

COMBINED MAGHEMITE - TITANIA NANOPARTICLES EMBEDDED IN  
POLYVINYL ALCOHOL-ALGINATE BEADS FOR HEAVY METALS AND  
RADIOACTIVE IONS REMOVAL

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To my parents, my husband; SayyedAli Yahyazadeh and beloved daughter,  
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## ABSTRACT

The presence of heavy metal ions in the environment is of major concern due to their toxicity to many life forms. Their toxicity affects the ecosystem and presents human health risk. Thus, wastes that contain heavy metals ions must be well treated so on to protect the people and environment. In this study, potential method for removal of heavy metal ions (such as: lead(II), cadmium(II), cesium(I), barium(II) and iodine(I) ions) from aqueous solution using combined maghemite ( $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ) and titania ( $\text{TiO}_2$ ) nanoparticles embedded in PVA-alginate beads were investigated. In addition, control experiments that involved the study of  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanoparticles in polyvinyl alcohol (PVA)-alginate beads and  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanoparticles in PVA-alginate beads were also performed. For this purpose,  $\text{TiO}_2$  and  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanoparticles were synthesized by hydrothermal and co-precipitation method, respectively. The average size of  $\text{TiO}_2$  and  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  nanoparticles was 15 and 9 nm, respectively. The nanoparticles and the beads were characterized by x-ray diffraction (XRD), field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM), Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) and transmission electron microscopy (TEM). These beads were used in batch sorption experiments for removal of heavy metal ions and iodine ions from aqueous solution under sunlight. Several operating conditions such as initial ion concentration, pH and contact time were investigated to evaluate their effects on the process. The results showed  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{TiO}_2$  PVA-alginate beads could remove Pb(II), Cd(II), Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I) ions, with efficiency of around 100, 100, 93, 99 and 99%, respectively. Also, the combined  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{TiO}_2$  PVA-alginate beads showed best efficiency among three types of beads. After sunlight exposure, the beads were characterized by x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) and energy-dispersive x-ray (EDX) system. The results revealed the mechanism for ion removal of photocatalytic process. These beads can be easily recovered from the aqueous solution and they can be recycled for a maximum of seven times before losing their original properties.

## ABSTRAK

Kehadiran ion-ion logam berat dalam persekitaran adalah menjadi perhatian disebabkan oleh ketoksikannya terhadap banyak bentuk kehidupan. Ketoksikannya memberi kesan negatif kepada ekosistem dan kesihatan manusia. Oleh itu, sisa yang mengandungi ion logam berat mesti dirawat dengan baik untuk melindungi manusia dan alam sekitar. Dalam kajian ini, kaedah yang berpotensi untuk penyingkiran ion logam berat seperti: ion plumbum (II), kadmium(II), cesium(I), barium (II) dan iodin(I) dari larutan akueus dengan menggunakan gabungan maghemite ( $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ) dan titania ( $\text{TiO}_2$ ) nanopartikel terbenam dalam manik PVA-alginat telah disiasat. Di samping itu, eksperimen kawalan yang melibatkan nanopartikel  $\text{TiO}_2$  dalam manik PVA-alginat dan nanopartikel  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  dalam manik PVA-alginat juga telah dijalankan. Untuk tujuan ini, nanopartikel  $\text{TiO}_2$  dan  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  telah disintesis oleh kaedah hidroterma dan kaedah pemendakan. Saiz purata nanopartikel  $\text{TiO}_2$  dan  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  adalah masing-masing pada 15 dan 9 nm. Nanopartikel dan manik telah dicirikan oleh belauan sinar-x (XRD), mikroskop imbasan elektron pancaran medan (FESEM), spektrofotometer inframerah transformasi fourier (FTIR) dan mikroskop transmisi elektron (TEM). Manik ini telah digunakan dalam eksperimen erapan kelompok untuk penyingkiran ion logam berat dan ion iodine daripada larutan akueus di bawah cahaya matahari. Beberapa keadaan operasi seperti kepekatan ion awal, pH dan masa sentuh telah disiasat untuk menilai kesan-kesannya terhadap proses. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa manik maghemite dan titania PVA-alginat boleh menyingkir ion Pb(II) dan Cd(II) sebanyak 100%. Kadar penyingkiran ion Cs(I), Ba(II) dan I(I) masing-masing kira-kira 93, 99 dan 99%. Juga, gabungan  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  dan  $\text{TiO}_2$  PVA-alginat telah menunjukkan kecekapan terbaik di antara tiga jenis manik. Selepas proses cahaya matahari, manik-manik dicirikan oleh sistem spektroskopi fotoelektron sinar-x (XPS) dan analisis penyerakan tenaga sinar-x (EDX). Keputusan telah mendedahkan mekanisme penyingkiran setiap ion adalah proses fotopemangkinan. Manik-manik ini dapat dipulihkan secara mudah daripada penyelesaian akueus dan boleh digunakan semula untuk tempoh maksimum selama tujuh kali sebelum kehilangan sifat-sifat asal.

