engineering proceedings

MDPI

Proceeding Paper

Composition of Engineered Cementitious Composite with Local Materials, Composite Properties and Its Utilization for Structures in Developing Countries †

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† Presented at the 1st International Online Conference on Buildings, 24–26 October 2023; Available online: https://iocbd2023.sciforum.net/.

Abstract: This study focuses on developing cost-efficient Engineered Cementitious Composites (ECC) with glass and polypropylene fibers, using local materials for sustainable construction in developing countries. The ECC exhibits unique properties such as strain hardening, enhancing structural resilience and crack mitigation. The composite utilizes 1–2% volume of 6mm fibers, with fly ash as a supplementary cementitious material and a superplasticizer. PPGF-ECC surpasses PC in mechanical properties, making it suitable for various applications, including rigid pavements in developing countries. This research recommends 2% PPGF-ECC for various applications in developing countries, including rigid pavements, due to their superior performance.

Keywords: material; Engineered Cementitious Composite (ECC); pseudo ductility; durability; volume stability; structural applications

Citation: Sikandar, A.; Ali, M. Composition of Engineered Cementitious Composite with Local Materials, Composite Properties and Its Utilization for Structures in Developing Countries. *Eng. Proc.* **2023**, *53*, x. https://doi.org/ 10.3390/xxxxx

Academic Editor(s): Name

Published: 24 October 2023

1. Introduction

Concrete, primarily composed of cement, has inherent limitations like low tensile strength and ductility, although it boasts high compressive strength. The addition of synthetic and polymer fibers in specific ratios can significantly enhance its ductility [2]. Engineered Cementitious Composite (ECC), a fiber-reinforced material, displays unique strain-hardening behavior, maintaining small fracture widths (<100 μm) under tension stress and offering remarkable ductility and strength through meticulous micromechanical design [1]. ECC, specifically, exhibits high tensile strength, resilience, and the ability to self-heal small cracks when exposed to water and air [3,4]. Under tensile and bending loads, ECC dissipates energy effectively and creates numerous fine fractures [5–7].

ECC often uses local materials for sustainability in large-scale projects. Germany, Brazil, and China have experimented with regional materials and local PVA fibers, facing challenges in mechanical properties and cost. Exploring affordable fiber alternatives is crucial to mitigate PVA fiber costs [8]. In developing countries, balancing performance and cost when choosing construction materials is crucial. ECC's high unit cost, largely driven by PVA or PE fiber expenses, has hindered its widespread adoption. Many efforts have been made to replace costly PVA fibers with more affordable synthetic options like PE, PP, and PAN fibers [9]. Wang et al. [10] suggest that substituting PVA with PP fibers can result in cost savings for fibers. In the developing countries alternate of the high cost fiber material will lead to sustainable development of ECC as a construction material.

ECC finds application in three distinct types of infrastructure: building, transportation, and water resources. Various qualities of ECC material are employed to address specific issues within each of these infrastructure categories [11]. This research focuses on

ECC adoption in developed nations and aims to facilitate its production in developing countries. It aims to create a ductile composite using glass and PP fibers, exploring composite behavior, micro-mechanical design, materials, and practical applications in infrastructure projects. The findings can assist developing nations in addressing infrastructure challenges with ECC.

2. ECC Criteria's and Properties

2.1. ECC Micromechanics

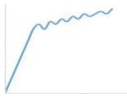
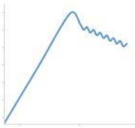
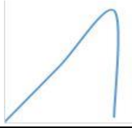
To ensure the initiation of cracks at multiple points, it is crucial that the maximum fiber-bridging strength exceeds the matrix rupture strength. Additionally, the complementary energy provided by the bridging fiber should surpass the peak crack toughness to maintain steady-state multiple cracking. These requirements are defined in the ECC pseudo strain hardening criteria [3,12,13].

2.2. ECC Properties

ECC's strain-hardening is due to steady-state flat cracks under sustained loading. To maintain this, ECC needs ample energy exceeding fracture toughness and tensile strength surpassing fiber-bridging strength, allowing cracks to start from different points, leading to steady-state cracking [5,7,10,12].

Table 1 summarizes ECC and FRC properties, including fracture pattern, material behavior, strength, and deformation. An ideal ECC exhibits closely spaced cracks, strain-hardening, high strength, and significant deformation capacity, showcasing its superiority [14]. Conversely, in moderate to low-quality ECC composites, the transition occurs from multiple spaced fractures towards single crack formation, exhibiting pseudo-ductile behavior with high strength [15,16]. In contrast, typical FRC materials feature a single, prominent crack, limited ductile failure characteristics, and do not possess the high strength and deformation capabilities observed in ECC [17].

