

MICROBIAL INDUCED CALCITE PRECIPITATION TREATMENT ON  
TROPICAL RESIDUAL SOIL

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TROPICAL RESIDUAL SOIL

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*To my beloved parents, lover and sibling*

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## ABSTRACT

Biomediated soil improvement, also known as Microbial Induced Calcite Precipitation (MICP), is a promising new branch of microbial geotechnology. Earlier MICP studies only focused on sandy soils, but more recent studies have also investigated the potential and feasibility of MICP on tropical residual soil. The main objective of this study is to examine the feasibility of MICP and the mechanisms involved between two types of bacteria and chemical reagents in improving the strength of tropical residual soil. Essentially, this was about identifying the optimized treatment conditions as well as the effects of some specific MICP parameters and curing on unconfined compressive strength (UCS) development and calcite distribution. Two bacteria from the *Bacillus* family, namely, *Bacillus subtilis* and *Sporosarcina pasteurii*, were used as urease producing bacteria. The tropical residual silt soil with 80% fine soil was compressed to a cylindrical sample measuring 100 mm in height and 50 mm in diameter as well as having a dry density of 1.31 Mg/m<sup>3</sup>. Continuous injection method was employed. Series of tests were carried out, with each having different chemical reagents concentrations (0.15, 0.25, 0.35 or 0.45 M), reagent flow pressures (0.1, 0.2, 0.3 or 0.4 bars), and treatment durations (24, 48, 72 or 96 hours). Strength improvement of about 56.70% and 38.14% was immediately discovered after MICP treatment using *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis*, respectively. Additionally, strength improvement of about 30 to 104.12% were recorded after curing the samples for 3, 7, 14, 20, and 28 days. The optimum curing period was 14 days. The optimum treatment condition of MICP treatment for both bacteria consisted of 0.25 M of reagent concentration, 0.2 bars of reagent flow pressure, and 48 hours of treatment duration. The reagent flow pressure was the only MICP parameter that affected calcite distribution. No clear correlation was observed between calcite precipitation and strength. The two bacteria had distinctive responses to the designated treatment conditions as the behaviour of living microorganisms could differ although they are from the same family. This information were analysed to establish design charts for MICP practitioner in selecting optimal MICP parameters under different circumstances.

## ABSTRAK

Pembaikan tanah secara *Biomediated* yang juga diketahui sebagai pemendakan kalsit cetusan mikrob (MICP) merupakan bidang Geoteknologi mikrob yang baru dan berpotensi. Kajian-kajian awal MICP hanya tertumpu kepada tanah berpasir, tetapi beberapa kajian baru MICP telah dijalankan untuk mengkaji potensi dan kebolehlaksanaan MICP ke atas tanah baki tropika. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kebolehlaksanaan MICP dan mekanismanya antara dua jenis bakteria serta reagen kimia untuk meningkatkan kekuatan tanah baki tropika, mengenalpasti keadaan rawatan yang optima, kesan parameter MICP yang tertentu dan pengawetan terhadap perkembangan kekuatan tak terkurung dan taburan kalsit. Dua jenis bakteria dari keluarga *Bacillus* yang sama, *Bacillus subtilis* dan *Sporosarcina pasteurii*, digunakan sebagai bakteria penghasil urease. Kelodak dari tanah baki tropika dengan 80% butiran halus telah dimampatkan kepada sampel berbentuk silinder dengan ketinggian 100 mm, garispusat 50 mm serta berketumpatan kering  $1.31 \text{ Mg/m}^3$ . Kaedah suntikan berterusan digunakan untuk rawatan ini. Siri ujian MICP telah dilakukan dengan mengubah kepekatan reagen kimia (0.15, 0.25, 0.35, dan 0.45 M), tekanan aliran reagen (0.1, 0.2, 0.3, dan 0.4 bars), dan tempoh rawatan (24, 48, 72, dan 96 jam). Peningkatan kekuatan sebanyak 56.70 % dan 38.14 % telah diperhatikan sejurus selepas rawatan MICP yang menggunakan *Sporosarcina pasteurii* dan *Bacillus subtilis*. Disamping itu, peningkatan kekuatan sebanyak 30 hingga 104.12 % telah direkodkan selepas proses pengawetan selama 3, 7, 14, 20, dan 28 hari. Masa pengawetan optimum adalah 14 hari. Keadaan optimum MICP untuk kedua-dua bakteria adalah 0.25 M kepekatan reagen, 0.2 bar tekanan aliran reagen, dan 48 jam tempoh rawatan. Tekanan aliran reagen adalah satu-satunya parameter MICP yang memberikan kesan terhadap taburan kalsit. Tiada hubungan yang jelas antara mendakan kalsit dan kekuatan. Kedua-dua bakteria memberi tindak balas yang berbeza terhadap rawatan dalam kajian ini kerana mikroorganisma hidup mempunyai kelakukan yang berlainan walaupun dari keluarga yang sama. Maklumat ini telah dianalisa bagi menghasilkan carta rekabentuk untuk pengguna MICP dalam membuat pemilihan parameter MICP yang optima bagi keadaan yang berbeza.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	<b>DECLARATION</b>	ii
	<b>DEDICATION</b>	iii
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
	<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
	<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
	<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	vii
	<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xiii
	<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xvi
	<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xxii
	<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS</b>	xxiv
	<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xxv
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
	1.1 Background of Study	1
	1.2 Problem Description	3
	1.3 Objectives	4
	1.4 Scope of Study	4
	1.5 Structure of Thesis	5
	1.6 Significance of Study	7
<b>2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	8
	2.1 Introduction	8
	2.2 Tropical Residual Soil	8
	2.3 Engineering Properties of Tropical Residual Soil	11
	2.3.1 Strength	11
	2.3.2 Hydraulic Conductivity	13
	2.4 Biomediated Soil Stabilization	15
	2.5 Theory and Mechanism of Biomediated Soil Stabilization	16

