Wear and Mechanical Behavior of ZA27 Alloy Reinforced with B₄C Produced by Powder Metallurgy Method

Emre Deniz YALCIN1*, Aykut CANAKCI2, Fatih ERDEMIT2

1 Karadeniz Technical University, Abdullah Kanca Vocational High School, 61530, Trabzon, Turkey
2 Karadeniz Technical University, Department of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, 61080, Trabzon, Turkey

Highlights

• This article focuses on the wear behavior of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites.
• Different loads were applied to determine the wear performance in the study.
• Mechanical alloying and hot pressing technique showed effective results.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, zinc-aluminum derivatives are successfully used in many engineering applications. Especially, ZA27 alloy attracts increasing attention day by day by design engineers due to its properties such as good rigidity, good machinability, and good heat transfer. In addition, researchers are focused on strengthening the ZA27 matrix alloy with ceramic-based hard particle reinforcements and increasing its wear performance [1-6]. Yalcin et al. investigated dry sliding (not lubricated), abrasive wear, and corrosion behavior of ZA27/Graphene/B₄C nanocomposites. The composites made by the powder metallurgy method were made with various loads (1, 2, 5, and 10 N) using a ball type on the disc. According to their results, increasing B₄C reinforcement improved the wear and corrosion behavior of hybrid composites. Although, all the wear types changed from adhesive to abrasive wear when the adhesive wear mechanism was more dominant for ZA27 alloy and had a lot higher weight loss composites. Essentially, reinforcement with nano B₄C particles changed the mechanism to abrasive wear. The increase in nano B₄C content resulted in the changing of wear from two-body to three-body abrasion.

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they produced hybrid composites by adding B4C and graphite to Al6061 and Al7075 alloys, and they improved mechanical properties with B4C reinforcement and maintained their lubrication properties with graphite reinforcement. Besides, lubricating materials such as graphite increase abrasion resistance while reducing physical and mechanical properties [10]. Miloradovic et al. investigated the wear properties on samples prepared from ZA27 matrix metal matrix hybrid composites containing 10% SiC and 1% graphite by volume. As a result of the experiments conducted in different experimental conditions using block-on-disc in a dry friction environment, they observed that ZA27 matrix hybrid composites showed lower amounts of wear than pure ZA27 material at all applied loads and speeds. They determined that the amount of wear increased with increasing speed and load and that the wear mechanism of pure ZA27 material was the same as that of hybrid composites. It was observed that the tendency to form micro-cracks increased with increasing loads and speeds, and thus demonstrated that mechanically mixed layers on the contact surfaces played an important role during the wear process [11]. Varol et al. studied the effect of reinforcement amount of Al2024-B4C composites on mechanical and physical properties. They found that the reinforcement amount of 10% by weight was an optimum amount for superior physical and mechanical properties [12]. Prasad examined, the wear behavior of Zn/SiC composites in a dry and oily environment was examined. It was stated that the wear rate increased with increasing load in dry and oily friction. The graphite supplement added to the oil reduced the abrasion rate by up to 6%. It was observed that SiC reinforcement hardened the soft matrix against abrasion and the graphite particles transferred into the oil in an oily environment reduce the wear on the surface by mixing with the oil [13]. This finding indicates that composite materials have a better tribological performance than matrix materials. B4C ceramic particles were used to increase mechanical strength within the scope of this research work. The significant reason for using B4C instead of SiC (3.21gr/cm3) and Al2O3 (3.98 gr/cm3) ceramic particles is that B4C (2.52 gr/cm3) particles have a very low density compared to SiC and Al2O3 particles and will therefore be made using B4C. This is because composites and nanocomposites have higher specific strength values. Another feature that provides superiority to B4C particles over SiC and Al2O3 particles is its high chemical stability due to its high melting temperature. There is a difference of approximately 700°C between the melting point of B4C particles (2763°C) and the melting point of Al2O3 particles (2072°C). Another advantage of B4C particles (3200 kg/mm²) compared to SiC (2800 kg/mm²) and Al2O3 (2000 kg/mm²) particles are that they have high hardness. Thus, the desired mechanical strength can be obtained easily by using a lower reinforcement ratio [14]. An increase in reinforcement content or a decrease in particle size increases the amount of reinforcement, as a larger interfacial zone is required for dislocation drilling to occur. Moreover, dislocation growth results in a coherent ground of precipitates in the metal matrix. Eventually, both the reinforcement and the precipitates obstruct the mobility of these dislocations causing improved yield and ultimate tensile strength [15]. Additionally, B4C content is a direct relationship in the mechanical properties of the composite. There are limited research studies in the materials science literature on the effect of B4C content of ZA27/B4C composites produced by hot-pressing techniques on the wear and mechanical properties.

