

NEW OPTIMIZATION FEATURE FOR THE DEVELOPED OPEN CNC
CONTROLLER BASED ON ISO 6983 AND ISO 14649

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UNIVERSITI TUN HUSSEIN ONN MALAYSIA

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CONTROLLER BASED ON ISO 6983 AND ISO 14649
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NOOR HATEM OBAYES

A thesis submitted in
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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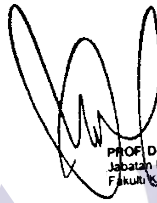


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I would like to dedicate this thesis to

Almighty "Allah"

(Who gave me strength, knowledge, patience and wisdom)

My "Family"

(To my Father, who that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time)



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ABSTRACT

The computer numerical control (CNC) system controls the movement of the machine tool automatically. The development of open CNC systems is one of the most popular topics in the last three decades due to the system remains exclusive all the time. PC-based open architecture controller (OAC) has been constructed to make adding, upgrading, swapping components easy, and broke the specific vendor chain. However, this system has some limitations, such as tool path optimization. This research aims to minimize tool path airtime during machining of input ISO codes via an ant colony optimization algorithm. A new optimized system was developed based on open architecture control (OAC) technology and interpreted STEP-NC (Standard for the Exchange of Product Model Data) programming approaches. The developed system can provide a new feature for both ISO data interface models (ISO 14649 and ISO 6983) interpretation, along with its graphical verification, execution and report generation functionalities into the CNC core. The system is composed of ISO data interface models interpretation, tool path optimization, 3D simulation, and automatic document generation modules. The functionalities of the system were validated through the manufacturing of case study components. Corresponding experimental results verified the proposed technique with satisfactory outcomes. Milling and drilling with G-code and drilling with STEP-NC were evaluated on tool path optimization. The optimization process that produced the shortest tool path was observed at different solved examples. The improvement percent for G-code was 10.41% and 16.58 % for milling and drilling, respectively. While improvement percent for STEP-NC was 16.98% for drilling. The results revealed that the optimization feature has a significant effect on the tool path.

ABSTRAK

Sistem kawalan berangka komputer (CNC) mengawal pergerakan mata alat secara automatik. Pembangunan sistem CNC terbuka adalah satu topik yang paling popular tiga dekad kebelakangan ini kerana sistem ini tetap eksklusif sehingga kini. Pengawal senibina terbuka berasaskan komputer (OAC) dibina bagi membolehkan penambahbaikan, menaik taraf, pertukaran komponen secara mudah, dan memutuskan rantai yang spesifik pembekal. Walau bagaimanapun, sistem ini mempunyai beberapa limitasi, seperti pengoptimuman laluan mata alat. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk meminimumkan laluan mata alat semasa kod input ISO pemesinan melalui algoritma pengoptimuman koloni semut. Sistem pengoptimuman baru dikembangkan berdasarkan teknologi kawalan senibina terbuka (OAC) dan menafsirkan pendekatan pengaturcaraan STEP-NC (Standard bagi Pertukaran Data Model Produk). Sistem yang dibangunkan dapat memberikan ciri baru untuk kedua-dua model antaramuka data ISO (ISO 14649 dan ISO 6983) interpretasi, bersama dengan pengesahan grafik, pelaksanaan dan fungsi pembangunan laporan ke dalam teras CNC. Sistem ini terdiri daripada interpretasi model antaramuka data ISO, pengoptimuman laluan mata alat, simulasi 3D, dan modul pembangunan dokumen secara automatik. Fungsi sistem disahkan melalui pemesinan komponen melalui kajian kes. Hasil eksperimen mengesahkan teknik yang dicadangkan memuaskan berdasarkan keputusan eksperimen yang diperolehi. Pengisaran dan pengerudian dengan kod-G dan pengerudian dengan STEP-NC dinilai pada pengoptimuman laluan mata alat. Proses pengoptimuman yang menghasilkan laluan mata alat terpendek diperhatikan melalui contoh yang berbeza. Peratus peningkatan untuk kod-G masing-masing adalah 10.41% dan 16.58% untuk pengisaran dan pengerudian. Sementara peratus peningkatan untuk STEP-NC adalah 16.98% untuk pengerudian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa ciri pengoptimuman mempunyai pengaruh yang signifikan pada laluan mata alat.

| | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|------|
| LIST OF SYMBOLS | | xvi |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | | xvii |
| CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 | Background of Research | 1 |
| 1.3 | Problem Statement | 3 |
| 1.4 | Objectives of the Research | 4 |
| 1.5 | Scopes of the Research | 5 |

| TITLE | | PAGE |
|-----------------------|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | | iv |
| ABSTRACT | | v |
| ABSTRAK | | vi |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | | vii |
| LIST OF TABLES | | xi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | | xii |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS | | xv |
| LIST OF SYMBOLS | | xvi |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | | xvii |
| CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 1.2 | Background of Research | 1 |
| 1.3 | Problem Statement | 3 |
| 1.4 | Objectives of the Research | 4 |
| 1.5 | Scopes of the Research | 5 |
| 1.6 | Significance of the Research | 5 |
| 1.7 | Thesis Organization | 6 |
| CHAPTER 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW | 7 |
| 2.1 | Introduction | 7 |
| 2.2 | Computer Numerical Control of machine tools | 7 |
| 2.3 | Development progress of G-M Code | 8 |
| 2.4 | STEP-NC Development | 11 |
| 2.4.1 | Versions of STEP-NC | 11 |
| 2.4.2 | Benefits of STEP-NC | 14 |
| 2.4.3 | Structure of STEP-NC | 17 |
| 2.4.4 | Implementation Strategies for STEP-NC Controller | 18 |

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| 2.4.5 | Challenges of STEP-NC | 20 |
| 2.5 | STEP-NC Related Research | 21 |
| 2.5.1 | Research Work in Europe | 21 |
| 2.5.2 | Research Work in USA | 27 |
| 2.5.3 | Research Work in South America | 28 |
| 2.5.4 | Research Work in Asia | 29 |
| 2.6 | Open Architecture Control Technology | 41 |
| 2.6.1 | OAC International Projects | 41 |
| 2.6.2 | Next Generation CNC Controllers | 45 |
| 2.7 | Optimal Machining Parameter | 45 |
| 2.8 | Development progress of optimization system in the milling process | 46 |
| 2.9 | Intelligence Methods of Tool Path Optimization in CNC Machines | 48 |
| 2.10 | Various Artificial Intelligence Optimization Method | 49 |
| 2.10.1 | Genetic Algorithms | 49 |
| 2.10.2 | Artificial Neural Network | 50 |
| 2.10.3 | Artificial Immune Systems | 50 |
| 2.10.4 | Ant Colony Optimization | 51 |
| 2.10.4.1 | ACO Algorithm | 51 |
| 2.10.4.2 | Pheromone Trail Updating | 52 |
| 2.10.5 | Particle Swarm Optimization | 53 |
| 2.11 | Review Work on Tool Path Optimization | 54 |
| 2.12 | Optimization Methods for Machining | 58 |
| 2.13 | Review on Ant Colony Optimization | 62 |
| 2.13.1 | Ant Colony Optimization Algorithms | 65 |
| 2.13.2 | Historical Contributions | 66 |
| 2.14 | Comparison between ACOAs and Genetic Algorithms (GAs) | 68 |
| 2.15 | Comparison between ACOAs and Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) Algorithms | 72 |
| 2.16 | The Relationship between Traditional Machining and Controller Systems | 73 |
| 2.17 | Research Gaps | 74 |

| | | |
|------|---------|----|
| 2.18 | Summary | 75 |
|------|---------|----|

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 76

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 3.1 | Introduction | 76 |
| 3.2 | Research methodology | 76 |
| 3.3 | Principles of the Developed System framework | 79 |
| 3.4 | Architecture of the System | 81 |
| 3.5 | ISO Data Interface Model Interpretation (ISODIMI) | 83 |
| 3.6 | Tool Path Optimization Model (TOP) | 84 |
| 3.6.1 | Index | 84 |
| 3.6.2 | Distance | 85 |
| 3.6.3 | Ant Colony Optimization | 87 |
| 3.7 | Simulation | 91 |
| 3.8 | Automatic Document Generation | 91 |
| 3.9 | Validation of System | 92 |
| 3.10 | Summary | 92 |

CHAPTER 4 SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT 93

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.1 | Introduction | 93 |
| 4.2 | Modules Functional Blocks in NI LabVIEW | 93 |
| 4.3 | ISO Data Interface Model Interpretation (ISODIMI) | 94 |
| 4.4 | Tool Path Optimization Model (TOP) | 96 |
| 4.4.1 | Index | 96 |
| 4.4.2 | Distance | 98 |
| 4.4.3 | Ant Colony Optimization | 99 |
| 4.5 | Simulation | 105 |
| 4.6 | Automatic Document Generation | 105 |
| 4.7 | Model Graphical User Interface (GUI) and Block Diagram | 106 |
| 4.7.1 | Main Tab | 106 |
| 4.7.2 | Optimization Process Tab | 107 |
| 4.7.3 | Optimization Result Tab | 108 |
| 4.7.4 | 3D Simulator and Document Generation Tab | 109 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| 4.8 | Summary | 112 |
| CHAPTER 5 | EXPERIMENTAL STUDY | 113 |
| 5.1 | Introduction | 113 |
| 5.2 | Experimental 1 | 113 |
| 5.3 | Experimental 2 | 132 |
| 5.4 | Experimental 3 | 135 |
| 5.5 | Summary | 139 |
| CHAPTER 6 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 140 |
| 6.1 | Introduction | 140 |
| 6.2 | Conclusions | 140 |
| 6.3 | Research contributions | 141 |
| 6.4 | Recommendation | 142 |
| REFERENCES | | 143 |
| LIST OF PUBLICATIONS | | 209 |



