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Effect of curing temperature and fiber on metakaolin-based geopolymer

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Abstract

This paper presents mechanical properties of geopolymer mortar with metakaolin as a base material. Cylindrical specimens were prepared with a diameter of 5 cm and 10 cm height. Four compositions of geopolymer paste varied with adding polyvinyl alcohol fiber (PVA) from 0% to 1% by volume of paste. After casting, steam curing method was conducted at 40°C, 60°C and 80°C for 24 hours. A control specimen was cured at room temperature. Some tests were performed for setting time, compressive strength, split-tensile, direct-tensile and porosity. It showed that the strength of fibrous specimens was 67.29 MPa at of 56 days without steam curing. When curing temperature was risen from room temperature 80°C, the strength increased up to 14% at 28 days. Ratio of split to compressive strength was about 10% when 1% fiber was applied. However, an optimum result was shown by specimens containing 0.6% fibers according to direct-tensile test. It is recommended to apply steam curing at 60°C-80°C to increase the tensile strength. © 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

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Keywords: Metakaolin, geopolymer, PVA, curing temperature

1. Introduction

Global warming has become a major topic in the wide range of science and engineering research, within the last decade. The problem is related with exhaust emissions such as CO₂ from human activities. It is about 65% of

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greenhouse gases caused by CO₂ where Portland cement production contributes in a range of 7-8% [1]. Therefore, it is necessary to obtain green concrete materials as an innovative solution. One of the solutions is geopolymer manufacture, which is also known as zero-cement concrete. Most of geopolymer mixtures use by-products in their composition. Fly ash is the most favorable material for making geopolymer concrete [2]. Mud, clay and slag are also utilized as the raw material in geopolymer binders [3-5]. However, in Indonesia, some by products such as fly ash and bottom ash are considered as hazardous materials. It comes to being the application limitation to develop geopolymer products from laboratory to industry scale. In addition, physical characters of by-product vary in some aspects such as origin materials treatment, shape, size, etc. [6-7]. Kaolin is one of the natural pozzolanic materials, which is rich in silica and alumina. With a proper calcination, metakaolin can be produced from 75%-80% by mass of kaolin, which contains soluble silica. Since it consists of reactive oxides, metakaolin requires low concentration of alkali activator [8-9].

In this paper, polyvinyl alcohol fiber (PVA) is introduced to improve tensile strength of metakaolin geopolymer paste. In addition, variations of curing methods were also introduced to investigate the effect of temperature to increase compressive strength. Some influential factors to the mechanical strength of fresh and hardened paste were analyzed and discussed comprehensively. Therefore, this study will be a bench-mark formalization of environmental friendly material using kaolin as one of the alumina-silicate sources.

2. Experiment

2.1. Materials and Mix Proportions

Kaolin with 2.5 g/cm³ of density adopted in this study was obtained from Bangka Belitung, Indonesia. Its chemical composition is listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Chemical composition of source materials

Oxides (%)	SiO ₂	Al ₂ O ₃	Fe ₂ O ₃	CaO	MgO	Na ₂ O	K ₂ O	TiO ₂	MnO ₂	SO ₃	LOI
	50.26	43.00	0.73	0.04	0.12	0.04	0.57	0.28	0.01	4.72	4.72

Calcination method to activate raw material from kaolin to metakaolin is based on an experimental work developed by Triani [15]. Kaolin with particle size of 75 μm was immersed and stirred in distilled water for 10-15 minutes. It was kept in room temperature for 24 hours until sedimentation occurred. This precipitated materials were not used for making the geopolymer mixture since it may contain unreactive quartz. The top part of silt was collected to be dried in oven. Calcination process is illustrated in Fig. 1 as temperature history of furnace setting. Temperature target of 700°C was set constant for six hours. Metakaolin was then pulverized until its maximum particle size of 75 μm as shown in Fig 2.

