

BEARING CAPACITY OF CIRCULAR FOOTING ON GEOCELL REINFORCED
SAND DEPOSIT UNDER CYCLIC LOADING

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Specially dedicated to my beloved parents and my lovely wife and daughter

Thank you for your prayers and understanding

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ABSTRACT

Sand has the characteristics of low bending and tensile strength. One of the methods to improve the bearing capacity of sand is using geocell, in which the sand is improved through the interaction between the sand and geocell, and through the sand mattress effects as a result of sand filling the pockets of geocell. The aim of this research is to determine the effect of geocell reinforcement on the bearing capacity of circular footing on sand deposit under static and low frequency cyclic loading through the laboratory physical model tests and numerical simulations using ABAQUS 3-D finite element software. The laboratory physical model tests had been carried out using 75 mm diameter (D) circular footing on sand reinforced with geocell, placed at various depth ratio (u/D). The geocell had a 450 mm length, various width (b) and height (h). Homogeneous sand was formed in box models of 620 mm length, 620 mm width and 500 mm height. The relative densities of sand used were 30% and 70%. The ultimate bearing capacity (q_u) obtained at the settlement (s) equals to $10\%D$ was used as the basis for calculating the cyclic stress amplitude in the cyclic tests. The frequency of 0.067 Hz and three cyclic stress amplitudes of $0.15q_u$, $0.25q_u$ and $0.4q_u$ were used. Three patterns of geocell were tested; honeycomb, diamond and chevron. In the numerical simulation, the infill sand was modeled using the Mohr-Coulomb and the geocell was modeled using linear elastic. The optimum u/D was found as 0.1. The settlement ratio (s/D) increased with the number of cycles and reached a sensibly constant maximum value of less than 10% at high number of load cycles. The s/D correlates linearly with the cyclic stress amplitude and relative density. The correlation equations obtained can be used as preliminary design charts. There were good agreements between the results from numerical and experimental models indicating high reliability for prediction of low frequency of cyclically loaded behavior of footing. The static extra safety factor, F_e of between 1.1 to 1.17 was suggested to be used together with the global factor of safety when calculating the safe bearing capacity. F_e depends on relative density and pattern of geocell. The cyclic extra safety factor, F_c is recommended to be used if utilising the settlement obtained from numerical modelling to calculate the expected settlement to be achieved. The range of F_c for unreinforced sand deposits is between 0.8 and 0.9 while it is 0.9 to 0.93 for geocell reinforced sand deposits. The values depend on the pattern of geocell reinforcement, relative density and cyclic stress amplitude. The results revealed that all patterns of geocell increased the bearing capacity of sand under static load and reduced the settlement under cyclic loading, but with more significant improvement in dense sand. The chevron pattern gives the most beneficial effect compared to the honeycomb and diamond pattern of geocell.

ABSTRAK

Pasir mempunyai ciri-ciri lenturan dan kekuatan tegangan yang rendah. Salah satu kaedah untuk meningkatkan keupayaan gelas pasir adalah menggunakan geosel, yang mana kekuatan pasir dipertingkatkan melalui interaksi antara pasir dan geosel, dan melalui kesan tilam pasir akibat pasir yang mengisi poket geosel. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan kesan tetulang geosel pada keupayaan gelas tapak bulat di atas pasir di bawah pembebanan statik dan berkitar berfrekuensi rendah melalui ujikaji model fizikal makmal dan simulasi berangka menggunakan perisian unsur terhingga 3-D ABAQUS. Ujikaji model fizikal makmal dilakukan menggunakan 75 mm diameter (D) tapak bulat di atas pasir diperkukuhkan dengan geosel, yang diletakkan pada pelbagai nisbah kedalaman (u/D). Geosel mempunyai panjang 450 mm, pelbagai lebar (b) dan ketinggian (h). Pasir homogen telah disediakan dalam kotak model 620 mm panjang, 620 mm lebar dan 500 mm tinggi. Ketumpatan relatif pasir yang digunakan ialah 30% dan 70%. Keupayaan gelas muktamad (q_u) yang diperolehi pada enapan (s) bersamaan $10\%D$ telah diguna sebagai asas bagi mengira amplitud tegasan berkitar dalam ujian berkitar. Frekuensi 0.067 Hz dan tiga amplitud tegasan berkitar iaitu $0.15 q_u$, $0.25 q_u$ dan $0.4 q_u$ telah digunakan. Tiga corak geosel telah diuji; sarang lebah, berlian dan chevron. Untuk simulasi berangka, pasir isian telah dimodelkan menggunakan Mohr-Coulomb, dan geosel telah dimodelkan sebagai anjal lurus. u/D optimum didapati sebagai 0.1. Nisbah enapan (s/D) meningkat dengan bilangan kitaran dan mencapai nilai maksimum malar yang kurang daripada 10% pada bilangan kitaran beban yang tinggi. s/D berhubungkait secara lurus dengan amplitud tegasan berkitar dan ketumpatan relatif. Persamaan korelasi yang diperolehi boleh digunakan sebagai carta reka bentuk awal. Terdapat kesamaan yang baik antara keputusan model berangka dan eksperimen, yang menunjukkan kebolehpercayaan yang tinggi untuk ramalan bagi tingkah laku tapak dibawah pembebanan berkitar berfrekuensi rendah. Faktor keselamatan statik tambahan, F_e antara 1.1 hingga 1.17 dicadang untuk diguna bersama dengan faktor keselamatan global apabila mengira keupayaan gelas selamat. F_e bergantung kepada ketumpatan relatif dan corak geosel. Faktor keselamatan tambahan kitaran, F_c disyor untuk diguna jika menggunakan enapan yang diperolehi daripada model berangka dalam mengira enapan jangkaan. Julat F_c untuk endapan pasir tanpa tetulang adalah antara 0.8 dan 0.9 manakala ianya adalah 0.9 hingga 0.93 untuk endapan pasir bertetulang geosel. Nilai bergantung pada corak tetulang geosel, ketumpatan relatif dan amplitud tegasan berkitar. Keputusan menunjukkan semua corak geosel meningkatkan keupayaan gelas pasir dibawah pembebanan statik dan mengurangkan enapan dibawah pembebanan berkitar, tetapi dengan peningkatan lebih ketara untuk pasir padat. Corak chevron memberikan kesan yang paling bermanfaat berbanding dengan corak geosel sarang lebah dan berlian.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	DECLARATION	ii
	DEDICATION	iii
	ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
	ABSTRACT	v
	ABSTRAK	vi
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
	LIST OF TABLES	xiv
	LIST OF FIGURES	xxi
	LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND SYMBOLS	xxxii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xxxv
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	1.1 Background of the Study	1
	1.2 Problem Statement	3
	1.3 Objectives of Study	4
	1.4 Scope and Limitation of Study	5
	1.5 Significant of the Study	5
	1.6 Thesis Organization	6
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	8
	2.1 Introduction	8
	2.2 Soil Improvement	9
	2.2.1 Geosynthetic Material	9
	2.2.2 History of Geocell	11

