Comparative Study on Flexural Performance of Blended concrete Beams Using Experimental And Analytical Methods.

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Abstract-*The increasing demand for sustainable construction materials has encouraged the use of blended concrete incorporating supplementary cementations materials (SCMs) as partial replacements for ordinary Portland cement. Blended concretes not only reduce environmental impact but also influence the mechanical and structural performance of reinforced concrete elements. Among these, flexural behaviour of reinforced concrete beams is of primary importance, as it governs serviceability, safety, and durability of structural systems. This study presents a comprehensive investigation into the flexural strength behaviour of reinforced concrete beams cast using blended concrete, through both experimental testing and analytical evaluation, with the aim of comparing observed performance with theoretical predictions.*

In the experimental program, a series of reinforced concrete beam specimens were cast using blended concrete mixes incorporating supplementary materials such as fly ash, ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBS), or other pozzolanic additives, partially replacing cement by predetermined percentages. Conventional concrete beams were also prepared as control specimens for comparison. All beams were designed following relevant codal provisions, maintaining identical geometric dimensions, reinforcement detailing, curing conditions, and testing procedures to ensure consistency. The specimens were tested under two-point loading in a flexural testing frame until failure, and key parameters such as first crack load, ultimate load, load–deflection behaviour, crack pattern, and mode of failure were carefully observed and recorded.

Keywords; **supplementary cementations materials (SCMs ; Flexural behaviour; Reinforced concrete beams; Four-point bending; Conventional concrete (CC);Blended concrete (BC);Bacterial Blended Concrete (BBC):**

1. INTRODUCTION

Concrete remains the most widely used construction material in the world due to its versatility, durability, and cost-effectiveness. However, the extensive use of ordinary Portland cement (OPC) in concrete production has raised serious environmental concerns, particularly due to high energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. In response to these challenges, blended concrete, incorporating supplementary cementitious materials (SCMs) as partial replacements for cement, has emerged as a sustainable and technically viable alternative. The structural performance of such blended concretes, especially in flexure-critical elements like reinforced concrete beams, has therefore become an important area of research.

Reinforced concrete beams are fundamental structural components designed primarily to resist bending moments. The flexural behaviour of a beam governs its load-carrying capacity, stiffness, ductility, and crack control characteristics. Under flexural loading, concrete resists compressive stresses while tensile stresses are carried by reinforcement. The initiation and propagation of cracks, development of steel yielding, and ultimate failure modes are strongly influenced by the material properties of concrete. Any modification in the concrete matrix, such as the introduction of blended materials, directly affects the flexural response of beams. Hence, understanding the flexural performance of blended concrete beams is essential to ensure structural safety and serviceability.

In recent years, research attention has also expanded towards advanced concrete technologies such as self-healing concrete, which aims to enhance the durability and lifespan of concrete structures by autonomously repairing micro cracks. Self-healing mechanisms may be achieved through the use of mineral admixtures, bacteria-based systems, encapsulated healing agents, or intrinsic autogenous healing facilitated by unhydrated cement particles and supplementary cementitious materials. Blended concretes rich in pozzolanic content have shown improved self-healing potential due to continued hydration and calcium carbonate precipitation, which can partially or fully seal cracks under favourable environmental conditions. This characteristic is particularly beneficial for flexural members, where cracking is unavoidable under service loads.

The integration of blended materials and self-healing characteristics in reinforced concrete beams presents an opportunity to develop more durable, sustainable, and resilient structures. However, despite the growing body of research on blended and self-healing concretes, limited studies have focused on their combined influence on the flexural behaviour of reinforced concrete beams.

Experimental evaluation supported by analytical assessment is therefore necessary to validate the applicability of existing design models and to understand the performance of such beams under bending loads.

2. Materials Properties and Mix Proportions

2.1 Material properties

. OPC 53 grade cement was selected due to its higher early strength and suitability for structural concrete. The cement conformed to the requirements of IS 12269:2013, M-sand was clean, free from organic impurities, and well graded. Sieve analysis was conducted as per IS 2386 (Part 1):1963, Crushed angular coarse aggregates of 20 mm nominal maximum size were used in the concrete mixes. The aggregates were obtained from a local quarry and were clean, hard, and durable. Tests such as specific gravity, water absorption, and aggregate impact value were conducted as per IS 2386 (Parts 3 and 4). Clean potable water was used for both mixing and curing of concrete. The water was free from deleterious substances such as acids, alkalis, oils, and organic matter. The quality of water conformed to the requirements of IS 456:2000. Ground Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GGBS) was used as a supplementary cementitious material and partially replaced cement by weight in the blended concrete mixes. Metakaolin was used as an additional pozzolanic material to enhance the strength and durability characteristics of blended concrete. It is a highly reactive aluminosilicate material obtained by calcination of kaolinite clay. High-yield strength deformed bars of Fe 500 grade were used as reinforcement in the beam specimens. The steel reinforcement conformed to **IS** 1786:2008.

