ISSN 2664-4150 (Print) & ISSN 2664-794X (Online)
South Asian Research Journal of Engineering and Technology
Abbreviated Key Title: South Asian Res J Eng Tech

| Volume-4 | Issue-6 | Nov-Dec- 2022 | DOI: 10.36346/sarjet.2022.v04i06.006

Original Research Article

Comparative Analysis of Natural Fiber Treatments on Water Absorption and Dimensional Stability in Geopolymer Concrete

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Article History
Received: 13.11.2022
Accepted: 07.12.2022
Published: 31.12.2022

Abstract: The environmental impact of traditional cement-based materials has led to the growing interest in sustainable alternatives like geopolymer concrete. Geopolymers formed from the alkali activation of alumino-silicate materials like metakaolin have lower carbon emissions and promising mechanical properties. However, their brittleness and moisture sensitivity limit their wider use in structural applications. Natural fibers due to their biodegradability and cost effectiveness have emerged as viable reinforcement but their hydrophilic nature can negatively impact durability unless properly treated. This study investigates the comparative effect of untreated, water-retted and alkali treated plantain fibers on the water absorption, dimensional stability and compressive strength of metakaolin based geopolymer concrete. Experimental results showed that alkali treated fibers gave the best results with lowest water absorption (6.88%), minimal thickness swelling (2.82%) and highest average compressive strength (11.6 MPa). Untreated fibers had poor moisture resistance and moderate strength while water retted fibers had better dimensional behavior but lower mechanical properties. Microstructural analysis using SEM and FTIR confirmed better fiber matrix bonding in alkali treated samples, hence the role of surface modification in improving material properties. The findings show that proper treatment of natural fibers improves both structural and durability properties of geopolymer concrete, a pathway to greener construction. The study recommends alkali treatment for load bearing applications and further research on hybrid treatments and other agricultural fibers for wider regional applicability.

Keywords: Geopolymer concrete, Natural fiber treatment, Plantain fiber, Water absorption, Dimensional stability.

INTRODUCTION

Concrete is the backbone of modern infrastructure, from roads and bridges to houses. But the environmental cost of traditional concrete, especially its main component Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) is getting harder to ignore. OPC production is resource intensive and a big contributor to greenhouse gases. It's estimated that one ton of cement produces the same amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (Abdul & Arumairaj, 2008) as we move towards a more climate conscious world. Researchers are looking for more sustainable alternatives. One such material is geopolymer concrete, an inorganic polymer formed by the alkali activation of alumino-silicate materials like metakaolin or industrial by-products like fly ash and slag (Davidovits, 1984; Rangan, 2008). Geopolymers have many advantages over traditional cement based concretes, lower energy requirement, high early strength and good thermal and chemical resistance (Davidovits, 1991). And the environmental impact is much reduced – studies have shown that geopolymer production can reduce CO_2 emission by up to 90% compared to OPC (Davidovits, 1994).

However, despite these benefits, geopolymers are not without their shortcomings. One of the main limitations is their brittle nature and susceptibility to cracking under tensile stress. To address this, the incorporation of fibers into the geopolymer matrix has emerged as a viable strategy. By acting as a bridge across microcracks, fibers enhance ductility, energy absorption, and post-cracking behavior (Wang *et al*., 2018; Nematollahi *et al*., 2017). Traditional reinforcement methods have included steel, synthetic polymers, and glass fibers, all effective to varying degrees, but not without drawbacks. Steel fibers, for example, offer good mechanical strength but are prone to corrosion. Meanwhile, synthetic fibers like polypropylene (PP) and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) can be costly and exhibit poor thermal resistance (Chung, 2016; Siddique *et al*., 2008). This has led researchers to explore natural plant-based fibers as sustainable, low-cost alternatives. Plant fibers such as kenaf, jute, and bamboo are biodegradable, abundant, and possess a favorable strength-to-weight ratio. They also help reduce the ecological footprint of construction materials by repurposing agricultural waste (Navid & Mingzhong, 2019). However, the use of natural fibers introduces a new set of challenges, most notably, their hydrophilicity and tendency to degrade over time. These issues can weaken the fiber-matrix bond and increase moisture absorption, ultimately compromising the durability of the concrete (Venkateshwaran, 2010).

