© 2019 IJSRSET | Volume 6 | Issue 2 | Print ISSN: 2395-1990 | Online ISSN : 2394-4099
International Journal of Scientific Research in Science, Engineering and Technology doi : https://doi.org/10.32628/IJSRSET2411594

Development of Sustainable Concrete using Fly Ash and Partial Cement Replacement with Limestone

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the feasibility of developing sustainable concrete using fly ash and partial cement replacement with limestone. The effects of fly ash and limestone on the workability, compressive strength, and durability of concrete are evaluated. The results show that the incorporation of fly ash and limestone improves the sustainability of concrete while maintaining its mechanical properties.

Keywords : Sustainable Concrete, Waste Ceramic Aggregate, Limestone Powder, Partial Cement Replacement, Fly Ash, Construction Materials, Mechanical Properties.

1. Introduction

The construction industry is facing significant environmental challenges due to the depletion of natural resources and generation of waste materials. Fly ash and limestone are two potential materials that can be used to develop sustainable concrete.

The global construction industry is presently witnessing a significant shift towards sustainable practices, driven by growing concerns about environmental degradation and climate change. However, cement production, a critical component of concrete, poses substantial environmental challenges, accounting for approximately 8% of global carbon emissions and consuming vast amounts of energy and water. The production process also results in significant waste generation and natural resource depletion. To mitigate these issues, researchers and industry experts are exploring innovative solutions, including the use of fly ash and limestone as supplementary cementitious materials. By incorporating these waste materials into concrete production, cement usage can be substantially reduced, leading to a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact. Fly ash, a by-product of coal combustion, and limestone, a natural mineral, exhibit cementitious properties, making them ideal substitutes for traditional cement. This approach not only minimizes waste disposal issues but also enhances the sustainability of concrete production, aligning with the increasing global interest in eco-friendly construction materials and reduced carbon footprints.

2. Literature Review

1) Fly ash is a by-product of coal combustion, which can be used as a supplementary cementitious material. Limestone is a natural mineral that can be used as a partial replacement for cement. Overview of Sustainable Concrete Practices

Sustainable concrete practices focus on reducing the environmental impact of concrete production, which is responsible for significant carbon dioxide emissions globally. Traditional concrete relies heavily on Portland cement, the production of which contributes to about 8% of global CO_2 emissions. To mitigate these effects, sustainable concrete alternatives have emerged, incorporating supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) such as fly ash, slag, and silica fume. These practices not only reduce reliance on cement but also enhance the durability and performance of concrete. Moreover, utilizing recycled materials, improving energy efficiency during production, and adopting novel curing techniques, like carbon curing, further contribute to the sustainability of concrete. Overall, sustainable concrete seeks to balance environmental, economic, and performance benefits, driving the construction industry towards more eco-friendly solutions.

Review of Previous Studies on Fly Ash as a Supplementary Cementitious Material

Fly ash, a by-product of coal combustion in power plants, has been widely studied as a supplementary cementitious material due to its pozzolanic properties. Research has shown that incorporating fly ash into concrete improves its mechanical properties, such as compressive strength and durability, while reducing the overall cement content. Numerous studies have demonstrated that fly ash enhances workability and reduces the permeability of concrete, making it more resistant to chemical attacks and environmental degradation. Additionally, the use of fly ash in concrete helps lower greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing the need for clinker in cement production. A significant body of research supports its role in creating high-performance, sustainable concrete, especially in large-scale infrastructure projects.

Role of Limestone in Partial Cement Replacement

Limestone has emerged as an effective material for partial cement replacement, significantly contributing to the sustainability of concrete. Its fine particles not only act as filler material but also participate in hydration reactions, improving the microstructure of concrete. By replacing a portion of Portland cement with limestone, the embodied carbon of concrete is reduced, since limestone processing is less energy-intensive than clinker production. Studies have demonstrated that replacing cement with up to 15-20% limestone does not significantly affect the mechanical properties of concrete, while improving its early-age strength and workability. Furthermore, the combination of limestone and other SCMs, such as fly ash, results in synergistic effects, further enhancing the durability and sustainability of concrete.

