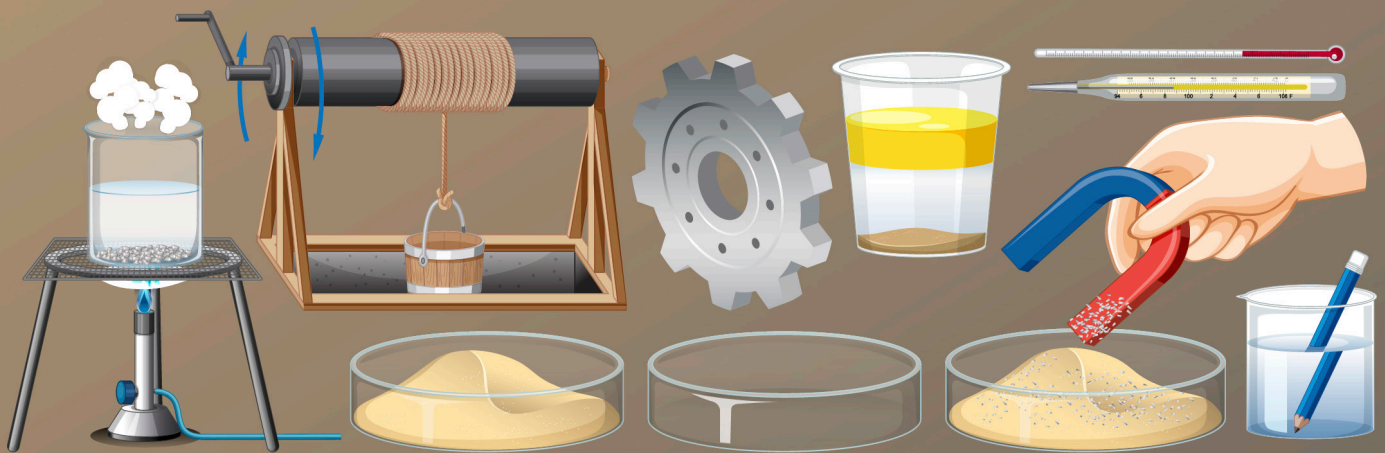




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## Comprehensive Study on Enhancing the Forming Performance of Incrementally Forming Sheet Metal

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### ABSTRACT

Incremental sheet forming (ISF) is a versatile, die-less sheet metal forming process that allows for the manufacture of complex shapes in sheet metals at minimal tooling expense. Its widespread application, however, is hindered by significant limitations such as high forming forces, rapid work hardening, and unfavorable surface finish, especially for challenging-to-beat alloys like stainless steel, high-strength aluminum, and titanium. This review presents recent advances to enhance sheet metal formability. We examine innovative heat-assisted methods, such as local approaches (e.g., laser- and electrical-assisted forming) that accurately soften the deformation zone, and global strategies (e.g., hot air and oil bath heating) that evenly improve ductility, and hybrid strategies with ultrasonic vibrations. The role of hybrid approaches that integrate two or more heating methods to find an optimal balance between energy efficiency and properties of materials is investigated. The impact of significant process factors (temperature, tool geometry, tool rotation, feed rate, and step size) is thoroughly analyzed, and predictive modeling methods (analytical, numerical, and empirical) are presented to formulate robust optimization algorithms. Scalability of the ISF process in industry, considering its applications in aerospace, automotive, and biomedical industries, is also included under the review. This comprehensive study outlines current challenges and proposes avenues for future research to advance incremental sheet forming further towards more efficient, sustainable, and reliable industrial applications.

### INTRODUCTION

Incremental sheet forming (ISF) is an innovative technology in modern manufacturing that offers the benefits of flexibility, low-cost tooling, and the potential to produce custom geometries without employing special dies (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Unlike conventional forming methods requiring costly dies and intricate setups, ISF uses a computer-controlled tool path to induce localized deformation, thus making it an economically sound means of manufacturing complex parts (Trzepieciński, 2020). Its prospects have attracted attention across various industries like healthcare, automotive, aerospace, and defense (Gupta *et al.*, 2019). ISF is especially significant in low-volume production, prototyping, and patient-specific biomedical components where precision and customization are crucial (Raabe *et al.*, 2020). It can be applied on a wide range of materials like aluminum alloys, stainless steel, titanium alloys, and polymers, each presenting their own set of challenges (Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

Although numerous advantages, creating high-strength, low-ductility alloys such as stainless steel, high-strength aluminum, and titanium is nonetheless still problematic owing to excessive forces of forming, inhomogeneous thickness distribution, and restricted ductility (Centeno *et al.*, 2017; Kumar *et al.*, 2015). These limitations restrict the amount of plastic deformation under standard ISF, and thus new approaches are needed for enhancing formability (Duflou *et al.*, 2007). Heat treatment techniques have been suggested to modify material properties temporarily so that yield strength is decreased and ductility is increased

(Liu, 2018; Pragana *et al.*, 2020). Hybrid processes that combine thermal energy and vibrations further boost the forming performance by relieving residual stresses and providing surface finish improvement (Jiang, 2022; La *et al.*, 2024). Further, improvements in tool design, tool path strategy, and process parameter optimization are vital in controlling material flow, strain distribution, and end-part accuracy (Chang & Chen, 2021; Farahani *et al.*, 2018).

