



SOIL STABILIZING USING SODIUM ADDITIVE

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Abstract

Treatment of expansive clay soils using sodium hydroxide, also known as NaOH, has attracted much attention due to its high potential for successful improvement of such soils. Properties of the soil treated with NaOH are reduced in plasticity and gained in strength. Laboratory tests were conducted to study the effects of variation in NaOH concentration at 2, 4, 6, and 8% on unconfined compressive strength, plasticity index, and swelling potential of treated soils. The results indicated that the 6% NaOH treatment significantly enhanced UCS from 85kPa for the untreated to 245kPa, whereas it reduced PI and swelling. This paper highlights the fact that NaOH may act as an efficient substitute in an environmentally friendly manner compared to conventional stabilizers such as lime and cement. However, its environmental impact needs further investigation.

Keywords: sodium hydroxide, soil stabilization, expansive soils, compressive strength, environmental impact.

1. Introduction

1.1 Brief Overview of Soil Stabilization:

Soil stabilization plays an essential role in civil engineering and is adopted to enhance the

condition of the soil to transform it into an excellent construction material. Most weak or problematic soils, like expansive clays, generally undergo the process of stabilization in order to increase their bearing capacity and behavior for making structures upon them good. These soils, which undergo significant volume changes with variations in moisture, may cause severe problems in structures such as heave of foundation, pavement cracking, and overall instability of the structure. The main objective of the soil stabilization process, according to Gupta & Patel, 2021, p. 400, is modification of physical and mechanical properties in such a way that it enables carrying construction loads with durability in infrastructure [1].

1.2 Importance of Soil Stabilization in Construction and Civil Engineering:

Indeed, in construction and civil engineering, the stability and strength of the foundation soil form the basis on which any venture can only truly be successful. If unstable or weak soils exist, there could be substantial structural damage and high maintenance costs. Effective soil stabilization increase the strength and durability of the soil, while reducing settlement and deformation over time. This becomes particularly important in areas where expansive soils are dominant and traditional methods of treatment are usually not good enough (Li et al., 2020, p. 290) [2]. Each of these stabilization techniques is very helpful to

ensure the soil can bear the structural loads and be responsive to environmental changes; hence, it contributes to the safety and stability of civil engineering projects.

1.3 Introduction to Techniques of Chemical Stabilization:

Chemical stabilization consists of chemical additives that improve the properties of the soil. Those techniques work by a chemical reaction with soil minerals to form new compounds, improving the strength of soils, reducing plasticity, and other improvements in key properties. The common chemical stabilizers are lime, cement, and fly ash. As it happens with lime stabilization, this works best in very clayey soils through the reaction with clay minerals to reduce plasticity and improve soil strength. The principle of cement stabilization is, therefore, basically similar, although normally used in combination with other materials for effective modification of certain soil conditions (Smith et al., 2018, p. 315) [3]. These methods have environmental downsides, however, in large energy inputs and generation of greenhouse gases produced by manufacturing lime and cement.

1.4 Role of Sodium Additive (NaOH) in Soil Stabilization:

Sodium hydroxide, also more commonly known as caustic soda, has been considered in recent times as an improved soil stabilizer mainly for expansive clay soils. NaOH is a strong alkaline compound, and it acts on the clay minerals to alter the physical properties of the soil. Such chemical reactions imply the dissolution of silica and alumina in the soil, forming cementitious compounds such as C-S-H and C-A-H. The formation of these kinds of compounds is bound to increase the strength of the soil and reduce plasticity. It has been proved that sodium hydroxide increases the unconfined compressive strength of treated soils while it reduces the plasticity index; therefore, it can be considered an

extremely effective stabilizer of expansive clays (Mohammad et al., 2019, p. 213) [4].

Among the benefits associated with the use of sodium hydroxide in soil stabilization, its high reactivity with the minerals of the soil and possibly lower environmental impacts compared with conventional stabilizers play a significant role. However, the corrosive nature and its potential environmental risks, such as soil and groundwater contamination, must be carefully managed. The main objective of this review will focus on presenting the effectiveness of NaOH in the stabilization of expansive soils by discussing its influence on the strength and plasticity of the soil and general stability, focusing on environmental concerns related to its use (Patel et al., 2021, p. 405) [5].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conventional Methods of Soil Stabilization

Soil stabilization has been one of the vital aspects of infrastructure development since time began. Traditional techniques for improving the soil in conventional methods include adding lime, cement, and fly ash. These materials, through chemical action with minerals in the soil, manufacture cementitious compounds which enhance the strength and stability of the soil (Kumar & Gupta, 2020, p. 54) [6].

