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Research Article

Fabrication and Characterization of Partial Bio-nano-silica Inclusion in Fibre-Reinforced Concrete for High-performance Applications

D. Vivek,[1] **C. Aravind**,[1] **S. Gokulkumar**,[2] **M. Aravindh**,[2] **and Yalew Asres**[3]

[1]*Department of Civil Engineering, KPR Institute of Engineering and Technology, Arasur, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641407, India*
[2]*Department of Mechanical Engineering, KPR Institute of Engineering and Technology, Arasur, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641407, India*
[3]*Department of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Manufacturing, Institute of Technology, Hawassa University, Hawassa, Ethiopia*

Correspondence should be addressed to D. Vivek; viveksiga91@gmail.com and Yalew Asres; yalewa@hu.edu.et

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Ultra-high-performance fibre-reinforced concrete (UHPFRC) is a specialized type of concrete (to create a very dense matrix) that is used for both new construction and renovation projects in order to improve the lifespan of structures. Researchers analyse and evaluate only the microstructure, porosity, and fresh and hardened concrete properties of UHPFRC but limited their exploration on the reduction of the mechanical properties of UHPFRC due to the presence of metallic particles and micro-fractures that occur during the generation of hydrogen. Hence, the present study aims to eliminate the existing problem by hybridization approach (mixing of bio-nano-silica (nS) and polypropylene) with different percentages to further improve the strength properties of UHPFRC. The result showed that the compressive strength is increased by 15.5% compared to traditional concrete due to the filling ratio of nS in the pores of the concrete; in addition, the fibre's surface and roughness also contributed to the strength enhancement.

1. Introduction

Concrete is regarded as a broadly used resource on the globe, with an anticipated yearly manufacture of 28.2 billion tones during 2017, resulting in a standard of roughly 2.8 m^3 for every person on the planet. Concrete is considered to be primary element in construction industry. The need for infrastructure industry accounts for almost 70% of all carbon. CO_2 outflows account for 5%–7% of total CO_2 discharges on our planet. By 2060, the need for concrete is expected to increase by about 200%, reaching 7,000 million tons per year. As a result, the primary management problems for the next several years will be developing and producing concrete that uses fewer clinkers and emits less carbon dioxide than ordinary concrete while providing the same performance unchanging quality and somewhat more strength [1–3]. It was portrayed as the importance of toughness in construction materials for eco-effectiveness, stating that an augment in considerable resilience for 60 years to 600 years might reduce the climate's influence by up to 10%. It was calculated that by increasing the significant compressive strength, the consumption of supported steel might be reduced by as much as half. All things considered, the main concern for its future production is long-lasting concrete [4]. This research intended at use of bio-nanoparticles to enhance the resilience and mechanical characteristics of cementitious composites. In late 1980s, the use of bio-nanoscience in cement materials was recognized and became dynamic for over a quarter-century. Bio-nano-materials offer incredible features and capacities, and they can be afforded as cementitious composites with top performance, good mechanical, and durability properties, as well as multifunctionality and insight [5]. Cementitious composites made of bio-nanoscale metallic and non-metallic compounds were initially employed on the way by altering or improving the characteristics of cementitious resources. Other inventions of superior performance of building materials may be reorganized created, developed by seeing the structure at its bio-nano-level. The design at the nuclear level, the composite, may be seen as technology advances, and their distinct qualities of each successive phase are able to be measured at the bio-nano-level. Perception on bio-nanoparticles can thus be used to improve the presentation of composites [6–8]. The analysts were persuaded to use bio-nanoparticle and bio-nano-filaments to increase the strength, durability and handling property of concrete composites. Novel features of bio-nanoparticles with diameters ranging from 1 to 100 nm have piqued the curiosity of many people in recent years [9–11]. One of the key advantages of bio-nanoparticles is their huge quantity at the surface [12–14]. Some bio-nanoparticles are being used as a bio-nano-added ingredient in concrete-based products to improve their quality and increase their utility; nS have become common among such bio-nano-sized particles [15]. The parameter nS, also known as silicon dioxide bio-nanoparticles, could be used as additives to improve the mechanical and toughness qualities of concrete. The influence of nS on the bio-nanostructure in concrete also confirmed the enhancement of significant strength [16–19]. The results discovered that nS is an outstanding solution for reducing the use of concrete in the production of high-strength concrete. Incorporating nS as a cement substitute makes significant sense and reduces the CO_2 impact of the significant goods [20, 21]. Because of their superior performance in filling effect and molecular size appropriation, nS has gained special attention in comparison to other mineral admixtures, reduced permeability in concrete, and widened their pozzolanic reaction by calcium hydroxide to generate calcium-silicate hydrate (C-S-H). In terms of availability, nS is produced on a large scale, making it relatively accessible for industrial and commercial purposes. However, the production process of nS can be challenging and requires specialized equipment, which can result in higher costs compared to the production of traditional silica materials. The cost of nS depends on several factors, including the production method, purity, and quantity being purchased. Generally, larger quantities of nS are more cost-effective than smaller quantities. Such nS behaviour results in enhanced mechanical characteristics in the significant blend [22–24]. When compared to silica exhaust, nS improved the concrete setting process, reduced drainage, and increased the isolation and cohesion of new mixes [25, 26]. Because of its high pozzolanic activity, bio-nano-silica (nS) can consume and change calcium hydroxide into C-S-H gel at an early stage, improving the mechanical properties of the substance [27–30]. The biggest limitation hindering the widespread production of UHPFRC is its high cost [31]. Therefore, there is an increasing need to replace expensive key ingredients such as cement and silica fume to overcome this limitation [32]. Such substitution may be achieved using by-product materials with disposal processes that raise environmental concerns [33]. Some by-product materials have also been incorporated into his UHPFRC to improve its performance and reduce overall costs [34]. Concrete curing is the result of chemical reactions that occur throughout cement hydration and is referred as a set of concrete. Environmental factors, such as reactions, may influence the concrete's properties throughout setting. High temperatures, low humidity, wind, and other factors are considered throughout concrete setting. Strong wind, high temperature, and a dry environment may all have an impact on the speed of two phenomena which impact concrete curing: moisture evaporation owing to cement hydration. To address this issue, one potential strategy is to explore filaments, which may effectively limit growth to avoid the utilization of non-sustainable normal rock as well as to keep Stay away from excessive ground filling. The main objective of this study is to find the effect of utilizing combination of bio-nS and steel fibre in ultra-high-performance fibre-reinforced concrete (UHPFRC). UHPFRC has become an important component in the construction industry due to its excellent properties. Therefore, many researchers recently tested UHPFRC properties under the influence of additional cementitious materials obtained using industrial waste [35]. Previous studies have demonstrated the high potential for using industrial waste as a partial cement substitute in UHPFRC production, such as rice husk ash being effectively used to partially replace silica fume or cement in concrete mixes.

