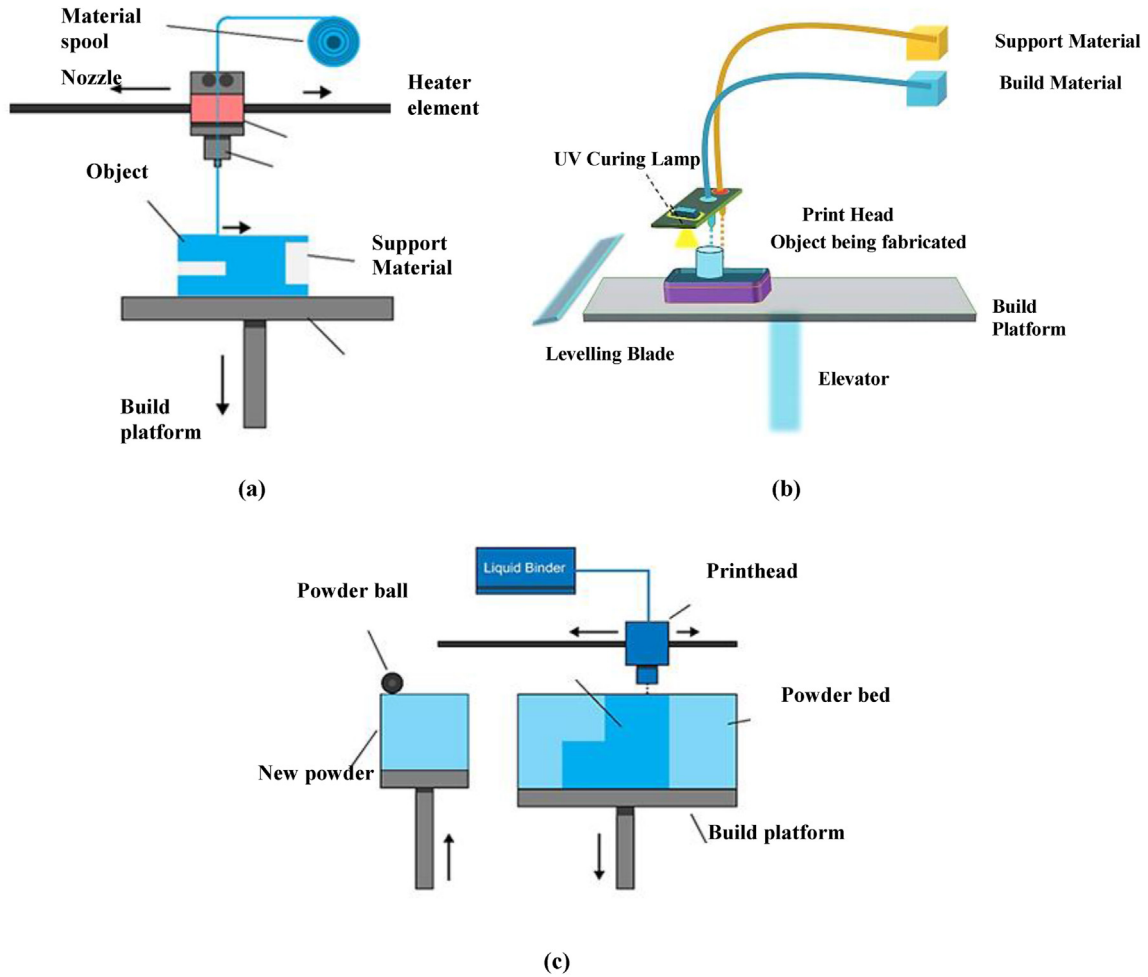


Fig. 5 – Working principles of 3D printing methods; a) Material extrusion technique, b) Material jetting, c) Binder jetting [92–94].

modelling and provides the opportunity to examine complex kidney anatomy and pathology. In today's conditions, the diagnosis of kidney tumours can be made with technological methods such as tomography and MRI, but understanding the relationship between kidney tumours and surrounding renal

anatomical structures is quite difficult in some cases. Therefore, modelling has a great role in the diagnosis of kidney tumours and in examining the patient's condition. There are many studies that argue that modelling will be of great benefit not only in the kidney but also in cardiovascular and liver diseases. Traditional imaging methods may not be sufficient, especially in complex surgeries such as cardiovascular surgery because these methods are limited on a flat-screen. Therefore, 3D modelling for many surgeries can provide a complete representation of the anatomy, prevent unexpected findings, and provide personalised treatment. In this way, it can reduce the duration of the operation and the possibility of error and provide patient safety [131–138].

