



Faculty of Manufacturing Engineering

**SYNTHESIS OF UREA IMPREGNATED RUBBER WOOD BIOCHAR
FOR RETENTION OF NITROGENOUS NUTRIENT IN SOIL**

Se Sian Meng

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SE SIAN MENG

**A thesis submitted
in the fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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2015

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitle “Synthesis of Urea Impregnated Rubber Wood Biochar for Retention of Nitrogenous Nutrient in Soil” is the results of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

Signature :.....

Name :.....

Date :.....

APPROVAL

I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and in my opinion this thesis is sufficient in terms of scope and quality for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signature :

Supervisor's Name:

Date :

DEDICATION

To my late mother, beloved father and family,
For the understanding and moral support
throughout the years

ABSTRACT

Urea is one of the nitrogen sources for plants to grow. Upon its application to soil, mineralisation takes place, where urea $[(\text{NH}_2)_2\text{CO}]$ is hydrolysed and converted to an intermediate compound known as ammonium carbonate $[(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{CO}_3]$. Subsequently, it is converted to ammonium ions (NH_4^+) by urease activities for plant uptake. The remaining hydroxide ions (OH^-) increase the soil's pH and release ammonia (NH_3) , a greenhouse gas produced after the reaction with NH_4^+ . Some portions of NH_4^+ will be oxidised by oxygen in the air and converted to nitrite (NO_2^-) and nitrate (NO_3^-) by bacteria. The mobility of NO_3^- causes leaching by the run-off of ground water and surface water that leads to eutrophication. Many efforts have been carried out to address this matter. However, there are still some research gaps and room for improvement. Biochar derived from rubber wood sawdust (RWSD) is introduced to be impregnated with urea to slow down the mineralisation and reduce nitrogen losses. The main objective of this research is impregnation of urea onto biochar for nitrogenous nutrient retention in soil. The characterisation of biochars focused on physiochemical characteristics such as X-ray diffraction (XRD), Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) surface area analysis, Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy, Boehm titration, pH alkalinity, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and SEM with energy-dispersive X-ray (SEM-EDX) spectroscopy. The porosities and acidic functional groups such as carboxylic ($-\text{COOH}$) groups are hypothesised to enhance the physio-chemi adsorption of urea onto biochar. The impregnation of urea onto biochar is performed by urea dissolution and recrystallisation with biochars content ranging from 2 % to 15 %. The ammonium and nitrate retained in soil after four weeks incubation are analysed by the first order kinetic model. It is observed that the mineralisation rate constant of urea is 54.4 %/week, higher compared with that of the impregnated samples at 5 % biochar obtained at 300 °C, which is 25.9 %/week and urea impregnated biochar sample produced at 700 °C with 10 % of impregnation, which is 28.9 %/week. In addition, the result from the total nitrogenous nutrient retention show that the percentage of biochar produced at 300 °C ranging from 3 % to 7 % and those at 700 °C ranging from 2 to 10 % are able to retain 15 % more nitrogenous compound than pristine urea. Moreover, ammonia volatilisation also indicated significant reduction after impregnation with the biochars with percentage ranging from 4 to 10 %, and exhibited the maximum ammonia loss of 35 % at 7.5 % of biochar. The reduction of ammonia emission is due to better nitrogen retention in soil upon impregnation. In addition, the trend nitrogenous nutrient retention in soil shows inverse quadratic relationship for both biochar while the ammonia emission shows a normal quadratic relationship. Hence, the emission of nitrous oxide is reported very minimal compared to pristine urea. Finally, the water column analysis revealed that the influence of urea impregnation with urea is negligible for ammonium. Nevertheless, the leaching of nitrate declined in the urea impregnated biochar sample due to the biochar contribution in reducing the mobility of nitrate in soil.

