

Abstract

Following a critical review of the conceptual and laboratory studies on expansive soil behaviour, it is shown that the current understanding of unsaturated expansive soil behaviour is not consistent. In the main, the approach used is based on the concept of soil water potential. Notwithstanding its success, the suction concept is suited for water movement in soils, and not the mechanics of the soil response. On this background, a new concept of visualising the swelling phenomenon is formulated. The concept is herein called the *induction concept*. It facilitates the characterisation of soil potentials (adsorptive forces) from a mechanistic point of view. The concept forms the basis of characterising the soil potentials in terms of effective stress. In this regard, an effective stress hypothesis is proposed and later on validated. The accompanying change in soil structure is adequately catered for via compatible physical soil models. One such physical soil model is developed herein for the first time. It is called the *Swelling Boundary Surface (SBS) model*. The SBS physical soil model is compatible with the changes of the soil potentials during soil swelling. It is applicable to different wetting conditions, direction of water flow and degrees of soil confinement.

An appropriate laboratory test programme was designed to study the fundamental response of an unsaturated expansive soil to flow of water. Accordingly, the laboratory test results analysed and reported herein set out to rationalise the induction concept and to validate the effective stress hypotheses. This leads to the characterisation of the expansive soil behaviour in terms of the effective stress. The study is limited to the stress-strain-water content relationships and does not explicitly incorporate time effects.

The resistance concept (Janbu, 1963, 1998) is the method adopted for analysing the test results. One of the merits of the resistance concept is that it is not dependent on the condition of the soil, e.g. initial water content or degree of saturation. Pure numbers are obtained from the test data, which are specific to the soil type. They constitute the essential soil parameters required in any geotechnical analysis. The simplicity and rationality inherent in the resistance concept, which is already used in geotechnical engineering, is particularly suited to analysis of unsaturated expansive soil behaviour.

The analyses show that the change in the internal effective stress governs the soil behaviour. Principally, the internal effective stress at the shrinkage limit is characteristic to the soil and it underlies the intrinsic soil property. It is herein called *pretension stress*, while the intrinsic soil property is herein called *pretension rate*. The pretension rate can be normalised against atmospheric pressure and thus expressed as pure number called *pretension number*. The significance of eodometer compression and the preconsolidation pressure of the soil to the intrinsic soil property is demonstrated.

The rationalisation of the induction concept has far reaching consequences. It affords the development of appropriate unsaturated expansive soil models in effective stress terms. Significantly, it provides a first opportunity to harmonise the mechanical behaviour of unsaturated and saturated soils in terms of effective stress. The rationalisation of the previously dubbed 'empirical' consistency limits in terms of effective stress opens the possibility of adopting them in characterising and modelling soil behaviour. Lastly, the resistance concept was successfully used to characterise both the swelling and shrinking behaviour of an expansive soil.

Declaration

I hereby certify that, except when specific reference to other investigation is made, the work described in this thesis is the result of the investigation by the candidate.

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Notations

1) Latin letters

A	soil attraction
D	coefficient of diffusivity (diffusion coefficient)
DP	disintegration point
e	void ratio
EL	elastic limit
e_o	initial void ratio
f	free energy of any system
G_s	specific gravity
k	pretension number
K	pretension rate
LCE	low compactive effort
LL	liquid limit
m	modulus number
M	Oedometer (tangent) modulus
m_h	stress number for hydrotransient (swelling) pressure
m_b	mobilisation number
m_s	stress number
M_o	initial stress modulus
M_b	mobilisation, swelling or unloading modulus
M_r	reloading modulus
m_r	reloading number
NC	normally consolidated
OC	overconsolidated
P	hydrotransient or swelling pressure
p	soil suction
P_H	horizontal swelling pressure
PI	plasticity index
PL	plastic limit
P_o	reference pressure = atmospheric pressure
P_v	vertical swelling pressure
R	Time resistance
s	soil number
S	soil resistance (flexibility modulus)
SL	linear shrinkage limit
SP	pressure saturation point
S_r	degree of saturation
t	time
U	water (penetrant) uptake at saturation point (infinite time)
U_a	pore air pressure
U_a-U_w	soil suction
U_t	water (penetrant) uptake at time t
U_w	pore water pressure
w	water content
w/c	water content
W_o	initial water content
Y	swelling modulus