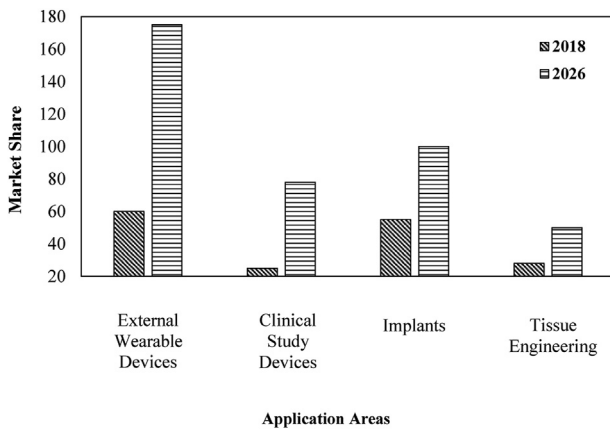


Fig. 6 – Forecast of the increase in the use of 3D printer technology in biomedical applications [113].

3.3. Medical devices

3D printer technology is a frequently preferred method in the production of many devices used in the medicine. It is especially used in the production of medical devices that are hard to produce using conventional methods. Also, the production of devices suitable for the anatomical structure of the patient is provided at an affordable cost. For this reason, most of the hearing aids specially produced for the patient, such as

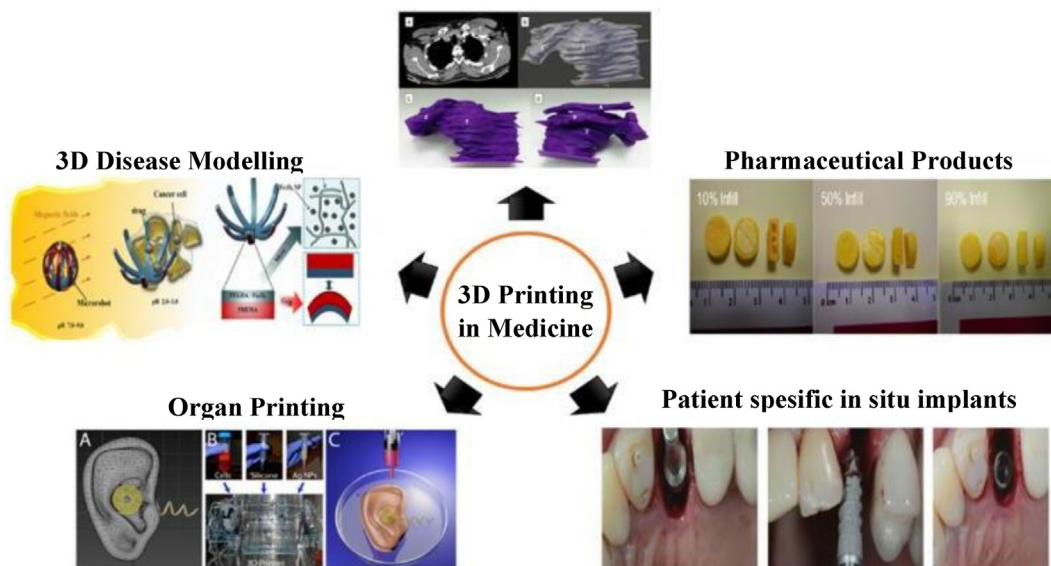


Fig. 7 – Applications of 3D printer in health [115].

hearing aids, which must be suitable for the patient's ear anatomy are produced with this technique [139,140]. In fact, it is said that more than 10 million printed hearing aids were produced worldwide for 2013. Today, much more than this number is produced and used. Thanks to the advantages of this method, hearing aids can be produced in a much shorter time than normal production time. This technology is promising for many medical devices not only hearing aids but also especially eye lenses, stethoscopes and glasses specially designed for the visually impaired [141–143]. The manufacture of many medical types of equipment like hearing aids with printing is very valuable in many aspects such as cost, patient safety and device efficiency. It is anticipated that the use of 3D printers will increase for many of our needs in the near future. In fact, the term medical devices are a broad definition, from the human face and skull surgical transplantation to prostheses, implants and human organs, etc. can contain. Therefore, this topic will be mentioned in the next sections [144,145]. Treatment is a promising technology for 3D printing technology, especially with regard to the demanding paediatric patient population that requires different doses and flexible-dose adjustments. When pharmaceutical production is adopted with this method, besides all its benefits, it can be an alternative to clinical medical

research on humans and animals in toxicology tests and cosmetic development. It is predicted that it will be a great benefit even because of this [146,147]. As shown in Fig. 9, the 3D printer can be used to design drugs in desired dimensions and geometries. It can be a solution to the problems encountered in conventional manufacturing and can provide the development of drugs with complex formulations in terms of cost and time [148–157].

3.4. Patient-specific implants

The manufacturing of patient-specific prostheses is of great importance in the medical use of 3D printer technology. Personal implant application in dental implant applications provides convenience for healthcare personnel as well as patient comfort. However, the implants produced with traditional methods are accepted as the gold standard thanks to their biological compatibility and superior mechanical properties. They are not able to provide enough aesthetic appearance, they are insufficient as a result of placing the implant with an angulation far from ideal, and they cause areas that cannot be cleaned to prevent the continuity of hygiene, and personalized implants can be produced. One of the advantages of this technology is that it eliminated traditional measurement methods and shortened waiting times. The printing method is frequently preferred in knee joints, tibia bone,



Fig. 8 – Use of 3D printer technology in surgical imaging [127].

