

1 **Factors affecting the Degree of Conversion of**
2 **Universal Adhesives**

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1 **Abstract**

2 Universal adhesives are advertised as having a simplified application technique, however all still
3 require multiple steps. This study tested the effect of solvent evaporation, oxygen inhibition layer
4 (OIL) formation, and curing time on the degree of conversion (DC) for the following dental
5 adhesives: All-Bond Universal Adhesive (AB), Prime & Bond Elect Universal Dental Adhesive
6 (PB), iBond Universal (iBU), Scotchbond Universal (SBU), and One Coat 7.0 (OC). Adhesives
7 were rubbed onto a glass slide for 20 s, then air blown for 5 s or 40 s. Some samples had an Epitex
8 strip (Anaerobic) placed over the adhesive before polymerization, while the other group of samples
9 were cured without an Epitex strip (Aerobic). Samples were light cured for 10 s, 20 s, or 40 s
10 (n=4). The DC was measured using Fourier transmission infrared spectroscopy (FTIR). Results
11 were analysed with 3 way ANOVA and Tukey *post-hoc* test ($\alpha=0.05$). Curing under anaerobic
12 conditions significantly increased the overall mean DC for all tested adhesives. A higher DC can
13 be obtained by increasing solvent evaporation time for AB, iBU, SBU, and increasing curing time
14 for all the adhesives, except iBU. Some universal adhesives benefit from a different application
15 process than the manufacturers' instructions.

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22 **Keywords:**

23 Oxygen inhibition layer, Curing time, A. self-etch adhesive, C. Infra-red spectroscopy.

1 **1. Introduction**

2 Ever since composite was introduced to the market in the 1960's [1], the need for efficient
3 adhesion to a dentin substrate has increased, leading to the development of several generations of
4 bonding agents. These generations have been divided into two different approaches, etch-and-rinse
5 (ER) or self-etch (SE) technique [2]. The ER approach involves several steps such as applying
6 phosphoric acid to remove the smear layer, rinsing the acid, drying the prepared tooth, and then
7 applying primer and bond [3]. Among the advantages proposed by the SE technique, simplicity
8 should be highlighted, since in this approach the etching, rinsing, and drying steps are no long
9 required. For clinicians, it is advertised that SE can be applied as "*one step*", since all three
10 components are all combined into one bottle. In general, this makes the SE procedure more time
11 efficient, less technique-sensitive, and easier [4, 5]. However, the manufacturers' instructions
12 provide detailed descriptions on how to apply their products. Correctly following the steps, such
13 as agitating, rubbing, and drying is important to achieve maximal performance of dentin bonding
14 agents [6, 7].

15 All universal adhesives have one or more organic solvents, usually ethanol or acetone, to
16 facilitate monomers infiltration [7-9]. Ideally, all water and organic solvent content should
17 evaporate because residual content of these molecules may reduce the degree of polymerization,
18 also known as degree of conversion (DC) [10-12]. An ideal degree of conversion is 65% [13]. A
19 lower DC is associated with a weaker bonding strength [14, 15]. Having a low DC also decreases
20 biocompatibility, since residual monomers can lead to cytotoxicity, therefore reducing the amount
21 of monomer will improve the biocompatibility [14, 16-18].

22 Another factor that reduces polymerization rate is oxygen interacting with the outermost
23 layer of the adhesive, forming what has been termed the oxygen inhibition layer (OIL) [19]. The

1 classical concept [20] of the OIL being important for bonding composite to the adhesive layer
2 (where the adhesive's monomer polymerizes with the composite's monomer), has been
3 contradicted in some studies [21, 22]. Also, for other substrates like ceramics and metals no data
4 is available about beneficial effects of OIL. The relationship between DC and OIL are well
5 established in the literature for SE adhesives [21, 23, 24], yet little data is available about OIL
6 specifically about universal adhesives. Another issue is that the adhesive's DC values can be
7 inflated by reducing or eliminating OIL. Some authors recommend removing OIL with an ethanol
8 impregnated cotton pellet [25]; others suggest using the "anaerobic technique", where a plastic
9 matrix strip is placed on top of the adhesive during curing to prevent OIL formation [23, 24]. Both
10 techniques have been criticized for lacking of clinical correspondence [26].

