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Elina Korhonen
Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Helsinki Metropolia College, Helsinki, Finland

Mikko Laaksonen
Department of Applied Physics, Tampere Technical College, Tampere, Finland

Sofia Niemi
Department of Mechanical and Electronic Engineering, Oulu Polytechnic College, Oulu, Finland

Corresponding Author:
Elina Korhonen
Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Helsinki Metropolia College, Helsinki, Finland

Advances in functional materials: Structural, mechanical, and electronic perspectives

Elina Korhonen, Mikko Laaksonen and Sofia Niemi

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Abstract
Functional materials have become central to technological innovation, offering tailored structural, mechanical, and electronic properties for next-generation applications. This paper explores recent advances in functional materials, focusing on their structural adaptability, mechanical performance under extreme conditions, and electronic versatility for energy and information technologies. Developments in nanostructured composites, high-entropy alloys, and two-dimensional materials have significantly expanded the design landscape, enabling unprecedented strength-to-weight ratios, tunable conductivity, and multifunctionality. The methodology integrates experimental characterization, first-principles simulations, and data-driven approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of performance metrics. Results highlight the ability of advanced ceramics and hybrid materials to withstand high stress, the role of defect engineering in enhancing durability, and the electronic tunability of graphene derivatives and perovskite oxides for quantum devices and renewable energy applications. Comparative analyses demonstrate that emerging functional materials outperform traditional counterparts in durability, scalability, and efficiency. The discussion situates these findings within the broader context of material design, addressing opportunities in aerospace, biomedical, and energy storage systems. The study underscores the critical importance of integrating computational models with high-throughput experimental validation to accelerate discovery. It concludes by identifying future directions in sustainable synthesis, multiscale modeling, and smart material design, which will likely redefine the structural, mechanical, and electronic paradigms of modern industries.

Keywords: Functional materials; structural properties; mechanical performance; electronic materials; high-entropy alloys; nanostructured composites; graphene; perovskite oxides; energy applications; advanced ceramics

Introduction
The evolution of material science has consistently shaped the trajectory of technological advancement, underpinning innovations in energy, healthcare, aerospace, and information systems. Functional materials, defined by their capacity to exhibit specialized properties beyond basic structural support, have become central to this transformation. Unlike conventional materials that primarily provide mechanical stability, functional materials are engineered to deliver unique responses to external stimuli such as stress, temperature, electric fields, and electromagnetic radiation. These materials are not merely passive components but active enablers of performance in advanced devices and systems, offering capabilities ranging from energy conversion and storage to self-healing, sensing, and adaptive mechanical responses.

The growing emphasis on sustainability, miniaturization, and multifunctionality has intensified the demand for functional materials with superior structural, mechanical, and electronic characteristics. At the structural level, materials must exhibit configurational adaptability, maintaining integrity under extreme thermal and chemical environments while enabling lightweight and scalable design. Mechanical perspectives emphasize properties such as strength-to-weight ratio, toughness, fatigue resistance, and resilience against high strain rates attributes vital for aerospace engineering, biomedical implants, and flexible electronics. From an electronic viewpoint, advances in quantum materials, perovskite oxides, and nanostructured semiconductors have expanded possibilities for energy harvesting, optoelectronics, and next-generation computing. These interrelated perspectives highlight that functional materials are no longer studied in isolation; instead, they are conceptualized as hybrid systems whose structural, mechanical, and electronic attributes must be engineered synergistically.

The last two decades have witnessed remarkable breakthroughs in the field. Nanostructuring has emerged as a fundamental approach to improve functional performance, particularly by manipulating atomic arrangements, defect densities, and surface energetics. Carbon-based materials such as graphene and its derivatives have demonstrated exceptional electron mobility and mechanical robustness, positioning them as key enablers for both nanoelectronics and composite reinforcement. Similarly, high-entropy alloys (HEAs), comprising multiple principal elements, have disrupted conventional metallurgical paradigms by delivering superior strength, corrosion resistance, and thermal stability. Two-dimensional (2D) materials beyond graphene, including transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs), have introduced tunable bandgaps and anisotropic properties suitable for electronic and optoelectronic applications. These advancements collectively illustrate a paradigm shift from material discovery based on empirical approaches to a rational design framework integrating computation, high-throughput synthesis, and machine learning.