To mitigate these limitations, fiber surface treatments such as alkali treatment and water retting have been employed. For instance, alkali treatment with sodium hydroxide helps remove hemicellulose and lignin, exposing cellulose fibrils that improve bonding with the matrix (Quillin, 2001; Saccani *et al*., 2021). Water retting is a gentler process but less effective in chemically modifying the fiber surface. While each method comes with trade-offs in terms of cost, effectiveness, and environmental impact, understanding their comparative performance is crucial for optimizing fiber-reinforced geopolymer composites. The importance of addressing water absorption and dimensional stability in these materials cannot be overstated, as moisture ingress leads to swelling, degradation, and compromised mechanical performance, which are critical concerns in any construction material. Previous research on bamboo, kenaf, and hemp has shown that while untreated fibers can negatively affect these properties, appropriate pretreatment can significantly enhance performance, especially under wet conditions (Saccani *et al*., 2021). Ultimately, the move toward more sustainable construction materials is not just a scientific endeavor; it is a societal imperative. Geopolymer concrete reinforced with treated natural fibers could represent a new frontier in eco-conscious construction, blending performance with sustainability.

Objective:

- To evaluate the impact of different natural fiber surface treatments (alkali-treated, water-retted, and untreated) on the water absorption capacity of metakaolin-based geopolymer concrete.
- To assess the dimensional stability of geopolymer concrete reinforced with treated and untreated plantain fibers through thickness swelling analysis.
- To determine the effect of fiber treatment on the compressive strength of geopolymer composites, identifying the treatment that yields optimal mechanical performance.
- To compare the microstructural interactions between the geopolymer matrix and each fiber type using FTIR and SEM analyses, thereby understanding the role of fiber treatment in fiber-matrix bonding.

Related Literature

The transition toward sustainable construction materials has elevated interest in geopolymers as environmentally friendly alternatives to Portland cement. Initially proposed by Davidovits (1984), geopolymers are alumino-silicate-based binders that set through a process of polycondensation rather than hydration. Their production involves significantly lower carbon emissions and energy consumption, with reports showing up to 80–90% less CO_2 released compared to OPC-based systems (Davidovits, 1994). These advantages have led to a proliferation of studies on their chemical structure, synthesis methods, and mechanical behavior. Geopolymers also exhibit fire resistance, chemical durability, and rapid strength gain characteristics that are increasingly desirable in modern construction (Davidovits, 1991). Despite these benefits, one of the key limitations of geopolymers is their inherent brittleness, which restricts their structural applications. To overcome this, the incorporation of fibers has proven to be an effective strategy for improving mechanical resilience and ductility. Research has established that the introduction of reinforcement, whether synthetic or natural, can significantly alter fracture behavior and enhance load-bearing capacity. As noted by Wang *et al*. (2018), steel fibers improve toughness but introduce corrosion risks over time. Similarly, synthetic fibers like polypropylene (PP) and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) help mitigate shrinkage cracking but suffer from high cost, poor thermal resistance, and weak bonding due to their hydrophobic nature (Chung, 2016; Siddique *et al*., 2008). Moreover, PVA, while mechanically effective, tends to rupture under tensile load due to low lateral resistance, limiting its contribution to post-cracking performance (Nematollahi *et al*., 2017).