11 Other studies have noted that the predominant cause for bond failure, from a dental
12 materials perspective, is the adhesive, not the composite [10, 27, 28]. These facts raise questions
13 about how less technique sensitive and easier universal adhesive effectively are. For that reason,
14 this study aims to further investigate the influence of clinical steps such as solvent evaporate, time
15 of light curing, and the presence of the oxygen-inhibition layer, on the DC of universal adhesives.
16 The null hypothesis is that the three factors tested; solvent evaporation time, effect of the OIL, and
17 curing time will not affect DC of universal adhesives.

18 **2. Materials and Methods**

19 A total of five adhesives were used in this study. Their chemical compositions,
20 manufacturers' information and recommended methods of application are in Table 1. Four
21 universal adhesives; Prime & Bond Elect Universal Dental Adhesive (PB), iBond Universal (iBU),
22 Scotchbond Universal (SBU), All-Bond Universal Adhesive (AB), and a seventh generation
23 adhesive, One Coat 7.0 (OC), were tested.

1 **Table 1.** Adhesive composition and method of application based on manufacturers' instructions.

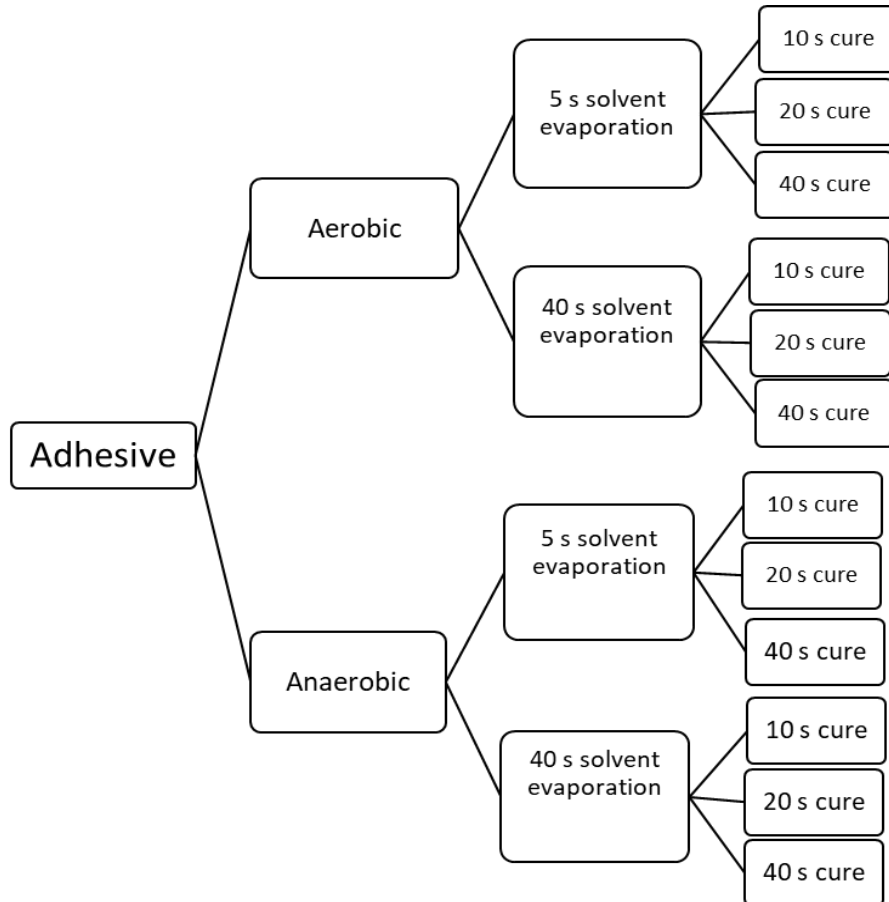
Adhesive Brand	Manufacturer	Chemical composition	Manufacturer Instructions
Prime & Bond Elect Universal Dental Adhesive (PB)	Dentsply Caulk, Milford, DE, USA	Monomer: PENTA Solvent: Acetone Other: Mono-, di-, and trimethacrylate resins, diketone, organic phosphine oxide, stabilizers, cetylamine hydrofluoride, water, mono- and di- methacrylate resins, catalyst, camphorquinone, initiators	-Agitate for 20 s -Air dry for 5 s -Cure for 10 s
iBond Universal (iBU)	Heraeus Kulzer, Hanau, Germany	Monomer: UDMA Solvent: Acetone Other: 4-MET, glutaraldehyde, water, camphorquinone, stabilizer	-Rub for 20 s -Air dry until film no longer moves -Cure 10 s
Scotchbond Universal (SBU)	3M ESPE, St Paul, MN, USA	Monomer: 10-MDP Solvent: Ethanol Other: dimethacrylate resin, HEMA, polyalkenoic acid copolymer, filler, water, camphorquinone, silane	-Rub for a minimum of 20 s -Air dry for 5 s -Cure 10 s
All-Bond Universal Adhesive (AB)	BISCO Inc, Schaumburg, IL, USA	Monomer: MDP, Bis- GMA, Solvent: Ethanol Other: water, camphorquinone	-Apply 2 coats -Rub in for 10-15 s per coat, do not cure in between coats -Cure 10 s
One Coat 7.0 (OC)	Coltene Whaledent, Altstätten, Switzerland	Monomer: Methacrylate Solvent: Ethanol Other: Camphorquinone, water	-Brush in for 20 s -Air dry for 5 s -Cure 10 s