Figure 1: Bio-nano-silica.

2. Research Significance

This study is the first to use a combination of bio-nS and polypropylene fibres as a partial substitute for cement. This study investigates the impact of using a combination of bio-nS and polypropylene fibres in various ratios as a partial substitute for cement on freshness and mechanical microstructural properties.

3. Materials and Methods

Industrially accessible bio-nS is chosen as the pozzolanic material as shown in Figure 1, and its XRD analysis is done to study the primary characteristics as illustrated in Figure 2. Further, we used two sorts of filaments which is straight steel fibre varying from 1% to 2% and small polypropylene fibre. Table 1 displays additional information on used resources. Ordinary Portland cement of grade of 53 grade, confirming to IS: 12269–1987, was used, and polycarboxylate ether is used as a water-reducing agent. Preliminary test on cement was

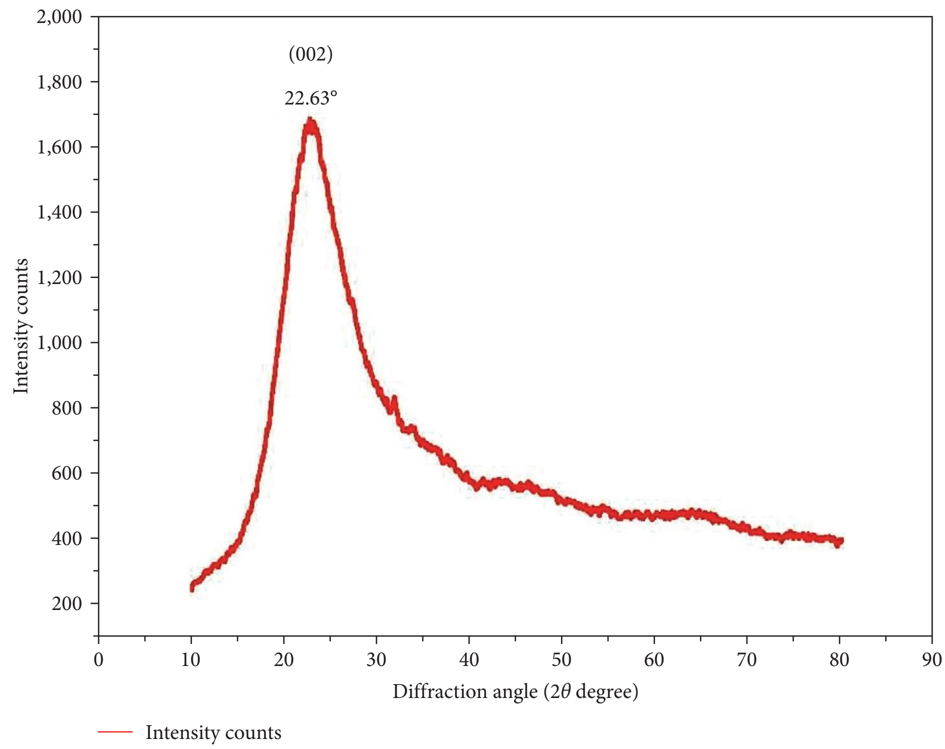

Figure 2: XRD analysis of bio-nano-silica.

