The Influence of Oil Palm Empty Fruit Bunch Fibre Geometry on Mechanical Performance of Cement Bonded Fibre Boards

Zainal Abidin Akasah, Nik Mohd Zaini Nik Soh, Hayana Dullah
Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
Email: zainal59@uthm.edu.my, nikzaini@uthm.edu.my, hayanadullah@gmail.com

Astimar Abdul Aziz[1], Eeydzah Aminudin[2]
[1]Malaysian Palm Oil Boards
[2]Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
Email: astimar@mpob.gov.my, eeydzah@utm.my

***Abstract*— The mechanical properties of cement bonded fibreboards theoretically influenced by several factors like density, water cement ratio, fibre to cement ratio and geometry of fibre has been discussed by previous researchers. This experimental research work was conducted to explore the role of EFB Fibre geometry on the mechanical performances of cement boards. The experiment work designed for 1300 Kg/m^3 density boards consist of two parts, first is cement boards mixed with different length of EFB; retained 7 mesh (R7M), retain 14 mesh (R14M) and retain 80 mesh (R80M). Subsequently, second part is based on the cement boards fabricated from mixed of 6 different percentage lengths of EFB known as SA, SB, SC, SD, SE and SF. The ratio of EFB to cement was 3:1, while water used in the system was 35% based on cement weight. To improve the compatibility of EFB-cement, the fibres were soaked in 0.4% NaOH solution for 24 hours. The mechanical properties were investigated in this study like modulus of elasticity (MOE), modulus of rupture (MOR) and internal bonding (IB). It was observed that the higher presence of shorter EFB (R80M) in cement boards, the lower mechanical properties were produced. The boards fabricated with heterogeneous fibre length, SE (35% R7M + 45% R14M + 20% R80M) produced the highest mechanical properties with MOE of 4859.5 N/mm^2, MOR of 10.06 N/mm^2 and IB of 0.36 N/mm^2. The properties of MOE and MOR for boards fabricated from SE mixture were satisfy the minimum requirement of British standard.**

***Index Terms*—component; Fibreboards; Empty Fruit Bunch; Modulus of Elasticity; Modulus of Rupture; Internal Bonding; Fibre length**

I. Introduction

The role of natural fibre/wood in cement composite as reinforcement can increase the workability of composite and fracture development can be reduced significantly. Theoretically, neat cement is brittle and possess higher compressive strength than wood/natural fibre, while wood/natural fibre is slightly higher load in bending [1]. The application of cement boards in building construction mostly required the composite material that must be good in bending, flexural strength and internal bonding. Therefore, integration of natural cellulosic fibre with cement binder able to yield up the properties on composite, to fulfil the requirement of cement bonder fibreboards or particleboards as stated in BS EN 634-2 [2].

The production of cement-bonded composite (C-BC) evolved in various shapes, e.g. cement bonded wood wool, cement bonded fibreboards and cement bonded particleboards. These C-BCs actually made from different size of particles. Frybort et al. [1] has classified particle as the form of strands, flakes, chips and fibre with the size varying from shapes of particle, fibre to strand. The CB-C produced from different particle size and geometry will have different physical and mechanical properties. The research finding done by [3] indicated that the manufacturing cement-bonded boards need larger particle size compare to resin bonded panel. In addition, they also clarified the particle with high slenderness ratio (longer and thinner) will produce the stronger, stiffer and more dimensionally stable the boards. While Sotannde et al. [4] found that, incorporation heterogeneous particle size will enhance the bending strength properties of CB-C if compared to single particle of larger size. Therefore, particle size of fibre/wood to be incorporated in cement boards production need to be identified to achieve the desired physical and mechanical properties. Perhaps, apart from research attempt for fabricate Empty Fruit Bunch Cement Boards (EFB-CB), there are very limited and rare to found published research finding about the effect of particle dimension on the EFB-CB properties. Therefore, it is essential to explore and identify the appropriate fibre sizes that contribute to the optimum performance.

