

EVALUATION OF THE GEOTECHNICAL PROPERTIES OF RESIDUAL SOILS IN TWO DIFFERENT BASEMENT COMPLEX AREAS OF NIGERIA

ABSTRACT.

Rocks from the Basement Complex areas of Nigeria weather to produce residual soils of varying geomechanical properties. Two such soils from the zone of accumulation were collected from Ore (Ors) and Abuja (Abs). The soils were understudied for their suitability for use as construction materials by subjecting to geotechnical analyses in order to evaluate their index and engineering properties. Ors with clays, silts, sands and gravel of (17, 22, 60 & 01) % respectively, and specific gravity of 2.57g/cm^3 is classified as a silty sand with clays whereas Abs is clayey sands with gravels. Their index properties are in the order : LL, (43.45 & 51.7)% ; PI, (12.14 & 31.57)%; linear shrinkage, (8.57 & 12.1)%; free swell, (11.1 & 22.5)%; liquidity index, (-1.10 & -0.09); group index, (3.30 & 9.54); and plasticity plots, (ML & CH) for Ors and Abs respectively. Similarly, their engineering characteristics are as follows: maximum dry density, (1.52 & 1.49g/cm^3); optimum moisture content, (22.0 & 22.5)%; change in void ratio, (0.18 & 0.39); change in porosity, (0.05 & 0.10); cohesion (20.65 & 31.65KN/m^2 ; shear strength, (86.63 & 88.9KN/m^2); and CBR, (27.86 & 26.79)% respectively. Overall, this study shows that whilst Ors has superior analytes properties, both soils can be used as subgrades in flexible pavement design as well as for many other common construction purposes.

INTRODUCTION

In-situ weathering of bedrocks produce residual soils which may also contain organic material derived from plants and animals living in the area. The associated humus in soils are to be avoided as they impact weaknesses to engineering soils. All Engineering structures are erected on a substructure (foundation). The rigidity and safety of the super structure subsist in part, on the constituent and consistency of the substructure. Geotechnical methods have

31 been used in assessing the strength of materials for the support of infrastructures such as
 32 roads, buildings and dams (Akintorinwa and Adesoji, 2009; Akintorinwa and Abiola, 2011).
 33 The significance of geotechnical tests on soils cannot get excess mention given its immense
 34 relevance for construction purposes. Designing structures on a soil material without prior
 35 knowledge of its engineering behaviour and competence based on geotechnical tests may
 36 prove costly in terms of capital, labour, and human misery in the event of failure. The main
 37 thrust of this work is to understudy Ore soil (Ors) and Abuja soil (Abs) by subjecting them to
 38 geotechnical analyses in order to evaluate their index and engineering properties and
 39 therefore determine their suitability for use as construction materials.

40

41 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY OF THE STUDY AREAS

42 The sample from Abuja (Abs) was collected at latitude 9.1335°N and longitude 7.22288°E
 43 along Daura Road in the Kubwa area of the FCT (Fig. 1). It is a residual soil formed from
 44 Zuma rock. The Zuma rock is an igneous intrusion composed of gabbro and granodiorite.
 45 The soil colour is dark brown. It is coarse and very plastic with angular grains, some
 46 containing quartz and incompletely weathered feldspars. The Ore soil sample (Ors) was
 47 collected off the Ore-Ondo Road (some distance from the Benin- Sagamu expressway) at a
 48 depth of 1.2m with a geographical co-ordinates of 6.7758°N and 4.8755°E . It is a light reddish
 49 brown soil with mottled yellow, and gritty with grains fragments thought to be derived from
 50 migmatitic rocks within the Basement Complex (fig. 2).

51 The Nigerian Basement Complex lies within the Pan-Africa mobile belt to the east of West
 52 Africa Craton and North West of the Congo Craton. It can be divided into two provinces. The
 53 Western province is approximately west of Latitude 8°E and is characterised by N-S
 54 trending to low grade schist belt in a predominately migmatite gneiss Older Basement
 55 introduced by Pan Africa granitic plutons. The eastern province comprises mainly migmatite
 56 gneiss complex introduced by larger volume of Pan- Africa granites and the Mesozoic ring
 57 complexes of central Nigeria. The most obvious tectonic effect of the Nigerian Basement
 58 Complex is the Pan- African Orogeny (Rahaman, 1988).

65 A quick reconnaissance study of the sample area was made on reaching the field. The soil
66 profile after observation, was sketched and described together with the soil characteristic, in a
67 field notebook.

68 The observed colour at in-situ moisture content was recorded, since colour is dependent on
69 moisture content. Soil description aids the development of a feel for soil behaviour, it also
70 helps in interpretation of the results obtained and checks laboratory classification against that
71 made in the field.

72 A measure of the plasticity of the soil was obtained by noting how much working on the soil
73 between the fingers was required to dry it; from the wet state, near the liquid limit, to the
74 crumbling state, near the plastic limit. The greater the plasticity the longer the kneading time
75 required. The zones containing humus were not sampled, since humus impacts weaker
76 strength to engineering soil. Ample quantity of representative soil was collected (about 25kg
77 per location) for required laboratory test. Some of these were placed in cellophane bags for
78 moisture content determination

79 A series of tests were conducted on the soil samples. These included- natural moisture
80 content determination, Atterberg or consistency limit, free swell linear shrinkage, particle
81 size analysis, determination of the colloidal activities of fine - grained fractions, specific
82 gravity determination, standard compaction, California Bearing Ratio, unconfined
83 compressive strength test and direct shear test.