ABSTRAK

Urea merupakan sumber nitrogen terpenting untuk tumbeseran tanaman. Apabila ia ditaburkan ke atas tanah, proses mineralisasi berlaku dimana urea akan dihidrolisis dan bertukar kepada bahan ammonium karbonat $[(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{CO}_3]$. Bahan ini ditukarkan kepada ion ammonium (NH_4^+) oleh aktiviti urease untuk diambil oleh tumbuhan. Baki ion hidroksida yang tinggal pada tanah akan meningkatkan pH tanah dan bertindakbalas dengan ion ammonium lalu membebaskan gas ammonia sebagai gas rumah hijau. Sebahagian NH_4^+ akan dioksidakan di udara dan bertukar kepada ion nitrit (NO_2^-) dan ion nitrat (NO_3^-) oleh bakteria. Ion NO_3^- adalah gerak-bebas dalam tanah lalu melarut resapan bersama air larian bawah tanah dan menyebabkan eutrofikasi. Pelbagai usaha telah dijalankan untuk mengatasi masalah ini, tetapi, masih terdapat jurang dan ruang untuk penambahbaikan. Biochar yang dihasilkan daripada serbuk kayu pokok getah diperkenalkan, untuk digabungkan bersama urea bagi memperlambatkan penguraian urea dan mengurangkan pembebasan nitrogen. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah penghasilan baja urea impregnasi biochar untuk menambak pengkalan nutrient nitrogen pada tanah. Pencirian sifat fizik-kimia biochar menggunakan X-ray diffraction (XRD), analisis luas permukaan Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET), Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spektroskopi, Boehm titration, kealkalian pH, scanning electron microscopy (SEM) and SEM energy-dispersive X-ray (SEM-EDX) spektroskopi. Porositi dan kumpulan berfungsi bersifat asidik seperti karboksilik ($-\text{COOH}$) pada permukaan biochar dihipotesis dapat meningkatkan penyerapan urea impregnasi biochar. Penyediaan impregnasi urea biochar dihasilkan melalui pembubaran dan penghabluran semula dengan kandungan biochar dari 2 % hingga 15 %. Jumlah kandungan ammonium dan nitrat yang dikekalkan selepas 4 minggu pengeraman pada tanah telah dikaji dan dianalisis menggunakan Kinetik Model Perintah Pertama. Kadar mineralisasi konstan untuk urea didapati paling tinggi sebanyak 54.4 %/minngu berbanding dengan urea yang diimpregnasikan dengan biochar 25.9 %/minngu untuk biochar yang dihasilkan pada suhu 300 °C sebanyak 5 % dan 28.9 %/minggu untuk biochar yang dihasilkan pada suhu 700 °C. Jumlah simpanan kandungan nitrogen bagi sampel yang imregnasi dengan urea menunjukkan biochar yang dihasilkan pada suhu 300 °C dengan 3 % hingga 7 % biochar mengekalkan 15 % nitrogen lebih daripada sampel urea. Biochar yang dihasilkan pada suhu 700 °C dengan kandungan 4 % hingga 10 % dapat mengekalkan nitrogen nutrien yang melebihi 15 %. Pembebasan gas ammonia berkurang dengan jelas selepas impregnasi dengan biochar dari 4 % hingga 10 %, dan mencapai pengurangan yang maksimum sebanyak 35 % dengan 7.5 % kandungan biochar. Selain itu, didapati hubungan antara jumlah nitrogen yang kekal pada tanah dengan kandung biochar adalah kuadratik songsang, manakala pembebasan ammonia menunjukkan kuadratik normal. Gas nitrus oksida yang dibebaskan didapati pada tahap yang sangat minimal untuk sampel urea impregnasi biochar berbanding dengan sampel urea. Keputusan analisa air larut lesap menunjukkan kesan urea impregnasi biochar tidak memberi kesan yang ketara untuk larut resapan ammonium. Namun, larut resapan nitrat telah berkurangan pada sampel urea impregnasi biochar dimana biochar telah mengurangkan mobility nitrate pada tanah.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DECLARATION	
APPROVAL	
DEDICATION	
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENT	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
LIST OF APPENDICES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xvi
LIST OF SYMBOLS	xvii
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	xix
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problem Statement	6
1.3 Research objective	8
1.4 Research Hypothesis	8
1.4 Research scope	9
1.5 Thesis overview	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Biomass	12
2.1.1 Biomass content	15
2.2 Pyrolysis of biomass	21
2.2.1 Slow pyrolysis in biochar production	24
2.2.2 Physiochemical properties of biochar	26
2.2.3 Pyrolysis process parameters screening	31
2.2.4 Analysis of Variance	33
2.3 Application of biochars in soil	35
2.4 Application of urea in soil	37
2.4.1 Mineralisation of urea in paddy soil	40
2.4.2 Kinetic model of urea mineralisation	43
2.5 Slow release fertiliser	45
2.5.1 Function and mechanism of slow release fertiliser	46
2.6 Urea-biochar fertiliser for nutrient retention in soil	47
2.7 Environmental complications by urea	49
2.7.1 Emission of gas ammonia	50
2.7.2 Emission of nitrous oxide	52
2.7.3 Water contamination by ammonium and nitrate via leaching	53

