

Review of Mechanical Performance of Concrete with Coconut Fiber and Waste Aggregate Additions

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ABSTRACT

The increasing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly construction materials has led to extensive research on incorporating natural fibers and recycled aggregates in concrete production. This paper presents a comprehensive review of the mechanical performance of concrete when partially reinforced with coconut fibers and modified with waste aggregates. The discussion covers the effects on compressive strength, tensile strength, flexural strength, workability, and durability, highlighting both the benefits and limitations of these sustainable materials. The study aims to promote environmentally responsible alternatives for the construction industry while ensuring structural efficiency.

Keywords —Coconut Fiber, Waste Aggregates, Sustainable Concrete, Mechanical Properties, Recycled Materials, Eco-Friendly Construction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The construction industry is one of the largest consumers of natural resources and a significant contributor to global environmental pollution. The production of conventional concrete relies heavily on non-renewable resources such as natural aggregates, cement, and freshwater, resulting in the depletion of raw materials and the generation of considerable carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), cement production alone accounts for approximately 7–8% of global CO₂ emissions, making it one of the most carbon-intensive industrial processes.

In response to these environmental challenges, the construction sector is increasingly focusing on sustainable development practices that promote the use of renewable, recycled, and waste-derived materials. One such approach involves incorporating agricultural waste fibers and industrial by-products as alternative materials in concrete production.

Among various available options, coconut fibers, commonly referred to as coir fibers, have gained attention due to their abundance, renewability,

biodegradability, and low cost. These natural fibers, extracted from the husk of coconut shells, possess favorable mechanical properties such as high tensile strength, good ductility, and resistance to chemical degradation. Their addition to concrete helps improve tensile and flexural strengths, crack resistance, and energy absorption capacity, thereby enhancing the material's toughness and post-cracking behavior.

Similarly, waste aggregates derived from construction and demolition waste (CDW), including crushed concrete, ceramic tiles, bricks, and glass, present a sustainable alternative to natural aggregates. The use of such recycled aggregates not only reduces the demand for virgin quarry materials but also diverts substantial amounts of construction debris from landfills, mitigating associated environmental hazards.

Incorporating coconut fibers and waste aggregates into concrete offers multiple environmental benefits, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions, conservation of natural resources, and efficient waste management. However, their impact on the mechanical performance, durability, and workability of concrete remains a subject of ongoing research.

Critical factors such as fiber content, aggregate replacement ratio, particle size distribution, and fiber-matrix interaction significantly influence the final properties of the composite material.

Therefore, it is essential to thoroughly investigate and optimize the mix design when introducing these alternative materials to ensure that the resulting concrete meets the required performance standards for structural applications. This review aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the effects of coconut fiber and waste aggregate additions on the mechanical properties of concrete, focusing on compressive, tensile, and flexural strength, while also addressing challenges related to workability and long-term durability.

II. COCONUT FIBER IN CONCRETE

2.1. Properties of Coconut Fiber

Coconut fiber, commonly referred to as coir fiber, is a natural lignocellulosic material extracted from the outer husk of coconut shells. It is widely available in tropical regions and has gained attention as a sustainable reinforcement material for concrete due to its renewable nature, low cost, and eco-friendliness.

Some of the key physical and mechanical properties of coconut fiber include:

- **Low Density:** Approximately 1.15–1.20 g/cm³, making it one of the lightest natural fibers suitable for construction applications.
- **High Tensile Strength:** Ranges between 100 to 200 MPa, allowing the fibers to resist tensile stresses effectively.
- **Excellent Ductility:** Coconut fibers exhibit good elongation at break, enhancing the toughness of concrete.
- **Natural Durability:** The fibers possess inherent resistance to biological degradation, rot, and decay, making them suitable for use in concrete exposed to varying environmental conditions.
- **Fiber Dimensions:** Typically, fiber lengths used in concrete applications range between 50 mm to 100 mm, with a modulus of elasticity between 4 to 6 GPa, which provides sufficient flexibility and load transfer capacity.

The surface roughness and chemical composition of coconut fibers allow them to develop moderate bonding with the cementitious matrix, though treatments such as alkali soaking (e.g., NaOH treatment) can further enhance fiber-matrix interaction.

2.2. Effects on Mechanical Properties of Concrete

The inclusion of coconut fibers in concrete significantly influences its mechanical behavior, especially in terms of tensile strength, flexural strength, ductility, and crack resistance. However, its impact on compressive strength and workability requires careful mix design and fiber content optimization.

Compressive Strength: The incorporation of coconut fibers typically results in a slight reduction in compressive strength compared to conventional concrete. This decline is primarily attributed to the increased air entrainment and reduced compaction caused by fiber clustering and non-uniform distribution within the mix. Additionally, the fiber-matrix interfacial bond strength is generally lower compared to steel or synthetic fibers, leading to a marginal decrease in load-carrying capacity under compression.

However, when the fiber content is maintained within an optimal range of 1–2% by volume, the reduction in compressive strength remains minimal and within acceptable limits for non-structural and some structural applications.