PTTA UTHM
 PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE NO. | TITLE | PAGE |
|------------|--|------|
| Table 2.1 | Comparisons between 14649 and 10303 model | 13 |
| Table 2.2 | Comparison between STEP-NC and ISO 6983 | 16 |
| Table 2.3 | Research work related to enabled intelligent STEP-NC controller | 19 |
| Table 2.4 | Summary of the research that has been performed by different countries and researchers. | 33 |
| Table 2.5 | Presents the projects from various countries with year, title, software, technology and problem limitation details. | 37 |
| Table 2.6 | Optimization methods used for improving machining factors in previous research. | 59 |
| Table 2.7 | Illustrates the presents contributions of the ACO algorithms starting from the first biological inspiration to its various applications. | 67 |
| Table 5.1 | The extracted points and the divided groups | 116 |
| Table 5.2 | The groups' index | 117 |
| Table 5.3 | The distance array between the first and last point of each group | 118 |
| Table 5.4 | The distance array after replaces origin point row and column with 0. | 121 |
| Table 5.5 | The distance array after replaces row of selected ant (2 nd row) with 0 and calculate probability (2 nd column). | 122 |
| Table 5.6 | The distance array after replaces row of selected ant (i) with 0 and calculate probability. | 123 |
| Table 5.7 | Path index array for first iteration. | 125 |
| Table 5.8 | The distance array between the first and last point of each group | 126 |
| Table 5.9 | The τ_{ij} array update (first ant at first iteration) | 128 |
| Table 5.10 | The update τ_{ij} array after first iteration | 129 |
| Table 5.11 | The tool path length improvement after optimization | 138 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE NO. | TITLE | PAGE |
|-------------------|--|-------------|
| Figure 2.1: | ISO 6983 CNC coding [48] | 9 |
| Figure 2.2: | Information diagram of STEP-NC [57] | 12 |
| Figure 2.3: | ISO 14649 design manufacturing life cycle | 13 |
| Figure 2.4: | Current CAx data flow | 14 |
| Figure 2.5: | STEP-NC CAx data flow | 15 |
| Figure 2.6: | Structure of STEP-NC data model [73] | 18 |
| Figure 2.7: | Main contributors to STEP-NC Research Approach | 22 |
| Figure 2.8: | Framework of AB-CAM system | 23 |
| Figure 2.9: | Operational Structure STEP-TM CAPP System | 24 |
| Figure 2.10: | Shows the number of optimization methods used to improving machining factors | 49 |
| Figure 2.11: | The machining factors improved by using optimization methods | 58 |
| Figure 2.12: | Double Bridge Experiments. a) The two paths are equal length. b) The lower path is twice as long as the upper path [300] | 63 |
| Figure 2.13: | Basic principle of AC [301] | 64 |
| Figure 3.1 | The flowchart of developed system | 78 |
| Figure 3.2: | Steps involved in the methodology | 79 |
| Figure 3.3: | Flow chart of system structure | 82 |
| Figure 3.4: | ISODIMI function modules | 84 |
| Figure 3.5: | Flow chart of index modules for milling and drilling | 85 |
| Figure 3.6: | Flow chart of distance functional modules for milling and drilling machining | 86 |
| Figure 3.7: | Flow chart of ant colony optimization steps | 88 |
| Figure 4.1: | Information module for G-code and STEP-NC with mechanism | 94 |
| Figure 4.2: | Extraction module for G-code and STEP-NC with mechanism | 95 |

| | | |
|--------------|--|-----|
| Figure 4.3: | Functionality of group index modules for milling | 97 |
| Figure 4.4: | Functionality of group index modules for drilling | 98 |
| Figure 4.5: | Distance functional modules analysis for milling | 99 |
| Figure 4.6: | Distance functional modules analysis for drilling | 99 |
| Figure 4.7: | ACO functional modules for milling process | 102 |
| Figure 4.8: | Example of τ_{ij} update functional modules | 103 |
| Figure 4.9: | The path length calculation strategy for milling process of original path 0-1-2-3-0 | 104 |
| Figure 4.10: | The path length calculation strategy of optimized path for milling of path 0-3-2-1-0 | 105 |
| Figure 4.11: | Snapshots of the GUI of module for main tab | 106 |
| Figure 4.12: | Block diagrams of the information module | 107 |
| Figure 4.13: | Snapshots of the GUI of module for optimization process tab | 108 |
| Figure 4.14: | Snapshots of the GUI of module for optimization result tab | 109 |
| Figure 4.15: | Snapshots of the GUI of module for 3D simulator and document generation tab | 110 |
| Figure 5.1: | Graphical representation of experiment 1 | 114 |
| Figure 5.2: | Graphical representation of G-code extracted data | 115 |
| Figure 5.3: | A milling tool path steps based on G-code | 124 |
| Figure 5.4: | The tool path steps of ant 15 at 1 st iteration | 125 |
| Figure 5.5: | The shortest milling tool path steps for ant 15 for 6 th iteration | 130 |
| Figure 5.6: | The G-code and paths of the 15 ants path at 6 th iteration | 131 |
| Figure 5.7: | Path length for ant NO.15 with different iterations | 131 |
| Figure 5.8: | Manufactured part | 132 |
| Figure 5.9: | Graphical representation of experiment 2 | 133 |
| Figure 5.10: | A drilling tool path steps based on G-code | 134 |
| Figure 5.11: | The shortest drilling tool path steps for ant 41 for 2 nd iteration | 135 |
| Figure 5.12: | A drilling tool path steps based on STEP- NC code | 135 |

| | | |
|--------------|--|-----|
| Figure 5.13: | Graphical representation of experiment 3 | 136 |
| Figure 5.14: | The shortest drilling tool path steps for ant 13 and 5 th iteration | 137 |
| Figure 5.15: | The STEP-NC code and paths of the 13 ants path at 5 th iteration | 137 |