	2.5.1	The Mechanisms of MICP with Soil Particle	19
	2.5.2	Calcite Distribution within Pore Space	20
2.6		MICP Studies in Civil Engineering	22
	2.6.1	MICP Application in Civil Structural and Construction Materials	22
	2.6.2	MICP Application in Geotechnical Engineering	23
2.7		Microorganism	27
	2.7.1	<i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	29
	2.7.2	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	30
	2.7.3	Microorganisms Used for MICP Studies	31
		2.7.3.1 MICP Geotechnical Compatible	32
	2.7.4	Role of Bacteria in MICP Treatment	34
2.8		Microbial Induce Calcite Precipitation (MICP)	35
2.9		Parameters and Factors Affecting on Formation of Microbial Induced Carbonate Precipitation (MICP)	38
	2.9.1	Temperature and pH	39
	2.9.2	Nutrient for Bacteria Growth	40
	2.9.3	Bacteria Cell Concentration	41
	2.9.4	Chemical Reagent Concentration	42
	2.9.5	Chemical Reagents Flow Pressure for MICP Continuous Injection Method	43
	2.9.6	Curing of MICP Treated Soil	43
2.10		Effect of MICP on Soil Engineering Properties	45
	2.10.1	Strength and Stiffness	45
	2.10.2	Permeability	45
	2.10.3	Compressibility	46
2.11		Enzyme Option on Biomediated Soil Stabilization	46
2.12		Concluding Remarks	47
<b>3</b>		<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>50</b>
	3.1	Introduction	50
	3.2	Collection of Soil Sample	54
	3.3	Determination of Physical Properties	57
		3.3.1 Specific Gravity	57
		3.3.2 Particle Size Distribution	57
		3.3.3 Atterberg Limit	58
	3.4	Determination of Engineering Properties	58



3.4.1	Compaction	58
3.4.2	Permeability	59
3.4.3	Unconfined Compressive Strength (UCS)	61
3.5	Determination of Chemical and Microstructure Properties	62
3.5.1	Determination of Soil pH	62
3.5.2	Calcite Content Measurement	64
3.5.3	Determination of Mineral and Compounds	67
3.5.4	Determination of Mineralogical Elements	67
3.5.5	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope (FESEM)	70
3.6	Urease Producing Microorganism	71
3.6.1	<i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	72
3.6.2	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	72
3.6.3	Bacteria Growth Mediums and Preparation Methods	73
3.6.4	Equipment and Materials for Sterilization and Cultivation Process	76
3.6.5	Cultivation Process	79
3.6.6	Preparation of Nutrient Broth	83
3.6.7	Preparation of Nutrient Agar	83
3.6.8	Bacteria Counting	86
3.7	Chemical Reagents	88
3.8	Method of Placement	89
3.9	MICP Treatment Laboratory Setup	89
3.9.1	Stainless Steel Mould	93
3.9.2	Pressure Gauge, Fittings, and PVC Tubing	97
3.9.3	Pressure Tank	100
3.9.4	Pneumatic Compressor	101
3.9.5	Research Programme and Treatment Variables	102
3.10	Sample Preparation for MICP Treatment	104
3.11	Extrusion of Soil Sample after MICP Treatment	110
3.11.1	Strength Test after MICP Treatment	113
3.11.2	Hydraulic Conductivity after MICP Treatment	113
3.11.3	Calcite Determination after MICP Treatment	113
3.11.4	FESEM and XRD after MICP Treatment	114

