

Unit Weight, Strengths and Thermal Conductivity of Cellular Lightweight Fly Ash Geopolymer Mortar Reinforced with Polyvinyl Alcohol

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Received July 18, 2022; Revised August 12, 2022; Accepted October 11, 2022

Cite This Paper in the Following Citation Styles

(a): [1] Sermasak Tiyasangthong, Piyathida Yoosuk, Kitsada Krosoongnern, Bundit Krittacom, Prin Nachaisit, Cherdasak Suksiripattanapong, "Unit Weight, Strengths and Thermal Conductivity of Cellular Lightweight Fly Ash Geopolymer Mortar Reinforced with Polyvinyl Alcohol," *Civil Engineering and Architecture*, Vol. 10, No. 7, pp. 2943 - 2952, 2022. DOI: 10.13189/cea.2022.100713.

(b): Sermasak Tiyasangthong, Piyathida Yoosuk, Kitsada Krosoongnern, Bundit Krittacom, Prin Nachaisit, Cherdasak Suksiripattanapong (2022). Unit Weight, Strengths and Thermal Conductivity of Cellular Lightweight Fly Ash Geopolymer Mortar Reinforced with Polyvinyl Alcohol. *Civil Engineering and Architecture*, 10(7), 2943 - 2952. DOI: 10.13189/cea.2022.100713.

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Abstract Lightweight materials are the most popular building wall construction materials because of their fast installation, high insulation, and low cost. However, these materials use cement as a binder. Cement production releases carbon dioxide emissions resulting in environmental issues. The research investigated the use of fly ash geopolymer and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) to enhance the mechanical and thermal properties of cellular lightweight mortar. The effects of PVA concentrations, foam content (Fc), and curing time on properties of the cellular lightweight fly ash geopolymer (CLFAG) mortar reinforced with PVA specimens were evaluated. The results revealed that the PVA concentrations and Fc had an effect on the unit weights of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens. The lowest unit weight of the specimens was 10.10 kN/m³ at a PVA concentration of 20% and Fc of 2%. According to the Thailand industrial standard for C12 and C14 CLC block types, all mixed ingredients met the unit weight and compressive strength requirements. The correlation between unit weight and thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens was represented by a linear function, which was a useful

equation for estimating the thermal conductivity of specimens.

Keywords Cellular Lightweight Concrete, Fly Ash Geopolymer, Polyvinyl Alcohol, Thermal Conductivity

1. Introduction

The use of lightweight materials with low thermal conductivities in the building is continuously increasing because they can reduce the dead load of building structure [1,2] and energy consumption [3]. Many researchers have carried out properties of building walls, including cellular lightweight concrete [4], expanded polystyrene foam aggregate (EPS) concrete [5], phase change materials [6-9], and masonry units [10-14]. The cellular lightweight concrete, one of the lightweight materials, has lower unit weight and thermal conductivity than conventional materials (red brick, cement brick, and masonry unit) [15]. Borbon-Almada et al. [15]

investigated the thermal properties of a sample composed of cement, sand, and foam. They concluded that the addition of foam reduced the unit weight and thermal conductivity of the samples due to the large size of the pores [16]. To reduce CO₂ emissions and environmental issues from cement production, geopolymer can be utilized as a substitute for cement. Furthermore, the addition of polymers in lightweight materials can be used to improve their strength.

Lightweight geopolymer materials have been applied extensively, such as lightweight geopolymer concrete [17], lightweight geopolymer mortar [18-21], and lightweight geopolymer soil [22]. The optimum heat conditions of 65°C for 72 hours were proposed by Suksiripattanapong et al. [22]. However, heat temperature resulted in consumption. To solve this problem, high calcium fly ash (FA) was used to improve the strength of geopolymer mortar due to its low energy consumption [3,18]. Yoosuk et al. [3] concluded that the cellular lightweight FA geopolymer mortar sample with 8 M NaOH gave maximum 7-day compressive strength and unit weight of 20.94 MPa and 14.34 kN/m³, respectively. In addition, Wongkvanklom et al. [18] concluded that the unit weight, compressive strength of 28 days, thermal conductivity, and sound absorption coefficients were 844-2100 kg/m³, 2.7-57.8 MPa, 0.13-1.62 W/mK, and 0.05-0.5, respectively. Suksiripattanapong et al. [2] introduced the utilization of bottom ash in cellular lightweight geopolymer mortar, demonstrating the lowest unit weight, highest compressive strength and lowest thermal conductivity of 11.08 kN/m³, 16.98 MPa, and 0.15 W/mK, respectively. Recently, Adji [20] produced lightweight geopolymer concrete with concentrations of NaOH of 14 M and reported a unit weight of 14.53 kN/m³, a strength of 19.2 MPa, and thermal conductivity of 0.27 W/mK.

Polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) has been widely used in construction materials [24-27] and ground improvement [28,29] to improve the flexural strength. However, the excessive PVA content (PVA/cement > 1) could lead to lower workability [27]. To manage this problem, the slump was controlled by varying superplasticizer content. Lee et al. [25] concluded that red clay mixed PVA's compressive strength and flexural strength were 16.57 and 3.02 MPa, respectively. The high strengths are because of hydrogen bonds. In addition, Al-Baghdadi et al. [24] evaluated the sulfate resistance of RCA concrete modified with PVA. They discovered that mixes with RCA and PVA had higher compressive strengths than control because more hydration products resulting from its water and PVA solution retention capacity, leading to improvement in microstructure [26].