84 All the testing procedures were done in line with set- standards. Both the cone penetrometer
85 and casagrande devices were used for the determination of liquid limits. The procedures for
86 the determination of the index and strength parameters were done in accordance with
87 British Standards (BS) 1377.

88

89 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

90 The samples were collected at about the same depth and time during the dry season and the
91 natural moisture content values obtained are consistent with their percentage of fines, the
92 influence of temperature and humidity being almost negligible. Ors has slightly higher
93 natural moisture content (w) with a value of 17.85% as compared to 17.24% of Abs (fig. 3).
94 This is understandable given probable dispersed moisture emanating from a proximal spring

. Abs has more clays than Ors (27% vs. 17%) but lower fines than Ors (37% vs. 39%). However, Ors has more silts and sands and is therefore expected to be less plastic with a slightly lower specific gravity (2.57 vs. 2.6) g/cm³. Overall, Ors is thus designated as silty sand with clays while Abs is clayey sand with gravels. Both soils are well-graded.

The inference therefore is that the Ore clay will be the least plastic (considering its percentage of clays) since at lower moisture content the soil becomes more friable. In the same vein, Abuja soil will be more plastic than the Ore soil. It also shows that the Ors will attain greater strength assuming the same quantity of water content is abstracted from all the soils. Considering the granular percentage however, Ore soil may not give the best shear strength parameters even under effective drainage. Besides, the presence of feldspar in it makes it susceptible to weathering.

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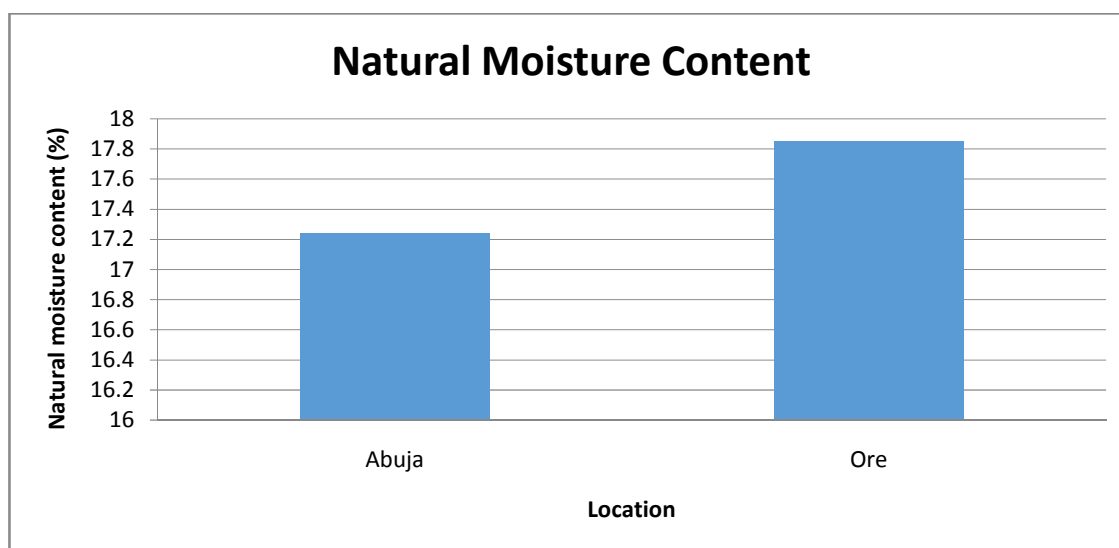
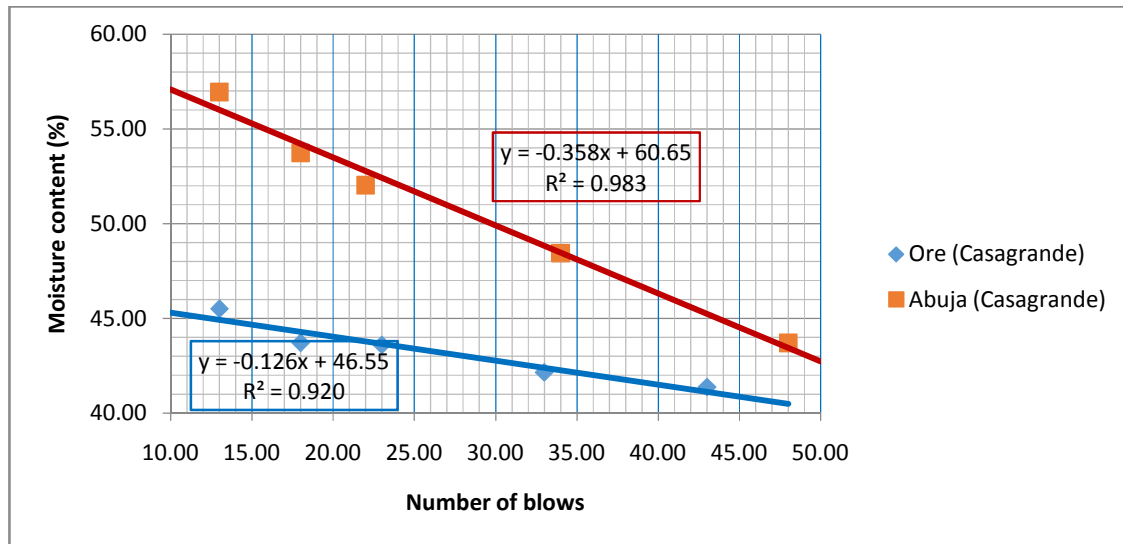


