INFLUENCE OF PROCESSING PARAMETERS FOR GLOBULAR MICROSTRUCTURE FORMATION OF ALUMINIUM 7075 FEEDSTOCK BILLET PRODUCED BY DIRECT THERMAL METHOD

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ABSTRACT: Limited information on aluminium 7075 alloy behaviour, and lack of proper understanding of globular microstructure formation are among the problems that arise in this research field. The influence of parameters on DTM processing should be investigated in depth. In particular, there is a lack of information about the aluminium 7075 effects near the liquidus temperature. Therefore, this study investigated the effects of globular microstructure formation and parameters in aluminium 7075 alloys in depth. The processing parameters for forming globular microstructures on billets of aluminium 7075 alloys was evaluated by using a direct thermal method (DTM). Semi-solid metal (SSM) processing is preferred to produce a high-quality product, which reduces casting flaws such as macroscopy, shrinkage, and porosity. It requires a solid globular microstructure in the semisolid aluminium liquid matrix. DTM is a simple SSM technique for creating a globular microstructure in a temperature environment that is typical of nature. In this experiment, molten aluminium 7075 alloys were poured into a cylindrical copper mould at pouring temperatures of 645 °C and 665 °C, then quenched into the water after holding times of 20, 40, and 60 s. Following that, the microstructure of feedstock billets prepared at a range of pouring temperatures and holding times was investigated. The results of this

experiment indicated that a pouring temperature of 665 °C combined with a holding time of 60 s produced a finer and globular microstructure.

KEYWORDS: *Aluminium 7075 alloy, Direct thermal method, Feedstock billets, Pouring temperature, Holding time, Semisolid metal processing.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As an alternative to the traditional metal-forming process, David Spencer introduced a new forming metal technology between solid and liquid states in 1971 [1–3]. Ranjan found that semisolid metal (SSM) processing offers the best results for all ferrous and non-ferrous metals and metal matrix alloys [4]. According to Nafisi , SSM processing has been reported to provide several advantages including lower processing temperature, shorter solidification time, and lower energy consumption, thus, stimulating interest in SSM processing [5]. Its short solidification time, minimal shrinkage, capacity to fill intricate geometries rapidly, flow control capabilities, and ability to build a suitable microstructure have all demonstrated its good performance.
Therefore, SSM processing has been recognized as a valuable method for low-temperature casting, improving die life, and accelerating production [6]. There are several suggestions that highlight microstructure formation importance in the rheological behaviour of SSM feedstocks used in the foundry industry to produce high-quality products [7], [8]. A study on the rheological behaviour of semisolid SEED-processed 7075 aluminium alloys revealed that globular structured samples exhibit better deformation behaviour at higher solid content (from 0.42 to 0.53 Fs) [9]. Rogal, and K.P. Sołek, both, suggested that rheological properties can be improved by changing the dendrite of SSM into a globular microstructure [10],[11]. Various methods have been practised to create a globular microstructure [12–14].

DTM is one of the best methods for producing globular microstructure feedstock billets for the thixoforming process [12]. It is gaining attention due to its unique ability to induce controlled thermal changes in materials. B. Benjunior investigated the feasibility of producing aluminium alloy 6061 feedstock billet by the DTM method. A low superheated molten metal was poured into a high conductive copper mould and then quenched in cold water after a certain holding time to easily form the desired microstructures. Temperature and holding time, cooling rate, and metallic properties have been reported to play a significant role in the formation of globular microstructures. The results showed that the lowest pouring temperature of 660 °C and the shortest holding time of 20s produced small and globular grains [15]. In contrast, N.A. Razak found that a lower pouring temperature of 660 °C and a longer holding time of 60s produce globular grains, thus, showing a discrepancy with the previous study. Additional information can be obtained when changing metals, and processing parameters. Aluminium 7075 alloy is one of the strongest and lightweight metals compared to some steel grades [16]. It has several advantages, such as a high strength-to-weight ratio, excellent mechanical properties, resistance to fatigue, high corrosion resistance, toughness and durability, machinability, heat Treatability, high-stress applications, versatility, and recyclability. However, due to their low fluid flow, solidus cracking, hot shortness, and shrinkage flaws, aluminium 7075 alloys are challenging to cast [17].

