

LOAD CARRYING CAPACITY OF COLUMNS SUPPORTED EMBANKMENT
ON SOFT SOIL USING TREATED BOTTOM ASH

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DEDICATION

This thesis work is dedicated to my parents, who have always supported, encouraged, and loved me unconditionally and whose continuous advice have motivated me to work hard. Also, to my siblings and family members who always been there for me.

This work is especially dedicated to my brothers for their continuous support and encouragement during difficulties in life.

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ABSTRACT

When an embankment is to be built on ground that is too weak and compressible to support the embankment appropriately, columns of firm material can be installed in the soft ground to offer essential support by carrying the embankment load to a stiff stratum. This procedure is referred to as column supported embankments. There are two main motives to employ columns supported embankments: a) expedite construction compared to traditional construction techniques such as staged construction or pre-designed vertical drains, b) protection of nearby amenities against distress, like settlement of existing carriageways when a highway is being extended. Despite its extensive usage in the construction industry, the current situation of technology suggests that further investigation is needed to give a deeper understanding of the technology in reference to sustainable material used in column, performance and failure mechanisms of the columns underneath the embankment. In this study, the performance of a group of bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns in enhancing the load-carrying capacity of soft soil under embankment were investigated. A series of laboratory physical model test was carried out to examine the behaviour of improved ground under an embankment subjected to constant strain loading. The influence of key parameters such as column materials, length of columns and area replacement ratio on the performance of improved ground was investigated by the overall number of 13 model tests. The research variables include two column lengths of 150 mm (floating) and 200 mm (end bearing), three area replacement ratios of 11%, 16% and 22%, three column materials such as bottom ash (stone column), cement bottom ash and geopolymer (rigid column). In addition, numerical analysis was carried out in parallel to model the behaviour of laboratory model tests by using Plaxis 3D foundation software. It is evident from the results that the load-carrying capacity of the foundation soil under embankment increased significantly with columns installation. The load-carrying capacity of bottom ash columns reinforced clay with the area replacement ratio of 11%, 16% and 22% increased by 24.31%, 39.09% and 63.35% for the floating columns and 27.49%, 42.63% and 83.60% for the end bearing columns as compared to the unreinforced model. Cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay with an area replacement ratio of 16% and 22% increased the load-carrying capacity by 19.53% and 69.39% for the floating case and 53.00% and 78.24% for the end bearing columns in comparison to unreinforced test. While geopolymer columns reinforced ground with an area replacement ratio of 16% increased the load-carrying capacity by 64.47% and 83.48% for the floating and end bearing columns, respectively. The results showed that the area replacement ratio and column length significantly affect the performance of reinforced ground. The load-carrying capacity and stiffness of foundation soil under embankment enhanced by increasing the area replacement ratio and column length. In addition, bottom ash columns reinforced ground showed perfectly plastic behaviour failure, while cement and geopolymer columns reinforced ground under embankment possess ductile behaviour failure. Bulging as a mode of failure occurred in the bottom ash columns, while tilting and punching occurred in the cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns. The stress concentration ratio was greater than unity for column reinforced models. Furthermore, the experimental and numerical results showed good agreement. The stress-settlement curves achieved from both experimental and numerical models followed the same pattern. Preliminary design charts were produced from the relationship between load-carrying capacity and area replacement ratios for different length to diameter ratios of bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns. The design charts will help the construction industry in designing bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns.

ABSTRAK

Apabila tambakan hendak dibina di atas tanah yang terlalu lemah dan mudah termampat untuk menyokong tambakan dengan baik, tiang daripada bahan yang keras boleh dipasang dalam tanah lembut untuk memberikan sokongan sepatutnya dengan memindahkan beban tambakan ke stratum yang sangat keras. Prosedur ini disebut sebagai tambakan yang disokong tiang/lajur. Terdapat dua tujuan utama untuk menggunakan tambakan yang disokong tiang: a) pembinaan yang dipercepat berbanding dengan teknik pembinaan tradisional seperti pembinaan berperingkat atau untuk pra-ujikaji aliran menegak, b) perlindungan kemudahan berdekatan daripada kecemasan, seperti mendakan pada jalan raya sedia ada apabila membuat penambahan lebuh raya. Walaupun penggunaannya yang meluas dalam industri pembinaan, keadaan teknologi saat ini menunjukkan bahawa penyelidikan lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai teknologi tersebut dengan merujuk pada bahan lestari yang digunakan dalam tiang/lajur, prestasi dan mekanisme kegagalan lajur di bawah tambakan. Dalam kajian ini, prestasi sekumpulan tiang/lajur abu dasar, simen-abu dasar dan tiang geopolimer dalam meningkatkan daya galas tanah lembut di bawah tambakan telah diselidik. Satu siri ujian model fizikal makmal telah dilakukan untuk memeriksa kelakuan tanah komposit di bawah tambakan yang dikenakan beban secara regangan seragam. Pengaruh parameter utama seperti bahan lajur, panjang lajur dan nisbah penggantian kawasan terhadap prestasi penambahbaikan tanah disiasat dengan jumlah keseluruhan 13 model ujian. Pemboleh ubah kajian merangkumi dua panjang tiang iaitu 150 mm (terapung) dan 200 mm (kedalaman penuh), tiga nisbah penggantian kawasan iaitu 11%, 16% dan 22%, tiga bahan tiang abu dasar (lajur batu), simen-abu dasar dan geopolimer (tiang tegar). Di samping itu, analisis berangka dilakukan selari dengan ujian model makmal dengan menggunakan perisian Plaxis 3D. Ini terbukti dari hasil kajian bahawa daya galas tanah komposit di bawah tambakan meningkat dengan ketara dengan pemasangan tiang. Kapasiti beban bagi tiang abu dasar sebagai pengukuhan tanah clay terhadap nisbah penggantian kawasan 11%, 16% dan 22% meningkat sehingga 24.31%, 39.09% dan 63.35% untuk tiang terapung dan juga 27.49%, 42.63% and 83.60% untuk tiang penuh seperti yang dibandingkan dengan tanah yang tiada pengukuhan. Bagi tiang simen-abu dasar dengan nisbah penggantian kawasan 16% dan 22% meningkatkan kapasiti tanggungan beban sehingga 19.53% dan 69.39% untuk tiang terapung, dan 53.00% dan 78.24% untuk tiang penuh seperti yang dibandingkan dengan tanah tiada pengukuhan. Manakala untuk tiang geopolymer dengan nisbah penggantian kawasan sebanyak 16% meningkatkan kapasiti tanggungan beban, masing-masing sebanyak 64.47% dan 83.48% untuk tiang terapung dan tiang penuh. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa nisbah penggantian kawasan dan kedalaman penembusan tiang mempunyai pengaruh terhadap prestasi pengukuhan tanah. Kapasiti tanggungan beban dan kekukuhan asas tanah di bawah tambakan dapat dipertingkatkan dengan penambahan nisbah penggantian luas dan panjang tiang. Tambahan lagi, pengukuhan tanah tiang abu dasar menunjukkan kegagalan kelakuan plastik dengan sempurna, sementara pengukuhan dengan tiang simen dan geopolimer di bawah tambakan mempunyai kegagalan kelakuan mulur. Pembonjolan adalah mod kegagalan yang berlaku di tiang/lajur abu dasar, manakala kecondongan dan penembusan tiang/lajur diperhatikan untuk tiang abu dasar dan tiang geopolimer. Nisbah tumpuan tekanan adalah lebih besar untuk model pengukuhan tiang. Di samping keputusan eksperimen dan numerik yang menunjukkan keselarian yang baik. Lengkung tekanan – mendakan juga tercapai daripada kedua-dua model eksperimen dan numerik juga menunjukkan bentuk yang sama. Carta rekabentuk asal dihasilkan daripada hubungan di antara kapasiti tanggungan beban dan nisbah penggantian kawasan bagi nisbah panjang kepada diameter abu dasar yang berbeza, simen-abu dasar dan tiang geopolimer. Carta rekabentuk tersebut akan membantu industri pembinaan dalam rekabentuk abu dasar, simen-abu dasar dan tiang geopolimer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	iii
	DEDICATION	iv
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
	ABSTRACT	vi
	ABSTRAK	vii
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
	LIST OF TABLES	xvii
	LIST OF FIGURES	xix
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xxx
	LIST OF SYMBOLS	xxxii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xxxiii
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Problem Statement	6
1.3	Aim and Objectives	8
1.4	Scope of the Study	8
1.5	Significance of Research	10
1.6	Thesis Overview	12
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	Ground Improvement Description	15
2.3	Stone Columns	18
2.3.1	Introduction	18
2.3.2	Stone Column Method: Historical Evolution	19
2.3.3	Stone Column Installation Methods	20
2.3.4	Vibro-Flotation Methods	20