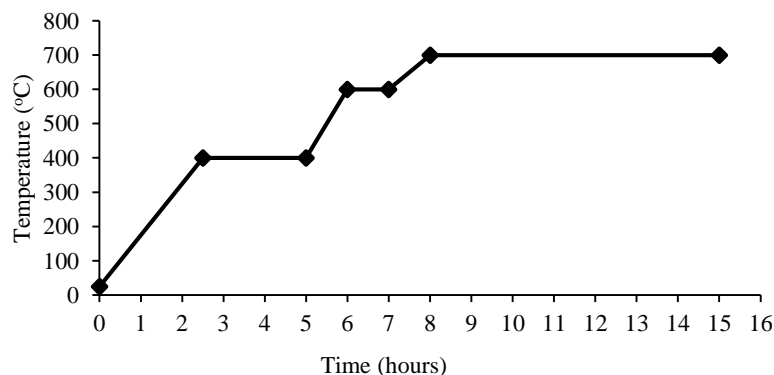


Fig. 1. Temperature History of Kaolin Calcination



Fig. 2. Metakaolin

Alkali activators consisted of sodium hydroxide and sodium silicate. Flake form of sodium hydroxide with 98% purity was prepared for concentration of eight molar. Sodium silicate ($\text{SiO}_2/\text{Na}_2\text{O} = 2.0$ and solid content 55%) was mixed with sodium hydroxide with a mass ratio of 56:44. Both liquids were mixed together, prepared one day before mixing with metakaolin and kept in environmental control room. Ratio of metakaolin to alkali activators of 1:1 was used for all variations.

PVA-RECS15 as shown in Fig.3 varied with 0%, 0.3%, 0.6% and 1% by paste volume. Fresh paste became more hardened and difficult to cast if it contained more than 1% of PVA. Properties of fibers are listed in Table 2.

All variations of paste were cast in cylindrical molds with 50 mm in diameter and 100 mm in length. Immediately after casting, the specimens were covered with plastic and then cured at a steam chamber with temperature varied at 40°C, 60°C and 80°C for 24 hours. After steam curing, specimens were moist-cured at room temperature until specific age for mechanical and physical testing.

Table 2 Fibers Properties

Physical Properties	Specification
Diameter	38 μm
Length	8mm
Density	1.3 gr/cm ³
Tensile strength	1600 MPa
Bending strength	40 GPa
Melting Point	225°C
Absorption	Less than 1 %



Fig. 3. PVA-RECS 15

Variations of mix proportion and curing temperature are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Specimen variations

No.	Code	Curing Temperature (°C)	PVA (% Volume)
1	G-0-25		0
2	G-0.3-25	25	0.3
3	G-0.6-25		0.6
4	G-1-25		1
5	G-0-40		0
6	G-0.3-40	40	0.3
7	G-0.6-40		0.6
8	G-1-40		1
9	G-0-60		0
10	G-0.3-60	60	0.3
11	G-0.6-60		0.6
12	G-1-60		1
13	G-0-80		0
14	G-0.3-80	80	0.3
15	G-0.6-80		0.6
16	G-1-80		1

2.2. Testings

Setting time for fresh paste was conducted according to ASTM C191 [16]. Compression test to obtain the strength of some specimens at 3, 7, 14, 21, 28 and 56 days was conducted according to ASTM C39 [17]. To obtain the effect of fiber on density of specimens, which the specimens are categorized lightweight concrete, weight and volume of specimens were examined according to ASTM C1693-11 [18]. Splitting test according to ASTM C 496 [19] was conducted for cylindrical specimens at 28 days. Direct tensile test according to CRD-C 260-01 [20] was conducted for dog bone-like shape specimens at 28 days. Porosity test was also performed at 28 days to obtain portions of closed and open porosity as a function of total porosity.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Setting Time

Both initial setting time and final setting time were carried out to observe the effect of fiber to setting time of paste. The result is provided in Fig 4.