	3.11.5	Curing Process for MICP Treated Soil	114
	3.12	Concluding Remarks	116
<b>4</b>		<b>GEOTECHNICAL PROPERTIES OF TROPICAL RESIDUAL SOIL AND VARIATION OF MICP TREATMENT CONDITIONS</b>	117
	4.1	Introduction	117
	4.2	Physical Properties	118
	4.3	Chemical Properties	122
	4.4	Engineering Properties of Tropical Residual Soil	126
	4.4.1	Compaction	126
	4.4.2	Unconfined Compressive Strength of Tropical Residual Soil	127
	4.4.2.1	Unsoaked Untreated Soil	128
	4.4.2.2	Soaked Untreated Soil Sample	129
	4.4.2.3	Comparison of Untreated Soaked and Unsoaked Sample	131
	4.4.3	Hydraulic Conductivity	135
	4.5	Variation of MICP Treatment Conditions	135
	4.5.1	Treatment with Chemical Reagents	136
	4.5.2	Treatment with Nutrient Broth only	141
	4.5.3	Treatment with Bacteria only	145
	4.5.3.1	Treatment with <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> only	145
	4.5.3.2	Treatment with <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> only	148
	4.6	Microbial Induced Calcite Precipitation (MICP) Treatment	153
	4.6.1	MICP Treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	153
	4.6.2	MICP Treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	156
	4.6.3	Comparison of MICP using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> and <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	160
	4.7	Hydraulic Conductivity of MICP Treated Soil	167
	4.8	Concluding Remarks	172
<b>5</b>		<b>EFFECT OF CHEMICAL REAGENTS FLOW PRESSURE, CONCENTRATION, AND TREATMENT DURA-</b>	

	<b>TION ON MICP OF <i>SPOROSARCINA PASTEURII</i> AND <i>BACILLUS SUBTILIS</i></b>	174
5.1	Introduction	174
5.2	Effect of Chemical Reagents Flow Pressure	175
5.2.1	Effect of Chemical Reagents Flow Pressure on MICP Treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	175
5.2.2	Effect of Chemical Reagents Flow Pressure on MICP Treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	178
5.3	Effect of Chemical Reagents Concentration	181
5.3.1	Effect of Chemical Reagents Concentration using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	182
5.3.2	Effect of Chemical Reagent Concentration on MICP Treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	184
5.4	Effect of Treatment Duration	187
5.4.1	Effect of Treatment Duration on MICP Treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	188
5.4.2	Effect of Treatment Duration on MICP Treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	191
5.5	Microstructure Study on MICP Treated and Untreated Soil	193
5.6	Comparison of MICP Treatments and Parameters in Present Study	197
5.7	Comparison of MICP Treatment Parameters with Other Studies	200
5.8	Effect of Calcite Uniformity on Strength Improvement of MICP Treated Soil	202
5.9	UCS of MICP Treated Soil with Different Calcite Precipitation Position	205
5.10	Relation between Calcite Distribution and UCS	207
5.11	Concluding Remarks	211
<b>6</b>	<b>THE MICP TREATMENT DESIGN CHARTS AND EFFECT OF CURING FOR MICP TREATMENT</b>	213
6.1	Introduction	213
6.2	Establishment of MICP Design Charts	213

6.2.1	MICP Treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> : Treatment Duration Versus Chemical Reagents Concentration	214
6.2.2	MICP Treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> : Treatment Duration Versus Chemical Reagents Concentration	218
6.2.2.1	The MICP Design Chart	222
6.3	Effects of Curing Period on MICP Treated Tropical Residual Soil	226
6.4	Concluding Remarks	230
<b>7</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>231</b>
7.1	Introduction	231
7.1.1	Optimization of MICP Treatment	231
7.1.2	Strength	231
7.1.3	Permeability	232
7.1.4	Microstructure of MICP Treated Soil	233
7.1.5	Relationship of MICP Parameters and Calcite Distribution	233
7.1.6	Relationship of Calcite Precipitation and Strength Development	233
7.1.7	Post MICP Treatment: Curing and MICP Design Chart	234
7.2	Recommendations	235
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>236</b>
	Appendices A – B	252 – 262

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Definitions of residual soil	9
2.2	Overview of MICP Applications in Civil engineering by using <i>Bacillus</i> class bacterium	23
2.3	MICP application in geotechnical engineering	24
2.4	Type of bacteria used in MICP treatment in geotechnical engineering	25
2.5	The optimum parameter used by other MICP studies	26
2.6	The bacteria used in biomediated soil improvement	31
2.7	Factors affecting the survival of bacteria in soils (van Veen <i>et al.</i> , 1997)	38
2.8	The factors affecting on MICP	39
2.9	The nutritional requirements for bacteria (Mitchell and Santamarina, 2005)	40
3.1	Number of the testing performed in this MICP research	52
3.2	Code of practices used in this research	56
3.3	Chemical composition of medium (ATCC <sup>®</sup> 1376)	72
3.4	Chemical composition of medium (ATCC <sup>®</sup> 18) for <i>Bacillus Subtilis</i>	73
3.5	Method of preparation for ATCC <sup>®</sup> 18 and ATCC <sup>®</sup> 1376	75
3.6	Chemical composition of nutrient broth	83
3.7	Chemical composition of chemical reagents	89
3.8	Experimental variables	103
4.1	Physical properties and classification of tropical residual soil specimen	118
4.2	Physical properties of tropical residual soil	119
4.3	Soil composition and classification of tropical residual soil	121
4.4	Value of carbonate content and pH of some granite residual soils in Peninsular Malaysia	122
4.5	Value of chloride, sulphate and organic matter from other studies of granite residual soils	123

