

THE INFLUENCE OF CATION EXCHANGE CAPACITY TOWARDS  
ELECTRICAL RESISTIVITY VALUE FOR FINE GRAINED SOIL

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This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my beloved parents who have been my source of inspiration and gave me strength when I thought of giving up, who continuously provided their moral, emotional, and financial support.

And lastly, I dedicated this thesis to Allah S.W.T, thank you for the guidance, strength, power of mind, protection, and giving me a healthy life.



PTTA UTHM  
PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

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## ABSTRACT

An electrical resistivity method (ERM) is a non-destructive test in subsurface exploration that would be able to save the cost of a project. However, an improvement is needed as there are some difficulties in the interpretation of earth material using resistivity charts due to overlapping values and not many researches were conducted to revise the earth minerals resistivity value based on the variable in Archie's Law. The objectives were to characterize physical properties and mineral compounds, identify the relationship of ERV with water content and CEC, and identify the effect of fine-grained artificial minerals' mixed proportion towards ERV and CEC value. The fine-grain artificial mineral used were kaolinite, montmorillonite, illite, quartz, mica, and feldspar, passing 0.063 mm sieve, tested its basic soil index properties via British Standard 1377 and tested mineral compound with X-Ray Diffraction (XRD). The samples were prepared in four (4) types of mixtures: individual minerals, major mineral, minor mineral, and major and minor mineral. The resistivity value of montmorillonite at degree of water saturation 10% and 100% were 347  $\Omega\text{m}$  and 5  $\Omega\text{m}$  respectively. The mineral's effects towards the ERV were clearly observed such as between kaolinite and montmorillonite at 10% water saturation were 5990  $\Omega\text{m}$  and 347  $\Omega\text{m}$  respectively. The study showed that minerals contained their own CEC. Hence, the CEC influenced the ERV of the fine-grain artificial mineral mixture. Hence the CEC value of kaolinite and montmorillonite were at 1 meq/100g and 70 meq/100g respectively. The CEC of a mineral mixture increased when a high percentage of minerals with high CEC were added and vice versa, for example the mixture of montmorillonite and illite were 29.82 meq/100g and the mixture of kaoline and quartz were 4.34 meq/100g. The correlation that was made showed that minerals contained their own CEC. Hence, the CEC influenced the ERV of the fine-grain artificial mineral mixture.

## ABSTRAK

Kaedah kerintangan elektrik (ERM) ialah ujian tidak memusnahkan dalam penerokaan permukaan bawah tanah yang boleh menjimatkan kos projek. Walau bagaimanapun, penambahbaikan perlu dilakukan memandangkan terdapat sedikit kesukaran dalam tafsiran bahan bumi menggunakan carta kerintangan disebabkan nilai yang bertindih dan tidak banyak kajian yang dijalankan untuk menyemak semula nilai kerintangan mineral bumi berdasarkan Archies' Law Objektifnya adalah untuk mencirikan sifat fizikal dan sebatian mineral, mengenal pasti hubungan ERV dengan kandungan air dan CEC, dan mengenal pasti kesan perkadaran campuran mineral buatan berbutir halus terhadap nilai ERV dan CEC. Mineral buatan bijirin halus yang digunakan ialah kaolinit, montmorilonit, illite, kuarza, mika, dan feldspar, melepasi ayak 0.063 mm, menguji sifat indeks tanah asasnya melalui British Standard 1377 dan diuji sebatian mineral dengan X-Ray Diffraction (XRD). Sampel telah disediakan dalam empat (4) jenis campuran: mineral individu, mineral utama, mineral kecil, dan mineral utama dan kecil. Nilai kerintangan montmorilonit pada tahap ketepuan air 10% dan 100% masing-masing ialah 347  $\Omega\text{m}$  dan 5  $\Omega\text{m}$ . Kesan mineral terhadap ERV diperhatikan dengan jelas seperti antara kaolinit dan montmorilonit pada ketepuan air 10% masing-masing ialah 5990  $\Omega\text{m}$  dan 347  $\Omega\text{m}$ . Kajian menunjukkan bahawa mineral mengandungi CEC mereka sendiri. Oleh itu, CEC mempengaruhi ERV bagi campuran mineral tiruan bijirin halus. Oleh itu nilai CEC kaolinit dan montmorilonit masing-masing pada 1 meq/100g dan 70 meq/100g. CEC campuran mineral meningkat apabila peratusan mineral yang tinggi dengan CEC tinggi ditambah dan begitu juga sebaliknya, contohnya campuran montmorilonit dan illite ialah 29.82 meq/100g dan campuran kaolin dan kuarza ialah 4.34 meq/100g. Korelasi yang dibuat menunjukkan bahawa mineral mengandungi CEC mereka sendiri. Oleh itu, CEC mempengaruhi ERV bagi campuran mineral tiruan bijirin halus..

