

# Mechanical Behavior of Concrete Block Masonry

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study is to verify, through compression tests on different prisms, the vertical and horizontal deformability and the failure modes of the components of concrete blocks under compression. In this study two mortar mixes were tested, along with two types of prism, with and without the presence of a vertical joint. The conclusions were: the appearance of non-linearities of the masonry corresponds to an increase in the lateral strain due to extensive cracking of the material and a progressive increase in the Poisson ratio, the cracks in the three-block prisms built with the mortar type I were vertical, occurring symmetrically on both sides; the prisms built with mortar type II had, as a consequence of localized crushing, an association with vertical cracks due to the concentrations of stresses at some points, the presence of a vertical joint led to the appearance of separation cracks between the middle block and the vertical mortar joint, when the stress reached approximately 30% of the compressive strength of the set; the prisms with two whole blocks and one vertical joint (B) built with the mortars of mixes I and II had a compressive strength of the order of 42% and 66% of the prisms with three whole blocks (A), respectively.

**Key words:** Masonry, concrete block, prisms, failure, vertical joint.

## 1. Introduction

Unreinforced structural masonry can be considered as a system formed of distinct materials which interact to respond to vertical and horizontal loads produced by self-weight, wind and seismic activity during its useful life, with a low tensile strength, as stated by Vermeltoort [1].

It is worth noting that the behavior of the set is dependent not only on the quality of each material employed, but also on the physic-chemical interactions between the materials. Thus, a structural masonry wall must be treated not as a function of the characteristics of its individual materials but as a composite material resulting from the interaction of the unit, of the mortar and also, when used, the grout. It is therefore important to understand completely the behavior of “masonry material”, which can vary from unit to unit and with the different types of mortar and grout. For this reason, the structural performance of masonry walls cannot be

estimated without carrying out tests on the walls or prisms of the materials to be used.

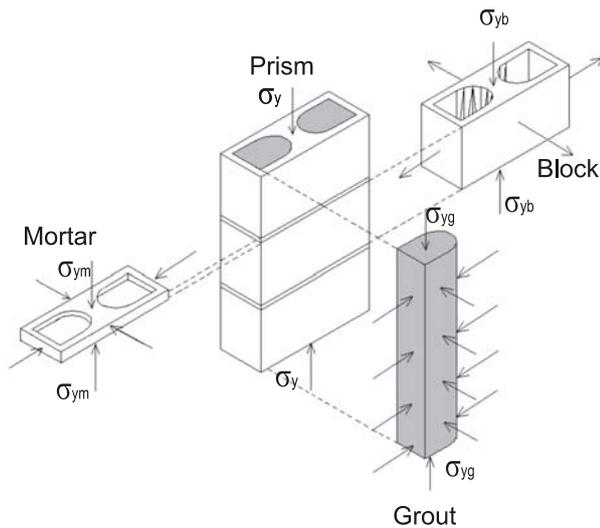
The main mechanical properties which masonry walls must offer are the compression, tensile, flexural and shear strength. Of these properties, the most important is the compression strength since, in general, masonry walls are submitted to more intense vertical loads than horizontal loads produced by wind or seismic activity. Previous studies on blockwork masonry indicate that the failure mode of masonry occurs under a biaxial state of tension-compression stress and the nonlinearity of the stress-strain correspond to large increasing in the Poisson's ratio which are associated with microcracking of the concrete and to evaluate the carrying capacity of the wall and to improve the knowledge about the compressive strength is important to understand the mechanisms involved in deformation and failure [2–9].

Fig. 1 shows a diagram of the distribution of stresses in the materials.

This study aims to analyze the mechanical results for prisms relating to the failure mode as a function of the

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**Fig. 1** Vertical and horizontal stresses in materials.

ratio between the strength of the materials (block and mortar), as well as to initiate a discussion on the linear and non linear deformability characteristics of the set. This paper addresses different relevant issues for the discussion of the mechanics of hollow concrete block masonry under compression.