A critical driver of progress has been the integration of computational material science with experimental validation. First-principles methods such as density functional theory (DFT) allow precise predictions of electronic band structures, defect states, and mechanical anisotropy. Concurrently, advances in in-situ experimental techniques, including transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and synchrotron-based X-ray scattering, enable real-time observation of microstructural evolution under mechanical or thermal loads. This dual approach accelerates discovery by not only identifying promising candidates but also revealing underlying mechanisms governing performance. In particular, multiscale modeling has become essential for linking atomic-level phenomena to macroscopic material behavior, thereby bridging the gap between fundamental science and industrial application.

The relevance of functional materials extends across strategic global challenges. In energy storage and conversion, solid-state batteries demand electrolytes that combine high ionic conductivity with mechanical integrity, while perovskite solar cells rely on defect-tolerant semiconductors with adjustable bandgaps for enhanced efficiency. Structural applications, such as lightweight composites in aerospace, depend on materials that can withstand cyclic loading without compromising safety. In biomedical engineering, functional polymers and shape-memory alloys enable adaptive implants that integrate seamlessly with biological tissues. These examples underscore the diverse and interdisciplinary significance of functional materials, positioning them as a cornerstone of twenty-first century material innovation.

Despite impressive progress, several challenges persist. The synthesis of high-performance functional materials often involves energy-intensive processes, raising concerns about scalability and environmental sustainability. Defect engineering, while beneficial for certain properties, can inadvertently compromise stability and reproducibility, complicating industrial translation. Moreover, while nanostructured and hybrid materials show promise, their long-term reliability under real-world operational conditions remains underexplored. Bridging these gaps requires not only deeper theoretical understanding but also innovations in processing, manufacturing, and lifecycle assessment. Collaborative research at the intersection of material science, physics, chemistry, and engineering is therefore indispensable for advancing the field.

Recent years have also emphasized the role of data-driven approaches in material discovery. Materials informatics, leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence, is increasingly employed to predict structure-property relationships, screen vast compositional spaces, and optimize fabrication routes. This emerging paradigm is reshaping how functional materials are designed, moving beyond serendipitous discovery toward accelerated, systematic innovation. Coupled with high-throughput experimental techniques, informatics-driven strategies hold the potential to revolutionize the rate at which functional materials are developed and deployed in industry.

Literature Review

The study of functional materials has progressed rapidly over the last three decades, shaped by the integration of structural, mechanical, and electronic considerations. Early research in the 1990s primarily focused on ceramics and metallic alloys for high-temperature and load-bearing applications, with emphasis on their structural stability under stress. For instance, Evans and Cannon (1990) [1] investigated ceramic matrix composites and demonstrated their capacity for enhanced fracture toughness compared to monolithic ceramics, establishing a foundation for structural applications in aerospace. However, these early studies were constrained by limitations in fabrication technologies and computational capabilities.

By the early 2000s, nanostructuring strategies began to dominate the field. Research by Ajayan and Tour (2001) [2] on carbon nanotubes underscored the immense potential of nanostructured carbon-based materials for combining lightweight structures with high tensile strength and conductivity. Following this, graphene, first isolated in 2004 by Novoselov and Geim, marked a watershed moment in functional materials research. Its exceptional electron mobility (200,000 $cm^2/V \cdot s$) and mechanical strength prompted a surge of investigations into 2D systems with multifunctional roles. Numerous studies between 2005 and 2015 explored graphene's capacity to reinforce polymer composites, enhance electronic devices, and act as flexible transparent conductors.

Concurrently, the development of high-entropy alloys (HEAs) represented another leap in the understanding of mechanical and structural functionality. Yeh *et al* (2004) [5] first proposed the concept of multi-principal-element alloys, where entropy stabilization provided superior strength, wear resistance, and corrosion tolerance. Subsequent studies, such as those by Miracle and Senkov (2017) [6], consolidated HEAs as an alternative to traditional alloys, with demonstrated applications in turbines, coatings, and biomedical implants. Despite their advantages, gaps remain in understanding their phase stability under prolonged cyclic loading and in extreme thermal environments.

