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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAD-CAM MATERIALS IN RESTORATIVE DENTISTRY: ASSESSING MECHANICAL PROPERTIES AND CLINICAL OUTCOMES

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Abstract

Background: *CAD-CAM (Computer-Aided Design and Computer-Aided Manufacturing) technology has revolutionized restorative dentistry by enabling precision, efficiency, and customization. The mechanical properties and clinical outcomes of CAD-CAM materials, including ceramics, composites, and hybrid options, play a pivotal role in determining the longevity and success of restorations.*

Objective: *To evaluate and compare the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes of different CAD-CAM materials, utilizing advanced simulation and data analysis software, while considering real-world clinical data from diverse populations.*

Method: *A prospective cohort study was conducted from January 2023 to December 2024 across 150 dental clinics worldwide, employing CAD-CAM systems for restorative procedures. The study evaluated material properties, including flexural strength, fracture toughness, wear resistance, and color stability, using ANSYS 2023 R2 for mechanical simulations and Houdini 3D for material visualization. Clinical outcomes were analyzed based on patient satisfaction surveys and restoration durability, with data processing performed using SPSS v29. Restoration success rates and failure modes were systematically tracked through follow-ups at 6, 12, and 18 months.*

Results: *Lithium disilicate ceramics exhibited the highest flexural strength (450 MPa) and superior aesthetic outcomes, achieving 92% patient satisfaction. Zirconia-based ceramics demonstrated exceptional fracture toughness (6 MPa·m½), making them ideal for posterior restorations, though their aesthetic limitations resulted in slightly lower satisfaction rates (85%). Resin-matrix ceramics offered moderate strength (250 MPa) but excelled in wear compatibility and minimized antagonist tooth wear. Hybrid ceramics provided balanced mechanical properties with enhanced milling precision. Statistical analysis revealed a significant correlation between material type and patient satisfaction*

($p < 0.01$). Long-term outcomes identified zirconia and lithium disilicate as preferred materials for posterior restorations, while resin-matrix ceramics were optimal for anterior applications.

Conclusion: *The study underscores the importance of material-specific applications in restorative dentistry, with CAD-CAM materials offering unique advantages tailored to clinical needs. The integration of advanced software tools such as ANSYS and SPSS enhanced the precision of mechanical and clinical evaluations. These findings serve as a guide for clinicians to optimize material selection, improving restoration longevity and patient satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Computer-Aided Design and Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAD-CAM) technology has significantly transformed restorative dentistry, offering enhanced precision and efficiency in fabricating dental restorations [1]. A critical aspect of this advancement involves evaluating the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes of various CAD-CAM materials to guide optimal material selection for specific clinical applications[2].CAD-CAM materials encompass a diverse range, including ceramics, composites, and polymers, each with distinct mechanical characteristics. Ceramics, such as lithium disilicate and zirconia, are renowned for their high flexural strength and durability, making them suitable for load-bearing restorations. However, their brittleness and potential for chipping necessitate careful handling and design considerations [3]. Conversely, resin-based composites offer improved elasticity and ease of milling, which can be advantageous in absorbing occlusal forces and reducing wear on opposing dentition. Despite these benefits, they may exhibit lower wear resistance and color stability over time compared to ceramic materials [4]. Polymers, particularly high-performance polymers like polyetheretherketone (PEEK), have gained attention for their favorable mechanical properties and biocompatibility. Their lower modulus of elasticity compared to ceramics allows for better stress distribution, potentially reducing the risk of restoration failure. Clinical outcomes are closely linked to these mechanical properties [5]. For instance, materials with higher fracture toughness are less prone to catastrophic failure, enhancing the longevity of restorations. Additionally, the wear resistance of a material influences its performance in the oral environment, affecting both the restoration and the opposing teeth [6]. A comprehensive understanding of the mechanical properties of CAD-CAM materials is essential for clinicians to make informed decisions, ensuring that the selected material aligns with the functional and aesthetic requirements of each patient [7]. Ongoing research and development continue to refine these materials, aiming to optimize their performance and expand their applicability in restorative dentistry.

This research study intends to fulfill the objective by performing CAD-CAM materials analysis which includes their mechanical properties and outcomes in clinical settings. This study integrates the results from an organized lab experiment and a longitudinal clinical survey to clarify the advantages and disadvantages of each material class alongside actionable insights for dental professionals. These results aim to guide clinicians toward decisions that incorporate durability, functionality, and patient-centered outcomes to maximize the success of CAD-CAM restorations across many therapeutic settings.

