

POLY(ETHYLENE GLYCOL) - NANOSILICATE SACRIFICIAL INK FOR CERAMIC MATERIAL EXTRUSION ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING

Karina Feliciano Santos¹

Fabiana Cunha Giora²

Ana Beatriz Girassol de Carvalho Pereira³

José Luis Dávila⁴

Andrea Cecilia Dorió Rodas⁵

Jorge Vicente Lopes da Silva⁶

Juliana Kelmy Macário Barboza Daguano⁷

SUMMARY

There are many techniques to produce ceramic and bioglass scaffolds, each one with advantages and limitations. Among them, Additive Manufacturing (AM), foam replica and freeze-drying are widely used. Despite previous works investigating the fabrication of bioceramic scaffolds, some gaps still need to be fulfilled to establish cost-effectivity routes with satisfactory reproducibility and accuracy [1–3]. As an alternative, the use of AM techniques to construct three-dimensional (3D) structures has been widely explored, considering the fabrication of complex structures as the main advantage. However, the massive search for ink formulations that are easy to obtain, low cost and suitable for AM technologies remains a challenge [4,5]. Sacrificial inks from biomaterials can be 3D printed, resulting in biocompatible 3D structures that can be leached or dissolved after fulfilling their function without changing the medium after their degradation [6]. These materials are commonly transformed in gel or liquid under mechanical, physical or chemical stimuli. Its application has been used basically in two ways: in creating free spaces within 3D structures of complex geometry, as the creation of internal channels (fugitive), or as support materials [7]. In this way, poly(ethylene

¹Mestrando do Curso de Engenharia Biomédica da Universidade Federal do ABC – UFABC, karina.feliciano@ufabc.edu.br;

²Graduado pelo Curso de Ciências Biológicas da Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas – PUC, fabiana.giora@cti.gov.br;

³Graduado pelo Curso de Biomedicina da Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná - UTP, anabgirassol@gmail.com;

⁴Doutor, Centro de Tecnologia da Informação Renato Archer - SP, jose.davila@cti.gov.br;

⁵Professor Doutor pelo Curso de Engenharia Biomédica da Universidade Federal do ABC - SP, andrea.rodas@ufabc.edu.br;

⁶Doutor, Centro de Tecnologia da Informação Renato Archer - SP, jorge.silva@cti.gov.br;

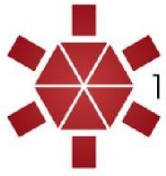
⁷Doutor pelo Curso de Engenharia do Materiais da Universidade Estadual de São Paulo - USP, jdaguano@cti.gov.br.



glycol) (PEG)-hydrogels arise as an interesting alternative for sacrificial ink formulation to design ceramic scaffolds, based on their shear-thinning behavior, which is essential for material AM. In this study, sacrificial inks based on PEG-400 and Laponite nanosilicate were obtained and characterized. Initially, the rheological properties of different Laponite concentrations (5, 7.5, and 10% w/w) were evaluated to establish their influence over the PEG viscosity profile. As a result, the viscosity of the PEG-400 solution increased dramatically as a function of the addition of Laponite, characterizing a strong shear-thinning and solid-like rheological behavior, ideal for material extrusion AM. Also, the shape of the ink at the nozzle tip was observed to verify the extrusion of filaments. Then, multi-layer pentagram tube-like structures were designed for printability evaluation. The morphological feature of these structures was investigated and imaged with a stereomicroscope; as observed, tailored rheological properties enabled the material deposition of these multi-layer samples, which could retain their shape in the construction platform. The latter allowed the development of Biosilicate® (BioS) scaffolds comprising 70% (v/v) of ceramic filler. The green samples showed good reproducibility in the deposition of the extruded filaments and the adhesion points between the layers. They do not present defects and pores after the sintering post-processing step. Finally, the chemical composition was analyzed by FTIR and the thermal stability by TGA; as observed, the sacrificial ink was removed through heat treatment, which does not compromise the structure nor change the final composition of the original ceramic material. In conclusion, bearing in mind the increasing demand for inks with excellent printability to generate shape fidelity, the formulated PEG-Laponite ink presents rheological properties that make it promising for extrusion-based 3D printing of BioS scaffolds, where the main target are bone tissue regeneration applications.

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