2 PENTA: dipentaerythritol penta acrylate monophosphate; UDMA: Urethane dimethacrylate; 4-MET: 4-
3 methacryloxyethyltrimellitate; 10-MDP: 10-methacryloyloxydecyl dihydrogen phosphate; HEMA: 2-hydroxyethyl
4 methacrylate; Bis-GMA: bisphenol A glycidylmethacrylate

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1 On a glass slide previously cleaned with ethanol, a single drop of adhesive was dispensed
2 using the bottle's spout held at 90 degrees. All samples were mixed, agitated, and rubbed into the
3 glass slide with a clean microbrush for 20 s over an area of 3.14 cm² outlined on the glass slide.
4 The different protocols tested is represented in Figure 1 below.



5 **Figure 1.** Schematic of factors applied to each adhesive.

6 To test the effect of solvent evaporation, samples had air blown from a syringe for either 5
7 s, which is the recommended time, or 40 s. Then to test the effect of the OIL, some samples had
8 an Epitex translucent finishing strip (GC America Incorporated, Alsip, IL, USA) placed over the
9 drop of adhesive before polymerization to minimize the effect of the OIL (anaerobic technique)
10 and the other group of samples were cured without an Epitex strip being placed (aerobic
11 technique). All samples were cured for either 10 s, as recommended by the manufacturers, 20 s, or

1 40 s using a light-emitting diode (LED) light curing unit (Valo Cordless, Ultradent, South Jordan,
2 UT, USA), with a potency of 1000 mW/cm². All samples were cured at a distance of 8.0 mm, this
3 distance was standardized by resting the curing light on a glass slab. To minimize the effect of
4 operator variability, all samples were prepared and tested by a single operator.