Table 1. Properties used to characterize ECC and FRC composites.

S. No	Composite	Fracture Pattern	Composite Behavior	Graphical Image	High Strength	High Deformation	Ref
1	Ideal ECC	Multiple Close racks 	Strain hardening		✓	✓	[2]
2	ECC	Multiple Spaced cracks 	Pseudo Ductile		✓	✓	[15]
3	Acceptable ECC or HPFRCC	Single crack 	Pseudo Ductile		✓	✓	[16,17]
4	FRC	Single crack 	Low ductility		X	X	[18]
5	PC	Broken in two Piece 	Brittle		X	X	[18]

3. Materials and Employed Methodology

3.1. Materials and Specimen Preparation

The materials utilized include OPC cement, sand, fly ash (Class-F), Polycarboxylate-based superplastisizor (SP), and portable water, supplemented with synthetic polymer fibers. Commercially available glass and polypropylene fibers are both employed, each with a 6mm length [19,20].

3.2. Mix Design, Manufacturing, Casting and Specimens

For ECC preparation, a ratio of 1:0.8:1.2 (cement:sand:fly ash) is used [5,7]. Multiple ECC batches are created, incorporating polymer fiber percentages of 1%, 1.5%, and 2% by volume to examine the impact of increased fiber content [21]. These fibers consist of a blend of glass and polypropylene, each contributing half of the specified percentage in their respective batches [5]. The fly ash content remains consistent across all batches, with Class F fly ash used, and sand added per the specified ratio [7,22]. A Poly-carboxylate-based superplasticizer, at 1.2% of the binder material's weight, is added for workability [5]. To achieve higher strength, the water-cement ratio is set at 0.30 for the engineered cementitious composite, while a 0.55 water-cement ratio is used for PC. The specimens, including cylinders and slabs, are cast, demolded after 24 h, and cured for 28 days. Slab specimens comprise those with steel bars, with longitudinal bars, and without steel, totaling 12 slabs specimens and 12 cylinders, with 3 representing PCC and 3 representing 2% PPGF-ECC for each mechanical test.

3.3. Testing

3.3.1. Procedures for Mechanical Properties

The compressive strengths of both PCC and ECC are determined using a Universal Testing Machine (UTM). The ASTM C39 test is applied to cylindrical specimens of PC and the bendable composite having 200 mm diameter and 400 mm height. The Splitting-Tensile test, following ASTM C496M-02 standards, is conducted using the same UTM machine, with both PC and bendable composite cylinders undergoing the testing procedure.

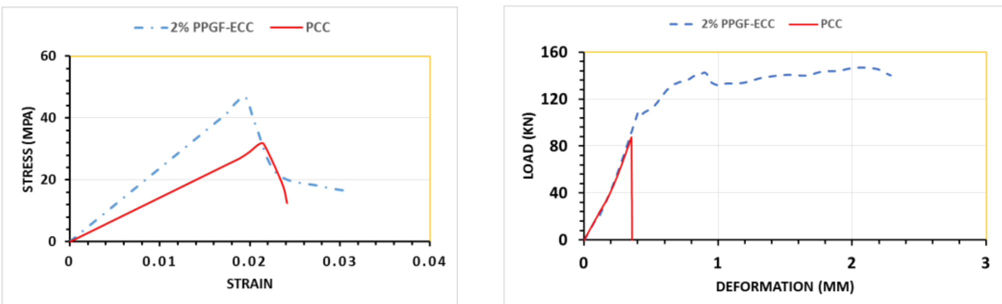
3.3.2. Test Set Up for Flexural Capacity of Slabs

Flexural testing is conducted following the ASTM C78 criteria, utilizing a three-point loading system, with deflection loading rate of 0.5 mm/sec. This testing procedure is applied to both PC and ECC composite slabs. The slab dimensions were length 457 mm, width 203 mm and height 50 mm.

4. Results

4.1. Composite Properties of PC and ECC

Upon analyzing the test results, it becomes clear that among PPGF-ECC and PC, the PPGF-ECC displays the highest compressive strength (C-S) value. Notably, the compressive strength of 2% PPGF-ECC exhibits a significant increase of 45% presented in Figure 1a. The 2% PPGF-ECC achieves the highest (STS) value, which can be attributed to a potentially ideal volume percentage of polypropylene and glass fibers shown in Figure 1b.