Improvements in computational software such as finite element analysis (FEA), analytical modeling, and empirical methods further refined understanding of ISF mechanics to permit optimal tool path optimization effectively and reduce trial-and-error experimentation (Hussain & Al-Ghamdi, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2013). Future advancement is expected through more powerful hybrid approaches, material-specific process optimization, and the employment of real-time monitoring to provide superior control (Afzal *et al.*, 2021; Qin *et al.*, 2024). This paper will highlight the recent developments in ISF, including process innovation, material-specific challenges, and avenues for future research to spur development of this promising manufacturing technique.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Incremental sheet forming (ISF) is a widely accepted flexible technology over conventional metal forming methods, especially for prototypes, customized, or small lots of parts. ISF has unique advantages of low-cost tooling, flexibility, and the ability to produce complex shapes without the need for expensive dies. These benefits

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have made ISF a promising technique for firms forming hard-to-form metals such as stainless steel, high-strength aluminum, and titanium (Jeswiet *et al.*, 2005). Despite its immense potential, the process continues to experience high forming forces, uneven thickness distribution, rapid work hardening, and low surface finishes (Cao & Banu, 2020).

One of the most important advancements has been the addition of heat-assisted incremental sheet forming (HA-ISF). Localized heating methods such as laser-assisted and electric current-assisted ISF have exhibited notable enhancements in formability and reduction in forming forces. Silva *et al.* (Silva *et al.*, 2011) reported laser-assisted ISF reducing forming forces by over 30%, whereas Wang *et al.* (Ao *et al.*, 2024) obtained comparable improvements using electric current-assisted ISF on titanium sheets. Besides, ultrasonic-vibration-aided ISF has found more popularity because of its capability to further reduce forming loads and improve surface qualities through improving material flow (Trzepieciński *et al.*, 2021).

Hybrid ISF processes involving localized heating and ultrasonic vibration have also shown their effectiveness. Experiments by Jagtap and Kumar (2021) found that hybrid processes effectively reduce the surface roughness, minimize springback, and enhance dimensional accuracy. Additionally, Asghar *et al.* (2014) highlighted that hybrid heating processes improve formability as well as tool life through reduction of wear and friction between the metal and the tool.

Global heating methods, such as hot air and oil bath heating, have also been employed for ductility improvement. However, Fan and Gao (2014) reported drawbacks like increased oxidation and challenges in maintaining uniform process control at elevated temperatures. Instead, Singh *et al.* (2023) proposed combining global and local heating arrangements to maximize temperature uniformity and local softening.

Parallel to thermal advances, process parameter optimization remains a priority. Investigations focused on step size, tool rotation, feed rate, and tool pathing have proven their direct influence on the quality of the final product. Analytical and finite element modelling (FEM) approaches have been utilized extensively to predict forming forces, thickness distribution, and residual stresses. Li *et al.* (2023) established the credibility of FEM to simulate complex ISF deformation behavior, while empirical models like those of Chen *et al.* (2018) provided useful process predictions with less computational effort. In recent years, predictive models based on AI and machine learning have emerged as promising tools to improve ISF optimization. Huang *et al.* (2021) proposed the coupling of AI with FEM simulations to improve the accuracy of predictions for hybrid ISF processes, opening new possibilities in adaptive, real-time process control.

Although considerable advancements have been made, some challenges persist in areas such as achieving reliable temperature distribution, reducing tool wear, and scaling ISF processes to industrial-scale use. Overcoming these

challenges with hybrid processes, advanced control systems, and AI-based monitoring remains a primary area of future development.

### Techniques For Enhancing Forming Performance

Improving ISF's performance for sheet materials is crucial to increasing its industrial usability. This section classifies the main methods used to enhance surface quality and formability.

#### Customized Heat Treatment Strategies

##### Localized Heating Techniques

Localized heating methods, such as laser-assisted and electrical-assisted ISF, employ concentrated heat to the zone of deformation to reduce material strength and enhance ductility. By reducing the yield point and activating additional slip systems, these methods reduce forming force and minimize defects like tearing and cracking (Kulkarni & Mocko, 2020; Safari *et al.*, 2020). Laser-assisted ISF uses a controlled laser beam for localized heating, while electrical-assisted ISF uses resistive heating by electric currents. These techniques allow for accurate thermal control, dimensional accuracy, and avoidance of thermal distortion (Göttmann *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, localized heating techniques expand the range of materials to be applied on ISF, improving overall forming capability. These techniques also reduce the likelihood of tool wear through minimizing the forming forces, thus improving tool life, and reducing cost of production. Heating select portions alone also assists in saving energy, thus making ISF more viable for the manufacturing industry.