Table 1: Material properties.

Materials	Specific density (g/cm^3)
Cement	3.16
Fine aggregate	2.54
Coarse aggregate	2.43
Superplasticizer	1.01
Bio-nano-silica	2.10
Polypropylene fibre	8.90

Table 2: Mix proportions.

Properties	Percentage of polypropylene fibre				
	0	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5
Cement (kg/m^3)	612	605	602	600	596
NS (percentage)	0	1	1	2	2
Water (kg/m^3)	200	200	200	200	200
Fine aggregate (kg/m^3)	680	680	680	680	680
Coarse aggregate (kg/m^3)	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,020	1,020
Superplasticizer (%)	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2

Table 3: Fresh concrete properties.

Percentage of polypropylene fibre	Slump flow (mm)
0	158
1	179
1.5	183
2	186
2.5	190

Table 4: Bionano-silica properties.

Particulars	Range
Specific surface area (m^2/gm)	204
pH value	4.2
Loss on drying (%)	0.66
Loss of ignition (%)	0.72
Silica content	99.9
Carbon content	0.07

conducted as per IS 4031-1988. Tables 1 and 2 provide information on the mix proportions of the concrete's material properties, while Tables 3 and 4 display the properties of fresh concrete and bio-nS, respectively.

4. Experimental Methodology

4.1. Compressive Strength. Materials used for this research are well graded and dry condition is maintained. Concrete cubes of size (150 × 150 × 150 in mm) are casted to test compressive strength and curing is carried out for 28 days by immersing specimen in water. As stated below, an intrinsic grain size distribution technique of regular variety of factors presents a potential for mix design in which extremely tiny particles may be added with comparatively little effort. The first attempts to explain an intended formulation of concrete blends that frequently comprise regularly scaled elements can be traced back more than a century. Gong et al. [34]

proved through his experimentation that the stacking of concrete particles may change the characteristics of the resulting concrete. It was accomplished that a spatial uninterrupted gradation of particles in the created concrete mixes can facilitate to develop the characteristics of concrete. An ideal particle shape of the applied particle components in the mix might potentially yield a minimum porosity, as demonstrated in Equation (1).

$$P(D) = \frac{(D)}{(D_{\max})} \tag{1}$$

Here D would be the element dimension (μm), P (D) is proportion of entire solids that are lesser than dimension D, and $D_{\max}$ is major element size (μm). However, the minimal particles are not included in Equation (1), notwithstanding the fact that the stocking model has a finite smaller size limit with which it may be enhanced. The modified model is shown below in Equation (2).

$$P(D) = \frac{D^q - D^q_{\min}}{D^q_{\max} - D^q_{\min}}, \tag{2}$$

where $D_{\min}$ – Particle size in μm

Using Equation (2), various types of concrete may be constructed by varying the dispersion modulus q, which defines the percentage of fine and coarse grains in the combination. Greater value of dispersion modulus ($q > 0.5$) often results in coarse mixes, but lesser values ($q = 0.25$) result in fine-particle-rich concrete blends. It was proved that a q range of 0–0.28 will potentially affect optimum packing. The suggestions provided that even in self-compacting concrete, a q in range of 0.22–0.25 are used (SCC). As a result, it is used to design UHPFRC in this case, given that a significant number of fine particles are present. In this study, the frequency of q is set at 0.23 since it is used to construct the UHPFRC. In this investigation, the adapted model Equation (2) serves while a goal task for optimizing the composition of granular material mixtures. By means of an optimization process based on least squares method, the scope of each individual constituent in the mix is modified until an optimal match between the assembled mix and the goal curve is achieved, as shown in Equation (3). While the divergence among goal curve and its constructed blend is minimized, as shown by addition of square of residuals (RSS) for set element size, the concrete composition is considered optimum.

$$\mathrm{RSS} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left(P_{\mathrm{mix}}\left(D_i^{i+1}\right) - P_{\mathrm{tar}}\left(D_i^{i+1}\right)\right) \tag{3}$$

$P_{\mathrm{mix}}\left(D_i^{i+1}\right)$–Composed mix, $P_{\mathrm{tar}}\left(D_i^{i+1}\right)$–Target grading calculated from Equation (2).