The objectives of this study is to investigate; (a) the effect of Oil Palm Empty Fruit Bunch Fibre (EFB) size on the mechanical performance of EFB-CB with the classification of fibre size 1) passing 4 retained 7 mesh, 2) passing 7 mesh and retained 14 mesh and 3) passing 14 mesh and retained 80 mesh (nominal openings of 4.76

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mm, 2.83 mm, 1.41 mm and 0.177 mm respectively); (b) the effect of EFB-CB density with respect to different EFB fibre size (objective a) where EFB-CB fabricated with the density of 1000 Kg/m3, 1100 Kg/m3, 1200 Kg/m3 and 1300 Kg/m3; and (c) the mechanical performance of EFB-CB that fabricated with mixing different percentage EFB fibre size.

II. Materials and Methods

A. EFB Fibre Preparation

EFB fibre used for this research supplied by Kulim Plantation, Ladang Tereh Mill located at Kluang Johor, Malaysia. Originally, EFB fibre from oil palm mill was in coil condition with average length between 50mm to 200mm. EFB fibre then reduced to particle by hammer milled and screened with size distribution about 20.5% passing 4 retained 7 mesh, 33.8% passing 7 and retained 14 mesh, 35.3% passing 14 and retained 80 mesh and the remainder for the next 10.4% represent dust that passing through 80 mesh. Table I shows the range of fibre length and fibre length distribution. EFB fibre then soaked in Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH) with 0.4% concentration based on water weight for 24 hours as recommended by [5]. The fibres then washed with tap water to remove any impurities and PH value-measuring device is used to determine the pH value of wash water, to ensure the presence of alkali from NaOH is completely removed. Afterward, the treated EFB fibres were oven-dried until the percentage moisture content remained as 5%. The process of EFB fibre production was done in Timber Fabrication Laboratory, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UTHM and Malaysian Palm Oil Boards Laboratory, UKM Research Centre Bang Selangor

TABLE I. The Range of EFB Fibre Lengths According to Meshing Size

EFB Fibre Length (mm)		
Passing 4 Mesh, Retain 7 Mesh (R7M)	**Passing 7 Mesh Retain 14 Mesh (R14M)**	**Passing 14 Mesh Retain 80 Mesh (R80M)**
15.9 mm to 30.85 mm	8.88 mm to 16.55 mm	2.15 mm to 9.67 mm

TABLE II. Design Mix for EFB-CB Sample with Various Fibre Size and Boards Density

Part 1 (Based on different fibre size)						
Density (Kg/m^3)	**Screening Mesh Size**					
	Passing 4 Mesh, Retain 7 mesh (R7M)		**Passing 7 Mesh Retain 14 Mesh (R14M)**		**Passing 14 Mesh Retain 80 Mesh (R80M)**	
1000	5		5		5	
1100	5		5		5	
1200	5		5		5	
1300	5		5		5	
Part 2 (Based on different percentage of size)						
1300	SA	SB	SC	SD	SE	SF
	5	5	5	5	5	5
Note: SA: 100% R80M; SB: 5% R7M + 15% R14M + R80M; SC: 15% R7M + 25% R14m + 60% R80M; SD: 25% R7M + 35% R14M + 40% R80M; SE: 35% R7M + 45% R14M + 20% R80M; SF: 45% R7M + 55% R14M + 0% R80M						

B. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

In this study Ordinary Portland Cement Type 1 (OPC-Tasek Brand) was used, and to optimum the EFB-cement compatibility, 0.4% NaOH solution was used to bleach out unwanted extractive from EFB. Whereas, tap water with PH value 7.5 fulfil Malaysia government for water quality as in [6] was used to optimize the hydration rate of cement with the 35% water based on cement weight.