3	METHODOLOGY	54
3.1	Experimental approaches	55
3.2	Characterisation of rubber wood sawdust	58
3.2.1	Determination of ash content	58
3.2.2	Determination of fixed carbon content of RWSD	59
3.2.3	Determination of carbon, hydrogen and nitrogen (CHN) content	59
3.3	Pyrolysis and Impregnation process	60
3.3.1	Design of experiment (DoE) by Design-Expert	60
3.3.2	Slow pyrolysis	61
3.3.3	Urea impregnation	62
3.4	Characterisations of biochar and urea impregnated biochar	64
3.4.1	Crystallinity phase analysis	64
3.4.2	Quantitative measurement of surface area using Brunauer-Emmett-Teller	66
3.4.3	Microstructural and compositional analysis using SEM/EDX	71
3.4.4	Quantitative measurement of surface functional groups using FT-IR spectroscopy	72
3.4.5	Quantitative measurement of acidic surface functional groups using Boehm titration	73
3.4.6	Determination of alkalinity	73
3.4.7	Chemisorption of ammonia gas by biochar	74
3.4.8	Thermal stability by differential scanning calorimetry (DSC)	76
3.5	Nitrogenous nutrient retention in soil	76
3.5.1	Incubation for unconverted urea in soil	76
3.5.2	Incubation for mineralised ammonium and nitrate	77
3.6	Emission of greenhouse gasses from the paddy soil	79
3.6.1	Ammonia (NH ₃) emission via volatilisation	80
3.6.2	Nitrous oxide (N ₂ O) emission via denitrification	82
3.7	Water column leaching test	83
3.8	First order kinetic model for determination of mineralization rate constant	85
4	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	87
4.1	Characteristics of raw materials	89
4.1.1	Proximate analysis of rubber wood sawdust	89
4.1.2	Ultimate analysis of rubber wood sawdust	91
4.1.3	Characterisation of urea	92
4.2	Characteristics of biochars	94
4.2.1	Specific surface area using BET technique guided by factorial design	94
4.2.2	Acidic functional groups by Boehm titration guided by factorial design	96
4.3	Influence of pyrolysis temperature and holding time on physiochemical properties of biochar	103
4.3.1	Phase analysis by X-ray diffraction (XRD)	103
4.3.2	Thermal analysis by thermogravimetric analysis (TGA)	106
4.3.3	Surface porosities by Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) analysis	109

4.3.4	Morphology analysis by Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and SEM-EDX	114
4.3.5	Surface functional groups by Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy	120
4.3.6	Negative surface charge by Boehm titration	123
4.3.7	pH alkalinity	125
4.3.8	Chemisorption of biochar surface with ammonia gas	128
4.4	Characteristics of urea-impregnated biochar	130
4.4.1	Pore filling analyses of urea fertiliser	130
4.4.2	Thermal stability of urea impregnated biochar fertiliser by Differential scanning calorimetry (DSC)	135
4.4.3	Elemental analysis by CHN	137
4.4.4	Formation of chemical bonds by FT-IR	138
4.5	Soil test of urea biochar-urea fertiliser	139
4.5.1	Urea retention as un-converted urea in soil	141
4.5.2	Mineralisation of fertiliser to exchangeable minerals ammonium and nitrate in soil	144
4.5.3	Mineralisation rate of urea and urea impregnated biochar fertiliser using first order kinetic model	146
4.5.4	Total nitrogen retention in soil	150
4.5.4.1	The effect of biochar negative surface charge on nitrogenous nutrient retention	153
4.5.4.2	The effect of biochar specific surface area on nitrogenous nutrient retention	157
4.6	Ammonia emission by urea fertilisers	162
4.7	Nitrous oxide (N ₂ O) loss via volatilities	173
4.8	Leaching of ammonium and nitrate by water column	174
4.8.1	Ammonium content in leachate	174
4.8.2	Nitrate content in leachate	177
5	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES	179
5.1	Conclusions	179
5.2	Contributions to knowledge	180
5.3	Future recommendations	182
	REFERENCES	183
	APPENDICES	190