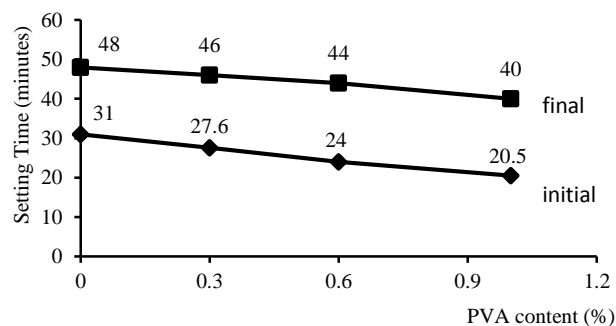


Fig 4. Setting Time

More addition of PVA fibers caused faster initial and final setting time. It is because of more fiber in mixtures turns the mixtures to be more viscous resulting in the decreasing of workability, and the setting becomes quicker. It has a good agreement as a result conducted by Noushini [21]. In this case, for larger scale of application, superplasticizer and retarder are necessary to ensure the mixture workability.

3.2. Density

Fig 5. describes the addition of fiber and curing temperature show less effect to density of geopolymer paste. The average density is about 1800 kg/m³, which indicates that geopolymer paste is a sort of lightweight concrete. In addition, it was due to the amount of fiber was added at most only 1% by paste volume, and water absorption of fiber is less than 1% of the fiber mass. As a result, thee of PVA does not affect the weight to the volume of mortar geopolymer [22].

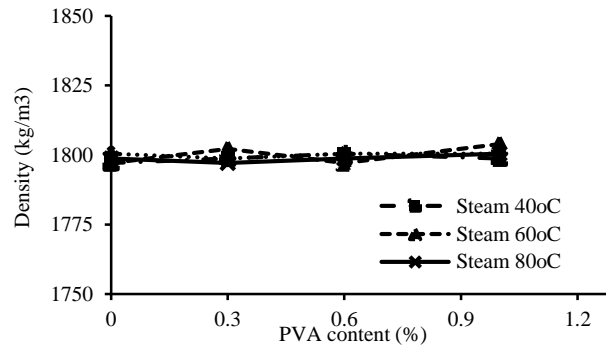


Fig 5. Relation of density and fiber content at different curing

3.3. Compressive Strength

Compressive strength test performed at the age of 3,7,14,21,28 and 56 days. An average from three identical specimens was determined for each variation. The results for each variation can be seen in Figure 6 to Figure 9.

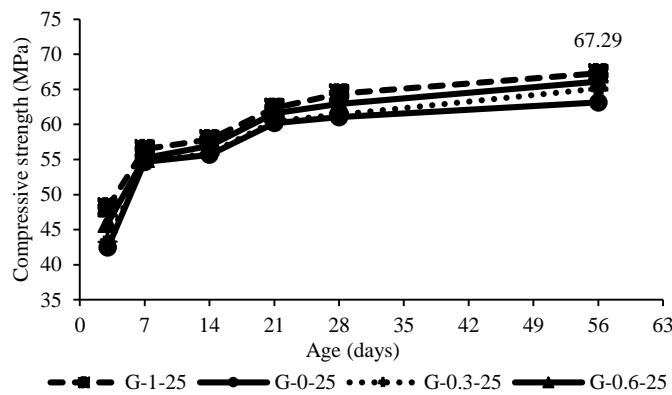


Fig 6. Compressive strength of specimens cured at room temperature

In Fig. 8, it is discovered that adding fiber increases the compressive strength. However, the fiber has less effect to contribute the strength at early age. The strength significantly increases up to seven days. After one week, it increases gradually and still has a tendency to improve until 56 days. Specimens containing 1% of fiber shows the highest compressive strength from the early age until the later age.

An effect of steam curing at 40°C and 60°C with different fiber content is presented in Fig. 7 and Fig 8 respectively. The increase of compressive strength occurred at the early age due to the acceleration of geopolymerization reaction. At 60°C, the strength increased up to 21 days, which was faster than the specimens cured at room temperature and at 40°C. The geopolymeric reaction of metakaolin paste is revealed to be accelerated strongly according to the curing

temperature regardless of the fiber content. Geopolymeric reaction is similar to hydration reaction in cement portland, which occurs rapidly due to heat treatment [23].