Although much research has been conducted on cellular lightweight fly ash geopolymer and PVA in construction materials, the properties of cellular lightweight fly ash geopolymer (CLFAG) mortar reinforced with polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) have not been investigated. This research studied the using fly ash geopolymer and polyvinyl

alcohol (PVA) to enhance the properties of cellular lightweight mortar. The influence parameters, including PVA concentration, foam content (Fc), and curing time, were investigated via unit weight, compressive and flexural strengths, and thermal conductivity.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Materials

Sand (S) was collected in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand. According to ASTM C778 [30], its specific gravity of 2.65 was measured. S had a fineness modulus of 2.33.

Fly ash (FA) with a specific gravity of 2.32 is a by-product of the electricity generation plant in Mae Moh, Thailand. The chemical components of FA are shown in Table 1 per ASTM E1621 [31]. The FA comprised 39.6% SiO₂, 12.69% Al₂O₃, 11.3% Fe₂O₃, and 29.44% CaO. The FA can be categorized as FA class C according to ASTM C618 [32].

The polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) was a white powder. PVA had a specific gravity of 1.27-1.31 and a molecular weight and 13,000 g/M [13]. The PVA concentration of 5, 10, 15, and 20% by water weight was used.

The liquid alkaline (L), sodium silicate (Na₂SiO₃) and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) were used. The NaOH concentration of 8 molars was kept.

Air foam agent (Sika Poro 40) was supplied by Sika (Thailand) Company Limited. Air foam was composed of foaming agent and water at a weight ratio of 1:40.

Table 1. Chemical compositions of FA

Chemical compositions	FA (%)
SiO ₂	39.6
Al ₂ O ₃	12.69
Fe ₂ O ₃	11.3
CaO	29.44
MgO	N.D.
SO ₃	3.01
Na ₂ O	0.96
K ₂ O	2.13
LOI	0.87

2.2. Specimen Preparation

The effect of variables, including PVA concentrations of 5, 10, 15, and 20%, foam content (Fc) of 0, 1, and 2%, and curing time of 7 and 28 days, on the properties of cellular lightweight fly ash geopolymer (CLFAG) mortar reinforced with PVA was evaluated. The L/FA ratio, Na₂SiO₃/NaOH, and NaOH concentration were fixed at

0.60, 2, and 8 molars, respectively. First, specimens of CLFAG reinforced with PVA were made by combining dry S and FA with L and PVA for 5 minutes. The sample was then blended for 5 minutes to achieve homogeneity after the addition of Fc. The CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens were transferred into the mold with 50x50x50 mm and 40x40x160 mm, respectively. The specimens were covered in a vinyl sheet and cured at room temperature (27-30°C) for 7 and 28 days. In accordance with ASTM C138 [33], ASTM C109 [34], ASTM C 348 [35], and ASTM E1225-04 [36], the unit weight, compressive strength, flexural strength, and thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA were evaluated.

3. Test Results

3.1. Unit Weight

Figure 1 indicates the 7-day and 28-day unit weights of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens with different PVA concentrations and Fc. The test result showed that the 7-day and 28-day unit weight of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens decreased with the increase in PVA concentrations. For instance, 7-day unit weight of the specimens at Fc of 2% is 10.96, 10.78, 10.59, 10.57, and 10.10 kN/m³ for PVA concentrations of 0, 5, 10, 15, and 20%, respectively. This is due to the fact that PVA has lower specific gravity than both S and FA.

In addition, the increase in Fc resulted in the reduction

of unit weight. This is due to the increase in the large size of pores, resulting in high porosity in sample increases [15]. For instance, the 7-day unit weight of specimens with PVA concentrations of 20% was 11.85, 11.10, and 10.10 kN/m³ for Fc of 0, 1, and 2%, respectively. The 28-day unit weight of specimens was greater than the 7-day unit weight because the large size of pores was filled by geopolymerization products [1,2,22]. The lowest unit weight of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens was found at PVA concentrations of 20% and Fc of 2%.

3.2. Compressive and Flexural Strengths

Figures 2 and 3 indicate the compressive and flexural strengths of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens with different curing times, PVA concentrations and Fc. For all curing times, the strengths of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens increased as PVA concentrations increased until PVA concentration was 5%. This is because they coexist with PVA films and geopolymerization products, resulting in strong bonding [23]. Beyond PVA concentration of 5%, specimens' compressive and flexural strengths decreased. For instance, the 7-day compressive strength of the specimens at Fc of 2% is 12.1, 12.8, 10.5, 9.6, and 6.8 MPa for PVA concentrations of 0, 5, 10, 15, and 20%, respectively. The excessive PVA concentration resulted in a large void in the specimens due to the high viscosity of PVA [26]. In addition, the excessive PVA concentration retarded the geopolymerization reaction [27].