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$r$	-	Rate of Photo-reduction treatment
$C$	-	Concentration of the reactant
$t$	-	Illumination time
$K_{LH}$	-	removal coefficient
$k_r$	-	reaction rate constant
$q_e$	-	the equilibrium adsorption capacity of ions
$q_{max}$	-	the maximum capacity of adsorbent
$k_F$	-	Freundlich constant
$\lambda$	-	X-ray wavelength
$\delta$	-	Average crystallite size of the particles
$\theta$	-	Maximum(saturation) surface coverage
$k$	-	Sorption rate constant
$m$	-	Weight of sorbent
	-	

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AAS	-	Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer
Pb(II)	-	Lead ion
Cd (II)	-	Cadmium ion
Cs(I)	-	Cesium ion
Ba(II)	-	Barium ion
I(I)	-	Iodine ion
TiO <sub>2</sub>	-	Titanium dioxide
FeCl <sub>2</sub>	-	Ferrous chloride iron(II) chloride
FeCl <sub>3</sub>	-	Ferrous chloride iron(III) chloride
$\gamma$ - Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	-	Maghemite
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub>	-	Magnetite
ZnO	-	Zinc Oxide
WO <sub>3</sub>	-	Tungsten Oxide
Fe(NO <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>3</sub>	-	Iron (III) nitrate
FTIR	-	Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy
FESEM	-	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope
XRD	-	X-ray Diffraction
TEM	-	Transmission electron microscopy

XPS	-	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy
AAS	-	Atomic absorption spectrophotometer
L-H	-	Langmuir-Hinshelwood

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The toxic organic and inorganic materials found in soil, water and air via the photocatalyst approach is flexible enough to be applied for treatment to a diverse range of noxious and non-biodegradable compounds. This technique is reported to have the ability to treat and recover the pollutants from inaccessible areas such as in wastewater that have occurred recently. The damage that these pollutants may incur upon the environment and the economy can be contained by speedy mediation. Moreover, alternate power sources, such as solar power, may prove more successful in remote areas as opposed to the primary power supply. As a non-binding example, nanostructured photoactive films can be mentioned to improve light harvesting and charge separation, and to extend the photoactivity into the visible light region by altering the band structure of the materials, as well as to develop improved photoreactor units using solar light. There is a whole field of research dedicated to improving the efficacy of photocatalytic techniques and materials. Reaction temperatures are critical and photocatalysis should take place at normal environment temperatures.

## 1.2 Research background

Environmental pollutant by heavy metal ions has become a major issue and has sequentially received global attention. Metal ions contaminations are often found in industrial and urban aqueous surroundings and they are harmful to health and environment. Many metal ions such as Cr(VI), Pb(II), Zn (II), Hg(II), Ba(II) and Cd(II) can be found in waste water. Some heavy metals for instance, lead and cadmium are classified as toxic materials and their presence in large concentrations can create diseases such as anemia, brain damage, kidney damage and anorexia that they are dangerous for both adults and children (Agency, 1999).