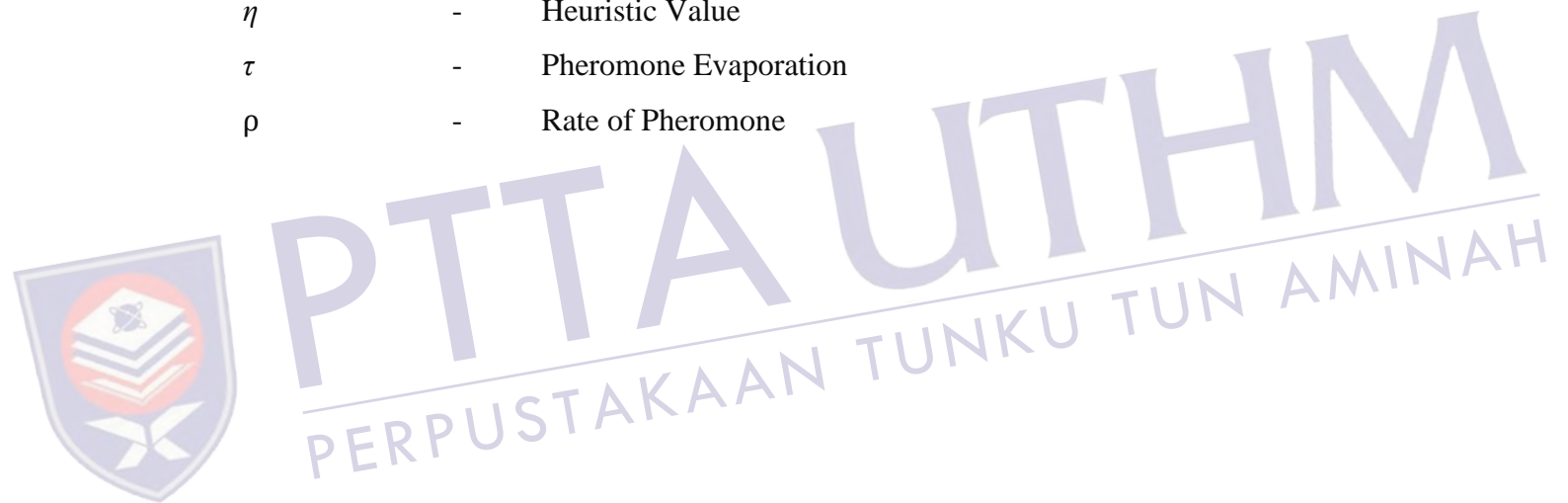


LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| ACO. | - | Ant Colony Optimization |
| AIM. | - | Application Interpreted Model |
| ANN. | - | Artificial Neural Network |
| ARM. | - | Application Reference Model |
| CAD. | - | Computer Aided Design |
| CAM. | - | Computer Aided Manufacturing |
| CAPP. | - | Computer-Aided Process Planning |
| CNC. | - | Computer Numerical Control |
| CTTP. | - | Cutting Tool Travel Path |
| FMS. | - | Flexible Manufacturing System |
| GA. | - | Genetic Algorithm |
| HIPP. | - | High-level Inspection Planning |
| HOOM. | - | Hierarchical Object-Oriented Model |
| IMS. | - | Intelligent Manufacturing System |
| ISO. | - | International Standards Organization |
| LabVIEW. | - | Laboratory Virtual Instrument Engineering Workbench |
| OAC. | - | Open Architecture Controller |
| OACC. | - | Open Architecture CNC Controller |
| OCC. | - | Open CNC Controller |
| PLC. | - | Programmable Logic Control |
| PSO. | - | Particle Swarm Optimization |
| RAMP. | - | Rapid Acquisition of Manufactured Parts |
| SCSTO. | - | STEP Compliant System for Turning Operations |
| SMS. | - | STEP Manufacturing Suite |
| STEP-NC. | - | Standard for The Exchange of Product Data-Compliant Numerical Control |
| TSP. | - | Travel Salesman Problem |
| UOCC. | - | UTHM Open CNC Controller |
| VGM. | - | Virtual Gears Model |

LIST OF SYMBOLS

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------------------|
| D | - | Distance |
| i | - | Current City |
| j | - | Next City |
| k | - | Ant Number |
| L | - | Tour Length |
| p | - | Probability |
| α | - | Trail of Pheromones |
| β | - | Heuristic Data |
| η | - | Heuristic Value |
| τ | - | Pheromone Evaporation |
| ρ | - | Rate of Pheromone |



LIST OF APPENDICES

| APPENDIX | TITLE | PAGE |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| Appendix A | ISO 6983 milling code (Experimental 1) | 165 |
| Appendix B | Generated report of experimental 1 | 170 |
| Appendix C | Physical file of experimental 1 | 177 |
| Appendix D | ISO 6983 drilling code (Experimental 2) | 181 |
| Appendix E | Generated report of experimental 2 | 184 |
| Appendix F | Physical file of experimental 2 | 193 |
| Appendix G | ISO 14649 drilling code (Experimental 3) | 199 |
| Appendix H | Generated report of experimental 3 | 203 |
| Appendix I | Physical file of experimental 3 | 207 |



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents computer numerical control (CNC) concepts by describing their background development. Then, the problem statement focusing on research gaps will be put forth, followed by the research objectives and scopes. Finally, the chapter examines the importance of the research and thesis organization.

1.2 Background of Research

Computer numerical control (CNC) is an advanced manufacturing technology that is widely implemented in different machine tools to ensure precise and efficient machining and easy operation. Moreover, CNC has become a central part of the modern manufacturing system [1]. The CNC system automatically controls machine tool's movements and can thus be regarded as the 'brain' of a machine tool [2]. After 60 years of development, modern CNC systems have become powerful, reliable, and secure, particularly concerning machining precision and speed. CNC machines are today used in various industries involving diverse controllers and abilities concerning different applications including drilling, turning, packaging, milling, robotic cutting, and tube welding [3]. Further, the CNC has several parts with the controller at its core consisting of two parts: software and hardware. While the hardware part includes different components such as motor drives and motion control, the software part includes Programmable Logic Control (PLC) as well as an interpreter to execute the machine hardware. As noted by Ertell [4], the CNC controller's interpreter receives the International Standards Organization (ISO) data interface model instructions that it translates into internal commands to move tools as well as execute auxiliary functions in a CNC system.

The ISO 6983 data interface model, previously called G & M codes, is implemented in CNC machines for their operations. CAM systems generate ISO 6983 data interface model program codes using CAD information. In this model, information is defined by numerical codes (G, T, M, F, S, etc.) that suggest a machine's movement and an axis to the controller [5]. Further, when developing flexible CNC systems, the ISO 6983 data interface model depicted several limitations such as being unable to seamlessly integrate (computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing) CAD, CAM, and CNC; delivering limited information to CNC; and transferring one-way information from CAD/CAM to CNC, which can be significant problems and involve last-minute changes that cannot be handled at the shop floor [6]. Besides, various manufacturers also included additional commands into G codes to enable more facilities into the systems even though these extensions were not included in ISO 6983. Such additions led to the part programs creating interchangeability problems among various machines, making the G code more machine-specific [7].

Moreover, ISO is creating a high-level NC data model, known as Standard for the Exchange of Product Data-Compliant Numerical Control (STEP-NC), for addressing problems caused by the G&M codes [8]. Apart from the G&M codes, this data model implements the object-oriented 'Working steps' associated with advanced machining features and process parameters for defining the machining processes. Thus, using the STEP-NC can help with transitioning from the task-level data to the method-level data while maintaining machining information including feature, geometry, machine tool, tolerance, and cutters information [9].

CNC system is also always exclusive. This exclusivity does not concern a CNC system's software or hardware that is standardized. That is, a CNC software includes vendor-specific CNC domain logic regarding a specific type of machines such as traditional machining type (which includes turning, electrical discharge machining, and milling, among others), additive machining [10], as well as the latest hybrid additive and subtractive machining [11]. Therefore, CNC software can be regarded as proprietary software with high value-added products that tend to go over 30% of an industrial machine tool's price [12]. However, users do not have permission to copy, distribute, or change its functionality for various production orders.

Over the past few years, the machine device's traditional controller has been increasingly undermined by the PC-based open CNC system that is not dependent on the CNC merchant and can execute client-characterized application programs [13].

Moreover, a personal computer can be considered hardware that functions using real-time operating system software, thus decreasing costs while increasing the control system's flexibility. Developing an open architecture platform can make the CNC application framework more flexible as well as modular. It will also allow the system users to customize the designed function according to the demand concerning different applications. Thus, changing the programming or coding can make the software reusable. This enhances the overall system's performance as it simply upgrades the hardware system [2]. The past 30 years have been increasingly focused on the subject of developing open CNC systems. There have been several open CNC prototypes including Open System Architecture for Control within Automation Systems (OSACA) [14], Open Modular Architecture Controller (OMAC) [15], Linux NC [16], Twin CAT [17], and Open System Environment Consortium (OSEC) [18].

Besides the CNC system, 70% of the time in a manufacturing process is devoted to tool indexing as well as tool movement [19]. Through tool path optimization, the total processing cost involving tooling, non-productive tool traveling, machining, and tool switching costs is also minimized [20]. Further, researchers have optimized the CNC milling tool path's sequencing by utilizing particular algorithms such as Satin Bowerbird Optimizer (SBO) [21], ant colony optimization (ACO) [22], particle swarm optimization (PSO) and the genetic algorithm (GA) [23]. There are also other studies that have reduced the drilling tool path by implementing integrated genetic and simulated annealing (IGSA) [19], colony optimization [24] algorithms, and Lin-Kernighan Heuristic (LKH) [25]. Considering the fact that the new, cheaper, and more compact CNC system offers more advantages than the closed source systems, developing an open architecture controller as per the optimization algorithms for simultaneously and effectively addressing problems of energy, exclusivity, and time wastage are necessary.

1.3 Problem Statement

Computer numerical control (CNC) system is the "brain" of a machine tool as it controls the movement of the machine tool automatically. In progression towards CNC development, the current ISO 6983 contains low-level information [26]. To overcome these issues, a new ISO data interface model (ISO 14649) was

introduced in 1999 [6]. While ISO 6983 and ISO 14649 implementation, the problem of being vendor dependent in commercial CNC systems was found. In order to overcome that issue, the researchers used software development to produce open CNC systems [2]. Basically, the open CNC systems used limited features such as interpretation, and simulation of the input code data. As technology grows, there are demands and new prospects to empower current CNC with more advanced features. As noted by Oysu and Bingul [27], the tool-path optimization problem is generally regarded as the NP-hard combinatorial optimization problem. Therefore, using optimization features to minimize non-machining time, efficient toolpath selection can be implemented [23]. Previous studies have also reported the open CNC system without optimization features [2, 28-31].

The open CNC systems tend to be utilized for extracting the points from ISO codes so that they can be applied in an open computer control (OCC) machine. The existed open CNC systems are closed source by developers. However, there are no open CNC systems available with open source that can be used to extract data from input code and add new features [32]. The developed optimization systems that are used with open CNC controllers deal with more than one system. Generally, it used one system for interpreting the input code and the other for optimizing the extracted data. Because the optimization feature is not used directly on the same system of interpretation but instead needs an extra step.

The researchers have focused on different methods of optimizing tool path including genetic algorithm [23] and colony optimization (ACO) [22] in terms of milling. The others researchers have examined it in terms of drilling by implementing ant colony optimization [24] and a genetic algorithm [33], although they manually input data to the optimization system. It has been shown that the ACO algorithm offers better results in terms of optimality and robustness [34] compare with other algorithms. However, the existed open CNC systems have some limitations such as tool path optimization, simulation and inspection.