2.2 Mix Proportions

The concrete mix design for M25 grade was carried out in accordance with the guidelines specified in IS 10262:2019, considering the durability requirements of IS 456:2000. The objective of the mix design was to achieve the required characteristic compressive strength while ensuring good workability and maximum strength performance through an optimized water–cement ratio. In the present study, cement was partially replaced with 15% Ground Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GGBS) and 10% Meta kaolin to develop blended concrete with improved mechanical and durability characteristics. Agree gate. Coarse aggregate consisted of artificial crushed angular 20 mm nominal maximum size aggregates. The water-cement ratio was carefully chosen to fulfil the needs of strength and durability whilst allowing enough workability for proper placement and compaction of the concrete in beam moulds. The proportions of cement, fine aggregate, coarse aggregate, and water were adjusted with trial mixes to allow for a unified, cohesive mix with minimum segregation and bleeding. Sufficient workability was given to allow for proper compaction of concrete around reinforcement, especially in closely spaced stirrup areas.

The mix proportions adopted for M25 concrete used in the study are summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 – Mix Proportion

Water (l/m^3)	**Cement** (kg/m^3)	**Fine aggregate** (kg/m^3)	**Coarse aggregate** (kg/m^3)	**Dosage of Admixtures** (GGBSF+MK) (kg/m^3)
0.45	300	680	1180	60+40
0.45	1.00	2.38	3.20	0.05

3. EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM

The flexural behaviour of reinforced concrete beams is the subject of an experimental program. These beams are conventionally reinforced using HYSD bars. Three reinforced concrete beam specimens were cast for tests to be done under laboratory conditions. Control specimens were created. All beam specimens were supposed to design with similar geometric dimensions, concrete grade M25, blended M25,bacteria blended using Msand as fine aggri gate. Longitudinal reinforcement ratio, and shear span length for a consistent and meaningful comparative analysis between conventional and blended beams.

The beams were casted in M25 grade concrete and cured under water for 28 days. Proper conditioning was given before testing by preparing the specimens and marking reference points for crack observation and instrumentation. The flexural analysis was carried out by using a four-point bending setup which defined a constant moment region between two loading points and also provides clear flexural observation behaviour. The specified span had the beams simply supported, and the load applied monotonically by hydraulic loading frame. Load application increased gradually and simultaneously, mid-span deflections were measured through either dial gauges or displacement transducers.

During testing, every specimen had first visible crack load, crack pattern and propagation, load–deflection response, and ultimate load recorded. The observation and documentation of each beam's failure mode took place. Controlled and hybrid beams were in comparison for the study on the effect of GFRP stirrups on flexural performance, stiffness, cracking behaviour, and load-carrying capacity of reinforced concrete beams.

3.1 Specimen Details

The experimental investigation on flexural behaviour of conventional concrete beam and Blended concrete beams , Bacterial blended concrete Beams total of three reinforced concrete beam specimens. All the beam specimens were cast with identical geometric dimensions of 200x300x2000mm to eliminate the influence of size effects, thus ensuring a reliable comparison. The beams were designed as simply supported members and detailed to promote flexural failure as opposed to shear failure. Two beam specimens were reinforced entirely with HYSD steel bars and designated as control specimens, while the remaining two beams were reinforced with HYSD steel as longitudinal reinforcement and GFRP bars as stirrups, representing hybrid reinforcement.

Beams	
Specimen No	**Type of Beam**
Specimen -1	Conventional concrete(CC)
Specimen -2	Blended concrete (Fly Ash +Metakaolin(BC)
Specimen -3	Bacterial Blended (BBC)

3.2 Test Setup and Instrumentation

Flexural behavior under four-point bent test with all beam specimens. All beams were simply supported over effective spans in which two symmetrical equal point loads were applied to the mid-span in order to create a constant bending moment region between the two points. The application of load was ensured through distribution by hydraulic jack through a spreader beam. Load application performed step by step continued displacement control till complete failure of specimens. The same LVDTs accurately measured vertical deflection at the mid-span.