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLE</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Project background	2
1.2 Problem statement	3
1.3 Aim and Objectives	4
1.4 Scope of Project	4
1.5 Significance of Study	5
1.6 Summary	5
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE RIVIEW</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 Geophysics	9
2.3 Electrical Geophysical Technique	10
2.3.1 Electric Resistivity Method (ERM)	11
2.3.2 Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT)	13
2.4 Resistivity Theory	14
2.4.1 Ohm's Law	15
2.4.2 Archie's Law	16
2.4.3 Waxman and Smits Model	17
2.5 Electrical Properties of Soil	18
2.5.1 Electrical Resistivity of Soil Minerals	19
2.5.2 Electrical Effect on Water Saturation	20
2.5.3 Electrical Effect on Soil Mixture	21
2.5.4 Electrical Effect on Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	21
2.6 Formation of Soil	23

2.6.1	Weathering Process	24
2.6.2	Soil Profile	26
2.6.3	Silt	27
2.6.4	Clay	28
2.7	Mineralogy	28
2.7.1	Mineralogy in Soil	29
2.7.2	Soil Mineralogy Research	30
2.8	Mineral in Soil	31
2.8.1	Major mineral	32
2.8.2	Minor mineral	34
2.9	Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	36
2.10	Summary	38
<b>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>39</b>
3.1	Introduction	39
3.2	Research Program	41
3.3	Material Preparation	42
3.4	Determination of Mineral Compound With XRD	47
3.5	Physical Properties Testing	49
3.5.1	Hydrometer	50
3.5.2	Liquid Limit (LL)	52
3.5.3	Plastic Limit (PL)	53
3.5.4	Plastic Index (Pi)	54
3.5.5	Water content	54
3.5.6	Specific Gravity	55
3.5.7	Void Ratio	56
3.5.8	Porosity	57
3.6	Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	57
3.6.1	Determination of pH Value	57
3.6.2	Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	58
3.7	Electrical Resistivity Value (ERV)	60
3.7.1	Electrical Resistivity Equipment	60
3.7.2	Electrical Resistivity Method (ERM)	61
3.8	Summary	63
<b>CHAPTER 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION</b>		<b>64</b>
4.1	Introduction	64
4.2	Particle Size Distribution	64
4.3	X-Ray Diffraction	66

4.4	Atterberg Limit	69
4.4.1	Liquid Limit	69
4.4.2	Plastic Limit (PL)	70
4.4.3	Plastic Index	70
4.5	Specific Gravity	73
4.6	Porosity	75
4.7	Resistivity	79
4.7.1	Individual Mineral	79
4.7.2	Major Mineral	81
4.7.3	Minor Mineral	86
4.7.4	Major and Minor Mineral	90
4.8	Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	93
4.9	Corellation of Mineral Resistivity and CEC	96
4.9.1	Individual Mineral	96
4.9.2	Major Mineral	98
4.9.3	Minor Mineral	101
4.9.4	Major and Minor Mineral	104
4.10	Summary	106
<b>CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION</b>		<b>109</b>
5.1	Conclusion	109
5.2	Recommendation	111
<b>REFERENCE</b>		<b>112</b>
<b>ATTACHMENT</b>		<b>117</b>





