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Area of Interest: Data Mining, VLSI Physical Design, Computer Networks, Embedded systems

CONTENTS

ANN Modeling of Emission and Performance Parameters of Polanga Biodiesel based CI Engine at Different Injection Pressures

pp. 27453-27470

Abhishek Sharma, P K Sahoo, R K Tripathi and L C Meher

A Study on the Concurrency Control Model using BIRDT

pp. 27471-27476

Hui-Jeong, Ju and Seong-Je, Cho

Implementation Of Fir Filter Using Booth Multiplier And Carry Skip Adder

pp. 27477-27486

Kondeti Lakshmi and K.Chitambara Rao

Temperature Rise Of Hot Bar In Induction Heating Process

pp. 27487-27492

Jong-Hyun Lee, Jin-Taek Kim, Byung-JoonBaek, Sung-Hyuk Lim, Do-GyunJung and Hyeong-Jin Kim

Analysis of PMDC Drive Performance Based on PSO Algorithm Based Tuning of PID Controller

pp.27493-27504

M. Antony Freeda Rani, and B. Sankaragomathi

Comparison Study of Certification Emission Test and Real-time Road Driving Emission Test for Various Emission Level Vehicles

pp. 27505-27511

Myungdo Eom, Junhong Park and Doo-Sung Baik

Comparison of Checkpointed Aided Parallel Execution Against Mapreduce

pp. 27513-27524

Nisha Rani N, Shiju Sathyadevan, Eric Renault and Viet Ha Hai

Comparison Study on Emission Measurement with MOVES and Emission Factor Methods

pp. 27525-27530

Myungdo Eom, Junhong Park and Doo-Sung Baik

Validating The Choice of A, B, C Parameters of The PID Compensator For Controlling The Key Paramaters of High Frequency Dc-Dc Buck Converter

pp. 27531-27540

P. Kausalya, G. Pavithra and Jayanta Biswas

Reconfigurable STIM For Robots In Iot Environment

pp. 27541-27551

Y. Bharath kumar and S. Ilaiyaraja

A Study about Robotic Hand and Finger for Violin Playing Robot

pp. 27553-27557

Hyeonjun Park, Wonse Jo, Kyeongmin Choi and Donghan Kim and Bum-Joo Lee

Design of A Stable Closed Loop Model of Buck Converter and Digital Controller With

Tuning of PID Parameters

pp. 27559-27568

G. Pavithra, P. Kausalya and Jayanta Biswas

Construction of the Multi-sensory Service Space to increase the Neuro-energy

pp. 27569-27574

Jung-Min Kim and Myung-Ho Kim

“Human Resources Audit Practices Among It Firms: A Descriptive Analysis”

pp.27575-27586

M. N. Praba Devi and. A. Chandra Mohan

Classification of Roadway Type Based on Roadway Characteristics Using RCCC

pp. 27587-27592

Sang-Chan Moon, Soon-Geul Lee, Dong-Han Kim

Low Area – High Speed – Energy Efficient One Bit Full Subtractor With MTCMOS

pp. 27593-27604

M. Mahaboob Basha, K. Venkata Ramanaiah, and. P. Ramana Reddy

A Study On Impact Characteristics Of Aluminum Foam Sandwich As A Function Of Impact Energy And Thickness

pp. 27605-27611

Teng Gao and Jae Ung Cho

NIOS Ii Based Secure Test Wrapper Design For Testing Cryptographic Algorithms

pp. 27613-27620

K. Chakrapani and P. Neelamegam

Design of the Location Based Service System for Local Area Tourism

pp. 27621-27633

Jaegel Yim

Quantification of Human Error Probability By Cognitive Approach In LPG Dispenser

pp. 27635-27650

A. Maniram Kumar, S.Rajakarunakaran and V. Arumuga Prabu

A Profile Analysis of an Accelerated Thermal Life Test

pp. 27651-27659

Kyu-bark Shim and Jae-geol Yim

Efficient Birch Clustering Algorithm For Categorical and Numerical Data Using Modified Co-Occurrence Method

pp. 27661-27673

P.Parameswari, J.Abdul Samath and P.Saranya

A Study on the Emotional Values of the Smartphone Use of the New Silver Generation: Focusing on In-depth Interviews

pp. 27675-27681

Huh, Won Whoi

Test Vector Based Multiple Parametric Faults Detection In Non Linear Analog Circuits

pp. 27683-27694

G.Puvaneswari and S.UmaMaheswari

Design and Implementation of Collaboration Tourist Information System using Location-based SNS

pp. 27695-27700

Eunmi Jung, Sungwook Yoon and Hyenki Kim

A Review on Energy Efficient Routing Protocols In Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 27701-27715

Srinivasan. R and E. Kannan

Car Manufacturer and Model Recognition based on Deep Network

pp. 27717-27723

Yongbin Gao and Hyo Jong Lee

Efficient Authentication Method Using Score Level Fusion and Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) of Multimodal Biometrics

pp. 27725-27737

P. Sugantha Priyadharshini, A. Kayalvizhi and B. Mohankumar

P. Sugantha Priyadharshini¹, A. Kayalvizhi², B. Mohankumar

pp. 27739-27745

Byeong Jeong Kim, Seong-Ho Song and Seop Hyeong Park

Investigation of Independent-Gate Operation in Junctionless Devices

pp. 27747-27755

N. Vinodhkumar and R. Srinivasan

Special Interface Using Handy Joystick on Tablet PC for Augmented Reality

pp. 27757-27762

Young Jae Lee

Image Processing Algorithm For Quantitative Characterization of Austenitic Stainless Steel Weld Defect In TOFD Images and Validation With Radiographs

pp. 27763-27768

C. F. Theresa Cenate, B. Sheela Rani and B.Venkatraman

Enhanced Cell Search with Signal Tracking in 3GPP LTE based FDD Receiver¹

pp. 27769-27773

YoungkwonRyu, Bangwon Seo and Jeong Gon Kim

Phishing Prevention System Using Session Based Color Model

pp. 27775-27788

D. Muthu Krishnan, D. Anantha Kumar and V.Subramaniaswamy

Searching the Nearest Neighbour with a keyword based on Max- Priority

pp .27789-27801

ANUSHA VAKA and. SHAIK SALAM,M.E

An Improved MAC Protocol with Delay Limitation for Medical Wireless Body Sensor Networks

pp. 27809-27816

Rae Hyun Kim, Pyung Soo Kim and Jeong Gon Kim

Study on Parameters Influencing Fill Time In A Multi-Cavity Mold

pp. 27817-27826

Anoop.K.Philip and M.Elangovan

An Integrated Inference Platform Using Customer Feedback for Performance Management of the Service Industry

pp. 27827-27833

Eun-Jee Song and Min-Shik Kang

High Payload and Secured Video Steganography Using Compression and AES Crypting System

pp. 27835-27844

T V S Gowtham Prasad and S Varadarajan

Decision Feedback Signal Processing based on Constant Modulus Errors for Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 27845-27852

Namyong Kim

High Performance Filter For Removing Impulse Noise From Video

pp. 27853-27860

Jerrin Thomas Panachakel

An Enhanced Application Protocol for Image Transmission in WMSN

pp. 27861-27867

Hyun-Soon Son, Jeong-Hyeon Park and Sung-Keun Lee

Prediction of Breast Cancer Outcome Using KNN With Dimensionality Reduction

pp. 27869-27878

N. Oliver Smith Iruthayaraj and N.Sairam

Application of Agent-Based Simulation and System Dynamics to Control the Risk of Enterprises and Human Life

pp. 27879-27894

KyoungJong Park

Efficient Prediction Model For Multi Dimensional Images In Social Networks

pp. 27895-27902

S. Venkatraman

Betterment of Infrared Image Resolution Using Infrared RGB Filter and Common RGB Filter

pp. 27903-27908

JongwooJoo and DaewookKim

An Efficient 16-Bit Carry Select Adder With Optimized Power and Delay

pp. 27909-27916

Bobbala Madhukar Reddy and Prabhu E.