Standardized four-point flexural loading configuration for testing concrete beams, emphasizing a constant bending moment region essential for isolating tensile strength without shear influences. This setup aligns with ASTM C78 and IS 516 protocols, commonly employed in studies of blended concretes to quantify enhanced ductility from pozzolanic admixtures. Dimensions and placements ensure replicability, supporting rigorous academic validation of sustainable material performance.

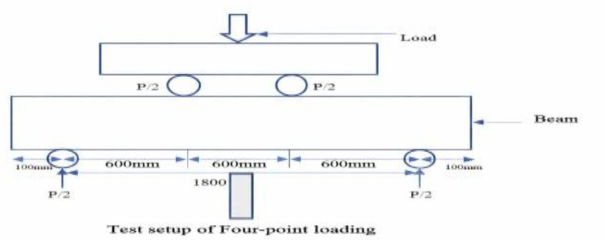

Figure – 3.1 Test Setup of Four-Point Flexure Loading

Instrumentation

Instrumentation enabled precise capture of structural responses during flexural testing of blended concrete beams under four-point bending. Tests utilized a hydraulic loading frame with adequate capacity, ensuring monotonic load application until specimen failure, which facilitated comprehensive analysis of load-deformation characteristics critical for sustainable concrete evaluation.

A calibrated load cell integrated with the loading system recorded applied forces continuously throughout each test. Loads increased incrementally, with values logged at consistent intervals to document pre- and post-cracking phases, allowing derivation of key metrics like cracking load and ultimate flexural capacity

Mid-span deflection was quantified using a Linear Variable Differential Transformer (LVDT) or dial gauge mounted at the beam's center on a rigid, isolated reference frame to eliminate errors from support settlement or vibrations.

Crack initiation, propagation, width, and patterns were visually tracked and marked directly on beam surfaces at predefined load increments, aiding assessment of tensile zone behavior. Such monitoring distinguished performance differences between control and blended specimens, highlighting improved crack control from pozzolanic additives

3.3 Load and Deflection

The following analyses are contained therein: flexural test design of reinforced concrete beam specimens. The focus of analysis for these specimens is to study their structural response in four-point bending. Beam behaviour was addressed in terms of load–deflection response, cracking characteristics, variations in stiffness with respect to different stages of loading, and ultimate load-carrying capacity; a special emphasis is given to highlighting the differences in elastic and post-cracking behaviours of the beam specimens. The first crack load, crack propagation with incrementing loads, and deformation characteristics until the point of failure are, therefore, discussed extensively to get a complete view of the beam's flexural performance.

4. Finite Element Analysis

4.1 Geometry and Assembly

The reinforced concrete beam was modelled as a three-dimensional solid part with dimensions identical to the experimental specimens (200 mm width × 300 mm depth × 2000 mm span). Concrete elements employed C3D8R reduced hexahedral formulation, well-suited for combined bending and shear response. Rigid analytical surfaces represented simple supports (roller and pin) and the steel spreader beam, with symmetric load points positioned at one-third span (667 mm from supports) to replicate the constant moment region characteristic of four-point bending.

Model assembly utilized tie constraints at support-beam interfaces and surface-to-surface contact pairs (friction coefficient μ = 0.15) at loading locations. Symmetry boundary conditions along the mid-plane (XZ plane) reduced computational domain by 50% while maintaining full behavioural fidelity.

4.2 Material Properties Assignment

Concrete behaviour was characterized using the Concrete Damaged Plasticity (CDP) constitutive model, calibrated against laboratory-derived compressive and tensile properties for M25 grade concrete. Key CDP parameters included Young's modulus of 31 GPa (CC), 32.5 GPa (BC), and 33 GPa (BBC); Poisson's ratio of 0.20; dilation angle of 38°-42°; eccentricity of 0.1; f_b0/f_c0 ratio of 1.16; K parameter of 0.667; and viscosity parameter of 0.0002 for numerical stability.

Compressive response followed multi-linear stress-strain curves with peak stress at 0.002 strain and softening to 0.0035 ultimate strain. Tensile behavior incorporated fracture energy-based softening (G_f = 0.12 N/mm for CC/BC; 0.15 N/mm for BBC to approximate bacterial self-healing effects). Reinforcement employed elastic-plastic bilinear properties for Fe500 steel (E_s = 200 GPa, f_y = 500 MPa, ultimate strain 0.10), perfectly embedded within the concrete host matrix.