5 *2.1 Attenuated Total Reflection-Fourier Transformed Infra-Red (ATR-FTIR) analysis.*

6 The effect of the clinical steps on the DC for each sample was determined by using ATR-FTIR
7 (Thermo Scientific Nicolet 6700, Waltham, MA, USA). For each experimental condition, four
8 samples were produced (n=4). The carbonyl peaks at 1700 cm⁻¹ and the aliphatic double carbon
9 bond at 1640 cm⁻¹ were used to calculate the DC for the universal adhesives; PB, iBU, AB and
10 SBU, while the aromatic peaks at 1610 cm⁻¹ and the aliphatic double bond peaks at 1640 cm⁻¹ were
11 used for OC [15]. In order to calculate the DC for each sample, an unpolymerized sample was also
12 prepared under the same conditions except it was not cured. The DC was calculated using equation
13 1 below.

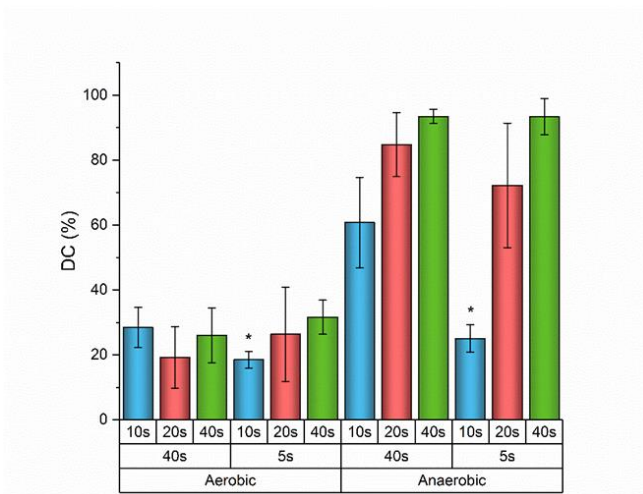
$$14 \quad 1- \frac{[(\text{unpolymerized } 1640 \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ peak}) / (\text{unpolymerized } 1700 \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ peak})]}{[(\text{polymerized } 1640 \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ peak} / (\text{polymerized } 1700 \text{ cm}^{-1} \text{ peak}))]} \times 100 = \text{DC} \quad (1)$$

16 To increase the accuracy, all samples were prepared at the testing site and subjected to
17 FTIR analysis immediately after curing. To ensure the sample did not polymerize further during
18 FTIR analysis, the FTIR machine was covered to prevent any penetration of ambient light.

19 All the data from each adhesive was tabulated and submitted to statistical analysis using 3
20 way ANOVA and Tukey *post-hoc* test ($\alpha=0.05$), and the analysis was performed using OriginLab
21 software version 2017 (Northampton, MA, USA). The three factors studied were: solvent
22 evaporation time, anaerobic effect (presence of OIL), and curing time.

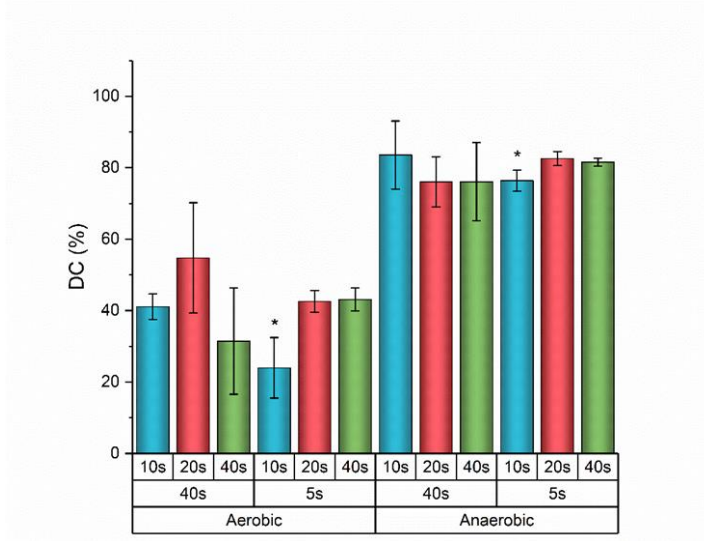
1 **3. Results**

2 The three experimental conditions tested when analyzed independently from each other,
3 proved to be statistically significant for the adhesives used in this study. When analyzed with the
4 three factors interacting with each other, the significance drops for all but SBU. Letting the solvent
5 evaporate for 40 s was statistically significant for AB, iBU, and SBU, but not significant for PB
6 and OC. The overall results indicated that curing time was statistically significant for AB, PB, OC,
7 and SBU, but not for iBU.



