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# Improving polysulfone membrane resistance to carbon dioxide induced plasticization during natural gas separation using functionalized carbon nanotubes

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**2019**

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/28412

Aberefa, Oluseyi Adebisi. (2019). Improving polysulfone membrane resistance to carbon dioxide induced plasticization during natural gas separation using functionalized carbon nanotubes. University of the Witwatersrand, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/28412

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# IMPROVING POLYSULFONE MEMBRANE RESISTANCE TO CARBON DIOXIDE INDUCED PLASTICIZATION DURING NATURAL GAS SEPARATION USING FUNCTIONALIZED CARBON NANOTUBES

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May, 2019

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to any other University.

_____

(Signature of candidate)

_____ Day of _____ year _____

## ABSTRACT

Commercial natural gas, generally methane ($CH_4$), is described as the most efficient energy source with a calorific value per mass of approximate 50.1 MJ/kg. However, raw natural gas is made up of mostly methane and a considerable quantity of other components like $C_{2+}$, $CO_2$, water and hydrogen sulphide ($H_2S$) in varying composition from well to well depending on the geographical location and condition. Membrane technology for gas separation technology has become an acceptable method for $CO_2$ removal from natural gas. Majority of commercial natural gas separation membrane systems are polymeric due to processing feasibility and low cost. However, conventional polymeric membranes have reached a trade-off threshold between permeability and selectivity, and of great concern is $CO_2$ induced plasticization due to harsh industrial conditions such as high feed pressure. The addition of carbon nanotubes (CNTs) into polymers appears to offer a unique solution to the deficiencies of conventional polymeric membrane systems.

In this study, carbon nanotubes (CNTs) were produced using a catalyst-assisted chemical vapour deposition method. Ferrocene was used as the catalyst. Effects of carbon sources (acetylene and methane) and production conditions (temperature and type of carrier gas) on the physicochemical property of as-produced CNTs were investigated using field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM), energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS), electronic precision balance (EPB) and Raman spectroscopy. The best of as-produced CNTs was purified and functionalized using carboxylation protocol. The surface chemistry, thermal stability, textural property and crystallinity of the functionalized CNTs (FCNTs) were obtained using Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), thermo-gravimetric analysis (TGA), $N_2$ physisorption at 77 K and X-ray diffraction (XRD), respectively. CNT produced from methane and argon at 900 $^oC$ displayed the best quality with $I_D/I_G$ ratio of 0.17 while the CNT produced from acetylene and mixture of argon and hydrogen at 1000 $^oC$ has the highest yield of 1.78 mg/s. FTIR confirms successful functionalization of CNTs. The degree of functionalization obtained from TGA is consistent with that of EPB. $N_2$

physisorption at 77 K indicates an increase in pore volume and average pore size of the FCNTs indicating more adsorption sites for the adsorbate. Thereby suggesting that FCNT could be a good filler in membrane synthesis for gas separation.

Dense mixed matrix membranes (MMMs) were synthesized by incorporating functionalized CNTs (FCNTs) at different wt. % (0.2, 0.5, 1.0, and 1.5) into polysulfone (PSF) using evaporation method. The MMMs were characterized using field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM), thermogravimetric analysis (TGA), differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), atomic force microscopy (AFM) and texture analysis (TA). Single gas permeation experiment was conducted using a custom-built permeation set-up via constant volume variable pressure technique while mixed gas permeability was measured on a constant pressure variable volume gas permeation apparatus. Surface and cross-section morphology of the MMMs as depicted by FESEM show that the membranes are dense, indicating that the membranes consist of dense structure whose porosity is not observable under an electron microscope. Depth-at-max analysis of AFM images of the synthesized membranes further supports that the pores of the MMMs possess dense structure. TGA indicates improved thermal stability of the MMMs with increasing wt. % loading of FCNTs. DSC results show that the glass transition temperature ($T_g$) of the MMMs was also improved with the addition of FCNTs. However, the increase in wt. % loading of FCNTs does not significantly increase the $T_g$ of the MMMs. Tensile strength and Young's modulus of the MMM obtained from TA show an increase in these mechanical properties with the addition of FCNTs. Single gas permeation results indicate an increase in $CO_2$ permeability as the wt. % loading of FCNTs increases up to 1.0 wt. % loading. Mixed gas separation shows similar trend without sacrificing $CO_2/CH_4$ selectivity.

$CO_2$ induced plasticization of the membranes was investigated experimentally and by phenomenological modelling. The sorption isotherms showed a typical dual-mode sorption model behaviour for all the types of synthesized membranes with the $CO_2$ concentration increasing rapidly at low pressures, which indicated a hole-filling of the Langmuir sites. At higher pressure, the rate of increase in the concentration declines

due to the saturation of the Langmuir sites, the further increase in the concentration at higher pressure is because of the penetrant sorption in Henry's law sites. The permeation isotherm of pure PSF indicated plasticization onset at $CO_2$ pressure of 12 bar. The MMMs showed no sign of plasticization over the pressure range tested (0-20 bar). This indicated an improvement in the $CO_2$ plasticization resistance of PSF by the addition of FCNTs. The developed model assumed three possible interface interactions in the MMMs; polymer matrix – polymer matrix, CNT – polymer matrix, and aligned CNT – CNT interface interactions. The model also accounted for the plasticization of the membrane. The model equation was solved by using the Levenberg-Marquardt algorithm in the Matlab environment to obtain the plasticization potential and the fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane. The model $CO_2$ permeability is in good agreement with $CO_2$ permeability obtained experimentally. The PSF plasticization potential obtained is similar to ones reported in the literature. The fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane increases with an increase in FCNT wt. % loading which shows high diffusivity through the microvoids with respect to diffusivity through the polymer matrix. This is an indication of an increase in Langmuir sorption sites for the penetrant thereby improving gas permeability.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am a product of the grace of God and the privilege of working with some great men and women on this PhD journey. My heart is full of gratitude to God, the Father of light, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Your help has brought me thus far. I am eternally thankful!

It an honour and a rare privilege for me to have Profs Sunny Iyuke and Michael Daramola as my supervisors. You believed so much in my abilities and you gave me ample opportunities to give expressions to my ideas. I cannot thank you enough for your great support and valuable contributions towards the success of this study. Sirs, I am grateful.

I wish to appreciate my host at the University of Melbourne (UoM), Australia, Dr. Colin Scholes and his research group for the warm welcome I received during my research visit to the department of chemical engineering, UoM. Special thanks to Bill Lu and Liang Liu for assisting me with gas permeation and sorption measurement equipment set-up at UoM.

I wish to thank National research foundation (NRF) and University of the Witwatersrand for funding this study. Special thanks to CHMT workshop team and MMU staff for fabrication of equipment and characterization of samples, respectively. Many thanks to my colleagues; Demilade, Ezinne, Damilola, Olawale, Ndangi, Veronica, Kelvin, and Kgothatso. I value your immense contributions to the success of this study.

My sincere thanks to my children; Praise, Wisdom, and Michelle. You understood with me during my many absences at home in the course of this study. You often stayed awake till late night just to say ‘welcome daddy’ to the daddy that always come home late due to his studies. You guys are the best!

To my wife, my love, the first lady federal republic of my home, princess Olufunke, words cannot express the immeasurable support you gave me during this study. You

encouraged me and you covered the missing gap due to my absence at home such that the children did not feel my absence so much. Thank you, my darling friend!

## LIST OF PRESENTATIONS AT CONFERENCES, RESEARCH VISIT, PUBLISHED AND SUBMITTED PAPERS RELATED TO THIS WORK

1. **Aberefa**, O., Bedasie, K., Madhi, S., Daramola, M.O. and Iyuke, S.E. (2018) Production of carbon nanotube yarn from swirled floating catalyst chemical vapour deposition: a preliminary study. *Advances in Natural Sciences: Nanoscience and Nanotechnology*, *9*(3), p.035009

2. **Aberefa, O.A.,** Daramola, M.O. and Iyuke, S.E., 2019. Production and functionalization of carbon nanotubes for application in membrane synthesis for natural gas separation. Microporous and Mesoporous Materials, 280, pp.26-36.

3. **Aberefa**, O. A, Daramola, M. O., Scholes, C. A. and Iyuke, S. E. Synthesis and performance evaluation of functionalized carbon nanotube/polysulfone dense membrane for $CO_2/CH_4$ separation. ***Submitted to Separation Science and Technology.***

4. **Aberefa**, O. A, Daramola, M. O. and Iyuke, S. E. $CO_2$ induced plasticization study of functionalized carbon nanotube/polysulfone dense membrane: experimental and modelling. ***Submitted to Chemical Engineering Journal.***

5. **Aberefa**, O. A, Daramola, M. O. and Iyuke, S. E. *Synthesis of novel carbon nanotube infused polymeric membranes for improved resistance to carbon dioxide plasticization during natural gas separation: Prospects*, Centre for Renewable Energy and Water, International Conference, 24 November 2016, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa. **Oral Presentation.**

6. **Aberefa**, O. A, Daramola, M. O. and Iyuke, S. E. *Production and functionalization of carbon nanotubes for application in membrane natural gas separation*, School of Chemical and Metallurgical Engineering, Wits poster day, 28 September 2017, Johannesburg. **Poster Presentation.**

7. **Aberefa**, O., Bedasie, K., Madhi, S., Daramola, M.O. and Iyuke, S.E. *Production and characterization of yarn spun directly from carbon nanotube bundles,* Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering, International conference, 22 – 25 October 2017, Edmonton, Canada. **Oral Presentation.**

8. **Aberefa, O.A.,** Daramola, M.O. and Iyuke, S.E. *Synthesis and performance evaluation of functionalized CNT/PSF dense membrane for $CO_2/CH_4$ separation,* Gordon Research Conference, 11 – 17 August 2018, New London, NH, United States. **Discussion leader and Poster.**

9. ***Research visit**:* Peter Cook Centre for Carbon Capture and Storage research, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia. 07 December 2017 – 10 January 2018.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents Page

DECLARATION ..... ii
ABSTRACT ..... iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ..... vi
LIST OF PRESENTATIONS AT CONFERENCES, RESEARCH VISIT, PUBLISHED AND SUBMITTED PAPERS RELATED TO THIS WORK ..... viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... x
LIST OF FIGURES ..... xv
LIST OF TABLES ..... xx
NOMENCLATURE ..... xxiiiii

**1 INTRODUCTION ..... 1**
**1.1 Background ..... 1**
**1.2 Research problem and motivation ..... 4**
**1.3 Aim and Objectives of the study ..... 6**
**1.4 Overview of the thesis ..... 7**
**References ..... 7**

**2 LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 11**
**2.1 History of gas separation membrane ..... 11**
**2.2 Gas separation mechanisms in polymeric membranes ..... 13**
**2.3 $CO_2$ induced plasticization in glassy polymeric membranes ..... 16**
2.3.1 Theory of plasticization ..... 16
2.3.2 Techniques for improving $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of polymeric membranes ..... 19
**2.4 Carbon nanotubes ..... 21**
2.4.1 Structure and properties ..... 21
2.4.2 Production methods ..... 23
2.4.3 Functionalization techniques ..... 25

**2.5 Recent developments in CNT infused polymeric membranes for gas separation ..... 28**
**2.6 Membrane gas permeation models ..... 29**
**2.7 Concluding remarks ..... 34**
**References ..... 35**

**3 MATERIALS AND EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES ..... 46**
**3.1 Materials ..... 46**
**3.2 Production of carbon nanotubes ..... 46**
**3.3 Functionalization of as-produced carbon nanotubes ..... 47**
**3.4 Membrane preparation procedures ..... 48**
**3.5 Characterization of produced CNTs and membranes ..... 48**
3.5.1 Field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM) ..... 48
3.5.2 Raman spectroscopy ..... 49
3.5.3 Fourier transform infrared radiation (FTIR) spectroscopy ..... 49
3.5.4 Nitrogen physisorption ..... 49
3.5.5 X-ray diffraction (XRD) ..... 49
3.5.6 Thermo-gravimetric analysis (TGA) ..... 50
3.5.7 Differential scanning calorimetry (DSC) ..... 50
3.5.8 Atomic force microscopy (AFM) ..... 51
3.5.9 Texture Analysis ..... 51
**3.6 Evaluation of gas transport property of the membranes ..... 52**
3.6.1 Single gas permeation measurements ..... 52
3.6.2 **Mixed gas separation ..... 56**
3.6.3 $CO_2$ gas sorption measurements ..... 61
**References ..... 61**

**4 PRODUCTION AND FUNCTIONALIZATION OF CARBON NANOTUBES ..... 64**
**4.1 Introduction ..... 64**
**4.2 Experimental ..... 65**

4.2.1 Materials ..... 65
4.2.2 Production and characterization of CNTs ..... 66
4.2.3 CNTs functionalization protocol and characterization ..... 67
**4.3 Results and discussion** ..... 67
4.3.1 Morphology of as-produced CNTs ..... 67
4.3.2 Effect of production conditions on the yield of as-produced CNTs ..... 68
4.3.3 Raman spectroscopy of as-produced CNTs ..... 73
4.3.4 Analysis of the degree of functionalization of CNTs ..... 77
4.3.5 FTIR analysis of the functionalized CNTs ..... 80
4.3.6 Effect of functionalization on the adsorption and textural properties of CNTs ..... 81
4.3.7 Effect of functionalization on the crystallinity of CNTs ..... 83
**4.4 Concluding remarks** ..... 84
**References** ..... 85

**5 SYNTHESIS AND PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF FUNCTIONALIZED CARBON NANOTUBE REINFORCED POLYSULFONE MEMBRANES FOR $CO_2/CH_4$ SEPARATION** ..... 95
**5.1 Introduction** ..... 95
**5.2 Experimental** ..... 96
5.2.1 Materials ..... 96
5.2.2 Membrane synthesis and characterization ..... 97
**5.3 Results and discussion** ..... 98
5.3.1 Membrane morphology ..... 98
5.3.2 Surface topology ..... 98
5.3.3 Thermal stability and glass transition temperature ..... 103
5.3.4 Mechanical property ..... 105
5.3.5 Single gas permeation results ..... 107
5.3.6 Mixed gas separation performance ..... 110
**5.4 Concluding remarks** ..... 118
**References** ..... 119

**6 $CO_2$ INDUCED PLASTICIZATION STUDY OF FUNCTIONALIZED CARBON NANOTUBE/POLYSULFONE DENSE MEMBRANE: EXPERIMENTAL AND MODELLING ..... 127**

**6.1 Introduction ..... 127**

**6.2 Experimental ..... 129**

6.2.1 $CO_2$ sorption experiment ..... **129**

6.2.2 Pure $CO_2$ gas permeation experiment at elevated pressure ..... **131**

**6.3 Model development ..... 138**

6.3.1 Theory ..... **138**

6.3.2 Assumptions and model equations ..... **144**

**6.4 Experimental results and discussion ..... 127**

6.4.1 Effect of FCNT on the $CO_2$ sorption isotherms of synthesized membranes ..... **138**

6.4.2 Effect of FCNT on $CO_2$ induced plasticization pressure of synthesized membranes ..... **144**

**6.5 Model results and discussion ..... 127**

6.5.1 Effect of FCNT on the fraction of $CO_2$ held in the Langmuir sites that have mobility ..... **144**

**6.6 Concluding remarks ..... 118**

**References ..... 151**

**7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK ..... 155**

**7.1 Conclusions ..... 155**

**7.2 Recommendations for future work ..... 158**

**References ..... 159**

**APPENDICES ..... 160**

Appendix A: EDS elemental compositions and spectra of as-produced CNTs ..... **160**

Appendix B: BET surface area calculations ..... **169**

Appendix C: Sample of measurement of membrane thickness using SEM ..... **172**

Appendix D: DSC thermogram analysis ..... **173**

Appendix E: AFM depth-at-max analysis ..... **178**

Appendix F: Tables of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeability and selectivity values for pure and mixed gases..... **181**

Appendix G: Dual-mode sorption model parameters analysis..... **187**

Appendix H: Tables of $CO_2$ solubility coefficient and permeability values at elevated pressure..... **192**

Appendix I: Permissions to include published works in this thesis..... **1925**

## LIST OF FIGURES

**Figures** **Page**

Figure 1.1: Overview of Natural gas processing ..... 2
Figure 1.2: Relationship between membrane permeability and selectivity for polymeric membranes (adapted from Robeson, 2008) ..... 5
Figure 1.3: $CO_2$ induced plasticization isotherm (adapted from Dong et al., 2011) ..... 5
Figure 1.4: Overview of the thesis ..... 7
Figure 2.1: Milestones of membrane gas separation systems in industrial application (adapted from Bernardo and Clarizia, 2013) ..... 12
Figure 2.2: General classification scheme of polymeric membranes ..... 13
Figure 2.3: General gas transport mechanisms through polymeric membranes (with permission from Stern and Trohalaki, 1990) ..... 16
Figure 2.4: Basic structure of (A) SWCNTs (B) MWCNTs (with permission from Ismail et al., 2009) ..... 21
Figure 2.5: Formation of different types of CNTs (A: armchair; B: zigzag; C: chiral) (with permission from Ma et al., 2010) ..... 23
Figure 3.1: Process flow diagram of the CCVD system set-up ..... 47
Figure 3.2: Pictures of the pure gas permeation apparatus at UoM [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module and permeate sample cylinder. C – Close view of e-Baratron digital manometer] ..... 56
Figure 3.3: Pictures of the mixed gas permeation apparatus at UoM [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module. C – Gas chromatography] ..... 59
Figure 3.4: Pictures of the mixed gas permeation apparatus at WITs [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module. C – Gas chromatography] ..... 60
Figure 3.5: Picture of the gravimetric sorption analyser at UoM [A- sample chamber, B- control panel] ..... 61

Figure 4.1: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon as carrier gas (A = A-800-Ar, B = A-850-Ar, C = A-900-Ar, D = A-950-Ar, E = A-1000-Ar). Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min ..... 69
Figure 4.2: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon/hydrogen as carrier gas (A = A-800-Ar/H, B = A-850-Ar/H, C = A-900-Ar/H, D = A-950-Ar/H, E = A-1000-Ar/H). Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 125 ml/min; hydrogen flow rate = 25 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min 70
Figure 4.3: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from methane as carbon source and argon as carrier gas: A = M-800-Ar; B = M-900-Ar; C = M-1000-Ar. D = TEM image of M-900-Ar. Experimental conditions: methane flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min ..... 71
Figure 4.4: Production rate of CNTs ..... 72
Figure 4.5: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min ..... 74
Figure 4.6: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon/hydrogen as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 125 ml/min; hydrogen flow rate = 25 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min ..... 75
Figure 4.7: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from methane as carbon source and argon as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: methane flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min ..... 76
Figure 4.8: TGA quantitative analysis of raw CNTs (RCNT), purified CNTs (FCNT) and functionalized CNTs (FCNT) ..... 78

Figure 4.9: TGA quantitative analysis of degree of functionalization of FCNT ..... 79
Figure 4.10: FTIR spectra of raw CNTs (RCNT), purified CNTs (PCNT) and functionalized CNTs (FCNT) ..... 80
Figure 4.11: Nitrogen adsorption-desorption isotherms of raw CNT (RCNT), purified CNT (PCNT) and functionalized CNT (FCNT) at 77 K. (a) Full Isotherm (b) Expanded view of the pore condensation region ..... 82
Figure 4.12: XRD patterns of raw CNT (RCNT), purified CNT (PCNT) and functionalized CNT (FCNT) ..... 84
Figure 5.1: SEM micrograph of surface morphology of the synthesized membranes 99
Figure 5.2: SEM micrograph of cross-sectional morphology of the synthesized membranes ..... 100
Figure 5.3: AFM surface topographies of synthesized membranes; (A) is amplitude 2D image, (B) is 2D height image and (C) is 3D image of height. Scan size for Pure PSF: 50 µm x 50 µm, scan size of the MMMs: 10 µm x 10 µm ... 102
Figure 5.4: Thermogravimetric curves of synthesized membranes ..... 104
Figure 5.5: Derivative of TG curves of synthesized membranes (a) Full curve and (b) expanded view of peaks of the curves ..... 104
Figure 5.6: Mechanical properties of the synthesized FCNTs-PSF; (a) Tensile strength and (b) Young's Modulus ..... 106
Figure 5.7: Single gas permeation at 35 $^{o}$C. (a) Pure $CO_2$, (b) Pure $CH_4$, (c) Ideal selectivity ..... 109
Figure 5.8: Separation performance of 10%/90% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. (a) $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CH_4$ permeability as a function of $CH_4$ partial pressure; (c) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor ..... 112
Figure 5.9: Separation performance of 50%/50% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. (a) $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CH_4$ permeability as a function of $CH_4$ partial pressure; (c) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor ..... 114
Figure 5.10: Schematic of the gas transport mechanism in the membrane ..... 114

Figure 5.11: Separation performance of 50%/50% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture in 1.0 wt. % PCNT-PSF and 1.0 wt.% FCNT-PSF. (a) $CH_4$ and $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor ..... 115
Figure 6.1: $CO_2$ sorption isotherms of synthesized membranes at 35 $^oC$ ..... 139
Figure 6.2: Experimental and model $CO_2$ sorption isotherms ..... 143
Figure 6.3: Effect of pressure on the solubility of $CO_2$ in the membranes at 35 $^oC$ . 144
Figure 6.4: Pure $CO_2$ permeability isotherms at 35 $^oC$ of the synthesized membranes ..... 145
Figure 6.5: Experimental and model $CO_2$ permeability at 35 $^oC$ of the synthesized membranes ..... 148
Figure A1: Elemental composition spectrum for A-800-Ar ..... 160
Figure A2: Elemental composition spectrum for A-850-Ar ..... 161
Figure A3: Elemental composition spectrum for A-900-Ar ..... 161
Figure A4: Elemental composition spectrum for A-950-Ar ..... 162
Figure A5: Elemental composition spectrum for A-1000-Ar ..... 163
Figure A6: Elemental composition spectrum for A-800-Ar/H ..... 163
Figure A7: Elemental composition spectrum for A-850-Ar/H ..... 164
Figure A8: Elemental composition spectrum for A-900-Ar/H ..... 165
Figure A9: Elemental composition spectrum for A-950-Ar/H ..... 165
Figure A10: Elemental composition spectrum for A-1000-Ar/H ..... 166
Figure A11: Elemental composition spectrum for M-800-Ar..... 167
Figure A12: Elemental composition spectrum for M-900-Ar..... 167
Figure A13: Elemental composition spectrum for M-1000-Ar..... 168
Figure B1: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for raw CNT ..... 170
Figure B2: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for purified CNT..... 170
Figure B3: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for Functionalized CNT ..... 171
Figure C1: SEM micrograph of Pure PSF thickness measurement ..... 172

Figure D1: Pure PSF DSC thermogram ..... 173
Figure D2: 0.2 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram ..... 174
Figure D3: 0.5 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram ..... 175
Figure D4: 1.0 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram ..... 176
Figure D5: 1.5 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram ..... 177
Figure E1: Pure PSF depth at max spectrum ..... 178
Figure E2: 0.2 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum ..... 178
Figure E3: 0.5 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum ..... 179
Figure E4: 1.0 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum ..... 179
Figure E5: 1.5 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum ..... 180
Figure G1: Linear asymptotes of the sorption data at elevated pressure for $k_d$ determination ..... 189
Figure G2: Plot of $p/C_h$ against p for the determination of $C_h'$ and $b$ ..... 191

## LIST OF TABLES

**Tables** **Page**

Table 1.1: Natural gas compositions characteristic (Dung et al., 2008) ..... 3
Table 1.2: Specifications of natural gas for commercial applications (Kidnay and Parrish, 2006) ..... 3
Table 2.1: The advantages and disadvantages of different CNT production methods (as reported by Rafique and Iqbal (2011)). ..... 25
Table 4.1: CNT production conditions ..... 66
Table 4.2: EDS of the as-produced CNTs showing wt. % of Carbon ..... 73
Table 4.3: Main raman signals of the produced CNTs ..... 77
Table 4.4: Gravimetric analysis of degree of functionalization of M-900-Ar using EPB ..... 79
Table 4.5: Effect of functionalization on textural properties of the produced M-900-Ar ..... 83
Table 5.1: Surface topographic analysis of synthesized membranes ..... 102
Table 5.2: Thermogravimetric analysis of synthesized membranes ..... 105
Table 5.3: Glass transition temperature of synthesized membranes ..... 105
Table 5.4: Summary of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeation results from this study compared to literature ..... 116
Table 6.1: Dual-mode sorption model parameters of synthesized membranes ..... 140
Table 6.2: Immobilization factors for the synthesized membranes at 35 $^oC$ ..... 150
Table A1: Elemental composition table for A-800-Ar ..... 160
Table A2: Elemental composition table for A-850-Ar ..... 160
Table A3: Elemental composition table for A-900-Ar ..... 161
Table A4: Elemental composition table for A-950-Ar ..... 162
Table A5: Elemental composition table for A-1000-Ar ..... 162
Table A6: Elemental composition table for A-800-Ar/H ..... 163
Table A7: Elemental composition table for A-850-Ar/H ..... 164
Table A8: Elemental composition table for A-900-Ar/H ..... 164

Table A9: Elemental composition table for A-950-Ar/H ..... 165
Table A10: Elemental composition table for A-1000-Ar/H ..... 166
Table A11: Elemental composition table for M-800-Ar ..... 166
Table A12: Elemental composition table for M-900-Ar ..... 167
Table A13: Elemental composition table for M-1000-Ar ..... 168
Table F1: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of pure PSF ..... 181
Table F2: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.2% FCNT PSF ..... 181
Table F3: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.5% FCNT PSF ..... 181
Table F4: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% FCNT PSF ..... 182
Table F5: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.5% FCNT PSF ..... 182
Table F6: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of pure PSF ..... 182
Table F7: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 0.2% FCNT PSF ..... 183
Table F8: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 0.5% FCNT PSF ..... 183
Table F9: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 1.0% FCNT PSF ..... 183
Table F10: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 1.5% FCNT PSF ..... 184
Table F11: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of pure PSF ..... 184
Table F12: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.2% FCNT PSF ..... 184
Table F13: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.5% FCNT PSF ..... 185
Table F14: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% FCNT PSF ..... 185
Table F15: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.5% FCNT PSF ..... 185

Table F16: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% PCNT PSF ..... 186
Table G1: $CO_2$ concentration in the MMMs based on sorption experiment ..... 187
Table H1: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of pure PSF ..... 192
Table H2: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 0.2% FCNT PSF ..... 192
Table H3: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 0.5% FCNT PSF ..... 193
Table H4: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 1.0% FCNT PSF ..... 193
Table H5: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 1.5% FCNT PSF ..... 194

## NOMENCLATURE

| | |
|---|---|
| A | Permeation area |
| A-Ar | Acetylene and argon |
| A-Ar/H | Acetylene and argon plus hydrogen |
| AFM | Atomic force microscopy |
| b | Langmuir affinity constant |
| BET | Brunauer-Emmett-Teller |
| BJH | Barrett-Johner-Halenda |
| BTU | British thermal unit |
| C | Total penetrants concentration |
| CCVD | Catalyst chemical vapour deposition |
| $C_d$ | Concentration of gas molecules in Henry's law environment |
| CEE | Centre for energy economics |
| $C_h$ | Concentration of gas molecules in Langmuir adsorption sites |
| $C_h'$ | Polymer matrix saturation constant |
| $CH_4$ | Methane |
| $C_m$ | Concentration of the mobile gas |
| CNT | Carbon nanotube |
| $CO_2$ | Carbon dioxide |
| CPVV | Constant pressure variable pressure |
| CVD | Chemical vapour deposition |
| CVVP | Constant volume variable pressure |
| DC | Direct current |
| DCM | Dichloromethane |
| $D_d$ | Diffusion coefficient |
| $D_o$ | diffusion coefficient as $C_m$ tends to zero |
| DSC | Differential scanning calorimetry |
| DWCNT | Double-walled carbon nanotube |
| EDS | Energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy |

| | |
|---|---|
| EIA | Energy information administration |
| EPB | Electronic precision balance |
| F | Fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility |
| FCNT | Functionalized carbon nanotube |
| FESEM | Field emission scanning electron microscopy |
| FTIR | Fourier transform infrared radiation spectroscopy |
| $H_2S$ | Hydrogen sulphide |
| $H_2SO_4$ | Sulfuric acid |
| HCl | Hydrochloric acid |
| $HNO_3$ | Nitric acid |
| IUPAC | International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry |
| J | Gas flux |
| $J_s$ | Gas flux at steady state |
| $k_d$ | Henry's law solubility coefficient |
| L | Membrane thickness |
| M-Ar | Methane and argon |
| MMM | Mixed matrix membrane |
| MWCNT | Multi-walled carbon nanotube |
| $N_2$ | Nitrogen |
| NMP | N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone |
| $O_2$ | Oxygen |
| $^oC$ | Degree Celsius |
| P | Permeability |
| p | Pressure |
| PCNT | Purified carbon nanotubes |
| $P_{eff}$ | Effective permeability |
| PES | Polyethersulfone |
| PSF | Polysulfone |
| RBM | Radial breathing mode |
| RCNT | Raw carbon nanotube |

| | |
|---|---|
| STP | Standard temperature and pressure |
| SWCNT | Single-walled carbon nanotube |
| T | Temperature |
| TA | Texture analyzer |
| TEM | Transmission electron microscopy |
| $T_g$ | Glass transition temperature |
| TGA | Thermo-gravimetric analysis |
| UoM | University of Melbourne, Australia |
| V | permeate constant volume |
| wt. | Weight |
| XRD | X-ray diffraction |
| $\alpha$ | Selectivity/separation factor |
| $\beta$ | Plasticization potential |
| $\emptyset$ | Fraction of FCNTs dispersed into the polymer matrix |
| % | Percentage |
| $\Delta p$ | Transmembrane pressure |

# CHAPTER 1

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Natural gas has become the most increasing energy source globally in terms of consumption. According to Energy information administration (EIA, 2016), natural gas world consumption projection will rise from 120 trillion cubic feet in 2012 to 203 trillion cubic feet in 2040. Commercial natural gas, generally methane ($CH_4$), is described as the world's cleanest and most efficient energy source with a calorific value per mass of approximate 50.1 MJ/kg (George et al., 2016). Furthermore, it has the lowest carbon dioxide ($CO_2$) emission upon combustion when compared to oil (30% less) and coal (43% less) (Langston and Lee, 2010).

Natural gas processing involves separation of acid gases, water (both free and saturated water), condensate and non-condensate from raw natural gas (Mokhatab et al., 2015), as shown in Figure 1.1. The objective is to produce a sales gas that conforms to market specifications. These specifications are primarily aimed at meeting pipeline requirements and the needs of industrial and domestic consumers (Poe and Mokhatab 2017). The specifications include the following:

- The gross heating value must be within a specified BTU content range. For instance, in the US, it should be 1035±50 Btu per standard cubic foot (CEE, 2004).
- It must be delivered at a specified hydrocarbon dew point. This would prevent liquid condensate and slugs formation which could damage the reticulation network (CEE, 2004).
- It should contain only trace amount of elements of compound such as $CO_2$, $H_2S$, $N_2$, mercury, organic sulfur products and $O_2$ (CEE, 2004).
- The gas must be dehydrated sufficiently to prevent corrosion and formation of gas hydrates in the processing plant or pipeline (CEE, 2004).

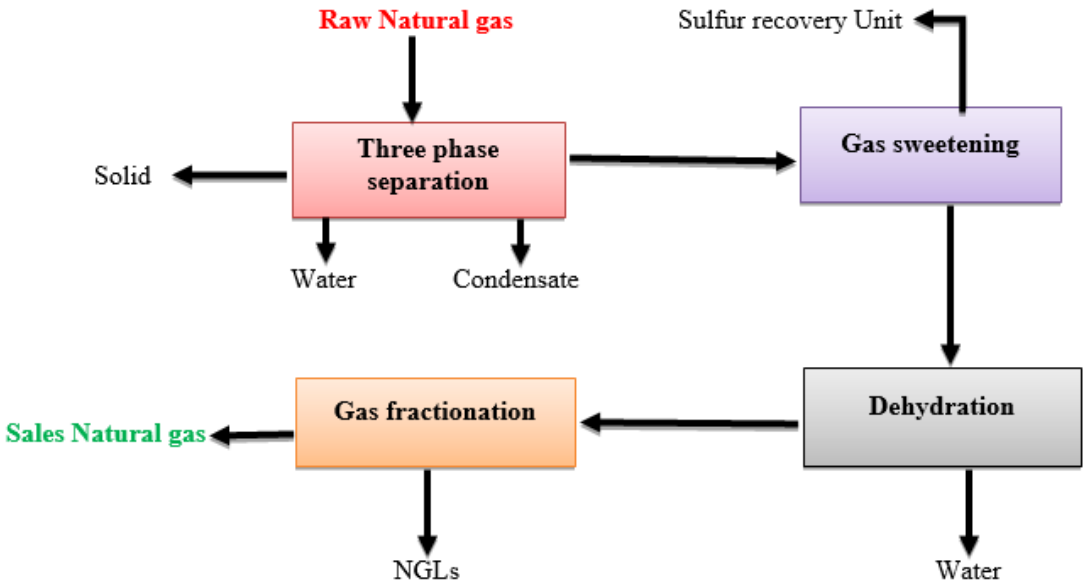



Figure 1.1: Overview of Natural gas processing (Adapted from Mokhatab et al., 2015)

Raw natural gas is made up of mostly methane and a considerable amount of other components like $C_{2+}$, $CO_2$, water and hydrogen sulphide ($H_2S$) in varying composition from well to well depending on its geographical condition (Mushtaq et al., 2013). Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show typical natural gas compositions and natural gas specifications for commercial applications. $CO_2$ is the most common impurity in raw natural gas (Baker and Lokhandwala, 2008) and needs to be separated to increase the calorific value of natural gas; reduce pipeline corrosion within the gas reticulation system (Xiao et al., 2009); prevent environmental effects such as global warming and ocean acidification (Mushtaq et al., 2013).

Traditional methods used for $CO_2$ removal are solvents absorption (basic solvents used include amine and hot aqueous potassium carbonate solution), pressure swing adsorption (Xiao et al., 2009) and by cryogenic distillation (Chen et al., 2015). However, these methods suffer some setbacks. The most developed and fully matured amine absorption method suffers need for solvent regeneration with a significant energy penalty, equipment corrosion, large footprint and flow assurance due to change in viscosity (Adewole et al., 2013; Ahmad et al., 2008).

Table 1.1: Natural gas compositions characteristic (Dung et al., 2008)

| **Component** | **Composition range (mol%)** |
|---|---|
| $CH_4$ | 29.98 – 90.12 |
| Ethane | 0.55 – 14.22 |
| Propane | 0.23 – 12.54 |
| Butanes | 0.14 – 8.12 |
| Pentanes and heavier hydrocarbons | 0.037 – 3.0 |
| $CO_2$ | 0.06 – 42.66 |
| $H_2S$ | 0.0 – 3.3 |
| Nitrogen | 0.21 – 26.10 |
| Helium | 0.0 – 1.8 |

Table 1.2: Specifications of natural gas for commercial applications (Kidnay and Parrish, 2006)

| **Major components** | **Minimum (mol%)** | **Maximum (mol%)** |
|---|---|---|
| $CH_4$ | 75 | Nil |
| Ethane | Nil | 10 |
| Propane | Nil | 5 |
| Butanes | Nil | 2 |
| Pentanes and heavier hydrocarbons | Nil | 0,5 |
| Nitrogen and other inert | Nil | 3 |
| $CO_2$ | Nil | 2 – 3 |
| Total diluents gases | Nil | 4 - 5 |

Membrane technology has become an acceptable method of $CO_2$ removal from natural gas since its first use in 1981 (Dortmundt and Doshi, 1999). Membrane separation is reported to have the following advantages over traditional methods: smaller footprint, lower capital and operational costs, ease of operation, adaptability and environmental friendliness (Dortmundt and Doshi, 1999; Baker and Lokhandwala, 2008; Zhang et al., 2013). Therefore, several research works are being undertaken to harness viable advantages of membrane technology by improving the performance and durability of membrane systems.

## 1.2 Research problem and motivation

Majority of commercial natural gas separation membrane systems are polymeric due to processing feasibility and low cost. However, existing polymers have reached a trade-off threshold between permeability and selectivity, hence, are not viable for full commercial exploitation (Mushtaq et al., 2013). Figure 1.2 shows the relationship between permeability and selectivity. Also, of great concern is the plasticization problem associated with polymeric membranes due to harsh industrial conditions such as high feed pressure. Plasticization reduces polymer glass transition temperature ($T_g$) and selectivity of gases while increasing gas mobility and permeability (Ismail and Lorna, 2002). Figure 1.3 depicts the effect of plasticization on permeability. Generally, the performance of polymeric membranes is measured based on permeability and selectivity. Permeability measures intrinsic productivity of the membrane while selectivity measures the separation factor of the membrane during separation of mixed gases (Eguchi et al., 2015).

Carbon nanotubes (CNTs) have exceptional mechanical properties owing to the carbon-carbon bonds in the graphite layers, which are perhaps the most powerful chemical bond known (Ismail et al., 2009), light weight and its length to radius ratio. However, this also causes a dispersion problem in polymer matrix due to agglomeration. Functionalization of CNTs is believed to overcome this problem (Chen et al., 2008). The addition of functionalized carbon nanotubes into polymers appears to

offer a unique solution to the deficiencies of conventional polymeric membrane materials (Deng and Hagg, 2014). This is the primary motivation of this research.

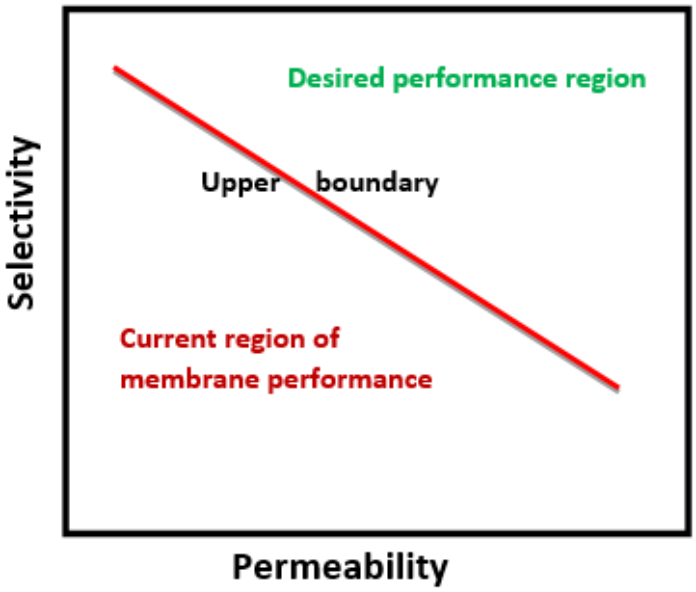



Figure 1.2: Relationship between membrane permeability and selectivity for polymeric membranes (adapted from Robeson, 2008)

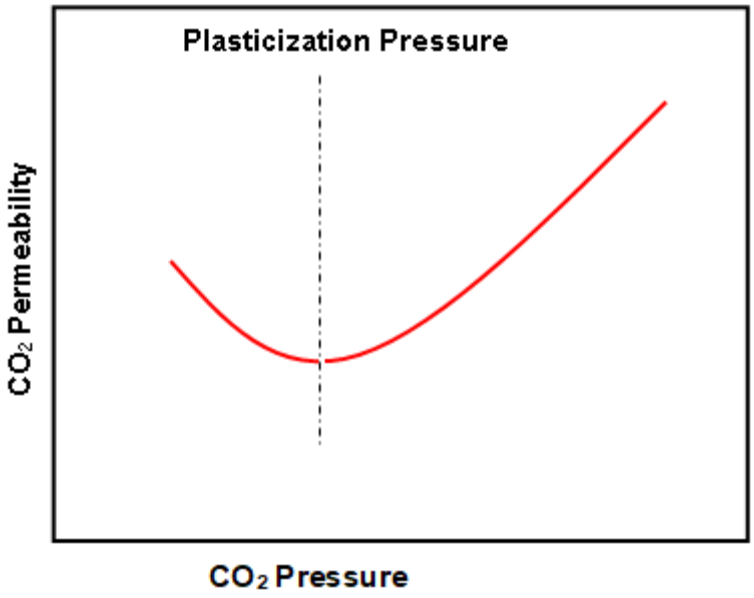



Figure 1.3: $CO_2$ induced plasticization isotherm (adapted from Dong et al., 2011)

One of the most widely researched polymeric membranes for $CO_2/CH_4$ separation is polysulfone due to its low cost, chemical resistance, mechanical strength and good transport properties (Scholes et al., 2010). Furthermore, the polysulfone membrane has been widely used as a commercial polymer for gas separation owing to its ease of synthesis with reproductive properties and controllable porosity (Shah and Murthy, 2013). When compared to state-of-the-art cellulose acetate, polysulfone has a lower $CO_2$ permeability and lower selectivity for $CO_2/CH_4$ but a higher plasticization pressure (Julian and Wenten, 2012; Momeni and Pakizeh, 2013). Therefore, the novel aspect of this research is to suppress $CO_2$ induced plasticization of polysulfone membrane by the addition of functionalized CNTs so as to withstand high feed pressure while achieving an improved permeability without sacrificing the selectivity during natural gas separation, particularly the separation of $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture.

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of this research was to synthesize functionalized CNT infused polysulfone membranes with an excellent balance of permeability, selectivity and carbon dioxide ($CO_2$) induced plasticization resistance during natural gas separations, particularly the separation of $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. Also, to develop a mathematical model for $CO_2$ gas permeability in mixed matrix membranes in the presence of plasticization.

This aim was achieved by meeting the following objectives:

i. To produce CNTs and functionalize them using carboxylation protocol.
ii. To synthesize functionalized CNT-infused polysulfone membranes and characterize them.
iii. To evaluate gas permeation properties of the synthesized membranes at different loading of the functionalized CNTs.
iv. To investigate $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of the synthesized membranes using gas permeation properties.
v. To develop a mathematical model for $CO_2$ gas permeability in the mixed matrix membranes in the presence of plasticization.

## 1.4 Overview of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three broad sections: introduction, results, and conclusions. The introduction is further subdivided into three chapters, the result section is subdivided into three chapters in response to our five objectives, and the conclusion. The overview of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.4.

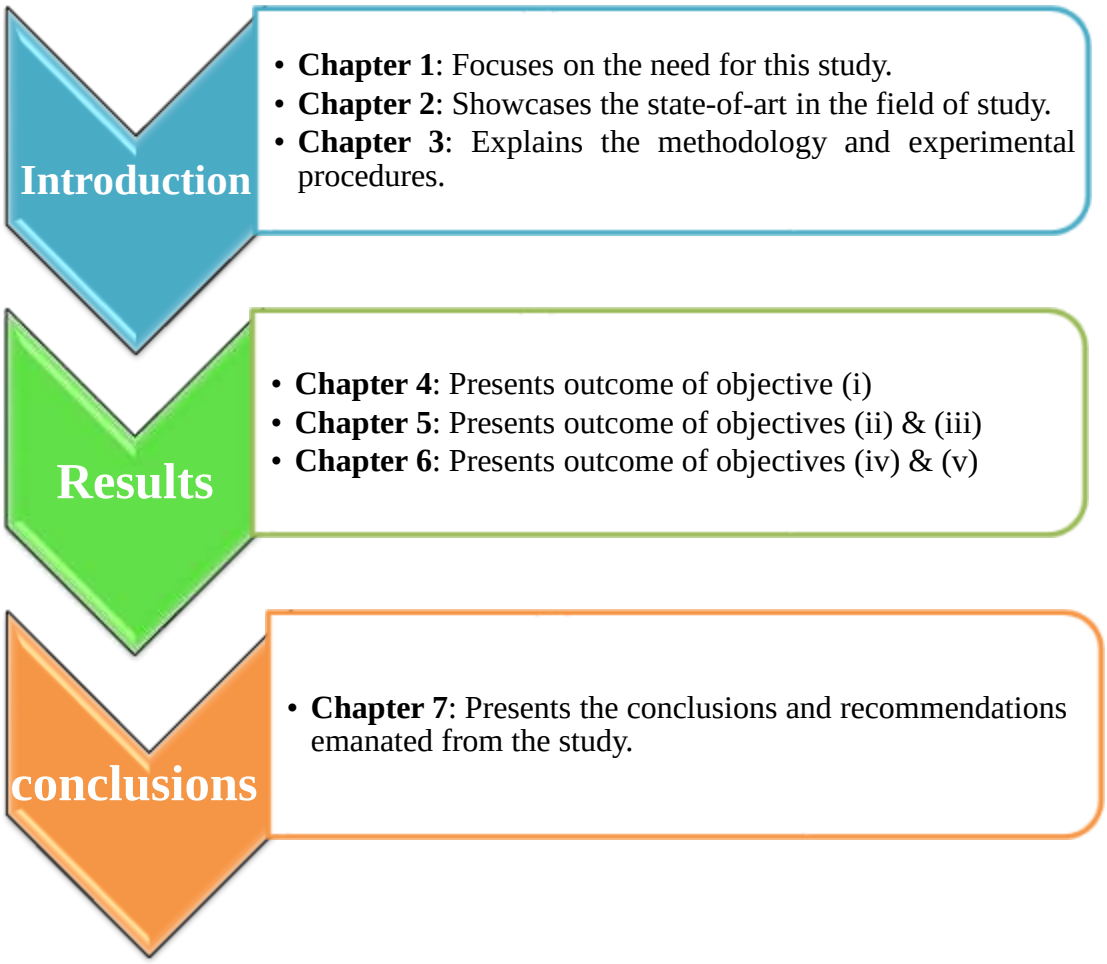



Figure 1.4: Overview of the thesis

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# CHAPTER 2

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 History of gas separation membranes

In 1823, a German chemist by the name Johann Doebereiner reported the escape of hydrogen gas through a crack in a bell jar that was left in a pneumatic trough (Mason, 1991). No consistent scientific explanation was given to this phenomenon until Thomas Graham postulated the law of gas diffusion in 1833 (Mason, 1991). However, no significant breakthrough was reported in membrane gas separation until 1943 during world war II, Graham's law of diffusion was exploited to enrich Uranium $^{235}UF_6$ from $^{238}UF_6$ in a project coded as Manhattan project (Baker, 2004). Since then many researchers have laid the foundation for the modern theories of membrane gas separation. Richard Barrer and Van Amerongen were the first to report the systematic gas permeability measurement in 1951 (Van Amerongen, 1950; Barrer, 1951).

The first commercial membrane for gas separation (PRISM® membranes) was commissioned in 1980 by Permea for hydrogen gas separation from flue gas streams of ammonia plants using polysulfone hollow fiber membranes (Bernardo and Clarizia, 2013). After the success of PRISM® membranes, other companies like Cynara, Separex, Medal, MTR and UOP commercialized cellulose acetate membranes for $CO_2$ removal during natural gas processing. Figure 2.1 shows the milestones of membrane gas separation systems during the early stage and in industrial application.