2.3	Ultimate Bearing Capacity	13
2.3.1	Terzaghi's Equation	15
2.3.2	Meyerhof's Equation	16
2.3.3	Hansen's Equation	17
2.3.4	Vesic's Equation	17
2.3.5	Comparison between Bearing Capacity Equation	18
2.3.6	Back Calculation of Bearing Capacity Coefficient	21
2.4	Defining Ultimate Bearing Capacity from Load Tests	22
2.5	Geosynthetics Reinforcement Mechanisms	24
2.5.1	Geotextile and Geogrid Reinforcement Mechanisms	24
2.5.2	Geocell Reinforcement Mechanisms	26
2.6	Experimental Studies on Reinforced Soil with Geocells	27
2.6.1	Experimental Laboratory Tests under Static Load	27
2.6.1.1	Effect of Pocket Size of Geocell	29
2.6.1.2	Effect of Depth Placement of Geocell	31
2.6.1.3	Effect of Width of Geocell	33
2.6.1.4	2.6.1.4 Effect of Height of Geocell	34
2.6.1.5	Effect of Pattern and Material of Geocell	35
2.6.1.6	Effect of Relative Density of Sand	37
2.6.1.7	Improvement Factor	38
2.6.2	Experimental Laboratory Model Tests under Cyclic Load	40
2.6.2.1	Effect of Number of Load Cycles	41
2.6.2.2	Frequency of cyclic load	43
2.6.2.3	Effect of Cyclic Stress Amplitude	44
2.6.2.4	Effect of Pattern of Geocell	45
2.6.2.5	Effect of Relative Density	46
2.7	Numerical Simulations	47
2.8	Input Parameter to Software	56

2.8.1	Permeability of soil	57
2.8.2	Young Modulus	57
2.8.3	Internal Friction Angle	58
2.8.4	Poisson Ratio	59
2.8.5	Unit Weight	60
2.8.6	Soil-Geosynthetic Interaction	60
2.9	Design of Physical Model Test	64
2.9.1	Effect of Particle Size of Soil on Shallow Foundations	65
2.9.2	Size of Physical Model Box	65
2.9.3	Time scaling	68
2.10	Summary of Literature Review	68
3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	72
3.1	Introduction	72
3.2	Selection of Reinforcement Methods	74
3.3	Selection and Collections of Material	74
3.3.1	Soil Sample	76
3.3.2	Geocell Sample	77
3.4	Determination of Engineering Properties of Materials	78
3.5	Determinations of Interaction between Geogrid and Sand	78
3.6	Physical Model Tests	79
3.6.1	Materials	79
3.6.2	Circular Footing	80
3.6.3	Design of model test box	80
3.6.4	Sand Deposit Preparation for Model Test	82
3.6.4.1	Modification of Mobile Pluviator System	83
3.6.4.2	Preparation of Unreinforced Sand Deposit	87
3.6.4.3	Preparation of Reinforced Sand Deposit	90

3.6.5	Model and Size of Geocell Reinforcement	91
3.6.6	Scaling Coefficient	93
3.6.7	Load Testing Assembly	95
3.6.7.1	Static Load Test	95
3.6.7.2	Cyclic load test	100
3.6.8	Instruments	109
3.6.9	Testing Program for Model Tests	111
3.6.9.1	Static Load Test	111
3.6.9.2	Cyclic Load Test	114
3.7	Analysis of Data	115
3.8	Numerical Simulation	115
3.8.1	Simulation Process	116
3.8.2	Model Development	119
3.8.2.1	Defining the Model Geometry	119
3.8.2.2	Defining the Material and Section Properties	120
3.8.2.3	Creating an Assembly	120
3.8.2.4	Configuring the Analysis	121
3.8.2.5	Assigning Interaction Properties	121
3.8.2.6	Boundary Conditions	122
3.8.2.7	Designing the Mesh	123
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF PHYSICAL MODEL TEST	128
4.1	Introduction	128
4.2	Properties of Sand	128
4.2.1	Particle Size Distribution and Classification	129
4.2.2	Specific Gravity	130
4.2.3	Maximum and Minimum Density	131
4.2.4	Coefficient of Permeability	132
4.3	Direct Shear	133
4.3.1	Loose Sand	133
4.3.2	Dense Sand	136

	4.3.3	Comparison with Previous Studies	139
4.4		Interactions between Sand and Geogrid	141
	4.4.1	Loose sand	141
	4.4.2	Dense sand	143
	4.4.3	Comparison with Previous Studies	146
4.5		Physical Model Test : Static Load Test	148
	4.5.1	Introduction	148
	4.5.2	Bearing Capacity of Unreinforced Sand Deposit	149
	4.5.3	Reinforced Sand Deposit	153
		4.5.3.1 Bearing Capacity of Reinforced Sand	153
		4.5.3.2 Determination of the Optimum Depth Placement of Geocell	156
		4.5.3.3 Effect of Width of Geocell Mattress	162
		4.5.3.4 Effect of Height of Geocell Mattress	169
		4.5.3.5 Effect of Pattern of Geocell	175
		4.5.3.6 Effect of Relative Density of Sand	181
		4.5.3.7 Shape of Geocell after Tests	185
4.6		Physical Model Test : Cyclic Load Tests	187
	4.6.1	Relationship between Applied Stress and Settlement : Unreinforced	187
	4.6.2	Relationship between Applied Stress and Settlement : Reinforced	195
		4.6.2.1 Effect of Number of Load Cycles	198
		4.6.2.2 Effect of the Cyclic Stress Amplitude	205
		4.6.2.3 Effect of Pattern of Geocell Reinforcement	215
		4.6.2.4 Effect of the Relative Density of Sand	224
4.7		Summary Results of Static and Cyclic Loading Tests	230
	4.7.1	Static Loading Test Results	230
	4.7.2	Cyclic Loading Test Results	231
5		NUMERICAL MODELING	236
	5.1	Introduction	236
	5.2	Numerical Simulation for Static Loading	237