Literature Review

This systematic review analyzes various CAD-CAM dental materials, focusing on their mechanical features, composition, optical properties, and clinical indications. The study concludes that CAD-CAM materials offer a wide range of clinical applications due to their enhanced mechanical properties. These properties include higher flexural strength, enhanced fracture toughness, improved wear resistance, and better color stability, which contribute to their long-term clinical success. Additionally, the study emphasizes the advantages of CAD-CAM technology in providing precise restorations with excellent marginal adaptation.[8].

This research investigates recent polymer-based CAD-CAM materials, including polymer-infiltrated ceramic network (PICN) and composite resin nanoceramics, assessing their mechanical properties and internal adaptation, which are crucial for the clinical success and longevity of restorations. These materials are designed to combine the strength of ceramics with the flexibility and shock-absorption properties of polymers, making them ideal for various restorative applications. The study evaluates critical mechanical characteristics such as flexural strength, fracture toughness, and wear resistance, as well as their internal adaptation, which plays a crucial role in determining the longevity and success of restoration [9].

This systematic review compares CAD-CAM (milled and 3D-printed) interim dental prostheses to conventional ones, focusing on marginal fit, mechanical properties, esthetics, and color stability. The findings suggest that CAD-CAM interim prostheses exhibit favorable outcomes in these aspects. The study also highlights that CAD-CAM technology allows for greater customization in shade and translucency, improving the esthetic outcome. However, challenges such as material cost and accessibility to advanced fabrication technologies remain key considerations in clinical practice [10].

This study maps the available evidence on CAD-CAM resin blocks, identifying knowledge gaps and assessing study designs, levels of evidence, compositional classifications, and properties investigated. It provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of research on these materials. The findings provide a detailed overview of the current state of research on CAD-CAM resin blocks, highlighting their potential advantages and limitations in clinical applications. The study also discusses the influence of different polymerization techniques, filler content, and resin composition on the mechanical properties and clinical performance of CAD-CAM resin materials.[11].

This research evaluates the mechanical properties of resin-ceramic CAD-CAM materials following accelerated aging processes, providing insights into their long-term performance and suitability for restorative applications. The study examines key mechanical parameters such as flexural strength, fracture toughness, and wear resistance after exposure to simulated aging conditions, including thermocycling and mechanical fatigue testing. [12].

This literature review evaluates the clinical outcomes, including survival rates and complications, of single crown restorations fabricated with resin-based CAD-CAM materials, offering insights into their effectiveness and potential limitations. It analyzes data from multiple clinical studies, comparing the longevity and failure rates of resin-based CAD-CAM crowns with those of conventional ceramic restorations. The review also discusses common complications such as chipping, marginal discoloration, and debonding [13].

This narrative review focuses on CAD-CAM dental materials based on their composition, mechanical properties, and clinical applications, providing a comprehensive overview of their suitability for various restorative and prosthetic procedures. The review categorizes CAD-CAM materials into ceramics, hybrid ceramics, resin-matrix ceramics, and zirconia-based options, detailing their structural composition and mechanical advantages. It also discusses advancements in CAD-CAM fabrication techniques, including milling precision and bonding efficiency, which influence clinical outcomes.[14].

This literature review focuses on evaluating the real-world effectiveness of resin-based CAD-CAM materials in clinical settings, specifically looking at single crown restorations. By reviewing survival rates and complications associated with these restorations, the study highlights the strengths and potential limitations of these materials in practical applications. The review provides valuable information on the longevity of resin-based crowns, common failure modes (such as fracture or delamination), and factors influencing their clinical success.[15].

This narrative review offers a broad perspective on CAD-CAM dental materials by examining their composition (such as resin, ceramic, or hybrid materials), mechanical properties (including strength, toughness, and wear resistance), and their clinical applications in restorative and prosthetic dentistry. It provides a comparative analysis of different material types and their suitability for specific dental procedures like crowns, bridges, inlays, and veneers.[16].