2.3.4.1	Wet top feed method	23
2.3.4.2	Dry top feed method	24
2.3.4.3	Dry bottom feed method	24
2.3.5	Stone Columns Material	26
2.3.6	Principle of Stone Columns	27
2.4	Rigid Columns	28
2.4.1	Introduction	28
2.4.2	Rigid Column Installation	30
2.4.3	Application of Rigid Columns	31
2.5	Column Supported Embankments	32
2.5.1	Introduction	32
2.5.2	Feasibility Assessments of Column Supported Embankments	34
2.5.3	Case Histories of Columns Supported Embankment	35
2.5.3.1	Field Scale	36
2.5.3.2	Laboratory Scale	40
2.5.3.3	Numerical Modelling	52
2.6	Determination of Load-Carrying Capacity	58
2.6.1	Theoretical Solution	58
2.6.1.1	Flexible Columns	59
2.6.1.2	Rigid Columns	59
2.6.1.3	Semi-Rigid Columns	60
2.6.2	Ultimate load-Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure from Load Tests	61
2.7	Definition of Terms	63
2.7.1	Area Replacement Ratio	63
2.7.2	Critical Length of Columns	64
2.7.3	Stress Applied by Embankment	64
2.7.4	Stress Concentration Ratio	65
2.7.5	Stress Reduction Ratio	66
2.7.6	Column Stress Ratio	67
2.8	Achieving Sustainability in Ground Improvement	67

2.9	Bottom Ash	69
2.9.1	Properties of Bottom Ash	70
2.9.1.1	. Particle Size Distribution	71
2.9.1.2	Specific Gravity	72
2.9.1.3	. Compaction	72
2.9.1.4	Relative Density	73
2.9.1.5	Coefficient of Permeability	73
2.9.2	Application of Bottom Ash	74
2.9.2.1	Geotechnical Applications	75
2.9.2.2	Aggregate for Cementitious Composites	76
2.9.3	Previous Study Performed on Bottom Ash Columns	76
2.10	Closing Remarks	86
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	89
3.1	Introduction	89
3.2	Material Properties	91
3.2.1	Bottom Ash	91
3.2.2	Cement Bottom Ash Mortar	92
3.2.3	Bottom Ash based Geopolymer Mortar	92
3.3	Material Testing	94
3.3.1	Laser scattering particle size analyzer test	95
3.3.2	Specific Gravity	96
3.3.3	Consistency Limits Tests	97
3.3.4	Compaction Test	98
3.3.5	Relative Density	99
3.3.6	Permeability Test	100
3.3.7	Consolidation Test	100
3.3.8	Unconfined Compression Test	101
3.3.9	X-ray Diffraction	103
3.3.10	Scanning Electron Microscopy/Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectrometry	103
3.4	Physical Modelling	103

3.4.1	Experimental Chamber	104
3.4.2	Ground Model Height	106
3.4.3	Model Width	108
3.4.4	Model Length	110
3.4.5	Rigidity of Chamber Walls	110
3.4.6	Pneumatic Cylinder	110
3.4.7	Driving Unit	112
3.4.8	Column Installation Tools	113
3.4.9	Mould for Embankment	114
3.5	Measurement Technique	115
3.5.1	Calibration	116
3.5.2	Vane Shear Apparatus	120
3.6	Specimen Preparation	121
3.6.1	Kaolin Slurry	121
3.6.2	Consolidation Process	121
3.6.3	Columns Materials	123
3.6.3.1	Bottom Ash Columns	123
3.6.3.2	Cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns	124
3.6.4	Column Configuration	125
3.6.5	Columns Installation	127
3.6.6	Embankment Preparation	129
3.6.7	Testing Method	130
3.6.7.1	Testing Procedure	130
3.6.7.2	Test notation	133
3.7	Numerical Modelling	135
3.7.1	Kaolin Clay	136
3.7.2	Embankment	137
3.7.3	Columns	137
3.7.4	Rigid Plate	139
3.7.5	Plaxis 3D Modelling Details	139
3.7.6	Mesh Formation	140

	3.7.7	Stage Construction	140
	3.8	Preliminary design charts	141
	3.9	Closing Remarks	141
CHAPTER 4		PRELIMINARY DATA	143
	4.1	Introduction	143
	4.2	Fundamental Properties	143
	4.2.1	Laser Scattering Particle Size Analyzer	144
	4.2.2	Atterberg Limits	146
	4.2.3	Specific Gravity	147
	4.2.4	Permeability	148
	4.2.5	Compaction	148
	4.2.6	Relative Density	150
	4.2.7	Consolidation Parameters	151
	4.2.8	Unconfined Compressive Strength Test	152
	4.2.9	XRD Analysis	160
	4.2.10	SEM Micrographs	163
	4.2.11	EDX Characterization	168
	4.3	Physical Modelling	174
	4.3.1	Definition of Failure Point	175
	4.4	Unreinforced Model	175
	4.4.1	Stress-Settlement Relationship	175
	4.4.2	Load Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure	176
	4.4.3	Excess Pore Water Pressure	178
	4.5	Closing Remarks	179
CHAPTER 5		LABORATORY PHYSICAL MODELLING TEST	181
	5.1	Introduction	181
	5.2	Columns Reinforced Models	181
	5.2.1	Load-Carrying Capacity	182
	5.2.2	Increase in Ultimate Load-carrying Capacity:	182
	5.2.3	Improvement factor	182
	5.2.4	Soil Arching Concept	183

	5.2.4.1	Stress Concentration Ratio	184
	5.2.4.2	Stress Reduction Ratio	184
	5.2.4.3	Column Stress Ratio	185
5.3		Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Clay Under Embankment	185
	5.3.1	Stress Settlement Relationship	185
	5.3.1.1	Load Carrying Capacity at Failure	187
	5.3.1.2	Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	188
	5.3.1.3	Improvement Factor	188
	5.3.2	Bearing Ratio Versus Settlement Ratio	189
	5.3.2.1	Clay Reinforced with Floating Bottom Ash Columns	189
	5.3.2.2	Clay Reinforced with End Bearing Bottom Ash Columns	191
	5.3.3	Columns Failure Pattern	192
	5.3.4	Excess Pore Water Pressure	196
	5.3.5	Relationship Between Pressure on Surrounding Soil, Column Top and Column Bottom with Time	197
	5.3.5.1	Pressure at the Surrounding Soil	197
	5.3.5.2	Pressure Acting on Column Top	198
	5.3.5.3	Pressure at Base of Column	199
	5.3.6	Soil Arching Terminology	200
	5.3.6.1	Stress Concentration Ratio	200
	5.3.6.2	Stress Reduction Ratio	202
	5.3.6.3	Column Stress Ratio	203
5.4		Cement Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Clay Under Embankment	204
	5.4.1	Stress Settlement Relationship	204
	5.4.1.1	Load Carrying Capacity	206
	5.4.1.2	Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	207
	5.4.1.3	Improvement Factor	207
	5.4.2	Bearing Ratio Versus Settlement Ratio	208
	5.4.2.1	Clay Reinforced with Floating Cement Bottom Ash Columns	208

