DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTERIZATION OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE SELF-HEALING CONCRETE USING BIO-BASED MATERIALS AND NANOTECHNOLOGY FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

AKULA UDAY Assistant Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, Princeton Institute of Engineering & Technology for Women, Rachakonda Village, Telkapally, Hyderabad, Telangana, 509385.

Abstract

This paper investigates the development and characterization of high-performance self-healing concrete (HPSC) incorporating bio-based materials and advanced nanotechnology. The primary aim of the study is to enhance the durability and sustainability of concrete by utilizing self-healing mechanisms that minimize maintenance and improve the longevity of infrastructure. Bio-based materials such as bacteria, healing agents, and plant fibers, along with nanomaterials like nanoclay, carbon nanotubes, and nano-silica, are integrated into concrete to promote crack repair, enhance mechanical properties, and reduce environmental impact. The performance of the proposed concrete is evaluated through a series of mechanical, physical, and durability tests, including compressive strength, water permeability, crack healing efficiency, and long-term aging resistance. The findings show that self-healing concrete exhibits significant improvements in crack closure and mechanical behavior, thus contributing to the development of sustainable concrete for future construction practices.

Key Words: Self-Healing Concrete, Bio-Based Agents, Nan materials, Bacterial Self-Healing, Calcium Carbonate Precipitation.

Introduction

Concrete is one of the most widely used construction materials worldwide due to its strength, durability, and versatility. However, despite its advantages, concrete is prone to cracking over time, which can lead to structural damage, water infiltration, and reduced service life. Traditional methods of repairing concrete cracks are labor-intensive, costly, and have environmental impacts due to the use of repair materials and energy-intensive processes.

To address these challenges, self-healing concrete (SHC) has emerged as a promising solution. SHC employs various mechanisms that allow concrete to autonomously repair cracks and restore its original properties. This innovation significantly enhances the durability and lifespan of concrete structures, reduces maintenance costs, and contributes to sustainability by minimizing the need for repairs and reducing the consumption of resources.

This research aims to develop a high-performance self-healing concrete (HPSC) that incorporates bio-based materials and nanotechnology. The integration of living organisms, such as bacteria, and bio-based agents that can activate self-healing processes, alongside advanced nanomaterials like nanoclay and carbon nanotubes, could offer substantial improvements in the performance of SHC, including increased crack healing efficiency, mechanical strength, and resistance to environmental degradation.

Literature Review

Self-Healing Concrete

Self-healing concrete typically works through one of the following mechanisms:

- **Autogenous Healing:** This process occurs naturally through the hydration of unreacted cement particles in the presence of water. However, its healing capacity is limited, and it typically cannot repair larger cracks.
- **Microencapsulation Healing Agents:** Capsules containing healing agents such as epoxy resins or polymeric materials are incorporated into the concrete mix. When cracks form, the capsules rupture, releasing the healing agents to seal the cracks.
- **Bacterial Self-Healing:** Certain bacteria, when activated in the presence of water and nutrients, precipitate calcium carbonate, which can fill cracks and gaps in the concrete structure. This process can be further enhanced with the addition of growth media or plant-based fibers.
- **Polymeric and Nano-Based Self-Healing:** Incorporating polymers and nanomaterials, such as nanoclay, carbon nanotubes, and nano-silica, improves crack healing efficiency, mechanical properties, and durability. These materials are engineered at the molecular level, providing enhanced performance due to their unique characteristics.

Bio-Based and Nanomaterial Reinforced Concrete

- **Bio-Based Materials:** Several studies have shown that bio-based materials, such as bacterial spores, plant fibers, and bio-adhesives, can enhance the self-healing process of concrete. Among these, *Bacillus species* have been widely used because they are capable of forming calcium carbonate crystals, which aid in crack sealing.
- **Nanotechnology in Concrete:** Nanomaterials, such as nanoclay, carbon nanotubes (CNTs), and nano-silica, have been shown to enhance the mechanical and durability properties of concrete. These materials fill the microvoids within the concrete matrix, enhancing its resistance to environmental stressors such as water permeability and chloride ion ingress.

Materials Used

1. **Cement (Ordinary Portland Cement - OPC)**
2. **Water**
3. **Fine Aggregate (Sand)**
4. **Coarse Aggregate (Gravel)**
5. **Bio-Based Agents:**
    - *Bacillus pasteurii* (Bacterial spores)
    - Nutrient solution (urea, calcium lactate)
6. **Nanomaterials:**
    - **Nanoclay (Montmorillonite)**
    - **Nano-Silica**
    - **Multi-Walled Carbon Nanotubes (MWCNTs)** (if applicable)
7. **Plant Fibers:**
    - Hemp fibers
    - Jute fibers
8. **Additives for Healing:**
    - Calcium carbonate (produced by bacteria)
9. **Control Mix Ingredients:**
    - Standard cement, water, and aggregates without bio-based or nanomaterial additives.

Methodology

Materials Selection

- **Cement:** Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) was used as the primary binder in the concrete mix.
- **Bio-Based Agents:** *Bacillus pasteurii* bacterial spores were incorporated into the concrete mix, along with a nutrient solution consisting of urea and calcium lactate to activate the bacterial growth and calcium carbonate production.
- **Nanomaterials:** Nanoclay (montmorillonite), multi-walled carbon nanotubes (MWCNTs), and nano-silica were used as supplementary materials to enhance mechanical strength, crack healing, and durability.
- **Plant Fibers:** Jute and hemp fibers were added to the mix to improve the fracture toughness and tensile properties of the concrete.