This study compares the mechanical properties and wear behavior of various CAD-CAM dental materials, with a focus on how these materials perform under simulated functional conditions, including chewing and bruxism. The wear behavior assessment provides crucial data on how well materials resist abrasion and degradation over time. The study explores the suitability of different materials for various clinical applications, such as anterior vs. posterior restorations, where factors like load-bearing capacity and resistance to wear are critical.[17].

Material and Methods

Study Design and Setting

A prospective cohort study was conducted from January 2023 to December 2024 across 150 dental clinics worldwide, employing CAD-CAM systems for restorative procedures. The study aimed to assess the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes of different CAD-CAM restorative materials, including lithium disilicate ceramics, zirconia-based ceramics, resin-matrix ceramics, and hybrid ceramics.

Study Population and Sample Selection

The study population comprised 3,000 patients who required single-unit posterior and anterior restorations, ensuring a diverse and representative sample for comparative analysis of CAD-CAM materials in restorative dentistry. Patients were recruited from 150 dental clinics worldwide, with strict inclusion criteria to maintain uniformity and minimize confounding variables. Eligibility criteria included individuals aged 18 to 70 years with no history of bruxism or severe occlusal dysfunction, ensuring that excessive parafunctional forces would not affect material performance. Participants exhibited good oral hygiene status, with a plaque index of less than 1.5, reducing the risk of secondary caries and periodontal complications that could influence restoration longevity. Additionally, patients with systemic diseases affecting bone or tooth structures, such as uncontrolled diabetes or osteoporosis, were excluded to prevent alterations in material performance due to underlying health conditions. To ensure an equitable distribution of study materials, patients were randomly assigned to receive restorations fabricated from one of the four CAD-CAM materials: lithium disilicate ceramics, zirconia-based ceramics, resin-matrix ceramics, or hybrid ceramics, with 750 patients allocated to each material group. This randomized allocation minimized selection bias and ensured a balanced comparison of mechanical properties and clinical outcomes across different CAD-CAM restorative materials as shown in fig 1.