The SSM process is called thixoforming. It offers excellent opportunities for casting aluminium 7075 alloys. The presence of solid globular grains in the liquid matrix is the most crucial need for the thixoforming process [18]. These globular primary phase structures improve flow behaviour during SSM processing to form near-net-shaped components with superior mechanical properties [19]. Although DTM is considered the best method for globular microstructure formulation, several findings have reported that lower pouring temperatures provide higher cooling rates and holding time is crucial to provide a globular microstructure. However, the pouring temperature close to the liquidus temperature is not investigated. There is a gap in the influence of microstructure at pouring temperatures close to the liquidus temperature. Holding time effects should also be examined to eliminate contradiction [15], [20]. The present study was expected to lead to a detailed understanding of globular microstructure and the influence of processing parameters. It investigated the effects of processing parameters on the globular microstructure formation of aluminium 7075 feedstock billet produced by the DTM.

2.0 Experimental procedures

2.1 Material

The chemical composition of the produced metal was analyzed in this study using Optical Emission Spectroscopy (OES) from Foundry Master Oxford Instruments (FMOI). Table 1 displays the results of the chemical composition.

Table 1: Aluminium 7075 alloys chemical composition.

Source	Al	Mg	Cu	Zn	Fe	Cr	Mn	Si	Ti
Wt %	89.7	2.24	1.46	5.8	0.17	0.22	0.04	0.12	0.04

2.2 Feedstock Billet Preparation

A 400 g of aluminium 7075 alloy was placed inside a 30 mm x 80 mm graphite crucible and heated to 800 °C via a 15-kW high-frequency electromagnetic induction heating furnace. The temperature of the melted alloy was measured using a K-type thermocouple connected to a data logger. The melted alloys were poured into a cylindrical copper mould when they attained the required pouring temperature. The copper mould had a diameter of 25 mm, a height of 50 mm, and a thickness of 1 mm. The mould was quenched into normal-temperature water after the required holding period. The billet was removed from the copper mould once it had fully solidified. The liquidus temperature of aluminium 7075 alloy was 640 °C. The cooling rate of this study was 0.7°C/s. Therefore, the temperature range of 645 °C and 665 °C was chosen to be the closest to the liquidus temperature, and the holding time was determined to be between 20 and 60s [20]. Figure 1 displays the DTM's schematic diagram whereas Table 2 shows the processing and billet specimen parameters for DTM.

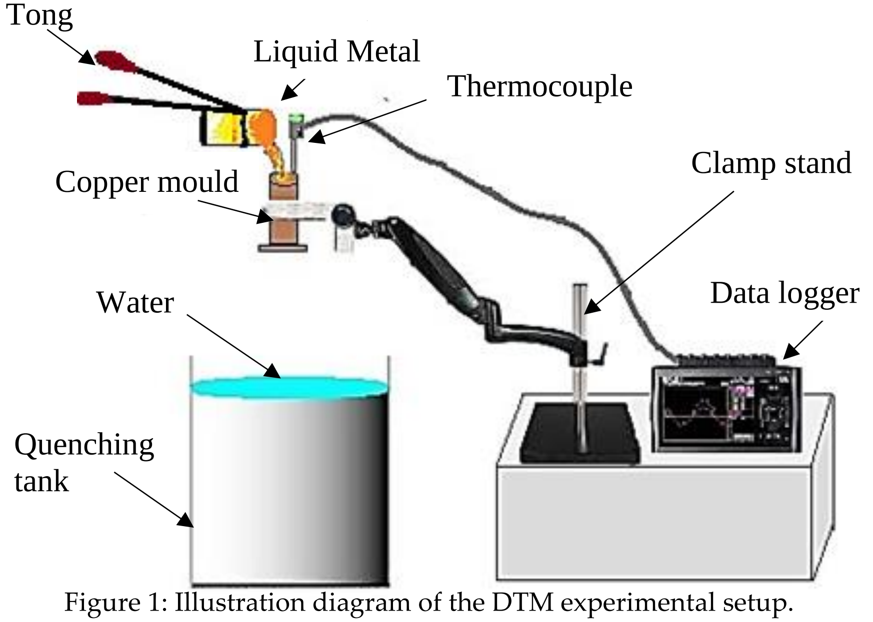


Figure 1: Illustration diagram of the DTM experimental setup.

Table 2: Combination of Processing parameters for DTM.