5.4.2.2	Clay Reinforced with End Bearing Cement Bottom Ash Columns	209
5.4.3	Columns Failure Pattern	209
5.4.4	Excess Pore Water Pressure	212
5.4.5	Relationship Between Stress on Surrounding Soil, Column Top and Column Bottom with Time	213
5.4.5.1	Pressure at the Surrounding Soil	213
5.4.5.2	Pressure Acting on Column Top	214
5.4.5.3	Pressure at Base of Column	215
5.4.6	Soil Arching Terminology	216
5.4.6.1	Stress Concentration Ratio	216
5.4.6.2	Stress Reduction Ratio	217
5.4.6.3	Column Stress Ratio	218
5.5	Geopolymer Columns Reinforced Clay Under Embankment	219
5.5.1	Stress Settlement Relationship	219
5.5.1.1	Load Carrying Capacity	221
5.5.1.2	Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	221
5.5.1.3	Improvement Factor	221
5.5.2	Bearing Ratio Versus Settlement Ratio	222
5.5.2.1	Clay Reinforced with Floating Geopolymer Columns	222
5.5.2.2	Clay Reinforced with End Bearing Geopolymer Columns	223
5.5.3	Columns Failure Pattern	224
5.5.4	Excess Pore Water Pressure	226
5.5.5	Relationship Between Stress on Surrounding Soil, Column Top and Column Bottom with Time	227
5.5.5.1	Pressure at the Surrounding Soil	227
5.5.5.2	Pressure Acting on Column Top	228
5.5.5.3	Pressure at Base of Column	229
5.5.6	Soil Arching Terminology	230
5.5.6.1	Stress Concentration Ratio	230

	5.5.6.2	Stress Reduction Ratio	231
	5.5.6.3	Column Stress Ratio	232
5.6		Comparison Between Bottom Ash, Cement Bottom Ash and Geopolymer Columns Reinforced Models	233
5.7		Effect of Area Replacement Ratio and Column Length	234
5.8		Summary of Comparison of the findings	237
5.9		Closing Remarks	238
CHAPTER 6		NUMERICAL MODELLING OF COLUMNS SUPPORTED EMBANKMENT	241
6.1		Introduction	241
6.2		Properties of Materials	242
6.3		Deformed Mesh	243
6.4		Numerical Modelling Results	245
	6.4.1	Unreinforced Model	245
		6.4.1.1 Stress-Settlement Relationship	245
		6.4.1.2 Load Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure	246
	6.4.2	Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Models	246
		6.4.2.1 Stress-Settlement Relationship	247
		6.4.2.2 Load Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure	248
		6.4.2.3 Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	249
		6.4.2.4 Improvement Factor	249
	6.4.3	Cement Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Clay	250
		6.4.3.1 Stress-Settlement Relationship	250
		6.4.3.2 Load Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure	251
		6.4.3.3 Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	251
		6.4.3.4 Improvement Factor	251
	6.4.4	Geopolymer Columns Reinforced Clay	252
		6.4.4.1 Stress-Settlement Relationship	252
		6.4.4.2 Load Carrying Capacity at Ground Failure	253
		6.4.4.3 Increase in Load Carrying Capacity	254
		6.4.4.4 Improvement Factor	254

6.5	Comparison Between Bottom Ash, Cement Bottom Ash and Geopolymer Columns Reinforced Models	255
6.6	Effect of Area Improvement Ratio	257
6.7	Effect of Columns length	260
6.8	Summary of Comparison of Numerical Results	263
6.9	Comparison of Physical and Numerical Results	264
6.9.1	Unreinforced Model	264
6.9.2	Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Clay Under Embankment	265
6.9.3	Cement Bottom Ash Columns Reinforced Clay	268
6.9.4	Geopolymer Columns Reinforced Clay	270
6.9.5	Summary of Comparison of the Numerical and Experimental results	272
6.10	Preliminary Design Charts	273
6.11	Closing Remarks	277
CHAPTER 7	CONCLUSIONS	279
7.1	Introduction	279
7.2	Conclusions	279
7.3	Recommendations for Future Research Work	281
	REFERENCES	283
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	306

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
Table 1.1	Coal demand for different coal-burnt power plants from 2014 to 2016 in million tonnes per year (PMESILO, 2017)	4
Table 2.1	Various construction methods and its requirements (Amini, 2016; Raju and Sondermann, 2005)	25
Table 2.2	Case histories of column supported embankments	35
Table 2.3	TDM and conventional DM columns performance comparison (Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	40
Table 2.4	Summary of model tests conditions	45
Table 3.1	Laboratory tests conducted for various research materials	95
Table 3.2	Calibration coefficient for different instruments	120
Table 3.3	Practical (prototype) and model bottom ash columns parameters	124
Table 3.4	Quantity of bottom ash required for different length of the column	128
Table 3.5	Test notation for different physical model tests	134
Table 3.6	Input parameters for numerical simulations	139
Table 4.1	Properties of kaolin, residual soil and bottom ash achieved from experimental tests	144
Table 4.2	Accumulated particles size distribution data for CBA, MBA, FBA, kaolin and residual soil	145
Table 4.3	Specific gravity value of Tanjung Bin bottom ash obtained with previous researchers	147
Table 4.4	Compaction test results of Tanjung Bin bottom ash obtained with previous researchers	149
Table 4.5	Compression index values of kaolin clay with previous researchers for OCR of 10	152
Table 4.6	Ultimate load-carrying capacity of the embankment at ground failure for unreinforced clay	177
Table 5.1	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the bottom ash reinforced ground underneath embankment loading	188

Table 5.2	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced ground underneath embankment loading	207
Table 5.3	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the geopolymer columns reinforced ground underneath embankment loading	222
Table 5.4	Results achieved from physical model tests	237
Table 6.1	Parameters for numerical modelling of kaolin clay, embankment and rigid footing	242
Table 6.2	Parameters for different columns	243
Table 6.3	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the bottom ash reinforced ground underneath embankment (Numerical modelling)	249
Table 6.4	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced ground underneath embankment loading	252
Table 6.5	Load carrying capacity and improvement factor at ground failure for the geopolymer columns reinforced ground underneath embankment loading	254
Table 6.6	Results achieved from numerical models	263
Table 6.7	Comparison of numerical and experimental results	272

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
Figure 1.1	Fuel consumption for power generation in Peninsular Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia Electricity Supply Industry Outlook 2017)	3
Figure 1.2	Application of bottom ash in the United States as a percentage of entire re-used (ACAA, 2006)	5
Figure 2.1	Stone column construction using vibro-floatation method (a) Vibro-compaction (b) vibro-replacement (Dieseko Group: International construction equipment-Vibroflots, 2020)	21
Figure 2.2	Particle size gradation representing suitability of vibro-replacement and vibro-compaction (www.keller.co.uk, 2019)	21
Figure 2.3	Vibro-floatation construction method by bottom feed method (Vibro-techniques brochure by keller, 2019)	22
Figure 2.4	Vibro-floatation construction method by top feed method (Vibro-techniques brochure by keller, 2019)	23
Figure 2.5	Load transfer mechanism for stiff pile and stone column	28
Figure 2.6	Load transfer mechanism of rigid and non-rigid columns (Modified after Mahdavi (2019))	30
Figure 2.7	Rigid columns installation by displacement method (Rigid Inclusions brochure by keller, 2019)	31
Figure 2.8	Ground improvement techniques suitability for different soils (Holmwood, 2017)	32
Figure 2.9	Floating columns supporting embankment	33
Figure 2.10	Fixed/End bearing columns supporting embankment	34
Figure 2.11	Monitoring devices locations for the T-shaped soil-cement mixed columns under the embankment (Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	39
Figure 2.12	Section view of ground reinforced with granular columns (Almeida <i>et al.</i> , 1985)	41
Figure 2.13	Schematic diagram of centrifuge model (Inagaki <i>et al.</i> , 2002)	42
Figure 2.14	Setup for the model ground (Kitazume and Maruyama, 2006)	43
Figure 2.15	Ground deformation for the test models (Kitazume and Maruyama, 2006)	44