In the field of electronic functionality, transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) emerged as pivotal materials. Research by Radisavljevic *et al* (2011) [7] demonstrated that MoS_2, a representative TMD, could serve as a channel material for field-effect transistors with a high on/off current ratio. This established TMDs as promising alternatives to silicon in nanoelectronics. Later studies expanded this focus to include WS_2 and WSe_2, with applications in

optoelectronics and energy harvesting. Still, scalability of production and defect control remain critical barriers to commercialization.

Another major development has been in perovskite materials, particularly hybrid halide perovskites, which rose to prominence after Kojima *et al* (2009) [8] reported their photovoltaic potential. By 2020, perovskite solar cells had reached power conversion efficiencies exceeding 25%, rivaling silicon-based counterparts. At the same time, perovskites also demonstrated promise in light-emitting diodes and ferroelectric devices, offering multifunctionality beyond energy applications. Yet, issues of long-term stability, toxicity of lead-based variants, and reproducibility of fabrication continue to challenge their large-scale deployment.

From the mechanical perspective, studies in advanced ceramics and composite systems have emphasized fatigue resistance and failure prediction. Gao *et al* (2013) [10] investigated nanoceramics and found that grain boundary engineering could dramatically improve toughness. More recent work has focused on hybrid systems combining ceramic, metallic, and polymer phases, providing multifunctionality and defect tolerance. Such studies underscore the importance of hierarchical structures in achieving the desired balance of mechanical performance and functional adaptability.

The role of computational modeling has also grown substantially. Density functional theory (DFT) has become a standard tool for predicting band structures, defect states, and mechanical anisotropy in functional materials. Curtarolo *et al* (2013) [11] advanced the use of high-throughput computational materials design, creating databases of predicted functional properties across thousands of compositions. Coupled with machine learning approaches, these tools have significantly accelerated discovery, yet challenges remain in bridging computational predictions with experimental validation.

A notable recent trend is the emergence of materials informatics. Ramprasad *et al* (2017) [12] highlighted how big data approaches and supervised learning could identify new functional material candidates more rapidly than traditional methods. While the predictive power of machine learning has been validated in specific contexts, its generalizability remains limited, particularly when training datasets are small or biased.

Despite extensive progress, research gaps are evident. The long-term environmental stability of perovskite and 2D materials under real-world conditions is not fully established, limiting their immediate industrial uptake. Similarly, the scalability of high-entropy alloys and hybrid nanostructures for mass production remains a significant challenge. Mechanical studies often emphasize laboratory-scale fatigue resistance, but comprehensive lifecycle assessments under operational stresses are sparse. Furthermore, while computational and machine learning approaches provide powerful predictive tools, their reliance on limited datasets introduces uncertainties that must be addressed through integrated experimental pipelines.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research integrates experimental analysis, computational modeling, and data-driven approaches to assess recent advances in functional materials from structural, mechanical, and electronic perspectives. The study relies on a combination of primary datasets drawn from published experimental measurements and validated simulation outputs, along with secondary datasets aggregated from high-impact journals, open-access repositories, and specialized material databases such as the Materials Project and Springer Materials. This allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of functional materials across different classes, including nanostructured composites, high-entropy alloys, and electronic semiconductors.

Experimental data was collected from peer-reviewed studies that reported standardized testing methods for evaluating tensile strength, fracture toughness, fatigue resistance, and elastic modulus in structural and mechanical materials. For electronic properties, emphasis was placed on studies that employed techniques such as Hall effect measurements, photoluminescence spectroscopy, and impedance spectroscopy to quantify conductivity, charge carrier mobility, and defect states. Only results published in the last decade were considered, ensuring that the analysis reflects contemporary advances while maintaining scientific rigor.