C. EFB-CB Fabrication

Design parameter of EFB-CB as shown in Table II. Total of 60 samples were prepared for fibre with different EFB fibre size (R7M, R14M and R80) and another 30 samples prepared for different fibre percentage (SA, SB, SC, SD, SE and SF). Oven-dried EFB fibres (5% moisture content) were first mixed with tap water in drum mixer for 2 minutes. Then wet EFB fibre were mixed with OPC and the mixing process were continued for another 10 minutes. The mixture then placed in wooden mould with the size of 400 mm x 400 mm on 450 mm x 450 mm reinforced steel plate. The mixture was evenly spread and flattened using a wooden stick to build up the mat, and the wooden mould was removed. Both side (top and bottom) pre-formed mats were covered with polythene sheet. Thereafter, another reinforced steel plate was placed on top of pre-formed mats. The mats were later applied with cold press until meet desired thickness of 12mm. The pressed mats were kept under pressure for 24 hours by bolting the two-reinforced steel plate together. The mats then de-clamped after 24 hours, stacked and conditioned in ambient temperature 28±1 ℃ with relative humidity of 65±5% for 28 days to allow cement-EFB composite to cure thus increase the strength.

D. EFB-CB Mechanical Properties Testing

There are three mechanical properties testing conducted for EFB-CB; Bending Strength (MOR), Modulus of Elasticity (MOE) and Internal Bonding (IB). These testing were conducted according to BS EN 310:1993 [7] and BS EN 319: 1993 [8] respectively.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Mechanical Performance of EFB-CB Fabricated with Different EFB Fibre Length

Twenty-eight days after being fabricated by procedure as described in section 2.3, the samples EFB-CB were tested for mechanical properties guided by BS EN 310 and BS EN 319 (section D). The results indicated that the mechanical performance significantly influenced by fibre length incorporated in the composite. Besides, the result was also discovering that the increase of board's density would enhance the mechanical performance of EFB-CB. It was observed that the flexural behavior of EFB-CB made from EFB with shortest length (R80M) were very low (1856 to 2976 N/mm^2 in MOE, 2.72 to 6.19 N/mm^2 in MOR and 0.01 to 0.14 N/mm^2 in IB) compared to those EFB-CB fabricated from longer length of EFB with R14M and R7M as shown in Fig. 1. The author attributed this mainly to the several factors. Surface area of shorter fibre larger than longer fibre, thus more binder (OPC) is needed to optimize the cement setting, eventually create stronger bonding between fibre as claimed by earlier research [9], [3]. Besides, the embrittlement of composite was associated with the migration of cement hydration product especially calcium hydroxide into the fibre lumen, wall and void consequently mineralization the EFB fibre [10]. It gets worse when short fibres were used since the higher number of exposed surface that allowed a faster penetration of hydration product, thus mineralization of fibre. Furthermore, low energy is required to pull the fibre through the matrix, thus failure fracture of composite occur quickly [11].

The good mechanical performance of EFB-CB made with R14M with the range of MOE (2158 to 4883 N/mm^2), MOR (4.4 to 9.11 N/mm^2) and IB was slightly lower than boards made of R7M (0.13 to 0.18 N/mm^2), and followed by EFB-CB made from R7M with MOE (1519 to 4331 N/mm^2), MOR (2.58 to 8.25 N/mm^2) and IB (0.08 to 0.29 N/mm^2). It clearly shows that the length of the fibres has played significant role to yield up the mechanical properties of composite. As longer EFB fibres were used in making EFB-CB, it provides larger contact area and has resulted in higher friction force between EFB fibre and cement. Therefore, pulled out failure does not occur easily. Earlier research claimed that, the length of fibre in cement-bonded composite is very important since their strength completely depends on the bonding between fibre and binder [12]. Similar finding was obtained by Semple and Evans [3] where the use of high slenderness ratio fibre would enhance mechanical performance of composite.