## LIST OF TABLE

2.1	Classification of Geophysical Technique (Herckenrath & Government, 2016)	10
2.2	The value for a and m	17
2.3	Resistivity value of different type of soil and groundwater	19
2.4	Past studies experimental result for mineralogy in residual soil	30
2.5	Mineral Cation Exchange Capacity (Mitchell, 1993 and Mohd Raihan & Ramli, 1992)	37
3.1	Mineral mixture	43
3.2	Physical properties testing	49
4.1	PSD quantification result for artificial mineral	65
4.2	Atterberg Limit for Individual Mineral	71
4.3	Atterberg Limit for Major Mineral Mixture	71
4.4	Atterberg Limit for Minor Mineral Mixture	71
4.5	Atterberg Limit for Mixture Major and Minor Mineral Mixture	72
4.6	Individual Mineral Specific Gravity	73
4.7	Major Mineral Mixture Specific Gravity	74
4.8	Minor Mineral Mixture Specific Gravity	74
4.9	Major and Minor Mineral Mixture Specific Gravity	75
4.10	CEC of Individual Mineral	94
4.11	CEC of Major Mineral Mixture	94
4.12	CEC of Minor Mineral Mixture	94
4.13	CEC of Major and Minor Mineral Mixture	95
4.14	ERV and CEC of individual mineral	97
4.15	ERV and CEC of major mineral	99
4.16	ERV and CEC of minor mineral	102
4.17	ERV and CEC of major and minor mineral mixture	105

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>2.1</b>	Basic Concept of Electrical Resistivity Subsurface Measurement (adopted from Sharma, 1997)	12
<b>2.2</b>	Concept of Electrical Resistivity Measurement Done in Lab	12
<b>2.3</b>	An ERT profile along an exposed outcrop, with varying lithology of chert and claystone. The water content and porosity differences lead to the differences seen in the ERT profile modified from (Hisham et al 2017)	14
<b>2.4</b>	Schematic diagram of the electrical array in the electrical resistivity method (Zhan et al. 2019)	14
<b>2.5</b>	Ohm's Law for soil sample	15
<b>2.6</b>	Resistivity vs water saturation for different value of CEC created by Teorica and Vol (2005)	23
<b>2.7</b>	The illustration of physical weathering	24
<b>2.8</b>	The illustration of chemical weathering	25
<b>2.9</b>	The typical development soil horizons	27
<b>2.10</b>	Process of mineral silica through weathering (Beavis, 1992)	32
<b>2.11</b>	The concept of Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC)	37
<b>3.1</b>	Flow Chart of Study	40
<b>3.2</b>	Shows the objective of combined minerals	41
<b>3.3</b>	Ternary plot of ratio mixture of major minerals	45
<b>3.4</b>	Ternary plot of ratio mixture of minor mineral	45
<b>3.5</b>	Ternary plot of ratio mixture of major and minor mineral	46
<b>3.6</b>	Quartz visible on sand sample (view using a magnifying glass)	47
<b>3.7</b>	Quartz grind into silt and clay particle size	47
<b>3.8</b>	XRD plastic sample holder	48
<b>3.9</b>	XRD machine	49
<b>3.10</b>	Essential measurement for calibration of hydrometer	51

<b>3.11</b>	Hydrometer Bulb	52
<b>3.12</b>	Hydrometer testing	52
<b>3.13</b>	Cone penetrometer	53
<b>3.14</b>	Sample rolling for plastic limit (PL)	54
<b>3.15</b>	Specific gravity equipment - (a) pycnometer bottle (b) vacuum container to release air	56
<b>3.16</b>	Digital pH meter	58
<b>3.17</b>	Sample preparation in an ammonium acetate solution	59
<b>3.18</b>	Extracted sample of cation for AAS testing	59
<b>3.19</b>	Atomic Absorption Spectrometer (AAS)	60
<b>3.20</b>	Soil box used to measure smaller sized particles and minerals	60
<b>3.21</b>	Abem Terameter LS 2	61
<b>3.22</b>	The position of C1C2P1P2 in a soil box	62
<b>3.23</b>	Layer of sample in the soil box - (a) second layer (b) third layer	63
<b>3.24</b>	Compaction of the sample using a small rod for 20 taps before smoothing out the surface of the samples - (a) compaction at second layer (b) compaction at third layer	63
<b>4.1</b>	Mineral PSD curve	66
<b>4.2</b>	XRD Kaolinite	67
<b>4.3</b>	XRD Illite	67
<b>4.4</b>	XRD Montmorillonite	67
<b>4.5</b>	XRD Mica	68
<b>4.6</b>	XRD Fledspar	68
<b>4.7</b>	XRD Quartz	68
<b>4.8</b>	Individual Mineral Porosity	76
<b>4.9</b>	Major Mineral Mixture Porosity	76
<b>4.10</b>	Minor Mineral Mixture Porosity	77
<b>4.11</b>	Major and Minor Mineral Mixture Porosity	78
<b>4.12</b>	WC with ERV for individual mineral	80
<b>4.13</b>	Saturation with ERV for individual mineral	81
<b>4.14</b>	WC with ERV for major mineral kaolinite (K) and quartz (Q)	83
<b>4.15</b>	Saturation with ERV for major mineral (K) and quartz (Q)	83