##### Global Heating Approaches

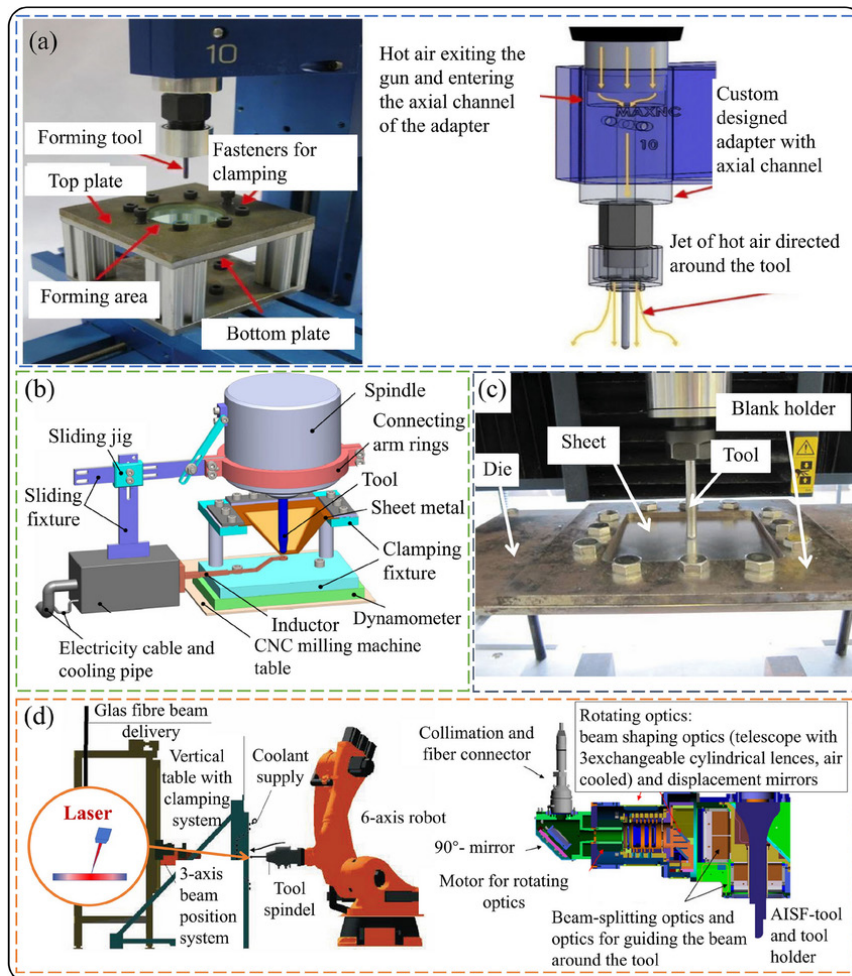
Global heating techniques involve uniform heating of the entire sheet by processes like hot air, oil baths, or heated chambers. These processes enhance ductility and reduce forming forces through softening of the material to become more pliable for deformation (Almadani *et al.*, 2023). However, achieving uniform temperatures across the entire sheet may be challenging, potentially leading to non-uniform mechanical properties. Moreover, high-temperature oxidation can also degrade surface quality, for which protective coatings or inert atmospheres must be used to combat such an effect. Although there are such challenges, heating the entire sheet at one time can lead to easier process control compared with localized methods. In some situations, the heating medium (e.g., oil) also acts as a lubricant and reduces friction and further improves surface finish, which is particularly beneficial to produce parts with intricate geometries (Trzepieciński *et al.*, 2024; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Global heating techniques are most suitably applied to high-strength, low-ductility materials that require extensive thermal assistance to achieve wanted deformation.

##### Hybrid Heating Methods

Hybrid techniques offer the advantages of localized and

general heating or include other sources like ultrasonic vibration to enhance the forming process. By a blend of localized heating with overall material softening, these methods achieve precise thermal control while reducing forming forces and limiting defects (Cheng *et al.*, 2019; Jiang, 2022). Ultrasonic-assisted ISF, for instance, employs high-frequency vibrations on the tool or material, reducing friction and slowing down material failure. These result in improved surface finish and increased tool life. Further, the combination of thermal assistance with mechanical vibrations helps in stress distribution in a more even manner, reducing the possibilities of cracks and surface flaws. Figure 1 illustrates various heat treatment techniques used in hybrid heating processes

like hot air heating, electric heating, friction stir heating, and laser heating. These processes provide localized heating, which enhances the formability of the material and minimizes springback effects in forming. The choice of the heating process depends on material properties, accuracy demands, and limitations in manufacturing. Hybrid techniques prove particularly beneficial in working with hard-to-machine materials like high-strength alloys, which typically lack good ductility and require enhanced formability. Although these methods offer numerous benefits, the use may require sophisticated equipment and process control to enable uniform performance, and consequently, may be more applicable to high-tech production plants.



**Figure 1:** Heat Treatment Strategies: (a) Hot air heating (Mosecker *et al.*, 2013), (b) Electric heating (Gilman, 2000), (c) Friction stir heating (Jiang *et al.*, 2012), (d) laser heating (Heigel *et al.*, 2000; Zhao *et al.*, 2013)

### Tool and Process Modifications

#### Tool Geometry and Surface Modifications

Tool geometry is equally crucial in determining the performance and quality of the ISF process. Hemispherical and ball-end roller tools have been shown to reduce friction and enhance material flow compared to flat-end tools, resulting in smaller forming forces and better surface quality (Yan *et al.*, 2021; Zhao *et al.*, 2021). The tool dimensions and shape also determine the pattern of localized strain, influencing the final shape and

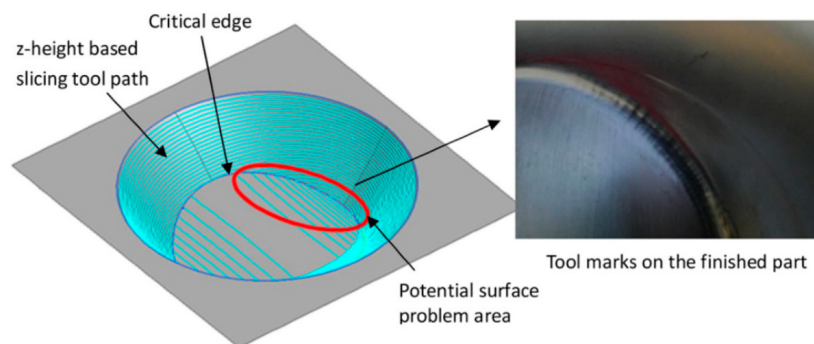
thickness distribution of the formed part. In addition, tool surface coatings such as TiN or DLC are employed for wear reduction and reduction of material adhesion, increasing tool life, and maintaining surface integrity (Afonso *et al.*, 2019; Rinschede *et al.*, 2021). Unique tool designs incorporate internal cooling channels or cryogenic cooling to eliminate heat, preventing thermal damage to the tool and material. Proper selection of tool material, based on hardness and thermal conductivity, also enhances process stability and efficiency. By reducing

tool design, manufacturers achieve greater formability, better dimension accuracy, and a better surface finish in ISF processes.