5.2.1	Deformed Mesh	237
5.2.2	Simulation Results	240
5.2.3	Comparison of Results between Numerical and Experimental Model for Static Load Test	242
5.2.3.1	Loose Sand Deposit	243
5.2.3.2	Dense Sand Deposit	248
5.2.3.3	Improvement Factor	252
5.3	Numerical Simulation for Cyclic Loading	254
5.3.1	Deformed Mesh	254
5.3.2	Simulation Results	257
5.3.3	Comparisons between Numerical Simulation and Experimental Test Results under Cyclic load	261
5.3.3.1	Loose Sand under 25% of Cyclic Stress Amplitude ratio	262
5.3.3.2	Loose Sand Deposit under 40% of Cyclic Stress Amplitude ratio	266
5.3.3.3	Dense Sand under 25% of Cyclic Stress Amplitude ratio	269
5.3.3.4	Dense Sand under 40% of Cyclic Stress Amplitude ratio	272
5.3.3.5	Effect of Cyclic Stress Amplitude	276
5.3.3.6	Effect of Relative Density of Sand	278
5.4	Summary of Comparison Results between Numerical and Experimental	281
5.4.1	Static Test	281
5.4.2	Cyclic Test	282
6	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	288
6.1	Introduction	288
6.2	Conclusion	288
6.3	Contributions of Research	291
6.3.1	Extra Safety Factors	291
6.3.2	Design Charts	291

6.4	Recommendations for further studies	292
REFERENCES		293
Appendices A – B		309- 316

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Example of previous studies on geosynthetics reinforcement	10
2.2	Comparison of bearing capacity equations	19
2.3	Previous experimental studies on geocell reinforced soil under static load	28
2.4	Relative density designation (Lambe and Whitman, 1969 and Head, 1992)	38
2.5	Previous experimental studies on geocell-reinforced soil under cyclic load	40
2.6	Numerical modeling studies reviewed on geocell reinforced soil supporting static load	49
2.7	Summary of finite element material models of reinforced soil	56
2.8	Values of coefficient of permeability of soils (Atkinson, 2007)	57
2.9	Values of Young's Modulus related to soil consistency (Liu and Evett, 2008, Gofar and Kassim, 2007)	58
2.10	Values of Young's Modulus related to soil consistency (Das, 2004)	58
2.11	Range of soil property of gravel and sand (Price, 2009)	59
2.12	Values of Poisson's ratio for different soil type (Gofar and Kasim, 2007)	59
2.13	Values of Poisson's ratio for different type of soils (Das, 2004)	60
2.14	Direct Shear Test Results (Liu <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	63

2.15	Dimension of the box and foundation models used by previous researchers	67
2.16	Scaling Relations between prototype and model	67
2.17	Previous investigations on geosynthetic reinforced soil under static and cyclic load	70
3.1	Properties of Geogrid and Geocell	76
3.2	Laboratory testing programme for material properties determination	77
3.3	Scale coefficient values between prototype and model	95
3.4	Monotonic stress and cyclic stress amplitudes	108
3.5	Dead load used corresponds to the cyclic stress amplitude	108
3.6	Static load testing programme	112
3.7	Cyclic load testing program	114
3.8	Properties of sand	120
4.1	Summary results from sieve test	130
4.2	Summary of data for Specific Gravity Test	130
4.3	Specific gravity in previous studies	131
4.4	Maximum and minimum density test results	131
4.5	Density of sand used in this study	132
4.6	Coefficient of permeability of sand	132
4.7	Direct shear test results of loose sand	135
4.8	Direct shear test results of dense sand at peak stress	138
4.9	Direct shear test results of dense sand at critical state	138
4.10	Comparison of internal friction angle of sand with previous studies	140
4.11	Direct shear test result of loose sand-geogrid interface	143
4.12	Direct shear test result of dense sand-geogrid interface	145
4.13	Results of soil – geogrid interactions from direct shear tests	145
4.14	Comparison of internal friction angle of sand-geosynthetic with previous studies	146
4.15	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity based on existing equation and results from model tests	150

4.16	Back-calculated of coefficient of bearing capacity, N_γ for circular footing	151
4.17	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity for footing on sand from physical model tests	152
4.18	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity of footing on unreinforced and geocell reinforced sand	155
4.19	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity for footing directly on honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand ($u=0$)	156
4.20	Improvement factor and ultimate bearing capacity of geocell reinforced at different placement of geocell	158
4.21	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity of footing on honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand, placed at optimum depth with previous researcher	162
4.22	Ultimate bearing capacity and improvement factor of honeycomb geocell reinforced at different of width geocell	164
4.23	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity at optimum depth placement and best width of honeycomb pattern geocell with previous researcher	166
4.24	Improvement factor and ultimate bearing capacity of honeycomb geocell reinforced sand at different of height ratio of geocell	171
4.25	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity at optimum depth placement and best height of honeycomb pattern geocell with previous researcher	175
4.26	Ultimate bearing capacity and improvement factor of footing on various patterns geocell reinforced sand deposits	178
4.27	Comparison of ultimate bearing capacity at optimum depth placement with previous researcher	180
4.28	Comparison of effect of relative density on ultimate bearing capacity of footing on various pattern geocell reinforced sand	183

4.29	Comparison on effect of relative density on ultimate bearing capacity of footing on honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand with previous studies	184
4.30	Settlement ratio at various number of cycles for different cyclic stress amplitude for footing on unreinforced loose and dense sand deposits	192
4.31	Comparison on the reduction of settlement ratio between unreinforced loose and dense sand at certain number of cycles, at various cyclic stress amplitudes	193
4.32	Settlement ratio at various numbers of cycles for different cyclic stress amplitude for footing on honeycomb geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposits	200
4.33	Comparison on the reduction of settlement ratio between honeycomb geocell reinforced loose and dense sand at certain number of cycles, at various cyclic stress amplitudes	201
4.34	Comparison on the reduction of settlement ratio between unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced sand at certain number of cycles, at various cyclic stress amplitudes	203
4.35	The correlation equations relating the cyclic stress amplitude and the settlement ratio of unreinforced and reinforced sand with honeycomb pattern geocell	207
4.36	The correlation equations relating the cyclic stress amplitude and the settlement ratio of unreinforced and reinforced sand with honeycomb pattern geocell	208
4.37	The correlation equations relating the cyclic stress amplitude and the settlement ratio of unreinforced and reinforced sand with honeycomb pattern geocell	210
4.38	Summary of settlement ratio obtained after 5 cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand	213