4.16	WC with ERV for major mineral kaolinite (K), Quartz(Q) and illite (I)	84
4.17	Saturation with ERV for major mineral kaolinite (K), quartz (Q) and illite (I)	84
4.18	WC with ERV for major mineral	85
4.19	Saturation with ERV for major mineral	85
4.20	WC with ERV for minor mineral montmorilloite (Mo) and Mica (M)	87
4.21	Saturation with ERV for minor mineral montmorilloite (Mo) and Mica (M)	88
4.22	WC with ERV for minor mineral montmorilloite (Mo), Mica (M) and feldspar (F)	88
4.23	Saturation with ERV for minor mineral montmorilloite (Mo), Mica (M) and feldspar (F)	89
4.24	WC with ERV for minor mineral	89
4.25	Saturation with ERV for minor mineral	90
4.26	WC with ERV for major and minor mineral mixture	92
4.27	Saturation with ERV for major and minor mineral mixture	92
4.28	ERV with CEC correlation of individual mineral	98
4.29	ERV with CEC correlation of major mineral kaolinite (K) and quartz (Q)	100
4.30	ERV with CEC correlation of major mineral kaolinite (K), quartz (Q) and illite (I)	100
4.31	ERV with CEC correlation of major mineral kaolinite (K), quartz (Q) and illite (I)	101
4.32	ERV with CEC correlation of minor mineral montmorillonite (Mo) and mica (M)	103
4.33	ERV with CEC correlation of minor mineral montmorillonite (Mo), mica (M) and feldspar (F)	103
4.34	ERV with CEC correlation of minor mineral montmorillonite (Mo), mica (M) and feldspar (F)	104
4.35	ERV with CEC correlation of major and minor mineral mixture	106

## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATION

$\Omega$	-	ohm
$\Omega\text{m}$	-	ohm.m
$\phi$	-	Porosity
$\rho_0$	-	Sample resistivity
$\rho_w$	-	water resistivity
$\beta$	-	counter-ion conductance which is a CEC dependent parameter (temperature)
$m$	-	cementation exponent
$n$	-	saturation exponent
$v$	-	volume
$Q_v$	-	counter -ion conductance which is a CEC dependent parameter
$S_w$	-	water saturation
PSD	-	Particle size distribution
LL	-	Liquid Limit
PL	-	Plastic Limit
PI	-	Plastic Index
WC	-	Water Content
CEC	-	Cation exchange capacity
XRD	-	X-Ray Diffraction
ERT	-	Electrical Resistivity Tomography
ERM	-	Electrical Resistivity Method
ERV	-	Electrical Resistivity Value
$^{\circ}\text{C}$	-	Degree Celcius

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project background

Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) is a method used for subsurface profiling in soil. The subsurface profile characterization determines the layer, thickness, soil lithology, presence of groundwater, fracture zones, variations in soil saturation, areas of increased salinity, or groundwater contamination. The obtained geotechnical data is an important parameter used in design and construction, monitoring, and maintenance during pre and post-construction or forensic investigation. Previously, conventional geotechnical site investigation methods were used, such as boring, drilling, probing, and in situ testing. However, the effectiveness of the conventional method, on the other hand, was determined by several parameters, including site topography and accessibility, the total area of sites covered, time consumption, and cost.

ERT is a non-destructive method where the current is being injected into the ground. The value of the sub-surface resistivity is determined by adopting the geophysical electrical technique survey such as electrical resistivity method (ERM). The principle of electrical resistivity technique is about how the current is opposed to flow between electrodes. However, the interpretation tasks in deciding the layer of soil is unable to directly refer to the earth material-resistivity chart due to the overlapping values. Thus, it is essential to understand the influence of the mineralogy towards the resistivity values.

Due to the saturated condition, it is challenging to differentiate between silt and clay body in the Quaternary geological formation. The saturated ground resulting

the resistivity value is lowered for all materials including silt and clay. Therefore, the resistivity parameter could be utilized to recognize the change of soil parameters such as the soil moisture, porosity, and mineralogy. Multiple site investigation studies have been conducted in relation to the resistivity value of the subsurface. However, for this particular study, the testing was performed in a lab scale environment where the important factor affecting the resistivity values was mineralogy. There were multiple factors which could influence the analysis results of ERM, especially the particle size distribution, porosity, mineralogy, density, Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC), and water content. These parameters were controlled and tested to define the major factors which might affect the resistivity value. It was hoped that this study could improve the understanding of resistivity value and improve the earth material-resistivity chart.

