A Review of the Use of Nanosilica and Silica Fume in Cement and Concrete

J.Venkanna[1]|Y.Nagaraju[2]|C.Mahesh[3]|G.Sai reddy[4]

1Associate Professor, CIVIL department, Brilliant Grammar School Educational Society's Group of Institutions-Integrated Campus, Hyderabad, TS.

2 Assistant Professor, CIVIL department, Brilliant Grammar School Educational Society's Group of Institutions-Integrated Campus, Hyderabad, TS.

3&4 UG SCHOLARS, CIVIL department, Brilliant Grammar School Educational Society's Group of Institutions, Hyderabad-Integrated Campus, TS.

Abstract:

The use of silica fume (micro-silica) and nano-silica for the sustainable growth of the concrete industry is reviewed in this study along with current advancements. By reducing trash, this will not only save energy and natural resources but also safeguard the environment. There is a dearth of research on the application of nano- and micro-silica in paste, mortar, and concrete, and what is known about their effects on the development of mechanical strength and durability characteristics is very conflicting. To comprehend the impact of micro and nano-silica on the fresh, hardened, and microstructural characteristics of paste, cement mortar, and concrete, a variety of literature has been reviewed. Utilizing technologies and materials for nanostructure and microstructure characterization, the optimal usage of micro-silica and nano-silica separately and simultaneously will provide a novel concrete mixture that will lead to long-lasting concrete structures in the future.

Keywords: Micro-silica, Nano-silica, mortar, concrete, compressive strength.

1. Introduction

In the most customary sense, cement is a binder that sets and hardens independently as well as binds other materials together. Cement mortar is a building compound created by mixing fine aggregate and a selection of cementing material with a specified amount of water. Mortar has been used for centuries as a means of adhering bricks or concrete blocks to one another. Cement mortar continues to be used in many different types of construction such as the binder between bricks in walls, fences, and walkways, to make quick repairs in patio slabs and reset loosened stones or bricks in a walkway or retaining wall. Unfortunately, construction industry is not only one of the largest consumers of natural resources and energy, but is also responsible for large emissions of green house gases (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide responsible for global warming. It is estimated that one ton of Portland cement clinker production yields one ton of GHGs. In addition, due to the accumulation of natural aggregate extraction from quarries; it poses an immediate concern for sustainable construction development.

1.1 Concrete and Sustainability

Concrete is probably unique in construction, it is the only material exclusive to the business and therefore is the beneficiary of a fair proportion of the research and development money from industry. Concrete is a composite construction material composed primarily of aggregate, cement, and water, which is a nano structured, complex, multi-phase material that ages over time. Sustainability is defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as the development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. It is basically an idea for concern for the well being of planet Earth with continued growth and human development. The current construction practices are based on the consumption of enormous quantities of building materials and drinking water, resulting in the scarcity of these resources after a long turn. The sustainable development of the cement mortar would save not only the natural resources and energy but also protect the environment with the reduction of waste material. The mortar properties in fresh state such as workability are governed by the particle size distribution and the properties in hardened state, such as strength and durability, are affected by the mix grading and resulting particle packing. Rheological properties of a fresh cement paste play an important role in determining the workability of concrete. The water requirement for flow, hydration behavior, and properties of the hardened state largely depends upon the degree of dispersion of cement in water. Factors such as water content, early hydration, water reducing admixtures and mineral admixtures like silica fume determine the degree of flocculation in a cement paste (Sanchez and Sobolev, 2010).

1.2 Nanotechnology in Concrete

Nanotechnology is rapidly becoming the Industrial Revolution of 21st century (Siegel et al., 1999). It will affect almost every aspect of one's life (IWGN, 1999). In comparison to other technologies, nanotechnology is much less well defined and well-structured. It is known that 'Nano' is a Greek word and means 'dwarf'. It does not mean dealing with dwarfs but it became a common word for everything which is smaller than 1 Micron or 1 million of a millimeter. 1 Micron is 1000 Nanometer. The nano science and nano-engineering (nano-modification) of concrete are terms that have come into common usage and describe two main approaches of applications of nanotechnology in concrete (Scrivener and Kirkpatrick, 2008; Scrivener, 2009). Until today, concrete has primarily been seen as a structural material. Nanotechnology is helping to make it a multipurpose ''smart'' functional material. Concrete can be nano-engineered by the incorporation of nano-sized building blocks or objects e.g., nano particles, nano admixtures and nano tubes) to control material behavior and add trailblazing properties, or by the grafting of molecules onto the cement particles, cement phases, aggregates, and additives (including nano-sized additives) to provide the surface functionality adjusted to promote the specific interfacial interactions of the molecules. Recently, nano technology is being used in many applications and it has received increasing attention also in building materials, with potential advantages and drawbacks being underlined (Campillo et al., 2003; Pacheco-Torgal and Jalali, 2011).