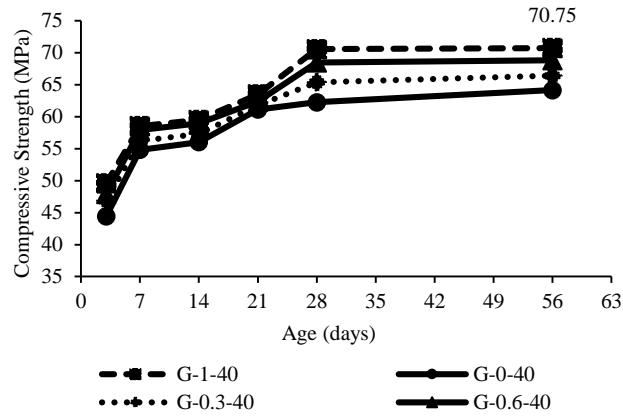


Fig 7. Compressive strength of specimens cured at 40oC

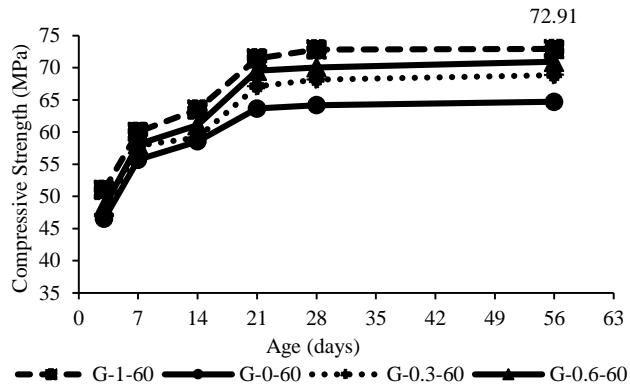


Fig 8. Compressive strength of specimens cured at 60°C

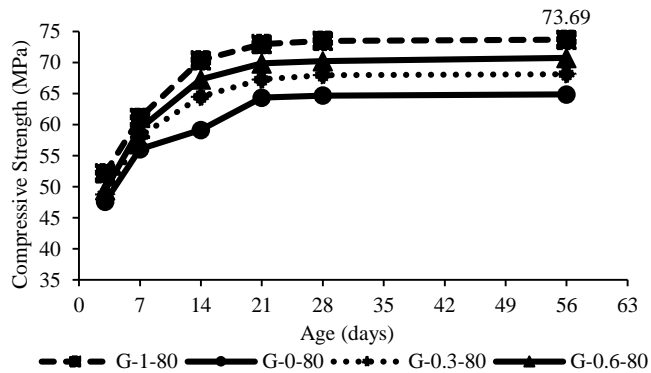


Fig 9. Compressive strength of specimens cured at 80°C

Corresponding to specimens cured at 40°C and 60°C, Fig 9 shows the influence of steam curing at 80°C to the strength. Mechanical strength increased along with fiber content and age of specimens. At 80°C, the strength increased rapidly until 14 days and gradually increased slowly until 21 days. It can be compared with Fig. 6, the compressive strength of specimens at 28 days, which contains 1% of fiber rises up to 14%. It is in accordance with an experimental study conducted by Hardjito [24] using fly ash as the raw material. In his research, the optimum strength of fly ash-based geopolymer concrete was achieved at 75°C.

