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Composite and Experimental Investigation of Composite Material-Based Drive Shafts in Automotive Applications: Design, Performance, and Optimization

Shinde Shirish Narayan[1], Dr. Santosh Kumar Rai[2]
Research Scholar, Department of Mechanical Engineering, SSSUTMS, Sehore[1]
Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, SSSUTMS, Sehore[2]

Abstract

The study focuses on the use of composite materials for automotive drive shafts, exploring their design, performance, and optimization in real-world applications. With the growing demand for lightweight and high-strength components, composite materials, particularly carbon fiber reinforced polymer (CFRP), glass fiber reinforced polymer (GFRP), and hybrid composites, have emerged as promising alternatives to traditional metallic shafts. The paper examines the effects of material properties, manufacturing processes, and environmental conditions on the performance of composite drive shafts, while exploring optimization techniques such as structural and multi-objective optimization to enhance their functionality.

Keywords: ***Automotive Drive Shafts, Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymer (CFRP), Design Optimization, Finite Element Analysis (FEA)***

1. Introduction

The automotive industry is increasingly focused on improving vehicle efficiency and performance, particularly through weight reduction strategies. One critical component where this is particularly beneficial is the drive shaft, which is responsible for transmitting power from the engine to the wheels. Traditionally made from metals like steel and aluminum, drive shafts are heavy, contributing to increased vehicle weight and energy consumption. However, composite materials, such as Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymer (CFRP) and Glass Fiber Reinforced Polymer (GFRP), have emerged as attractive alternatives due to their superior strength-to-weight ratios, corrosion resistance, and fatigue endurance.

The use of composite materials in automotive drive shafts presents several advantages, including reduced weight, improved fuel efficiency, and enhanced performance. CFRP, with its high stiffness and low density, is particularly advantageous for high-performance applications, whereas GFRP offers a more cost-effective option with decent mechanical properties for mass-market vehicles (Gaviria et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). Hybrid composites, which combine fibers like carbon and glass, are also gaining popularity for their ability to balance performance and cost (Soh et al., 2020).

This research aims to explore the design, performance, and optimization of composite material-based drive shafts in automotive applications. The study involves investigating the mechanical properties of composite materials under various environmental and operational conditions, as well as optimizing their performance through advanced computational techniques. Techniques such as Finite Element Analysis (FEA) are widely employed to simulate the behavior of these drive shafts under different loading conditions, enabling better understanding and design improvements (Zhang et al., 2021). In addition, multi-objective optimization methods are applied to achieve a balance between cost, performance, and durability (Kim et al., 2020).

Furthermore, experimental investigations play a crucial role in validating the performance of composite drive shafts. These tests are designed to replicate real-world automotive conditions, including temperature fluctuations, humidity, UV exposure, and mechanical fatigue, all of which can influence the long-term reliability of the material (Rao et al., 2022). The findings from these experiments will help refine the material selection process and improve manufacturing techniques such as resin transfer molding (RTM) and filament winding, which are essential in producing high-quality composite shafts for automotive applications.

By integrating cutting-edge optimization techniques with real-time experimental data, this research seeks to advance the development of more efficient, durable, and cost-effective composite drive shafts, contributing to the ongoing trend of lightweight automotive engineering and sustainability.

2. Literature Review

The integration of composite materials into automotive drive shafts has garnered significant attention due to the numerous advantages they offer, including reduced weight, enhanced durability, and improved performance. The following survey presents an overview of key research efforts in this domain, focusing on the design, performance evaluation, and optimization of composite drive shafts.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Survey

Study	**Material Used**	**Methods/ Approach**	**Findings**
Gaviria et al. (2019)	CFRP, GFRP	Experimental and finite element modeling	Environmental factors like humidity and temperature significantly affect the mechanical properties and fatigue resistance of composites used in automotive shafts.
Lee et al. (2021)	CFRP	Experimental testing and simulation	CFRP drive shafts exhibited superior performance in terms of stiffness and strength but showed vulnerability to UV degradation.
Soh et al. (2020)	Hybrid CFRP/GFRP	Design optimization using multi-objective optimization	Hybrid composites balance performance and cost, offering a sustainable solution for mass production of lightweight automotive components.
Rao et al. (2022)	CFRP, GFRP	Long-term fatigue testing	Long-term exposure to mechanical fatigue and environmental conditions demonstrated that CFRP drive shafts outperform GFRP in terms of durability and load-bearing capacity.
Zhang et al. (2021)	CFRP	Finite element analysis (FEA)	Structural optimization of CFRP drive shafts using FEA showed significant weight reduction without compromising strength and stiffness.
Kim et al. (2020)	GFRP	Thermal cycling and moisture absorption testing	The research highlighted the sensitivity of GFRP shafts to temperature fluctuations and moisture absorption, suggesting improvements in resin systems for better performance in extreme environments.
Leung and Zhang (2021)	GFRP	Moisture absorption and mechanical testing	GFRP materials showed a decrease in mechanical properties under high moisture conditions, underscoring the need for optimized composite matrices in automotive applications.