8 **Figure 2.** DC mean (%) for AB under aerobic or anaerobic conditions, solvent evaporation
9 for 40 or 5 s, and curing times of 10, 20, or 40 s. Asterisk signifies manufacturer's instructions.

10 For AB, the DC mean under anaerobic conditions was 71.6 % (\pm 26.2), which presented to
11 be over twice the DC for aerobic conditions which was 25.0% (\pm 9.0). When comparing solvent
12 evaporation time, the DC was higher with 40 s of solvent evaporation when curing for 10 s. As
13 seen in figure 2, under aerobic conditions the mean results for solvent evaporation and curing time
14 were not significant. The highest DC for AB was obtained under anaerobic conditions when cured
15 for 20 or 40 s. When the solvent evaporated for 5 s and cured for 10 s, it resulted the lowest DC
16 mean for both aerobic and anaerobic groups.

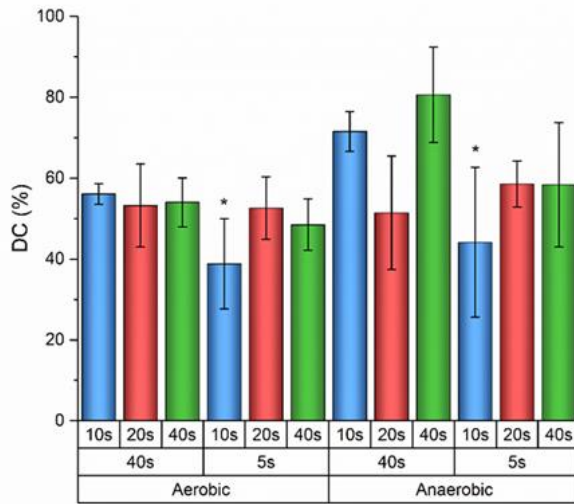


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2 **Figure 3.** DC mean (%) and for PB under aerobic or anaerobic conditions, solvent
 3 evaporation for 40 or 5 s, and curing times of 10, 20, or 40 s. Asterisk signifies manufacturer's
 4 instructions.

5 For PB, the results showed a consistently high DC when anaerobic conditions were used
 6 regardless of the time of solvent evaporation and time of cure, but the anaerobic results were not
 7 statistically significant compared to each other. The increasing from 5 s to 40 s in the solvent
 8 evaporation time seems did not produce major improved in DC values.

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Figure 4. DC mean (%) and for iBU under aerobic or anaerobic conditions, solvent

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evaporation for 40 or 5 s, and curing times of 10, 20, or 40 s. Asterisk signifies manufacturer's

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instructions.

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As seen in figure 4, iBU was less affected by the OIL, because under aerobic conditions

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this adhesive had high DC values with a mean DC of 50.54% (± 9.10), while the anaerobic

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conditions had 60.78% (± 3.42). Also the solvent evaporation time had no significant effect on the

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DC. The highest DC was obtained under anaerobic conditions when the solvent had 40 s to