3.4. Splitting Tensile Strength

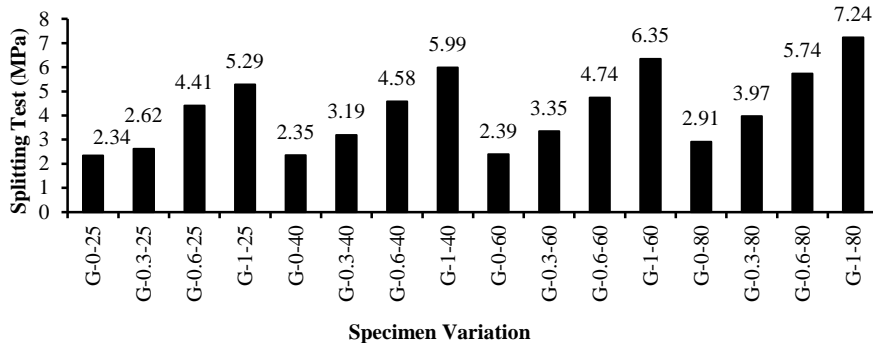


Fig 10. Splitting test of specimens cured at different temperature

Fig. 10 shows the result of splitting test at 28 days. As expected, influence of fiber content indicated more than the heat effect to the strength. It is shown by s G-1-80 containing 1% PVA 80°C. It also implies that fiber has more contributions to tensile strength than compressive strength.

3.5. Direct Tensile Strength

Stress-strain relation of dog bone-like specimens is provided in Fig. 11 to Fig. 14. It was predicted that at higher curing temperature, the tensile strength tended to rise. The absence of fiber showed less effect on specimen’s ductility. Fiber content increased the ductility cured at the same condition. However, ductility of specimens containing fiber had a tendency to decrease at higher temperatures. Stress hardening was observed for specimens with 0.6% and 1% of fiber. It indicated that after crack occurred, tensile stresses were transferred to the fiber. Because of fiber, tensile strength is greater than the paste causing hardening phenomenon. This means that the PVA fiber starts to control the crack after paste failure to resist tensile load [26].