## 1.2 Problem statement

Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) is a reliable method for subsurface exploration in determining the properties and profile of ground in non-destructive way. A non-destructive test in subsurface exploration would able to safe project cost and to avoid excavating or drilling hole which would disturb the condition of the subsurface. Usually, soil properties are determined based on the geotechnical method in a laboratory testing. However, an improvement is needed in assisting an engineer in terms of parameter in design. Other use of ERT is to identify the aquifer layer and types of earth materials. The interpretation of earth material was unable to directly refer to the resistivity chart due to the overlapping values. Resistivity values are overlapping due to several factor as stated in Archies' Law. Thus, it is important to understand the influence of the parameters in Archies' Law especially for fine grained soil such as the Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) and porosity.

Not many researches were conducted to revise the earth minerals resistivity value based on the variable of water resistivity, porosity, degree of saturation, mineralogy and cation exchange capacity. By referencing the Archie's Law and the usage of fine-grained soil, this research was formulated to understand the issue of the electrical resistivity overlapping value. However, the study focused on the type of minerals and cation exchange capacity (CEC) as a variable parameter in order to

understand the fine-grained earth material. This study is conducted in laboratory in a control environment and parameters, thus able to help in understanding the variable that influencing the electrical resistivity values and ease the interpretation concerning the fine-grained earth materials.

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to evaluate the effects of cation exchange capacity (CEC) towards the electrical resistivity values (ERV). To achieve the aim of this study, the following objectives were established:

- I. To characterize physical properties and mineral compounds of artificial fine-grain.
- II. To identify the relationship of fine-grain artificial minerals' ERV with water content and CEC.
- III. To establish correlation of the fine-grain artificial minerals' mixed proportion towards ERV and CEC value.

### 1.4 Scope of Project

In order to achieve the objectives, set, a few scopes of research were devised. Firstly, the research was focused only on fine-grained artificial soil. These fine-grained artificial soils were bought from a supplier which comprised kaolinite, illite, montmorillonite, quartz, mica, and feldspar. The soil test was focused on determining the basic physical properties of soil (grain size, water content, density, void ratio, and porosity) using hydrometer test, Atterberg limit test, specific gravity test, and density test according to BS 1377 (1990).

Secondly, in determining the microstructures and mineral compound of the samples, the X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) was used. Furthermore, the experiment on the effect of resistivity of minerals and their mixtures used a four-terminal resistance meter (soil box) and ABEM LS2 terrameter to obtain the value for resistivity. Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) was determined by using ammonium acetate solution and



Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer (AAS). The minerals had a mixed proportion in various ratios to simulate the probability of minerals mixture in a soil towards the resistivity value. Water content was mixed with the minerals, as mentioned earlier until it reached the liquid limit. Electrical Resistivity data analysis was performed using Microsoft EXCEL. The result may vary and were combined to understand the effect of water content and Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) further towards the resistivity of minerals.

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

The study was essential to improve the understanding of the effect of minerals in silt and clay size distribution for water content and CEC towards electrical resistivity value. The charts plotted based on this research could assist in understanding the effect on fined-grained artificial mineral in a soil sub-surface by using electrical methods.

The contribution were as follows;

- This research filled the knowledge gap and added value to the resistivity of mineralogy.
- The availability of the improved electrical resistivity value data contributed a meaningful parameter input for engineering and environment purposes.
- Enhanced the quality of national study in the subsurface area, especially in the field of electrical resistivity.

### **1.6 Summary**

Chapter 1 describes the background study of the related research involving ERT, which has been a common use for subsurface profiling. ERT is a non-destructive method where current is injected into the ground. The value of the sub-surface resistivity is determined by adopting the geophysical electrical technique survey such as resistivity method. The problem that contributed to this study was the difficulty in determining the precise identification or classification of soil beneath the surface. Any

mistakes made during subsurface exploration would cost money, time, and effort. Therefore, in order to achieve the aim of this study, the geotechnical properties of artificial silt and clay mineral using geotechnical test were characterized. Hence, the electrical resistivity value of the fine-grained artificial soil due to the existence of water content was established. The effect of fine-grained artificial soil of mixed proportion towards the electrical resistivity value was identified. This showed that the fine-grained artificial, soil water content and cation exchange capacity with the electrical resistivity value was correlated. The scope that was devised for this study involved the use of fine-grain artificial soil. According to BS 1377 (1990), basic physical properties of soil were used. The types of equipment used such as XRD, ABEM LS2 terrameter and AAS were to determine the mineral compound, resistivity value, and CEC value of the mineral, respectively.