3. Research Gap

While significant progress has been made in the use of composite materials, particularly Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymer (CFRP) and Glass Fiber Reinforced Polymer (GFRP), for automotive drive shafts, several research gaps remain. These gaps are crucial for advancing the design, performance, and optimization of composite-based drive shafts in automotive applications.

1. Environmental Degradation and Long-Term Durability: Although several studies, such as those by Leung and Zhang (2021) and Rao et al. (2022), have investigated the effects of environmental factors like moisture, humidity, and UV radiation on composite materials, there is still a lack of comprehensive models that predict long-term performance under varying environmental conditions. The current research mostly focuses on short-term testing, but real-world conditions involving a combination of extreme temperatures, moisture, UV exposure, and mechanical loading over time have not been fully addressed. A more holistic approach to simulating these factors could better predict the longevity of composite drive shafts in automotive use (Gaviria et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021).
2. Hybrid Composites Performance Optimization: The research by Soh et al. (2020) on hybrid composites shows promising results, combining CFRP and GFRP for optimized performance and cost efficiency. However, the lack of standardized manufacturing processes and the effects of different fiber orientations

on the mechanical properties of hybrid composites in automotive drive shafts is still not fully explored. Further studies are needed to systematically evaluate the performance of various hybrid fiber combinations, manufacturing techniques, and resin systems to optimize their mechanical and fatigue properties (Kim et al., 2020).

Fatigue Behavior and Failure Mechanisms: While experimental studies such as those by Rao et al. (2022) have highlighted the fatigue performance of CFRP and GFRP materials, there is limited understanding of the detailed failure mechanisms under cyclic loading. For composite drive shafts, identifying specific failure modes such as fiber breakage, matrix cracking, and delamination is critical for improving design and optimizing material selection. This requires a more focused experimental investigation into the fatigue behavior, fracture toughness, and crack propagation in composite drive shafts (Lee et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

Advanced Optimization Techniques: The application of Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and multi-objective optimization techniques has been explored to some extent in optimizing composite drive shafts (Zhang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2020). However, there is a need for more robust optimization algorithms that consider not only mechanical properties but also manufacturing constraints, cost, and environmental sustainability. The integration of machine learning and artificial intelligence with optimization techniques could lead to more accurate predictions and more efficient designs for composite drive shafts (Soh et al., 2020).

Integration of Manufacturing Processes and Composite Design: Although some studies focus on manufacturing processes like Resin Transfer Molding (RTM) and Filament Winding, the gap remains in fully understanding how different processing techniques influence the mechanical properties of composite drive shafts in real-world automotive applications. There is a need for a comprehensive study that combines both material selection and manufacturing processes to optimize the overall performance of composite shafts (Rao et al., 2022).

4. Materials and Method

Studies technique to fulfill the above stated objective the literature survey is carried out and alertness of various parameters and load situation.