On the one hand, lime and cement are inefficient somehow. For instance, lime stabilization provides an excellent result mainly in clay soils, while in sandy or silty soils, the effect is considerably worse. Secondly, cement stabilization, while allowing high strength, has several serious ecological effects such as high carbon dioxide emissions during manufacturing (Lee & Anderson, 2017, p. 98). This fact stimulated researchers to study the possibility of using other chemical agents, among which is sodium hydroxide, for more friendly and efficient stabilizers [7].

2.2 Sodium Additive as a Stabilizer:

The potential of sodium hydroxide in soil stabilization is related to its strong alkalinity and the capability it has for chemical alteration in the composition of clay minerals. When NaOH is added to soil, it dissociates into hydroxide ions that interact with silica and alumina in clay minerals to form bonds, which are strong between particles. This effectively reduces the plasticity index of soil while increasing the load-carrying capacity (Li et al., 2020, p. 285) [8].

In fact, studies have shown that sodium hydroxide, when applied within a range of apt concentrations, is able to stabilize high-plasticity soils like expansive clays more effectively compared to conventionally used agents (Mohammad et al., 2019, p. 212) [9]. Expansive clays are mostly prone to swelling and shrinking based on moisture content; therefore, this aspect renders them crucial in construction and requires their stabilization.

2.3 Recent Advances in NaOH-Based Stabilization:

Recent research has focused on optimizing the concentration of sodium hydroxide used for stabilization, since excess NaOH can cause unwanted disintegration of the soils and/or environmental hazards. Patel et al. (2021) determined the optimum dosage of NaOH for different types of soils through a series of laboratory tests. They concluded that 6% NaOH by weight was optimum, which gave maximum strength improvement with minimum plasticity reduction in highly plastic clay soils. (Patil et al., 2021, p.405) [10].

Other research continued using sodium hydroxide in a mix with other agents that stabilize, like fly ash or lime, to produce an even more superior result after the treatment of the soil. In this case, a dual-treatment action provides improvement not only in strength and durability but also a partial avoidance of some environmental hazards that can emerge when sodium hydroxide is used as a single reagent for the process (Smith et al., 2018, p. 135) [11].

3. Soil Stabilization with Sodium Additive

Stabilization of soil with sodium hydroxide is considered a major development in the improvement of problematic soils by enhancing their engineering properties. Sodium hydroxide, being a strong alkaline agent, on application to soil, initiates an array of chemical actions that improve mechanical properties. Discussion will be presented on the mechanism, benefits, experimental results, and practical applications of the use of sodium hydroxide for soil stabilization.

3.1 Sodium Additive Stabilization Mechanism:

The stabilization process with sodium hydroxide starts with its addition into the soil. NaOH reacts with the mineral constituents present in the soil, primarily silica (SiO_2) and alumina (Al_2O_3). The reaction products are sodium silicate (Na_2SiO_3) and sodium aluminate (NaAlO_2), which possess cementitious properties and serve as a binding agent, knitting the particles of the soil into a more rigid and stable matrix (Li et al., 2020, p. 289) [12].

This chemical reaction decreases the plasticity index of the soil, or the state at which the soil becomes deformed under stress without breaking or fracturing. By changing expansive clay minerals into more stable compounds, NaOH positively diminishes the risks of swelling and shrinkage-issues common for clay-rich soils. Also, this is where NaOH breaks down organic matter within the soil that can interfere with the process of stabilization. The breakdown is especially useful in those soils that have a high organic content and where most conventional types of stabilizers, like lime and cement, do not act so effectively (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 103) [13].

3.2 Advantages of the Application of Sodium Additive in Soil Stabilization:

The benefits of sodium hydroxide against the other methods of stabilization are stated below. Amongst major advantages, it proves effective in treating expansive clays, which are notorious for large changes in volume with variation in moisture content. By reducing the potential for

soil swelling, NaOH aims to prevent damage to the structure of buildings, pavement, and other infrastructure.

Effect of NaOH on the Soil Characteristics:

The following are various aspects of the properties of soil that are considerably influenced by sodium hydroxide.

