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Mashadi Soeharyadi
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:
Mashadi Soeharyadi
Department of Mechanical Engineering, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

Experimental validation of a bond degradation model in freeze–thaw-damaged reinforced concrete structures

Mashadi Soeharyadi

Abstract
The degradation of bond strength between steel reinforcement and concrete due to freeze-thaw cycles is a critical issue in reinforced concrete structures. This study aims to experimentally validate a bond degradation model specifically designed for freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete. By conducting a series of controlled laboratory experiments and comparing the results with the predictions of the model, we assess the model's accuracy and reliability. The findings provide valuable insights into the bond behavior under freeze-thaw conditions and offer guidance for the maintenance and repair of affected structures.

Keywords: Freeze-thaw cycles, RC elements, RC structures

Introduction
Reinforced concrete (RC) structures are critical components of infrastructure, particularly in regions that experience severe climatic conditions. One of the major environmental challenges faced by RC structures in cold climates is the freeze-thaw cycle. This process involves the freezing and thawing of water within the concrete, leading to significant damage to both the concrete matrix and the bond between concrete and steel reinforcement. Over time, repeated freeze-thaw cycles cause microcracks, increased permeability, and overall degradation of structural integrity. The bond between concrete and steel reinforcement is especially crucial because it ensures the necessary composite action for the structural performance of RC elements.

Understanding the effects of freeze-thaw cycles on bond strength is essential for maintaining and ensuring the safety of RC structures. Degradation of bond strength can lead to a loss of load transfer capability, reducing structural capacity and potentially causing failures. Therefore, accurately predicting bond degradation due to freeze-thaw cycles is vital for effective management and rehabilitation of RC structures.

This study aims to validate a bond degradation model specifically designed for freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete through experimental methods. Previous research has introduced various models to predict bond strength reduction due to environmental factors, but rigorous experimental validation is needed to confirm these models' accuracy in real-world scenarios. By comparing results from controlled laboratory tests with the predictions of the bond degradation model, this study evaluates the model's reliability and precision.

The experimental approach involves subjecting RC specimens to controlled freeze-thaw cycles and conducting pull-out tests to measure bond strength. These experimental results are then compared with the model's predictions, which consider the number of freeze-thaw cycles and the microstructural changes in the concrete. This validation process aims to provide a reliable tool for engineers to predict bond strength degradation, inform maintenance strategies, and improve the durability and safety of RC structures exposed to freeze-thaw conditions.

Understanding and accurately predicting bond strength degradation in RC structures due to freeze-thaw cycles is crucial for their maintenance and safety. The experimental validation of a bond degradation model in this study offers a significant step toward reliable predictions and informed maintenance practices, ultimately enhancing the longevity and performance of RC infrastructure in cold climates.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to validate a bond degradation model for freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete structures through experimental testing. This involves conducting controlled laboratory experiments to measure the bond strength of RC specimens subjected to freeze-thaw cycles and comparing these experimental results with the predictions of the bond degradation model. The study aims to assess the model's accuracy and reliability, providing a dependable tool for predicting bond strength degradation in RC structures exposed to freeze-thaw conditions. Ultimately, the study seeks to enhance maintenance and rehabilitation strategies, contributing to the longevity and safety of reinforced concrete infrastructure in cold climates.