4.39	Summary of settlement ratio obtained after 100 cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand	214
4.40	Summary of settlement ratio obtained variation cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and different pattern of geocell reinforced loose sand deposit	218
4.41	Summary of settlement ratio obtained variation cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and different pattern of geocell reinforced dense sand deposit	218
4.42	Comparison on the reduction of settlement ratio between unreinforced and different pattern of geocell reinforced loose sand at certain number of cycles, at various cyclic stress amplitudes	219
4.43	Comparison on the reduction of settlement ratio between unreinforced and different pattern of geocell reinforced dense sand at certain number of cycles, at various cyclic stress amplitudes	219
4.44	Comparison on the decreased of settlement between chevron pattern geocell with the unreinforced sand and reinforced sand with honeycomb and diamond pattern after 100 cycles of loading	222
4.45	Comparison on the decreased of settlement between diamond pattern geocell with the unreinforced sand and reinforced sand with honeycomb pattern after 100 cycles of loading	223
4.46	Settlement ratio for footing on honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced sand deposits and reduction of settlement between dense and loose sand deposits	226
4.47	Settlement ratio for footing on diamond pattern geocell reinforced sand deposits and reduction of settlement between dense and loose sand deposits	226

4.48	Settlement ratio for footing on chevron pattern geocell reinforced sand deposits and reduction of settlement between dense and loose sand deposits	226
4.49	Summary results from cyclic loading test series	232
5.1	Parameters for sand, geocell and footing in numerical models using ABAQUS modelling	237
5.2	Ultimate bearing capacity and improvement factor of footing on various patterns geocell reinforced sand deposits obtained static loading from numerical simulation	242
5.3	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for unreinforced loose sand deposit under static loading	245
5.4	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for honeycomb geocell reinforced loose sand deposit under static loading	245
5.5	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for diamond geocell reinforced loose sand deposit under static loading	246
5.6	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for chevron geocell reinforced loose sand deposit under static loading	246
5.7	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for unreinforced dense sand deposit under static loading	250
5.8	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for honeycomb geocell reinforced dense sand deposit under static loading	250
5.9	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for diamond geocell reinforced dense sand deposit under static loading	250
5.10	Comparison results between numerical simulation and experimental test for chevron geocell reinforced dense sand deposit under static loading	251

5.11	Comparison improvement factor between numerical simulation and experimental test of footing on various patterns of geocell reinforced loose and sand deposits	253
5.12	Summary of settlement ratio obtained variation cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and different patterns of geocell reinforced loose sand deposit	261
5.13	Summary of settlement ratio obtained variation cycles of cyclic loading for footing on unreinforced and different patterns of geocell reinforced dense sand deposit	261
5.14	Comparison result between numerical simulation and experimental test for loose sand deposit at 25% cyclic stress amplitude ratio and $N=100$	264
5.15	Comparison result between numerical simulation and experimental test for loose sand deposit at 40% cyclic stress amplitude ratio and $N=100$	268
5.16	Comparison result between numerical simulation and experimental test for dense sand deposit at 25% cyclic stress amplitude ratio and $N=100$	271
5.17	Comparison result between numerical simulation and experimental test for dense sand deposit at 40% cyclic stress amplitude ratio and $N=100$	275
5.18	Comparison between the settlement ratio obtained from experimental and numerical simulation for unreinforced and reinforced sand deposits at $N=100$	278
5.19	Summary of the results of the monotonic settlement, cyclic settlement at $N=100$, total settlement and settlement ratio	283

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Examples of geocell application (Yang, 2010)	3
2.1	Examples of polymeric geocells used by previous researchers	13
2.2	Patterns used in geocells constructed with geogrids (Krishnaswamy <i>et al.</i> , 2000)	13
2.3	Terzaghi's failure modes of shallow foundation (in Barnes, 2010)	14
2.4	Combined results of footing tests performed on brown mortar sand (Cerato and Lutenegeger, 2008)	21
2.5	Different methods for defining ultimate bearing capacity of shallow foundations from load test results (Lutenegeger and Adams, 1998)	23
2.6	Reinforcement mechanisms of geotextile and geogrid, as the two types of geosynthetic materials (Chen 2007)	25
2.7	Unreinforced and geocell-reinforced soil behaviour under shallow foundation (Pokharel <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	26
2.8	Geometric parameters of geocell reinforced foundation bed (Krishnaswamy <i>et al.</i> , 2000)	29
2.9	Isometric view of pocket size of the cell (Moghaddas Tafreshi and Dowson, 2010)	31
2.10	Bearing pressure against settlement for different depth placements of geocell mattress (Krishnaswamy <i>et al.</i> , 2000)	32
2.11	Load- settlement relations of geocell-reinforced soft ground (Shimizu and Inui, 1990)	36

2.12	Change of the Improvement factor with a change in the relative density of the soil (Dash <i>et al.</i> 2001)	39
2.13	Variation of the cyclic settlement ratio with the frequency of cyclic load. (El Sawwaf and Nazir 2012)	44
2.14	Effect of quality of infill material and subgrade strength on geocell reinforced road sections under cyclic loading (Kazerani and Jamnejad, 1987)	47
2.15	Three-dimensional model of single cell-reinforced soil (Han <i>et al.</i> , 2008)	53
2.16	The picture of mesh dividing of geocell slope (Wang <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	55
2.17	Geosynthetic- aggregate interaction model (Perkins, 2001)	62
2.18	Geosynthetic specimens used influence on sand (Liu <i>et al.</i> 2010)	64
2.19	Model of general shear failure (Sutjiono and Najooan, 2005)	66
3.1	Flowchart of research methodology	73
3.2	Sand used in the study	75
3.3	Geogrid and different pattern of geogell used in this study	76
3.4	Schematic diagram of geogrid-sand interaction tests	78
3.5	Schematic details of model test box	81
3.6	Mobile Pluviator System developed by Khari <i>et al.</i> (2014)	84
3.7	Modified shutter plates	85
3.8	Cylindrical moulds used to determine the density of sand using the Mobile Pluviator System	86
3.9	The relationship between density and area of holes in the shutter plates for obtaining 30% and 70% relative density using the Mobile Pluviator System	87
3.10	Preparation of unreinforced sand deposit	90
3.11	Preparation of reinforced sand deposit	91
3.12	Different pattern of cell	91

