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A Study of Effective Factors on the Behavioural Characteristics of Clayey Sands

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Fifth International Conference on

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A STUDY OF EFFECTIVE FACTORS ON THE BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CLAYEY SANDS

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ABSTRACT

As in recent years liquefaction phenomena have occurred in sandy soils containing different amounts of clay contents, it was concluded that in addition to silty sands, clayey sands are also vulnerable to liquefaction phenomenon. So, the urge for comprehensive study aroused to cover the issue.

In this paper, the effect of clay content and its plasticity properties on behavioural characteristics of clayey sands under various density and confining pressure values have been investigated. To achieve the goal, about a hundred monotonic triaxial tests were performed on remoulded specimens of sandy soils containing different clay contents with different plasticity values. Based on the results, the latter factors affect peak strength, steady state strength, undrain brittleness and residual shear strength, considerably. Furthermore, great results obtained on the issue of whether clay content or plasticity properties variations is much effective.

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been focused on soil-related problems so far. These may include consolidation, soil settlement, or swelling for clayey soils. However, before some incidents like liquefaction phenomena had been recognized, sands were not defined as a sort of problematic soil. After some liquefaction and flow failure took place during Nigatta and Alaska earthquakes in 1964, comprehensive studies were carried out to explain sands behaviour under various situations.

Three general trends were observed for sands during undrained loading (situations such as earthquake or rapid static loading) based on various density and confining pressure values including hardening, softening, and limited strain softening [1, 7, 15, 17, 27, and 36]. In strain softening behaviour of sand, there is a significant strength loss after peak value and it continues to decrease until it reaches to a steady state. In this case, depending on topographical conditions and the induced residual shear strength, large deformations may occur, leading to landslides and slope failures afterwards. In limited strain softening, after an initial drop in strength, because of dilation and the following increase in soil volume (decrease in pore pressure), the strength rises again representing a temporarily steady state

thus. Although deformations are more limited in respect to the previous case, extensive significant failures may happen. Hence, Kramer and Seed (1988) proposed this case to be considered as a sort of liquefaction phenomena.

Based on other studies, it was revealed that in addition to density and depth, other parameters are pivotal. They may include layer orders [2 and 18], specimen preparation method [10, 20, and 22], fines content [3, 19, 24, 26, 29, 33 and 34], fines type [8, 11, 16, 28 and 35], and stress path [12]. They affect stress-strain behaviour of sands and the procedure of generation of excessive pore pressure.

As it was said previously, one of the most crucial factors that can affect soil behaviour is fines content and their types. Many investigations have been conducted on behavioural characteristics of clean and silty sands since liquefaction first observed in these kinds of soils. Most of studies suggest that sand liquefaction potential boosts with an increase in silt content until a threshold value and after that it starts to decline as silt content increases [16, 21, 24, 29, 30, and 33].

Unlike non-plastic fines, effects of plastic ones have been investigated rarely. It seems it was the outcome of this delusion that clay cohesion prevents the occurrence of liquefaction. Despite this idea, research following the Northridge (1994), Kokaali (1999), and Chi-Chi (1999) earthquakes has identified a significant number of cases where

ground failure in silty and clayey soils containing more than 15% clay size particles caused considerable damage to buildings[5][9]. Moreover, as research continued it was showed that in addition to clay content, its plasticity [6][4][14], over-consolidation ratio [25] and pore pressure properties [13][31][32] are of the main concerns and can affect clayey sand behaviour substantially.

In any case, it seems that providing a fully proper judgment about the effect of clay content and its plasticity is not available, since most of recent studies have been carried out under different situations and applying a unique kind of clay. In the current paper, in order to satisfy appropriate conditions, similar conditions are defined for all the tests and then the effect of clay content's increase with various plasticity values has been investigated.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Test Materials

All basic geotechnical tests were performed in accordance with American Standard Test Method (ASTM). In this study, Firooz-kooch crashed silica sand (sand 161) was used since it demonstrates desirable properties (Table 1).

Clayey material properties (passed by #200 sieve) are demonstrated in Table 2. These natural clays selected in such a way that one possesses high and the other possesses low plastic properties. High plastic clay is obtained from a site near Gazvin city (latitude 35°46'19", longitude 50°3'46") and low plastic clay is obtained from a site near Mashhad city (latitude 37°22'24", longitude 58°45'40"). By mixing these two different clayey materials with sand 161, the feasibility of a proper investigation on the effects of plasticity on specimens' behaviors was provided. The grain size distribution curves for sand161 and clays are presented in figure 1.

