Chapter 01

Advanced composite materials, biopolymers, and additive manufacturing for oil-gas-chemical engineering
ISBN: 978-9915-704-06-7
DOI: 10.62486/978-9915-704-06-7.Ch01
Pages: 1-27

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Synergistic Advances in Composite Materials and Intelligent Systems: Redefining Engineering for the Oil and Gas Sector

Avances sinérgicos en materiales compuestos y sistemas inteligentes: redefiniendo la ingeniería para el sector del petróleo y el gas

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ABSTRACT

The remodel of the oil and gas industry is largely influenced by these two simultaneous trends: better material on one side and smart automation on the other. The article investigates how new bio-based and hybrid composite materials, especially those upgraded via compatibilizers and interfacial tailoring, can deliver the necessary support for next-gen design in drilling, pipeline integrity, and high-temp process environments. Besides, the implementation of intelligent systems in the industry which also refers to the use of automated exploration platforms, real-time sensing architectures, and adaptive control algorithms is not only improving operational reliability but also the environmental performance. Innovations in materials, which is a different domain from that of automation, is the focus of the research which also reveals the ways in which these can be combined including the capability of material innovations to facilitate automated decision-making, by giving better mechanical resilience, and by allowing more efficient asset management. The paper claims that the connection between advanced composite materials and intelligent automation can be the source of a new engineering paradigm that leads to the oil and gas sector transition being centered on sustainability, resilience, and precision. This study presents guar gum (GG), a natural galactomannan polysaccharide isolated from *Cyamopsis tetragonal* seeds, as a green compatibilizer for natural fiber-reinforced polymer composites. In contrast to the use of traditional chemical coupling agents, GG facilitates higher interfacial adhesion as a result of better wettability and hydrogen bonding without affecting environmental sustainability. Hybrid composites were prepared by using a guar gum–montmorillonite Nano clay-modified epoxy matrix (GGE) reinforced with both synthetic (glass) and natural fibers (banana, sisal, and jute). Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) revealed the even distribution of Nano clay and the strong fiber–matrix interfacial bonding. The J/G/J hybrid composite without any treatment and reinforcement with GGE containing 3 vol.% nano clay was mechanically the best performing material, as it reached an impact strength of 30,2 kJ m^{-2}, a hardness of 62,3 BHN, and a tensile strength of 92,4 MPa. These results serve as a primer for use of guar gum as a bio-based compatibilizer that can meet the mechanical performance requirements and interfacial bonding in natural fiber–polymer hybrid composites while being environmentally friendly.

Keywords: Intelligent Automation; Oil And Gas Engineering; Digital Exploration Systems; Guar

Gum; Nano Clay; Hybrid Composites.

RESUMEN

La transformación de la industria del petróleo y el gas está ampliamente influenciada por dos tendencias simultáneas: mejores materiales por un lado y automatización inteligente por el otro. El artículo investiga cómo los nuevos materiales compuestos de base biológica e híbridos, especialmente aquellos mejorados mediante compatibilizantes y el diseño de interfaces, pueden proporcionar el soporte necesario para el diseño de próxima generación en perforación, integridad de tuberías y entornos de procesos a altas temperaturas. Además, la implementación de sistemas inteligentes en la industria, que también se refiere al uso de plataformas de exploración automatizadas, arquitecturas de sensado en tiempo real y algoritmos de control adaptativo, no solo está mejorando la confiabilidad operativa, sino también el desempeño ambiental. Las innovaciones en materiales, que constituyen un dominio diferente al de la automatización, son el foco de la investigación, la cual también revela las formas en que estos pueden combinarse, incluyendo la capacidad de las innovaciones en materiales para facilitar la toma de decisiones automatizada, proporcionando mayor resiliencia mecánica y permitiendo una gestión de activos más eficiente. El artículo sostiene que la conexión entre los materiales compuestos avanzados y la automatización inteligente puede ser la fuente de un nuevo paradigma de ingeniería que conduzca a una transición del sector del petróleo y el gas centrada en la sostenibilidad, la resiliencia y la precisión. Este estudio presenta la goma guar (GG), un polisacárido galactomanano natural aislado de las semillas de *Cyamopsis tetragonoloba*, como un compatibilizante ecológico para compuestos poliméricos reforzados con fibras naturales. A diferencia del uso de agentes de acoplamiento químicos tradicionales, la GG facilita una mayor adhesión interfacial como resultado de una mejor humectabilidad y la formación de enlaces de hidrógeno, sin afectar la sostenibilidad ambiental. Se prepararon compuestos híbridos utilizando una matriz epoxi modificada con goma guar y nanoarcilla montmorillonita (GGE), reforzada con fibras tanto sintéticas (vidrio) como naturales (banana, sisal y yute). La microscopía electrónica de barrido (SEM) reveló una distribución uniforme de la nanoarcilla y una fuerte unión interfacial fibra–matriz. El compuesto híbrido J/G/J sin tratamiento y reforzado con GGE que contenía 3 % en volumen de nanoarcilla fue el material con mejor desempeño mecánico, alcanzando una resistencia al impacto de 30,2 kJ m^{-2}, una dureza de 62,3 BHN y una resistencia a la tracción de 92,4 MPa. Estos resultados sirven como base para el uso de la goma guar como compatibilizante de origen biológico capaz de cumplir con los requisitos de desempeño mecánico y de adhesión interfacial en compuestos híbridos fibra natural–polímero, manteniendo al mismo tiempo un enfoque respetuoso con el medio ambiente.

Palabras clave: Automatización Inteligente; Ingeniería de Petróleo y Gas; Sistemas Digitales de Exploración; Goma Guar; Nanoarcilla; Compuestos Híbridos.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the innovations in the oil and gas industry that have been historically process-engineering-based have now shifted their focus on the use of advanced materials and the implementation of intelligent automation. The use of real-time sensing, data-driven control, and autonomous operational systems has changed the landscape of upstream and subsea activities, thus, increasing efficiency, lowering waste of time, and safety improvement throughout the processes of exploration and production.[28,30] These changes led by digitization and automation in the oil and gas sector are coupled with the needs for parts that can endure heavy load

conditions, big changes in temperature, and harsh chemical exposure situations — conditions that heavily rely on material and structural strength in difficult environments offshore or onshore.[26] The material performance of engineering becoming the scaffolding for system-level functionality, is a clear indication of the deep integration of exploration technologies automation and interconnection.

At the same time, research in polymer and composite material has accelerated the development of natural-fiber–reinforced polymers and bio-derived compatibilizers that provide good strength-to-weight ratio, low environmental impact, and efficient interfacial adhesion.[27,29] The breakthroughs in this material science have expanded the use of bio-based and hybrid composites to sectors previously relying on metallic or synthetic materials. If injected into the oil and gas industry, be it as lightweight structural, protective housings, monitoring devices, or other field components, it will synchronize with the broad industry aspiration for sustainability-oriented engineering solutions. The few, albeit increasing, number of cases shows that coupling high-performance natural fiber composites with smart exploration systems may open the new-door way of making oil and gas structures more resilient, less of maintenance demanding, and environmentally friendly transition supportive. Combined, these converging trends point to a timely opportunity to reconsider how the innovations in composite materials and intelligent systems may collaboratively lead to engineering practices radical change in the oil and gas sector. The global research on sustainable and biodegradable materials has been significantly motivated by environmental concerns and the depletion of nonrenewable resources.[1,2] Out of them, natural fiber–reinforced polymer (NFRP) composites are being recognized as viable materials for structural and semi-structural uses due to their low density, renewability, affordability, and relatively good mechanical properties.[6,7,8] Unfortunately, a major problem is that natural fibers are hydrophilic, whereas polymer matrices are hydrophobic. As a result, the fibers and the matrix often have weak interfacial adhesion, voids, and early failure under loading.[4,6,7] Accordingly, the interfacial region is in charge of the mechanical stability and durability of such composites over time. In order to solve the problem of fiber–matrix incompatibility, the literature reports a variety of chemical coupling agents and surface modification methods, e.g., silane treatment, maleic anhydride grafting, and alkali modification.[8,21] These measures increase the mechanical interlocking and thus improve the stress transfer; however, they mostly require the use of toxic chemicals and complicated processing, which are not in line with the green manufacturing principles and environmental safety.[2,22] As a result, the present-day research endeavors are directed to the search of bio-based compatibilizers that, besides ecological sustainability, could also provide better interfacial bonding.[1,9,25] Guar gum (GG) is a galactomannan polysaccharide isolated from the seeds of Cyamopsis tetragonal, which, in this regard, fits perfectly as a modifier and compatibilizer without causing any harm to the environment.[3,4,5] The main structure of GG is the mannose backbone that is linear, while the galactose side chains consist of numerous hydroxyl groups that readily form hydrogen bonds and other intermolecular interactions with fiber hydroxyls and polymer functional groups.[3,4,9] Some of the previous research works demonstrated that guar gum and its derivatives could be a medium through which polymers are combined to achieve the mechanical strength, toughness, and filler dispersion improvements without losing biodegradability.[4,5,14] Moreover, GG is an excellent resin viscosity and processing homogeneity promoter which are two very important steps in fiber wetting and nanofiller distribution.[5,17] The use of Nano clays, especially that of montmorillonite (MMT), is the latest trend in polymer matrix reinforcement and property improvement. Montmorillonite has been described as a few aluminosilicate layers stacked one on top of the other with cations present in the interlayer space that can be organ modified to improve the polymer compatibility.[11,12,13] Nano clay particles when exfoliated or intercalated

in a polymer matrix lead to a sharp increase in modulus, barrier resistance, and dimensional stability even when the amount of addition is very low.[11,12,16] The reason for the intimate connecting of the Nano clays with the polymeric chains is both the limited mobility of the latter inside the galleries and the strong interfacial interactions formed during processing.[13,16,17] However, it is still hard to obtain uniform dispersion of Nano clay, especially in hydrophobic matrices such as epoxy resins.