Figure 2.16	Columns failure pattern (Kitazume and Maruyama, 2007c)	46
Figure 2.17	Model testing setup: (a) Installation of earth pressure cells, (b) Embankment fill	47
Figure 2.18	Columns failure pattern: (a) stone columns, (b) Geogrid encased stone columns	48
Figure 2.19	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the embankment model resting on ordinary stone columns reinforced soil (Fattah <i>et al.</i> , 2016b)	48
Figure 2.20	Test results: (a) columns failure pattern (b) distribution of stress concentration ratio with time (Das and Deb, 2018)	50
Figure 2.21	Embankment preparation and columns failure pattern: (a) constructed embankment (b) Ordinary stone columns (c) GESC-G1 (d) GESC-2 (Chen <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	52
Figure 2.22	Geometry and parameters used in the numerical analysis by Han <i>et al.</i> (2004)	53
Figure 2.23	Geometry of numerical model (Zhang <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	54
Figure 2.24	3D model of columns supported embankment on soft soil (Chai <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	55
Figure 2.25	3D model of columns supported embankment on soft soil (Das and Deb, 2018)	57
Figure 2.26	Comparison of experimental results with numerical results (Das and Deb, 2018)	58
Figure 2.27	Ultimate bearing capacity from load tests: (a) Logarithmic scale method and (b) Double tangent method	62
Figure 2.28	Distribution of stress applied by embankment (Smith, 2005)	65
Figure 2.29	Generation of coal combustion by-products (NETL, 2006)	70
Figure 2.30	Particle size distribution curves of various bottom ash samples (Recycled Materials Resource Centre, 2012).	71
Figure 2.31	Particle size distributions of bottom ash samples obtained from Tanjung Bin power plant	72
Figure 2.32	Advantageous usage of bottom ash in the United States (Modified after Kim and Lee (2015))	74
Figure 2.33	Kaolin improved with single and group of bottom ash columns (Marto <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	77
Figure 2.34	Relationship between apparent cohesion versus height penetration ratio (Marto <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	78

Figure 2.35	Bottom ash columns arrangement with the different area replacement ratio (Marto <i>et al.</i> , 2016)	79
Figure 2.36	Relationship between bearing capacity and settlement ratio achieved by Marto <i>et al.</i> (2016)	80
Figure 2.37	Vertical stress plotted against displacement/width of the footing for the uncased bottom ash columns (Moradi, 2016)	82
Figure 2.38	Relationship between stress and settlement for the ground reinforced with floating uncased bottom ash columns and geotextile encased columns (Moradi, 2016)	83
Figure 2.39	Relationship between stress and settlement for the ground reinforced with floating uncased bottom ash columns and geotextile encased columns (Moradi, 2016)	83
Figure 2.40	Comparison of stress-settlement behaviour achieved from physical and numerical modelling (Moradi, 2016)	84
Figure 2.41	Columns failure mode (a,b) Floating and end-bearing uncased bottom ash columns, (c,d) End-bearing geotextile encased bottom ash columns	85
Figure 3.1	Flowchart of the study	90
Figure 3.2	Geopolymer preparation process	93
Figure 3.3	Particle size distribution: (a) Laser scattering particle size analyser, (b) Pouring droplet of soil solution	96
Figure 3.4	Pycnometer for determination of specific gravity	97
Figure 3.5	Atterberg limit test: (a) Plastic limit sample, (b) Cone penetrometer for liquid limit determination	98
Figure 3.6	Compaction test [a] Sample placed in airtight bags [b] Measuring the mass of mould with compacted soil	99
Figure 3.7	Schematic diagram of unconfined compression test	102
Figure 3.8	Unconfined compression test; (a) Bottom ash based geopolymer sample, (b) Residual soil sample	102
Figure 3.9	Laboratory physical modelling	105
Figure 3.10	Schematic diagram of physical model: (a) front view (b) side view	106
Figure 3.11	Consolidation parameters achieved by Srisakthivel (2003) and Hird and Moseley (2000)	108
Figure 3.12	Failure mechanism in soil under strip footing by Li (2019)	109

Figure 3.13	Embankment on soft soil by Leshchinsky (2015) [a] Slip circle for different location of footing from the crest of slope [b] Plaxis 3D model	109
Figure 3.14	Pneumatic cylinder along with a platform	111
Figure 3.15	Schematic set up showing a pneumatic cylinder during the consolidation process	111
Figure 3.16	Driving unit (Displacement control system)	112
Figure 3.17	Driving unit framework	113
Figure 3.18	Fabricated template	114
Figure 3.19	Column installation tools	114
Figure 3.20	Mould for embankment	115
Figure 3.21	Load cell subjected to 10 kg load during calibration	116
Figure 3.22	LVDT of 100 mm and 50 mm length	117
Figure 3.23	Miniature pressure transducer fixed in the triaxial chamber	118
Figure 3.24	Calibration of miniature pressure transducer connected to a data logger	119
Figure 3.25	Data logger [a] TDS 303 [b] TDS 540	120
Figure 3.26	Hand vane shear	121
Figure 3.27	Filter sheets	122
Figure 3.28	Consolidation pressure applied during the preparation of ground model	123
Figure 3.29	Columns (a) and (b) Cement bottom ash columns 150 and 200mm length respectively (c) MBA based geopolymer columns 150mm length	125
Figure 3.30	Columns arrangement for different area replacement ratio (a) Ar 10.91%; (b) Ar 16.37%; (c) Ar 21.83%	127
Figure 3.31	Installation method for bottom ash columns	128
Figure 3.32	Installation technique for geopolymer and cement bottom ash columns	129
Figure 3.33	Embankment preparation process	130
Figure 3.34	Miniature pressure transducers set up; (a) untreated ground model; (b) treated ground model	132
Figure 3.35	Loading test setup	133

Figure 3.36	Numerical modelling of clay reinforced with four partially penetrated columns (Moradi, 2016)	138
Figure 3.37	Numerical simulation of clay reinforced by six partially penetrated columns (Said, 2019)	138
Figure 3.38	Mesh generated for the unreinforced clay model	140
Figure 4.1	Laser scattered particle size distribution of FBA, MBA, CBA, kaolin and residual soil	145
Figure 4.2	Soil classification using plasticity chart (Unified soil classification system/ASTM D 2487)	146
Figure 4.3	Relationship between dry density and moisture content; (a) Compaction curve for residual soil, (b) Compaction curve for bottom ash	150
Figure 4.4	Consolidation curve for kaolin clay	151
Figure 4.5	Stress-strain curves of CBA based geopolymer for various curing time	153
Figure 4.6	Stress-strain curves of MBA based geopolymer for various curing time	153
Figure 4.7	Stress-strain curves of FBA based geopolymer for various curing time	154
Figure 4.8	Stress-strain curves of cement bottom ash mortar (1:2) for various curing time	154
Figure 4.9	Stress-strain curves of cement bottom ash mortar (1:4) for various curing time	155
Figure 4.10	Stress-strain curves of cement bottom ash mortar (1:6) for various curing time	155
Figure 4.11	Unconfined compression strength of cement bottom ash and geopolymer mortars after 7 days of curing	157
Figure 4.12	Unconfined compression strength of cement bottom ash and geopolymer mortars at 14 days curing age	158
Figure 4.13	Unconfined compression strength of cement bottom ash and geopolymer mortars after 28 days curing period	158
Figure 4.14	Unconfined compression strength of cement bottom ash and geopolymer mortars after 56 days curing age	159
Figure 4.15	Comparison of unconfined compression strength of cement bottom ash and geopolymer mortars after 7, 14, 28, 56 days curing periods	159
Figure 4.16	XRD spectrum of the residual soil	161

Figure 4.17	XRD pattern of the bottom ash	162
Figure 4.18	XRD diffractogram of hardened cement bottom ash mortar (1:2, 1:4 and 1:6) at a curing age of 28 days	162
Figure 4.19	Diffractogram of bottom ash based geopolymer (CBA-7D, CBA-14D, CBA-28D, MBA-28D and FBA-28D)	163
Figure 4.20	SEM micrograph of CBA geopolymer for 7, 14 and 28 days curing age	165
Figure 4.21	SEM micrograph of FBA, MBA, and CBA geopolymer for 28 days curing age	166
Figure 4.22	SEM micrograph of cement bottom ash mortar (CBM 1:2, 1:4 and 1:6) for 28 days curing age	167
Figure 4.23	EDX characterization of residual soil	169
Figure 4.24	EDX characterization of CBA based geopolymer for 7 days of curing age	170
Figure 4.25	EDX characterization of CBA based geopolymer for 14 days of curing age	170
Figure 4.26	EDX characterization of CBA based geopolymer for 28 days of curing age	171
Figure 4.27	EDX characterization of MBA based geopolymer for 28 days of curing age	171
Figure 4.28	EDX characterization of FBA based geopolymer for 28 days of curing age	172
Figure 4.29	EDX characterization of CBM (1:2) for 28 days of curing age	172
Figure 4.30	EDX characterization of CBM (1:4) for 28 days of curing age	173
Figure 4.31	EDX characterization of CBM (1:6) for 28 days of curing age	173
Figure 4.32	Stress-settlement relationship of the unreinforced clay subjected to embankment loading	176
Figure 4.33	Load carrying capacity at ground failure using the double tangent method	177
Figure 4.34	Load carrying capacity at ground failure using the logarithmic method	178
Figure 4.35	Excess pore water pressure for the unreinforced model	179