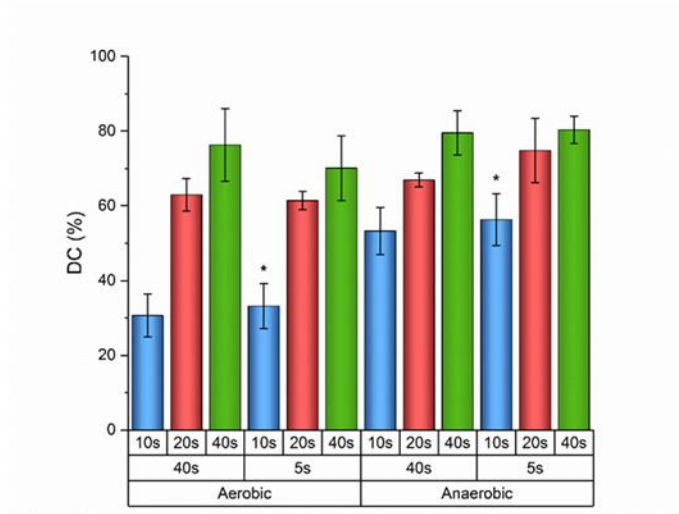
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evaporate and cured for 40 s, and this result was statistically different from the 10 s recommend

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by the manufacturer.

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Figure 5. DC mean (%) and for OC under aerobic or anaerobic conditions, solvent

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evaporation for 40 or 5 s, and curing times of 10, 20, or 40 s. Asterisk signifies manufacturer's

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instructions.

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For OC a trend was observed, an increase in the curing time increased the DC regardless

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of solvent evaporation time and the OIL presence. Although the manufacturer recommends 10 s

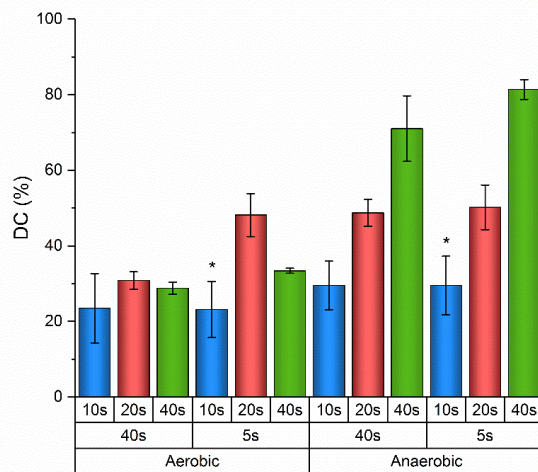
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for curing time, leaving the curing-light on for 40 s may double the DC values, even for aerobic

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conditions.

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1 **Figure 6.** DC mean (%) and for SBU under aerobic or anaerobic conditions, solvent
 2 evaporation for 40 or 5 s, and curing times of 10, 20, or 40 s. Asterisk signifies manufacturer's
 3 instructions.

4 For SBU, curing time increased the DC when under anaerobic conditions. The highest DC
 5 was achieved when cured for 40 s under anaerobic conditions regardless of the solvent evaporation
 6 time. Lengthening the solvent evaporation time did not increase the DC for SBU.

7 **4. Discussion**

8 Simplicity has been the concept behind the proposed use of universal adhesives, because
 9 with 5 s of solvent evaporation and 10 s of light curing, a strong and durable bond could be
 10 produced. Therefore, the question that motivated this study was: how these different universal
 11 adhesives, with varying chemical components, can have almost identical manipulation
 12 recommendations? In other words, does following the manufacturer's recommendations lead to
 13 maximizing the material's properties? Or is the focus on minimizing application time to make it
 14 more attractive? This study's results showed that for some adhesives, there is a mismatch between
 15 the proposed solvent evaporation time and curing time recommended by manufacturers and those

1 where high DC values were obtained. In particular, AB, OC, and SBU benefited from increasing
2 the curing time. Some of the results have large standard deviations, which can be explained by
3 how the adhesives are heterogeneous materials, so each drop tested could have a slightly different
4 percentage of individual components.