1.4 Objectives of the Research

Considering the problem statement stated above, three major objectives were established:

- i. To develop an interpretation open CNC system based on complete G code and STEP-NC data structure.
- ii. To optimize the tool travel path of ISO code through combine open CNC system and ACO algorithm.
- iii. To validate the developed open CNC system through case study components.

1.5 Scopes of the Research

To achieve the objective, the study was conducted within the following scopes:

- i. The developed open CNC system was designed for ISO 6983 and ISO 14649 data that considering a 3-axis CNC milling machine (PROLIGHT 1000 Milling CNC).
- ii. The optimization of the extracted tool path points involved implementing an ant colony optimization algorithm (ACO).
- iii. The present study also considered example cases of milling and drilling processes in terms of ISO 6983 and considered an example case of drilling process regarding ISO14649.
- iv. A three-dimensional (3D) simulator used to conduct verifications graphically as well as to automatically document generation systems concerning optimized data is included in this system.
- v. The experimental validation only involves verifying the performance of interpreters, optimization, along with modern features and does not address problems concerning surface roughness or accuracy.

1.6 Significance of the Research

This study aims to amplify an existing CNC controller to optimize the both ISO (14649 and 6983) data interface models' tool path and to conduct the milling and drilling machining processes. Moreover, it aims to aid concerning optimization, interpretation, automatic document generations, simulation, as well as tool path generation. Such functionalities not only offer more flexibility, interoperability, portability and

adaptability but also provide more open CNC environment on one platform (all-in-one).

1.7 Thesis Organization

This thesis includes six chapters. The first chapter presents the fundamentals of CNC including the background, research problem statement, objectives, and the scopes of the research. Chapter 2 briefly introduces and examines the concerned technologies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology that was used to address the research gaps. Chapter 4 illustrates the system's development based on research findings as well as adopted methodology. Chapter 5 presents the experimental validation concerning the developed system. Finally, Chapter 6 presents the conclusions along with suggestions for future studies.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the fundamentals of CAD/Computer-Aided Process Planning (CAPP)/CAM, CNC, CNC controller technologies, ACO algorithm, G codes, and STEP-NC. Moreover, it examines the entire process of creating the next generation CNC systems. This chapter also explores the diverse methods presented in numerous previous studies as well as present the latest machines ranging from NC to the modern CNCs, focusing on the earlier techniques, approaches, and methods used in this development.

2.2 Computer Numerical Control of machine tools

CNC refers to the control system, including a computer. It was in the 1970s that the first CNC machine was constructed, and it involved computers replacing the earlier NC systems' electronic hardware as well as punch cards [35]. CNC system implements microcomputers or minicomputers for creating, filtering, and then performing the sequential control depicting the end effectors' behavior, and it is used frequently for applications such as milling, turning, metal cutting, welding, cutting robots, and sheet metal formatting [3].

As the modern systems continued to develop, in the 1970s and 1980s, it became necessary to manufacture a wider range of parts, which further needed the Flexible Manufacturing System (FMS). The CNC machine is thus crucial in ensuring a flexible environment to manufacture systems as these machines can be reprogrammed to produce various complex parts on a large scale [36]. CAM and CAD systems were utilized for creating the CNC program parts as sophisticated programs were necessary for producing such parts [37, 38].

The CAD system refers to geometric primitives such as lines, curves, and points were used for defining a design's geometry. It was only the Two-Dimensional (2D) drawings that needed the first CAD systems. Further, the solid modeling methods defined the 3D CAD systems in the 1980s [39]. The existing files generated by CAD systems are stored using proprietary fonts, with these files being imported and exported by all systems considering defined standards. With the CNC systems' further development, an increasing number of studies began focusing on CAM techniques. Computer systems were utilized in this technology for planning, managing, and controlling the manufacturing processes. Also, the CAM system included cutting methods, tools, as well as operation sequences information in the CAD file. CAM and CAD integrated systems were launched in the 1970s, with the turnkey CAD/CAM system gaining more popularity in the 1980s. An integrated CAD/CAM system intended to reduce the distance between designing and manufacturing. To this end, CAPP systems are necessary [40].

The specifications of the CAD design are translated by the CAPP system into manufacturing information such as raw material selection, product geometry, equipment, and machine tool selection, as well as machining operation conditions and manufacturing operation and sequencing [41]. This stage involves the information being reserved in CAM file, and this CAM file is then used to develop the machine tool's manufacturing instructions by the CAM system post-processor [42]. Moreover, the post-processor's output is an NC file that is formed as per the particular language that translates the drawing of the job information to computer controlled machine [43]. This language was earlier called Automatically Programmed Tool (APT) [44]. ISO later implemented APT in 1982 as an international standard ISO 6983, which was commonly referred to as G & M codes and formally as RS-274D [45].

2.3 Development progress of G-M Code

Over the last 60 years, there has been significant development in machine tools, from basic machines that had controllers without memory and were operated with punching tape to the current improved CNC multi-processor workstations [46]. Such workstations can perform various functions such as versatile control, multi-axis control, mistaken payments as well as multi-process produce including

pounding machine and joined plant/turn/laser. Such capacities have resulted in responsible programming becoming increasingly complicated while also making it necessary in the productive age to develop disconnected programming devices in terms of CAD/CAM that can verify NC code. Although machines and tools have fundamentally changed, there has been no significant change in the programming dialect that has G-code. Moreover, the “how to make” refers to instructions concerning which path to move to and where and how. As Figure 2.1 presents, the ISO 6983 CNC coding is developed as per five specifications [47].

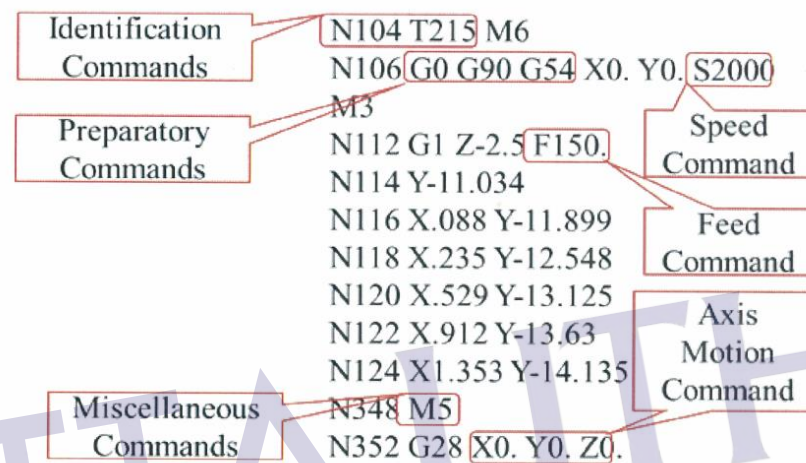


Figure 2.1: ISO 6983 CNC coding [48]

The first specification is “Preparatory Functions” that are commands indicated by “G,” suggesting the controller concerning the types of motions such as fixed cycle, rapid positioning, and linear or circular feed. Thus far, from G0 to G99, approximately hundred commands are being used. The second specification is “Miscellaneous Commands” that commands indicated by “M”. These are auxiliary commands or action codes that are primarily implemented for machine functions. The third specification is “Axis Motion Commands” that are commands that define the incremental or absolute positions concerning machine tool axis, suggested by X, Y, Z, A, B, C. The fourth specification is “Feed and Speed Commands” that are commands that define the spindle speed (S) and feed rate (F). Finally, the fifth specification is “Identification Commands” that are commands that define the cutting tool selection function (T) and line number (N).

G-code is a form of CNC programming and refers to the language that is implemented for controlling CNC machines. CNC programmers often use G-code for

programming apart from CAM programming. G-code is quite commonly executed in a typical machine's CNC controller. Presently, post-processors are used to develop G-code naturally in the majority of computer-aided design/CAM programming frameworks. Further, G-code is committed to enhancing the present manufacturing technology. The program form that G-code defines typically refers to ISO 6983, which specifies the control program's format that is used for the machine's numerical controls (NC). On the other hand, ISO 6983 is also useful in various geometric designations as well as to communicate with machines [5].

Although G-codes are used in all CNC machines for controlling their operations, there continue to be several difficulties that hinder CNC technology's development. There are three reasons for which ISO 6983 restricts program portability. To start with, the language concentrates on programming the tool focus way as for machine axes, instead of the machining procedure regarding the part. Second reason is that through the standard characterizes the program descriptions' language, it keeps the semantics ambiguous. Third reason is sellers tend to use expansions to add to the language, and these expansions are not included in ISO 6983, with the postprocessor translating the low-level information into NC code. Moreover, the information flowing to CNC from CAD is unidirectional and does not provide an explanation concerning data manufacturing at the CNC level [49].