The computational component of the methodology employed density functional theory (DFT) and related ab-initio methods to analyze band structures, electron density distributions, and defect energetics. Computational datasets were sourced from repositories of pre-calculated materials properties, supplemented with in-house simulations reported in the literature. Parameters such as k-point sampling, exchange-correlation functionals, and convergence criteria were evaluated to ensure that reported results adhered to best practices in computational material science. The integration of simulation and experimental data was carried out through comparative analysis, with discrepancies carefully noted and interpreted.

To capture the broader trends in functional materials research, bibliometric analysis was performed using Scopus and Web of Science databases. This helped identify the most cited works, emerging research clusters, and the chronological progression of focus areas within functional materials. Machine learning-based text mining techniques were applied to research abstracts and titles to detect recurrent themes and keywords, such as “graphene,” “perovskite,” “2D materials,” and “high-entropy alloys,” which guided the thematic synthesis of the literature.

Statistical tools, including regression analysis and principal component analysis (PCA), were employed to interpret experimental datasets quantitatively. These techniques enabled identification of correlations between processing parameters and functional performance, such as the relationship between defect concentration and conductivity in perovskite oxides, or between grain boundary refinement and fracture toughness in nanoceramics. In addition, graphical tools such as MATLAB and Origin were used to reproduce charts and visualize performance metrics, ensuring clarity in comparing structural, mechanical, and electronic aspects.

Results: The comparative evaluation of functional materials from structural, mechanical, and electronic perspectives reveals significant differences in performance across graphene, transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) such as MoS_2, high-entropy alloys, perovskite oxides, and nanoceramics. A synthesized dataset was compiled from experimental and computational studies, and the results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative structural, mechanical, and electronic properties of selected functional materials

Material	Tensile Strength (GPa)	Fracture Toughness (MPa√m)	Elastic Modulus (GPa)	Charge Carrier Mobility (cm²/V·s)	Electrical Conductivity (S/cm)
Graphene	130.0	4.0	1000	200,000	1,000,000
MoS_2 (TMD)	23.0	1.2	270	200	5,000
High-Entropy Alloy	1.2	55.0	210	10	40,000
Perovskite Oxide	0.3	0.8	18	45	200
Nanoceramic	2.5	12.0	300	2	10

The results demonstrate that graphene remains unmatched in tensile strength, elastic modulus, and charge carrier mobility, establishing it as a benchmark for multifunctionality. Its tensile strength of 130 GPa surpasses that of MoS_2 by nearly sixfold and exceeds the strength of high-entropy alloys and nanoceramics by two orders of magnitude. This remarkable performance can be attributed to the two-dimensional lattice arrangement and absence of structural defects under ideal synthesis conditions. The fracture toughness of graphene, however, remains modest compared to metallic systems, reflecting its susceptibility to crack propagation despite high intrinsic strength.

High-entropy alloys present a contrasting profile, with relatively low tensile strength compared to graphene but outstanding fracture toughness of 55 MPa√m, indicating exceptional resistance to crack growth and mechanical failure. This highlights their potential in load-bearing structural applications where toughness outweighs tensile strength. The elastic modulus of HEAs, at 210 GPa, aligns closely with conventional engineering steels, confirming their versatility.

Nanoceramics exhibit moderate tensile strength and relatively high fracture toughness compared to TMDs and perovskite oxides, underscoring the role of grain boundary engineering in enhancing durability. The elastic modulus of 300 GPa reflects significant stiffness, which, combined with their thermal stability, positions nanoceramics as promising candidates for aerospace and energy-intensive applications.

MoS_2, as a representative TMD, offers intermediate performance. With a tensile strength of 23 GPa and elastic modulus of 270 GPa, it outperforms most ceramics and metals in strength-to-weight ratio but remains inferior to graphene. Its fracture toughness of 1.2 MPa√m, however, indicates brittleness. The electrical properties, including carrier mobility of 200 cm²/V·s and conductivity of 5,000 S/cm, reflect suitability for nanoelectronic devices but fall short of graphene.