Necessitating the use of a computerizing agent.[15,20] Some of the latest advancements indicate that the combination of natural polysaccharides such as GG with montmorillonite can produce bio-based polymer nanocomposites that have better mechanical and interfacial performance.[3,4,9,20] The hydroxyl groups of GG bind to the silicate layers of Nano clay, thus increasing interfacial adhesion and allowing better dispersion in the polymer matrix.[3,5,9] Moreover, the GG–Nano clay network can facilitate hydrogen bonding as well as mechanical interlocking at the fiber–matrix interface which results in the fiber–matrix interface being able to carry the load more efficiently.[9,14,19] For instance, Wang et al.[3,14] illustrated that guar gum graft copolymers together with Na-montmorillonite create superabsorbent nanocomposites that have properties of enhanced swelling and increased structural stability. In the same way, Mansa et al.[4] and Ullah et al.[5,20] declared that the GG/MMT hybrid system is characterized by uniform Nano clay dispersion and strong hydrogen bonding which is responsible for the system's mechanical and thermal stability enhancement. At the same time, the structural materials that have been made stronger by using both synthetic and natural fibers have attracted a lot of interest because they have the ability to combine the qualities of strength, stiffness, and sustainability in a balanced way.[6,8,21,23] The process of hybridization gives the possibility of mixing the positive features of the different components in a controlled way, e.g., the high tensile strength of glass fibers together with the low density and environmental friendliness of natural fibers like jute, sisal, and banana.[7,8,23] However, the mechanical performance of such systems is still mainly dependent on the interfacial compatibility of the dissimilar fibers and the matrix. Insufficient adhesion between the layers may cause delamination and result in the weak transfer of the load, thus, the total composite efficiency will be lowered.[7,8,21] The insertion of a green compatibilizer such as guar gum can be helpful in solving these problems since it can improve the surface energy balance, hydrogen bonding, and act as a bridge with the chemical differences between the reinforcing phases.[3,4,5,9,20] Research first published on natural fiber–reinforced epoxy systems, shows that fiber treatment and compatibilization have significant influence on mechanical and tribological behavior.[7,8,21,24] As an illustration Ray et al.[7] presented evidence that alkali-treatment of jute fibers produces composites that have higher tensile and flexural strength than those of untreated fibers. Likewise, Sanjay et al.[8,23] brought to the fore that fiber surface modification and stacking sequence hugely determine the balanced mechanical performance in hybrid composites. The most recent studies by Dias et al.[10,18] and Khalid et al.[22] are also supportive of the potential of Nano clay-filled hybrid composites to achieve enhanced stiffness, thermal stability, and moisture resistance due to the synergistic effects between micro- and nanoscale reinforcements. The theoretical basis of such enhancements is quite clear in the researches on polymer–clay nanocomposites. Core studies by Alexandre and Dubois[11,15] and by Sinha Ray and Okamoto[12] present the sources of intercalation and exfoliation that control mechanical reinforcement and barrier behavior. Later on, Gianelli's[13] and Krishnamoorti and Gianelli's[16] have gone further to clarify the relation between the structure and the property, showing how interfacial dynamics affect the transfer of stress and viscoelastic response. These discoveries offer invaluable guidance in determining the behavior of guar gum–Nano clay–modified epoxy when used for natural fiber composites reinforcement. Researchers, therefore, have shifted their focus to the bio-based nanocomposite model, wherein the use of

renewable compatibilizers and nanoscale fillers in polymer matrices is explored.[9,17,19,25] Shi et al.[9,19] fabricated epoxy nanocomposites enhanced with montmorillonite and linked through hydrogen bonds, thus, achieving noteworthy improvements in strength and thermal stability. In the same way, Patnaik et al.[25] proved that bio-based polymer nanocomposites strengthened with natural fibers and Nano clay are an excellent case of interfacial adhesion and mechanical performance, thus, signaling the viability of eco-friendly compatibilization strategies. The above-mentioned publications, in unison, lead to the conclusion that guar gum has the ability to be a bio-compatibilizer and a rheological agent which facilitates Nano clay dispersion and fiber wetting at the same time. The integration of renewable polysaccharides and Nano clays within hybrid fiber architectures in this work is a step forward towards the ambitious goal of sustainable composite design-where the enhancement of performance goes hand in hand with environmental protection.[1,2,22,25] The results of the study will be used to develop composites that are high-performing and low in toxicity that can be used in various industries such as the automotive sector for making car parts, structural laminates, and eco-friendly construction materials.

The present investigation seeks to broaden the knowledge base by exploring the mechanical and fractographic behavior of hybrid composites developed with a guar gum–montmorillonite-modified epoxy matrix (GGE) and reinforced with glass, banana, sisal, and jute fibers. The primary goal is to determine the effect of GG, as a bio-based compatibilizer, on the following: (i) interfacial bonding, (ii) Nano clay dispersion uniformity, and (iii) the mechanical properties of hybrid composites. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) is used to reveal interfacial morphology and fracture processes, while tensile, impact, and hardness tests serve as mechanical improvement quantification methods. The present study, therefore, seeks to elucidate the synergistic mechanisms of GG–MMT–fiber interactions in epoxy-based hybrid systems.

METHOD

The experimental program was aimed to assess the effect of bio-based guar gum (GG) as a compatibilizer and montmorillonite (MMT) Nano clay as a reinforcing nanofiller on the mechanical and microstructural features of hybrid natural fibber-reinforced epoxy composites. The method combines the fabrication of composites from the established practices [6,8,11,12] and green material strategies for polysaccharide–clay nanocomposites as per recent studies. [3,4,5,9,19,25] It was mainly focused on attaining the even dispersion of Nano clay, the controlled fibber stacking sequences, and the reproducible processing conditions for the reliability and comparability of results

Materials Used

Guar Gum (GG)

Guar gum is a galactomannan polysaccharide obtained from the seed of Cyamopsis tetragonal. It was bought from Sigma-Aldrich (India) in the powdered form with a purity of more than 99 %. From a structural point of view, GG is made up of a linear ß-(1→4)-linked mannose main chain, which is substituted at every second unit by α-(1→6)-linked galactose residues.[3,4] The reason being, the number of hydroxyl groups in this structure which can form hydrogen bonds with hydrophilic fiber surfaces and polymer matrices thus leading to an effective compatibilization route.[3,5,9] Before use, GG was dried in a vacuum at 60 °C for 24 h to get rid of the moisture and to prevent the formation of lumps during the mixing. The choice of GG was supported by references, which proved that GG can change the rheological properties and has a good environment-friendly nature in polymer systems.[4,5,14,20]

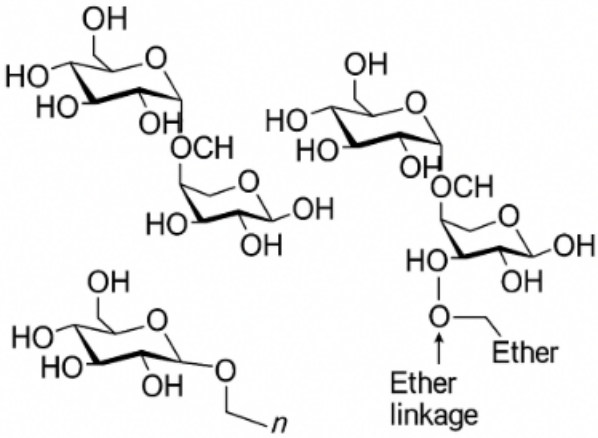

Figure 1.1. Chemical Structure and functional groups of Gaur Gum

Epoxy Resin and Hardener

The matrix was an epoxy resin bisphenol-A-based (LY556) with an amine hardener (HY951). This mechanical strength system was selected for its outstanding strength, resistance to chemicals, and good compatibility with the nanofiller modification.[11,16] The resin-to-hardener ratio was kept at 10:1 by weight, as per the tool supplier's instructions. Such epoxy resins have been broadly used in hybrid fiber–nano clay composites because of their good wetting nature and thermal stability.[11,15,25] The modification of the matrix with GG and MMT was to facilitate the penetration of the interface and transfer of the load between the phases, as demonstrated in similar epoxy–clay nanocomposites cited by Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Shi et al.[9,19]

Natural Fibers

As reinforcements, three different natural fibers—banana (Musa sapient), sisal (Agave sisalana), and jute (Corchorus capsularis)—were chosen because of their high aspect ratio, availability, and biodegradable nature.[6,7,21] In order to remove surface impurities and waxes, each fiber type was cleaned with a mild alkali solution (5 wt.% NaOH) for 2 h, then thoroughly rinsed, and oven-dried at 80 °C for 8 h.[7,23] The alkali treatment increases the roughness of the fibers and causes fibrillation, thus improving the wettability and mechanical interlocking with the matrix.[7,8,21] The fibers that were treated were cut into 25 cm pieces and kept in desiccators before they were used. The fiber characteristics like diameter, cellulose content, and tensile strength were compared with the references and the values given by Sanjay et al.[8] and Khalid et al.[22]