Radioactive by-products of nuclear power generation and other nuclear technology, for instance, cesium, barium and iodine ions, put all life forms at risk, which is why they must be monitored, supervised and regulated by the government. The main difference between other toxic waste and radioactive waste is that the latter decays over a period of time, depending on the material's half-life which is why they must be treated with more caution. The period of time radioactive waste must be stored depends on the type of waste and radioactive isotopes. The time period that radioactive waste must be confined is unique to the half-life of the radioactive isotope which may fall anywhere between a number of days to millions of years. For example, iodine and barium have a half-life,  $t_{1/2} = 8$  and 10 days respectively, whereas  $^{137}\text{Cs}$  has a half-life,  $t_{1/2} = 30.17$  years (Sato *et al.*, 2011). These radioactive ions are extremely hazardous as they can easily incorporate themselves into the biochemical processes of living organisms.

There are many treatments methods for removal of heavy metal ions and radioactive ions from aqueous solution. However, the selection is very much dependent on factors such as economic, surrounding and the chemical synthesis of the wastewater to be removed. The common treatment method includes chemical precipitation process, ion exchange, osmosis, reverse osmosis, nanofiltration, electrolydialysis, adsorption and solvent derivation. These methods have been used for large scale processes (Saeed *et al.*, 2005). Adsorption is a renowned equilibrium

separation approach and has attained much success in water treatment applications. Adsorption has been found to be superior to other techniques for water reuse in terms of initial cost, flexibility and simplicity of design, ease of operation and insensitivity to toxic pollutants. Adsorption also does not result in the formation of harmful substances (Fu and Wang, 2011).

In recent years, easy treatment techniques were introduced without secondary waste such as photocatalytic process. Some of these technologies include materials that can be quickly reused on a large scale for industries. The pursuit for new methods for heavy metal removal has resulted in the use of biosorbents and magnetic nanoparticles. The use of biosorbents such as calcium alginate and PVA as encapsulation materials for nanoparticles such as maghemite is fast becoming attractive. The availability of carboxylate functional groups provide sufficient binding sites responsible for removal of heavy metals for example Cd(II), Cu(II) and Pb(II) (Grant *et al.*, 1973). A significant amount of research has been conducted on the natural polymer, alginate for the elimination of toxic, heavy metal ions due to its cost-effectiveness and high capacity for adsorption. The carboxylate function of this polysaccharide is found to be responsible in capturing the heavy metals cations such as Cd(II), Pb(II), Cu(II).

Heterogeneous photocatalysis appears to be a very promising technique for the destruction of organic pollutants (Evgenidou *et al.*, 2006). It is generally known that photocatalytic reduction can be used for the removal of heavy metal ions by reducing them to their insoluble forms. In previous studies, the photoreduction of Cr(VI) ion (Chenthamarakshan *et al.*, 2000; Idris *et al.*, 2010; Khalil *et al.*, 1998), Hg(II) (Huang and Datye, 1996), Cd(II) (Chenthamarakshan *et al.*, 2000) and Ag(I) (Khalil *et al.*, 2002) were investigated. The reduction of organic compounds, such as benzoquinone (Richard, 1994), 4-nitrophenol (Brezová *et al.*, 1997) and hydrazine (Chatterjee, 2000) were also investigated. Semiconductor photocatalysts can be used to reduce transition metal ions by photocatalysis. In recent years, efforts have been devoted to the study of photochemical processes using semiconductor oxides, such as TiO<sub>2</sub>, CdS, or ZnO, in heterogeneous system (Liu and Chiou, 2005).



Titanium oxide is the most common heterogeneous photocatalyst used in the photocatalysis process and it showed higher efficiency for the reduction and oxidation of organic and inorganic matters. However, commercial exploitation of this new technology is limited by the fact that titania is only active with UV light or radiation with wavelength below about 387nm, which makes it impossible to wider applications. Thus, there is a need to explore other possible photocatalysts for water treatment purposes by developing photocatalyst sensitive to sunlight (Hou *et al.*, 2006). Light can be understood as a chemical reagent that can convey about a wide variety of selective transformation, some of which are practically impossible to achieve using conventional reactant. An additional advantage is that light is even obtained at no cost when it comes from the sun.