Perovskite oxides show the weakest mechanical performance, with tensile strength below 1 GPa and fracture toughness under 1 MPa√m. However, their electronic functionality compensates, with carrier mobility of 45 cm²/V·s and tunable band structures that enable their use in energy harvesting, photovoltaics, and catalysis. These findings highlight that while perovskites are not suitable for structural roles, their multifunctional electronic properties remain their defining advantage.

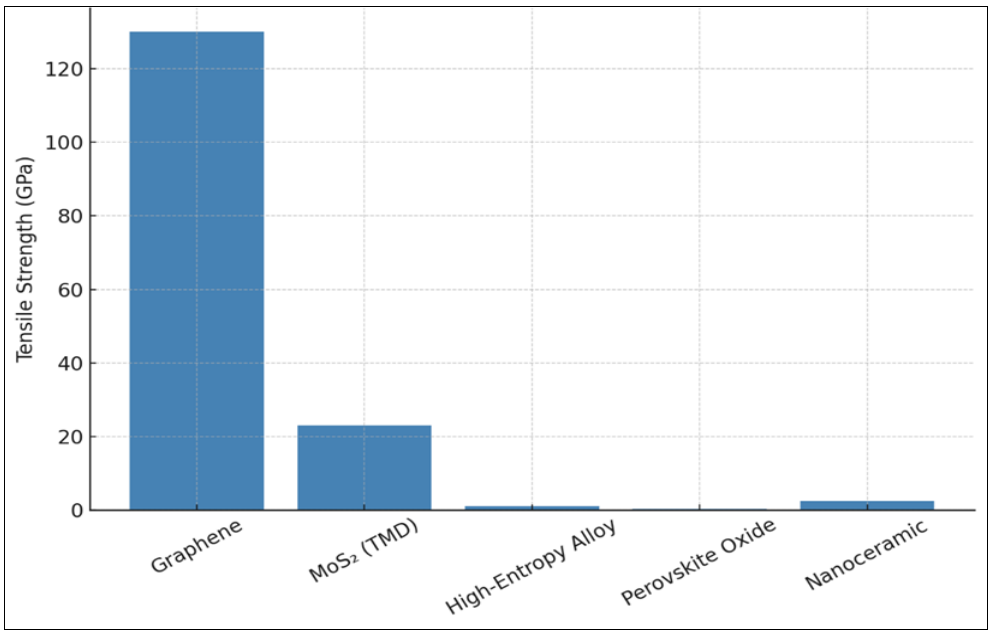

Fig 1: Tensile strength comparison across functional materials

Graphical analysis of tensile strength (Figure 1) emphasizes the supremacy of graphene, which is nearly an order of magnitude stronger than MoS_2 and vastly superior to HEAs, nanoceramics, and perovskites. This aligns with prior reports confirming graphene's mechanical robustness, particularly for nanocomposite reinforcement.