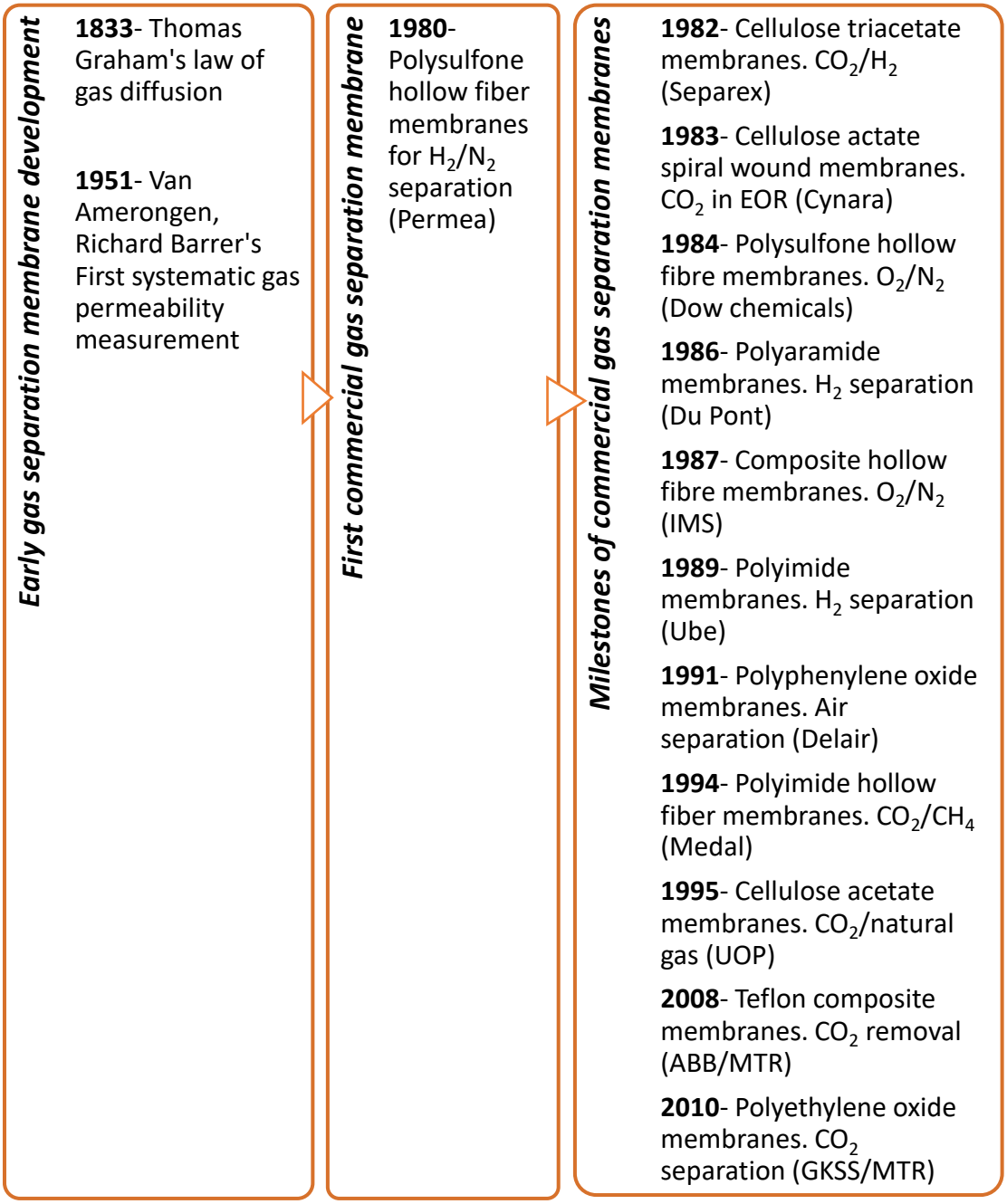



Figure 2.1: Milestones of membrane gas separation systems in industrial application (adapted from Bernardo and Clarizia, 2013)

## 2.2 Gas transport mechanisms in polymeric membranes

Polymeric membranes are generally classified in terms of morphology as symmetric, asymmetric, composite and mixed matrix membranes; and in terms of porosity as porous and non-porous dense membranes. The symmetric membrane is a homogenous structure with porosity approximately evenly distributed. Asymmetric membranes consist of an ultrathin selective layer placed on thicker and porous support of the same polymeric materials (Shusen et al., 1996). The composite membrane is an improved form of asymmetric membranes where the ultrathin selective layer is made of a polymeric material different from the polymeric material of the porous support (Dortmundt and Doshi, 1999). Mixed matrix membranes (MMM) consist of filler particles dispersed into the matrix of a polymer. The filler is immiscible with the matrix and they both have different transport properties (Wang et al., 2017). The classification scheme of polymeric membranes in terms of morphology and porosity is presented in Figure 2.2.

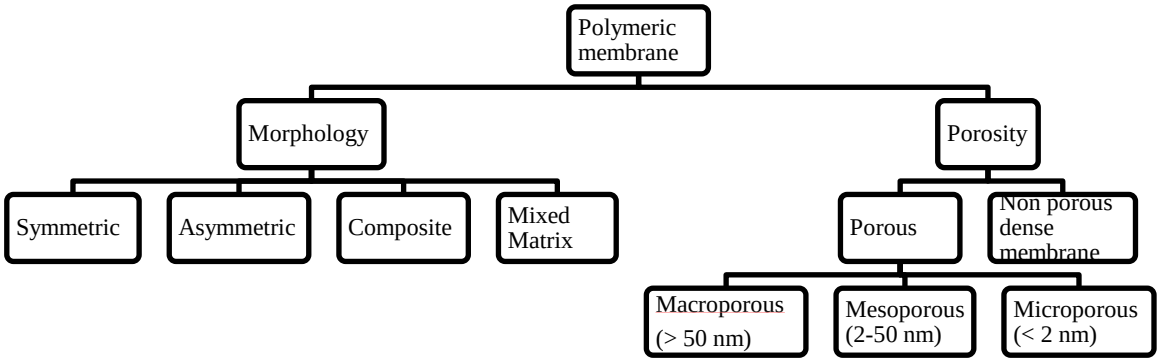



Figure 2.2: General classification scheme of polymeric membranes (Baker, 2007)

The gas transport mechanism in polymeric membranes is a controlling factor in membrane gas separation processes (George and Thomas, 2001). Some of the factors influencing the type of gas transport mechanisms in polymeric systems of membrane include the nature of the polymer, type of penetrant (George and Thomas, 2001), membrane pore structure and type of fillers (Bird and Trimm, 1983). The transport mechanisms in porous polymeric membranes include Poiseuille flow (viscous flow), Knudsen diffusion and molecular sieving mechanisms (Ismail et al., 2011) while the transport mechanism in the nonporous dense membrane is generally solution-diffusion mechanism (Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005). These mechanisms are represented schematically in Figure 2.3.

- **Poiseuille flow**: It occurs in macroporous membranes and it uses pressure gradient as a driving force. The penetrant molecules exert a mutual frictional force on one another due to the collision. As a result of the mutual frictional force, all the molecules pass the pores at an average drift velocity which is independent of their mass, size or shape (Bitter, 2012). Therefore, no gas separation occurs in Poiseuille flow regime.
- **Knudsen diffusion**: This takes place in mesoporous membranes. When the membrane pore diameter is very small with respect to the mean free path of the penetrant molecules, the tendency for these molecules to collide with one another is negligible relative to the tendency to collide with the pore wall. Therefore, each penetrant molecules will pass the membrane pores at its own molecular speed which is based on its own molecular weight (Present and Debethune, 1949). This means that lighter gases will penetrate through the membrane faster than heavier gases in the Knudsen diffusion regime. In a binary gas mixture, the separation factor from Knudsen diffusion is a function of the inverse square root of the two molecular weights (Koros and Fleming, 1993). It is important to state that Knudsen diffusion selectivity is generally low, hence its application is limited to separation systems that have large values for the molecular weight ratios e.g hydrogen separation from hydrocarbons mixture (Bitter, 2012).

- **Molecular sieving mechanism**: This happens in microporous membranes. According to the mechanism, separation of a gas mixture is based on the molecular size of the gases. When the membrane pore size is close to the molecular size of the penetrant, the membrane acts as a molecular sieve (Dos Santos, 2009). It implies that smaller molecules are given passage through the narrow pore and the larger molecules are obstructed. Molecular sieving mechanism has a balance of high selectivity and permeability (Ismail et al., 2011). However, condensible gases have been reported to cause pore blockage and fouling which alters the tortuosity of the membrane (Chen, 2002).
- **Solution-diffusion mechanism**: This mechanism involves three stages (Wijmans and Baker, 1995; Pandey and Chauhan, 2001): (a) dissolution of the gas into the high chemical potential upstream side of the membrane, (b) diffusion of the gas through the membrane and (c) desorption from the low chemical potential downstream side of the membrane. Separation is achieved in a gas mixture by this mechanism based on the differences in the amount of penetrants that dissolve in the membrane (solubility coefficient) and the rate at which the penetrants diffuse through the membrane (diffusivity coefficient) (Ismail et al., 2005). Solubility selectivity is a function of condensability of the penetrant, it favours penetrant with a higher critical temperature (Robeson et al., 2014). Diffusivity selectivity is based on the shape and size of the penetrant molecules, it favours smaller and linear molecules (Chung et al., 2003). In this study, the transport mechanism through the synthesized membranes is the solution-diffusion mechanism. Both solubility selectivity and diffusivity selectivity favour $CO_2$ over $CH_4$. This is because $CO_2$ is a more condensable gas with a critical temperature of 304.25 K, a kinetic diameter of 0.33 nm, and linear shape. $CH_4$, on the other hand, is less condensable with a critical temperature of 191.25 K, a kinetic diameter of 0.38 nm, and a tetrahedral shape.

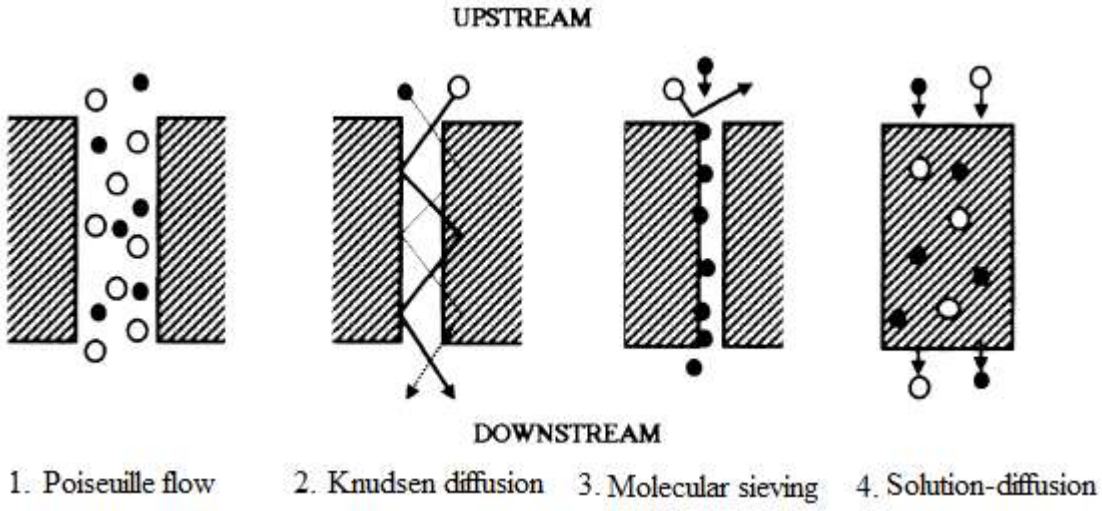



Figure 2.3: General gas transport mechanisms through polymeric membranes (used with permission from Stern and Trohalaki, 1990)

## 2.3 $CO_2$ induced plasticization in glassy polymeric membranes

### *2.3.1 Theory of plasticization*

Plasticization phenomenon has been described as swelling and solvation of polymer due to disruption in chain packing and reduction in the interaction between the adjacent segments of polymer chains (Kesting and Fritzche, 1993; Scholes et al., 2010; Zhuang et al., 2018). This phenomenon occurs when the concentration of a very condensable gas e.g $CO_2$, reaches a critical point within the polymer matrix causing an increase in the segmental mobility and the free volume (Horn and Paul, 2011). $CO_2$ induced plasticization has been attributed to an increase in permeability, diffusivity (Dong et al., 2011) and the absolute value of the heat of sorption (Chung, 2004) of $CO_2$ through the membrane. However, plasticization phenomenon is reported to cause loss of selectivity (Yong et al., 2015) and a decrease in glass transition temperature (Chow, 1980) of the membrane. Let us take a closer look at the impact of $CO_2$ induced plasticization on these quantities in glassy polymeric membranes.

- **Permeability**: This is a measure of intrinsic productivity of a membrane (Eguchi et al., 2015). In glassy polymeric membranes, an increase in pressure is expected to cause a slight decrease in $CO_2$ permeability owing to the saturation of Langmuir environment of the membrane which reduces the solubility of $CO_2$ with increasing pressure (Wijmans and Baker, 1995). At plasticization, new free volumes are created in the membrane due to the mobility of the polymer matrix. This creates more sorption sites for $CO_2$ and causes an increase in the gas permeability with increasing pressure. Therefore, the plasticization pressure may be determined from the permeability isotherm. Plasticization pressure has been defined as the pressure at which permeability reaches its minimum value before it begins to increase (Dong et al., 2011).
- **Diffusivity**: Diffusivity of gas is said to be a measure of the energy required by the gas to achieve a diffusive jump through the polymer matrix (Ismail and Lorna, 2002). It is a function of the packing and motion of polymer segments and the size and shape of the gas molecules (Chung, 2004). When a membrane is plasticized, there is a disruption in the chain packing and an increase in the mobility of the polymer matrix. Hence, the amount of energy required by the gas to execute diffusive jump reduces and consequently, the diffusivity of the gas through the polymer matrix increases.
- **Heat of sorption**: Heat of sorption also described as isosteric heat is an indication of the affinity of a material for a given adsorbate (Roque-Malherbe, 2000). It measures the strength of interaction between a gas and the polymer matrix which could provide potential selectivity between a gas pair (White, 2017). The heat of sorption is exothermic, hence an increase in pressure of the gas is expected to reduce the absolute value of the heat of sorption which means less affinity for the gas as the sorption sites are getting saturated with increasing pressure. However, at plasticization, the absolute value of the heat of sorption increases. This depicts an increase in affinity for the gas by the polymer due to the formation of new free volume in the polymer matrix as a result of plasticization. Chung et al. (2004) reported that plasticization pressure could be

determined from the turning point at which the gradient of the absolute value of the heat of sorption against pressure changes from a negative value to a positive one. This approach for determining the plasticization pressure is still at a preliminary stage; further research is needed to support this claim.

- **Selectivity**: This is a measure of membrane's separation efficiency (Eguchi et al., 2015). Selectivity of polymeric membranes for a gas pair is defined as the ratio of their permeability. During plasticization of membranes, the permeability of all gases is enhanced which leads to a loss in separation efficiency of the membrane. Conversely, the use of loss of selectivity to determine the onset plasticization of membranes especially in a gas mixture has been discouraged by many researchers (Sanders et al., 1984; Dong et al., 2011). Owing to the fact that in the separation of a gas mixture, there is the tendency for selectivity to reduce without plasticization due to competitive sorption and bulk flow effect of the mixed gas (Kraftschik et al., 2013).
- **Glass transition temperature ($T_g$)**: $T_g$ is a measure of the rigidity of the polymer matrix (Xue et al., 2013). During $CO_2$ induced plasticization, the polymer matrix swells due to the condensability of $CO_2$. This causes a reduction in the rigidity of the polymer matrix and consequently, a decrease in $T_g$ is observed. However, there is a limitation to the use of $T_g$ to determine membrane plasticization due to $T_g$ measurement technique. Plasticization could be temporal if the plasticizer is removed in good time, the polymer may immediately return to its original state. Since the $T_g$ measurement technique is not in-situ, the $T_g$ of the membrane after plasticization may remain unchanged except where membrane conditioning has taken place. Conditioning of a membrane occurs when the plasticizer is removed and the polymer did not immediately return to its original state (Horn and Paul, 2011).

### *2.3.2 Techniques for improving $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of polymeric membranes*

Several techniques have been reported in the literature for suppressing $CO_2$ induced plasticization of polymeric membranes. These techniques include thermal annealing, cross-linking, polymer blending, and mixed matrix membrane.

- **Thermal annealing**: The plasticization of membranes may be suppressed by thermal annealing of the membranes owing to a densification of the polymer matrix which results in a reduction of chain mobility through the heating process (Kusworo et al., 2013). Chung et al. (2004) observed an improvement in $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of dense poly [2,6-toluene-2,2-bis(3,4-dicarboxylphenyl)hexafluoropropane diimide] membranes by thermal annealing at 250 $^oC$ for 24 h. Thermal annealing of polysulfone membranes at 140 $^oC$ and 160 $^oC$ for 1 h was reported to have successfully suppressed $CO_2$ induced plasticization of the membrane (Ismail and Lorna, 2003). In the work of Dong et al. (2011), the effect of thermal annealing of Matrimid hollow fiber membrane was investigated. According to their report, superior $CO_2$ induced plasticization of the membrane was achieved at 250 $^oC$ for 30 min heating protocol. However, densification of the polymer matrix by thermal annealing has been reported to cause loss of permeability (Ismail and Lorna, 2003).
- **Cross-linking**: Cross-linking process involves thermally and chemically joining of two or more molecules of cross-linkable membrane materials together by using cross-linking agents such as glycidol and 1,3-propandiol (Eguchi et al., 2015; Qiu et al., 2011). Cross-linked polymeric membranes have been reported to enhance $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of glassy polymers. Wind et al. (2003) investigated the covalent cross-linking of 6FDA-based polyimide membranes with different cross-linking agents. Cross-linking with cyclohexanedimethanol and butylene glycol at 295 $^oC$ was effective in suppressing $CO_2$ induced plasticization up to 40 atm feed pressure without sacrificing sorption. Qiu et al. (2011) studied sub-$T_g$ cross-linking of 6FDA-

2,4,6-trimethyl-1,3-diaminobenzene(DAM):3,5-diaminobenzoic acid (DABA) (3:2) membranes with glycidol as cross-linker. Their study showed that excellent balance of selectivity, permeability and anti-plasticization was achieved with decarboxylation-induced thermal cross-linking of 6FDA-DAM:DABA (3:2) polymeric membranes at temperatures below the polymer $T_g$.

- **Polymer blending**: Blending of a polymer with high $CO_2$ induced plasticization propensity with another that is less plasticized by $CO_2$ has tendencies to improve plasticization resistance of the blended polymer. Bos et al. (2001) investigated the effect of homogeneous polymer blending on the balance of $CO_2$ plasticization resistance, permeability and separation factor. Their results showed that homogeneous blending of the polyimide matrimid and polysulfone (50/50) enhanced the plasticization resistance of the membrane but at the expense of both permeability and separation factor. However, blending of the polyimide matrimid with a copolyimide P84 (60/40) improved the plasticization resistance without sacrificing the separation factor. Furthermore, Kapantaidakis et al. (2003) reported that the plasticization pressure of polyimide ultrathin hollow-fiber membrane was improved by the addition of polyethersulfone.
- **Mixed matrix membrane (MMM)**: Since plasticization causes mobility of polymer matrix, the addition of fillers with excellent mechanical properties to rigidify the polymer chains has been reported to suppress $CO_2$ induced plasticization of the membrane. Some of the inorganic fillers used include metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) (Shahid and Nijmeijer, 2014), zeolitic imidazolate frameworks (ZIFs) (Zhuang et al., 2018), mesoporous silica (Khan et al., 2015) and zeolites (Adams et al., 2011). However, the use of CNTs as fillers for the synthesis of MMMs for $CO_2$ plasticization suppression is yet to be reported in open literature to the best of our knowledge. Therefore, the focus of this study is to leverage the exceptional mechanical properties, light weight,

and length to radius ratio of CNTs to fabricate MMMs that can withstand high $CO_2$ feed pressure without plasticizing.

## 2.4 Carbon nanotubes

### *2.4.1 Structure and properties*

The structure of a CNT has been described as a rolled up sheet of graphene with carbon atoms distributed in a planar-hexagonal lattice (Rastogi et al., 2014). CNTs are classified into single-walled, double-walled, and multi-walled carbon nanotubes depending on the number of graphene sheets that the rolling layers contained (Peponi et al., 2011). Figure 2.4 shows the basic structure of single-walled carbon nanotube (SWCNT) and multi-walled carbon nanotube (MWCNT).

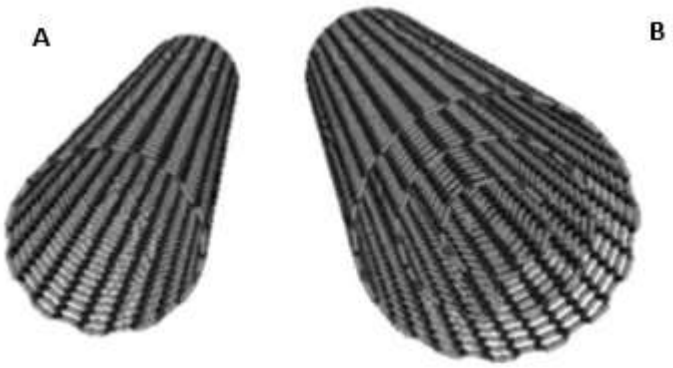



Figure 2.4: Basic structure of (A) SWCNT (B) MWCNT (used with permission from Ismail et al., 2009)

CNTs have also been group into an armchair, zigzag and chiral with respect to the angle of rolling layers of the graphene sheet (Ma et al., 2010). Figure 2.5 depicts the formation of different types of CNTs from planar-hexagonal graphene sheet as determined by the chiral vector Equation (2.1):

$$C_h = na_1 + ma_2 \tag{2.1}$$

Where:

$a_1$, $a_2$ = unit vectors of the hexagonal lattice.

Integers ($n$, $m$) = number of movements along the unit vectors.

If $n = m$;

The CNTs are called armchair.

If $m = 0$;

The CNTs are called zigzag.

The CNTs that do not fall into these two categories are called chiral.

Kirtania and Chakraborty (2012) determined the circumference of CNTs by using Equation (2.2):

$$L = a\sqrt{n^2 + m^2 + nm} \tag{2.2}$$

Where:

$a$ = length of the unit vector.

The angle (θ) of the rolling layers of the graphene sheet is given by Equation (2.3):

$$\cos\theta = \frac{(n+m)/2}{\sqrt{n^2+m^2+nm}} \tag{2.3}$$

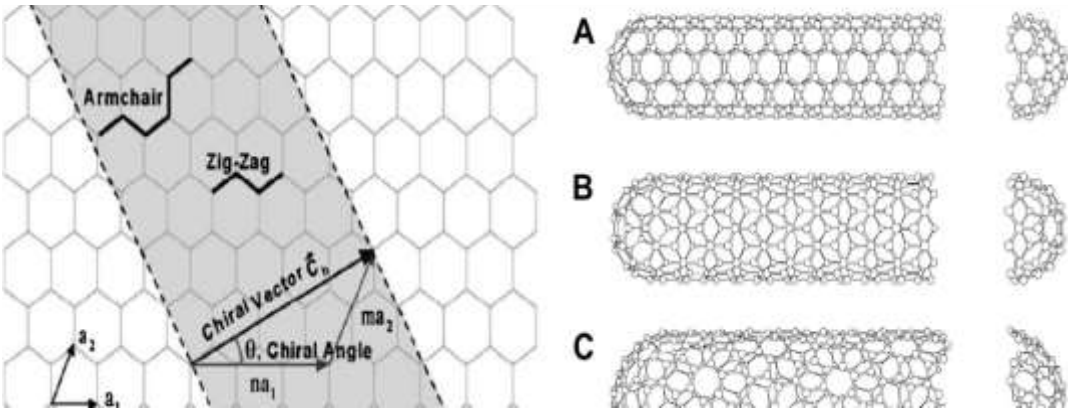



Figure 2.5: Formation of different types of CNTs (A: armchair; B: zigzag; C: chiral) (used with permission from Ma et al., 2010)

### *2.4.2 Production methods*

Several methods have been reported in the literature for the production of CNTs. These methods include but not limited to arc-discharge (Sharma et al., 2015; Ando and Zhao, 2006), laser ablation (Chrzanowska et al., 2015) and chemical vapour deposition (Iyuke and Simate, 2011).

- **Arc discharge**: Arc discharge set-up is one of the oldest methods of production of CNTs. The set-up entails two electrodes and a DC power supply with current and voltage rating of 100-200 A and 20-30 V, respectively (Sharma et al., 2015). The arc-containing CNTs and other forms of carbon are produced between the two graphite rods that are used as anode and cathode electrodes (Ando and Zhao, 2006). Furthermore, the set-up consists of three component systems containing argon, methane, and iron for CNT synthesis (Rafique and Iqbal, 2011). The vessel can contain deionized water to provide an environment favourable for the reaction, as well as cooling due to extremely high temperatures. It further creates an insulation of the reaction from atmospheric oxygen. The produced carbon soot settles upon termination, by bringing the electrodes a certain distance apart, and is collected on the cathode (Sharma et al., 2015).

- **Laser ablation**: Laser ablation method uses a pulsed laser, striking at a graphite target in a reactor at a very high temperature. This is done in the presence of an inert gas which then vaporizes the graphite target. CNTs are said to develop at the cooler end of the reactor. According to Rafique and Iqbal (2011), this physical process has some short-comings which include extensive energy use that makes it economically unfavourable. It also requires graphite to be evaporated so as to produce the desired nanotubes. This limits large-scale production in industrial processes.
- **Chemical vapour disposition (CVD)**: CVD method is said to be the most preferred and widely used method (Awadalla et al., 2012) with great potential for large-scale and continuous CNT production (Yah., 2011). This method uses transition metals as catalyst and hydrocarbon as a carbon source (Awadallah et al., 2012; Hou et al., 2008). CVD method has low energy input requirements in terms of CNT production, as well as lower reaction temperatures (Yah, 2011). This makes it a preferred method for large-scale production. The production quantity and quality are influenced by reaction parameters such as temperature, catalytic systems, carrier gas composition and type of carbon source used (Aberefa et al., 2019; Biris et al., 2006). Even though arc discharge and laser ablation are well-established processes that produce high quality and near perfect CNTs, they have scale-up limitations. The use of temperatures and pressures of over 1200$^{o}$C and 10 atm, respectively, make production costs too high and thus not economically viable (Hou et al, 2008). In this study, the CVD method was used to produce CNTs from acetylene and methane as carbon sources and ferrocene served as a catalyst. Table 2.1 shows the advantages and disadvantages of different CNT production methods.

Table 2.1: The advantages and disadvantages of different CNT production methods (as reported by Rafique and Iqbal (2011)).

| ***Process/Property*** | ***Arc Discharge*** | ***Laser Ablation*** | ***Chemical Vapour Deposition*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Raw material availability | Difficult | Difficult | Easy, abundantly available |
| Energy requirement | High | High | Moderate |
| Process control | Difficult | Difficult | Easy, can be automated |
| Reactor Design | Difficult | Difficult | Easy, can be designed as large-scale process |
| Production rate | Low | Low | High (CoMoCAT, HiPco) |
| Purity of product | High | High | High |
| Yield of process | Moderate (70%) | Moderate (80%-85%) | High (95%-99%) |
| Post-treatment requirements (refining e.t.c.) | Require refining | Require refining | No extensive refining required |
| Process Nature (Batch or Continuous type) | Batch | Batch | Continuous |
| Per unit cost | High | High | Low |

### *2.4.3 Functionalization techniques*

The presence of strong carbon-carbon bonds in the graphite layers of CNTs cause agglomeration of CNTs in both aqueous and non-aqueous solvents, and in polymer matrix even when a dispersing agent is used (Inam and Peijs, 2007). This creates a major limitation to the commercial application of CNTs. Hence, the functionalization chemistry of CNTs has become a growing area of research. Functionalization of CNTs

reduces the strong Van der Waal force of attraction between carbon-carbon atoms of CNTs and enhances separation of CNT bundles into individual CNT when dispersed in solvents. This improves the CNT-polymer matrix interface interaction (Chen et al., 2008). Furthermore, CNT functionalization could be modified to have particular interactions with specific gases to enhance molecular sieving by chemical recognitions (Corry, 2011). Several functionalization protocols for joining CNTs and functional groups have been reported in the literature (Ma et al., 2010). These protocols are classified into two groups viz; physical and chemical functionalization, according to the interfaces between the molecules of the functional group and carbon-carbon atoms of the CNTs (Rafiee and Pourazizi, 2014).

Physical functionalization of CNTs involves self-arrangement of individual CNTs held together by non-covalent bonds to form thermodynamically stable structures (Lin et al., 2003). Some of the physical functionalization methods that are mostly used include polymer wrapping, surfactant adsorption, and endohedral filling.

- **Polymer wrapping**: Several species of polymers, especially the high molecular weight and conjugated polymers, have the capacity to wrap through the surface of CNTs to form supermolecular complexes of CNTs (Yang et al., 2011). This could be attributed to the dispersion of CNTs in the polymers matrix. Examples of such polymers include polypropylene and polyethylene (Tasis et al., 2006). The process involves the non-covalent interaction of the van der Waals and p–p stacking between CNTs and polymer matrix with aromatic rings (Ismail et al., 2009). The advantage of this method is that it does not damage the structure and the physicochemical properties of the CNTs.
- **Surfactant adsorption**: Rahimpour et al. (2012) reported the surfactant-assisted functionalization of CNTs. In this process, the surface tension of CNTs is lessened by the physical adsorption of surfactant onto the surface of CNTs thereby suppressing the agglomeration of CNTs. Furthermore, the surfactant-assisted CNTs prevent the attraction due to van der Waals forces through electrostatic repulsive forces (Wang et al., 2014). The effectiveness of

surfactant-assisted functionalization of CNTs is based on the surfactant properties, the chemistry of the medium, and polymer matrix (Bekou and Mattia, 2011).

- **Endohedral filling**: Endohedral method operates on the principle of the capillary effect. In this principle, foreign atoms such as fullerene derivatives and metal halides are implanted into the tubes of CNTs (Tasis et al., 2006). Examples of metal halides used for the functionalization by Endohedral filling include $AgCl_xBr_y$, $CdI_2$ and $ThCl_4$, $CdCl_2$, $TbCl_3$, $TiCl_4$ and $PbI_2$ (Hirsch, 2002). The disadvantages of this method as compared to other physical functionalization methods include the possible re-agglomeration of CNTs in the polymer matrix and the method is not easy to use (Ma et al., 2010).

Chemical functionalization involves covalent interaction between the molecules of functional groups and the carbon-carbon atoms of CNTs. This functionalization could be achieved using direct covalent sidewall or using defect transformation.

- **Direct covalent sidewall**: Direct sidewall method involves the conversion of the hybridized carbon atoms from $sp^2$ to $sp^3$ and an immediate loss of π-conjugation alignment on the graphene layer. The disadvantages of this method, however, include the damage of the physicochemical properties of CNTs and possible re-agglomeration of CNTs in a polymer matrix (Inam and Peijs, 2007; Chen et al., 2008).
- **Defect transformation**: This method entails pre-oxidation of CNTs by using strong acids such as nitric acid, sulfuric acid, or a mixture of them; or with strong oxidants such as potassium per manganite in acidic medium, ozone or reactive plasma (Dyachkova et al., 2013), in order to create a site defect on the CNTs. The defect sites are covalently stabilized by bonding with functional groups such as carboxylic and hydroxyl groups (Ma et al., 2010).

## 2.5 Recent developments in CNT infused polymeric membranes for gas separation

CNT infused polymeric membranes have become an emerging technology for gas separation which has been keenly discussed in the literature. Several research works have shown that polymeric membrane embedded with well-dispersed CNTs has enhanced gas permeability and selectivity while improving physiochemical properties of the membrane.

In the work of Sanip et al. (2011), cyclodextrin functionalized multi-walled carbon nanotubes (FMWCNTs) were dispersed in *N*-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP) solvent with polyimide membrane, pure gas permeation measurements were done at 35$^{o}$C with feed pressure up to 10 bars. It was reported that the mixed matrix membrane showed 100% improvement for the selectivity of $CO_2/CH_4$ at optimum FMWCNT load of 0.7% ratio compared to pure polyimide membrane. Also, $CO_2$ permeance was said to be highly favoured compared to other pure gases like $CH_4$, $O_2$, and $N_2$ due to stronger adsorption of $CO_2$ through the channels of CNTs.

The effects of single-walled CNTs (SWCNTs) and multi-walled carbon nanotubes (MWCNTs) on brominated poly(2,6-diphenyl-1,4-phenylene oxide) (BPPO) for $CO_2/N_2$ separation were investigated by Cong et al. (2007). According to the report, 4.8 wt. % of BPPO was dissolved in chloroform and pristine CNTs (SWCNTs or MWCNTs) were slowly added to the polymer solution at varying wt. % (2, 5, 9 and 17 wt. %), pure gas permeation measurements were conducted at 25$^{o}$C with 10 psig feed pressure. Their results showed an optimum CNT load of 5 wt. %. It was reported that at 5 wt. % of SWCNTs and MWCNTs, the $CO_2$ permeability increased by 58% and 91% respectively without compromising $CO_2/N_2$ selectivity, while the tensile modulus of BPPO increased by 67% and 44%, respectively.

Ismail et al. (2011) studied the effect of purification and functionalization of MWCNTs loading on gas separation performance of polyethersulfone (PES) at varying MWCNTs loading from 0.5 - 3.0 wt. %. They purified MWCNTs with $HNO_3/H_2SO_4$ acid mixture

and surface functionalized using 3-aminopropyltriethoxylsilane (APTES), the PES/MWCNTs membranes were then synthesized by dry-wet phase inversion method and gas permeation measurements conducted at 27ºC with a feed pressure of 4 bar. They reported that the highest $CO_2/CH_4$ selectivity was achieved at 0.5 wt. % MWNTs loading ($\alpha = 250$) but decreased with increasing MWNTs loading from 1.0 – 3.0 as a result of the possible existence of interface voids which became significant at increasing MWNTs loading.

Ranjbaran et al. (2015) synthesized a novel Elvaloy4170/ FMWCNT membranes for $CO_2/CH_4$ separation. In their study, raw MWCNTs were treated with a mixture of concentrated acid comprising 3/1 volumetric ratio of $H_2SO_4/HNO_3$ so as to purify and have carboxyl/hydroxyl groups on their surfaces, then were solution-blended with Elvaloy4170 in toluene, pure gas permeability tests were conducted at 35ºC with the feed pressures of 2, 4 and 6 bars. Their results showed that $CO_2$ permeability and $CO_2/CH_4$ selectivity increased by 30% and 14% respectively as the feed pressure increased from 2 to 6 bars in pure Elvaloy4170 membrane, while with 1 wt. % FMWCNT loading, $CO_2$ and $CH_4$ permeabilities increased by 30% and 40% respectively in comparison to pure Elvaloy4170 membrane, $CO_2/CH_4$ selectivity increased with increasing FMWCNTs loading from 1 - 4 wt. % in the polymeric membrane.

## 2.6 Membrane gas permeation models

Membrane-based gas separation is economically and environmentally viable than conventional gas separation processes (Balçık and Ahunbay, 2018). Hence, varieties of polymeric and mixed matrix membranes need to be screened to develop a membrane with an excellent balance of permeability, selectivity and penetrant induced plasticization resistance. Experimental screening of these membranes is quite tedious especially with the need for high-pressure equipment for determination of penetrant induce plasticization pressure of these membranes. Therefore, model-based determination of the membrane gas transport properties has become necessary to

facilitate accelerated development of novel membrane for commercial gas separation (Adewole et al., 2015). Several models have been reported in the literature for predicting gas permeability and subsequently determining plasticization pressure of the membranes. These models could be classified as empirical, phenomenological, mechanistic and atomistic models.

The empirical model is developed using experimental data. It requires minimal investment in modeling but needs a greater number of experimental data to improve the predictability of the model (Neumann et al., 2006). According to a concise dictionary of physics, a phenomenological model is defined as 'a theory which expresses mathematically the results of observed phenomena without paying detailed attention to their fundamental significance' (Thewlis, 1973). Phenomenological models are expected to have a better predictive capacity than empirical models (Neumann et al., 2006). In mechanistic modeling, detailed fundamental principles and physical theories governing a process are used to develop mathematical equations for the prediction of different phenomena (Zhang et al., 2010). Atomistic molecular modeling enables direct observation of some properties of membrane gas separation system such as the mobility of penetrant atoms and the distribution of free volume (Hölck et al., 2006).

Adewole et al. (2015) developed a semi-empirical model for estimating plasticization pressure and gas permeability at plasticization, from permeation experimental data. In their report, the permeability-pressure relationship was represented by Equation (2.4);

$$P = \emptyset e^{f(p)} \tag{2.4}$$

Where

P = permeability

p = pressure

Expanding Equation (2.1) using Taylor series up to 2$^{nd}$ order gives:

$$P_{(p)} = a_1 p^2 + a_2 p + a_3 \tag{2.5}$$

Where $a_1$, $a_2$ and $a_3$ are the model parameters.

Since plasticization is the pressure at which gas permeability is at a minimum (Dong et al., 2011), then;

$$\frac{dP}{dp} = 0 \tag{2.6}$$

Applying Equation (2.6) to Equation (2.5) gives:

$$p_i = \frac{-a_2}{2a_1} \tag{2.7}$$

$$P_{(p_i)} = a_3 - \frac{a_2^2}{4a_1} \tag{2.8}$$

Where:

$p_i$ = plasticization pressure

$P_{(p_i)}$ = permeability at plasticization

The values of $a_1$, $a_2$ and $a_3$ were estimated using experimental data from about 90 polymeric membranes available in litthe erature.

Dual mode sorption phenomenological model is widely used to describe gas sorption in glassy polymers (Vieth and Sladek, 1965; Petropoulos, 1970; Paul and Koros, 1976; Barrer, 1984; Zhou and Stern, 1989). Dual mode sorption model is the summation of Henry's law and the Langmuir equation (Koros et al., 1976). Equations (2.9) – (2.11) illustrate the dual mode sorption mechanism;

$$C_d = k_d p \tag{2.9}$$

$$C_h = \frac{C_h' bp}{1+bp} \tag{2.10}$$

$$C = C_d + C_h = k_d p + \frac{C_h' bp}{1+bp} \tag{2.11}$$

Where $C_d$ is the concentration of gas molecules in Henry's law environment, $k_d$ is Henry's law solubility coefficient, p is pressure, $C_h$ is the concentration of gas molecules in Langmuir adsorption sites, $C_h'$ is the polymer matrix saturation constant, $b$ is the ratio of the rate of gas adsorption and desorption into the polymer matrix (also known as Langmuir affinity constant) and C is the total penetrants concentration.

In the work of Paul and Koros (1976), it was observed that a fraction of the gas in $C_h$ and all the gas in $C_d$ are mobile within the membrane. Therefore, the concentration of the mobile gas, $C_m$, and the permeability of gas, P, within the polymeric membrane are expressed by Equations (2.12) and (2.13) respectively (Zhou and Stern, 1989; Koros et al., 1981).

$$C_m = C_d + FC_h = k_d p\left(1 + \frac{FC_h' b}{k_d(1+bp)}\right) \tag{2.12}$$

$$P = k_d D_d\left(1 + \frac{FC_h' b}{k_d(1+bp)}\right) \tag{2.13}$$

Where F is the fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane, $D_d$ is the diffusion due to the local concentration gradient. $k_d$, b and $C_h'$ can be determined from independent gas sorption measurement. $D_d$ and F can be obtained graphically by plotting P against $1/(1+bp)$.

Mechanistic model on the basis of continuity and momentum equations was developed by Gilassi and Rahmania (2015). The overall conservation of mass, momentum and concentration equations for the gas as reported are as follows;

$$\frac{\partial u_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial u_y}{\partial y} = 0 \tag{2.14}$$

$$\frac{\partial n_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial n_y}{\partial y} = 0 \tag{2.15}$$

$$u_x \frac{\partial C}{\partial x} + u_y \frac{\partial C}{\partial y} + D\left(\frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 C}{\partial y^2}\right) = 0 \tag{2.16}$$

$$\rho\left(u_x \frac{\partial u_x}{\partial x} + u_y \frac{\partial u_y}{\partial y}\right) = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial x} + \mu\left(\frac{\partial^2 u_x}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u_x}{\partial y^2}\right) + \rho g_x \tag{2.17}$$

$$\rho\left(u_x \frac{\partial u_x}{\partial x} + u_y \frac{\partial u_y}{\partial y}\right) = -\frac{\partial p}{\partial y} + \mu\left(\frac{\partial^2 u_y}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2 u_y}{\partial y^2}\right) + \rho g_y \tag{2.18}$$

Where $u_x$, $u_y$, $\rho$, D and p represent velocity in x and y directions, density, diffusivity and pressure, respectively. Applying appropriate concentration and velocity boundary conditions, the equations were solved using a numerical scheme.

Other mathematical models used to predict gas permeability include; Maxwell equation (Maxwell, 1954) and Bruggeman model (Bruggeman, 1935). Maxwell equation, represented by Equation (2.19), was originally developed for electrical conductivity and adapted for gas flux through a membrane. Bruggeman model, denoted by Equation (2.20), was initially developed to determine the dielectric constant of a particulate composite.

$$P_r = \frac{1+2\emptyset\left(\frac{P_d}{P_m}-1\right)/\left(\frac{P_d}{P_m}+2\right)}{1-\emptyset\left(\frac{P_d}{P_m}-1\right)/\left(\frac{P_d}{P_m}+2\right)} \tag{2.19}$$

$$(P_r)^{1/3}\left(\frac{\frac{P_d}{P_m}-1}{\frac{P_d}{P_m}-P_r}\right) = (1-\emptyset)^{-1} \tag{2.20}$$

Where $P_r$ is the relative permeability of species, $P_m$ is the permeability of species in the matrix (continuous phase), $\emptyset$ is volume fraction of the filler particles, $P_d$ is the permeability of species in the dispersed phase.

## 2.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter reviews recent developments in production and functionalization of CNTs, separation performance of CNT infused polymeric membranes and techniques for suppressing $CO_2$ induced plasticization in glassy polymeric membranes. Some challenges have been identified. Currently, there is a concern about the production of quantity and quality CNTs at lowest cost possible. CNTs production techniques that yield quality CNTs do so at a lower quantity and at a higher cost, while the techniques that yield a higher quantity of CNTs do so at lower quality. Hence the need to balance these three factors. Furthermore, CNT infused membranes have shown an improved gas permeability as compared to conventional polymeric membranes with little compromise of ideal selectivity. However, the selectivity of mixed gas separation is sacrificed due to the competitive sorption of different gas molecules in a mixed gas. In addition, the majority of techniques for suppressing $CO_2$ permeability in membranes tend to sacrifice $CO_2$ permeability of the membrane.

With the aforementioned challenges in mind, the remaining chapters of this thesis will show the promising potential of CNTs-PSF membrane for an excellent balance of permeability, selectivity and carbon dioxide ($CO_2$) induced plasticization resistance during natural gas separations, particularly the separation of $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture.

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# CHAPTER 3

# 3 MATERIALS AND EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

## 3.1 Materials

Nitrogen (purity: 99.99%), argon (purity: 99.99%), hydrogen (purity: 99.99%), acetylene (purity: 99%), methane (purity: 99.95%), carbon dioxide (purity: 99.99%) and carbon dioxide/methane mixture (50%/50%) gases were purchased from Afrox, South Africa. The following chemicals were purchased from Sigma Aldrich, South Africa: hydrochloric (wt. 37%), sulfuric (wt. 98 %) and nitric (wt. 70%) acids, ferrocene (purity: 98%), dichloromethane (purity ≥ 99.8%) and Polysulfone pellets (transparent, average $M_w$ ~ 35 000). All the materials were used as supplied without any further purification.

## 3.2 Production of carbon nanotubes

The catalyst chemical vapour deposition (CCVD) system used for this study comprised of a vertical quartz tube reactor in a furnace and a temperature controller is attached to the reactor. Furthermore, the system is equipped with a set of four Supelco rotameter to regulate the flow of gases into the reactor. The process flow diagram of the CCVD system set-up employed in this study is shown in Figure 3.1.

The CCVD system was first tested for leaks and thereafter purged using nitrogen gas to create an inert environment in the reactor. 7 g of ferrocene was fed into the vapourizer for each of the experimental runs. Subsequently, the reactor was set to the desired temperature (800 $^{o}$C – 1000 $^{o}$C) using the temperature controller attached to the reactor furnace. When the desired reactor temperature was reached, the ferrocene vapourizer was heated up to the melting point of ferrocene (~ 173 $^{o}$C) while the carrier gas, argon (150 ml/min) or argon/hydrogen (125/25 ml/min) was introduced to transport the ferrocene vapour into the reactor. Simultaneously, the carbon source, acetylene (150 ml/min) or methane (150 ml/min), was also introduced into the reactor. In order to adequately compare the production yields at different conditions, the

reaction was terminated at the end of 15 minutes for each experimental run by shutting down the system.

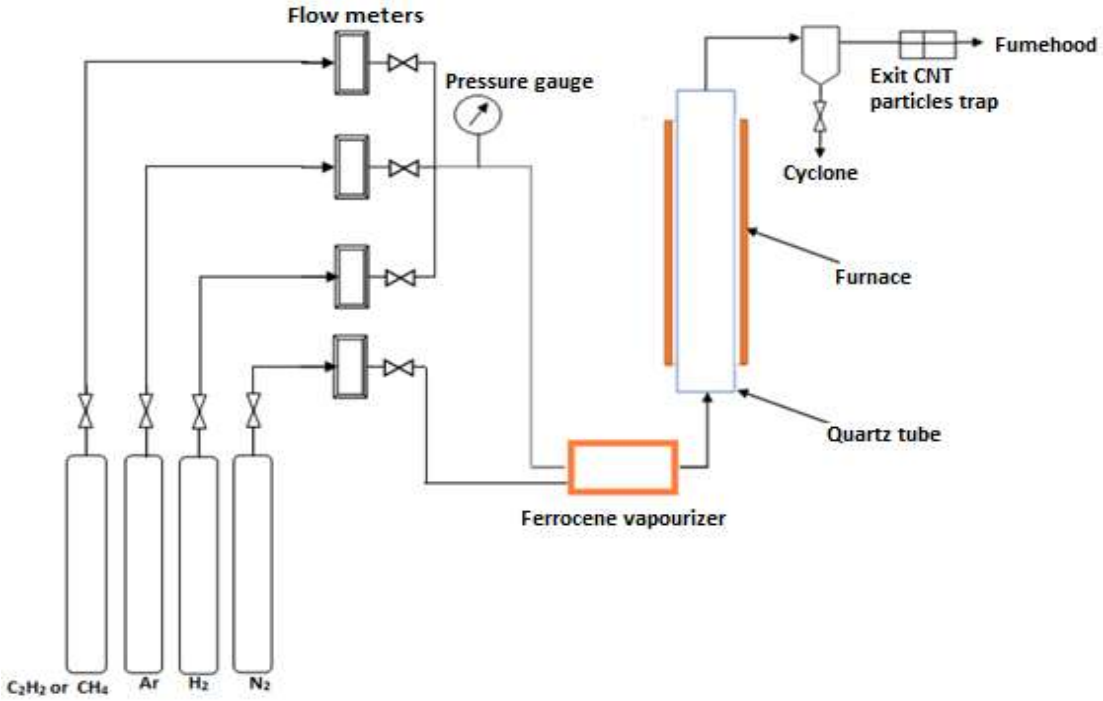



Figure 3.1: Process flow diagram of the CCVD system set-up

### 3.3 Functionalization of as-produced carbon nanotubes

CNTs produced at optimum quality condition was first purified to remove iron particle residues attached to the CNTs from the catalyst used and possible presence of amorphous carbon due to incomplete nucleation of the carbon source (Humphries et al., 2009). 1 g of raw CNTs (RCNTs) was added to 100 ml of hydrochloric acid and ultrasonicated for 4 h at 40 $^{o}$C bath temperature. The mixture was thereafter washed with distilled water and centrifuge 3 times. Afterward, the purified CNTs (PCNTs) was washed again with distilled water and filter until the filtrate pH approaches neutral. The filtered PCNTs was dried at 100 $^{o}$C for 24 h to remove the water content present in the PCNTs. PCNTs were functionalized using carboxylation protocol. 1 g of PCNTs were added to 75 ml of sulfuric acid and 25 ml of nitric acid. The mixture was ultrasonicated

for 1 h at 40 $^{o}$C. Drying, washing and recovery determination procedure were the same as that of the purification process.

## 3.4 Membrane preparation procedures

Dense flat sheet membranes were synthesized by solvent evaporation. For pristine PSF membrane preparation, 1 g of polysulfone (PSF) beads were added to 10 ml dichloromethane (DCM) and stirred using magnetic stirrer until a homogeneous solution was formed. The solution was transferred to a flat bottom petri dish and left in a vacuum oven at room temperature for 6 h for controlled evaporation of DCM. Afterward, the oven temperature was increased to 40 $^{o}$C (boiling point of DCM) for 24 h for complete removal of the solvent.

With respect to FCNT/PSF membrane preparation, desired wt. % of FCNTs were added to 5 ml of DCM and ultrasonicated for 30 min in a cold water bath to control agglomeration temperature. 1 g of PSF beads were added to 5 ml of DCM and stirred to form a homogeneous solution. PSF solution was transferred to FCNT solution and stirred for 12 h. Solvent evaporation steps of FCNT/PSF dope were the same as that of pristine PSF dope. The thickness of the membranes was measured using digital micrometer at 10 different points on the membrane and the average thickness was used for permeability calculations. Some of the thicknesses were verified by scanning electron microscope (SEM). A sample of the measurement of membrane thickness using SEM is presented in Appendix C. The thicknesses were between 60 – 90 μm.

## 3.5 Characterization of produced CNTs and membranes

### *3.5.1 Field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM)*

SEM micrographs of as-produced CNTs and synthesized membranes were obtained using FESEM operated at 10 kV to check the morphology. A spatula tip of each sample was mounted onto an aluminum stub using carbon tapes. Two layers of gold-palladium coating, each of 10 nm in thickness, were applied to the mounted samples before taking images of the samples using the microscope.

### *3.5.2 Raman spectroscopy*

Raman spectra were obtained using a Horiba LabRAM HR Raman spectrometer equipped with an Olympus BX41 microscope to check the existence of $sp^2$ carbon and to obtain the degree of disorder of the as-produced CNTs. A Lexel argon ion laser at a wavelength of 514.5 nm (green line) was used to excite raman scattering in the samples. A 100x objective was used to collect the backscattered light, which was dispersed via a 600 lines/mm grating onto a liquid nitrogen cooled charge coupled device (CCD) detector. The laser power at the samples was ~0.4 mW to prevent localized heating.