Tensile Strength: One of the most notable benefits of coconut fiber reinforcement is the enhancement of tensile strength, particularly split tensile strength. Experimental studies have shown that incorporating coconut fibers can lead to a 10–25% improvement in tensile strength, depending on factors such as fiber length, aspect ratio, content, and surface treatment. The fibers effectively bridge microcracks, delaying crack propagation and improving the overall tensile capacity of the concrete.

Flexural Strength: The addition of coconut fibers significantly improves the flexural strength and toughness of concrete. The fibers help in controlling crack initiation and propagation, leading to improved post-cracking behavior and energy absorption capacity. This makes coconut fiber-

reinforced concrete suitable for pavements, slabs, and other elements prone to flexural stresses. Flexural strength improvements are generally reported in the range of 15–30% for fiber dosages up to 2% by volume.

Workability: A common challenge associated with coconut fiber addition is the reduction in workability. The hydrophilic nature of natural fibers leads to increased water absorption, while the fibrous texture increases internal friction within the mix, causing a decrease in slump. As fiber content increases, the workability progressively decreases, making concrete placement and compaction more difficult.

To mitigate this issue, chemical admixtures like superplasticizers and pre-soaking of fibers are often recommended to improve mix flowability and ensure uniform fiber dispersion.

III. WASTE AGGREGATES IN CONCRETE

3.1 Types of Waste Aggregates

The utilization of waste aggregates in concrete production has gained significant attention in recent years due to growing environmental concerns and the need for sustainable construction practices. Waste aggregates are typically sourced from construction and demolition waste (CDW) or other industrial by-products. They serve as a partial or complete replacement for natural aggregates in concrete mixes, helping reduce the extraction of virgin materials and minimize landfill disposal.

The most commonly used types of waste aggregates include:

Recycled Concrete Aggregates (RCA): Derived from crushed and processed old concrete structures. RCA contains both coarse and fine particles with residual mortar adhering to their surfaces.

Ceramic Waste Aggregates: Obtained from discarded ceramic tiles, sanitary ware, and bricks. These aggregates are known for their high hardness and abrasion resistance but also possess higher porosity.

Glass Waste Aggregates: Sourced from waste glass bottles and panels, crushed and graded into fine or coarse aggregates. Glass aggregates provide good aesthetic value but require processing to mitigate alkali-silica reaction (ASR) risks.

Brick Waste Aggregates: Generated from broken bricks, these aggregates have relatively low density and high water absorption, making them suitable mainly for non-structural applications.

All these waste materials undergo crushing, sieving, washing, and grading processes to ensure they meet standard requirements for concrete production.

3.2 Influence on Mechanical Properties

The incorporation of waste aggregates significantly affects the mechanical performance and durability characteristics of concrete. The extent of these effects largely depends on factors such as the type, quality, replacement ratio, and pre-treatment of the waste aggregates. One of the most prominent impacts is on compressive strength. Typically, the use of waste aggregates leads to a reduction in compressive strength, especially when natural aggregates are replaced at higher levels. This strength reduction is primarily due to the higher porosity and irregular surface texture of most waste aggregates, such as recycled concrete aggregates (RCA) and brick waste, which increase the void content within the concrete mix. Additionally, the interfacial transition zone (ITZ) between the waste aggregates and the cement matrix is generally less dense and more prone to microcracking compared to that in concrete made with natural aggregates. Residual mortar attached to aggregates like RCA further lowers the overall density and mechanical strength. Studies have shown that compressive strength reductions typically range between 10% and 20% when natural aggregates are fully replaced. However, partial replacement levels of up to 30–40% can still achieve acceptable strength, especially when pozzolanic materials like fly ash or silica fume are used as supplementary binders.

Similar trends are observed in tensile and flexural strength properties. Both the split tensile strength and the flexural strength of concrete tend to decrease with increasing waste aggregate content. This reduction is mainly attributed to weak aggregate-matrix bonding, caused by the porous and rough surface texture of waste aggregates, and increased microcracking due to higher water absorption. Despite these challenges, modest replacement levels, typically up to 30–35%, can

still deliver satisfactory tensile and flexural performance, making such mixes suitable for selected structural and non-structural applications.

Durability properties of concrete are also influenced by the use of waste aggregates. One major concern is higher water absorption, which leads to increased permeability and can reduce durability. Furthermore, the increased porosity of waste aggregates negatively affects freeze-thaw resistance, especially in colder climates. The chloride and sulphate resistance of concrete can also diminish, particularly when RCA or brick waste is used, unless compensated with supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs). To mitigate these adverse effects and improve durability, pre-treatment methods such as aggregate saturation, surface coating, or pozzolanic slurry treatments are recommended. Additionally, optimizing the concrete mix design by lowering the water-cement ratio, incorporating SCMs like fly ash, silica fume, or ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBS), and using superplasticizers can significantly enhance durability.