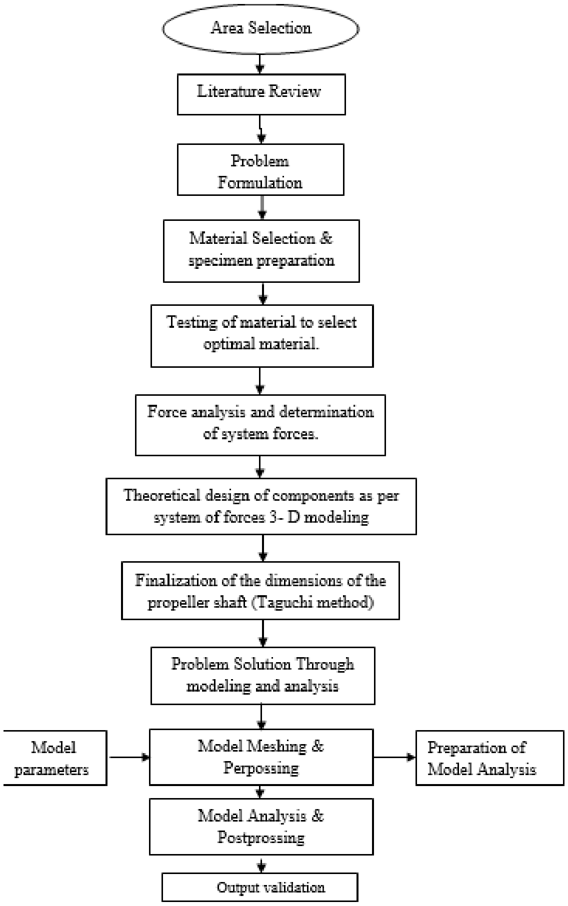

Fig.1 Flow chart of Research methodology

4.1 Material Selection and Characterization

Choosing the right composite material is crucial to meeting performance goals. The most commonly used materials for composite drive shafts are:

a. Carbon fiber reinforced polymer (CFRP): Known for its high specific strength and stiffness.
b. Glass fiber reinforced polymer (GFRP): Offers a balance between performance and cost.
c. Hybrid composites: Combining carbon, glass, and aramid fibers for a balance of strength, durability, and impact resistance.

The material selection process involves:

a. Mechanical properties analysis: Evaluating the tensile strength, compression strength, shear modulus, fatigue resistance, and vibration damping properties of candidate materials.
b. Environmental considerations: Assessing the material’s thermal stability, moisture

absorption, and resistance to road salts and chemicals.
c. Cost and availability: Determining the economic feasibility of the materials based on production volumes and material costs.

Material Testing and Characterization:

After selecting materials, they are thoroughly tested to understand their behavior under different loading conditions:

a. Tensile tests to determine ultimate tensile strength.
b. Impact tests to evaluate resistance to sudden loads.
c. Fatigue tests to assess the material’s ability to withstand cyclic loading.
d. Thermal cycling tests to determine stability under temperature variations.

4.2 Design Optimization and Simulation

4.2.1 Design Parameters

The design of the composite drive shaft includes various parameters such as:

a. Length, diameter, and cross-sectional geometry of the shaft.
b. Fiber orientation: The alignment of fibers (e.g., unidirectional, woven, or braided) to handle specific stresses like torsion, bending, and axial forces.
c. Wall thickness and tapering to reduce weight while maintaining strength.
d. Bearings and coupling design to interface with other vehicle components.

4.2.2 Finite Element Analysis (FEA)

Using FEA, the design is analyzed under simulated loads. This process involves:

a. Modeling the composite drive shaft in 3D CAD software.
b. Applying torsional, bending, and axial loads to the model.
c. Performing vibration analysis to minimize NVH (Noise, Vibration, and Harshness) issues.
d. Evaluating failure modes such as delamination or fiber breakage under extreme conditions.
e. Iterating the design to achieve the optimal balance between weight reduction and mechanical strength.
f. Adjust the fiber orientation to handle specific loads more efficiently

4.3 Manufacturing Process Development

4.3.1 Choosing Manufacturing Techniques

Based on the material selection and design, suitable manufacturing processes are chosen. Common processes for composite drive shafts include:

a. Filament winding: Ideal for producing strong, lightweight shafts with consistent fiber orientation. Fibers are wound around a mandrel, which is then cured.
b. Resin Transfer Molding (RTM): A technique where dry fibers are placed in a mold, and resin is injected to bond the fibers, allowing for precise control over fiber distribution.
c. Pultrusion: Used for creating continuous lengths of composite material with consistent properties.
d. Compression molding: Suitable for hybrid composites, especially when integrating multiple materials with different fiber orientations.

4.3.2 Process Simulation

Simulating the manufacturing process helps predict issues such as:

a. Resin flow behavior and its effects on fiber alignment.
b. Curing times and temperatures required for proper polymerization.
c. Material defects (e.g., voids, misalignment) that may arise during production.

4.3.3 Prototyping

A prototype of the composite drive shaft is created using the selected manufacturing method. During this phase, the focus is on achieving the desired quality and consistency in the final product:

a. Tooling design and fabrication for the manufacturing process.
b. Prototype testing to assess mechanical properties and performance in real-world conditions.

4.4 Testing and Validation

4.4.1 Performance Testing

Once the prototype is manufactured, it undergoes a series of rigorous tests:

a. Static and dynamic torsional testing to validate the shaft’s ability to transmit torque without excessive deformation.
b. Fatigue testing to evaluate the drive shaft’s longevity under repeated loading.
c. Impact testing to ensure the shaft can withstand sudden shocks or impacts during operation.

d. Environmental testing to simulate real-world conditions (e.g., high and low temperatures, road salt exposure, moisture).