3.13	Schematic diagram of different pattern of geocell reinforcement models	92
3.14	Different height of honeycomb pattern of geocell	93
3.15	Loading Frame	96
3.16	Details of load connection assembly	97
3.17	Some preparation before static load test	98
3.18	Schematic diagram of static load test in laboratory physical model	99
3.19	Schematic diagram of laboratory cyclic load model test	101
3.20	Details of Cyclic Load Beam System (CLBS)	102
3.21	Cyclic loading test set-up showing the CLBS, pneumatic air pressure, box model and testing frame	104
3.22	Load transfer by horizontal beam between the hanger and the footing	105
3.23	Measuring equipment in cyclic load test	106
3.24	Loading sequence in cyclic load test	107
3.25	Equipments to generate cyclic loading and to control the cyclic frequency	109
3.26	Data logger (Model UCAM-70A)	110
3.27	Measuring equipments in laboratory physical model tests	111
3.28	Sectional view of reinforced sand model	112
3.29	Finite element model and mesh for unreinforced sand	117
3.30	Finite element model and mesh for sand reinforced with geocell of honeycomb pattern	117
3.31	Finite element model and mesh for sand reinforced with geocell of diamond pattern	118
3.32	Finite element model and mesh for sand reinforced with geocell of chevron pattern	118
3.33	The boundary condition model	122
3.34	The mesh of sand deposit and circular footing in the model	124
3.35	The mesh different pattern of geocell in the model	125
4.1	Particle size distribution of sand	129

4.2	Shear stress-shear strain behavior of loose sand	134
4.3	Direct shear test result of loose sand	135
4.4	Shear stress-displacement behavior of dense sand	137
4.5	Direct shear test result of dense sand	139
4.6	Comparison of internal friction angle of sand with previous studies	141
4.7	Shear stress-displacement behavior of loose sand-geogrid interface	142
4.8	Direct shear test result of loose sand-geogrid	143
4.9	Shear stress-displacement behavior of dense sand-geogrid interfaces	144
4.10	Direct shear test result of dense sand-geogrid	145
4.11	Comparison of interaction factor of sand-geosynthetic with previous studies	147
4.12	Plot of bearing pressure versus footing settlement (s/D) for unreinforced model at difference relative density of sand	149
4.13	Probable operational mechanisms for unreinforced sand with local shear failure	151
4.14	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposits ($u=0$)	154
4.15	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced loose sand deposit at different depth placement	157
4.16	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced dense sand deposits at different depth placement	157
4.17	Variation of bearing capacity improvement factor with depth placement ratio of geocell at different value of footing's settlement in loose sand	159

4.18	Variation of bearing capacity improvement factor with depth placement ratio of geocell at different value of footing's settlement in dense sand	159
4.19	Probable operational mechanisms for geocell reinforced sand in local shear failure for geocell placed at optimum u	161
4.20	Probable operational mechanisms for geocell reinforced sand in local shear failure for geocell at $u \geq D$	161
4.21	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced loose sand deposits at different width	163
4.22	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced dense sand deposits at different width	163
4.23	Variation of improvement factors with width ratio of geocell (optimum depth) at different settlement ratio for loose sand	167
4.24	Variation of improvement factors with width ratio of geocell (optimum depth) at different settlement ratio for dense sand	167
4.25	Probable operational mechanisms for geocell reinforced sand at local shear failure for $b=180$ mm	168
4.26	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced loose sand deposits at different height	170
4.27	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced dense sand deposits at different height	170
4.28	Variation of improvement factors with height ratio of geocell (optimum depth) at different settlement ratio for loose sand	172
4.29	Variation of improvement factors with height ratio of geocell (optimum depth) at different settlement ratio for dense sand	172

4.30	Details dimension of geocell patterns	176
4.31	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and various patterns of geocell reinforced loose sand deposits	177
4.32	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and various patterns of geocell reinforced dense sand deposits	177
4.33	Variation of improvement factors with different pattern of geocell reinforced loose sand deposit at different settlement ratio	179
4.34	Variation of improvement factors with different pattern of geocell reinforced dense sand deposit at different settlement ratio	179
4.35	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposits at optimum depth	181
4.36	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on diamond pattern geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposits at optimum depth	182
4.37	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on chevron pattern geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposits at optimum depth	182
4.38	Change of shape of different pattern geocell after test	186
4.39	Variation of settlement with time in cyclic load test for unreinforced loose sand	188
4.40	Variation of settlement with time in cyclic load test for unreinforced dense sand	188
4.41	Variation of applied stress with settlements in cyclic load test for loose sand ($q_u = 33$ kPa)	189
4.42	Variation of applied stress with settlements in cyclic load test for dense sand ($q_u = 64.5$ kPa)	190
4.43	Variation of settlement ratio with number of load cycles for loose sand	191

4.44	Variation of settlement ratio with number of load cycles for dense sand	191
4.45	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with number of cycles at various cyclic stress amplitudes	194
4.46	Variation of settlement with time in cyclic load test for honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced loose sand	195
4.47	Variation of settlement with time in cyclic load test for honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced dense sand	196
4.48	Variation of applied stress with settlements in cyclic load test for honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced loose sand	197
4.49	Variation of applied stress with settlements in cyclic load test for honeycomb pattern geocell reinforced dense sand	197
4.50	Variation of settlement ratio with number of load cycles for loose sand deposits	198
4.51	Variation of settlement ratio with number of load cycles for dense sand deposits	199
4.52	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with number of cycles at various cyclic stress amplitudes	202
4.53	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with number of cycles at various cyclic stress amplitudes between unreinforced and honeycomb reinforced loose sand deposit	203
4.54	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with number of cycles at various cyclic stress amplitudes between unreinforced and honeycomb reinforced dense sand deposit	204
4.55	Variation of settlement ratio with amplitude of cyclic load at different number of cycles load	206
4.56	Relationship between c and m with relative density for unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced sand deposits at $N=5$	209