Table 1. Firooz-Kooh sand (sand 161) properties

Sand 161	Properties
2.66	Specific gravity (Gs)
0.928	Maximum void ratio (e_{max})
0.583	Minimum void ratio (e_{min})
0.26	D50 (mm)
0.15	D10 (mm)
1.80	Uniformity coefficient (C_U)
1.14	Curvature coefficient (C_C)

Table 2. Low (L) and high (H) plastic clay material properties (passed by #200 sieve)

Gs	Plastic Index (PI%)	Plastic Limit (PL%)	Liquid Limit (LL%)	Material
2.64	11	17	28	Mashhad Clay (Low plastic)
2.64	30	25	55	Qazvin Clay (High plastic)

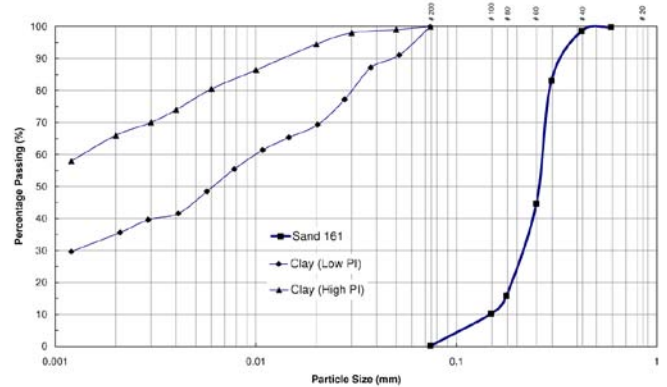


Figure 1. Grain size analysis (sand 161, Mashhad clay (Low PI), Gazvin clay (High PI))

Apparatus and Methodology

The device used for conducting tests was a Japanese triaxial static apparatus. The device features high sensitive sensors, thus providing computer data logging. To conduct tests, strain controlled loading approach was applied by a 0.5mm/min loading rate. Specimens were prepared using wet tamping method in which first dried clayey material passed by sieve #200 were mixed by sand to obtain a homogeneous mixture. After that, water was added to the mixture to provide 5 percent of humidity. Having obtained the appropriate blend, it was poured into a special mold and compacted in 6 layers. Prepared specimens were 50 mm and 100 mm in diameter and height, respectively. Although this approach might not present the field characteristics of the soil, Ishihara (1993) and Yasrobi (1997) showed that specimen preparation by this approach is beneficial. All tests were conducted under consolidated undrained conditions (CU).

In all tests a "B" value greater or equal to 0.97 was considered to represent fully saturated conditions. After reaching to a fully saturated condition, specimens were consolidated to desirable consolidation pressure and then were subjected to shear.

Tests Program

In this study, in order to investigate fines content, plasticity, density, and confining pressure effects, initial tests conditions

were adjusted in special manner, so it would be possible to investigate any factor influence while other desirable factors are held constant during the tests.

Two different density values used: a) $\gamma_d=1.45\text{gr/cm}^3$ ($Dr=27\%$) for loose state and b) $\gamma_d=1.5\text{gr/cm}^3$ ($Dr=45\%$) representing medium dense specimens. During this study, these densities represented two different liquefaction associated behaviors in clean sand specimens: complete strain softening leading to steady state and limited strain softening leading to a temporarily steady state (quasi-steady state).

For both density values, tests were conducted on specimens made of clean sand and its mixtures with 5, 10, and 15 percent of clay content for high and low plastic clays. Also in order to investigate the influence of confining pressure on tests results, all tests were conducted under two different confining pressures (100 and 400 Kpa).

Another important factor considered in specimens preparation was to use materials which had virtually the same specific gravity (G_s) values. Hence, not only they were prepared in constant dry unit weights (γ_d) but also they had constant void ratios. This would be very useful in comparing results. Void ratio values for $\gamma_d=1.45\text{gr/cm}^3$ and $\gamma_d=1.5\text{gr/cm}^3$ are 0.828 and 0.767, respectively.

In this paper every group of specimens has been named in a sequence of A-B-C letters, where "A" represents for specimen density, "B" for effective confining pressure applied in test, and "C" for clay type. For a high plastic clay ($PI=30\%$), "H" and for a low plastic clay ($PI=11\%$) "L", were used to be abbreviations. About clay content of specimens, wherever it was necessary, it was directly mentioned (For example, 1.45-400-H represents specimens which are made by mixing and compacting sand with desirable percent of high plastic clay in density equal to 1.45 gr/cm³. Its obvious that consolidation pressure of test is 400 Kpa).

Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate an overview of tests classifications for combinations of sand with low and high plastic clays. As it is obvious, for 8 different groups of density, confining pressure and clay type, tests were conducted on specimens made of clean sand and its mixtures with 5, 10 and 15 percent of clay content. Such a classification of parameters provides an appropriate and independent evaluation of each parameter's effect.

Table 3: General classification of tests for combinations of sand with low plastic clay

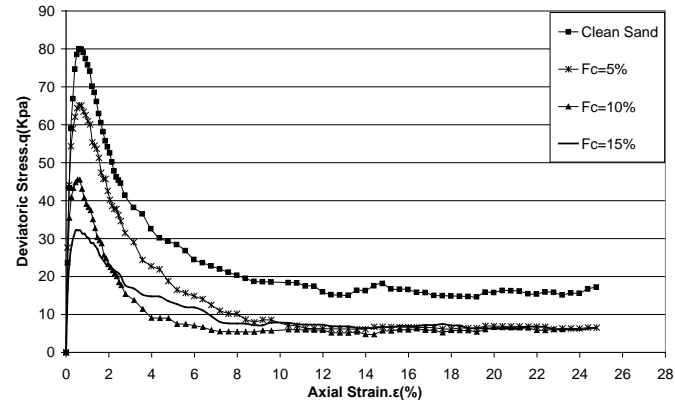
Group	Test No.	Combinations	Group	Test No.	Combinations
Group 1: 1.45-100-L	1	Clean sand	Group 3: 1.45-400-L	9	Clean sand
	2	Sand+5%clay		10	Sand+5%clay
	3	Sand+10%clay		11	Sand+10%clay
	4	Sand+15%clay		12	Sand+15%clay
Group 2: 1.5-100-L	5	Clean sand	Group 4: 1.5-400-L	13	Clean sand
	6	Sand+5%clay		14	Sand+5%clay
	7	Sand+10%clay		15	Sand+10%clay
	8	Sand+15%clay		16	Sand+15%clay