Sample Number	Pouring Temperature	Holding Time
1	645 °C	20 s
2	645 °C	40 s
3	645 °C	60 s
4	665 °C	20 s
5	665 °C	40 s
6	665 °C	60 s

2.3 Metallography Sample Preparation and Measurements

The prepared feedstock billets were first cut 5 mm to remove impurities with a precision cut-off machine, followed by a 20 mm cut to examine the microstructure. The separated sample was mounted using a 60-bar hot mounting machine. The samples were ground with 240, 320, 400, 600, 800, and 1200-grit paper to obtain a smooth and flat surface. The sample was polished with abrasives of 3 microns and 1 micron, followed by automatic polishing at a speed of 250 rpm by using colloidal silica and imperial moist cloth. The etching process was performed with Keller etchant reagent to improve the microstructural features. An optical microscope and Image J software were used to measure the primary size, sphericity, and aspect ratio of the microstructure. The equations used for the grain diameter, sphericity, and aspect ratio determination are presented in Eq. **Error! Reference source not found.** to **Error! Reference source not found.**).

$$\text{Grain Diameter (GD)}=\sqrt{\frac{4A}{\Pi}} \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Sphericity (S)}=\frac{4\Pi A}{C^2} \tag{2}$$

$$\text{Aspect Ratio (AR)} = \frac{\text{Major length axis}}{\text{Minor length axis}} \tag{3}$$

Where A is the total area of the primary particle, and C is the perimeter of the particle. The grain size of selected primary particles with perfect shape was thoroughly investigated.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The microstructures were successfully evaluated to determine the grain size of the samples. The microstructure of the samples obtained by an optical microscope is presented in Figure 2. It demonstrates that, in contrast to other samples, the primary phases were more homogeneous and smaller at 665 °C pouring temperature and 60s holding period (Sample 6).

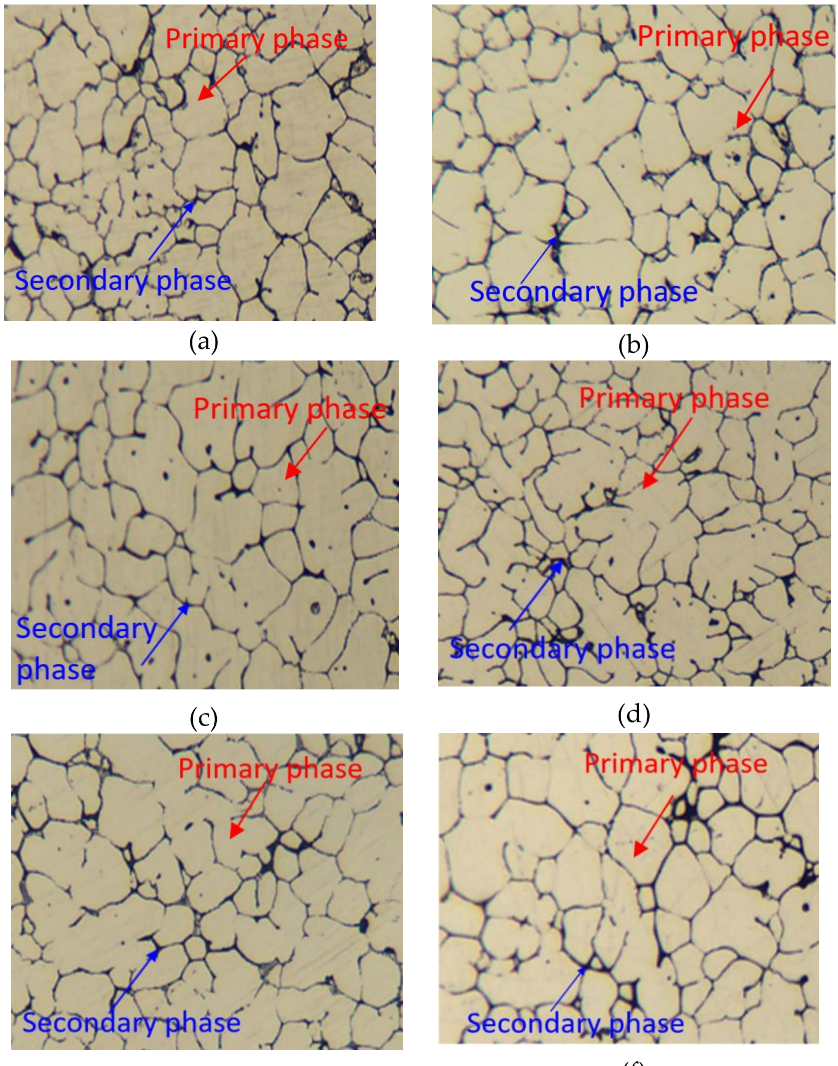


Figure 2: The microstructure of the samples prepared as per Table 2 with (a) 645 °C & 20s; (b) 645 °C & 40s; (c) 645 °C& 60s; (d)665°C& 20s; (e) 665 °C& 20s °C & 40s; and (f) 665°C &60s (scale bar =100μm).

