

PREPARATION, CHARACTERIZATION AND
DEGRADATION OF LINEAR LOW DENSITY
POLYETHYLENE / RAMBUTAN PEEL FLOUR
BIOCOMPOSITES

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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA PERLIS

2016



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DEGRADATION OF LINEAR LOW DENSITY
POLYETHYLENE / RAMBUTAN PEEL FLOUR
BIOCOMPOSITES**

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Biosystems Engineering

**School of Bioprocess Engineering
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA PERLIS**

2016

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA PERLIS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Sam Sung Ting whose help me a lot in my journey to complete my research and thesis. His excellent in guidance, caring, patiently corrects my writing day and nights will not be forgettable. I really appreciate his enthusiasm and ideas towards this research.

Thank you does not seem sufficient but it said with appreciation and respect. Special appreciation goes to my co-supervisor Dr. Nik Noriman Bin Zulkepli for his supervision and knowledge to this research.

I would like to express my indeed grateful to my beloved parents, Mr. Azmi Bin Ahmad and Mrs. Halimaton Sakdiah Bt Abu Bakar for their endless love, encouragement and prayers that make this research become possible.

I would also like to thank to all teaching engineers and technicians who rendered their helps during the period of my project work.

Last but not least, sincere thanks to all my colleagues for sharing their knowledge and their moral support. I owed all of u a lot.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------------|--|
| AA | Adipic acid |
| AAc-g-PLDPE | Acrylic acid grafted LDPE after plasma treatment |
| CaSt | Calcium stearate |
| CA | Citric acid |
| Co | Cobalt |
| CO ₂ | Carbon dioxide |
| CS | Cobalt stearate |
| DSC | Differential scanning calorimetry |
| E _b | Elongation at break |
| Fe | Iron |
| FTIR | Fourier transform infrared |
| GLU | Glutaraldehyde (GLU) |
| H ₂ O | Water |
| HDPE | High density polyethylene |
| HF | Hemp fiber |
| HMTA | Hexamethylenetetramine |
| MA-g-PLDPE | Maleic anhydride grafted LDPE after plasma treatment |
| Mn | Manganese |
| MSW | Municipal solid waste |
| NaOH | Sodium hydroxide |
| LDPE | Low density polyethylene |
| LLDPE | Linear low density polyethylene |

| | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| PCL | Polycaprolactone |
| PE | Polyethylene |
| PE-g-MA | Polyethylene-grafted-maleic anhydride |
| PET | Polyethylene terephthalate |
| PGA | Poly (glycolic acid) |
| PLA | Poly (lactic acid) |
| PMMA | Polymethylmethacrylate |
| PP | Polypropylene |
| PS | Polystyrene |
| PSW | Plastic solid waste |
| PVC | Polyvinyl chloride |
| PVOH | Poly (vinyl alcohol) |
| RPF | Rambutan peel flour |
| RWF | Rambutan skin waste flour |
| SEM | Scanning electron microscopy |
| TGA | Thermogravimetric analysis |
| TPS | Thermoplastic starch |
| TPSS | Thermoplastic sago starch |
| UTM | Universal Testing Machine |
| UV | Ultra violet |

LIST OF SYMBOLS

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| % | percentage |
| wt % | weight percentage |
| Mt | metric ton |
| g | gram |
| kg | kilogram |
| mg | milligram |
| °C | degree celcius |
| °C/min | degree celcius per minute |
| nm | nanometer |
| µm | micrometre |
| MPa | mega pascal |
| GPa | giga pascal |
| h | hour |
| L | litre |
| ml | milimetre |
| g/cm ³ | gram per cubic centimeter |
| Da | Dalton |
| kV | kilo volt |
| ΔH^*_{f} | heat fusion for 100% crystalline polyethylene |
| ΔH°_{f} | heat of fusion for semi crystalline polyethylene |
| cm ⁻¹ | reciprocal wavelength |
| cm ³ | cubic centimeter |
| mm ³ | cubic milimetre |
| mm/min | milimetre per minute |

Perincian dan Sifat – sifat Terhadap Keupayaan Degradasi oleh Campuran Linear Polietilena Berketumpatan Rendah / Tepung Kulit Rambutan Biokomposit