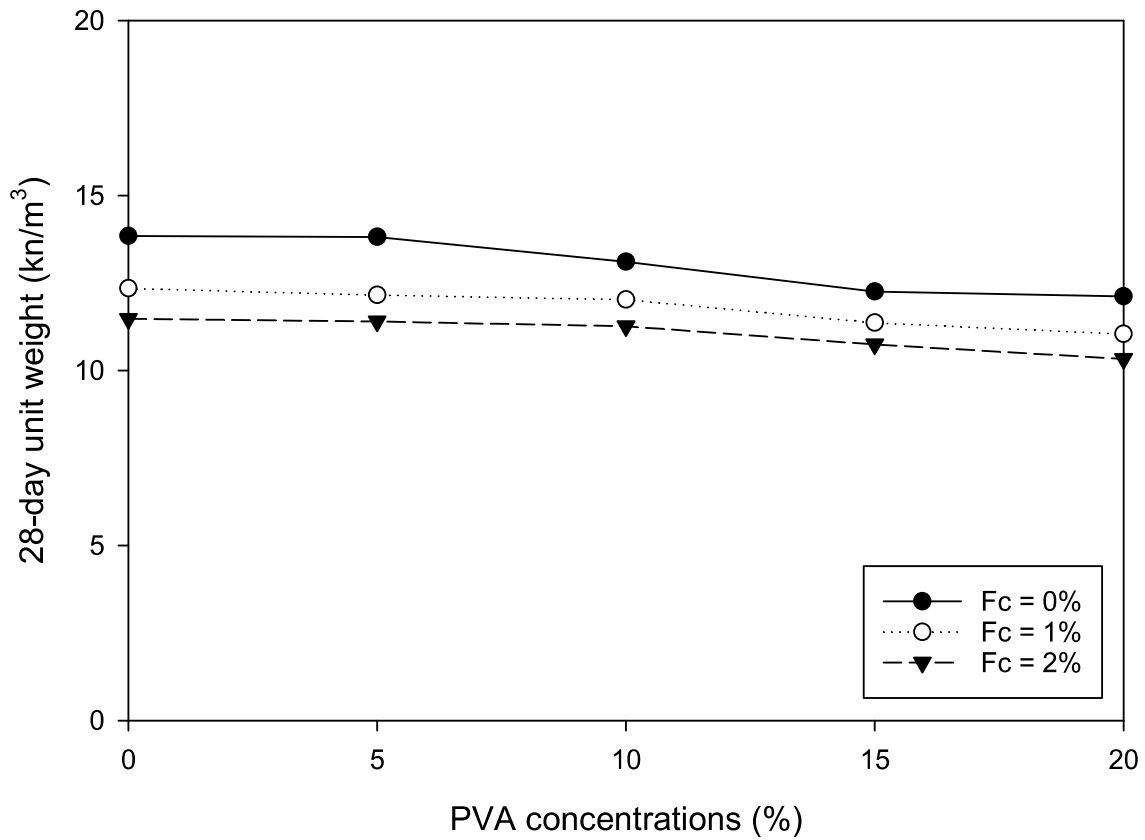
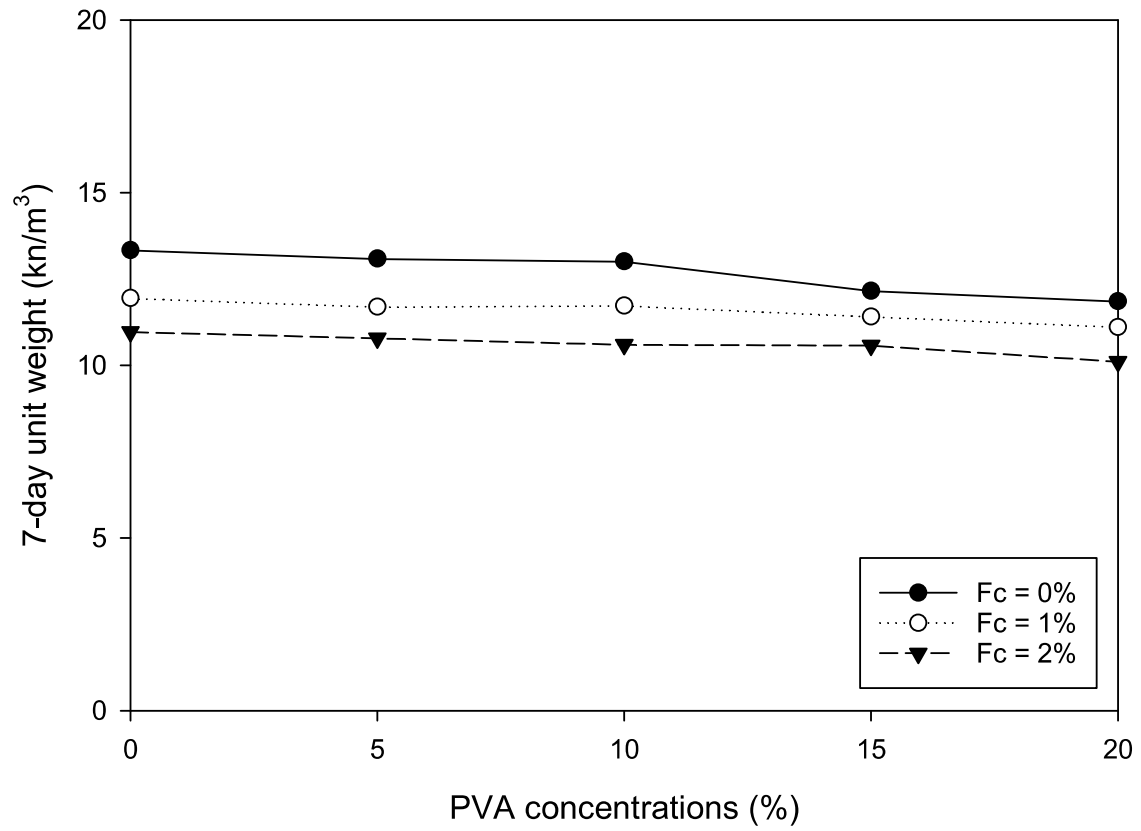