4.6	Major compositions in granitic residual soil	124
4.7	Engineering properties of some granite residual soils	126
4.8	Comparison of shear strength for tropical residual soil	129
4.9	Parameters and variable in each treatment condition	136
4.10	Composition and pH value of the medium and chemical reagents	144
4.11	Composition and pH for <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> medium	150
4.12	Total Sodium chloride (NaCl) in treatment conditions	152
4.13	Comparison of MICP treated soil in present study	164
4.14	Shear strength and percentage of improvement for different treatment condition	165
4.15	permeability and percentage of improvement under different treatment condition	169
4.16	Summary for strength and permeability for different treatment conditions	173
5.1	Comparison of optimum parameters, UCS, and calcite distribution for MICP treatment in present study	198
5.2	Comparison of optimum MICP parameters with other studies	201
5.3	Calcite distribution and UCS	207
5.4	Summary of the MICP treatments	211
6.1	Strength improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> at different chemical reagents concentrations and treatment durations	217
6.2	Optimum chemical reagent concentration and percentage of improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> for different treatment duration	217
6.3	Optimum treatment duration and percentage of improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> with different reagent concentration	217
6.4	Percentage of UCS Improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> at different chemical reagents concentration and treatment duration	220
6.5	Optimum chemical reagent concentration, and percentage of improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> at different treatment durations	221
6.6	Optimum treatment duration and percentage of improvement for MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> with different concentrations	221

6.7	The MICP treatment design chart for <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> and <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	223
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## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Schematic diagram of weathering profile for residual soil (Little, 1969)	10
2.2	Water flow at flocculated and dispersed soil structure (Datta, 2005)	13
2.3	Overview of bio-mediated soil improvement systems (DeJong <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	15
2.4	Overview of MICP process (DeJong <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	17
2.5	Illustration of calcite distribution alternatives within pore space (DeJong <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	21
2.6	Illustration of calcite failure mechanism alternatives of calcite due to compression and/or shearing (DeJong <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	21
2.7	Bacteria morphology shapes (Barnes-Svarney and Svarney, 2014)	27
2.8	Image of <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> shape (Bang <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	29
2.9	Image of <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> shape (Samarakoon <i>et al.</i> , 2012)	30
2.10	Geotechnical compatible of MICP process (DeJong <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	33
2.11	Shape of different type of calcium carbonate (Dhami <i>et al.</i> , 2013)	36
2.12	SEM images of amorphous calcium carbonate (ACC) produced by <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> (Richardson <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	37
3.1	Research methodology framework	51
3.2	Timeframe for the MICP treatment processes	53
3.3	Sampling location	54
3.4	Collection of soil sample	55
3.5	Photograph of falling head hydraulic conductivity test	60
3.6	2 kN load frame with unconfined compressive test equipment	61
3.7	Soil pH testing using pH meter	63
3.8	Soil pH testing using litmus paper	63
3.9	The filter paper used in calcite determination	65



3.10	Equipment for calcite content determination	66
3.11	XRF device	68
3.12	Inside view of the XRF device	68
3.13	Manual hydraulic compressor	69
3.14	Compressed and solidified soil samples for XRF analysis	69
3.15	FESEM device	70
3.16	Photograph of the bacteria	71
3.17	The growth mediums for <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> and <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	74
3.18	The equipment and materials for bacteria cultivation	76
3.19	The structure and components of autoclave	77
3.20	Flowchart of cultivation of bacteria	80
3.21	Bacteria was pipetted out from the source	81
3.22	Transferring the bacteria to new medium for cultivation	81
3.23	The conical flask was sealed with aluminium foil and parafilm	82
3.24	Placing the conical flasks into the incubator	82
3.25	Nutrient broth and nutrient agar	84
3.26	Preparation of nutrient agar	85
3.27	Serial dilution	86
3.28	Bacteria counting (viable plate method)	87
3.29	Photographs of AR grade chemical reagents used in MICP treatment	88
3.30	Schematic diagram and photographs of the laboratory setup	91
3.31	Flow chart illustrating the general procedure to perform MICP treatment	92
3.32	Photographs of the stainless steel mould	93
3.33	Photographs of mould caps	94
3.34	Photographs of compression cap	95
3.35	Photographs of O-ring and rubber sheets	95
3.36	Breakdown diagram of the MICP sample and parts	96
3.37	Photographs of pressure regulator and pressure gauge	97
3.38	Photographs of different type of fittings	98
3.39	photographs of PVC tubes	99
3.40	Photographs of control valve	99
3.41	Photographs of fittings storage box	100
3.42	Photographs of pressure tank	101
3.43	Photographs of pneumatic air compressor	102
3.44	Flow chart illustrating the procedures of sample preparation before MICP treatment	106