Today, although certain controllers continue to use punch tape for information storage, several tools such as networking and USB flash drives have replaced the NC controller's punch card. Data transport is crucial for ensuring the likeability of the configuration of all parts and that people can peruse them. Nevertheless, both G-code and M-code have obstructed the manufacturing process as well as the development of a CNC framework [50]. There are three types of motions in G-code: G01, G02, and G03. While G01 depicts linear motions, G02 and G03 depict circular motions. Moreover, as G-code does not sustain spline data, it cannot control five or more axis milling. Although the fact that CNC framework is becoming increasingly refined and developed cannot be questioned, this framework also has a disadvantage as it uses the old codes, the G-code and M-code, for information exchange.

The Electronics Industry Association (EIA) enhanced the G and M based on the ANSI standard [51] code during the mid-1960s. It should be noted that the ISO 6983 can be considered as a low-level international standard that refers to switching commands and an axis movement control. Several CNC manufacturers have attempted

to address this problem by merging the existing ISO 2983 standards with their own standards if high-level command code. In addition, this design enabled the CNC machine manufacturer to create a programming language that helped prevent interoperability between manufacture and design [52]. It should be noted that GM code programs are important as they combine the operator experience and micro-process plan [53], which is why G code working environment is included in this study.

2.4 STEP-NC Development

When discussing information models that can improve CAD/CAM information sharing, it is important to examine STEP-NC. To ensure that the data flow between CNC and CAM was seamless, a new standard called ISO 14649, commonly referred to as STEP-Compliant Numerical Control or STEP-NC, was introduced. This standard enabled applications' data integration to be seamless from design to manufacturing [54]. At present, ISO focuses on developing the STEP manufacturing environment that encompasses STEP in, STEP throughout, as well as STEP out [53]. STEP-NC intends to rectify ISO 6983's limitations through machining processes and not tool motion. For this, object-oriented and feature-oriented concepts concerning working steps are implemented that create a seamless connection in CAX so that CNC becomes more portable, open, adoptable, interoperable, intelligent, and flexible. In particular, STEP-NC uses ISO 10303's existing data models to create seamless and smooth information exchange regarding CAX. Moreover, there are numerous information sets included in ISO 14649 such as "How-to-make" (process plan) and "What-to-make" (geometry).

2.4.1 Versions of STEP-NC

At present, two versions of STEP-NC, which are ISO 10303-238 and ISO 14649, are being worked on by the Technical Committee's two sub-committees. It can be said that ISO 10303-238 and ISO 14649 are the STEP-NC standard's two distinct implementation methods. There is a high possibility that the ISO 14649 standard will be implemented when the shop floor provides precise information to the CAM systems. On the other hand, STEP AP 238, which is included in the STE standard, is better suited for a thorough integration of design and manufacturing. Moreover, STEP-

NC is able to offer CNC machine tools direct input involving product information including features, geometry, tool path, and machining steps [42]. Presently, G-codes have to be used for programming CNC machines, and thus, they can only explain the precise tool movements and not provide information concerning the processed part. Unlike G-codes, STEP-NC does not explain to the machine how to perform a task but simply tells it what to do.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the information that STEP-NC presented in EXPRESS-G. That is, STEP-NC utilized the working steps concepts that depicted a series of material removals, locations, as well as related process parameters to define the machining processes. It should be noted that every working step is connected to an operation as well as a machining feature. It is assumed that CNC controllers will translate the tool movements and working steps to machine parts and axis motions, respectively [55]. This type of STEP-NC includes a CAM software being able to completely access all production data [56]. Further, there are six parts included in ISO 14649:

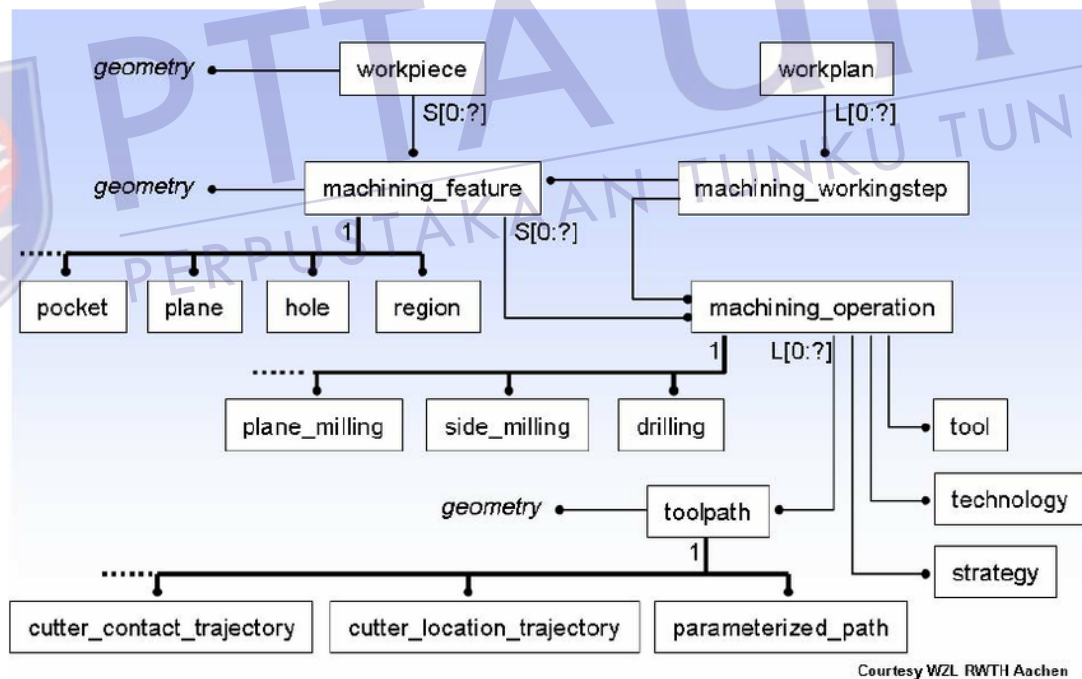


Figure 2.2: Information diagram of STEP-NC [57]

ISO 14649-1 that presents an overview of CNCs' data model and describes its benefits as well as fundamental principles as per the product data concepts [58]; ISO 14649-10 that outlines a set of essential capabilities concerning the machined parts' process planning; ISO 14649-11 that identifies the milling machine's process planning

abilities; ISO 14649-12 that presents the turning machine's process planning capabilities; ISO 14649-111 that presents tools for milling; and ISO 14649-121 that presents tools for turning.

Moreover, these parts are organized according to their hierarchy and utilized considering their relevant forms. For example, in terms of the milling machine part, 10 refers to the overall process plan data while part 11 outlines the milling's process plans and part 111 introduces tools data considering milling. Figure 2.3 illustrates other machining processes' chain including turning, grinding, and drilling. This model, however, does not include the complete designing data, thus making it difficult to combine CNC and CAD [42].

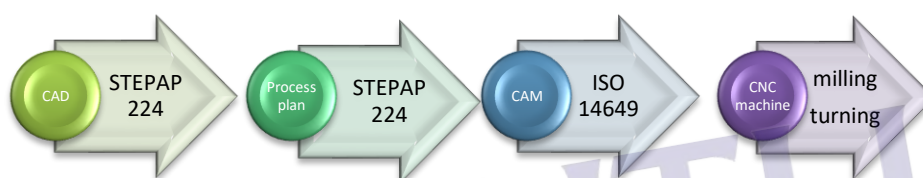


Figure 2.3: ISO 14649 design manufacturing life cycle

Table 2.1 presents the first Reference Model ISO 14649 along with Interpreted Model (ISO 10303), with the AIM and ARM models considered as the STEP-NC models' two distinct execution frameworks. However, it is also appropriate to use ISO 14649 standard when the shop floor provides precise information to CAM frameworks, while STEP AP-238, included in the STEP standard, is more suited for assembling joining and a complete outline. Moreover, while the AIM is entirely agreeable to with STEP, the ARM included data that is assumed will program a CNC machine [59, 60].

Table 2.1 Comparisons between 14649 and 10303 model

| Comparison criteria | ISO 14649 model | ISO 10303-model |
|---------------------|---|--|
| File size | 10 times smaller than AIM | 10 times bigger than ARM |
| Programming | Simple | More complicated |
| Human legible | Hard | Nearly impossible |
| Data compatibility | Initial design information is desolate | Initial design information is saved |

2.4.2 Benefits of STEP-NC

STEP-NC refers to a feature-oriented as well as an object-oriented data model that offers unique possibilities for supporting standardized and high-level information from the design to the manufacturing process [61]. STEP-NC's development and use can aid the manufacturing field in several aspects, some of which are explored in this section, as highlighted in [7, 42, 62-66]. In the present CAX, it is possible for the information to get lost in the process as the CAD to CAM data transfer may be incomplete. In such cases, the geometry fixes are done in CAM and not communicated with CAD, thus resulting in the data flow to the post to be restricted. Using diverse standards is also a reason for information loss, as depicted in Figure 2.4. STEPNC resolves such problems by offering a structured and complete data model that is connected to technical and geometrical information.

Further, it puts forth one standard for different systems' data integration, and thus, there is no information lost from the design to the manufacturing cycle, as illustrated in Figure 2.5. The information flow in the present systems is uni-directional. As Figure 2.4 shows, CAX does not have any information feedback.