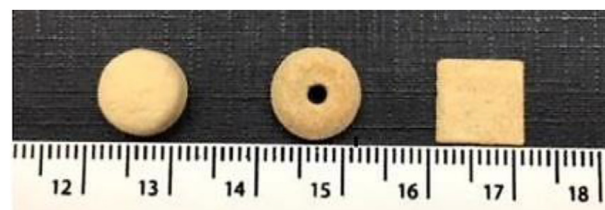


Fig. 9 – Drugs with different geometries such as cylinder, torus, film and size produced by 3D printer [157].

femur bone, fibula bone implants and dental implants. For example, hip and knee implants produced by 3D printing are shown in Fig. 10. The tibial tray produced by SLM technique, which is one of the 3D printer methods, is shown in Fig. 10a. Femoral component fabricated by SLM is shown in Fig. 10b, acetabular cup manufactured by AM is shown in Fig. 10c and hip stem built with SLM method is shown in Fig. 10d. Thanks to this technology, it allows an accurate manufacturing specific to the patient with biocompatible. With successful surgical imaging, anatomical information of the patient is obtained, a digital model is created, and complications and errors that may occur in the placement of the implant are prevented. In addition, implants produced specifically for the patient's anatomy increase the chance of success. A printed mould can be used in the production of these implants or can be printed directly [158]. In addition, it can support tissue regeneration depending on the regeneration and growth factors of cells. Furthermore, implants produced with AM can have high fatigue strength and high corrosion resistance [159–166]. One of the types of implants that can be successfully produced with this method is cranial implants. Patients often need cranial implants due to damage to their cranial part as a result of an accident or injury. The reason for using these implants is to protect the brain from possible damage and to improve the cranial appearance and provide psychological support to the patient. Cranial implants are modelled with a 3D printer in accordance with the patient's skull anatomy and produced with this technology using a biocompatible material. This miracle technology is preferred in the production of implants due to provides good mechanical properties and the ability to produce suitable for the patient [167,168]. There are many successful examples of cranial implants produced with 3D printers in the world. One of these examples is the production of implant for Yaşar Ağayev from the Azerbaijani army, who was shot in the head in April 2016. METUM (Turkish abbreviation for Medical Design and Production Center) produced cranial implants with 3D printers for Yasar Ağavey. It is the medical design and manufacturing centre in Turkey. Yaşar Ağayev, who lost half of his skull, could not speak and could not move his left side, was replace with a cranial implant that he produced as a result of

METUM's study. Thus, thanks to this implant produced in a printing technology, the damage to the patient's skull is largely eliminated. METUM and other organisations in different countries continue to create miracles thanks to this technology [168].

3.5. Patient-specific prostheses

Prostheses have a very old history and are thought to have been used since ancient Egypt. Generally, prostheses are produced by traditional methods such as casting methods nowadays, 3D printing technology has also been used in order to manufacture prostheses and has to get successful results. Compared to a prosthesis produced with traditional methods, a big difference can't be seen between them compared to the one produced by a 3D printer. 3D technology is more advantageous for personal production. Recently, the wide commercialization of 3D printing in prosthetic designs has provided the opportunity to rapidly prototype a number of desired designs, and they can be tested in a short time at minimum cost. The 3D printer enables the production of prostheses that have the desired mechanical and physical properties and are fully compatible with the patient in a short time. Realistic, suitable for the patient's anatomy, and close to the original mechanical properties, prostheses are produced for the ear, nose, teeth, bone, hand and foot. In addition, using the multi-material printing approach, it is possible to adjust the skin tone of the person who will use the prosthesis in accordance with the skin pigmentation. However, there are some limitations regarding this technology. One of them is that the prosthesis has a harder texture compared to the original skin [169]. And the prostheses are not adjustable; that is they do not grow with the patient, after a patient grows up the prosthesis will not fit for the patient. It is expected that these limitations are eliminated and the usage potential of the technology increases. Another problem that is thought to be a solution is the weight of the prostheses. Especially complex prostheses are heavy. Weight may not seem like an important problem in the short term, but the use of the prosthesis becomes difficult when doing daily activities [170–177]. Prostheses can be produced in different colours to provide the necessary mechanical and physical properties for people of different ages, races, genders and sizes [178].