Nano clay (Montmorillonite)

A commercially available sodium montmorillonite (Na^+-MMT, particle size < 25 μm) was procured from Southern Clay Products, USA. To make the nano clay compatible with the epoxy-GG matrix, it was modified organically with a cationic surfactant (quaternary ammonium salt) by following the method of Sinha Ray and Okamoto[12] and Krishnamoorti and Gianelli's.[16] The organically treated MMT promotes exfoliation and helps in uniform dispersion, thus, reducing the formation of taction.[11,12,13,15] The mechanically reinforced polymer is decorated with the help of nano clay whose layered structure and large surface area serve as the loading sites and deflect the cracks, in line with the reports of Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Patnaik et al.[25]

Composite Fabrication

The hybrid composite laminates were made via a hand lay-up method and then compression molding was used, which is a typical process for epoxy-based natural fiber composites, as per the cited literature.[8,21,23] In preparation for the lay-up, a multistage process was used to prepare the guar gum–nonclay–epoxy mixture to ensure uniform dispersion and strong interfacial bonding. Initially, a set amount of dried GG (2 wt.% of resin) was gradually added to the epoxy resin while it was being stirred at 1,500 rpm for 30 min by means of a mechanical stirrer. Next, the mixture was sonicated for 20 min in a probe-type ultrasonic bath. This helps in the molecular-level dispersion of GG chains within the resin matrix.[3,4,9] After that, 3 vol.% of chemically modified MMT nano clay was added to the GG–epoxy blend.

The blend was heated to and kept at 60 °C for 45 min while being stirred. The temperature employed was intended to optimize resin viscosity for nano clay exfoliation, i.e., to follow the path of the work by Wang et al.[3,14] and Dias et al.[10,18] When a uniform mixture was attained, the hardener (HY951) was added and mixed gently for another 10 min so as not to introduce air bubbles. The hybrid laminate configuration used was Jute/Glass/Jute (J/G/J), which was found to be best in a previous study of hybrid composites.[8,23]

The manually stacked sequence of layers was on a mold made of glass that was both clean and coated with a thin layer of release agent. Besides glass fiber mats (woven E-glass, 200 gsm), banana and sisal fibers were used in the hybrid lay-up in such a way that the resultant composite was balanced. The total fiber volume fraction was 30 %, while the matrix

Was an epoxy modified by GG/MMT making up the rest of 70 %. The mold after lay-up was compressed under 50 kN pressure at room temperature for 24 h and then post-cured at 80 °C for 2 h to cross-link it completely. This two-stage curing treatment that is typical of epoxy nanocomposite systems,[11,12,15,19] contributes not only to the dimensional stability but also to the mechanical properties of the material.

The fabricated laminates were cut to standard sizes and left to condition for seven days at 25 °C and 50 % relative humidity before undergoing testing. The hybridization strategy aimed at combining the best features of the different fibers, i.e., the high modulus of glass fibers and the natural fibers' high ultimate tensile strength, while at the same time GG and nano clay were contributing synergistically to improve the interfacial bonding and thus stress transfer efficiency.[8,9,23,25]

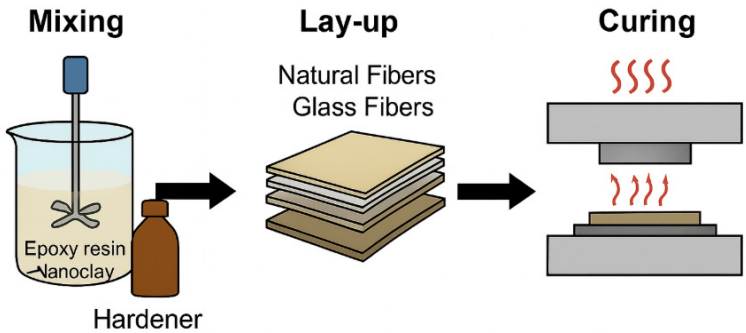

Figure 1.2. Schematic diagram of hybrid composite fabrication process

Table 1.1. Material composition and formulation details of guar gum–nanoclay–modified hybrid composites

Sample Code	Matrix Composition 300 ml (Pure epoxy (60 %) + Guar gum Powder (40 %)) hardener (10:1 wt ratio)	Fiber Type & Stacking Sequence J/G/J (jute-glass-jute)	Fiber Volume Fraction (% vol.)	Nanoclay (MMT) Loading (% vol.)	Curing Conditions
E-GG	Hybrid resin	J/G/J (jute–glass–jute)	30	0	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C
E-MMT1	Hybrid resin	J/G/J	30	1	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C
E-MMT2	Hybrid resin 300 ml	J/G/J	30	2	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C
E- MMT3	Hybrid resin 300 ml	J/G/J	30	3	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C
E- MMT4	Hybrid resin 300 ml	J/G/J	30	4	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C
E- MMT5	Hybrid resin 300 ml	J/G/J	30	5	24 h RT + 2 h @ 80 °C

Characterization Methods

Mechanical Testing

The mechanical properties were verified according to ASTM standards to guarantee the accuracy and repeatability of the results.[7,8,21] The tensile tests were carried out in compliance with ASTM D3039 by means of a universal testing machine (Instron 3367) at a crosshead speed of 2 mm/min. The impact strength was determined by a Charpy impact tester following ASTM D6110, and the specimens were 55 × 10 × 10 mm, with a standard V-notch depth of 2 mm. The Brinell method (ASTM E10) was used to find the hardness with a 10 mm indenter under a 500 N load. More than five specimens were taken from each sample, and the tests were performed, with the average values being reported. The mechanical changes due to the addition of GG and nano clay were confirmed by statistical analyses such as standard deviation and ANOVA performed for this purpose.[8,9,10]

Fractography Observation

The changes in the surface and the fracture of the material were imaged through scanning electron microscopy (SEM) (JEOL JSM-7600F) at 15 kV. To improve surface conductivity, all samples were coated with gold. SEM images were analyzed to evaluate fiber–matrix adhesion, nano clay dispersion, and fracture features such as pull-out, debonding, and void formation.[7,8,9,19] The comparative study between GG-modified and unmodified composites revealed the compatibilization efficiency and interfacial strengthening mechanism, as reported by Shi et al.[9,19] and Ray et al.[7]

Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy

Chemical interactions between epoxy, GG, and MMT were confirmed by Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) that was conducted with a PerkinElmer Spectrum 2 spectrometer. The occurrence of the characteristic peaks for hydroxyl (–OH), Si–O–Si, and C–O–C stretching vibrations was taken as evidence for hydrogen bonding and interfacial cross-linking, which was supported by the references Wang et al.[3,14] and Arora and Gupta.[18]

X-ray diffraction

X-ray diffraction (XRD) analyses were performed on a PANalytical X'Pert Pro diffractometer with Cu Kα radiation (λ = 1,5406 Å) to study the nano clay intercalation and exfoliation occurrence

in the matrix. The diffraction patterns of pure MMT, GG-modified epoxy, and GGE hybrid composites were compared to determine basal spacing (d001) changes. The disappearance or shift of the (001) reflection peak to lower 2θ values was indicative of the partial exfoliation of nano clay platelets, thus the successful intercalation of GG molecules between silicate layers was confirmed.[11,12,13,16]

Integration of composite materials and intelligent systems for improved oil and gas operations.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the conceptual linkage of future composite materials technology with the proliferation of intelligent automation in the oil and gas industry. In the case of materials, the diagram presents three facets: natural-fiber composites, bio-based compatibilizers, and durability-driven design. Each of these features represents the ongoing development of sustainable polymer engineering. It is stated in the publication that,[27,29] these substances, if they are fabricated at the interface level, provide excellent stiffness-to-weight ratios, better environmental resistance, and lower ecological impacts as compared to their synthetic counterparts. The figure portrays these material innovations not only as replacements but also as possible new innovations that require the use of lightweight housings, corrosion-resistant structures, and modular components that can be easily connected with automated tools and sensing devices used in the latest energy operations.

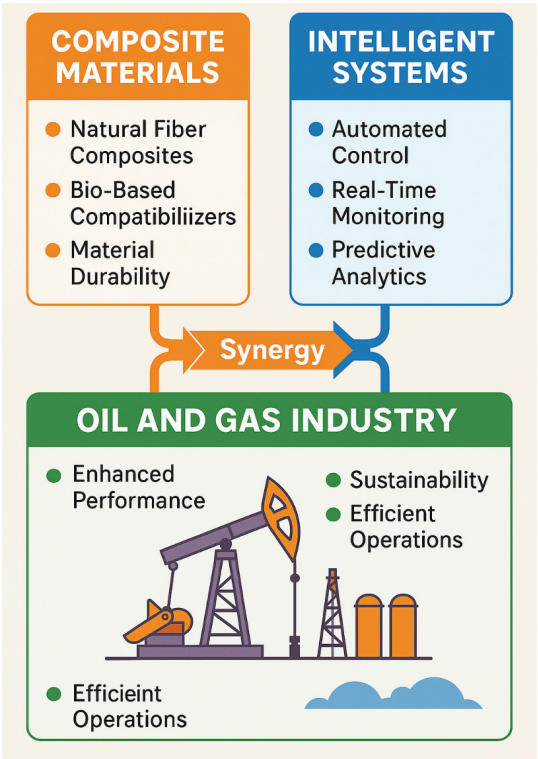

Figure 1.3. Integration of composite materials and intelligent systems for improved oil and gas operations