Y_0	initial swelling modulus
y	swelling number
YP	yield point
1D	one-dimensional

2) Greek letters

δ	heave
ε	swelling strain
ε_a	axial swelling strain
γ	bulk density
γ_d	dry density
σ'	effective stress
σ_c	(effective) preconsolidation pressure
σ'_{cm}	mobilised preconsolidation pressure
σ'_i	intergranular effective stress
σ'_o	initial effective stress
σ'_s	pre-swelling stress
σ'_T	pre-tension stress
σ'_v	vertical effective stress
σ'_w	mobilised effective stress
σ_i	internal (effective) stress
ψ	soil suction

Contents

List of tables	xii
List of figures	xiv
CHAPTER 1 REVIEW OF EXPANSIVE SOIL BEHAVIOUR & STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	1
1.1 Definition of expansive soils	1
1.1.1 Origin	2
1.1.2 Occurrence	3
1.2 Structure of expansive soils	4
1.2.1 Conceptual models for the microstructure level	4
1.2.2 Conceptual models for the macroscopic level	5
1.2.3 Summary	6
1.3 Laboratory investigation of expansive soils	7
1.3.1 Stress paths commonly investigated in the laboratory	7
1.3.2 Stress state variables	9
1.4 Laboratory stress-strain behaviour	10
1.4.1 One dimensional free swelling	10
1.4.2 One-dimensional swell-under-load	12
1.4.3 Shrinking strain	13
1.4.4 Discussion	15
1.5 Soil models for expansive soils	15
1.5.1 Total heave prediction	16
1.5.2 Differential heave prediction models	16
1.5.3 Advanced conceptual models	18
1.5.4 Discussion	18
1.6 Summary of the literature review	19
1.7 Statement of the research problem	20
1.7.1 Problem	20

1.7.2	Justification and validity of the study	21
1.7.3	Objectives and scope of this study	22
1.8	Organisation of the Thesis	23
CHAPTER 2	DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW CONCEPT FOR VISUALISING PARTICLE-LEVEL PHENOMENA	26
2.1	Clay-water-electrolyte system of an expansive soil	26
2.2	Development of a new concept - The induction concept	27
2.2.1	Characterisation of soil potentials	28
2.2.2	Formulation of the induction concept	29
2.2.3	Soil structure and the induction concept	32
2.3	A new model for the dynamic (changing) soil structure	34
2.3.1	The soil particles model	34
2.3.2	Formulation of the dynamic soil structure model	37
2.3.3	The physical significance of the arbitrary water content points	40
2.4	Mechanistic view of the particle level phenomenon	40
2.4.1	Effective stress hypothesis	40
2.4.2	Swelling pressure hypothesis	41
2.4.3	Storage chamber hypothesis	41
2.4.4	Significance of the hypothesis	42
2.5	Development of a physical soil model for an expansive soil	42
2.5.1	Formulation of the model	42
2.6	Summary	47
CHAPTER 3	LABORATORY EQUIPMENT, TESTING PROGRAMME & METHODS OF ANALYSIS	48
3.1	Test equipment: The split ring oedometer	48
3.1.1	Description of the oedometer	49
3.1.2	Modifications to the split-ring oedometer	53
3.1.3	Reliability of the equipment	55
3.2	Laboratory test programme	56
3.2.1	Test programme	56
3.2.2	Confined swelling test	59
3.2.3	One-dimensional free-swelling test	61
3.3	Description of the expansive soil investigated	63
3.3.1	Field description	64