A Hybrid Optimization Model Using Decomposition and Integration of a Supply Chain Network at Risks

pp. 27917-27922

KyoungJong Park

Load Balancing on Eucalyptus Platform

pp. 27923-27929

S.Vikram

Study on the Effect of Physical Symptoms, Stress, and Self-Esteem Factors on the User Satisfaction of the Mentally Handicapped

pp. 27931-27942

Jong-Pil Kim and Sung-Je Cho

Resolving LPN Problem In Vector Processing Architectures

pp. 27943-27950

N. Hari Ram Kumar

Study on the Influence of Resilience on Suicidal Impulse of the Elderly Population in City and Fishing Village

pp. 27951-27959

Mi-Ja Yang and Sung-Je Cho

Design and Performance Evaluation of The Multi-Gateway Smart Grid NAN Networks For Maximizing Network Capacity

pp. 27961-27980

Seok Hong Min, Jong Uk Kong, Byung Chul Kim and Jae Yong Lee

Criterion For Assessing The Effectiveness of Functioning of Complex Systems Based on The Use The Amount of Information

pp. 27981-27985

Abdullakh L.S., Smetannikova T.A. and Korneev A.M.

Genetics For Enhanced Heart Murmur Classification

pp. 27987-28000

G. Venkata Hari Prasad and Rajesh Kumar

Morphological and Mechanical Properties of Natural Zeolite-High Density Polyethylene Composite

pp. 28001-28012

Purnomo, Rudy Soenoko, Yudy Surya Irawan and Agus Suprpto

Design of Low Power Dual Dynamic Node Flip-Flop Using Sleep Transistor With NMOS

pp. 28013-28022

Ajeesh Kumar and N. Saraswathi

An Approach to Manage Handover Decision Process in Heterogeneous Networks Using Fuzzy Logic

pp. 28023-28030

K. Janardhana Rao and A.S.Srinivasa Rao

Patch Based Prior Occlusion Detection In Vital Sites With Performance Analysis

pp. 28031-28040

Smitha Suresh and K Chitra

Continuous and Non-Continuous Stirring Patterns For The Reactive Mixing Process of Glycerin

pp. 28061-28072

Retno Wulandari, I.N.G. Wardana, Slamet Wahyudi, and Nurkholis Hamidi

Design and Analysis of Creep Failure In Clinker Feeding System on VRPM Circuit Maintenance

pp. 28073-28096

A. G. Mohandas Gandhi K. Soorya Prakash, K. Saravana Kumar, R. Suresh Kumar, K. Sangeeth and R. Sakthivel

Modeling of A Power Balance of A Three-Phase High Voltage Power Supply For Microwaves Generators With One Magnetron By Phase

pp. 28097-28104

M.Bassoui, M.Ferfra and M.Chraygane

Mixed Convection Heat Transfer In A Lid-Driven Square Cavity Completely Filled With Porous Material

pp. 28105-28128

Mohamed A. Teamah, Wael M. El-Maghlany, M.M. Abo Elazm, and Ali S. Bakr

A New Tool For Analysis of HPC Concrete Beam Under Static and Cyclic Loading Using Matlab

pp. 28129-28136

Seshadri Sekhar.N and P.N. Raghunath

Surface Treatment of Concrete By Using Bacterial Calcite Precipitation

pp. 28137-28143

Krishnapriya. S, Prince Arulraj. G and Moorthi. M

Optimisation of Process Parameters of Co2 Moulding Process For Better Tensile Strength- Taguchi Approach

pp. 28145-28154

M. Venkata Ramana

Congestion Based Delay Model For Asynchronous NOC

pp. 28155-28160

K. Ilamathi, and.P.Rangarajan

On Distinguished GB-Compact Topological Spaces

pp. 28161-28176

Vidyottama Kumari and Thakur C. K. Raman

A Review on Road Traffic Accident and Related Factors

pp. 28177-28183

Muthusamy A P, Rajendran M, Ramesh K and Sivaprakash P

Novel Implementation of Image Restoration Schema Using Band Reject Filter Processing Techniques

pp. 28185-28194

A. Shakul Hamid and S. P. Victor

Real-Time Vehicle License Plate Detection and Recognition System

pp. 28195-28210

Kumar Rajan, V. Laxmi, D. K. Mohanta and S. Das

Experimental Studies on The Performance and Emission Characteristics of A Turbocharger Coupled Multi Cylinder Diesel Engine

pp. 28211-28223

I. Vimalkannan, K. S. Babulal, A. Pradeep and P. Muthukumar

A Computer Aided Design For Mass Classification In Digital Mammogram Using Dual Tree M-Band Wavelet Transform and Support Vector Machine

pp. 28225-28232

C. Suba and K. Nirmala

Water Management In An Institutional Building In Northern, India

pp. 28233-28244

Architect Gaurav Chandra

A Survey on Modeling and Simulation of Cloud Computing

pp. 28245-28254

Prince Mary, and V.Anusha

Influence of Multi-Walled Carbon Nanotubes on Circularity of Drilled Holes In

Epoxy/Glass Fabric Polymeric Composite

pp. 28255-28262

S. Ponnuvela, T.V. Moorthy and P. Hariharan

Fingerprint Matching Algorithm musing Advanced Pre-Processing Technique

pp. 28263-28271

Sarbjit Kaur, Urvashi Garg and Manjit Kaur

Data Duplication Using Ensemble Classification

pp. 28273-28286

M.Padmanaban and R.Radha

An Efficient Privacy Preserving Mechanism In Geo-Social Applications

pp. 28287-28294

S. Deepika and D.Ganesh

Design and Implementation of Double Tail Dynamic Comparator For Low Power 3-Bit Flash ADC

pp. 28295-28304

K.Vijay kumar, Sakthivel.R and VanithaM

Content Addressable Memory of Reordering Overlapped Mechanism With Efficient Power In Asynchronous Transfer Mode

pp. 28305-28316

Dr.M.Meenakumari and S.Sharmila

Induction Motor Bearing Fault Diagnosis Using Cascaded EMD and DWT techniques

pp. 28317-28330

Raj Kumar Patel and V. K. Giri

Design and Implementation of Digital Household Energy Meter With A Flexible Billing Unit Using FPGA

pp. 28331-28340

Vigneshu R I, Dinesh Udhayan R, Raghav S, Wilfred Thadeus P, Anguselvan S, Prabhu E

A Multi -Objective Bee Swarm Optimization For Energy Efficient Clustering In Multi-Hop Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 28341-28354

D. Rajendra Prasad, P. V. Naganjaneyulu, and. K. Satya Prasad

Single Supplier Multiple Cooperative Retailers Fuzzy Inventory Model With Quantity Discount and Permissible Delay In Payments

pp. 28355-28368

K. Kalaiarasi and G. Ram Sankar.

A Technical Comprehensive Survey ForUser Input Models For Mathematical Expression

pp. 28369-28378

Sachin Naik and PravinMetkewar

An Approach To Make Energy Efficient Routing Protocol Based on Improved RSSI Value

pp. 28379-28388

Manpreet Kaur and Gulshan Kumar

Speaker Identification Using Relevance Vector Machine

pp. 28389-28399

C. Sunitha and E. Chandra

Experimental Investigation of Alkali-Surfactant-Polymer flooding Forcarbonate Reservoirs

pp. 28401-28410

Khaled A. Elraies, Shuai A. Kalwara, Mohamme A. Ayoub and Hadi A. Belhaj

A Study on Remote Method Invocation In JAVA

pp. 28411-28415

Asha Sukumaran

Performance Analysis of Gain Flattened L-Band EDFA For WDM System

pp. 28417-28426

J. Helina Rajini and S.Tamil Selvi

Formant Estimation of Speech Using Discrete Hartley Transform

pp. 28427-28438

Madhukar.B.N, Sanjay Jain and P. S. Satyanarayana

Secure Resource Authentication Module In Public Cloud Access Management

pp. 28439-28446

S Ramamoorthy N Kumaran, JS Shyam mohan and MThirunavukkarasu

Performance Characteristics of Electroless Ni-P-Cu and Ni-P-Cu-Pvp Composite Coatings

pp. 28447-28454

Hareesh P, S. Karthikeyan, K. Raja and P. A. Jeeva

Detection of Retinal Blood Vessels Using Nonsubsampled Contourlet Transform (NSCT) and Multistructure Elements Morphology By Reconstruction With Length Filtering

pp. 28455-28470

D. Karthika and A. Marimuthu

Design and Implementation of A Low Power Comparator Circuit Using Reversible Logic Technology on FPGA

pp. 28471-28479

Priyanka Katta, G Rakesh Chowdary and T V Rama Krishna

Collision and Congestion Recognition With Aid of Test Packet Generation For Network Troubleshooting Nodes

pp. 28481-28494

T. Prasath, M.Babu and T. Lakshmi

Block Based Error Correction Code Watermarking With Video Steganography Using Interpolation And LSB Substitution

pp. 28495-28503

Gurbakash Phonsa and Priya Sidhu

High Speed and Low Power Glitch Aware Magnitude Comparator Using Reversible Logic