The left side of the figure presents intelligent systems like automated control, real-time monitoring, and predictive analytics that indicate the digital transformation that is happening in both upstream and downstream activities. The deployment of these technologies through ongoing data acquisition and adaptive control algorithms has been instrumental in cutting down

the machine downtime, facilitative safe operation, and thus, increasing the correctness of the decision-making process.[28,30] The two areas coming together as indicated by the "synergy" arrow show that the use of materials in the oil and gas industry which are more friendly to the mechanical and environmental aspects of the automated equipment, while the intelligent systems use the increased reliability and stability brought about by advanced composites.[26] The combined effect, which is assembled at the bottom of the figure, brought the industry to a performance upgrade, sustainability enhancement, and operational efficiency increase.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mechanical Properties of Guar Gum-Modified Hybrid Composites

The conjoint analysis of tensile strength, impact energy, and hardness discloses a synergistic reinforcement effect between GG and nano clay up to a maximum loading of 3 vol.% as illustrated in table 1.2. The synergy results from: i) Chemical compatibilization via hydrogen bonding between GG, fibbers, and epoxy ii) Physical reinforcement by exfoliated MMT layers which are bridging from the nano-scale across the matrix; and iii) Microstructural refinement through reduction of voids and better stress distribution. The present results are in very good agreement with the previous research on hybrid biopolymer–nano clay composites [9,11,18,25] and indicate that guar gum can be utilized not only as a green compatibilizer but also as a dispersion stabilizer, thus, producing composites with enhanced mechanical and structural performance.

Table 1.2. Mechanical properties of GG-modified hybrid composites

Sample code	Nanoclay (MMT) loading (% vol.)	Tensile strength (MPa)	Impact energy ($kJ \cdot m^{-2}$)	Brinell hardness (BHN)
E-GG	0,0	78,1	24,0	56,2
E-MMT1	1,0	82,6	26,2	58,1
E-MMT2	2,0	88,0	28,0	60,0
E-MMT3	3,0	92,4	30,2	62,3
E-MMT4	4,0	90,1	29,0	61,0
E-MMT5	5,0	85,0	25,1	59,0

Tensile Strength

Tensile strength of the composite materials glued with guar gum (GG)–modified epoxy shows significantly enhanced performance as a result of the nano clay (MMT) loading increase up to an optimum value of 3 vol.% (table 1.2). It was found that the tensile strength increased from 78,1 MPa (E-GG) to 92,4 MPa (E-MMT3) that corresponds to around 18 % of the increment, and then slightly decreased at the higher filler loading (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5) (table 1.2). This behaviour is in good agreement with the typical reinforcement pattern of polymer–clay nanocomposites which is characterized by a moderate filler dispersion resulting in effective load transfer and a high filler content leading to agglomeration and matrix discontinuity.[11,12,13,16] At lower nano clay levels (E-MMT1 and E-MMT2), the improvement of tensile strength is likely due to the better interfacial bonding between the fibber and the matrix, which in turn is supported by the simultaneous action of GG and exfoliated MMT platelets. The hydroxyl-rich GG molecules form hydrogen bonds with both epoxy and cellulose fibber surfaces, thus they become more chemically compatible and have fewer interfacial voids.[3,5,9,20] In parallel, MMT platelets that are well dispersed into the matrix establish the reinforcement of the "brick-and-mortar"-type structure thereby limiting the polymer-chain mobility and extending the resistance to crack propagation under tensile loading.[11,12,19] The highest tensile strength at 3 vol.% MMT (E-MMT3) indicates an ideal dispersion–interaction balance, in which exfoliated silicate layers are deeply

embedded with the GG–epoxy network. SEM images of this material reveal a compact and uneven fracture surface with very few fibbers pulled out, which is the evidence of interfacial failure with the separation of the cohesive phase rather than the adhesive one. The quire [10,18] and the Patnaik research[25] confirm these results, as both researches also reported improvements in tensile strength of the epoxy–nano clay composites in the presence of polysaccharide-based compatibilizers. After the limit, the tensile strength dropped (E-MMT4 = 90,1 MPa; E-MMT5 = 85,0 MPa), which may be explained by the presence of nano clay factoid and agglomeration. These aggregates work as the locations of the stress concentrators, thereby lowering the bonding area and the uniformity of the stress distribution.[12,15,16] This behaviour is similar to the finding of Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Lutfi et al.[6], where they found the drop in mechanical efficiency at the over-concentration of nano clay. So, tensile results show that the nano clay addition at moderate levels (2–3 vol.%) has the potential of strengthening the GG–epoxy–fibber network through the synergistic effect of the interfacial reinforcement.

Impact Energy

The composites' resistance to impact, as represented in table 1.2, shows a similar pattern to tensile behaviour, but also highlights the composite's microstructural integrity and the strength of the interfacial bonding. The impact energy was first of all raised from 24,0 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$ (E-GG) to the highest value of 30,2 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$ (E-MMT3), but then it was decreased to 25,1 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$ for E-MMT5. This increase in energy up to MMT 3 vol.% seems to indicate that the material could dissipate more energy, mainly because the ductility of the matrix was increased and interfacial adhesion as well as crack deflection were benefited from GG and nano clay dispersion.[7,8,9,19] The impact energy of the GG-modified epoxy (E-GG) alone is higher than that of the pure epoxy systems, as reported by Singh and Thakur(7) and Sanjay et al.[8], thus proving that GG is one of the factors which facilitate the formation of a semi-flexible interphase between the rigid matrix and the natural fibbers. Hydroxyl groups in GG help impact loading to relax stresses by localized deformation, and this in turn reduces the occurrence of brittle fracture. The nano clay–polymer–fibber network which is formed is thus responsible for the energy absorption to increase even further upon the addition of 1–3 vol.% MMT (E-MMT1 to E-MMT3). Exfoliated MMT platelets are crack initiators in the small regions of the tested material, where they cannot rely on a single-plane path; instead, cracks propagate a tortuous path through the material, thus fracture energy is increased saving the MMT-contained composite from the break.[11,12,19,25] The SEM of the E-MMT3 evidently shows fracturing of the surface along with micro-ridges, thereby confirming that the material has undergone ductile deformation and the cracks have been deflected efficiently. Hybrid natural/synthetic fibber nanocomposites have similar mechanisms as have been found by Dias et al.[10,18] and Saba et al.[24] The rationale for the decrease in impact energy at a higher MMT level (≥4 vol.%) is the development of micro voids and brittle zones which are the results of nano clay agglomeration and the partial exfoliation of the nano clay. These structural defects are starting points for cracks which cause the impact energy to be lowered.[13,16,19] In addition, tactoid formations that can be found in E-MMT4 and E-MMT5 not only break the matrix continuity, but they also make it possible for cracks to propagate there prematurely. Similar conclusions concerning impact reduction at higher filler content levels were addressed by Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Khalid et al.[22] Hence, the impact strength variations (E-GG < E-MMT1 < E-MMT2 < E-MMT3 > E-MMT4 > E-MMT5) serve as a proof that if nano clay is properly scattered in a GG-modified epoxy network, then better energy absorption and crack resistance will be achieved. This result is in agreement with the latest green-composite work by Ullah et al.[20] and Patnaik et al.[25] whose study highlighted the pivotal role of biopolymer–nano clay synergy in the impact toughness increment through the formation of a flexible interphase.

Hardness

Hardness changes show a steady, monotonic increase with nano clay content up to 3 vol.% (table 1.2) and then a small decrease at higher contents. The surface of the epoxy resin has become more rigid and resistant to localized deformation as evidenced by the increase in the Brinell hardness from 56,2 BHN (E-GG) to 62,3 BHN (E-MMT3). The improvement in hardness is mainly due to the less mobile molecular structure of the epoxy network as a result of the presence of the mechanically nano clay platelets and the -H-bond crosslinking facilitated by GG.[3,4,9,11] At substantially low filler levels (E-MMT1 and E-MMT2), the delaminated nano clay layers are capable of providing the polymer matrix with reinforcement by the occupation of the free volume and the formation of interpenetrating networks with GG. The exfoliated silicate sheets act as nano-scaled hard domains which enhance the material's resistance to indentation and provide dimensional stability under load.[11,12,16] These phenomena are comparable to the ones observed in polymer–layered silicate systems investigated by Gianelli's[13] and Krishnamoorti and Gianelli's.[16] The highest value of hardness at 3 vol.% (E-MMT3) is the point where the optimal nano clay dispersion leads to an increase in microstructural packing density and a decrease in voids that is consistent with dense morphology observed via SEM. Hardness data of samples beyond this concentration indicate a slight decrease (E-MMT4 = 61,0 BHN; E-MMT5 = 59,0 BHN), which is explained by the agglomeration of nano clay toxoids that locally not only disrupt the epoxy network but also introduce residual stresses. The agglomerates serve as the brittle inclusions that render the material more vulnerable to microcrack generation provoked by the area of indentation.[15,19,25] The overall pattern supports the conclusions drawn from natural fibber hybrid composites by Khalid et al.[22] and Saba et al.[24], that moderate filler levels enhanced hardness, but overuse resulted in structural inhomogeneity. Therefore, the GG–MMT hybrid system is a tannable combination of stiffness and toughness - nano clay enough to improve the rigidity without loss of ductility.