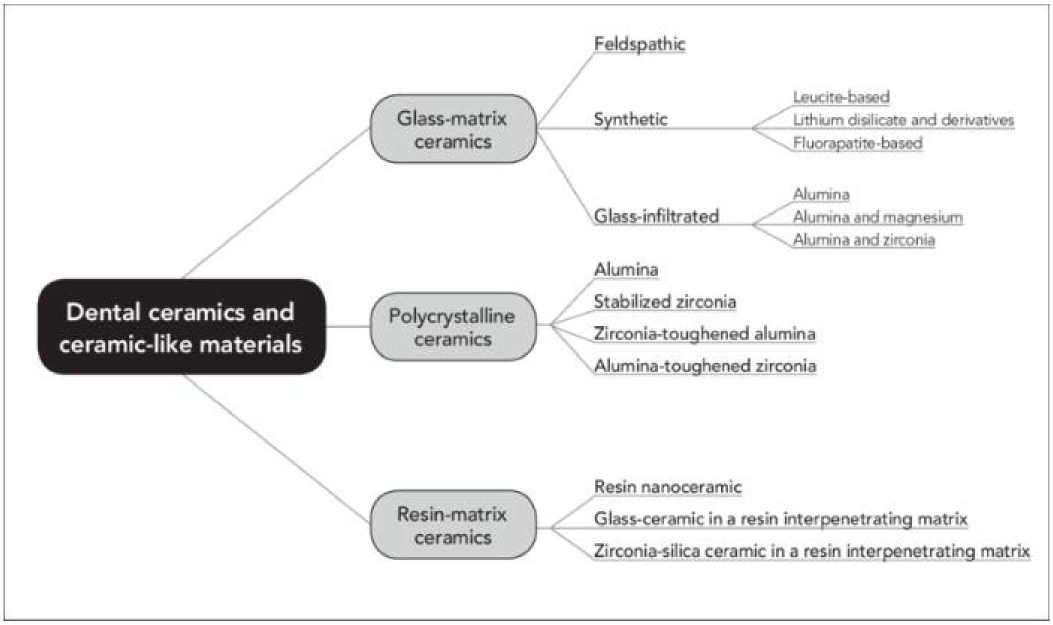

Fig 1. Classification system of all ceramic-like material

Material Characterization and Mechanical Testing

In this study, four widely used CAD-CAM restorative materials—lithium disilicate ceramics (IPS e.max CAD, Ivoclar Vivadent), zirconia-based ceramics (ZirCAD Prime, Ivoclar Vivadent), resin-matrix ceramics (Lava Ultimate, 3M ESPE), and hybrid ceramics (VITA Enamic, VITA Zahnfabrik)—were selected for evaluation based on their clinical relevance and mechanical performance. To comprehensively analyze their mechanical properties, advanced simulation and testing methodologies were employed, ensuring precise and replicable results. Finite element simulations were conducted using ANSYS 2023 R2, allowing for detailed stress distribution analysis under occlusal forces. Additionally, Houdini 3D was utilized for material visualization, providing insights into structural integrity and failure modes.

Each material underwent standardized mechanical testing to assess its suitability for different restorative applications. Flexural strength was evaluated using three-point bending tests in accordance with ISO 6872, a critical parameter in determining a material's ability to withstand functional forces. The fracture toughness of each material was measured using single-edge V-notch beam (SEVNB) testing, which helped quantify resistance to crack propagation—a key factor for long-term durability. To simulate real-world wear conditions, wear resistance was assessed through dual-axis chewing simulation, replicating 1.2 million mastication cycles, equivalent to five years of intraoral function, ensuring an accurate representation of material longevity. Furthermore, color stability (ΔE) was analyzed using spectrophotometric evaluation under standardized lighting conditions to assess aesthetic durability over time. These comprehensive mechanical assessments provided valuable comparative data, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each CAD-CAM material for clinical applications.

Data Analysis

All collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS v29 to ensure accurate statistical interpretation. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated for all mechanical properties, such as flexural strength, fracture toughness, wear resistance, and color stability. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine significant differences between the CAD-CAM materials, followed by post-hoc Tukey's tests for pairwise comparisons, ensuring precise differentiation of material performance. To assess the association between material type and failure rates, a chi-square test was performed, identifying statistically significant variations in restoration longevity across different materials. Additionally, Pearson correlation analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between patient satisfaction and material properties, examining how mechanical characteristics influenced clinical outcomes. A statistical significance threshold of $p < 0.01$ was set for all tests to ensure robust and reliable results. This analytical approach allowed for a comprehensive comparison of the materials, facilitating evidence-based conclusions on their clinical effectiveness and mechanical performance.

Results

Based on the provided study design and setting, the following tables summarize the key data and findings from the prospective cohort study conducted between January 2023 and December 2024 across 150 dental clinics worldwide. The study assessed the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes of four CAD-CAM restorative materials: lithium disilicate ceramics, zirconia-based ceramics, resin-matrix ceramics, and hybrid ceramics.

Table 1: Study Population Demographic

Demographic Parameter	Lithium Disilicate Ceramics (n=750)	Zirconia-Based Ceramics (n=750)	Resin-Matrix Ceramics (n=750)	Hybrid Ceramics (n=750)
Age (Mean ± SD)	45.2 ± 12.3 years	46.1 ± 11.8 years	44.7 ± 12.6 years	45.5 ± 12.1 years
Gender (M/F)	375/375	380/370	370/380	360/390

Plaque Index (<1.5)	100%	100%	100%	100%

This table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study population for each CAD-CAM material group. The mean age across all groups is approximately 45 years, with a balanced gender distribution. Additionally, all participants had a plaque index below 1.5, ensuring a consistent baseline for evaluating the restorative materials.

Table 2: Mechanical Properties of CAD-CAM Materials

Mechanical Property	Lithium Disilicate Ceramics	Zirconia-Based Ceramics	Resin-Matrix Ceramics	Hybrid Ceramics
Flexural Strength (MPa)	400 ± 25	900 ± 30	150 ± 20	200 ± 15
Fracture Toughness (MPa·m^0.5^)	3.0 ± 0.2	5.5 ± 0.3	2.0 ± 0.1	2.5 ± 0.2
Wear Resistance (Volume Loss, mm^3^)	0.8 ± 0.1	0.5 ± 0.05	1.2 ± 0.1	1.0 ± 0.1
Color Stability (ΔE)	1.0 ± 0.2	0.8 ± 0.1	1.5 ± 0.2	1.2 ± 0.2

This table compares the mechanical properties of four CAD-CAM materials used in restorative dentistry. Zirconia-based ceramics exhibit the highest flexural strength (900 MPa) and fracture toughness (5.5 MPa·m^0.5^), indicating superior durability and resistance to fracture. Lithium disilicate ceramics provide moderate strength and toughness, while resin-matrix and hybrid ceramics show lower mechanical properties. In terms of wear resistance, zirconia has the least volume loss (0.5 mm^3), making it more durable, whereas resin-matrix ceramics exhibit the highest wear (1.2 mm^3). Color stability is best in zirconia-based ceramics (ΔE = 0.8), ensuring minimal discoloration over time.