pp. 28505-28513

Gomathy Kannan and Prashanth Radhakrishnan

A Novel Algorithm For Detecting Moving Objects In A Real Time Video

pp. 28515-28525

Amrutha S and S Ravishakar

Dc Motor Speed Control Using Fuzzy PID Controller

pp. 28527-28538

M. Kathamuthu, G. Balasubramanian and K. Ramkumar

Landslide Spatial Data Analysis Using Decision Tree Classification Approach

pp. 28539-28553

P. Anbalagan and R. M. Chandrasekaran

Content Ranking Using Semantic Word Comparison And Structural String Matching

pp. 28555-28560

R. R. Sathiya

Prediction of Compressive Strength of The Fibre Reinforced Slag Geopolymer Concrete

pp. 28561-28574

Srinivasan.K, G. Mohan Ganesh and. A.S.Santhi

Human Activity Analysis For Video Surveillance Based on Visual Features

pp. 28575-28585

Sivaprakash Paramasivan and 2Ravichandran C Gopalakrishnan

Micro Solar Inverter Applications Using PV Cells

pp. 28587-28591

K Bhaskar and K. Siddappa Naidu

Big Data Literature Survey

pp. 28593-28602

Shobhanjaly P. Nair, N. Gomathi and D. Archana Thilagavathy

A Comparative Study of Single and Dual Database In Tamil Text To Speech Synthesis System

pp. 28603-28609

Kiruthika S and Krishnamoorthy K

Implementation of Network Security: Voice Based Authentication Using Kerberos Protocol

pp. 28611-28624

Apoorva P

Analysis of ST Segment Variability Dynamics and Detection of Myocardial Infarction

pp. 28625-28634

S. Thulasi Prasad and S. Varadarajan

ATSA: Advanced Task Scheduling Algorithm For Grid Computing Environment

pp. 28635-28644

S. Vaaheedha Kfatheen

A Fast and Robust Level Set Method For Medical Image Segmentation

pp. 28645-28655

P Sudharshan Duth

Laws of Thermodynamic Description In The Economic System

pp. 28657-28668

S Prabakaran and Carlos D. Paternina-Arboleda

Methodology To Reverse Engineer A Javacard Applet using Pattern Matching Attack

pp. 28669-28679

Mohammed Amine Kasmi, Azizi Mostafa and Jean Louis Lanet

Medicinal Sapling-Plants Diversity At The Peat-Swamp Forest In Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

pp. 28681-28690

The Architecture & Connectivity of IOT For The Things In Automation and Industrial Environment

pp. 28691-28700

K. Ramyasree and P. Venkateswarlu Reddy

Congestion Control in Peer-To-Peer File Sharing Based on Message Deleting and Transferring

pp. 28701-28710

T. Nikhila and S. Bavaji

Analysis and Evaluation of Proposed Algorithm For Advance Options of H.263 and H.264 Video Codec

pp. 28711-28731

M. A. Ansari and Imran Ullah Khan

Static Relaxation Technique With Test Vector Compression

pp. 28731-28739

Deepak Rajan and J.P.Anita

The Effect of Mechanization on Operator Performance – An Ergonomic Perspective

pp. 28741-28748

Prathik Rudresh, Vigneshwaran Ramesh, Anbuudayasankar S. P., Rahul P. Kikani and Ayush Khandelwal

An Overview of Apache Mahout

pp. 28749-28758

Niveditha M, Deeksha Vimmadiseti and Aarthi R

2-D Digital Waveguide and Finite Difference Modeling of A Sitar

pp. 28759-28777

Priya D. Deshmukh and Neela Rayavarapu

Platform Independent Generic Compiler Design Using Reverse Engineering

pp. 28779-28795

Amit Verma, Shruti Gujral and Nikita Bakshi

Single Image Super-Resolution Based on Sparse Representation Using Batch-Wise K-SVD Algorithm

pp. 28797-28809

Jino Hans W and Venkateswaran N

GA Trained Classification For Behavior Based Anomaly Detection in the MANETS

pp. 28811-28827

S.R .SEENIVASAN and M. GANAGA DURGA

An Extended Extreme Learning Machine With Multi-Hidden Layer Feed Forward Networks

pp. 28829-28844

Vimala Alexander and Pethalakshmi Annamalai

Fast Rerouting Technique on Energy Efficient Routing

pp. 28845-28851

A. Anbarasan and P. Venkateswarulu Reddy

Myhill Nerode Theorem For Fuzzy Automata (Min-Min Composition)

pp. 28853-28861

Chatrapathy. K and V. Ramaswamy

M/M (A, D, B)/ (2,1) Queueing Model With Servers Single and Delayed Vacation

pp. 28863-28874

R. Sree Parimala and S.Palaniammal

Data Security on Cloud: A Survey, Research Issues and Challenges

pp. 28875-28887

Deeksha Vimmadisetti, Tushar Sharma, Ashwini Bhaskar and Kavitha C R

Early Stage FPGA Architecture Development By Exploiting Dependence on Logic Density

pp. 28889-28902

Prem Lal Paleri and Ramesh. S R

A Novel Advertisement Recommendation System For Online Video Portals

pp. 28903-28910

Soundappan. S, Shaji Kumar. R and Ritwik. M

Semi-Analytical Solutions of Nonlinear Transient Circuits Using Differential Transform Based Methods

pp. 28911-28922

E. R. El-Zahar and H .M. Habib

Evaluation of DC-DC Power Converters For 3.5kw Micro-Butt Welding Applications

pp. 28923-28933

M. Thiruvenkadam, S. Thangavel, S. Paramasivam and R. Govarathanan

An Improved Tamil Text To Speech Synthesis System With Annotated Dual Corpora

pp. 28935-28944

Kiruthika S and Krishnamoorthy K

Cartesian Product Representation of Intuitionistic Fuzzy Matrices

pp. 28945-28954

T. Gandhimathi

Design & Analysis of Vertical Takeoff and Landing Vehicle (VTOL)

pp. 28955-28962

Aditya M. Intwala

On Designing of MEM Switch

pp. 28963-28974

C.Pamuleti, K.Lal Kishore and M.Satyam

An Effective Online Gross Motor Movements Screening Tool For Dyslexia Based on Kinesthetic Perception

pp. 28975-28986

V.ThulasiBai, P.M.Beulah Devamalar, M.Arun Marx and L.Padmanaban

Real-Time Reconnaissance Robot Using FPGA

pp. 28987-28994

Apoorav Gupta and Kambhampati Sumant V

Empirical Modelling and Optimization of Friction Stir Welding Process Parameters Using Multiple Regression Method and Genetic Algorithm

pp. 28995-29004

Vaibhav R. Shinde, Mandar Sapre, VijayKumar S. Jatti, Rahul Dhabale and Nikhil M

A Naive-Bayes Approach For Disease Diagnosis With Analysis of Disease Type and Symptoms

pp. 29005-29014

Shahid Khan and Muhammad Rukunuddin Ghalib

Survey Study on LEACH Protocols For Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 29015-29024

S. Ananda Kumar, P. Ilango, Dinesh Kumar, Silla Shameer Guptha and Grover Harsh Dinesh

Hicast-K: A Novel Hybridized Gene Clustering Algorithm With Inbuilt Validation

pp. 29025-29040

Muhammad Rukunuddin Ghali and Motaal Ahmed

Karatsuba Multiplication In Galois Field For The Implementation of Elliptic Curve Cryptography

pp. 29041-29049

Ashkar Mohammed M and. S Suresh Babu and M Navas chokli

Internet of Things: A Vision Through Data Mining, Cloud Computing and Semantic Technologies

pp. 29051-29060

Sini Raj P, Y Reethu Sasira, L Revathi, and Su Rubaasri

PLC - HMI Based Pipeline Leakage Detection System In Petroleum Transfer Lines

pp. 29061-29072

A. Selwin Mich Priyadharson, Vinson Joshua. S and Senthil Kumaran. B

The Consequences of Stage-Based Knowledge Management Evolution

pp. 29073-29093

Dennis Joseph and Nasina Jigeesh

Retrieval of Answers For Inaccurate Queries From Domain Specific Ontology

pp. 29095-29104

S. J. Karale and. Manali Kshirsagar

Brain Tumour Segmentation Using Clustering and Em Segmentation

pp. 29105-29119

M.Malathi, K.Sujatha and Sinthia.P

A Novel Approach For Solving Quadratic Riccati Differential Equations

pp. 29121-29126

Abiodun A. Opanuga, SundayO. Edeki, Hilary I. Okagbue and GraceO. Akinlabi.