ABSTRAK

Pada masa kini, perkembangan plastik dari polimer terbiodegradasi dan pengisi semulajadi telah menarik minat besar dalam bidang sains dan penyelidikan. Polimer terbiodegradasi boleh membenarkan degradasi lengkap di dalam tanah dan tidak mengeluarkan mana-mana komponen toksik atau berbahaya. Oleh itu, dalam kajian ini, percubaan telah dibuat dengan menggabungkan tepung kulit rambutan (RPF) ke dalam matriks linear polietilena berketumpatan rendah (LLDPE). Kajian ini menyiasat pengaruh asid adipik sebagai pengserasi pada sifat-sifat komposit menggabungkan linear polietilena ketumpatan rendah dengan kandungan tepung kulit rambutan bervariasi dari 5-25% kandungan. Kobalt stearat sebagai pro-oksidan dengan berat 0.2% telah ditambah ke dalam komposit LLDPE/RPF-AA. Pendedahan polimer kepada persekitaran semulajadi dan ditanam ke dalam tanah dijalankan untuk tempoh 9 bulan untuk mengenal pasti tahap potensi polimer terdegradasi dalam persekitaran yang berbeza. Hasilnya, komposit LLDPE/RPF-AA menunjukkan kekuatan tegangan dan pemanjangan pada takat putus yang lebih tinggi berbanding komposit LLDPE/RPF selepas pendedahan kepada persekitaran dan ditanam di dalam tanah. Walaubagaimanapun, selepas penambahan kobalt stearat, kekuatan tegangan dan pemanjangan takat putus komposit LLDPE/RPF-AA menjadi berkurangan. Pengimbas elektron mikroskopi menunjukkan mikrograf pembentukan retak, liang dan koloni kulat pada permukaan komposit LLDPE/RPF dan komposit LLDPE/RPF-AA. Untuk analisis pengimbas pembezaan kalorimeter, komposit LLDPE/RPF-AA menghasilkan penghabluran yang lebih tinggi berbanding dengan komposit LLDPE/RPF. Kestabilan haba bagi setiap komposit menurun daripada 429 °C bagi LLDPE dengan pertambahan sebanyak 25% kandungan tepung kulit rambutan (251 °C) dan tepung kulit rambutan bersama asid adipik (262 °C).

Characterization and Properties on Degradability of Linear Low Density Polyethylene/Rambutan Peel Flour Biocomposites

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, developments of plastics from biodegradable polymers and natural filler have attracted great interests in science and research. Biodegradable polymer could allow complete degradation in soil and does not emit any toxic or noxious components. Therefore, in this research, an attempt was made by incorporating rambutan peel flour (RPF) into LLDPE matrix. This study investigated the influence of adipic acid as compatibilizer on the properties of the composites prepared from LLDPE with different RPF loading varied from 5 to 25 wt%. Cobalt stearate (CS) as a pro-oxidant (0.2 wt%) has been added into LLDPE/RPF-AA composites. Natural weathering and soil burial test were performed for 9 months' period to determine the potential of this polymer to degrade in different surroundings. As a result, LLDPE/RPF-AA composites showed higher tensile strength and elongation at break (E_b) compared to LLDPE/RPF composites after weathering and composting exposure. However, after the addition of CS, the tensile strength and E_b of LLDPE/RPF-AA composites decreased. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) micrographs showed the formation of cracks, pores and fungus colonization on the LLDPE/RPF composites and LLDPE/RPF-AA composites surface. For differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) analysis, LLDPE/RPF-AA composites presented higher crystallinity compared to the LLDPE/RPF composites. The thermal stability for the composites decreased from 429 °C (LLDPE) to 251 °C for 25 wt% of RPF and 262 °C for 25 wt% of RPF-AA.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Nowadays, the disposal of plastic waste has been continuously on the increase and its has been a big problem up to today in Malaysia. Most of the solid waste is contributed by petroleum-based plastics such as polyethyele (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polivinyil chloride (PVC) and polystyrene (PS). The application of the plastics typically used for packaging purposes but also in non-plastics applications such as textile fibres and coatings (Dewil et al., 2006). Apart from that, 40% of the plastic that used in packaging application is from PE. Table 1.1 illustrates the total waste generated in peninsular Malaysia.

Table 1.1: Generation of total solid waste in Peninsular Malaysia (Johari et al., 2014)

| Year | Total amount (Tonnes per day) |
|------|-------------------------------|
| 2010 | 23 000 |
| 2012 | 25 000 |
| 2020 | 30 000 |

The average amount of solid waste generated in Malaysia is 0.5-0.8 kg/person/day (Kathirvale et al., 2003). Figure 1.1 shows the components of solid waste composition in

Peninsular Malaysia. Plastics contributes about 11% from the component of solid waste and indicates the high amount waste disposal based on statistic generation of total solid waste in Peninsular Malaysia.