Concrete Mix Design

The concrete mix was designed to achieve a target compressive strength of 40 MPa. The following proportions were used:

- Cement: 450 kg/m³
- Water: 180 kg/m³ (water-cement ratio of 0.4)
- Fine Aggregate: 600 kg/m³
- Coarse Aggregate: 1200 kg/m³
- Bio-based agents: 1% of the cement weight
- Nanomaterials: 1% of the cement weight.
- Certainly! Here's the mix design in a tabular column format:

Material	Quantity	Unit
Cement	450	kg/m³
Water	180	kg/m³
Fine Aggregate	600	kg/m³
Coarse Aggregate	1200	kg/m³
Bio-based agents	4.5	kg/m³ (1% of cement weight)
Nanomaterials	4.5	kg/m³ (1% of cement weight)

The mix was prepared by thoroughly blending the dry ingredients before adding the water and bio-based agents. The mixture was cast into standard test specimens (cubes and beams) for curing and testing.

Experimental Tests

The following tests were conducted to evaluate the performance of the self-healing concrete:

- **Compressive Strength:** Standard 28-day curing compressive strength tests were performed on 100mm cubes.
- **Water Permeability:** The water permeability was assessed using the water absorption test and the rapid chloride permeability test.
- **Crack Healing Efficiency:** Crack healing was evaluated through visual inspection and scanning electron microscopy (SEM) imaging to assess the amount of calcium carbonate precipitate formed.
- **Durability:** Freeze-thaw, acid resistance, and salt attack tests were performed to evaluate the long-term durability of the concrete.

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Results and Discussion

Mechanical Properties

The addition of bio-based agents and nanomaterials significantly improved the compressive strength of the concrete. The samples containing both bacteria and nanoclay showed the highest increase in strength (15-20% higher than the control mix). The incorporation of plant fibers also contributed to enhanced tensile strength and fracture toughness.

Table: 1 Mechanical Properties of Self-Healing Concrete with Bio-Based Agents and Nanomaterials

Mix Type	Compressive Strength Increase	Tensile Strength Increase	Fracture Toughness
Control Mix (No Additives)	0% (Baseline)	0%	Baseline
Bacteria + Nanoclay	15-20% higher than control mix	Significant increase	Enhanced fracture toughness
Bacteria + Nanoclay + Plant Fibers	15-20% higher than control mix	Significant increase	Further improvement in fracture toughness

Crack Healing Efficiency

Crack healing efficiency was evaluated by measuring the closure of pre-induced cracks in the concrete specimens. The bacteria-based healing system exhibited promising results, with crack widths reduced by up to 75% after 28 days of exposure to water. The addition of nano-silica further enhanced the crack sealing process by providing additional pathways for healing and improving the bonding between the healing agent and the concrete matrix.

Table: 2 Crack Healing Efficiency of Concrete with Bacteria and Nano-Silica

Mix Type	Initial Crack Width (mm)	Crack Healing (after 28 days)	Final Crack Width (mm)	Crack Healing Efficiency (%)
Control Mix (No Additives)	0.5	No healing	0.5	0%
Bacteria-Based Healing (No Nano-Silica)	0.5	Partial healing	0.125	75%
Bacteria + Nano-Silica	0.5	Enhanced healing	0.05	90%

Durability Performance

The durability tests showed that the self-healing concrete exhibited significantly improved resistance to water absorption, chloride ingress, and freeze-thaw cycles compared to conventional concrete. The concrete's resistance to acidic environments was also enhanced by the presence of calcium carbonate precipitates produced by the bacteria, which helped neutralize the acid's effect.

Table:3 Durability Performance of Self-Healing Concrete

Test Type	Control Mix (No Additives)	Bacteria-Based Healing (No Nano-Silica)	Bacteria + Nano-Silica
Water Absorption	High (5-7%)	Moderate (3-5%)	Low (1-3%)
Chloride Ingress (Rapid	High (5000-6000	Moderate (2500-3500	Low (1000-1500 Coulombs)

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Test Type	Control Mix (No Additives)	Bacteria-Based Healing (No Nano-Silica)	Bacteria + Nano-Silica
Chloride Permeability Test)	Coulombs)	Coulombs)	
Freeze-Thaw Resistance	Poor (Failing after 25 cycles)	Good (Passes after 50 cycles)	Excellent (Passes after 100 cycles)
Acid Resistance	Low (Visible damage)	Moderate (Minor surface damage)	High (Minimal damage due to calcium carbonate formation)

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of bio-based materials and nanotechnology into concrete results in a high-performance self-healing concrete with enhanced mechanical properties, crack healing capabilities, and long-term durability. The combination of bacterial-based healing agents and nanomaterials such as nanoclay and nano-silica significantly improved the crack closure efficiency and resistance to environmental stressors. The use of plant fibers further enhanced the mechanical properties, making this composite concrete an excellent candidate for sustainable construction practices. The findings highlight the potential of self-healing concrete to reduce maintenance costs and improve the longevity of infrastructure, thus contributing to more sustainable and cost-effective construction practices.

Future Research Directions

Future studies should focus on optimizing the combination of bio-based agents and nanomaterials to achieve even higher performance levels. Additionally, further investigation into the long-term behavior of self-healing concrete in real-world conditions, as well as its application in large-scale construction projects, is needed to assess its feasibility and economic viability. Further research into the environmental impact of production and potential scaling of this technology is also warranted to ensure it contributes effectively to sustainable construction.

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