Figure 5.1	Stress-settlement relationship of bottom ash columns reinforced clay subjected to embankment loading	186
Figure 5.2	Vertical stress plotted against settlement ratio for the bottom ash columns reinforced soil (Moradi, 2016)	187
Figure 5.3	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the floating bottom ash columns reinforced clay under the embankment	190
Figure 5.4	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for embankment model over soft soil improved with ordinary stone columns (Fattah <i>et al.</i> , 2016b)	190
Figure 5.5	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the end bearing bottom ash columns reinforced clay under the embankment	191
Figure 5.6	Failure pattern for the partially penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 11\%$)	193
Figure 5.7	Failure pattern for the partially penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 16\%$)	193
Figure 5.8	Failure pattern for the partially penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 22\%$)	194
Figure 5.9	Failure pattern for the fully penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 11\%$)	194
Figure 5.10	Failure pattern for the fully penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 16\%$)	195
Figure 5.11	Failure pattern for the fully penetrated bottom ash columns reinforced clay ($A_r = 22\%$)	195
Figure 5.12	Comparison of failure mode for the floating and end bearing bottom ash columns (a,b)with embankment loading (this study) and (c,d) footing loading Moradi (2016)	196
Figure 5.13	Excess pore water pressure with time for the bottom ash columns reinforced clay under the embankment	197
Figure 5.14	Pressure acting on the surrounding soil versus time for the bottom ash columns reinforced clay	198
Figure 5.15	Pressure acting at the top of bottom ash columns versus time	199
Figure 5.16	Pressure at the base of bottom ash columns with time	200
Figure 5.17	Stress concentration ratio versus time for the clay treated with bottom ash columns	201
Figure 5.18	Stress concentration ratio for various embankment heights obtained by Yun-Min <i>et al.</i> (2008)	202

Figure 5.19	Stress reduction ratio versus time for the clay treated with bottom ash columns	203
Figure 5.20	Column stress ratio versus time for the clay treated with bottom ash columns	204
Figure 5.21	Stress-settlement relationship of cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay subjected to embankment loading	205
Figure 5.22	Relationship between surcharge and incremental displacement for rigid columns supporting embankment (Zhou <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	206
Figure 5.23	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the floating cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay under the embankment	208
Figure 5.24	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the end bearing cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay under the embankment	209
Figure 5.25	Failure pattern for the partially penetrated cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay (Ar 16%)	210
Figure 5.26	Failure pattern for the partially penetrated cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay (Ar 22%)	211
Figure 5.27	Failure pattern for the fully penetrated cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay (Ar 16%)	211
Figure 5.28	Failure pattern for the fully penetrated cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay (Ar 22%)	212
Figure 5.29	Relationship between excess pore water pressure with time for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay under embankment loading	213
Figure 5.30	Pressure acting on the surrounding soil versus time for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay	214
Figure 5.31	Pressure acting on the top of cement bottom ash column versus time	215
Figure 5.32	Pressure at the base of cement bottom ash columns versus time	216
Figure 5.33	Stress concentration ratio versus time for the clay treated with cement bottom ash columns	217
Figure 5.34	Stress reduction ratio versus time for the clay treated with cement bottom ash columns	218
Figure 5.35	Column stress ratio versus time for the clay treated with cement bottom ash columns	219
Figure 5.36	Stress-settlement relationship of bottom ash based geopolymer columns reinforced clay subjected to embankment loading	220

Figure 5.37	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the floating geopolymer columns reinforced clay under embankment loading	223
Figure 5.38	Bearing ratio versus settlement ratio for the end bearing geopolymer columns reinforced clay under the embankment	224
Figure 5.39	Failure pattern for the floating geopolymer columns reinforced clay under embankment (Ar 16%)	225
Figure 5.40	Failure pattern for the end bearing geopolymer columns reinforced clay (Ar 16%)	226
Figure 5.41	Relationship between excess pore water pressure with time for the geopolymer columns reinforced clay under embankment loading	227
Figure 5.42	Pressure acting on the surrounding soil versus time for the geopolymer reinforced clay	228
Figure 5.43	Pressure acting on the top of geopolymer column versus time	229
Figure 5.44	Pressure at the base of geopolymer columns versus time	230
Figure 5.45	Stress concentration ratio versus time for the clay treated with geopolymer columns	231
Figure 5.46	Stress reduction ratio versus time for the clay treated with geopolymer columns	232
Figure 5.47	Column stress ratio versus time for the clay treated with geopolymer columns	233
Figure 5.48	Comparison of bearing ratios for all physical model tests	234
Figure 5.49	Comparison of the load-carrying capacity of ground reinforced with bottom ash columns with the different area replacement ratio	236
Figure 5.50	Comparison of load carrying capacity for ground improved with cement bottom ash columns under the embankment	236
Figure 5.51	Comparison of load carrying capacity for ground improved with geopolymer columns under the embankment	237
Figure 6.1	Deformed mesh of embankment with surcharge loading on soft soil	244
Figure 6.2	Total displacement of embankment on soft soil	244
Figure 6.3	Stress-settlement relationship of the unreinforced clay subjected to the embankment with surcharge loading (Numerical Modelling)	246

Figure 6.4	Stress-settlement relationship of the bottom ash columns reinforced clay subjected to the embankment with surcharge loading (Numerical Modelling)	247
Figure 6.5	Bottom columns reinforced ground: (a) Vertical displacement, (b) Effective stress distribution	248
Figure 6.6	Stress-settlement relationship for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced clay (Numerical Modelling)	250
Figure 6.7	Stress-settlement relationship for the geopolymer columns reinforced clay (Numerical Modelling)	253
Figure 6.8	Comparison of the load-carrying capacity of all numerical models	257
Figure 6.9	Load carrying capacity of clay reinforced with bottom ash columns	258
Figure 6.10	Load carrying capacity of clay reinforced with cement bottom ash columns	259
Figure 6.11	Load carrying capacity of clay reinforced with geopolymer columns	260
Figure 6.12	Effect of columns length for the $Ar = 11\%$	261
Figure 6.13	Effect of columns length for the $Ar = 16\%$	262
Figure 6.14	Effect of columns length for the $Ar = 22\%$	262
Figure 6.15	Comparison of the stress-settlement relationship between numerical modelling (Plaxis 3D) and physical model test	265
Figure 6.16	Comparison of experimental and numerical models stress-settlement relationship for the floating bottom ash columns	266
Figure 6.17	Comparison of experimental and numerical stress-settlement relationship for the end bearing bottom ash columns	267
Figure 6.18	Comparison of experimental and numerical load carrying capacity for the bottom ash columns reinforced models	267
Figure 6.19	Comparison of the stress-settlement relationship between numerical modelling and experimental results for the floating cement bottom ash columns	268
Figure 6.20	Comparison of experimental and numerical stress-settlement relationship for the end bearing cement bottom ash columns	269
Figure 6.21	Comparison of experimental and numerical load carrying capacity for the cement bottom ash columns reinforced models	269

Figure 6.22	Comparison of experimental and numerical results for the floating geopolymer columns	270
Figure 6.23	Comparison of experimental and numerical results for the end bearing geopolymer columns	271
Figure 6.24	Comparison of experimental and numerical load carrying capacity for the geopolymer columns reinforced models	271
Figure 6.25	Charts achieved for the ground reinforced with bottom ash columns under the embankment	274
Figure 6.26	Charts achieved for the ground reinforced with cement bottom ash columns under the embankment	275
Figure 6.27	Charts achieved for the ground reinforced with geopolymer columns under the embankment	276