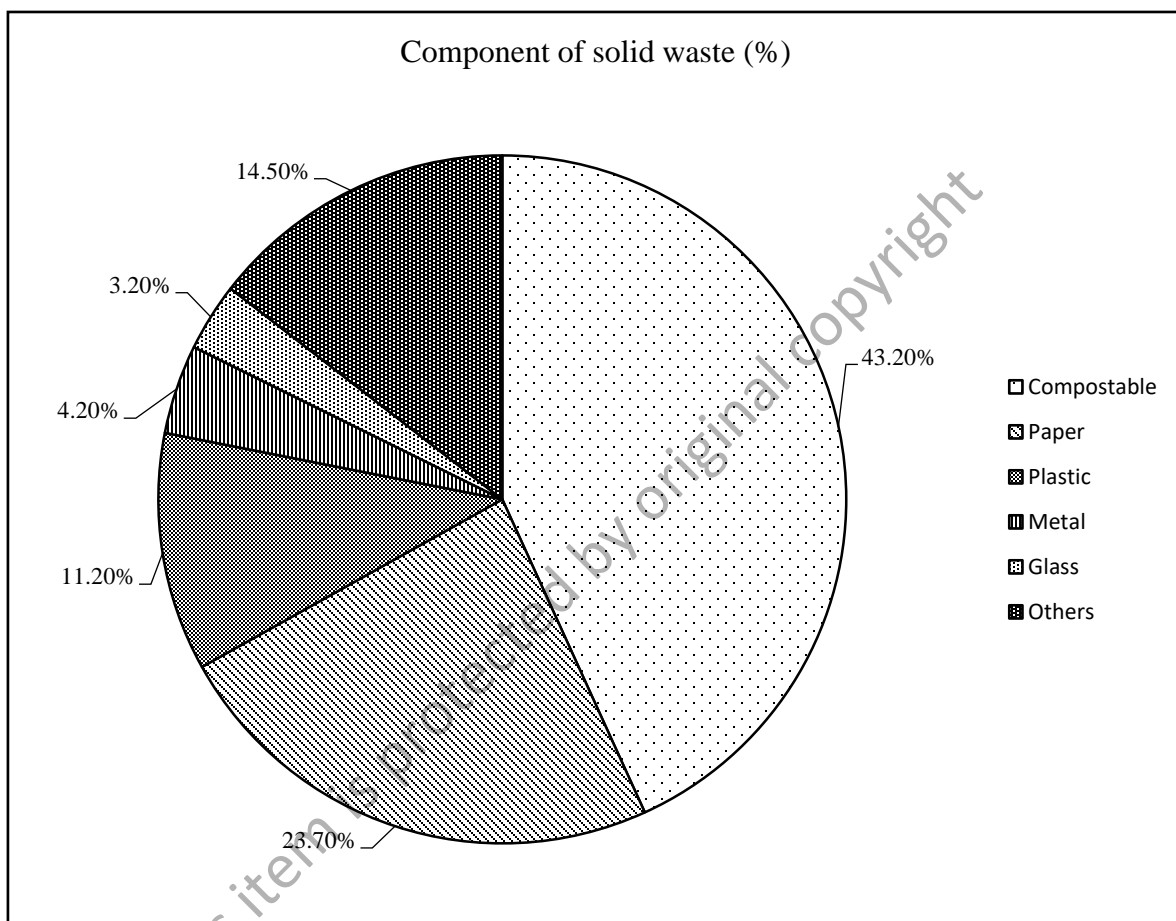


Figure 1.1: Component of solid waste (%) (Pusat Perbadanan dan Pengurusan Sisa Pepejal awam, 2014).

PE is non-degradable polymer and takes hundred years to completely degrade and highly resistant due to its chemical and environmental degradation (Otake et al., 1995). This is due to the properties of PE that has high molecular weight and cannot be degraded since it comprises of many branches that hardly to break down (Kathirvale et al., 2003). One of the

alternative accelerates the biodegradation of PE is the incorporation of natural filler into the polymer matrices.