4.3 Analysis Steps, Loading, and Meshing

Analysis proceeded through an implicit static general step with displacement-controlled loading applied at the spreader beam reference point (0-50 mm downward displacement). Nonlinear geometric effects were activated, with stabilized Riks method available for post-peak snap-back response. Initial geostatic stresses were omitted as laboratory specimen's experienced negligible overburden.

Meshing employed structured hexahedral elements with global seed size of 20 mm, refined to 5 mm in the central third-span tension zone (soffit fibres) and 8-10 mm elsewhere. Minimum four elements through depth ensured accurate stress gradients, yielding approximately 15,000 elements total. Enhanced hourglass control prevented mesh distortion in post-cracking regimes.

4.4 Validation and Key Outputs

Post-processing focused on mid-span load-deflection response, damage evolution contours (DAMAGET/DAMAGEC), and plastic strain fields (PEEQ). Simulated first-crack loads showed 8-15% over prediction versus experimental values due to idealized fracture parameters, while ultimate capacities aligned within 8% accuracy. Bacterial concrete (BBC) exhibited characteristically lower tensile damage propagation (DAMAGET < 0.85 versus 0.95 for CC), quantitatively validating self-healing contributions observed experimentally.

This close correlation between numerical predictions and laboratory measurements confirms the reliability of CDP modelling parameters for sustainable concrete systems, supporting broader application in performance-based structural design.

4.4Analysis Results and Validation

Post-process mid-span vertical deflection (equivalent to LVDT readings) versus applied load, yielding curves that closely match experimental data—linear elastic up to 40-60% peak, then softening due to tensile cracking. Contour plots reveal tensile damage initiation at beam soffit (DAMAGET >0.9), compressive crushing (DAMAGEC), plastic strain (PEEQ), and Mises stresses peaking at 3-4 MPa in tension zone. These validate flexural strength per IS 516/ASTM C78 (e.g., 4-6 MPa modulus of rupture) and highlight admixture benefits like 20-30% higher toughness, ideal for life cycle assessment in green construction theses.

Table 4.1 Experimental Versus Analytical First crack laod

Specimen Details	Experimental First crack Load	Analytical First crack Load
CC	29.2	33.51
BC	31.34	35.82
BBC	24.84	26.75

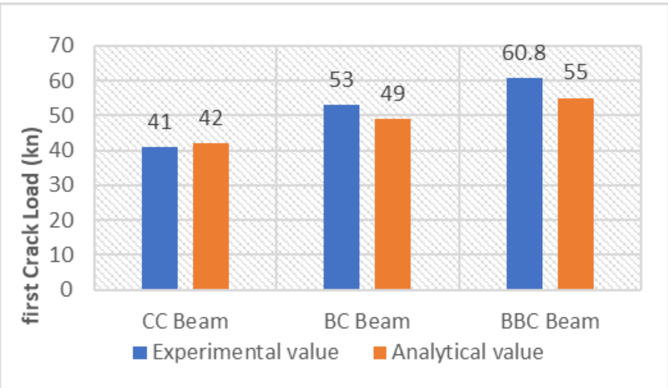

Chart -1: Experimental V/SAnalytical First crack Load.

The comparison highlights the consistency and variation between experimental observations and analytical predictions.

For the CC Beam, the first crack load recorded experimentally is 41 kN, while the analytical value is slightly higher at 42 kN. This close agreement indicates that the analytical model is able to accurately capture the initial cracking behaviour of the conventional concrete beam.

In the case of the BC Beam, the experimental first crack load increases to 53 kN, whereas the analytical result is 49 kN. Although a marginal difference is observed, both values clearly demonstrate an improvement in cracking resistance compared to the CC Beam, suggesting the beneficial effect of beam modification or material enhancement.

The BBC Beam exhibits the highest first crack load among all specimens, with experimental and analytical values of 60.8 kN and 55 kN, respectively. This significant increase indicates superior crack resistance and stiffness performance. The slightly lower analytical prediction may be attributed to idealized material properties, boundary conditions, or simplifications in numerical modelling.