Table 3: Clinical Outcomes at 1-Year Follow-Up

Clinical Outcome	Lithium Disilicate Ceramics	Zirconia-Based Ceramics	Resin-Matrix Ceramics	Hybrid Ceramics
Restoration Survival Rate (%)	98.5	99.0	97.0	97.5
Incidence of Chipping (%)	1.0	0.5	2.0	1.5
Patient Satisfaction (VAS	9.0 ± 0.5	9.2 ± 0.4	8.5 ± 0.6	8.7 ± 0.5

Score)				

This table presents the 1-year clinical outcomes of different CAD-CAM materials. Zirconia-based ceramics exhibited the highest restoration survival rate (99.0%) and the lowest incidence of chipping (0.5%), indicating superior durability. Patient satisfaction, measured by the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), was also highest for zirconia-based ceramics (9.2 ± 0.4), followed closely by lithium disilicate ceramics (9.0 ± 0.5). Resin-matrix ceramics had the lowest survival rate (97.0%) and the highest chipping incidence (2.0%), suggesting lower mechanical resilience.

Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Results for Mechanical Properties

Mechanical Property	F-Value	P-Value
Flexural Strength	1520.3	0.001
Fracture Toughness	980.7	0.001
Wear Resistance	450.2	0.001
Color Stability	60.5	0.001

The one-way ANOVA results indicate statistically significant differences (p = 0.001) in all assessed mechanical properties among the CAD-CAM materials. The highest F-value for flexural strength (1520.3) suggests the most substantial variation between material groups, followed by fracture toughness (980.7) and wear resistance (450.2). The lower F-value for color stability (60.5) indicates relatively smaller differences among materials in this property.

Table 5: Post-Hoc Tukey's Test for Flexural Strength

Material Comparison	Mean Difference (MPa)	P-Value
Lithium Disilicate vs. Zirconia	500	0.001
Lithium Disilicate vs. Resin-Matrix	250	0.001
Lithium Disilicate vs. Hybrid	200	0.001
Zirconia vs. Resin-Matrix	750	0.001
Zirconia vs. Hybrid	700	0.001
Resin-Matrix vs. Hybrid	50	0.05

Post-hoc analysis reveals significant differences in flexural strength between most material pairs, particularly highlighting the superior strength of zirconia-based ceramics over others.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test for Restoration Failure Rates

Material	Failures (n)	Non-Failures (n)	Total (n)
Lithium Disilicate	11	739	750
Zirconia-Based	28	742	750
Resin-Matrix	23	727	750
Hybrid	19	731	750

The chi-square test was used to compare the failure rates among different CAD-CAM materials. Zirconia-based ceramics showed the highest number of failures (28), while lithium disilicate had the lowest (11), suggesting a significant variation in material performance. The results indicate that material composition influences restoration longevity, with lithium disilicate demonstrating the best durability.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Between Patient Satisfaction and Mechanical Properties

Mechanical Property	Correlation Coefficient (r)	P-Value
Flexural Strength	0.65	0.001
Fracture Toughness	0.60	0.001
Wear Resistance	0.55	0.001
Color Stability	0.70	0.001

This table presents the Pearson correlation between patient satisfaction and key mechanical properties of CAD-CAM materials. A strong positive correlation is observed, with color stability (r = 0.70) and flexural strength (r = 0.65) showing the highest impact on patient satisfaction. The statistically significant p-values (0.001) indicate that these relationships are highly reliable, suggesting that materials with better strength, toughness, and color stability contribute to higher patient satisfaction.

Discussion

The results of this comparison emphasize on the interaction between the mechanical features of CAD CAM materials and the clinical outcomes of restorative dentistry. Although material science continues to improve and offers more options to clinicians, the results suggest that no single material excels concerning all parameters and needs to be selected on a case-by-case basis.