Natural fibres that have been applied in non-degradable matrices are (i) leaf: sisal, pineapple leaf fibre (PALF), and henequen; (ii) bast: flax, ramie, kenaf/mesta, hemp and jute; (iii) seed: cotton; (iv) fruit: coconut husk, i.e., coir (Mohantya et al., 2000). Moreover, natural fibres are lignocellulosic in nature. Lignocellulosic materials are the most abundant renewable biomaterial of photosynthesis on earth. The lignocellulosic materials are widely distributed in the biosphere in the form of trees (wood), plants and crops. In lignocellulosic systems, the amount of cellulose, can vary depending on the species and age of the plant/species. Therefore, all of the natural fibres are hydrophilic in nature; their moisture content reaches 8 to 12.6% (Bledzki et al., 1996). Rambutan peel waste is one type of natural filler and readily abundant but does not have any market value. Therefore, the utilization of rambutan peel waste as natural filler in the polyolefins will provide a new application route to produce a low cost and degradable polymer. Rambutan peel waste as a lignocellulosic natural filler are degraded biologically. Biodegradation by the high molecular weight cellulose weakens the lignocellulosic cell wall and usually photochemical degradation by ultraviolet light occurs when lignocellulosics are exposed to outside exposure (Mohantya et al., 2000). Moreover, the utilization of rambutan peel waste can bring economic benefit and reduced the environmental problem impact. In recent years, the use of natural filler in polyolefins has gained great interest among researchers and industries due to some advantage of natural filler compared to mineral filler (e.g., kaolin, mica, talc, and calcium carbonate) such as low density, biodegradable, ecofriendly and renewable (Chun et al., 2013b; Salmah et al., 2013).

In general, the poor adhesion between the natural filler and the hydrophobic polyolefins is the main drawback to produce biocomposites. However, compatibilizer can be used to modify the hydrophilic natural filler, which can improve filler dispersion, wettability and filler-matrix adhesion. Previously, it was found that the used of used citric acid as a compatibilizer (Ning et al., 2007), glutaaldehyde as a crosslinking agent (Chan et al., 2013) and acrylic acid as chemical modification (Yeng et al., 2013) enhanced the properties of biocomposites. In current study, adipic acid (AA) was used as a compatibilizer. This compatibilizer was first used to compatibilize the polyolefin and rambutan peel. There is a lack of study in the utilization of adipic acid as a compatibilizer in polyolefin.

Apart from incorporating natural filler into non-degradable polymer, another approach to induce biodegradation of polyethylene is adding pro-oxidant into the polyolefin. Pro-oxidants are normally used for initiation of degradation including transition of complexes metal ions that can accelerate the oxidative process, consequently reducing the molecular weight of the polymer on the level that biodegradation takes place. It will act as initiator for the oxidation of the polyolefin. According to Reddy et al. (2009), the smaller segment of polymer chain can become nutrient for microorganism. Moreover, cobalt stearate (CS) has contributed the highest degradability to LDPE compared to the other cobalt carboxylates namely palmitate and laurate (Roy et al., 2007). Therefore, cobalt stearate has been applied as pro-oxidant in the present study.

1.2 Problem Statement

In recent years, the disposal of plastics especially those used in packaging, shows a serious challenge to waste management. Many efforts have been done on recycling the polyethylene including mechanical recycling, feedstock recycling and energy recovery. In order to reduce the waste problem of plastic, a replacement is needed. It is well known that polyethylene is highly resistant to biodegradation. One way by which the biodegradation of polyethylene can be accelerated is by the incorporation of a biodegradable filler such as fruit peel waste into the polymer matrix.

The incorporation of polyolefin with rambutan peel waste is necessary to produce a degradable plastic materials and hence resolve the waste problem from non-degradable plastic. However, one of the challenges is the compatibilization of rambutan peel waste and PE. Rambutan peel is hydrophilic material due to the presence of hydroxyl functional group. In contrast, PE is hydrophobic due to its hydrocarbon structure. In order to improve the properties of the biocomposites, compatibilizer is needed to compatibilize both materials.

The degradability of the polyolefin/biocomposites was always an issue among the researches. They claim that polyolefin that can be degraded during the degradation but the non-degradable component is still remain. Therefore, in order to overcome this issue, the potential of cobalt stearate as pro-oxidant in the biocomposites was investigated in the study.

1.3 Objectives of Study

1. To evaluate the effect of rambutan peels flour (RPF) loading on LLDPE/RPF composites properties.
2. To study the effect of adipic acid as compatibilizer on the properties and degradability of LLDPE/RPF composites.
3. To investigate the effect of cobalt stearate as a pro-oxidant on the degradability of LLDPE/RPF-AA composites by natural weathering and soil burial.

1.4 Scope of Study

This study focused on the development of degradable polymers by incorporating RPF into the LLDPE. The addition of adipic acid into RPF filler helps in dispersing RPF homogeneously within the LLDPE matrix. The composites are subjected to tensile, morphological and thermal properties testing. Then, the effect of natural weathering and soil burial test to the composites are investigated to determine their degradability. Other than that, the addition of cobalt stearate is aimed to accelerate the degradation process by accelerating the oxidation of LLDPE.

1.5 Thesis Organization

This thesis contains five chapters with chapter one introduces briefly the scope of the thesis including the introduction about the research background, problem statement and