B4C reinforced ZA27 nanocomposite materials used in the study; it is produced by combining mechanical alloying and powder metallurgy techniques, which have a significant place among material production methods. Powder metallurgy is a suitable method in producing and metal–matrix composites. A significant benefit of this technique is its low processing temperature compared with casting methods. It is also feasible to achieve a good distribution of reinforcing particles. Another benefit of the powder metallurgy method is its ability to manufacture near net shape products with low cost [16]. Because of this, our study focused on the production, mechanical properties, wear characteristics of nano B4C reinforced ZA27 alloy, containing different rates of B4C, produced using the conventional powder metallurgy method.

2. MATERIAL METHOD

Nanosized B4C powders were obtained from Alfa Easer with 99.9% purity and 50 nm size. ZA27 matrix powders were produced by the casting method. The chemical composition of the ZA27 is shown in Table 1. The experimental flow chart is shown in Figure 1. ZA27/B4C nanocomposites with different content of nano B4C (0, 0.125, 0.5, 1, 2, and 3 vol %) were produced by mechanical milling (Table 2). ZA27 and B4C powders were ground in a planetary ball mill (Retsch PM 100) at 400 rpm for 1 h. Ball powder ratio was...
chosen as 5:1 and 10 mm diameter tungsten balls were used. To prevent clumping, 1% zinc stearate was added to the mixtures. The prepared mixtures were pre-pressed at 200 MPa for 1 minute and then hot pressed at 435 degrees under 500 MPa pressure. Brinell hardness values were determined by applying a load of 31.25 kgf with 6 replicate measurements and the hardness results were calculated by taking the arithmetic average of the results obtained. Wear tests of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites were performed using the ball-on-disc (DUCOM-TR20-LE) technique. The wear tests were performed in unoiled conditions, with a sliding speed range (100 rpm) and load (1, 2, 5, and 10 N). The sliding distances were chosen as 300 m, separately. Before and after the abrasion tests, the weights of the nanocomposites were measured with precision scales and weight loss was determined. The produced ZA27/B₄C nanocomposite materials were cut with a diamond disc for metallographic examination and covered in a Bakelite removal device. The samples prepared after these processes were gritted with 600, 800, 1000, 1200, and 1500 numbered grinding papers, respectively, in an automatic polishing device. The surface of ground samples was polished using alumina liquid and their surfaces were cleaned with ethyl alcohol. The morphology and microstructure analysis of the starting powders, the ground powders were examined using a ZEISS LBS 10 brand SEM-EDX (Figure 2). The distribution of reinforcements in the ZA27, porosity, interfacial research of nanocomposite samples were carried out in detail by SEM and X-ray diffractometer (XRD) analysis. A laser particle size analyzer (Malvern-Mastersizer Hydro2000) was used for determination of particle size of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposite powders (Figure 2).

**Table 1. Chemical composition of ZA27 (wt%)**

|   | Al  | Cu  | Mg  | Zn  |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|   | 25.8| 2.4 | 0.012| Bal.|

**Table 2. The nanocomposites produced by mechanical milling**

| Sample Number | Milling Time (h) | ZA27 (wt%) | B₄C (wt%) |
|---------------|------------------|------------|-----------|
| ZA27          | 1                | 100        | 0         |
| ZAB-0.125     | 1                | 99.875     | 0.125     |
| ZAB-0.5       | 1                | 99.5       | 0.5       |
| ZAB-1         | 1                | 99         | 1         |
| ZAB-2         | 1                | 98         | 2         |
| ZAB-3         | 1                | 97         | 3         |
3. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Microstructure