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	Several types of popular biomass available in Malaysia (Source: Sustainable Energy Development Authority Malaysia, 2012)	14
2.2	Composition of lignocellulose originated from five sources of biomass in Malaysia (Maria et al., 2011)	19
2.3	Linkages between monomers in lignocellulose biomass (Harmsen and Huijgen, 2010)	20
2.4	Functional groups in lignocellulose biomass (Harmsen and Huijgen, 2010)	21
2.5	Pyrolysis process control and typical parameters (Atkinson et al., 2010; Ahmad et al., 2014)	23
2.6	Classification of nanoporosity by IUPAC (IUPAC, 1985)	26
2.7	Biochar physiochemical properties reported by previous researchers	32
2.8	Arrangement of a standard two-way ANOVA with two factors (Sahai and Ageel, 2000)	33
2.9	Total ammonia loss over 6 weeks (Junejo et al., 2009)	52
3.1	Factors and levels for pyrolysis	61
3.2	Recommended process parameter for pyrolysis of dried RWSD	61
3.3	Sample identification and parameters involved in pyrolysis	62
3.4	Sample identification and parameters involved in impregnation	63
4.1	Sample identification and parameters involved in pyrolysis	88
4.2	Sample identification and parameters involved in impregnation	88
4.3	Proximate analysis of RWSD	90
4.4	Ultimate analyses of raw RWSD	92
4.5	Physical properties of urea	93

4.6	Specific surface area of biochars measured by BET method at parameters recommended by factorial design	95
4.7	ANOVA of specific surface area with four factors	95
4.8	Negative surface charge values of biochars at parameters recommended by factorial design	96
4.9	ANOVA of negative surface charge with four factors	97
4.10	ANOVA of main factor (A) and interaction factor (B)	98
4.11	ANOVA of main factor (A) and interaction factor (C)	99
4.12	ANOVA of main factor (A) and interaction factor (D)	101
4.13	Specific surface porosities of biochar samples obtained from pyrolysis temperature 300 °C – 700 °C with holding time 1 and 3 hours	111
4.14	Surface functional groups on biochar	123
4.15	BET surface area analysis of biochar samples and urea-impregnated biochar fertiliser	131
4.16	pH level of paddy soil	139
4.17	Amount of fertilisers, biochar and negative surface charge added to soil	140
4.18	Amount of fertilisers, biochar and total surface area added to soil	141
4.19	Mineralisation rate constant, mineralisable potential and t _{1/2} of urea and fertiliser samples	150
4.20	Total nitrogen accumulate in soil after 4 weeks	151
4.21	Ammonia emission of urea and urea-impregnated biochar fertiliser to environment	163
4.22	Statistical summary of total nitrogenous retention and ammonia emission to the environment	171

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	World urea consumption of top 20 countries year 2011 (Source : Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations)	4
2.1	Types and sources of biomass in Malaysia (Source: Sustainable Energy Development Authority Malaysia)	13
2.2	Various technologies involved in biomass utilisation (Harmsen and Huijgen, 2010)	15
2.3	A typical biomass composition and the chemical structures (Singh et al., 2012)	16
2.4	Schematic of cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin in biomass (Yang et al., 2007)	17
2.5	TGA curves of cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin (Yang et al., 2007)	18
2.6	The composition of fractions obtained by various types of pyrolysis (Ronsse et al., 2013)	22
2.7	Decomposition of each component via pyrolysis (Parthasarathy and Narayanan, 2014)	24
2.8	The yield of biomass process by combustion and pyrolysis (Bolan et al., 2012)	25
2.9	SEM micrograph of biochar obtained from wood based biomass via slow pyrolysis at 400 °C and 1-hour holding time showing the pores on biochar surface upon pyrolysis (Shaaban et al., 2014)	27
2.10	(a) Acidic and (b) base functional groups commonly found on biochar surface (Brennan et al., 2001)	29
2.11	Surface negative charge on biochar surface (Shafie et al., 2012)	31
2.12	A statistic showing the grain yield increase by biochar compared to	36