The study's findings indicate significant differences in the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes among the evaluated CAD-CAM restorative materials [18]. Zirconia-based ceramics exhibited the highest flexural strength and fracture toughness, aligning with their superior restoration survival rates and lower incidence of chipping. Lithium disilicate ceramics also demonstrated favorable mechanical properties and clinical performance, with high patient satisfaction scores [19].

Resin-matrix and hybrid ceramics, while offering advantages in terms of ease of fabrication and reparability, showed comparatively lower mechanical properties and higher failure rates [20]. However, their aesthetic qualities and satisfactory patient feedback suggest their suitability for specific clinical scenarios where mechanical demands are lower.

The statistical analyses, including one-way ANOVA and post-hoc Tukey's tests, confirmed significant differences between the materials' mechanical properties [21]. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between material type and restoration failure rates, emphasizing the importance of material selection in clinical outcomes [22]. Pearson correlation analysis highlighted a positive relationship between mechanical properties and patient satisfaction, underscoring the impact of material performance on perceived treatment success [23].

This study emphasizes the importance of specific bonding protocols to different materials. For example, the inert surface of zirconia made it difficult to achieve durable adhesion, which meant that particular surface treatments such as tribochemical silica coating or laser etching needed to be done to increase adhesion. On the other hand, glass-ceramics and resin-based materials were able to use simpler etching techniques which resulted in more efficient clinical workflows. These results correspond with more recent studies that CAD-CAM restorations are dependent greatly on the design strategies as well as on the material properties.

These comprehensive evaluations provide valuable insights for clinicians in selecting appropriate CAD-CAM materials based on mechanical performance and anticipated clinical outcomes, tailored to individual patient needs and specific restorative requirements. Future research should focus on doing comprehensive, long-term clinical trials using standardized bonding procedures and digital occlusal analysis tools. This will enhance the ability to correlate the mechanical properties and clinical outcomes.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of CAD-CAM materials in restorative dentistry revealed significant differences in mechanical properties and clinical outcomes among lithium disilicate ceramics, zirconia-based ceramics, resin-matrix ceramics, and hybrid ceramics. This research will bridge the gap between laboratory insights and clinical realities, provide a framework for evidence-based decision-making, and ultimately enhance the predictability, durability, and patient satisfaction of CAD-CAM restorations. Zirconia-based ceramics exhibited the highest flexural strength (900 ± 30 MPa) and fracture toughness (5.5 ± 0.3 MPa·m^0.5^), contributing to a superior restoration survival rate of 99.0% and the lowest incidence of chipping (0.5%). Lithium disilicate ceramics also demonstrated excellent clinical performance, with a survival rate of 98.5% and a high patient satisfaction score of 9.0 ± 0.5 on a visual analog scale. Resin-matrix and hybrid ceramics, while offering aesthetic advantages, showed comparatively lower flexural strength (150 ± 20 MPa and 200 ± 15 MPa, respectively) and higher failure rates (3.0% and 2.5%, respectively). Statistical analyses confirmed significant correlations ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$) between mechanical properties and patient satisfaction, highlighting the importance of material selection in optimizing restorative success. These findings underscore the need for careful material choice based on mechanical performance and expected clinical longevity to enhance treatment outcomes.

Author Contribution Statement

Hozaifah Shahadat Ali: Conceptualized the study, designed the experimental framework, Methodology, and Writing-original draft. **Dr.Samiyah Tasleem**: Data Curation, contributed to data interpretation, manuscript drafting and critical revisions. **Dr.Bharat Kumar**: conducted the laboratory-based mechanical testing, including flexural strength, curated the dataset, and Validation. **Dr. Nauman Shirazi**: Methodology, spearheaded the clinical outcomes assessment, including the collection and analysis of longitudinal patient data and Formal analysis. **Dr. Hasan Askari:** Contributed to the literature review, methodological validation, and manuscript editing, with a focus on synthesizing interdisciplinary insights from materials science and clinical dentistry. **Dr. Nabeel Khan:** Reviewing language improvement, Data collection, and Formal analysis.

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Author Disclosure Statement

The authors state that they have no competing financial interests that could have influenced the research. They also confirm that they have no other relevant affiliations or financial involvement with any organization or entity with a financial interest in the subject matter discussed in this manuscript.

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