Fig. 3: Natural moisture content of the sampled areas.

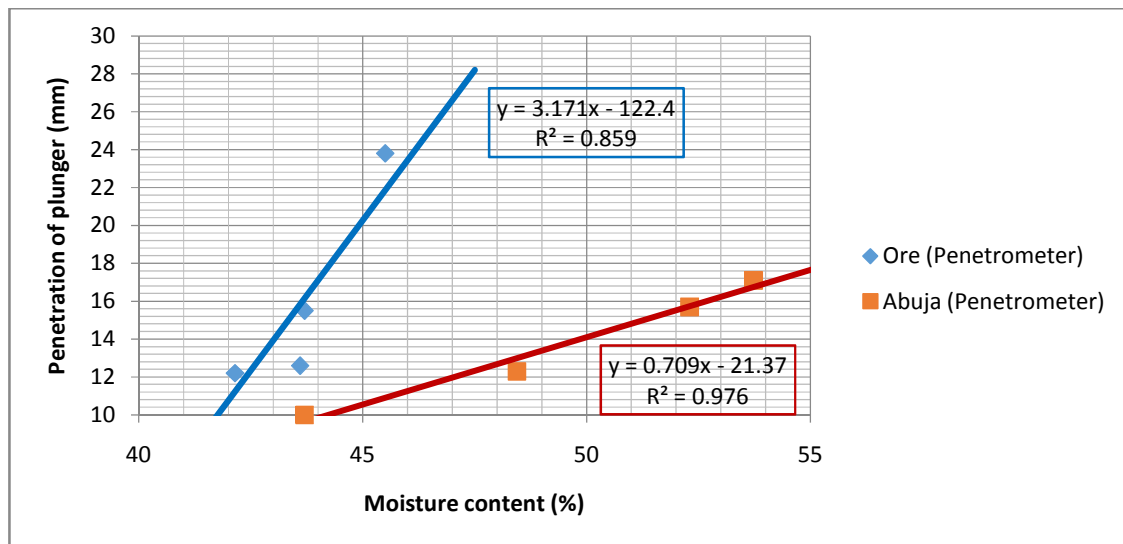
The liquid limit (LL) is the lowest water content above which soil behaves like liquid. Normally, this is below 100. This represents the minimum moisture content at which soil will flow under its own weight. Empirical analyses reveal that a disturbed soil at liquid limit has a shear strength around 1 kN/m² (Waltham, 2002). However, for the present discourse, it is convenient to regard the liquid limit as the water content corresponding to a shear strength of about 2.5 kN/m² (after Lee, 1961). Ors and Abs have LL of (43.4 & 51.7)% respectively as

shown in Fig. 4. The use of the cone penetrometer gives slightly higher values as shown in fig. 5.



117

118 Fig. 4: Determination of LL in the sampled areas using the casagrande device



119

120 Fig. 5: Determination of LL in the sampled areas using the cone penetrometer

121 With reducing moisture content from the liquid limit, the soil becomes stiffer and less plastic
 122 and finally emerges into a semi-solid state. The moisture content at which this change occurs
 123 is called the plastic limit (PL). The lowest water content at which soil behaves like a plastic
 124 material is normally below 40. Ors and Abs have PL of 31.26 and 20.13 respectively
 125 Mitchell (1976) concluded that whatever the structural status of water and the nature of the
 126 inter-particle forces, the plastic limit is the lower boundary of the range of water content

127 within which soil exhibits plastic behaviour that is, above the plastic limit, the soil can be
128 deformed without volume change or cracking and will retain its deformed shape.

