Development of a graphical user interface for determining the optimal mixture parameters of normal weight concretes: A response surface methodology based quadratic programming approach

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A B S T R A C T
The optimization of a normal weight concrete mixture proportions for determination of the desired concrete quality is an important issue for concrete manufacturers and users. In this study, the constrained quadratic programming methodology is based on meta-models developed by using response surface methodology for determining optimal normal weight concrete mixture proportions. We developed a graphical user interface to take the burden of numerous experiments and complex mathematical calculations away from laboratory experts and manufacturers. However, we developed a graphical user interface based on MATLAB® toolbox which allows performing optimization of normal weight concrete mixture proportions interactively. The GUI was tested through real case studies and satisfactorily results were obtained. The results showed that developed graphical user interface was functional, effective and flexible in solving the optimization problems of normal weight concrete mixture proportions.

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1. Introduction


The RMC’s (Ready Mixed Concrete Plant) mixture proportion optimization process is time consuming and difficult task for the decision makers. In Turkey, during the last six years, C30/37 concrete class or higher durability concrete production rate (see Tables A1–A2) increased from 17.77% to 38.40% [29],[33]. In the ready mixed concrete mixture optimization process, decision makers or laboratory technicians need expert systems which accelerate the concrete production process and make laboratory technicians’ work easier due to increase in concrete production. Although there are a vast amount of studies to predict optimal mixture parameters of concrete using expert systems such as fuzzy logic, neural network, genetic algorithm and genetic programming, there is still a need for an easy-to-use, flexible, modifiable and user-friendly tools such as graphical user interface (GUI) that help the decision makers to identify optimal mixture proportions of RMCs.

The proposed methodology in this paper aims to fill this gap in RMC mixture optimization process. This paper proposes such an experimental
design based graphical user interface for determining optimal mixture proportions of normal weight concrete (NWC). The main contribution of this study demonstrates the development of easy to use GUI in order to determine optimal mixture proportion of NWCs. The developed GUI allows laboratory technicians to analyze relationship between the required responses and required factors by three-dimensional plots. Other contribution of this article shows the application of RSM based quadratic programming (QP) in order to optimize NWCs’ properties. The developed GUI is quite flexible in terms of assigning different weights to quality criteria and selecting properties of concrete type. The developed methodology not only relieves the user from numerous calculations but also provides excellent graphical user interfaces (GUIs) through which the user can enter various input combinations and have the results calculated.

2. Materials and methodologies

2.1. Materials

The cement used in this research is a “CEM I 42.5 R” and weighs 350 kg. It has a specific gravity of 3.08 and Blaine fineness of 3540 cm²/g. Fly ash was used with a specific gravity of 2.46 and weighs 80 kg [23]. Chemical composition of the binder materials is given in Table 1 [24].

A novel polycarboxylate ether type superplasticizer (PCE) was used in concrete mixtures. The physical and chemical properties of PCE are shown in Table 2. Crushed sand, which has particle size smaller than 4 mm (I), was used as the fine aggregate. Aggregate number (II) with a size between 4 mm and 11.2 mm and aggregate number (III) with a size between 11.2 mm and 22.4 mm were used as coarse aggregate in the concrete mixtures [24]. Table 3 presents the aggregate sieve analysis. The fine and coarse aggregates have specific gravities of 2.65 g/cm³ and 2.70 g/cm³ and mean water absorptions of 1.5% and 0.9%, respectively. Well water was used for the test [23]. The fine aggregate ratio was fixed at 50% in all experiments. Also, mixture time of fresh concrete was fixed at 120 s.

2.2. Response surface methodology

RSM is an experimental design methodology for determining the optimum factor levels for a multi-level system [7,10]. Although it is possible to use either a first-order model or a second-order model, in RSM the second-order model is more common due to its flexibility and ease of estimation of the optimal factor levels in that model [34]. There are practical experimentations indicating that second-order models are sufficient in solving real word multi-response problems [6]. First-order models are inadequate modeling the complex systems. Therefore, optimization with the first-order models is not very successful. However, second-order models such as quadratic models are successful modeling the complex systems including various material interactions. One of the most useful second-order designs in RSM is Central Composite Design (CCD) ([6]; Myers, and Montgomery, [36]).

In our study, rotatable experimental design is carried out as CCD which consists of 20 experiments [2n (23 = 8: factor points) + 2n (2x3 = 6: axial points) + 6 (center points: six replications)] [7].

In this study a second-order RSM was obtained by regression analysis for three factors by using MINITAB®. In the regression equation developed by Box-Hunter, the test factors are coded according to the following equations (Eq. (1)) [7]:

\[ x_i = \frac{X_i - X_0}{\Delta X_i} \]

where in Eq. (1) \( x_i \) is the coded value of the ith independent variable, \( X_i \) is the natural value of the ith independent variable, \( X_0 \) is the natural value of the ith independent variable at the center point, and \( \Delta X_i \) is the step change value [7].

The three significant independent variables A, B, and C and the mathematical dependency of the response Y to these variables can be approximated by second-order polynomial equation as given below [7]:

\[ Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 A + \beta_2 B + \beta_3 C + \beta_{11} A^2 + \beta_{22} B^2 + \beta_{33} C^2 + \beta_{12} AB + \beta_{13} AC + \beta_{23} BC \]

where \( Y \) is the predicted response, \( \beta_0 \) is the constant, \( \beta_1, \beta_2, \) and \( \beta_3 \) are the linear coefficients, \( \beta_{11}, \beta_{12}, \beta_{13}, \) and \( \beta_{23} \) are the cross–product coefficients, and \( \beta_{12}, \beta_{21}, \) and \( \beta_{31} \) are the quadratic coefficients [7].

2.3. Quadratic programming

Quadratic programming is one of the most important optimization techniques in operations research. It has led to a number of interesting applications and the development of numerous useful results. The inventory management, engineering design, molecular study, economics, and portfolio selection are some examples [15]. Quadratic programming is a mathematical modeling technique designed to optimize the use of limited resources. In vector–matrix notation, it may be written as [15]:

\[ \min Z = cx + x'Qx \]

s.t. \[ Ax \leq b, \]
\[ x \geq 0, \]

where \( x = (x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n) \) is the vector of decision variables to be determined. The other parameters given by the problem \( c = (c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_n) \) is vector of cost coefficients, \( Q = [q_{ij}] \) is the matrix of the quadratic form \( b = (b_1, b_2, \ldots, b_m) \) is vector of right-hand sides, and \( A = [a_{ij}] \) is the matrix of constraint coefficients [15]. In our study, \( Q \) is symmetric and semi-definite. The optimal values of the decision variables \( x_j, j = 1, \ldots, n \) are functions of the parameters \( a_{ij}, b_i, \) and \( c_j, i = 1, \ldots, m, j = 1, \ldots, n. \)

Table 1
Chemical composition of binders [23,24].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemicals</th>
<th>CEM I 42.5 R (%)</th>
<th>Fly ash (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CaO</td>
<td>66.25</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SiO₂</td>
<td>21.79</td>
<td>56.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al₂O₃</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe₂O₃</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO₃</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MgO</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K₂O</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na₂O</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cl</td>
<td>0.0071</td>
<td>0.0018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of ignition</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Properties of the PCE at 20 °C [23].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Superplasticizers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chemical description</td>
<td>Polycarboxylic type polymer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific gravity (kg/L)</td>
<td>1.059–1.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlorin content (%)</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkaline content (%)</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase</td>
<td>Liquid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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