3.45	Photographs of the MICP sample preparation	107
3.45	Photographs of the MICP sample preparation (continued)	108
3.45	Photographs of the MICP sample preparation (continued)	109
3.46	The equipment used for sample extrusion	111
3.47	Flow chart illustrating the process of sample preparation after MICP treatment	112
3.48	Sample curing process after MICP treatment	115
4.1	Particle size distribution of tropical residual soil in this study	120
4.2	Diffractogram of untreated granitic residual soil	125
4.3	Compaction curve of tropical residual soil	127
4.4	Stress-strain curve for unsoaked untreated sample	128
4.5	Stress-strain curve of the soaked untreated soil sample	130
4.6	Stress-strain curve for soaked and unsoaked untreated sample.	132
4.7	Comparison of failure plane for (untreated) unsoaked and soaked soil samples	133
4.8	UCS values and moisture contents of untreated soil samples immersed for 24, 36, and 48 hours	134
4.9	UCS value and calcite content for untreated soaked soil sample, A1; soil sample treated with chemical reagents, A2; and soil sample treated with nutrient broth only, A3	137
4.10	Plastic contraction of the sample treated with chemical reagents only (Ductile)	138
4.11	Stress-strain curve of untreated and treated with chemical reagents	139
4.12	Moisture content for untreated sample, A1; treated only with cementation reagents, A2; and Treated with <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> at top, middle, and bottom part	140
4.13	Stress-strain curve of untreated, A1; treated with chemical reagents, A2; and treated with nutrient broth, A3	143
4.14	Brittle failure of sample treated with nutrient broth only	144
4.15	Stress-strain curve of untreated and treated with bacteria only	146
4.16	Failure mode of the sample treated with bacteria ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ) only	148
4.17	Stress-strain curve of untreated, A1; treated with <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> , A4; and treated with <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> , A5	149
4.18	Brittle failure of the sample treated with <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> only	151
4.19	Stress-strain curves of untreated, A1; MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> , A6; and sample treated with <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	154

4.20	Brittle failure of the MICP treated sample ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> )	155
4.21	Calcite distribution at different parts of the sample under MICP treatment ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ), A6	156
4.22	Stress-strain curves of untreated, A1; MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> , A7; and treatment with bacteria only ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> ), A5	157
4.23	Brittle failure of the MICP treated sample ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> )	158
4.24	Calcite distribution at different parts of the sample under MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> , A7	159
4.25	Stress-strain curves of untreated, A1; MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> , A6; and MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> , A7	161
4.26	Comparison of calcite distribution for untreated, A1; MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> , A6; and MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> , A7	162
4.27	UCS value of MICP treated soil under different treatment condition: A1, Untreated; A2, chemical reagent only; A3, nutrient broth only; A4, bacteria only ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ); A5, bacteria only ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> ); A6, MICP treatment ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ); and A7, MICP treatment ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> )	166
4.28	Hydraulic conductivity of MICP treated soil under different treatment condition: A1, Untreated; A2, Chemical reagent only; A3, Nutrient broth only; A4, Bacteria only ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ); A5, Bacteria only ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> ); A6, MICP treatment ( <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i> ); and A7, MICP treatment ( <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> )	168
4.29	Imaginary illustration of different MICP mechanism for permeability	171
5.1	UCS and calcite contents under effect of reagent flow pressure on MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	175
5.2	Calcite distribution at different part of the sample under the effect of chemical reagent flow pressure for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	177
5.3	Effect of reagents flow pressure on MICP treated soil using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	179

5.4	Calcite distribution at different part of the sample under the effect of reagents flow pressure for MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	180
5.5	UCS and calcite contents under the effect of chemical reagent concentrations for MICP using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	182
5.6	Calcite distribution at different part of the sample under the effect of chemical reagents concentrations for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	184
5.7	UCS and calcite content for various concentration of chemical reagent for MICP treated using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	185
5.8	Calcite distribution at different parts of the sample under the effect of chemical reagents concentrations on MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	187
5.9	UCS and calcite content under effect of treatment duration for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	188
5.10	UCS and calcite content under effect of treatment duration for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	190
5.11	UCS and calcite content for various concentration of chemical reagent for MICP using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	191
5.12	Calcite distribution at different parts of the sample under the effect of treatment duration for MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	192
5.13	FESEM of untreated sample. (1) intraaggregate pores (2) interaggregates pores and (3) large pores within groups of aggregates	194
5.14	FESEM of the rod shape calcified bacteria for MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	195
5.15	FESEM of MICP treated soil sample by using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	196
5.16	FESEM of MICP treated soil sample using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	196
5.17	FESEM of effective and ineffective calcite precipitation	197
5.18	Stress-strain curves for sample with uniform calcite distribution, non-uniform calcite distribution and untreated sample	203
5.19	UCS failure of MICP treated and untreated samples.	204
5.20	UCS of MICP treated soil with dominant calcite at different part of sample	205
5.21	Stress strain curves for sample with dominant calcite at different parts of the samples	206