## 2. Compressive Strength of Masonry, Blocks and Mortars

It is important to highlight that the compressive strength and failure mode of masonry components are important for the specification of appropriate materials for the construction of a building. Thus, for the different types of units and mortars, the behavior of the “structural masonry” has variations, whether in the failure mode or in its strength compared with the materials strength of which it is composed (unit, mortar and grout) by Mohamad [10]. A commonly used concept to define this relation is called the efficiency factor. This factor is obtained by dividing the compressive strength of the masonry prism by the compressive strength of the unit. Generally, this value is lower than one and decreases as a function of the increase in the resistance of the unit.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the mechanical behavior of two types of concrete block prisms produced with

two mortar mixes, according to the recommendations of BS-5628 [11], through the parameters of compressive strength, axial deformability, lateral deformability and failure mode.

## 4. Experimental Methodology and Program

For the experimental studies two types of prism were tested, the first named “A” containing three whole concrete blocks joined by two horizontal mortar joints. In this type of prism there are only two bed joints. The second type of prism, named “B”, is three blocks high, the middle block being composed of two half blocks with one vertical and two horizontal mortar joints. The main objective of the tests was to determine the influence of the vertical joint on the deformability characteristics and failure mode of the set. The total number of prisms of type A was eight, that is, four for mortar mix I and four for mortar mix II, with the volume compositions shown in Table 1. For type B the number of prisms built with mixes I and II were four and six, respectively. A larger number of prisms were built with mix II due to the possibility that mortars with a lower strength may have higher scattering in the values.

The axial strain measurement devices for one and two bed joints are shown in Figs. 2 and 3. A total of six LVDTs (linear variable differential transformer) with different displacement fields were used. The LVDTs were numbered as follows: numbers: 50237, 50238 and 50239, with a maximum displacement field of  $\pm 1$  mm (measurement base of 20 cm), and LVDT number 40351 had a maximum displacement field of  $\pm 5$  mm (measurement base of 40 cm). The LVDTs T1W and T2W accompany the steel plate and allow to observe whether the load transfer causes flexion.

**Table 1** Proportion of cement, limestone and sand in the mortar mixes (by volume).

Series	Mix – Proportion of materials used (by volume)		
	Cement	Limestone	Sand
I	1	0.25	3
II	1	0.5	4.5

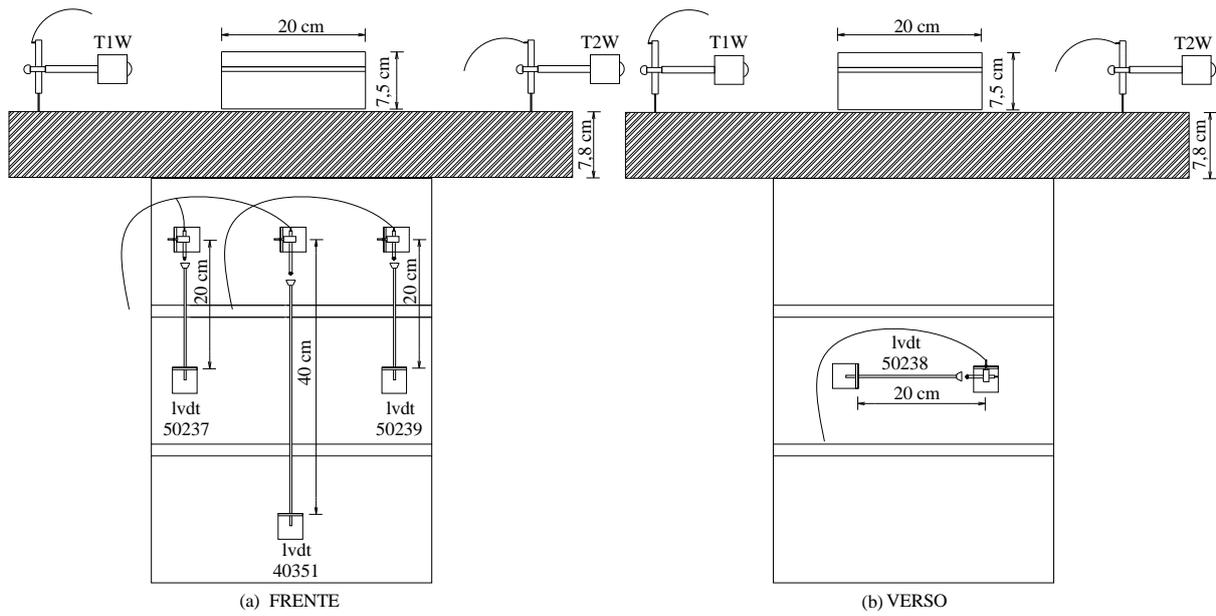


Fig. 2 Positioning of the LVDTs in the tests with prisms made of three blocks (type A).