3.6. Vet medicine

3D printing is widely used in human medicine, as mentioned in previous sections, in many surgical applications, especially in vascular surgery, neurosurgery, modelling of diseases, and patient-specific implant and prosthesis design. The benefits of the method are hopeful not only for human medicine but also for veterinary medicine. In most of these investigations, it is used in different application areas in vet. For example, in order to manage view and understand the anatomy of the animal more clearly and the veterinarian's practice before the surgery, imaging with this method is preferred. Thus, the veterinarian can anticipate the possible anatomical differences, reduce the margin of error and ensure the safety of the animal just by planning pre-surgery [179–181]. In one of these, surgical intervention AM to improve a dog's lameness has

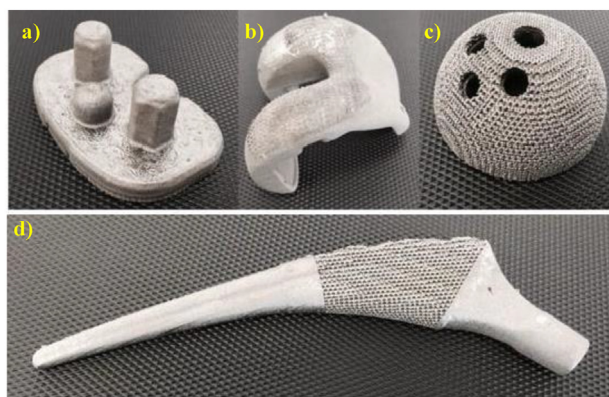


Fig. 10 – Hip and knee implants manufactured by 3D printer technology; a) tibial component, b) femoral component, c) acetabular cup, d) hip stem [162].



Fig. 11 – 3D printed prostheses for animals: a) Leg prosthesis for secretary bird, b) A prosthesis for a penguin whose foot has been amputated, c) Prosthesis produced for a kitten who is not one of the congenital front legs bones [184,185].

been successful in characterising and planning surgery. In another case, 3D printer was used in the tumour removal surgery of the dog so the defect area was determined the mass was removed with the correct surgical planning and the patient was cured [182,183]. Unfortunately, every year hundreds of animals are disabled through accidents and some medical issues every year. Thanks to these technology prostheses, that are fully compatible with the anatomical structure for animals can be produced, a damaged bone, tissue or muscle can be printed and implanted like the original one. There are many successful examples and studies on this subject. One of them is the use of it in the surgery of the hornbill kept in the Jurong Bird Park zoological collection, which was diagnosed with cancer. This technology was used as a surgical guide, and the damaged muscle was removed with a smooth surgery, and a prosthesis designed with a 3D printer was placed. In this study, it was used for both preoperative imaging and production of prosthesis suitable for the patient, and it was successful [183,184]. Thanks to this technology, prostheses can be designed for many animals; some of these examples are shown in Fig. 11. For example, is a printed prosthesis for a secretary bird whose leg is broken and whose leg amputated due to damage, as shown in Fig. 11a [184]. In another example, a prosthesis with AM is designed for acute penguin whose foot has been amputated. The prosthesis is shown in Fig. 11b.

Prostheses are not only produced for animals that have amputated limbs, but also for congenitally missing limbs. For instance, one of the congenital front legs bones of a 4-month-old kitten was missing, so a suitable prosthesis was produced with 3D printing for the offspring. The prosthesis is shown in Fig. 11c [185]. There is no ready-to-use implant in animals, and patient-specific implants are the one way convenient. For this reason, using 3D printing, a perfectly compatible patient-specific implant can be produced in accordance with the anatomy of animals. Moreover, in many situations, necessary implants with complicated shapes will be not possible or uneconomic to production by methods other than AM. In veterinary orthopaedics, AM can mainly be used to create bone models, complex patient-specific implants, and surgical guides. It is expected that the use of this technology in veterinary medicine will increase in the near future [186,187].

3.7. Tissue engineering and stem cell technology

Tissue Engineering (TE) includes the application of engineering principles and life sciences together for tissue regeneration, regulation and continuity of organ functions. It aims to produce living cells in in vitro environment on support scaffolds made up of biomaterials and place them in the damaged area of the body. Its main purpose is to produce three-dimensional functional artificial tissues and organs by using cell, tissue scaffold, instead of damaged organs that have become unable to perform their duties [188–190]. Bioprinting is an evolving technology with various applications in making functional tissue structures to replace injured or diseased tissues. It is based on the principle of precise positioning of biological materials and living cells layer by layer. During the bioprinting process, a solution of biomaterials or a mixture of several biomaterials is usually used in the form of a hydrogel that encapsulates the desired cell types to create tissue structures. Hydrogels containing cells are printed in defined shapes. And the polymers in the hydrogels are joined together or cross-linked so that the printed gel becomes stronger. Bioinks can be made from natural or synthetic biomaterials alone or a combination of the two as hybrid materials. Biological materials must be biocompatible with materials related to the ink and the printer itself. Some of the methods used for 3D bioprinting of cells are photolithography, magnetic 3D bioprinting, stereolithography and direct cell extrusion [191–197]. The pre-process, methods used in technology and applications of the bioprinting are shown in Fig. 12 [198].