Workability is another critical aspect impacted by waste aggregates. The use of such aggregates generally reduces workability, resulting in lower slump values. This is primarily due to the higher surface roughness and angularity of waste aggregates, which increases internal friction within the mix. Moreover, their higher water absorption capacity further reduces mix consistency. To counteract these effects, the use of water-reducing admixtures like superplasticizers is recommended. Additionally, pre-saturating the waste aggregates before batching can help minimize water absorption during mixing, thereby improving workability without compromising the overall strength and durability of the concrete.

IV. SYNERGISTIC USE OF COCONUT FIBER AND WASTE AGGREGATES

The simultaneous incorporation of coconut fiber and waste aggregates in concrete offers a promising strategy for balancing mechanical performance with environmental sustainability. Individually, each material presents specific benefits and limitations. Waste aggregates, derived from construction and demolition debris, help in reducing the consumption

of natural resources and lowering carbon emissions. However, their inclusion often leads to reductions in compressive strength, increased porosity, and decreased durability due to weaker interfacial transition zones (ITZ) and higher water absorption. On the other hand, coconut fibers, being a natural and renewable material, contribute significantly to improving tensile and flexural properties, crack resistance, and energy absorption capacity. Their ability to bridge microcracks within the concrete matrix enhances ductility and toughness, which are often compromised when using waste aggregates alone.

When used together, coconut fibers can help offset the negative impact of waste aggregates on tensile and flexural performance. This synergistic effect is particularly valuable in applications where improved post-cracking behavior and resistance to brittle failure are required. While the waste aggregates contribute to environmental benefits by promoting recycling and waste management, coconut fibers improve the mechanical behavior of the composite material by enhancing load transfer and delaying crack propagation.

To achieve an optimal balance between strength, durability, and workability, researchers recommend specific mix proportions. Coconut fiber content is generally maintained between 0.5% and 2% by volume of the concrete mix. Within this range, fibers contribute positively to tensile and flexural strength without causing significant workability loss or fiber balling issues. Similarly, waste aggregate replacement levels are typically limited to 20% to 40% by weight of natural aggregates. At these levels, the reduction in compressive strength remains within acceptable limits, and durability can be maintained, especially when supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) like fly ash or silica fume are included to refine the microstructure.

Moreover, appropriate pre-treatment of waste aggregates and the use of superplasticizers or water-reducing admixtures are essential to counterbalance the higher water demand and maintain suitable workability. Overall, the combined use of coconut fibers and waste aggregates not only aligns with sustainability goals but also offers an innovative pathway to produce environmentally friendly,

structurally sound concrete suitable for a range of construction applications.

V. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the environmental and mechanical benefits offered by the combined use of coconut fibers and waste aggregates in concrete, several challenges and limitations need to be addressed to ensure their effective and safe application in construction projects.

Workability Loss: One of the primary challenges associated with incorporating both coconut fibers and waste aggregates is the significant reduction in workability. Coconut fibers tend to absorb water and increase the cohesiveness of the mix, leading to lower slump values and difficulties in placement and compaction. Similarly, waste aggregates, especially those with high porosity and surface roughness like recycled concrete aggregates (RCA) or brick waste, further reduce workability due to their high water absorption and angularity. To overcome this issue, the use of water-reducing admixtures or superplasticizers becomes necessary to restore desired workability without compromising the mix's strength or durability.

Mix Design Complexity: Achieving an optimal balance between strength, workability, and durability requires precise mix design and careful proportioning of both coconut fibers and waste aggregates. Excessive fiber content can lead to problems such as fiber balling, uneven distribution, and reduced compactability. Similarly, higher replacement levels of waste aggregates can excessively lower strength and durability. Therefore, pre-treatment processes such as pre-soaking waste aggregates to minimize water absorption and fiber surface treatments (like chemical coating or alkali treatment) to improve fiber-matrix bonding are often required. These additional steps increase the complexity of the mix design and production process.

Long-Term Durability Concerns: The long-term durability of concrete containing both coconut fibers and waste aggregates remains a subject of ongoing research. Natural fibers like coconut fibers are organic and susceptible to degradation over time, especially when exposed to moisture, alkalis, or

microbial attacks. Additionally, the higher permeability and porosity introduced by waste aggregates can increase the risk of water ingress, freeze-thaw damage, and chemical attacks. Further studies are needed to investigate the long-term performance, fiber durability under various exposure conditions, and protective treatments that can enhance lifespan.

Lack of Standardization: Currently, there is a lack of well-established and widely accepted standardized guidelines or codes for the combined use of natural fibers and recycled aggregates in concrete. This absence of standards creates uncertainties regarding mix proportioning, quality control, performance evaluation, and structural safety. Without clear specifications, engineers and contractors may hesitate to adopt these sustainable alternatives on a larger scale.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The incorporation of coconut fibers and waste aggregates offers a viable, sustainable alternative to conventional concrete constituents. While there are trade-offs in terms of workability and compressive strength, the improvements in tensile and flexural performance, along with environmental benefits, make such concrete suitable for low to medium strength applications like pavements, non-structural elements, and precast units. Further research into durability performance, long-term behavior, and optimal mix design will help in mainstreaming these sustainable materials in construction.

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