LVDTs: 50237, 40351 and 50239

LVDT number 50238

Fig. 3 Positioning of the LVDTs in the tests with prisms made of two whole blocks (type B).

### 5. Experimental Program

#### 5.1 Experimental Results for the Type A Prisms

The individual ( $f_{prism}$ ) and average ( $f_{p\ average}$ ) results for compressive strength for the three-block prisms (type A) are given in Table 2, with the respective standard deviations and CV (coefficient of variance). The values for the compressive strength of the prisms are given in net area. Table 3 shows the average results

for the block, mortar, and prism strength together with the  $f_{prism}/f_{block}$  (efficiency factor) and  $f_{mortar}/f_{block}$  ratios.

The potential equation, using the average values for the prisms, establishes a correspondence between the  $f_{paverage}/f_{block}$  and  $f_{mortar}/f_{block}$  values, allowing a comparison between the influence of the mortar and that of the block, in the way given in the EUROCODE 6 [12], Eq. (1).

$$f_{pm\ medio} = 0.6929 \cdot f_{mortar}^{0.0597} \cdot f_{block}^{0.9403} \tag{1}$$

From the coefficient obtained in Eq. (1), it can be noted that the compressive strength of the mortar has little influence on the compressive strength of the prism. From the experimental results it was not possible to estimate the increase in the stiffness of the mortar joint due to the confinement. Table 4 gives the average results for the deformability, the stress/strength ratio and the secant elasticity modulus of the prisms with a bed joint, obtained for the LVDTs designated as 50237 and 50239. It was verified that there is an increase in the average compression strain of the prisms, due to the decrease in the compressive strength of the mortar. The secant elasticity modulus values calculated for the stress/strength ratio ( $\sigma/f_c$ ) of 30% for prisms I and II were close.

Table 5 shows the average results for the prism strain, the stress/strength ratio, the Poisson ratio and the secant elasticity modulus of the prisms. In this case the strain of the two bed joints was considered. In the same way, the horizontal strain of the set at half the prism height was verified, allowing the determination of the Poisson ratio of the prism.

Figs. 4 and 5 show the axial and lateral stress-strain diagrams for the prisms built with mortar mixes I and II.

For prism A of mix I an increase in the lateral strain can be observed until the stress reaches 0.80 of compressive strength, as shown in Fig. 4. For the prisms with mix II localized crushing and crumbling of the prisms was observed. There was no instantaneous increase in the lateral strain. The areas of crushing were located in the upper mortar joint of the prism for a stress level close to 50% of the compressive strength, after which the crumbling of the block surface began and the propagation of vertical cracks.

5.2 Experimental Results for Type B Prisms

The individual results for the compressive strength of the prisms are given in Table 6, with the respective values for the average, standard deviation and coefficient of variation. The CVs of the results were

Table 2 Average results for compressive strength of the prisms.

Series	I	II
$f_{prism}$ (MPa)	15.9	15.1
	15.1	16.0
	16.1	15.0
	13.7	11.1
$f_{p\ average}$ (MPa)	15.2	14.3
Standard deviation (MPa)	1.09	2.18
CV (%)	7.2	15.2

Table 3 Compressive strength of blocks, mortars, prisms and their ratios.

Series	$f_{block}$ (MPa)	$f_{mortar}$ (MPa)	$f_{p\ average}$ (MPa)	$f_{p\ average}/f_{block}$	$f_{mortar}/f_{block}$
I	23.1	19.8	15.2	0.66	0.86
II	23.1	7.2	14.3	0.62	0.31

Table 4 Average experimental results for the strain of the prisms.

Prism	n*	Average strain (50237 and 50239)	$\sigma/f_c$	Elasticity Modulus (MPa)
I	4	0.0002266	0.31	20989
II	4	0.0002447	0.33	19405

\* n is the numbers of the specimens.

Table 5 Average experimental results for the strain of the prisms.

Prism	n	Strain 40351	Strain 50238	$\sigma/f_c$	Poisson	Elasticity Modulus (MPa)
I	4	0.0002962	0.0000670	0.31	0.22	16056
II	4	0.0003098	0.0000866	0.33	0.28	15326

\* n is the numbers of the specimens.