TE generally involves the use of material referred to as scaffold. The scaffold is designed as a means of transport for the transport of cells to a specific area, providing structural support for newly formed tissue. Tissue scaffolds are of great importance in preserving their chemical and biological properties and cell viability. Scaffolds should be biocompatible, have a porous structure and provide mechanical support to the cells. However, the necessary conditions for scaffolding can't be obtained with traditional methods. For example, adequate control of the ideal pore mesh and pore size can't be achieved, and non-ideal scaffolds are produced. 3D printing is used to solve this problem, and controlled pore size and pore structure can be obtained thanks to this technology. The desirable mechanical properties can be obtained by controlling the pore in the

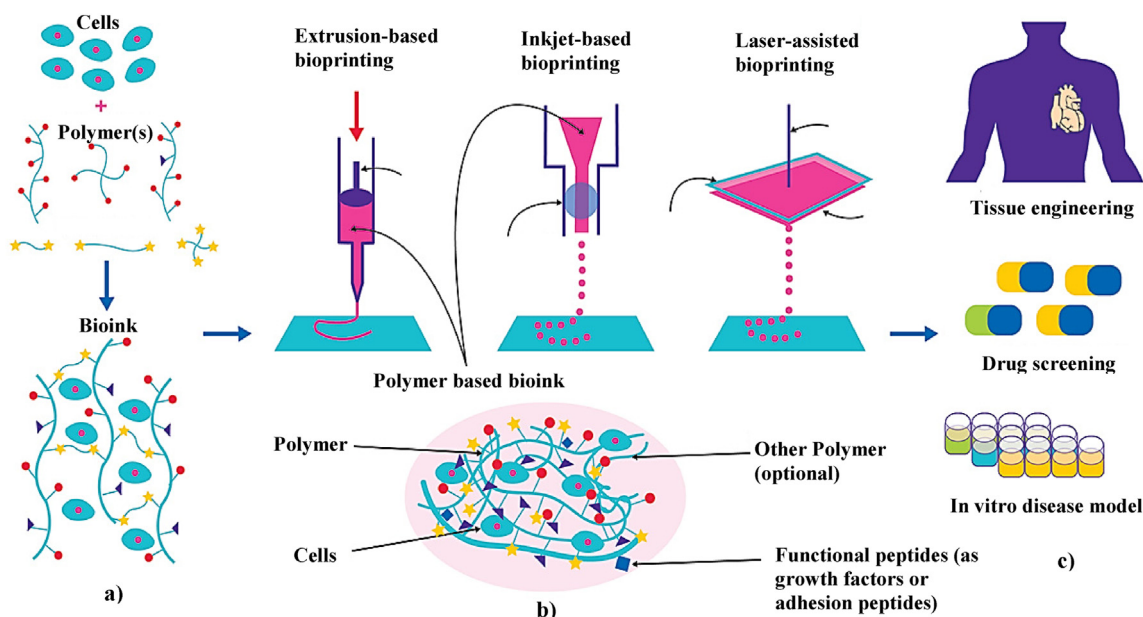


Fig. 12 – 3D Bioprinting; a) Bioinks are formed by combining various biocompatible materials and cultured cells; b) Various methods used in the process; c) Applications areas [198].

scaffolds produced with printers. The very porous structure reduces the strength and the desired strength can't be obtained, while the non-porous structure is not suitable. Therefore, the desired mechanical and physical properties are achieved through 3D printer production. Pore control is not only provided in scaffolds, but also scaffolds compatible with bone tissue can be produced. Successful experiments have been carried out for cell-free tissue scaffolds, cartilage, bone and skin printing studies produced with this technology [199–206]. In one of the studies on this subject, TE models with high bioactivity have been developed with bioprinting. The study aims to produce BC/PCL composite scaffold with a 3D printer. It has been concluded that bioprinting is a useful technology for many areas of health, as well as showing great potential for TE and regenerative medicine [206]. The scaffolds produced with AM can also repair the damaged nervous system in spinal cord injuries that are still not successfully treated [207]. In addition to these developments, there are many studies and many successful experiments. Artificial tissue production instead of joint, cartilage and skin losses due to injuries, diseases and accidents are important developments for the healthcare industry. Artificial tissue production instead of joint, cartilage and skin losses due to injuries, diseases and accidents are important developments for the healthcare industry. The classical processes of tissue engineering are shown in Fig. 13 [208].

