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Smart Retrofitting of Reinforced Concrete Structures Using Conventional Methods and Self-Healing FRP Materials

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ABSTRACT

The deterioration of reinforced concrete structures has increased the need for effective retrofitting and strengthening methods. Conventional techniques such as steel jacketing, epoxy injection, external post-tensioning, and FRP wrapping improve load capacity, ductility, and seismic resistance, but they are mainly reactive and require post-damage intervention. Recent advancements in fiber-reinforced polymer composites, nanomaterials, smart sensors, and self-healing mechanisms have introduced more intelligent and sustainable solutions. Self-healing FRP systems can repair microcracks, reduce maintenance needs, and improve long-term durability. Therefore, comparing conventional retrofitting with self-healing FRP systems is essential for developing resilient and smart infrastructure.

Keywords: *Retrofitting, FRP Composites, Self-Healing Materials, Smart Infrastructure, Reinforced Concrete.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The deterioration of reinforced concrete (RC) structures has become a major global concern due to the continuous aging of infrastructure, increased loading demands, environmental degradation, and exposure to extreme conditions such as earthquakes, corrosion, and fatigue. Conventional structural systems, although widely used due to their cost-effectiveness and availability, gradually lose their serviceability over time, necessitating timely retrofitting and strengthening interventions. Traditionally, civil engineers have relied on conventional retrofitting techniques such as steel jacketing, epoxy injection, external post-tensioning, and fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) wrapping to restore or enhance structural performance. These methods have demonstrated significant success in improving load-carrying capacity, ductility, and seismic resistance of damaged or deficient structures (Oucif et al., 2019; Raturi et al., 2022). However, such approaches are predominantly reactive in nature, requiring manual inspection and repair after damage has already occurred. This limitation has led researchers to explore more advanced, intelligent, and sustainable alternatives that can not only strengthen structures but also enable autonomous damage detection and recovery. In this context, the integration of smart materials and self-healing systems into structural retrofitting has emerged as a transformative direction in modern civil engineering, aiming to enhance durability while reducing maintenance costs and lifecycle interventions (Azanaw, 2025).

In recent years, fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) composites have gained significant attention as a superior alternative to conventional strengthening materials due to their high strength-to-weight ratio, corrosion resistance, and ease of installation. FRP-based retrofitting systems have been extensively applied in columns, beams, and bridge components to improve structural integrity under static and dynamic loading conditions. Studies have demonstrated that FRP confinement significantly enhances compressive strength and ductility, particularly in seismic applications, making it a preferred solution for structural rehabilitation (Oucif et al., 2019). Despite these advantages, conventional FRP systems are still limited by issues such as brittle failure behavior, debonding at the interface, and lack of post-damage recovery mechanisms. To address these limitations, researchers have increasingly focused on modifying FRP composites using nanomaterials and bio-inspired chemistries. For instance, carbon nanotubes and graphene nanoplatelets have been integrated into FRP matrices to improve interlaminar strength, multifunctionality, and toughness (Ding et al., 2025; Clancy et al., 2020). Similarly, dynamic covalent bonding systems such as Diels–Alder chemistry and thiol–Michael networks have been explored to introduce reversible bonding mechanisms that enable repeated healing of microcracks and restoration of mechanical performance (Khan et al., 2023; Chakma et al., 2018). In parallel, microencapsulation techniques have been developed in which healing agents are released upon crack formation, facilitating in-situ repair without external intervention (Ullah et al., 2016; Chowdhury et al., 2015). These advancements collectively mark a paradigm shift from passive strengthening toward active, responsive, and self-sustaining structural materials.