11.1% and 16.9%, respectively, for the mortar mixes I and II. The standard deviations of the samples of mixes I and II were 1.19 and 1.45 MPa, respectively. It can be observed that, for this type of prism, the vertical joint can introduce an increase in the CV of the results. This probably occurs due to the fact that the failure process begins at the vertical joint. The average results for the compressive strength of the prisms with a vertical joint were lower than those for the prisms without a vertical joint (A). This decrease was 42% and 66% for the mortar mixes I and II, respectively. Table 7 shows the average results for the compressive strength of the block, mortar and prism, together with the  $f_{prism}/f_{block}$  (efficiency factor) and  $f_{mortar}/f_{block}$  ratios.

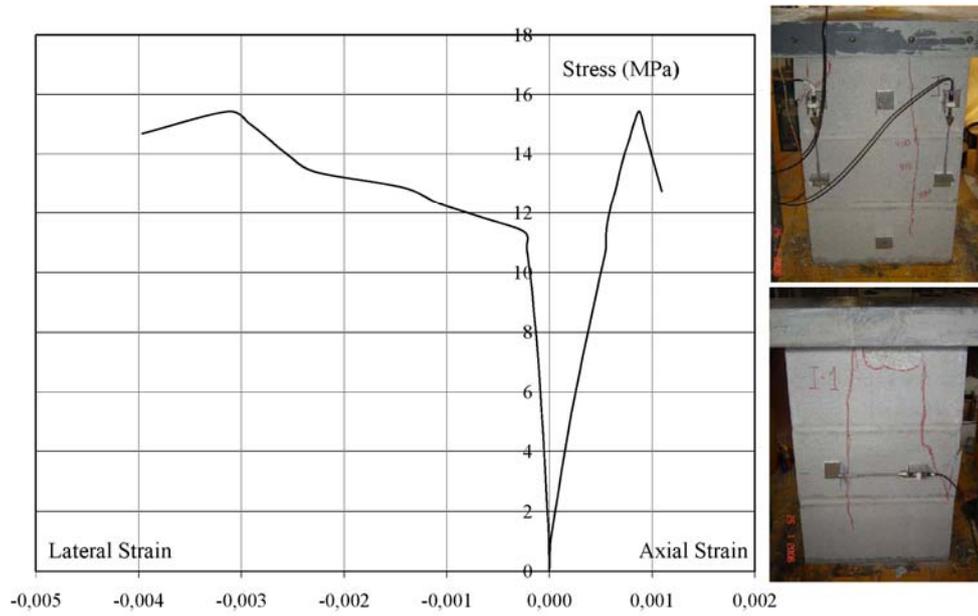


Fig. 4 Stress-Strain diagram for prism A and mortar mix I.

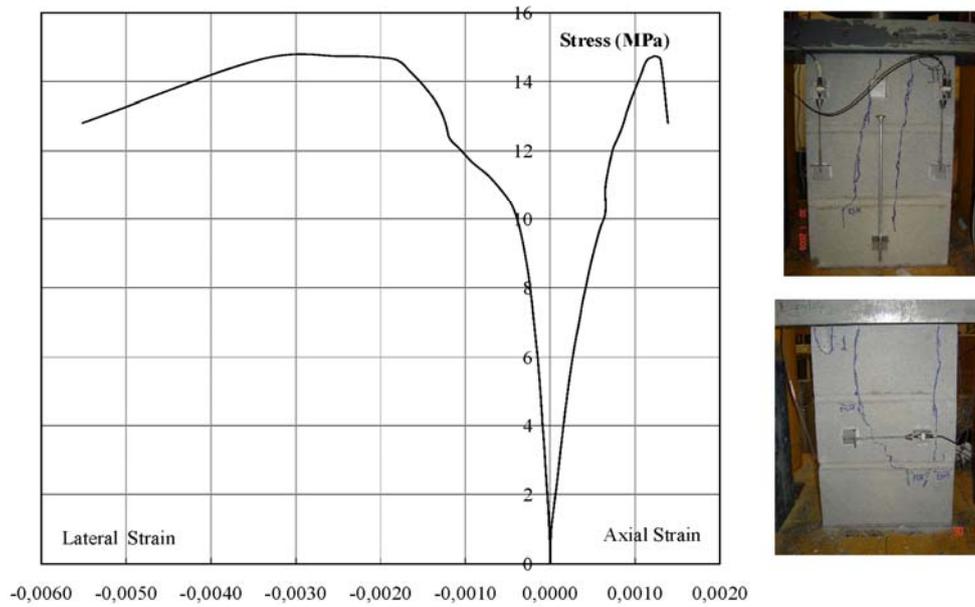


Fig. 5 Stress-deformation diagram for prism A and mortar mix II.