5.22	Illustration for excessive calcite precipitation (side view)	208
5.23	Illustration for ineffective calcite precipitation (side view)	209
5.24	Illustration for effective calcite precipitation (side view)	210
6.1	Reagents concentration and treatment durations of MICP treatment using <i>Sporosarcina pasteurii</i>	215
6.2	Reagents concentration and treatment duration of MICP treatment using <i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	219
6.3	Example of using MICP chart for determining suitable chemical reagents concentration for a given treatment time	224
6.4	Example of using MICP chart for determining suitable treatment duration for a given reagent concentration	225
6.5	Effect of curing on MICP treated fine grained soil	227
6.6	Calcite distribution of MICP treated soil samples at different part of the sample under the effect of curing	229

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACC</b>	–	Amorphous Calcium Carbonate
<b>AEC</b>	–	Anion Exchange Capacity
<b>ATCC</b>	–	American Type Culture Collection
<b>BIM</b>	–	Biologically Induced Mineralization
<b>BCM</b>	–	Biologically Controlled Mineralization
<b>BSCS</b>	–	British Soil Classification System
<b>CEC</b>	–	Cation Exchange Capacity
<b>DDL</b>	–	Diffuse Double layer
<b>DIC</b>	–	Dissolve Inorganic Carbon
<b>DTA</b>	–	Differential Thermal Analysis
<b>FESEM</b>	–	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope
<b>FTIR</b>	–	Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy
<b>LOI</b>	–	Loss of Ignition
<b>LL</b>	–	Liquid Limit
<b>MICP</b>	–	Microbial Induced Calcite Precipitation
<b>MEOR</b>	–	Microbially Enhanced Oil Recovery
<b>OC</b>	–	Organic Content
<b>PI</b>	–	Plasticity Index
<b>PL</b>	–	Plastic Limit
<b>PVC</b>	–	Polyvinyl Chloride
<b>UCS</b>	–	Unconfined Compressive Strength
<b>UCT</b>	–	Unconfined Compressive Test
<b>XRF</b>	–	X-ray Fluorescence
<b>XRD</b>	–	X-ray Powder Diffraction

- USCS** – Unified Soil Classification System
- UV** – Ultraviolet

**LIST OF SYMBOLS**

$C_c$	–	Compression Index
$C_r$	–	Recompression Index
$k_h$	–	Hydraulic Conductivity
$S_c$	–	Total Consolidation Settlement
$\rho_{d \max}$	–	Maximum Dried Density
$w_{opt}$	–	Optimum Moisture Content
$P_s$	–	Pre-consolidation Stress
$G_s$	–	Specific Gravity



**LIST OF APPENDICES**

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
A	Example Datasheet for Tropical Residual Soil	252
B	Example of MICP Data Sheet	262

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

The rapid and unprecedented population growth rate of the modern world's population are fuelling the demand for faster infrastructure development to meet the ever-growing societal needs. However, its expansion is often limited by geographical boundaries, undesired soil condition, and also the unavailability of competent soil upon which facilities can be constructed. Fortunately, there exists different type of soil stabilization or soil improvement methods that are able to treat and improve the quality and the engineering properties of soil to enable infrastructure construction.

In Malaysia, the major problem specific to tropical residual soil is the high annual rainfall which infiltrates into slopes and causes erosion, landslide and slope failure at hillside area and highway (Huat *et al.*, 2012). The strength and compressibility of tropical residual soil arise from the effect of cementation of secondary deposition, but this is often disrupted by the brittleness of the deposit (Kamarudin, 2004). To overcome this, a more effective and environmental friendly soil improvement such as bio mediated soil stabilization has to be examined to understand its feasibility.

The current massive soil stabilization methods often come with some environmental issues. For example, the production of cement used pervasively for construction and to improve ground condition is believed to be one of the major contributors to carbon release and global warming through the burning of fossil fuels (DeJong *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, most of the grouting injection fluid used for chemical soil stabilization is toxic and hazardous to the environment and public (Karol, 2003). Therefore, a more sustainable and environmental friendly method is needed to replace and improve the conventional soil improvement techniques. In this regard, the bio mediated soil stabilization method is a promising soil improvement approach since it

utilizes biological processes to alter the engineering properties of soil such as strength, stiffness, and permeability.