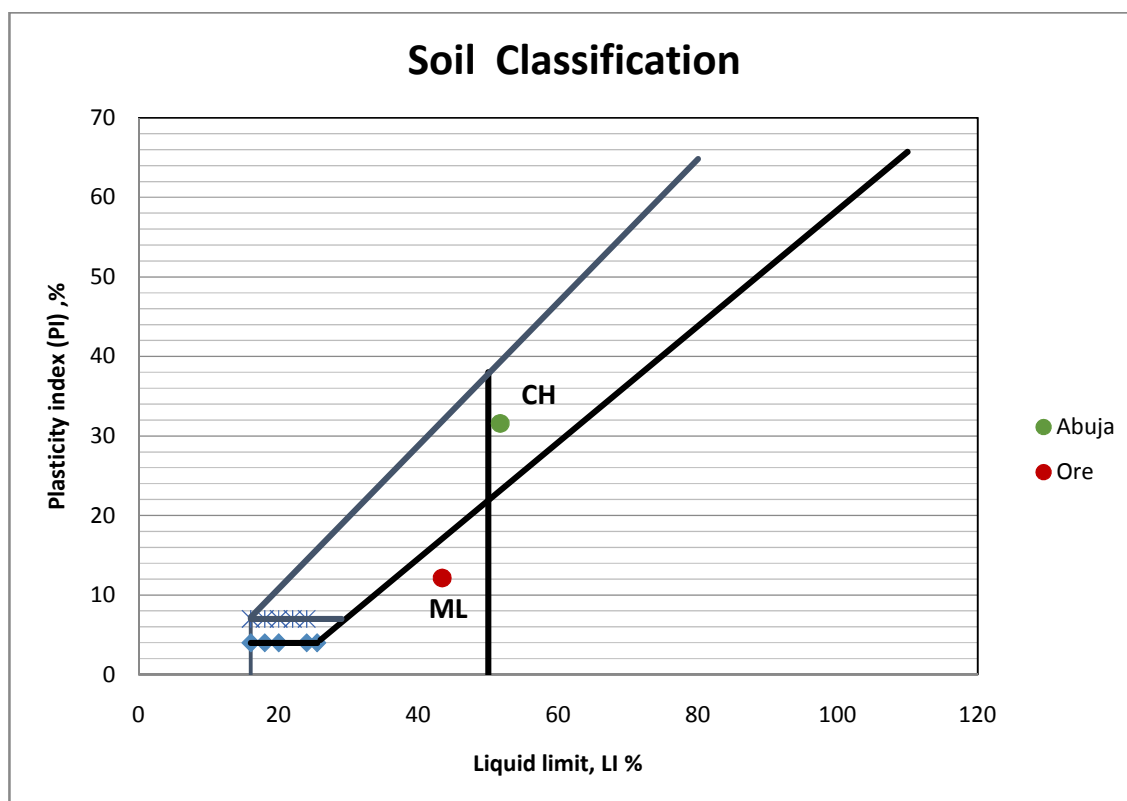
129 The plasticity index is derived from the difference between LL & PL and is an important
130 indicator of the surface chemical activity of the fine soil fraction of the material. It refers to
131 the soil itself and is the change in water content required to increase the strength of disturbed
132 samples a hundred times (Waltham, 2002).

133 Abs with about 27% of clays and 10 % of silt has a higher PI value of 31.57% and is more
134 plastic when compared with Ors with 17% clays, 22% silt and PI of 12.14%. A measure of
135 consistency and strength is deduced from the liquidity index (LI). LI is given by $(w-PL)/PI$.
136 The LI values for Ors and Abs are -1.10 & -0.09 respectively and indicates that both soils are
137 semi-solid to stiff since $LI < 0$ (Committee of British Standard Code of Practice, 1957). A
138 collaborative measure is also inferred from the consistency index, CI (which is derived from
139 $(LL-w)/PI$). The CI values are 2.10 and 1.09 in the aforementioned order. Similarly, because
140 $CI > 1$, it buttresses the previous deduction. Also their colloidal activity values of 0.71 &
141 1.17 infers that the clays are normal clays since these values are lower than the >1.25
142 designated for chemically reactive clays. Ors has a better soil group index (GI) with a value
143 of 3.30 whereas that of Abs is 9.54. In general, the rating for a pavement subgrade is
144 inversely proportional to the group index, GI. The closer the soil GI is to zero or negative
145 values, the better it is in terms of its suitability for use as subgrade. The compressibility of the
146 sampled clays according to Terzaghi & Peck (1967), and then according to NAVFAC (1992)
147 are 0.3 & 0.38; and 0.16 and 0.41 for Ors & Abs respectively.

148 Swelling may cause building foundation to heave to such an extent that building are
149 damaged. However, given their marginal free swell values of 11.1% and 22.5% for the Ore
150 and Abuja clays respectively, none of the tested soil exhibited such critical swelling since
151 soils with a free swell value below 50% will not have appreciable volume change when
152 loaded (Lee, 1961). The Ore soil clay mineral could be kaolinite derived from the weathering
153 of feldspars and micas within the migmatitic body present in the Basement Complex from
154 where the sample was collected. The clay mineral in the Abuja soil could also be kaolinite
155 from the weathering of rocks containing more feldspars and micas in the Basement
156 Complex. It is known that it is the clay fraction in a soil that will respond to swelling and
157 shrinkage because they are expandable and compressible. The silt and sand fraction are
158 predominantly made up of quartz which are physico-chemically inert.

Whereas Abs plots above the 'A' line of the Casagrande plasticity chart, Ors plots below (Fig. 6). Essentially the fines in Ors are silts of low plasticity whereas Abs has clays of relatively higher plasticity.

