Journal of Emerging Trends and Novel Research
JETNR.ORG | ISSN : 2984-9276
An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

# Effect Of Bolt Pattern Geometry On The Strength Of Steel Gusset Plates: Analytical And Experimental Investigation

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***Abstract :*** Steel gusset plate connections are critical components in structural systems, where bolt pattern geometry significantly influences load distribution and failure behavior. This study investigates the effect of different bolt configurations on the strength and performance of gusset plates through analytical, numerical, and experimental approaches. Finite Element Analysis (FEA) was carried out to predict stress concentration and deformation patterns, followed by validation using Universal Testing Machine (UTM) experiments. Three specimens with varying bolt arrangements were tested under tensile loading. Initial experimental trials exhibited premature failure due to improper stress distribution, while optimized configurations demonstrated improved load-carrying capacity and ductility. The results highlight that bolt spacing, edge distance, and arrangement pattern play a vital role in enhancing structural efficiency. The study provides design recommendations for improving gusset plate performance in practical applications.

**Keywords:** Gusset Plate, Bolt Pattern Geometry, Finite Element Analysis, UTM Testing, Structural Connections, Stress Distribution

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Steel connections are fundamental to the stability and safety of structural systems such as bridges, industrial buildings, and transmission towers. Among these, gusset plates are widely used to connect multiple members at a joint. The efficiency of such connections largely depends on the arrangement of bolts, which governs load transfer and stress distribution.

Traditional design methods often rely on simplified assumptions that do not fully capture localized stress concentrations and failure mechanisms. Improper bolt configurations can lead to premature failure, reduced load-carrying capacity, and inefficient material utilization.

This study aims to analyse the influence of bolt pattern geometry on gusset plate performance using a combination of analytical calculations, Finite Element Analysis (FEA), and experimental validation through UTM testing.

## 2. Literature Review

Previous research has highlighted the significance of connection design in determining the strength and durability of structural systems. Several studies have reported that bolt spacing, edge distance, and arrangement patterns have a direct influence on stress distribution and failure mechanisms in gusset plates. Non-uniform stress distribution has been identified as a major cause of early failure in poorly designed connections. Finite Element Analysis has been widely adopted to predict stress concentration zones and deformation patterns, offering detailed insights into structural behavior. Experimental investigations using testing machines have further validated these numerical predictions, demonstrating that optimized bolt configurations can significantly improve load-carrying capacity and ductility. However, there remains a gap in studies that integrate analytical calculations, numerical simulations, and experimental validation within a single framework, which this research aims to address.

## 3. Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of bolt pattern geometry on the strength and performance of steel gusset plates. The research focuses on analyzing stress distribution and deformation behavior using Finite Element Analysis, conducting experimental testing through a Universal Testing Machine, and comparing the results obtained from analytical, numerical, and experimental approaches. The study also aims to identify the most efficient bolt configuration that enhances load-carrying capacity and minimizes failure risks.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Specimen Preparation

Steel gusset plate specimens were fabricated with different bolt pattern geometries to examine their structural performance under tensile loading. Three specimens were prepared, each with a distinct bolt arrangement, while maintaining consistent material properties and geometric dimensions to ensure comparability. The first specimen consisted of an initial bolt configuration, the second incorporated slight modifications in bolt positioning, and the third represented an optimized arrangement designed to achieve uniform stress distribution.

### 4.2 Analytical Calculations

Analytical calculations were performed to estimate the theoretical load-carrying capacity of the specimens based on standard steel design principles. Parameters such as net sectional area, bolt bearing strength, and tensile stress were evaluated using established design equations. These calculations provided a baseline for comparison with numerical and experimental results, enabling a comprehensive assessment of structural performance.

### 4.3 Finite Element Analysis (FEA)

Finite Element Analysis was carried out to simulate the behavior of gusset plate connections under tensile loading conditions. The models were developed using ANSYS software, where appropriate boundary conditions and loading parameters were applied to replicate real-world scenarios. The analysis focused on evaluating stress distribution, deformation patterns, and potential failure zones within the specimens. The results obtained from FEA were instrumental in identifying critical regions of stress concentration and understanding the influence of bolt arrangement on structural performance.

### 4.4 Experimental Testing (UTM)

Experimental validation was conducted using a Universal Testing Machine to assess the actual performance of the fabricated specimens. Tensile load was applied gradually until failure, and key parameters such as load versus displacement behavior, ultimate load capacity, and failure modes were recorded. The experimental results provided valuable insights into the real-time structural response and served as a basis for validating analytical and numerical findings.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The experimental results revealed significant differences in the performance of the three specimens due to variations in bolt pattern geometry. The first specimen exhibited premature failure at a lower load, primarily due to improper bolt alignment and severe stress concentration near the edges. The second specimen demonstrated moderate improvement in load-carrying capacity, although failure still occurred due to uneven stress distribution. In contrast, the third specimen with an optimized bolt arrangement showed a substantial increase in strength and exhibited more uniform stress distribution across the plate.

A comparative analysis of the results indicated that the load-carrying capacity improved progressively from the first to the third specimen. The failure modes also varied, with edge tearing observed in the initial specimen, bolt hole elongation in the second specimen, and balanced deformation in the optimized specimen. The Finite Element Analysis results closely matched the experimental observations, confirming the accuracy of numerical predictions. Overall, the findings emphasize that bolt pattern geometry plays a critical role in determining the structural efficiency and failure behavior of gusset plate connections.

## 6. Key Findings

The study demonstrates that bolt spacing and arrangement significantly influence stress distribution within gusset plates. Improper bolt configurations lead to stress concentration and premature failure, whereas optimized patterns enhance both load-carrying capacity and ductility. The results also confirm that Finite Element Analysis is an effective tool for predicting structural behavior, as it shows strong agreement with experimental outcomes. Furthermore, experimental validation reinforces the importance of proper connection design in achieving reliable structural performance.

## 7. Future Scope

Future research can focus on investigating the influence of varying plate thickness and material properties on connection behavior. Studies involving high-strength bolts and different loading conditions, such as cyclic and dynamic loads, can further enhance understanding of structural performance. Additionally, comparisons between welded and bolted connections and the application of optimization techniques, including artificial intelligence, can provide new directions for improving gusset plate design.

## 8. Conclusion

This research highlights the critical influence of bolt pattern geometry on the strength and performance of steel gusset plate connections. The study reveals that poorly designed bolt arrangements result in uneven stress distribution and early failure, while optimized configurations significantly improve structural behavior and load capacity. The integration of analytical calculations, numerical simulations, and experimental testing provides a comprehensive understanding of connection performance and failure mechanisms. The findings offer valuable insights for engineers and designers, emphasizing the need for careful consideration of bolt spacing, edge distance, and arrangement during the design process. Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of more efficient and reliable steel connection designs.

## I. Acknowledgment

The authors express sincere gratitude to the faculty and staff of the Civil Engineering Department at our institution for their guidance and support. Special thanks are extended to the laboratory technicians for assistance during UTM testing and to all contributors who helped in completing this research successfully.

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