Bio mediated soil stabilization, also known as Microbial Induced Calcite Precipitation (MICP), is a new and innovative application in the geotechnical engineering field that has attracted the attention and great interest of researchers worldwide. Similar rigour can be seen in research works on microbial induced carbonate precipitation with varying type of soil, injection depth and bacteria as well as methods to improve and practically implemented at site being studied. In fact, the usage of microbial induced precipitation is not new in many industries. It has been applied to treat contaminated soils (Khachatoorian *et al.*, 2003); stabilize metal (Etemadi *et al.*, 2003); recover reservoir oil (Nelson and Launt, 1991); improve the strength of concrete and cement mortar (Ghosh *et al.*, 2005); retrofit and fix cracks in concrete (Van Tittelboom *et al.*, 2010); and others as described in Chapter 2.

DeJong *et al.* (2010) were among the researchers who had successfully started the application of microbial induced precipitation in geotechnical engineering to alter the permeability and shear strength of a sandy soil. In relation to MICP of tropical residual soil, Soon *et al.* (2014) conducted a series of MICP treatments on a tropical residual soil (sandy silt) using *Bacillus megaterium*. They discovered that the unconfined compressive strength (UCS) improved by 69% and the permeability reduced by 90% compared to the untreated soil.

Although numerous studies have been published, literature on biomediated soil stabilization mostly remains at the research stage due to inconsistencies in results reported. The limitations of this approach are most commonly associated with the soil type, the bacteria compatibility, and the complexity of the reactions. To this date, these limitations are still unanswered and remain one of the biggest challenges to researchers (Ivanov and Chu, 2008).

## 1.2 Problem Description

Most studies on MICP technique are done on sandy soil rather than fine grained soil. Although a few studies have been published on fine-grained soils and tropical residual soil (Soon *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2013), the results are inconsistent and remained at the laboratory stage due to uncertainties and complexity of tropical residual soil, soil geochemistry, bacteria, and other environmental factors.

On the other hand, *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* have been widely used as a urea-hydrolysing bacterium in numerous MICP studies, but its application and feasibility in MICP treatment of typical fine-grained soils has never been examined.

The sizes of soil particle and pore throat are the main attributes in determining the feasibility of the MICP treatment. The migration of the chemical reagents and bacteria into the soil might be hindered by the fine grained soil and subsequently affect the calcite precipitation distribution along the sample length. For this reason, the application of MICP technique for fine grained soil remains largely an unexplored territory.

Not only that, the small clay pore size and its low permeation rate for nutrient and oxygen tend to limit cell growth on the particles' surface. This makes the usage of injection method inevitable despite the inherent problem of uneven calcite distribution. In order to reach a uniform calcite distribution, the MICP parameters such as chemical reagents, treatment duration, and reagents flow pressure have to be optimised, controlled and counterbalanced

The implication from the problems stated above on the bacteria and other environmental factors shows that there is no one recipe or typical formulation applicable to all soil types for MICP treatment. Different soil type requires different combination of MICP parameters due to the variations in mineralogy, pH, and geochemistry of the soil.

### 1.3 Objectives

The aim of this research is to improve the engineering properties of tropical residual soil through the utilization of the bacteria and chemical reagents. The main objectives in this research are listed as below.

- (a) To determine the feasibility and relationship of MICP treatment by using two different bacteria strains, *Sporosarcina pasteurii* (ATCC® 11859™), and *Bacillus subtilis* (ATCC® 55422™) to improve shear strength and examine change in permeability of treated tropical residual soils.
- (b) To optimize MICP treatment and examine subsequent changes in strength, calcite distribution and microstructure of the treated tropical residual soil with reference to different MICP parameters, i.e., treatment duration, reagent concentration, and reagent flow pressure.
- (c) To establish a design chart for MICP treatment of tropical residual soil and to examine the effects of curing period on MICP treated soil.

### 1.4 Scope of Study

This bio-mediated soil stabilization research focused on small scale laboratory physical modelling. Tropical reddish residual clayey soil retrieved from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) at Skudai, Johor and passing 2 mm sieve was used. The length and diameter of MICP treated cylindrical sample were 100 and 50 mm, respectively.

The MICP treatment system was designed based on continuous injection method in which the chemical reagents were injected uninterrupted throughout the treatment duration. This treatment was conducted in an air-conditioned room with temperature controlled at 25.5°C. *Sporosarcina pasteurii* (ATCC® 11859™) and *Bacillus subtilis* (ATCC® 55422™) were the bacteria used. It was hypothesized that both *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* are feasible for MICP treatment of tropical residual soil. The formation of calcite tends to increase the shear strength of the soil after treatment. However, it decreases the permeability of the treated soil. Geotechnical engineering properties of the bio-mediated treated soil such as permeability and shear strength were examined extensively with every recorded change further studied and compared with those of the untreated soil samples.