Influence of Guar Gum on Interfacial Adhesion

The inclusion of guar gum (GG) in the epoxy matrix led to the fibber–matrix interfacial adhesion being significantly improved, which was the main reason for the hybrid composites' mechanical performance improvement (table 1.2). The nano clay-free composite with GG (E-GG) showed a tensile strength of 78,1 MPa, an impact energy of 24,0 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$, and a hardness of 56,2 BHN, all three parameters being considerably higher than those of the untreated epoxy-natural fibber systems, which have been reported in the literature.[7,8,21] The main reason for this upgrade is the use of GG as a compatibilizer, where its function is to establish effective chemical and physical bonds between hydrophilic natural fibbers and hydrophobic epoxy resin. Guar gum is a natural galactomannan polysaccharide and it has a lot of hydroxyl (–OH) groups, which can form hydrogen bonds both with the hydroxyl groups on the fibber surface and the polar groups in the epoxy resin.[3,4,5] These bonds result in the formation of a semi-interpenetrating interphase which enhances surface energy compatibility and fibber wetting. In the studies of Wang et al.[3,14] and Ullah et al.[5,20], it is found that GG may be a bio-based coupling agent that offers molecular bridges linking the inorganic or natural fillers with the polymer matrix. This molecular connection strengthens the interfacial adhesion and thus, decreases the separation of the attach area under the application of mechanical stress, which results in the more efficient load transfer across the interface.

Effect of Nano clay Dispersion on Composite Reinforcement

The mechanical reinforcement of a guar gum (GG)–modified epoxy hybrid composite by the influence of montmorillonite (MMT) nano clay dispersion was evaluated from the data presented in table 1.2. Basically, the performance of the composites in tensile strength, impact toughness,

and surface hardness is getting better and better as the nano clay content goes up from 0 to 3 vol.%. Nevertheless, at higher loadings (≥ 4 vol.%), the mechanical properties of the samples start to decrease, which is an indication that the nano clay dispersion and the interfacial integration play a very important role in the final performance of the composites.

In the case of low nano clay contents (E-MMT1 and E-MMT2), the exfoliated MMT platelets are evenly spread in the GG–epoxy matrix and thus form a network that is able to inhibit the polymer-chain mobility and enable the load to be transferred. The tensile strength went up from 78,1 MPa for E-GG to 88,0 MPa for E-MMT2, and the impact energy increased from 24,0 to 28,0 kJ m^{-2}. The reason for this is the high aspect ratio and surface area of the individually dispersed nano clay sheets which are able to serve as mechanical anchoring sites and at the same time facilitate stress redistribution throughout the matrix.[11,12,13,16,19] Guar gum is very likely to be the dispersing agent as its hydroxyl-rich chains interact with the hydrophilic silicate surfaces of MMT, thus by this interaction, the agglomeration is not only hindered but also exfoliation is promoted.[3,4,5,9,20]

The best mechanical performance of the tensile strength, impact energy, and hardness were displayed by the optimized composite, E-MMT3 (3 vol.% MMT), with values of 92,4 MPa, 30,2 kJ m^{-2}, and 62,3 BHN, respectively. This particular composition is the dispersion–reinforcement balance at its best, where the MMT platelets are mostly exfoliated and evenly integrated into the GG-modified epoxy matrix. XRD evidence corroborates this finding by revealing the shift of the basal (001) reflection to a lower 2θ angle, which is indicative of larger interlayer spacing and partial exfoliation. Such rearrangements in structure are related to strengthened interfacial bonding and better stress transfer between the polymer and the nanofiller.[11,12,13]

Moreover, the SEM pictures of E-MMT3 show a tightly packed structure with a rough fracture surface and very few fibber pull-outs, which is evidence of cohesive failure and strong interfacial adhesion.[7,8,9] The reinforcement system can be understood through the multi-scale strengthening model. At the nano level, the presence of the exfoliated MMT platelets creates a barrier effect that prevents the growth of cracks and polymer flow under the application of the load.[9,19] At the micro-level, the interfacial adhesion improvement due to GG and MMT results in the transfer of the load from the matrix to the fibbers becoming efficient. At the macro-level, this hierarchical system is capable of both increasing the stiffness and the toughness thus it was able to produce the highest mechanical values for E-MMT3.

The results here are consistent with the theories of Gianelli's[13] and Krishnamoorti & Gianelli's[16] that were mentioned in the introduction, who strongly argued that the key to obtaining the maximum reinforcement is the homogeneous exfoliation in the polymer matrix. On the other hand, the further increment of nano clay loading (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5) was associated with the decrease in mechanical performance. The tensile strength was reduced to 90,1 MPa for E-MMT4 and 85,0 MPa for E-MMT5, and the impact energy also dropped from 29,0 to 25,1 kJ m^{-2}. The root cause of this decline can be traced to the nano clay agglomeration since an excessive amount of the filler leads to the re-stacking of the silicate layers and, subsequently, the formation of micro-toxoids.

The SEM images of E-MMT4 and E-MMT5 showed that there are nano clay particles agglomerates locally as well as micro voids around the fibber–matrix interface, and thus confirming that exfoliation was incomplete. These structural flaws serve as stress concentrators since they decrease the effective bonding area and, therefore, make it easier for the material to fail at a

lower load.[12,15,16,19] The hardness behaviour is another piece of evidence for this explanation. It is true that the Brinell hardness was very slightly decreased for E-MMT5 (59,0 BHN) after the filler addition had initially caused it to increase due to the restricted molecular motion and the improved packing density, which indicates matrix embrittlement and stress localization at nano clay clusters. There exist similar non-linear relationships between filler concentration and mechanical response for polymer–clay systems that have been reported by Alexandre & Dubois[11], Dias et al.[10,18], and Patnaik et al.[25]

Fractography and Morphological Observation (SEM Analysis)

Morphological and Structural Analysis

The morphological features of the hybrid composites have been analyzed by the authors through Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) to understand how the fiber–matrix adhesion, nanofiller dispersion, and overall microstructural integrity were affected by guar gum (GG) compatibilization and montmorillonite (MMT) nano clay addition. The representative micrographs of the fractured surfaces of samples E-GG to E-MMT5 are shown in figure 1.4. With the gradual nano clay incorporation, a sharp change in surface morphology and interfacial quality can be seen, which is the main evidence that the structural evolution of the epoxy matrix is very much determined by filler–matrix interactions and the distribution efficiency of the nano clay platelets.

The micrograph of the E-GG composite which is a GG-modified epoxy without nano clay, shows a somewhat smooth surface with fibers well-embedded and resin uniformly covering. The uniform look is the result of effective compatibilization between the hydrophilic guar gum and the hydrophobic epoxy network which would have caused interfacial adhesion to increase and void formation to decrease. The good distribution of GG in the matrix might have provided the formation of hydrogen bonds thereby resulting in fiber wetting and adhesion which is in line with the statements of the previous articles on biopolymer-assisted compatibilization.[3,4,5,9,18] The surface of the material with 1 vol.% nano clay (E-MMT1) showed some partial agglomeration of clay platelets around the fiber brought about by the formation of localized fiber–clay clusters. This is a sign that while the exfoliation of nano clay has started, the dispersion is incomplete. Similar micro-agglomerations were identified by Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Sinha Ray and Okamoto[12] who point to the limited intercalation of polymer chains in the silicate galleries as the cause of that behavior. Even these clusters, bonding between fiber and hybrid matrix has been enhanced as compared to the unmodified epoxy systems thus confirming that guar gum is a mediator that partially locates the nano clay in the epoxy domain.

The E-MMT2 composite (2 vol.% MMT) showcases the structural changes more clearly. Nano clay seems to be evenly spread in the matrix with very few aggregates, and the rough and irregular nature of the fracture surface is a typical feature of ductile failure. The better void-free material is an indication that the guar gum molecules were able to assist the exfoliation of MMT layers by hydrogen bonding and interfacial stabilization. This microstructure is consistent with the mechanical performance optimization described, thus a confirmation that 2–3 vol.% MMT is the right balance of reinforcement and processability.[9,16,19] The micrograph for the E-MMT3 sample (3 vol.% MMT) shows a thick and tightly packed structure with strong fiber–matrix interfacial adhesion. The fractured surface has less pull-outs and more trapped fibers which is an indication of efficient load transfer and cohesive failure at the interface. The presence of rough surface and embedded fiber bits suggests that the fracture is ductile which is in line with the high impact and tensile strengths result for this composition. The improvement in the morphology is due to the synergistic effect of GG and nano clay which creates a 3D hydrogen-

bonded network that serves as a bridge at the epoxy–fiber interface.[3,5,9,19,25] Nevertheless, increment of nano clay loading beyond the optimal concentration (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5) results in microstructural degradation. Taction formation at 4 vol.% MMT is evident as the clustered nano clay particles disrupt the continuity of the matrix and create micro voids. The dense aggregates not only hamper polymer chain mobility but also give rise to local stress concentrations, thus being responsible for the decrease of ductility and toughness at the higher filler content.[11,12,15]

The voids are most pronounced at fiber–filler intersections in E-MMT5 along with the microcracks, which indicates a poor dispersion and phase segregation. These morphological anomalies are a manifestation of nano clay over-saturation where interfacial compatibility is at a low and filler–filler interactions prevail over polymer–filler bonding.[16,19,25] The SEM results, in general, reveal that moderate MMT addition (2–3 vol.%) in the GG-modified epoxy matrix not only induces effective exfoliation but also ensures uniform nano clay distribution and strong interfacial bonding between fiber and resin. On the other hand, overloading of the filler leads to agglomeration and interfacial defects, thus confirming the inverse correlation between nano clay dispersion quality and filler concentration. The morphological transition from E-GG to E-MMT5 is therefore a confirmation of the two functions of guar gum: (i) as a bio-based compatibilizer that enhances epoxy–fiber interfacial adhesion, and (ii) as a molecular dispersant that eases nano clay exfoliation and even stress distribution.