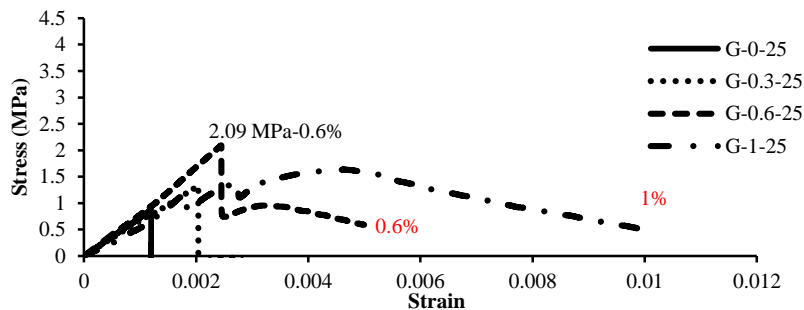


Fig 11. Tensile strength cured at room temperature

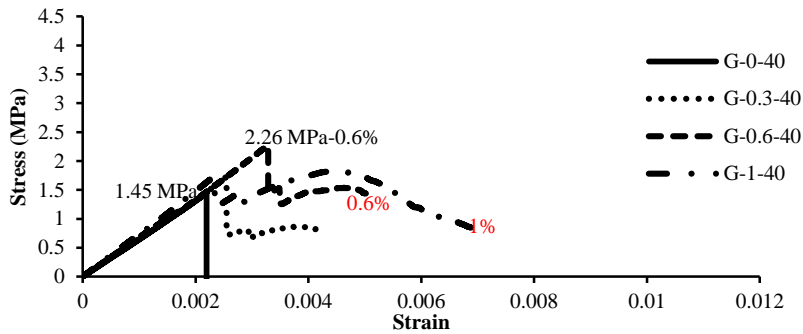


Fig 12. Tensile strength cured at 40°C

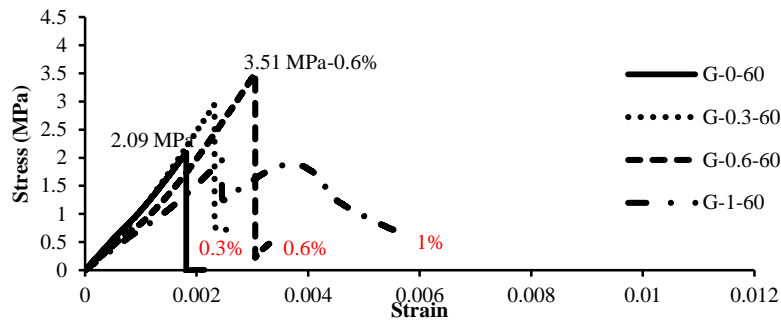


Fig 13. Tensile strength cured at 60°C

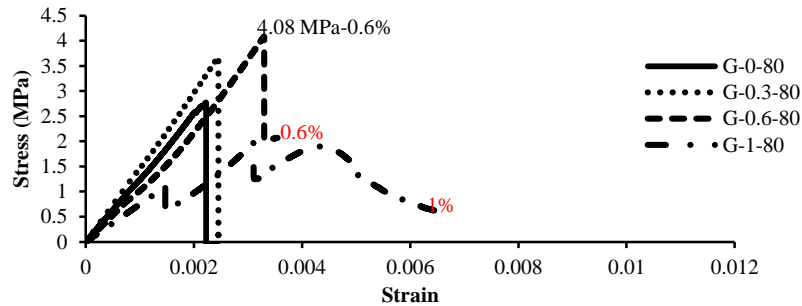


Fig 14. Tensile strength cured at 80°C

A relation of compressive strength and tensile strength at 28 days is represented by some factors. Some relationships such as f_{split}/f_c' , f_t/f_c' and $\Delta f_t/\Delta \epsilon_t$ are provided in Fig. 15, Fig. 16 and Fig. 17 respectively. Splitting strength, f_{split} , compressive strength, f_c , and tensile strength f_t represents mechanical strength of specimens. Elastic stiffness is corresponded to a ratio of tensile stress (Δf_t) and tensile strain ($\Delta \epsilon_t$) which is determined before cracks occur.

In Fig. 15, it can be seen that fiber content has more contributions to increasing the ratio of tensile strength to compressive strength. Less influence to this ratio was exhibited by heat effect. This indicated that the increase of split tensile strength had a linear correlation to the increase of compressive strength. At room temperature, this ratio rose from 3% to 9%. At 60°C, it increased up to 9.9%. However, in Fig. 16, there is an optimum point where addition of fiber at 0.6% shows the highest ratio of tensile to compressive strength. Since 1% of fiber resulted in difficulty of

casting, direction of fiber in the paste caused the specimens became less uniform. Fig. 17 shows that the ratio of Δf_t to $\Delta \epsilon_t$ tends to descend along the increasing of fiber content and curing temperature. It reveals that greater stiffness generates brittleness of geopolymer paste.