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACAA	-	American Coal Ash Society
Ar	-	Area Replacement Ratio
ASTM	-	American Society for Testing and Materials
BC	-	Bottom ash Column
BS	-	British Standard
CBA	-	Coarser Bottom Ash
CSE	-	Columns Supported Embankment
CSR	-	Column Stress Ratio
EB	-	Embedded beam
EDX	-	Energy Dispersive X-ray
FBA	-	Fine-size Bottom Ash
GC	-	Geopolymer Column
GESC	-	Geosynthetic Encased Stone Columns
LEM	-	Linear Elastic Model
LVDT	-	Linear Variable Pressure Transducer
MBA	-	Medium-size Bottom Ash
MCM	-	Mohr-Coulomb Model
OMC	-	Optimum Moisture Content
PVC	-	Polyvinyl Chloride
PPT	-	Pore Pressure Transducer
RC	-	Rigid Columns
SC	-	Stone Column
SEM	-	Scanning Electron Microscopy
SPT	-	Soil Pressure Transducer
SRR	-	Stress Reduction Ratio
SSM	-	Soft Soil Model
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
XRD	-	X-Ray Diffraction

LIST OF SYMBOLS

A_{col}	-	Area of Columns
A_r	-	Area Replacement Ratio
A_s	-	Area of Surrounding Soil
A_T	-	Total Territory Area
c_c	-	Coefficient of Curvature
c_u	-	Undrained Shear Strength of Soil
D	-	Diameter of Column
D_{eq}	-	Equivalent Diameter of Columns
E	-	Modulus of Elasticity
e_1	-	Initial Void Ratio
e_f	-	Final Void Ratio
G_s	-	Specific Gravity
H_f	-	Final Height
k	-	Permeability
kN	-	Kilo Newton
kPa	-	Kilo Pascal
L	-	Length of Column
m_1	-	Initial Moisture Content
mm	-	Millimetre
m/s	-	Metre per Second
μm	-	Micrometre
$NaOH$	-	Sodium Hydroxide
Na_2SiO_3	-	Sodium Silicate
S	-	Spacing between Columns
σ	-	Stresses Acting on the Embankment Surface
σ_{col}	-	Stresses Acting on the Column
σ_s	-	Stresses Acting on the Surrounding Soil
q_s/c_u	-	Bearing Ratio
δ/w	-	Settlement Ratio
ν	-	Poisson Ratio
ϕ	-	Internal Friction Angle
γ_d	-	Dry Unit Weight

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
Appendix A	Calibration of Instruments	301

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the twentieth century, advances in the industrial revolution have led to an increase in socio-economic growth setting up new employment opportunities and successive scientific development in a short time frame. As a result, the entail for infrastructural development in large-scale projects like airport, dams, and harbours etc. and small range projects like railways, dwellings and roads have been extensively increased on inadequate soil. This scenario has driven the construction to be carried out on soft ground and marshy sites due to the unavailability of adequate soil.

Soft ground possesses higher compressibility and insufficient undrained shear strength (lower than 25 kPa) like silt, loose sand, peat and clay deposits (Flodin and Broms, 1981; Rashid, 2011). Soft soils have anisotropic behaviour by virtue of their accumulation history. The properties of soil in conjunction with conditions like variations in stress history and pore pressure distributions depend on the clay particles orientation during the deposition stage. Clay consists of intermittently organized particles assembled to make an anisotropic structure. The interaction between the particles destroys gradually as a result of an increase in plastic strain due to loading (Rouainia and Muir Wood, 2000). Besides this, clays possess a viscous behaviour approach to persisting deformation.

When highways pass through a low-lying ground, then embankments have to be constructed to carry the roadways toward serviceable elevation. These embankments may encounter stability issues and will provoke settlement for a long duration if built on extremely compressible soft clays. In recent years, the demand for constructing such embankments increased rapidly due to the expansion of the

traffic network. However, the prevention of embankment failure and controlling subsoil deformation within the permissible limit is challenging job for geotechnical engineers.

Column supported embankments (CSE) are usually built on soft soil to enhance the stability of embankment, expedite construction, limit the differential and residual settlements, and provide protection to the nearby amenities (Filz *et al.*, 2012; Smith, 2005; Stewart and Filz, 2005). The column supported embankments have proven as an effective solution compared to the conventional geotechnical methods for construction over soft soil (Collin *et al.*, 2005; Han, 2015). The columnar supports within the soft ground are classified as flexible columns (among which are lime columns and stone columns), semi-rigid columns (e.g; construction of soil-cement and lime cement columns employing grouting or deep mixing method) and rigid pile (such as vibro-concrete piles, steel piles, timber piles and concrete piles) (Smith, 2005). The columns should be properly designed and supposed to be stronger and rigid than the available ground, which may impede the supported embankment's excessive settlement. The column supported embankment would be a suitable engineering solution if protection of adjoining existing amenities or rapid construction is essential. CSE is mostly adopted in the United Kingdom, Japan, Malaysia, Poland, Scandinavia and also getting more attention in other countries. CSE method has great applicability at various soft ground location, comprising coastal sites where new embankments have to be constructed or widening of existing embankments are needed.

Nowadays the recycled industrial by-products drawing attention as construction material (Hansson, 2008). The uncontrolled usage of natural materials like; sand, gravel, rock, steel, concrete, timber, and residual products generated from industrial operations directly influence environmental sustainability. The utilization of recycled materials like pulverized fly ash, bottom ash, shredded waste tyres and steel slag instead of natural materials is one of the possible solutions to achieve long term development in ground stabilization (Zukri and Nazir, 2018).

In Malaysia, coal is a major source for electricity generation in coal-fired power plants, and coal consumption follows a 9.7% raise each year (Jamaludin, 2009). Baruya (2010) stated that the coal requirement is greater than 30 million tonnes per year (Mt/y) in Malaysia. The fuel demand for electricity production in Peninsular Malaysia is shown in Figure 1.1 from PMESILO-2017 (Peninsular Malaysia Electricity Supply Industry Outlook 2017). It is evident from the comparison of various sources for fuel consumption, coal is a vital resource for power generation.

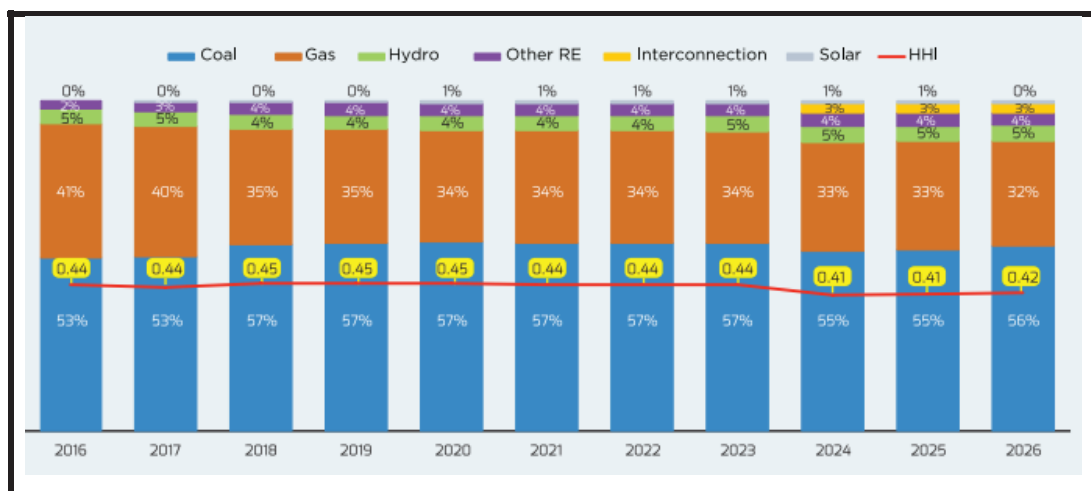


Figure 1.1 Fuel consumption for power generation in Peninsular Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia Electricity Supply Industry Outlook 2017)

As stated in the PMESILO-2017, that the utilisation of gas is expected to be reduced by approximately 12% and coal would be used as an alternative due to low price and easily manageable as compared to the other fuel sources (Jamaludin, 2009). Table 1.1 describes the coal consumption for power generation at various electricity units. The growing demand for electricity generation resulted in a huge amount of surpluses and waste by-products, which are discarded as a landfill and causes a threat to environmental sustainability (Ramzi *et al.*, 2016).