Figure 1. 7-day and 28-day unit weight of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens

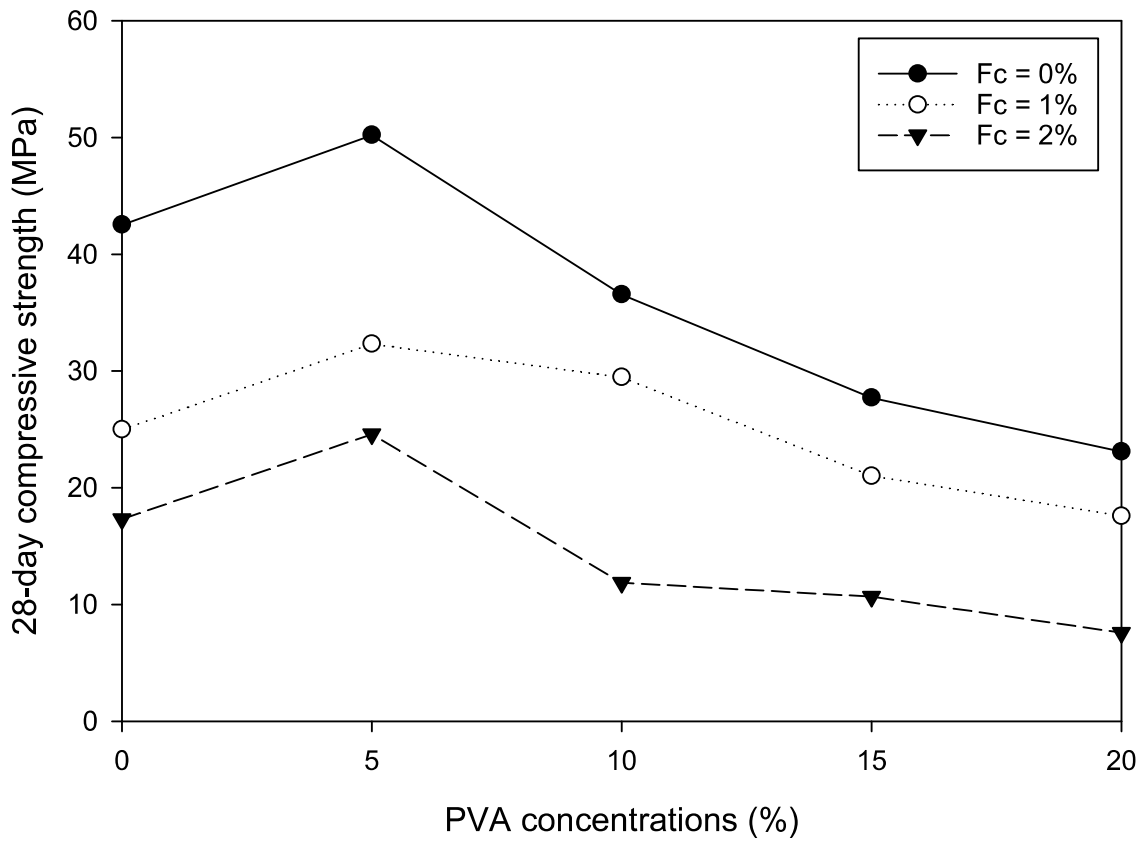
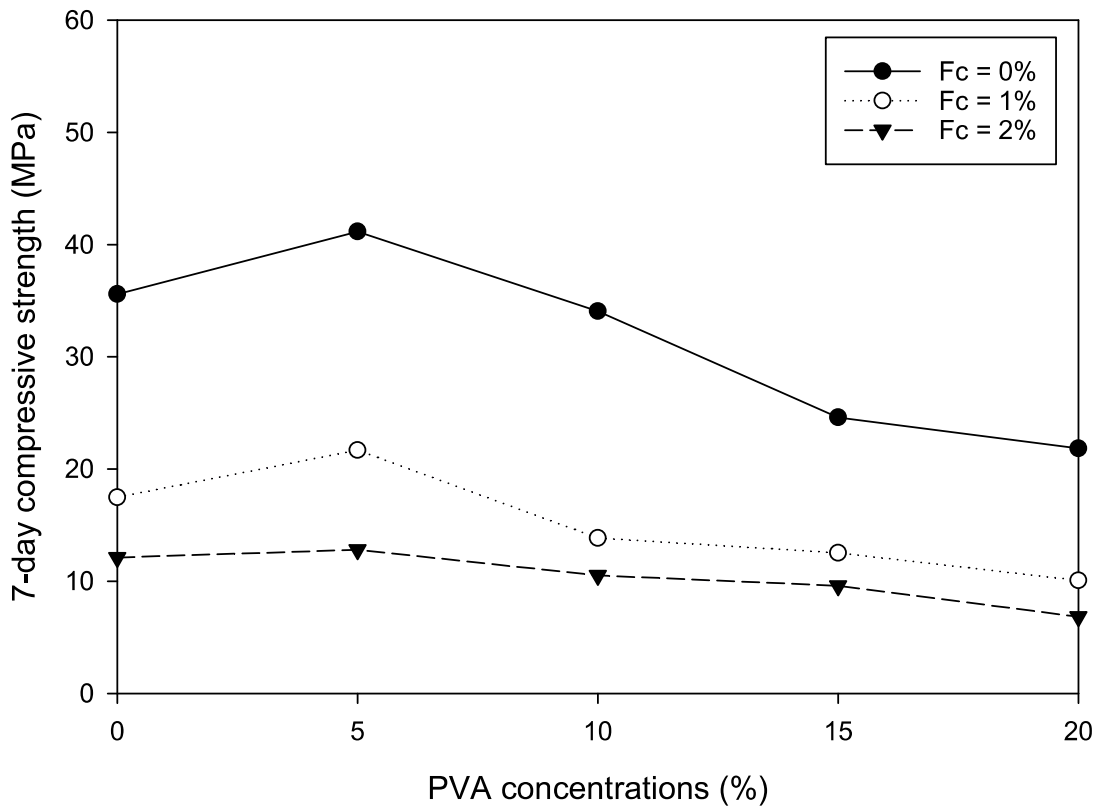