	types of organic carbon contents in different type of soil (Ernsting, 2011)	
2.13	The nitrogen cycle (Rosenstock et al., 2013)	38
2.14	Simplified process flow of (a) ammonia production, and (b) urea production (Haber-Bosch, 1999)	39
2.15	Mineralisation of urea in soil	41
2.16	Zoning of flooded paddy soil modified from (Chowdary et al., 2004)	43
2.17	Mechanism of control release fertiliser modified from (Trenkel, 2010)	46
2.18	Mechanism of slow release fertiliser (Trenkel, 2010)	46
2.19	Mechanism of urease and nitrification inhibitors (Trenkel, 2010)	47
2.20	Environmental losses of nitrogen (Ruark, 2012)	49
3.1	Plate-like shape of rubber wood sawdust as receiving	54
3.2	(a) Overall experimental works in section A, B, C and D, (b) Details on experimental works in section A, B, C, and D	55
3.3	Schematic diagram for the process of urea-impregnated biochar (a) biochar before impregnation (b) urea-impregnated biochar	63
3.4	Fundamentals of x-ray diffraction in material	65
3.5	General shape of sorption isotherms (Andrade et al., 2011)	67
3.6	Classification of adsorption isotherms (IUPAC)	70
3.7	Classification of adsorption hysteresis (Wang et al., 2012)	70
3.8	Electron interaction in SEM (Allwar, 2012)	72
3.9	Schematic diagram of chemisorption analysis chamber	75
3.10	A typical pulse of chemisorption profile	75
3.11	Incubation experiment setup (a) a plastic pot containing the mixture of paddy soil, fertiliser and distilled water, (b) 3 replicates of each treatment for 4 weeks	79
3.12	Method of determining the amount of ammonium and nitrate in soil solution (a) distillation of soil solution, (b) distillate with indicator, and (c) titration for ammonium and nitrate quantification	79
3.13	Schematics diagram of experiment setup for ammonia loss measurement	81
3.14	The soil incubation setup for measurement of nitrous oxide emission	82

3.15	Water column leaching test	84
3.16	Quantification of ammonium in the effluent by UV-vis adsorbent	84
3.17	Schematic diagram of nitrogen mineralisation in soil (Stanford and Smith, 1972)	85
4.1	Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) of RWSD using a constant heating rate (5 °C/min) with a N ₂ flow rate of 10 ml/min	90
4.2	Schematic diagram on the effect of heat on wood structure	91
4.3	FT-IR spectrum of pristine urea	93
4.4	(a) Half normal plot and (b) interaction graph of main factor (A) with factor (B)	98
4.5	(a) Half normal plot and (b) interaction graph of main factor (A) with factor (C)	100
4.6	(a) Half normal plot and (b) interaction graph of main factor (A) with factor (D)	102
4.7	X-ray diffractogram of raw RWSD and biochars produced at pyrolysis temperatures ranged from 300 to 700 °C at 1 hour holding temperature	104
4.8	X-ray diffractogram of raw RWSD and biochars produced at pyrolysis temperatures ranged from 300 °C to 700 °C at 3 hours holding temperature	105
4.9	Schematic diagram of wood structure decomposition by the effect of heat at temperature above 220 °C	106
4.10	TGA patterns of treated biochar on pyrolysis temperature (300 °C and 700 °C) and holding time (1 hour and 3 hours)	107
4.11	DTG patterns of heated biochar on pyrolysis temperature (300 °C and 700 °C) and holding times (1-hour and 3-hours)	108
4.12	Temperature dependency of the surface area and total pore volume of biochars prepared at 1-hour and 3-hours holding time at pyrolysis temperature 300 °C to 700 °C	110
4.13	Isotherms of adsorption and desorption of biochar samples obtained from temperatures 300 °C and 700 °C, with holding times 1-hour and 3-hours	113
4.14	SEM micrograph of raw RWSD	115