The emergence of self-healing FRP-based systems represents a significant advancement in the field of structural engineering, offering a promising alternative to conventional retrofitting techniques. Unlike traditional systems that only address visible damage after occurrence, self-healing composites are designed to autonomously detect and repair micro-level damage, thereby preventing crack propagation and structural failure at early stages. This capability is achieved through various mechanisms, including microcapsule-based healing, reversible chemical bonding, and nanomaterial-enabled energy dissipation systems (Ullah et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2023). Moreover, the integration of smart technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and additive manufacturing has further enhanced the functionality of these systems by enabling predictive maintenance and adaptive structural responses (Betoush et al., 2024; Azanaw, 2025). In addition, advanced sensing technologies, including optical fiber sensors, have been incorporated into structural systems to continuously monitor strain, stress, and damage evolution, providing real-time data for intelligent decision-making (Sasy Chan et al., 2021). These developments collectively contribute to the evolution of “smart infrastructure,” where structures are no longer passive entities but adaptive systems capable of responding to environmental changes. Therefore, the comparative study of conventional retrofitting techniques and FRP-based self-healing material systems is essential to understand their relative effectiveness, limitations, and future potential in achieving sustainable, resilient, and intelligent infrastructure systems.

II. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Raji (2026) reported that stimuli-responsive polymers had attracted considerable attention due to their wide-ranging applications. It was highlighted that extensive research had been conducted to develop smart polymers capable of altering their properties in response to external stimuli such as temperature, light, and redox conditions. The study emphasized recent advancements and their applications in sustainable agriculture, wastewater treatment, and drug delivery systems. It was further observed that poly(HEA-EXEA) networks with controlled dispersity had been synthesized, where intermediate dispersity exhibited superior mechanical performance. Additionally, polymers with protected carboxylic groups had undergone UV-induced deprotection followed by chemically fueled crosslinking, resulting in controlled gelation and tuneable mechanical properties. Moreover, Diels–Alder crosslinked networks demonstrated enhanced self-healing and strength, while coumarin-based networks exhibited photo responsive adhesion behaviour, enabling efficient debonding-on-demand for practical applications.

Ding et al. (2025) presented recent advances in carbon nanotube (CNT)-reinforced fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) composites, focusing on the integration of enhanced interlaminar mechanical properties and microwave absorption performance. The study provided a systematic comparison of preparation methods, including matrix or solution blending, fiber surface growth or grafting, and CNT macroassembly interleaving, and clarified their effects on CNT dispersion, interfacial bonding, and multifunctional behavior. It was highlighted that the combined approach of structural reinforcement and electromagnetic wave absorption enabled the development of lightweight, high-strength, and broadband-absorbing materials suitable for aerospace and telecommunication applications. Furthermore, emerging techniques for improved CNT alignment and integration were discussed, along with the influence of CNT content and orientation. The study also identified challenges such as limited numerical modeling and durability concerns, and suggested future directions including multi-scale simulation, process optimization, and self-healing composite design.

Azanaw (2025) examined that the durability and safety of civil infrastructure had been increasingly challenged by factors such as aging, excessive utilization, environmental stressors, and natural disasters. It was reported that traditional structural strengthening methods had largely relied on reactive and material-intensive approaches. However, a significant shift toward intelligent, sustainable, and digitally driven techniques had been observed. The study highlighted that structural performance had been evaluated using innovative methods, including smart materials and artificial intelligence, which had improved design optimization and intervention strategies. Furthermore, it was noted that these advancements had enabled predictive and responsive maintenance practices. The review also indicated that alignment with sustainability and circular economy principles had been emphasized, focusing on material efficiency and lifecycle planning. Additionally, future directions such as AI-assisted co-design, 3D printing for retrofitting, and bio-inspired adaptive systems had been identified as promising developments.

Betoush et al. (2024) examined the integration of 3D printing and machine learning technologies in the development of smart structures, highlighting their role in enhancing optimization, adaptability, and intelligence. It was reported that 3D printing had enabled the fabrication of complex geometries and customized structural components, while machine learning algorithms had facilitated real-time data analysis and informed decision-making, thereby improving structural performance. The study indicated that this integration had supported the development of self-monitoring structures capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions and optimizing resource utilization. Various case studies were presented to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of these technologies in practical applications. Furthermore, the authors outlined key steps for successful integration, which had contributed to streamlining implementation processes. The work was considered a practical guide for researchers and industry professionals, as it highlighted both the benefits and challenges, while also emphasizing future prospects for resilient and efficient built environments.