This study will design thirty batches of UHPFRC in total. Furthermore, nS is incorporated in amounts ranging from 1% to 2% of the overall binder quantity. According to the literature, the proportion of steel fibre is approximately 3% by concrete volume, whereas the content of polymer fibre is not as much as 2.5% by concrete volume. As a result, steel and polypropylene fibres account for 0%–2.5% of the volume of concrete correspondingly. As a result of examining the characteristics of various UHPFRCs, it will be feasible to assess the various impacts of nS and hybrid fibres here on characteristics of UHPFRC. Mixing duration intended UHPFRC is about ten minutes and lower binder proportion. Furthermore, incorporation is usually done in a laboratory setting using dried and toughened aggregates and powder components. While combining and testing, the room temperature remains constant at roughly twenty-one degrees Celsius.

4.2. Porosity of UHPFRC. The intended UHPFRC's porosity is calculated using the vacuum saturation system that is known as highest effective saturation method. Saturation is performed on at least three samples ($100 \times 100 \times 20$) mm for every combination, as described as per ASTM C1202. The following Equation (4) is used to compute the water-permeable porosity.

$$\varphi_{v,\,\mathrm{water}} = \frac{m_s - m_d}{m_s - m_w} \times 100 \tag{4}$$

$\varphi_{v,\,\mathrm{water}}$–Permeable water porosity, m_s–saturated sample mass in surface dry condition, m_w–mass of saturated water sample, m_d–mass of oven-dried sample.

5. Result and Discussion

Preliminary investigations revealed that the addition of nS and fibres will reduce its workability of concrete. The flowability of intended concrete decreases from 35.6 cm to roughly 29.0 cm. This incident is capable of recognizing the nS permeable surface, which is capable of absorbing a lot of water. Moreover, the impact of nS and hybrid fibres incorporation into the slump flow capacity of new UHPFRC blends. The data exhibit the link between the nS and composite fibre content as well as flowability of fresh UHPFRC. It is vital to note that the flowability of all UHPFRC combinations diminishes linearly with the incorporation of polypropylene fibres. The determining coefficients, R^2 in every regression outline, are close to one, indicating a good relationship between the numbers of polypropylene fibres, and also, the workability is developed by UHPFRC. Furthermore, the inclusion of nS lowers the UHPFRC's workability. For example, the slump flow value in the sample material (excluding nS and fibres) is around 29 cm, but it lowers to roughly 25.6 and 22.5 cm if nS (2%) or steel fibre (2% by volume) is added, respectively. When nS (2%) and Steel fibre (2% by volume) was concurrently introduced to the UHPFRC, the slump flow is reduced to around 23.5 cm. Furthermore, when nS, Steel fibre and polypropylene fibre (0.5%) are combined in UHPFRC and Slump flow is the smallest, measuring approximately 12.8 cm. Impact of nS on concrete flowability is supposed to be accredited to an increase in cement paste viscosity. The considerable water-holding capacity of cement paste with nS is due to immediate

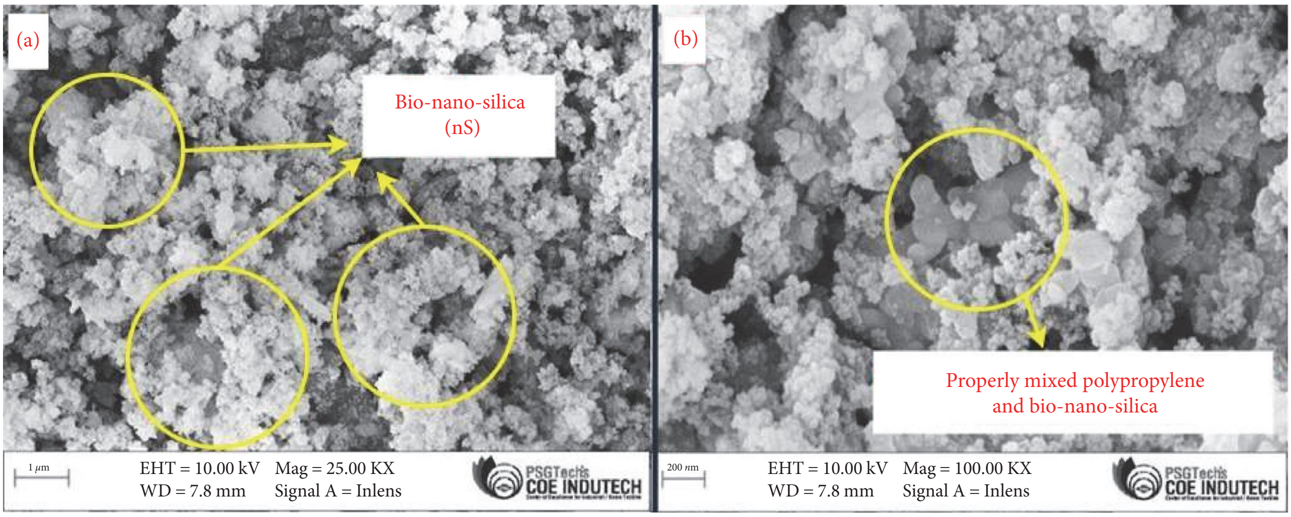

FIGURE 3: Scanning electron microscope of NS at (a) 1 μm (b) 200 nm.