A stem cell is a host cell that can renovate itself and grow into one or more cells in its tissue. Stem cells can not only differentiate into adult cells of tissue-specific stem cells, but can also turn into unexpected cells, so they hold promise for regenerative medicine. In addition, stem cells provide a renewable source of cells because they are constantly growing. Moreover, some stem cells provide an internal repair that is they divide to renew cells during illness or injury. Thus, it plays a role in the regeneration of all tissues and organs that are sick

or damaged. By transforming into the needed cell type; repairs organ and tissue damage or loss due to disease, injury and other reasons. Thanks to this feature, it is used in the treatment of many diseases that may result in death and some types of cancer. Stem cells can be transformed into blood or muscle cells and can be produced by 3D printing. Thanks to the 3D printer, adipose tissues, blood vessels using stem cells can be produced, thus providing a deeper perspective on metabolic diseases and potentially replacing damaged tissues. In addition, cell behaviour, environment, tissue formation and architecture can be better understood. It is also thought that it will be used for many applications from tissue production to clinical applications in the future. Especially with this technology, many patients will be hopeful with stem cell production [209–214]. Unfortunately, stem cell donation is not enough today, and many patients die while waiting for a transplant. In the future, it is hoped that the production of stem cells will be done much faster and more effectively with the 3D printer, and thus the treatment of many diseases will be much easier. Until it makes this process much easier, please let us be a stem cell donor to save someone's life.

3.8. Organ printing

Recent developments have enabled biocompatible materials, cells, to be 3D printed on living tissues. Bioprinting is developed to produce tissues and organs appropriate for organ transplantation. Bioprinting includes additional complexities such as material selection, growth and differentiation factors, cell types, and technic difficulties living cells compared to non-bioprinting. This technology has been applied to production and tissues, involving multilayer heart tissue, cartilage and bone structures. In addition, highly efficient printed tissue models have been developed for drug discovery, toxicology and various research. As we move towards printing complex

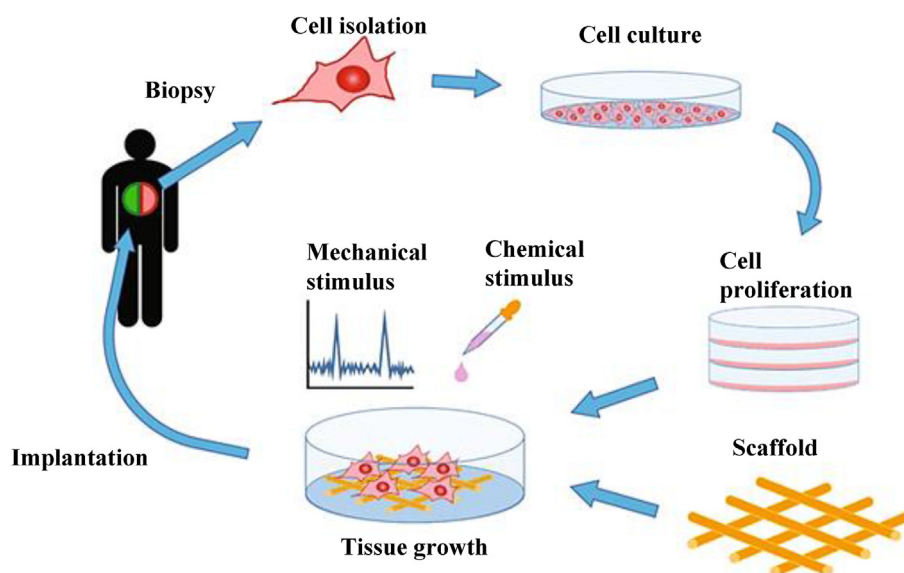


Fig. 13 – Classic flow of tissue engineering applications [208].

tissues, various problems such as cell and material requirements, tissue maturation and functionality will be encountered, and different research will be needed to overcome these difficulties and transform this technology into regenerative medicine because the possibilities of this technology are too many to ignore in the medical field. One of them is the benefit that organ printing with the 3D printer will add to organ donation. Unfortunately, organ donation is still insufficient despite the increase in volunteer donors. The average donation is not even a third of those in need [215]. Solving this problem requires long-term solutions by creating or generating living organs from one's own cells, as with solutions to other major engineering challenges. Despite the medical benefits of 3D printer and advances in tissue engineering, several problems need to be solved to make organ pressure a reality. Even if the organ is imitated with a 3D printer, it is very difficult to perform its original function. The most important challenge is the assembly of vascular structures, a problem faced by most tissue engineering technologies. 3D thick tissue or organs designed without a circulatory system cannot receive enough nutrients, waste removal and gas exchange required for maturation during circulation which causes cell viability problems and malfunction of organs produced by 3D printing. But on the one hand, one of its biggest advantages is the potential to use patient-specific cell resources, and the tissue produced minimizes the possibility of organ rejection. When some of its limitations and problems are solved, AM will bring revolutionary innovations in the field of medicine and save many lives. Therefore, many researchers are working on organ printing with 3D printers. Organ production with it can't yet produce organs that can perform exactly the same functions as the original, but organs very close to the original can be produced by examining the patient's anatomical structure as shown in Fig. 14 [215–224]. For example, Zein et al. produced the first fully printed liver known in their study. By using it in the preoperative planning stage, they have achieved better preoperative surgical planning, and by examining the livers of