### Tool Path Optimization

The trajectory of the forming tool is important to ensure uniform thickness distribution, minimize surface defects, and reduce spring back in ISF. New tool trajectories such as helical, Z-level, and parallel line motions have been developed to maximize material flow, improve deformation homogeneity, and minimize residual stresses (Hoang & Nguyen, 2021; Torres *et al.*, 2022). Helical motions ensure smooth transition, avoiding abrupt variations in strain, while Z-level motions provide better control in multi-pass operation. Parallel line tool paths are best to utilize for achieving precise geometric and

form accuracy on complex contours. However, improper use of tool paths can lead to surface defects in sample, particularly in non-symmetrical parts. Figure 2 shows a problem of potential surface defect on non-symmetrical components where tool marks on the resulting surface are observed due to accumulated strain and uneven slicing paths. It normally happens whenever the tool path is unable to create equal deformation so that localized stresses form and result in surface irregularities. Finite element analysis (FEA) is also frequently utilized to optimize and examine such trajectories, achieve equal material deformation, and reduce the risk of tool failure. Optimal choice and optimization of tool path enable manufacturers to achieve improved part quality, and dimension accuracy, as well as improved tool life in ISF processes.



**Figure 2:** Potential surface problem in non-symmetrical part (reprinted with permission from (Lu *et al.*, 2013).

### Process Parameter Optimization

Critical process parameters such as step size, feed rate, and spindle rotation speed play a significant role in determining the quality of the part and the overall process efficiency in ISF. Higher step sizes can minimize cycle times but can increase the forming forces, cause surface roughness, and result in non-homogeneous thickness distribution (Afzal & Buhl, 2022; Patel & Gandhi, 2022). Similarly, higher feed rates can enhance productivity but can compromise the surface finish and lead to tearing. Rotational speed of tools influences frictional heating, and this affects surface finish and material flow. Balanced optimization of the parameters is thus required to achieve a compromise between part quality and efficiency (Riofrio Sabando, 2024; Samoy-Alvarado, 2022). In practice, process optimization will entail numerical simulations or experimental tests to establish the best combination of these parameters for specific part geometries and material types.

### Impact of Process Parameters on Sheet Forming

The sheet material forming behavior in ISF is greatly affected by process conditions. This chapter summarizes the effect of temperature, tool geometry, tool rotation, feed rate, step-over distance, and tool path.

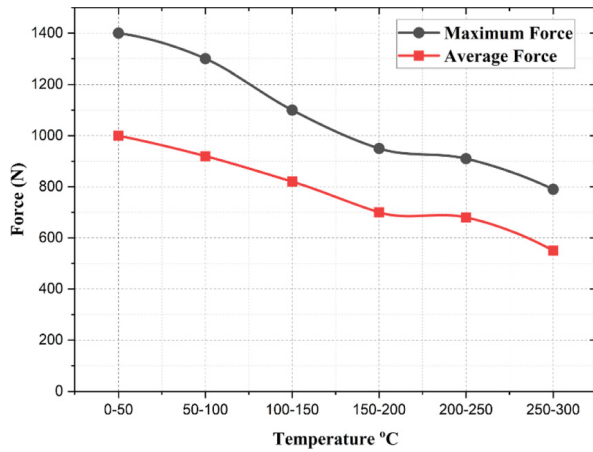
### Temperature Effects

Increased forming temperatures reduce the yield

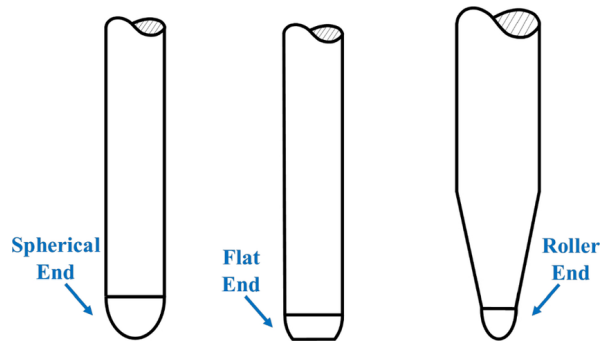
strength of the sheet material and activate other slip systems, thereby lowering the required forming force and improving formability (Y. Li *et al.*, 2023; Qin *et al.*). Localized heating techniques, such as laser-assisted and electrical-assisted ISF, allow local temperature control and localized material softening with reduced thermal distortion. Global heating methods, including hot oil or air heating, are useful for isotropic improvement of ductility but could lead to complications such as oxidation, temperature gradient, or inhomogeneous distribution of temperature (Jiang *et al.*, 2022; Yang *et al.*, 2023). Although flow of the material is increased with rising temperatures, spring back is reduced. Care should be exercised to avoid excess heating to reduce grain growth, surface degradation, or compromised mechanical properties. The selection of the correct heating method and regulation of optimum temperature levels are crucial for establishing the desired equilibrium between formability and part quality in ISF processes. This idea is further supported by the graph Figure 3, which shows that forming resistance can be successfully decreased by maintaining regulated temperatures, resulting in more accurate and efficient material shaping.