Effect of Temperature on 1 Micron Thick Silicon Solar Cell

pp. 29127-29133

M. R. Tamjis ,A. A. Zulkefle and, Z. A. Baharudin

Nonlinear Design and Performance Analysis of An 8/6 Switched Reluctance Motor (SRM)

pp. 29135-29138

R.T. Mohamad, Z. A. Baharudin, A. I. Abdul Rahman, M. Zainon, R. R. Raja Abd Rahman, A. A. Zulkefle, S. N. Syed Salim, M. A. Mat Hanafiah, I. Abu Shah, M. Ibrahim and N. M. K. N. NIK REMELI

Efficacy of A Machine Learning Approach To Pricing Options In The Indian Context

pp. 29139-29145

Dipti Ranjan Mohanty and Susanta Kumar Mishra

Secure Emergency Response Protocol For Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 29147-29154

A. Deepika

Improvement In Load Balancing Technique For Mongodb Clusters Using Data Center Awareness and Ant Colony Optimization

pp. 29155-29173

Harpinder Kaur and Janpreet Singh

An Efficient Algorithm With Low Power Implementation For Hearing Aids

pp. 29175-29192

D. Joseph Jeyakumar, J.Raja Paul Perinbam, N.Ramadas and L. Vinoth

Improving Annotation Process and Increase The Performance of Tag Data

pp. 29193-29200

A.Harikrishna and K.Bhaskarnaik

Ranking Based Dynamic Query Forms For Database Queries

pp. 29201-29208

S. Naresh and B. Gurunadha Rao

EPASAL: Effective Path Selection Algorithm For Congestion Control In Wireless Sensor Network

pp. 29209-29219

P. Renish Kumar and K. Jeevan Pradeep

Effect of Chemical Warm Asphalt Additive on Wettability of Aged Binder Incorporating Waste Engine Oil

pp. 29221-29229

Nurul Hidayah Mohd Kamaruddin, Mohd Rosli Hainin, Norhidayah Abdul Hassan and Mohd Ezree Abdullah

Wind Turbine Modeling And Control Using Fuzzy Logic

pp. 29231-29256

B. Deepa Lakshmi, K.Sujatha and T.Godhavari

Novel Image Retrieval Approach in Similarity Integrated Network Using Combined Ranking Algorithm

pp. 29257-29265

P.Selvi¹, R.Sandya, T. Yogeswari and G.Viveka

Admin Leach: A New-Fangled Well-Organized Energy Efficient Routing Protocol For Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 29267-29282

S.G.Susila and J.Arputhavijayaselvi

Experimental And Analtical Study Of Plate Formed Box Column Subjected To Axial Compression And Biaxial Bending

pp. 29283-29302

Analysis Of High Power Multifunctional Grid Connected PV System Using Multilevel Inverter

pp. 29303-29319

Jeyasudha.S, Ramya.S, and Geethalakshmi.B

Text Mining For Vulnerable Software Components Envisionment

pp. 29321-29325

C.Anu and K.Bhaskar Naik

Analysis of Avalanche Effect In Modified Des Algorithm

pp. 29327-29335

Raja Sekhar Krovi and Pujyasri Jetty

SecureDBaaS Model for Accessing Encrypted Cloud Databases

pp. 29335-29346

P Jagadeeswaraiah and M.R. Pavan Kumar

Allocation of data in HadoopClusters

pp. 29347-29353

G. Divya and ShaikSalam

A Method for Classification of Bulk Grain Images and Detection of Unwanted Residue in Bulk Grain Images

pp. 29355-29366

Harish S Gujjar and M. Siddappa

Efficient Association Rule Mining Based On Correlation Analysis

pp. 29367-29383

M.L.Valarmathi, Siji P D and S.Mohana

Multiple Human Tracking and Prediction under severe Occlusions using GMM and Kalman Filter

pp. 29385-29404

D. Harihara Santosh and P.G. Krishna Mohan

Strategy for Overlap Minimization in Sensing Area

pp. 29405-29415

Sravani Anne and N.Radhika

Fundamental of IEEE 802.15.4 and Its Application on Vehicular Wireless ADHOC Network

pp. 29417-29423

S. R. Lalhrulaitluanga and M. Nirubama

High Efficiency Video Coding Using NCDS Algorithm For Edge Preservation

pp. 29425-29438

D.Monisha and G. Sethuram Rao

Wireless Server For Total Healthcare System For Clients

pp. 29439-29444

S.Vaishnodevi, G.Sureshkumar, C. Arun kumar Madhuvappan and S.Mathankumar

State Estimation Based on Probabilistic Contaminated Exponential Square Method

pp. 29445-29455

Gomathi Venugopal and Uma Velayutham

Overview of Terminology Related To The Security Issues In MANETS

pp. 29457-29466

Suma Patrac

Over View of The Face and Facial Feature Detectors Based on The Viola-Jones Algorithm

pp. 29467-29475

Gunjala Shashidhar and Nirupama

Improved Interoperability In Heterogeneous Nodes For Manets

pp. 29477-29484

T. V. Krishna Reddy

DEVELOPMENT OF SIMPLIFIED TOTAL PRODUCTIVE MAINTENANCE SYSTEM FOR TINY INDUSTRIES AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

pp. 29485-29503

G. Ananth and B.K.Vinayagam

Performance Comparison of Uncoded OFDM & Uncoded Adaptive OFDM System Over AWGN Channel

pp. 29507-29514

Njilo jemu and Saravana

Enhanced Xpress Architecture For Wireless Multihop Networks

pp. 29515-29525

G. Sandhya and.P.Rajani.

Channel Estimation of OFDM System Based on PACE Using LAB VIEW

pp. 29527-29537

S. K. Mydhili and. A.Rajeswari

Adapting Map-Reduce Programming Model With Container Based Virtualization For Self-Organizing Networks

pp. 29539-29554

Premnath KN, Srinivasan R and Elijah Blessing Rajsingh

Real Time Guidance For Indoor Navigation Using Bluetooth Technology

pp. 29555-29567

V.Prithiviraj, Meenakshi Pavithra C., Sakthipriya G and Suprabha S

A Novel Design Optimization of a Fault-Tolerant AC Permanent Magnet Synchronous Machine-Drive System

pp. 29569-29579

K. Sabir Khan and B. Murali Babu

Performance Analysis of AOMDV Under The Impact of Rushing Attack

pp. 29581-29594

V. Muthupriya and K. M. Mehata

Understanding Oil & Gas Pipeline Failures and Mitigation Measures Using Bayesian Approach

pp. 29595-29608

G. Unnikrishnan, Nihal Siddiqui and Shrihari Honwad

Optimum Cost Allocation For Reactive Power Planning In Wind Farms Using Modified Artificial Immune System

pp. 29609-29620

P. Booma Devi, and. A. Shunmugalatha

Design of Programmable JTAG Controller In FPGA

pp. 29621-29630

Ramesh Bhakthavatchalu, and Saranya K Kannan

Comparision of Image Classification Methods on Event Data

pp. 29631-29640

Dinesh Kumar. C. K, Manjusha. R and Latha Parameswaran

Low Cost Heart Rate Monitoring Using Fingertips

pp. 29641-29649

Naman Jain, Priya. G and Ramya. G

A Hetero Dictionary Learning Based Noise Removal in Gray and Color Images

pp. 29651-29679

P. Jothibasur and P. Rangarajan

On the M/G/1 Queue With Batch Service and Compulsory Server Vacations

pp. 29681-29694

S. Vanitha

A Novel Study on Learning Evidence From Distance Metric For KNN Based Text Classification Algorithm

pp. 29695-29704

P. Umar Sathic Ali and C. Jothi Venkateswaran

Managing Resources Through Selection of Leader To Achieve Energy Efficiency For Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 29705-29715

S. Diwakaran and K. Vimala Devi

Context Based Ranking of Web Database Based on User Query Search

pp. 29717-29724

Koteswari. C and Saleena. B

Research on Energy Efficient In MANET Using MAC Protocol- A Survey

pp. 29725-29731

T. Dheepak and S. Neduncheliyan

Legal Aspects of Real Estate Valuation In India

pp. 29749-29759

Sayali Sandbhor and. N.B. Chaphalkar

A Low Delay Column Bypassing Multiplier With AHL Implementation For Digital Filters

pp. 29761-29772

Y.R Annie Bessant, T Latha and Alma J John

An Efficient Method For Computing Total Autocorrelation Over Shared Binary Decision Diagram

pp. 29773-29782

S. R. Malathi and P. Sakthivel

Secure and Resource Optimization Mechanism For Improving Privacy and Throughput In Wireless Network

pp. 29783-29796

D V Srihari Babu and P Chandrasekhar Reddy

A Traffic Locality Oriented Second Route Discovery For Manets

pp. 29797-29808

S. Vinoth, and G. Shanmugaraj

Experimental Study on Influence of Recycled Fresh Concrete Waste Coarse Aggregate on Properties of Concrete

pp. 29809-29815

G.K.Arunvivek, G.Maheswaran, S.Senthil kumar. M.Senthilkumar and T.Bragadeeswaran