### *3.5.3 Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy*

The presence of functional groups on the FCNTs was checked by PerkinElmer FTIR spectrometer equipped with a high-performance deuterated triglycine sulphate (DTGS) detector and a KBr beam splitter to establish successful functionalization of the CNTs. 2 mg of CNT sample was mixed with 300 mg potassium bromide (KBr) and pressed to form a self-supporting pellet (Scholze and Meier 2001). The spectra of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs were recorded from 4000 and 500 $cm^{-1}$ wavenumbers.

### *3.5.4 Nitrogen physisorption*

Nitrogen physisorption of CNT samples was conducted at 77 K using Tristar 3000 v6.05A to obtain the textural properties of the CNTs. Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) equation was used to evaluate the surface area of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs. Barrett-Johner-Halenda (BJH) equation was used to determine the pore volume and average pore size of all the types of CNTs (Zaine et al., 2016).

### *3.5.5 X-ray diffraction (XRD)*

The crystalline structure of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs was analyzed using Bruker XRD D2 Phaser with a Cu Kα target at a wavelength of 0.154184 nm, a tube voltage of 30 kV and a tube current of 10 mA to check the effect of functionalization on the crystallinity of the CNTs. The samples were scanned at a stepsize of $0.02^o$ and a rate

of 8.5º/min from 5º to 90º of 2θ. The Miller indices (hkl) were obtained from the reference library of Diffrac.EVA software.

### *3.5.6 Thermo-gravimetric analysis (TGA)*

TGA was used to determine the degree of functionalization of the CNTs and check the thermal stability of the synthesized membranes. TA instrument SDT Q600 simultaneous DSC/TGA analyzer with balance sensitivity of 0.1 µg was used. The heating rate was 20 ºC/min from 25 ºC to 800 ºC. Nitrogen gas at 70 ml/min flowrate was used to create an inert environment in the instrument. Thermal stability of CNTs as a function of weight % loss with respect to temperature was used to quantitatively evaluate the degree of functionalization of the CNTs (Momeni and Pakizeh, 2013). For the synthesized membrane, thermal stability was determined using the graphs of weight % loss against temperature and derivative of weight with respect to temperature (Darabi et al., 2012).

### *3.5.7 Differential scanning calorimetry (DSC)*

DSC analyzer incorporated into TA instrument SDT Q600 was used to measure the glass transition temperature ($T_g$) of synthesized membranes. $T_g$ of synthesized membranes was calculated from heat flow against temperature curve using the half $C_p$ (heat capacity at constant pressure) extrapolated method (Ranjbaran et al., 2015). To conduct DSC analysis, membranes samples were subjected to two heating cycles. The first heating cycle was to eliminate the thermal history of the membrane (Lappe et al., 2017). 15 mg of the sample was placed in alumina pan and heated at a heating rate of 10 ºC/min from 25 ºC – 300 ºC under a nitrogen atmosphere with a flowrate of 70 ml/min. Thereafter, the sample was cooled back to the initial temperature. For the second heating cycle, the sample was heated up to 350 ºC under the same conditions as the first heating cycle.

### *3.5.8 Atomic force microscopy (AFM)*

Veeco Dimension 3100 atomic force microscopy (AFM) was used to study the surface topography of the membranes so as to determine if the pores in the membranes are continuous and to check the effect of FCNTs on the pore depth of the membranes. The membranes were cut into 1 cm x 1 cm size and mounted unto the instrument by attaching them to a steel disk using double-sided tape. Air duster was used on the mounted sample to minimize dust on the sample surface. For surface imaging, tapping mode was selected as imaging option. The scan size used was 10 µm x 10 µm at a scan rate of 1.5 Hz, except for pure PSF where scan size of 50 µm x 50 µm was used because its detailed surface topography could not be observed at 10 µm x 10 µm scan size. The tip resonant frequency is 75 kHz with a spring constant of 2.8 N/m. The number of data points captured during each extend-retract operation was 256. The Z range for amplitude data type was set at 1.5V while the Z range for height data type was set at 400 nm. AFM Nanoscope software was used to process the data and to obtain 2-D and 3-D views of the membrane surface images.

### *3.5.9 Texture Analysis*

Bulk mechanical properties of the membranes were evaluated using TA XT Plus texture analyzer at ambient temperature to determine the effect of FCNTs on the tensile strength and Young's Modulus of the synthesized membranes. The membranes were cut into a 30 mm x 10 mm size and fixed into the sample holder of the instrument. Force and distance data at a rate of 500 points per second were captured and analyzed using integrated Exponent 32-bit software. Tensile strength and Young's Modulus of the membranes were calculated from the data using Equations (3.1) and (3.2), respectively. Tensile strength is the maximum amount of tensile stress a material can withstand before breaking. Young's Modulus is a measure of the stiffness of a solid material.

$$\sigma = \frac{F}{A} \tag{3.1}$$

$$E = \frac{Fl}{A\Delta l} \tag{3.2}$$

Where $\sigma$ is the tensile strength, E is the Young's modulus, F is the uniaxial force, A is cross-sectional area of the sample (width x thickness), $\Delta l$ is the elongation of the sample and $l$ is the original gauge length.

## 3.6 Evaluation of gas transport property of the membranes

Gas separation performance of membranes is generally evaluated by single and mixed gas permeation measurements. Single gas permeation measurement provides an ideal gas separation performance of a membrane. It serves as a platform for improving the fabrication conditions of the membrane for better performance. Mixed gas permeation measurement, on the other hand, provides real gas separation of a membrane which is lower than the single gas permeation measurement in most cases. The reason being that in mixed gas separation, all penetrants compete for Langmuir sorption sites of the membrane which decreases their permeabilities (Kraftschik et al., 2013).

### *3.6.1 Single gas permeation measurements*

Pure gas permeation measurements were carried out at the department of chemical engineering, University of Melbourne (UoM), Australia. The pure gas permeation experiment was conducted using a custom-built permeation set up via constant volume variable pressure (CVVP) technique (Scholes et al., 2010). The system temperature was kept constant at 35 $^{o}$C and the feed pressure was between 2 and 20 bar. The permeate side contained 0.5 L sample cylinder. Before each experiment, the system together with the membrane to be tested was evacuated overnight to ~ 75 mtorr vacuum. The measured leakage rate was below $10^{-5}$ torr/s during permeability measurements. The rate of pressure increase on the permeate side due to the gas flux across the membranes was monitored using e-Baratron digital manometer. The output of the manometer was captured through a National instrument data logging card and the data were recorded electronically using LabVIEW X at 1s intervals. The pictures of pure gas permeation apparatus are shown in Figure 3.2.

For each experimental run, $CH_4$ was tested first followed by $CO_2$. Permeability measurement was determined after 1 h 30 min to ensure that solution-diffusion equilibrium was reached for each gas. The equation for calculating pure gas permeability was derived from the first principle as follows:

According to Yasuda (1975):

$$Permeability = \frac{membrane\ flux}{membrane\ permeation\ area \times driving\ force\ gradient} \tag{3.3}$$

Permeant flux is generally measured by either rate of pressure change at a fixed volume or rate of volume change at a fixed pressure (Yasuda, 1975). Also, the driving force gradient in our experiment is the differential pressure of the gas with respect to the thickness of the membrane. Equation (3.3) can then be written mathematically as:

$$P = \frac{J}{A \times \Delta p / \Delta L} \tag{3.4}$$

Where:

P = permeability

J = permeant flux

A = permeation area

Δp = differential pressure of the gas

L = membrane thickness

Since the technique used is CVVP,

$$J = V \frac{dp}{dt} \tag{3.5}$$

Substituting Equation (3.5) into Equation (3.4)

$$P = \frac{VL}{A \times \Delta p} \frac{dp}{dt} \tag{3.6}$$

Permeability unit used is Barrer (1 Barrer = $10^{-10}$cm$^3$ (STP) cm/cm$^2$ .s. cmHg). Therefore, the permeate variables need to be changed from process conditions to STP. Using the ideal gas equation:

$$\frac{p_1 V_1}{T_1} = \frac{p_2 V_2}{T_2} \tag{3.7}$$

p = rate of change of pressure for the permeate $(\frac{dp}{dt})$

V = permeate constant volume

T = operating temperature

Subscript 1 = process condition

Subscript 2 = STP (273 K and 76 cmHg)

$$V_2 = \frac{273}{76}\frac{V_1}{T_1}\frac{dp}{dt} \tag{3.8}$$

Equation (3.6) becomes;

$$P\ (in\ Barrer) = \frac{273}{76} \times \frac{VL}{T \times A \times \Delta p} \times \frac{dp}{dt} \times 10^{10} \tag{3.9}$$

Δp = absolute feed pressure – permeate pressure

Since absolute feed pressure >>> permeate pressure

Δp ≈ absolute feed pressure (p)

$$\therefore P = \frac{273}{76} \times \frac{VL}{TA\,p} \times \frac{dp}{dt} \times 10^{10} \tag{3.10}$$

To account for the leak in the system, permeate variable pressure was obtained from Equation (3.11)

$$\frac{dp}{dt} = \left[\frac{dp}{dt}\right]_{ss} - \left[\frac{dp}{dt}\right]_{leak} \quad (3.11)$$

$\left[\frac{dp}{dt}\right]_{ss}$ = rate of change of permeate pressure at steady state

$\left[\frac{dp}{dt}\right]_{leak}$ = rate of change of pressure of the system leakage

The ideal selectivity was calculated using Equation (3.12) (Alaslai et al., 2016):

$$\alpha^{id}_{CO_2/CH_4} = \frac{P_{CO_2}}{P_{CH_4}} \quad (3.12)$$

$P_{CO_2}$ = Permeability of $CO_2$

$P_{CH_4}$ = Permeability of $CH_4$






Figure 3.2: Pictures of the pure gas permeation apparatus at UoM [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module and permeate sample cylinder. C – Close view of e-Baratron digital manometer]

### *3.6.2 Mixed gas separation*

The mixed gas separation experiments were carried out at UoM and WITs laboratories. For the experiment conducted at UoM, the mixed gas composition was 10%/90% of $CO_2/CH_4$ with a feed pressure between 2 – 10 bar at 35 $^oC$. The experiment at WITs was conducted with a feed pressure between 2 – 6 bar (based on the limit on the equipment) at 35 $^oC$, the mixed gas composition was 50%/50% of $CO_2/CH_4$. The mixed gas permeability was measured on a constant pressure variable volume (CPVV) gas permeation apparatus (Scholes et al., 2015).

To ensure no concentration polarization on both sides of the membrane, the retentate flow rate was kept at about 200 ml/min on the feed side. For the permeate side, nitrogen was used as a sweep gas with a flow rate of 26 ml/min at 1 bar. The permeate gas was passed through a sample cylinder that was immersed in a water bath at ambient

temperature. The pictures of mixed gas permeation equipment used at UoM and Wits are shown in Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4 respectively.

The flow rate of gas permeate was measured through a universal flowmeter (Agilent Technologies ADM 3000). The permeate gas was compositionally analyzed using pre-calibrated online gas chromatography equipped with a thermal conductivity detector. Permeability was determined after 3 h for each experimental run. The Equation for calculating mixed gas permeability was derived as follows:

From Equation (3.4)

$$P = \frac{J}{A \times \Delta p/L}$$

Since the technique used is CPVV,

$$J = p\frac{dV}{dt} \tag{3.13}$$

Substituting Equation (3.13) into Equation (3.4)

$$P = \frac{pL}{A \times \Delta p}\frac{dV}{dt} \tag{3.14}$$

Converting the process condition to STP as previously discussed

$$P = \frac{273}{76} \times \frac{p_p L}{TA \times \Delta p} \times \frac{dV}{dt} \times 10^{10} \tag{3.15}$$

$p_p$ = permeate pressure ≈ 76 cmHg

T = permeate Temperature ≈ 273 K

Δp = absolute feed pressure ($p_f$) - $p_p$

$$\therefore P = \frac{L}{A(p_f - p_{p)}} \times \frac{dV}{dt} \times 10^{10} \quad (3.16)$$

The permeability of $CO_2$ and $CH_4$ was calculated using Equations (3.17) and (3.18), respectively:

$$P_{CO_2} = \frac{y_{CO_2} L}{A(x_{CO_2} p_f - y_{CO_2} p_{p)}} \times \frac{dV}{dt} \times 10^{10} \quad (3.17)$$

$$P_{CH_4} = \frac{y_{CH_4} L}{A(x_{CH_4} p_f - y_{CH_4} p_{p)}} \times \frac{dV}{dt} \times 10^{10} \quad (3.18)$$

The mixed gas separation factor was determined using Equation (3.19) (Alaslai et al., 2016):

$$\propto_{CO_2/CH_4} = \frac{(y_{CO_2}/y_{CH_4})_{permeate}}{(x_{CO_2}/x_{CH_4})_{feed}} \quad (3.19)$$

$\frac{dV}{dt}$ = permeate flow rate ($cm^3/s$).

Where x and y are the mole fractions.




Figure 3.3: Pictures of the mixed gas permeation apparatus at UoM [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module. C – Gas chromatography]




Figure 3.4: Pictures of the mixed gas permeation apparatus at WITs [A – Full view of the equipment. B – Oven that housed the membrane module. C – Gas chromatography]

### *3.6.3 $CO_2$ gas sorption measurements*

Sorption measurement of $CO_2$ gas was carried out at UoM. The measurements were conducted on a gravimetric sorption analyzer (GHP-FS, with a Cahn D-200 balance, VTI Scientific Instruments, Florida) operated in a static mode at 35 $^oC$ with 10 pressure points between 0 - 20 bar. Prior to sorption measurement, a sample of the membrane was placed in the sample chamber and the system was purged for 360 min at 35 $^oC$ to remove all air from the polymer matrix. Thereafter, $CO_2$ was introduced into the sample chamber at incremental pressure. At each pressure point, the system was allowed to equilibrate for 1 h until a constant mass of adsorbed $CO_2$ by the membrane was achieved. $CO_2$ sorption isotherms as a function of feed pressure were determined. The system was then evacuated for another 300 min. For buoyancy correction, the above procedure was repeated with Helium gas, which can be assumed to have no adsorption onto the membrane. The picture of the sorption analyzer used is shown in Figure 3.5.




Figure 3.5: Picture of the gravimetric sorption analyzer at UoM [A- sample chamber, B- control panel]

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# CHAPTER 4

# 4 PRODUCTION AND FUNCTIONALIZATION OF CARBON NANOTUBES

The work presented in this chapter has been published in Microporous and Mesoporous Materials journal as "Aberefa, O.A., Daramola, M.O. and Iyuke, S.E., 2019. Production and functionalization of carbon nanotubes for application in membrane synthesis for natural gas separation. *Microporous and Mesoporous Materials*, *280*, pp.26-36".

## 4.1 Introduction

CNTs have exceptional mechanical properties owning to their light weight, length to radius ratio and the carbon-carbon (C-C) bonds in the graphite layers, which are perhaps the most powerful chemical bond known (Ismail et al., 2011). Furthermore, several literature have reported simulation studies of gas transport through CNTs (Skoulidas et al., 2002; Sokhan et al., 2004). CNTs have shown superior gas permeability and selectivity as compared to other fillers of similar pore sizes owing to the inherent smoothness of CNTs (Ismail et al., 2009). Addition of CNTs as a filler in polymeric mixed matrix membrane (MMM) has been reported to improve the mechanical strength (Sanip et al., 2011) and gas permeability and selectivity (Aroon et al., 2010; Sanip et al., 2011) of the membrane. Generally, the performance of polymeric membranes is measured based on permeability and selectivity. Permeability measures intrinsic productivity of the membrane while selectivity measures the membrane's separation efficiency (Eguchi et al., 2015).

The transfer of excellent mechanical and transport properties of a filler particle to the polymer matrix depends largely on the effective dispersion of the filler particles into the polymer matrices (Bastani et al., 2013). However, the C-C bonds cause a dispersion problem for CNTs in the polymer matrix due to the agglomeration of CNTs (Ma et al., 2010). Functionalization of CNTs has been proposed as a solution to this problem (Chen et al., 2008). The addition of functionalized carbon nanotubes (FCNTs) into

polymers appears to offer a unique solution to the deficiencies of conventional polymeric membrane systems (Deng and Hägg, 2014). Chemical functionalization of CNTs reduces the strong Van der Waal force of attraction between CNTs and enhances separation of CNT bundles into individual CNT thereby improving CNT-polymer matrix interface interaction (Balasubramanian and Burghard, 2005). Furthermore, functionalization of CNTs could be modified to have particular interactions with specific gases to enhance molecular sieving of MMMs by chemical recognitions during gas separation (Corry, 2011).

In this study, CNTs were produced by CCVD method using methane and acetylene as carbon sources, hydrogen and argon served as carrier gas and ferrocene used as catalyst. The effect of carbon sources and production conditions (temperature and type of carrier gas) on the yield and quality of produced CNTs are presented. Finally, CNT with optimum quality was purified and functionalized using carboxylation protocol to enhance its dispersion and adsorption properties for use in membrane synthesis for natural gas separation. Physicochemical properties of the as-produced and as-functionalized CNTs were checked to evaluate the influence of the aforementioned conditions on the yield and quality of them.

## 4.2 Experimental

### *4.2.1 Materials*

Nitrogen (purity: 99.999%), argon (purity: 99.999%), hydrogen (purity: 99.999%), acetylene (purity: 99%) and methane (purity: 99.95%) gases were purchased from Afrox, South Africa. Hydrochloric (37 wt. %), sulfuric (98 wt. %) and nitric (70 wt. %) acids were purchased from Sigma Aldrich, South Africa. In addition, ferrocene (98%) used as catalyst was also purchased from Sigma Aldrich, South Africa. All the materials were used as supplied without any further purification.

### *4.2.2 Production and characterization of CNTs*

CNTs were produced using chemical vapour deposition method. Methane and acetylene were used as carbon source, argon and hydrogen served as carrier gases while ferrocene acted as catalyst. The reactor temperature was varied between 800$^{o}$C and 1000$^{o}$C. Detailed production protocol is stated in chapter 3, section 3.2. Table 4.1 describes the variation in production conditions for the CNT samples.

The morphology and elemental composition of as-produced CNTs were obtained using field emission scanning electron microscope (FESEM) equipped with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscope (EDS), degree of defect and graphitization were determined using raman spectroscope equipped with Olympus BX41 microscope and electronic precision balance (EPB) with readability of 0.1 mg was used to measure the yield of each experimental run.

Table 4.1: CNT production conditions

| ***Sample*** | ***Carbon Source*** | ***Reactor Temperature ($^{o}$C)*** | ***Carrier Gas*** | ***Notation C-T-G*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Acetylene | 800 | Argon | A-800-Ar |
| 2 | Acetylene | 850 | Argon | A-850-Ar |
| 3 | Acetylene | 900 | Argon | A-900-Ar |
| 4 | Acetylene | 950 | Argon | A-950-Ar |
| 5 | Acetylene | 1000 | Argon | A-1000-Ar |
| 6 | Acetylene | 800 | Argon/Hydrogen | A-800-Ar/H |
| 7 | Acetylene | 850 | Argon/Hydrogen | A-850-Ar/H |
| 8 | Acetylene | 900 | Argon/Hydrogen | A-900-Ar/H |
| 9 | Acetylene | 950 | Argon/Hydrogen | A-950-Ar/H |
| 10 | Acetylene | 1000 | Argon/Hydrogen | A-1000-Ar/H |
| 11 | Methane | 800 | Argon | M-800-Ar |
| 12 | Methane | 900 | Argon | M-900-Ar |
| 13 | Methane | 1000 | Argon | M-1000-Ar |

***C-T-G: C = carbon source; T = reactor temperature; G = carrier gas; A = Acetylene; M = Methane; Ar = Argon; H = Hydrogen***

### *4.2.3 CNTs functionalization protocol and characterization*

Extensive CNT functionalization procedure is given in chapter 3, section 3.3. In summary, 1 g of raw CNTs (RCNTs) was added to 100 ml of hydrochloric acid and ultrasonicated for 4 h at 40 $^{o}$C. The mixture was rinsed with distilled water and filtered until the filtrate pH nears seven. The filtered PCNTs was dried at 100 $^{O}$C for 24 h. Thereafter, 1 g PCNTs was added to 75 ml of sulfuric acid and 25 ml of nitric acid. The mixture was ultrasonicated for 1 hr at 40 $^{O}$C. Rinsing, filtering, and drying were repeated as previously mentioned.

In order to confirm successful functionalization of PCNTs and to investigate the effect of functionalization; RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs were characterized using TGA to quantify the degree of functionalization, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) was used to check the presence of functional groups and Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) analysis to obtain the textural properties and X-ray diffraction (XRD) was used to investigate the change in the crystallinity of CNTs due to functionalization.

## 4.3 Results and discussion

### *4.3.1 Morphology of as-produced CNTs*

Figure 4.1 depicts the SEM images of CNTs produced from acetylene and argon at varying reactor temperature. The images show that carbon nanoballs are predominant at all the investigated temperatures. This observation is similar to the one obtained by Iyuke et. al (2009) where acetylene and argon were used but without a catalyst. The expectation is that the use of catalyst would provide nucleation sites for CNTs to grow (Liu et al., 2004). However, Figure 4.1 does not support this theory. We, therefore, looked at the growth mechanism of CNTs, the most acceptable growth mechanism of CNTs involves three stages (Iyuke and Simate, 2011; Meyyappan, 2004): (i) decomposition of the carbon source on the catalyst surface; (ii) dissolution and diffusion of the carbon atoms through the bulk of the catalyst particles; (iii) precipitation of CNTs on the other side of the catalyst particles. Hence, we postulated that, since acetylene is highly reactive (Soneda, 2002), there could be the formation of

carbon deposits on the surface of the catalyst which might deactivate the catalyst active sites (Ning et al., 2005; Kuwana et al., 2005). In order to substantiate our postulation, hydrogen gas, which is known to reduce catalyst deactivation (Bahome et al., 2005), was added to argon to serve as a carrier gas. The result shows the presence of more CNTs in all the reactor temperature as depicted in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.3 shows the SEM results of CNTs produced from methane and argon. Methane being less reactive than acetylene (Soneda, 2002), supports the growth mechanism of CNTs without the addition of hydrogen to the carrier gas. This could be seen in the presence of more CNTs in the samples produced from methane. Figure 4.3a displays the existence of amorphous carbon in the sample which could be attributed to non-nucleation of some of the carbon atoms at a lower temperature (Gomez-Ballesteros et al., 2015). CNTs were predominant in Figure 4.3b, this was also confirmed with a transmission electron microscope (TEM) and presented in Figure 4.3d. Figure 4.3c depicts thermal degradation of the CNTs at a higher temperature (Duong et al., 2008).

### *4.3.2 Effect of production conditions on the yield of as-produced CNTs*

The effect of production conditions on the rate of production of CNTs is depicted in Figure 4.4. CNTs production rate for acetylene and argon (A-Ar) shows a decrease in CNTs yield with an increase in temperature. This could be attributed to the deactivation of the catalyst active site with an increase in temperature (Sivakumar et al., 2010). However, with the addition of hydrogen to argon as carrier gas (A-Ar/H), the CNT yield increases with increase in temperature. This further support our initial postulate about the deactivation of catalyst active site due to the formation of carbon deposits on the surface of the catalyst owing to the high reactivity of acetylene, which is reduced by the addition of hydrogen gas (Ning et al., 2005; Kuwana et al., 2005). CNTs production rate of Methane and argon (M-Ar) shows an optimum yield at 900 $^{o}$C.

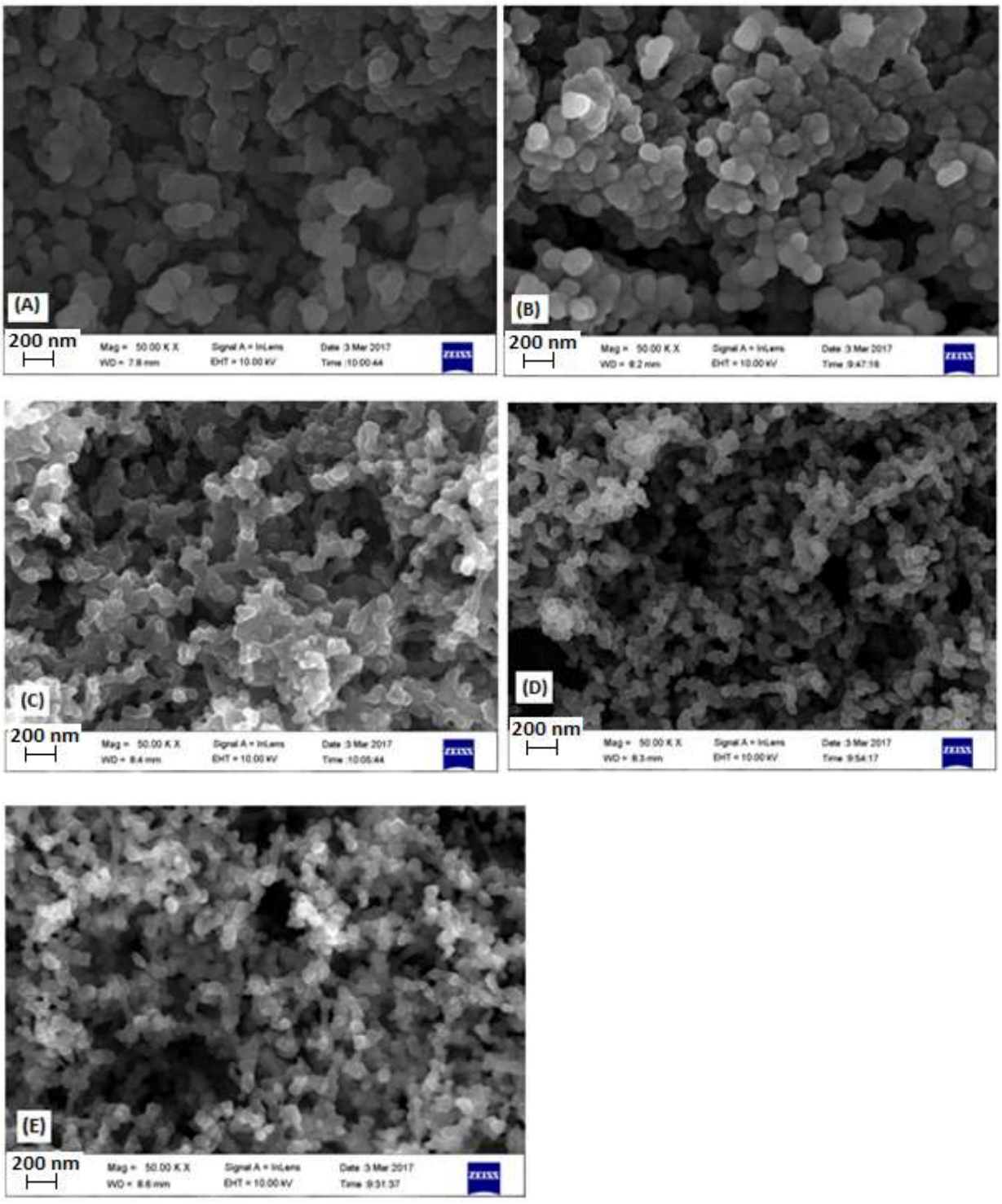



Figure 4.1: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon as carrier gas (A = A-800-Ar, B = A-850-Ar, C = A-900-Ar, D = A-950-Ar, E = A-1000-Ar). Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

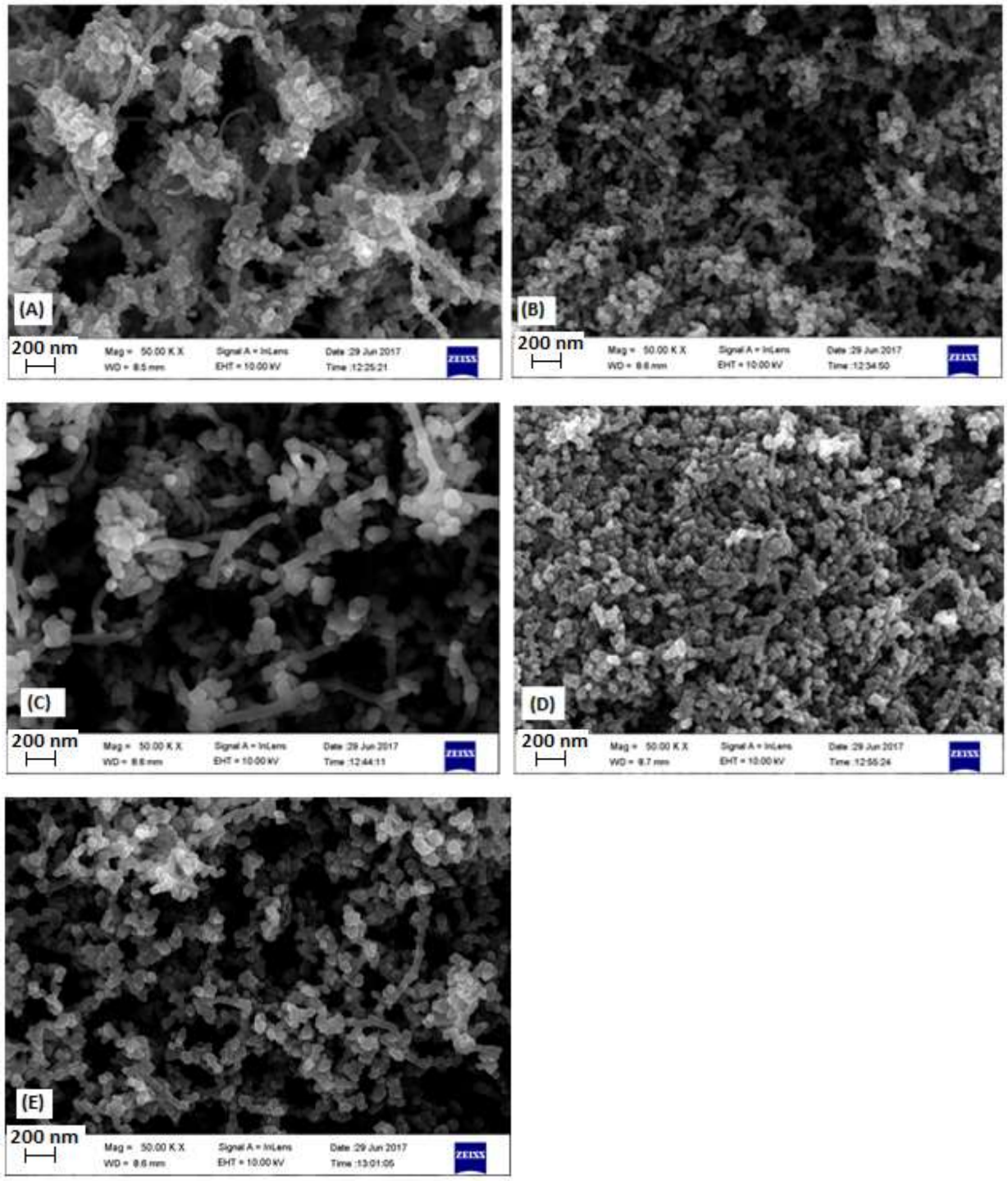



Figure 4.2: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon/hydrogen as carrier gas (A = A-800-Ar/H, B = A-850-Ar/H, C = A-900-Ar/H, D = A-950-Ar/H, E = A-1000-Ar/H). Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 125 ml/min; hydrogen flow rate = 25 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

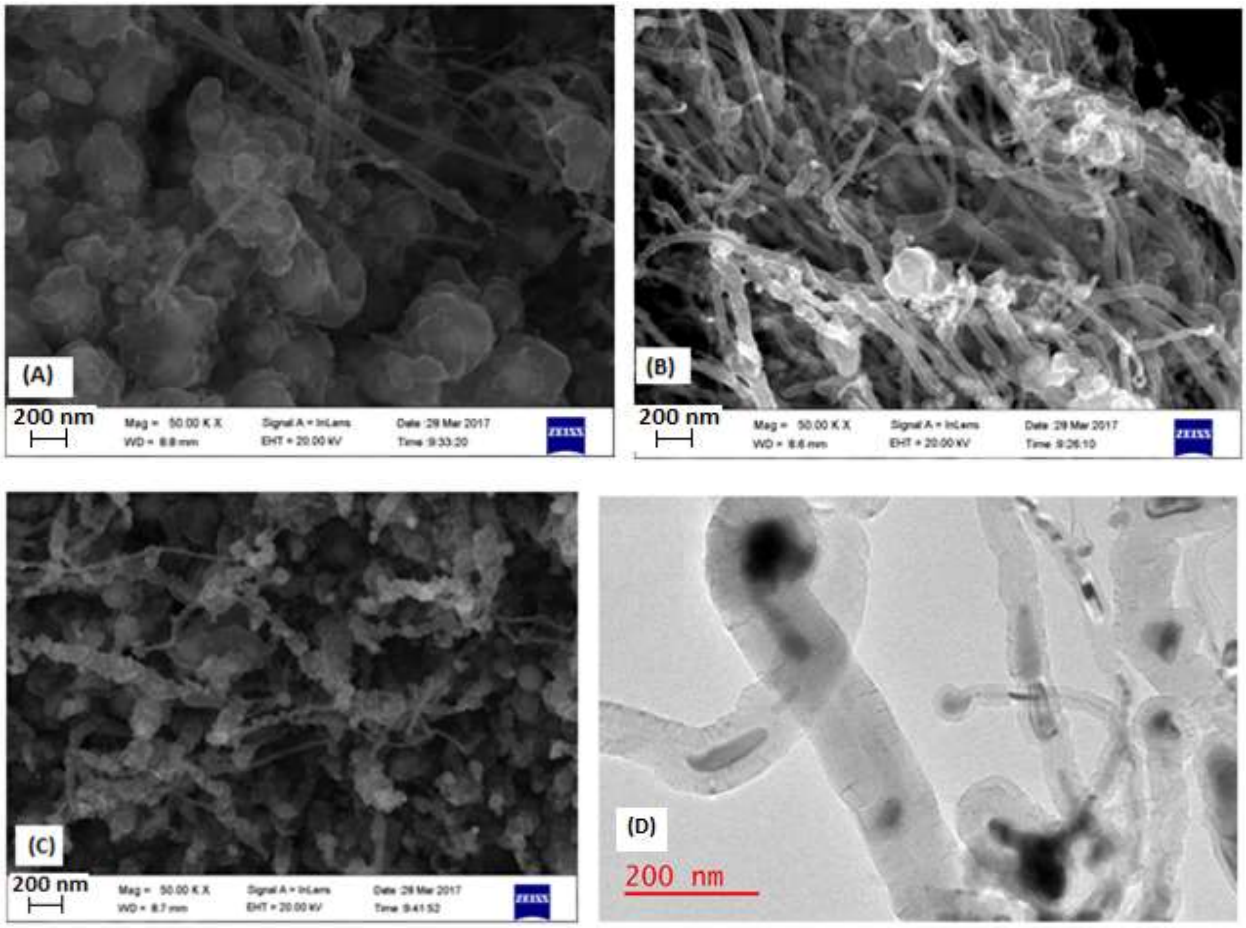



Figure 4.3: SEM micrograph of CNTs produced from methane as carbon source and argon as carrier gas: A = M-800-Ar; B = M-900-Ar; C = M-1000-Ar. D = TEM image of M-900-Ar. Experimental conditions: methane flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

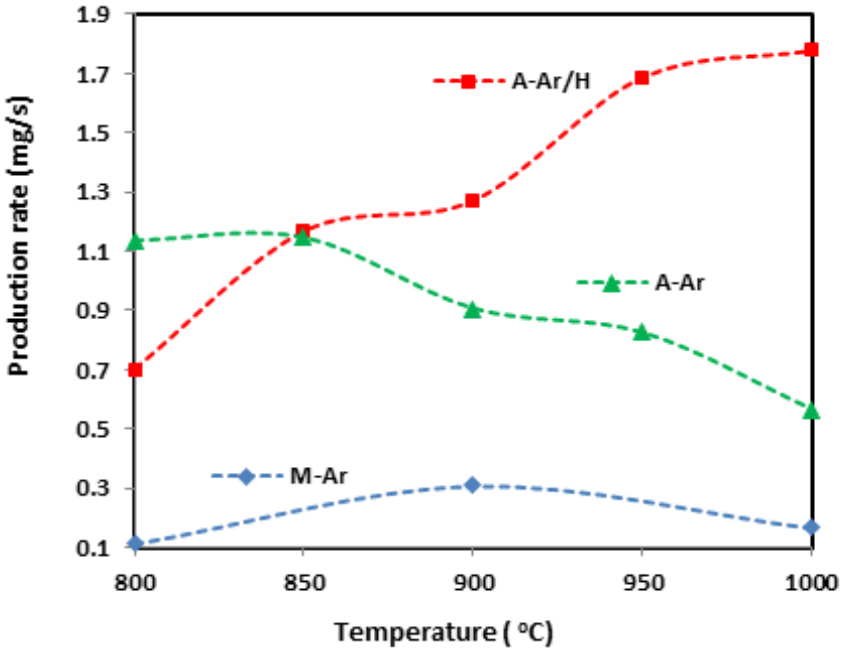



Figure 4.4: Production rate of CNTs

To further substantiate the effect of production conditions on CNTs production rate, EDS analysis was carried out on all the samples. EDS gives the elemental composition of a material. The weight percent (wt. %) of carbon in each sample is presented in Table 4.2. The results are consistent with the results obtained from EPB. Wt. % of carbon in A-Ar/H is the highest, followed by A-Ar. M-Ar shows the least wt. % of carbon. The full elemental compositions and spectra of all the as-produced CNTs are presented in Appendix A.

Table 4.2: EDS of the as-produced CNTs showing wt. % of Carbon

| Sample | Wt. % of Carbon |
|---|---|
| A-800-Ar | 85.34 |
| A-850-Ar | 87.03 |
| A-900-Ar | 90.51 |
| A-950-Ar | 88.32 |
| A-1000-Ar | 92.56 |
| A-800-Ar/H | 95.96 |
| A-850-Ar/H | 94.76 |
| A-900-Ar/H | 89.08 |
| A-950-Ar/H | 98.45 |
| A-1000-Ar/H | 98.94 |
| M-800-Ar | 79.39 |
| M-900-Ar | 78.43 |
| M-1000-Ar | 70.74 |

### *4.3.3 Raman spectroscopy of as-produced CNTs*

Raman spectra in Figure 4.5 through Figure 4.7 show the existence of $sp^2$ carbon in all the samples due to peaks of high symmetry present in the spectra and this is a characteristic of CNTs (Dresselhaus et al., 2010). Three main characteristic peaks of CNTs are: (i) low-frequency peak also known as radial breathing mode (RBM) which is present in spectra range of 100-400 $cm^{-1}$ (Toni et al., 2015). This is one of the main signatures of single-wall CNTs because it depends only on CNT diameter and can usually be detected for CNT diameter < 2 nm (Lehman et al., 2011); (ii) disorder-induced peak known as D-band which is observed around 1340 $cm^{-1}$ (Lehman et al., 2011) and this is a measure of structural defect in CNTs (Miyata et al., 2010); (iii) G-band which is a measure of graphitization of CNTs and is present in spectra range of 1550-1600 $cm^{-1}$ (Lehman et al., 2011). Furthermore, the ratio of the intensity of D-band to the intensity of G-band ($I_D/I_G$) is used as an indication of the degree of defect

in the CNTs (Wepasnick et al., 2010). The smaller the ratio is the lesser the structural defect in the CNTs (Liu et al., 2003).

The spectra depicted in Figures 4.5 – 4.7 show the presence of D-band and G-band in all the samples around the expected spectra ranges. RBM is noticed in all the samples from methane while the samples from acetylene show RBM at low temperatures. Also, the $I_D/I_G$ ratio of samples from methane show the least CNTs sidewall defect, with M-900-Ar exhibiting the best quality. This result corroborated with SEM micrograph in Figure 4.3b. Addition of hydrogen to the carrier gas does not improve the sidewall defect in as-produced as shown in Table 4.3.

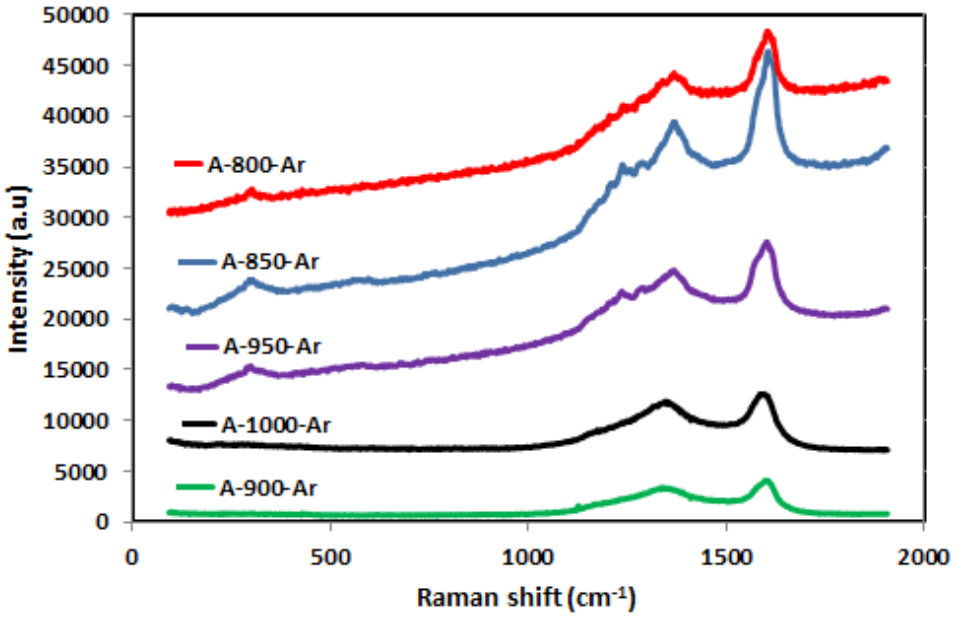



Figure 4.5: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

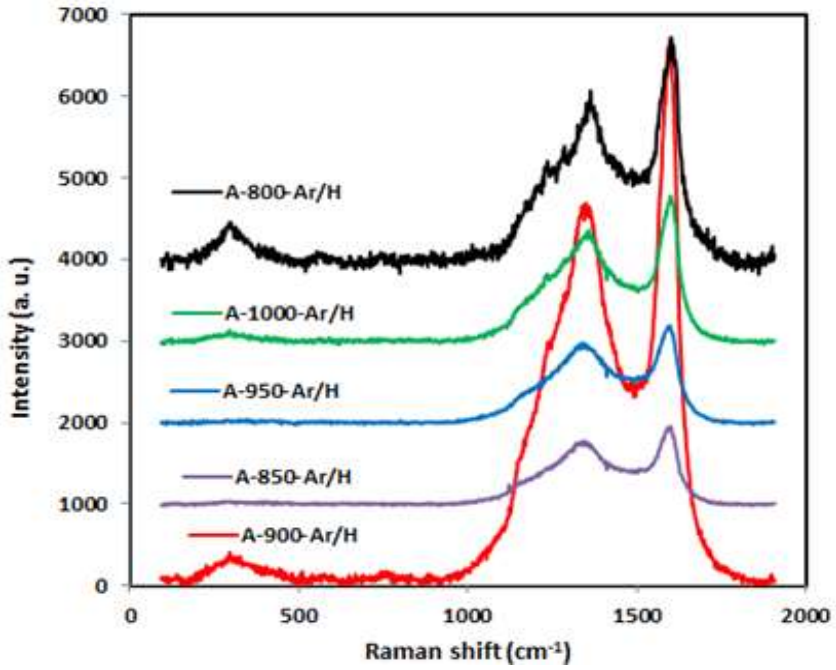



Figure 4.6: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from acetylene as carbon source and argon/hydrogen as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: acetylene flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 125 ml/min; hydrogen flow rate = 25 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

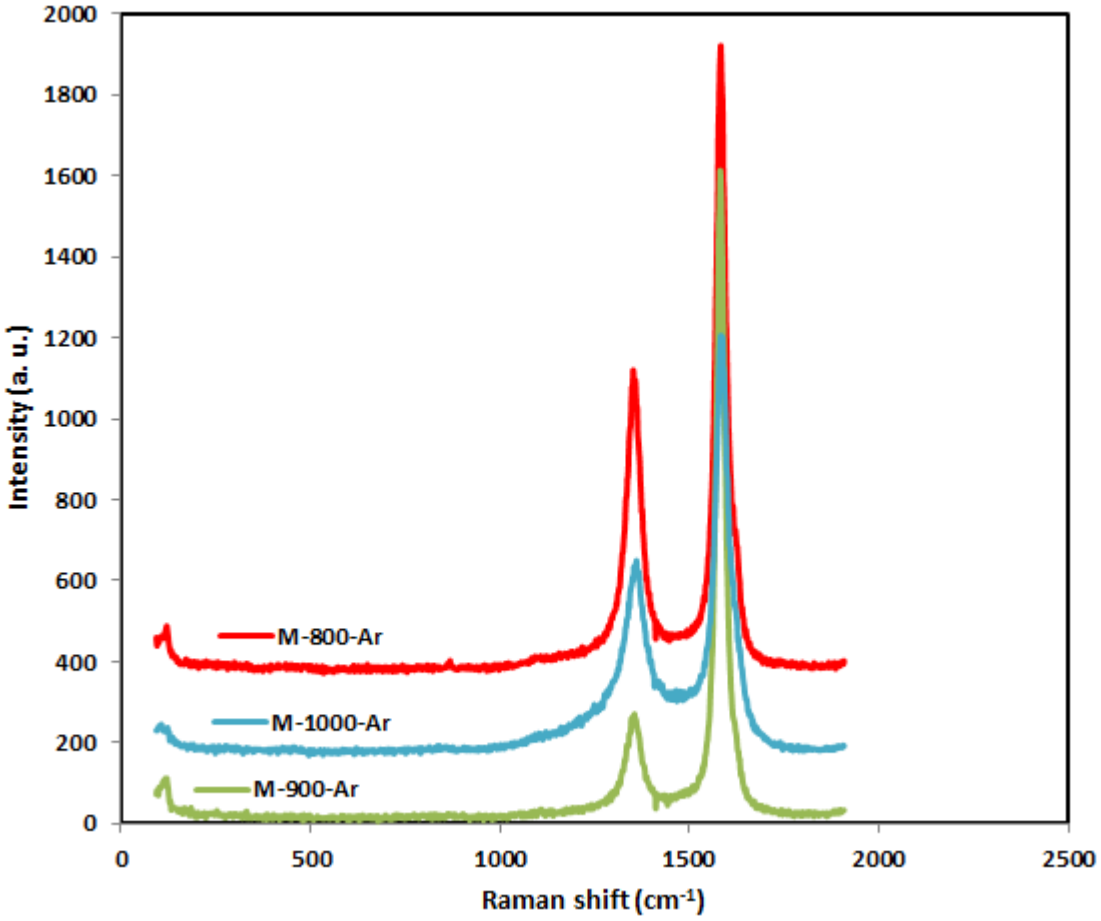



Figure 4.7: Raman spectra of CNTs produced from methane as carbon source and argon as carrier gas. Experimental conditions: methane flow rate = 150 ml/min; argon flow rate = 150 ml/min; amount of catalyst = 7 g; reaction time = 15 min

Table 4.3: Main raman signals of the produced CNTs

| Sample | RBM ($cm^{-1}$) | D-band ($cm^{-1}$) | G-band ($cm^{-1}$) | $I_D/I_G$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A-800-Ar | 306 | 1368 | 1604 | 0.85 |
| A-850-Ar | 301 | 1370 | 1605 | 0.82 |
| A-900-Ar | - | 1342 | 1602 | 0.80 |
| A-950-Ar | 299 | 1368 | 1602 | 0.89 |
| A-1000-Ar | - | 1346 | 1600 | 0.89 |
| A-800-Ar/H | 299 | 1362 | 1600 | 0.90 |
| A-850-Ar/H | - | 1335 | 1600 | 0.90 |
| A-900-Ar/H | 299 | 1349 | 1600 | 0.71 |
| A-950-Ar/H | - | 1342 | 1600 | 0.93 |
| A-1000-Ar/H | - | 1358 | 1600 | 0.91 |
| M-800-Ar | 120 | 1351 | 1582 | 0.49 |
| M-900-Ar | 120 | 1354 | 1580 | 0.17 |
| M-1000-Ar | 122 | 1359 | 1582 | 0.47 |

### *4.3.4 Analysis of the degree of functionalization of CNTs*

TGA and EPB were used to explore the degree of functionalization of as-produced CNTs (M-900-Ar). Figure 4.8 displays the effect of purification and functionalization on the thermal stability of the CNTs. The result shows that the onset degradation temperature of raw CNTs (RCNTs) was improved by purification. This could be attributed to the removal of amorphous carbon from the RCNTs by the purification process. A similar observation was reported by Hou et. al (2008). The percentage change in weight of purified CNTs (PCNTs) is less than that of RCNTs which confirmed an enhancement in the purity of PCNTs (Ling et al., 2013). The onset degradation temperature of functionalized CNTs (FCNTs) decreased significantly. This could be attributed to the decomposition of carboxylic chain covalently bounded to the PCNTs (Ling et al., 2013). The degree of functionalization is a measure of mass loss due to thermal degradation of functional group attached to CNTs (Salam and Burk,

2017). For FCNTs, the degree of functionalization was obtained from mass loss between the onset and endset degradation temperatures on the TGA curve as shown in Figure 4.9. A similar trend was obtained from EPB analysis and presented in Table 4.4.