4.57	Relationship between c and m with relative density for unreinforced and honeycomb geocell reinforced sand deposits at $N=100$	210
4.58	Relationship between settlement ratio and cyclic stress amplitude for different relative density at $N=5$ for unreinforced sand deposit	211
4.59	Relationship between settlement ratio and cyclic stress amplitude for different relative density at $N=5$ for honeycomb geocell reinforced sand deposit	211
4.60	Relationship between settlement ratio and cyclic stress amplitude for different relative density at $N=100$ for unreinforced sand deposit	212
4.61	Relationship between settlement ratio and cyclic stress amplitude for different relative density at $N=100$ for honeycomb geocell reinforced sand deposit	212
4.62	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cycles at $q_c/q_u=25\%$ for the unreinforced and different pattern of geocell for loose sand deposit	216
4.63	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cycles at $q_c/q_u=40\%$ for the unreinforced and different pattern of geocell for loose sand deposit	216
4.64	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cycles at $q_c/q_u=25\%$ for the unreinforced and different pattern of geocell for dense sand deposit	217
4.65	Variation of the footing settlement (s/D) with number of cycles at $q_c/q_u=40\%$ for the unreinforced and different pattern of geocell for dense sand deposit	217
4.66	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with pattern of geocell at cyclic stress amplitudes of $0.25q_u$ and various numbers of cycles for loose sand deposit	220
4.67	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with pattern of geocell at cyclic stress amplitudes of $0.4 q_u$ and various numbers of cycles for loose sand deposit	221

4.68	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with pattern of geocell at cyclic stress amplitudes of $0.25 q_u$ and various numbers of cycles for dense sand deposit	221
4.69	Variation of settlement ratio reductions with pattern of geocell at cyclic stress amplitudes of $0.4q_u$ and various numbers of cycles for dense sand deposit	222
4.70	Variation of the footing settlement with the number of cycles of load at various cyclic stress amplitudes for the honeycomb pattern of geocell reinforced sand deposit	224
4.71	Variation of the footing settlement with the number of cycles of load at various cyclic stress amplitudes for the diamond pattern of geocell reinforced sand deposit	225
4.72	Variation of the footing settlement with the number of cycles of load at various cyclic stress amplitudes for the chevron pattern of geocell reinforced sand deposit	225
4.73	Variation of settlement ratio with various numbers of cycles at various cyclic stress amplitudes for loose and dense sand	227
4.74	Variation of reduction settlement with various cyclic stress amplitudes and various numbers of cycles between dense and loose sand deposits	229
5.1	Deformed mesh of settlement on shading results of unreinforced and different pattern of geocell sand deposit static loading	240
5.2	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and various patterns of geocell reinforced loose sand deposits from numerical simulation	241
5.3	Variation of bearing pressure with settlement ratio of footing on unreinforced and various patterns of geocell reinforced dense sand deposits from numerical simulation	241
5.4	Comparison graphs of footing settlement ratio with bearing pressure on loose sand under static load	244

5.5	Variation on the percentage of error for bearing capacity at different settlement ratio for footing on unreinforced and reinforced loose sand deposits under static load	247
5.6	Comparison graphs of footing settlement ratio with bearing pressure on dense sand under static load	249
5.7	Variation on the percentage of error for bearing capacity at different settlement ratio for footing on unreinforced and reinforced dense sand deposits under static load	251
5.8	Comparison improvement factors with different pattern of geocell reinforced loose and dense sand deposit	253
5.9	Deformed mesh of settlement on shading results of unreinforced and different pattern of geocell dense sand deposit under cyclic loading at $N=100$ and $q_c/q_u=40\%$	257
5.10	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cyclic load at $q_c/q_u=25\%$ for the unreinforced and reinforced for loose sand deposit (numerical simulation)	258
5.11	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cyclic load at $q_c/q_u=40\%$ for the unreinforced and reinforced for loose sand deposit (numerical simulation)	259
5.12	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cyclic load at $q_c/q_u=25\%$ for the unreinforced and reinforced for dense sand deposit (numerical simulation)	259
5.13	Variation of the settlement ratio with number of cyclic load at $q_c/q_u=40\%$ for the unreinforced and reinforced for dense sand deposit (numerical simulation)	260
5.14	Comparison graphs of settlement ratio with number of cycles of loose sand at 25% cyclic stress amplitude ratio	263
5.15	Comparison graphs for reinforced loose sand deposit on the reduction of settlement ratio with different patterns of geocell; $q_c/q_u=25\%$, $N=100$	265
5.16	Comparison graphs of settlement ratio with number of cycles of loose sand at 40% cyclic stress amplitude ratio	267

5.17	Comparison graphs for reinforced loose sand deposit on the reduction of settlement ratio with different patterns of geocell; $q_c/q_u = 40\%$, $N=100$	269
5.18	Comparison graphs of settlement ratio with number of cycles on dense sand under 25% cyclic stress amplitude	271
5.19	Comparison graphs for reinforced dense sand deposit on the reduction of settlement ratio with different patterns of geocell; $q_c/q_u = 25\%$, $N=100$	272
5.20	Comparison graphs of settlement ratio with number of cycles on dense sand under 40% cyclic stress amplitude	274
5.21	Comparison graphs for reinforced dense sand deposit on the reduction of settlement ratio with different patterns of geocell; $q_c/q_u = 40\%$, $N=100$	276
5.22	Comparison of the effect of cyclic stress amplitudes on settlement ratio of unreinforced and honeycomb pattern of geocell reinforced sand deposits at $N=100$	277
5.23	Comparison of settlement ratio with relative density for unreinforced and reinforced sand deposits at $q_c/q_u=25\%$ and $N=100$	279
5.24	Comparison of settlement ratio with relative density for unreinforced and reinforced sand deposits at $q_c/q_u=40\%$ and $N=100$	280