Chapter 2 discusses the pervious study literature related to the current study. Firstly, geophysics is a subsurface site characterization of the geology, geological structure, groundwater, and contamination beneath the Earth's surface. There are various types of geophysical methods but the main focus of this study is the electrical resistivity method. The electrical resistivity method has followed the fundamental physical law of Ohm's Law and determined the value of resistivity in Ohm meter ( $\Omega\text{m}$ ). Furthermore, to calculate the resistance of the soil, Archie's Law formula is use which relates, for a clay-free sediment, the electrical resistivity ( $\rho$ ) of a porous rock containing water and cement towards the fraction of the pore space that is filled with water. However, as the sample used in this study is in a form of silt and clay distribution, a revise version of Archie's Law is used which is Waxman and Smits model that includes cation exchange into the formula. Electrical resistivity values are fairly dependent on the constituent mineralogy of the clay material at the moist side. It is essential to understand the possible range of resistivity values and trends of variations of a specific clay mineral under different saturations and physio-chemical properties (such as cation exchange capacity). Lastly, previous study conducted on distribution of minerals in a soil sample was where the mineral mixture design was based. The minerals are characterized into two categories which is the major mineral (dominant mineral found in the soil) and minor mineral (non-dominant mineral found in soil). The study on soil based on geotechnical, geophysical and integrated method is still able to be enhanced due to the uncertenties nature of the soil. A detailed study on minerals in soil could well be established including the quatitative study with

degree of saturation and ion exchange using an integration of electrical resistivity value (ERV) with water content and cation exchange capacity (CEC).

Chapter 3 elaborate the methodology to achieve the research objectives based on the flowchart of the overall methodology used, type of minerals, experimental involved related to the mineral mixture, characterization of index properties, cation exchange capacity, and electrical resistivity test. A detailed explanation of the experiment procedure was discussed including the determination of mineral compound, physical properties testing, the electrical resistivity test, and cation exchange capacity test of the minerals and the mixtures. Then, the analyses involving electrical resistivity, cation exchange capacity, and geotechnical data (water content, saturation, and porosity) were explained based on the formulae. Finally, electrical resistivity value (ERV) for water content (WC) and cation exchange capacity (CEC) were analyzed and correlated between the mineral mixtures.

Chapter 4 began by the determination of the particle size distribution of the mineral clay where the particle size was sieved, passing 0.065 mm. The particle size of the mineral was in the silt and clay category. Figure 4.1 shows the mineral particle distribution of the sample. The mineral clay had to undergo XRD testing to confirm the mineral used was the dominant mineral element used in the samples which was exclaimed and to ensure that the mineral was not an amorphous sample. In Figure 4.2 to Figure 4.7, the peak of the graphs generated showed the dominant mineral element from Kaolinite, illite, montmorillonite, mica, feldspar, and quartz sample, respectively. Atterberg limits were known as water content limits involving plastic index (PI), plastic limit (PL), and liquid limit (LL). The PI was the water content range for the soils of a plastic nature, while PL was known as the minimum water content for soils that was kneaded to a diameter of 3 mm without undergoing dissolution. Furthermore, LL was the minimum water content for a soil that can flow with its own weight. Table 4.2 to Table 4.5 show the LL, PL, and PI results obtained for individual and mixed minerals. From the table shown, it was clear that montmorillonite had the highest LL followed by kaolin, mica, illite, quartz, and feldspar. Therefore, in a mineral mix proportion, the increase of the percentage of minerals with a high LL value would increase the LL value of the mixed mineral. Furthermore, the result of PL obtained from this study showed that quartz was non-plastic and the increase of montmorillonite in the clay mixture affected the increase in the PI value. Specific gravity values were obtained through the pycnometer test. The specific gravity value for individual

