The Functionalization Study of PVDF/TiO$_2$ Hollow Fibre Membranes Under Vacuum Calcination Exposure

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Abstract. In this study, polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) hollow fibre membrane was modified by adding TiO$_2$. TiO$_2$ presence affects the membrane structure becomes more less hydrophobic which makes the membrane less fouling. Membranes were made via dry-wet spinning method and calcined under vacuum condition by furnace (100, 300, and 500 °C). Besides, PVDF-TiO$_2$ uncalkined membrane were also prepared as comparison to investigated the effect of calcination on hollow fibre membrane’s functional groups. Fourier Transform Infrared (FT-IR) spectra indicated that all PVDF-TiO$_2$ membranes have bands of OH in the TiO$_2$ at ~1600 cm$^{-1}$. Peaks of α-phase PVDF crystals appeared at ~876, ~876, and ~872 cm$^{-1}$ for uncalcined, 100 and 300 °C, while for 500 °C the PVDF peak only shows at 874 cm$^{-1}$. The peaks at ~1200 cm$^{-1}$ represent CF$_2$ groups. Peaks at ~1400 cm$^{-1}$ assigned to CH$_2$ groups, but it does not observed for 500 °C. Deconvolution by Fityk software that shows calcination using vacuum condition gives the compounds gradually decomposes. At high temperature calcination lead the CH$_2$ peak extremely lost.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, a method for removing salt of water through a selective barrier called membrane is known as desalination technology. To save more energy consumption, desalination via pervaporation is preferred to reverse osmosis (RO) because it only requires 1 bar pressure [1-3]. Pervaporation has been applied for water desalination, alcohol dehydration, and volatile removal [2, 4-10]. Pervaporation separates the mixture by partial vaporization. Polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) suits for desalination because of their high salt rejection [11]. Moreover, the hydrophobicity of membrane caused on fouling.

In the last decade, polymeric membranes immobilized with TiO$_2$ have gained much attention due to specific benefits. Firstly, chemical modification cannot be happened because there is no covalent bond formation between polymeric and catalyst. Secondly, different chemicals show different affinities for polymeric membranes [12]. TiO$_2$ was also chosen because it is inexpensive, non-toxic, and
commercially available. TiO$_2$ addition within the PVDF material combination creates a new material that will increase the advantages such as reduce the membrane hydrophobicity and formed a less fouling material [13]. Because TiO$_2$ has an anti-fouling properties [14]. Fouling has been known as a major problem in membrane technology field that resulting in flux reduction. Among all polymeric membranes, polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) is often used because it provides good chemical resistance, chemical stability, temperature stability and mechanical strength [4, 15-18]. There are various transitions of PVDF polymorph such as as α, β, γ, and δ and density alters[19]. One of common material used in hollow fibre membrane is made from PVDF [20].

More specifically, membrane preparation technique depends on the material used, desired structure and morphology. Several membrane configurations included hollow fibre, tubular and flat sheet are found in the membrane modules. In application, hollow fibre membrane has a better flux performance compare to flat sheet [21], because of their huge of square meters of membrane per cubic meter [22]. Hollow fibre also has high mass transfer and thermal transfer efficiency that makes it less affected by temperature [23-25]. In other hand, flat sheet membranes require membrane support as well as tubular membrane because the packing density [26].

Several works have investigated PVDF-TiO$_2$ in various configuration and fabrication method. Previous study has developed PVDF-TiO$_2$ flat sheets membrane [27]. Méricq, Mendret, Brosillon and Faur [28] reported PVDF-TiO$_2$ preparation by non-solvent induced phase separation (NPIS) wet process. It resulting in finger-like macrovoid structure and hydrophilic properties. Other studies made a PVDF-TiO$_2$ hollow fibre ultrafiltration membrane using a wet-spinning method. It reported a strong interaction between inorganic network and polymeric that led to TiO$_2$ dispersed uniformly. A few amounts of TiO$_2$ addition even increases mean pore size compare to PVDF without TiO$_2$. It also found TiO$_2$ limit the PVDF decomposition during calcination and enhances stiffness of polymer chains and limited their thermal action [29].