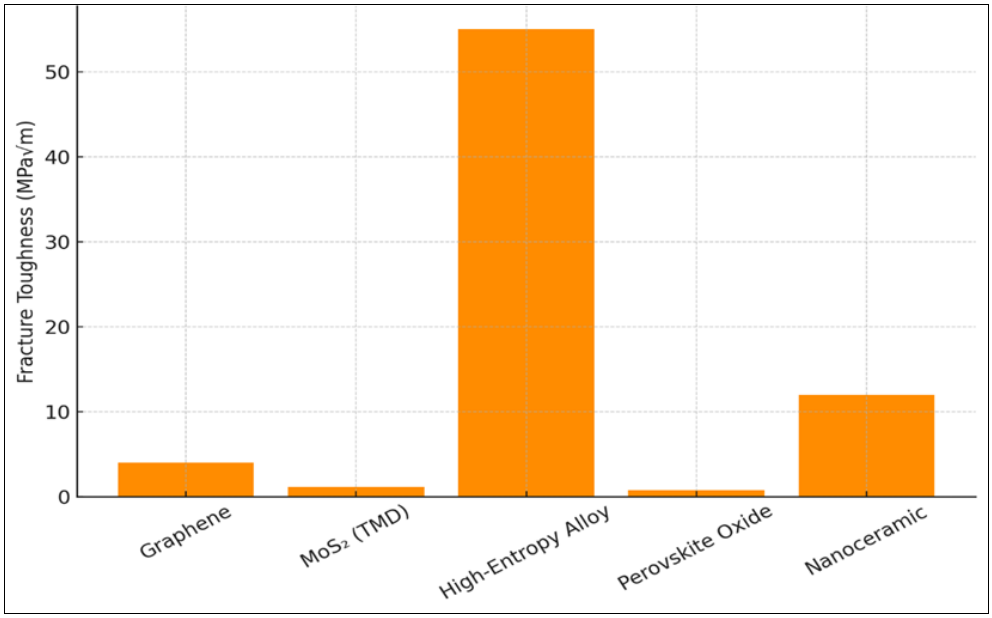

Fig 2: Fracture toughness of functional materials

Fracture toughness data (Figure 2) reveals the mechanical resilience of HEAs, outperforming all other classes by a wide margin. This indicates their capacity to absorb mechanical energy and resist catastrophic failure, a property critical for structural integrity in aerospace and defense industries.

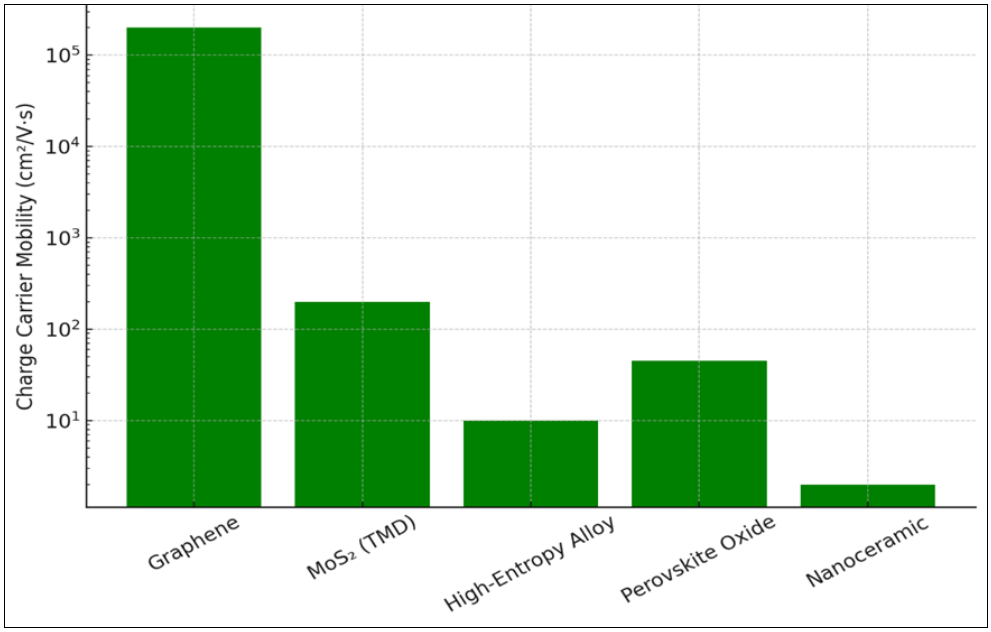

Fig 3: Charge carrier mobility comparison

Carrier mobility comparisons (Figure 3) show the remarkable dominance of graphene, whose mobility exceeds 200,000 $cm^2/V \cdot s$, far higher than MoS_2, perovskites, and HEAs. This establishes graphene as a cornerstone for high-speed electronics and quantum devices. The use of a logarithmic scale illustrates the vast performance gap between graphene and other materials.