1.3 Silica fume

Silica is the common name for materials composed of silicon dioxide (SiO2) and occurs in crystalline and amorphous forms. Silica fume or micro-silica (SF) is a byproduct of the smelting process in the silicon and ferrosilicon industry. The American concrete institute defines silica fume as 'Very fine non crystalline silica produced in electric arc furnaces as a by-product of production of elemental silicon or alloys containing silicon' (ACI Committee 226., 1987b). It is a grey colored powder, similar to Portland cement or fly ashes. It is an ultrafine powder collected as a by-product of the silicon and ferrosilicon alloy production and consists of spherical particles with an average particle size (diameter) of 150 nm. The main field of application is as pozzolanic material for high performance concrete (Prasad et al., 2003).

1.4 Nano-silica

Nano silica is typically a highly effective pozzolanic material. It normally consists of very fine vitreous particles approximately 1000 times smaller than the average cement particles. It has proven to be an excellent admixture for cement to improve strength and durability and decrease permeability (Loland, 1981; Aitcin et al., 1981). NS reduces the setting time and increases the strength (compressive, tensile) of resulting cement in relation with other silica components that were tested (Roddy et al., 2008). Nano-silica is obtained by direct synthesis of silica sol or by crystallization of nano-sized crystals of quartz.

2. Effect of addition of silica fume and nan o-silica

Silica fume has been recognized as a pozzolanic and cementitious admixture which is effective in enhancing the mechanical properties to a great extent. The pozzolanic reaction results in a reduction of the amount of calcium hydroxide in concrete, and silica fume reduces porosity and improves durability. It accelerates the dissolution of C-S and formation of C-S-H with its activity being inversely proportional to the size, and also provides nucleation sites for C-S-H. It is responsible for an additional increase in strength and chemical resistance and decrease in water absorption (Diab et al., 2012). The addition of micro and nano silica particles to cement paste could effectively reduce the degradation rate as well as its negative consequences. Even small additions (0.5 wt. % binder) of these particles are very efficient in terms of improvement in mechanical properties of cement based materials. This is especially pronounced at early ages and for concretes with regular strength grade. Therefore, application of SF and NS could be a successful method for improvement of low strengths of cement based materials. In addition, when low water content is used, economical advantages and higher durability are expected. However, when mortars with nano silica (NS) and silica fume (SF) are produced using low water content, the resulting material has inadequate workability for most applications. In this case, adding extra amount of water has to be done, but the benefits of mineral additions on the hardened state properties would be minimized. The use of plasticizers and super plasticizers (SP) is always desirable to improve the rheological properties without the need for addition of extra water (Qing et al., 2007).

3. Literatures reviewed

The fundamental processes that govern the most pertinent issues to the study of concrete technology (strength, ductility, early age rheology, creep, shrinkage, durability, fracture behavior, etc) are affected (dominatingly or not), by the performance of the material at the nanoscale. The use of supplementary cementing materials have become an essential part of the Portland cement concrete production, and the research on new materials with supplementary cementing potential is receiving considerable attention from the scientific point of view.

3.1 Influence on Fresh and Mechanical properties

Experiments using nano silica and silica fume were conducted and the results showed that with 5% replacement of cement by NS (mean size 15±5 nm), 7 & 28-days compressive strength of mortars were increased by 20% and 17%, respectively, whereas 15% silica fume replacement increased mortar strengths by 7% and 10% compared with those of control Portland cement mortar. With the experimental analysis, it was proved that the compressive and flexural strengths of the cement mortars with nano-silica and with nano-Fe_2O_3 were both higher than that of the plain cement mortar with the same water to binder ratio (Li et al., 2004).

In a study to evaluate the effect of silica fume on the compressive strength, split tensile strength and modulus of elasticity of low quality coarse aggregate concrete was conducted whose results indicated that the type of coarse aggregate influenced the compressive strength, split tensile strength and modulus of elasticity of both plain and silica fume cement concretes. Incorporation of silica fume enhanced the compressive strength and split tensile strength of all concretes especially that of the low quality limestone aggregates (Abdullah et al., 2004).

In an experiment it was showed that the compressive and tensile strengths increased with silica fume incorporation, and the results indicated that the optimum replacement percentage is not constant but depends on the water cementitious material ratio of the mix.

