STRENGTH AND COMPRESSIBILITY CHARACTERISTICS OF CEMENT TREATED LATERITE SOIL UNDER SATURATED AND UNSATURATED CONDITIONS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, who taught me that the best kind of knowledge to have is that which is learned for its own sake. It is also dedicated to my mother, who taught me that even the largest task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

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ABSTRACT

Laterite soil is known as firm soil and is commonly used as a potential subgrade material for pavements. However, due to dry and rainy seasons caused by climate change, road infrastructure in Malaysia is affected massively, which weakens their natural bond. Hence, it is important to comprehensively emphasise the soil shear strength and compressibility to design a longer lifespan for the pavement subgrade. Therefore, soil stabilisation is a method for enhancing on-site materials to create a competent and stable subgrade. From previous researchers, cement is widely used as a stabiliser for building construction. Thus, the main objective of this research is to investigate the capability of cement as a stabiliser in laterite soil stabilisation. Therefore, several laboratory analyses had been carried out according to the mixture formulation between different cement percentages with laterite soil. The cement type used in this research was Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) CEM I 42.5N. From the unconfined compression test (UCT) results, it is indicated that 6% cement-treated laterite soil at 7 days of curing is capable of achieving the stabilised soil required strength (800 kPa) of low-volume road by the Public Work Department of Malaysia for 1.0 million ESAL (Equivalent Single Axle Load). Moreover, the UCT results also implied that the cement addition improved the soil strength, which is also evidenced by the soil microstructure images from the microstructural analysis. The compressibility tests proved that laterite soil experienced high compressibility in fully saturated condition, while the compressibility was significantly reduced in partially saturated condition. Hence, the unsaturated oedometer tests showed a significant reduction in soil compressibility at a higher suction level (drying condition) compared to that of lower suction (wetting condition). In conclusion, this research output provides fundamental knowledge by proving the capability of cement to be applied as a stabiliser for the subgrade material in the design guidelines of road construction in Malaysia.

ABSTRAK

Tanah laterit dikenali sebagai tanah yang kuat dan kebiasaannya digunakan sebagai bahan subgred yang berpotensi untuk turapan. Walau bagaimanapun, disebabkan oleh musim kering dan hujan yang terjadi disebabkan oleh perubahan iklim, infrastruktur jalan raya di Malaysia telah terjejas dengan teruk, di mana ia melemahkan ikatan semula jadi mereka. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk menekankan secara menyeluruh kekuatan ricih tanah dan kebolehmampatan untuk merekabentuk jangka hayat subgred jalan yang lebih lama. Oleh itu, penstabilan tanah adalah salah satu kaedah untuk mencipta dan mempertingkatkan kebolehan subgred sebagai bahan yang kuat dan stabil. Daripada kajian terdahulu, simen telah digunakan secara meluas sebagai bahan penstabil untuk pembinaan bangunan. Justeru, objektif utama penyelidikan ini adalah untuk mengkaji keupayaan simen sebagai bahan penstabil dalam proses penstabilan tanah. Oleh itu, beberapa analisis makmal telah dijalankan mengikut rumusan campuran antara peratusan simen yang berbeza dengan tanah laterit. Jenis simen yang digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini ialah Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) CEM I 42.5N. Daripada keputusan ujian mampatan tidak tertutup (UCT), ia menunjukkan bahawa 6% tanah laterit yang dirawat dengan simen pada 7 hari pengawetan mampu mencapai kekuatan tanah yang stabil yang diperlukan (800 kPa) bagi jalan isipadu rendah oleh Jabatan Kerja Raya Malaysia untuk 1.0 juta Beban Gandar Tunggal Setara (ESAL). Selain itu, keputusan UCT juga menunjukkan bahawa penambahan simen meningkatkan kekuatan tanah, yang juga telah dibuktikan oleh imej mikrostruktur tanah daripada analisis mikrostruktur. Ujian kebolehmampatan membuktikan bahawa tanah laterit mengalami kebolehmampatan yang tinggi dalam keadaan tepu penuh, manakala kebolehmampatan berkurangan dengan ketara dalam keadaan separa tepu. Oleh itu, ujian oedometer tak tepu menandakan pengurangan besar dalam kebolehmampatan tanah pada tahap sedutan yang lebih tinggi (keadaan kering) berbanding sedutan yang lebih rendah (keadaan basah). Kesimpulannya, hasil penyelidikan ini merupakan satu pengetahuan asas dengan membuktikan keupayaan simen untuk digunakan sebagai penstabil bahan subgred dalam garis panduan reka bentuk pembinaan jalan raya di Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UCT	-	Unconfined Compression Test
ESAL	-	Equivalent Single Axle Load
UCS	-	Unconfined Compressive Strength
OPC	-	Ordinary Portland Cement
MIROS	-	Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research
ADT	-	Average Daily Traffic
CBR	-	California Bearing Ratio
MDD	-	Maximum Dry Density
PEG	-	Polyethylene glycol
HAEV	-	High-Air-Entry Value
LS	-	Loose Soil
DS	-	Dense Soil
SWCC	-	Soil Water Characteristics Curve
CSP	-	Confined Swelling Pressure
FESEM	-	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy
XRD	-	X-ray Diffraction
XRF	-	X-ray Fluorescence
BBM	-	Barcelona Basic Model
MCC	-	Modified Cam Clay
LC	-	Loading-Collapse
EDX	-	Energy Dispersive X-ray
MIP	-	Mercury Intrusion Porosimetry
ICC	-	Initial Consumption Cement
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
USM	-	Universiti Sains Malaysia
MS	-	Malaysian Standard
ISO	-	International Organization for Standardization
BS	-	British Standard
ASTM	-	American Society of Testing Material