Development of A Regression Model To Enhance The Economic Status of Self-Help Groups

pp. 29817-29824

Soumitro Chakravarty

Change Detection In Mammogram Images Using Fuzzy C- Means Clustering

pp. 29825-29834

Nazneen P Kotwal, M. Kirubaa, R. Lavanya and Devi Vijayan

Optimization of Fuzzy EOQ Inventory Cost Under Order Crossover

pp. 29835-29843

K. Kalaiarasi, P.Mercy and B.KomalaDurga

A Survey on Context Based Image Annotation Techniques

pp. 29845-29856

Swati Nair L, R Manjusha and.LathaParameswaran

Model Based Design Approach In Automotive Software and Systems

pp. 29857-29865

P.Sivakumar, B.Vinod , R.S.Sandhya Devi and S.Poorani Nithilavallee

FPGA Implementation of An Area Efficient Digit-Serial FIR Filter's Using CSE and GB Algorithm

pp. 29867-29874

FazalNoor Basha and K.Vamsi Krishna

Performance Analysis and Thermal Modeling of A Solar Flat Plate Collector With Concave Ridged Profile

pp. 29875-29882

R Gopi Krishnan, Vignesh Venkatesan, Pratik Nayak, Aditya Kumar Yadav andRajesh.V.R

Compact Triple Band Patch Antenna For Cognitive Radio Applications Using Defected Ground Structure

pp. 29883-29891

Janardan Sahay and Sanjay Kumar

Modelling and Analysis of Space Vector Modulation Based Three Phase Voltage Source Inverter

pp. 29893-29906

V.Indragandhi, A. Kannabhiran, R. Santhi and K. Giridharan

Optimization of Machining Parameters In Turning Process Using Exergy Analysis

pp. 29907-29916

P. Raghuram, K. Balaji, Karthik S, Hari Haran R, Siva Sankar P and Vimal P

Edge Preserving Image Fusion Using Linear Prediction

pp. 29917-29926

Hema P Menon, Sreeja S and K A Narayanankutty

Power Quality Improvement In A Distribution System Using D-STATCOM With Fuzzy Controller

pp. 29927-29936

B. Gokulakrishnan and T.Govindaraj

Monthly Groundwater Level Fluctuation Prediction Using Artificial Neural Network

pp. 29937-29948

G. R. Umamaheswari and D.Kalamani

Optimization of A Multiple-Vendor Single Buyer Integrated Inventory Model With A Variable Number of Vendors

pp. 29949-29962

K. Kalaiarasi and K. Praveen Kumar Rao

Covariance-Fitting Based Sparse Spectrum Estimation of Non-Uniformly Sampled Data In Presence of Noise

pp. 29963-29975

Neetha I Eappen, Arunprakash Jayaprakas, and G.Ramachandra Reddy

Optimal Consistency Measures For Pest Identification Based on Ant Colony Optimization In Agricultural Field

pp. 29977-29987

A.Siva Sangari, and.D.Saraswady

Implementation of Low Pin Debug (LPD) Interface For Data Acquisition In Automotive Applications

pp. 29987-29998

S.M.Dhanya and N. Kirthika

Energy Aware Clustering Algorithm For Distributed Heterogeneous Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 29999-30008

P.Anbhazhagan and S.Nagarajan

A Study on Treatment Efficiency of Tannery Wastewater Using Up Flow Anaerobic Sludge Blanket Reactor

pp. 30009-30018

R. Elliss Yogesh, and V. Sekaran

Numerical Investigation of Natural Convection Heat Transfer In A Square Cavity With The Influence of Prandtl Number

pp. 30019-30028

Chithra D, Eswaramurthi M. and Sundararaj K

An Intelligent Business Expert System For Predicting Sales Patterns Using Temporal Association Rule Mining

pp. 30029-30043

C. Perkinian and P. Vikkraman

A Review of Medical Image Classification and Evaluation Methodology For Breast Cancer Diagnosis With Computer Aided Mammography

pp. 30045-30054

Venmathi A R, E N Ganesh and N. Kumarathanan

Experimental Evaluation of Performance and Emission Characteristics of Minimally Processed Ethanol Fuelled HCCI Engine

pp. 30055-30070

N.Vinayagam, G. Nagarajan and R.Karthikeyan

Criticality Analysis and Inventory Cost Reduction For High-Value, High Volume Spares

pp. 30071-30082

Sonujalam.K and Raghuram.P

TCAD Simulation Study of Algan/Gan High Electron Mobility Transistors(HEMT)

pp. 30083-30089

T.Venishkumar and N.B.Balamurugan

Criteria Based Supplier Selection Model By Integer Linear Programming- A Case Study In A Manufacturing Organization

pp. 30091-30100

SVS Rajaprasad and P Venkata Chalapathi

Human Energy Harvesting Through A Low Cost Footstep Power Generator

pp. 30101-30107

Abhimanyu Dev, Prayrit Arora and Ravi Sekhar

Image Contrast Enhancement using AGCWD with Region Based Enhancement

pp. 30109-30119

Sourav Das, Tarun Gulati and Vikas Mittal

SAR Considerations of The EM Radiation & System Requirements of The EA Uplink-Downlink LTE Systems and The Performance Evaluation of The Resulting FDD & TDD Duplexing Schemes

pp. 30121-30134

V. Rama Krishna Sharma and.P.Chandrasekhar

Single Moving Object Detection and Tracking Using Horn-Schunck Optical Flow Method

pp. 30135-30152

Akshay S

Bottom Up Approach For Modelling Visual Attention Using Saliency Map In Machine Vision A Computational Cognitive Neuroscience Approach

pp. 30153-30166

Manjunath R Kounte and B.K. Sujatha

Analysis of Students Behavior Using Moving Objects Using Rpart and Rattle - R Software

pp. 30167-30175v

Pallavi M S

Morphological and Mechanical Properties of Natural Zeolite-High Density Polyethylene Composite

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Abstract

This study focused on the morphology and mechanical properties of novel implant skull reconstruction from the natural zeolite-high density polyethylene (HDPE). The composites were formed through injection molding techniques. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) was used to investigate the morphology of composites. The composite morphology showed the present of aggregate. An increase in the content of the particles resulted in lower the inter-particle distance. Ductility and yield stress decreased with increasing content of zeolite. On the other hand, Young's modulus increased in line with the increasing zeolite content. Tensile stress increased with addition of zeolite content of 5 wt.% and decreased in further additions. This indicated that the highest adhesion strength of the interface occurs at a concentration of 5 wt.% zeolite. Therefore, the mechanism of stress transfer from the matrix to the filler occurs effectively.

Keywords: morphology, mechanical properties, high-density polyethylene, zeolite, composites

Introduction

High density polyethylene (HDPE) is a biocompatible, inert, non-toxic and has been widely used in the fields of orthopedics such as skull reconstruction implant to repair the skull defect. However, HDPE has limitations in the use of, for example, the low stiffness and low strength. To overcome its limitation in the low stiffness, rigid particles possessing a Young's modulus much higher than the polymer is added as a

filler in order to form a composite that has a stiffness greater than the neat matrix [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]. Bioactive particles such as hydroxyapatite were used as filler [6, 7, 8, 9] to obtain bioactive composite. To avoid the occurrence of accelerated degradation, HDPE should be kept out of direct ultraviolet radiation [10].