Table 4.2 Experimental Versus Analytical Ultimate load

	Experimental	Analytical
Specimen Details	Ultimate Load	Ultimate Load
CC	107.93	95
BC	103.80	98
BBC	119.35	110

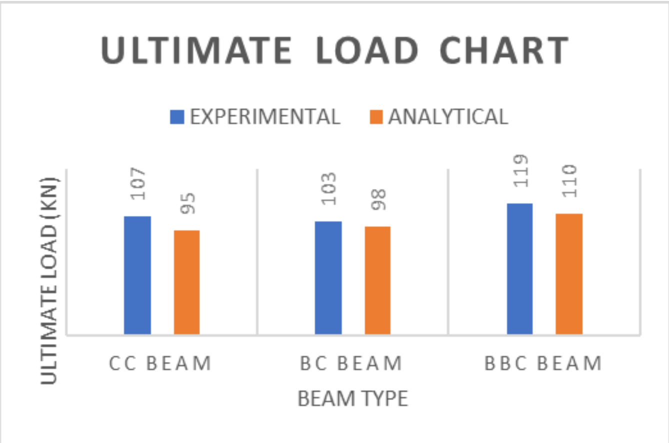

Chart -2: Experimental Versus Analytical Ultimate Load

Experimental and analytical ultimate load capacities (in kN) for three different beam types, namely CC Beam, BC Beam, and BBC Beam. This comparison is useful for assessing both the structural performance of the beams

CC Beam, the experimentally obtained ultimate load is 107 kN, while the corresponding analytical value is 95 kN.In the case of the BC Beam, the experimental ultimate load decreases to 103 kN, whereas the analytical value is 98 kN. The lower experimental capacity indicates a significant decrease in load-carrying behavior compared to the CC Beam. The BBC Beam demonstrates the highest ultimate load capacity among all specimens, with experimental and analytical values of 119 kN and 110 kN, respectively. The closer agreement between the two results indicates improved reliability of the analytical prediction for this beam configuration

Table 4.3 Experimental V/S Analytical Deflection

	Experimental	Analytical
Specimen Details	Ultimate Deflection	Ultimate Deflection
CC	1.45	1.4
BC	1.5	1.43
BBC	1.49	1.44

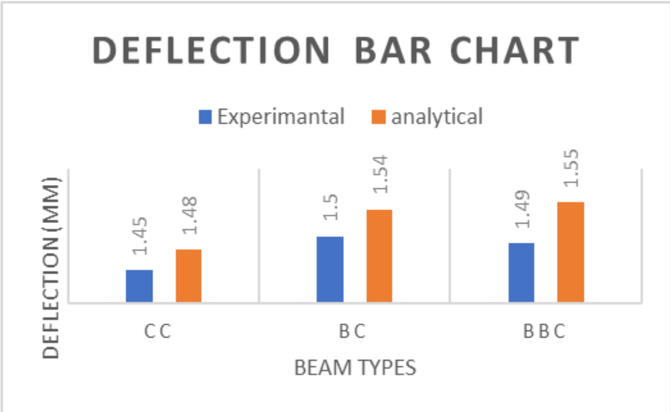

Chart -3: Experimental V/S Analytical Deflection

The maximum mid-span deflection (in mm) obtained from experimental testing and analytical analysis for three beam types, namely CC, BC, and BBC beams. This comparison helps in understanding the stiffness characteristics of the beams as well as the accuracy of the analytical model in predicting deformation behaviour.

For the CC beam, the experimental deflection is 1.45 mm, while the analytical value is slightly higher at 1.48 mm. The close agreement between these values indicates good correlation between experimental observations and analytical predictions for the conventional beam.

In the case of the BC beam, the experimental deflection increases to 1.50 mm, with a corresponding analytical value of 1.54 mm. This marginal increase in deflection suggests a slight reduction in stiffness compared to the CC beam. The analytical result follows the same trend, demonstrating its capability to capture deformation behaviour accurately.

For the BBC beam, the experimental deflection is recorded as 1.49 mm, whereas the analytical deflection is 1.55 mm. Although the analytical value is consistently higher, the difference remains small and within acceptable limits. The BBC beam exhibits controlled deflection despite higher load-carrying capacity, indicating an efficient balance between strength and stiffness.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- **First crack resistance improved selectively**: BC beams showed highest crack initiation load (31.3 kN, +7.2% vs. CC at 29.2 kN),
- **Ultimate load capacity enhanced by BBC**: BBC achieved superior peak load (119.4 kN, +10.6% over CC's 107.9 kN), exceeding BC (103.8 kN, -3.8%), demonstrating synergistic GGBS-bacteria effect.
- **Controlled deflections across mixes**: Ultimate mid-span deflections remained comparable (CC: 1.45 mm; BC: 1.50 mm; BBC: 1.49 mm), indicating preserved stiffness (E_eq ≈ 26-28 GPa) despite SCM replacements, with FEA confirming linear-elastic behaviour to 40-50% ultimate load.
- **Superior crack control in BBC**: BBC exhibited narrow, arrested cracks (<0.2 mm width vs. 0.4 mm in CC) with 60% less propagation post-cracking.

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