Table 4: General classification of tests for combinations of sand with high plastic clay

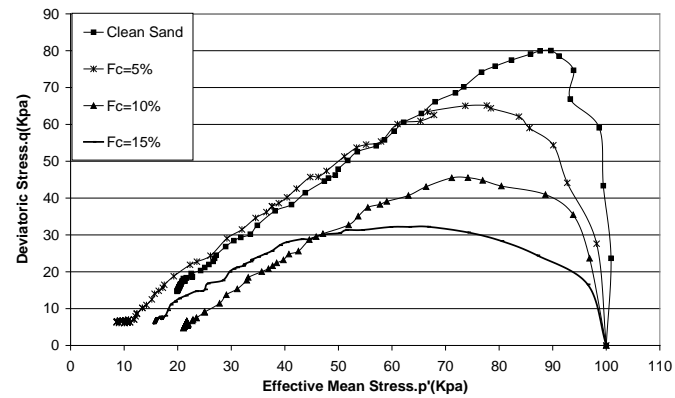
Group	Test No.	Combinations	Group	Test No.	Combinations
Group 5: 1.45-100-H	17	Clean sand	Group 7: 1.45-400-H	25	Clean sand
	18	Sand+5%clay		26	Sand+5%clay
	19	Sand+10%clay		27	Sand+10%clay
	20	Sand+15%clay		28	Sand+15%clay
Group 6: 1.5-100-H	21	Clean sand	Group 8: 1.5-400-H	29	Clean sand
	22	Sand+5%clay		30	Sand+5%clay
	23	Sand+10%clay		31	Sand+10%clay
	24	Sand+15%clay		32	Sand+15%clay

RESULTS

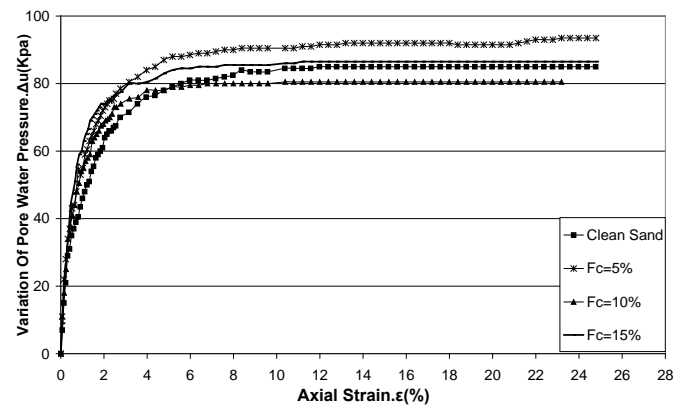
In figures 2a to 2c, results for different combinations of group 1.45-100-L (containing different clay contents) are presented. Obviously these results include stress paths and variations of deviatoric stress and pore pressure versus axial strain. Also, in Figures 3a to 3c results for different combinations of group 1.5-100-L are presented.