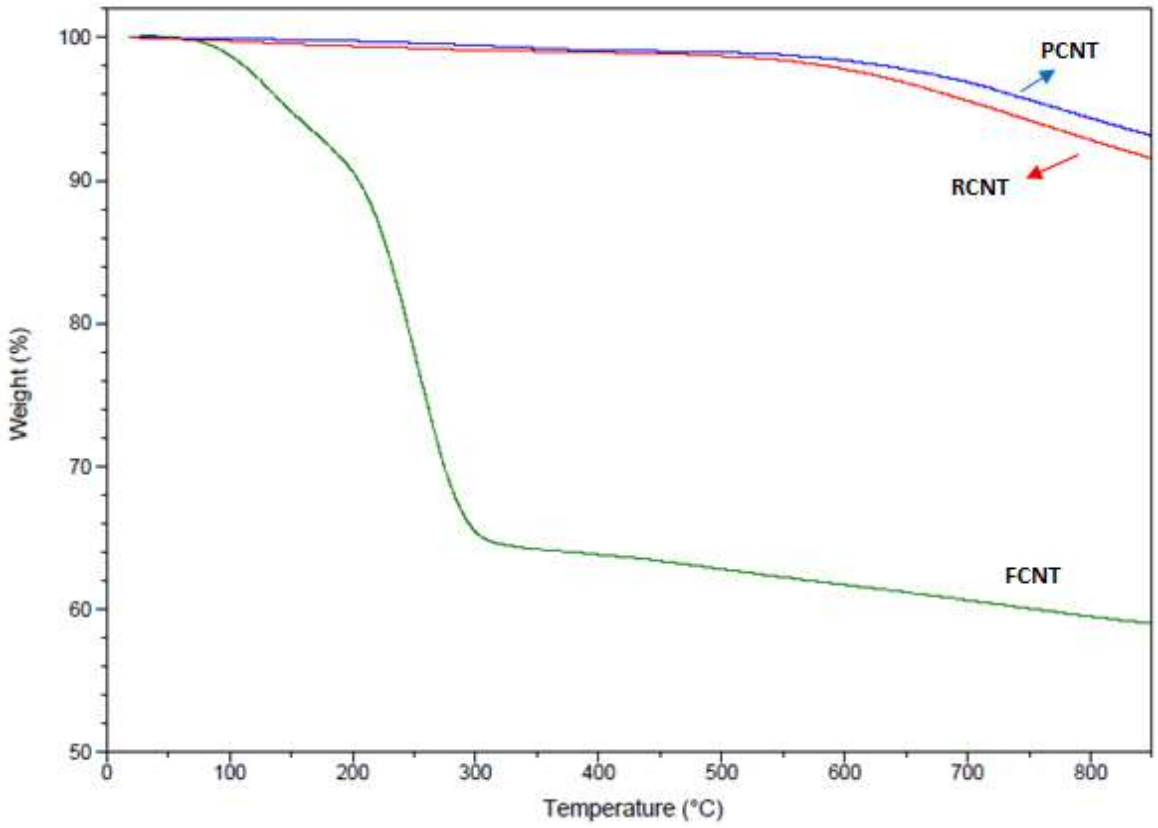



Figure 4.8: TGA quantitative analysis of raw CNTs (RCNT), purified CNTs (FCNT) and functionalized CNTs (FCNT)

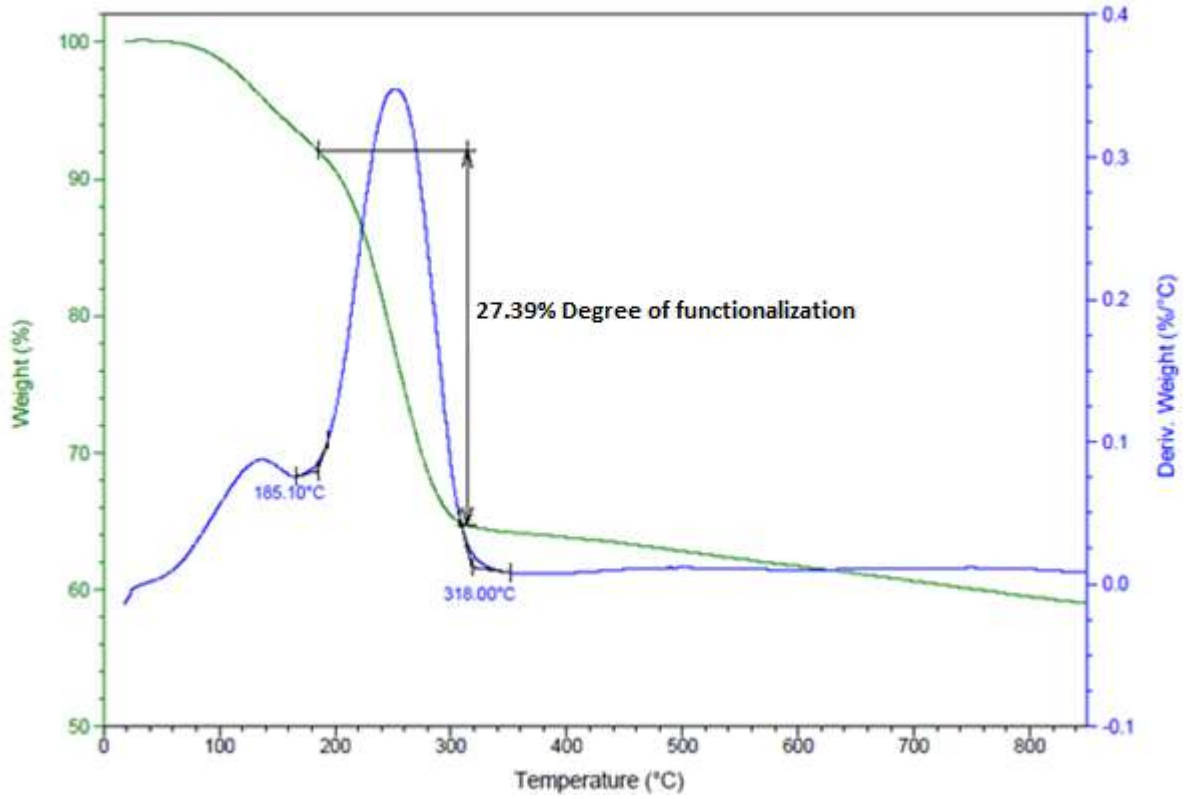



Figure 4.9: TGA quantitative analysis of degree of functionalization of FCNT

Table 4.4: Gravimetric analysis of degree of functionalization of M-900-Ar using EPB

| Process | Initial weight (g) | Final weight after drying (g) | Change in weight (g) | Change in weight (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Purification | 1.60 | 1.57 | 0.03 ▼ | 1.88 |
| Functionalization | 1.00 | 1.24 | 0.24 ▲ | 24.00 |

### *4.3.5 FTIR analysis of the functionalized CNTs*

A FTIR spectrum comprises two regions: the fingerprint region with the spectrum range of 1500-400 $cm^{-1}$ and functional group region between 4000-1500 $cm^{-1}$ (Sahil et al., 2011). The fingerprint region comprises overlapping peaks of series of absorption due to bending vibration within a molecule (Danilczuka et al., 2011). Functional group region has distinctive peaks due to vibration of the functional group (Danilczuka et al., 2011). The FTIR spectra presented in Figure 4.10 show similar spectra for RCNTs and PCNTs. This confirms that the purification process does not add any functional group to the CNTs. The FCNT spectrum has five distinctive peaks at the functional group regions. The peak at 1614 $cm^{-1}$ represents C=O stretch from COOH, that of 2347 $cm^{-1}$ signifies OH stretch from H-bonded COOH, the peak at 2937 $cm^{-1}$ represents C-H stretch and the broad peak at 3425 $cm^{-1}$ denotes OH stretch from COOH (Titus et al., 2006). These peaks confirm successful carboxylic functionalization of CNTs. Furthermore, asymmetric and symmetric C-H vibration band at 2855 $cm^{-1}$ and 2937 $cm^{-1}$ are usually located at defect sites on the CNT sidewall (Ling et al., 2013).

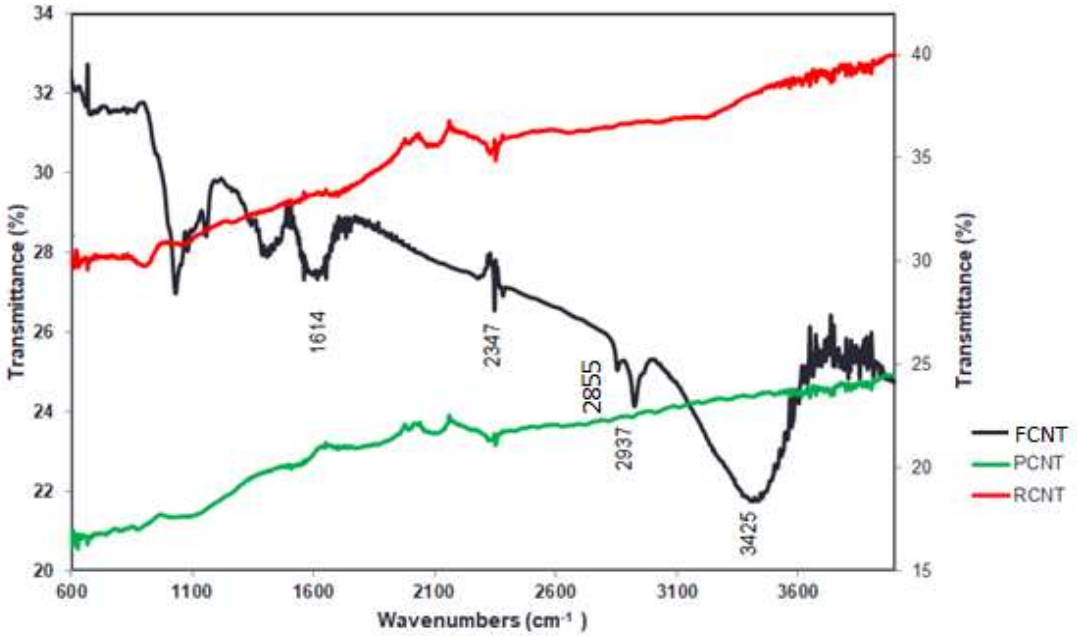



Figure 4.10: FTIR spectra of raw CNTs (RCNT), purified CNTs (PCNT) and functionalized CNTs (FCNT)

### *4.3.6 Effect of functionalization on the adsorption and textural properties of CNTs*

Despite the shortcomings in the theoretical foundation of BET theory, it remains the most widely used method for studying the textural properties of nanoporous materials (Lehman et al., 2011; Thommes et al., 2015). According to IUPAC technical report (Thommes et al., 2015), nanoporous materials are classified, with respect to their pore sizes, as macropores (> 50 nm), mesopores (between 2 nm and 50 nm) and micropores (< 2 nm). As shown in Table 4.5, the average pore size of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs as determined by Barrett-Johner-Halenda (BJH) equation is within mesopore classification. Physisorption mechanisms in mesopore materials are monolayer-multilayer adsorption at a low relative pressure of adsorbate and pore condensation as the relative pressure of the adsorbate approaches unity (Sing, 1995). BET surface area of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs was estimated within the region of monolayer-multilayer adsorption up to a relative pressure of 0.29 (see Appendix B for detailed BET analysis). The pore volume was determined within the pore condensation region up to a relative pressure of 0.99 for all the types of CNTs.

Figure 4.11 depicts nitrogen adsorption and desorption isotherms of the CNTs at 77 K. The amount of nitrogen molecules adsorbed onto PCNTs and FCNTs within the pore condensation region is higher than that of RCNTs as shown in Figure 4.11b, indicating an increase in the porosity of PCNTs and FCNTs (Chen et al., 2006; Zaine et al., 2016). This is further supported by an increase in the pore volume and average pore size of PCNTs and FCNTs as presented in Table 4.5. From Figure 4.11a, the isotherms for all the types of CNTs showed Type IV physisorption isotherms with a characteristic H1 hysteresis as classified by IUPAC (Thommes et al., 2015). This means that most of the pores of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs are in mesopore sizes (Ziegler et al., 2005). Increase in the pore volume and the average pore size of PCNTs could be attributed to the removal of amorphous carbon and iron impurities constituting occluded materials in the inner wall of RCNTs (Li et al., 2004). Furthermore, the decrease in the surface areas of PCNTs and FCNTs with respect to RCNTs could be due to the removal of

amorphous carbon attached to CNTs after acid treatment (Salam and Burk, 2017). Increase in the pore volume and the average pore size of FCNTs as compare to PCNTs could be attributed to the etching of FCNTs sidewall by the acid, creating new pores (Salam and Burk, 2017; Wu et al., 2014).

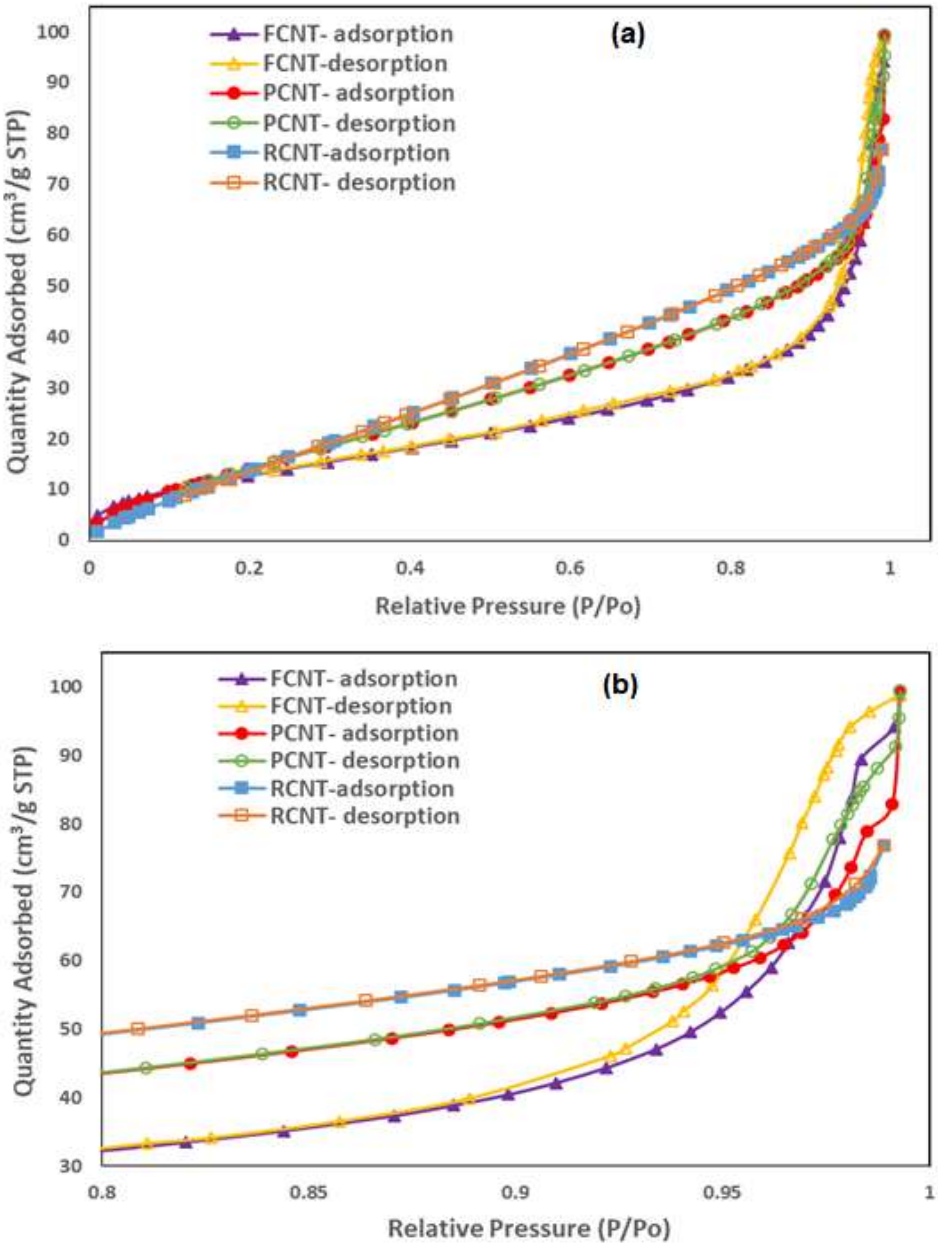



Figure 4.11: Nitrogen adsorption-desorption isotherms of raw CNT (RCNT), purified CNT (PCNT) and functionalized CNT (FCNT) at 77 K. (a) Full Isotherm (b) Expanded view of the pore condensation region

Table 4.5: Effect of functionalization on textural properties of the produced M-900-Ar

| Sample | [a]Surface Area ($m^2/g$) | [b]Pore Volume ($cm^3/g$) | [b]Average pore size (nm) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Raw CNT | 74.548 ± 4.077 | 0.107 | 5.504 |
| Purified CNT | 61.606 ± 2.357 | 0.142 | 7.706 |
| Functionalized CNT | 49.182 ± 0.871 | 0.145 | 10.372 |

*a = determined using BET equation, b = determined using BJH equation*

### *4.3.7 Effect of functionalization on the crystallinity of CNTs*

Figure 4.12 shows the diffraction patterns of RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs obtained using Bruker XRD D2 Phaser. Reference pattern from Diffrac.EVA software was used to obtain the Miller indices (hkl). Similar diffraction patterns were observed for RCNT and PCNT. This shows that purification of RCNT did not change its crystallographic characteristics and interatomic distances. The RCNT and PCNT diffraction patterns consist of two peaks at 2θ values of 25.6° (002 plane) and 44.0° (110 plane), corresponding to interatomic distances ($d_{hkl}$) of 0.348 nm and 0.206 nm, respectively.

The high-intensity peak at angle 25.6° represents the presence of graphitic particles. However, XRD is not sufficient to differentiate between pure graphite structure and other graphitic carbon like CNT (Zhu et al., 2003; Peigney et al., 1998). The low-intensity peak at angle 44.0° corresponds to α-Fe based on the match from Diffrac.EVA reference library. Mallakpou and Zacchnazari (2013) reported a similar result. This could be attributed to iron particles present in the CNT structure during synthesis with ferrocene catalyst. FCNT diffraction pattern depicts a similar number of peaks like that of RCNT and PCNT but with a slight shift in the 2θ angles. This shows that functionalization did not change the crystallographic characteristic of the CNTs but alters the interatomic distances. The high-intensity peak shifted to 2θ angle of 25.9°

which corresponds to $d_{hkl}$ of 0.344 nm and the low-intensity peak shifted to 2θ angle of 44.6$^{o}$ corresponding to $d_{hkl}$ of 0.203 nm.

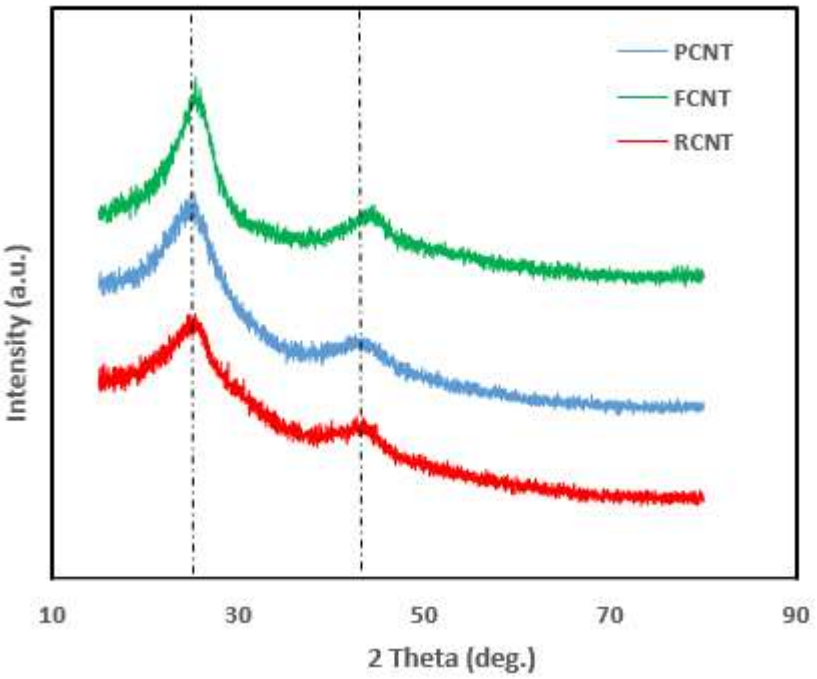



Figure 4.12: XRD patterns of raw CNT (RCNT), purified CNT (PCNT) and functionalized CNT (FCNT)

## 4.4 Concluding remarks

This work demonstrates the impacts of the type of carbon source and production conditions on the quantity and quality of CNTs produced by CCVD method. It also establishes the effect of hydrogen in reducing the deactivation of the catalyst active site during the production of CNTs. The SEM micrographs of CNTs produced from the mixture of acetylene and argon show the presence of more carbon nanoballs than CNTs. This is attributed to the deactivation of catalyst active site owing to the high reactivity of acetylene forming carbon nanoshells that reduce the activity of the catalyst. Addition of hydrogen to the carrier gas facilitated the production of CNTs present in the sample as well as the CNT yield. However, the presence of carbon nanoballs is minimal in the samples produced from the mixture of methane and argon

without the addition of hydrogen. This is because methane is less reactive than acetylene and the stoichiometric ratio of hydrogen during decomposition of methane is twice that of acetylene. The highest production rate was achieved with a mixture of acetylene, argon, and hydrogen at 1000 $^{o}$C while the mixture of methane and argon at 900 $^{o}$C gives the best quality.

FTIR spectra of FCNTs show the presence OH, C-H, and C=O groups at wavenumbers of 3425 $cm^{-1}$, 2937 $cm^{-1,}$ and 2347 $cm^{-1}$, respectively. This confirms the successful functionalization of as-produced CNTs. Nitrogen physisorption isotherm for RCNTs, PCNTs, and FCNTs show an increase in the quantity of nitrogen adsorbed by FCNTs which indicates that functionalization improves the adsorption sites of CNTs. Furthermore, BET analysis of the textural properties showed an increase in pore volume and average pore size of FCNTs as compared to PCNTs and RCNTs. These characteristics could enhance the transport properties of FCNT reinforced polymeric membranes when compared to that of non-reinforced polymeric membranes. The XRD patterns reveal that purification and functionalization of RCNT preserve its crystallographic characteristics. Purification did not alter the interatomic distances of the RCNT, but functionalization altered them.

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# CHAPTER 5

# 5 SYNTHESIS AND PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF FUNCTIONALIZED CARBON NANOTUBE REINFORCED POLYSULFONE MEMBRANES FOR $CO_2/CH_4$ SEPARATION

## 5.1 Introduction

Several advanced classes of polymeric membranes have been reported in the literature for the enhancement of productivity and separation efficiency of conventional polymeric membranes. The classes include mixed matrix membranes (Rezakazemi, et. al., 2014; Wang et. al., 2017, Liu, et. al., 2018), membranes of polymers of intrinsic microporosity (Swaidan, et. al., 2015; Hart and Colina, 2014) and thermally rearranged polymer membranes (Li, et. al., 2013; Liu, et. al., 2016; Comesaña-Gándara, et. al., 2015). Mixed matrix membrane (MMM) has attracted more research attention than other classes of advanced polymeric membrane owing to its processability and reproducibility (Aroon et. al., 2010). MMMs consist of inorganic particles dispersed into polymer matrices in order to alter the structure of the matrices thereby improving permeability, selectivity, mechanical and thermal properties of the polymeric membranes (Vinoba, et. al., 2017). CNT has outstanding mechanical and thermal properties owing to the presence of strong Van der Waal force between carbon-carbon (C-C) atoms of its graphite layers (Du et. al., 2007; Ismail et. al., 2011). Furthermore, simulation studies of gas transport through CNTs have shown that CNTs have exception gas permeability and selectivity when compared to other inorganic particles of similar pore sizes due to the inherent smoothness of CNTs (Skoulidas et. al., 2002; Sokhan et. al., 2004; Ismail et. al., 2009).

Hence, incorporation of CNTs into polymer matrices to form a MMM has been reported to improve the productivity and separation efficiency of the conventional polymeric membrane (Cong et al., 2007). However, the transfer of outstanding mechanical, thermal and transport properties of CNTs into polymer matrices is greatly dependent on the effective dispersion of the CNT into the polymer matrix. The presence

of strong Van der Waal force between C-C atoms of CNT causes inadequate dispersion of CNTs into the polymer matrices due to aggregation of CNTs. Functionalization of CNTs has been proposed as a solution to this problem (Chen et. al., 2008). The addition of functionalized carbon nanotubes (FCNTs) into polymers appears to offer a unique solution to the deficiencies of conventional polymeric membrane systems (Deng and Hägg, 2014). Chemical functionalization of CNTs reduces the strong Van der Waal force of attraction between CNTs and enhances separation of CNT bundles into individual CNT thereby improving CNT-polymer matrix interface interaction (Balasubramanian and Burghard, 2005).

In this study, polysulfone (PSF) was used as the base polymer because of its low cost, mechanical strength, good transport properties (Scholes et. al. 2010), and ease of synthesis with reproductive properties (Shah and Murthy, 2013). The aim of the study was to enhance physicochemical properties and $CO_2$ permeability of PSF without sacrificing separation factor of $CO_2/CH_4$, by the addition of FCNTs to PSF. The working theory is that introduction of the carboxyl group to the walls of the CNTs will enhance the dispersion of CNTs into PSF matrices and perhaps give sorption competitive advantage to $CO_2$ over $CH_4$ during mixed gas separation.

## 5.2 Experimental

### *5.2.1 Materials*

Polysulfone pellets (transparent, average $M_w$ ~ 35 000), dichloromethane (purity ≥ 99.8%), ferrocene (purity: 98%), hydrochloric (37 wt. %), sulfuric (98 wt. %) and nitric (70 wt. %) acids were purchased from Sigma Aldrich, South Africa. Nitrogen (purity: 99.999%), argon (purity: 99.999%), and methane (purity: 99.95%) gases were purchased from Afrox, South Africa. All the materials were used as supplied without any further purification.

### *5.2.2 Membrane synthesis and characterization*

Dense flat sheet pure and mixed matrix membranes were synthesized by solvent evaporation. For pristine PSF membrane preparation, 1 g of polysulfone (PSF) pellets were added to 10 ml dichloromethane (DCM) and stirred using magnetic stirrer until a homogeneous solution was formed. With respect to FCNT/PSF membrane preparation, wt. % FCNT loading was calculated using Equation (5.1). Desired wt. % of FCNTs were added to 5 ml of DCM and ultrasonicated for 30 min in a cold water bath to control CNT agglomeration temperature. 1 g of PSF pellets were added to 5 ml of DCM and stirred to form a homogeneous solution. PSF solution was transferred to FCNT solution and stirred for 12 h. Detailed casting and solvent evaporation steps are stated in chapter 3, section 3.4.

$$FCNT\ loading\ (wt.\%) = \frac{mass\ of\ FCNT}{mass\ of\ FCNT + mass\ of\ PSF} \times 100 \quad (5.1)$$

Physicochemical properties of the synthesized membranes were checked using field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM), thermogravimetric analysis (TGA), differential scanning calorimetry (DSC), atomic force microscopy (AFM) and texture analysis (TA). Permeation measurement of pure $CO_2$ and $CH_4$ was carried out using a custom-built permeation set up via constant volume variable pressure (CVVP) technique. The mixed $CO_2/CH_4$ permeability was measured on a constant pressure variable volume (CPVV) gas permeation apparatus. Elaborated explanations of characterization and permeability determination are contained in chapter 3, sections 3.5 and 3.6.

## 5.3 Results and discussion

### *5.3.1 Membrane morphology*

The morphology of a membrane influences the gas transport mechanism through the membrane (George and Thomas, 2001). Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the FESEM surface and cross-sectional morphologies of synthesized membranes, respectively. From the figures, the PSF membrane has a smooth, homogeneous and dense structure with non-continuous pores. The MMMs also have a dense structure with non-continuous pores. Hence, the gas transport through the membranes is expected to be governed by a solution-diffusion mechanism (Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005). The surface morphology of the MMMs shows that the FCNTs were well dispersed into the polymer matrices up until 1.0 wt. % loading. However, at 1.5 wt. % loading, agglomeration of FCNTs become evident. A probe into the pores of 1.5 wt.% loading of FCNT-PSF at higher magnification (HM) of 50,000x shows the agglomeration of FCNTs as depicted in Figure 5.2 (HM 1.5 wt.% FCNT-PSF).

### *5.3.2 Surface topology*

The AFM images depicting the surface topography of the synthesized membranes are shown in Figure 5.3. From the height images (2D and 3D), some bright and dark regions can be observed which are ascribed to the peaks and valleys (or pores) of the surface of membranes, respectively (Prokopowicz, 2016). Furthermore, the amplitude and height images of 0.2 wt. % FCNT-PSF show that FCNTs were well dispersed into the polymer matrices with no visible particles. However, 1.5 wt. % FCNT-PSF images show evidence of FCNT agglomeration. This is similar to the FESEM micrographs depicted in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. The pores of pure PSF appears to be reduced with the addition of FCNTs.

Depth-at-max of height images (2D) of the synthesized membranes were analyzed to determine if the pores are continuous and the influence of FCNTs on the pore depth. The result is presented in Table 5.1. From the result, the depth-at-max of the

membranes are far smaller than the thickness of the membranes (60 µm – 90 µm). Hence, the pores are non-continuous. This further corroborates the results from FESEM

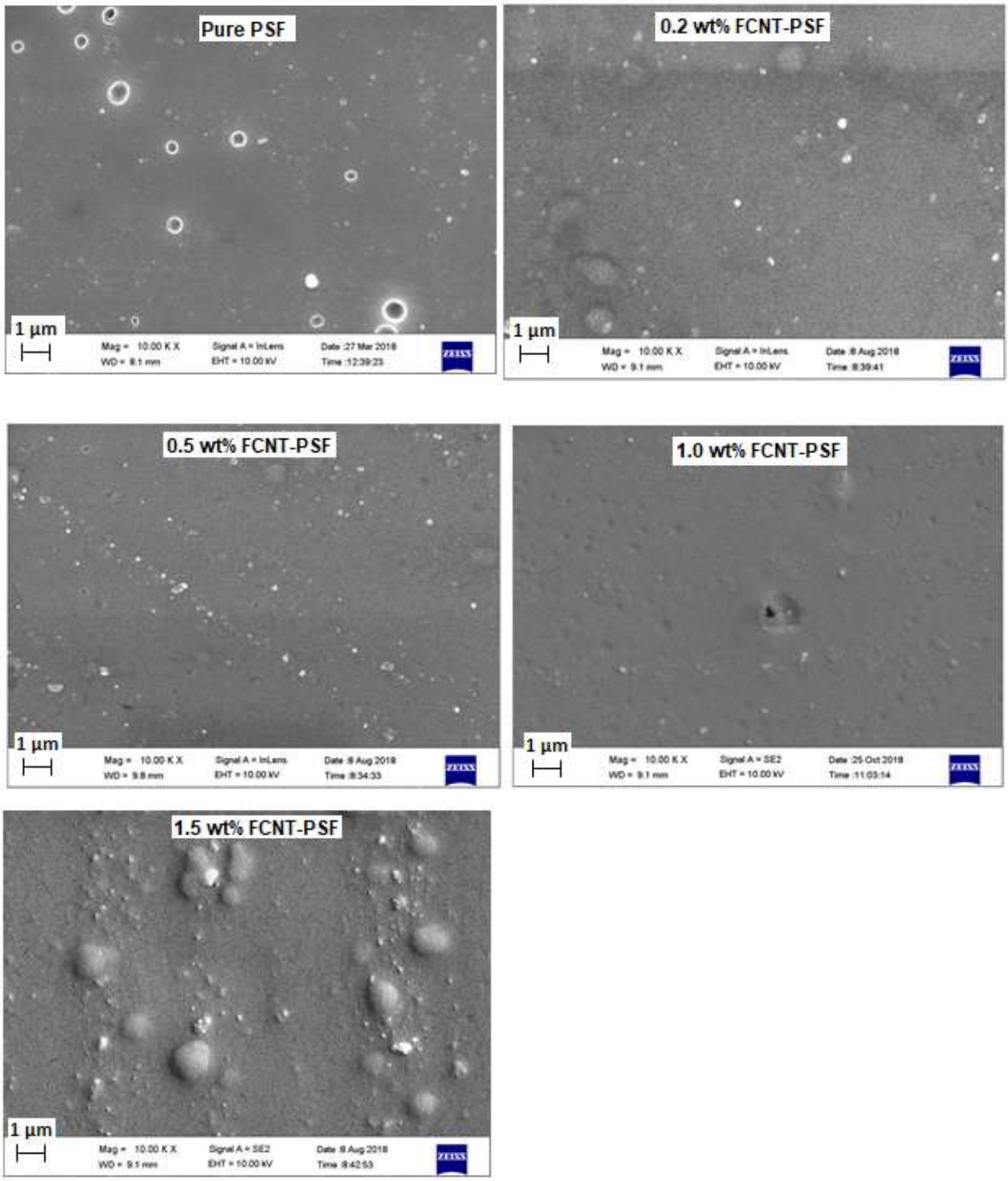



Figure 5.1: SEM micrograph of surface morphology of the synthesized membranes

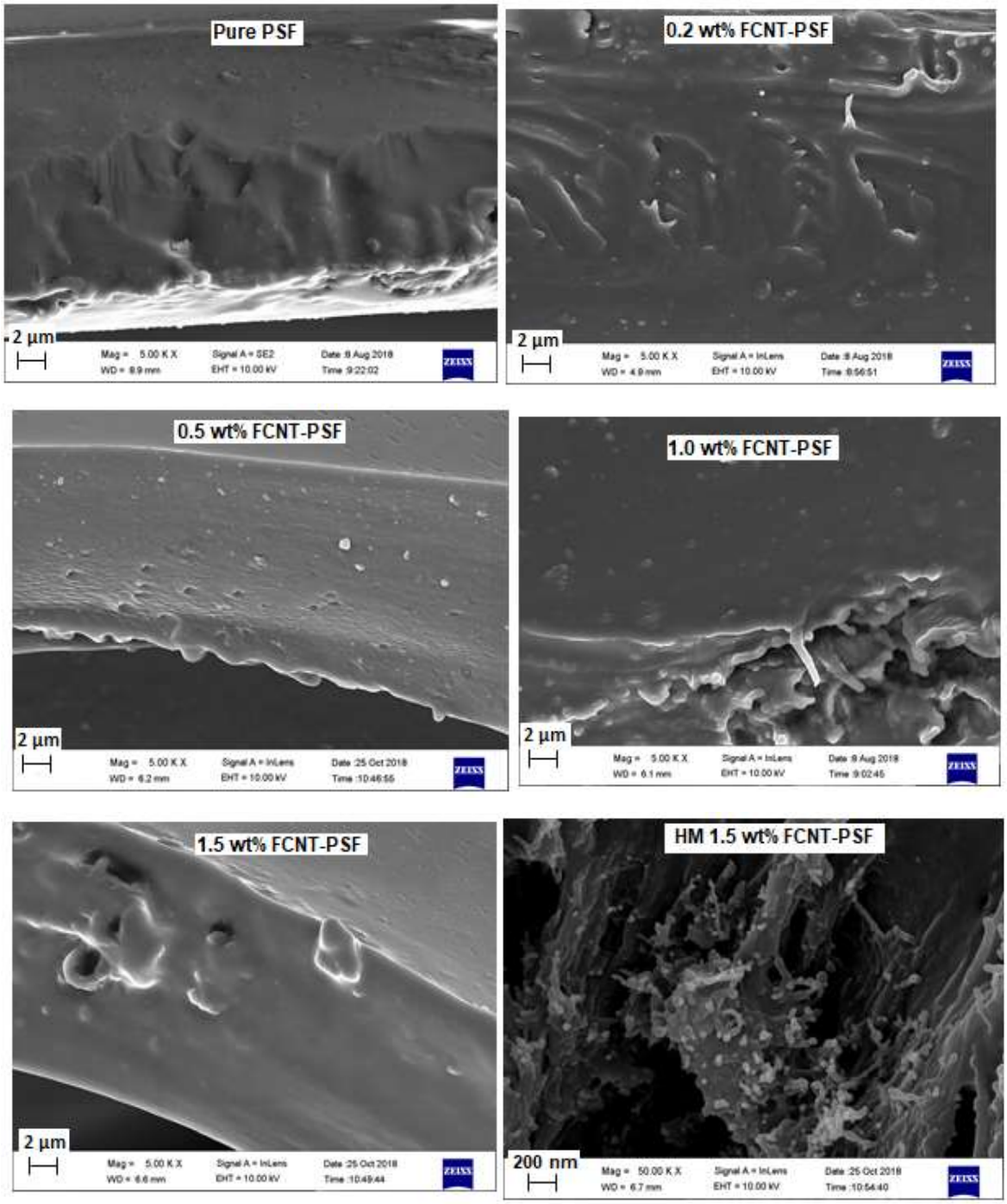
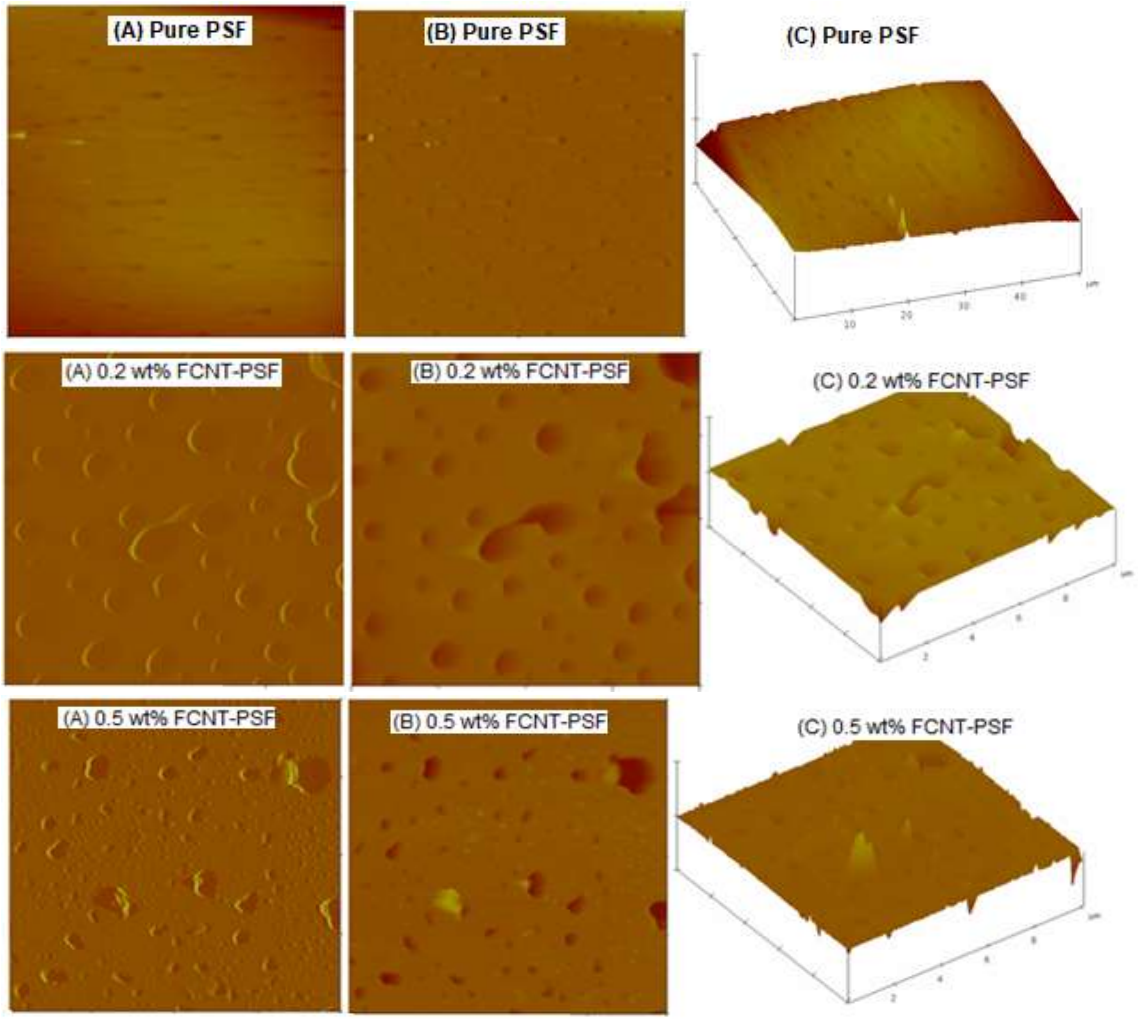



Figure 5.2: SEM micrograph of cross-sectional morphology of the synthesized membranes


(A) Pure PSF
(B) Pure PSF
(C) Pure PSF
(A) 0.2 wt% FCNT-PSF
(B) 0.2 wt% FCNT-PSF
(C) 0.2 wt% FCNT-PSF
(A) 0.5 wt% FCNT-PSF
(B) 0.5 wt% FCNT-PSF
(C) 0.5 wt% FCNT-PSF

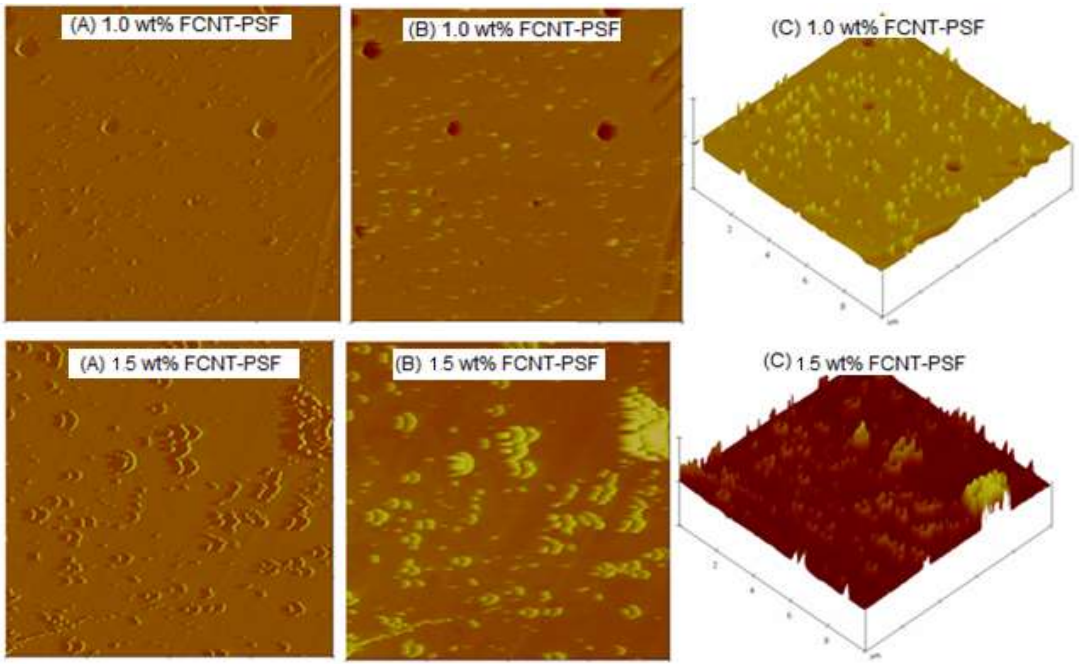



Figure 5.3: AFM surface topographies of synthesized membranes; (A) is amplitude 2D image, (B) is 2D height image and (C) is 3D image of height. Scan size for Pure PSF: 50 µm x 50 µm, scan size of the MMMs: 10 µm x 10 µm

Table 5.1: Surface topographic analysis of synthesized membranes

| **Membrane** | **Depth-at-max (nm)** |
|---|---|
| Pure PSF | 145.82 |
| 0.2 FCNT-PSF | 81.13 |
| 0.5 FCNT-PSF | 86.96 |
| 1.0 FCNT-PSF | 111.65 |
| 1.5 FCNT-PSF | 155.42 |

(Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Also, the depth-at-max of MMMs (0.2 wt. % - 1.0 wt. % of FCNTs) is lower than that of the pure PSF, which shows pore filling by FCNTs. However, 1.5 wt. % FCNT-PSF shows greater depth-at-max compared to pure PSF. This could be attributed to poor interface interaction between FCNTs and PSF matrices due to agglomeration of FCNTs (Khan et al., 2012). AFM images of depth-at-max analysis are presented in Appendix E.

### *5.3.3 Thermal stability and glass transition temperature*

Figures 5.4 and 5.5 depicts thermogravimetric (TG) and derivative of TG (DTG) curves of the synthesized membranes, respectively. Figure 5.4 shows that there is no weight loss below 150 $^{o}$C, which indicates that there is complete removal of the solvent from the membranes. Decomposition temperature, which is the peak of DTG curves of the membranes (Rafiq et al., 2012), and weight residue content of the membranes at 700 $^{o}$C are presented in Table 5.2. Addition of FCNTs to PSF improves the decomposition temperature of the MMMs as depicted in Figure 5.5. A similar result was reported by Amirian et al. (2013). With Increase in FCNTs loading, however, the decomposition temperature of the MMMs remains relatively unchanged. Furthermore, the residue content increases with increasing wt. % loading of FCNTs up until 1.0 wt. % FCNT, which suggests successful dispersion of FCNTS into the polymer matrices thereby improving the thermal stability of the MMMs. But, further increase in FCNT loading to 1.5 wt. % decreases the residual content, which could be attributed to the agglomeration of FCNTs in the polymer matrices as evident in SEM and AFM images shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.3, respectively.

Glass transition temperature ($T_g$) of the synthesized membranes are presented in Table 5.3. $T_g$ of polymeric membranes is the temperature region where the matrix of the membrane losses its glassy state to rubbery nature (Jansen, 2015). It is also a measure of the rigidity of the polymer matrix (Xue et al., 2013). $T_g$ of the PSF membrane was slightly improved with the addition of FCNTs as shown in Table 5.3, which indicates that the mobility of the polymer chains is reduced. Although the increase in wt. % loading of FCNTs does not significantly impact the $T_g$ of the MMMs, but there is a

trend similar to that of residual content of the MMMs presented in Table 5.2. 1.5 wt.% FCNT-PSF shows a decline in the $T_g$ compared to the other MMMs. Ismail et al. (2011) reported similar behaviour where $T_g$ of polyethersulfone was slightly increased with the addition of 0.5 wt. % CNT, but further increase in wt. % loading of CNTs decreased the $T_g$ of the membrane. DSC thermograms of the membranes are presented in Appendix D.