### Tool Geometry and Size Effects

Tool geometry plays a crucial role in material deformation, surface finish, and stress distribution in ISF. Reducing tool diameter concentrates frictional heat on the tool-



**Figure 3:** Temperature effect on forming force (Leonhardt *et al.*, 2018)



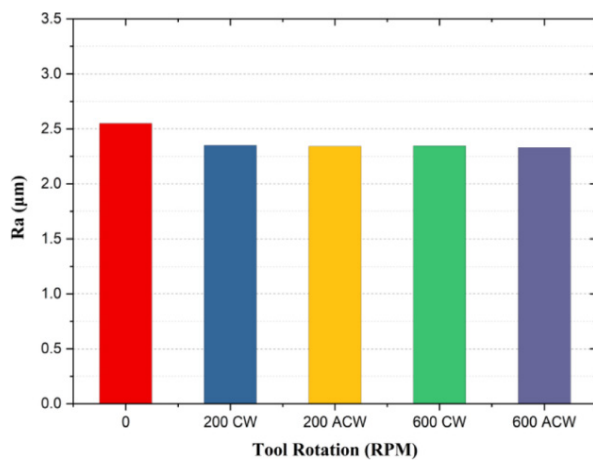
**Figure 4:** Different tool shape for the deformation process

sheet interface, reducing forming force and enhancing material flow but raises more uniform deformation (Kajal *et al.*, 2023; Singh *et al.*, 2023). Tool shape and profile can affect thickness variation and localized strain distribution. Additionally, specialized surface finishes can minimize wear, friction, and total surface finish. Built-in internal cooling systems ensure a stable temperature, extend tool life, and keep dimensional tolerance (Benmessaoud, 2024; Felinks *et al.*, 2023). Proper tool selection relative to material properties and part complexity is crucial to maximize the process. Different tool shapes for the deformation process as shown in Figure 4.

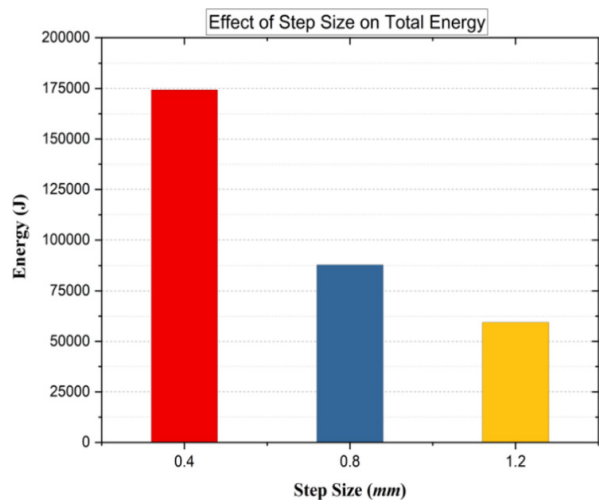
tool wear (Jayathunga & Chandana, 2023; Kumar, 2024; Zhang, 2023). Moreover, Figure 6, illustrates the effect of step size on the energy consumption, where a smaller step size contributes to a sudden rise in total energy requirements. This implies that while smaller step size improves surface quality and precision, it comes with the cost of higher energy consumption. Similarly, feed rate and step size are also important parameters in forming quality. As evident from Figure 7, higher feed rates have the tendency to increase residual stresses, particularly with spherical-end tools. In the same way, Figure 8, indicates that higher step sizes lead to elevated residual stresses, potentially jeopardizing part integrity (Mandaloi *et al.*, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2020). A trade-off between these parameters is essential to maximize material deformation, minimize defects, and maintain part quality. Therefore, careful selection of parameter settings based on material properties and desired outcomes is necessary to realize optimum efficiency and effectiveness (Eyers *et al.*, 2022).

**Tool Rotation, Feed Rate, and Step Size**

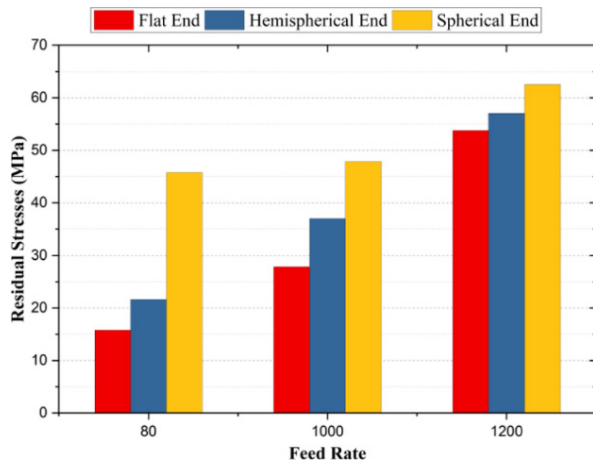
Tool rotation influences heat generation and friction. As shown by Figure 5, increased rotational speeds can enhance material flow by generating additional frictional heat, which can reduce forming forces and enhance ductility (Jayathunga & Chandana, 2023). However, excessively high speeds can cause surface defects or