Figure 2. 7-day and 28-day compressive strength of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens

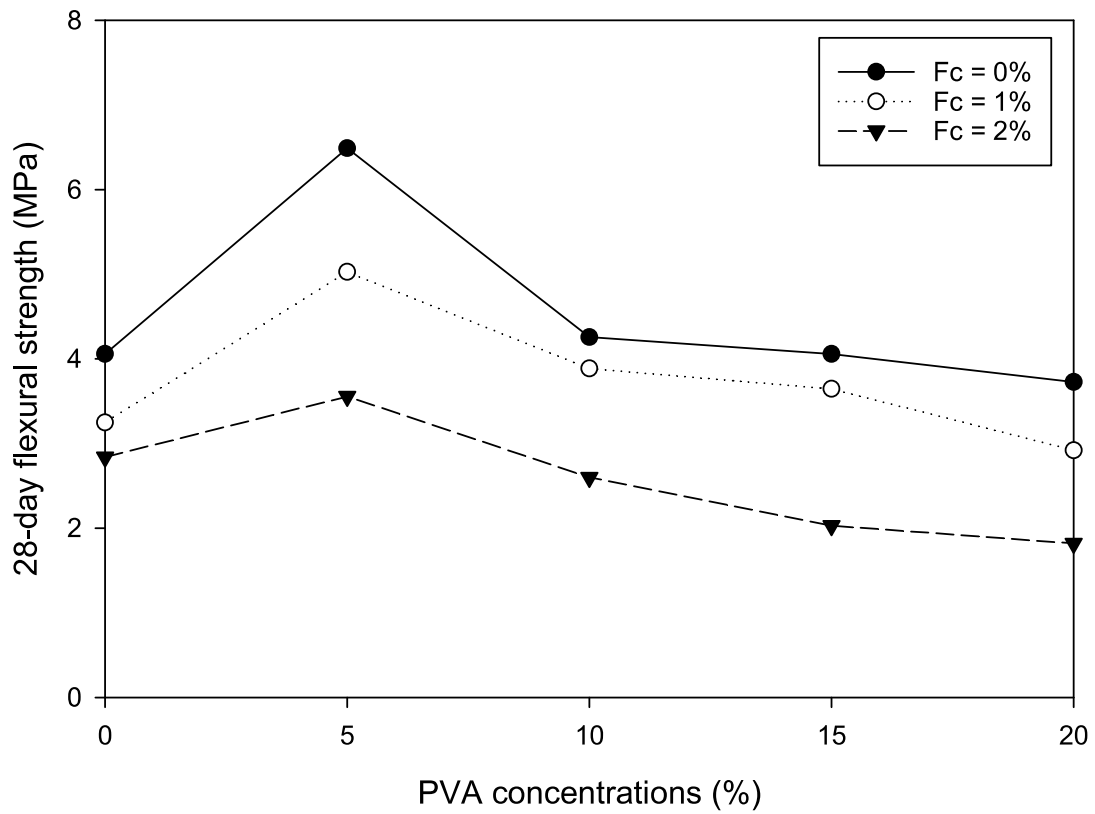
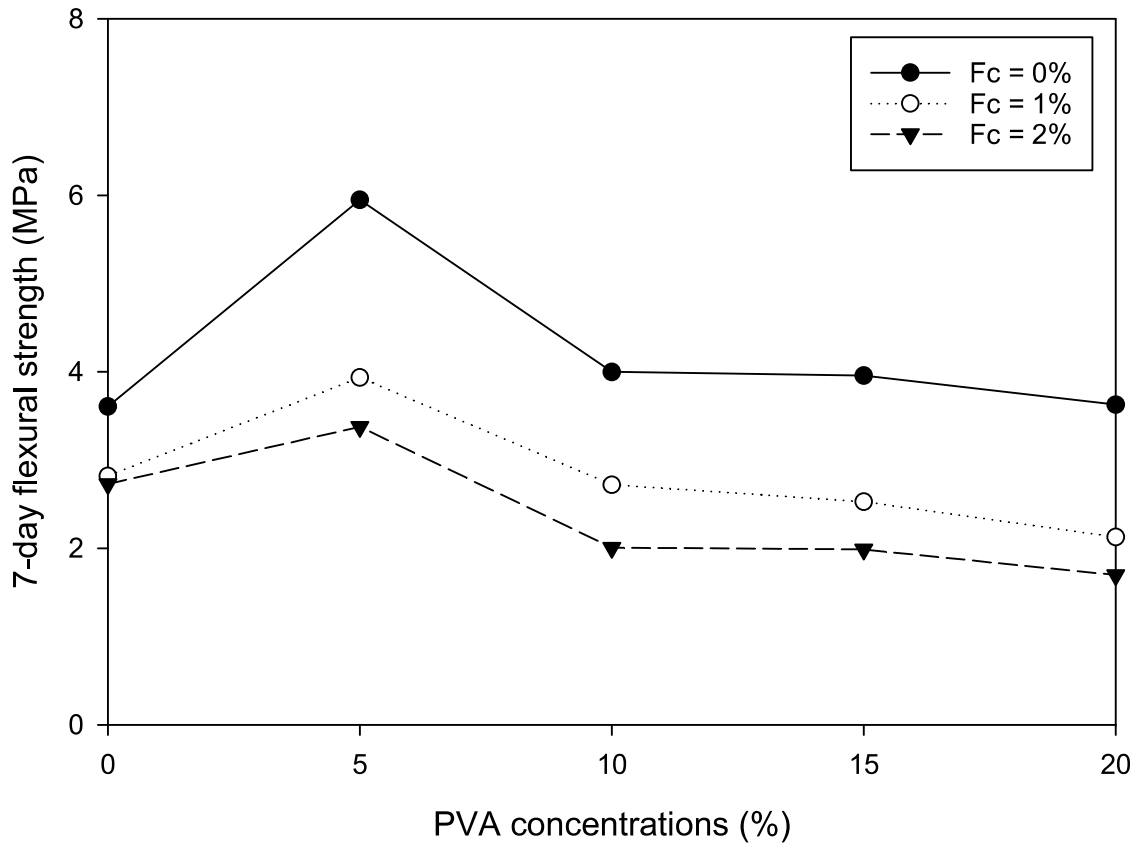