reactions in the nS slurry as well as the liquid of cement paste. The existence of nS reduces the quantity of lubricating water accessible inside the inter-particle gaps, causing an increase in yield stress. Because of the numerous impacts of bio-nS and hybrid fibres on the workability of UHPFRC, the flowability of a sample comprising nS (5%), steel fibres 3% by volume, and polypropylene fibre (0.4% or 0.5% by volume) can be reduced to zero. Furthermore, the addition of bio-nS, steel, and synthetic fibre can limit the flow property of the UHPFRC even further. As a result, it is critical to carefully tune the liquid and admixtures quantities in order to achieve a flowable UHPFRC. Scanning Electron Microscope analysis was carried out for nS, and the results are shown in Figures 3(a) and 3(b). From the results, it is evident that the average range of particles is 30 nm. Because of the extreme fineness of the bio-nS particles, the microstructure could be upgraded in terms of packing efficiency. The extremely tiny particle size enabled the filling of very small pores which cement particles could not reach.

5.1. Porosity of the UHPFRC. The porousness of UHPFRC is higher, at roughly 17% of volume. Primary investigations revealed that perhaps the porosity of the planned UHPFRC is around 10%, implying that the addition of fibres should account for roughly 7% of the porosity. Furthermore, the inclusion of steel fibres can greatly enhance the permeability of the UHPFRC, whereas Polypropylene fibres only minimally enhance the porousness of the UHPFRC. These effects should be ascribed to the steel fibre that might alter the granular skeleton's structure, whereas extensible fibres bridge the void between both the large particles. However, it is significant to mention that perhaps the permeability of the UHPFRC drops marginally with the addition of nS. For example, in samples without fibres, the addition of roughly 4% of nS can lower the porosity of the UHPFRC from 17.8% to 18.5%.

The nucleation as well as the pozzolanic impact of nS in cement hydration should be attributed to this. As it is well recognized, due to the nucleation effect, the creation of CSH phase is no longer limited to the cement grain surface only, resulting in a greater hydration degree of cement and more holes that may be filled by the recently created CSH phase. In general, the incorporation of fibres and other admixtures results in a rather high porosity of the proposed UHPFRC. Furthermore, the combination of steel fibres may develop the permeability of the concrete. The inclusion of nS might decrease the permeability of the concrete and the results are shown in Figure 4.

5.2. Compressive Strength of UHPFRC. The inclusion of the steel fibre greatly boosts the mechanical properties of UHPFRC. For example, a mechanical property with no steel fibres varies at 80 MPa. The compressive strength of concrete with steel fibre increased up to 120 MPa. As the amount of bio-nS in the concrete grows, so does its compressive strength. Furthermore, it can be seen that the influence of fibres on the compressive strength is negligible. Nonetheless, mechanical properties of the developed UHPFRC are much less than those of other UHPFRC. This can be attributable to the subsequent factors such as utilization of nS that can influence the microstructure improvement of concrete, potentially increasing the porosity and reducing the concrete's mechanical properties. It is obvious that when the nS is added to concrete, mechanical properties drop dramatically, but the flexural strength remains reasonably equivalent. However, including nS, steel fibres, and polypropylene fibres at the same time can greatly increase the mechanical characteristics of the concrete. Figure 5 shows variation of compressive strength for different percentages of polypropylene fibre and nS. There is an increase in compressive strength of 15.5% observed for concrete with 2% of nS and polypropylene fibre when compared to conventional concrete. For mix containing 1% of nS and 2% of fibre, there is an enhancement in compressive strength of 12.2% when compared to nominal concrete. The above phenomenon is mainly due to pore filling effect of nS and other properties such as the surface of the fibre, surface roughness and bond between mortar and aggregates. Addition of fibres and nS