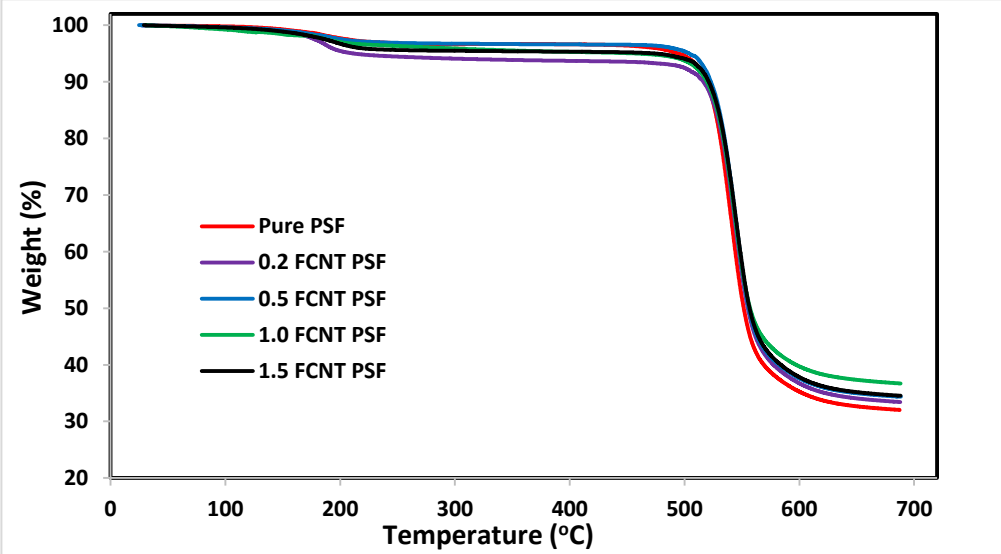



Figure 5.4: Thermogravimetric curves of synthesized membranes

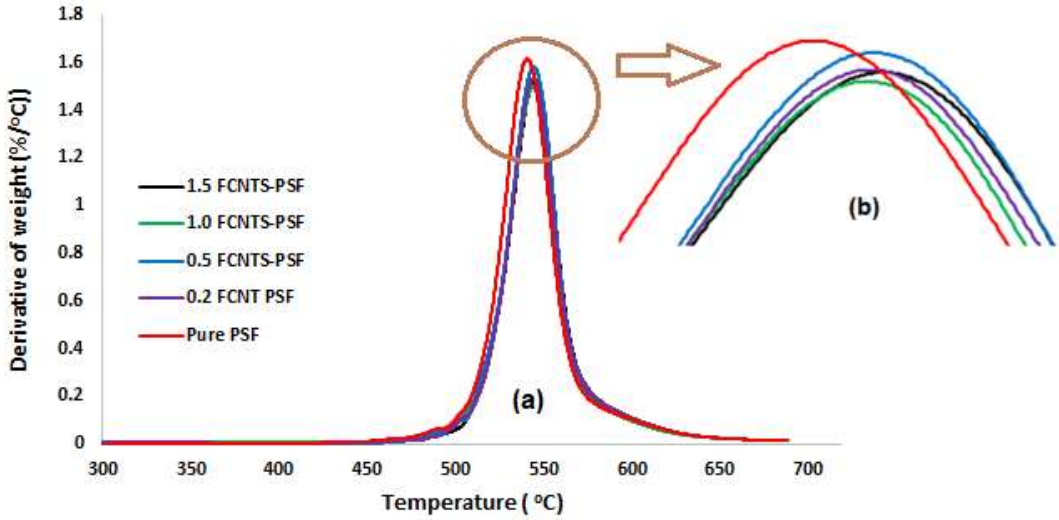



Figure 5.5: Derivative of TG curves of synthesized membranes (a) Full curve and (b) expanded view of peaks of the curves

Table 5.2: Thermogravimetric analysis of synthesized membranes

| Samples | Decomposition Temperature (°C) | Residual contents (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Pure PSF | 540.4 | 32.0 |
| 0.2 FCNT-PSF | 544.1 | 33.4 |
| 0.5 FCNT-PSF | 544.3 | 34.3 |
| 1.0 FCNT-PSF | 544.0 | 37.7 |
| 1.5 FCNT-PSF | 544.8 | 34.5 |

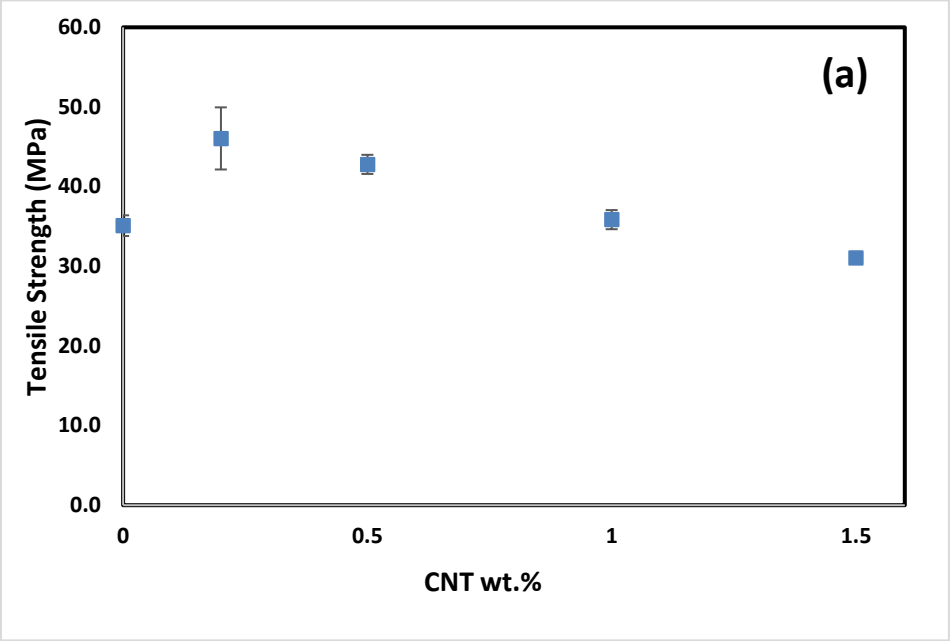
Table 5.3: Glass transition temperature of synthesized membranes

| Sample | $T_g$ (°C) |
|---|---|
| Pure PSF | 183.6 |
| 0.2 FCNTS-PSF | 186.0 |
| 0.5 FCNTS-PSF | 186.1 |
| 1.0 FCNTS-PSF | 186.5 |
| 1.5 FCNTS-PSF | 185.8 |

### *5.3.4 Mechanical property*

Mechanical properties of a MMM is largely dependent on the polymer matrix-filler interface interaction (Shen and Lua, 2012). Good interface interaction enables the FCNT as a filler to transfer its excellent mechanical property to the polymer matrix. The variations of tensile strength and Young's modulus as a function of wt.% FCNTs loading are presented in Figure 5.6. 0.2 wt. % FCNT-PSF has maximum tensile strength and maximum Young's modulus of 46.1 MPa and 668 MPa, respectively while pure PSF has tensile strength and Young's modulus of 35.1 MPa and 477 MPa, respectively. This showed that 0.2 wt. % FCNTs have good interface interaction with the polymer matrices. For 1.5 wt. % FCNT-PSF, decrease in the tensile strength and Young's modulus compared to pure PSF was observed. This could be attributed to poor

interface interaction between FCNTs and polymer matrices due to agglomeration of FCNTs. Deep and Mishra (2018) reported a comparable result.



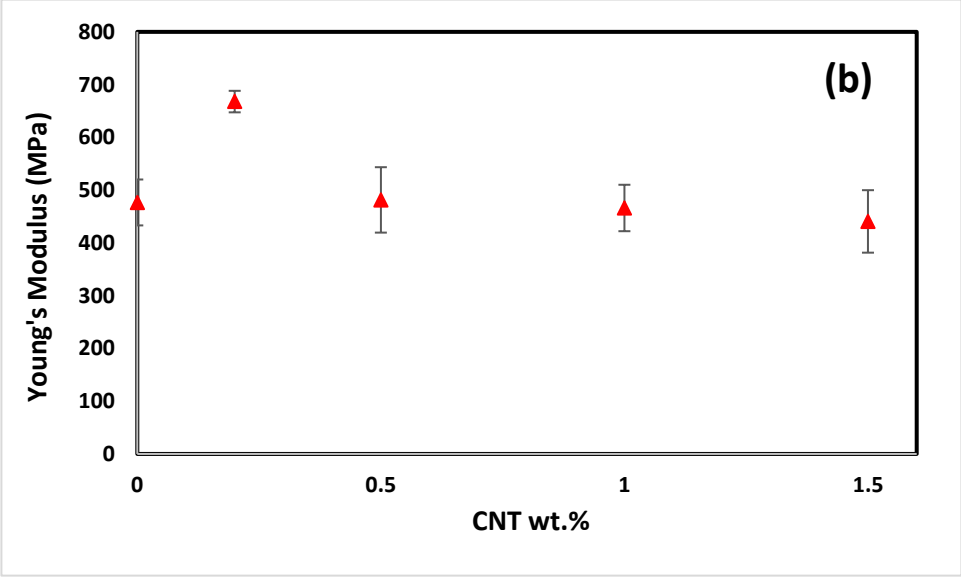



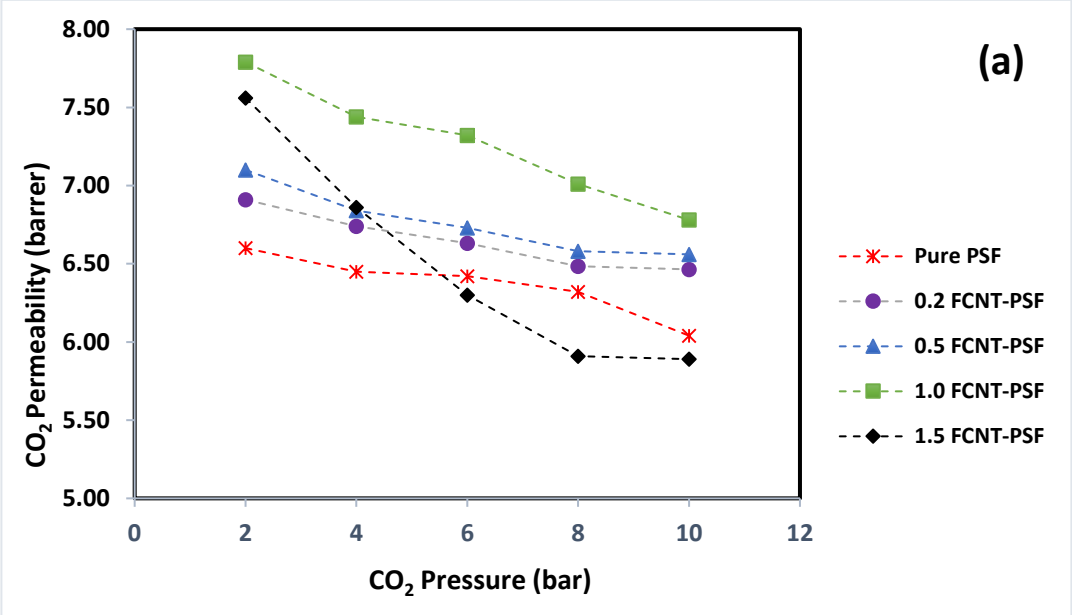

Figure 5.6: Mechanical properties of the synthesized FCNTs-PSF; (a) Tensile strength and (b) Young's Modulus

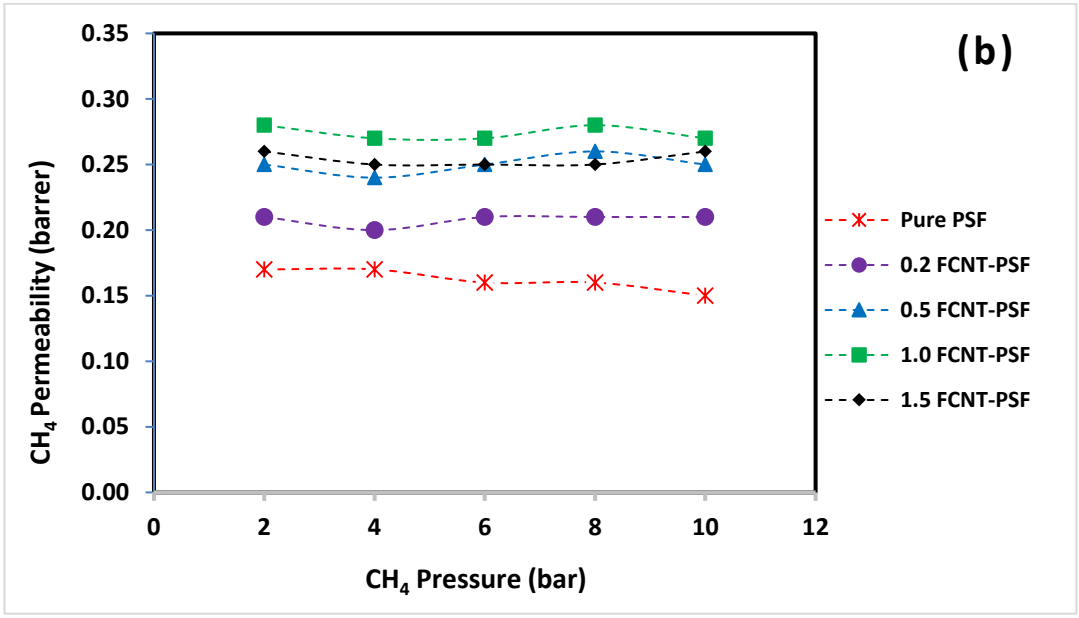
### *5.3.5 Single gas permeation results*

Gas permeation through polymeric dense membrane has been widely reported to follow solution-diffusion mechanism also known as dual-mode sorption model (Shen and Lua, 2012; Deep and Mishra, 2018). This mechanism involves three stages (Mauze and Stern, 1984; Zhou and Stern, 1989): (a) dissolution of the gas into the high-pressure side of the membrane, (b) diffusion of the gas through the membrane and (c) desorption from the low-pressure side of the membrane. The rate of dissolution of a gas into a membrane is a function of the critical temperature of the gas (Wijmans and Baker, 1995). The higher the critical temperature of gas the higher its solubility coefficient. The rate of diffusion of a gas through a membrane increases as the kinetic diameter of the gas decreases (Pandey and Chauhan, 2001). The critical temperatures of $CO_2$ and $CH_4$ are 304.25 K and 191.25 K, respectively while their kinetic diameters are 0.33 nm and 0.38 nm, respectively. Hence, $CO_2$ has transport advantages over $CH_4$ through polymeric membranes.

From Figure 5.7a, FCNT-PSF showed higher pure $CO_2$ permeability compared to pure PSF at a specific pressure over the whole range of pressure. This could be attributed to an increase in excess free volume of the MMM by FCNTs thereby creating more sorption sites for $CO_2$ (Chung et al., 2003) and increasing the diffusion path (Robeson et al., 2014). Also, the inherent smoothness of CNTs could increase the rate of diffusion of gas through the MMM (Ismail et al., 2009). However, $CO_2$ permeability reaches the highest at 1.0 wt.% loading of FCNTs. Further increase in wt.% loading of FCNTs to 1.5 wt.% resulted in a decrease in the permeability of $CO_2$. This could be attributed to agglomeration of FCNTs within the polymer matrix causing a poor interface interaction between FCNT and polymer matrices (Khan et al., 2012). Furthermore, the increase in pressure led to a slight decrease in $CO_2$ permeability for all the types of membranes. This behaviour is predicted by the dual-mode sorption model owing to the saturation of Langmuir sites reducing the solubility of $CO_2$ with increasing pressure (Wijmans and Baker, 1995). Figures 5.7b depicts the permeability of pure $CH_4$ at 35 $^oC$. Pure $CH_4$ permeability shows a similar trend as that of $CO_2$ permeability with the increase in

wt.% loading of FCNTs. Hence, a decrease in ideal selectivity of $CO_2/CH_4$ was observed with increase in FCNTs wt.% loading, as presented in Figure 5.7c. However, the increase in feed pressure has little effect on the $CH_4$ permeability for all the types of membranes. This agrees with the result obtained by Alaslai et al. (2016). $CH_4$ is a low-condensable gas, hence an increase in feed pressure has little effect on the saturation of Langmuir sites of the membranes (Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005).





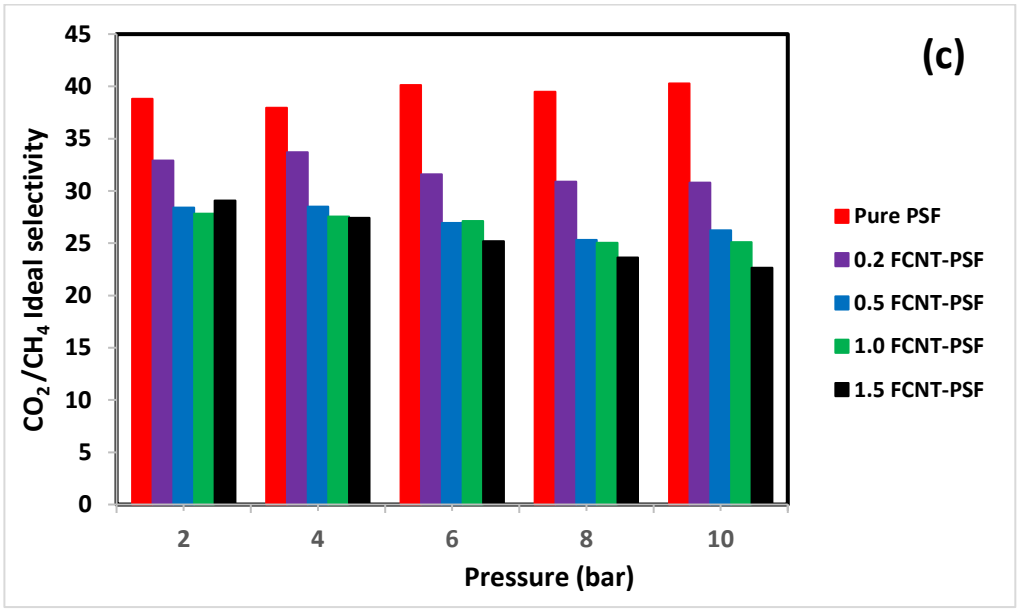



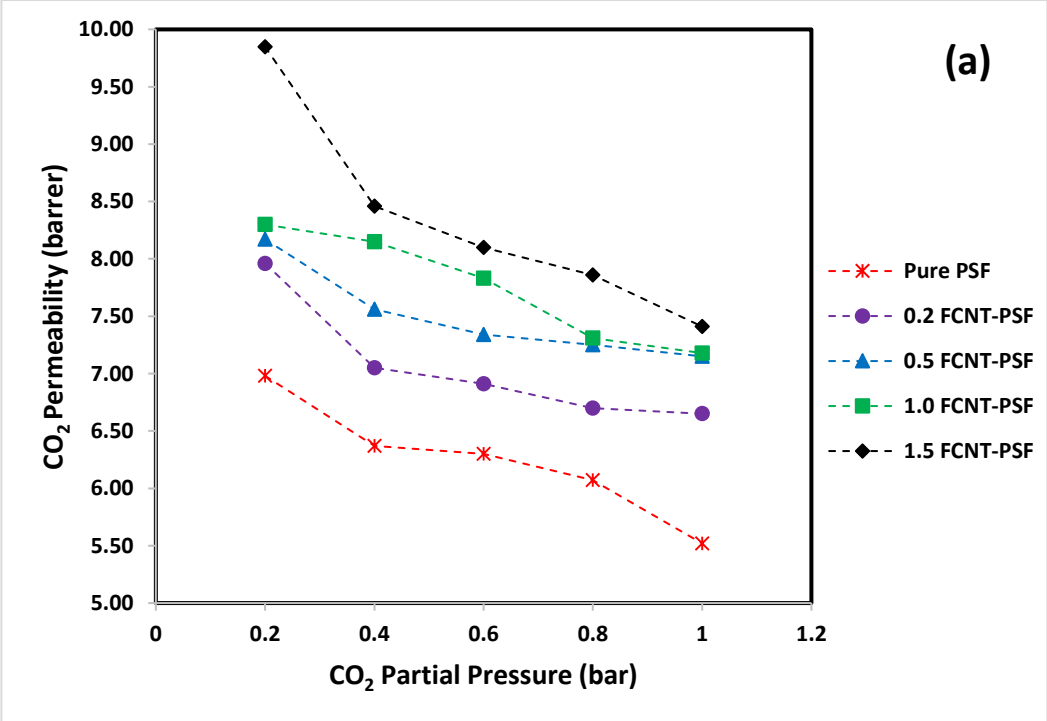

Figure 5.7: Single gas permeation at 35 $^{o}$C. (a) Pure $CO_2$, (b) Pure $CH_4$, (c) Ideal selectivity

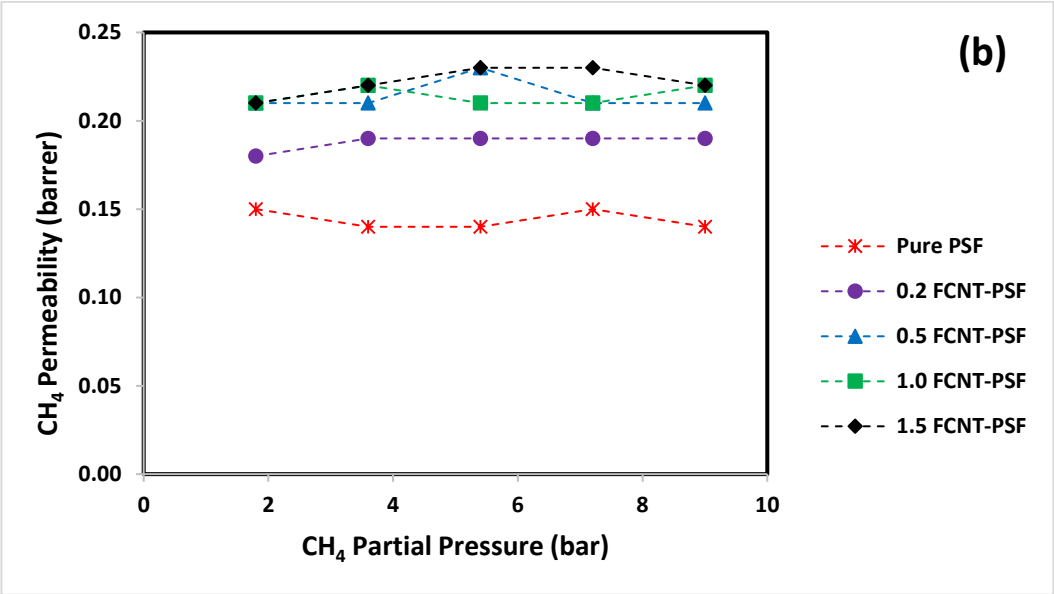
### *5.3.6 Mixed gas separation performance*

Figure 5.8a shows that $CO_2$ permeability increases with increase in wt. % loading of FCNTs in PSF for a mixture of $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%). This is due to enhanced diffusion rate of $CO_2$ through the membrane owing to excellent diffusivity properties of CNTs. A similar result was reported by Cong et al., (2007). Furthermore, $CO_2$ permeability decreases with an increase in the partial pressure of $CO_2$ for all the types of membrane. This is similar to the results obtained for pure gas permeation of $CO_2$ (Figure 5.7a) and for a mixture of $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) as shown in Figure 5.9a. However, the increase in $CH_4$ partial pressure does not significantly affect $CH_4$ permeability for both gas mixtures in all the types of the membrane as shown in Figures 5.8b and 5.9b. This is similar to the results obtained for pure gas permeation of $CH_4$ (Figure 5.7b). 1.5 wt. % FCNT-PSF showed highest $CO_2$ permeability when the $CO_2$ partial pressure was less than 2 bar. However, the effect of agglomeration of 1.5 wt. % FCNT in PSF on $CO_2$ permeability became evident at $CO_2$ partial pressure of 2 bar and above.

Mixed gas separation factor is expected to be lower than the ideal selectivity due to competitive sorption and bulk flow effects of the mixed gas (Kraftschik et al., 2013). However, in this study, mixed gas separation factor is higher than the ideal selectivity for both gas mixtures. For a mixture of $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%), the partial pressure of $CO_2$ is much lower than $CH_4$ partial pressure. Since partial pressure difference across the membrane is a driving force for $CO_2$ permeation (Merkel et al., 2000), lower $CO_2$ partial pressure favours the permeability of $CO_2$ over $CH_4$. Hence, the mixed gas separation factor increases as depicted in Figure 5.8c. For a mixture of $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%), the partial pressure of the component gases is the same but the mixed gas separation factor is still higher than ideal selectivity as shown in Figure 5.9c. There would be intermolecular interactions between the CNTs and $CO_2$, giving $CO_2$ a sorption competitive advantage over $CH_4$. Ansaloni et al. (2015) reported a similar experience with amino-functionalized CNT coupled with a hydrophilic polymer matrix to form a facilitated transport membrane. The gas transport mechanism in the membrane is depicted in Figure 5.10.

Therefore, improved mixed gas separation factor over ideal selectivity in our study could be due to intermolecular bonding between $CO_2$ and the CNTs thereby giving $CO_2$ additional sorption advantage over $CH_4$. To further substantiate this possibility, 1.0 wt. % purified CNT (PCNT) PSF membrane was tested using a mixture of $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) to eliminate the influence of differences in partial pressure of the component gases. The results of permeability and separation factor of the gas mixture in 1.0 wt. % PCNT-PSF as compared to 1.0 wt. % FCNT-PSF are presented in Figures 5.11a and 5.11b. The results show an improved $CO_2$ permeability and separation factor for 1.0 wt.% FCNT-PSF membrane over 1.0 wt.% PCNT-PSF membrane. The summary of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeation results from this study compared to literature reports is presented in Table 5.4. Notwithstanding the differences in the conditions different studies recorded in the literature were conducted, results documented in this study are comparable to literature. Full tables of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeability and selectivity values for pure and mixed gases are presented in Appendix F.





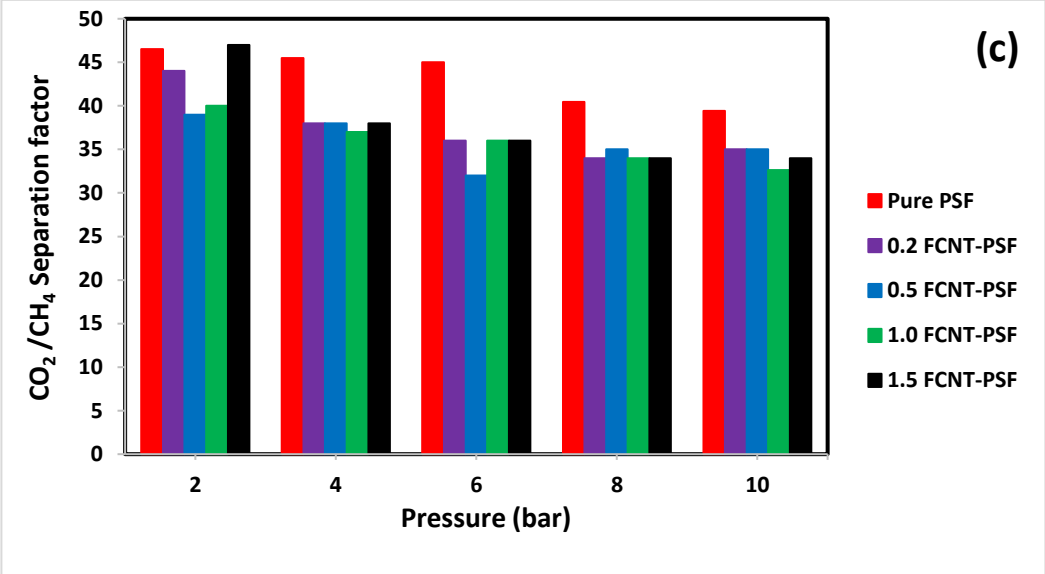
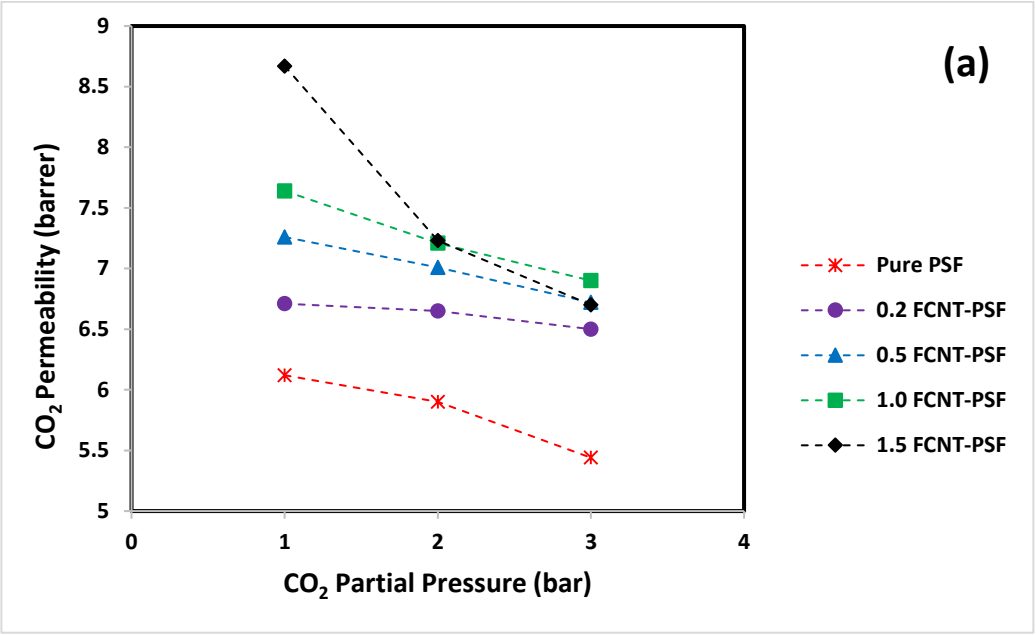
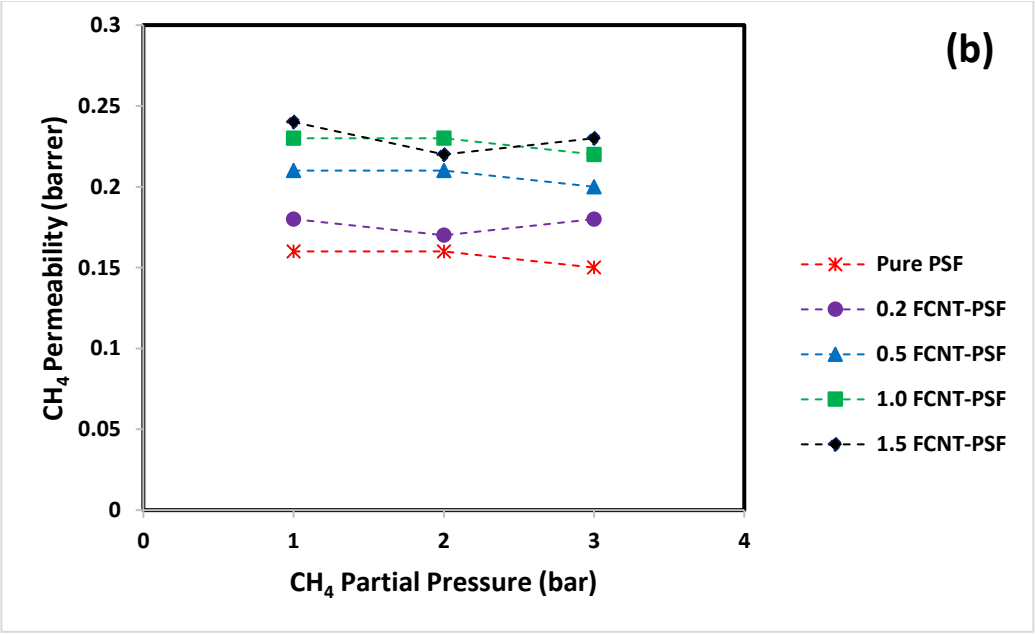




Figure 5.8: Separation performance of 10%/90% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. (a) $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CH_4$ permeability as a function of $CH_4$ partial pressure; (c) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor


(a)
$CO_2$ Permeability (barrer)
$CO_2$ Partial Pressure (bar)
9
8.5
8
7.5
7
6.5
6
5.5
5
0
1
2
3
4
Pure PSF
0.2 FCNT-PSF
0.5 FCNT-PSF
1.0 FCNT-PSF
1.5 FCNT-PSF


(b)
$CH_4$ Permeability (barrer)
$CH_4$ Partial Pressure (bar)
0.3
0.25
0.2
0.15
0.1
0.05
0
0
1
2
3
4
Pure PSF
0.2 FCNT-PSF
0.5 FCNT-PSF
1.0 FCNT-PSF
1.5 FCNT-PSF

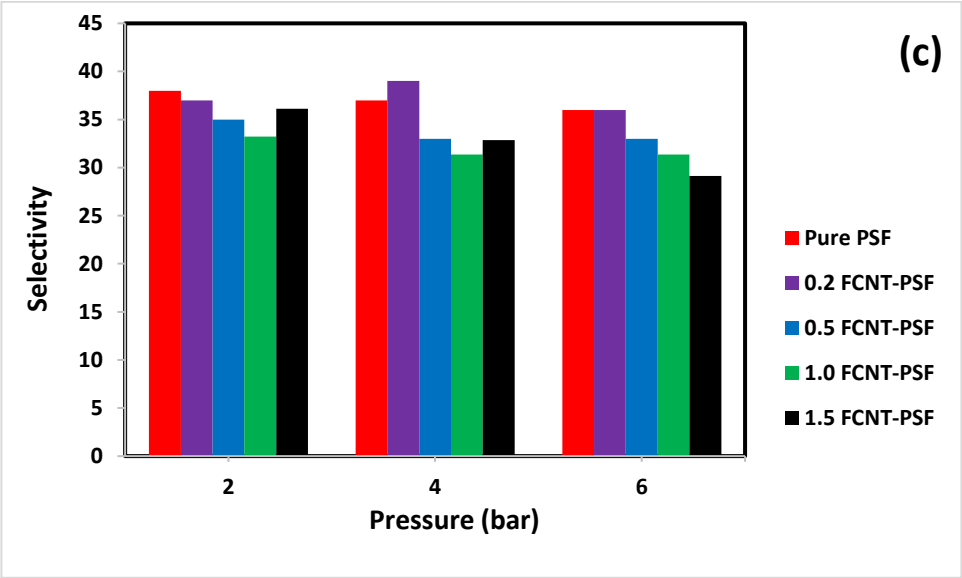



Figure 5.9: Separation performance of 50%/50% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. (a) $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CH_4$ permeability as a function of $CH_4$ partial pressure; (c) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor

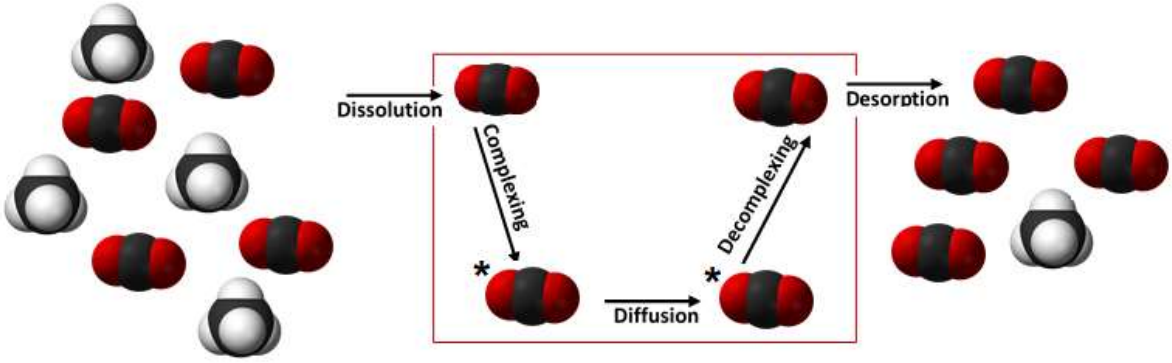



Figure 5.10: Schematic of the gas transport mechanism in the membrane (adapted from Luebke et al., 2007)



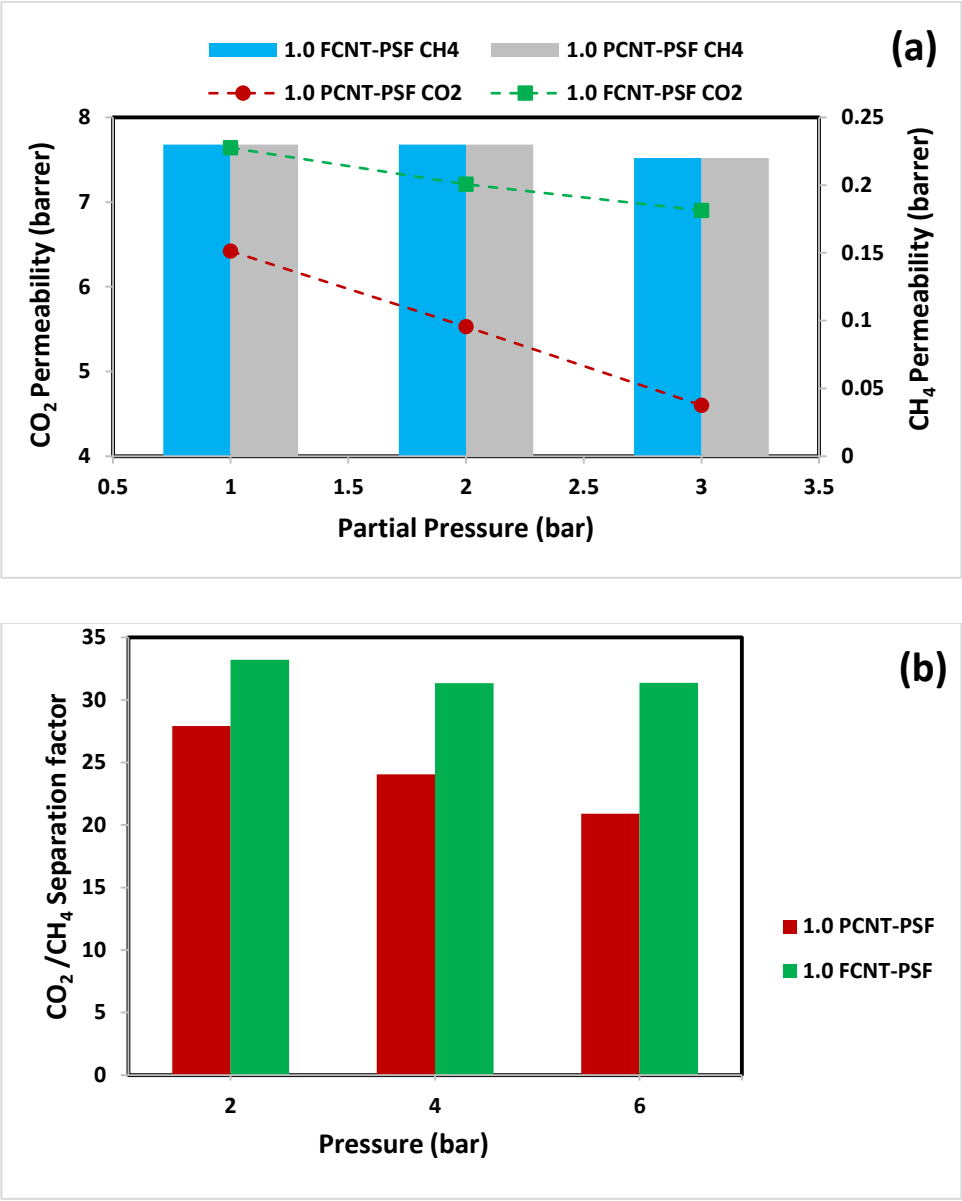



Figure 5.11: Separation performance of 50%/50% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture in 1.0 wt. % PCNT-PSF and 1.0 wt. % FCNT-PSF. (a) $CH_4$ and $CO_2$ permeability as a function of $CO_2$ partial pressure; (b) $CO_2/CH_4$ separation factor

Table 5.4: Summary of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeation results from this study compared to literature

| polymer | CNT Loading (wt. %) | Feed gas | Operation conditions | P($CO_2$) | α($CO_2/CH_4$) | Ref. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PSF[a] | 0 | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.60 | 39 | This work |
| | 0.2 (F) | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.91 | 33 | This work |
| | 0.5 (F) | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.10 | 28 | This work |
| | 1.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.79 | 28 | This work |
| | 1.5 (F) | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.56 | 29 | This work |
| | 0 | $CO_2/CH_4$ (10/90 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.98 | 47 | This work |
| | 0.2 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (10/90 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.96 | 44 | This work |
| | 0.5 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (10/90 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 8.17 | 39 | This work |
| | 1.0 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (10/90 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 8.30 | 40 | This work |
| | 1.5 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (10/90 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 9.85 | 47 | This work |
| | 0 | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.12 | 38 | This work |
| | 0.2 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.71 | 37 | This work |
| | 0.5 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.26 | 35 | This work |
| | 1.0 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 7.64 | 33 | This work |
| | 1.0 (R) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 6.42 | 28 | This work |
| | 1.5 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4$ (50/50 v/v) | 35 °C, 2 bar | 8.67 | 36 | This work |
| Elvaloy[a] | 0 | Pure gases | 35 °C, 2 bar | 80.69 | 6.57 | Ranjbaran et al., 2015 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 2 bar | 102.78 | 5.95 | Ranjbaran et al., 2015 |
| | 1.0 (R) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 2 bar | 78.36 | 6.05 | Ranjbaran et al., 2015 |
| | 2.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 2 bar | 76.92 | 5.97 | Ranjbaran et al., 2015 |
| | 2.0 (R) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 2 bar | 73.73 | 5.77 | Ranjbaran et al., 2015 |
| PES[b] | 0 | Pure gases | 27 ºC, 4 bar | 10.98 | 51.26 | Ismail et al., 2011 |
| | 1.0 (F) | Pure gases | 27 ºC, 4 bar | 2.79 | 30.91 | Ismail et al., 2011 |
| | 2.0 (F) | Pure gases | 27 ºC, 4 bar | 11.60 | 14.22 | Ismail et al., 2011 |
| | 3.0 (F) | Pure gases | 27 ºC, 4 bar | 13.56 | 5.04 | Ismail et al., 2011 |
| PDMS[a] | 0 | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 166.02 | 5.89 | Kim et al., 2006 |
| | 2.0 (R) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 190.67 | 5.58 | Kim et al., 2006 |
| | 10.0 (R) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 191.3 | 5.21 | Kim et al., 2006 |
| PI[a] | 0 | Pure gases | 25 ºC, 15 bar | 8.92 | 19.1 | Aroon et al., 2010 |
| | 1.0 (F) | Pure gases | 25 ºC, 15 bar | 14.27 | 10 | Aroon et al., 2010 |
| | 1.0 (R) | Pure gases | 25 ºC, 15 bar | 5.44 | 22.7 | Aroon et al., 2010 |
| PSF[a] | 0 | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 3.90 | 22.94 | Kim et al., 2007 |
| | 5.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 5.12 | 18.96 | Kim et al., 2007 |
| | 10.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 ºC, 4 bar | 5.19 | 18.54 | Kim et al., 2007 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 15.0 (F) | Pure gases | 35 °C, 4 bar | 4.52 | 16.14 | Kim et al., 2007 |
| FTM[a] | 2.1 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4/H_2$ (20/58.8/20.2) | 107 °C, 2 bar | 3157 | 650 | Ansaloni et al., 2015 |
| | 0 | $CO_2/CH_4/H_2$ (20/58.8/20.2) | 107 °C, 15 bar | 986 | 283 | Ansaloni et al., 2015 |
| | 6.9 (F) | $CO_2/CH_4/H_2$ (20/58.8/20.2) | 107 °C, 15 bar | 1014 | 265 | Ansaloni et al., 2015 |

[a] $P(CO_2)$ in Barrer; [b] $P(CO_2)$ in GPU; F – Functionalized; R – Raw; PES – Polyethersulfone; PDMS – Poly (imide siloxane); PI – Polyimide; FTM – Facilitated transport membrane

## 5.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, results of the investigation of the effect of the addition of FCNTs to PSF on the physicochemical and gas separation properties of the MMM are reported. Addition of FCNTs to PSF membrane increased its thermal and mechanical properties. With Increase in FCNTs loading, the decomposition temperature of the MMM remains relatively unchanged. However, the percentage change in weight decreases with increase in FCNTs loading with an optimum point at 1.0 wt. %. Glass transition temperature ($T_g$) of PSF membrane was improved with the addition of FCNTs, but the increase in FCNTs does not significantly impact the $T_g$ of the MMM. Analysis of tensile strength and Young's modulus of the MMM show an increase in these mechanical properties with the addition of FCNTs. The permeability of pure $CO_2$ increased with increase in FCNTs wt. % loading. The optimum permeability was achieved at 1.0 wt. %. The permeability of pure $CO_2$ decreased with an increase in pressure for all the membranes, but the permeability of pure $CH_4$ was relatively the same with an increase in pressure. Ideal selectivity decreased with increase in FCNTs wt. % loading. Mixed gas permeability trend was similar to that of pure gas permeability. However, 1.5 wt. % loading of FCNTs showed the best $CO_2$ permeability result. Mixed gas selectivity of MMM was at par with pure PSF at low pressure with

improved $CO_2$ permeability. This favourable condition could be attributed to molecular interactions between the CNTs and $CO_2$, giving $CO_2$ additional sorption competitive advantage over $CH_4$. For quick dissemination of these results, a manuscript is currently under review at Separation Science and Technology.

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# CHAPTER 6

# 6 EXPERIMENTAL AND MODELLING STUDY OF $CO_2$ INDUCED PLASTICIZATION OF FUNCTIONALIZED CARBON NANOTUBE / POLYSULFONE DENSE MEMBRANE

## 6.1 Introduction

In glassy polymers, plasticization causes a decrease in the interface between adjacent segments of polymer chains (Scholes et al., 2010) which theoretically can be seen as swelling and solvation of polymers (Kesting and Fritzche, 1993). $CO_2$ induced plasticization is a pressure dependent phenomenon (Balçık and Ahunbay, 2018) and it occurs when the concentration of $CO_2$ reaches a critical point, causing mobility of polymer matrix and increasing the fractional free volume of the polymer. Furthermore, $CO_2$ induced plasticization has been defined as the increase in $CO_2$ permeability with an increase in feed pressure (Bos et al., 1999). In polymeric membranes, the increase in feed pressure of many gases decreases the permeability of these gases through the membrane (Minelli and Sarti, 2013). However, the minimum pressure at which gas permeability begins to increase is known as plasticization pressure (Dong et al., 2011). The increase in the permeability is as a result of disruption in chain packing and increase in inter-segmental mobility (Zhuang et al., 2018).

Dual-mode sorption model consisting of Langmuir and Henry's law contributions has been used to describe the plasticization effects of gases in the polymeric membrane (Mauze and Stern, 1984; Zhou and Stern, 1989). The following Equations (6.1 – 6.3) illustrate the dual-mode sorption mechanism:

$$C_d = k_d p \tag{6.1}$$

$$C_h = \frac{C_h' bp}{1+bp} \tag{6.2}$$

$$C = C_d + C_h = k_d p + \frac{C_h' bp}{1+bp} \tag{6.3}$$

Equation (6.1) is an expression of gas molecules dissolution process with respect to Henry's law where $C_d$ is the concentration of gas molecules based on Henry's law sorption, $k_d$ is Henry's law solubility coefficient and $p$ is pressure. Some literature reported the use of fugacity in place of pressure (Petropoulos, 1992). However, Koro et al. (1976) investigated the effect of using fugacity instead of pressure and reported that it makes little or no effect within the pressure range of 1 – 23 bar. Equation (6.2) describes fixed sites gas molecules absorption into the polymer matrix by Langmuir isotherm where $C_h$ is the concentration of these molecules, $C_h'$ is the polymer matrix saturation constant and $b$ is the Langmuir affinity constant. Equation 6.3 gives the total penetrants concentration C.

The solubility of a penetrant in glassy polymers is a thermodynamic parameter (Hu et al., 2003) and may be affected by the inherent condensability of the penetrant, the polymer-penetrant interactions and the excess free volume in the polymer (Chung et al., 2003). The solubility, S, can be expressed in terms of dual mode sorption model parameters as follows:

$$S = \frac{C}{p} \tag{6.4}$$

Substituting Equation (6.3) into Equation (6.4)

$$S = k_d + \frac{C_h' b}{1+bp} \tag{6.5}$$

In this study, $CO_2$ induced plasticization of functionalized carbon nanotube (FCNT) reinforced polysulfone (PSF) dense membranes was investigated using $CO_2$ sorption measurement at feed pressure up to 20 bar. This is to determine the total $CO_2$ concentration in the membrane matrix and to evaluate the dual-mode sorption model parameters. In addition to the sorption measurement, pure $CO_2$ permeability was measured at feed pressure between 2 – 20 bar to determine the plasticization pressure of the membranes. The use of CNTs as fillers for the synthesis of MMMs for $CO_2$ induced plasticization suppression is yet to be reported in open literature to the best of our knowledge. Hence, the focus of this work is to leverage the excellent mechanical properties, lightweight, and length to radius ratio of CNTs to synthesize MMMs that can withstand high $CO_2$ feed pressure without plasticizing. Furthermore, many of the existing phenomenological models focus on the polymer matrix – polymer matrix interface interaction without considering filler particle – filler particle interface interaction in the fundamental development of the models. Therefore, three possible interface interactions in MMMs were considered in this work to develop a phenomenological model for $CO_2$ permeability determination in FCNT reinforced polymeric dense membrane in the presence of plasticization.

## 6.2 Experimental

### *6.2.1 $CO_2$ sorption experiment*

Sorption measurement of $CO_2$ gas was carried out using a gravimetric sorption analyzer (GHP-FS, with a Cahn D-200 balance, VTI Scientific Instruments, Florida) operated in a static mode at 35 $^oC$ with 10 pressure points between 0 - 20 bar. At each pressure level, the system was allowed to equilibrate for 1 h until a constant mass of adsorbed $CO_2$ by the membrane was achieved. $CO_2$ sorption isotherms as a function of feed pressure were determined. The detailed $CO_2$ sorption measurement protocol is given in

chapter 3, section 3.6.3. Equation (6.6) was used to convert the mass of adsorbed $CO_2$ ($m_a$) in g/g to concentration (C) in $cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer (Hölck et. al., 2006).

$$C = \frac{V_{id} m_a \rho_o}{M_{CO_2} m_o} \tag{6.6}$$

Where

$V_{id}$ = Volume of an ideal gas at STP = 22400 $cm^3$

$\rho_o$ = density of the polymer prior to any measurement

$M_{CO2}$ = molar mass of $CO_2$

$m_o$ = mass of the polymer prior to any measurement

Analysis of sorption data for the determination of dual-mode sorption parameters in Equation (6.3) was carried out using the graphical method as follows (Koro et al. 1976; Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005):

- $k_d$ which represents the $CO_2$ dissolved in the polymer matrix at equilibrium was obtained from the gradient of linear asymptote of the sorption data at high pressure.
- $C_h$ representing the $CO_2$ concentration in the polymer matrix based on Langmuir sorption was obtained from Equation (6.3) to form Equation (6.7);

$$C_h = C - k_d p \tag{6.7}$$

- Equation (6.2) was written in form of linear equation (y = mx + c) as shown in Equation (6.8);

$$\frac{p}{C_h} = \frac{p}{C_h'} + \frac{1}{C_h' b} \tag{6.8}$$

- $\frac{p}{C_h}$ was plotted against $p$. From the graph, the following parameters were obtained;

$$C_h' = \frac{1}{gradient}$$

$$b = \frac{1}{y - intercept \times C_h'}$$

- Graphs obtained from the analysis of sorption data for each synthesized membrane are presented in Appendix G.