During the high-energy ball milling process, the impacts between the surfaces of the powder-ball-powder, and ball-powder-ball, which is subjected to a high-energy grinding process, caused changes in particle size. Therefore, nanocomposite powders were subjected to 0, 1, and 4 h of milling processes to determine the optimum milling time. Figure 3 shows the morphology and SEM-EDS element distributions of 2% B₄C containing nanocomposite powders at a milling time of 1h. It was observed that a small amount of nano B₄C was embedded in the matrix during the initial milling time. More B₄C particles were embedded into the matrix after a milling time of 1 h. A milling time was determined in which the B₄C particles were...
homogeneously dispersed into the ZA27 powders and at the same time embedded. Figure 4 shows the B₄C particles into the matrix that are used for reinforcement. The black region shows the reinforcement particles for ZAB-3 sample. As compared with ZAB-2, the distribution of B₄C particles was non homogeneous. It is clear that the agglomerated particles settle around the grain boundary.

Figure 3. SEM mapping images of ZAB-2 sample at milling time of 1h

Figure 4. SEM images of ZAB-3 sample at milling time of 1h; a) 500 X and b) 1.00 K.X

3.2. Porosity and Hardness

The Brinell hardness and porosity measurement results of the samples (with data distributions) are shown in Figures 5 and 6, respectively. It was seen that there was an important decrease in the hardness values. Gülsoy et al. studied Injection molding of 316L reinforced with Al₂O₃. They briefed that the tensile strength
decreased due to the increase in the Al₂O₃ particle content of the microstructure, more increased porosity, and lower theoretical density [17]. Erdemir et al. produced functionally graded Al2024/SiC composites by hot press method. They stated that the porosity value of composites increased from 0.56% to 2.02% with changing the SiC content of the composites from 30% to 60%. Similar results with this study were observed in hard particle reinforced composite [18]. High amounts of reinforcing increases resulted in increases in pore amount and more plastic deformation of the ZA27 alloy matrix material powders while reductions in the hardness of the samples. When we examined the hardness values of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposite samples, after 1h of the milling time, the hardness values of nanocomposite did not change at low reinforcement amounts but decreased at increased reinforcement rates. High amounts of reinforcing increases resulted in increases in pore amount more plastic deformation of the ZA27 alloy matrix material powders during milling, while reductions in the hardness of the samples. The lowest hardness value was 67.9 HB for the ZAB-3 nanocomposite. The increase in pore amount to 11.07% caused the hardness values to decrease. According to the results, while the distribution of reinforcing materials in the matrix was one of the factors affecting the hardness values of nanocomposite materials, the amount of porosity played an important role. The relative density decreased with increasing supplementation amount while the amount of porosity increased.

Figure 5. Porosity values of nanocomposites with different B₄C contents

Figure 6. Hardness values of nanocomposites with different B₄C contents
3.3. XRD Analyses

XRD patterns of specimens which include B\textsubscript{4}C nanoparticle ingredients are shown in Figure 7. The peaks of Zn, Al, and CuZn\textsubscript{5} as well as B\textsubscript{4}C can be seen in the XRD pattern. When compared with the matrix, newly produced phases such as the B\textsubscript{4}C phase were watched for ZA27/B\textsubscript{4}C nanocomposites, while the diffraction peaks of the B\textsubscript{4}C phase were very weak for the ZAB-0.5 composite. The increase in the diffraction peaks of B\textsubscript{4}C was seen in the ZAB-3 composite (Figure 7). XRD patterns showed that a milling speed of 400 rpm was sufficient to get the best results. When the milling speed, ball/powder ratio, and milling time were compared, it was seen that the ground B\textsubscript{4}C particles were effective on the particle size [14].

![XRD patterns of nanocomposites for different B\textsubscript{4}C content](image_url)