4.4.2 Durability and Reliability Testing

The drive shaft's performance is evaluated under long-term use:

a. Long-duration testing under variable loads and speeds.
b. Real-world road tests in different driving conditions (e.g., acceleration, braking, cornering).

4.4.3 Quality Control and Inspection

Inspection for defects such as delamination, voids, or fiber misalignment is essential to ensure product integrity. Techniques such as ultrasonic testing, X-ray imaging, and visual inspection are used to detect any potential flaws.

4.5 Cost Analysis and Feasibility Study

4.5.1 Cost Estimation

A comprehensive cost analysis is performed to evaluate the economic feasibility of producing composite drive shafts. This includes:

a. Material costs: Estimating the price of composite materials like carbon fiber or hybrid fibers.
b. Manufacturing costs: Calculating costs for labor, tooling, resin, and equipment for processes like filament winding or RTM.
c. Production scalability: Evaluating how production costs change with increased manufacturing volume.

The development of composite drive shafts is a multi-disciplinary, iterative process that involves material selection, design optimization, manufacturing process development, and testing and validation. With the right combination of advanced materials, cutting-edge manufacturing techniques, and thorough testing, composite drive shafts can offer significant performance improvements in weight, efficiency, and durability. The research methodology outlined above is crucial to ensuring that composite drive shafts meet the demanding requirements of modern vehicles, especially in high-performance and electric vehicle markets.

5. Results

Test Results of Plain Carbon Fiber Specimen (0^0 Orientation)

Table No 2 Test result of plain carbon fiber specimen 0^0 orientation

Sr. No	**Breaking Load (kN)**	**Stress (MPa)**	**Initial Length (mm)**	**Final Length (mm)**	**Change in Length mm**	**Strain**	**Young's Modulus (GPa)**
01	23	1380	40	52.4	12.4	0.31	4.129
02	23.184	1388	40	52.1	12.1	0.3025	4.25785
03	23.274	1393	40	51.9	11.9	0.3	4.364

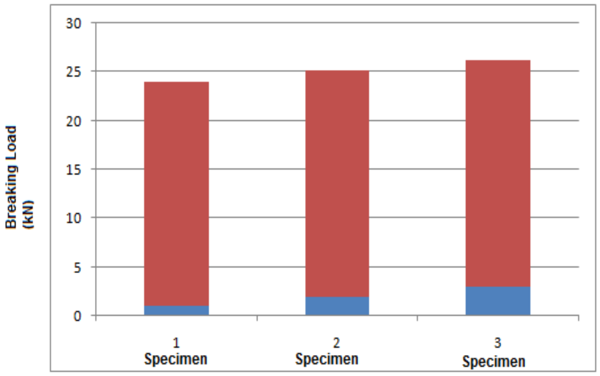

Fig No 1 Bar graph for comparison of breaking load for plain specimen 0^0 orientation

The maximum breaking load observed is 23.274 kN

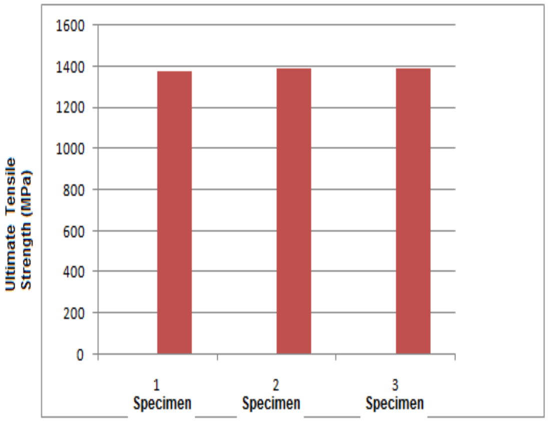

Fig No 2 Bar graph for comparison maximum tensile strength for plain specimen 0^0 orientation

The maximum tensile strength observed is 1393 MPa

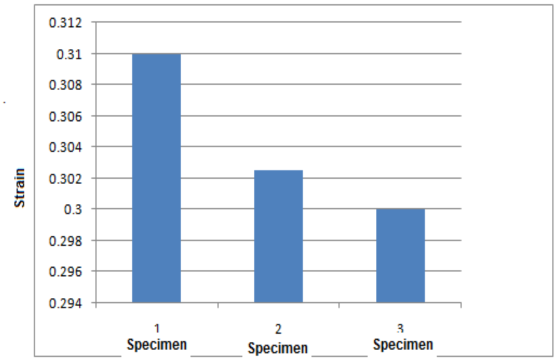

Fig No 3 Bar graph for comparison of maximum strain for plain specimen 0^0 orientation