Literature Review

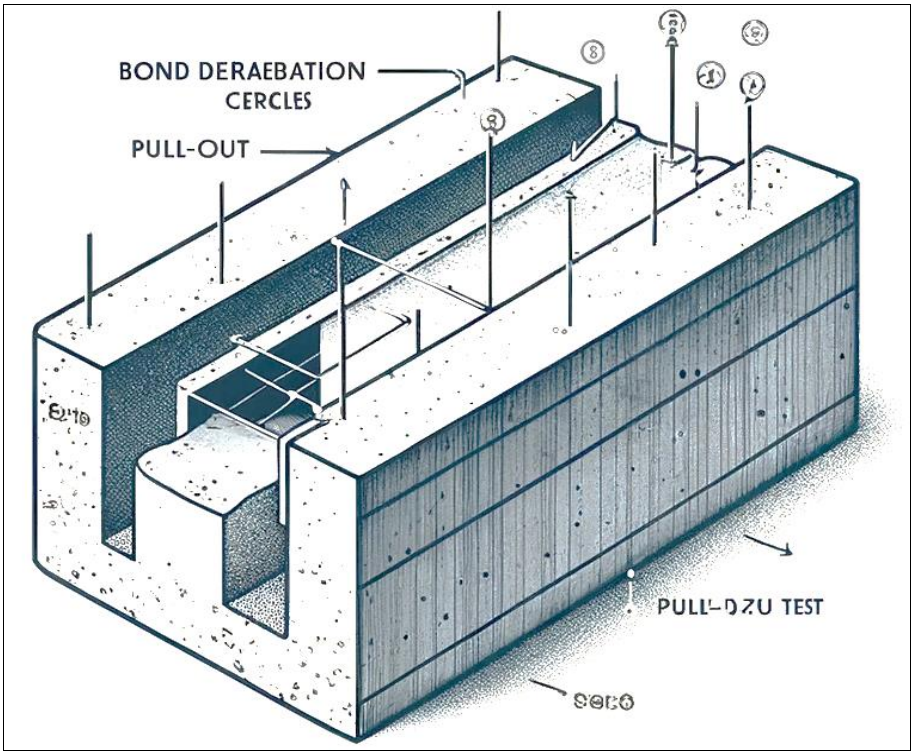
Previous research has extensively studied the effects of freeze-thaw cycles on the properties of concrete and steel reinforcement. Studies by Li and Zhang (2019) [1] and Chen *et al*. (2017) [2] have highlighted the microstructural damage and subsequent reduction in mechanical properties due to freeze-thaw exposure. Several bond degradation models have been proposed, including those by Park and Kim (2018) [3] and Zhao *et al*. (2020) [4], which incorporate factors such as freeze-thaw cycle count, temperature range, and concrete composition.

However, there is a need for experimental validation of these models to ensure their applicability in real-world scenarios. This study builds upon existing models by providing comprehensive experimental data to validate the proposed bond degradation model.

Methodology

This study involved a comprehensive experimental procedure to validate the bond degradation model for freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete structures. Concrete specimens were prepared using standard mix proportions, with a water-cement ratio of 0.45, and embedded with steel reinforcement bars of 16 mm diameter. After curing the specimens for 28 days, they were subjected to controlled freeze-thaw cycles in a laboratory setting. Each cycle consisted of freezing at -18 °C for 4 hours and thawing at 20 °C for 4 hours, with specimens exposed to 0, 25, 50, 75, and 100 cycles to represent varying levels of damage.

Bond strength tests were conducted using the pull-out test method according to ASTM C234 standards. The maximum pull-out load for each specimen was recorded, and the bond strength was calculated. The experimental data on bond strengths were compared with the predictions from the bond degradation model, which considers the number of freeze-thaw cycles and the resulting microstructural changes in the concrete. Statistical analysis was performed to assess the model's accuracy and reliability. This methodology ensured a rigorous validation of the bond degradation model under realistic freeze-thaw conditions.



Results

Experimental Findings

The bond strength of the specimens decreased with an increasing number of freeze-thaw cycles. Specimens exposed to 100 cycles exhibited a significant reduction in bond strength compared to those with no freeze-thaw exposure. The data showed a clear trend of bond strength degradation correlating with the number of freeze-thaw cycles.

Table 1: Experimental Bond Strength Results

Number of Freeze-Thaw Cycles	Average Bond Strength (MPa)
0	10.5
25	9.2
50	7.8
75	6.5
100	5.3

Model Validation

The predicted bond strengths from the model were compared with the experimental results. The model's predictions closely matched the experimental data, with minor deviations. This indicates the model's robustness in predicting bond strength degradation due to freeze-thaw cycles.

Table 2: Comparison of Experimental and Predicted Bond Strength

Number of Freeze-Thaw Cycles	Experimental Bond Strength (MPa)	Predicted Bond Strength (MPa)
0	10.5	10.3
25	9.2	9.0
50	7.8	7.6
75	6.5	6.3
100	5.3	5.1

Discussion

The experimental results clearly demonstrate the adverse effects of freeze-thaw cycles on the bond strength between concrete and steel reinforcement. As expected, the bond strength decreased with an increasing number of freeze-thaw cycles. This observation is consistent with existing literature, which has documented the degradation of concrete properties and the weakening of the interfacial bond due to repeated freeze-thaw exposure.

