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Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach to Material, Environmental, and Biological Characterization

Siti Fatimah Abdul Halim[1], Zulkarnay Zakaria[1,2,*], Engku Ismail Engku-Husna[3], Ahmad Nasrul Norali[1,2], Jaysuman Pusppanathan[4], Anas Mohd Noor[1,2], Mohd Hafiz Fazalul Rahiman[5], Siti Zarina Mohd Muji[6], Ruzairi Abdul Rahim[6], Robiyanti Adollah[7], Aiman Abdulrahman Ahmed[1]

[1]Biomedical Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Electronic Engineering & Technology, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia
[2]Medical Device & Life Sciences Cluster, Sports Engineering Research Centre (SERC), Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Arau, 02600 Perlis, Malaysia
[3]Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, Kubang Kerian, 16150 Kelantan, Malaysia
[4]Sport Innovation & Technology Centre (SiTC), Institute of Human Centered Engineering (iHumen), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, 81310 Johor, Malaysia
[5]Faculty of Electrical Engineering Technology, Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Arau, 02600 Perlis, Malaysia
[6]Department of Electronic Engineering, Faculty of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Parit Raja, Batu Pahat, 86400 Johor, Malaysia
[7]Faculty of Intelligent Computing, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Pauh Putra Campus, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy (MIS) is a non-contact, non-invasive electromagnetic technique used to measure the electrical and magnetic properties of materials. By applying an alternating magnetic field and observing frequency-dependent changes in induced eddy currents, MIS enables the characterization of conductivity, permittivity, and permeability. This technique has gained increasing attention for its versatility across diverse fields, including materials science, environmental sensing, food quality assessment, and biomedical diagnostics. This paper reviews the working principles of MIS and highlights its major applications in metal inspection, corrosion detection, composite material analysis, soil characterization, pH measurement, fruit quality assessment, tissue differentiation in biomedical and other emerging industrial applications.

1. INTRODUCTION

Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy (MIS) is a powerful tool for characterizing the electrical properties of materials without physical contact. Unlike conventional impedance spectroscopy, which requires electrodes, MIS operates through the induction of eddy currents using an external alternating magnetic field. The response of the material to this field, observed as changes in the amplitude and phase of the induced signal, provides insight into its internal structure and composition.

The advantages of MIS include:

- **Non-contact operation**, eliminating issues of electrode degradation or contamination.
- **High penetration depth**, enabling measurements through non-conductive barriers such as packaging or biological tissue.
- **Wide frequency range**, allowing for spectroscopic analysis of multiple material properties.

These features make MIS suitable for applications ranging from industrial non-destructive testing to agricultural quality control and biomedical diagnostics.

2. WORKING PRINCIPLE OF MAGNETIC INDUCTION SPECTROSCOPY

The operation of MIS shown in Figure 1 involves four key stages:

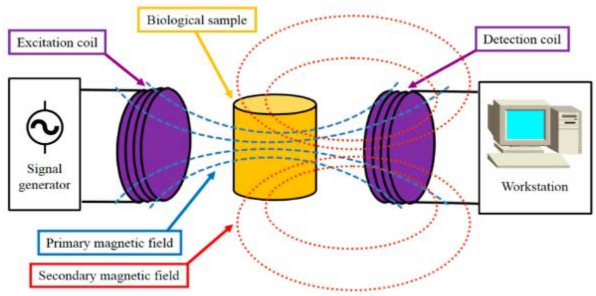

Figure 1. MIS measurement principle [1].

1. **Induction:** An excitation coil generates an alternating primary magnetic field that penetrates the material under study.
2. **Eddy Current Generation:** Conductive regions within the material respond by generating circulating eddy currents.

3. **Secondary Field Formation:** The eddy currents produce a secondary magnetic field, which perturbs the original excitation field.
4. **Detection and Analysis:** A receiver coil measures the resultant magnetic field. The amplitude and phase of the detected signal are analyzed as a function of frequency to extract the material's electrical and magnetic characteristics.
   By sweeping across a range of frequencies, MIS produces a spectral signature that reflects the material's conductivity (σ), permittivity (ε), and permeability (μ).

3. APPLICATIONS OF MAGNETIC INDUCTION SPECTROSCOPY

3.1. Metal Detection and Characterization

The distinct electromagnetic properties of metals make MIS ideal for metal identification and non-destructive testing (NDT).

- **Material Differentiation:** MIS distinguishes between ferrous and non-ferrous metals (e.g., steel, copper, aluminum) by their spectral response [2].
- **Defect Detection:** It reveals internal flaws such as voids, cracks, and corrosion by analyzing distortions in the eddy current spectrum [3].
- **Implant Monitoring:** High-sensitivity MIS systems can monitor metallic biomedical implants (e.g., bone screws) for movement or loosening [4].
- **Industrial and Security Applications:** MIS supports metal sorting in recycling, integrity checks in manufacturing, and detection of hidden metallic objects such as landmines [5].

3.2. Corrosion Detection

MIS offers a non-destructive approach for detecting corrosion and material degradation in metals.

- **Pipeline and Tank Inspection:** By monitoring variations in magnetic flux and eddy currents, MIS can identify corrosion, pitting, and wall thinning [6].
- **Structural Health Monitoring:** Real-time MIS systems are used to track metal integrity, reducing maintenance costs and preventing failures.