Moreover, it is almost impossible to make any exigency changes considering the present CAX's uni-directional data flow. In addition, as the STEP-NC model structure, as well as standard feature description, coincides with ISO 10303, it is able to maintain CAX's bi-directional information, as presented in Figure 2.5.

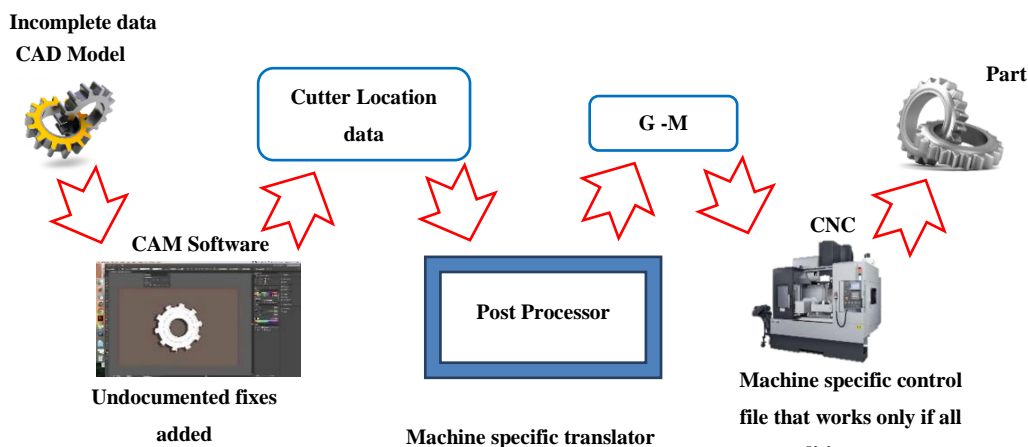


Figure 2.4: Current CAX data flow

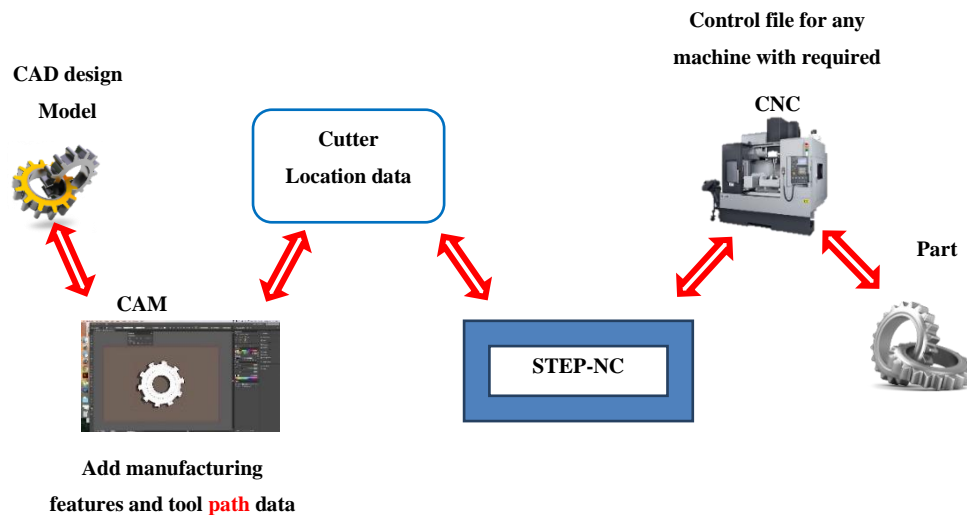


Figure 2.5: STEP-NC CAX data flow

The present CNC machines have been working as per ISO 6983 data interface model that has low level information, according to “how-to-make” instructions. STEP-NC standard, on the other hand, includes high level information as per “how-to-make” and “what-to-make” instructions that can aid facilities such as simulation, optimization, and inspection in CNC controller. It can thus be said that STEP-NC’s data elements can sufficiently describe NC data that is task oriented. Moreover, as systems today implement post-processor to develop ISO 6983 standard, ISO 6983 become more dependent on vendor and machine specific. Thus, generated code has to be modified before it used on various systems. STEP-NC standard, however, consists of a neutral format that does not include machine specifications and vendor dependency. It thus removes the necessity of post-processor while decreasing the CAX chain, thus saving time. Moreover, it is possible to execute the STEP-NC file on any machine with the necessary tooling, as the STEP-NC file is not machine specific. There are also other advantages to using STEP-NC compared to ISO 6983, as follows:

- i. The STEP-NC data model can be applied to other technologies, and CCs can be used to scale it for matching the capabilities of NC systems’ particular CAM Shop Floor Programming (SFP).
- ii. STEP-NC offers adequate information to aid intelligent optimization facility, thus decreasing machining time concerning small- and medium-sized jobs.

- iii. As the STEP-NC file includes all information necessary for developing a job, manufacturing operations can be altered to enhance efficiency in production.
- iv. As STEP-NC is independent of vendor and specifies fixtures' safety areas as included in the setup, it ensures the machine tools' complete safety as well as adaptability.
- v. The data in STEP-NC is self-documented, and thus, there can be a considerable decrease in the number of drawings that CAD sends to CAM.
- vi. CNC or CAM systems can be used to provide documentation for presenting the state of the part prior to and following every working step.
- vii. STEP-NC uses XML (ISO 14649-28) information transfer for ensuring e-manufacturing or web-based manufacturing.
- viii. As STEP-NC enables 3D geometry's changes to occur instantaneously directly on control, it will diminish the necessity of paper documents.
- ix. The data required for developing the part is stored in one file.

There are several other advantages of STEP-NC compared to ISO 6983, as presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Comparison between STEP-NC and ISO 6983

| G-code | STEP-NC |
|--|--|
| Hard NC programs for easy geometry Manufacturing | High-level Programming language |
| Program Length too big and limited information | Smaller than ISO 6983 and contain more information |
| Limited Control of Program with low speed | Easily Control of Module with high speed |
| Unidirectional data flow of Information | Bidirectional data flow of Information |
| Manufacturing features its modern Limited optimization support | Manufacturing features its primitive High optimization support |

2.4.3 Structure of STEP-NC

The STEP-NC file includes high-level information that is object-oriented regarding manufacturing features' programming. Moreover, the STEP-NC data model's structure is classified into two sections: HEADER and DATA [42, 67, 68]. The HEADER section begins and ends with the special token HEADER and ENDSEC token, respectively, and consists of general information including author, filename, organization, and date. The DATA section is regarded as STEP-NC's critical section as it is the STEP-NC data model's major section. It starts and ends with the DATA token and ENDSEC token, respectively and includes all information about geometries and manufacturing tasks.

In addition, this section's contents are classified into three sections that are workplan or executables, geometry description, and technology description. Every STEP-NC program's DATA section includes a PROJECT entity that suggests the NC functions' starting point as well as the workpiece on which operations are going to be conducted and the workplan that should be executed. There are also three types of executables including NC functions, program structures, and working steps. In the workplan, the working steps are crucial executables that specify manufacturing aspects of two-and-a-half-dimensional (2.5D) as well as 3D regions.

Further, every working step has sub-features such as a pocket, round hole, and a slot that have a cutting condition environment [69-71]. The DATA section's technology description part thoroughly describes all working steps data including machining strategy, tool, definitions of the workpiece, feed rate, depth of a hole, tool diameter, and spindle speed [72]. On the other hand, the geometry description part contains the geometry data utilized for the components and is defined in ISO 10303 format. Figure 2.6 presents the STEP-NC data model's overall structure. The present study uses a STEP-NC part 21 implementation method as this implementation is conducted in text format and is used extensively in offline systems. Additionally, ISO had presented a part program, previously called EXAMPLE [8], as per the Part 21 implementation method to research STEP-NC activities and has been used as part of the case study in the present study.