To respond to these problems, it is very important to develop a new filler material that is capable to increase resistance of HDPE matrix to ultraviolet radiation and in accordance with the requirements as biomaterials are biocompatible, bioactive and non-toxic. Both natural and synthetic zeolite are the right material to be used because they have all the requirements, i.e., biocompatible and non-toxic [11], bioactive [12, 13, 14] and are able to protect the polymer matrix from degradation due to ultraviolet radiation [15]. Another advantage of the use of zeolite is its abundant availability in nature with low prices that reduce the cost of making. However, the zeolites have a negative thermal expansion coefficient [16, 17, 18] and no information about the structure and mechanical properties of natural zeolite-filled HDPE is available. Research on the mechanical properties of bone implants performed through characterization of the tensile strength and stiffness [19, 20, 21]. The low mechanical properties causes the material can only be used for low load-bearing applications [22]. For load-bearing implants such as skull reconstruction implants, it is important to increase the stiffness and strength of materials [23]. In this study, the zeolite-filled HDPE was investigated as skull reconstruction implants. As novel biomaterials for bone implant applications, it is necessary to understand the mechanical properties of zeolite-filled HDPE. In this study, the morphological and mechanical properties of zeolite-filled HDPE were investigated as skull reconstruction implants. As novel biomaterials for bone implant applications, it is necessary to understand the mechanical properties of zeolite-filled HDPE. The morphology is very important to learn in order to support the analysis of the mechanical properties of the composite.

Material and Methods

Materials and Sample Preparation

Commercial high density polyethylene (HDPE) was used as the matrix, while the natural zeolite was used as filler. Natural zeolite composed of SiO₂ (72.6%), Al₂O₃ (10.55%), Fe₂O₃ (2.58%), TiO (0.16%), CaO (1.40%), MgO (1.00%), K₂O (2.45%), and Na₂O (1.29%). Natural zeolite powder with particle size distribution as shown in Figure 1 was calcined at a temperature of 300°C for 3 hours. The HDPE powder with particle size 177-250 µm was mixed with calcined zeolite powder. The zeolite and HDPE powder were mixed in dry conditions and the mass ratio of zeolite to HDPE was set as 0/100, 5/95, 10/90, 15/85 and 20/80. The blend powders were injection-molded into dumbbell shape by using injection molding machine. The injection parameters were set at barrel temperature of 160°C. The blends in the barrel were held for about 2 minutes prior to injection. Composites were cooled in air atmosphere and maintained no contact with direct ultraviolet light.

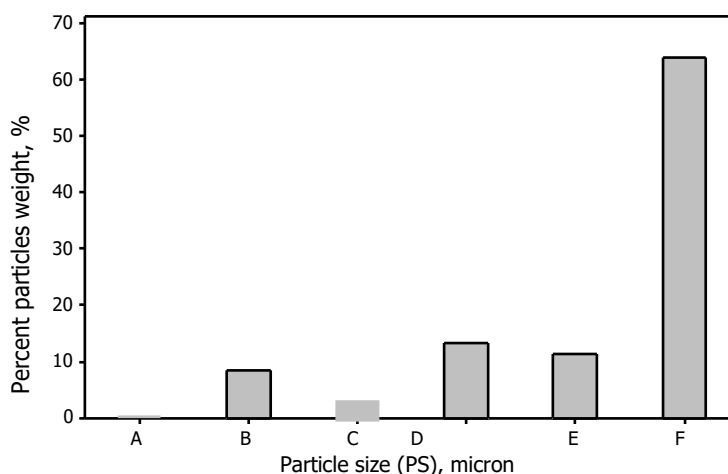


Figure 1: Particles size distribution of zeolite, where A, B, C, D, E and F are $177 \leq PS < 250$, $149 \leq PS < 177$, $125 \leq PS < 149$, $99 \leq PS < 125$, $74 \leq PS < 99$ and $PS < 74$, respectively.

Tensile Testing

Mechanical properties of zeolite/HDPE were evaluated by tensile testing on dumbbell shaped specimens. The tests were conducted according to ISO 527 using a universal testing machine at a cross head speed of 2 mm/min. All composites were given a tensile load to a complete failure and the elongation of the specimen is calculated from the crosshead displacement. All mechanical tests were performed at room temperature.

Morphological Analysis

The distribution and dispersion of zeolite particles in HDPE were examined using light microscope (LM). The specimens taken after injection molding were prepared included sectioning, mounting and polishing. The morphological analyses of the tensile fracture surface were carried out by FEI Inspect S50 scanning electron microscope. Samples were cut from the fracture tensile surface and sputter-coated with thin gold layer before investigation.

Results and Discussion

Zeolite Distribution in HDPE

Distributions of zeolite particles in the composite specimens were observed using a light microscope as shown in Figure 2. It appears that zeolite particles are well distributed in the HDPE matrix. However, the particles are not dispersed well. Aggregate particles present and increase in number with the increasing amount of zeolite content.

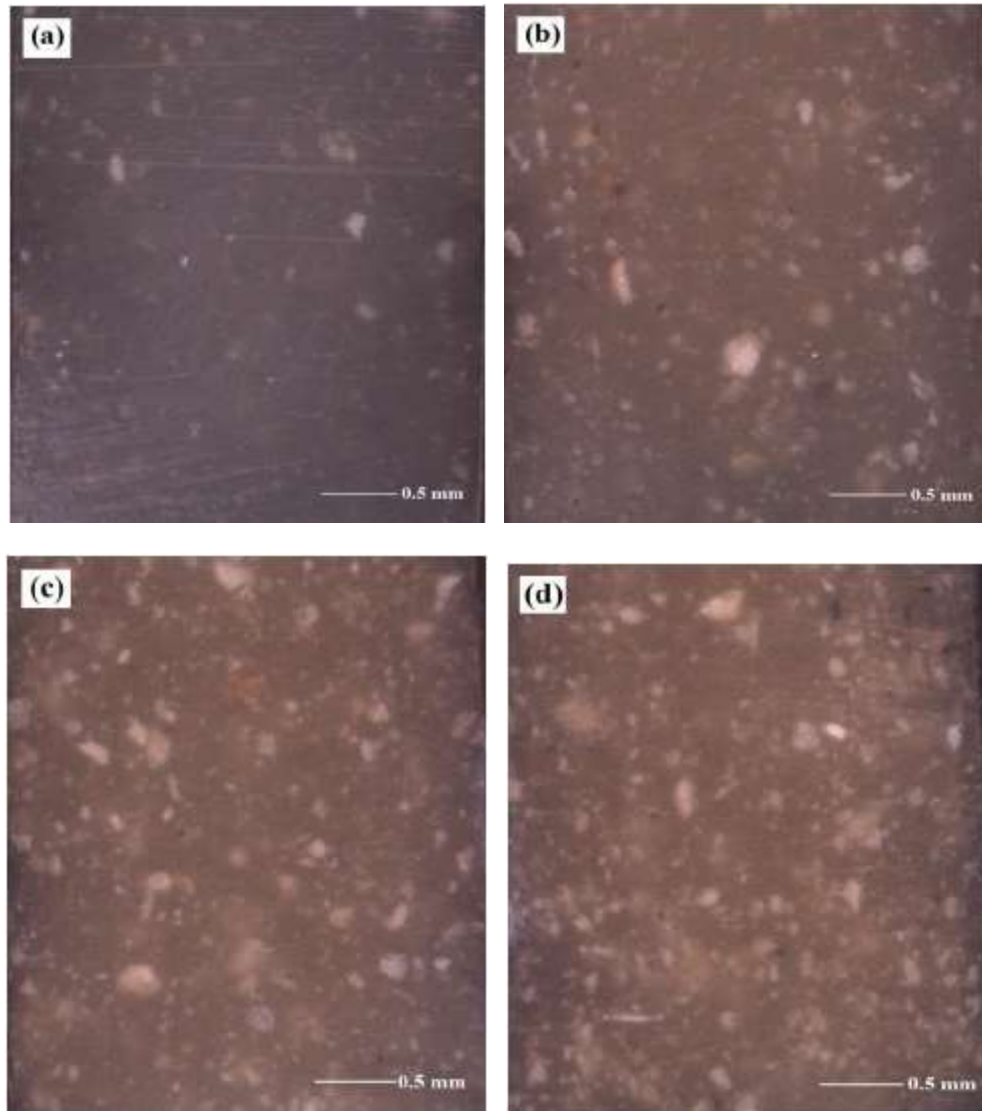


Figure 2: Zeolite/HDPE composite cross section which showed the distribution of the zeolite in after injection on zeolite content variations: (a) 5 wt.%, (B) 10 wt.%, (C) 15 wt.%, And (d) 20 wt.%.

Tensile Properties

The effects of adding zeolite content on elongation at break are shown in Figure 3. It can be seen clearly that the addition of zeolite content reduces the maximum displacement. The ratio of elongation at break (x_b) to the maximum load (F_{max}) is also shown in Figure 3. It is clearly shown that increasing the zeolite content lowers the elongation per applied load, which means a decline in the composite ductility. These results indicate that the increased of zeolite content causes a gradual transition behavior from ductile to brittle.