Khan et al. (2023) investigated the application of bio-inspired healing mechanisms in fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP)-based laminated composites, which had been recognized as a promising area for developing lightweight and high-performance materials. The study reported the development of Diels–Alder (DA) grafted graphene nanoplatelets (GNPs), which were incorporated into carbon-fiber-reinforced polymer (CFRP) composites to introduce self-healing capability. It was observed that the DA-grafted GNPs provided dual advantages, including repetitive self-healing and enhanced mechanical performance of the modified CFRP composites. The GNPs had been functionalized using DA adducts such as bismaleimide and furfurylamine through a simple functionalization method. The results indicated that the highest healing efficiency, measured using double cantilever beam (DCB) tests, had reached approximately 87% with more than ten healing cycles. The study suggested that this approach could facilitate the industrial-scale development of durable, self-healable CFRP composites.

Raturi et al. (2022) reported that fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) composites had been widely utilized in aerospace, marine, and automotive applications due to their lightweight nature, high stiffness, superior strength, and effective damping characteristics. The authors indicated that researchers had been encountering significant challenges related to technological advancements, fabrication processes, and repair methodologies for developing advanced FRP composites. It was observed that various defects could occur in FRP structures either due to damage or improper repair practices. Furthermore, the study highlighted that the increasing demand for composite materials had led to growing interest in effective repair techniques across multiple industries. The review had compiled existing research on repair strategies, emphasizing damage assessment, removal, and repair approaches such as patch repair, scarf joints, precured doublers, plug repair, and resin infusion methods. Additionally, it was noted that nondestructive testing methods and self-healing composites had been explored for efficient damage detection and automatic repair capabilities.

Sasy Chan et al., (2021) reported that railway infrastructures had played a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of goods and passenger transportation in China. It was observed that under extreme loading and environmental conditions, railway structures had been vulnerable to deterioration and failure, which had led to disruptions in the transportation system. The authors noted that various techniques had been employed for structural health monitoring, among which optical fiber sensors had been widely recognized due to their high sensitivity, resistance to electromagnetic interference, lightweight nature, small size, corrosion resistance, and ease of integration. The study further explained the strain transfer analysis for parameter evaluation. Additionally, a smart concept incorporating artificial intelligence had been proposed. The authors concluded that both existing developments and future prospects of AI-based optical fiber sensing technologies had provided valuable insights for improving structural health monitoring systems.

Clancy et al. (2020) stated that the ideal structural material should possess high strength and stiffness along with tough and ductile failure characteristics while maintaining low density. However, they observed that such a material had not historically existed, forcing materials engineers to compromise during material selection. It was reported that metals exhibited high density, fiber-reinforced composites showed brittle failure, and polymers suffered from low stiffness, each presenting inherent limitations. The authors highlighted that the emergence of nanomaterials had provided a promising pathway to overcome these challenges by enhancing the properties of conventional fiber composites. They explained that nanomaterials could potentially achieve high strength while incorporating improved toughening mechanisms similar to metallic deformation, without significantly increasing weight. Furthermore, it was emphasized that recent research had increasingly focused on enhancing toughness, which had often been overlooked in favor of strength and stiffness in structural material development.

Oucif et al. (2019) reported that the use of composite materials had been an effective technique for enhancing the capacity of reinforced concrete columns subjected to seismic loading, primarily due to their high tensile strength. The study developed numerical models to predict the experimental behavior of square reinforced concrete columns strengthened with glass fiber reinforced polymer and steel bars, as well as unstrengthened columns under cyclic and monotonic loading conditions. Two column models had been considered: one unstrengthened column subjected to lateral monotonic loading and another strengthened column subjected to lateral cyclic loading. The comparison between numerical simulations and experimental results had been performed, showing good agreement in force-displacement responses. The findings indicated that the strengthened column had demonstrated improved load-carrying capacity and ductility, thereby enhancing the overall structural performance under seismic conditions.