Table 1.1 Coal demand for different coal-burnt power plants from 2014 to 2016 in million tonnes per year (PMESILO, 2017)

Year	2014	2015	2016
Tanjung Bin	4.9	6.5	7.6
Jimah	3.2	4.1	4.3
Manjung	7.1	10.4	9.6
Kapar	3.5	3.7	4.1
Total (Mt/y)	18.7	24.6	25.4

The raw product of coal burning in coal-operated thermal power stations contains coal ashes (Singh and Siddique, 2013). The coal by-product generated during the combustion of coal in the coal-fired units mostly composed of bottom ash, fly ash and boiler ash (Feuerborn, 2005). Fly ash consists of lighter particles accumulated from the Cotrell precipitator and contributes 75-80% to the total mass of coal ash. While bottom ash (BA) comprised of heavy and large coal particles which are assembled in a hopper at the lower section of the furnace. BA generally composed of porous coarser ash particle and makes 20-25% of the overall generated coal ashes (Maliki *et al.*, 2017; Mukhtar *et al.*, 2003; Singh and Siddique, 2013). Although in developed countries, a certain portion of these coal ashes is effectively recycled, but still large proportion of coal ashes are directly disposed of as a landfill in the developing countries, as the disposal cost has been less than the utilization cost (Kim and Lee, 2015). However, the deposition of coal ashes has recently become a complex issue due to several reasons. The cost of dumping is increasing due to the insufficient capacity of existing ash ponds, which resulted in the construction of new sites far from the power stations and increasing the threat to environmental sustainability (Jang, 2010). In response to these challenges, many researchers have focused on techniques to optimize the application of coal ashes with the aims to decrease their dumping and rehabilitation.

In general, most researchers have concentrated on the utilization of fly ash and concluded that fly ash possesses appropriate properties for usage in different construction fields. Conversely, limited studies are reported on the application of bottom ash as a construction material. Bottom ash possesses higher permeability and low density (Kim and Lee, 2015), higher shear strength and lower compressibility

(Lynn *et al.*, 2017; Maliki *et al.*, 2017). BA indicated a resemblance of properties to that of granular aggregate particles (Kumar and Stewart, 2003; Marto *et al.*, 2010). BA is frequently used aggregate as a substitute for gravel and sand (ACAA, 2014). Other major usage includes, as an ingredient in concrete and mortar due to its coarser particles and alternative for natural soils and gravel in geotechnical engineering fills and embankments. According to the American Coal Ash Association (2006) report on bottom ash utilization, more than 45% of all bottom ash generated is mostly utilized in transportation and geotechnical applications such as road base material and structural fills. Figure 1.2 show the general applications of bottom ash in the United States.

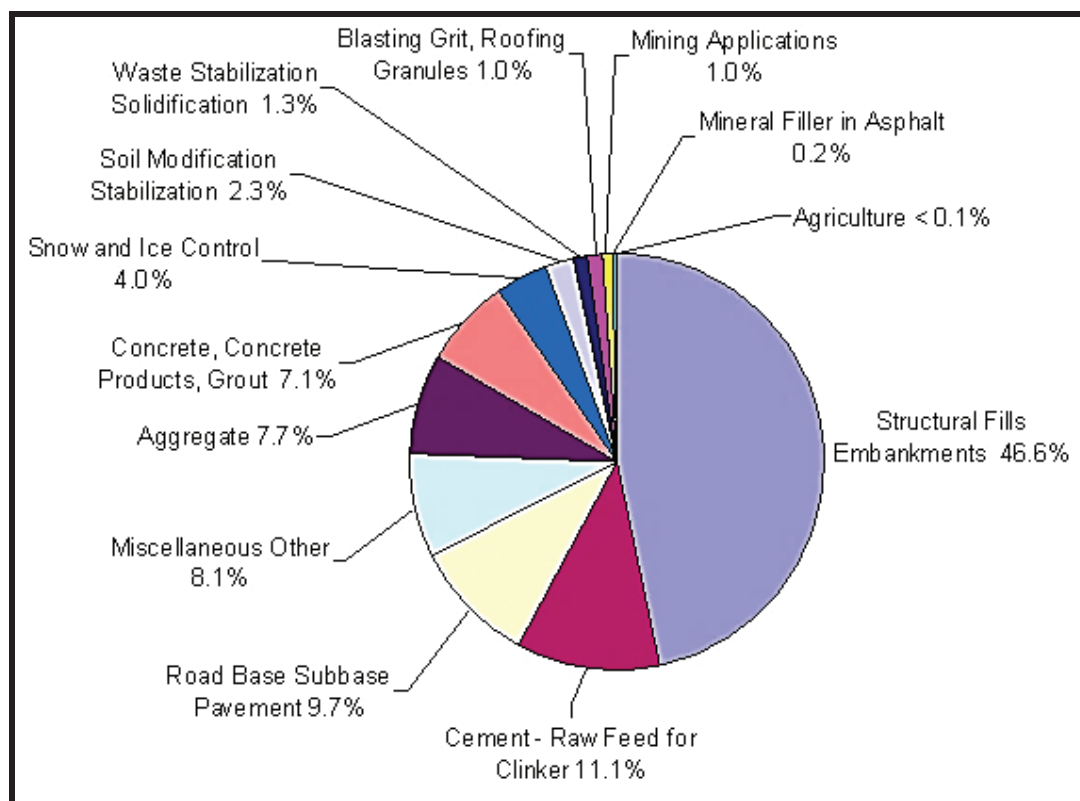


Figure 1.2 Application of bottom ash in the United States as a percentage of entire re-used (ACAA, 2006)

Due to irregular particle shape and higher permeability, BA can be used as a geotechnical drainage material (Kim and Lee, 2015). Lee (2008) and Kim (2009) conducted a study on the usage of bottom ash as a vertical sand drainage material and horizontal sand mat respectively. According to the findings achieved from both studies, BA is considered a suitable material for drainage purposes, given the fact

that consolidation time decreased with the application of BA in comparison to the usual sand drain. Lee *et al.* (2010) concluded that bottom ash piles have offered better drainage capacity and more clogging resistance as compared to the ordinary aggregate piles. In ordinary aggregate piles, silt and clay particles from the surrounding soil penetrate the voids of crushed gravel piles and tend to reduce the drainage capacity. In addition to these characteristics, BA is widely used as a mineral addition and artificial aggregate in cementitious composites (Torraldo *et al.*, 2013). Previous studies suggested that utilization of bottom ash in concrete/mortar proved good pozzolanic reactivity, increased compressive strength and heat of hydration (Kim, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement

The construction of new roadway embankments on the soft ground with low undrained shear strength is increasing due to the rapid evolution of the traffic system. Embankments construction on soft soil is an extremely challenging job for geotechnical engineers due to excessive settlement and probable bearing failure of embankment and foundation soil. Over the last few decades, embankments failure over soft soils created substantial uncertainty in stability analysis. When embankment over soft soil is subjected to repeated heavy traffic loads, then deformation will occur in the embankment by chasing the foundation soil movement. The consequence impacts of soil movement are settlement, sliding due to insufficient shear strength and embankment failures. However, various techniques are adopted to mitigate the settlement and increase the load-carrying capacity. One method is to establish columnar supports in the foundation soil such as stone columns, rigid columns etc.

Most of the studies have been performed on the performance of stone columns under the embankment loading, but each of them focused on the natural stone aggregates or primary aggregate (Das and Deb, 2018; Serridge and Synac, 2007; Xu *et al.*, 2021; Yoo, 2010). However, growing awareness for sustainable development in ground improvement is leading to a larger desire to utilize recycled

aggregates and secondary aggregates (industrial by-products) (Jefferson *et al.*, 2010; Serridge, 2005). Bottom ash is an industrial by-product generated in power stations for electricity production. Since the acceptance of bottom ash usage rises in the developed countries, these markets have the possibility to reuse all the bottom ash generated annually. Bottom ash possesses good drainage capacity and resistance to clogging (Lee *et al.*, 2010; Lee, 2008), and has proven good pozzolanic reactivity and increase in compressive strength of mortar/concrete (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Kim and Lee, 2015). As a part of attaining environmental sustainability in ground improvement, there is a growing desire to utilize the bottom ash in stone column technique. Several researchers have successfully applied uncased and geotextile encased bottom ash columns for reinforcing soft soil under rigid footing to increase the bearing capacity and reduce the settlement (Marto *et al.*, 2016; Moradi *et al.*, 2019; Moradi *et al.*, 2018). The geotextile encasement is provided to increase the tensile strength of the columns but is still weak in compression when installed in soil with low undrained shear strength. Therefore, rigid columns are installed in weak soil to increase the bearing capacity due to their higher rigidity. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding is needed to investigate the behaviour of soft foundation soil reinforced with a group of bottom ash columns (stone column) and cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns (rigid column) under the embankment. The utilization of bottom ash as columns material under embankment will help to solve the dumping issue, reduce the project cost, and will bring sustainability in ground improvement.