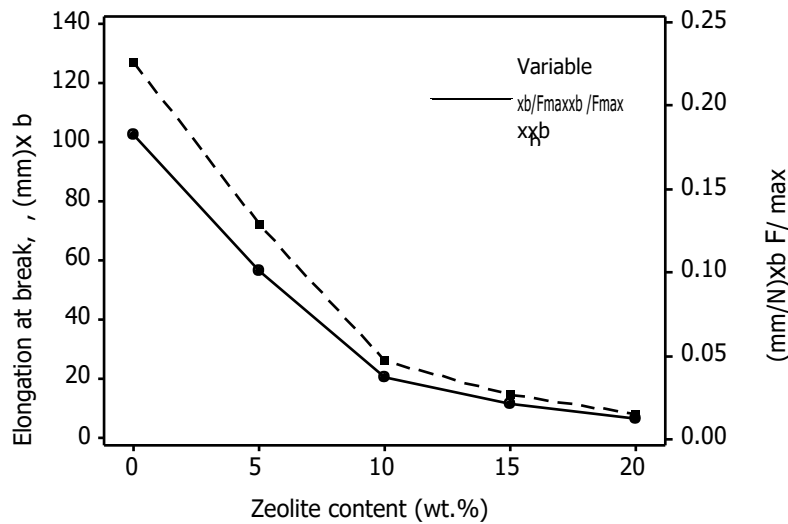


Figure 3: Zeolite Content Influence on The Elongation At Break And X_b/F_{max} Ratio

Tensile strength of composites on different content of zeolite is shown in Figure 4. It is clearly shown that the tensile strength of composite increased slightly by the addition of 5 wt% of zeolite into HDPE matrix. However, the addition of zeolite content above 5 wt%, the tensile strength decreased gradually. This indicates the good adhesion at the interface of zeolite particles/HDPE on the weight fraction of 5 wt% zeolite. Adhesion strength at the interface causes an effective stress transfer mechanism from the HDPE matrix to the zeolite particle. The addition of zeolite particles above 5 wt% encourages the formation of many aggregates of zeolite particles in the HDPE matrix. The aggregates have poor bonded so that the particles will undergo de-bonding and not capable to carry the load. This causes a decrease in the strength of the material by increasing the content of the zeolite.

The yield stresses are plotted as a function of zeolite content as shown in Figure 5. Yield stress decreased sharply (57.65%) by the presence of the zeolite particles. Furthermore, addition of zeolite content more than 5 wt% did not cause significant changes in the yield stress. The decrease of the yield stress was due to the early de-bonding of the filler particles from the host matrix.

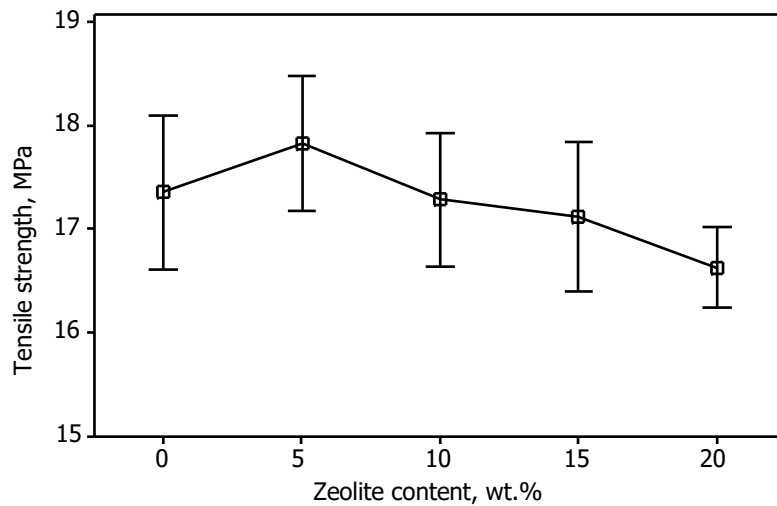


Figure 4: The Influence of Zeolite Content on The Tensile Strength of Composite

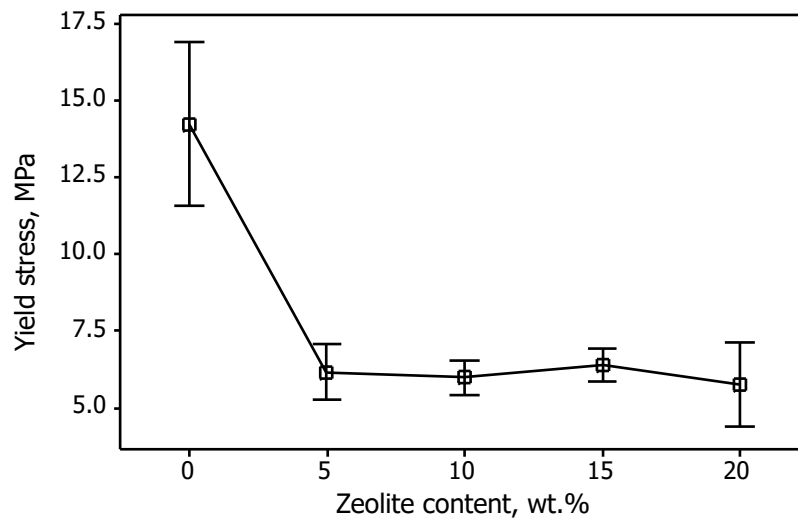


Figure 5: Composites Yield Stress At Different Filler Content.

Young's modulus of composites increased almost linearly by addition of zeolite particles containing up to 10 wt.% (Figure 6). Furthermore, a sharp increase in the content of zeolite of 15 wt.% occurred. Zeolites are much stiffer than the matrix so that the Young's modulus of the composite is sensitive to the content of the zeolite. According Vollenberg *et.al* [24] and Pukánszky [25], de-bonding stress (i.e., the stress necessary to initiate de-bonding) is proportional to the Young's modulus of the matrix and reversible work of adhesion. This means that the de-bonding stress increased by increasing the reversible work of adhesion. Meanwhile, Nilsen [26] and Kolarik *et.al* [27] argued that the Young's modulus of the composite is proportional to the matrix stiffness. By combining the opinions of these two groups, it can be concluded that the Young's modulus of the composite increased by two states, first, increasing de-

bonding stress, second, decreasing reversible work of adhesion. As explained earlier, an increase in Young's modulus by increasing the zeolite content is not caused by an increase in de-bonding stress. Decrease reversible work of adhesion is a cause of increased Young's modulus of the composites.

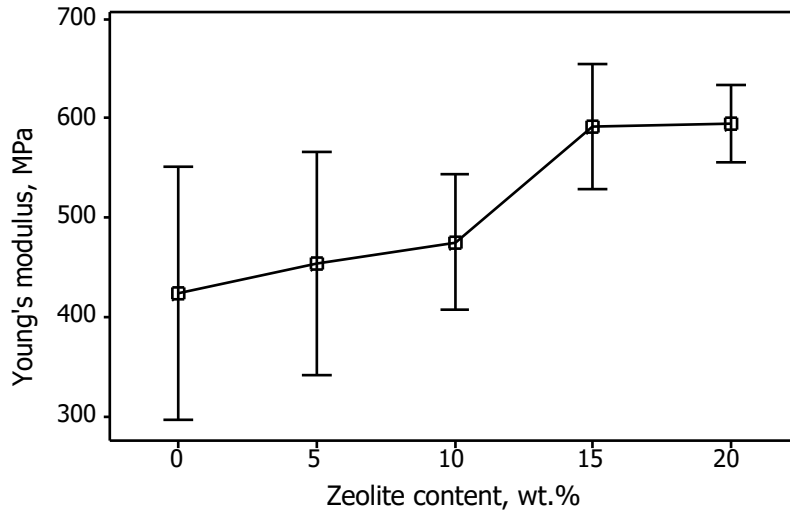


Figure 6: Young's Modulus As A Function of Zeolite Content

Tensile Fracture Surface

The SEM analysis of the tensile fracture surfaces for all tested composites is presented in Figure 7. It reveals the influence of the presence of zeolite particles on the local deformation of the HDPE matrix. The composite with 5 wt.% zeolite as shown in Figure 7a showed clearly that matrix underwent extensive plastic deformation. This indicates that this composite has undergone ductile fracture. The morphology of tensile fracture surface containing a large number of particles pull out of the HDPE matrix is shown in Figure 7b-d. The increase of the zeolite particles more than 10 wt.% promotes extensive voids initiated at the interface of HDPE matrix-zeolite particles as shown in Figure 7c and 7d. Finally, increasing zeolite particles lead to reduced matrix deformation.