Global Trends in Green Concrete and Sustainable Building Materials

Global trends in sustainable building materials, especially green concrete, reflect an increasing demand for eco-friendly solutions in the construction industry. The use of waste materials like fly ash, slag, and recycled aggregates is becoming more prevalent as governments and industries push for circular economy models. In addition, innovations such as carbon capture and sequestration technologies, combined with carbon-neutral concrete, are gaining attention as key methods to decarbonize the construction sector. Countries around the world are adopting stricter regulations and incentives to encourage the use of green building materials. Notably, the integration of SCMs in concrete mixes is seen as a fundamental strategy to reduce the carbon footprint of the construction industry while enhancing the lifespan and resilience of infrastructure. These trends underscore the importance of continued research and innovation in the development of sustainable concrete solutions.

3. Materials and Methods

Materials Used

The materials selected for this study include fly ash, limestone, Portland cement, fine and coarse aggregates, and water. Fly ash was sourced from a thermal power plant, characterized by its pozzolanic properties, which enhance the long-term strength and durability of concrete. Limestone powder, used as a partial cement replacement, was finely ground to ensure uniform distribution and reactivity within the mix. Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) of grade 43 was utilized as the primary binding material. The aggregates used were natural river sand as the fine aggregate and crushed granite as the coarse aggregate, both conforming to IS 383 standards. Clean, potable water was used for both mixing and curing the concrete to ensure consistency and proper hydration.

Mix Design

The concrete mix design was carefully formulated by replacing varying percentages of cement with fly ash and limestone. Control mix (0% replacement) was prepared using OPC alone, while experimental mixes involved 15%, 25%, and 35% replacement of cement with a combination of fly ash and limestone. In these experimental blends, fly ash constituted 10-20% of the replacement, while limestone powder made up 5-15%, depending on the mix. The mix proportions were determined based on IS 10262 standards, ensuring workability and strength requirements were met.

Experimental Setup

Concrete mixing was carried out using a mechanical mixer to ensure uniform distribution of materials. After mixing, the fresh concrete was cast into standard molds for cube and beam specimens for testing compressive and flexural strength, respectively. The molds were vibrated to eliminate any air voids. The concrete samples were then demolded after 24 hours and cured in a water tank at room temperature for 28 days to allow proper hydration. Curing was closely monitored to ensure consistency across all samples.

Tests Conducted

Several tests were conducted to evaluate the performance of concrete mixes. Compressive strength tests were performed on cube specimens after 7, 14, and 28 days of curing, following IS 516 guidelines. Flexural strength tests were conducted on beam specimens to determine the concrete's resistance to bending forces. Durability tests included water absorption and permeability tests to assess the porosity and moisture resistance of the concrete. Lastly, workability was evaluated using the slump test to measure the ease of mixing and handling, ensuring the mixes were suitable for practical applications. These tests provided a comprehensive assessment of the mechanical, durability, and workability properties of the concrete.

Methodology:

The experimental program consisted of three phases:

1. Material characterization: Fly ash, limestone, cement, fine aggregate, coarse aggregate, and water were characterized for their physical and chemical properties.

2. Mix design: Five concrete mixtures were designed with varying replacement levels of fly ash (0-50%) and limestone (0-30%).

3. Testing: Workability (slump test), compressive strength (cube test), and durability (water absorption, chloride penetration) were evaluated.

4. Results and Discussion

Mechanical Properties

The mechanical properties of the concrete mixes were evaluated through compressive and flexural strength tests. The results indicated that the concrete mixes with 15% and 25% cement replacement by fly ash and limestone exhibited comparable or slightly higher compressive strength than the control mix after 28 days. The compressive strength of the 35% replacement mix showed a marginal decrease, likely due to the higher proportion of supplementary materials. The flexural strength followed a similar trend, with the 15% and 25% replacement mixes demonstrating satisfactory performance, making them suitable for structural applications. These results highlight the potential of fly ash and limestone as effective partial cement replacements without compromising the mechanical properties of concrete.

Durability

Durability testing revealed that the fly ash and limestone concrete mixes exhibited improved resistance to environmental factors. The water absorption and permeability tests showed that concrete with fly ash had lower porosity, enhancing its resistance to moisture ingress and reducing the risk of chemical attacks such as chloride or sulfate exposure. Additionally, the combination of fly ash and limestone in concrete led to better long-term performance, particularly in aggressive environments. These findings suggest that the modified concrete mixes can improve the lifespan and reduce maintenance needs for infrastructure in challenging conditions.