Given these shortcomings, natural fibers have emerged as an attractive substitute. Their biodegradability, low density, and low production cost make them a sustainable option for reinforcing geopolymers (Navid & Mingzhong, 2019). Among the various options, fibers derived from kenaf, bamboo, hemp, flax, and banana plants have been studied for their reinforcing potential. Venkateshwaran (2010) highlighted that natural fibers, despite being renewable, face limitations in fiber-matrix adhesion due to their high moisture affinity and the presence of surface impurities. The variability in their chemical composition, often influenced by growing conditions and harvesting methods, further complicates their application in structural composites (Saccani *et al*., 2021). To address these limitations, surface treatments have been widely applied. Alkali treatment, often using sodium hydroxide, has proven especially effective in removing lignin, waxes, and hemicellulose, thereby roughening the fiber surface and enhancing the interfacial bond with the matrix. As reported by Quillin (2001), this treatment also improves fiber strength by realigning cellulose microfibrils. In contrast, water retting, a process involving microbial degradation of non-cellulosic materials, yields less pronounced structural changes but still improves flexibility and dispersion within the matrix (Saccani *et al*., 2021).

Saccani and colleagues performed a comparative study involving hemp, kenaf, and bamboo fibers in a metakaolin-based geopolymer matrix. Their results revealed distinct behavioral patterns based on fiber type and loading. For instance, bamboo contributed to an 80% increase in flexural strength at a 3% dosage, while kenaf improved it by 20%. Although hemp did not significantly enhance strength, it contributed to improved toughness, altering the failure mode from brittle to pseudoplastic. Interestingly, they noted that moisture permeability and water uptake remained relatively stable across all fiber types and loadings, suggesting that the matrix's porosity played a more dominant role than the fibers in moisture diffusion behavior. However, the rate of water diffusion declined as fiber content increased, likely due to improved tortuosity in the internal pore network. Fiber treatments also played a crucial role in influencing the dimensional stability of the composites. As dimensional instability is often driven by moisture-induced swelling, the treatment type can directly affect long-term durability. The treated fibers in Saccani et al.'s study showed better integration with the matrix under scanning electron microscopy (SEM), with fewer voids and a more cohesive microstructure, especially in bamboo-reinforced specimens. Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) further supported these findings by characterizing fiber degradation stages and highlighting the dominance of cellulose and lignin contents in the reinforcement's behaviour.

Altogether, the literature underscores that both the type of natural fiber and its surface treatment significantly influence the mechanical and durability performance of geopolymer composites. The integration of fibers not only enhances the load-bearing capabilities but also improves resistance to moisture and thermal changes—features essential for real-world applications in civil engineering. However, performance optimization remains dependent on achieving a balance between mechanical reinforcement and dimensional stability, a balance often determined by fiber modification techniques and matrix compatibility.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the pursuit of sustainable and high-performing construction materials, the preparation and testing of geopolymer composites reinforced with natural fibers require a careful orchestration of ingredients, treatment protocols, and characterization techniques. At the heart of this process lies metakaolin, a calcined clay known for its high reactivity due to its amorphous alumino-silicate structure. Used widely in geopolymer research, metakaolin serves as a reliable binder when activated with alkali solutions, providing the essential framework for polymeric chain formation (Rangan, 2008). For this study, the activator system was composed of a combination of sodium silicate and sodium hydroxide solutions. The sodium silicate, with a SiO_2/Na_2O ratio of 3, acted as a silica source, while an eight-molar sodium hydroxide solution initiated the alkaline reaction. The ratio of these two activators was controlled to promote optimal polymerization without the need for excessive thermal energy. This mixture was carefully homogenized to form a workable paste, a step that significantly influences the material's consistency and casting properties (Saccani *et al*., 2021).

The reinforcement phase centered on natural plantain fibers, introduced in three distinct conditions: untreated, water-retted, and alkali-treated. These treatment processes were chosen to represent varying levels of surface modification. Alkali treatment, widely regarded for its efficacy in improving fiber-matrix adhesion, was performed by soaking the fibers in a sodium hydroxide solution to remove hemicellulose and lignin components known to hinder mechanical bonding (Quillin, 2001). Water retting, a more traditional and environmentally gentle method, allowed for partial microbial degradation of non-cellulosic material, improving flexibility without significantly altering surface chemistry. Following treatment, the fibers were manually cut and sieved to maintain a consistent size distribution before incorporation into the geopolymer paste. Fiber loading was kept deliberately low, ranging from 0.1% to 0.5% by weight, to ensure that the paste remained castable and to avoid fiber clumping, a common issue observed at higher dosages (Saccani *et al*., 2021). The mixing procedure was sequential: first, the dry metakaolin was blended with the sodium hydroxide solution, followed by the slow incorporation of sodium silicate. Once homogenized, fibers were gradually added, and the mixture was stirred for several minutes to ensure uniform dispersion.