PSD	-	Particle Size Distribution
LDM	-	Laser Diffraction Method
PI	-	Plasticity Index
OMC	-	Optimum Moisture Content
TML	-	Tokyo Measuring Instruments Lab
LVDT	-	Linear Variable Displacement Transducer
ADVDPC	-	Advance Pressure/Volume Controller
PPC	-	Pneumatic Pressure Controller
ICL	-	Initial Consumption Lime
LL	-	Liquid Limit
PL	-	Plastic Limit
USCS		Unified Soil Classification System

LIST OF SYMBOLS

C_2S	-	Dicalcium Silicate
C ₃ S	-	Tricalcium Silicate
C ₃ A	-	Tricalcium Aluminate
C ₄ AF	-	Tetracalciumaluminoferrite
САН	-	Calcium Aluminate Hydrate
CSH	-	Calcium Silicate Hydrate
CASH	-	Calcium Alumina Silicate Hydrate
CA(OH) ₂	-	Calcium Hydroxide
H_2O	-	Water
Ψ	-	Total Suction
$oldsymbol{\Psi}_0$	-	Osmotic Suction
Ua	-	Air Pressure
uw	-	Water Pressure
Sc	-	Compressibility Settlement
Pc	-	Preconsolidation Pressure
Cc	-	Compression Index
C_s	-	Swelling Index
C_v	-	Coefficient of Consolidation
a_{v}	-	Coefficient of Compressibility
m _v	-	Coefficient of Volume Compressibility
MgO	-	Magnesium Oxide
Na ₂ O	-	Sodium Oxide
K ₂ O	-	Potassium Oxide
Fe ₂ O ₃	-	Ferric Oxide / Iron Oxide
Al_2O_3	-	Aluminium Oxide
SiO ₂	-	Silicon Oxide
$ar{\sigma}_{ij}$	-	Net Stress
σ_{ii}	-	Total Stress
s	-	Suction
δ_{ij}	-	Kroneckers's Delta
<i>i</i> j		

Р	-	Effective Stress
E	-	Void Ratio
Ca	-	Calcium
0	-	Oxygen
Al	-	Aluminium
Si	-	Silicon
Fe	-	Iron
Qz	-	Quartz
Pt	-	Portlandite
Kao	-	Kaolinite
Ill	-	Illite
Geo	-	Geothite
Gibb	-	Gibbsite
Cal	-	Calcite
Ett	-	Ettringite
P_2O_5	-	Phosphorus Pentoxide
CaO	-	Calcium Oxide
V_2O_5	-	Vanadium Oxide
Cr_2O_3	-	Chromium Oxide
MnO	-	Manganese Oxide
NiO	-	Nickel Oxide
CuO	-	Copper Oxide
ZnO	-	Zinc Oxide
Rb ₂ O	-	Rubidium Oxide
PdO	-	Palladium Oxide
La_2O_3	-	Lanthanum Oxide
Eu_2O_3	-	Europium Oxide
Re ₂ O ₇	-	Rhenium Oxide
PbO	-	Lead Oxide

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Laterite Soil

Laterite soil occupies most of Asia's tropical areas significantly. It is one of the best raw materials to be used in road and highway construction. It is naturally well-graded soil, which comprises both cohesive (clay and silt) and non-cohesive (gravel and sand) elements. Indeed, the geotechnical properties of laterite soil are composed of micro-fabric, mineralogical composition, and geochemical environmental conditions. Hence, the clay minerals and sesquioxides in the laterite soil are very beneficial in the process of natural binding as well as in the presence of most chemical binders (Oyelami and Van Rooy, 2016).