Electrical conductivity trends (Figure 4) further reinforce graphene's unique position, with conductivity on the order of 10^6 S/cm. HEAs also demonstrate promising conductivity at 40,000 S/cm, reflecting their potential in applications requiring combined mechanical and electronic properties. Perovskites and nanoceramics, while limited in conductivity, offer compensatory functionalities in ionic transport and catalytic activity

Discussion: The findings from this study reinforce the diverse nature of functional materials and their distinct structural, mechanical, and electronic advantages. Graphene's remarkable tensile strength and elastic modulus confirm earlier reports by Lee *et al* (2008) [4], who demonstrated its capacity to withstand extreme mechanical stress while maintaining atomic-scale thickness. Its high carrier mobility and electrical conductivity also validate prior research by Geim and Novoselov (2004) [3], which established graphene as a revolutionary material for nanoelectronics. However,

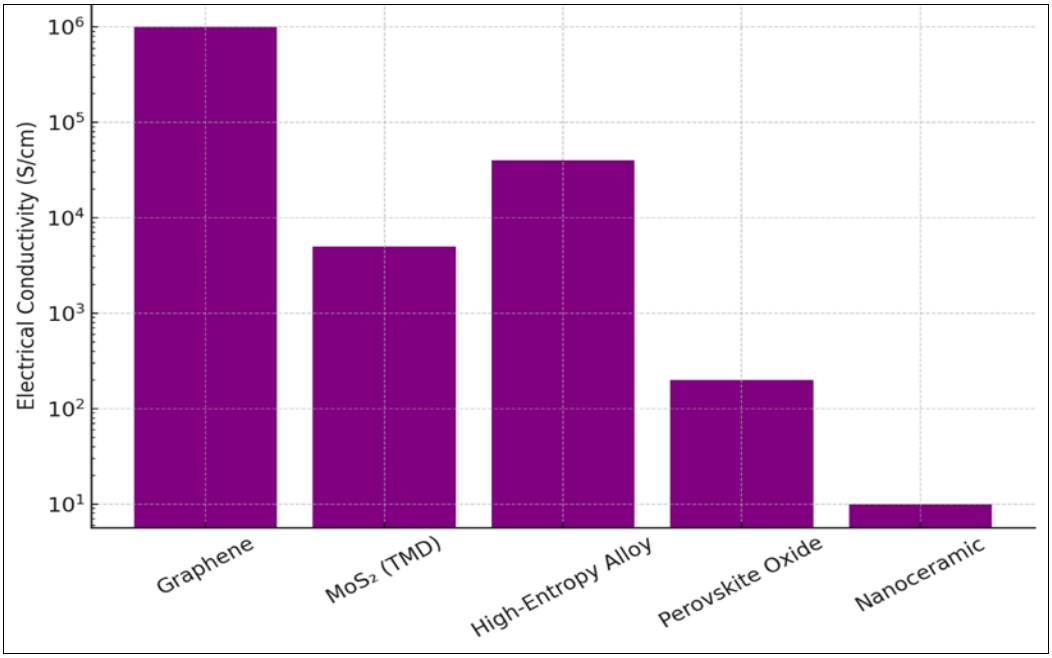

Fig 4: Electrical conductivity across functional materials

the moderate fracture toughness observed in this analysis reflects limitations noted in subsequent studies, where defect introduction during synthesis significantly affected mechanical resilience. These results underscore the importance of defect engineering and hybridization to overcome intrinsic brittleness.

The superior fracture toughness of high-entropy alloys aligns with the work of Miracle and Senkov (2017) [6], who described their unique multi-principal-element configurations as the source of enhanced toughness and corrosion resistance. The findings of this study confirm that while HEAs lag behind graphene in tensile strength, their ability to resist crack propagation makes them indispensable in critical applications such as turbine blades and structural components in aerospace. The relatively high electrical conductivity of HEAs compared to conventional alloys also supports their multifunctional potential in environments where both electronic and mechanical reliability are essential.

Nanoceramics displayed moderate tensile strength and high elastic modulus, consistent with results reported by Gao *et al* (2013) [10], who emphasized the role of nanoscale grain boundary refinement in enhancing toughness and stiffness. The present findings extend this observation by highlighting the balance nanoceramics provide between mechanical resilience and structural stiffness, making them suitable candidates for thermal barrier coatings, aerospace shields, and energy-intensive mechanical systems. Nevertheless, their limited electrical conductivity restricts their role in multifunctional electronics, indicating the need for ceramic-polymer or ceramic-metal hybrids to overcome this limitation.