3.3.2	Sampling and transportation	65
3.3.3	Laboratory sample preparation	66
3.4	Methods of analysis	67
3.4.1	The resistance concept	67
3.4.2	The resistance concept applied to unsaturated expansive soils	73
3.4.3	The diffusion concept	77
CHAPTER 4	LABORATORY TEST RESULTS	80
4.1	Routine test results	80
4.1.1	Classification test results	80
4.1.2	Soil-Moisture Characteristic Curves	81
4.2	Confined swelling test results	82
4.2.1	Swelling pressure - time results	82
4.2.2	Swelling pressure - water content results	85
4.2.3	Water flow- time results	87
4.3	One-dimensional free swelling test results	88
4.3.1	Swelling pressure - time results	88
4.3.2	Swelling pressure - strain results	90
4.3.3	Swelling strain - time results	91
4.4	General discussion	92
CHAPTER 5	VALIDATION OF THE NEW CONCEPT	93
5.1	Soil resistance analysis: confined swelling	93
5.1.1	General	94
5.1.2	Initial phase (A - A')	96
5.1.3	Soil softening (A' - B)	96
5.1.4	Stiffening phase (B-C)	98
5.1.5	Peak phase (C-C')	99
5.2	Stress resistance analysis: confined swelling	100
5.2.1	Initial phase	101
5.2.2	Softening phase	102
5.2.3	Stiffening phase	103
5.2.4	Peak phase (C-C')	103
5.3	Swelling resistance analysis: confined swelling	104
5.3.1	General	105
5.3.2	Initial phase (A-A')	106

5.3.3	Softening phase (A'-B)	106
5.3.4	Stiffening phase (B-C)	107
5.3.5	Peak phase (C-C')	107
5.4	Soil & stress resistance analysis: continuous swelling path	107
5.4.1	General	109
5.4.2	Initial phase (A-A')	110
5.4.3	Softening phase (A'-B)	111
5.4.4	Stiffening phase (B-C)	113
5.4.5	Peak phase (C-C')	114
5.4.6	Drift phase (C'-D)	115
5.4.7	Final phase (D-F)	116
5.5	Conclusions	116
CHAPTER 6 VALIDATION OF THE EFFECTIVE-STRESS HYPOTHESES		117
6.1	The nature of swelling pressure	117
6.1.1	Hypothesis 1	117
6.1.2	Experimental test results	118
6.1.3	The anisotropy in swelling pressure	120
6.1.4	Nature of swelling pressure	122
6.2	Soil attraction is the internal effective stress	124
6.2.1	Hypothesis 2	124
6.2.2	Experimental test results	124
6.2.3	Conclusion	131
6.3	Integration of the internal and mobilised forms of effective stress	131
6.3.1	Forms of effective stress	131
6.3.2	The internal stress model	132
6.4	Conclusions	133
CHAPTER 7 THE INTERNAL EFFECTIVE STRESS-STRAIN BEHAVIOUR		134
7.1	Effective stress-strain results	135
7.1.1	Results from a range initial water content	135
7.1.2	Typical stress-strain result	136
7.2	Method of analysis and test results	137
7.2.1	Method of analysis	137
7.2.2	Soil parameters	138
7.3	Stress mobilisation analysis	138

7.3.1	The mobilisation modulus, M_b	139
7.3.2	Significance of point B	144
7.4	Stress reloading analysis	145
7.4.1	The re-loading modulus, M_b	146
7.4.2	Reloading modulus, M_r	147
7.4.3	Significance of point D	151
7.5	Conclusions	151
CHAPTER 8 INTERNAL EFFECTIVE STRESS & INTRINSIC SOIL PROPERTY		153
8.1	The internal effective stress and limiting water content	154
8.1.1	Internal effective stress	154
8.1.2	The limiting water content	155
8.1.3	Pretension ratio	157
8.1.4	The effective stress at point D	157
8.2	The intrinsic soil property	158
8.2.1	Coupling between soil water content and internal effective stress	159
8.2.2	Definition of the intrinsic soil property	160
8.2.3	Rationality of the pretension rate, K	160
8.3	Laboratory determination of the intrinsic soil property	163
8.3.1	Determination of the preconsolidation pressure	164
8.3.2	Test results	164
8.3.3	Analysis	165
8.3.4	Expression for the intrinsic soil parameter, k	167
8.4	Conclusions	168
CHAPTER 9 SIMULATION OF STRESS CHANGES DURING SOIL WETTING		169
9.1	The principle of effective stress	169
9.1.1	Application to expansive soils	170
9.2	Formulations of the effective stress principle	170
9.2.1	The internal form of the effective stress model	170
9.2.2	The mobilised form of the effective stress model	171
9.2.3	Hydrotransient pressure, U_p	171
9.3	The input soil parameters	173
9.3.1	Internal effective stress (soil attraction)	173
9.3.2	Mobilised effective stress (soil cohesion)	173
9.3.3	Hydrotransient pressure	175