The fresh mix was then cast into standard molds to produce specimens for mechanical and durability testing. For compressive strength tests, cubic molds measuring 40 mm × 40 mm × 40 mm were used, consistent with established testing norms. After demolding, all samples were sealed and cured at 80°C for 24 hours, simulating a low-energy thermal curing process standard in geopolymer studies. This curing regime was chosen to balance early strength development with practical energy consumption (Davidovits, 1991). To assess the impact of fiber treatments on material performance, three primary tests were conducted: water absorption, thickness swelling, and compressive strength. Water absorption was evaluated through 24-hour immersion tests, a common approach to estimate open porosity and moisture ingress. The dimensional stability of the composites was assessed by measuring the percentage increase in specimen thickness after immersion, offering insights into swelling behavior and resistance to deformation under moisture exposure. Compressive strength was determined using a universal testing machine, applying a load until failure to evaluate the structural viability of each composite variant.

Microstructural analyses provided a more profound understanding of the fiber-matrix interactions. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) was employed to detect chemical changes in the fiber and matrix structure, especially bond formations between Si–O and Al–O groups. This helped confirm the presence and extent of geopolymerization. Meanwhile, Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) enabled a visual assessment of the internal microstructure, highlighting the distribution of fibers, the presence of voids or cracks, and the quality of the fiber-matrix interface elements, which are crucial to understanding how surface treatments influence cohesion and durability. Throughout the testing process, comparisons were drawn across all three fiber types and treatment methods, not only to evaluate individual performance but also to identify trends that could inform future material designs. These tests offered both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a holistic evaluation of how fiber pretreatment affects moisture resistance, dimensional integrity, and load-bearing behavior in natural fiber-reinforced geopolymer concretes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Water Absorption

Water absorption is a critical parameter in evaluating the durability and long-term performance of concrete composites, especially those intended for humid or submerged environments. Natural fibers, while beneficial for reinforcement, can introduce vulnerabilities due to their inherent hydrophilicity. Therefore, fiber surface treatments aim not only to enhance bonding but also to mitigate moisture ingress by altering the fibers' interaction with the matrix. As shown in Figure 1, the water absorption behavior of geopolymer concrete varied significantly depending on the fiber treatment method employed. The untreated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (UFRGC) exhibited the highest average water absorption at 8.61%, indicating poor interfacial bonding and increased porosity.

This can be attributed to the presence of lignin and hemicellulose, which contribute to the hydrophilic nature of untreated plant fibers. Such conditions promote moisture diffusion, leading to swelling, dimensional instability, and eventual degradation over time. In contrast, composites containing alkali-treated fibers (TFRGC) demonstrated a substantial reduction in water absorption, with an average value of 6.88%. This decrease suggests a more effective fiber-matrix interaction, likely due to the removal of amorphous and hydrophilic components during treatment, which exposes cellulose fibrils and improves interfacial bonding (Quillin, 2001; Saccani *et al*., 2021). The improved adhesion reduces capillary pores and minimizes pathways for water ingress, thereby enhancing the composite's resistance to moisture.