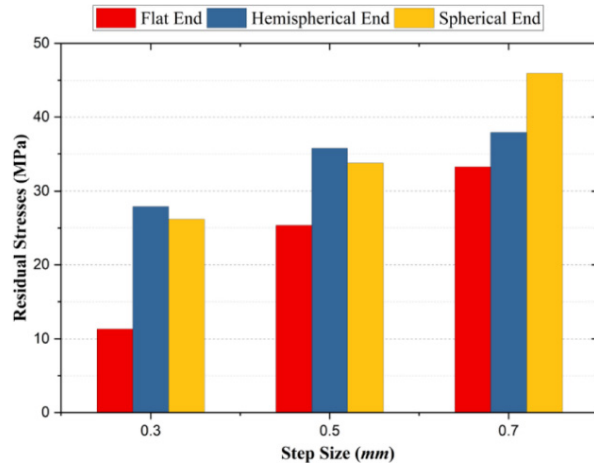
**Figure 5:** Rotation's effect on surface roughness (Durante *et al.*, 2009).



**Figure 6:** Effect of Step Size on total Energy (Li *et al.*, 2019).



**Figure 7:** Effect of tool geometry & feed rate on residual stress 550° FA (Conte *et al.*, 2017).



**Figure 8:** Effect of step size under different tool shape 45° FA (Abdulrazaq *et al.*, 2019).

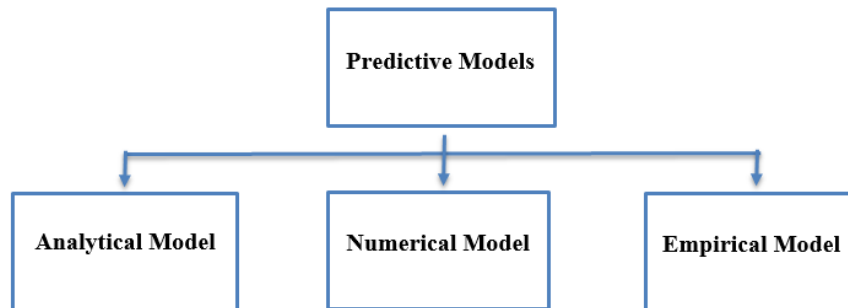
**Tool Path Considerations**

Tool path designing is necessary to attain uniform thickness distribution, decrease spring back, and lower residual stresses. Complicated trajectories such as helical, Z-level, and parallel line paths have been determined to reduce localized thinning, improve dimensional stability, and enhance surface quality. These paths allow for efficient control of material flow, enabling more predictable deformation as well as better geometric accuracy. Finite element analysis is a significant component in the calculation of optimal tool

paths, optimization of process parameters, and analysis of material behavior of various sheet materials and geometries (Dixit *et al.*, 2011). Tool path choice affects not only part quality but also the overall cycle time and process effectiveness.

**Modeling Approaches For Predicting Forming Performance**

For ISF process optimization, robust predictive modelling is crucial. This section describes the main modelling techniques.



**Figure 9:** The main modelling techniques

**Analytical Models**

Analytical models use fundamental concepts of heat transfer, friction, and material mechanics to predict temperature distributions, stress-strain behavior, and forming forces in ISF. Joule heating, frictional energy conversion, and slip line field theory-based models provide initial estimates of thermal and mechanical response of the forming zone (Ramzan *et al.*, 2021). These models help in predicting the influence of process parameters, material properties, and tool geometry on deformation behavior. Despite due to the inherent material behavior under high-temperature conditions, dynamic strain aging, and localized plastic deformation, most of the models are incomplete in capturing the complete behavior of real forming operations (Thornton

*et al.*, 2023). Therefore, they are traditionally employed together with experimental facts or numerical modelling to verify and refine them.

**Numerical Modeling**

Numerical simulation, particularly using finite element analysis (FEA), is used extensively to simulate the ISF process. FEA allows for accurate prediction of stress, strain, temperature profile, and material flow, and thus optimization of tool paths, process parameters, and material selection with fewer trial-and-error experiments (Kyratsis *et al.*, 2023; Sharma *et al.*, 2024). Validation of experimental data enhances the precision of FEA predictions, and therefore it serves as a useful tool for process planning and optimization. However, numerical

modelling is time-consuming computationally, requiring huge processing power and time, and highly sensitive to several parameters such as meshing, boundary conditions, and assumptions in material modelling (Panchal *et al.*, 2013; Pietrzyk *et al.*, 2015). Despite this, FEA remains an essential methodology for ISF process understanding and optimization.

### Empirical Modeling

Empirical models, derived from regression analysis and statistical analysis of experimental results, provide useful tools for predicting performance like surface quality, thickness distribution, and residual stress (Peng *et al.*, 2020). Empirical models tend to be faster and easier to apply compared to advanced numerical simulations and are well-suited for industrial applications where rapid decision-making is required. However, their reliability is heavily dependent on the consistency and availability of experimental data on which they are calibrated. While they might not have the theoretical depth of physics-based models, empirical models can be optimized and calibrated with growing datasets so that they can be progressively better predictors of behavior and more sensitive to the specific material and process conditions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This review systematically collected and reviewed research articles, conference articles, and technical reports on incremental sheet forming (ISF) from 2000 to 2025. Systematic searching of scholarly databases was conducted. The keywords and keyword phrases for the given search strategy were “incremental sheet forming,” “heat-assisted ISF,” “hybrid incremental forming,” “predictive modelling in metal forming,” and “tool path optimization.” These yielded 70 original research papers of high relevance to developments in the ISF process, and innovations in heating concepts, process parameter optimization, and modelling strategies from an initial yield of over 120 papers. The criteria for selecting privileged studies involving experimental data, numerical modeling, or industrial experience that addressed formability problems, enhanced surface quality, or improved process efficiency in ISF.