Chakma et al. (2018) reported the synthesis of dynamic materials crosslinked through thiol-Michael linkages using distinct primary polymer architectures. It was stated that RAFT polymerization enabled precise control over the degree of polymerization and macromolecular structure. Well-defined branched and linear polythiol polymers were synthesized and subsequently crosslinked via thiol-Michael chemistry. The resulting materials, with varying crosslink densities, were evaluated using size exclusion chromatography, tensile testing, rheology, and differential scanning calorimetry. The study indicated that these materials exhibited elasticity and dynamic behavior, including self-healing and malleability, when exposed to thermal stimulus (90 °C), attributed to thiol-maleimide linkages. It was observed that RAFT-synthesized materials demonstrated faster healing compared to those produced by conventional free radical polymerization. Furthermore, enhanced healing and malleability, along with mechanical stability under ambient conditions, were highlighted due to their quasi-static network nature.

Hofstätter et al. (2017) reported that additive manufacturing technologies had received considerable attention in recent years due to their applicability across a wide range of materials, including metals, ceramics, and polymers. The authors stated that the primary aim of their review was to analyze the technology of fiber-reinforced polymers and examine its integration with additive manufacturing processes. It was highlighted that the study had systematically reviewed recent developments, emerging concepts, and state-of-the-art technologies within this domain. Furthermore, the authors provided a comprehensive overview of the materials that were currently available for fiber-reinforced material applications. Their work emphasized the growing significance of combining fiber-reinforced polymers with additive manufacturing to enhance material performance, structural efficiency, and design flexibility. Overall, the study suggested that continuous advancements in this area were contributing to the expansion of innovative manufacturing solutions and improved engineering applications.

Ullah et al. (2016) reported that autonomic self-healing materials based on microcapsules had demonstrated significant advancements in repairing microcracks in polymers and polymer composite systems. The authors explained that encapsulated self-healing materials possessed an inherent ability to restore polymeric composites after damage caused by chemical and mechanical processes. It was further observed that these intelligent microencapsulated materials were capable of recovering mechanical, aesthetic, and barrier properties of polymeric structures. Based on experimental findings and real-world observations, the study indicated that microcracks in polymeric materials could arise due to various chemical and physical mechanisms, representing a critical issue. Particularly in polymeric coatings, such microcracks were found to cause severe failures, while conventional repair techniques like patching and welding were deemed ineffective at the micro-scale. Therefore, capsule-based self-healing materials were proposed as a promising alternative, eliminating the need for manual intervention and enabling efficient repair mechanisms.

Chowdhury et al. (2015) reported that low-velocity impact damage in fiber-reinforced composites had been a common issue, leading to micro-cracks and interfacial debonding that remained largely invisible at the microscopic level. The study suggested that the concept of self-healing composites had been explored to overcome such limitations and enhance structural durability. It was stated that an extrinsic self-healing approach had been adopted using urea-formaldehyde microcapsules containing a room-temperature curing epoxy system (SC-15), prepared through in situ polymerization. The microcapsules had been characterized using FTIR, optical microscopy, and SEM, revealing sizes ranging from 30 to 100 μm and thermal stability up to 210 °C. Composite fabrication had been carried out in multiple stages, followed by evaluation through low-velocity impact tests. The results indicated that damage such as delamination and micro-cracks had been effectively reduced, demonstrating significant healing performance.