The role of short fibre can be illustrated through the concept of concrete where the strength of concrete could be increased by reducing stress concentration made by coarse aggregate with inclusion of smaller aggregate [1]. Fig. 1 shows that typical physical appearance of EFB-CB fabricated from different length of fibre. Fig. 1a shows the EFB-CB made solely from R7M. It can be observed that the formation crystallization of cement occurred on board's surface and internal crystallization unevenly distributed. The author attributed the findings with the migration of cement slurry through void between long fibres to mat surface or dense area during pressing process. Fig. 1b and 1c represent typical appearance for EFB-CB consists of long and short fibre. The boards surface seen smoother and integration of binder (cement) and EFB fibre evenly distributed. Most likely the presence of short fibre filled up the void and holding cement slurry when pressure applied. Earlier research claimed that the fibre with the length less than 0.3mm acts more as filler in rather than reinforcement in composite [11].

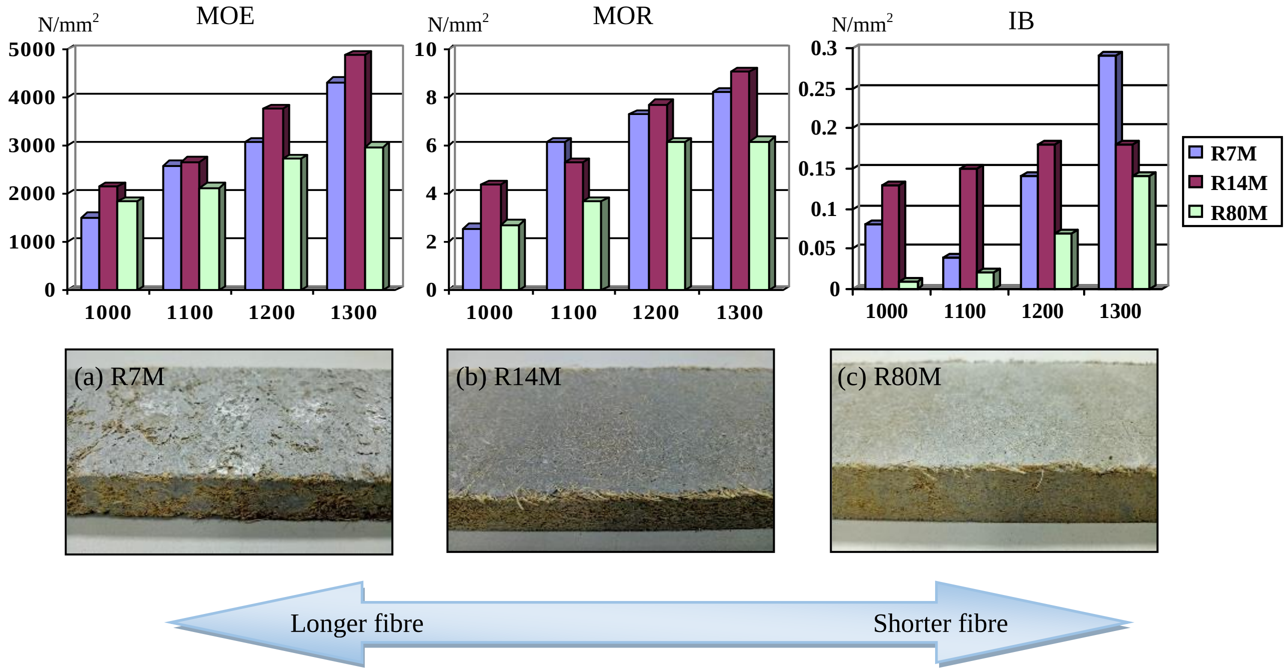

Figure 1. Mechanical performance and physical observation of EFB-CB fabricated from different length of EFB fibre.