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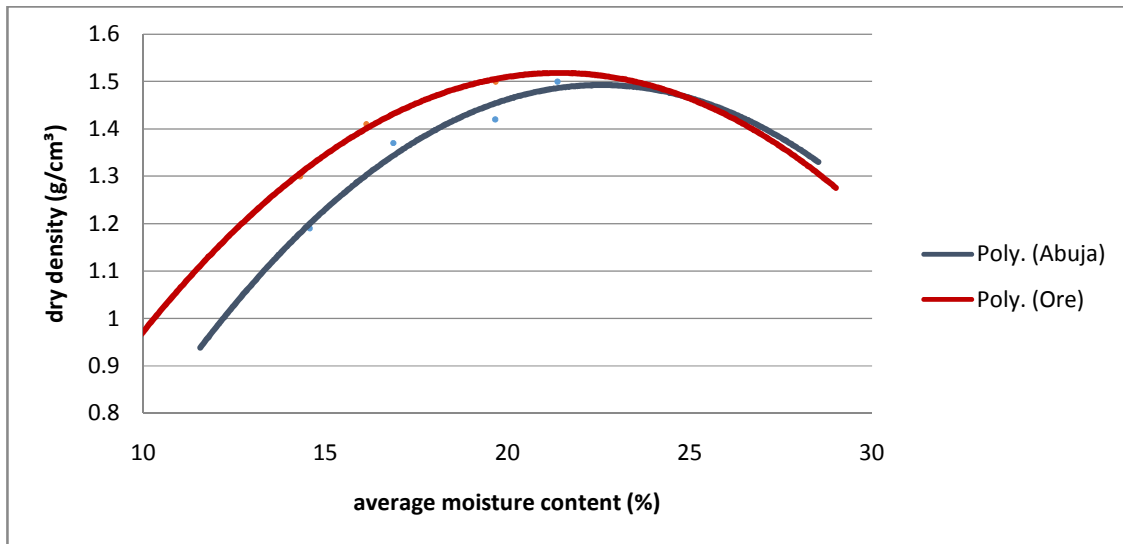


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Fig. 6: Classification of the sampled soils based on index properties.

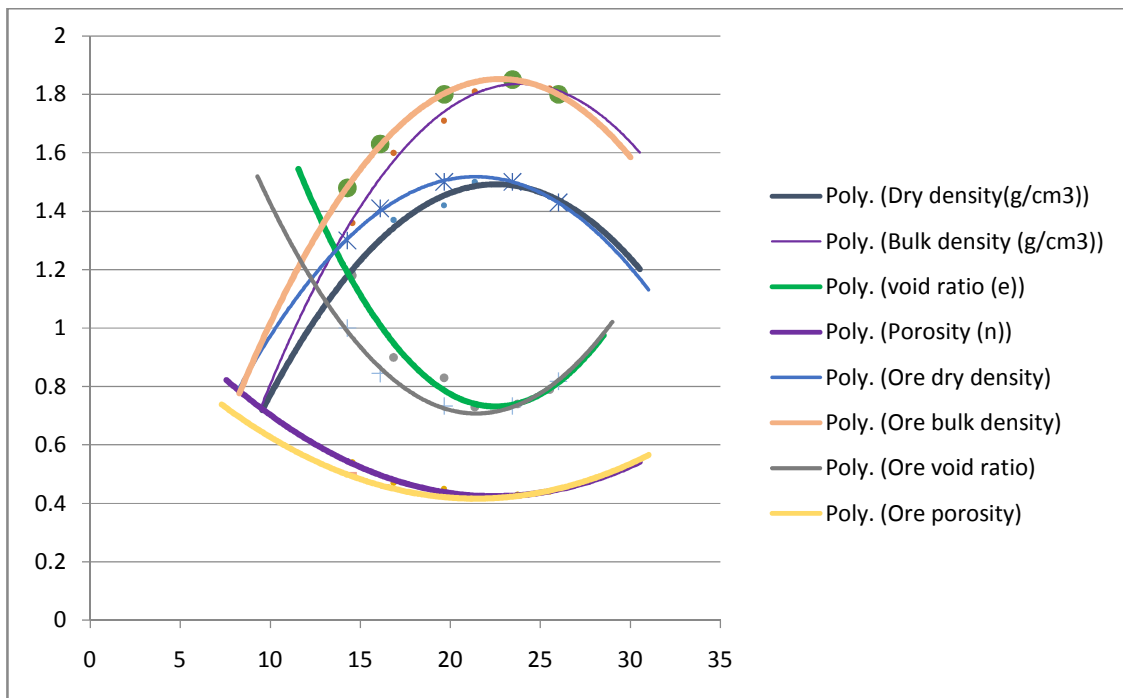
The purpose of the laboratory compaction test in this work was to determine the proper amount of mixing water to use when compacting the soil in the field and the resulting degree of denseness which can be expected from compaction at this moisture content. Compaction is the process by which the bulk density of an aggregate of matter is increased by driving out air. For any soil, for a given amount of compactive effort, the density obtained depends on the moisture content. At very high moisture contents, the maximum dry density is achieved when the soil is compacted to nearly saturation, where (almost) all the air is driven out. At low moisture contents, the soil particles interfere with each other; addition of some moisture will allow greater bulk densities, with a peak density where this effect begins to be counteracted by the saturation of the soil. The bulk density or dry density of soils is not a

constant value, it could be changed in relation with the moisture content of soils and the compaction effort (Fig. 7).