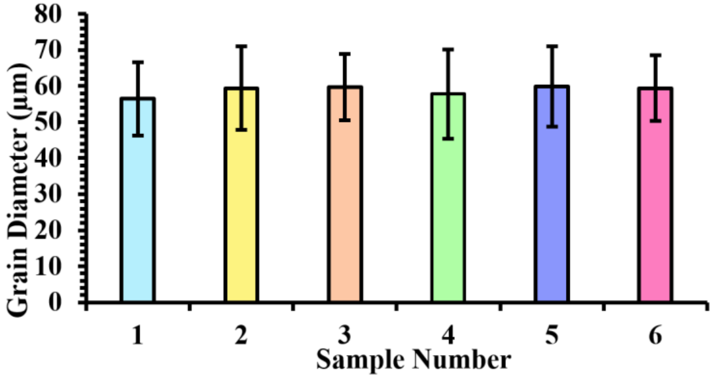


Figure 3 presents the grain diameter of the microstructures obtained at various combinations of holding times (20, 40, and 60 s) and pouring temperatures (645 °C and 665 °C). The microstructure was greatly affected by pouring temperature and holding times as evidenced by varying grain sizes. The pouring temperature, which was closely related to the cooling rate, was the main factor influencing how the microstructure changes. Higher pouring temperatures resulted in less heat dissipation, which accelerated the formation of the primary and secondary phases. The primary phase size increased as holding time increased, the grain size of samples 1 to 3 clearly illustrates the change in primary phase size. The sample's grain size was not uniform and increased with the holding time. A higher pouring temperature led to a slower cooling rate, allowing sufficient time to produce a globular grain (Samples 4 to 6) as adjacent dendritic particles coalesce to form fine spherical grain sizes in larger units per unit volume. Furthermore, higher temperatures created better mobility of the particles within the microstructure. As the holding period increased, the primary phase was constructed in a developed state. This experimental study showed that the microstructure obtained at 665 °C pouring temperature was more spherical than that obtained at 645 °C.

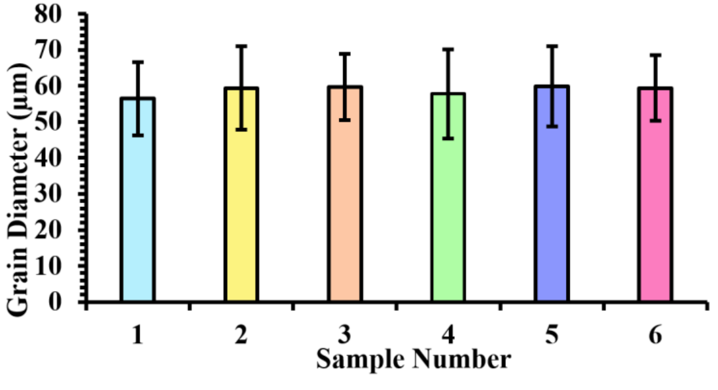


Figure 3: The grain diameter of the samples at different pouring temperatures and holding times.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Sample Number

of

Figure 4 were close to the spherical structure. The longer holding before quenching, the heat released from the molten mixture delay the formation of the dendritic microstructure, preventing it from freezing immediately before reaching a uniform grain size, thus forming a perfect spherical structure, which is deemed consistent with previous research findings [12]. Other samples produced a less spherical morphology when quenched while in the more liquid state.

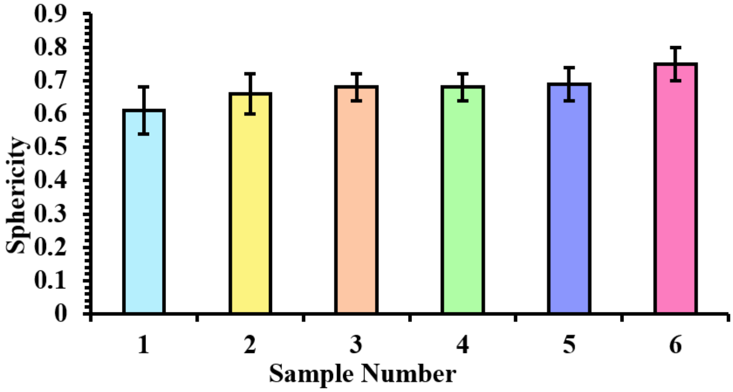
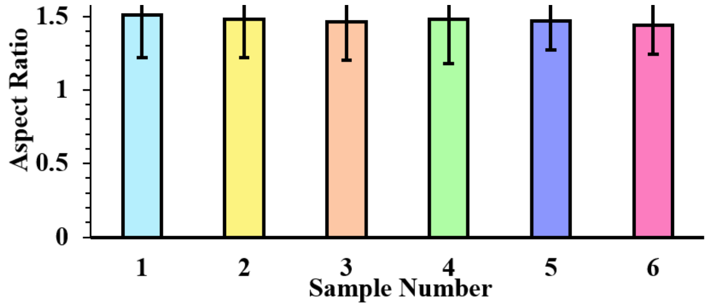