(a). Deviatoric stress against axial strain

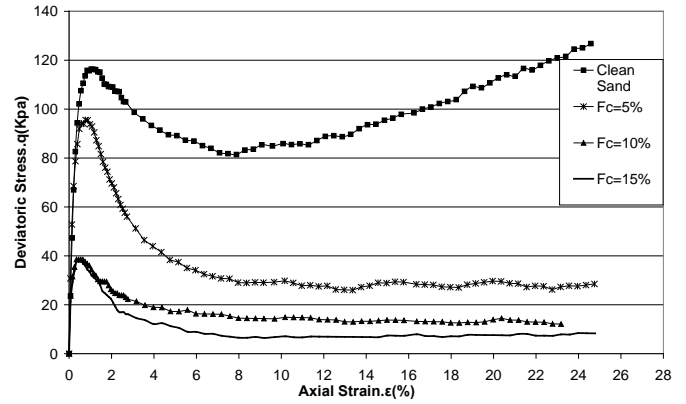


(b). Plot of stress paths

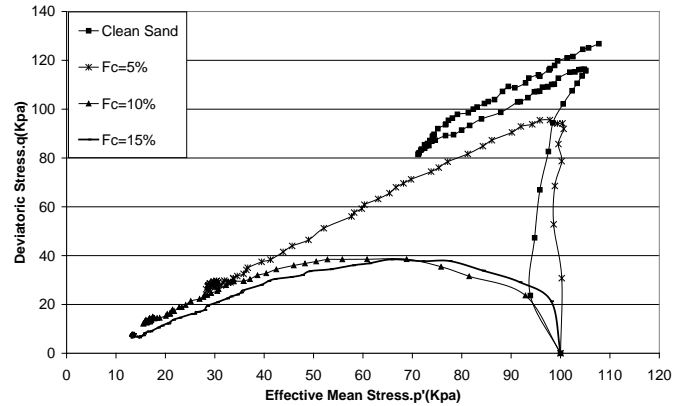


(c). Excess pore water against axial strain

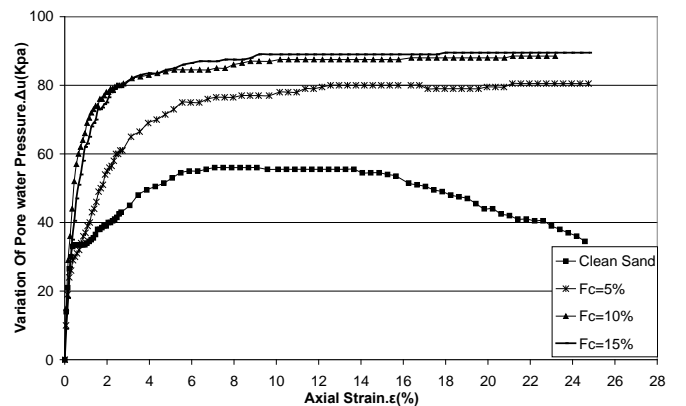
Figure 2: Results for different combinations of group 1.45-100-L containing various clay contents



a). Deviatoric stress against axial strain



(b). Plot of stress path



(c). Excess pore water against axial strain

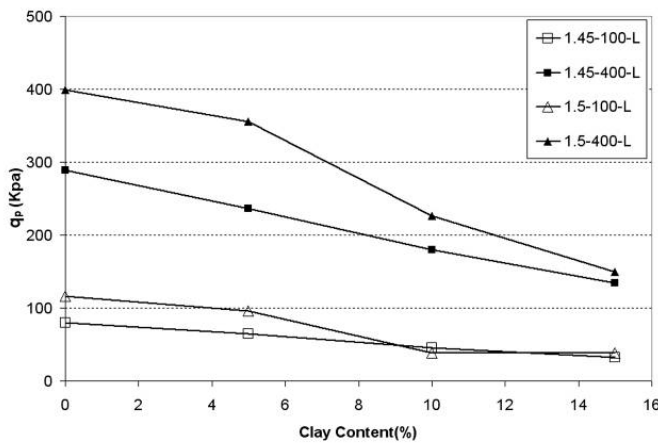
Figure 3: Results for different combinations of group 1.5-100-L containing various clay contents

Then instead of a direct representation of stress-strain curves, stress paths, and pore pressure-strain graphs, values of peak and steady state strength or other pertinent values were extracted (from graphs mentioned above) and revealed in the form of various desirable graphs. Thus, there would be better conditions to compare their variations more accurately and properly. Full results and detailed information are presented in the thesis (Naeemifar 2007), submitted for the degree of master of science at Tarbiat Modares university.

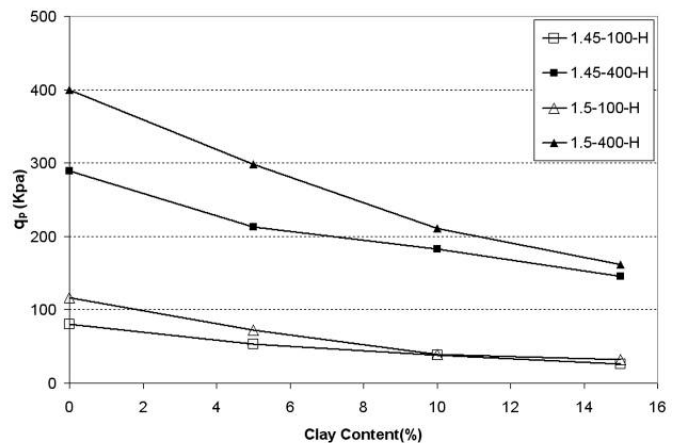
VARIATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Peak Strength Value

Clay content, density, and confining pressure influence



a) Low plastic clay



b) High plastic clay

Figure 4- variations of peak shear strength versus clay content increase under different condition