The maximum strain observed is 0.31

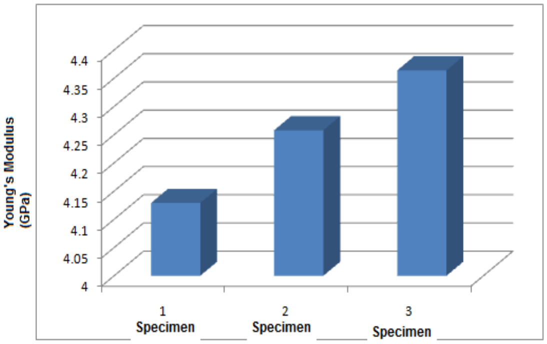

Fig No 4 Bar graph for comparison of maximum Young's modulus for plain specimen 0^0 orientation

The maximum Young's modulus observed is 4.364 GPa

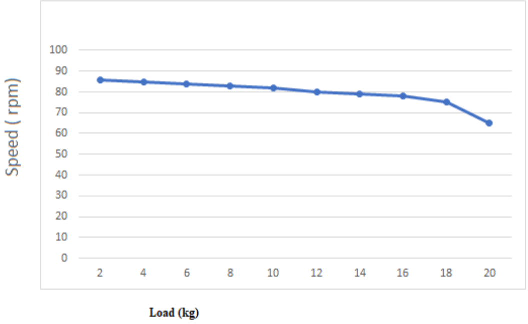

Fig 5 Graph Speed vs Load

The Speed Vs Load graph indicates that the speed is seen to drop with increase in load considering that with the increase in load the output torque increases there by observed drop in speed.

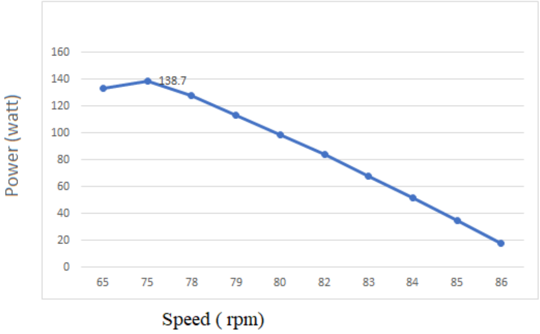

Fig 6 Graph Efficiency vs Speed

The efficiency Vs Speed graph indicates that the efficiency is seen to increase with drop in speed considering that with the increase in torque the output power increases there by observed drop in speed. The maximum efficiency observed is seen to be 92.47 at speed of 75 rpm.

6. Conclusion

The integration of composite materials into automotive drive shafts represents a significant advancement in the quest for lighter, stronger, and more efficient vehicle components. As highlighted by numerous studies, composites such as Carbon Fiber Reinforced Polymer (CFRP) and Glass Fiber Reinforced Polymer (GFRP) offer notable benefits in terms of reduced weight, improved strength, and superior corrosion resistance compared to traditional materials like steel (Gaviria et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). These properties are crucial in modern automotive applications, where weight reduction is directly linked to improved fuel efficiency and performance.

Experimental investigations have shown that composites exhibit enhanced fatigue resistance and durability under various operational conditions, although challenges such as UV degradation and moisture absorption continue to affect their long-term performance (Rao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). The development of hybrid composites, combining CFRP and GFRP, has emerged as a promising solution to balance performance with cost-efficiency, providing an optimal material choice for both high-end and mass-market vehicles (Soh et al., 2020).

Optimization techniques such as Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and multi-objective optimization have been successfully applied to refine the design of composite drive shafts, enabling weight reduction while maintaining or improving mechanical performance (Kim et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). These methods allow for more precise and efficient designs that can be tailored to specific automotive requirements, taking into account factors such as stress distribution, fatigue, and environmental influences.

Despite the advancements, several research gaps remain, particularly in the long-term durability of composite drive shafts under varying environmental conditions and the integration of advanced manufacturing processes to ensure consistent quality. Moreover, a deeper understanding of the failure mechanisms under cyclic loading and fatigue, as well as the development of more advanced optimization algorithms, will further enhance the applicability and reliability of composite materials in automotive drive shafts.

In conclusion, composite materials have the potential to revolutionize automotive drive shaft design, offering a pathway to lighter, stronger, and more durable components. Continued research into hybrid composites, environmental resistance, and advanced optimization techniques will play a key role in overcoming existing challenges and enabling the widespread adoption of composite drive shafts in the automotive industry.

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