mineral, major mineral, minor mineral, and the mixture of major and minor minerals are shown in Table 4.6 to Table 4.9. The specific gravity value ranges from 1.97 to 2.66. The presence of montmorillonite in a clay mineral mixture decreased the specific gravity value of the sample. This showed that the specific gravity of a clay mineral was affected by the amount of minerals elements contained in the soil sample. Figure 4.8 to Figure 4.11 show the porosity graph of the sample from unsaturated condition to fully saturated condition for individual mineral, major mineral mixture, minor mineral mixture, and both major and minor mineral mixture, respectively. The porosity values obtained for all the minerals (either individual or mixture) were from 0.5 to 0.6. There was a correlation between the values and water content for the ERV. Therefore, with the increasing water content, the resistivity and chargeability value decreased and became plateau until it reached the LL. The type of mineral and the ratio of mineral mixture also contribute to the ERV, as highlighted in Figure 4.12 to Figure 4.27. The CEC was a part of the chemical properties of clay minerals. The exchangeable cation calcium ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ), magnesium ( $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ ), and potassium ( $\text{K}^{+}$ ) were extracted by electrostatic force using ammonium acetate solution and AAS. Using the formula 3.6, the value of CEC was determined with the unit (meq/100g). Table 4.10 to Table 4.13 show the individual and mix mineral sample results obtained. The result obtained from this CEC testing showed that a high percentage of mineral content with a high CEC value mixed in a mineral mixture such as montmorillonite and illite, would increase the CEC value of the mixture. Lastly, based on the data achieved from this study, a correlation was made by referring to the Archies' law in Eq 2.3. However, Archies' law was applicable only to clean or clay mineral-free sand or rocks. Hence, Waxman and Smits model was used as in Eq 2.4, where the equation was the extension of the Archies' equation, taking into account the different resistivity caused by clay minerals such as the CEC. Figure 4.28 to Figure 4.35 and Table 4.14 to Table 4.17 show the analytical results of the relationship between the resistivity value and the CEC value. With the increasing percentage amount of mineral with high CEC value, the lower the resistivity value of the mineral mixture was.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The relevant pieces of literature related to this study were discussed in this chapter. It began with an explanation of geophysics, followed by the explanation of electrical resistivity theory of soil, electrical resistivity method and the cation exchange capacity. Lastly, this chapter summarized all literature-related studies, thus, contributing to research gaps and novelty of the study.

#### 2.2 Geophysics

Geophysics is a subsurface site characterization of geology, geological structure, groundwater, and contamination beneath the Earth's surface. It also involves a non-invasive investigation of subsurface conditions in earth by measuring the analysis and interpreting physical fields at the subsurface.

Over the years, with the introduction of several methods and techniques, geophysics technology has been rapidly improved. Table 2.1 shows the classification of Geophysical Technique by Herckenrath and Government 2016. In geological and geotechnical investigation settings, a large area is usually investigated. Therefore, the geophysical method will provide valuable tools in helping the survey of earth without

expanding many resources. However, in this study, the electrical resistivity method (ERM) was used to determine the resistivity of the fine-grained artificial minerals.

**Table 2.1:** Classification of Geophysical Technique (Herckenrath & Government, 2016)

<b>Method</b>	<b>Measure parameter</b>	<b>Operative physical property</b>
Seismic	Travel time of reflected/refracted seismic waves	Density and elastic moduli which determine the propagation velocity and seismic wave
Gravity	Spatial variation in the strength of the gravitational field of the earth	Density
Magnetic	Spatial variation in the strength of the geomagnetic field	Magnetic susceptibility and remanence
Electrical Resistivity	Earth resistance	Electrical conductivity
Induced polarization	Polarization voltage of frequency-dependent ground resistance	Electrical capacitance
Self-potential	Electrical potential	Electrical conductivity
Electromagnetic	Response to electromagnetic radiation	Electrical conductivity and inductance
Radar	Travel time of reflected radar pulse	Dielectric constant