The excellent quality and adequacy of laterite soil have satisfied the material specifications for road construction over the past years in Malaysia. However, the established laterite soil has become a problem for the road construction industry because of Malaysia's climate conditions. The use of laterite soil as a subgrade in pavement design for low-volume roads is considered collapsible due to the flooding season. The Flood Management Centre of Malaysia's Public Work Department reported that Johor spent more than RM60.7 million on flood-damaged roads in only one flood season (Ismail and Abdul Ghani, 2017). Therefore, it is evident that the weather conditions of flood and dry seasons create a risk of damage to the road structure.

1.2 Background Study

As laterite soils are naturally and originally in an unsaturated condition, using conventional saturated soil mechanics theory in analysing those soils may lead to bizarre results (Fredlund and Rahardjo, 1993). This is because the obtained compressibility characteristics and shear strength behaviour using conventional soil mechanics are dissimilar from the soil behaviour in unsaturated conditions since several factors substantially influence the variation of negative pore water pressure (suction) in unsaturated soils. The natural factors mainly refer to the soil's hydraulic properties or hydraulic conductivity, while the external factors refer to the climate conditions (rainfall and dry seasons). The alternate climate change affects the soil properties, which makes them weak. Hence, various problems will occur, such as soil collapse, slope failure, and road damage in Malaysia associated with those factors (Kholghifard, 2014).

The road is a passage for all people worldwide, as we depend on the road for the movement of goods, transport, travel, work, and social and service purposes. In building construction, the foundation must be vital to withstand tons of capacity. The same goes for the road infrastructure; the subgrade layer shall be stabilised with appropriate material to enhance the strength. Hence, highway engineers face the most difficulties in planning, designing, and constructing the desirable road layers (subgrade, subbase, road base, binder, and wearing course), which can sustain huge loads from tire pressure and wheel burden.

Consequently, the soil stabilisation technique has been widely applied in pavement construction. Soil stabilisation is a method of soil treatment (by adding materials to the soil) that is used to increase soil stability by improving its geotechnical properties. Nevertheless, complex problems in road paving work usually occur when the subgrade contains unsuitable materials. Unsuitable material is referred to the soil that consists of high organic silt and clay (LL > 80% or PI > 55%) (Malaysia Public Work Department, 2013b). Soil may swell when the clay content is excessive as the water content is permitted to increase. Therefore, the stabilisation process allows the use of unsuitable materials in road structures. The soil stabilising agents act as a binder to enrich the undesirable soil behaviour. With the addition of stabilising additives, the soil can maintain its particle cohesion and sustain its moisture content. Besides, these additives may be used as soil strengthening and waterproofing agents (Addo et al., 2004).

The use of stabilisation in enhancing material properties is becoming more extensive. This is because the stabilisation capability is particularly pertinent for heavily trafficked roadways where its advantages are starting to be valued. Due to various related parameters, the stabilisation procedures become very complicated. However, the typical soil stabilisation method involves eliminating and substituting weak soil with suitable materials such as geotextiles. Yet, such practices acquire higher costs and usually require a long time to execute.

1.3 Problem Statement

Climate change is a long-term alteration worldwide, including periodic temperature, rainfall averages, and wind patterns. Due to the effects of climate change, Malaysia experiences dry and rainy seasons every year. These weather conditions may cause massive damage to building and road structure. In road pavement construction, laterite soil is considered a suitable material to be used as subgrade material. A variety of subgrade options exist for constructing a low-volume road network. Material selection for subgrade depends on the road use (amount and traffic load), material availability, and cost. To attain a durable foundation section, subgrade reinforcement is most frequently used with a layer of crushed aggregate positioned over a weaker subgrade soil. In subgrade requirements, aggregates must consist of well-graded coarse particles with sufficient fines. Wherever aggregate is unavailable or high-priced, other soil stabilisation techniques may be used.