They also found that compared with split tensile strengths, flexural strengths have exhibited greater improvements (Bhanja and Sengupta, 2005) while in another, it was showed experimentally that the compressive strengths of mortars with nano-SiO2 particles were all higher than those of mortars containing silica fume at 7 and 28 days (Jo

Table 1: Compressive strength (MPa) after 7 and 28 days comparing the mortars containing nano-silica and silica fume (Jo et al.,2007).

	7 Days	28 days
OPC	18.3	25.6
SF5	22.5	35.1
SF10	24.7	37.4
SF15	26.1	38.0
NS3	39.5	54.3
NS6	46.1	61.9
NS10	49.3	68.2
NS12	50.7	68.8

et al., 2007). It was demonstrated that the nano-particles are more valuable in enhancing strength than silica fume. The addition of nano-silica and silica fume enhances mechanical properties of cement-based materials. Various conclusions were made regarding the effect of nano-silica that made cement paste thicker and accelerated the cement hydration process. Compressive strengths of hardened cement paste increased with increasing the nano-SiO2 content, especially at early ages. The pozzolanic activity of nano-SiO2 is much greater than that of silica fume (Qing et al., 2007). The effect of silica fume on compressive and split tensile strength of lightweight concrete after high temperature was studied in which the level of importance of percentage of silica fume and heating degree on compressive and splitting tensile strength was determined by using analysis of variance (ANOVA) method (Tanyildizi and Coskun, 2008). Researchers carried out an experimental investigation to study the effect of nano-silica on rheology and fresh properties of cement pastes and mortars.
It was seen that nano-SiO2 modified the characteristics of fresh mortars. The mortar with nanosilica showed the higher torque along all the testing period due to the plastic viscosity and yield stress increase (Senff et al., 2009). The addition of nano-silica reduced the spread diameter on the flow table of mortars,

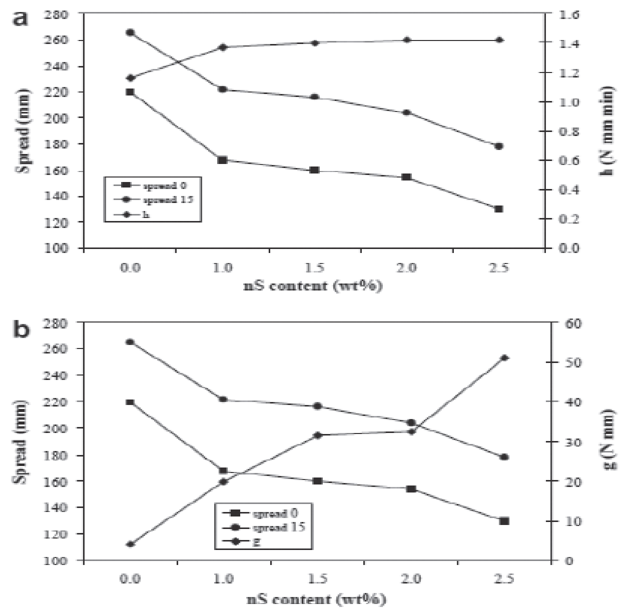

Figure 1: Influence of nS content on spread (after 0 and 15 strokes) and rheological parameters estimated after mixing (Senff et al., 2009).

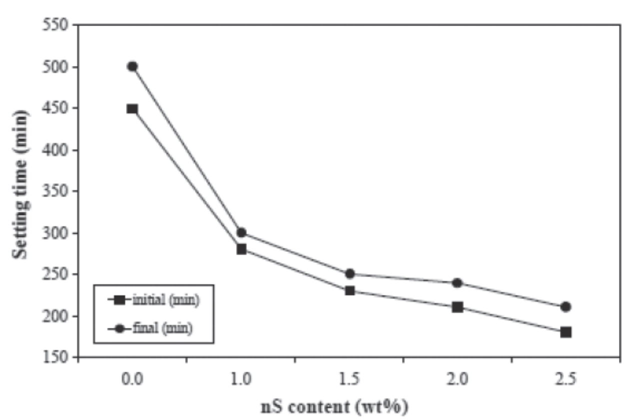

Figure 2: Variation of setting time (initial and final) on the mortar with the NS content (Senff et al., 2009).

due to the gain in cohesiveness of the paste. By adding nS, the beginning of setting was anticipated and the dormant period was reduced. Samples with NS (0–7 wt. %), SF (0–20 wt. %) and water/binder ratio (0.35–0.59), were investigated through factorial design experiments. Nanosilica with 7 wt. % showed a faster formation of structures during the rheological measurements.