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

A	-	Area
A_g	-	Equivalent circular area of the pocket of cell
b	-	Width of the geocell mattress
b_c, b_q, b_γ	-	Base factors
B	-	Width of the footing
c	-	Cohesion of soil
C_U	-	Coefficient of uniformity
C_C	-	Coefficient of curvature
d	-	Pocket size of the geocell
d_c, d_q, d_γ	-	Depth factors
D	-	Diameter of the footing
D_{10}	-	Effective size
D_{30}	-	Diameter finer than 30 %
D_{50}	-	Diameter of average
D_{60}	-	Diameter finer than 60 %
D_f	-	Depth of the footing (below ground surface)
D_p	-	Diameter of petroleum storage tank
D_r	-	Relative density
e_{min}	-	Minimum void ratio
e_{max}	-	Maximum void ratio
E	-	Young's Modulus

E_{50}	-	Young Modulus at 50% strain
E_{slip}	-	elastic slip
f	-	Frequency
f_p	-	Frequency to fill up the tank
f_m	-	Frequency for the model
F	-	Global factor of safety
F_c	-	Cyclic extra safety factor
F_e	-	Extra safety factor
G_s	-	Specific gravity
h	-	Height of the geocell mattress
H_s	-	Depth of failure zone under base of foundation
i	-	Hydraulic gradient
i_c, i_q, i_γ	-	Inclination factors
IF	-	Improvement factor
k	-	Coefficient of permeability
K_o	-	Coefficients of earth pressure at rest
L	-	Length of footing
L_M	-	Dimension of model
L_P	-	Dimension of prototype
L_{sh}	-	Length of the horizontal failure line
m	-	Mass of soil
N_c, N_q, N_γ	-	Coefficient of bearing capacity
$q_{u \text{ unreinforced}}$	-	Ultimate bearing capacity of unreinforced sand
$q_{u \text{ reinforced}}$	-	Ultimate bearing capacity of reinforced sand
q_{dyn}	-	Dynamic bearing capacity
q_{stat}	-	Static bearing capacity
q_u	-	Ultimate bearing capacity

q_s	-	Safe bearing capacity
Q	-	Quantity of water
s	-	Settlement of footing
s_c, s_q, s_γ	-	Shape factors
s_e	-	Expected settlement
t	-	Time
u	-	Depth placement of the geocell
v	-	Volume of soil
V_p	-	Volume of storage tank
α	-	Friction coefficient
γ	-	Unit weight of soil
Δ	-	Relative shear displacement between aggregate and geogrid
ϕ	-	Internal friction angle of soil
ψ	-	Dilation angle of soil
τ	-	Shear stress
τ_f	-	Shear stress at failure
σ_n	-	Normal stress
ν	-	Poisson's Ratio
λ	-	Geometric Scale Coefficient
ρ	-	Density of sand in current state
ρ_{max}	-	Maximum density of sand
ρ_{min}	-	Minimum density of sand
ρ_w	-	Density of water

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Coefficient of bearing capacity	309
B	Calibration of Instrumentation	313

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Nowadays, for large projects in addition to the technical principles, cost reduction and environmental conservation are important. For projects such as silos, water tanks and oil tanks, there is the need for large flat surface. Hence excavation work and embankment construction may be necessary to achieve large flat surface. For oil tank, silo and water tank, the most common shape is cylindrical. Hence the best foundations for these structures will be the circular type.

Several studies (Moghaddas and Dawson, 2010, Boushehrian *et al.*, 2010 and El Sawwaf and Nazir, 2012) have reported the successful use of reinforcement as a cost-effective method to improve the ultimate bearing capacity of a footing on the sand deposit and to decrease the settlement values to acceptable limits. Most of the previous studies deal with the behaviour of reinforced sands under cyclic vertical loads simulating either train and vehicle loads or sum of static loads and cyclic loads of high frequencies (El Sawwaf and Nazir, 2012).

The settlement of reinforced sand bed subjected to slow repeated load simulating a loading condition, for example the case of petrol tank has not been investigated (El Sawwaf and Nazir, 2012 and Boushehrian *et al.*, 2011). Hence,

many questions still remain on the effect of such repeated loads on the performance of sand, in particular the permanent cumulative settlement.

In petroleum tanks, petrol is transferred and stored in the tanks until it need to be taken back and distributed to the petroleum stations. Therefore, the supporting soil is subjected to repeated load in which the frequency and load amplitude are dependent on the rate of filling and emptying the tanks. In some structures, the live loads are greater than the dead loads of the structure itself and change with time, such as the loads of petroleum tank and silo (El Sawwaf and Nazir, 2010).

Due to many advances made during past decades in science, technology, and laboratory equipment, there are many studies focusing not only on new procedure for soil improvement through natural and synthetics materials, but also on the reinforcement of sand deposit under cyclic loading.

Hejazi *et al.* (2012) reported that the natural and synthetic materials widely used for increasing the bearing capacity of soils under static loads are as follows:

1. Natural materials such as Bamboo, Coconut fiber, Palm fiber and Jute.
2. Synthetic materials (geosynthetics) such as Geotextile, Geogrid and Geocell.

The use of geosynthetics for reinforcing soil is becoming a rapidly growing technology. The use of geosynthetics can improve soil performance, increase the safety factor, and reduce the construction cost for a project. This is why geosynthetic research has become a more common topic in the field of geotechnical engineering (Ketchart and Wu, 1996).

Geocell is one of the geosynthetic products used primarily for soil reinforcement. It was originally developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1970s for quick reinforcement of cohesion less soil in the military field. Like other geosynthetic products, geocell is usually made from polymeric materials. Figure 1.1 shows two examples of geocell reinforcement under load. In these

cases, geocell is used to improve the bearing capacity of soil and also reduce the settlement.