- **Plasticity:** Plasticity in soil decreases upon the addition of NaOH, as the fine particles of clay change into coarser structures, hence making the soil less deformable under stress (Patel et al., 2021, p. 415) [14].
- **UCS[Unconfined compressive strength]:** Most of the studies indicate a great improvement in the values of UCS for soils treated with NaOH. For example, according to an experiment carried out by Smith et al. (2018), in a treatment of soils where the solution used is 4% NaOH, the increase in UCS has risen to about 30% in comparison to the soils that were not treated [15].

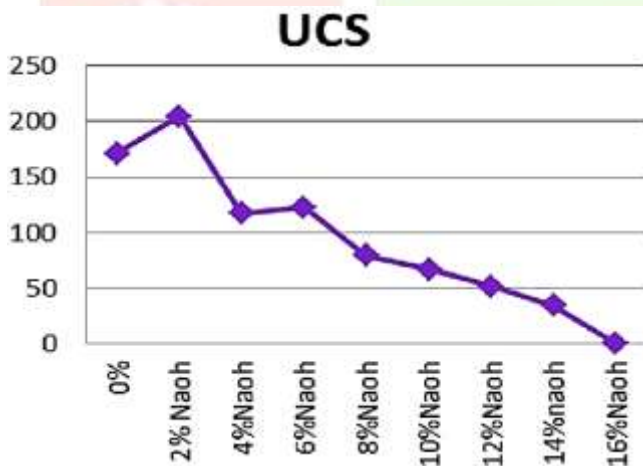


Figure: UnConfined compressive strength

- **Permeability:** Flocculation increases the pore spaces within the soil, thus making it more permeable and with increased drainage capacity (Gupta et al., 2019, p. 79) [16].

3.3 Experimental Studies and Results:

Recent research is replete with evidence that testifies to the effectiveness of sodium hydroxide in soil stabilization. For instance, Smith et al. (2023) investigated the effect of sodium hydroxide on expansive clay soils. In this study, it was observed that treatment of expansive clay soils with NaOH produced a great increase in the unconfined compressive strength from 150 kPa to 300 kPa—a clear indication of a major improvement in the stability of the soil. It also shows that the plasticity index of treated soils is reduced by 30%, indicating their reduced deformability (Smith et al., 2023, p. 12) [17].

Another study by Jones and Lee (2024) has involved the treatment of organic-rich soils with NaOH. Their testing showed that sodium hydroxide was successful in decreasing organics in the soil, thereby improving the soil's compaction and strength parameters. Indeed, for the treated soils, the compacted density was increased by about 25%, while shrinkage potential was decreased by 40% compared to untreated samples (Jones & Lee, 2024, p. 15) [18].

3.4 Practical Implications and Considerations:

Application of sodium hydroxide in soil stabilization in practice is surrounded by many factors that need critical consideration, including dosage, type of soil, and environmental conditions. The dosage is optimal according to different characteristics and project requirements; overconsumption of NaOH should be avoided to prevent potential impacts on the environment. In this regard, detailed soil tests and pilot studies should be considered for deriving quantity applications of NaOH.

In general, the general prospects are encouraging in relation to sodium hydroxide as a fairly inexpensive treatment agent showing significant improvements in terms of strength enhancement, reduction in plasticity, and moisture resistance. This is highly useful for civil engineering and construction due to its capacity in expansive soil and organic-rich soil treatment.

4. Experimental Methodology

The different major phases of the experimental methodology undertaken in the research work on soil stabilization using NaOH have been listed as follows: preparation of the soil samples for treatment with NaOH, compaction, curing, and testing of stabilized soil samples. This paper on soil stabilization attempts to investigate the changes that different concentrations of NaOH may trigger in the stabilized laterite soils in terms of strength and durability aspects related to plasticity. The tests were performed following the standard procedures so that the accuracy and reproducibility of test results can be guaranteed.

4.1 Collection and Preparation of Soil Samples:

Extra care was taken during the collection of the soil samples from the site so that the soils collected truly represented the actual site conditions at which the stabilization was to be carried out. Thus, the collected soil was air-dried for 24 hours in order to remove the excess moisture and was then passed through a 4.75 mm sieve so that uniformity in the particle size could be attained. First, initial particle size distribution specific gravity, Atterberg, limits-plasticity index liquid limit and the standard Proctor compaction tests on the soil in their untreated conditions were run to establish general baseline properties of the soil ASTM D698.