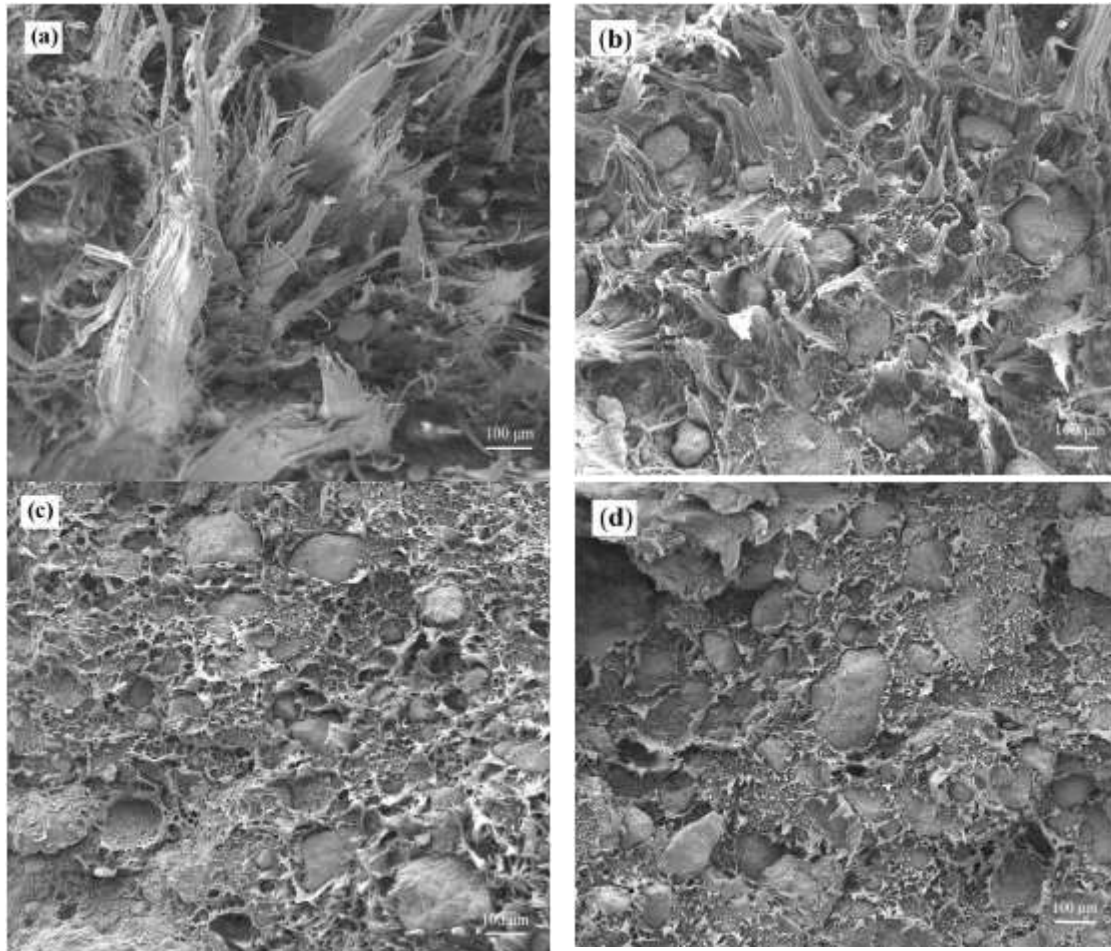


Figure 7: The Tensile Fracture Surface SEM micrographs of zeolite/HDPE composites: (a) 5 wt.% zeolite, (b) 10 wt.% zeolite, (c) 15 wt.% zeolite, (d) 20 wt.% zeolite.

The HDPE matrix network in the zeolite particles is depicted in Figure 8 which shows the gap between the HDPE matrix and the zeolite particles. Stress concentration due to the tensile load during test led to the voids formation as a result of particles de-bonding from the matrix. Furthermore, the voids grow in the tensile stress direction (Figure 9a). On the other hand, craze febrile network can be observed as shown in Figure 9b. The crazes formation was initiated when the plane strain led to a microscopic void to open up under appropriate state of local stress created by particles [28].

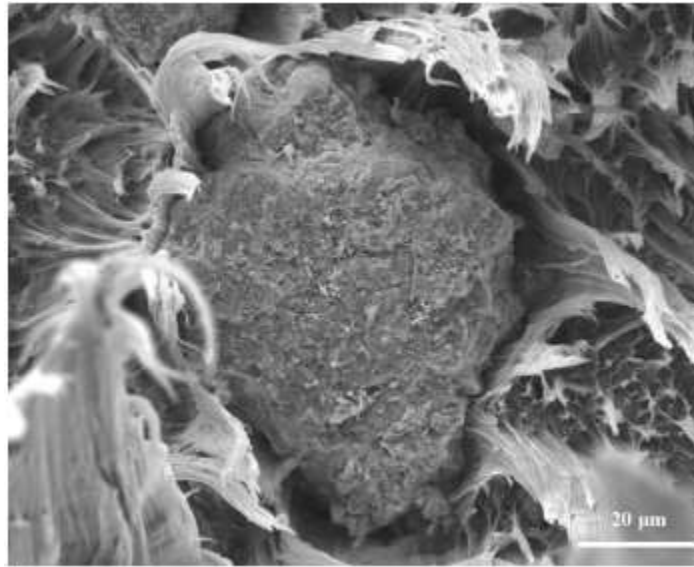


Figure 8: SEM micrograph of tensile fracture surfaces showing polymer network in the zeolite particles of composite with 10 wt.% zeolite

Further deformation of HDPE matrix led to void coalescence (Figure 9b) prior to composite fracture. Increase in the zeolite content shortens the distance between the particles in the host matrix. This resulted in a decrease in the strain required for growth and coalescence of voids and hence an increase in the content of the zeolite particles causing the fracture behavior of composites in transition from ductile to brittle. This mechanism resulted in the appearance of the fracture surface as shown in Figure 7 which reveals a change in the fracture behavior of the composite as previously discussed.

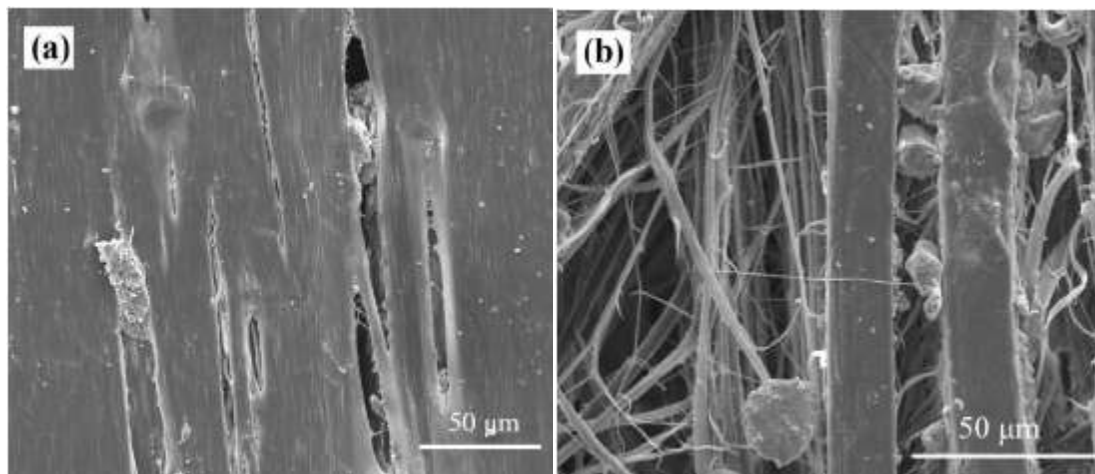


Figure 9: SEM images showing the fracture process of 5 wt.% zeolite/HDPE (a) voids grow in tensile stress direction (b) voids coalescence and the crazing formation.

Conclusions

Study on morphology and mechanical properties of novel composites has been discussed in this paper. Aggregates were observed and found in more locations with increasing zeolite content. The particles in the aggregates have poor bonding so that the particles are de-bonded early. Therefore, the de-bonding stress (i.e., stress necessary to initiate de-bonding) decreased. The voids created by the de-bonded particles can serve as precursor for crack during tensile loading. Aggregate lowers the ductility behavior of composites. Stress transfer from the matrix to the particles is effective on the addition of 5 wt% zeolite characterized by increased tensile strength. On the other hand, the load stress lead to an increase in the intensity of irreversible slip on the surface of the particles and the matrix are characterized by a decrease in the yield stress of the composites

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