### *6.2.2 Pure $CO_2$ gas permeation experiment at elevated pressure*

Pure $CO_2$ gas permeation experiment was conducted using constant volume variable pressure (CVVP) technique. The initial feed pressure was set at 2 bar and increased at 2 bar interval up until 20 bar [It is important to state that the typical partial pressure of $CO_2$ in most natural gas wells is around 5-10 bar (Baker, 2002)]. Each pressure point was kept for 60 min before the increase to another pressure level, this is to allow the system to equilibrate until a constant mass of adsorbed $CO_2$ by the membrane was achieved. The temperature was kept constant at 35$^o$ C throughout the experiment. The detailed experimental protocol for the gas permeation is given in chapter 3, section 3.6.1.

## 6.3 Model development

### *6.3.1 Theory*

Gas transport in a dense membrane is usually governed by a solution-diffusion mechanism (Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005). According to the mechanism, permeability (P) can be expressed as the product of the diffusion coefficient ($D_d$) and the solubility coefficient (S).

$$P = D_d S \tag{6.9}$$

From Equation (6.5)

$$S = k_d + \frac{C_h' b}{1+bp}$$

Petropoulos (1970) and Paul and Koros (1976) observed that a fraction (F) of the gas held in Langmuir sites have mobility within the membrane. Equation 6.5 then becomes;

$$S = k_d + \frac{F C_h' b}{1+bp} \tag{6.10}$$

F has also been described as the ratio of the diffusivity through the Langmuir sites (microvoids) to the diffusivity through the Henry's Law sites (polymeric matrix) (Scholes et al., 2010).

Substituting Equation (6.10) into Equation (6.9)

$$P = k_d D_d \left(1 + \frac{FC_h^{'} b}{k_d(1+bp)}\right) \quad (6.11)$$

i. If there is total immobilization of penetrant in Langmuir sites, F = 0

$$P = k_d D_d$$

This should result in constant permeability with pressure.

ii. If there is no immobilization of gas held in Langmuir sites, F is unity

$$P = k_d D_d \left(1 + \frac{C_h^{'} b}{k_d(1 + bp)}\right)$$

This should result in a sharp decrease in permeability with pressure.

iii. If there is partial immobilization of penetrant in Langmuir sites, F < 1

$$P = k_d D_d \left(1 + \frac{FC_h^{'} b}{k_d(1 + bp)}\right)$$

This should result in a slight decrease in permeability with pressure.

From the $CO_2$ permeability results obtained in this study, the synthesized MMMs tends to follow partly theory (ii) and partly theory (iii).

### *6.3.2 Assumptions and model equations*

The synthesized MMMs have three difference interface interactions:

a) Polymer matrix – polymer matrix interface interaction
b) CNT – polymer matrix interface interaction
c) Aligned CNT – CNT interface interaction

*Assumption 1:* There is partial immobilization of $CO_2$ in Langmuir sites of polymer matrix – polymer matrix and CNT – polymer matrix interface interactions.

*Assumption 2:* There is no immobilization of $CO_2$ held in Langmuir sites of aligned CNT – CNT interface interaction due to inherent smoothness of CNTs.

*Assumption 3:* Mobile species of $CO_2$ follow one-dimensional transport and permeability is measured at steady state.

Fick's law for one-dimensional transport can be expressed as Equation (6.12) to account for mobile species of the gas.

$$J = -D(C_m)\frac{dC_m}{dx} \tag{6.12}$$

$$C_m = C_d + FC_h + \emptyset C_h \tag{6.13}$$

Where $C_m$ is the total mobile gas in the membrane, $C_d$ is Henry's law sites contribution to the gas mobility, $FC_h$ is the partial immobilization contribution from the Langmuir sites of polymer matrix – polymer matrix and CNT – polymer matrix interface interactions and $\emptyset C_h$ is the no immobilization contribution from the Langmuir sites of aligned CNT – CNT interface interaction, $\emptyset$ is the fraction of FCNTs dispersed into the polymer matrix.

From Equations (6.1) and (6.2)

$$C_d = k_d p$$

$$C_h = \frac{C_h' bp}{1+bp}$$

Substituting Equations (6.1) and (6.2) into (6.13) results into Equation (6.14)

$$C_m = K_d\left(1 + \frac{(F+\emptyset)K}{1+bp}\right) \tag{6.14}$$

Where $K = \frac{C_h' b}{K_d}$

For penetrant induced plasticization of a glassy polymer, the diffusion coefficient is concentration dependent and it is often assumed to be an exponential function of $C_m$ (Stern and Saxena, 1980).

$$D(C_m) = D_o \exp(\beta C_m) \tag{6.15}$$

Where $D_o$ is the diffusion coefficient as $C_m$ tends to zero and $\beta$ is an empirical constant representing the plasticization potential of the gas – polymer system.

Substitute Equation (6.15) into Equation (6.12):

$$J = -D_o \exp(\beta C_m)\frac{dC_m}{dx} \tag{6.16}$$

Applying the exponential rule of differentiation to Equation (6.16) gives:

$$J = \frac{D_o}{\beta}\frac{d}{dx}[\exp(\beta C_m)] \tag{6.17}$$

In this study, permeation of gas across the membrane of thickness ($L$) occurs at upstream pressure $p_2$ as the downstream pressure, $p_1$, approaches zero i.e $p_2 >> p_1$. The effective permeability, $P_{eff}$, is usually given as Equation (6.18) (Zhou and Stern, 1989):

$$P_{eff} = \frac{J_s L}{p_2} \tag{6.18}$$

Where $J_s$ is the steady-state flux of gas through the membrane.

For steady-state conditions (dC/dt = 0), integral solution of Equation (6.17) with boundary conditions:

x = 0 $C_m = C_{m2}$ (for $p = p_2$)

x = $L$ $C_m = C_{m1} = 0$ (for $p = p_1 = 0$)

yields Equation (6.19):

$$J_s = \frac{D_o[\exp(\beta C_{m2})-1]}{\beta L} \tag{6.19}$$

Substituting Equations (6.14) and (6.19) into Equation (6.18) gives:

$$P_{eff} = \frac{D_0}{\beta p_2}\left\{exp\left[\beta k_d p_2\left(1 + \frac{(F+\emptyset)K}{1+bp_2}\right)\right] - 1\right\} \quad (6.20)$$

Let $z = k_d p_2\left(1 + \frac{(F+\emptyset)K}{1+bp_2}\right)$

$$P_{eff} = \frac{D_0}{\beta p_2}\{exp(z\beta) - 1\} \quad (6.21)$$

From Maclaurin series (Kreyszig, 2007):

$$\exp(z) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{z^n}{n!} = 1 + z + \frac{z^2}{2!} + \cdots \quad (6.22)$$

Applying equation (6.22) to equation (6.21) gives:

$$P_{eff} = \frac{D_0}{\beta p_2}\left\{1 + z\beta + \frac{(z\beta)^2}{2!} + \cdots\right\} - \frac{D_0}{\beta p_2} \quad (6.23)$$

Considering equation (6.23) for the following cases:

1. For polymeric membrane without a filler and that undergoes plasticization

$\emptyset = 0$ $\beta > 0$

Equation (6.23) becomes:

$$P_{eff} = \frac{D_0}{\beta p_2}\left\{exp\left[\beta k_d p_2\left(1 + \frac{FK}{1+bp_2}\right)\right] - 1\right\} \quad (6.24)$$

2. For MMM that is not undergoing plasticization

$$\emptyset > 0 \qquad \beta \rightarrow 0$$

Equation (6.23) becomes:

$$P_{eff} = k_d D_o\left[1 + \frac{(F+\emptyset)K}{1+bp_2}\right] \quad (6.25)$$

Equations (6.24) and (6.25) were solved by using Levenberg-Marquardt algorithm in the Matlab environment to obtain the plasticization potential ($\beta$) and the fraction (F) of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane. K and $k_d$ values were obtained from the sorption experimental data, $P_{eff}$ and $p_2$ values were obtained from the permeability-pressure results.

## 6.4 Experimental results and discussion

### *6.4.1 Effect of FCNT on $CO_2$ sorption isotherms of synthesized membranes*

Figure 6.1 showed a typical dual-mode sorption model behaviour for all the types of synthesized membranes (Kanehashi and Nagai, 2005; Hölck et. al., 2006). From the figure, it was observed that the $CO_2$ concentration increases rapidly at low pressures, which indicates a hole-filling of the Langmuir sites (microvoids). At higher pressure,

the rate of increase in the concentration declines due to the saturation of the microvoids, the further increase in the concentration at higher pressure is because of the gas sorption in Henry's law sites (polymer matrix). The $CO_2$ concentration in pure PSF was similar to those of MMMs at low pressures. As pressure increases, the $CO_2$ concentration in pure PSF deviates farther from those MMMs. This could be due to the formation of new microvoids at higher pressure for more sorption to take place, and also possible mobility of the polymer matrix. This means that pure PSF is likely to have been plasticized at higher $CO_2$ pressure. The MMMs showed similar $CO_2$ concentration throughout the pressure range irrespective of the % loading of FCNTs.

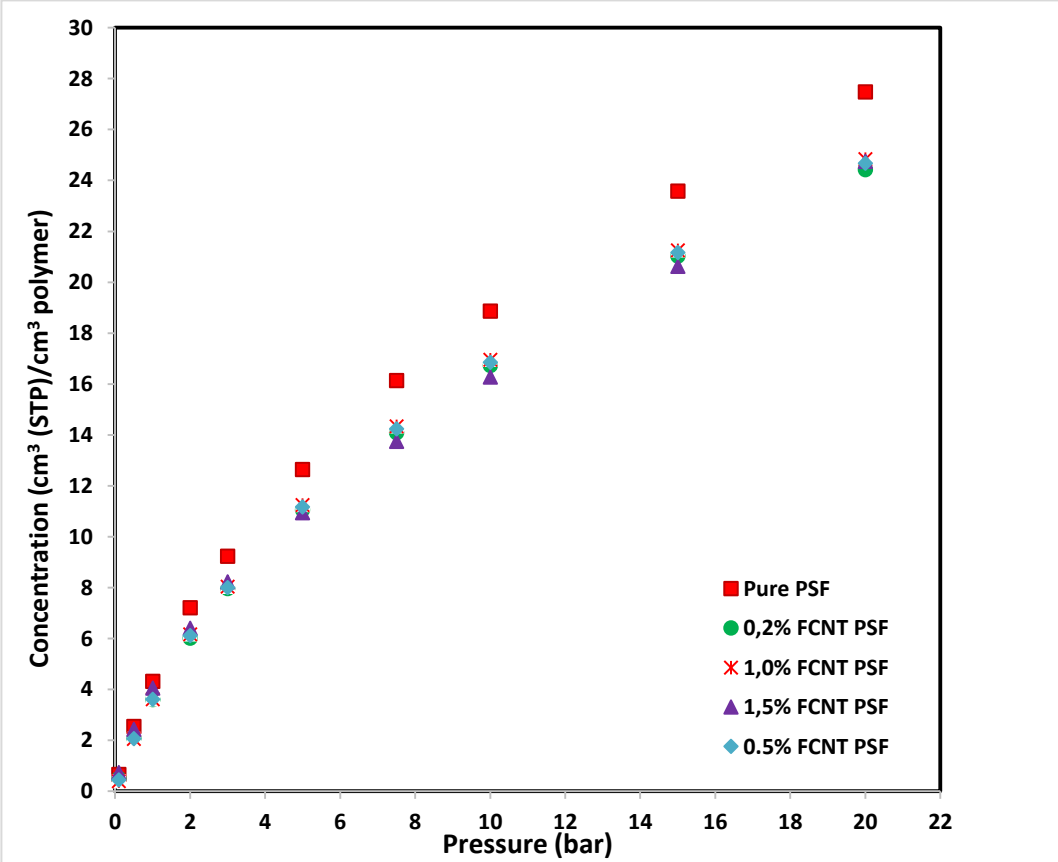


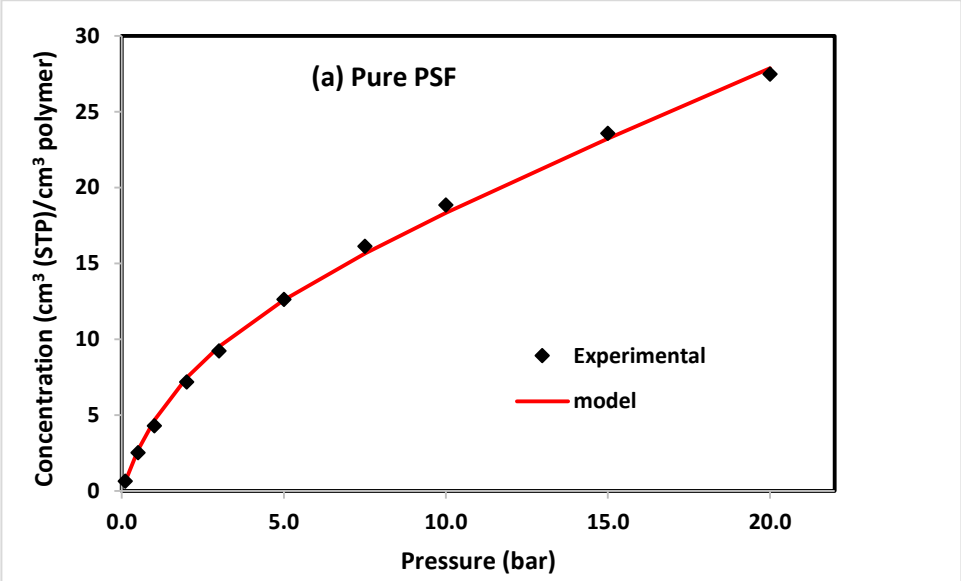

Figure 6.1: $CO_2$ sorption isotherms of synthesized membranes at 35 $^oC$

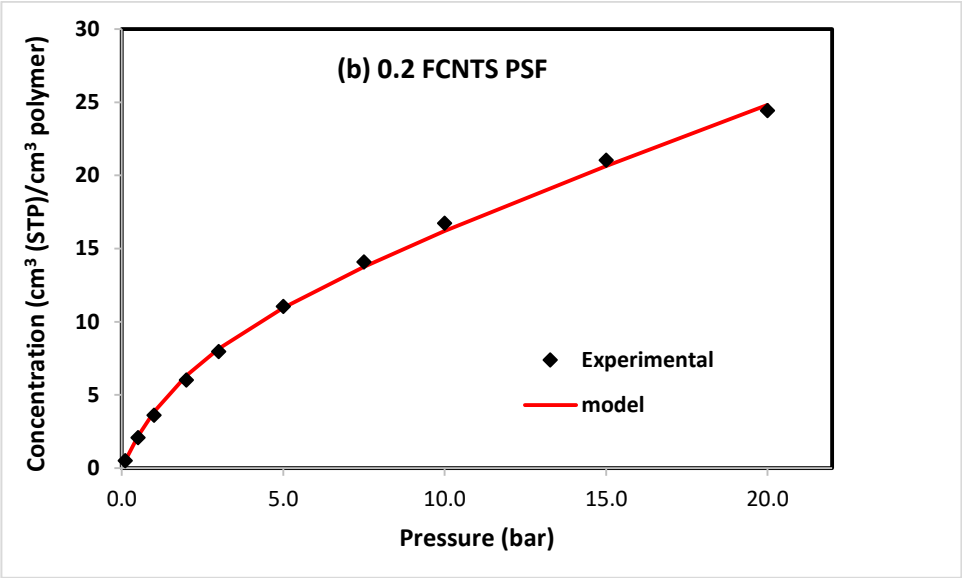
The dual-mode sorption model parameters as obtained from the graphical method is presented in Table 6.1. The parameters for pure PSF are similar to those reported in the literature using a non-linear regression algorithm (Erb and Paul, 1981; Scholes et al., 2010). The model $CO_2$ sorption isotherms based on Equation (6.3) and the dual-mode sorption model parameters were compared with the experimental isotherms and displayed in Figure 6.2. The model isotherms fitted well with the experimental isotherms. This means that the graphical method used to obtain the dual-mode sorption model parameters is efficient. From Table 6.1, $k_d$ and $C_h'$ of MMMs are lower than that of pure PSF. For $k_d$, this could be attributed to the smoothness of FCNTs within the polymer chains which reduces the ability of the $CO_2$ to associate with the chain (Kiadehi et al., 2015). In the case of $C_h'$, the could be due to the reduction in the microvoid volume (Scholes et al., 2010) because of the dispersion of FCNTs into the pores of the polymer as shown by depth-at-max analysis of the AFM images of the membranes (chapter 5 section 5.3.2). $b$ did not give any particular trend. The reason for this could not be ascertained.

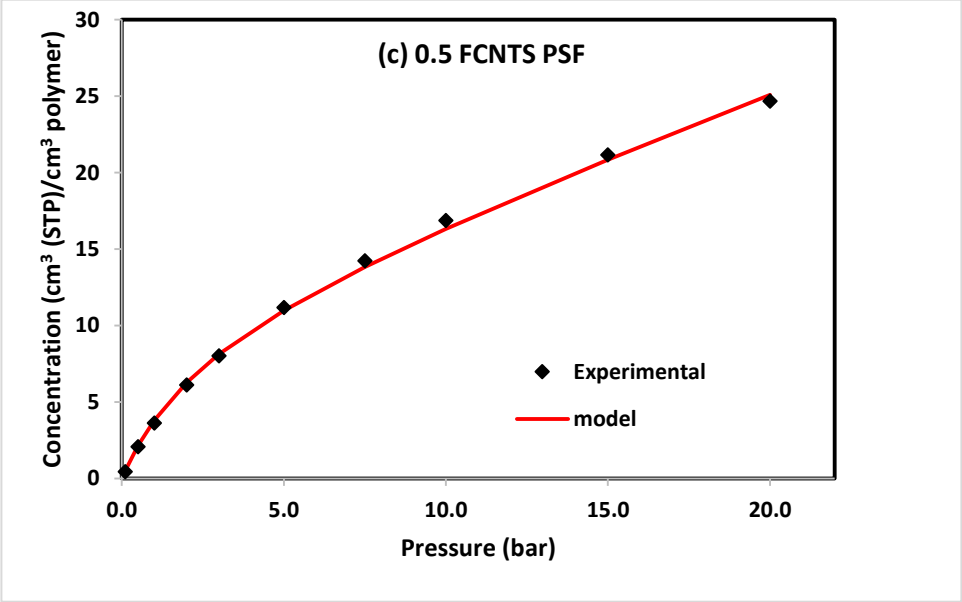
Table 6.1: Dual-mode sorption model parameters of synthesized membranes

| **Polymer** | $k_d$ **(cm$^3$ STP)/cm$^3$ bar)** | $C_h'$ **(cm$^3$(STP)/cm$^3$ bar)** | $b$ **(bar$^{-1}$)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pure PSF | 0.86 | 11.74 | 0.48 |
| 0.2 FCNT-PSF | 0.77 | 10.55 | 0.54 |
| 0.5 FCNT-PSF | 0.78 | 10.64 | 0.40 |
| 1.0 FCNT-PSF | 0.79 | 10.71 | 0.38 |
| 1.5 FCNT-PSF | 0.79 | 10.01 | 0.48 |

The effect of pressure on the solubility of $CO_2$ in the membranes is depicted in Figure 6.3. From Equation (6.4), Solubility is inversely proportional to pressure, hence, increase pressure reduces the solubility of the gas in the membranes as shown in the figure. The solubility of $CO_2$ in the membranes drops significantly with an increase in pressure within the low-pressure region but tends to level off in the high-pressure region. This shows that the effect of pressure on the solubility of $CO_2$ in the Langmuir sites is substantial at low pressures, but is negligible at high pressures once all the microvoids are filled by the penetrant (Chung et al., 2004).




(b) 0.2 FCNTS PSF
Concentration (cm³ (STP)/cm³ polymer)
Pressure (bar)
Experimental
model
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0


(c) 0.5 FCNTS PSF
Concentration (cm³ (STP)/cm³ polymer)
Pressure (bar)
Experimental
model
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0

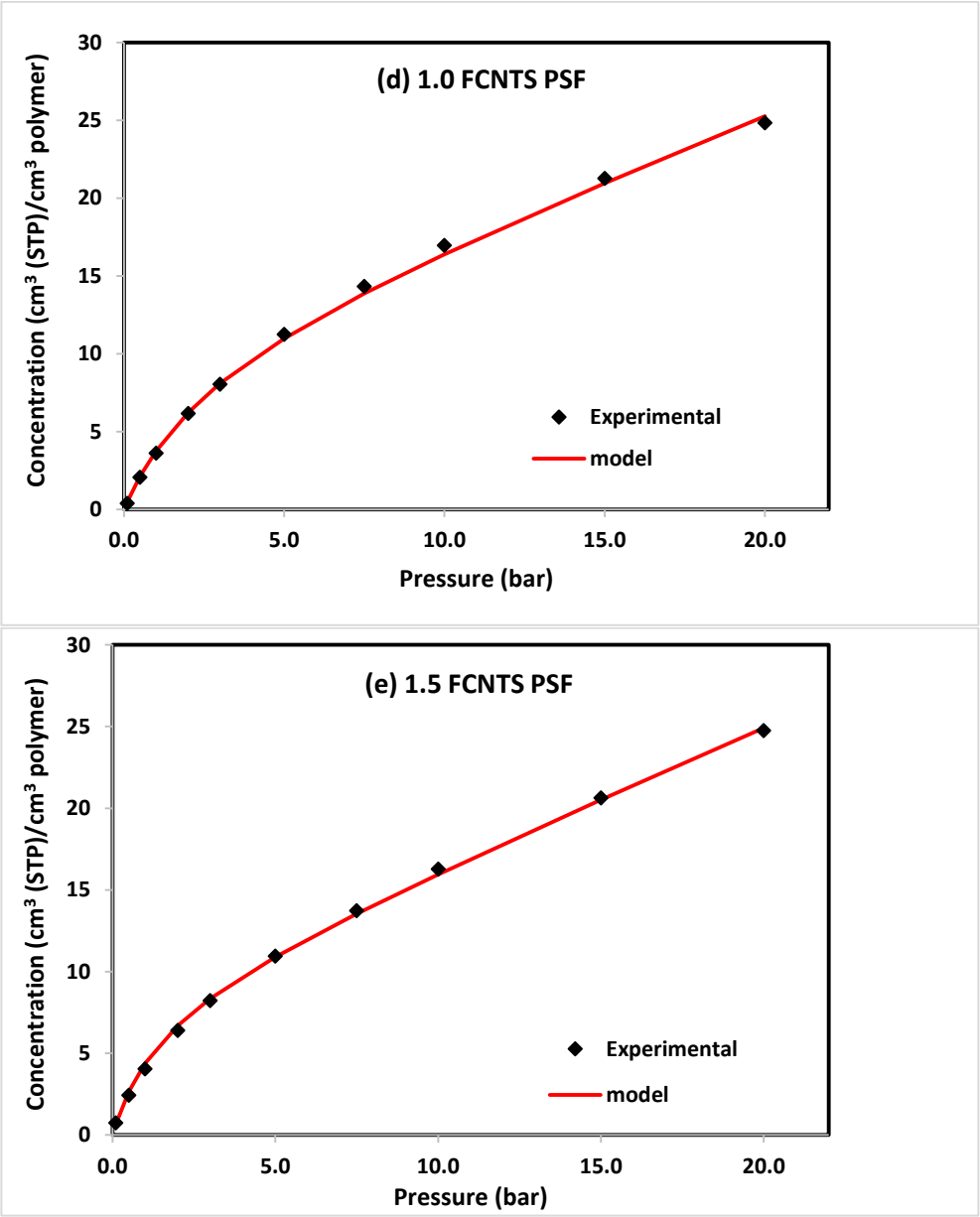



Figure 6.2: Experimental and model $CO_2$ sorption isotherms

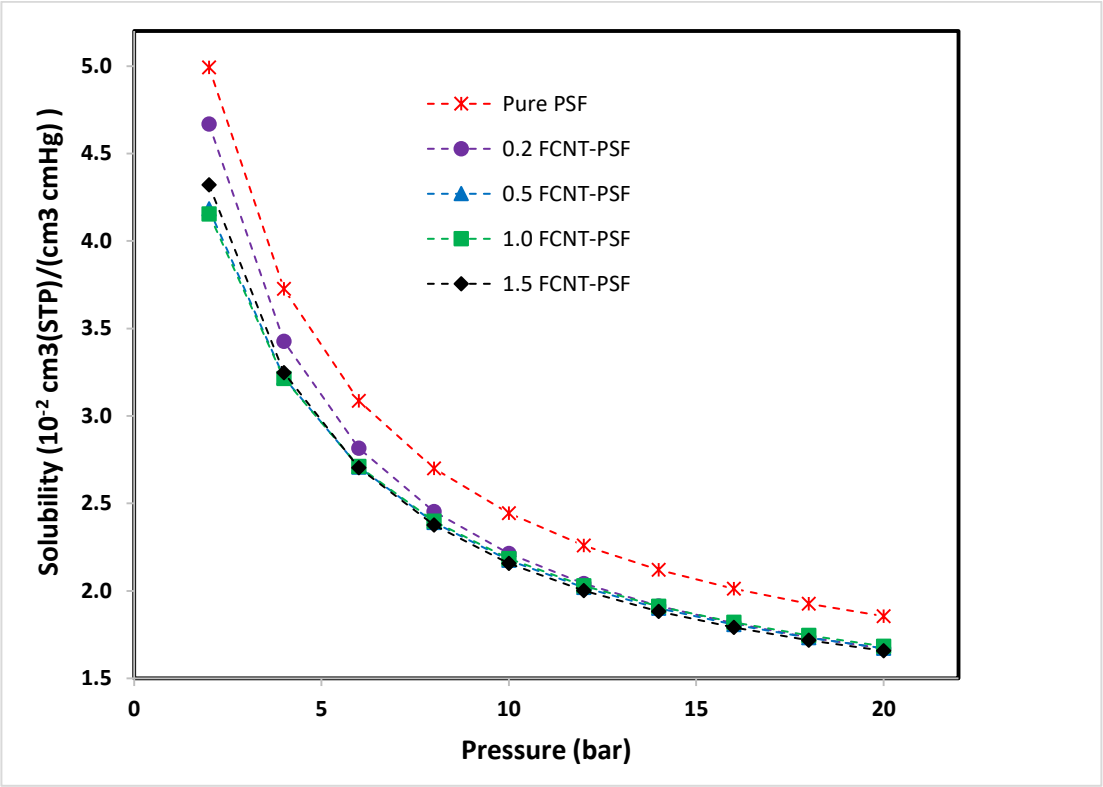



Figure 6.3: Effect of pressure on the solubility of $CO_2$ in the membranes at 35 $^oC$

### *6.4.2 Effect of FCNT on $CO_2$ induced plasticization pressure of synthesized membranes*

The $CO_2$ permeation isotherms of the synthesized membranes are shown in Figure 6.4. The isotherms represented a standard permeability-pressure curve for a polymeric membrane with a gradual decrease in permeability as the pressure increases from 2 bar to 12 bar (Minelli and Sarti, 2013). Although, for 1.5 FCNT-PSF, a sharp decline in $CO_2$ permeability was observed with increasing pressure from 2 bar to 8 bar. This could be attributed to reduced dissolution of $CO_2$ within the polymer matrix because of the agglomeration of FCNTs. Further increase in $CO_2$ pressure above 12 bar showed an increase in $CO_2$ permeability of pure PSF membrane. This indicates an onset of $CO_2$ induced plasticization of the membrane. The plasticization pressure of pure PSF is therefore 12 bar. Scholes et al. (2010) reported similar plasticization pressure for PSF

in their study. MMMs showed no sign of plasticization over the range of pressure tested. This could be due to enhanced chain rigidity of MMMs (Zhang et al., 2019). This means that the addition of FCNTs to PSF has improved the $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of the MMMs. Detailed tables of $CO_2$ permeability and solubility at elevated pressure are shown in Appendix H.

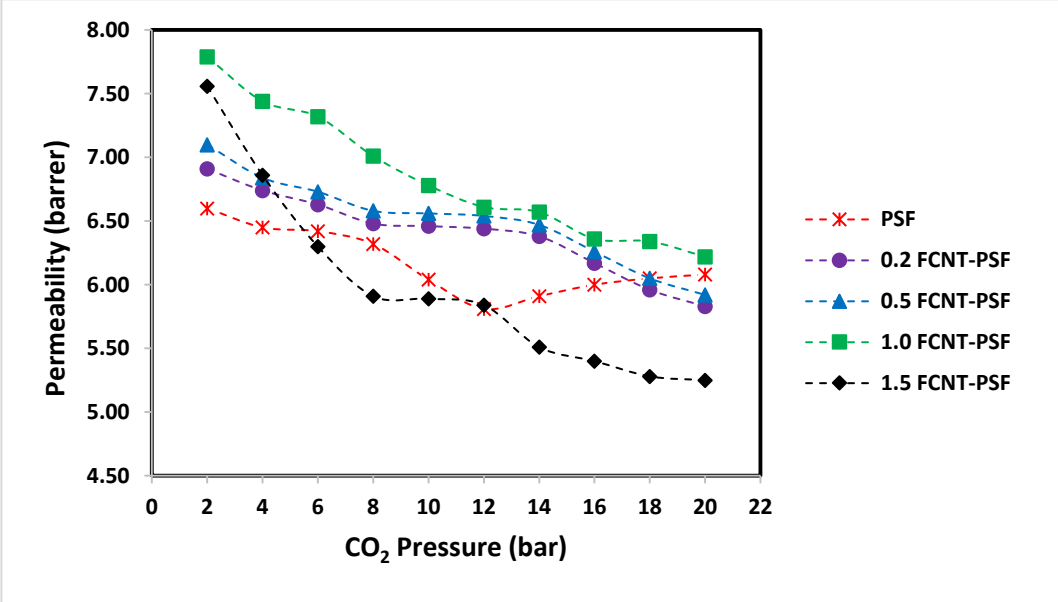
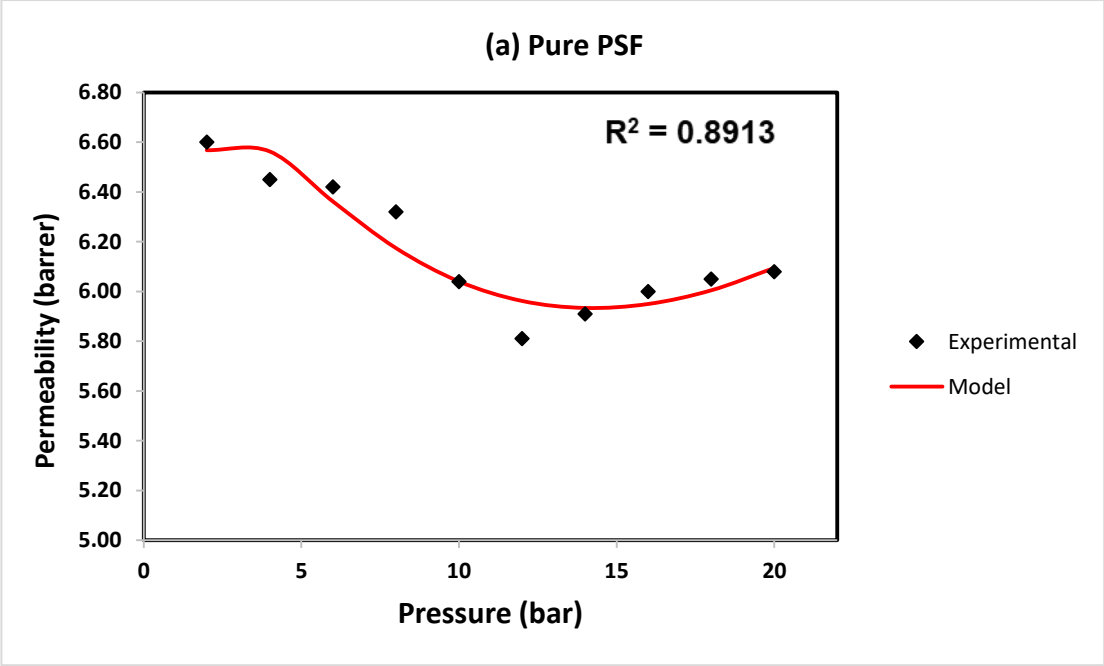


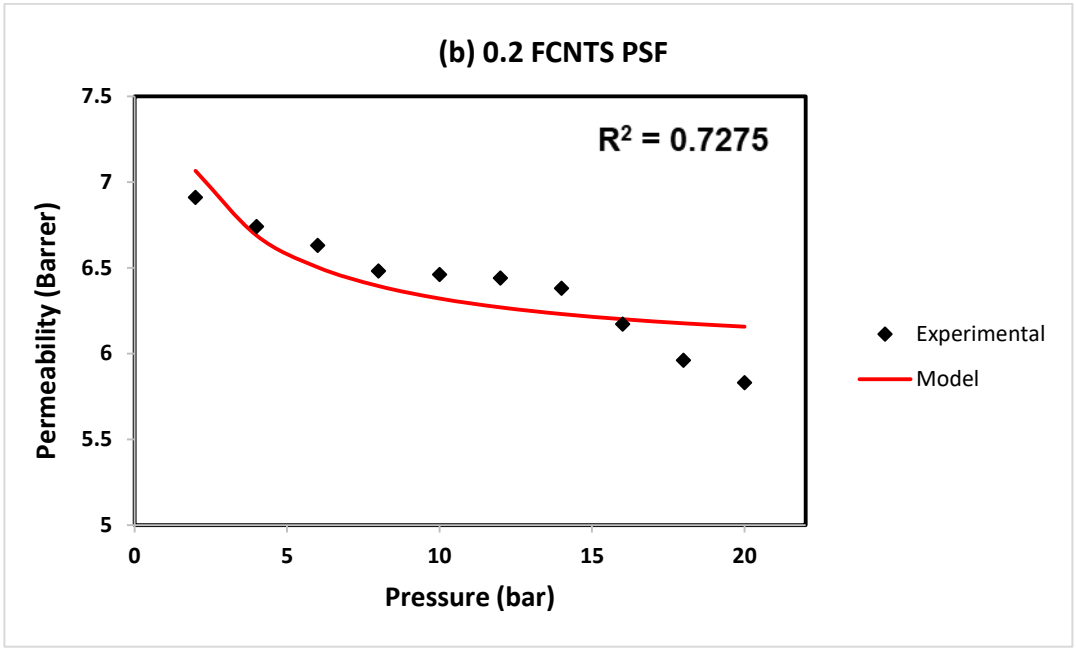

Figure 6.4: Pure $CO_2$ permeability isotherms at 35 $^oC$ of the synthesized membranes

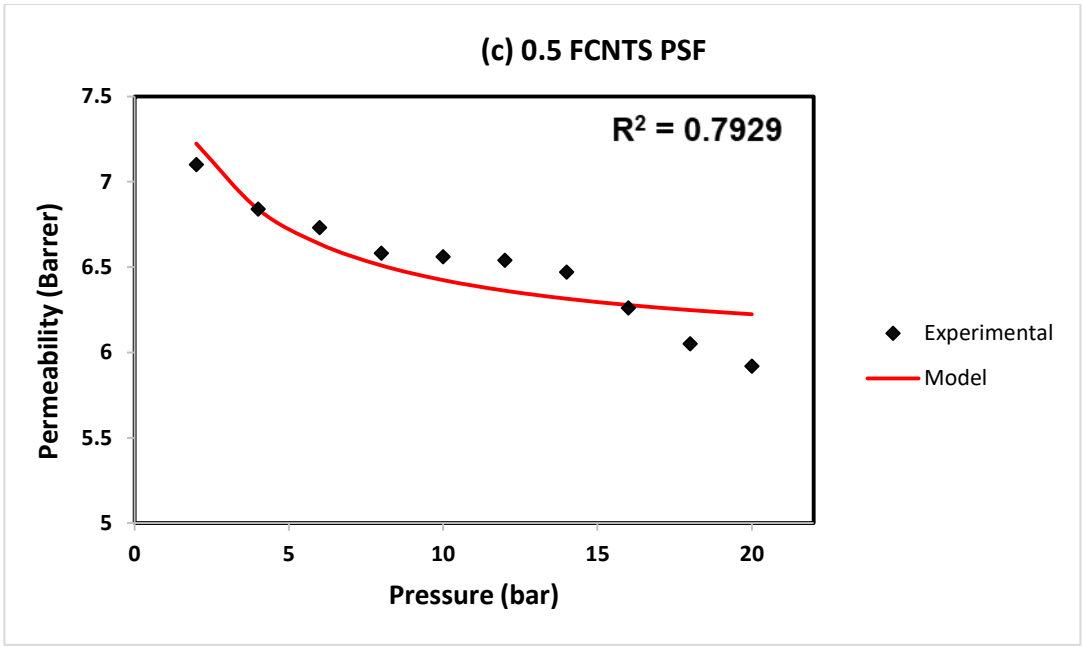
## 6.5 Model results and discussion

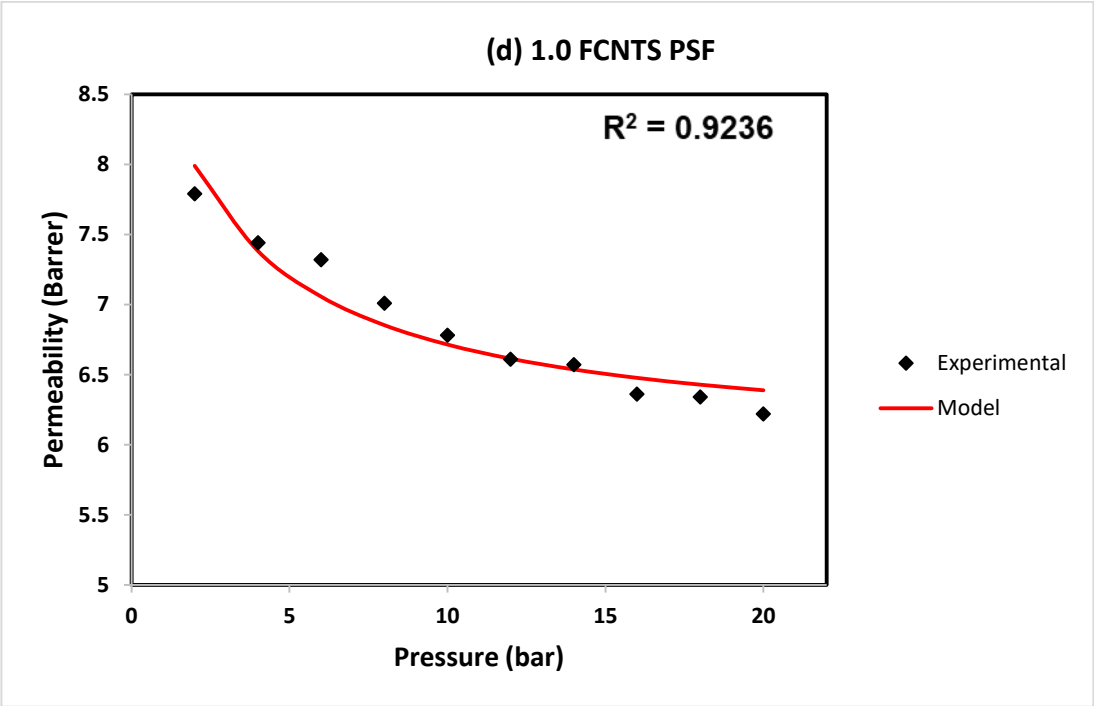
The model equations were solved using a Levenberg-Marquardt nonlinear regression algorithm to obtain the plasticization potential of pure PSF ($\beta$) and the fraction of $CO_2$ held in Langmuir sites that have mobility (F) with 95% confidence bounds. $\beta$ is an empirical parameters which describes the relative potential of condensable penetrant to plasticize polymeric membranes (Scholes et al., 2010). $\beta$ of pure PSF obtained from equation (6.24) was 0.052 at 35 $^oC$. Lock et al. (2018) reported 0.054 for $\beta$ of their pure PSF at 35 $^0C$. This result is similar to the $\beta$ obtained for this work. The slight variation may be due to PSF to solvent ratio in their work which was 1:4 while for this work,

PSF to solvent ratio was 1:10. Figure 6.5 showed experimental and model $CO_2$ permeability isotherms of the synthesized membranes at 35 $^oC$ and the coefficient of determination ($R^2$). $R^2$ is an expression of how much variance of the experimental data is explained by the model. Model $CO_2$ permeability is in good agreement with experimental $CO_2$ permeability. While $R^2$ does not tell the whole story about the accuracy of a model, the values of F obtained from the model equation (6.25) support the solution-diffusion phenomenon in polymeric membranes.




(b) 0.2 FCNTS PSF
R² = 0.7275
Permeability (Barrer)
Pressure (bar)
Experimental
Model
7.5
7
6.5
6
5.5
5
0
5
10
15
20


(c) 0.5 FCNTS PSF
R² = 0.7929
Permeability (Barrer)
Pressure (bar)
Experimental
Model
7.5
7
6.5
6
5.5
5
0
5
10
15
20



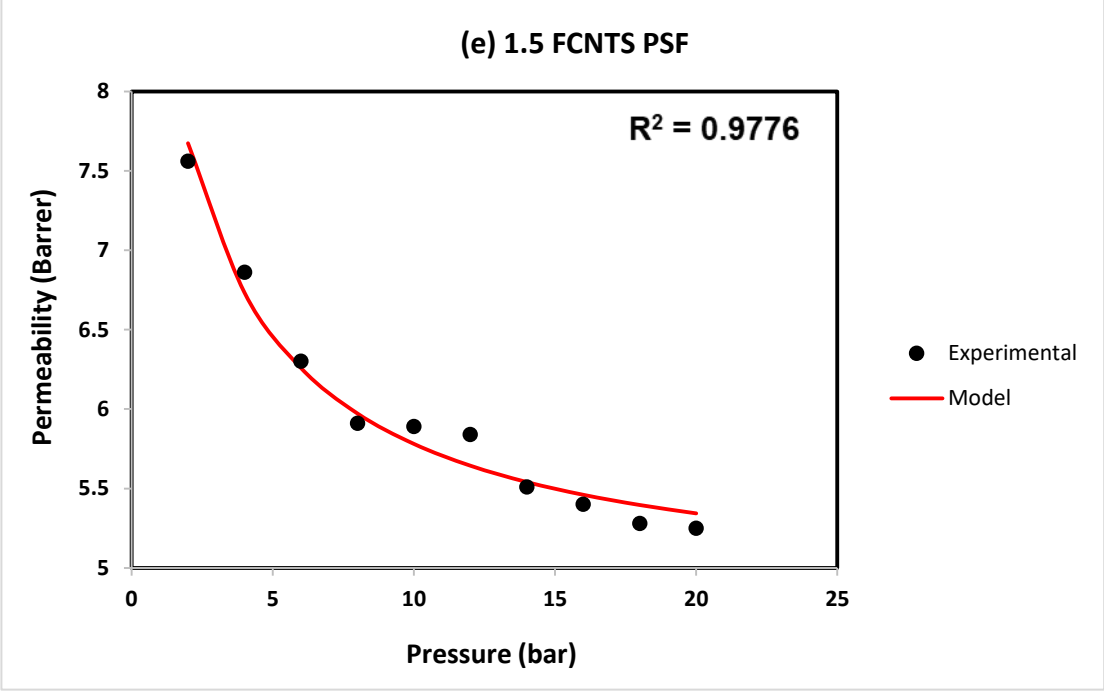




Figure 6.5: Experimental and model $CO_2$ permeability isotherms at 35 $^oC$ of the synthesized membranes

### *6.5.1 Effect of FCNT on the fraction of $CO_2$ held in Langmuir sites that have mobility*

The fraction of $CO_2$ held in Langmuir sites that have mobility (F) is a measure of the ratio of the diffusivity through the Langmuir sites (microvoids) to the diffusivity through the Henry's Law sites (polymeric matrix). It is an indication of the size and the number of microvoids that exist within a membrane (Lock et al., 2018). The higher the value of F is, the more is the contribution of diffused gas through the Langmuir sites to the overall gas mobility through the membranes. From Table 6.2, F increases with an increase in the wt. % loading of FCNTs in the membrane. This could be attributed to an increase in sizes and numbers of microvoid existing within the membrane as the amount of FCNTs dispersed in the pure PSF increases. The increase in the size and the number of the microvoid provides more sorption sites for the penetrant thereby increasing the penetrant permeability through the membrane as seen in experimental $CO_2$ permeability results in Figure 6.4. However, 1.5 wt. % FCNT PSF has higher F than 1.0 wt. % FCNT PSF but its experimental $CO_2$ permeability is lower than that of 1.0 wt. % FCNT PSF. This could be due to the reduced dissolution of $CO_2$ within the polymer matrix of 1.5 wt. % FCNT PSF because of the agglomeration of FCNTs shown in Figure 5.2 (chapter 5). This causes a decrease in the contribution of gas dissolution within the polymer matrix to the overall gas mobility in the membrane. Pure PSF has the least value of F, this means that more penetrant is immobilized within microvoids of the membrane. As the concentration of $CO_2$ immobilized within the microvoid reaches a critical point, there could be swelling of the polymer due to disruption in polymer chain packing (Zhuang et al., 2018). Hence, there is plasticization in pure PSF.

Table 6.2: Immobilization factors for the synthesized membranes at 35 ºC

| Membrane | F |
|---|---|
| Pure PSF | 0.048 |
| 0.2 FCNT-PSF | 0.050 |
| 0.5 FCNT-PSF | 0.064 |
| 1.0 FCNT-PSF | 0.105 |
| 1.5 FCNT-PSF | 0.176 |

## 6.6 Concluding remarks

This chapter investigated the effect of the addition of FCNTs to PSF on the $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of the MMM using sorption and permeation experiments at elevated pressure, and mathematical modelling. Sorption experiments reveal a higher concentration of $CO_2$ in the pure PSF as compared to the MMMs. This could lead to plasticization of pure PSF once the $CO_2$ concentration reaches a critical point. Furthermore, the rate of increase of $CO_2$ concentration in pure PSF membrane at high pressures suggested a likelihood of formation of new microvoids due to plasticization, which accounted for the additional sorption at high pressure along with the dissolution in the polymer matrix (Henry's law sites). $CO_2$ permeability isotherm of pure PSF indicated an onset of plasticization at $CO_2$ pressure of 12 bar. However, MMMs showed no indication of plasticization over the pressure range tested. Three possible interface interaction in MMMs were considered in developing a phenomenological model that describes the plasticization potential and the fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane. The model $CO_2$ permeability is in good agreement with experimental $CO_2$ permeability. The plasticization potential of PSF obtained is consistent with the values available in the literature. In addition, the fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane increases with an increase in FCNT wt. % loading which shows high diffusivity through the microvoids with respect to diffusivity through the polymer

matrix. This is an indication of an increase in Langmuir sorption sites for the penetrant thereby improving the penetrant permeability.

For quick dissemination of these results, a manuscript is currently under review at Chemical Engineering Journal.

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# CHAPTER 7

# 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to synthesize dense mixed matrix membrane (MMM) with an excellent balance of permeability, selectivity and $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance during natural gas separations, especially separation of $CO_2/CH_4$ mixture. This was achieved by the addition of functionalized carbon nanotube (FCNT) to polysulfone to fabricate the MMM.

Raw CNTs (RCNTs) were produced by catalyst chemical vapour deposition (CCVD) method. Impacts of types of carbon source used and production conditions were investigated. CNTs produced from a mixture of acetylene and argon showed the presence of more carbon nanoballs than CNTs. This could be attributed to the deactivation of the catalyst nucleation site for the growth of CNTs due to carbon deposition on the catalyst active site. The maximum yield of 1.15 mg/s was achieved at 850 $^oC$ and the yield decreased with increase in temperature from 850 $^oC$ to 1000 $^oC$. This could be as a result of the loss of catalyst activity due to the sintering effect. Addition of hydrogen to acetylene and argon showed the presence of more CNTs in the samples with increasing yield up to 1.78 mg/s as the temperature increases to 1000 $^oC$. This showed that the addition of hydrogen reduced catalyst deactivation caused by carbon deposition and sintering effect. Methane was used as the carbon source together with argon as a carrier gas, the result showed an improved CNT quality with $I_D/I_G$ ratio of 0.17 at 900 $^oC$ reactor temperature. However, the yield was lower than the yield from acetylene as a carbon source. The maximum yield obtained was 0.31 mg/s at 900 $^oC$. This could be attributed to less reactivity of methane compared to acetylene, and the number of carbon in acetylene is twice that of methane.