The outcomes here go hand in hand with the FTIR and XRD results (figures 1.5 and 1.6) where the shifts in the spectra and changes in basal spacing confirm that there are strong interfacial interactions and partial nano clay exfoliation at optimal GG-MMT compositions. The amalgamated morphological and structural witness work is in agreement with the assertion that guar gum is a green, multifunctional compatibilizer which by far elevates the microstructural integrity and interfacial synergy of natural fiber hybrid composites.[3,9,11,12,19,25]

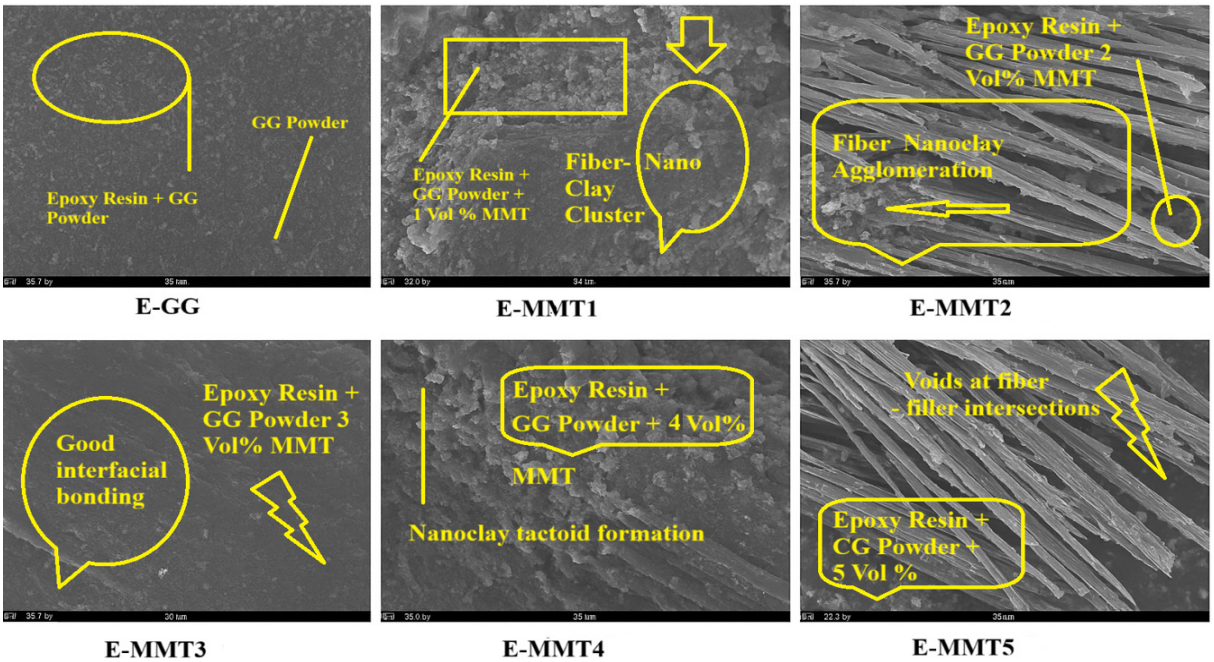

Figure 1.4. SEM images showing fracture surfaces of hybrid resin and hybrid composites

Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) Analysis

Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy was performed to identify the functional groups involved in the interfacial interactions among guar gum (GG), montmorillonite (MMT), and the epoxy matrix. The spectra of samples E-GG, E-MMT1, E-MMT2, E-MMT3, E-MMT4, and E-MMT5 are shown in figure 1.5. The observed peaks confirm successful physical and chemical interactions between the GG-modified epoxy resin and the nano clay particles, as well as the formation of hydrogen-bonded networks responsible for the improved mechanical performance presented in table 1.3.

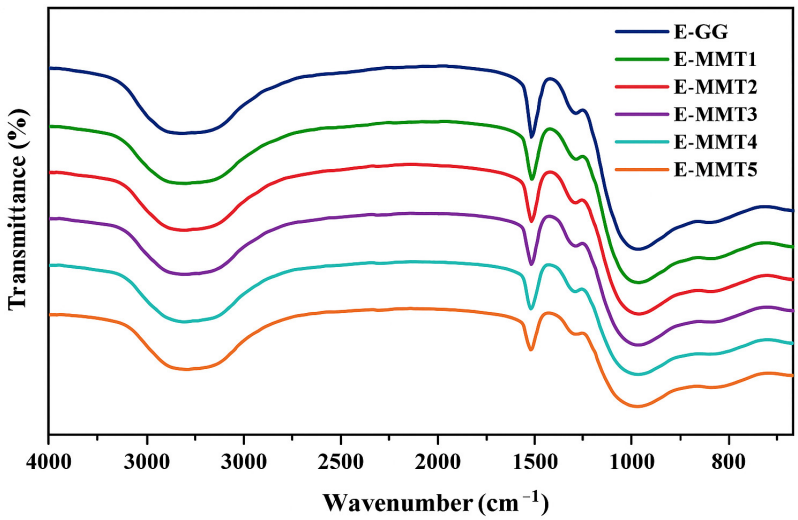

Figure 1.5. FTIR spectra of GG-modified epoxy, and GGE composites

Characteristic Peaks and Chemical Interactions

The pristine GG-modified epoxy (E-GG) spectrum shows characteristic absorption bands at:

- ~3400–3415 cm^{-1} – broad O–H stretching vibrations corresponding to hydroxyl groups of GG and epoxy moieties;
- ~2920–2850 cm^{-1} – C–H stretching of aliphatic CH_2 and CH_3 groups;
- ~1730–1710 cm^{-1} – carbonyl (C=O) stretching associated with the epoxy resin curing reaction;
- ~1250–1050 cm^{-1} – C–O–C asymmetric stretching of ether linkages in the epoxy backbone.

These peaks correspond to those reported in the literatures for guar gum-epoxy and bio-polymer composites.[3,5,9,18,25] The broad O–H peak at about 3400 cm^{-1} in E-GG is an absolute indication of hydrogen bonding of GG that acts as a computerizing agent between the hydrophilic fibbers and hydrophobic epoxy resin. The incorporation of nano clay (E-MMT1–E-MMT5) induced several spectral features besides the shifts that are indicative of the interfacial interactions among GG, MMT, and epoxy matrix. Significant changes are the appearance of a new band cantered 1030–1040 cm^{-1} which is the region of Si–O–Si and Si–O–Al stretching vibrations from the silicate layers of MMT.[11,12,13] The peak at this position gradually intensified until E-MMT3, indicating a good MMT dispersion and a strong interaction at the interface between the clay and the polymer phases.[12,16,19]

Besides, the O–H stretching band (~3410 cm^{-1}) progressively moved toward lower wavenumber (to ~3380 cm^{-1} for E-MMT3) and became broader with an increasing amount of nano clay up to 3 vol.%. The shift is attributed to the formation of hydrogen bond between hydroxyl groups of GG and oxygen atoms of the silicate platelets.[3,5,9,20] The finding indicates that a synergistic interaction takes place where GG serves as a coupling bridge that binds nano clay to the epoxy matrix via hydrogen-bonding networks. Ullah et al.[20] and Patnaik et al.[25] have also observed similar spectral shifts in their studies on bio-based polymer–nano clay systems, thus providing strong evidence for interfacial reinforcement through this mechanism.

Correlation with Nano clay Dispersion and Mechanical Behaviour

The changes in Si–O–Si peak intensity from E-MMT1 to E-MMT3 clearly reflect highly exfoliated and better dispersed MMT which was a result confirmed by XRD and SEM analyses. The polymer intercalation into the nano clay galleries is very well evidenced by the band at 1030 cm^{-1} which gets sharper and more distinct for E-MMT3. The best tensile (92,4 MPa) and impact (30,2 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$) properties recorded for E-MMT3, as shown in table 1.3, are in perfect agreement with this enhanced dispersion.