9.4	Simulation of the internal effective stress changes during soil wetting	177
9.4.1	Internal effective stress	178
9.4.2	Hydrotransient pressure	179
9.4.3	Mobilised effective stress	180
9.4.4	Zero internal effective stress	181
9.4.5	Rationality of the liquid limit and disintegration point	183
9.5	Conclusions	184
CHAPTER 10	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	186
10.1	Summary	186
10.2	Conclusions	188
10.3	Recommendations for further research	191
	REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	192

List of tables

Chapter 1

Table 1.1	Types of construction for various heave magnitude (<i>Williams, et al., 1985</i>)	17
-----------	---	----

Chapter 2

Table 2.1	Significance of the arbitrary water content points	40
-----------	--	----

Chapter 3

Table 3.1	Summary of the test programme	57
-----------	-------------------------------	----

Table 3.2	Summary of resistance moduli for confined swelling	74
-----------	--	----

Table 3.3	Summary of resistance moduli for unconfined swelling	76
-----------	--	----

Chapter 4

Table 4.1	Summary of soil data	81
-----------	----------------------	----

Chapter 5

Table 5.1	Summary of soil resistance analysis: suction wetting-path	95
-----------	---	----

Table 5.2	Interaction between softening and stiffening phenomena	100
-----------	--	-----

Table 5.3	Summary of stress resistance analysis: suction wetting path	101
-----------	---	-----

Table 5.4	Summary of swelling resistance analysis: flooding path	105
-----------	--	-----

Table 5.5	Summary of soil resistance analysis data: pressure wetting-path	110
-----------	---	-----

Chapter 6

Table 6.1	Comparison between undrained compression and swelling process	126
-----------	---	-----

Table 6.2	Analogy between the swelling process and oedometer consolidation test	130
-----------	---	-----

Table 6.3	The internal stress integration model	132
-----------	---------------------------------------	-----

Chapter 7

Table 7.1	Terminology for the soil parameters in the tangent modulus analysis	138
-----------	---	-----

Chapter 8

Table 8.1	Coupling between effective stress and water content	159
-----------	---	-----

Table 8.2	Comparison of degree of saturation and water content ratio	161
-----------	--	-----

Chapter 9

Table 9.1	Summary of soil parameters (from table 5.5 in chapter 5)	173
-----------	--	-----

Table 9.2	Summary of soil parameters for the effective stress models	177
-----------	--	-----

List of figures

Chapter 1

- Figure 1.1 Symbolic structure of (a) kaolinite and (b) montmorillonite clay minerals (*after Mitchell, 1993*). 3
- Figure 1.2 Typical stress paths in the (p, s) stress space (*after Alonso et al. 1987*) 8
- Figure 1.3 External stress - strain plot (*after Justo et al. 1984*) 13

Chapter 2

- Figure 2.1 Characterisation of the soil potentials 29
- Figure 2.2 Illustration of the induction concept in terms of soil attraction 30
- Figure 2.3 Illustration of the induction concept 33
- Figure 2.4 Illustration of the soil particle model 35
- Figure 2.5 A model for the dynamic (changing) soil structure 38
- Figure 2.6 The development of the Swelling Boundary Surface (SBS) 43