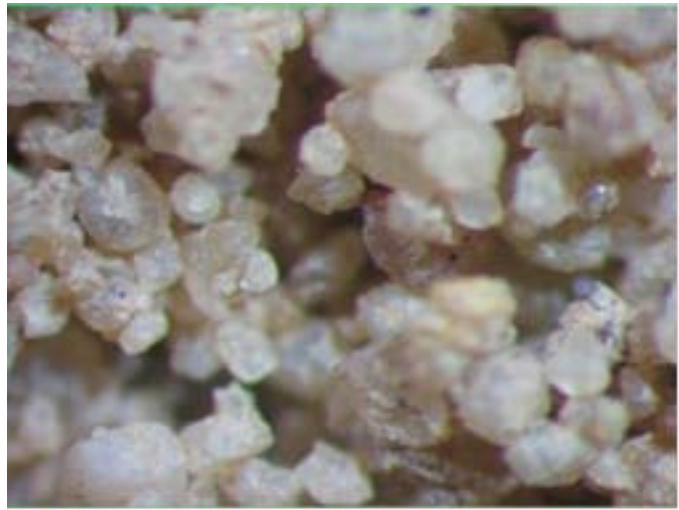
In figures 4a (4b), by comparing results of 1.45-100-L(H) with 1.45-400-L(H), or 1.5-100-L(H) with 1.5-400-L(H), it is found that for a same density an increase in confining pressure raises peak value for clean sand as well as for its mixtures with clay. This happens when grains and particles subside through the structure and become more involved, escalating grains surficial forces thus.

Figure 4 shows the peak value variations versus clay content for different mixtures of sand and clay, both for high plastic and low plastic clays. Apparently in all the graphs as clay content rises up, peak values drop. Taken microscopic photos (image1) reveal that as clay content enhances, specifically after about 5 percent admixture content, chain-like structures are brought about within its texture while clay particles represent unstable bridges between sand grains. Such kind of structures are not stable, since clay content is not as high as enough and as the strength touches its peak value, these structures collapse and fall between the available hollow spaces within themselves. Hence, a considerable decrease in peak value happens.

Also considering 1.45-100-L(H) against 1.5-100-L(H), or 1.45-400-L(H) versus 1.5-400-L(H), one reaches to these conclusions: first, in a same confining pressure as density rises up, peak value does the same. Second, the more clay contents the more coherence in graphs happens. The latter means as clay content escalates, density's influence on peak value declines.



a) clean sand (MF:40X-6X,1.45)



b) sand+15 %high PI clay (MF:40X-6X,1.45)

Image 1-Microscopic texture comparison between clean sand and clayey sand

It should be noticed that as density increases, peak value is expected to increase, too. Nevertheless, it causes empty spaces among soil particles to decrease. This eventually will lead to more contact between clay and sand particles and probably more decrease in their inter-particle friction, reducing strength finally. In other words, increase in density is caught up to some extent and the effect of density becomes pale in high clay contents.

Plasticity effects

In figures 4a and 4b, comparing strengths for two different clay types with different plasticity properties yet same clay content, same density, and same confining pressure, lead us to find that peak strengths for various levels of clay admixtures are higher for lower plasticity. Regarding to microscopic images (image1), it can be concluded that it is because of an increase in unstable structures in high plastic clays.

Steady State's Strength Value

In strain softening and limited strain softening behaviors which usually happen in loose and medium dense deposits of sands, specimen's strength drops after a peak value and it continues to decrease till a steady state or temporary steady state. Fundamentally, steady state of a soil mass represents a situation of constant volume, constant normal stress, constant shear stress, and constant deformation velocity in which soil deforms permanently and continuously [27]. In this section effects of different parameters on strength value of steady state have been investigated.

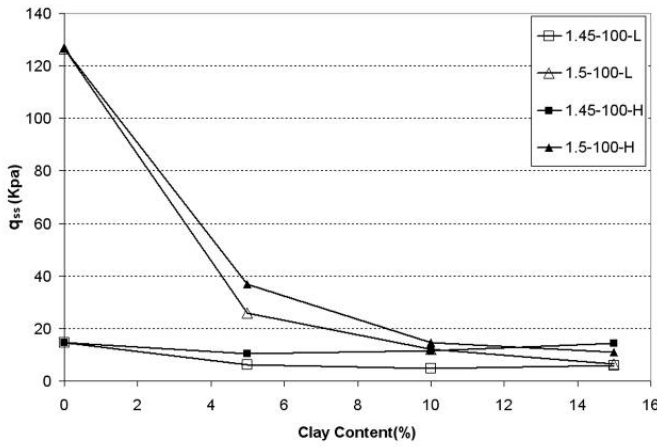
Clay content, confining pressure, and density effects

In figure 5, strength variations of steady state versus clay content for sand mixtures with low and high plastic clay contents have been demonstrated (both for 100 and 400 KPa confining pressures).

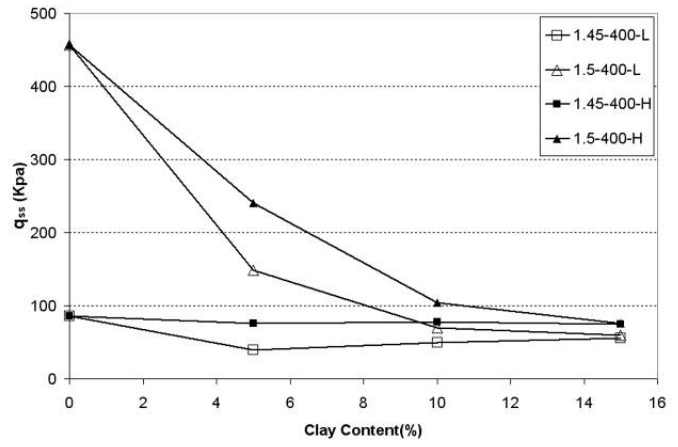
In figures 5, comparison between 1.45-100(400)-L with 1.5-100(400)-L, or 1.45-100(400)-H with 1.5-100(400)-H mixtures gives us the following conclusions: first, for $\gamma_d = 1.5 \text{ gr/cm}^3$ strength is higher and as clay content increases up to about 5 percent, the strength drops substantially and it remains constant after 10 percent. The considerable loss up to about 5 percent clay admixture is due to clay particle invading spaces among sand particles thus making a significant decrease in interlocking forces. In this way, much less energy will be used to relieve this interlocking.