This aim of this work is to brings a new insight to prepare PVDF-TiO$_2$ with various of vacuum calcination temperature for pervaporation via dry-wet spinning and investigated the functional groups. The simplicity, fast method, and able to produce asymmetric cross section structures become the beneficial of dry-wet spinning [30]. In addition, vacuum sintering offers a clean atmosphere and evaporate impurities in membrane material [31]. Deconvolution was carried out using fityk software to know the material’s surface area during vibration and stretching [32, 33].

2. Experimental

The fabrication of PVDF-TiO$_2$ hollow fiber membranes followed the process on previous research [34]. It consist of three stages (1) dope solution preparation to remove moisture with drying 21 wt% PVDF and 3 wt% commercial TiO$_2$ at 50°C for 24 h, (2) mixing PVDF (PVDF, kynar 760 powder series), commercial TiO$_2$ with DMAC (DMAc, QReC) as a solvent (3) spinning membrane through dry-wet spinning technique. The obtained PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membranes were calcined at varied temperature using furnace vacuum for an hour. Membranes were characterized using Fourier Transform Infra Red (FTIR). Fityk was used to deconvoluted overlapping peaks in PVDF-TiO$_2$ material. Schematic set up spinning hollow fibre membrane can be seen in Figure 1, as follow.
3. Results and discussion

The FTIR analysis was carried out to know the crystal structure of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre. As can be seen in Figure 2. Strong bands at ~1600 cm$^{-1}$ and below 800 cm$^{-1}$ attributed to OH area in the spectrum of immobilized TiO$_2$. Bands at 876, 876, and 872 cm$^{-1}$ could be indicated as α-phase PVDF [35] for uncalcined, 100 and 300 ºC, respectively. Small difference of α-phase PVDF band become very weak was observed at 874 cm$^{-1}$ for 500 ºC. This indicates that α-phase PVDF transformation to β-phase PVDF has occurred along with increasing temperature during vacuum calcination. This transition results similar to earlier study in literature [36]. PVDF crystalline has different phases such as α, β, and γ depending on processing methods [37]. Specifically, there are strong peak of CF$_2$ groups at ~1200 cm$^{-1}$ for uncalcined, 100 and 300 with a weak peak of CH$_2$ at 500 ºC. While, CH$_2$ groups found at ~1400 cm$^{-1}$. However, the CH$_2$ peak does not appeared in 500 ºC. (CH$_2$-CF$_2$)$n$ itself is the chemical structure in the PVDF molecules. Solvent impurities almost completely disappeared at higher calcination. This condition promotes TiO$_2$ crystallization at 500 ºC [38]. The result obtained in this study is same with Dzinun, Othman, Ismail, Putheh, Rahman and Jaafar [39] which fabricated dual layer of hollow fibre membrane. There are many overlapping peaks in PVDF. This peak can be deconvoluted using fityk software.

Figure 1. Schematic set up spinning hollow fibre membrane

Figure 2. Spectra FTIR of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membranes in the region between 1800 and 700 cm$^{-1}$ for uncalcined; calcined at 100, 300 and 500 ºC
To confirm the network structure is affected by calcination temperature, a quantitative analysis was conducted by deconvolution of the FTIR patterns using Fityk software. **Figure 3** illustrated Gaussian bands of IR spectra of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membranes which uncalcined and calcined varied temperature. Deconvolution method was applied to deconvolute the FTIR spectra by fitting the peaks until the deconvolution spectra approach the experimental data [4, 40]. The peak envelope in the range 1600 and 700 cm$^{-1}$ is assumed to consist of peaks components arising from the CH$_2$, CF$_2$, PVDF, and TiO$_2$ group. It is found that there are large reductions on the areas under the 1500 to 700 cm$^{-1}$ wavelength after calcination process over 300 °C. The results in Figure 3 prove that the stretching $\beta$-crystal transformed into $\alpha$-crystal by the calcination.