(**a**) (**b**)

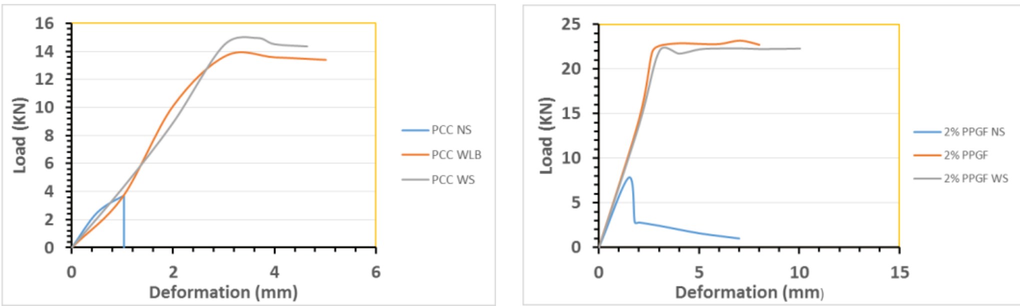
Figure 1. (**a**) Presents Compressive behavior while (**b**) Shows split tensile behavior.

4.2. Flexural Behaviour of Slabs with PC and ECC

The highest F-S value is achieved by the 2% PPGF-ECC, potentially owing to an optimal percentage of fiber content bridging the matrix. The flexure behavior of PC and PPGF-ECC composite, PC composite presents brittle behavior as the graph directly falls, while the PPGF-ECC presents pseudo ductile behavior after peak load. Figure 3 presents the cracking pattern of PPGF-ECC. Single large crack with few multiple cracks are observed after testing of the specimens. The composite exhibits certain properties of ECC, therefore it is characterized as HPFRCC [16,17].

4.2.1. Load Deflection Curves

The load deflection curves of slab specimen of PC and PPGF-ECC are presented in Figure 2. The slab specimen consists of with steel (WS), with longitudinal bars (WLB) and no steel (NS). While comparing Figure 2a,b bridging effect of fibers after peak load can be observed with a gentle down curve of load and ultimate deflection in PPGF composite while PC composite exhibits a sudden down after peak load. The F-S of PPGF is also enhanced as compared to PC. PPGF composites with steel and with longitudinal bars exhibits greater F-S and toughness compared to RCC composite.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 2. Shows the Flexural Behavior of Slabs: (**a**) PC Slabs; (**b**) PPGF-ECC Slabs.

4.2.2. Flexural Capacity

Table 2 presents the results for different mechanical testing. The testing includes compressive strength, spitting tensile strength and flexural strength. PPGF-ECC exhibits better flexural capacity in term of flexural strength, deformation and toughness index. Figure 3 presents the cracking induced in PPGF flexural specimens. Multiple crack with single large cracks are observed. Multiple cracks enhance post peak performance of PPGF-ECC.

Table 2. Represents mechanical properties of PPGF-ECC and PC.

Composite	Compressive Strength (MPa)	Split Tensile Strength (MPa)	Flexural Strength (MPa)
PC NS	25	1.5	2.2
2% PPGF NS	41	2.8	4.7

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. Shows the cracking of 2% PPGF-ECC composite: (**a**) Slab1; (**b**) Slab 2.

5. Conclusions

This research aims to develop ECC using local materials and assess its mechanical performance in comparison to PC. The goal is to showcase ECC as a durable and sustainable option for use in developing countries. ECC samples with 2% fiber content, comprising 1% PP and 1% G fibers, were analyzed, yielding the following results.

- PPGF-ECC exhibits notable mechanical properties improvements compared to PC, including higher strength, increased energy absorption pre and post-peak, and enhanced toughness, demonstrating its superior performance.
- Remarkably, the 2% PPGF-ECC shows a significant 45% increase in compressive strength and enhanced toughness, along with the highest STS and F-S values, compared to PCCs C-S, STS and F-S.
- PC is brittle with a sudden graph drop in flexural test, whereas PPGF-ECC exhibits pseudo-ductility after peak load. PPGF-ECC displays a cracking pattern with a single large crack and a few small multiple cracks while the specimen of PCC break with single large cracks, presenting brittle nature of composite.

ECC's superior mechanical properties, elongation, and durability make it a suitable choice for development in developing countries. PPGF-ECC composites utilization in structural elements will result in durable and sustainable construction in the developing countries.

6. Possible Practical Application

Moreover ECC has potential to be used in rigid pavement but further studies should be conducted in this regards for validating the composite durability.

Author Contributions: Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable for studies not involving humans or animals.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data cannot be shared.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank the organization and the reviewer for giving us opportunity to present our research work.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interest or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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