Since interlocking forces are higher in more dense specimens, generally the effect of clay content increase in strength loss is much evident for denser specimens.

However after 5 percent clay content, there will be little strength loss since interlocking forces for dense specimens have decreased and the lines representing different density values reach a same trend. Also while comparing values of figures 5a and 5b together under same conditions, it is crystal clear that a rise in confining pressure leads to a rise in steady state strength.



a) 100 KPa confining pressure



b) 400 KPa confining pressure

Figure 5- variations of steady state strength versus clay content increase under different conditions

Plasticity effects

The analogous fact which is apparent in both figures above is that as clay plasticity builds up, the respecting lines move upward (e.g. consider 1.45-100-L and 1.45-100-H, or 1.45-400-L and 1.45-400-H). This means that assuming other parameters to be constant (density and effective confining pressure), for a same clay content, the more clay plasticity the more strength specimens gain. It seems that high PI clay brings about much more difficulty for sand particles to slide on each other in large deformations. Furthermore, the clogs made of sand and high PI clay particles are bigger and stronger, thus giving more friction and strength during sliding (with respect to low plastic clay).

The effects of confining pressure and density on steady state strength variations of a sand deposit

In this section, we will discuss about different parameters roles on steady state strength loss in respect to clean sand strength. In figure 6, the vertical axis represents steady state

strength loss in respect to clean sand strength under same conditions using the following equation:

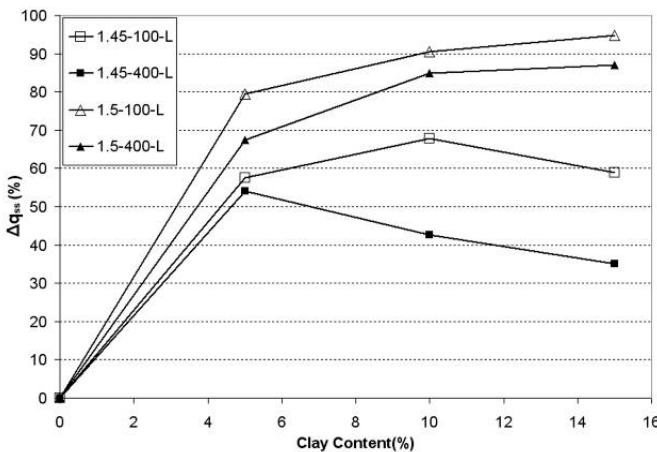
$$\Delta q_{ss}(\%) = -\left(\frac{q_{ss} - q_{ss_{cs}}}{q_{ss_{cs}}}\right) \times 100 \quad (1)$$

In equation 1:

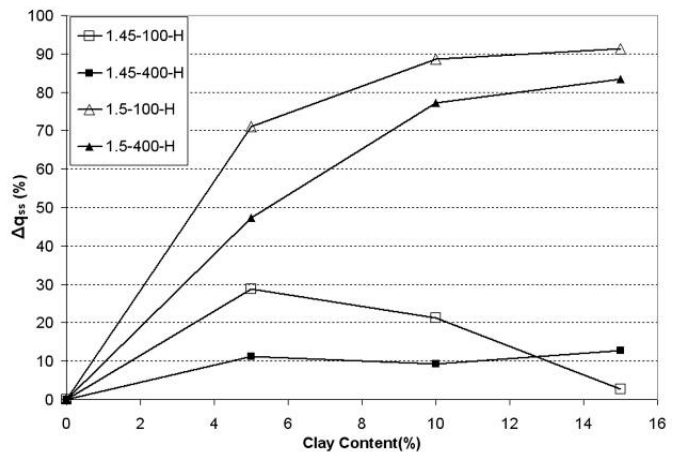
q_{ss} is steady state strength for any optional mixture

$q_{ss_{cs}}$ is steady state strength for the clean sand of that optional mixture

In figure 6, the graphs of steady state strength losses versus clay contents have been demonstrated for high and low plastic clays. In figure 6a (6b), comparing 1.45-100-L(H) with 1.45-400-L(H), or 1.5-100-L(H) with 1.5-400-L(H), it is revealed that the lines of higher confining pressures lay beneath the others. This means that for a same increase in clay content the more confining pressure, the less loss in steady state strength happens. In other words, the steady state strength of deeper deposits is less sensitive to clay content increase.



a) Low plastic clay



b) High plastic clay

Figure 6-Steady state strength loss (in percentage) versus clay contents increase under different conditions

Now, if we consider 1.45-100-L(H) and 1.5-100-L(H), or 1.45-400-L(H) and 1.5-400-L(H) mixtures' trends in figure

6a(6b) we may see that those lines representing higher densities lay above the others, which means steady state

strengths of denser sands are more sensitive to clay content increase.