B. *The Effect of Mixing Different Percentage of Fibre Length in Fabrication EFB-CB*

The research was designed by mixing the EFB fibre with different length percentage to establish the finding on fibre length effect. Graph on Fig. 2 shows the mechanical properties of EFB-CB for SA, SB, SC, SD, SE and SF. As shown in Table II, SA-SF were fabricated with different percentage fibre length. The result of mechanical properties indicated that the optimum performance obtained from EFB-CB made from 35% of R7M + 45% of R14M + 20% of R80M (SE) with MOE (4860 N/mm^2), MOR (10.05 N/mm^2) and IB (0.36 N/mm^2). It proves that the use of the integration various fibre lengths could enhance mechanical performance due to interconnected role of short fibre (filler) and long fibre (reinforcement). Apart of EFB-CB based on SE and SF, the boards containing higher amount of short fibre (SA, SB, SD and SE) tend to decrease mechanical performance. Therefore, it can be seen that the role of short fibre significantly decreases the overall mechanical performance of the EFB-CB through several ways as discussed earlier in section A. The samples those passing the minimum requirement of standard were MOE and MOR for EFB-CB with R14M at 1300 Kg/m^3 with 4883 N/mm^2 and 9.11 N/mm^2 respectively. While for different percentage of EFB, EFB-CB for SE and SF mix have full fill the requirement with MOE and MOR of 4860 N/mm^2, 10.05 N/mm^2 and 4298 N/mm^2 and 10.05 N/mm^2 respectively.

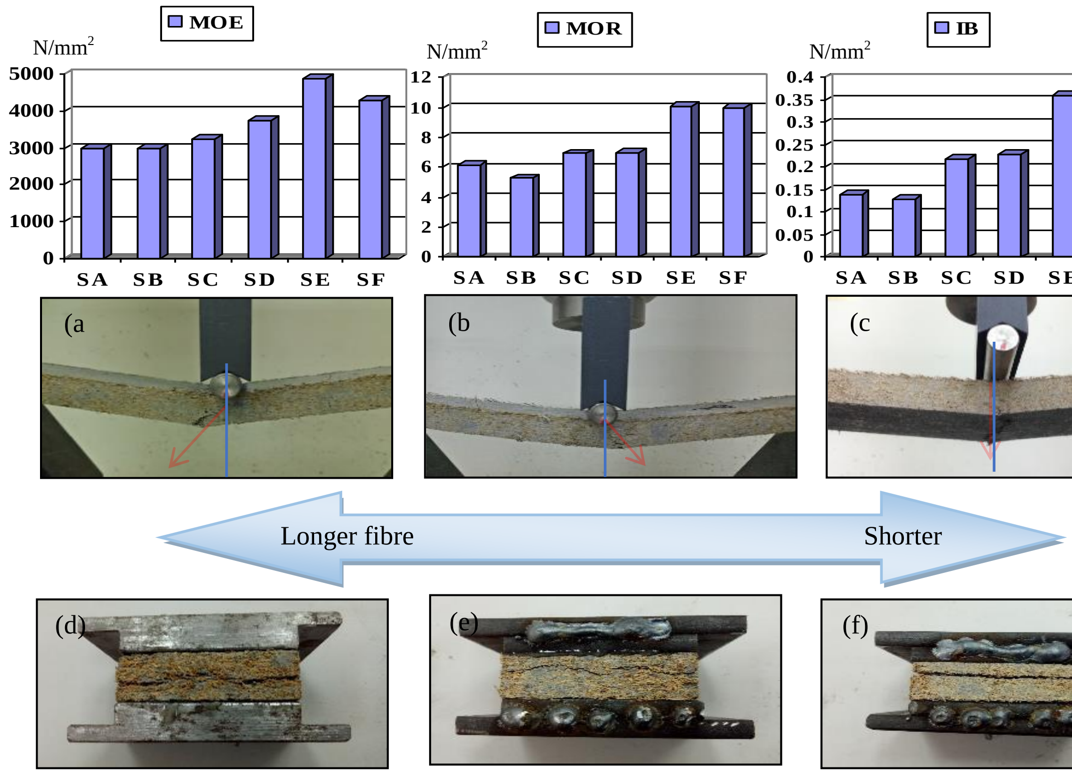

Figure 2. Mechanical performance and typical flexural strength and internal bonding failure profile for (a) and (d) fabricated with long fibre (R7M), (b) and (e) fabricated with combine of short and long fibre (R14M, R7M + R14M, R7M + R14M + R80M), (c) and (f) fabricated with short fibre (R80M).