### 2.3 Electrical Geophysical Technique

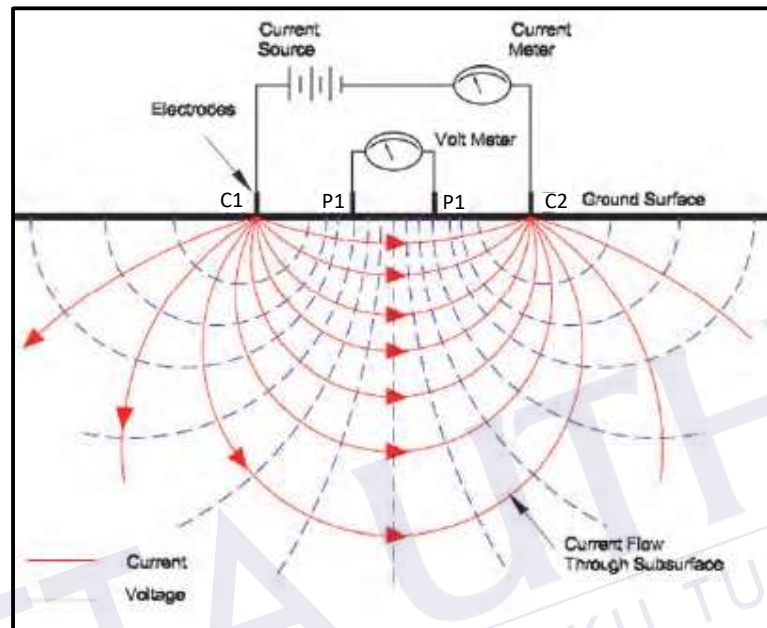
Electrical methods are probably the most widely used geophysical technique (Binley, 2015). This is because the subsurface electrical properties are often well correlated to the physical and chemical properties of fluid within the pore space such as saturation and salinity and the theoretical concepts are straightforward. Furthermore, Field measurement techniques are highly scalable, allowing an investigation towards the depths of tens to hundreds of meters, where the data analysis techniques have matured.

### 2.3.1 Electric Resistivity Method (ERM)

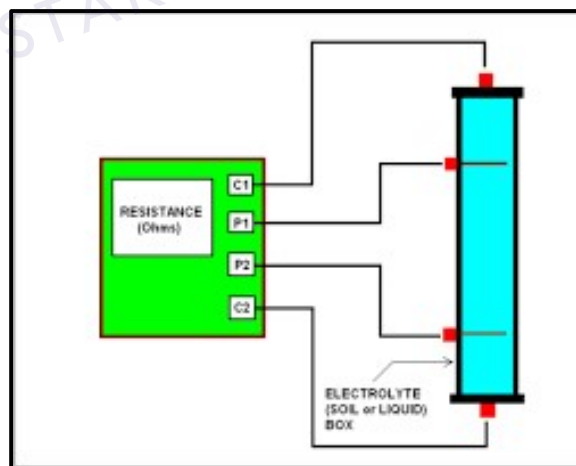
The electrical resistivity method (ERM) involves the measurement of the apparent resistivity of soils and rock as a function to determine the depth or position. A conventional method such as drilling was used to obtain groundwater position and determine soil sampling. However, this method is weak as it is expensive, time-consuming, and has limited data coverage (Baharuddin *et al.*, 2015). During resistivity surveys, a current is injected into the earth through a pair of electrodes. It utilizes direct current or low-frequency alternating currents to investigate the subsurface's electrical properties (resistivity). ERM follows the fundamental physical law of Ohm's Law and determines the value of resistivity in Ohm meter ( $\Omega\text{m}$ ) (Madun, *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, it provides a large-scale characterization of the physical properties under undisturbed conditions (Baharuddin *et al.*, 2015). However, the lack of cooperation with an expert may cause unreliable results due to the weak interpretation and justification (Hazreek *et al.*, 2015).

As per the understanding, electrical resistivity experiments have been performed to establish a relationship between the electrical resistivity and soil characteristics. In short, the voltage will act as a pressure to push the electricity towards any materials. The current is the number of electrons flowing through a circuit whilst the resistance is a measure of how the material reduces the electric current flow through it. There are usually two types of experiments where this experiment will be conducted (either in the lab or on site). Figure 2.1 shows the concept of ERM done on-site and Figure 2.2 shows the concept of ERM done in the Lab. In the lab, an analog

resistivity meter is used where a specific type or combination of soil and mineral can be used to investigate the probability of electrical resistivity on the combination of soil ratio. Water is added to the soil sample to encourage low electrical voltage to flow in between the soil sample to get an abundant result.



**Figure 2.1:** Basic Concept of Electrical Resistivity Subsurface Measurement  
(adopted from Sharma, 1992)



**Figure 2.2:** Concept of Electrical Resistivity Measurement Done in Lab



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