A general study of figures 6a and 6b reveals that most of changes in steady state strength is up to about 5 per cent clay content, thereupon its gradient lessens and in some cases becomes negative.

This points to less strength loss as clay content increases. Hence it seems that in low clay contents, clay has the crucial role and the occupation of rooms between sand grains by clay particles leads to significant decrease in inter-particle friction and effects so great drop in strength. On the other hand by clay content increase after about 5 percent, the mixture's plasticity boosts and plays much crucial role rather than the clay particles themselves. It means that in high clay contents, the rise in mixture plasticity prevents the significant loss in strength and even in some cases it leads to regaining strength.

Variations Of Undrain Brittleness

In this section, the variations of undrain brittleness versus clay content increase has been investigated. Undrain brittleness is defined as the slope of stress- strain graph after peak point until reaching steady state (fig 7).

The post peak behavior characteristics can be investigated properly using this parameter.

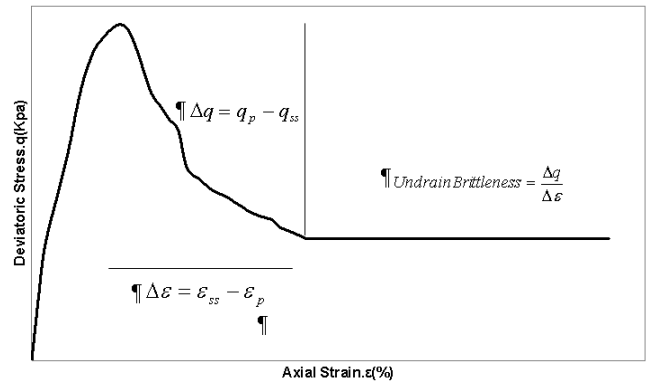


figure 7: The definition of undrain brittleness

The effect of clay content, density and confining pressure on the undrain brittleness variations

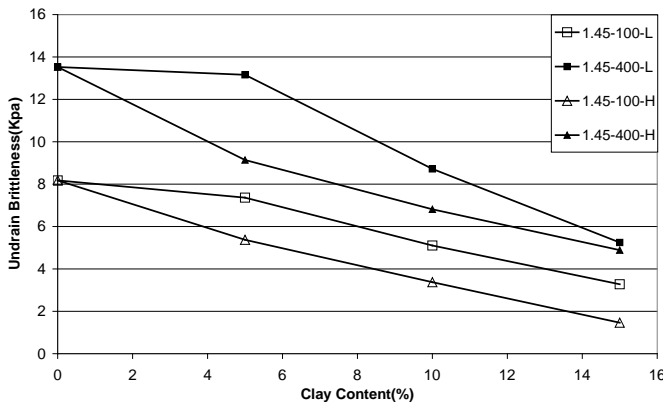
In fig 8 (a & b), the variations of undrain brittleness versus clay content increase has been demonstrated both for low and high plasticity clays. Apparently, it can be seen that as the clay content increases, the undrain brittleness drops significantly. It means that any increase in clay content leads to increase in ductility of the mixture.

Also by comparing the results of 1.45-100-L(H) with 1.45-400-L(H) in figure 8a or 1.5-100-L(H) with 1.5-400-L(H) in figure 8b, it can be seen that increasing the confining pressure will increase the brittleness of the mixtures.

Investigating about density effects shows that density hasn't any significant effect on the undrain brittleness.

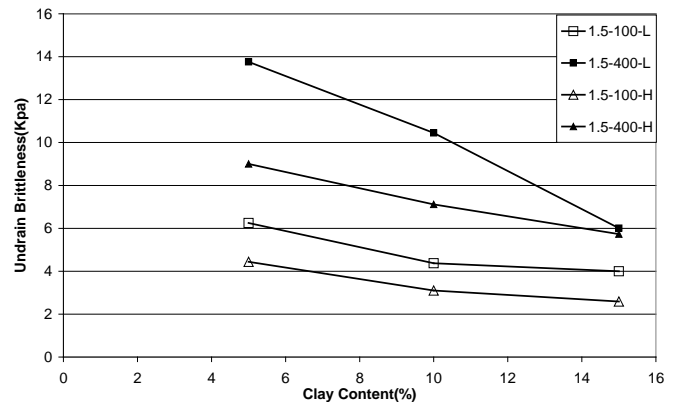
The effect of plasticity on the undrain brittleness variations

In fig 8, by comparing the results of 1.45(1.5)-100-L with 1.45(1.5)-100-H or the 1.45(1.5)-400-L with 1.45(1.5)-400-H, it can be concluded that the undrain brittleness decrease when the plasticity increases. It means that for the same clay content, the ductility of mixtures with higher plasticity clays is higher and more considerable.