4.15	(a) SEM micrograph of biochar sample BC 300-1, (b) SEM micrograph of biochar sample BC 300-3	116
4.16	(a) SEM micrograph of biochar sample BC 700-1, (b) SEM micrograph of biochar sample BC 700-3	117
4.17	SEM micrographs of (a) as received RWSD, (b) sample BC 300-1, (c) sample BC 400-1, (d) sample BC 500-1, (e) sample BC 600-1, (f) sample BC 700-1	118
4.18	Semi-quantitative of percentage of localised carbon and oxygen content by SEM-EDX analyses	120
4.19	FT-IR spectra for RWSD and biochar samples	121
4.20	Effect of pyrolysis temperature on negative surface charge at holding time 1-hour and 3-hours, temperature 300°C to 700 °C	124
4.21	Alkalinity of biochars obtained at temperature 300 °C to 700 °C with holding time 1-hour and 3-hours	126
4.22	Potassium and total minerals content in biochars obtained at temperatures 300 °C to 700 °C with holding time 1-hour and 3-hours	127
4.23	Ammonia gas molecule chemisorbed to the surface functional groups on biochar, modified from Briones, 2012 (Briones, 2012)	128
4.24	Chemisorption pulse TCD vs time of biochar sample BC 300-1	129
4.25	Amount of NH ₃ adsorbed on biochar obtained at temperatures ranged from 300 °C to 700 °C for 1-hour holding time	129
4.26	Isotherms of adsorption and desorption of biochar samples obtained from (a) BC 300- and UBC 300-10, and (b) BC 700-3 and UBC 700-10	132
4.27	SEM micrographs of (a) RWSD, (b) biochar BC 700, and (C) urea impregnated biochar	133
4.28	SEM micrographs and SEM-EDX analysis of biochar sample UBC 300-10	133
4.29	SEM micrographs and SEM-EDX analysis of biochar sample UBC 700-10	134
4.30	DSC endothermic peaks of urea, biochar BC 300 and fertiliser samples UBC 300-5 and UBC 300-10	137
4.31	DSC endothermic peaks of urea, biochar BC 700 and fertiliser	136

	samples UBC 700-5 and UBC 700-10	
4.32	Nitrogen content of urea-impregnated biochar fertilisers	137
4.33	FT-IR spectra of urea, BC 300 and UBC 300	138
4.34	Urea retention in soil of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 300-1 at week 1, week 2, week 3, and week 4 (Appendix B for data)	142
4.35	Urea retention in soil of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 700-3 at week 1, week 2, week 3, and week 4 (Appendix B for data)	143
4.36	Ammonium and nitrate retention in soil of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 300-1 at week 1, week 2, week 3, and week 4 (Appendix B for data)	145
4.37	Ammonium and nitrate retention in soil of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 700-3 at week 1, week 2, week 3, and week 4 (Appendix B for data)	145
4.38	Log (No-Nt) vs time plots of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 300-1	147
4.39	Log (No-Nt) vs time plots of urea and urea impregnated biochar BC 700-3	147
4.40	One-way ANOVA of urea impregnation samples with BC 300-1 at various percentages	152
4.41	Total nitrogen in soil by urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 at various percentages after 4 weeks	153
4.42	Total nitrogen in soil at various percentages of biochar and negative surface charge	156
4.43	(a) 3D scatter plot and (b) 3 D surface plot of nitrogen retention in soil at various percentages of biochar and negative surface charge	156
4.44	One-way ANOVA of fertiliser samples with BC 700-3 at various percentages	157
4.45	Total nitrogen in soil by urea-impregnated biochar BC 700-3 at various percentages after 4 weeks	158
4.46	Total nitrogen in soil at various percentages ages of biochar and BET surfae area	161
4.47	(a) 3 D scatter plot and (b) 3 D surface plot of nitrogen retention in	161

	soil at various percentages of biochar and BET surface area	
4.48	Ammonia emission of urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 and BC 700-3 after 8 weeks	164
4.49	One-way ANOVA of ammonia emission for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 at various percentages of biochar	165
4.50	One-way ANOVA of ammonia emission for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 700-3 at various percentages of biochar	165
4.51	Regression plot of ammonia emission for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 at various percentages of biochar	166
4.52	Regression plot of ammonia emission for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 700-3 at various percentages of biochar	167
4.53	Ammonia emission at various percentages of biochar and negative surface area	172
4.54	(a) 3D scatter plot (b) 3D regression plot of ammonia emission at various percentages of biochar and negative surface charge	173
4.55	Nitrous oxide emission of urea and UBC 300-5 for 12 days	174
4.56	Calibration curve of ammonium by standard solution by UV-Vis	175
4.57	Graph of ammonium content in leachate for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 over 4 weeks	176
4.58	Graph of ammonium content in leachate for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 700-3 over 4 weeks	176
4.59	Graph of nitrate content in leachate for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 300-1 over 4 weeks	178
4.60	Graph of nitrate content in leachate for urea and urea-impregnated biochar BC 700-3 over 4 weeks	178