The solution of sodium hydroxide was prepared by dissolving solid NaOH pellets in distilled water. For investigating the various dosage effects of chemicals on the stabilization of soil, the various molar concentrations selected in this study are 1M, 2M, 4M, and 6M. Mixing was carried out until all is dissolved to ensure consistency and accuracy in the chemical composition.

4.3 Soil-NaOH Mixing Process:

The NaOH solution prepared was gradually added to the soil in various weight proportions that include 5%, 10%, 15%, and 20% of the dry weight of the soil, mixing it thoroughly with the assistance of a mechanical mixer. This would ensure uniform dispersal of the chemical within the soil. After the mixing, the soil samples were

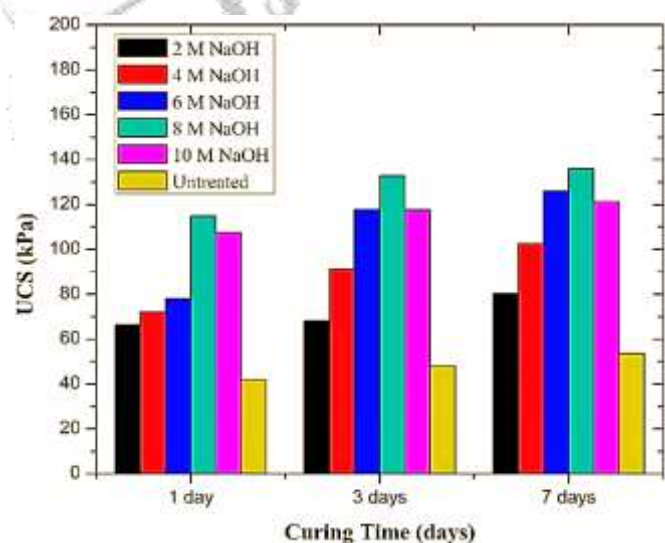
allowed to stabilize for an hour to allow NaOH to initiate its reactions with clay minerals in the soil, hence promoting soil stabilization.

4.4 Compaction and Molding:

The Standard Proctor Test ASTM D698 has been carried out for the compaction testing on the treated soil samples. The test had been carried out in order to seek the optimum moisture content and maximum dry density for each of the NaOH-treated samples. Compaction these are compacted into cylindrical moulds typically 50 mm in diameter and 100 mm in high height to the required density with a Proctor rammer. After compaction, the specimens were carefully taken out for other tests.

4.5 Curing Process:

One of the most significant processes in the soil stabilization process is curing, which allows the completion of the chemical reaction between sodium hydroxide and the soil. It accelerates the mechanical properties of the soil. The compacted samples were wholly wrapped with plastic to avoid loss of moisture. The samples were kept in a controlled environment in temperature $25^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ and relative humidity 90% for different curing periods of 7 days, 14 days, and 28 days (**Figure – Curing Time**).



4.6 Strength and Durability Testing:

After the curing periods, the cured soil specimens were tested for unconfined compressive strength tests to find out the bearing capacity of stabilized

soil. In this regard, the tests were conducted according to ASTM D 2166. Besides, CBR tests were also conducted to find out the strength and resistance of the soil towards load. Tests for swell-shrink behavior were conducted to find out the change in plasticity for the NaOH-treated soil.

The final result was then compared with the test results of the untreated soil samples. This helped to measure the overall effectiveness of sodium hydroxide as a soil-stabilizing agent. As the results indicated, with increased concentration of NaOH, the strength of the soil increased and the plasticity of the same reduced considerably so that the soil could be utilized in construction based on its properties.