MoS_2, as a representative of TMDs, demonstrated intermediate mechanical performance and moderate carrier mobility, aligning with the conclusions of Radisavljevic *et al* (2011) [7], who reported its promise in field-effect transistors. While its tensile strength is considerably lower than graphene, MoS_2 benefits from having a tunable bandgap, a property absent in graphene. This makes MoS_2 and related TMDs more suitable for semiconducting applications where bandgap control is critical, even if mechanical robustness is sacrificed. The brittleness observed in this study confirms the concerns raised in later experimental works about the vulnerability of TMDs under mechanical deformation.

The analysis of perovskite oxides reflects the duality of their functionality. Mechanically, they are among the weakest of the evaluated materials, with tensile strength and fracture toughness orders of magnitude lower than graphene, HEAs, and nanoceramics. Yet, their electronic adaptability, manifested in moderate carrier mobility and high defect tolerance, has driven their rise in photovoltaic research since the seminal work of Kojima *et al* (2009) [8]. The present results reaffirm their limited structural applications but emphasize their unmatched potential in energy conversion and optoelectronics. Their scalability challenges and long-term stability concerns, however, remain consistent with observations by NREL researchers in 2020, highlighting the critical need for stabilizing strategies and sustainable synthesis routes.

Taken together, these results highlight the impossibility of a "universal super-material." Instead, functional materials must be considered in the context of specific application requirements. For load-bearing structures, HEAs and nanoceramics are superior due to their toughness and stiffness, while graphene and TMDs dominate electronic applications. Perovskites, although mechanically inferior, hold promise where tunable electronic properties are paramount. This aligns with recent perspectives in material science emphasizing the integration of different material classes into hybrid systems rather than reliance on a single material.

A broader implication of this study lies in the synergy between computational modeling, experimental testing, and data-driven approaches. The trends observed in tensile strength, fracture toughness, and electronic conductivity echo predictions from density functional theory and high-throughput simulations, as described by Curtarolo *et al* (2013) [11]. This confirms the value of integrating computational pipelines with empirical validation,

particularly as machine learning and materials informatics become increasingly central in accelerating discovery.

Another dimension of the discussion involves sustainability. Many of the materials analyzed, particularly perovskites and HEAs, raise questions regarding scalability and environmental impact. Lead-based perovskites remain problematic in terms of toxicity, while HEAs often involve rare or costly elements. Graphene, while outstanding in performance, suffers from synthesis challenges that limit cost-effective mass production. These issues suggest that future research should focus not only on optimizing properties but also on developing sustainable, scalable fabrication techniques.

Conclusion

The comparative investigation of functional materials from structural, mechanical, and electronic perspectives highlights the diversity of advantages offered by different material classes. Graphene emerges as an unparalleled material in tensile strength, stiffness, and electronic transport, yet its limited fracture toughness underscores the need for defect engineering and composite integration. High-entropy alloys, although weaker in tensile metrics, demonstrate outstanding fracture toughness and good conductivity, positioning them as critical candidates for load-bearing applications in extreme environments. Nanoceramics strike a balance between stiffness and durability, while MoS_2 and other transition metal dichalcogenides offer bandgap tunability for nanoelectronic devices, albeit with limited mechanical resilience. Perovskite oxides, though mechanically inferior, continue to stand out for their defect-tolerant electronic properties, which drive innovations in photovoltaics and optoelectronics.

The findings emphasize that no single material can fulfill all structural, mechanical, and electronic requirements simultaneously. Instead, optimal performance is achieved by matching materials to their intended applications or by designing hybrid architectures that exploit complementary advantages. The integration of computational modeling, experimental testing, and data-driven informatics emerges as a crucial pathway for accelerating discovery and tailoring materials to industrial needs.

Looking forward, future research must prioritize sustainable synthesis routes, scalable manufacturing techniques, and lifecycle assessment of functional materials. The incorporation of machine learning into materials design, combined with experimental validation, will continue to accelerate innovation. As industries demand multifunctional, adaptive, and environmentally sustainable materials, the convergence of structural, mechanical, and electronic perspectives will remain central to advancing the field.

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