C. Failure Profile of Flexural Strength and Internal Bonding Test

Through observation during flexural test were conducting, the failure profile of flexural test can be clustered by three categories as shown in Fig. 2a, 2b and 2c. EFB-CBs made of longer EFB fibre (R7M) have clearly shown the angle of failure bigger and diverge from where the point load acted. This may be due to the facts that the longer fibres in composite have acted to stop fracture propagation. The similar pattern with slightly smaller angle of diverge were observed for those EFB-CB (Fig. 2b) made with combination either solely made of R14M or mixed three of them (R7M, R14M, R80M). Therefore, as described earlier, longer EFB provide larger interfacial bonding between cement matrix and fibre thus provide resistance for fracture propagation through higher friction force [1], [13]. However, fracture profile observed from EFB-CB with completely made from short fibre (R80M) shown different characteristic where fracture line observed parallel with the applied load direction as shown in Fig. 2c. The main reason for this finding were short fibre inhibit cement setting through larger surface exposure and poor friction forced that permit low pull out forced resulted to the low performance of EFB-CB [4], [10], [12]. Fig. 2d, 2e and 2f shows the typical failure profile for internal bonding test. Through observation, it was found that the type of failure generally could be divided into two types. As flexural failure profile, the samples consist of longer fibre or integration of short or long fibre typically shows nonlinear line of fracture failure (Fig. 2d and 2e). While, sample made of solely short fibre (Fig. 2f) show the failure profile in linear line perpendicular to loading direction. This show that heterogeneous fibre length in composite tends to act as barrier to fracture propagation, thus applied force that transferred to the fibre and binder tend to find the weakest area. A clear distinction found in EFB-CB made solely from short fibre (R80M) where linear line of failure was observed. This may due to short fibre in composite possess large weakest area due to poor in bonding between fibre and cement thus low pull out force capacity as discussed earlier. Furthermore, the trend of IB results were found in line to the failure profile where IBs for short fibre were lower than those samples fabricated either from long fibre or integration of long or short EFB fibre.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the experimental work the following conclusions have been drawn;

1. The appropriate EFB fibre lengths that contribute the optimum mechanical performance of EFB-CB can be either 8.88mm to 16.55mm (R14M) or SE (35% R7M + 45% R14M + 20% R80M) or SF (45% R7M + 55% R14M + 0% R80M).
2. EFB-CB fabricated of short EFB fibre (R80M) consistently produced lower mechanical properties due to poor in bonding mechanism between fibre surface and cement matrix thus low friction force consequently low in pull out force.
3. EFB-CB could only full fill the minimum requirement as stipulated in BS 634-2 2007 for those boards fabricated with density of 1300 Kg/m^3.

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Zainal Abidin Akasah is a well-known as the expert’s in the sustainable energy efficiency for heritage buildings in Malaysia and south East Asia. At present he is involved in research related to green building materials with Malaysian Palm Oil Bhd (MPOB) Malaysia. He is a graduate with a Degree in Technology and Education in Civil Engineering from Universiti of Teknologi Malaysia in 1992. He furthered his Master’s Degree in Building Technology at the Universiti of Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang in 1996. In 2008 he completed his PhD in Architecture at the Universiti of Teknologi Malaysia. He has attended skill up-grading and Post-graduate research at RMiT, Australia and University of Reading. UK in 1988 and 1998 respectively. . He is an experienced academician in the field of engineering technology and architectural education with over thirty years of teaching experience in higher education.