Figure 4: The sphericity of the samples at different pouring temperatures and holding times.

The results of this investigation on the sphericity microstructure showed that sample 6 produced smaller grains than the other samples (grain diameter: 57.28 μm) when it was formed at a pouring temperature of 665 °C and a holding time of 60 s. A longer holding time led to uniform cooling and improved nuclear performance due to the constant cooling of natural air, However, quenching within 60 s is expected to stabilize a homogeneous spherical structure. In the bar chart of this study, the heights of some of the bars in

Figure 3, 4, and 5 are close, suggesting that examining low and high pouring temperature variation may show differences.

The sphericity of the microstructure determined the exact round shape of the primary phase. A sphericity value near 1.0 suggested that the grain had a perfect round, whereas a value near 0 indicated that the grain was elongated. The maximum sphericity of sample 6 with 665 °C



ters was 0.75. between the on, producing l secondary dings [20]. A cooling, so the e. Bar graphs presented in Figure 5. As the aspect ratio value increased, it indicated elongated particles and as it decreased, it indicated a round shape. The aspect ratio for each sample presented in Figure 5 is slightly different from the others. The ratio value of sample 6 decreased due to the slower solidification of the larger primary particle. Sample 6 had an aspect ratio value of 1.41.

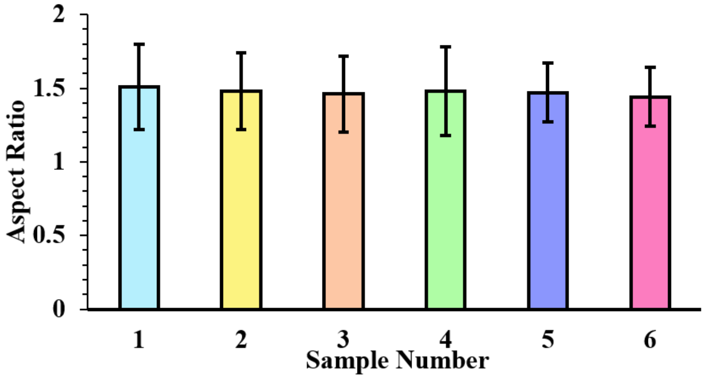


Figure 5: The Aspect ratio of the samples at different pouring temperatures and holding times.

Overall, from the results, a combination of a pouring temperature of 665 °C and a holding time of 60 s resulted in a fine and spherical microstructure. The grain diameter, sphericity, and aspect ratio values were 57.28 µm, 0.75, and 1.41 respectively.

4.0 Conclusion

This experiment successfully examines the impact of short and long holding times at temperatures close to liquidus on the microstructures of aluminium alloy 7075 feedstock billets produced using DTM and yielded acceptable results. At pouring temperatures close to the liquid state, uniform primary particles are not obtained even though the grain size is small. Similarly, a grain size similar to a globular shape is obtained at longer holding times. The results of the investigation show that when the holding time is short and the pouring temperature is extremely close to the liquidus temperature, the globular microstructure cannot form because of the difference between convection and superheat. Based on the experimental results, a combination of 665 °C pouring temperature and 60 s holding time results in fine and globular microstructure in aluminium 7075 alloys. The best grain diameter, sphericity, and aspect ratio are at 57.28 μm, 0.75, and 1.41 respectively. The influences and effects of processing parameters on DTM, provide an understanding of globular microstructure formation in aluminium 7075 feedstock billet.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Experiments were carried out and data was collected by A. Megalingam, A.H. Ahmad, N.A. Alang, M.M. Rashidi S. Naher guided the compilation of this information.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and has not been considered by other journals. All authors have approved the review, and agreed with its submission, and we certify that there are no conflicts of interest in the manuscript.

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