III. KEY FINDINGS FROM STUDY

Author (Year)	Focus Area	Methodology / Approach	Key Findings	Relevance to Study
Chowdhury et al. (2015)	Self-healing epoxy composites in FRP systems	Microcapsule-based in situ polymerization with epoxy healing agents	Demonstrated effective healing of microcracks and delamination under low-velocity impact; improved durability	Introduces foundational **extrinsic self-healing mechanism** for FRP composites
Ullah et al. (2016)	Microencapsulated self-healing materials	Review of capsule-based healing systems in polymers	Confirmed restoration of mechanical and barrier properties without manual intervention	Supports shift from conventional repair to **autonomic repair systems**
Hofstätter et al. (2017)	FRP in additive manufacturing	Review of fiber-reinforced polymer integration with 3D printing	Showed improved design flexibility and structural efficiency in composite fabrication	Links FRP retrofitting with **advanced manufacturing techniques**
Chakma et al. (2018)	Dynamic polymer networks	Thiol–Michael chemistry with RAFT polymerization	Achieved thermally responsive self-healing and reconfigurable mechanical behavior	Highlights **reversible chemical bonding for smart retrofitting materials**
Oucif et al. (2019)	RC column strengthening	Numerical + experimental cyclic and monotonic loading analysis	FRP-strengthened columns showed improved strength, ductility, and seismic resistance	Demonstrates effectiveness of **conventional FRP retrofitting**
Clancy et al. (2020)	Nanocomposite structural materials	Literature synthesis on nanomaterial-enhanced composites	Nanomaterials improve toughness while maintaining low weight	Supports transition toward **advanced FRP nanocomposites**
Sasy Chan et al. (2021)	Structural health monitoring	Optical fiber sensing with AI integration	Enabled real-time monitoring of strain and structural degradation	Supports **smart infrastructure monitoring for retrofitting systems**
Raturi et al. (2022)	FRP repair techniques	Review of aerospace, marine, automotive repair methods	Patch repair, scarf joints, resin infusion widely used but require manual intervention	Highlights limitations of **conventional FRP repair methods**
Khan et al. (2023)	Self-healing CFRP composites	Diels–Alder grafted graphene nanoplatelets in CFRP	Achieved up to ~87% healing efficiency over multiple cycles	Demonstrates **high-performance FRP self-healing capability**

Betoush et al. (2024)	Smart structural systems	Integration of 3D printing and machine learning	Enabled adaptive, self-monitoring structural systems	Connects retrofitting with **AI-driven smart infrastructure**
Ding et al. (2025)	CNT-modified FRP composites	CNT dispersion and interfacial enhancement methods	Improved mechanical strength and multifunctional properties (e.g., microwave absorption)	Advances **multifunctional FRP retrofitting materials**
Azanaw (2025)	Smart infrastructure strengthening	AI-driven, sustainable structural enhancement review	Shift from reactive repair to predictive, intelligent maintenance systems	Emphasizes **future smart retrofitting frameworks**
Raji (2026)	Stimuli-responsive polymers	UV-triggered, redox-responsive polymer networks	Tunable mechanical properties and self-healing via dynamic networks	Supports development of **next-generation adaptive FRP systems**

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of conventional retrofitting techniques and FRP-based self-healing material systems for reinforced concrete (RC) structures highlights a significant paradigm shift in structural rehabilitation practices, moving from reactive strengthening approaches toward intelligent, autonomous, and sustainable material systems. Conventional retrofitting techniques such as steel jacketing, epoxy injection, external post-tensioning, and fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) wrapping have long been established as reliable solutions for enhancing the load-carrying capacity, ductility, and seismic resistance of deteriorated RC structures. Studies have consistently demonstrated that these methods can effectively restore structural performance and extend service life under various loading conditions (Oucif et al., 2019; Raturi et al., 2022). However, despite their effectiveness, these techniques are inherently dependent on external inspection, manual intervention, and post-damage repair strategies, which make them maintenance-intensive and economically demanding over the long term. Furthermore, issues such as debonding, fatigue degradation, and limited adaptability under progressive damage conditions restrict their long-term sustainability. In contrast, FRP-based self-healing material systems represent a transformative advancement in structural engineering, offering the ability not only to strengthen but also to autonomously repair micro-level damage without external intervention. These systems utilize mechanisms such as microencapsulated healing agents, reversible chemical bonding (e.g., Diels–Alder reactions), and nanomaterial-enhanced polymer matrices to enable repeated crack healing and performance recovery (Ullah et al., 2016; Chowdhury et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2023). As a result, they significantly enhance durability, delay crack propagation, and improve the overall lifecycle performance of structural components. Moreover, the incorporation of carbon nanotubes, graphene nanoplatelets, and other nanomaterials into FRP composites has further improved interfacial bonding, mechanical strength, and multifunctionality, including sensing and electromagnetic properties (Ding et al., 2025; Clancy et al., 2020). In addition, advancements in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and smart sensing technologies have enabled real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance, thereby supporting the development of adaptive structural systems that can respond dynamically to environmental and loading conditions (Betoush et al., 2024; Azanaw, 2025). When compared, conventional retrofitting methods are still more practical, cost-effective, and widely implemented in current infrastructure projects due to their established design codes and engineering familiarity, whereas FRP-based self-healing systems, although highly innovative, are still in the developmental and optimization phase with challenges related to scalability, long-term durability validation, and economic feasibility. Nevertheless, the integration of both approaches in hybrid retrofitting strategies presents a promising direction for future research, where conventional FRP strengthening can be combined with self-healing and smart functionalities to achieve enhanced structural resilience. Overall, the evolution from conventional repair-based techniques to self-healing FRP composite systems signifies a major advancement toward next-generation infrastructure capable of autonomous damage mitigation, reduced maintenance requirements, and improved sustainability. This transition aligns with the broader goals of modern civil engineering, which emphasize resilience, lifecycle efficiency, and intelligent infrastructure development in response to growing environmental and structural demands.