**Figure 7.** XRD patterns of nanocomposites for different B\textsubscript{4}C content

3.4. Wear

ZA27/B\textsubscript{4}C nanocomposites showed that the wear mechanism is adhesive and delamination wear. The pressure force between the abrasive ball and the contact surfaces of the samples with the increase of the applied load caused scraping and rupture with friction in the samples, and the highest wear amounts were below the burden of 10 N that is the highest load. As a result, ZAB-3 was the highest abrasion resistance. This can be attributed to the weak bounded hard particles coming out of the matrix during the wear test. It appears that while the load increased from 1 to 10 N, an increase was observed in weight loss for ZA27 alloy and its nanocomposites. At the highest load of 10 N, the temperature of the worm surface and pin stroked the rudimentary value. As the load increased on the pin there was the same upsurge in the weight loss of the matrix and reinforcement materials. The weight loss of composite was most noteworthy in all the stacking terms as shown in Figure 8. When Table 3 was examined, the weight loss of the nanocomposites reduced from 0.093 to 0.023; however, nano B\textsubscript{4}C content increased from 0.125 to 3% in the ZA27 matrix. The increment in wear opposition of the ZA27 matrix with changing wt\% B\textsubscript{4}C nanocomposites might be because of the high hardness value of B\textsubscript{4}C which drives about as the boundary for the wear damages [19]. Canakci et al. studied the effects of Fe-Al intermetallic compounds on the corrosion and wear behaviors of AA2024/316L composites. Their study indicated that the relative density
of composites decreased from 98% to 75% with changing the reinforcement content of the composites from 0% to 25%. AA2024/25% 316L composite has highest wear resistance [20]. Related results with this study were perceived in the composite.

Table 3. Weight loss of ZA27 and its nanocomposites

| Sample  | Weight loss on 1 N load (mg) | Weight loss on 2 N load (mg) | Weight loss on 5 N load (mg) | Weight loss on 10 N load (mg) |
|---------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ZA27    | 0.36                        | 1.4                         | 76.6                         | 250                           |
| ZAB-0.125 | 0.04                      | 0.043                       | 0.055                        | 0.093                         |
| ZAB-0.5 | 0.024                      | 0.036                       | 0.045                        | 0.057                         |
| ZAB-1   | 0.018                      | 0.032                       | 0.04                         | 0.048                         |
| ZAB-2   | 0.007                      | 0.013                       | 0.021                        | 0.026                         |
| ZAB-3   | 0.003                      | 0.009                       | 0.02                         | 0.023                         |

Figure 8. Weight loss of ZA27 and its nanocomposites

Figure 9 shows the SEM image and EDS analysis obtained from the worn surface of the ZAB-3 nanocomposite. As the EDS analysis of the ZAB-3 sample with the highest abrasion resistance will be seen in the EDS analysis under 10 N load, the Zn element is indicated as red, the Al element is indicated as green and the distribution of the B4C reinforcement within the ZA27 alloy has determined the wear mechanism. Figure 9 also shows the wear track with the elemental mapping for ZAB-3 nanocomposites after a speed of 100 rpm by holding a heap of 10 N wear tests. From Figure 9, it is reasoned that the volume of nano B4C showed with blue colors into wear track is lower than that of nano B4C out of wear track. It can be concluded that hard B4C particles are coming out of the matrix. It is seen that the wear mechanism here changed from a two-body mechanism to a three-body mechanism. In addition, wear particles undertake the task of wearing between two surfaces. These wear particles also make a free-rolling motion as well as sliding. Wear caused by sand or gravel in a bed, hard debris trapped between moving surfaces are examples of three-body wear [21].
Figure 9. SEM and EDS analysis of ZAB-3 nanocomposite

From Figure 10, it is seen that nano B₄C content increases from 0 to 3 wt%, there is a decrement in wear for all the samples tested. Although, all the wear types changed from adhesive to abrasive wear when the adhesive wear mechanism was more dominant for ZA27 alloy and had a lot higher weight loss sample. Fundamentally, reinforcement with hard nano B₄C particles changed the mechanism to abrasive wear. Besides, as the sliding track continued expanding there was an increment in wear damage. The increased temperature rise due to high sliding rates causes plastic deformation of the composites. There was prolonged delamination accumulation to enhanced wear damages.
4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, the effect of the % B₄C content on the wear and mechanical properties of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites is examined. The results of our paper can be summarized as follows:

1) ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites were produced by the powder metallurgy technique. Increasing B₄C content increased the agglomeration region into a matrix.

2) The XRD patterns indicated the presence of compounds such as Zn, Al, B₄C, and CuZn₅. The B₄C phases become more distinct for composites with the highest B₄C content. Nevertheless, the content of these phases was intensely reduced for ZAB-0.5 composite.

3) The effect of B₄C content on the wear behavior of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites was analyzed in detail. Increasing B₄C supplementation reduced wear loss. The highest wear resistance was obtained from the ZAB-3 composite. In SEM analyses of the worn surfaces of ZA27/B₄C nanocomposites, increased B₄C reinforcement changed the wear characteristics of the composites from adhesive wear to abrasive wear.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

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