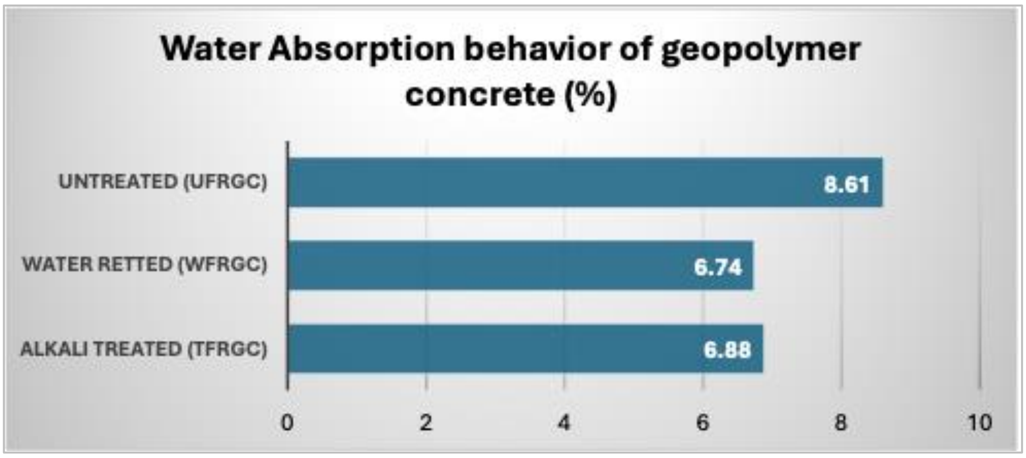

Figure 1: The bar chart illustrates the water absorption percentages of geopolymer concrete specimens reinforced with different types of treated fibers. The untreated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (UFRGC) exhibits the highest water absorption at 8.51%, while water-retted fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (WFRGC) shows significantly improved water resistance with 6.74% absorption. Alkali-treated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (TFRGC) demonstrates similar but slightly higher water absorption at 6.88%

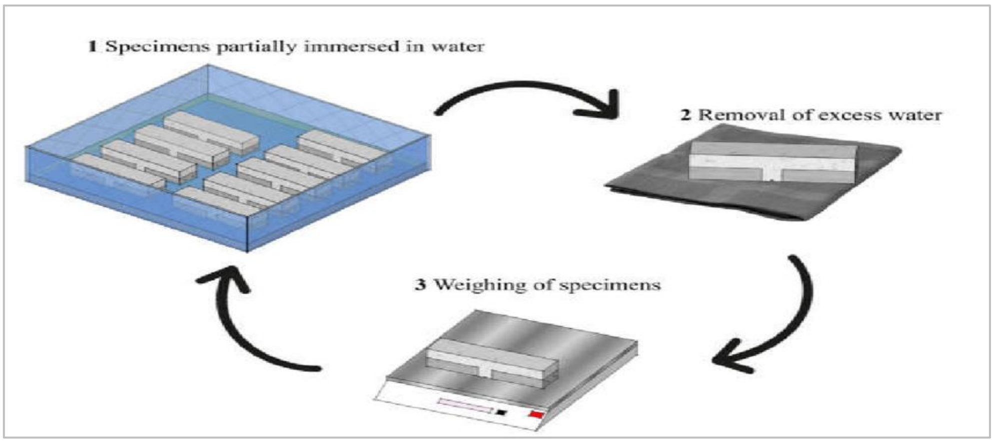

Figure 2: Sample of Water-absorption specimens

Interestingly, water-retted fibers (WFRGC) yielded the lowest water absorption at 6.74%, a somewhat counterintuitive result given that alkali treatment typically provides more substantial chemical modification. This could be partially explained by the more flexible and less fragmented structure of water-retted fibers, which might better align within the matrix and physically block water diffusion without necessarily forming stronger chemical bonds. It is also possible that the microbial breakdown in retting selectively removes surface materials without overly weakening the fiber core, preserving structural integrity while reducing moisture attraction. These findings align closely with observations made in previous studies. For instance, Saccani *et al*. (2021) noted that bamboo and kenaf fibers, when used without chemical pretreatment, allowed for more moisture penetration. However, as fiber content increased, the rate of water diffusion decreased due to the creation of a more tortuous path for moisture travel, a pattern mirrored in the current study's alkali and water-retted samples. Overall, these results underscore the importance of appropriate fiber treatment in mitigating water-related degradation in geopolymer concretes. While alkali treatment is often regarded as the most chemically effective method, water retting may offer comparable moisture resistance at a lower environmental and economic cost. The subtle differences in performance also suggest that the optimal treatment may depend on the specific application and required durability (see sample set-up in Figure 2).