a) Dry unit weight = 1.45 gr/cm³

Figure 8: Variations of undrain brittleness versus clay content increase under different conditions



b) Dry unit weight = 1.5 gr/cm³

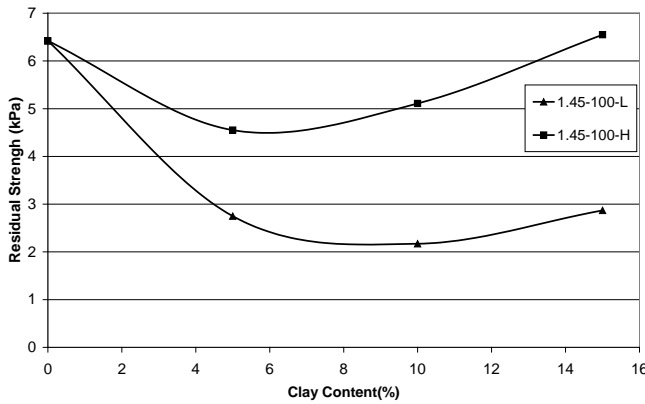
Residual Strength Study

Generally when the soil behaviour is perfect strain softening, after the strength reaches a climax, it drops significantly until it levels out in large strains (steady state).

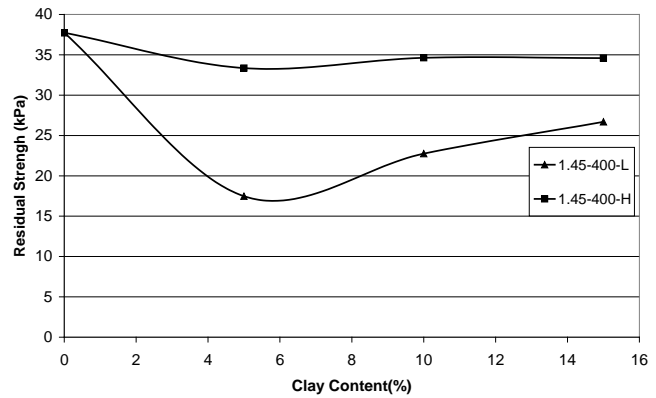
The shear strength of the soil under this condition is called residual strength and it is important in stability analysis and other relevant problems. This parameter is a function of angle of internal friction and it is calculated on a plane of Mohr's circle which has $(45 + \frac{\phi}{2})$ degrees angle with horizon. It can be calculated using equation 2:

$$S_U = \frac{\cos \phi}{2} q \tag{2}$$

The S_U value for any case is calculated by substituting appropriate values of ϕ and q . In the following section a



a) Confining pressure of 100 KPa



b) Confining pressure of 400 KPa

Figure 9: variations of residual strength versus clay content increase under different conditions

The effect of plasticity on residual strength variations

Considering curves of 1.45-100-L and 1.45-100-H, or 1.45-400-L and 1.45-400-H, it is clear that for lower PI admixtures, not only the residual strength is lower, but also its variations are more significant. Furthermore, as strength values start to boost again, the mixtures containing high PI clays gain values near to clean sand ones, however this is not true for low PI clays.

So it seems that by increasing plasticity, soil's strength develops against flow failures.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study in order to investigate effects of fines content and their plasticity on behavioral characteristics of sands, about a hundred consolidated undrained triaxial tests were performed. Tests were conducted in a special manner to study other parameters such as density and confining pressure in addition to fines content and plasticity.

graph for residual strength variations against clay content increase will be presented.

Clay content and confining pressure effects on residual strength

In figure 9, residual strength variations for clay content increase have been demonstrated based on different mixtures. If we accept the shape of lines in graphs as a general trend, it is obvious that for both graphs as clay content rises up to 6 or 8 percent, the residual strength decreases. Yet, it begins to increase after about 8 percent clay content.

By a comparison between 1.45-100-L and 1.45-400-L, or 1.45-100-H and 1.45-400-H in figures 11a and 11b, it might be seen that as confining pressure increases the residual strength does so.

To achieve these goals, in addition to using appropriate graphs representing tests' results, some images taken by electronic microscope were provided in the text in order to better understanding of explanations. The most important achievements are as follow (these results are valid by increasing clay up to 15 %):

- ❖ As clay content increases (for constant void ratio or dry density), peak strength and steady state strength in stress-strain curves drop. However, as plasticity increases for same level of clay content, peak strength decreases slightly, while steady state strength rises.
- ❖ As confining pressure and density increase, peak and steady state strength values do the same. Despite this fact, as clay content increases, effect of density

tends to pale. Thus in high clay contents strength values for two different density values are almost the same.

- ❖ It seems that steady state strength decrease for shallow sand specimens is more sensitive to clay content increase. Also it was concluded that denser specimens are more sensitive to any increase in clay content and their behavior changes much significantly.
- ❖ As the clay content increases, the undrain brittleness drops significantly while the ductility of mixtures with higher plasticity clays is higher and more considerable
- ❖ The residual strength value decreases as clay content increases up to about 6 to 8 percent, yet it increases after that value as clay content does the so. For mixtures containing high PI clays, the residual strength is higher while its variation is less significant.
- ❖ Based on the results, it seems that for lower clay contents, fines content governs behaviors. However as clay content increases, gradually the role of plasticity becomes more pivotal

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