These selected studies were then categorized systematically to corresponding groups to analyze and compare. The categories included localized and global heating practices, alteration of tool geometry, process parameter adjustment, hybrid sheet forming methods, and predictive software tools like finite element analysis (FEA), empirical models, and artificial intelligence (AI) systems. All the papers were closely reviewed to ascertain the extent to which each has helped in minimizing forming forces, maximizing thickness distribution, improving surface finish, and optimizing tool life. Comparative research in these areas facilitated the establishment of prevailing trends, technical bottlenecks, and deficiencies in existing literature. Specific emphasis was placed on the incorporation of hybrid processes and real-time control

systems because the disciplines showed tremendous potential to take ISF technology to industrial scale and application in demanding areas such as aerospace, automotive, and biomedical manufacturing.

### Applications and Case Studies

The enhanced ISF techniques highlighted here have been utilized successfully in various industries, to demonstrate their industrial capabilities.

#### Biomedical Applications

Customized biomedical implants require accuracy and complex geometry to meet patient-specific demands. High-end ISF processes have been employed to create cranial plates, facial prostheses, and orthopaedic braces from biocompatible sheet materials like titanium, magnesium alloys, and stainless steel (Salmi *et al.*, 2015). These types of materials are chosen for their compatibility with human tissue, corrosion resistance, and mechanical strength. ISF applications within the biomedical field demonstrate significant advantages including less wastage of materials, decreased lead times, and the ability to produce customized geometries appropriate for unique anatomical structures. In addition, surface treatments in ISF are better, allowing the achievement of smooth finishes that completely remove the chance of infection and increase patient comfort.

#### Automotive and Aerospace Industries

In automotive and aerospace applications, ISF enables fast prototyping and low-volume manufacturing of complex components like body panels, engine covers, and structural reinforcements. ISF's flexibility allows design changes to be incorporated without large-scale retooling, an aspect that is highly desirable in custom or niche applications. The integration of novel heat-assisted techniques and optimization of process parameters has led to improved strength-to-weight ratio and surface finish, and reduced lead times and tooling costs. ISF also enables the incorporation of lightweight materials like aluminium and titanium alloys and is therefore highly suitable for material efficiency- and performance-driven industries (Williams & Starke Jr, 2003).

### Discussions and Future Directions

Despite significant advancements, there are still several challenges in the application of ISF on sheet materials. Overcoming these challenges can lead to broader material applicability and industrial scalability:

#### Uniform Heating and Temperature Control

Uniform temperature distribution throughout the sheet is challenging to achieve, especially through localized heating sources. Temperature gradients result in inhomogeneous material flow, decreased ductility, and inconsistent part quality. For future research, high-end thermal sensing, adaptive control, and hybrid heating processes can be examined to minimize thermal gradients and increase

material properties (van Blitterswijk, 2024).

### Tool Wear and Surface Quality

Reducing tool wear while maintaining high surface finish is a complex challenge, particularly in long production runs. Severe wear can lead to dimensional error, attachment of material, and manufacturing cost. Investigating new tool coatings, surface finishing, and internal cooling can extend the tool life as well as minimize material attachment while enabling higher dimensional accuracy (Bin Che Ghani, 2013).

### Predictive Modelling

Existing models are likely to have problems predicting forming forces, surface finish, and size accuracy under variable conditions due to ISF being dynamic and complex in nature. It becomes impossible to make precise predictions that limit the process as well as control optimization. The development of more comprehensive modelling approaches that involve analytical, numerical, and empirical approaches could lead to more understanding and predictability, hence optimizing the process as well as control (Bikas *et al.*, 2016; Nguyen *et al.*, 2014).

### Hybrid Process Integration

Coupling different enhancement methods like induction heating, ultrasonic vibrations, and electrical-assisted techniques holds a promising way to higher efficiency and product quality. These hybrid methods can lower forming forces, enhance material flow, and minimize spring back at the same time, enhancing the versatility of ISF for intricate and hard-to-deform materials. They also lower variability and enhance the versatility of ISF in complex applications (Ben Said, 2022).

### Industrial Scalability

Scalability of ISF from pilot-scale laboratory facilities to large industrial production is difficult due to challenges such as increased cycle times, energy requirements, and process stability. Large-scale production requires the development of cost-effective, efficient, and stable systems from small-scale experimentations. Cycle times, energy, and process stability need to be optimized in the future research for higher industrial utilization and economy (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024; Shokrani *et al.*, 2024). Overcoming these challenges is essential to realizing the complete potential of ISF across all industries, innovations, and further applications development of new material forming technologies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent studies have proved that through the application of heat treatment techniques the formability of high-strength sheet metals is significantly enhanced. These treatments decrease the yield strength and enhance ductility, making it possible for materials like stainless steel and titanium alloys to be formed more deeply without fracture. The

improved results include increased achievable wall angles and improved thickness distribution. In addition to these thermal processes, hybrid ISF processes with localized electric heating, laser assistance, and ultrasonic vibration have been effective in reducing forming forces by up to 30% and improving surface quality. These benefits, however, depend on precise thermal control to prevent overheating and material degradation (Wang *et al.*, 2005; Zhu & Zeng, 2008). Hybrid methods also reduce springback and enhance geometric fidelity, particularly in low-ductility, high-strength alloys. Such techniques are of utmost significance in aerospace and biomedical applications, where customized properties and accuracy are crucial. Emerging advances, such as temperature-controlled tool heads and feedback-based thermal control, have improved process repeatability. However, broader industrial adoption is discouraged by greater equipment cost and complexity (Shao *et al.*, 2022).