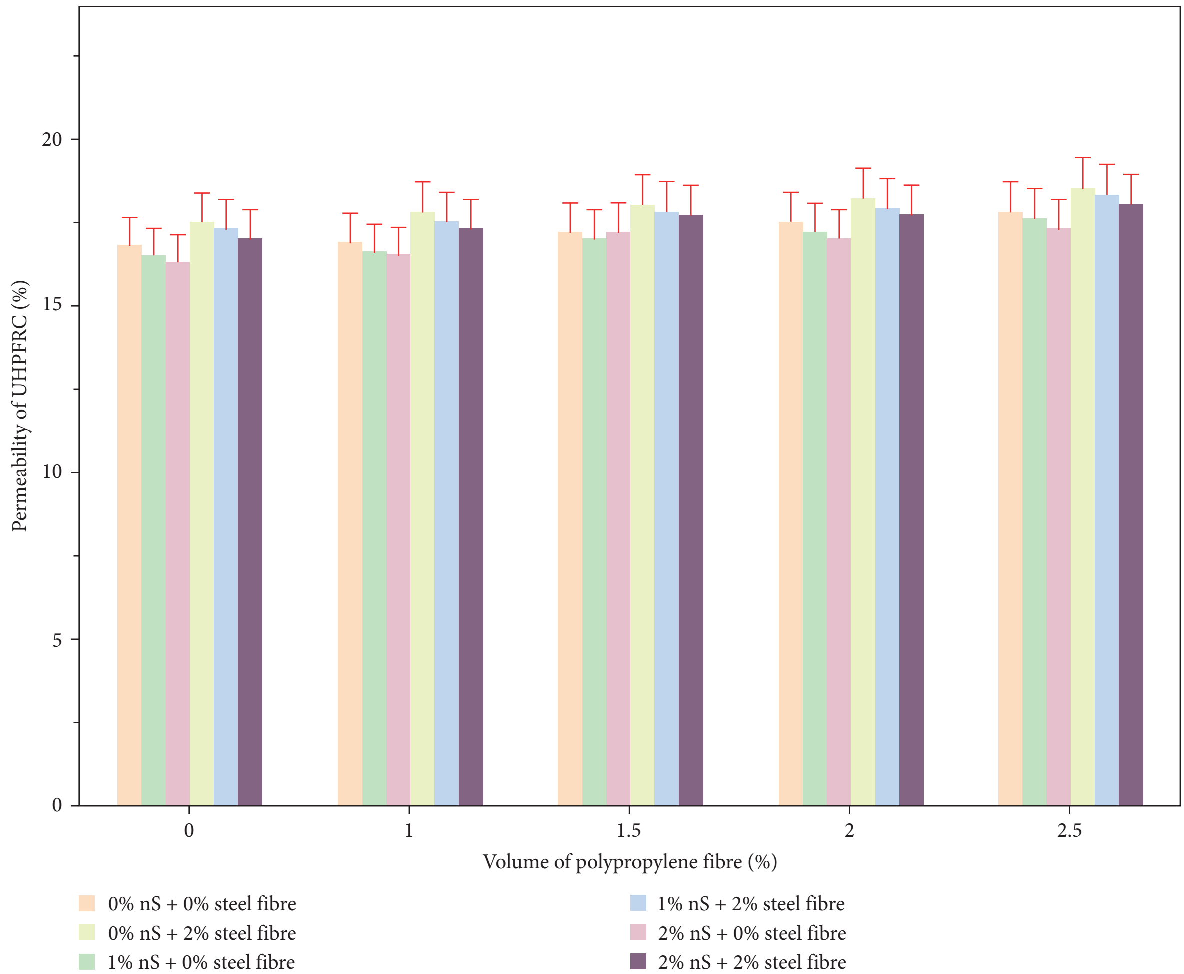

Figure 4: Effect on porosity of UHPFRC.

prevents the formation of micro-cracks and alters the crack propagation pattern. As a result, UHPFRC may be manufactured and used in applications requiring high flexural strength.

5.3. Hydration Process of the UHPFRC. Furthermore, the inclusion of nS may considerably speed cement hydration, and as the amount of nS increases, so does the cement hydration rate. Finally, in this investigation, the extra nS might compensate for the unfavourable effect on cement hydration. The aggregation and cementitious action of nS must be related to this process. The nanoparticles in concrete are equally disseminated after mixing. When the hydration process starts, the hydration products disperse and enclose nanoparticles as kernels, promoting cement hydration and making the cement structure highly homogenous and compact. As a result, more reactive kernels will be produced in this investigation as the amount of nS increases, and as a result, the cement's hydration rate is quickened.