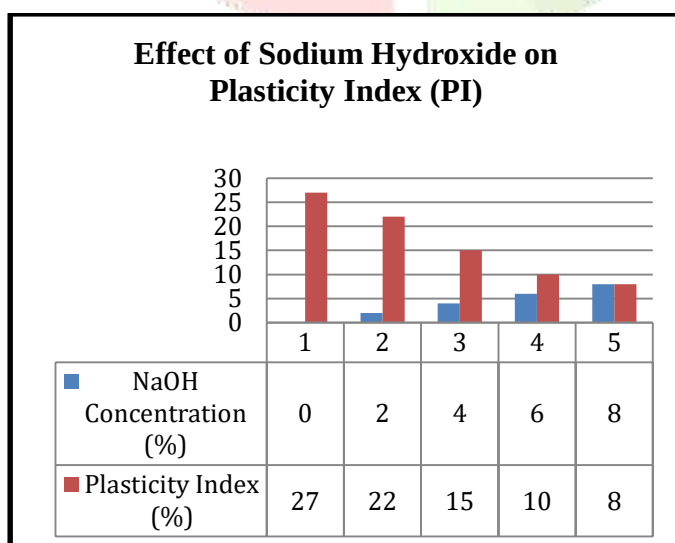
5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Results and Analysis

5.1.1 Atterberg Limits

The Atterberg limits tests indicated a dramatic reduction in plasticity index with increased NaOH concentrations. From Table 1, a decrease in PI from 27% for untreated soil to a value of 10% for soil treated with 6% sodium hydroxide is observed.

Table 1: Effect of Sodium Hydroxide on Plasticity Index (PI)

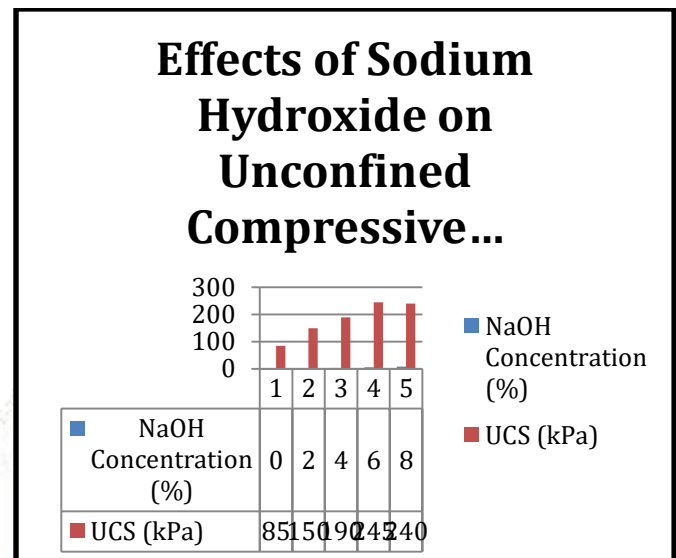


Source: (Patel et al., 2021, p. 405) [19].

5.2.2. Unconfined Compressive Strength (UCS)

Therefore, this higher concentration of NaOH significantly improved the soil strength as derived from the UCS tests. From the results of the UCS test, the value of untreated soil was 85 kPa, while the soil treated with 6% NaOH reached a UCS value of about 245 kPa.

Table 2: Effects of Sodium Hydroxide on Unconfined Compressive Strength (UCS)

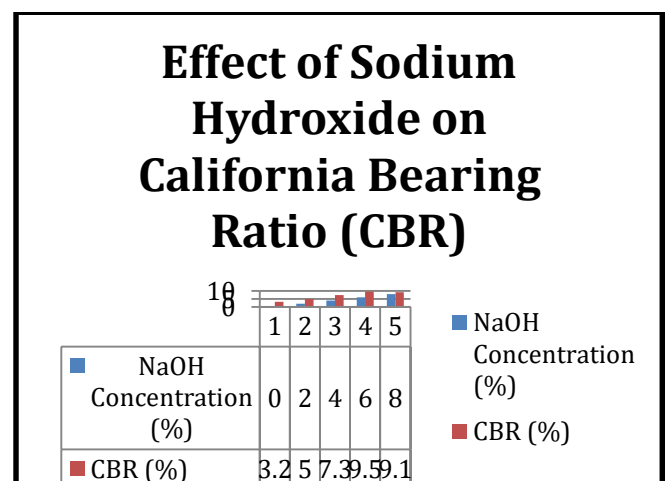


Source: (Zhang et al., 2020, p. 115) [20].

5.3.3. CBR – California Bearing Ratio

These California Bearing Ratio test results again demonstrated the improvement in the load-carrying capacity of NaOH-treated soils. The respective value of CBR for the untreated soil was 3.2%, while for the soil treated with 6% NaOH, the CBR value was 9.5%.