It was investigated that there are effects of size of NS on compressive, flexural and tensile strength of binary blended concrete. It was found that the cement could be advantageously replaced by NS up to maximum limit of 2.0% with average particle sizes of 15 and 80 nm. Although the optimal replacement level of nano-Silica particles for 15 and 80 nm size were gained at 1.0% and 1.5%, respectively (Givi et al., 2010).

In another experiment, the properties of cement mortars with nano-SiO2 were studied. Test data showed that nano-SiO2 made cement paste thicker and accelerates the cement hydration process. Compressive strengths increased on increasing the nano-SiO2 content (Ltifia et al., 2011). Researchers addressed the effect of nano-silica on the rheological behaviour and mechanical strength development of cementitious mixes. The addition of nano-silica to cementitious mixes produced a remarkable reduction of the mix workability (Berra et al., 2012). It was experimentally investigated about the influence of nano-SiO2 on the Portland cement pastes. It was concluded that nano-SiO2 appeared to affect the mechanical properties and the structure of high-strength cement pastes even in low concentration. The addition of nano silica seemed to create two competing mechanisms in terms of the overall chemo mechanical response of cement pastes. On one hand, the addition of extra water to the paste increased the water/cement ratio with all the well-established consequences, while the addition of nanoparticles tended to primarily increase the mechanical response. In that case, 0.5% up to 2% w/w of cement nano particles caused 20–25% strength increase despite the increased demand in water in the fresh state.

In the second set of specimens the above mentioned problem was restricted (Stefanidou and Papayianni 2012).

It was reported that the use of nS and nano-TiO2 in cement pastes and mortars have an effect on various properties. Rheological and flow table measurements were carried out. The values of torque, yield stress and plastic viscosity of mortars with nano additives increased significantly, reducing the open testing time in rheology tests. Meanwhile, the flow table values reduced. Mechanical properties were not significantly affected by nano particles in the range considered in the work (Senffa et al., 2012).

Mini-slump and rheometric tests were carried out on cement pastes made with three dose levels of nanosilica at different water/binder ratios. Cement paste workability resulted to be significantly lower than expected for the adopted water/binder ratios, as a consequence of instantaneous interactions between nano silica sol and the liquid phase of cement pastes, which evidenced the formation of gels characterized by significant water retention capacity. The resulting reduction of the mix workability was avoided by suitable addition procedures of super plasticizers. No appreciable improvement in the compressive strength development of cementitious mixes by nano silica addition was observed, in contrast with some results from literature. This confirmed conflicting experience on the problem, but some parameters (composition and content of mineral in mortars; water cement ratio and hydration degree of cement; size, number and distribution of capillary) affecting the strength development were identified and discussed (Berra et al., 2012). It was further studied about the effect of colloidal nano-silica on concrete incorporating single (ordinary cement) and binary (ordinary cement + Class F fly ash) binders. Significant improvement was observed in mixtures incorporating nano-silica in terms of reactivity and strength development (Said et al., 2012).

The effects of nano-silica on setting time and early strengths of high volume slag mortar and concrete was experimentally studied and results indicated that the incorporation of a small amount of nS reduced setting times, and increased 3-day and 7-day compressive strengths of high-volume slag concrete, significantly, in comparison to the reference slag concrete with no silica inclusion. The results also indicated that length of dormant period was shortened, and rate of cement and slag hydration was accelerated with the incorporation of 1% nS in the cement pastes with high volumes of fly ash or slag. The incorporation of 2% nS by mass of cementitious materials reduced initial and final setting times by 90 and 100 min, and increased 3- and 7-day compressive strengths of high-volume fly ash concrete by 30% and 25%, respectively, in comparison to the reference concrete with 50% fly ash (Zhang et al., 2012).

The effect of micro and nano-silica under various dosages of carboxylatedpolyether-copolymer-type superplasticizer on the rheological properties of grouts in the fresh state was determined. Data mentioned that the maximum strength in nS-system was reached at 1.0 wt%, whereas in SF-systems, it was at a level of replacement in the order of 15 wt%. In addition, the highest compressive strength was obtained in SF-systems (Zapata et al., 2013). In another experiment, the addition of nano-silica (NS), nano-Al2O3 (NA) and nano-Fe2O3 (NF) powders and their binary and ternary combinations on the compressive strength of cement mortars containing flyash (FA) was determined and the results showed that addition of any single type of oxide powders at 1.25% increased compressive strength of the mortars much further than the other proportions (Oltulu and Sahin, 2013). Thus, it was found that in most of the cases, addition of nano-silica and silica fume enhanced the compressive strength and flexural strength with optimized percentages.