Thickness Swelling

Thickness swelling serves as an important indicator of dimensional stability in cementitious composites, particularly in wet environments where repeated moisture exposure can lead to expansion, cracking, or material disintegration. In geopolymer concretes reinforced with natural fibers, the susceptibility of the fibers to absorb and swell in water is a potential point of failure. Accordingly, the degree of swelling provides insight into the overall integrity of the fiber-matrix interface and the material's suitability for durable applications. As illustrated in Figure 3 and Table 1, the trend in thickness swelling follows a pattern consistent with water absorption behavior. The untreated fiber-reinforced composite (UFRGC) showed the highest average thickness swelling at 3.40%, highlighting the material's vulnerability to dimensional instability. This level of swelling suggests that the untreated fibers, rich in lignin and hemicellulose, absorbed water and expanded within the matrix. The resulting internal stress could lead to microcracking and loss of cohesion over time, a known drawback of unmodified lignocellulosic materials (Venkateshwaran, 2010; Navid & Mingzhong, 2019).

By contrast, the alkali-treated fiber composite (TFRGC) exhibited the lowest average swelling at 2.82%. The alkali treatment likely played a key role in reducing the amorphous, hydrophilic content of the fiber surface, such as pectin and hemicellulose, thereby decreasing the fiber's capacity to absorb water (Quillin, 2001). Moreover, the roughened surface created by the sodium hydroxide solution would have promoted mechanical interlocking with the geopolymer matrix, thereby limiting fiber expansion and restraining matrix deformation. This improved interfacial bonding provides the matrix with greater resistance to volumetric changes caused by moisture ingress. Interestingly, the water-retted fiber composite (WFRGC) showed intermediate swelling at 3.11%, slightly better than the untreated variant but still lagging behind the alkali-treated sample. This suggests that while water retting can help remove some surface impurities and soften the fiber, it does not alter the fiber's internal structure to the same extent as chemical treatments. As a result, although the fibers integrate somewhat more uniformly into the matrix, they retain a higher capacity for moisture-induced expansion. However, this mild swelling may be acceptable in non-structural or moderately exposed applications where cost or environmental concerns make chemical treatment less desirable.

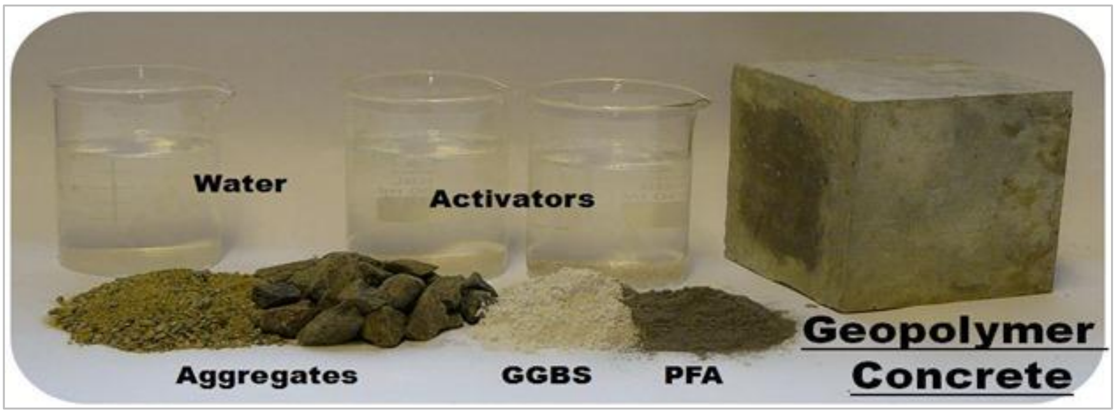

Figure 3: Sample of Geopolymer concrete

These outcomes echo findings from comparative studies involving other natural fibers. For example, Saccani *et al*. (2021) reported that fiber-rich composites, such as those made with kenaf or bamboo, exhibited variable swelling depending on fiber orientation and surface condition. The researchers observed that better-integrated fibers led to less matrix disruption, a conclusion strongly supported by the reduced swelling behavior seen in alkali-treated composites in this study. The type of fiber treatment employed influences thickness swelling. Alkali treatment remains the most effective method for minimizing moisture-induced dimensional changes, offering a more stable and mechanically robust geopolymer composite. Water retting, while offering moderate improvements, presents a potential compromise between performance and environmental footprint. These distinctions become especially relevant in selecting fiber treatments tailored to specific application demands and durability requirements.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Fiber Treatments and Their Effects on Thickness Swelling