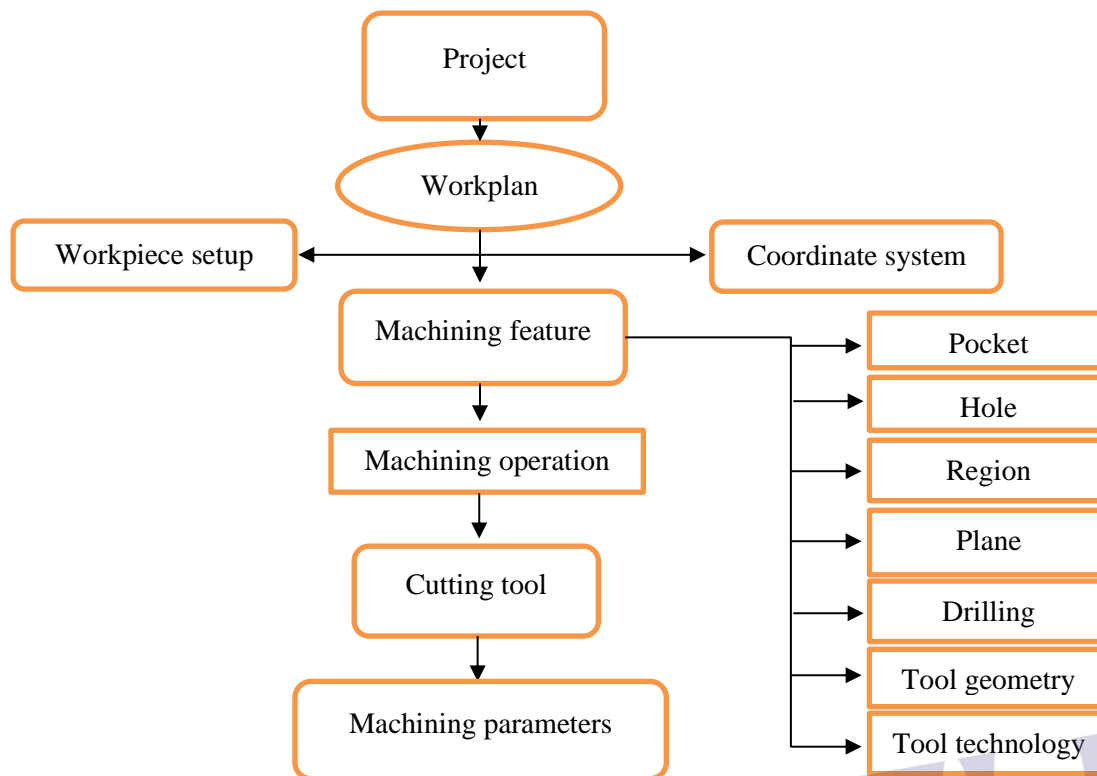


Figure 2.6: Structure of STEP-NC data model [73]

2.4.4 Implementation Strategies for STEP-NC Controller

Using STEP-NC for CNC was continued from years of numerous previous studies. Of these studies, few important projects were funded by institutes, companies, and industries including Intelligent Manufacturing System (IMS) STEP-NC [74], Rapid Acquisition of Manufactured Parts (RAMP), STEP Manufacturing Suite (SMS), Implementation of the STEP-NC and MT Connect Standards for Additive Manufacturing [75], European Strategic Program on Research in Information Technology (ESPRIT) STEP [76] Super Model [60], Intelligent Manufacture for STEP-NC Compliant Machining and Inspection [60], Architecture and implementation of closed-loop machining system based on open STEP-NC controller [77], and Rapid Prototyping Project Description in STEP-NC Model [78]. Different approaches have adopted different strategies based on the implementation of STEP-

NC on the CNC system, and these approaches can be categorized into several development levels in the future, as present in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Research work related to enabled intelligent STEP-NC controller

| Researcher [Ref.] | Year/country | Strategies | Technology | problem limitation |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Xu [50] | New Zealand, 2006) | Realization of STEP-NC enabled machining | Turning- AP238 | Different machine controller needs to build up a different interpreter of STEP-NC. |
| Wang [79] | 2007 New Zealand | An adaptable CNC system based on STEP NC | Plug and Play Module For Milling | Still utilized ISO 6983 for end controller |
| Kramer [80] | 2009/USA | (FBICS) | CAPP, milling | An automated program f framework utilizing six sorts of input information in STEP Concentrates on two tasks, to be specific the Intelligent Manufacturing System (IMS) for STEP-NC Compliant and Inspection |
| Yusof [81] | 2009/Malaysia | STEP-NC- compliant system | Turning | |
| Ridwan [82] | 2010- New Zealand | Generic Feed- Rate Optimization | Milling- ISO14649 | No input information to STEP-NC controller for mistake correction |
| Hua [83] | 2011/China | Converting design features g features | Feature Recognition AP214 | A possible method to execute for integration with other CAD/CAPP/CAM STEP-NC has been demonstrated to perform superbly in data exchange between CAD/CAM and CNC, |
| Lei [84] | 2017/China | Closed-loop machining | STEP-NC- CAM Laser tracker | |

2.4.5 Challenges of STEP-NC

Though researchers have shown increasing interest in STEP-NC, it has certain challenges that must be addressed. As using STEP-NC results in moving some CAM system capabilities to NC controllers, including feed rate and tools rotation information, it creates more complex controllers and needs the machine operators to provide more information [55]. It is important to first develop the NC machines' new STEP-NC compliant controllers prior to using STEP-NC in manufacturing. After this, NC controller manufacturers must redesign their controllers' strategies and structures. Moreover, ARM (ISO 14649), AIM (ISO 10303–AP 238), and ISO have been simultaneously developing two versions of STEP-NC. These two models primarily differ in the extent of their utilization of STEP representation methods as well as technical architecture. These models can both be considered as STEP-NC's different implementation methods.

Thus far, there has been no consensus regarding whether ARM or AIM should be used. Moreover, there are several inconsistencies regarding standards that must be addressed for the STEP-NC data model to be standardized. Hence, extensive systems-building work is required for ensuring the commercial feasibility of STEP-NC related technology. Despite the several years of effort, STEP-NC has not yet been implemented in the industry as CNC machine makers must include an interface for reading data, and CAM vendor must include a system interface for writing STEP-NC data [85]. Additionally, vendors are not keen on investing unless there is a necessary demand. Every CAD/CAM/CNC vendor's system is particular and unique and does not intend to share their algorithms. On the other hand, there must be a complete collaboration between CAD/CAM/CNC vendors for STEP-NC to be feasible. Moreover, in terms of developing STEP-NC's database, it is difficult to develop a working process as the EXPRESS language's fundamental concepts are low. As it is difficult to be read on a computer, another programming language must be used to translate it [86]. The author believed that if STEP-NC is developed and marketed successfully, its usage will need the programming to undergo a paradigm shift as well as machine-tool users to undergo a culture change and trust their manufactured parts' programming to intelligent CAM systems CNC controllers. For this change to occur, company owners will have to reduce the costs involves in the design to manufacturing

process chain, thus reducing the lead times and decreasing component prove out, increasing machine utilization, and enhancing part quality.

2.5 STEP-NC Related Research

Several efforts have been made from the late 1990s to use the STEP concept as a data interface between CNC and CAD/CAM. It is important to note that STEP-NC was developed following numerous research projects being conducted by educational institutions (universities) and companies across the world. To reduce decrease the time lag between a product being conceptualized to it being produced, there have been several studies on using information technology in design, analysis, as well as manufacturing practice [87]. At a STEP meeting in 2007 in Ibusuki, Japan, a STEP-enabled on-machine inspection demonstration was conducted. This meeting was attended by various major industry companies such as NIST, Boeing, STEP Tools Inc., and Airbus. At this meeting, an on-machine inspection was conducted on a workpiece shaped like a fish-head. Though this demonstration did not take into account measurement points optimization and inspection path planning, it was the first time STEP-enabled on-machine inspection was physically demonstrated [88]. Moreover, a High-level Inspection Planning (HIPP) system was also proposed to execute STEP-enabled inspection tasks. Figure 2.7 shows the tabulations of the main contributions of the research on STEP and STEP-NC.

2.5.1 Research Work in Europe

It was in 1999 that the first project was launched in the European region that involved industry and scientific partners for assessing and improving ISO 14649 [89]. This project used control vendors, universities, CAM system suppliers, and end-users and associations that represent machine tool builders. As a result systems to handle STEP-NC data for milling where STEP-NC interfaces to Dassault's CATIA V5, Open Mind's Hyper Fact and to the Siemens controller, EDM (Based on a Agie Chramilles machine tool CAD CA Mation did realise a STEP-NC driven scenario for wire EDM) and contour cutting of wood glass and stone were developed.

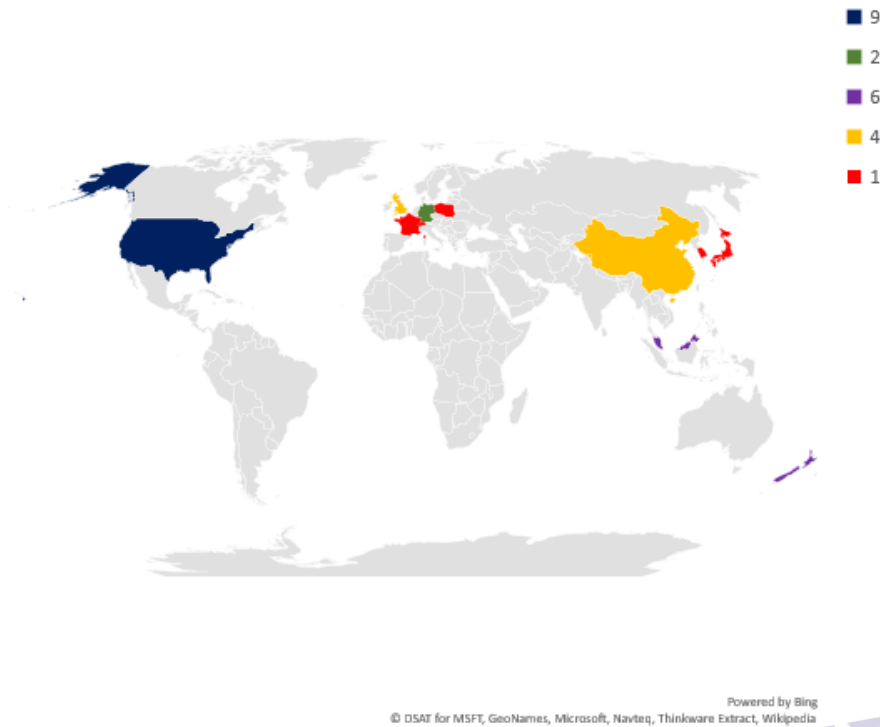


Figure 2.7: Main contributors to STEP-NC Research Approach

As per particular countries, in Germany, the study focused on developing and using STEP-compliant CAPP/CAM systems as well as NC controllers. In the STEP-NC project in Europe, Siemens, which is the CNC system vendor, and two German institutes, ISW in Stuttgart and WZL (Laboratory for Machine Tools and Production Engineering) RWTH in Aachen that were involved significantly [90]. ISW devised a prototype system called STEPTurn that used STEP-NC and STEP standards in terms of turned parts. Overall, STEPTurn can be considered a CAPP system that connects CAM with CAD. First, STEPTurn reads a STEP AP 203 Part 21 file's geometry data, and then, it creates a STEP-NC physical file by executing process-planning tasks including Working step sequencing and feature recognition [91].