177

178 Fig.7 : Determination of maximum dry densities and optimum moisture contents



179

180 Fig.8 : Determination of various compaction indices and ratios.

181 From figs. 7 & 8, it is easy to discern that as compaction commences, the dry density
 182 increases whereas the void ratio reduces as air is expelled. Similarly, there is an inverse
 183 relationship between bulk density and porosity. The changes in void ratio and porosity in the

course of standard compaction of Ors and Abs were (0.18 & 0.39) and (0.05 & 0.10) respectively. Both soils also share close maximum bulk & dry densities, and optimum water contents of (1.86 & 1.84)g/cm³, (1.52 & 1.49)g/cm³, and (22 & 22.5)% for Ors and Abs in the regular order. The optimum moisture content is the water content that results in the greatest dry density for a specified compactive effort. Compacting at water contents higher than the optimum water content; results in a relatively dispersed soil structure (parallel particle orientations) that is weaker, more ductile, less pervious, softer, more susceptible to shrinking, and less susceptible to swelling than soil compacted dry of optimum to the same density. The soil compacted lower than (dry of) the optimum water content typically results in a flocculated soil structure (random particle orientations) that has the opposite characteristics of the soil compacted wet of the optimum water content to the same density. Knowledge of density is essential in all problems where the body of the strata is an important factor, e.g. stability of slopes of earth dams; earth pressure on retaining walls, tunnel linings and timbering of excavation. The method of designing inverted fillers for dams, levees etc. uses the particles size distribution of the soils involved. This method is based on the relationship of grain size to permeability, along with experimental data on the grain size distribution required to prevent the migration of particles when water flows through the soil.

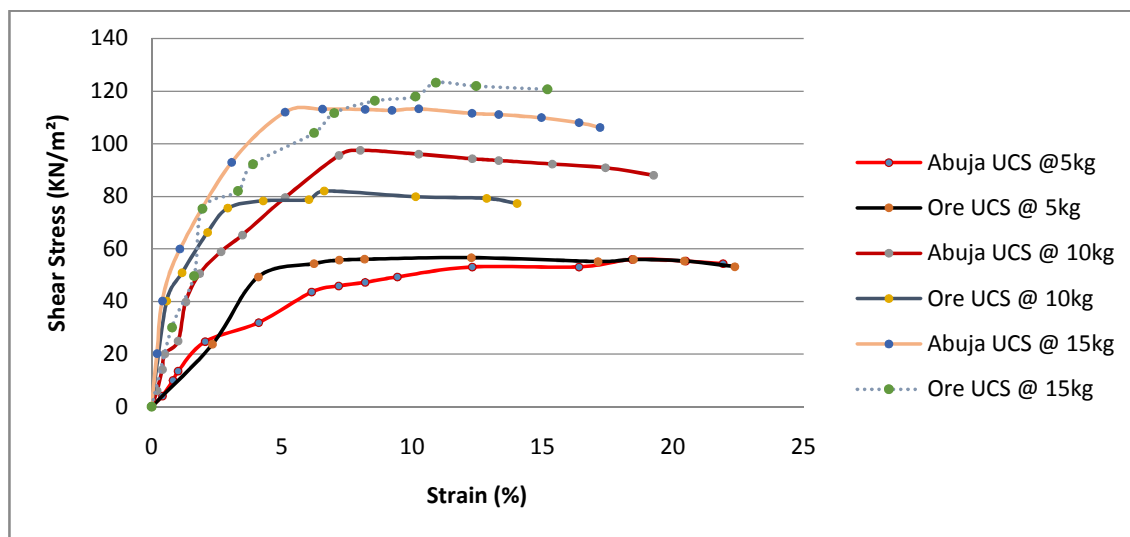


Fig. 9: Determination of unconfined compressive strength in the sampled soils.

Shear strength is a term used in soil mechanics to describe the magnitude of the shear stress that a soil can sustain. The shear resistance of soil is a result of friction and interlocking of particles, and possibly cementation or bonding at particle contacts. Due to interlocking,

particulate material may expand or contract in volume as it is subject to shear strains. Using the Tresca criterium, both soils are stiff soils because the shear strength are between 75-150KN/m² as previously deduced from the index parameters. Ors has slightly lower shear strength and cohesion with values of (86.63 & 20.65)KN/m² respectively. Though it has higher silts and sands, it has a lower granular interface of about 61%. More importantly, it bears just a percentage of gravel as against 18% offered by Abs. It is known that more compact masses offers better shearing strength. If soil expands its volume, the density of particles will decrease and the strength will decrease; in this case, the peak strength would be followed by a reduction of shear stress. The stress-strain relationship levels off when the material stops expanding or contracting, and when interparticle bonds are broken. The volume change behaviour and interparticle friction depend on the density of the particles, the intergranular contact forces, and to a somewhat lesser extent, other factors such as the rate of shearing and the direction of the shear stress. The average normal intergranular contact force per unit area is called the effective stress.