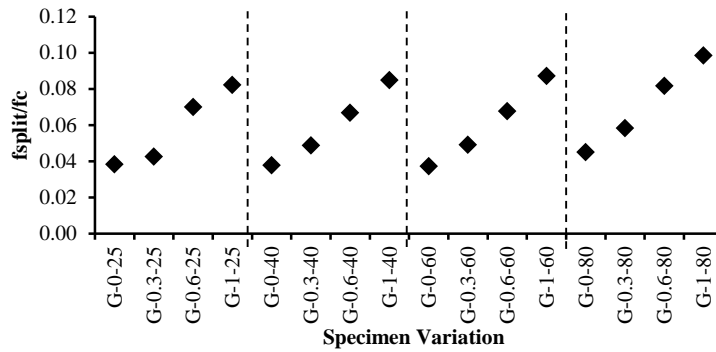


Fig 15. Ratio of splitting strength to compressive strength

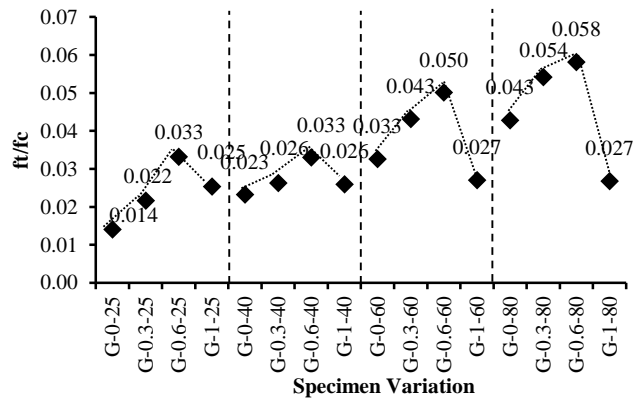


Fig 16. Ratio of tensile strength to compressive strength

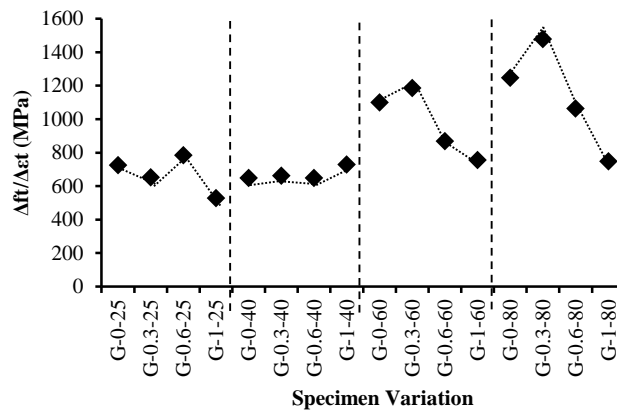


Fig 17. Ratio of tensile strength to tensile strain in elastic condition

3.6. Porosity

Fig.18 shows some relations of porosity of specimens containing 0% and 1% fiber. Curing temperature tended to decrease the total pores, which generated more strength. Surprisingly, fiber content showed less effect to the open porosity. In general, fiber increases the open porosity, resulted in denser of mixture and decreasing strength in certain proportion. Results in Fig. 18 reveal that PVA fiber contributes to decreasing of total porosity without affecting density of geopolymer paste.

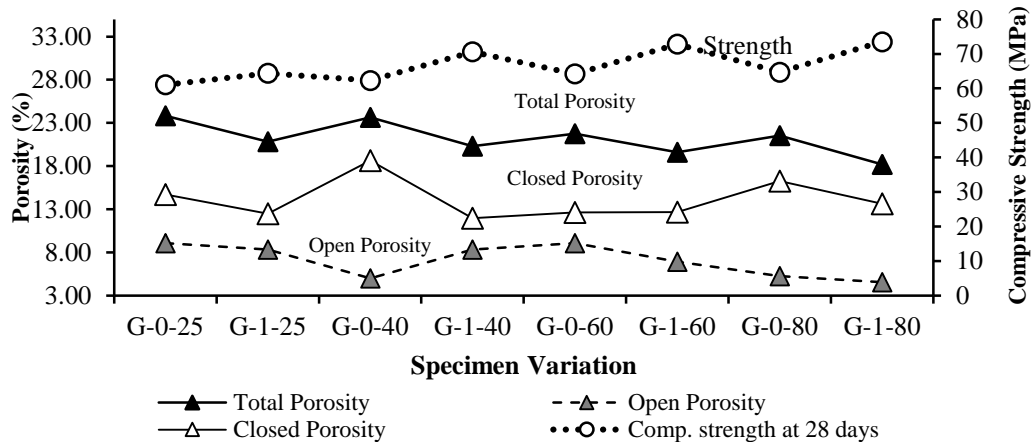


Fig 18. Porosity

4. Conclusions

- PVA fiber causes setting time becomes faster due to workability of fresh paste.
- Adding PVA fiber to 1% by paste volume shows less effect on density of paste.
- Curing temperature at 80°C generates the highest compressive strength of paste containing 1% of fiber.
- Tensile stress is contributed mostly by the presence of fibers, which expanded the ductility of paste. However, at higher curing temperature, even though the tensile stress increases, heat effect decreases the ductility.
- Stiffness of paste increases along with heat effect to the paste. However, the effect the fiber content contributes to decreasing of stiffness.
- Porosity has a strong relation with compressive strength. PVA fibers contribute to decrease the total pores which support the strength of paste.
- It is recommended to apply PVA fiber up to 0.6% by volume to increase the ductility of geopolymer paste.

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