5 Literature already shows that the presence of the solvent can decrease polymerization, since
6 the monomers are positioned further apart [10]. Therefore, letting the solvent evaporate longer,
7 brings the monomers in greater proximity to each other and increases the bond strength [29]. When
8 there was less than 10 s of solvent evaporation time, other studies found a lower average bond
9 strength [28, 29]. Some studies showed that letting the solvent evaporate for longer than the
10 manufacturer's recommendations increased the bond strength [28, 30]. In the study done, solvent
11 evaporation time was chosen to be 40 s because a previous study done found 20 s to have no
12 significant difference in bond strength for some adhesives, so doubling the solvent evaporation
13 time was done to see if this would result in significant differences [30]. The solvents in the
14 adhesives tested were ethanol (SBU, AB, OC) and acetone (PB, iBU). Ethanol has a vapor pressure
15 of 42.75 mm Hg at 20°C [31] while acetone's is 185 mm Hg at 20°C [32]. These differences in
16 vapor pressure should result in adhesives with ethanol requiring more solvent evaporation time
17 than adhesives with acetone. Yet with such volatile solvents, letting the solvent evaporate for a
18 prolonged period did not yield significant results for each adhesive under aerobic conditions.

19 Photopolymerization begins by the initiator molecule, which usually is camphorquinone
20 (CQ), becoming activated by light. The direct effect of the time of light curing on DC is well
21 established in literature [2, 15, 33-35]. It is expected that when more energy from light is provided
22 to CQ more monomers will become polymerized. However, this is not what happen for some
23 experimental conditions of this study. For example, increasing four times the energy did not

1 improve their DC values for iBU and PB under anaerobic conditions. The reasons for this are
2 currently unclear, and further studies would be required to understand this phenomenon.
3 Meanwhile, this finding could be a clinical advantage for these adhesives, because prolonged
4 curing time may result in clinical complications. The heat generated from prolonged light curing,
5 can cause water convective movement in the dentin tubules [4, 36]. This movement increases the
6 water content at the adhesive-dentin interface which accelerates the rate of degradation [36]. Water
7 may bring matrix metalloproteases to the interface, which also contributes to bond degradation
8 [37, 38].

9 In this study, the effect of OIL was tested comparing the polymerization of the adhesives
10 in two conditions: the aerobic condition, when the adhesive is exposed to air, which mimics the
11 adhesive after being applied on the tooth surface; and the anaerobic condition, when air is no longer
12 present on adhesive surface, which mimics the condition when the first layer of composite is
13 applied on top of the adhesive. For all tested adhesives, when OIL was present, the DC values
14 were far lower than when OIL formation was prevented. Also, some results from this study showed
15 that in aerobic conditions there is no significant difference for 40 s over 5 s for each adhesive
16 tested, but under anaerobic conditions better results was found with 40 s of solvent evaporation
17 time. This finding could indicate that OIL presence could mask the potential improvement brought
18 from the other factors. Curing under anaerobic conditions proved to have the greatest effect on
19 increasing the DC for AB, PB, and SBU. Other studies have also confirmed the OIL as significant
20 [26, 39] and that removal of the OIL increased shear bond strength as well [25]. The opposite is
21 also argued that the OIL is desirable since the monomers can polymerize with the layer of
22 composite placed [40]. Then another study found the OIL to not be significant [41]. It is worth
23 noting that the OIL contains a lower concentration of CQ compared to the polymerized layer

1 underneath, which will influence the ability for the OIL to be cured under the restorative material
2 [25]. The presence of the OIL may be what is preventing other factors from improving the
3 physiochemical properties of the universal adhesive.

4 **5. Conclusion**

5 With the limitation of this study, it is possible to conclude that letting the solvent evaporate
6 for 40 s increased the DC for AB, iBU, and SBU, but showed no significant difference in the
7 results for PB and OC. Curing under anaerobic conditions significantly increased the overall DC
8 mean for all tested adhesives. The overall results for AB, OC, and SBU indicated a higher DC
9 when the curing time was longer than 10 s. iBU showed no significant difference with respect to
10 curing time. The null hypothesis has been rejected, since the three factors tested did affect the DC.

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