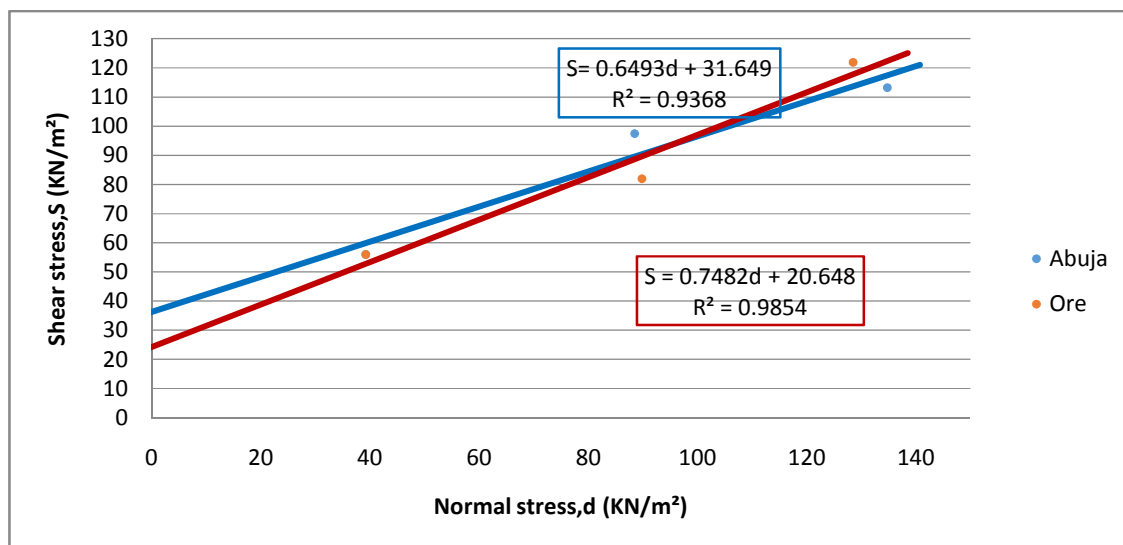


Fig.10: Determination of shear strength and angle of friction using direct shear test

From the shear strength results it is obvious that the stress-strain relationship of soils, and therefore the shearing strength, is affected by such factors as: the soil composition (mineralogy, grain size and grain size distribution, shape of particles, pore fluid type and content, ions on grain and in pore fluid.); initial state (defined by the initial void ratio, effective normal stress and shear stress (stress history)); structure (arrangement of particles within the soil mass; cementation, etc). This buttresses previous assertions by Poulos, 1989

A granular soil has no shearing resistance at a free surface but it increases fairly rapidly with increase of depth because of the appreciable internal friction. Since the shearing strength of cohesive soil is usually derived almost entirely from the cohesive strength, and very little or none from internal friction, the strength of a cohesive soil of constant water content increases very, little with the increase of depth (Lee, 1961).

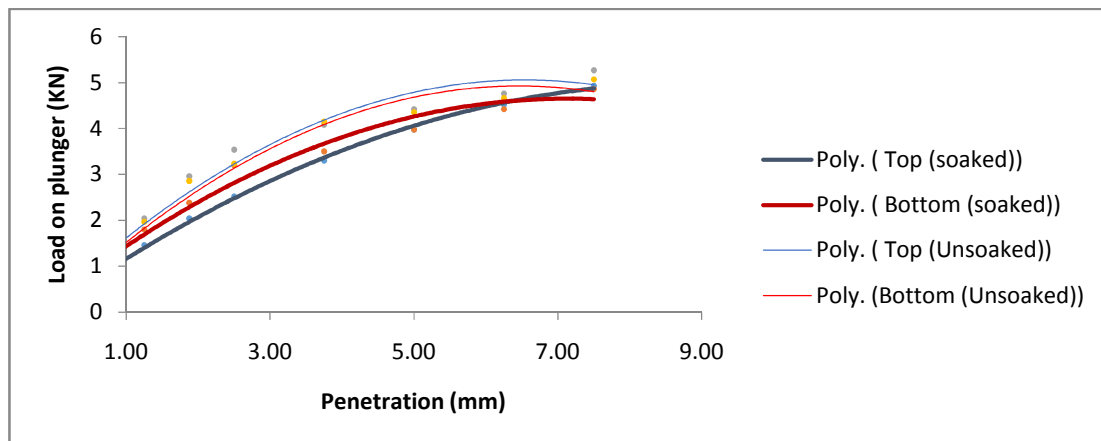
When a load is applied to a confined mass of soil, failure will eventually occur when the individual soil grains begin to move relative to each other, i.e. when sliding or shearing will take place along a shear plane. When this “plastic” state of stress is reached the soil mass will be unable to support any additional load. The strength of a soil is therefore dependent on its shearing resistance.

The purpose of compacting the disturbed samples used for this test was to improve the strength and durability of the soil. Soaking was done to stimulate highly unfavourable moisture condition of the prototype soil. The problem of whether or not to soak the samples for a specific design is one of the most controversial features of the CBR design procedures. Studies reported by the Corps of Engineers (U.SA), indicates that moisture accumulated in cohesive soils even in arid climates. The response of Ors to CBR tests was quite consistent with its aforementioned properties and indicates its suitability for common construction purposes requiring the use of soils as it is reasonably more tolerant to imbue with moisture.