Figure 3. 7-day and 28-day flexural strength of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens

The effect of F_c on compressive and flexural strengths of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens is indicated in Figures 2 and 3. Specimens' compressive and flexural strengths decreased as F_c increased for all PVA concentrations and curing times because of increased void in specimens [18]. The 28-day strengths of specimens were greater than the 7-day strengths because pozzolan and geopolymerization products are continuously increasing [1,2]. The maximum 28-day compressive and flexural strengths of specimens at PVA concentrations of 5% and F_c of 0% were 50 and 6.5 MPa, respectively. According to the Thailand industrial standard for cellular lightweight concrete blocks [2,22], all mix ingredients passed the unit weight (9.81-13.73 kN/m³) and compressive strength requirement (2.5-5.0 MPa) for C12 and C14 CLC blocks types.

3.3. Thermal Conductivity

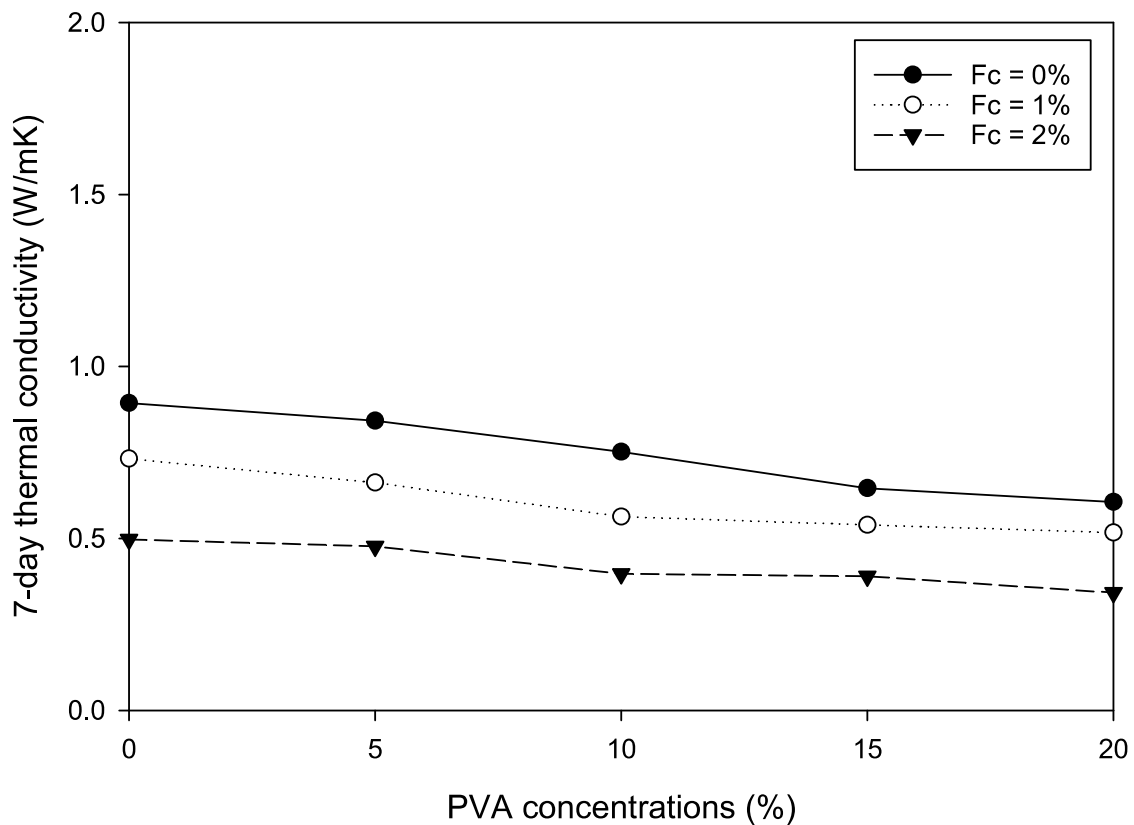
Figure 4 indicates the 7-day and 28-day thermal conductivity of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens with different PVA concentrations and F_c . It is evident that the 7-day and 28-day thermal conductivity of

the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens decreased as PVA concentration and F_c increased. For instance, 7-day thermal conductivity of the specimens at F_c of 2% is 0.497, 0.477, 0.397, 0.390, and 0.342 W/mK for PVA concentrations of 0, 5, 10, 15, and 20%, respectively. The higher concentration and F_c resulted in higher PVA films and large pores in specimens which prevent thermal transport [13].

Figure 5 indicates the correlation between thermal conductivity and unit weight of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens at different curing times, PVA concentrations, and F_c . It can be seen that the decrease in the unit weight of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens led to a reduction in heat conductivity. The correlation between unit weight and thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens at various curing times, PVA concentrations, and F_c can be represented as a linear function in Eq. 1:

$$k = 0.0495\gamma \quad R^2 \text{ of } 0.941 \quad (1)$$

where k is the thermal conductivity (W/mK) and γ is the unit weight (kN/m³).