Table 6 Average results for the compressive strength of prisms (type B).

Series	I	II	
$f_{prism}$ (MPa)	10.2	7.0	9.9
	10.9	9.2	6.5
	12.3	9.3	-
	9.5	9.6	-
$f_p$ average (MPa)	10.7	8.6	
Standard deviation (MPa)	1.19	1.45	
cv (%)	11.1	16.9	

\* n is the numbers of the specimens.

**Table 7 Compressive strength of blocks, mortars, and prisms and their ratios (type B).**

Series	$f_{block}$ (MPa)	$f_{mortar}$ (MPa)	$f_{p\ average}$ (MPa)	$f_{p\ average}/f_{block}$	$f_{mortar}/f_{block}$
I	23.1	18.2	10.7	0.46	0.79
II	23.1	8.5	8.6	0.37	0.37

The potential equation establishes a correspondence between the  $f_{p\ average}/f_{block}$  and  $f_{mortar}/f_{block}$  values, allowing a comparison with those provided in the EUROCODE 6 [12], as shown in Eq. (2).

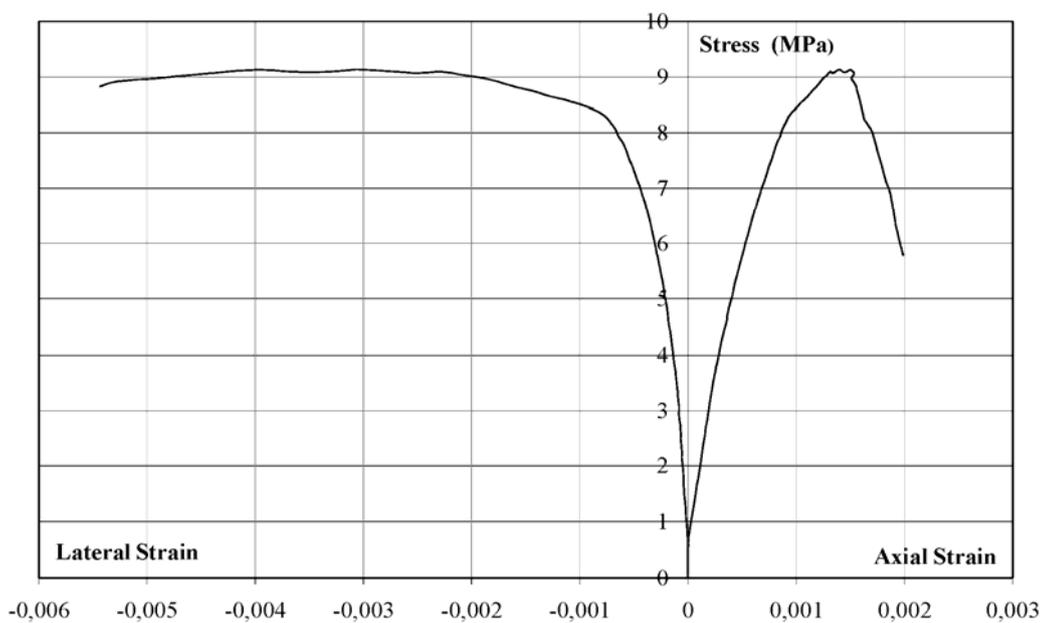
$$f_{p\ average} = 0.4972 \cdot f_{MORTAR}^{0.30} \cdot f_{BLOCK}^{0.70} \quad (2)$$

The results show a greater influence of the block strength in the prism strength, where the exponents of Eq. (2) are 0.30 and 0.70 for the mortar and block, respectively. Table 8 gives the average results for the secant elasticity modulus for the stress/strength ratio ( $\sigma/f_c$ ) of 30%, considering one and two bed joints, with the Poisson ratio measured between the block and the vertical joint. For the prisms built with a vertical joint

there was a progressive increase in the Poisson ratio, with values significantly higher than those of conventional three-block prisms. Also, a decrease in the value for the secant elasticity modulus of one and two bed joints for the prisms with a vertical joint was verified. The reduction in the secant elasticity modulus of the prism with a vertical joint was 18% in relation to the prism without a vertical joint. On considering one vertical joint the average reduction was approximately 8% in relation to the cases without a vertical joint. Figs. 6 and 7 show the axial and lateral stress-strain diagrams for the prisms made with mortar mixes I and II, respectively.