Table 1.3. FTIR absorption bands and corresponding functional group assignments for GG–MMT–epoxy hybrid composites

Sample Code	Wavenumber (cm^{-1})	Functional Group / Bond	Observed Change / Shift	Interpretation of Interaction	Reference Support
E-GG	3410 (broad)	O–H stretching (GG & epoxy)	Broad band indicating H-bonding	Formation of hydrogen bonds between GG and epoxy resin	(3,4,5,9,18,25)
	2920–2850	C–H asymmetric & symmetric stretch	Moderate intensity	Aliphatic CH_2/CH_3 groups of epoxy backbone	(7,8,9)
	1720–1710	C=O stretching	Stable peak position	Crosslinked epoxy structure; no clay interaction	(9,18)
	1250–1050	C–O–C asymmetric stretch	Sharp, well defined	Ether linkages from cured epoxy	(11,13,19)
E-MMT1	3400 → 3390	O–H stretching	Slight red-shift	Initial H-bonding between GG and silicate surface	(3,9,11)
	1035 (new)	Si–O–Si stretching (MMT)	New peak appears	Onset of polymer–clay interaction	(11,12,13,16)
E-MMT2	3385	O–H stretching	More pronounced shift	Enhanced GG–MMT hydrogen bonding and polymer intercalation	(3, 5, 9, 19)
	1030	Si–O–Si / Si–O–Al	Increased intensity	Improved dispersion and interfacial bonding	(11,12,13,19)
E-MMT3	3380	O–H stretching (broad)	Significant red-shift, broader	Maximum hydrogen bonding among GG, epoxy, and MMT	(9,18, 25)
	1032	Si–O–Si stretching	Highest intensity, sharp peak	Optimum exfoliation of nanoclay layers	(11,12,13,19,25)
	1220	C–O–C asymmetric	Slight shift	Polarization due to GG–MMT interaction	(3,5,9)

E-MMT4	3395	O–H stretching	Slight blue-shift	Reduced bonding due to partial agglomeration	(12,15,16)
	1045 (shoulder)	Si–O–Si stretching	Broadened	Formation of tactoid clusters; nonuniform dispersion	(13,16,19)
E-MMT5	3405	O–H stretching	Band broadens; reduced intensity	Agglomeration and weak interface	(12,16,22)
	1100–1150	Si–O–Si (overlap)	Split peaks	Silicate re-stacking, reduced polymer–clay interaction	(13,19,22)

By contrast to what happens up to the optimal concentration (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5), the intensity of the Si–O–Si band significantly diminishes and the O–H band further widens in the case of the over-concentration. These features point towards the agglomeration of nano clay and thus partly the re-stacking of the layers of the nano clay resulting in the reduction of the interfacial interactions. A slight shoulder peak appearance at 1100–1150 cm^{-1} for E-MMT4 and E-MMT5 corresponds to the presence of factoid structures, which essentially diminishes the polymer–clay interfacial area and favours micro void formation.(11,12,15) This chemical transition is in perfect agreement with the drop of mechanical properties at high MMT levels, where tensile and impact strengths decrease as poor stress transfer takes place. The C–O–C band (~1250 cm^{-1}) was also slightly red-shifted (≈1220 cm^{-1}) for E-MMT1–E-MMT3, which implied the formation of the epoxy ether groups-silicate layers of MMT interactions. On the one hand, such bond polarization facilitates the interfacial adhesion, on the other hand, it results in stiffer and more cohesive composite matrices.[9,13,19] The spectral data thus point to GG and nano clay having the highest interaction at 2–3 vol.% MMT, which corresponds to the optimal concentration. This statement is supported by the studies of Alexandre & Dubois[11], Gianelli's[13], and Dias et al.[10,18], who found that mechanical properties are improved the most when the polymer is partially exfoliated and hydrogen bonding is present.

The FTIR results reveal a multi-level reinforcement mechanism mediated by GG–MMT interactions:

1. Chemical coupling: GG's hydroxyl groups form hydrogen bonds with both the epoxy resin and the silicate surface of MMT, leading to the decrease of interfacial tension and the improvement of wettability.
2. Physical reinforcement: MMT exfoliated platelets stiffen the polymer by limiting chain flexibility and by providing a tortuous path for crack propagation
3. Network stabilization: The synergistic hydrogen bonding between GG, MMT, and epoxy resin results in a semi-interpenetrating network structure with elevated modulus and toughness.

Such a cooperative mechanism accounts for E-MMT3 having an optimal balance of strength (92,4 MPa), impact energy (30,2 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$), and hardness (62,3 BHN). At the prohibition of the filler layer, the bonding sites saturation, and particle agglomeration cause the effects to weaken, thus confirming the mechanical and morphological data.

The current results are in agreement with the previously conducted research on polymer nanocomposites that employ polysaccharide-based compatibilizers.(3,5,9,18,25) Moreover, they correlate well with the interfacial reinforcement mechanisms described by Wang et al.(14), Sinha Ray & Okamoto[12], and Patnaik et al.[25]

XRD and Microstructural Correlation

The crystallographic structure, interlayer spacing, and degree of exfoliation of montmorillonite (MMT) nano clay in a guar gum (GG)–modified epoxy matrix were investigated by X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis. The six composite samples (E-GG to E-MMT5) diffraction patterns are presented in figure 1.6. The change of the diffraction peaks reveals the effects of nano clay dispersion and polymer intercalation on the microstructure, which, in turn, determines the mechanical properties of the hybrid composites.

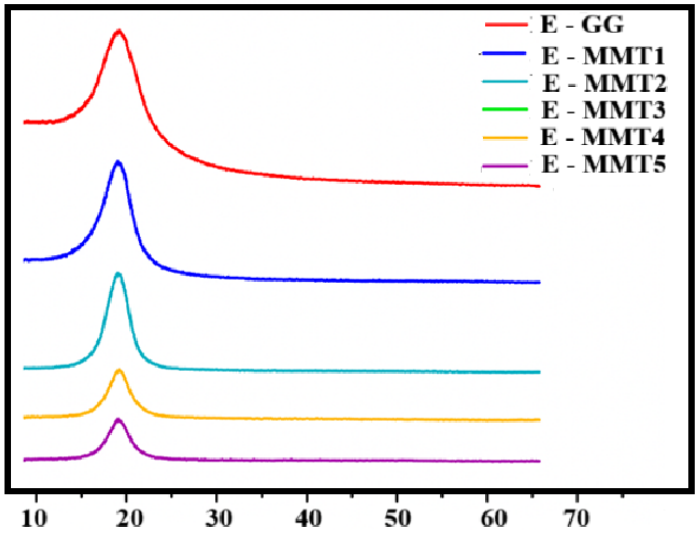

Figure 1.6. XRD patterns of GG-modified epoxy, and GGE composites

Baseline Structure of GG-Modified Epoxy (E-GG)

The diffraction pattern of the GG-modified epoxy matrix (E-GG) shows a broad halo cantered at 2θ ≈ 18°–20°, which is the typical feature of the amorphous part of the cured epoxy resin and the semi-crystalline domains of guar gum.[3,5,9,18] The lack of any sharp diffraction peak suggests that the polymer chains are randomly oriented and that GG is molecularly dispersed in the epoxy network, thus, a homogeneous hybrid matrix is formed. The broad hump also indicates the presence of hydrogen-bonded interactions between GG and epoxy molecules, which is in agreement with FTIR results and comparable to the findings of Ullah et al.[20] and Patnaik et al.[25] for biopolymer–epoxy systems.

Effect of Nano clay Incorporation (E-MMT1 to E-MMT3)

After the addition of MMT nano clay, a sharp diffraction peak is evident in the range 2θ ≈ 6°–9°, which is attributed to the (001) basal plane of the layered silicate structure.[11,12,13] The (001) reflection for the E-MMT1 composite (1 vol.% MMT) is quite narrow and can be observed at about 2θ = 8,8°, which corresponds to the interlayer distance (d_{001}) of ~1,00 nm calculated using Bragg's equation (nλ = 2d sin θ). This is a mainly intercalated structure in which epoxy and GG chains start to penetrate clay galleries, however, complete exfoliation has not yet been achieved.[11,12] With the rise in nano clay content up to 2 vol.% (E-MMT2) and 3 vol.% (E-MMT3), the (001) diffraction peak moves to lower 2θ values (~7,5°–7,8°), which indicates an expansion of the basal plane (d_{001} ≈ 1,18–1,22 nm). Such a shift is the most convincing evidence of the intercalation as well as by the partial exfoliation of the nano clay layers in the GG–epoxy matrix.[12,13,16,19] The low-intensity and broadened nature of the peaks discussed here correspond

to the disappearance of the highly ordered crystalline structure of the MMT layers and the good dispersion of silicate platelets at the nanoscale. The most likely reason for the GG–epoxy matrix to penetrate the silicate layers is the hydrogen bonding between GG hydroxyl groups and the oxygen atoms of the silicate layers. This strongly supports the intercalation process as it prevents re-stacking and leads to exfoliation. In the literature, the similar behaviour has been reported by Alexandre and Dubois[11] and Sinha Ray and Okamoto[12] for polymer–silicate nanocomposites where the interaction polymer–clay led to enhanced mechanical properties. The E-MMT3 sample among all is the most evident broadening and the lowest intensity peak shows the highest degree of exfoliation and the largest amount of disordered regions. The excellent mechanical behaviour (tensile strength = 92,4 MPa, impact energy = 30,2 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$) shown in table 1.4 is directly connected with this, hence, the improved dispersion and polymer intercalation are the main factors responsible for mechanical reinforcement. The interfacial stabilization by GG at this composition is in line with the conclusions of Dias et al.(10,18) and Patnaik et al.[25], who recognized the composite effect of biopolymers and nano clays for the structural homogeneity promotion.