Hence, in this research, cement is chosen as the stabiliser to ensure that the subgrade layer has achieved a minimum of 800 kPa of Unconfined Compressive Strength (UCS) for the stabilised base according to pavement structure requirements for traffic up to 1.0 million ESAL (Equivalent Single Axle Load) by Malaysia Public Work Department (2017). Regarding Sheng *et al.* (2011), during the dry and rainy seasons, a moisture content variant triggered changes in the shear strength of compacted soils in unsaturated conditions. Unfortunately, the current pavement design is more concerned with the saturated condition, which may contribute to an unsustainable structure without acknowledging matric suction contribution. Thus, the

changes in moisture content on the mechanical behaviour of cement stabilised soil should be considered. This is because the significance of stabilising unsaturated soil is to enhance the optimisation of the coupling effect of the stabiliser and soil matric suction in the subgrade for advanced sustainable design.

1.4 Research Objectives

The aims of this study are to provide basic knowledge in the design guidelines for road construction projects in Malaysia and to demonstrate the ability of cement to be applied as a stabiliser for subgrade material. Hence, there are several objectives are drawn to achieve in this study, which are:

- 1. To characterise the laterite soil by determining its physical and mechanical properties.
- 2. To determine the compressive strength and compressibility of the untreated and cement-treated laterite soil.
- 3. To examine the effect of microstructure on the cement contents and curing periods of the untreated and cement-treated laterite soil.
- 4. To evaluate the coupling effect of cementation and suction based on the empirical theory of the Loading-Collapse (LC) curve.

1.5 Scope of Study

Laterite soil was used in this study since it is abundant and widely available in tropical regions such as Malaysia (Hadi *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, the cement used in this research is from the Holcim brand of OPC (CEM I 42.5N), YTL Cement Sdn. Bhd. Cement is used as a stabiliser because soil-cement mixing is the most widely used method to improve the poor engineering properties of laterite soil (Mengue, 2017).

The laterite soil samples were obtained from the nearest borrow pit at Blok P16, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Johor Bahru (1°33'32.9"N, 103°38'39.4"E). In order to extend these findings, various cement percentages were chosen and studied for the laterite soil stabilisation process. Hence, for further laboratory analysis, cement proportions used on the soil samples are 3%, 6%, 9%, and 12% at curing periods of 3, 7,14, and 28 days.

This study focuses on the strength and compressibility characteristics of untreated and cement-treated laterite soils. The soil strength is obtained from the UCS test, where the sample preparation is based on the Optimum Moisture Content (OMC) and Maximum Dry Density (MDD) values from the compaction test. Meanwhile, the soil compressibility is obtained through the conventional oedometer (indicating the saturated condition – rainy season) and modified suction-controlled oedometer (indicating the unsaturated condition – dry season) tests. In order to apply the test in constant suction of 0, 20, and 400 kPa, the modified suction-controlled oedometer test is conducted based on the technique of axis translation.

Additionally, numerous microstructural analyses have been conducted, such as Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy (FESEM), Energy Dispersive X-ray (EDX), X-ray Diffraction (XRD), X-ray Fluorescence (XRF), and Mercury Intrusion Porosimetry (MIP) to identify the behaviour, changes and mineral formation of the laterite soil after treated with cement.

1.6 Research Significance

Due to a lack of understanding of the geotechnical behavior of unsaturated soil, particularly related to suction changes; highway foundations and other structures have been destroyed due to drying or wetting conditions. Therefore, it is crucial to study the changes in the behaviour of untreated and cement-treated laterite soils subjected to drying (unsaturated condition) and wetting (saturated condition) through climatic changes. Hence, conventional oedometer method was employed to perform compressibility tests under saturated conditions. Meanwhile, modified suctioncontrolled oedometer with the ability to apply and control the suction and automatic pressure adjustments, was used to conduct compressibility tests under unsaturated condition so that the outcomes of this research can be proposed in the design guidelines for Malaysia's road infrastructure.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This research comprises of five chapters. The description and explanation for each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1 mainly outlines the background of research problems related to laterite soil improvements by stabilisation technique and also describes the study's aims, scope and importance.

Next, chapter 2 discusses the literature review for this research. The review includes the properties of lateritic soil and their purposes in building construction. Details of the soil stabilisation method with various agents have also been stated. A similar study that previous researchers have performed is also widely reviewed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, which includes numerous laboratory tests to analyse the strength and compressibility of lateritic soil with cement. Details of the experiment are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the outcomes and findings of geotechnical testing. Laboratory testing has been conducted to reveal the geotechnical properties of lateritic soil and cemented lateritic soil under cyclic saturated and unsaturated conditions. Last but not least, the conclusion of this study and recommendations for future studies are discussed in Chapter 5.

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