5.4. Chloride Penetration Resistance. Chloride penetration was studied as a result of migration and diffusion (two of the major components of ion transport inside concrete). Migration is caused by an electrical potential gradient, while diffusion is caused by a gradient of concentration. The chloride migration in all of the samples was much lesser than in the control concrete, with differences at about 2 orders of magnitude. At 28 days, the mean Dnssm (m^2/s) value of the coefficient in concretes 2% nS and steel fibre and control specimen was 1.010×10^{-13} m^2/s and 1.2×10^{-13} m^2/s, respectively. Multiple factors contribute to (UHPFRC) high resistance to chloride penetration. On the one side, there is a very closely packed microstructure with low porosity as nS acts as filling agent, a quite fine porous structure, and capillary network segmentation, all of which reduce water permeability (when chlorides are dissolved in water).

5.5. Effect of Curing Temperature. High curing temperatures can help create a stronger concrete structure by promoting the formation of a dense and compact skeleton. The high temperatures also reduce capillary stress by creating a coarser porous structure. On the other hand, reducing the water-to-cement ratio (w/c) can increase autogenous strains, as the lower water content can lead to insufficient hydration and an incompletely developed microstructure. The relationship between curing temperature, w/c ratio, and concrete strength is complex and requires careful consideration to produce high-quality concrete with the desired properties.

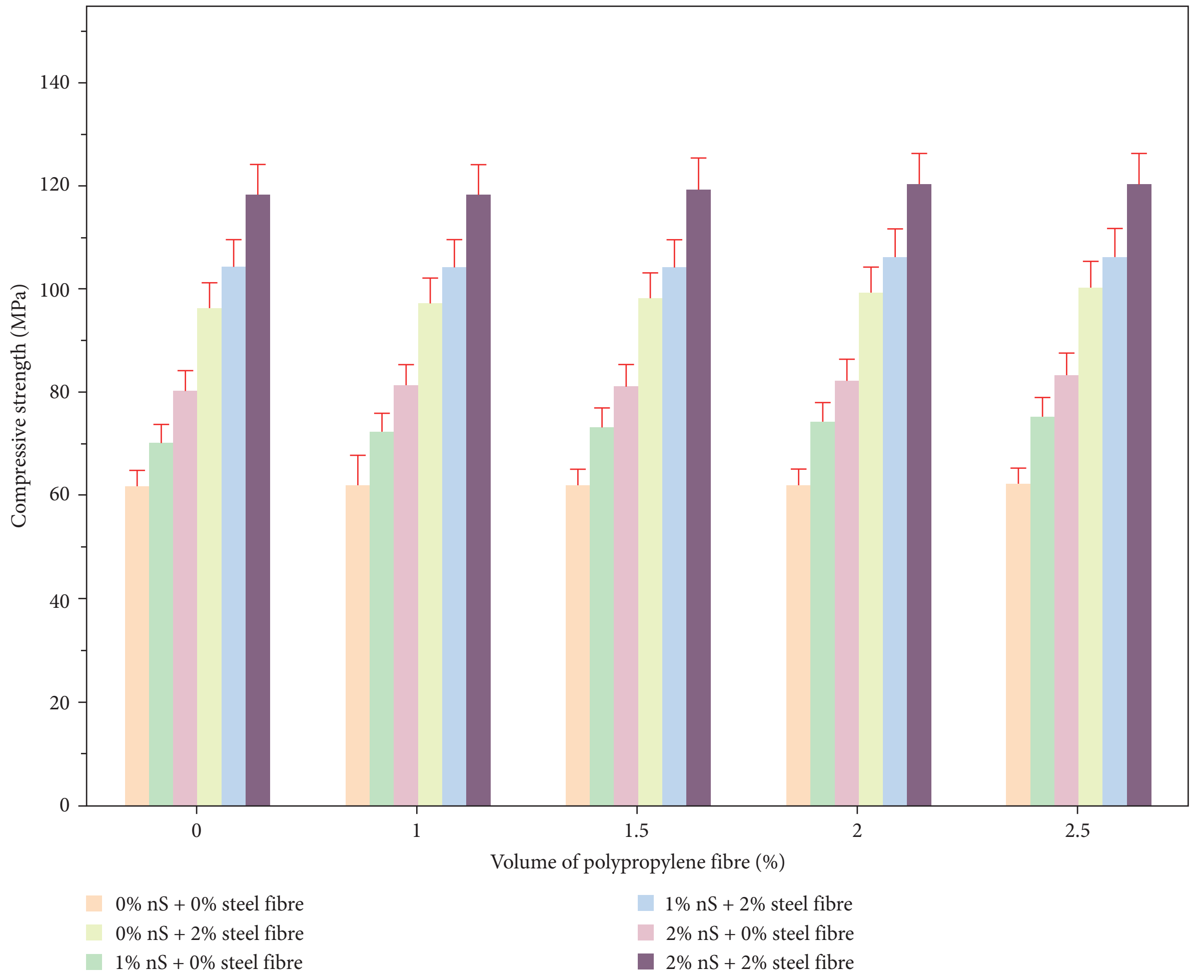

Figure 5: Compressive strength of UHPFRC.