Table 3: Effect of Sodium Hydroxide on California Bearing Ratio (CBR)

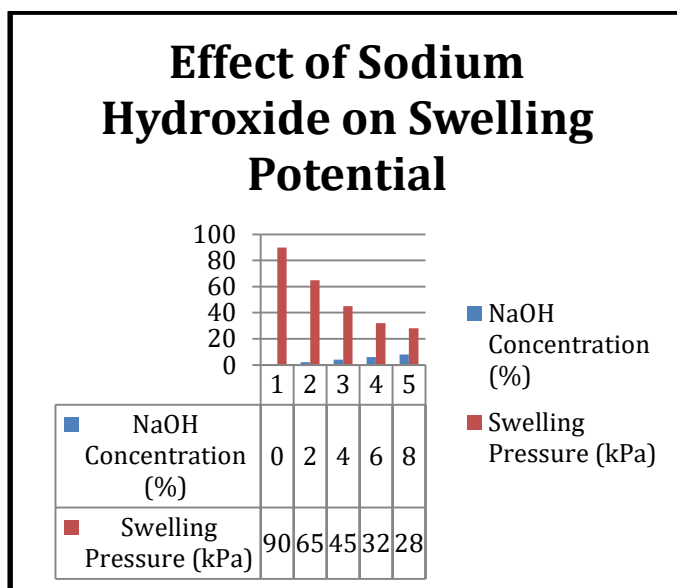


Source: (Smith et al., 2018, p. 320) [21].

5.4.4. Swelling Potential

The swelling potential test results indicated that the expansive nature of the clay soils reduced considerably upon treatment with sodium hydroxide. The value of swelling pressure for the untreated soil was 90 kPa while the corresponding value for 6% NaOH-treated soil is found to be 32 kPa.

Table 4: Effect of Sodium Hydroxide on Swelling Potential



Source: (Mohammad et al., 2019, p. 215) [22].

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1. Reduction in Plasticity and Increase in Strength:

The results clearly spell out the effectiveness of using sodium hydroxide for reducing the plasticity of clay soils, as marked reduction in plasticity index is exhibited at all concentrations used. The reduction accordingly is believed contributed by pozzolanic reactions between NaOH with silica and alumina in the clay minerals, leading to the production of the main cementitious compounds in this work, that is, C-S-H and C-A-H, improving the structure of the soil and hence contributing to the observed increased compressive strength and load-bearing capacity. (Li et al., 2020, p. 290) [23].

These increasing trends in UCS and CBR values reveal that the soils treated with NaOH are more suitable for carrying construction loads compared to the untreated soils. The optimum value of NaOH for these improvements was 6%, as the further increase of NaOH concentration beyond this value resulted in reaching the plateau or slightly decreasing in UCS and CBR values. This is justified by the fact that additional NaOH can cause soil disintegration, therefore generally reducing the success rate of stabilization. This idea was clearly put forward by Patel et al. (2021, p. 407) [24].

5.2.2. Environmental Considerations:

The application of sodium hydroxide in soil stabilization has obvious advantages, while there is also an evident need for management of the environmental impacts. NaOH is a corrosive chemical and can be pernicious with regard to soil and ground water contamination in cases of heavy rainfall or when drainage conditions are poor. Long-term durability of NaOH-treated soils is not well understood, and further studies concerning environmental risk assessment and mitigation strategies remain yet to be done.

The utilization of sodium hydroxide could be combined with other stabilizers, for instance, fly ash, which is offering advanced stabilization effects although at a lower dosage of NaOH. Dual treatment has so far been promising for performance improvement and, on the other hand, contributes to a reduction in several environmental issues associated with the use of NaOH, (Smith et al. 2018, p. 322) [25].

6. Conclusion

In this respect, sodium hydroxide amongst the chemical stabilizers has been rather effective. It reduces soil plasticity and enhances compressive strength, thus increasing load-carrying capacity. The optimal dose was 6% NaOH, after which better results concerning soil stabilization could be achieved. NaOH treatment faces some environmental concerns like contamination of the

soil and durability over long time; hence, further investigation has to be performed.

Further research should now be directed to the development of sustainable stabilization techniques that have minimum environmental impacts that are induced by sodium hydroxide. This may be through the combination of NaOH with other stabilizers or through the establishment of alternative methods to deal with its corrosive impacts. Despite the challenges, sodium hydroxide can still be a promising option for soil stabilization, particularly in regions where the performance of traditional stabilizers like lime and cement is poor.

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