patients and donors, they have successfully developed synthetic fibres with 3D printed networks of vessels and bile structures. They were able to produce a living transparent 3D liver that allows detailed visualization of vascular and bile structures, as shown in Fig. 14a. With this method, the liver produced for the patient was compared with the natural liver taken from the donor, and the success of the study has been proven. There are still many limitations, but it is clear that these studies are of great importance for the future [225]. Organ printing with this technology can be used not only for organ donation but also to produce and examine a replica of the sick organ in order to better understand the patient's disease. One example of this situation is shown in Fig. 14b. A 3D printed physical anatomical kidney model was created using tomography images of the patient with kidney cancer. The 3D printed model facilitated the preoperative planning, while successfully controlling the cancer, the cancerous tumour tissue was removed, and the operation was successfully completed [226]. Another successful example concerns the ability of organs produced with AM to perform some functions. In this study, an auricle containing electronics that provides alternative abilities to human hearing was produced with this technique. Despite the complex curved structure of the ear consisting of cartilage, a bionic ear was produced in accordance with the anatomical geometry, as shown in Fig. 14c [227].

4. Current challenges and future opportunities

In today's world that changes and develops day by day, the needs required by the age and the technology used to meet these needs are also developing. 3D printing technology, which has many successful examples in the different areas where it is used, offers great opportunities for the future. It is hoped that it will be effective in solving some of the problems we encounter recently. One of the best examples of this situation is

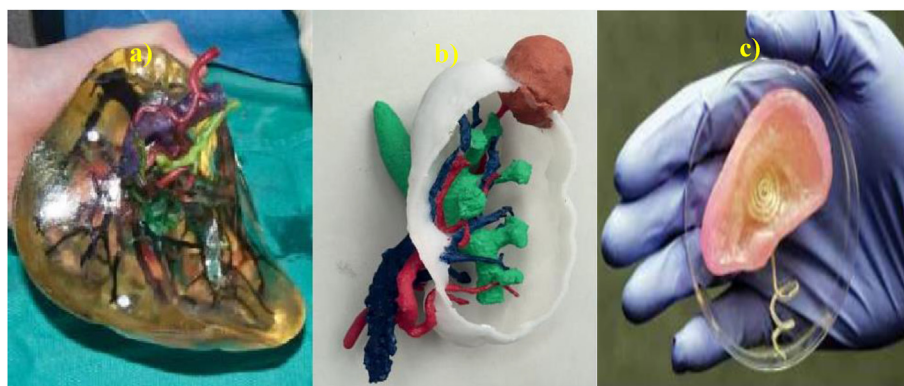


Fig. 14 – 3D printing organs: a) The first fully 3D printed liver known, b) Kidney model produced by additive manufacturing for surgical planning according to tomography image data, c) Bionic ear that have hearing manufactured with a 3D printer [225–227].

undoubtedly the masks produced with this method to protect from the coronavirus pandemic, which has been on the agenda all over the world recently. Lack of protective face masks is a major problem during pandemic crises, especially for people working in healthcare, such as doctors, nurses and paramedics. Therefore, printed masks are produced for healthcare professionals who are struggling with the COVID-19 epidemic that emerged in Wuhan, affected the whole world in a short time. Unfortunately, millions of people have been infected with coronavirus today, and thousands of people have died, for this reason so many studies are carried out to protect against the virus. One of the measures to be taken to protect against the virus is the use of personal masks. Due to the increasing demand for masks, various problems arise in the production and distribution of masks. As a potential solution to this problem, this technology is used in the production of masks. In this way, globally accessible masks are produced in a shorter time. In addition, it is also possible to produce masks just as personal prostheses and implants can be produced. The face mask produced with this method is shown in Fig. 15. The modelled personalized face mask is shown in Fig. 15a, and a printed face mask is shown in Fig. 15b. It can be used in the production of protective clothing, gloves, goggles, face shields and other equipment designed to protect not only masks but also from the spread of the disease. With CAD-CAM programs, any type of mask can be modelled within 10 min and printed in a short time. Therefore, compared to traditional methods, production can be made in a shorter time with lower labour costs. It also prevents waste through manufacturing on demand. The benefits of this technology during the crisis period have attracted attention due to its contribution to the fight against the epidemic and to providing a greener and more environmentally friendly future [228–235]. In addition, this technology is promising for cancer which is one of today's major health problems and the second cause of death in the world. Cancer cases increase with each passing year, and many people die because of this illness. In consequence, cancer treatment researches and early detection and targeted therapies have gained great importance. Differences between individuals are a serious problem in cancer treatment as each patient responds differently to existing drug treatments. 3D models are used for