He is the Associate Professor at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) in the Department of Architecture & Engineering Design, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Previously, he was the Head Department of Architecture and Engineering Design at UTHM before being attached as a Visiting Associate Professor at the Building Services Engineering Department, Polytechnic University of Hong Kong in 2014 and at present he is the visiting professor at IMEU. HIMIN. Shandong Province, China since 2017. He has graduated and supervised more than 100 students for undergraduate, Masters and PhDs related to Architectural design and technology, Civil Engineering and Construction management.

Prof. Zainal has involved in many professional and international conference committees and journal publications. Currently, he is the Editorial Board Members and Journal of Reviewers for International Journal of Information Technology and Business Management, Journal of Civil and Environmental Research, Journal Architecture Research, Journal of Civil Engineering Research, International Journal of Civil, Environmental, Structural, Construction and Architectural Engineering.

Hayana Dullah was born in Sandakan Sabah on October 25, 1990. She completed her secondary school education on 2007. She pursued her higher education in certificate and diploma in civil enginnering at Politeknik Kota Kinabalu in 2011. Upon completion of her diploma, she continued her bachelor’s degree in civil engineering at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. Currently, she in the last stage of her Master by research program at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and expected to be graduating in October 2018. During her master's program she managed to published an article indexed by scopus which carries the title of "Compatibility improvement method of empty fruit bunch fibre as a replacement material in cement bonded boards: A review".

Ms.Hayana was involved in many associations and assigned as a program director for university programs. In 2017, Ms.Hayana and her team participated in "NATIONAL INNOVATION AND INVENTION COMPETITION THROUGH EXHIBITION" which they were awarded GOLD MEDAL for the innovation product which is "Unsanded Empty Fruit Bunch Cement Board (EFB-CB).

Nik Mohd Zaini Nik Soh was born on 2 Mac 1982 in Jerteh, Terengganu, Malaysia. He has received his B. Eng. degree from University Technology MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia in Civil Engineering, while his M. Eng. (Civil Engineering) from Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). He is currently studying PhD in Building Materials and at the same time hold the position as Instructor Engineer in UTHM. He has 3 years experiences in Building Structure Design works and 9 years in lecturing for Building Construction courses. Mr. Nik Mohd Zaini has been involved in the research area of building and construction materials for more than 5 years.

Astimar Abdul Aziz was born on 11 December 1966 in Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. She received B.Sc and MSc in Food Technology University Science of Malaysia in 1991 and 1996 respectively. Then, in 2008, she received PhD in Science and Technology (Physic) from University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia. Currently, Dr. Astimar holds the position as a Director in Engineering and Processing Division at Malaysian Palm Oil Board of Malaysia (MPOB). She has been working in MPOB for more than 15 years and has been involved in oil palm biomass research area since 2001. The major areas of research interested are food, natural fibres and biomass products.

Eeydzah Aminudin is a senior lecturer in Department of Structure and Materials, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). Currently, she is the coordinator for Master Program in Construction Management, UTM. She completed Bachelor and Doctor of Philosophy in Civil Engineering from UTM, which is among the ASEAN top 10 universities based on QSuniversity ranking released in 2017. Currently, she been attached in her 4th year of teaching in UTM which previously she started her career in Universiti Tun Hussein Onn (UTHM), Batu Pahat for almost a year. Her enthusiasm in research and education has brings her up to date more than 20 publications published while involving herself in multidisciplinary research projects, which part of it is the government initiatives projects with different fields since 2010. She has developed numbers of award winning research product and services that have been patented trademarked in Malaysian construction industry. One of the national awards that she received is during INATEX 2012 with Bronze Medals and international awards in gold medal during SIIF 2013 Seoul Korea. Her associated professional membership includes: Concrete Society Malaysia (CSM) and Board of Engineering Malaysia (BEM). She is dedicated in gaining an effective task in the most efficient manners in order to meet the organization's objectives. Interested to be part of an outstanding and dynamic team, she also prefers to work in challenging environment. She is enjoying herself in meeting people; being extrovert, fast and easy-learner, and able to interact with any levels of workforce.