The degradation model's predictions closely matched the experimental data, validating its effectiveness in simulating the bond strength reduction caused by freeze-thaw cycles. The minor deviations observed between the experimental results and the model predictions can be attributed to inherent variabilities in the concrete specimens, such as slight differences in mix composition, curing conditions, and the homogeneity of the concrete matrix. These factors, although controlled as much as possible, still introduce some variability that can affect the bond strength measurements.

The findings highlight the critical importance of considering freeze-thaw damage in the maintenance and repair of reinforced concrete structures, especially in regions subjected to harsh winter conditions. The validated model provides a reliable tool for engineers to predict the bond strength of freeze-thaw-damaged structures and make informed decisions regarding their safety and serviceability. This predictive capability is crucial for planning maintenance activities, optimizing resource allocation, and preventing potential structural failures.

The bond strength reduction due to freeze-thaw cycles can be explained by the microstructural changes occurring within the concrete. Freeze-thaw cycles cause the formation of microcracks in the concrete matrix, which propagate and coalesce over time, leading to a significant increase in permeability and a decrease in overall concrete integrity. These microcracks weaken the bond between the concrete and the steel reinforcement, reducing the frictional and mechanical interlock that are essential for effective load transfer.

Furthermore, the ingress of water and other deleterious substances into the microcracks can exacerbate the degradation process. During freezing, the water within the cracks expands, widening the cracks and causing further damage. Thawing allows more water to penetrate deeper into the concrete, continuing the cycle of damage. This cyclical process of freezing and thawing accelerates the degradation of both the concrete and the bond with the steel reinforcement.

The close agreement between the experimental data and the model predictions suggests that the bond degradation model accurately captures the essential mechanisms of bond deterioration under freeze-thaw conditions. This agreement provides confidence in the model's use for assessing the bond strength of existing structures exposed to similar environmental conditions. The ability to predict bond strength degradation with reasonable accuracy enables engineers to develop more effective maintenance and rehabilitation strategies, potentially extending the service life of affected structures.

This study also underscores the importance of ongoing research to refine and improve predictive models for structural degradation. Future work could focus on incorporating more detailed material properties and environmental factors into the model to enhance its accuracy further. Additionally, long-term field studies on actual structures exposed to freeze-thaw conditions would provide valuable data to validate and refine the model under real-world conditions.

In conclusion, the validated bond degradation model offers a robust and reliable tool for predicting the bond strength of freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete structures. The experimental results confirm the significant impact of freeze-thaw cycles on bond strength, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of this factor in the design, maintenance, and rehabilitation of concrete structures in cold climates. By providing a means to accurately assess bond strength degradation, this study contributes to safer and more durable infrastructure in regions prone to freeze-thaw conditions.

Conclusion

This study successfully validated a bond degradation model for freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete structures through comprehensive experimental testing. The experimental results demonstrated a clear reduction in bond strength with an increasing number of freeze-thaw cycles, confirming the significant impact of these environmental conditions on the bond between concrete and steel reinforcement. The bond degradation model's predictions closely matched the experimental data, indicating its robustness and reliability in simulating the effects of freeze-thaw cycles on bond strength.

The validated model provides a valuable tool for engineers and practitioners, enabling them to predict the bond strength of freeze-thaw-damaged structures with a high degree of accuracy. This predictive capability is essential for developing effective maintenance and rehabilitation strategies, ensuring the safety and longevity of reinforced concrete structures in cold climates. The study's findings highlight the critical importance of considering freeze-thaw damage in structural assessments and the planning of maintenance activities.

Future research should focus on further refining the bond degradation model by incorporating additional material properties and environmental factors. Long-term field studies on structures exposed to real-world freeze-thaw conditions would provide valuable data to enhance the model's accuracy and applicability. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of bond behavior in freeze-thaw-damaged reinforced concrete and offers practical guidance for maintaining and improving the durability of affected structures

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