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Deriavations of First Order Kinetics Model	190
B	Experimental raw data of soil analyses	193

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BC	-	Biochar
BET	-	Brunauer-Emmett-Teller
CHN	-	Carbon-Hydrogen-Nitrogen
DSC	-	Differential Scanning Calorimetry
EDX	-	Energy-Dispersive X-ray
FT-IR	-	Fourier Transform Infrared
HCl	-	Hydrochloric Acid
IUPAC	-	International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry
N	-	Nitrogen
NaOH	-	Sodium Hydroxide
NH ₄ ⁺	-	Ammonium
NO ₃ ⁻	-	Nitrate
NO ₂ ⁻	-	Nitrite
N ₂ O	-	Nitrous oxide
NH ₃	-	Ammonia
RWSD	-	Rubber wood sawdust
SEM	-	Scanning Electron Microscopy
STP	-	Standard Temperature and Pressure
TGA	-	Thermogravimetric analysis
UV	-	Ultra violet
XRD	-	X-ray diffraction

LIST OF SYMBOLS

$^{\circ}\text{C}$	-	Degree Celsius
$^{\circ}\text{C}/\text{min}$	-	Degree Celsius per minute
ml/min	-	Milliliter per minute
g	-	Gram
mg	-	Milligram
W	-	Weight
$\%$	-	Percentage
h	-	Hour
$^{\circ}/\text{min}$	-	Degree per minute
C_{I_r}	-	Crystallinity Index
P		Pressure
P_o	-	Relative Pressure
m^2/g	-	Meter square per gram
N_A	-	Avogadro's number 6.023×10^{23} molecules/mol
Pa	-	Pascal
kV	-	Kilo volt
cm^{-1}	-	Wave number
nm	-	Nano meter

N	-	Normality
M	-	Molarity
$mmol/g$	-	Mili Mole per gram
$\mu g N g^{-1}$	-	Micro gram nitrogen per gram
V	-	Volume
K	-	Kinetic constant
g/cm^3	-	Gram per centimetre cube
2θ	-	Bragg angle
cm^3/g	-	Centimetre cube per gram
$wt \%$	-	Weight percentage
mW	-	Miliwatt
$\mu g/g$	-	Microgram per gram
Log	-	Logarithm
$t_{1/2}$	-	Half-life
ppm	-	Part per million
$mole$	-	Mole
$wt.\%/^{\circ}C$	-	Weight percentage per Degree Celsius
$gmol^{-1}$	-	Gram per Mole

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND AWARDS

Journal

1. Influence of heating temperature and holding time on biochars derived from rubber wood sawdust via slow pyrolysis. A. Shaaban, **Sian-Meng Se**, M.F. Dimin, Jariah M. Juoi, Mohd Haizal Mohd Husin, Nona Merry M. Mitan. *Journal of Analytical and Applied Pyrolysis*. 107 (2014), 31-39.
2. Characterization of biochar derived from rubber wood sawdust through slow pyrolysis on surface porosities and functional groups. A. Shaaban, **Sian-Meng. Se**, Nona Merry M. Mitan, Dimin.MF. *Procedia Engineering*, 68 (2013) 365 – 371.
3. Preparation and characterisation of rubber wood sawdust biochar through slow pyrolysis: surface functional groups. A. Shaaban, **Sian-Meng. Se**, Dimin, M.F., Nadiah Hamid. *Journal of Mechanical Engineering and Sciences (JMES)*. Status: accepted for publication. Scopus Index.
4. Urea Impregnated Biochar to Minimize Nutrients Loss in Paddy Soils. Dimin M.F., **Sian-Meng Se**, Azizah Shaaban, Mohd Mu'az Hashim. *Journal of Automotive and Mechanical Engineering (IJAME)*. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15282/ijame.10.2014.18.0169>, 10 (2014), 2016-2024.