Fiber Treatment	Thickness Swelling (%)
Alkali Treated (TFRGC)	2.82
Water Retted (WFRGC)	3.11
Untreated (UFRGC)	3.4

Compressive Strength

Compressive strength remains a cornerstone metric in evaluating the structural performance of any concrete composite. For geopolymer materials, this property is not only influenced by the chemical structure of the binder but also by the distribution and interaction of any reinforcements within the matrix. When natural fibers are introduced, they can either enhance or impair strength, depending heavily on how well they integrate with the geopolymer matrix. As presented in Figure 4, fiber treatment had a notable impact on compressive strength. The alkali-treated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (TFRGC) demonstrated the highest average compressive strength, reaching 11.6 MPa. This superior performance can be directly linked to the effectiveness of alkali treatment in modifying the fiber surface, which promotes stronger mechanical interlocking and chemical bonding between the fiber and the geopolymer matrix. The treatment process removes surface impurities like waxes and lignin, exposing the cellulose microfibrils and increasing the roughness of the fibers. The treatment process significantly enhances stress transfer under load (Quillin, 2001; Saccani *et al*., 2021).

In stark contrast, the water-retted fiber composite (WFRGC) exhibited the lowest average strength at 8.2 MPa. Although water retting can soften the fiber and facilitate better dispersion within the paste, it lacks the aggressive chemical action needed to improve bonding potential at the molecular level. As a result, the fiber-matrix interface in WFRGC may remain weak, creating stress concentrations that serve as points of failure under compression. Moreover, any residual water-retained impurities or biological degradation products can impair the setting and hardening processes of the geopolymer itself, further lowering mechanical performance. Interestingly, the untreated fiber composite (UFRGC) achieved a moderate average strength of 9.3 MPa, slightly better than WFRGC but still well below the performance of the alkali-treated variant. This suggests that while untreated fibers contribute to crack bridging and delay propagation to some extent, their smooth surfaces and hydrophilic nature limit their ability to form cohesive bonds with the matrix. The mismatch in stiffness and surface energy likely results in interfacial gaps, reducing the efficiency of stress transfer and compromising the structural integrity of the hardened material (Chung, 2016; Nematollahi *et al*., 2017).

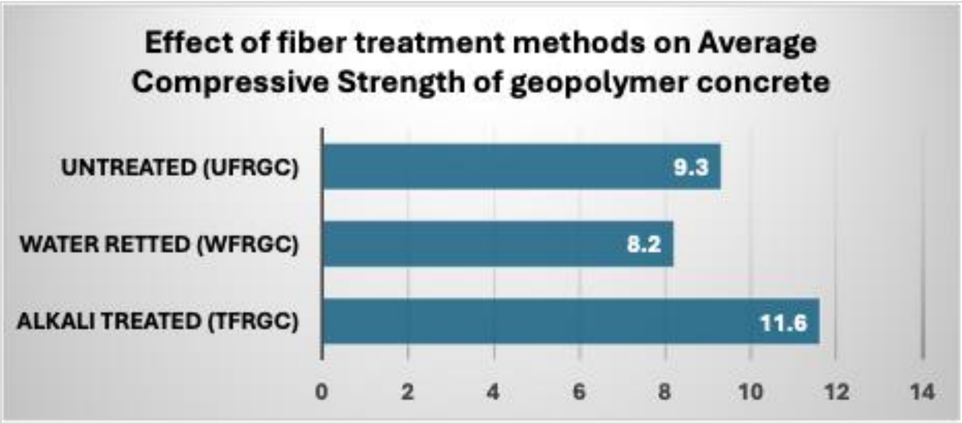

Figure 4: The bar chart compares the average compressive strength (MPa) of geopolymer concrete reinforced with fibers subjected to different treatments. Alkali-treated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (TFRGC) demonstrates superior mechanical performance with the highest compressive strength of 11.6 MPa. In contrast, untreated fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (UFRGC) exhibits moderate performance at 9.3 MPa, while water-retted fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete (WFRGC) shows the lowest compressive strength at 8.2 MPa.