In addition to experimental study, numerical analyses must be carried out concurrently to model the stress-settlement behaviour of columns supported embankments by considering the influencing factor such as area replacement ratios and Column length. Thus, numerical simulation of the physical model facilitates in carrying out the parametric study to understand the actual behaviour of embankment resting on columns reinforced soil.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate the load-carrying capacity performance of bottom ash, cement-bottom ash and geopolymer columns reinforced foundation soil under embankment subjected to constant strain loading. A series of instrumented small-scale laboratory model tests will be carried out on the columns reinforced soil under embankment loading. This research will focus on the following objectives to be achieved.

- (a) To examine the properties of untreated and treated bottom ash by carrying out a series of laboratory tests.
- (b) To quantify the load-carrying capacity improvement of soft foundation soil reinforced with bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns under embankment subjected to constant strain loading.
- (c) To evaluate the effect of governing factors such as area replacement ratios and column length on the performance of reinforced ground subjected to constant strain loading.
- (d) To predict the load-carrying capacity of treated and untreated bottom ash columns supported embankment on soft soil through numerical simulations.
- (e) To produce preliminary design charts on the usage of bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns as soil improvement methods to support embankment using numerical simulations.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research was carried out to examine the performance of soft foundation soil improved with a group of bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns (floating and end bearing columns) under the embankment subjected to constant strain loading. This study was carried out using three approaches; (a) basic properties tests were performed for kaolin, residual soil, bottom ash, cement bottom

ash and geopolymer, (b) instrumented small-sized laboratory physical model was carried out to investigate the behaviour of treated and untreated bottom ash columns supported embankment, (c) 3D modelling was performed to simulate the behaviour of treated and untreated bottom ash columns reinforced soil underneath embankment.

The bottom ash was obtained from the Tanjung Bin power plant located at Pontian, Johor. The size of the granular material used in the bottom ash, cement bottom ash columns was less than 2 mm. The brown kaolin powder was obtained from the Kaolin (M) Sdn Bhd in Selangor, Malaysia. The residual soil for the embankment was collected from a site inside Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru.

To determine the mechanical and physical properties of bottom ash and kaolin clay, various tests were performed following the specifications of the American Society of Testing and Material (ASTM) and British Standard (BS). A series of tests including a specific gravity test, laser scattering particle size test, relative density test, standard compaction test and constant head permeability test was conducted on the bottom ash. While, laser scattering particle size test, falling head permeability test, vane shear test, Atterberg limit test, and one-dimensional consolidation test were performed for kaolin. In addition, the residual soil was subjected to laser scattering particle size test, specific gravity, plasticity limits and compaction test.

Instrumented small-sized laboratory physical model was carried out to investigate the behaviour of treated and untreated bottom ash columns supported embankment. The brown kaolin slurry was used to represent the soft ground model and inserted into the rectangular experimental chamber. The embankment was prepared from the residual soil passed through a 2 mm sieve. A gradient of 1:2 (vertical: horizontal) was provided to the embankment slope. The experimental model test for unreinforced kaolin under embankment was selected as a benchmark model. The remaining tests were divided into three groups, such as clay reinforced with bottom ash columns, cement bottom ash columns and geopolymer columns. Two columns length of 150 mm (floating columns) and 200 mm (end bearing

columns) and three area replacement ratios of 11%, 16% and 22% were selected to improve the foundation soil. For area improvement ratio 11%, 16% and 22%, the number of columns were 12, 16 and 24, respectively.

The finite element based commercial software program “Plaxis 3D Foundation” was employed to model the behaviour of treated and untreated bottom ash columns supported embankment on soft soil and stress-settlement results obtained from the experimental and numerical models were compared.

1.5 Significance of Research

In recent decades, the engineering society has suggested various substitute methods to strengthen soft soils. These techniques need to be more practical, cost-effective, easy to accomplish and time-saving. In order to preserve non-recurring natural material in equilibrium, the construction industry sought an alternative approach to replace the primary aggregate with recycled or secondary aggregates. The goal of this study was to examine the load-carrying capacity of embankment rested on soft ground reinforced with bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns. The utilization of industrial by-product bottom ash in ground stabilization will also help to maintain environmental sustainability. The emphasis of this study considers the followings:

- (a) This study proposed the bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns as soil stabilization methods to improve the foundation of soft soil under the embankment. This technique is practical in enhancing the load-carrying capacity of soft ground. The re-use of bottom ash in place of stone aggregate in stone columns and cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns in rigid columns can assist in recycling the coal waste product. The utilization of bottom ash contributes to environmental sustainability despite being available in large proportion and economical.

- (b) Furthermore, the study provides an enhanced understanding of the reinforced foundation subjected to embankment loading by changing the area replacement ratio and columns length (End bearing and floating columns). The parametric investigation of this research can offer improved knowledge to engineers and researchers regarding the effect of significant variables on the stress settlement behaviour and load-carrying capacity of columns supported embankment.
- (c) The 3D modelling adopted in this research could be applied as a design tool for the construction of embankment over soft soil.

This study has focused on the substitution of bottom ash as a natural stone aggregate in stone columns to strengthen the soft ground under the embankment. Cement bottom ash and geopolymer were used as an alternative material to conventional mortar in rigid columns. This research has multiple contributions in the field of sustainable ground improvement in terms of economy and sustainability. As a sustainable ground improvement, this study investigated the factors influencing the performance of stone columns and rigid columns. Furthermore, bottom ash, cement bottom ash and geopolymer provided a new method for enhancing the load-carrying capacity of soft soil underneath embankment. Preliminary design charts were developed to help the construction industry in designing bottom, cement bottom ash and geopolymer columns under the embankment. This research will help to resolve the dumping or landfill issue of coal bottom ash by utilizing the bottom ash as a substitute for natural aggregates such as natural stone aggregate and sand, which will be a good step toward sustainability. The research relates the economic challenges of a project through which the cost of construction could be reduced due to the usage of industrial by-products in the columns.

1.6 Thesis Overview

This thesis addressed the behaviour of embankment over unreinforced clay and columns reinforced clay and divided it into seven chapters. The description of each chapter is outlined below.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background to the columns supported embankment technology. This chapter also consists of a problem statement, aim and objective, scope, and significance of the research.

Chapter 2 consist review of the literature regarding ground improvement methods, stone columns, rigid columns, and related work to the columns supported embankment. In chapter 2 some aspects related to stone columns and rigid columns are presented which including introduction, installation methods and their suitability. Besides this, introduction to column supported embankment method, feasibility assessment, case histories and some terms like stress concentration ratio, stress reduction ratio and column stress ratio are addressed. This chapter also discuss the bottom ash properties and its application as column material.

Chapter 3 explained the methodology adopted to carry out this research. This chapter briefly discussed the materials testing and equipment used in physical modelling. Details on the equipment calibration, specimen preparation, overall procedure for physical model tests and numerical modelling details are explained in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 discussed the basic properties test results for the materials used in this research, which involves basic properties test of kaolin, residual soil, bottom ash together with other supplementary tests. Unconfined compressive strength, morphological and micrographs results for cement bottom ash and geopolymer are also explained in chapter 4. The unreinforced embankment model results are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 present the result and discussion of the physical model tests. In this chapter, the stress-settlement relationship, the ultimate load-carrying capacity of clay reinforced with columns group, failure pattern of columns under embankment loading, stress at surrounding soil, stress at column top and bottom, stress concentration ratio and effect of area replacement ratio and column penetration are briefly discussed.

Chapter 6 include the output of numerical modelling. In chapter 6, numerical modelling results and comparison of experimental and numerical results are explained and summarized.

Finally, the key conclusions obtained from the findings of this research as well as suggestions and recommendations for future work are provided in chapter 7.

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