In a study by Brecher, Vitr and Wolf [92] at Germany's Aachen University's Laboratory for Machine Tools and Production Engineering (WZL), a system was devised concerning a closed loop process chain that combined examination of the STEP-NC machining information flow. This study put forth a system that aids milling along with CMM-employed inspection operations in terms of closed-loop and feature-based machining. Further, Loughborough University's research primarily focused on strategizing the STEP-NC process plan's creation and machining process regarding

milling and milling/turning components. Moreover, Allen, Harding and Newman [93] presented a STEP-NC compliant computational environment regarding a multi-agent framework in which the component's individual features were represented by the agents who also work independently while cooperating with each other for developing STEP-NC process plans regarding manufacturing of discrete component known as AB-CAM. This system ensures that a standard format is applied to transfer data between various CAM systems and machine tools that present data concerning machining operations, component geometry, tooling, detailed process plan, and fixturing. Figure 2.8 by Newman, Allen and Rosso [94] presents the AB-CAM system's framework.

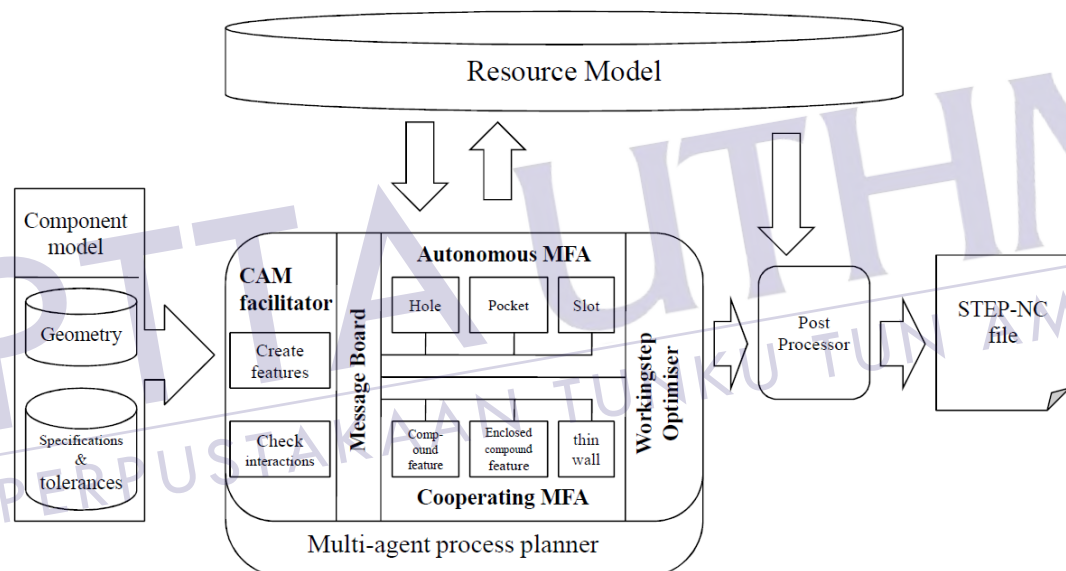


Figure 2.8: Framework of AB-CAM system

Moreover, Rosso, Newman and Rahimifard [95] and Rosso [96] explored the necessity of a new ISO 14649 machining schema particularly in terms of asymmetric rotational parts, and they devised a system known as STEP-TM CAPP System as a practical solution for implementing the ISO 14649 data model regarding turn/mill machining. Figure 2.9 illustrates the STEP-TM CAPP system's operational structure. Moreover, Ali, Newman and Petzing [97] further examined this, focusing primarily on using a CMM and devised a STEP compliant inspection framework that could establish standardized measuring as well as inspection throughout the

CAD/CAM/CAPP chain. That is, this inspection framework intended to close the inspection loop by combining information across the CAD/CAM/CAPP chain. This framework implements working step, an inspection workplan, as well as a mechanism for sending inspection results throughout the CAD/CAM/CAPP chain. It also used DMIS, STEP-NC (ISO 14649-16), and ISO 10303 AP 219 (implementing protocol for CMMs' dimensional inspection information exchange) to represent the manufacturing models and product.

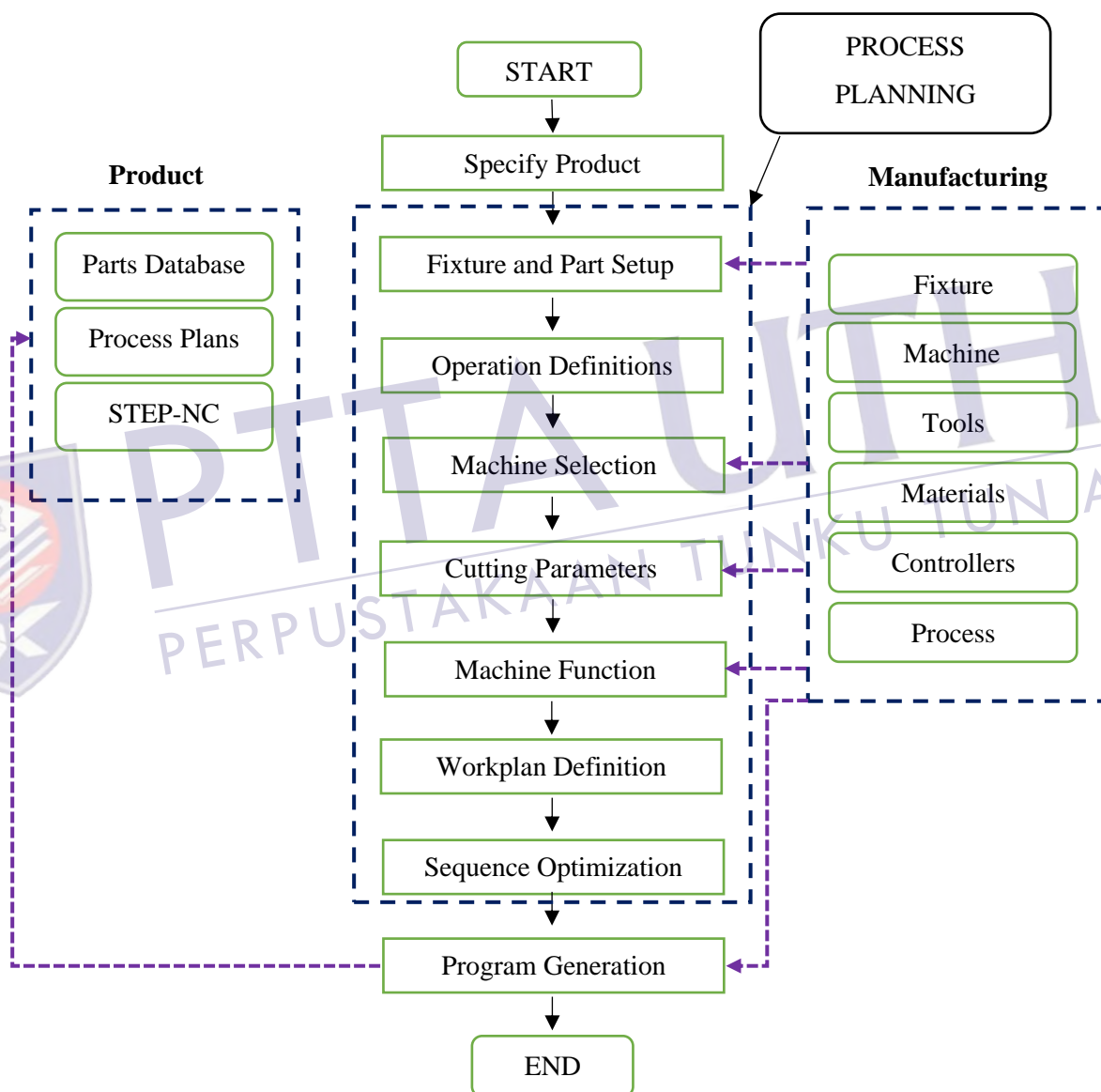


Figure 2.9: Operational Structure STEP-TM CAPP System

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