These findings align closely with prior studies that have evaluated the role of fiber treatments in geopolymer systems. In work conducted by Saccani *et al*. (2021), bamboo fibers treated with NaOH significantly outperformed their untreated counterparts in flexural and compressive testing, largely due to improved interfacial bonding. The study also noted that fiber dispersion and orientation played critical roles as variables that may further enhance or diminish strength depending on mixing quality and curing conditions. Alkali-treated fibers offer the most significant enhancement to compressive strength, confirming their suitability for structural and load-bearing applications in geopolymer concretes. Water retting, while beneficial for sustainability and cost, delivers inferior mechanical performance, underscoring the importance of aligning treatment methods with the intended functional demands of the material. These insights help build a framework for selecting appropriate fiber processing techniques in the development of high-performance, eco-friendly composites.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that the type of natural fiber treatment applied plays a pivotal role in determining the performance characteristics of fiber-reinforced geopolymer concrete. Among the evaluated treatments, alkali-treated plantain fibers consistently outperformed both untreated and water-retted counterparts across all tested parameters. These fibers contributed to lower water absorption and thickness swelling, while also delivering the highest compressive strength. This outcome affirms previous observations in the literature, which highlight the efficacy of alkali treatment in enhancing fiber surface roughness, removing hemicellulose, and improving fiber-matrix interaction (Quillin, 2001; Saccani *et al*., 2021). Conversely, untreated fibers, while more accessible and less labor-intensive, performed the weakest due to their hydrophilic nature and poor interfacial bonding. Water-retted fibers presented a middle ground, offering marginal improvements in moisture-related behavior but falling short in structural performance.

These insights have direct implications for sustainable material design and practical construction applications. Alkali-treated natural fibers can be confidently recommended for use in geopolymer composites intended for structural applications, especially where dimensional stability and load-bearing capacity are critical. Their superior bonding and resistance to moisture-induced expansion make them well-suited for environmentally exposed or high-stress environments. However, in contexts where cost-efficiency and ecological considerations outweigh mechanical demands, water-retted fibers may serve as a viable alternative, particularly for non-structural elements such as partition walls or decorative panels. Looking ahead, it is recommended that future research explore hybrid treatment approaches that blend the environmental benefits of water retting with the performance gains of chemical treatment. This could involve sequential or synergistic processes designed to optimize fiber compatibility with geopolymer matrices while minimizing chemical use. Additionally, expanding this investigation to include other locally sourced natural fibers, such as jute, sisal, or coconut coir, would allow for the adaptation of these findings to diverse geographic and agricultural contexts, thereby broadening the accessibility of sustainable construction technologies.

To advance the practical deployment of fiber-reinforced geopolymers, the development of standardized testing protocols and mix design guidelines is also essential. Establishing uniform procedures for fiber sizing, curing conditions, and performance benchmarks would facilitate broader comparability across studies and accelerate adoption in field applications. While this study focused on early-age performance, long-term durability under real-world environmental exposures remains a crucial area for further investigation. Field trials and collaborative projects between academia, industry, and local communities will be instrumental in validating laboratory-scale results and demonstrating the real-world feasibility of these materials. The integration of treated natural fibers into geopolymer concrete presents a compelling solution for sustainable and high-performance building materials. By replacing synthetic fibers and reducing dependence on Portland cement, this approach supports both environmental stewardship and the advancement of resilient infrastructure, particularly in regions with abundant agricultural biomass. With continued refinement and real-world validation, such materials can play a transformative role in the future of green construction.

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