V. FUTURE SCOPE

- **Development of Hybrid Retrofitting Systems:** Future research can focus on combining conventional FRP strengthening techniques with self-healing materials to develop hybrid systems that offer both immediate structural reinforcement and long-term autonomous damage recovery, thereby improving overall service life and resilience.
- **Large-Scale Field Implementation Studies:** Most self-healing FRP systems are currently tested at laboratory scale. Future studies should emphasize real-world implementation in bridges, buildings, and marine structures to evaluate long-term performance under actual environmental and loading conditions.
- **Cost Optimization and Economic Feasibility Analysis:** One of the major limitations of self-healing FRP systems is high material and production cost. Future work should focus on cost-reduction strategies, lifecycle cost analysis, and economic comparison with conventional retrofitting methods.
- **Durability Assessment under Extreme Conditions:** Further investigation is required to evaluate the performance of self-healing FRP composites under extreme conditions such as high temperature, freeze-thaw cycles, corrosion, seismic loads, and fatigue loading to ensure reliability in diverse environments.
- **Advanced Nanomaterial Integration:** Future research can explore the incorporation of advanced nanomaterials such as graphene, carbon nanotubes, and nano-silica to further enhance mechanical strength, crack resistance, and multifunctional behavior of FRP composites.
- **AI-Based Structural Health Monitoring Integration:** The integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning with FRP-based retrofitting systems can enable predictive maintenance, real-time damage detection, and intelligent decision-making for infrastructure management.
- **Smart Sensor-Embedded Composite Systems:** Embedding optical fiber sensors and smart monitoring devices within FRP systems can provide continuous structural health data, enabling early detection of damage and improving maintenance efficiency.
- **Standardization and Design Code Development:** There is a need to develop standardized design guidelines, codes, and safety factors for self-healing FRP systems to facilitate their acceptance in mainstream civil engineering practice.

- **Sustainability and Environmental Impact Studies:** Future research should assess the environmental benefits of self-healing materials, including reduced material consumption, lower repair frequency, and improved sustainability compared to conventional retrofitting methods.
- **Additive Manufacturing and 3D Printing Applications:** The use of 3D printing in fabricating FRP composites with embedded self-healing capabilities can open new possibilities for customized structural repair components with complex geometries.
- **Bio-Inspired Self-Healing Mechanisms:** Inspired by natural systems, future studies can explore biomimetic approaches such as vascular networks and microfluidic channels within composites to enhance autonomous healing efficiency.
- **Multiscale Numerical Modeling and Simulation:** Advanced computational models are required to simulate damage evolution, healing kinetics, and long-term performance of FRP-based self-healing systems across micro, meso, and macro scales.
- **Integration with Smart Cities and Infrastructure:** Self-healing FRP systems can be integrated into smart city frameworks where infrastructure continuously monitors, repairs, and optimizes itself using interconnected digital technologies.
- **Long-Term Aging and Performance Prediction Models:** Future work should focus on developing predictive models to assess long-term degradation, healing efficiency, and structural reliability over the entire lifecycle of RC structures.
- **Circular Economy and Recyclability Studies:** Research can also explore recyclable FRP composites and sustainable self-healing materials that align with circular economy principles in construction and infrastructure development.

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