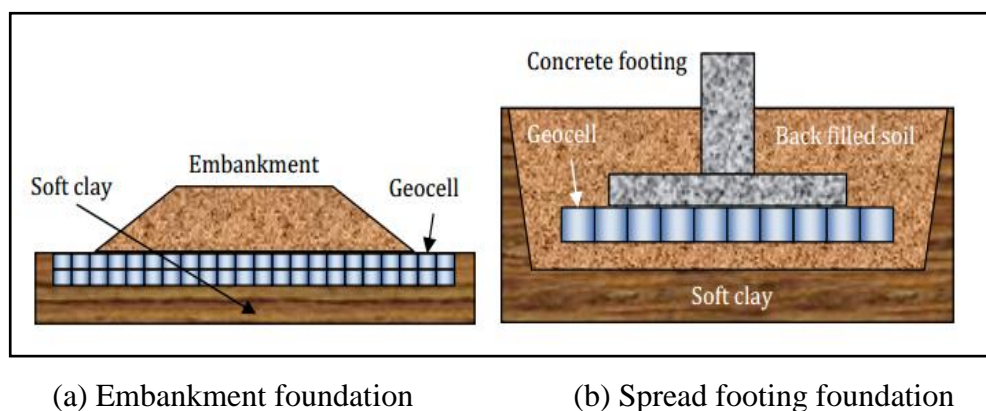


Figure 1.1 Examples of geocell application (Yang, 2010)

The mechanism of geocell reinforcement has not been well understood, especially for load-supporting applications. In the past, most of the researchers (Steward *et al.*, 1977, Giroud and Noiray, 1981, Giroud and Han, 2004) studied on the load-supporting geosynthetic reinforcement focused on planar geosynthetic products such as geogrid and geotextile. Limited number of researchers (Yang and Han, 2013, Moghaddas Tafreshi and Dawson, 2012, Boushehrian *et al.*, 2010 and El Sawwaf and Nazir, 2010) studied the design methods for the geocell reinforcement. However, widely accepted design methods for different applications of geocell are still unavailable. Such a gap between theory and application limited the usage of geocell. To facilitate the development of design methods for geocell reinforcement for load-supporting purposes, the behaviour of geocell-reinforced soil, under both static and repeated loading conditions, has to be studied.

1.2 Problem Statement

The advancement of works in bearing capacity studies has led to further works on the use of reinforcement in soils. A much cheaper solution will probably be the use of synthetic material to increase the bearing capacity of the soil. During recent years reinforced sand deposit has been studied under static and cyclic loading.

But most of the previous studies deal with the behaviour of reinforced sands under cyclic vertical loads simulating either train and vehicle loads or sum of static loads and cyclic loads of high frequencies. The factors influencing the behaviour of geocell-reinforced sand deposit under low frequency cyclic loading are therefore not well understood. Hence this research will investigate the problem through laboratory physical model and to simulate with numerical modelling in determining the response of circular footing constructed on geocell-reinforced as well as unreinforced sand deposit subjected to low frequency cyclic loading. This could demonstrate the benefits of introducing geocells beneath the circular footing and to determine the parameters controlling best usage under low frequency cyclic loading.

1.3 Objectives of Study

The aim of this research is to determine and evaluate the effect of geocell reinforcement on the performance of circular footing placed on sand deposits subjected to static and low frequency cyclic loadings. Thus, the objectives of this research are:

1. To determine the effect of various geocell parameters such as width, height and its pattern arrangement on the bearing capacity and settlement of circular footing placed on the reinforced sand deposit under static loading.
2. To determine the effect of low frequency cyclic loading on the bearing capacity and settlement of circular footing founded on geocell reinforced sand deposit.
3. To predict the bearing capacity of unreinforced and geocell reinforced circular footing under static load and the settlement ratio under cyclic load of different amplitudes through numerical simulation.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of Study

The scope and limitation of the research are as follows:

1. The study focuses on the bearing capacity of circular footings founded on geocell reinforced dry sand deposit under low frequency cyclic loading.
2. For cyclic loading; the frequency chosen is 0.067 Hz, the monotonic load is $0.5q_u$ and the cyclic loadings are $0.25q_u$ and $0.40q_u$ (q_u is the ultimate bearing capacity under static load).
3. The sand used in this research is obtained from the Iskandar Development Region, Johor, Malaysia, and the geocell produced from geogrid is supplied by Ten Cate Geosynthetics Malaysia Sdn. Bhd.
4. The engineering properties of sand are determined using the British Standard (BS) 1377 while the properties of geocell are provided by the supplier.
5. The experimental modelling is carried out using a box model of 62 cm length, 62 cm width and 50 cm height.
6. The commercial 3D finite element software called “ABAQUS” Version 6.8 was used in numerical simulation to evaluate and compare the results obtained from experimental model tests. The elasto-plastic Mohr-Coulomb soil model was used in the simulation work.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study includes:

1. The performance of circular footing on geocell reinforced sand, predicted through numerical modelling for various relative densities of sand and different cyclic stress amplitudes, could save the time and cost of performing laboratory tests particularly the cyclic loading tests.
2. Information on the improvement factor, as a result of using different pattern of geocell at different relative density of sand, could help the engineer to decide on the respective geocell to be used based on the bearing capacity to be achieved for specific project.
3. The known performance of circular footing placed on geocell reinforced sand deposits subjected to low frequency cyclic loadings could help the engineer to make decision on alternative reinforcement system for sand under vertical cyclic load.
4. The outcome of this study can help to reduce the costs in controlling the settlement and increase the bearing capacity of sand if using other expensive methods such as pile foundation.
5. The design charts developed in this study could be used easily and quickly by the engineers in preliminary design work.

1.6 Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of six chapters. The essence of each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 1 describes the background of problems associated with sand under static and cyclic loading, and brief description on some improvement methods was presented. The research philosophy, including problem statement, objectives of study, scope of study and significance of study, was also discussed.

Chapter 2 presents the review of literature in this study. The review encompasses the properties of geocell, and their applications in construction, in particular, as soil reinforcement material. A review on bearing capacity of soil is also carried out. Previous researches on the physical and numerical simulation of bearing capacity of shallow foundation are also discussed briefly. Based on the current scientific knowledge on sand improvement, a research framework is developed taking into consideration the gap in the current research.

Chapter 3 discusses research methodology that includes testing programmes and laboratory experimental work and numerical simulation on small scale model tests to study on bearing capacity of geocell reinforced sand deposit. Details on the design of the experimental and numerical test, fabrication of testing frame and construction of reinforcement models are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 discusses the properties of research materials used in this research that are obtained from laboratory tests. It includes the basic properties and classification of sand, shear strength and also the density of sand. The properties of geocell, given by the supplier are also discussed. Also in this chapter evaluates and discusses the results from experimental work of unreinforced and geocell reinforced sand deposit under static load and low frequency cyclic load.

Chapter 5 discusses and summarises the results obtained from numerical simulation tests and compares with experimental results.

Finally, Chapter 6 gives the conclusion of this study and recommendations for future studies are specified.

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