5.6. Comparison with Previous Work. The comparison literature highlights various research studies that have investigated the effects of incorporating steel fibre and non-steel fibres in concrete. The results obtained from Zhang et al. [35] showed that adding 2% of steel fibre can increase the impact resistance of concrete by up to 150%. However, a high composition of steel fibre can reduce the impact durability of concrete. They also found a linear relationship between the ductility ratio and impact strength, which can be used to estimate the impact strength of concrete with varying steel fibre levels.

Larsen et al. [36] showed that the addition of non-steel and polypropylene fibres enhances the mechanical properties of concrete over time. Meanwhile, Zhou et al. [37] found that steel fibre bond strengths in UHPC are increased by approximately 50% when coated with nS. The nS coating also improves the inter-facial adherence between the fibre and the concrete matrix, as evidenced by the outer layer of the ns-coated steel fibre having more scratches and hydrates than the plain steel fibre after pull-out. The coating also doubles the energy capacity for absorption, thus increasing the tensile strength of UHPFRC.

Similarly, Chen et al. [38] utilized a hybrid approach to improve the mechanical properties of UHPFRC by incorporating silica fume, polypropylene fibres, and graphene oxide. The results showed that the compressive and flexural strengths of UHPFRC were significantly enhanced due to the synergistic effect of the hybrid approach. The addition of graphene oxide and polypropylene fibres helped in improving the mechanical properties of UHPFRC, similar to the approach used in the study mentioned above. Likewise, Ozbakkaloglu et al. [39] evaluated the mechanical properties of UHPFRC under impact loading conditions. The results showed that the addition of steel fibres in UHPFRC improved the impact resistance and energy absorption capacity of the material. This study highlights the importance of incorporating fibres in UHPFRC to enhance its mechanical properties, similar to the approach taken in this present study.

Wang et al. [40] studied the mechanical properties and durability of hybrid fibre-reinforced ultra-high-performance concrete with nS and polyvinyl alcohol fibres. The study aimed to improve the mechanical properties and durability of UHPFRC by adding both nS and polyvinyl alcohol fibres. The results showed that the hybridization approach led to significant improvements in both compressive and flexural strength compared to UHPFRC without fibres or with only one type of fibre. The addition of nS also improved the durability of the concrete, reducing the deterioration caused by water and chloride ion penetration. In similar manner, Jain et al. [41] experimented the effect of steel fibre on the mechanical properties of ultra-high-performance concrete with nS. The study investigated the effect of adding steel fibres and nS to UHPFRC on its mechanical properties. The results showed that the addition of both steel fibres and nS significantly improved the compressive and flexural strength, as well as the toughness, of UHPFRC. The study also found that the optimum dosage of steel fibres and nS was 2% and 3%, respectively, for achieving the best mechanical properties.

Hence, the comparison literature highlights the benefits of incorporating fibres in concrete to enhance its mechanical properties, such as impact resistance and tensile strength. It also suggests that the optimal composition of fibres depends on the specific application and desired outcome. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully consider the type and composition of fibres used in concrete mix design.

6. Conclusions

The impact of nS and hybrid fibres on the characteristics of (UHPFRC) using fibres is discussed in this research. The concrete mixes were designed with the goal of achieving a highly compacted cementitious matrix. The following conclusions are reached from the data discussed in this paper:

(i) The inclusion of nS, steel fibres can limit its flow properties of UHPFRC. As a result, it is critical to carefully tune both fluid and superplasticizer quantities in order to achieve a flowable UHPFRC.

(ii) The water-permeable porosity of the planned UHPFRC is rather high around 18%. Furthermore, fibres might both enhance the permeability of concrete. Nonetheless, a suitable number of nS about 4% might marginally lower the permeability of the concrete.

(iii) The addition of nS and hybrid fibres to concrete can greatly increase its mechanical qualities. Moreover, very little number of additional nS might counteract for slowing impact on cement hydration, which is related to the nucleation impact of nS.

(iv) The incorporation of nS in concrete considerably reduces crack propagation and enhances the mechanical properties of concrete.

(v) Despite their significant cost, UHPFRC mixtures are presently used in building projects such as high-rise building structures, bridge girder construction, defence, aerospace, and marine industries due to their high durability as well as reduced maintenance needed during project's service life.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are included in the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: Vivek D, Yalew Asres; Methodology: Vivek D, Aravind C; Formal analysis and investigation: Vivek D, Yalew Asres; Writing—original draft preparation: Vivek D, Gokulkumar S; Writing—review and revise: Yalew Asres, Gokulkumar S, Aravindh M; Supervision: Yalew Asres; Ideology: Vivek D, Gokulkumar S, Aravindh M.

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