To improve the dispersion of CNTs within the polymer matrix and to enhance intermolecular interaction between $CO_2$ and the CNTs, the best of the as-produced CNTs was functionalized using carboxylation protocol. The CNTs were first purified

to remove the iron residue and amorphous carbon from RCNTs. Thereafter, carboxyl group was attached to purified CNTs (PCNTs) by the acid oxidation reaction. Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) of PCNT showed an improvement in its purity compared to RCNT. TGA also gave a quantitative analysis of the degree of functionalization of FCNT. Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) confirmed the presence of carboxyl functional group on FCNT. Nitrogen adsorption and desorption isotherms of RCNT, PCNT, and FCNT at 77 K showed Type IV physisorption isotherms with a characteristic H1 hysteresis as classified by IUPAC. This classification means that most pores of the CNTs are in mesopore sizes. Furthermore, BET analysis of the textural properties showed an increase in pore volume and average pore size of FCNTs as compared to PCNTs and RCNTs. These characteristics could enhance the transport properties of FCNT reinforced polymeric membranes when compared to that of non-reinforced polymeric membranes. The X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns reveal that purification and functionalization of RCNT preserve its crystallographic characteristics. However, interatomic distances of FCNT was altered.

MMMs were synthesized by incorporating FCNTs at different wt. % (0.2, 0.5, 1.0, and 1.5) into polysulfone (PSF) using evaporation method. Field emission scanning electron microscope (FESEM) micrographs of surface and cross-sectional morphologies of the synthesized membranes showed that they have a dense structure with non-continuous pores. The micrographs also revealed that FCNTs were well dispersed into the polymer matrix with agglomeration of FCNTs only noticeable at 1.5 wt. % loading of FCNTs. Atomic force microscope (AFM) images also corroborated the non-continuous porosity of the membranes. The depth-at-max of the AFM height images are much smaller than the thickness of the membranes. Furthermore, an addition of FCNTs to PSF improved the thermal stability and mechanical properties of the MMMs. TGA showed an improved decomposition temperature of the MMMs compared to pure PSF membrane, but increase in FCNT wt. % loading did not enhance the decomposition temperature. A similar pattern was observed for the glass transition

temperature ($T_g$) of the membranes as determined by differential scanning calorimeter (DSC). Tensile strength and Young's modulus of the membranes were measured using texture analyzer (TA). 0.2 wt. % FCNT-PSF has maximum tensile strength and maximum Young's modulus of 46.1 MPa and 668 MPa, respectively.

Single gas permeation results show an increase in $CO_2$ permeability with an increase in FCNTs wt. % loading with the highest $CO_2$ permeability achieved at 1.0 wt. %. $CO_2$ permeability decreased for 1.5 wt. % FCNT-PSF. This could be attributed to the agglomeration of FCNTs within the polymer matrix. The ideal selectivity of $CO_2/CH_4$ decreased with increase in FCNTs. This could be due to excess free volume created by the addition of FCNTs to the polymeric membrane which increased the flux of both $CO_2$ and $CH_4$. However, mixed gas separation performance of the MMMs for both 10%/90% and 50%/50% $CO_2/CH_4$ mixtures displayed a significant increase in $CO_2$ permeability without sacrificing $CO_2/CH_4$ selectivity. This could be as a result of interaction between carboxyl group covalently bounded to FCNTs and $CO_2$, giving $CO_2$ additional sorption competitive advantage over $CH_4$.

$CO_2$ sorption measurements reveal a higher concentration of $CO_2$ in pure PSF membranes as compared to the MMMs as the pressure increases. This showed that pure PSF membrane is more susceptible to plasticization than MMMs. However, the increase in FCNT wt. % loading did not significantly affect the $CO_2$ concentration within the MMMs. $CO_2$ gas permeation experiment at elevated feed pressure indicates the plasticization pressure of pure PSF membrane as 12 bar. Above the pressure of 12 bar, the $CO_2$ permeability of pure PSF membrane increases gradually and continuously throughout the pressure tested (14 - 20 bar). MMMs showed no sign of plasticization within the pressure range tested (0 – 20 bar). This indicates that the addition of FCNT to PSF improved $CO_2$ induced plasticization resistance of the MMMs. A phenomenological model that considers three possible interface interaction in the MMM was development. The plasticization potential of PSF obtained from the model is similar to those reported in the literature. Furthermore, the fraction of the gas held in Langmuir sites that have mobility within the membrane increases with an increase in

the wt. % loading of FCNTs. This indicates that the addition of FCNTs to PSF increases Langmuir sorption sites of the MMMs thereby enhancing the diffusivity through Langmuir region as compared to diffusivity through Henry's law region which further improves penetrant permeability through the membrane

In addition, the results of this work provide a platform for the development of robust CNT reinforced polymeric membranes for suppression of $CO_2$ induced plasticization in membranes during gas separation. The significant contributions of this work to the body of knowledge have been communicated through posters, oral presentations, and scientific journal publications. A list of presentations at conferences, published and submitted papers related to this work can be found in the initial pages of this thesis.

## 7.2 Recommendations for future work

The following recommendations should be considered for future work:

1. CNTs produced from methane was of good quality but low yield as compared to CNTs produced from acetylene. Therefore, more work should be done in the future to improve the quantity of CNTs produced from methane without sacrificing the quality.
2. Carboxylic functionalization protocol was adopted in this research work because carboxyl group has the potential to interact with $CO_2$ to enhance molecular sieving by chemical recognition during natural gas separation. Effect of other functional groups on the improvement of separation performance of mixed matrix membranes should be studied in future work.
3. To fully demonstrate the potential industrial application of CNT reinforced polysulfone membrane, future work should be carried out to evaluate the permeation performance of the membrane with multi-component feeds including $C_{2+}$ hydrocarbon.
4. $CO_2$ induced plasticization of polymeric membranes is a pressure-dependent phenomenon from a technical perspective (Zhang et al., 2010). However, the lower temperature has been reported to accelerate the plasticization of

polymeric membranes (Duthie et al., 2007). Therefore, future work should investigate temperature-dependent $CO_2$ induced plasticization of FCNT/PSF MMM.

5. Our experimental study of $CO_2$ induced plasticization of the synthesized membranes was limited to absolute feed pressure of 20 bar owing to the maximum pressure capacity of the equipment used. Besides, the majority of the current natural gas wells have $CO_2$ partial pressure of about 5–10 bar (Baker, 2002). Higher feed pressure above 20 bar should be investigated in the future for CNT reinforced polysulfone membrane.

**References**

Baker, R.W., 2002. Future directions of membrane gas separation technology. *Industrial & Engineering Chemistry Research*, 41(6), pp.1393-1411.

Duthie, X., Kentish, S., Powell, C., Nagai, K., Qiao, G. and Stevens, G., 2007. Operating temperature effects on the plasticization of polyimide gas separation membranes. *Journal of Membrane Science*, 294(1-2), pp.40-49.

Zhang, L., Xiao, Y., Chung, T.S. and Jiang, J., 2010. Mechanistic understanding of CO2-induced plasticization of a polyimide membrane: A combination of experiment and simulation study. *Polymer*, 51(19), pp.4439-4447.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: EDS elemental compositions and spectra of as-produced CNTs

Elemental composition tables and spectra of acetylene carbon source and argon only.

Table A1: Elemental composition table for A-800-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 85.34 | 89.98 |
| O | 11.87 | 9.39 |
| Fe | 2.79 | 0.63 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

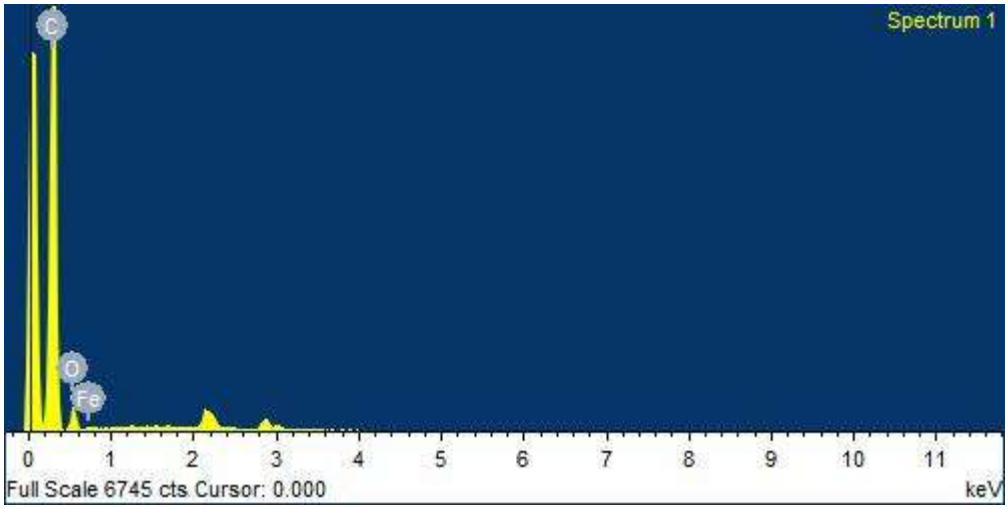



Figure A1: Elemental composition spectrum for A-800-Ar

Table A2: Elemental composition table for A-850-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 87.03 | 89.94 |
| O | 12.97 | 10.06 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

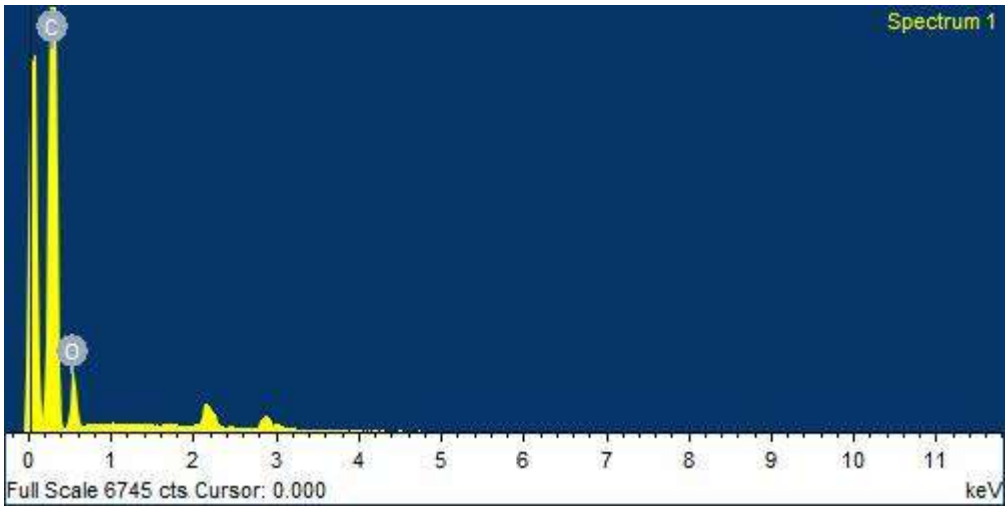



Figure A2: Elemental composition spectrum for A-850-Ar

Table A3: Elemental composition table for A-900-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 90.51 | 94.52 |
| O | 5.99 | 4.70 |
| Fe | 3.50 | 0.79 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

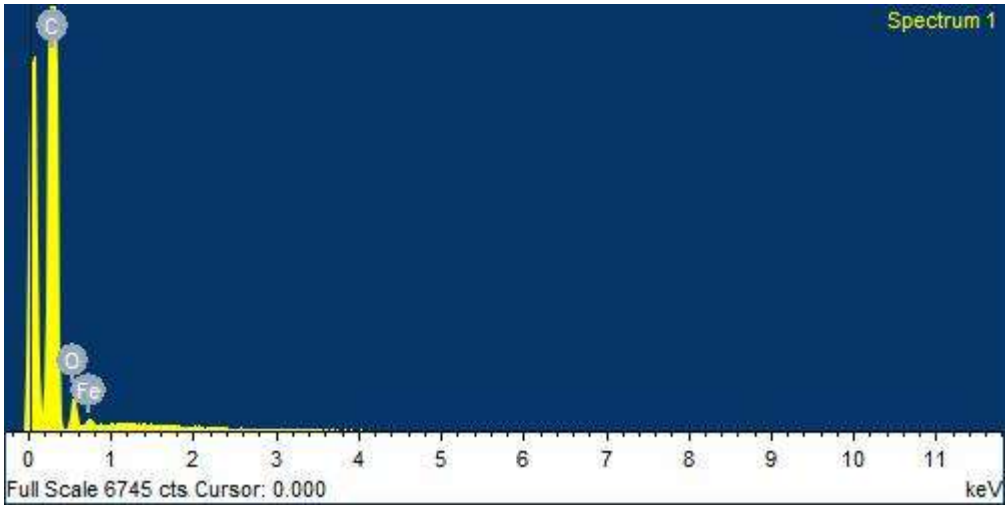



Figure A3: Elemental composition spectrum for A-900-Ar

Table A4: Elemental composition table for A-950-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 88.32 | 90.97 |
| O | 11.68 | 9.03 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

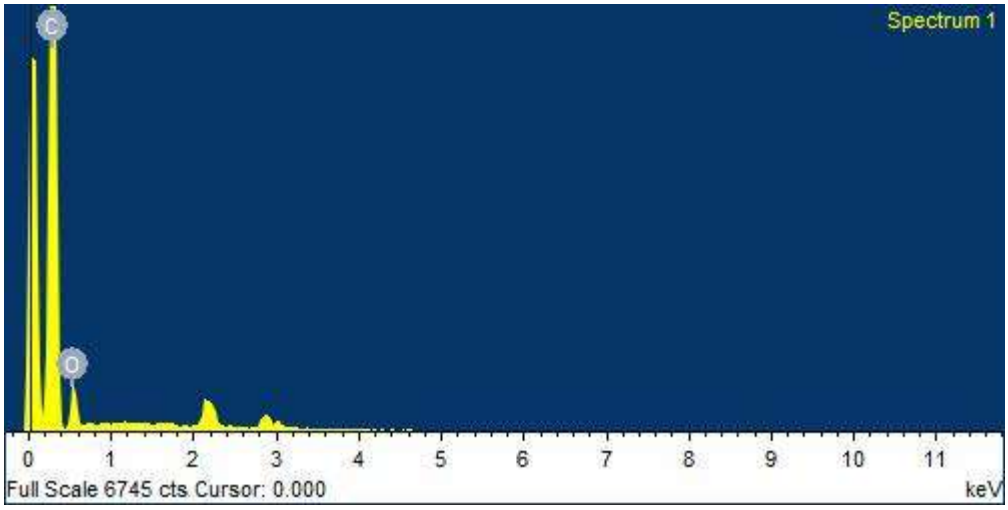



Figure A4: Elemental composition spectrum for A-950-Ar

Table A5: Elemental composition table for A-1000-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 92.56 | 95.66 |
| O | 4.85 | 3.76 |
| Fe | 2.59 | 0.58 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

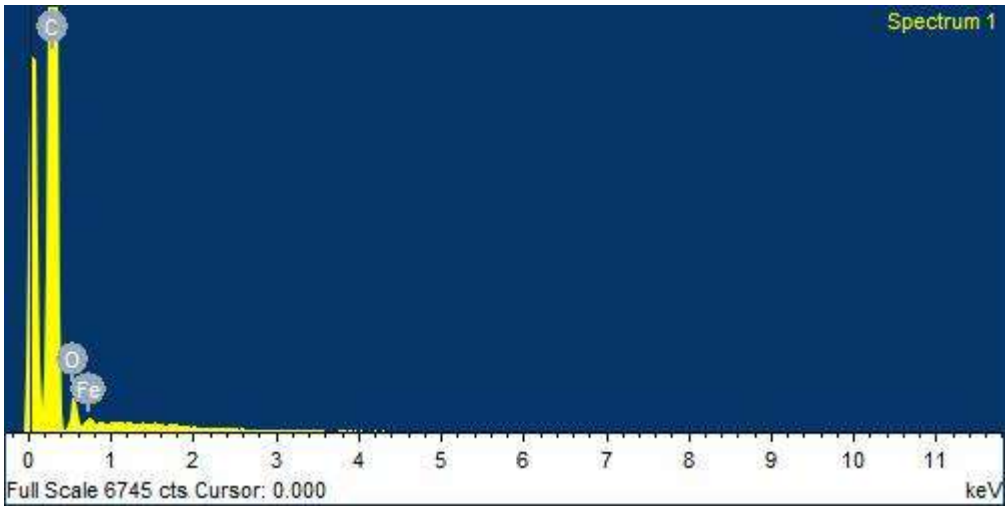



Figure A5: Elemental composition spectrum for A-1000-Ar

Compositional tables and spectra of acetylene carbon source and argon/hydrogen.

Table A6: Elemental composition table for A-800-Ar/H

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 95.96 | 99.10 |
| Fe | 4.04 | 0.90 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

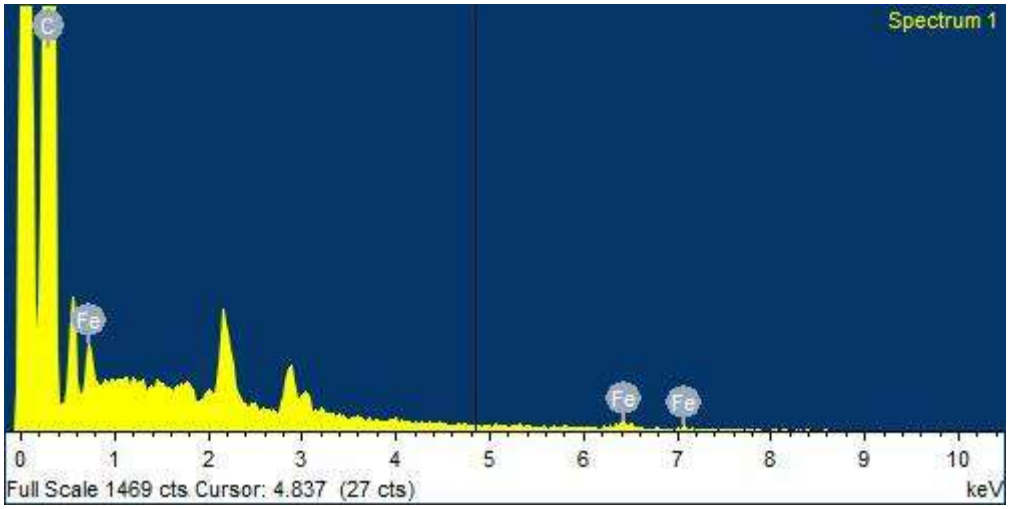



Figure A6: Elemental composition spectrum for A-800-Ar/H

Table A7: Elemental composition table for A-850-Ar/H

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 94.76 | 97.30 |
| O | 2.80 | 2.16 |
| Fe | 2.44 | 0.54 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

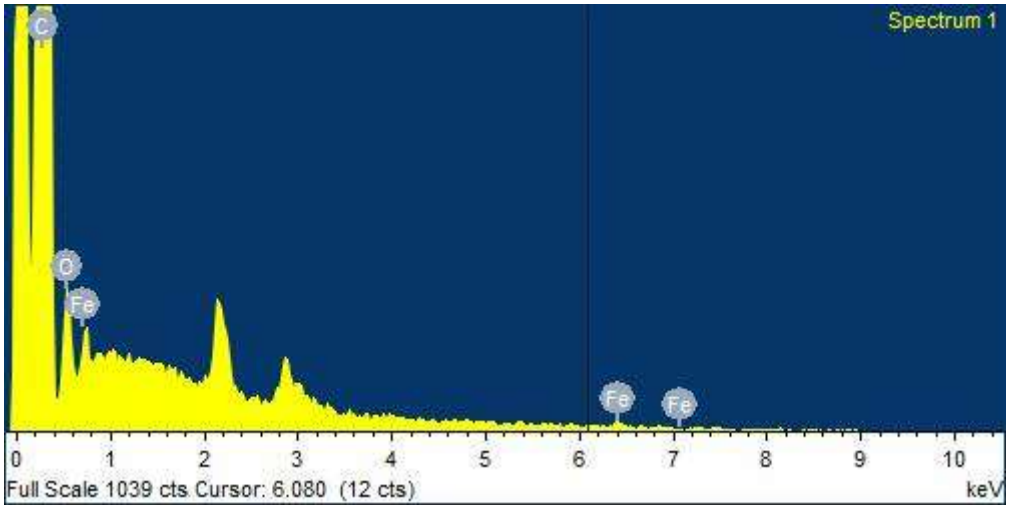



Figure A7: Elemental composition spectrum for A-850-Ar/H

Table A8: Elemental composition table for A-900-Ar/H

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 89.08 | 94.37 |
| O | 5.55 | 4.41 |
| Fe | 5.37 | 1.22 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

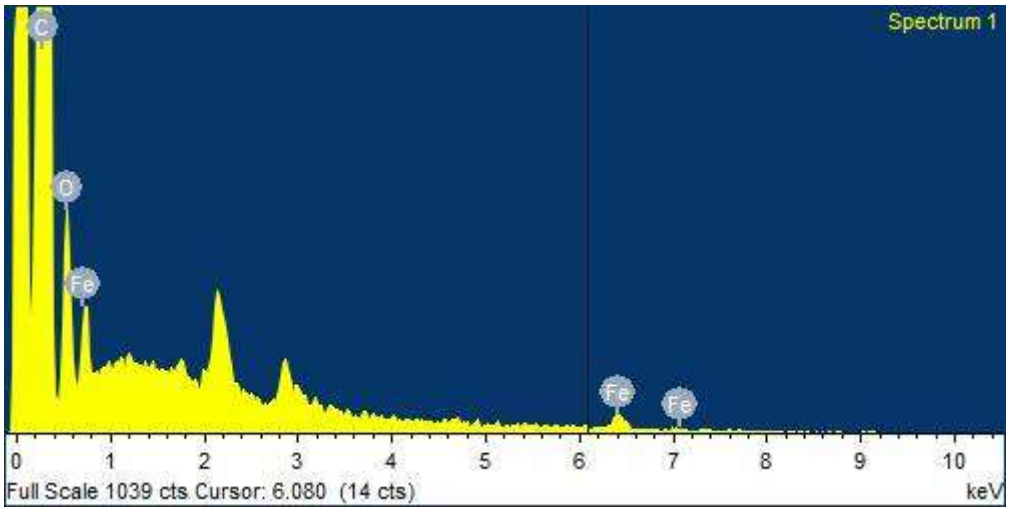



Figure A8: Elemental composition spectrum for A-900-Ar/H

Table A9: Elemental composition table for A-950-Ar/H

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 98.45 | 99.52 |
| Si | 0.67 | 0.29 |
| Fe | 0.88 | 0.19 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

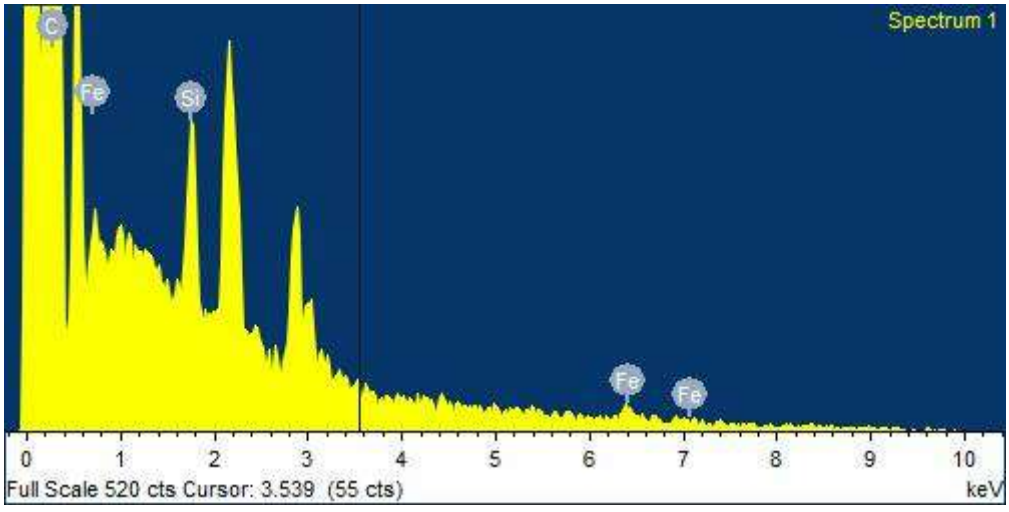



Figure A9: Elemental composition spectrum for A-950-Ar/H

Table A10: Elemental composition table for A-1000-Ar/H

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 98.94 | 99.77 |
| Fe | 1.06 | 0.23 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

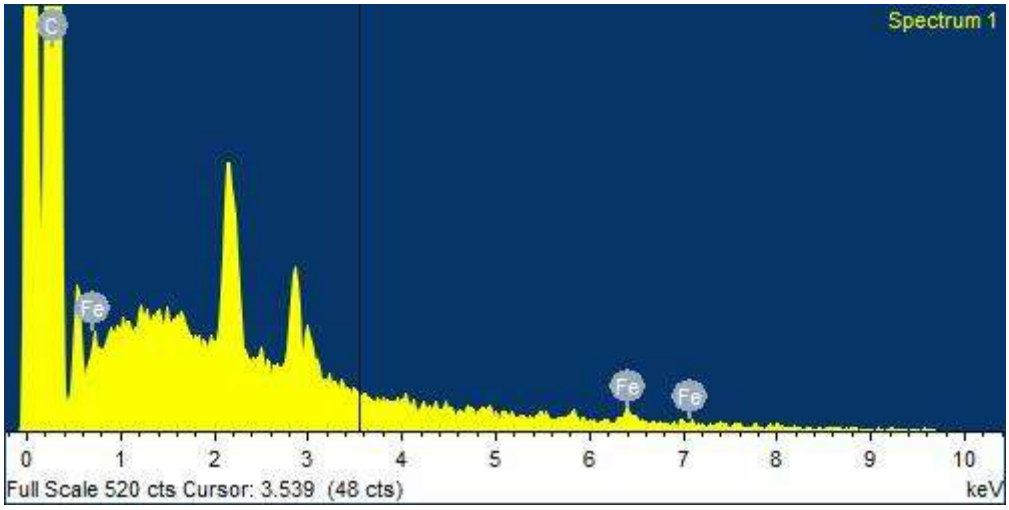



Figure A10: Elemental composition spectrum for A-1000-Ar/H

Compositional tables and spectra of methane carbon source and argon only.

Table A11: Elemental composition table for M-800-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 79.39 | 94.72 |
| Fe | 20.43 | 5.24 |
| Cu | 0.18 | 0.04 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

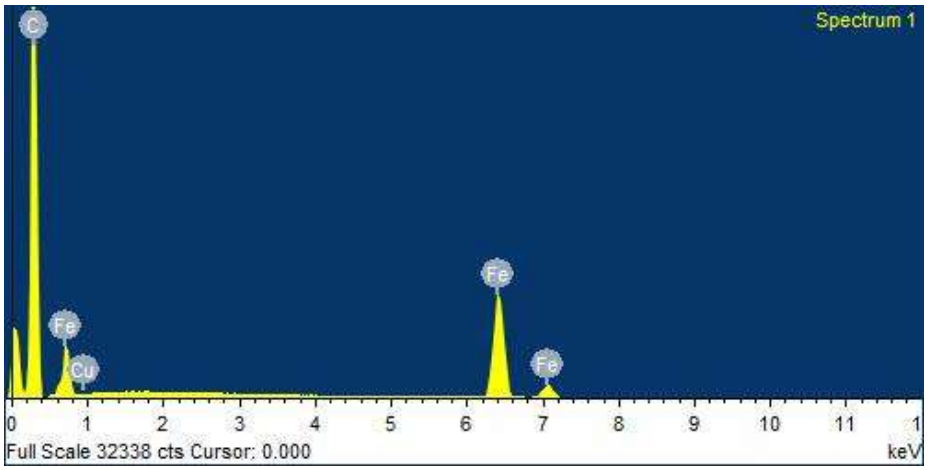



Figure A11: Elemental composition spectrum for M-800-Ar

Table A12: Elemental composition table for M-900-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 78.43 | 90.31 |
| O | 7.02 | 6.07 |
| Si | 0.09 | 0.05 |
| Fe | 14.46 | 3.58 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

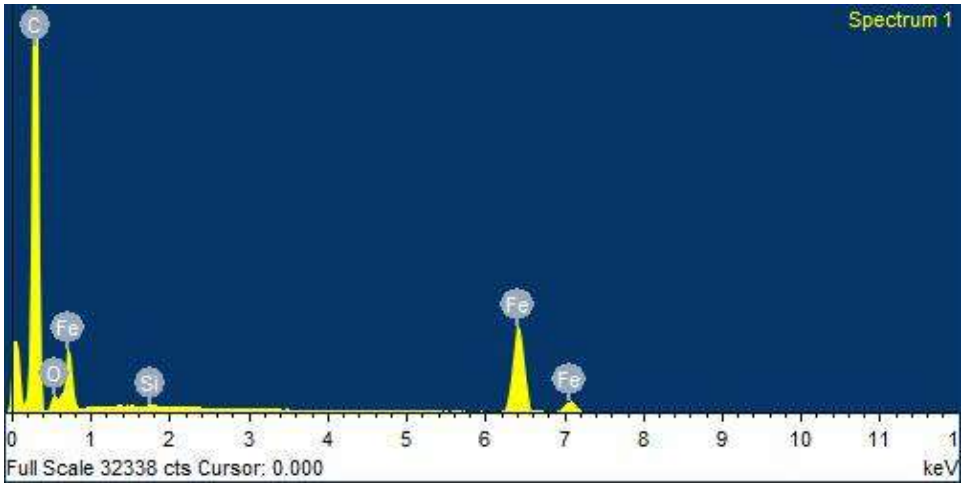



Figure A12: Elemental composition spectrum for M-900-Ar

Table A13: Elemental composition table for M-1000-Ar

| Element | Weight% | Atomic% |
|---|---|---|
| C | 70.74 | 91.83 |
| Fe | 29.26 | 8.17 |
| Totals | 100.00 | |

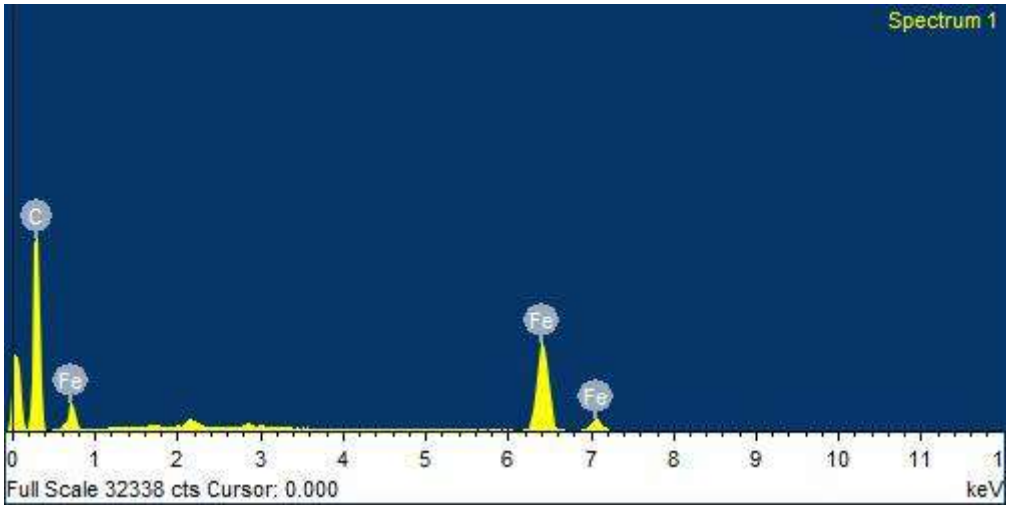



Figure A13: Elemental composition spectrum for M-1000-Ar

**Appendix B: BET surface area calculations**

BET equation is given as equation (B1):

$$\frac{1}{Q\left[\frac{P_O}{P}-1\right]} = \frac{C-1}{Q_m C}\left[\frac{P}{P_O}\right] + \frac{1}{Q_m C} \qquad \text{(B1)}$$

Where

Q = Volume of gas adsorbed at STP.

$Q_m$ = Volume of gas adsorbed at STP to produce apparent monolayer on the sample surface.

$P/P_o$ = Relative pressure

C = BET constant (its related to the enthalpy of adsorption of the adsorbate on the sample)

Equation (B1) can be writing in the form of straight line equation

$$y = mx + c$$

if

$$y = \frac{1}{Q\left[\frac{P_O}{P}-1\right]} \quad \text{and} \quad x = \left[\frac{P}{P_O}\right]$$

Then

Gradient of the linear graph (m) = $\frac{C-1}{Q_m C}$

The intercept (c) = $\frac{1}{Q_m C}$

Plotting $\frac{1}{Q\left[\frac{P_O}{P}-1\right]}$ against $\left[\frac{P}{P_O}\right]$ within the monolayer adsorption region i.e at relative pressure between 0 – 0.3, will yield a linear graph as shown in Figures B1-B3.

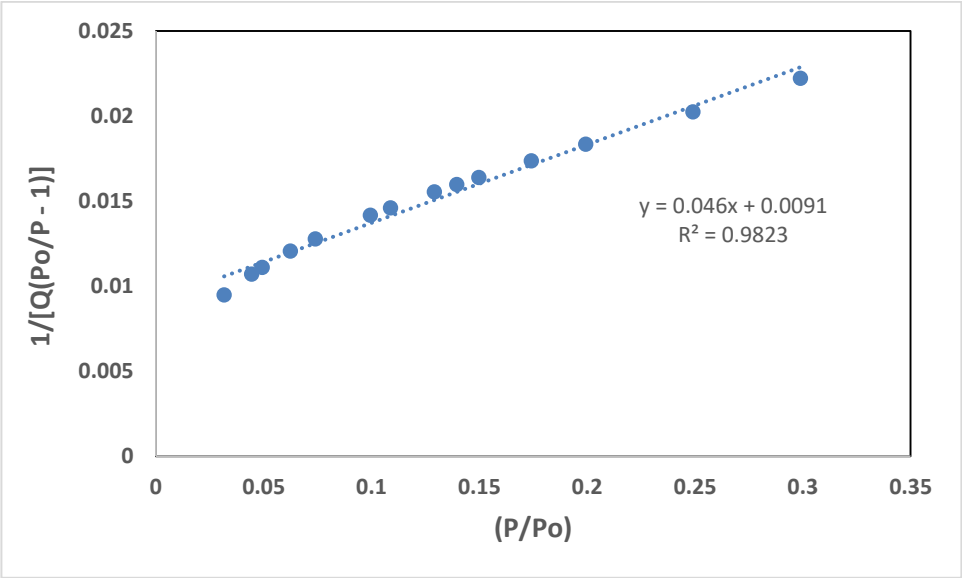



Figure B1: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for raw CNT

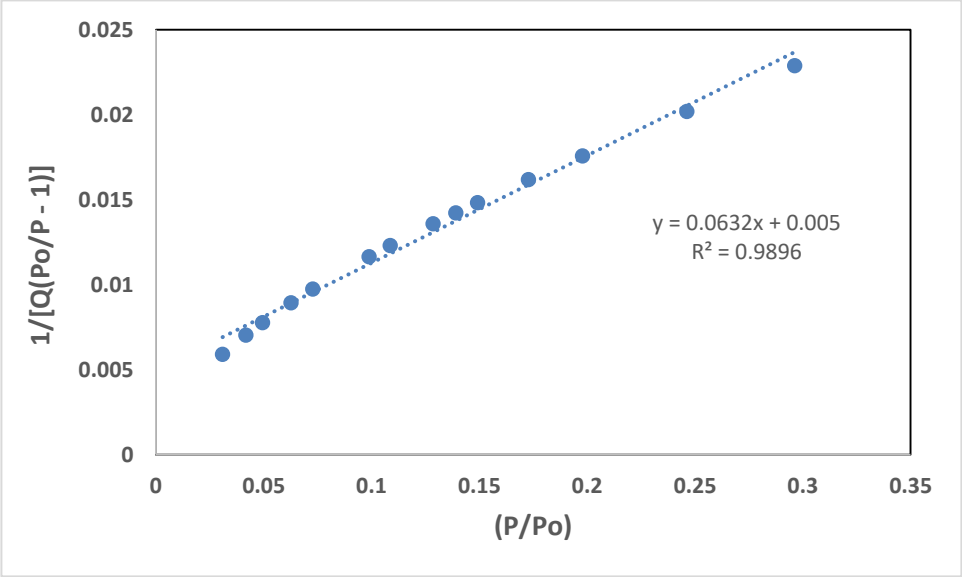



Figure B2: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for purified CNT

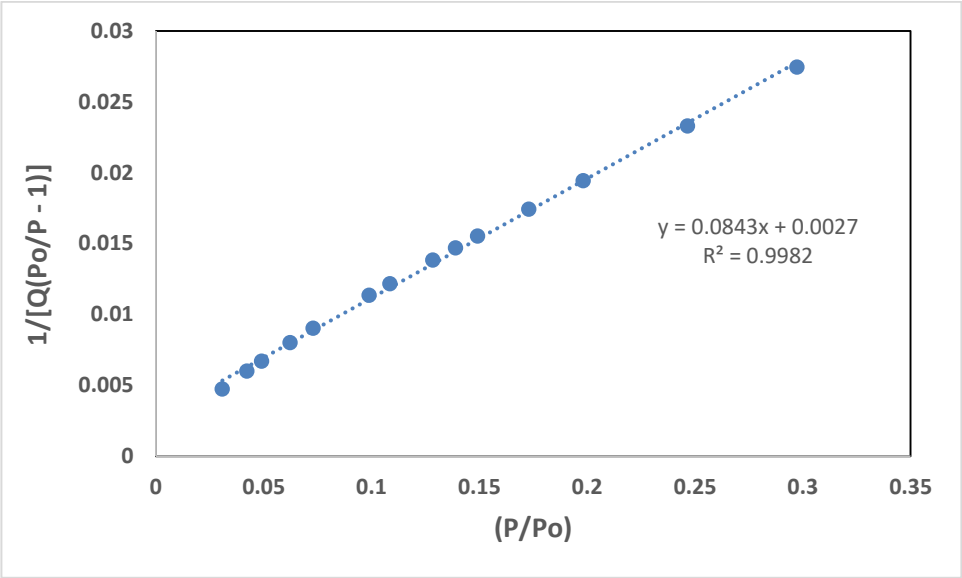



Figure B3: Graph of BET analysis within the monolayer adsorption region for Functionalized CNT