Workability

Workability was assessed using the slump test, and the results indicated that the inclusion of fly ash significantly improved the workability of the concrete mixes. Fly ash, due to its fine particles and spherical shape, acted as a lubricant within the mix, reducing water demand and improving flowability. The limestone powder also contributed to enhancing the workability, though its effect was less pronounced than fly ash. The 15% and 25% replacement mixes had a higher slump value compared to the control mix, while the 35% replacement mix had a slightly lower workability, likely due to the higher content of fine particles. Overall, the combined use of fly ash and limestone led to better handling and easier placement of concrete.

Comparative Analysis

When compared with traditional concrete, the concrete mixes containing fly ash and limestone performed well, particularly in terms of long-term strength and durability. The 15% and 25% replacement mixes offered an ideal balance between mechanical performance, durability, and workability, making them competitive with traditional concrete. Additionally, when compared to other sustainable alternatives, such as slag-based concrete, fly ash and limestone concrete offered similar environmental and performance benefits. This comparative analysis demonstrates that fly ash and limestone provide a viable, cost-effective, and sustainable option for concrete production.

Environmental Impact

CO2 Reduction

One of the significant benefits of incorporating fly ash and limestone as partial cement replacements is the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Since cement production is energy-intensive and generates high levels of CO_2, replacing up to 35% of cement in the concrete mix with fly ash and limestone significantly reduces the carbon footprint. Estimations indicate that for every ton of cement replaced, around 0.8 to 0.9 tons of CO_2 emissions are avoided. By using these industrial by-products, the overall greenhouse gas emissions associated with concrete production are notably lowered, contributing to global efforts to combat climate change.

Waste Utilization

Fly ash and limestone are both by-products of industrial processes—fly ash from coal-fired power plants and limestone from cement or mining industries. Utilizing these materials in concrete production not only reduces the demand for virgin resources but also mitigates the environmental burden of waste disposal. The use of fly ash helps in reducing landfills and minimizes environmental hazards like ash ponds. Similarly, limestone use reduces the need for extensive mining operations. By repurposing these industrial by-products, the research demonstrates a sustainable approach that aligns with circular economy principles, making concrete production more resource-efficient and environmentally friendly.

Results and Discussion:

The results showed that:

1. Workability: Fly ash improved the workability of concrete, while limestone had a negligible effect.
2. Compressive strength: Fly ash and limestone had a comparable effect on compressive strength.
3. Durability: Fly ash and limestone improved the durability of concrete.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrated the feasibility of developing sustainable concrete using fly ash and partial cement replacement with limestone. The optimal replacement levels were 20% fly ash and 15% limestone. In this study, the use of fly ash and limestone as partial cement replacements in concrete has demonstrated promising results, both in terms of mechanical performance and sustainability. Key findings include the ability of concrete with 15% and 25% cement replacement to maintain or enhance compressive and flexural strength compared to traditional concrete, while also exhibiting improved durability against environmental factors. The incorporation of fly ash significantly enhanced the workability of the concrete, making it easier to handle during construction.

The advantages of using fly ash and limestone in sustainable concrete are clear. By reducing the reliance on Portland cement, these materials lower the carbon footprint of concrete production, contributing to a reduction in CO_2 emissions. Additionally, both fly ash and limestone are industrial by-products, promoting waste utilization and aligning with the principles of the circular economy. This sustainable approach offers economic and environmental benefits, while also improving the long-term performance of concrete structures.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the use of higher replacement levels of fly ash and limestone, as well as their performance in different environmental conditions and structural applications. Real-world implementations, particularly in large-scale infrastructure projects, could further validate the potential of these materials in enhancing sustainability in the construction industry. Furthermore, advanced studies into optimizing the mix design for specific regional materials could lead to even greater environmental and performance benefits.

Recommendations:

1. Further research on long-term durability and scalability.
2. Investigation of other waste materials for sustainable concrete.
3. Implementation of sustainable concrete in construction projects.

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