3.2 Influence on Durability properties

The water absorption, capillary absorption and distribution of chloride ion tests indicated that the nano-silica concrete has better permeability resistance than the normal concretes. This was evident from the studies carried out that the water permeability resistant behaviour whose results showed that NS concrete is stickier than normal concrete due to the larger specific surface area (Ji, 2005). Through various experiments carried out, it was evident that for mixtures with 0.35W/B, the water absorption and apparent porosity reached the maximum values for mortars with 7% NS (Senff et al., 2010). The factorial design showed that the unrestrained shrinkage and weight loss of mortar did not follow a linear regression model and the mortars with nS showed higher values than SF. With 7 days the shrinkage increased 80%, while at 28 days it increased 54%. The chloride permeability of concrete containing nano-particles (TiO2 and SiO2) for pavement and compared with that of plain concrete, concrete containing polypropylene (PP) fibers and concrete containing both nano-TiO2 and PP fibers (Zhang and Li, 2011). The test results indicated that the addition of nano-particles refines the pore structure of concrete and enhances the resistance to chloride penetration of concrete. The nS addition decreased the apparent density and increased the air content in the mortars. It was investigated that the addition of super plasticizers in 1% w/w of cement reduced the water demand and the strength increase varied from 30% to 35% (Stefanidou nad Papayianni 2012); Quercia et al., 2012) addressed the characterization of six different amorphous silica samples with respect to their application in cement paste. It was determined that the addition of 0.5 to 4.0% nano-silica to the cement paste reduced the water demand without the use of superplasticizers. A linear relationship between the deformation coefficient and the specific surface area of nS/mS particles was confirmed. Higher deformation coefficients (Ep) for amorphous silica with high content of nanoparticles were found which were bigger than that of cement. Guidelines in compressive strength assessment of concrete modified with silica fume due to magnesium sulfate attack were suggested. These guidelines could be used to check the safety of any structural element subjected to any concentration of magnesium sulfate attack after any service time knowing the mix proportions of the used concrete mix. Application of these guidelines shows the hazards of using Portland cement and silica fume in concrete subjected to magnesium sulfate attack. The possibility of using waste ground ceramic powder and the combination of ground ceramic powder with nano-silica as a replacement for cement was studied and the results showed that concrete with ceramic waste powder ultimately demonstrated only minor strength loss, and ceramic waste powder exhibits very good pozzolanic reactivity and could be used as a cement replacement. Water absorption capacity of concrete was decreased by using pozzolan. The greatest decrease was observed in the sample containing 20% pozzolan (Heidari and Tavakoli 2013). Kawashima (2013) summarized the current work being done at ACBM-NU on nano-modification of cement-based materials. Shear rheology results indicated that nano clays have an immediate stiffening effect, governed by flocculation not water adsorption, but with little influence over time.

3.3 Influence on Microstructural properties

The Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) observations revealed that the nano-particles were not only acting as filler, but also as an activator to promote hydration and to improve the microstructure of the cement paste if the nano-particles were uniformly dispersed (Li et al., 2004). The results of the experimental analysis indicated that nano-scale SiO2 behaves not only as a filler to improve microstructure, but also as an activator to promote pozzolanic reaction (Qing et al., 2007); Jo et al., 2007).

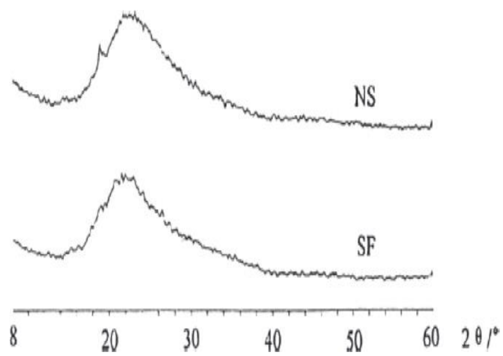

Figure 3: XRD powder pattern of nano-silica and silica fume (Qing et al., 2007).

4. Conclusion

The industry of building materials and construction could enter a completely new era thanks to nanotechnology. There has been a thorough review and discussion of the function and use of nano and micro silica particles with cementitious materials. The studied literature makes it clear that no researcher has conducted a thorough or in-depth investigation of the characteristics of mortar and paste containing nano and micro silica and their simultaneous use. The methods via which nano and micro silica impact cementitious mix flow characteristics are not well understood. Research on the application of nano silica is still in its infancy in India. Therefore, it becomes necessary to thoroughly examine the different characteristics of paste, mortar, and concrete that contain different proportions of nano silica and micro silica alone as a partial cement substitute, as well as the combined percentage effects of these two materials.

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