better understanding of the illness and for the necessary treatment to be more efficient. It facilitates complex treatments with models that closely mimic real conditions, so that problems encountered in cancer patients can be solved. In addition to these benefits, thanks to the produced tumour model, the doctor can be analysed, and it used in surgical planning, and more efficient treatment can be provided [236–239]. It is also thought that the efficiency of chemotherapy used in cancer treatment will increase. It is a very difficult process and can be dangerous for almost all patients. Chemotherapy, which has many side effects, including vomiting and heart failure, is actually treated using toxic drugs. To avoid these side effects of chemotherapy, Steve Hetts, a neuroradiologist at the University of California in San Francisco, developed the 3D sponge project. The sponge has been tested on pigs and has been successfully completed. The task of the sponge is to absorb the medicine before it enters the body. In this way, the drug becomes active where it should be active, and other organs are not damaged. In the test performed on pigs, it has been observed that the amount of drug administered to the body is reduced by 64%, it is thought that the same results will be achieved in humans. The use of the sponge produced with this technology will reduce the strong side effects of chemotherapy and prevent it from harming other organs [240]. In addition to cancer research, it is also promising for the treatment of congenital disorders or birth defects. For example, Lioufas et al. [241] used a 3D printer to treat eight and 14-month-old children born with a cleft palate. Anatomically accurate models were developed with the SLA method, and the operations were successfully completed. In the study, the use of this method in the education of medical students is recommended because it facilitates preoperative planning and offers practical opportunities. Moreover, in the near future, it may be possible to print 3D copies with materials that mimic the colour, physical and mechanical properties of living human tissue. It also has significant potential in drug development, treatment testing, medical research, wound healing, and even organ transplantation. Organ transplantation applications can't be performed at the moment because the technology is still insufficient for the design of an organ that is exactly the same as the original organ of the patient, has the entire vascular system and can perform all the functions of the

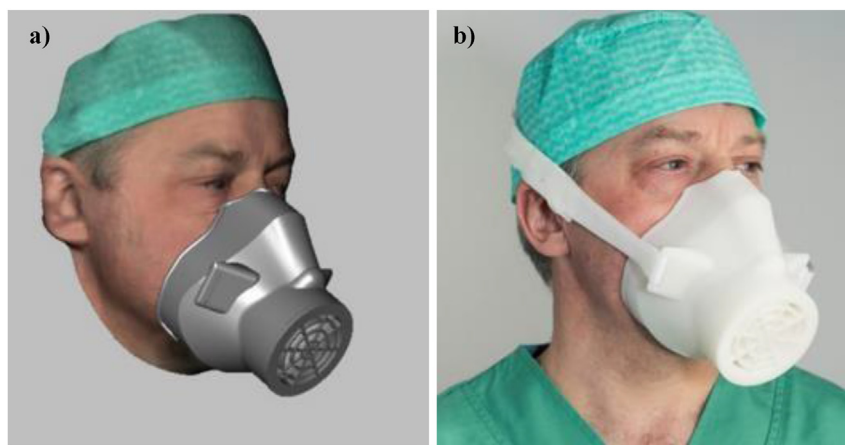


Fig. 15 – The face mask custom-made with a 3D printer; a) 3D facial mask modelling, b) Custom made 3D printed face mask [229].

original organ. The patient's organ can be modelled similarly but is not able to function. However, it is expected that this situation will change in the future, that organs that can fulfil their functions can be produced and used in organ transplantation, thus saving the lives of many people. These examples are just some of its future opportunities, a few years ago what the 3D printer can do now seemed to be imaginary things we could only see in science fiction movies, but that has changed. Therefore, it is believed that this technology will open new doors in the future [242,243].

5. Conclusion

3D printer technology can provide the production of complex-shaped parts that are difficult to produce with traditional methods, can produce easier and faster with less cost, and its use and prevalence in different sectors are increasing due to these advantages. It is especially used in the biomedical field thanks to its advantages, and it is preferred for different applications in this field every day. Some of these applications are included as surgical applications using biomodels or templates, modelling and imaging for a better understanding of diseases, manufacturing medical devices, patient-specific implant and prosthesis applications, vet medicine applications, tissue engineering applications, pharmaceutical industry applications and organ bioprinting which is currently in the testing stage. Thanks to the use of this technology especially in the modelling and diagnosis of diseases, it is possible to model, diagnose and monitor the course of cancer which is one of the health problems of our age. In addition, produced 3D models increase the accuracy of the operation compared to radiographic and clinical examination. This development is of great benefit not only for surgeons but also for veterinarians and medical school students. Furthermore, this method is preferred in the production of personalised prostheses and implants. The quality of life of many patients has increased with implants and prostheses, which can be produced in desired sizes and colours modelled according to the patient's anatomy. The use of this miracle technology in

the pharmaceutical sector and bioprinting applications is not widespread yet and continues to be tested and developed, but it is thought to bring revolutionary developments when it becomes widespread. When developed in the near future, it will bring revolutionary innovations to the medical field and can save many lives. From cancer treatment to birth defects treatment, from functional prostheses; In all areas of medicine, inventions powered by 3D printing are sought to provide patients with high quality of life and a longer life.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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