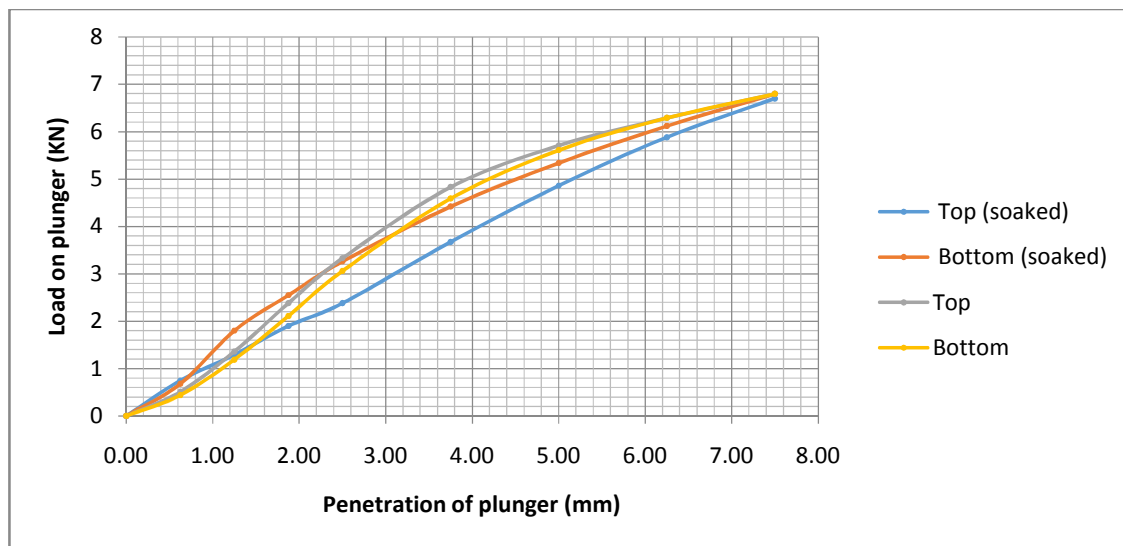
Based on the standard CBR designing curves for roads, Ors with a slightly higher CBR value (27.86%) will require a marginally lower pavement thickness than Abs with CBR of 26.79%. Unlike materials like steel, most of the soils are visco-elastic, meaning the failures are time dependant. Higher CBR reading of a soil ($> 15\%$) denotes suitability for use as subgrades. With stronger subgrade, the road pavement thickness is reduced thereby saving capital. Experience has shown that the largest percent of pavement failures is due to poor subgrade condition and excessive subgrade deformation. The improvement of subgrade support by good compaction close to the optimum moisture content can be the most economical measure to take for increased load capacity (after Woods, *et al.*, 1960).

Stability in ground water level will maintain the effective weight of the material that it saturates without increasing pore water pressure. Unfavourable conditions can be checked if effective sub drainage systems are put in place for both soils. This will help to reduce

261 maintenance and early replacement problems. Consequently, engineers resort to subdrainage
 262 whenever needed to assure maximum service and long life of the embankment or pavement
 263 with minimum maintenance and disruption of traffic. For example, unstable soils require the
 264 most efficient drainage for railway, municipal and airport application. Also the use of
 265 perforated steel pipe subdrains for the upstream side of levees and the downstream slope of
 266 earth and rock dams is considered good engineering practice. The purpose it to relieve the
 267 groundwater pressure of accumulating seepage.



268
 269 Fig. 11: CBR plots for Abs



270
 271 Fig.12: CBR plots for Ors

272 Subgrade performance is a function of a soil's strength and its behaviour under traffic
 273 loading. The subgrade should be sufficiently stable to prevent excessive rutting and shoving

during construction, provide good support for placement and compaction of pavement layers, limit pavement rebound deflections to acceptable limits, restrict the development of excessive permanent deformation (rutting) in the subgrade during the service life of the pavement and minimise effect of changes in moisture level.

CONCLUSION

The soils tested are admixtures of fine and granular materials. Their geotechnical properties reflect the combined effects of these fractions with moisture. In terms of fines, Ors is silt of low plasticity whereas Abs is clay of high plasticity. This suggest that Abs will be more resistant to erosion given similar volume of saturation as it has more significant cohesion due to some form of weak bonds between its particles.

Furthermore, as compaction commences, the dry densities of both soils increase whereas the void ratios reduce as air is expelled. Similarly, there is an inverse relationship between bulk density and porosity. Using the Tresca criterium, both soils are stiff soils because the shear strength are between 75-150KN/m² as previously deduced from their index parameters. Ors has slightly lower shear strength and cohesion Based on the standard CBR designing curves for roads, Ors with a slightly higher CBR value (27.86%) will require a marginally lower pavement thickness than Abs with CBR of 26.79% with relative capital savings. However, it is instructive to note that unlike materials like steel, the soils are visco-elastic, meaning the failures are time dependant. Higher CBR reading of a soil (> 15%) denotes suitability for use as subgrades.. Overall, this study shows that whilst Ors has superior analytes properties, both soils can be used as subgrades in flexible pavement design as well as for many other common construction purposes.

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