![Figure 3](image-url)

**Figure 3.** Deconvolution of the FTIR spectra of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membranes in the region between 1800 and 700 cm$^{-1}$ for uncalcined; calcined at 100, 300 and 500 °C

The peak area value of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membrane which uncalcined and calcined to high temperature was presented on **Figure 4**. The uncalcined of PVDF/TiO$_2$ hollow fibre membrane shows five main peaks which consist strong TiO$_2$, CH$_2$, CF$_2$ and PVDF groups. When the samples calcined at 100-500 °C, the PVDF and both of C group gradually decomposed. The CH$_2$ and CF$_2$ groups extremely disappear at calcined temperature of 500 °C and left over the TiO$_2$ (1.69 unit area) and weak PVDF groups (0.51 unit area) based on **Figure 4**. It is only exhibited the TiO$_2$ group and small PVDF peaks. The $\alpha$ PVDF was transformed into $\beta$-crystal as increasing calcined temperature at 300 °C. $\beta$-crystal is the most desired crystal structure in PVDF as TTTT configuration which produce the highest dipole moment [41].
Uncalcined hollow fibre membranes showed sharp and narrow curve at absorption band of 1400 cm\(^{-1}\). The absorption band at 1400 cm\(^{-1}\) is referred to the in plane bending vibration of CH\(_2\) bond, which belongs to the PVDF chain (Figure 3). Reduced in absorbance for absorption band 1400 cm\(^{-1}\) signified low bending vibration it is due to at 500 °C that CH\(_2\) groups are already oxidized [4, 42]. As observed for calcined hollow fibre membranes at 300 °C was presented the low PVDF group of 1.38 which indicating the existence of β-crystal [41]. It concluded that PVDF/TiO\(_2\) hollow fibre membrane with calcination temperature of 300 °C was the optimized membrane in this work due to the β-crystal of PVDF was increased.

![Figure 4. represents peak area of PVDF-TiO\(_2\)](image-url)

**Conclusion**

This work shows that calcination temperature has a considerable influence on structure properties of hollow fibre membranes derived from PVDF/TiO\(_2\). The FTIR spectra of all PVDF/TiO\(_2\) membranes indicated bands of OH in the TiO\(_2\) at ~1600 cm\(^{-1}\). Peaks of α-phase PVDF crystals appeared at ~876, ~876, and ~872 cm\(^{-1}\) for uncalcined, 100 and 300 °C, while for 500 °C the PVDF peak only shows at 874 cm\(^{-1}\). The peaks at ~1200 cm\(^{-1}\) represent CF\(_2\) groups. Peaks at ~1400 cm\(^{-1}\) assigned to CH\(_2\) groups, but it does not observed for 500 °C. Deconvolution by Fityk software that shows calcination using vacuum condition gives the compounds gradually decomposes. At high temperature calcination lead the CH\(_2\) peak extremely lost due to oxidized reaction. The highest β-crystal PVDF properties is necessary obtained by calcined at temperature 300 °C. It is considered that in Gaussian peak component are related to the different calcined temperature which allow us to design the polymer structure of PVDF/TiO\(_2\) based on its peak intensities.

**Acknowledgment**

Authors thanks to Materials and Membranes Research Group (M2ReG) Lambung Mangkurat University for the research facilities. Nurul Huda Thanks to AMTEC, UTM for the membrane hollow fibre fabrication. Muthia thanks to Applied Research Universities Grant 2019-2020 & 2021-2023, Basic Research Universities Grant 2021-2022, Thesis Magister Grant 2020, World Class Research Grant 2021-2022 the Directorate of Research and Community Service, the Ministry of Research and
Technology/the National Agency for Research and Innovation Republic of Indonesia and Lambung Mangkurat University Research Grant 2020.

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