Tool path and tool design techniques are also significant in achieving high-quality and precise ISF components. Literature recognizes the benefits of hemispherical tool shapes, adaptive vertical step sizes, and multi-pass or bidirectional tool paths in minimizing strain localization and improving geometric accuracy. Smoother tool paths also account for reduced thinning and improved surface finish. Moreover, the formability of ISF with a range of materials such as aluminium, stainless steel, titanium alloys, and polymers proves its versatility. However, forming high-strength aluminium and titanium remains problematic due to poor ductility and high forming forces, generally requiring specially adapted process parameters and hybrid enhancements to improve results (Duflou *et al.*, 2005).

Computational modelling with finite element analysis (FEA) is now essential in simulating part geometry, strain behavior, and tool forces in ISF. Optimizing tool paths is enabled through these models while reducing dependence on costly trial-and-error processes. However, limitations in modelling are present, and mainly of getting proper material behavior in hybrid or thermal assisted forming processes. Despite these advances, major research gaps persist in challenges such as real-time monitoring, intelligent process control, and green production. Future research must aim to address industrial scale-up, material-property-based optimization, and experimental protocol standardization for meaningful comparison across studies (Emmens *et al.*, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

This review has comprehensively discussed the advancements in enhancing the forming performance of incrementally formed sheet materials. With the addition of specially designed heat treatment strategies—both local and global—and innovative tool design, optimized tool paths, and precisely controlled process parameters, significant gains have been achieved. These advancements have led to the reduction in forming forces, surface defects, enhanced material flow, and better dimensional

accuracy. Use of predictive modelling methodologies, including analytical, numerical, and empirical methods, has also enabled further comprehension of the forming process and to provide efficient models for optimization of process parameters.

There are still many obstacles to overcome despite these advancements. The challenges of maintaining consistent temperature control, reducing tool wear, and creating predictive models that can accurately represent the intricate interconnections in the forming process are never-ending. These issues can be effectively addressed by hybrid approaches that combine thermal, mechanical, and vibrational energy inputs to maximize material formability while reducing harmful consequences like excessive thinning or surface flaws. For wider use, novel solutions are needed to reduce cycle times, energy usage, and production costs as controlled laboratory settings give way to full-scale industrial operations.

Future research must prioritize the development of holistic, cross-disciplinary strategies for addressing these challenges. Collaboration among material scientists, engineers, and industrialists can facilitate the development of more efficient, reliable, and scalable ISF processes. Ultimately, resolving these challenges will expand the application of ISF in critical industries like aerospace, automotive, and biomedical manufacturing, opening doors to new possibilities in the production of complex, customized parts with precision and affordability.

### Contribution to Knowledge

This review is a valuable contribution by consolidating scattered research on Incremental Sheet Forming (ISF) and streamlining it in a cohesive, structured format. By dividing developments into focused areas, addressing heating strategies, developments in tooling design, process parameter optimization, and predictive modeling techniques, the paper presents a unified knowledge of how these strategies individually and in conjunction influence ISF performance. It is particularly distinguished by its focus on the increased success of hybrid processes, like the coupling of localized heating and ultrasonic vibrations, which have consistently enhanced formability, dimensional accuracy, and reduction of defects. The review further draws attention to the increased application of artificial intelligence (AI) and data-driven predictive models for the optimization of process control and efficiency in real-time processes. Along with summarizing existing knowledge, the paper identifies key gaps in the areas of large-scale process scalability, real-time monitoring integration, and standardized performance testing of ISF components. By recognizing these difficulties and proposing pragmatic, research-based solutions, the paper offers tangible guidance for future research, helping to aid both academic researchers and industrial practitioners in advancing ISF from experimental setups to stable, high-performance production systems.

### Fulfilment of Research Gap

While previous reviews of ISF have tended to cover

individual topics such as heating methods, die designs, or specific modeling techniques, the literature has been absent a cohesive viewpoint that covers several approaches simultaneously. This review remedies this oversight by taking an overarching view of numerous techniques for enhancing performance, covering how they can be used in concert to achieve optimal outcomes for ISF. In particular, the review demands detailed research that considers the interplay of heating, tooling adaptations, parameter control, and modeling, with a more complete understanding of how these techniques can be integrated to achieve improved results. This integrated approach has been absent in the work done so far, and its consideration is a significant step in advancing ISF technology.

Furthermore, the review identifies primary outstanding areas requiring research, such as the scalability of ISF processes, in-process monitoring in real time, and potential for hybrid heating-vibration integration. These are pressing questions for ISF industrialization, where current knowledge has proved insufficient to surmount the difficulty of translating laboratory findings to full-scale production. The article also underlines the necessity of the integration of sophisticated modeling tools and AI-based control systems that would have the capability to dynamically adjust ISF parameters during the forming process. This integration of tools and technologies is an excellent opportunity for the implementation of ISF process optimization in real-time, which is one of the largest gaps in current research and would allow broader industrial application of ISF. By highlighting these gaps, this review provides a roadmap for future research that will be essential to allowing ISF to evolve as a more practical and efficient large-scale manufacturing technique.

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