$$Q_m = \frac{1}{m + c}$$

$$S = \frac{Q_m A_{cs} N}{w \times 22400}$$

Where

m = gradient of the graph

c = y-intercept of the graph

w = mass of tested sample

N = Avogadro constant

$A_{cs}$ = effective cross-sectional area of one adsorbate molecule

## Appendix C: Sample of measurement of membrane thickness using SEM

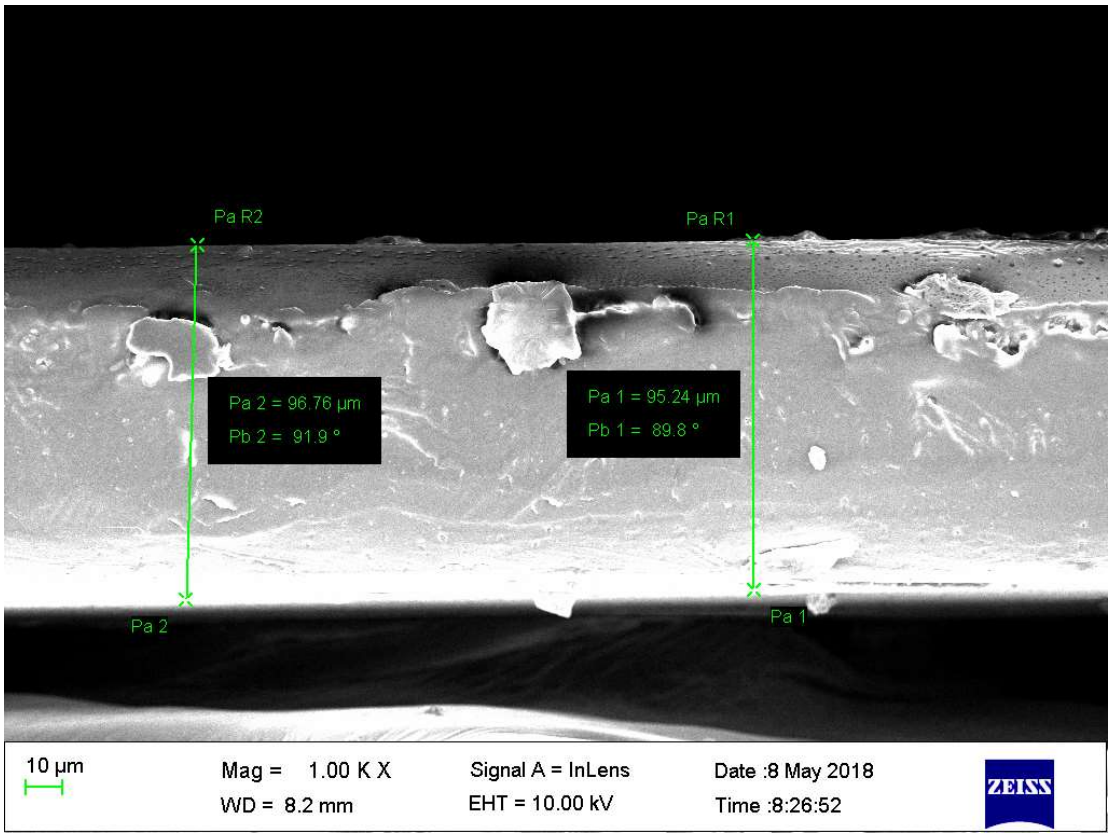



Figure C1: SEM micrograph of Pure PSF thickness measurement

## Appendix D: DSC thermogram analysis

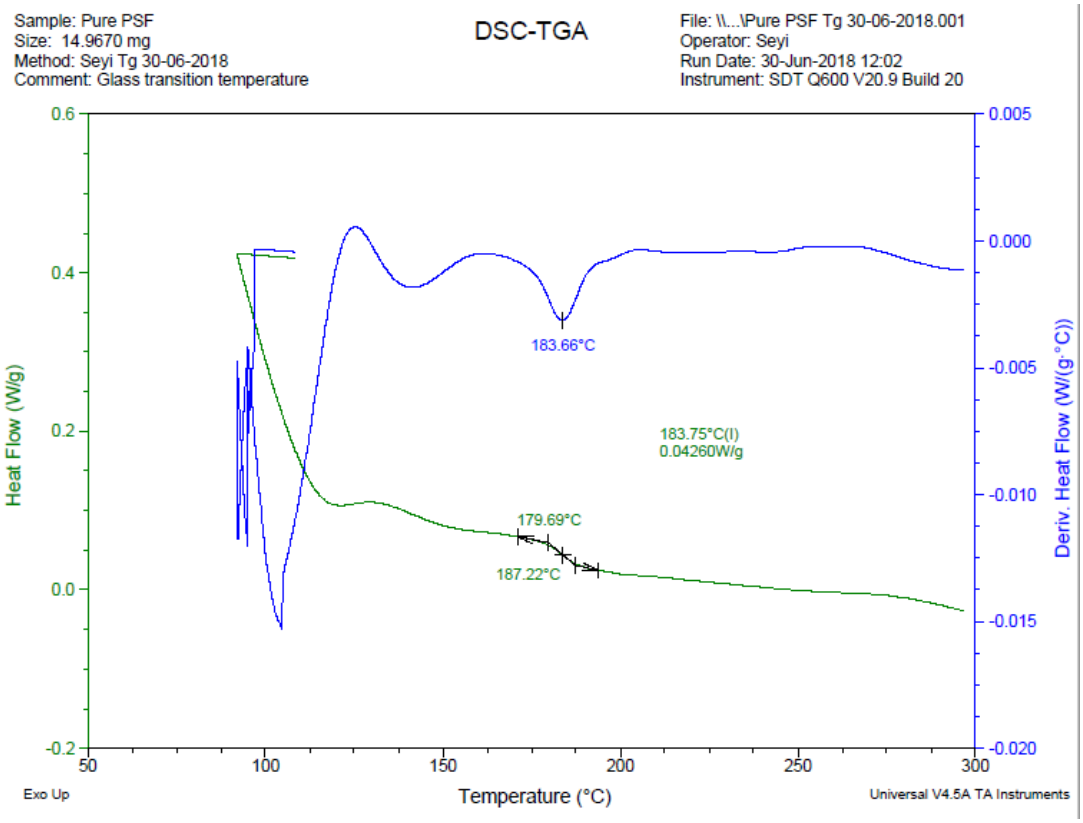



Figure D1: Pure PSF DSC thermogram

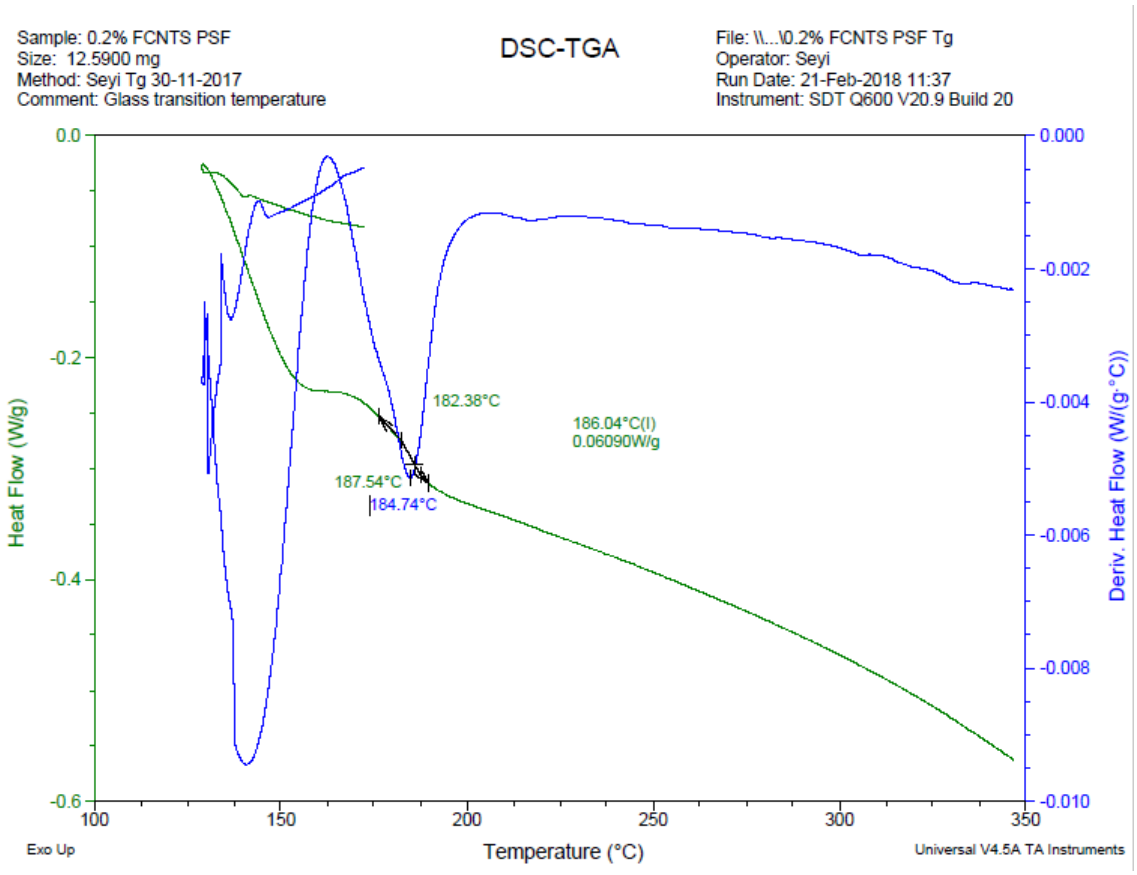



Figure D2: 0.2 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram

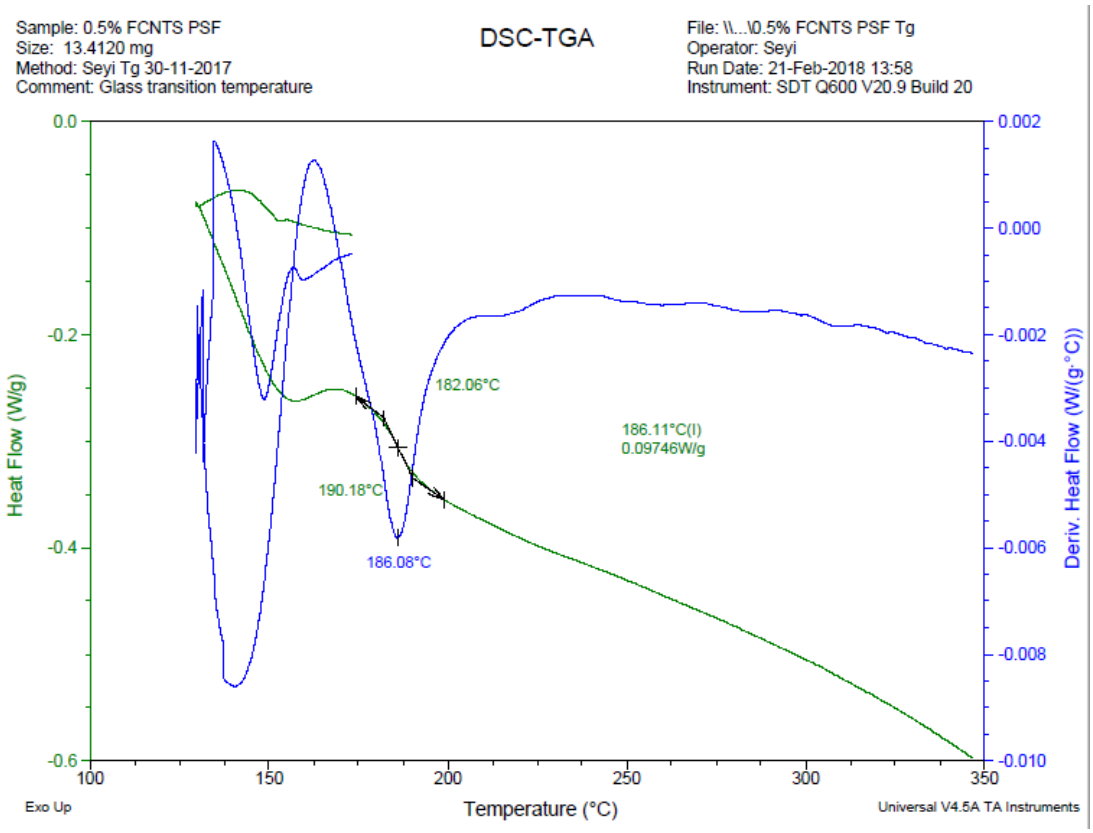


Figure D3: 0.5 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram

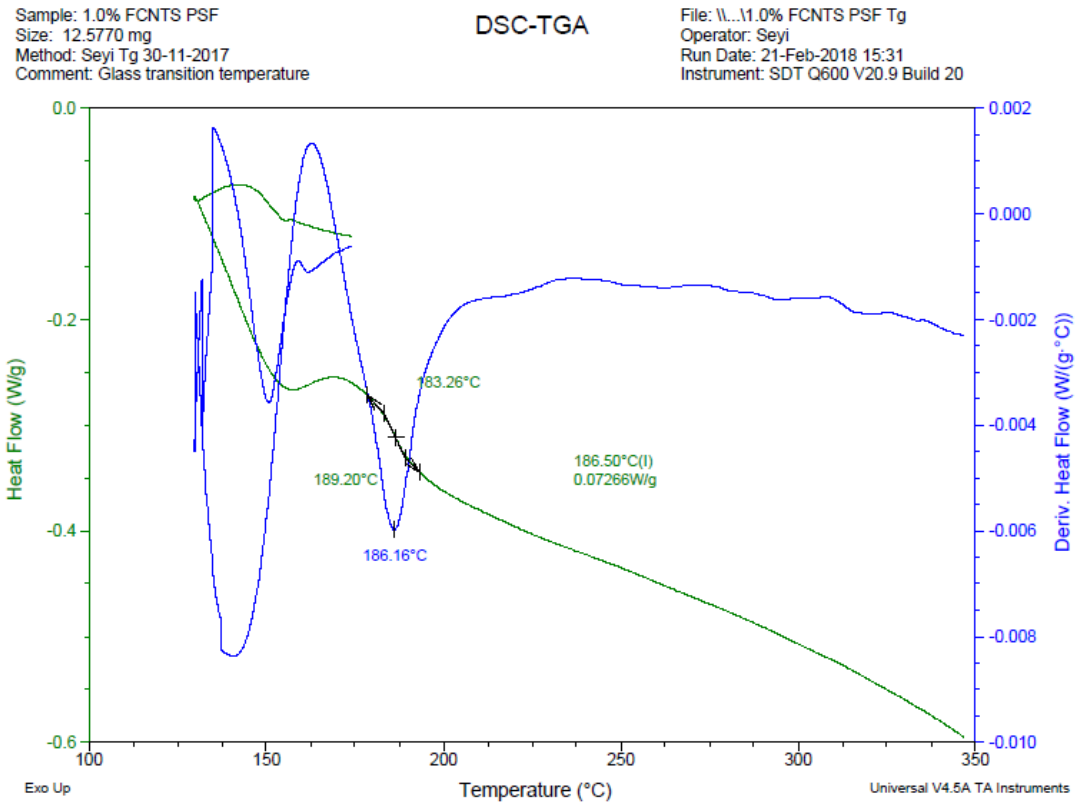



Figure D4: 1.0 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram

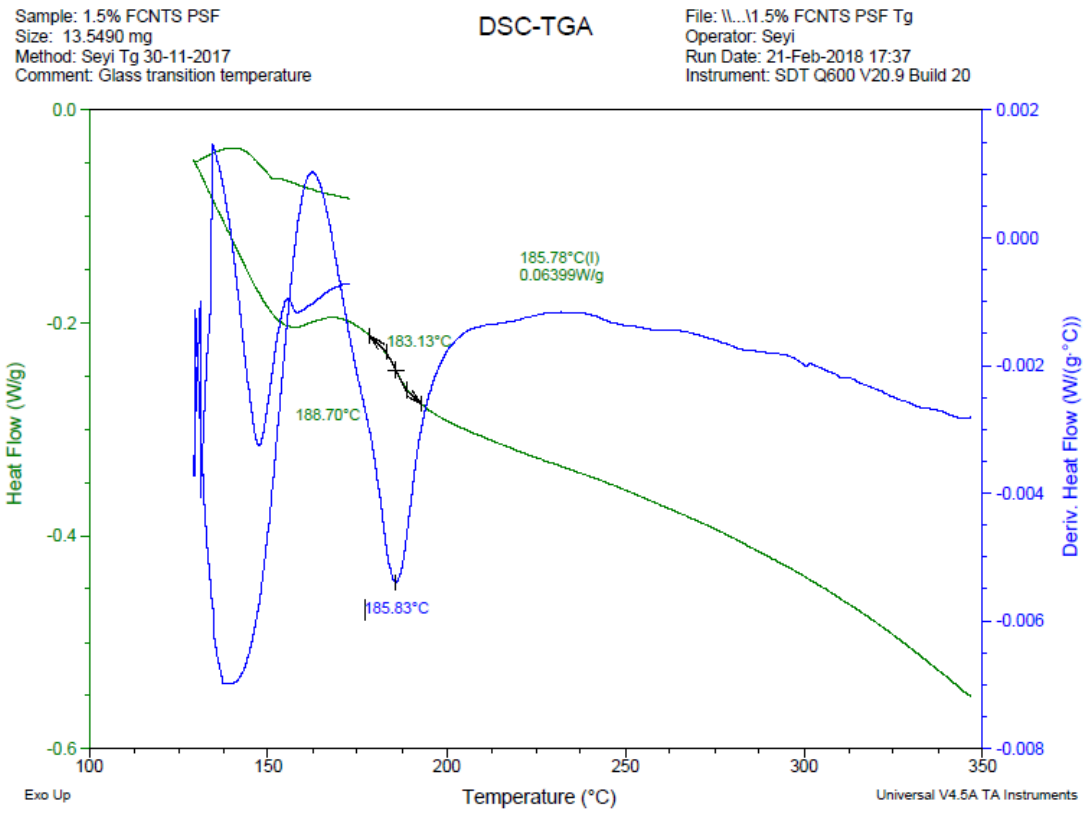



Figure D5: 1.5 FCNT PSF DSC thermogram

## Appendix E: AFM depth-at-max analysis

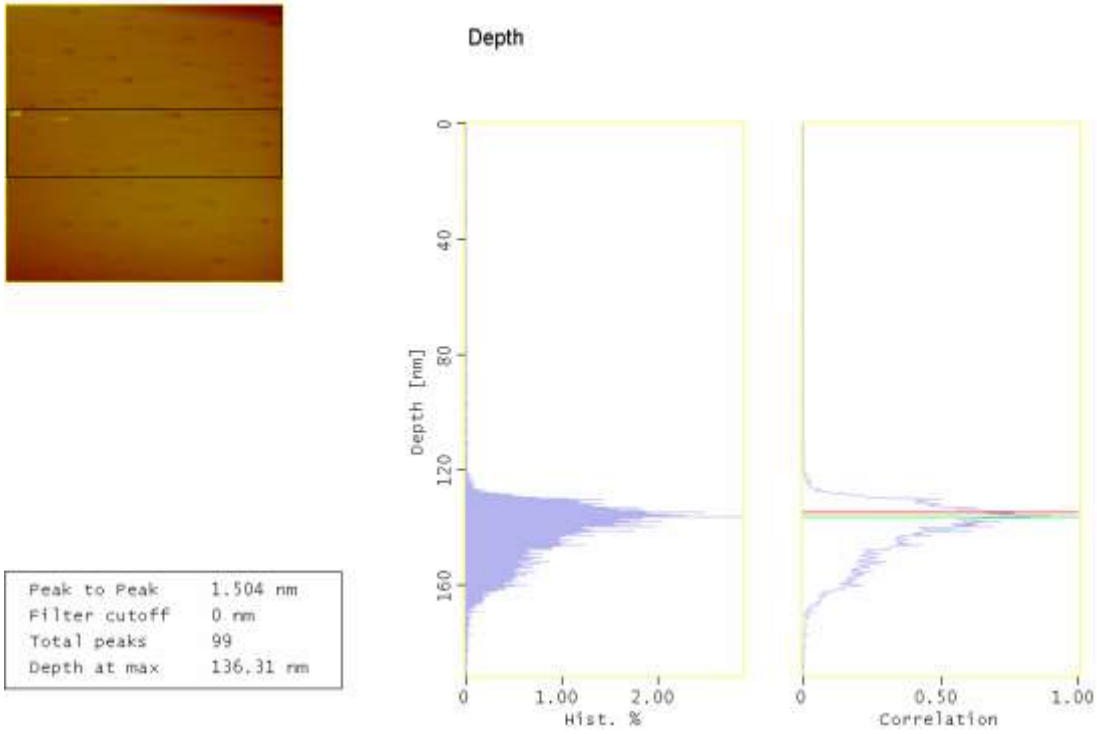



Figure E1: Pure PSF depth at max spectrum

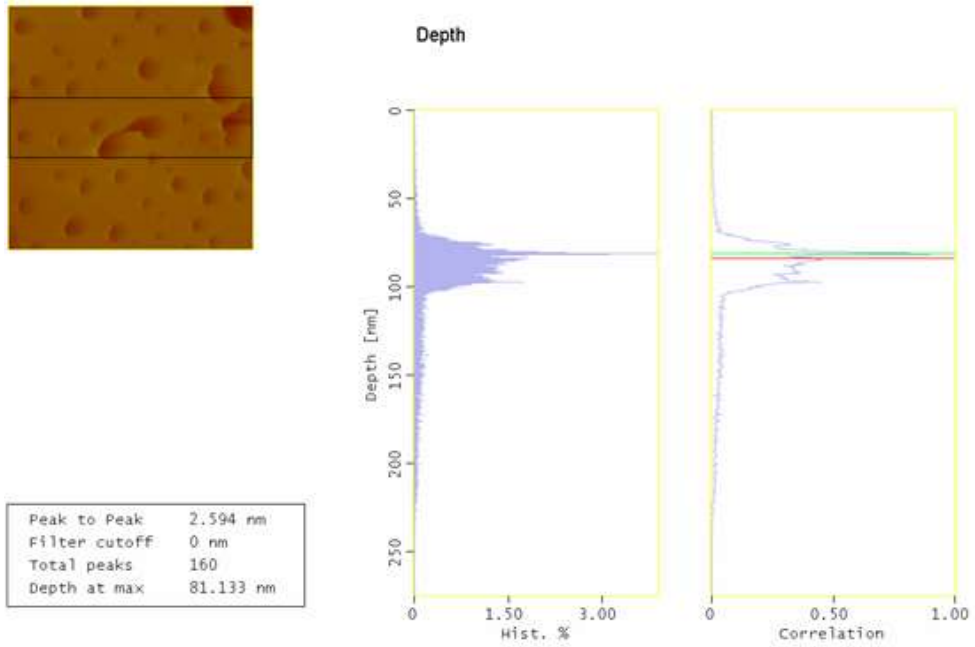



Figure E2: 0.2 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum

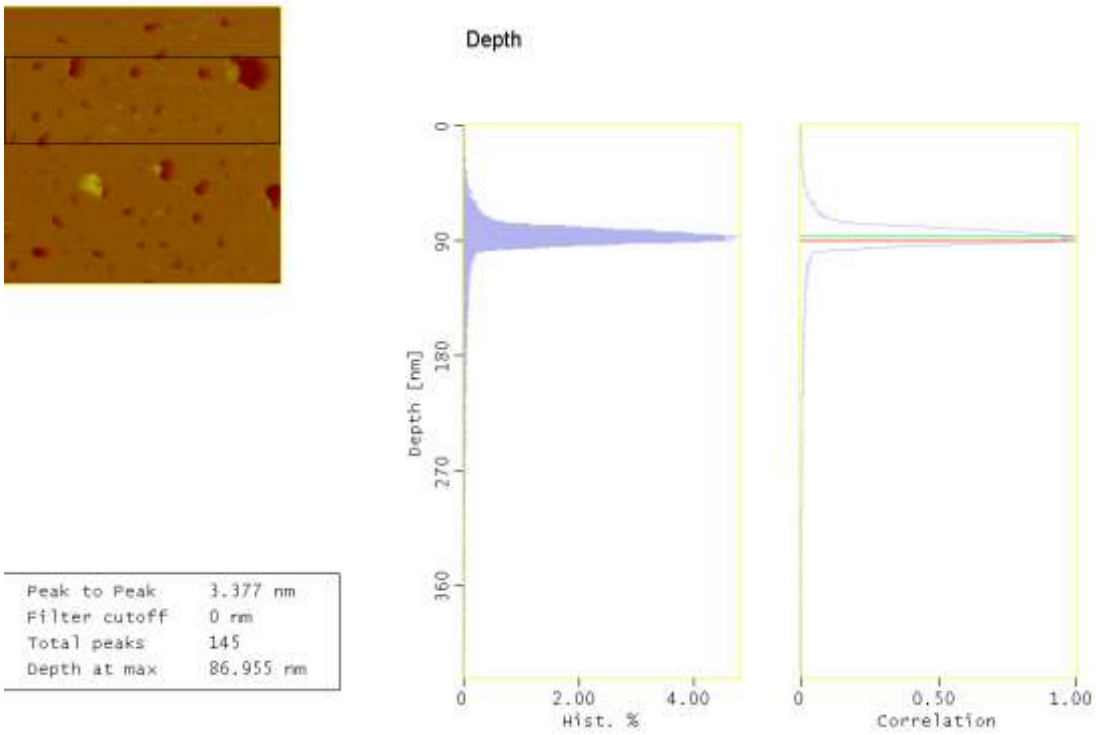



Figure E3: 0.5 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum

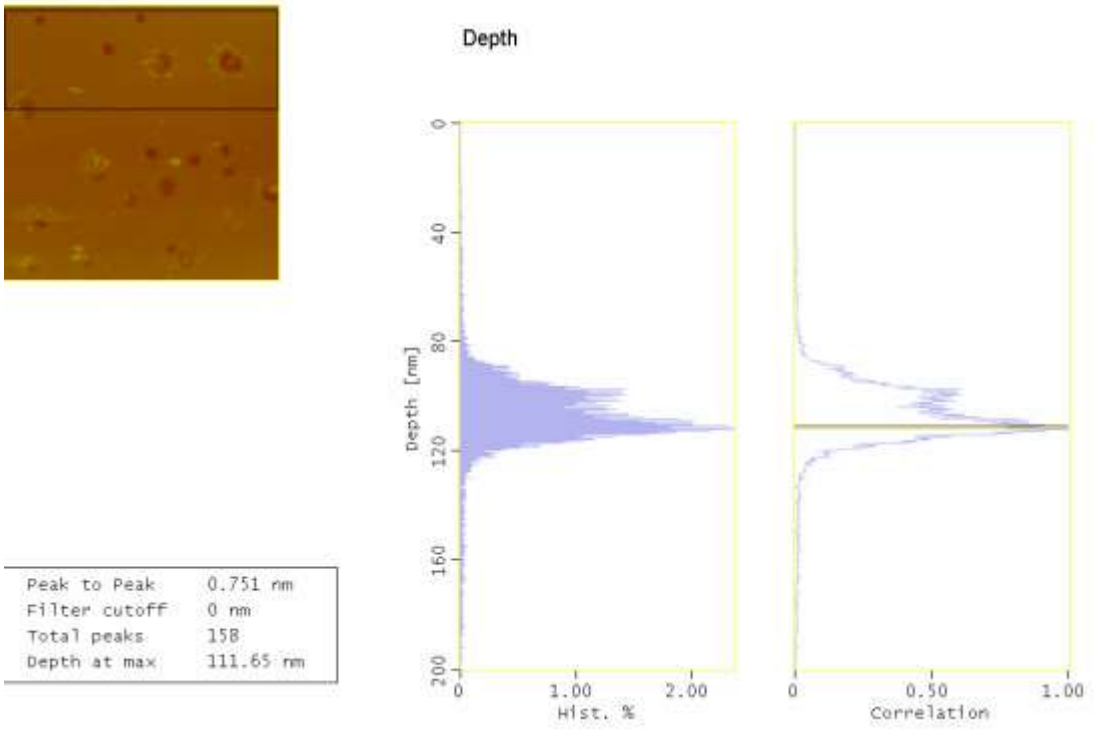



Figure E4: 1.0 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum

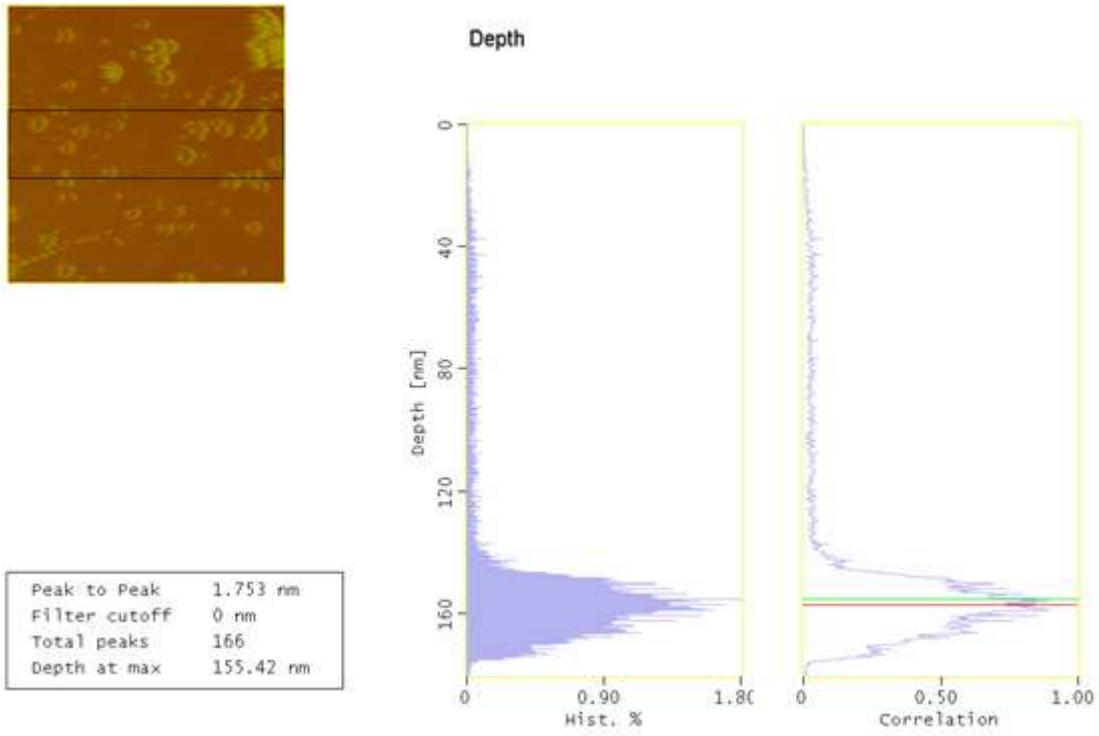



Figure E5: 1.5 FCNT PSF depth at max spectrum

## Appendix F: Tables of $CO_2/CH_4$ permeability and selectivity values for pure and mixed gases

Table F1: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of pure PSF

| Pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Ideal α |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6.60 | 0.17 | 39 |
| 4 | 6.45 | 0.17 | 38 |
| 6 | 6.42 | 0.16 | 40 |
| 8 | 6.32 | 0.16 | 40 |
| 10 | 6.04 | 0.15 | 40 |

Table F2: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.2% FCNT PSF

| Pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Ideal α |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6.91 | 0.21 | 33 |
| 4 | 6.74 | 0.20 | 34 |
| 6 | 6.63 | 0.21 | 32 |
| 8 | 6.48 | 0.21 | 31 |
| 10 | 6.46 | 0.21 | 31 |

Table F3: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.5% FCNT PSF

| Pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Ideal α |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.10 | 0.25 | 28 |
| 4 | 6.84 | 0.24 | 29 |
| 6 | 6.73 | 0.25 | 27 |
| 8 | 6.58 | 0.26 | 25 |
| 10 | 6.56 | 0.25 | 26 |

Table F4: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% FCNT PSF

| Pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Ideal α |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.79 | 0.28 | 28 |
| 4 | 7.44 | 0.27 | 28 |
| 6 | 7.32 | 0.27 | 27 |
| 8 | 7.01 | 0.28 | 25 |
| 10 | 6.78 | 0.27 | 25 |

Table F5: Pure gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.5% FCNT PSF

| Pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Ideal α |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.56 | 0.26 | 29 |
| 4 | 6.86 | 0.25 | 27 |
| 6 | 6.30 | 0.25 | 25 |
| 8 | 5.91 | 0.25 | 24 |
| 10 | 5.89 | 0.26 | 23 |

Table F6: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of pure PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.2 | 1.8 | 2 | 6.98 | 0.15 | 47 |
| 0.4 | 3.6 | 4 | 6.37 | 0.14 | 46 |
| 0.6 | 5.4 | 6 | 6.30 | 0.14 | 45 |
| 0.8 | 7.2 | 8 | 6.07 | 0.15 | 40 |
| 1 | 9 | 10 | 5.52 | 0.14 | 39 |

Table F7: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 0.2% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.2 | 1.8 | 2 | 7.96 | 0.18 | 44 |
| 0.4 | 3.6 | 4 | 7.05 | 0.19 | 38 |
| 0.6 | 5.4 | 6 | 6.91 | 0.19 | 36 |
| 0.8 | 7.2 | 8 | 6.70 | 0.19 | 34 |
| 1 | 9 | 10 | 6.65 | 0.19 | 35 |

Table F8: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 0.5% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.2 | 1.8 | 2 | 8.17 | 0.21 | 39 |
| 0.4 | 3.6 | 4 | 7.56 | 0.21 | 38 |
| 0.6 | 5.4 | 6 | 7.34 | 0.23 | 32 |
| 0.8 | 7.2 | 8 | 7.25 | 0.21 | 35 |
| 1 | 9 | 10 | 7.15 | 0.21 | 35 |

Table F9: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 1.0% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.2 | 1.8 | 2 | 8.30 | 0.21 | 40 |
| 0.4 | 3.6 | 4 | 8.15 | 0.22 | 37 |
| 0.6 | 5.4 | 6 | 7.83 | 0.21 | 36 |
| 0.8 | 7.2 | 8 | 7.31 | 0.21 | 34 |
| 1 | 9 | 10 | 7.18 | 0.22 | 33 |

Table F10: $CO_2/CH_4$ (10%/90%) mixed gas permeability and separation factor of 1.5% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.2 | 1.8 | 2 | 9.85 | 0.21 | 47 |
| 0.4 | 3.6 | 4 | 8.46 | 0.22 | 38 |
| 0.6 | 5.4 | 6 | 8.10 | 0.23 | 36 |
| 0.8 | 7.2 | 8 | 7.86 | 0.23 | 34 |
| 1 | 9 | 10 | 7.41 | 0.22 | 34 |

Table F11: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of pure PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 6.12 | 0.16 | 38 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 5.90 | 0.16 | 37 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 5.44 | 0.15 | 36 |

Table F12: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.2% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 6.71 | 0.18 | 37 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 6.65 | 0.17 | 39 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 6.5 | 0.18 | 36 |

Table F13: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 0.5% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 7.26 | 0.21 | 35 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 7.01 | 0.21 | 33 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 6.72 | 0.2 | 33 |

Table F14: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 7.64 | 0.23 | 33 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 7.21 | 0.23 | 31 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 6.9 | 0.22 | 31 |

Table F15: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.5% FCNT PSF

| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 8.67 | 0.24 | 36 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 7.23 | 0.22 | 33 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 6.7 | 0.23 | 29 |

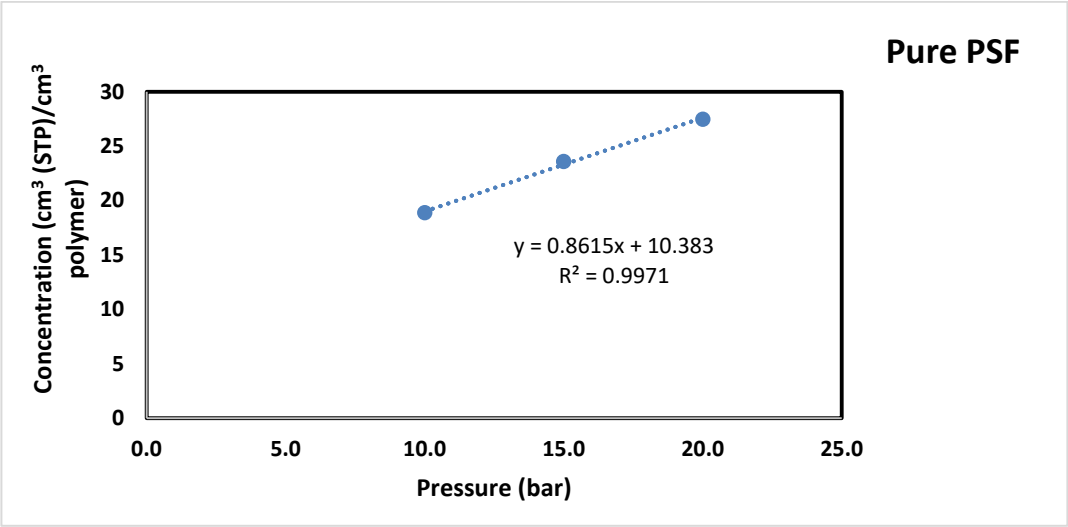
Table F16: $CO_2/CH_4$ (50%/50%) mixed gas permeability and selectivity values of 1.0% PCNT PSF

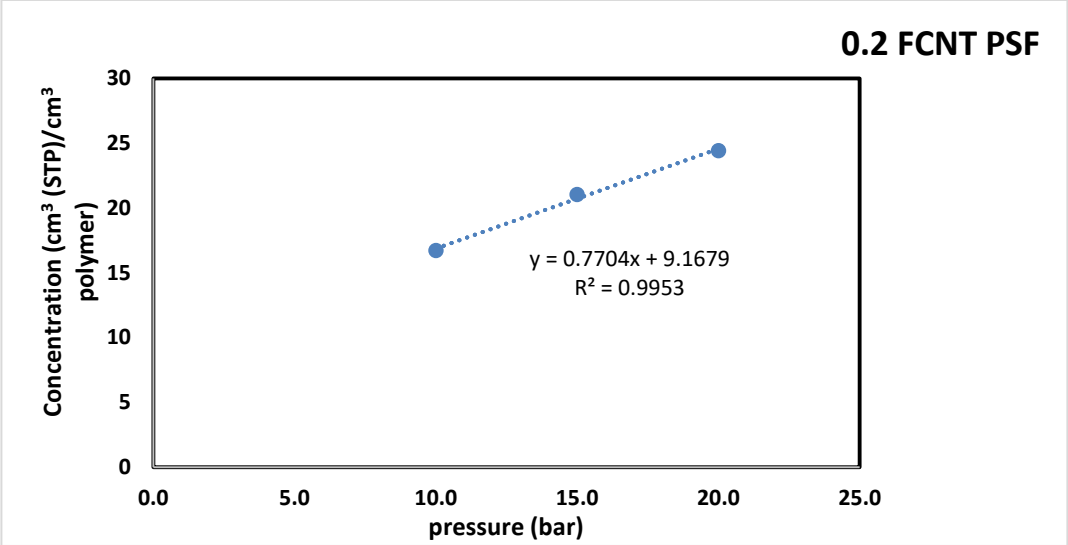
| $CO_2$ partial pressure (bar) | $CH_4$ partial pressure (bar) | Feed pressure (bar) | P (CO2) | P (CH4) | Separation factor (α) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.0 | 1.0 | 2 | 6.42 | 0.23 | 28 |
| 2.0 | 2.0 | 4 | 5.53 | 0.23 | 24 |
| 3.0 | 3.0 | 6 | 4.6 | 0.22 | 21 |

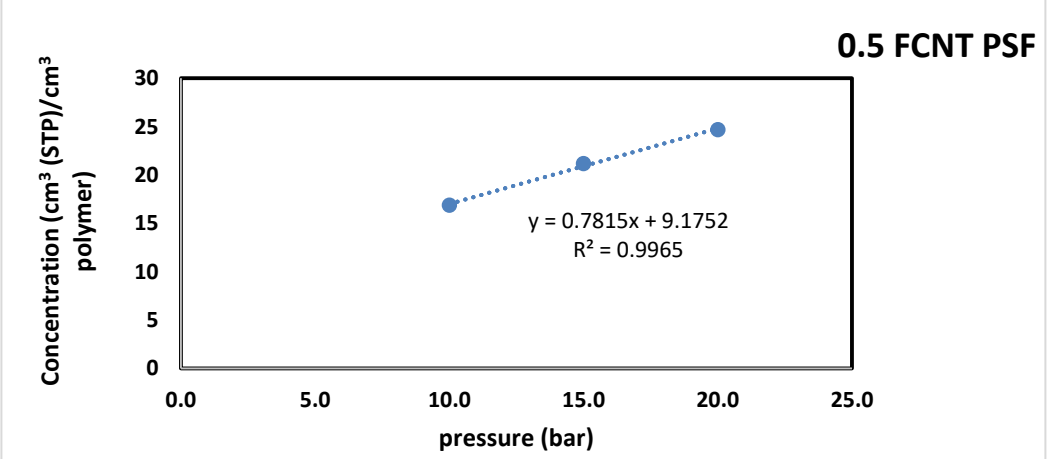
## Appendix G: Dual-mode sorption model parameters analysis

Table G1: $CO_2$ concentration in the MMMs based on sorption experiment

| Pressure (bar) | Pure PSF Concentration ($cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer) | 0,2% FCNT PSF Concentration ($cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer) | 0,5% FCNT PSF Concentration ($cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer) | 1,0% FCNT PSF Concentration ($cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer) | 1,5% FCNT PSF Concentration ($cm^3$ (STP)/$cm^3$ polymer) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.1 | 0.65637446 | 0.502575922 | 0.439904008 | 0.397913826 | 0.73552674 |
| 0.5 | 2.537139741 | 2.07772241 | 2.065888971 | 2.057960567 | 2.43018035 |
| 1 | 4.316924335 | 3.597708126 | 3.606452631 | 3.612311449 | 4.054223393 |
| 2 | 7.201185185 | 6.018653118 | 6.10788137 | 6.167664298 | 6.402024748 |
| 3 | 9.233421495 | 7.961538085 | 8.004261002 | 8.032885356 | 8.22024685 |
| 5 | 12.63520836 | 11.05054131 | 11.1646277 | 11.24106558 | 10.9446379 |
| 7.5 | 16.13166462 | 14.08438377 | 14.2321271 | 14.33111513 | 13.73963951 |
| 10 | 18.86445444 | 16.71984288 | 16.85684835 | 16.94864201 | 16.27573571 |
| 15 | 23.57267894 | 21.02851206 | 21.16551242 | 21.25730266 | 20.63005401 |
| 20 | 27.47936923 | 24.42396403 | 24.67220538 | 24.83852709 | 24.74900376 |


Pure PSF
Concentration (cm³ (STP)/cm³ polymer)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
Pressure (bar)
y = 0.8615x + 10.383
R² = 0.9971


0.2 FCNT PSF
Concentration (cm³ (STP)/cm³ polymer)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
pressure (bar)
y = 0.7704x + 9.1679
R² = 0.9953


0.5 FCNT PSF
Concentration (cm³ (STP)/cm³ polymer)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
pressure (bar)
y = 0.7815x + 9.1752
R² = 0.9965

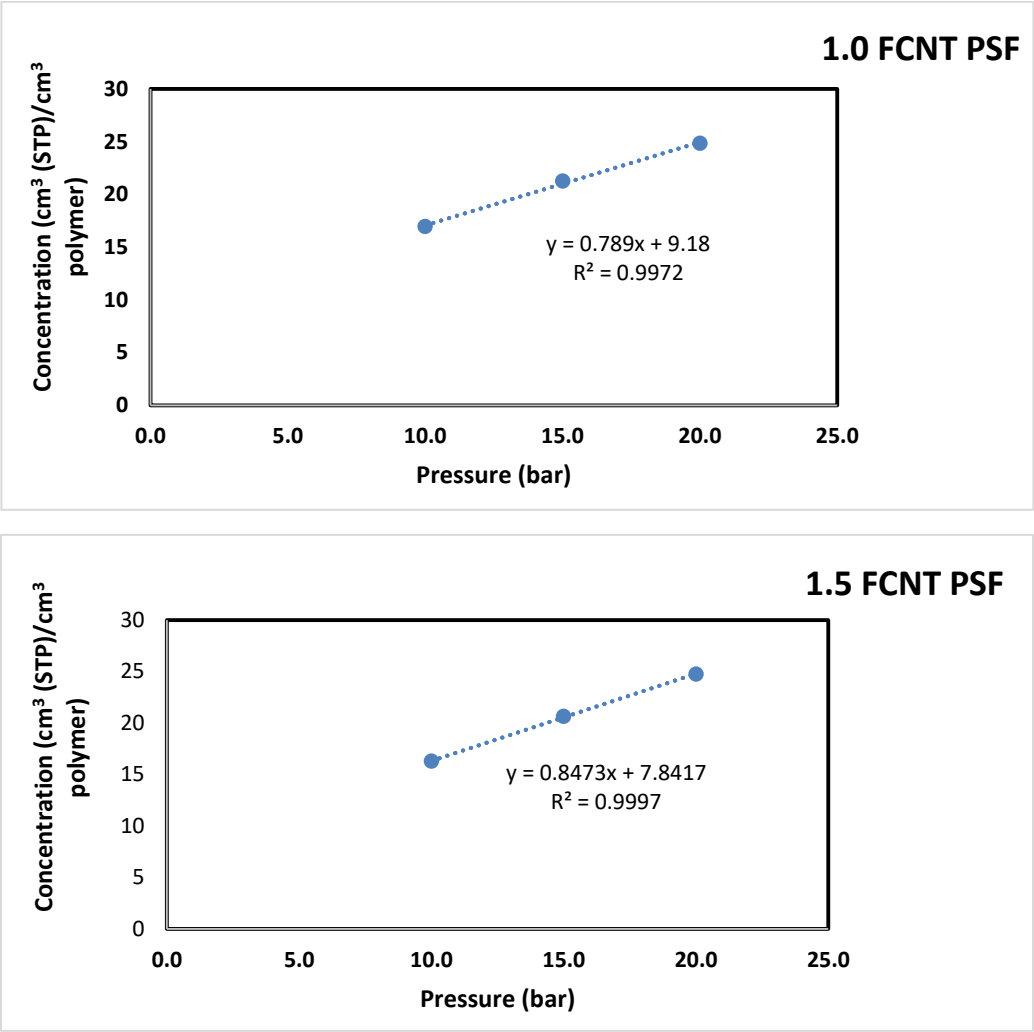
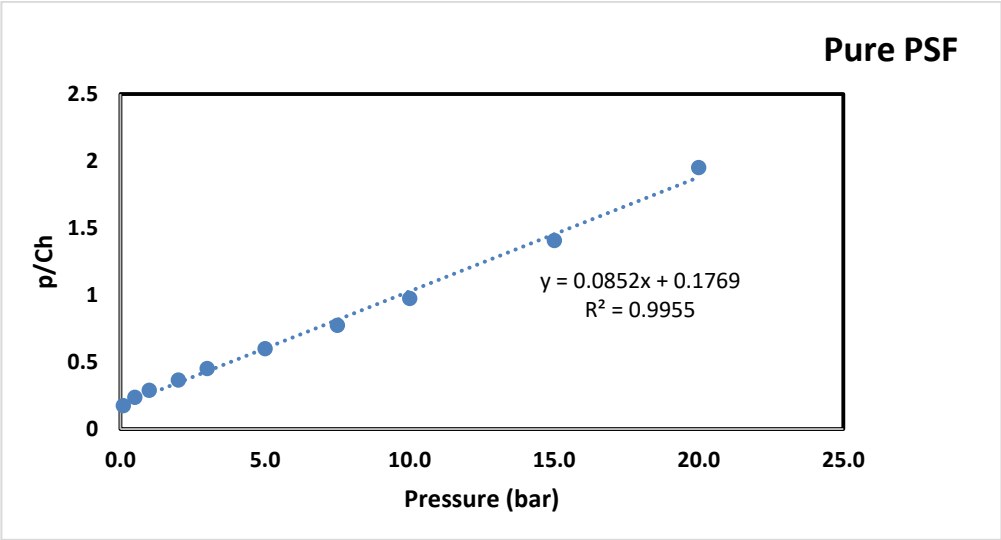
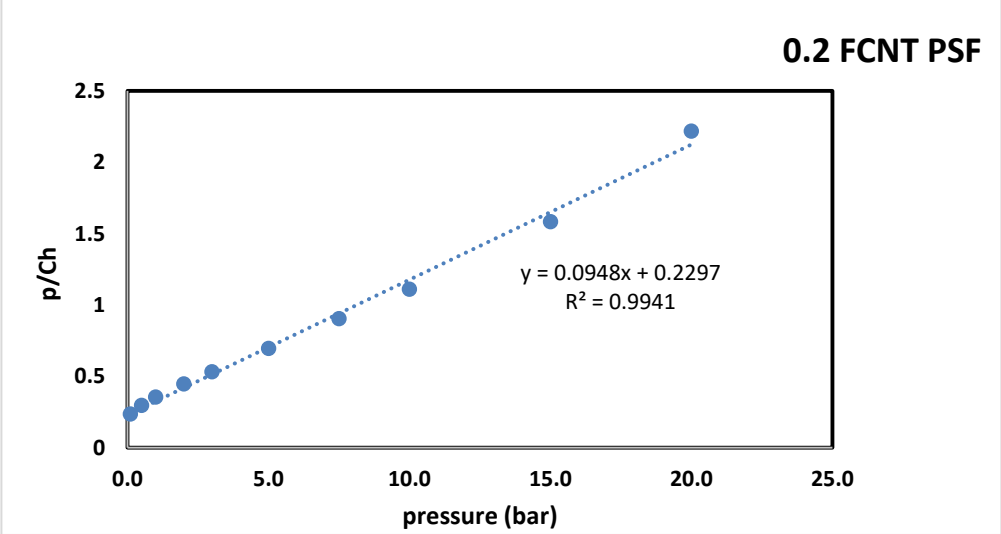
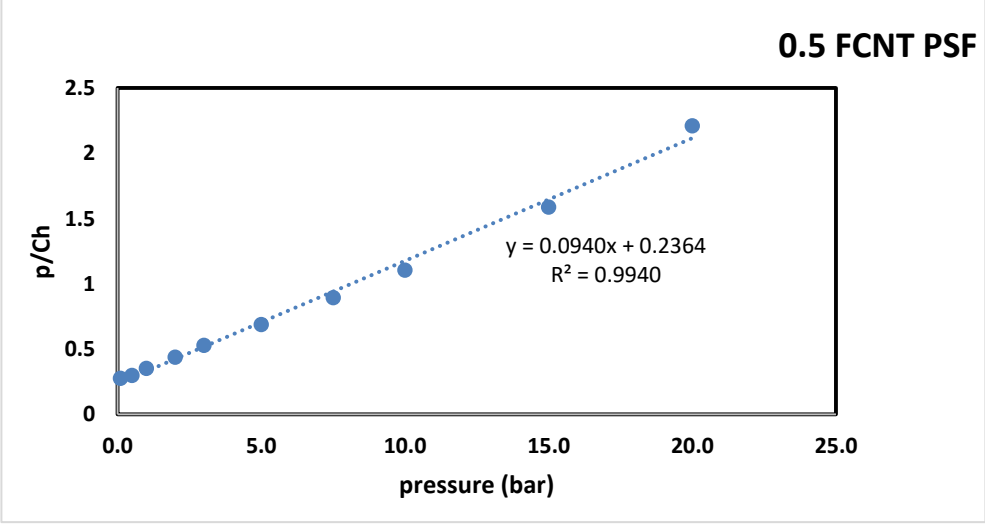



Figure G1: Linear asymptotes of the sorption data at elevated pressure for $k_d$ determination


Pure PSF
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
p/Ch
y = 0.0852x + 0.1769
R² = 0.9955
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
Pressure (bar)


0.2 FCNT PSF
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
p/Ch
y = 0.0948x + 0.2297
R² = 0.9941
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
pressure (bar)


0.5 FCNT PSF
2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
p/Ch
y = 0.0940x + 0.2364
R² = 0.9940
0.0
5.0
10.0
15.0
20.0
25.0
pressure (bar)

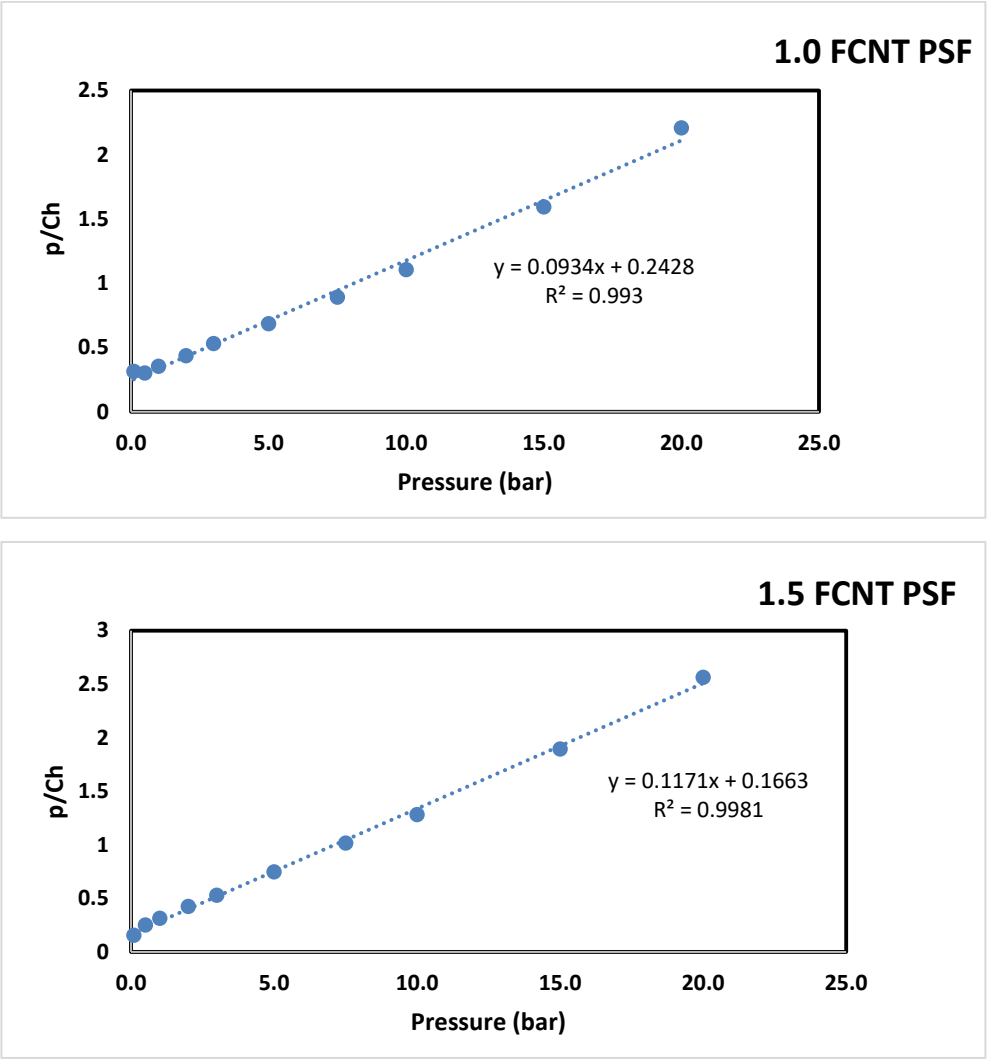



Figure G2: Plot of $p/C_h$ against p for the determination of $C_h'$ and $b$

## Appendix H: Tables of $CO_2$ solubility coefficient and permeability values at elevated pressure

Table H1: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of pure PSF

| Pressure (bar) | $CO_2$ Permeability (Barrer) | Solubility ($10^{-2}$ $cm^3$ (STP)/($cm^3$ cmHg)) |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6.60 | 4.99 |
| 4 | 6.45 | 3.73 |
| 6 | 6.42 | 3.09 |
| 8 | 6.32 | 2.70 |
| 10 | 6.04 | 2.44 |
| 12 | 5.81 | 2.26 |
| 14 | 5.91 | 2.12 |
| 16 | 6.00 | 2.01 |
| 18 | 6.05 | 1.93 |
| 20 | 6.08 | 1.86 |

Table H2: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 0.2% FCNT PSF

| Pressure (bar) | $CO_2$ Permeability (Barrer) | Solubility ($10^{-2}$ $cm^3$ (STP)/($cm^3$ cmHg)) |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6.91 | 4.67 |
| 4 | 6.74 | 3.43 |
| 6 | 6.63 | 2.82 |
| 8 | 6.48 | 2.45 |
| 10 | 6.46 | 2.21 |
| 12 | 6.44 | 2.04 |
| 14 | 6.38 | 1.91 |
| 16 | 6.17 | 1.81 |
| 18 | 5.96 | 1.74 |
| 20 | 5.83 | 1.67 |

Table H3: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 0.5% FCNT PSF

| **Pressure (bar)** | **$CO_2$ Permeability (Barrer)** | **Solubility ($10^{-2}$ $cm^3$ (STP)/($cm^3$ cmHg))** |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.1 | 4.18 |
| 4 | 6.84 | 3.22 |
| 6 | 6.73 | 2.71 |
| 8 | 6.58 | 2.39 |
| 10 | 6.56 | 2.18 |
| 12 | 6.54 | 2.02 |
| 14 | 6.47 | 1.90 |
| 16 | 6.26 | 1.81 |
| 18 | 6.05 | 1.73 |
| 20 | 5.92 | 1.67 |

Table H4: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 1.0% FCNT PSF

| **Pressure (bar)** | **$CO_2$ Permeability (Barrer)** | **Solubility ($10^{-2}$ $cm^3$ (STP)/($cm^3$ cmHg))** |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.79 | 4.15 |
| 4 | 7.44 | 3.21 |
| 6 | 7.32 | 2.71 |
| 8 | 7.01 | 2.40 |
| 10 | 6.78 | 2.18 |
| 12 | 6.61 | 2.03 |
| 14 | 6.57 | 1.91 |
| 16 | 6.36 | 1.82 |
| 18 | 6.34 | 1.74 |
| 20 | 6.22 | 1.68 |

Table H5: $CO_2$ permeability and solubility values of 1.5% FCNT PSF

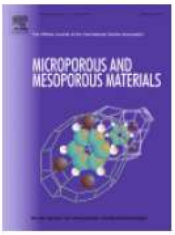
| **Pressure (bar)** | **$CO_2$ Permeability (Barrer)** | **Solubility ($10^{-2}$ $cm^3$ (STP)/($cm^3$ cmHg))** |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | 7.56 | 4.46 |
| 4 | 6.86 | 3.23 |
| 6 | 6.3 | 2.66 |
| 8 | 5.91 | 2.34 |
| 10 | 5.89 | 2.13 |
| 12 | 5.84 | 1.98 |
| 14 | 5.51 | 1.87 |
| 16 | 5.4 | 1.78 |
| 18 | 5.28 | 1.72 |
| 20 | 5.25 | 1.66 |

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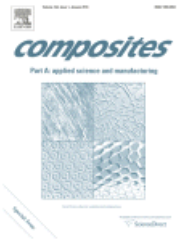
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