3.3. Composite and Nanomaterial Analysis

MIS enables characterization of composite materials and monitoring of nanostructures.

- **Structural Analysis:** Multi-frequency MIS reveals internal voids, delaminations, or inclusions in composite materials.
- **Nanomaterial Synthesis:** Magnetic induction heating facilitates the creation of carbon-based magnetic nanocomposites used for environmental remediation.
- **Magnetic Induction Swing Adsorption (MISA):** This MIS-derived process enables energy-efficient gas separation by heating magnetic nanoparticles embedded in adsorbents [7].

3.4. Soil Characterization

Electromagnetic Induction (EMI), a related method based on MIS principles, is used for soil analysis and geophysical mapping.

- **Soil Property Mapping:** MIS measures parameters such as moisture content, salinity, and magnetic susceptibility, aiding in precision agriculture and environmental studies [8].
- **Landmine Detection:** MIS-based detectors differentiate between metallic landmines and harmless fragments, even in highly mineralized soils.

3.5. pH Measurement

MIS can infer pH levels by detecting conductivity changes related to hydrogen ion (H^+) concentration.

- **Industrial and Environmental Monitoring:** MIS systems can assess pH in water treatment and wastewater management applications [9].
- **Fetal Blood pH Monitoring:** MIS probes have been proposed for non-invasive detection of fetal acidosis during labor [10].

3.6. Fruit and Agricultural Products

MIS has been widely adopted for non-destructive fruit quality assessment and ripeness detection. Variations in conductivity and permittivity correspond to changes in the cellular structure and water content of fruits.

- **Ripeness Detection:** Studies on avocados demonstrate that conductivity increases and the spectral slope flattens as the fruit ripens, reflecting cellular degradation [11].
- **Quality and Freshness Monitoring:** MIS has been used to evaluate the integrity of tomatoes, grapes, and apples by correlating electrical impedance spectra with freshness and shelf life [12].
- **Industrial Sorting:** MIS can be integrated into automated sorting systems for contactless bioimpedance measurement, improving throughput and reducing waste in food processing industries.

3.7. Tissue Differentiation and Biomedical Applications

In medicine, MIS provides a non-invasive imaging and diagnostic tool for studying the electrical properties of biological tissues.

- **Stroke Detection:** MIS differentiates between ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes by mapping changes in brain conductivity [13].
- **Cancer Assessment:** Tumor tissues often exhibit higher conductivity than surrounding healthy tissue, making MIS suitable for breast cancer evaluation [14].
- **Brain Edema and Hematoma Monitoring:** MIS can monitor tissue conductivity changes through the skull, offering an alternative to electrode-based methods.
- **Fetal and Cardiac Monitoring:** Proposed MIS-based probes could non-invasively measure fetal blood pH and monitor heart rate or respiration through bedding surfaces.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Strengths of Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy (MIS)

Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy (MIS) has shown strong potential as a non-contact, non-invasive technique for characterizing materials across many disciplines. The main advantages include:

- **Contactless operation:** It eliminates electrode-related issues such as corrosion and contamination.
- **Deep field penetration:** The magnetic field can pass through non-conductive barriers like packaging or skin.
- **Wide frequency range:** Enables multi-parameter analysis (conductivity, permittivity, permeability).

These features make MIS versatile and suitable for industrial, agricultural, environmental, and biomedical applications.

4.2 Technical Challenges

Despite its promise, MIS faces several technical limitations:

1. **Weak secondary signals:** Eddy current fields are often very small, especially in low-conductivity materials such as biological tissues. This demands sensitive detection and advanced signal processing.
2. **Material complexity:** Non-homogeneous or multi-layered samples (like fruit peel or human skin) cause measurement errors and require accurate physical modeling [15].
3. **Calibration and modeling:** Converting amplitude and phase data into real material properties involves complex mathematical inversion and calibration models.
4. **Depth limitation:** Higher frequencies reduce penetration depth due to the “skin effect,” limiting measurements to surface regions.
5. **Environmental interference:** Moisture, temperature, and background fields can affect soil and biological measurements.

4.3 Future Prospects

To expand MIS applications and improve accuracy, future research should focus on:

- **Enhanced electronics:** Improve signal amplification and noise reduction for low-conductivity samples.
- **Advanced coil design:** Optimize geometry and materials for better sensitivity and depth resolution.
- **Hybrid sensing systems:** Combine MIS with optical or ultrasonic sensors for multimodal diagnostics.
- **Machine learning integration:** Use AI to analyze spectral data and predict material properties more accurately.
- **Portable and wearable systems:** Develop compact MIS devices for on-site testing and biomedical monitoring.

5. CONCLUSION

Magnetic Induction Spectroscopy has evolved into a versatile analytical and diagnostic technology capable of probing a wide range of materials and environments. Its non-contact nature, sensitivity to subtle structural and compositional changes, and broad frequency response make it valuable in agriculture, medicine, materials science, and environmental monitoring. Ongoing research into miniaturized sensors, advanced signal processing, and multimodal integration will further enhance MIS performance and extend its real-world applicability.

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