Table 1.4. Effect of Nano Clay

Sample Code	Main Diffraction Peak (2θ, °)	Interlayer Spacing d_{001} (nm)	Structural Interpretation	Reinforcement Type	References
E-GG	Broad hump at 18°–20°	–	Amorphous GG–epoxy matrix	–	(3,4,5,9,18)
E-MMT1	8,8°	1,00	Partial intercalation of epoxy chains	Weak intercalation	(11,12,13,16)
E-MMT2	7,8°	1,13	Improved intercalation and dispersion	Moderate reinforcement	(9,11,12,19)
E-MMT3	7,5°	1,22	Maximum exfoliation; homogeneous dispersion	Strong reinforcement	(11,12,13,19, 25)
E-MMT4	8,3°	1,06	Partial re-stacking of silicate layers	Reduced reinforcement	(12,15,16)
E-MMT5	8,6°	1,03	Agglomeration and tactoid formation	Weak reinforcement	(13,16,19,22)

Structural Changes at Higher Nano clay Loading (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5)

On the other hand, a (001) peak can be observed for the nano clay composites with higher concentrations (E-MMT4 and E-MMT5) at slightly higher intensity that moves towards the higher 2q values (≈ 8,3°–8,6°), which suggests that the basal spacing decreases again as a result of nano clay re-stacking and agglomeration [12,15,16] after the reduction of the space between the consecutive layers of clay. The recovery of partial crystallinity indicates that the excess of MMT is the reason for the incomplete exfoliation and formation of taction structures. The SEM pictures that illustrated aggregated clay domains and voids at fibber–matrix junctions also agree with this explanation. The presence of such microstructural defects hinders the stress transfer and reaches the reason for the decrease of tensile and impact behaviour at 4–5 vol.% MMT, as it can be found in table 1.4. Moreover, the relative intensity of the broad amorphous hump (18°–20°) is slightly reduced for E-MMT4 and E-MMT5, which indicates that the mobility of polymer chains is limited due to the overloading of the filler. The authors Krishnamoorti and Gianelli's[16], Gianelli's[13], and Saba et al.[24] presented the same phenomena of re-stacking and filler crowding in their studies and observed that the excessive nano clay disrupts the homogeneous dispersion,

thus leading to the decrease of reinforcement efficiency.

The XRD study is a testimony of how the exfoliation of MMT plays a significant role in determining the mechanical properties of the composites.

- E-MMT1–E-MMT2 → Partially intercalated: Significant to moderate increase of strength and impact as a result of controlled separation of layers.
- E-MMT3 → Partially to fully exfoliated: The highest load transfer efficiency which is in line with the highest tensile, impact, and hardness values.
- E-MMT4–E-MMT5 → Tactics with re-stacking: Reduction of mechanical properties due to filler agglomeration as well as micro void formation.

This scheme corresponds to the FTIR data of hydrogen bonding and the SEM features of morphology that have been dealt with previously, and therefore it is further confirmed that optimal nano clay dispersion (at 3 vol.% MMT) guarantees the best interfacial synergy among GG, epoxy, and fibber components.

Where can we see these beneficial composite-automation synergies put to use in oil and gas operations? The three major areas naturally come out: drilling, pipeline integrity management, and subsea asset monitoring. Mechanical reliability is the common denominator in all these fields, and the failure consequences are very serious.

Material–automation linkages in oil and gas operations

Actually, abrasive particulates seem to be the main enemy of downhole drilling apparatuses. Besides abrasives, they are also subjected to drilling mud chemistries and variable torsional stresses. Therefore, if biomaterials-based composite housings are reinforced with natural fibers and compatibilized through guar-gum–based interfaces, they will have a lighter weight and better damping properties; hence, they may be able to reduce the vibration wear of measurement-while-drilling (MWD) and logging-while-drilling (LWD) tools induced by the environment.[27,29] Furthermore, the materials also reduce the rate at which corrosion causes the metal parts of the MWD tool, particularly the stainless steel or aluminum housings, to become the source of trouble in high-salinity and high-temperature environments.[26] Thus, these features, combined, point to the fact that advanced composites in the case of an automated drilling system can be the means not only to extend their service life but also to lessen maintenance intervals as shown in figure 1.7 and table 1.5.

The story is similar with the reappear of a major advantage in pipelines monitoring and subsea inspection systems, the main performers of which are intelligent sensors and robotic platforms, that is, their reliability in harsh conditions like high hydrostatic pressure, turbulent flow fields, and sediment-rich environments. The use of light composite enclosures can substantially improve the buoyancy control and hence the AUVs' maneuverability; apart from that, they can be used for the electrical insulation and have low susceptibility to biofouling.[26] Besides, when the units protected by composites are leveraged with predictive analytics and automated fault-detection algorithms,[28,30] they can be the means for continuous and real-time condition assessment of pipeline corrosion, flow anomalies, or structural defects. This comprehensive integration not only grants operational decision-making a higher power but also is in line with the ambitious industry-wide goals of leak risk reduction, downtime minimization, and environmental compliance enhancement. Consequently, material innovation turns into a direct enabler of safer, more resilient, and more sustainable oil and gas operations.

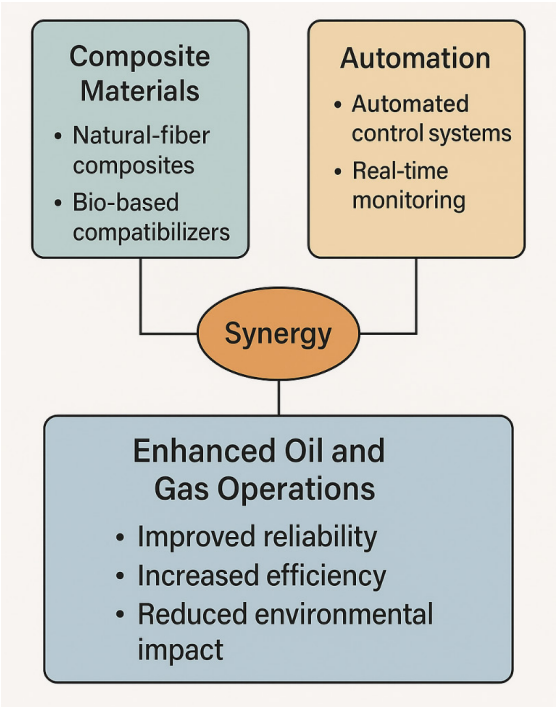

Figure 1.7. Material–automation linkages in oil and gas operations

Table 1.5. Performance Linkages Between Composite Materials and Intelligent Automation in Oil & Gas Operations

Parameter	Bio-Based / Natural Fiber Composites	Intelligent Automation Systems	Combined Impact on Oil & Gas Operations
Mechanical Performance	Improved tensile and flexural stability; enhanced interfacial bonding with compatibilizers[27,29]	Automated load control reduces mechanical shock and vibration	Increased reliability of drilling tools and structural components
Environmental Resistance	Reduced corrosion and moisture uptake compared to metals[29]	Real-time monitoring of environmental conditions	Longer service life in offshore and subsea environments
Weight Reduction	Low density improves device mobility and reduces energy use	Lightweight components enhance robotic maneuverability	Better efficiency in AUVs, ROVs, and automated pipeline inspectors
Sensor Integration Potential	Electrically insulating, vibration-damping housing materials	High-sensitivity sensors with predictive analytics[28,30]	More stable sensor readings and continuous monitoring accuracy
Operational Sustainability	Bio-derived origin reduces environmental footprint	Automation reduces emissions via optimized operations	Supports greener, regulation-compliant oil and gas practices

CONCLUSION

Combining bio-based composite material engineering with smart automation is a significant way to increase the performance, reliability, and sustainability of oil and gas operations. Natural fiber–reinforced polymers have made great progress, which can be further supported

by improved compatibilization strategies, to provide lightweight, corrosion-resistant, and mechanically stable materials that are viable for the harsh environments of drilling and subsea. Meanwhile, the use of automated control platforms, real-time sensing, and predictive analytics is becoming a standard practice in operational efficiency and safety, thus, continuously changing these fields. The integration of those technologies creates a system where advanced materials can be used for the durability and stability of the automated tools, while intelligent systems are capable of continuous performance monitoring in field conditions. Thus, combined they constitute a future engineering route that not only ensures operational excellence but is also environmentally friendly and helps the sector become more resilient and technologically adaptive in its evolution.

The research proved that guar gum is capable of being a potent bio-based compatibilizer for natural fibber–reinforced epoxy hybrid composites and it is the major factor which helps in controlling the dispersing of nano clay and interfacial bonding. It was found that the mechanical performance was greatly improved through the incorporation of small amounts of montmorillonite nano clay due to enhanced interfacial adhesion and polymer–clay intercalation. The composite with 3 vol.% MMT (E-MMT3) achieved the maximum tensile strength (≈ 92,4 MPa), impact energy (≈ 30,2 $kJ \cdot m^{-2}$), and hardness (≈ 62,3 BHN) among all the samples, thus, proving that the tested formulation attains an optimal balance between matrix stiffening, crack-deflection mechanisms and interfacial load transfer.

The SEM examination indicated that E-MMT3 had a dense fracture structure with very little fibber pull-out and almost no voids, while the higher nano clay concentrations (≥ 4 vol.%) resulted the formation of taction and micro voids at the fibber–filler junctions, which led to the decrease of mechanical response. FTIR investigation unveiled the formation of hydrogen bonds between guar gum, epoxy, and silicate layers, and XRD results evidenced the increase in basal spacing up to 3 vol.% MMT that suggested partial exfoliation. When more filler was added, the peak became sharper again and the shift reverses implying that re-stacking and agglomeration are starting.

In short, the chemical, structural, and mechanical data taken together are in line with the notion that guar gum is a green compatibilizer, which not only improves fibber–matrix affinity but also stabilizes nano clay. It also implies that the filler loading has to be very well determined as too much clay will disperse negatively and cause interfacial failure that will be of short duration. These results open the way for the production of sustainable high-performance hybrid composites, which are made possible by non-toxic natural compatibilizers, and they show a great potential for the application where weight reduction, environmental compatibility, and structural integrity are required at the same time.

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FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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