Chapter 3

- Figure 3.1 (a) Cross-section of the split-ring oedometer (*after Senneset, 1989*) 49
- Figure 3.2 (b) The split-ring oedometer 50
- Figure 3.3 Membrane deflection with increase in horizontal pressure 51
- Figure 3.4 General layout: Split-ring oedometer equipment at NTNU 53
- Figure 3.5 Calibration curve for the electronic burette 54
- Figure 3.6 Placing of the soil sample in the split-ring oedometer 58
- Figure 3.7 Oedometer set up for confined swelling tests 61
- Figure 3.8 Oedometer set up for free swelling tests 63
- Figure 3.9 Seasonal variation of in situ water content profile for Avon clay 65

Figure 3.10	Definition of the resistance of a material (<i>after Janbu, 1995, 1998</i>)	69
Figure 3.11	Stress-strain curve from an incremental oedometer test for clay.	70
Figure 3.12	Time-strain curve of an incrementally loaded oedometer test	72
Chapter 4		
Figure 4.1	Soil-Water Characteristic Curve for Avon clay	82
Figure 4.2	Mobilisation of swelling pressure with time (pressure-gradient)	83
Figure 4.3	Mobilisation of swelling pressure with time (suction gradient)	84
Figure 4.4	Change of soil temperature soil swelling (suction gradient)	84
Figure 4.5	Water content - swelling pressure plot (suction gradient)	86
Figure 4.6	Water content - swelling pressure plot (pressure gradient)	86
Figure 4.7	Fractional water uptake (water flow) plotted against time	87
Figure 4.8	Swelling pressure - time plot (flooding path)	89
Figure 4.9	Swelling pressure - swelling strain plot (flooding)	90
Figure 4.10	Time-swelling strain plot for a range of initial water content	91
Chapter 5		
Figure 5.1	Soil resistance along suction-gradient wetting path	94
Figure 5.2	Increase of soil water content with time-suction gradient path	95
Figure 5.3	Mobilisation of swelling pressure with degree of soil saturation	98
Figure 5.4	Swelling-pressure and stress resistance modulus curves	102
Figure 5.5	Mobilisation of swelling pressure along flooding path	104
Figure 5.6	Variation of the swelling modulus with passage of time	105
Figure 5.7	Mobilisation of soil resistance during continuous swelling	109
Figure 5.8	Mobilisation of stress resistance during continuous swelling	110

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1	Mobilised swelling pressure for a horizontally sampled sample	118
Figure 6.2	Mobilised swelling pressure for a sample compacted at LCE	119
Figure 6.3	Variation of swelling pressure ratio with time	119
Figure 6.4	Comparison of swelling pressure: confined and unconfined swelling	121
Figure 6.5	Change of the internal stress of the soil with time.	125
Figure 6.6	Illustration of undrained triaxial compression of saturated soils.	126
Figure 6.7	Swelling modulus - water content plot along atmospheric swelling	128
Figure 6.8	Idealised $M - s'$ curves (<i>after Janbu, 1963, 1985, 1998</i>)	129

Chapter 7

Figure 7.1	Effective stress-swelling strain plot	135
Figure 7.2	Stress-strain relationship along flooding wetting-path	136
Figure 7.3	Idealised oedometer tangent modulus (<i>Janbu, 1963, 1998</i>)	137
Figure 7.4	Mobilisation modulus plot	139
Figure 7.5	Internal effective stress-strain relationship	146
Figure 7.6	Reloading tangent modulus plot	148

Chapter 8

Figure 8.1	Determination of the pretension stress	155
Figure 8.2	Internal effective stress-modulus plot at shrinkage limit	156
Figure 8.3	Degree of saturation - swelling pressure plot: pressure gradient wetting	161
Figure 8.4	Consolidation test results on the investigated expansive soil.	164
Figure 8.5	Reloading modulus plot. Initial water content = shrinkage limit	166

Chapter 9

Figure 9.1	Coupling between effective stress and water content	178
------------	---	-----