In order to understand the mechanism and relationship of each of the MICP components, six different treatment conditions were set up, which were:

1. Treatment with chemical reagents only
2. Treatment with nutrient broth only
3. Treatment with inclusion of *Sporosarcina pasteurii* only
4. Treatment with inclusion of *Bacillus subtilis* only
5. MICP treatment using *Sporosarcina pasteurii*
6. MICP treatment using *Bacillus subtilis*

The three most important parameters in this MICP treatment were reagents concentration (0.15, 0.25, 0.35 and 0.45 M), reagent flow concentration (0.1, 0.2, 0.3, and 0.4 bars), and treatment duration (24, 48, 72 and 96 hours). Each parameter was altered to reach optimization and examine their effects on the unconfined compressive strength (UCS), microstructure, and calcite distribution of the treated soil sample. Additionally, the curing period was set at seven, 14, 20, and 28 days to examine the long term performance of *Sporosarcina pasteurii* on the MICP treated soil.

This study has also established the MICP design chart of tropical residual soil for strength improvement using *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* with reagent concentration set at 0.15, 0.25, 0.35, and 0.45 M and treatment duration fixed at 24, 36, and 48 hours only.

## 1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters: Introduction (Chapter 1); Literature Review (Chapter 2); Methodology (Chapter 3); Variation of MICP treatment conditions (Chapter 4); Effect of chemical reagents flow pressure, concentration, and treatment duration for MICP of *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* (Chapter 5); The MICP treatment design charts and effect of curing on MICP treatment (Chapter 6); and Conclusion and Recommendation (Chapter 7). Concluding remarks are provided at the end of each chapter to highlight and summarise the findings and outcomes of each chapter.

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter on bio-mediated soil stabilization. It also highlights the research background and problems; objectives; scope; and limitation of the present research in relation to bio-mediated soil improvement.

Review of literatures is presented in Chapter 2 with the main focus put on the origin of tropical residual soils and bio-mediated soil stabilization. Reviews on the bacteria, MICP processes, MICP treatment on different type of soil, engineering application, and factors are also included and discussed.

Research methodology, experiment procedures, material preparation, bacteria cultivation and maintenance process and equipment specification exercised in this study are explained and presented in Chapter 3. Physical and geotechnical properties test were performed in accordance to procedures outlined by the British Standard. However, for those testing methods which are not included in any specific standard, general accepted methods established by researchers have been used in the determination of parameters such as calcite determination, CEC, X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) and X-ray Diffraction (XRD) analyses.

The results and outcome of this study are divided and discussed separately in 3 different chapters, i.e., Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6. Chapter 4 presents the physical and geotechnical properties of tropical residual soil. It also presents an in depth discussion on each MICP component, i.e., bacteria, chemical reagents, nutrient broth, and tropical residual soil. Results for both samples treated by two different bacteria, *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* were also studied and discussed. The main subjects discussed in this chapter are UCS and permeability of the MICP treated soil.

Chapter 5 mainly focused on the optimization of MICP treatment using *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis*. Additionally, the effect of MICP parameters such as chemical reagents flow pressure, concentration, and treatment duration for both MICP of *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* were examined. The discussion mainly focused on the calcite distribution pattern, effect of calcite precipitation on UCS, effectiveness of calcite precipitation, and some comparisons with other MICP studies.

Chapter 6 compiles the results and outcome in this study for the MICP design chart establishment. It should be noted that the MICP treatment design charts, which are based on *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis*, only serve as a guideline, information and reference for MICP treatment of tropical residual soil. Nevertheless,

the charts are useful for determining the optimum treatment duration for a given reagent concentration and vice versa. In addition, the effect of curing on the MICP treated soil is also examined and discussed in Chapter 6.

Lastly, Chapter 7 concludes the findings and outcomes of this study. Recommendations for future research are also given in this last chapter.

## 1.6 Significance of Study

This particular research is crucial for the evolution of geotechnical ground improvement technique to provide a more environmental friendly alternative to conventional methods. The proposed MICP technique has the potential to resolve geotechnical problems including healing of crack surface of lime stabilized soil; sealing of tension crack of a slope; and coating for road embankment to prevent water infiltration and for slope protection (where the early strengthening of soil is not a concern). Besides, the exceptional advantage of using MICP treatment with bacteria is also able to heal degraded calcite bonding after deformation; a trait not common in conventional methods.

The research provides a more profound understanding and knowledge for bio-mediated soil stabilization on tropical residual soil. This research has evaluated the feasibility of *Sporosarcina pasteurii* and *Bacillus subtilis* in MICP treatment of tropical residual fine-grained soil, which has not been reported and attempted before the time of this writing. The application of these two bacteria in MICP treatment had been proven favourable and effective in UCS and permeability improvement. The research also provides more understanding on the some important MICP parameters that affect calcite distribution.

Another contribution is in a more in-depth understanding on the effects of calcite distribution on the strength development of MICP treated soils. This research has also evaluated the effect of curing period on UCS. The outcome of this research have been assembled to establish a design charts for the bio-mediated soil stabilization of tropical residual soil.



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