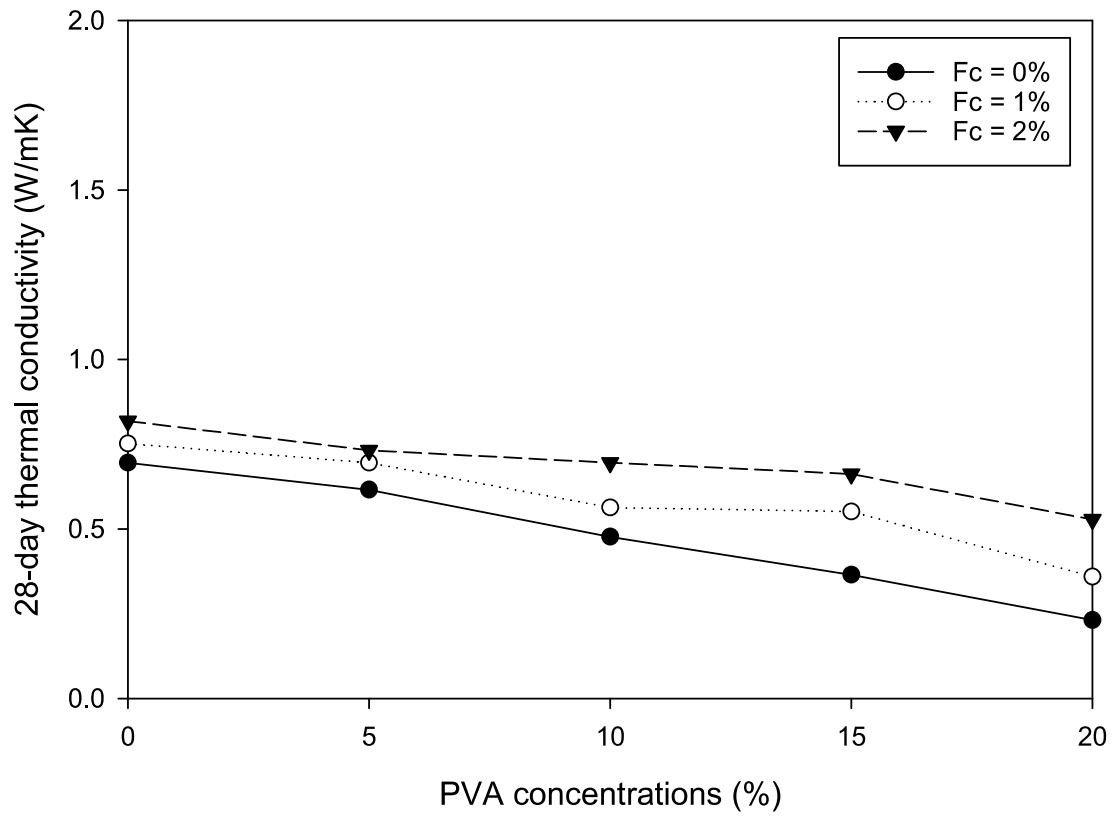


Figure 4. 7-day and 28-day thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens.

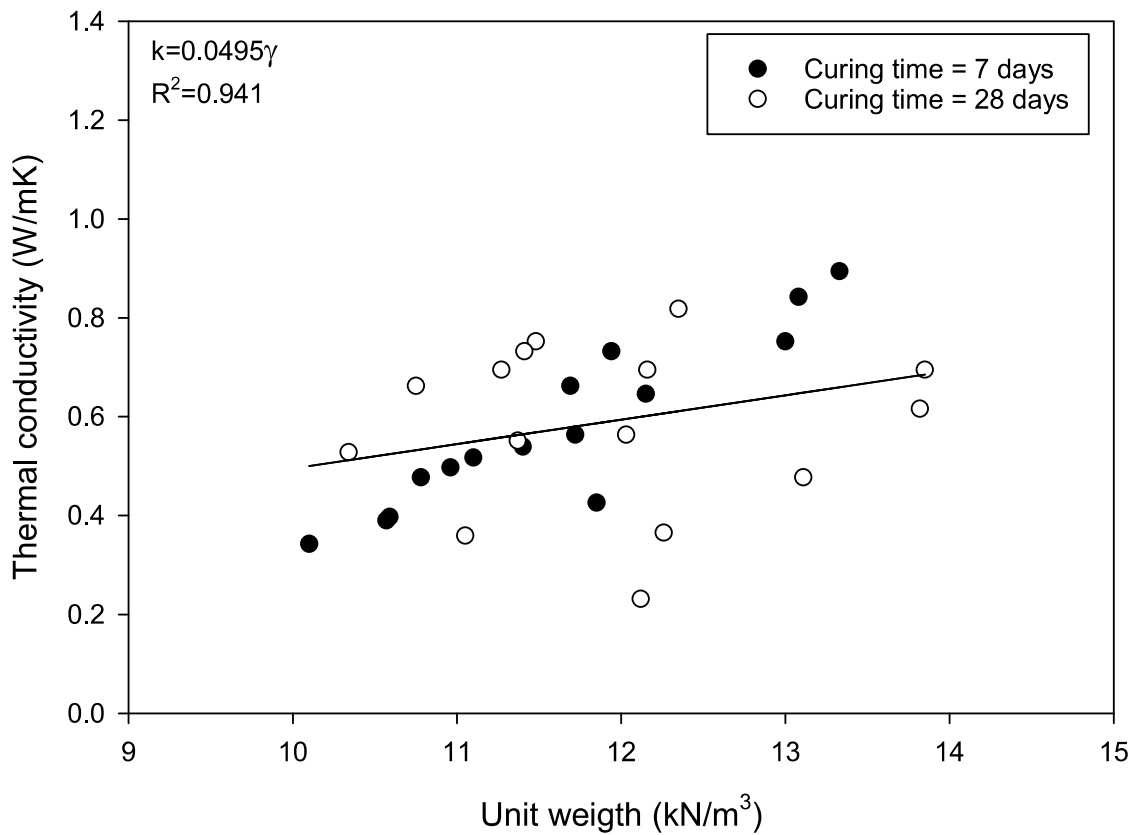


Figure 5. The correlation between thermal conductivity and unit weight

4. Conclusions

The properties of CLFAG specimens reinforced with PVA were analyzed. The conclusions are as follows:

1. The PVA concentrations and F_c had an effect on the unit weights of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens. The specimens with a PVA concentration of 20% and F_c of 2% gave the lowest unit weight of 10.10 kN/m³.
2. For all curing times, the compressive and flexural strengths of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens increased as PVA concentrations increased until PVA concentration was 5%. Beyond PVA concentration of 5%, specimens' compressive and flexural strengths decreased.
3. All mix ingredients passed the unit weight (9.81-13.73 kN/m³) and compressive strength (2.5-5.0 MPa) requirements according to the TIS for C12 and C14 CLC block types.
4. The 7-day and 28-day thermal conductivity of the CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens decreased as PVA concentration and F_c increased because higher concentration and F_c resulted in higher PVA films and large pores in specimens which prevent the thermal transport.
5. The correlation between unit weight and thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens at different curing times, PVA concentrations, and F_c could be expressed by a linear function which was a useful equation to estimate the thermal conductivity of CLFAG reinforced with PVA specimens.

Acknowledgments

This research project is supported by Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), contract No. FRB650059/NMA/21.

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