**Table 8 Elasticity modulus and Poisson ratio for the prisms with vertical joints (type B).**

PRISM	n*	$\sigma/f_c$	Elasticity modulus-one Joint	Poisson
I	4	0.34	17620	0.44
II	6	0.32	16480	0.50



**Fig. 6 Stress-strain diagram for prism B and mortar mix I.**

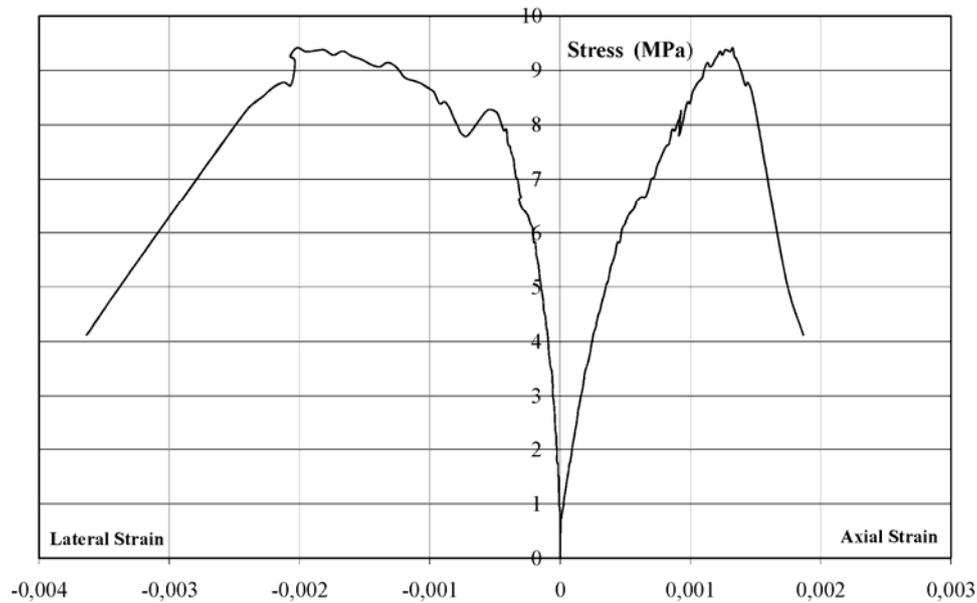


Fig. 7 Stress-strain diagram for prism B and mortar mix I.

## 6. Conclusions

The appearance of non-linearities in masonry corresponds to an increase in the lateral strain due to the extensive cracking of the material and to a progressive increase in the Poisson ratio. The cracks in the three-block prisms built with mortar mix I were vertical, occurring in a symmetrical way on both sides. None of the samples had crushing points on the bed joint. It could be observed visually that the prism began to behave as a single material. The cracks were symmetrical, vertical and dispersed for this type of prism.

The prisms built with mortar type II had, as a consequence some localized crushing with vertical cracks due to the stress concentration at some points. In the failure process, the beginning of a loss of cohesion of the mortar, the crushing of the mortar joint and the crumbling of the upper and lower surfaces of the block, were verified.

For the prisms built with a vertical joint there was a progressive increase in the Poisson ratio, the values being higher than those of conventional prisms with three whole blocks. The presence of a vertical bed joint resulted in the appearance of separation cracks between

the middle block and the vertical joint of the mortar. The crack was observed when the stress reached approximately the 30% of the specimen. The prisms built with mortar mix type I had the following failure modes: localized crushing of the bed mortar, crumbling of the block surface and vertical cracks in the block. It was verified that there was a significant reduction in the prism strength generated by the presence of a vertical joint.

The prisms with two whole blocks and a vertical joint, built with mortar mixes I and II, had a compressive strength of the order of 42% and 66% of the prisms with three whole blocks, respectively. The prisms with three whole blocks had average efficiency factors of the order of 0.63. For the prisms with two whole blocks and a vertical joint the walls had average efficiency factors of 0.42 and 0.45 for mixes I and II, respectively.

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