$\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> is an intriguing n-type semiconducting material, with a band-gap of 2.2 eV, a suitable candidate for its application as a photocatalyst in the visible light region (Akhavan and Azimirad, 2009). Its photocatalytic nature has been thoroughly monitored in the photodegradation of organic pollutants, water splitting and semiconductor electrode applications. Additionally, by its narrow band-gap, it has found application as a sensitizer of TiO<sub>2</sub>, which is another common photocatalyst. The irradiation with visible light, for the  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> composite film results in the excitation of  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> valence electrons to leave holes and move to the conduction band. Using formation of the built-in field in Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> heterojunction, electrons in the valence bands of TiO<sub>2</sub> are driven into Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> (while photogenerated holes move into the valence band of TiO<sub>2</sub> in an opposite direction) (Akhavan and Azimirad, 2009). Additionally, the charge transport in the  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>-TiO<sub>2</sub> plays an important role in improving photocatalytic efficiency as it improves the rate of electron-hole recombination (Akhavan and Azimirad, 2009).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

As an important semiconductor,  $\text{TiO}_2$  has been extensively investigated for degrading organic pollutions and removing heavy metal ions from water due to its high photocatalytic activity, chemical or photocorrosion stability, low cost and safety to environment (Xu *et al.*, 2011). Due to the large bandgap (3.2 eV),  $\text{TiO}_2$  is activated only by UV light, which constitutes only about 3-5% of the solar spectrum. This factor limits the use of the solar spectrum as a light source. Research regarding the photocatalytic activity of  $\text{TiO}_2$  in the visible range is an important topic especially regarding its applications in energy storage and environmental pollution control. Therefore,  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanoparticles were used for the removal of heavy metal ions under UV light as photocatalyst but its efficiency was rather low.  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanoparticles only capable of removing Pb(II) from aqueous solution, with an efficiency of only 45% (Recillas *et al.*, 2009). From this standpoint, development of new approaches to produce  $\text{TiO}_2$  with greater visible light adsorption is of great value (Collazzo *et al.*, 2012).

On the other hand, Maghemite nanoparticles are purposely incorporated with alginate and PVA to enhance the ability of bead as a biosorbent, in some case as a photocatalyst. Some studies showed the success of magnetic biosorbents using  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  as magnetic nanoparticles embedded in alginate or chitosan in removal of Ni(II), Co(II) and Au(III). These ferrogels were also used for Cd(II) removal but the removal rate was slower where 99 % of Cd were removed after four hours illumination under sunlight and the removal was due to adsorption. Such magnetic biosorbents still require secondary treatment and require a longer duration. Similar experiments were performed for Pb(II) (Idris *et al.*, 2012) where the maghemite beads behave as adsorbent for Pb(II) removal. Recently, magnetic nanoparticles are embedded in biosorbents such as alginate and PVA to form ferrogels or beads and are used for removal of Cr(VI) in a photocatalysis process. Almost 100% of the Cr(VI) was reduced to Cr(III) within 30 minutes under sunlight and the beads can be reused at least five times (Idris *et al.*, 2012).

Besides Cr(VI), Cd(II) and Pb(II), these ferrogels have not been tested for other heavy metals such as: Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I). Thus the challenge lies in identifying the possibility of removing heavy metals such as: Pb(II), Cd(II), Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I) using photocatalysis process. Based on literature review the removal of the mentioned ions from aqueous solution by using the photocatalyst have yet to be explored. Thus, the possibility of improving the maghemite PVA-alginate gels by combining the TiO<sub>2</sub> and  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> to enhance the efficiency of ions removal was investigated. It is hoped that the combination reduces the band gap of TiO<sub>2</sub>, thus improving its photocatalytic performance when applied under sunlight. Thus, in this study, maghemite and titania nanoparticles were embedded in PVA- alginate matrix in a bead form in order to enhance the photocatalytic removal of Pb, Cd, Cs, Ba and I from the aqueous solution under sunlight and to improve its reusability.

#### **1.4 Research objective**

The aim of the thesis is to combine both the maghemite and titanium oxide nanoparticles in PVA- alginate beads and investigate its effectiveness in removing heavy metal ions such as: Pb(II) and Cd(II) and radioactive ions such as: Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I) via photocatalysis process. To attain the aim of study the following objectives need to be put in place.

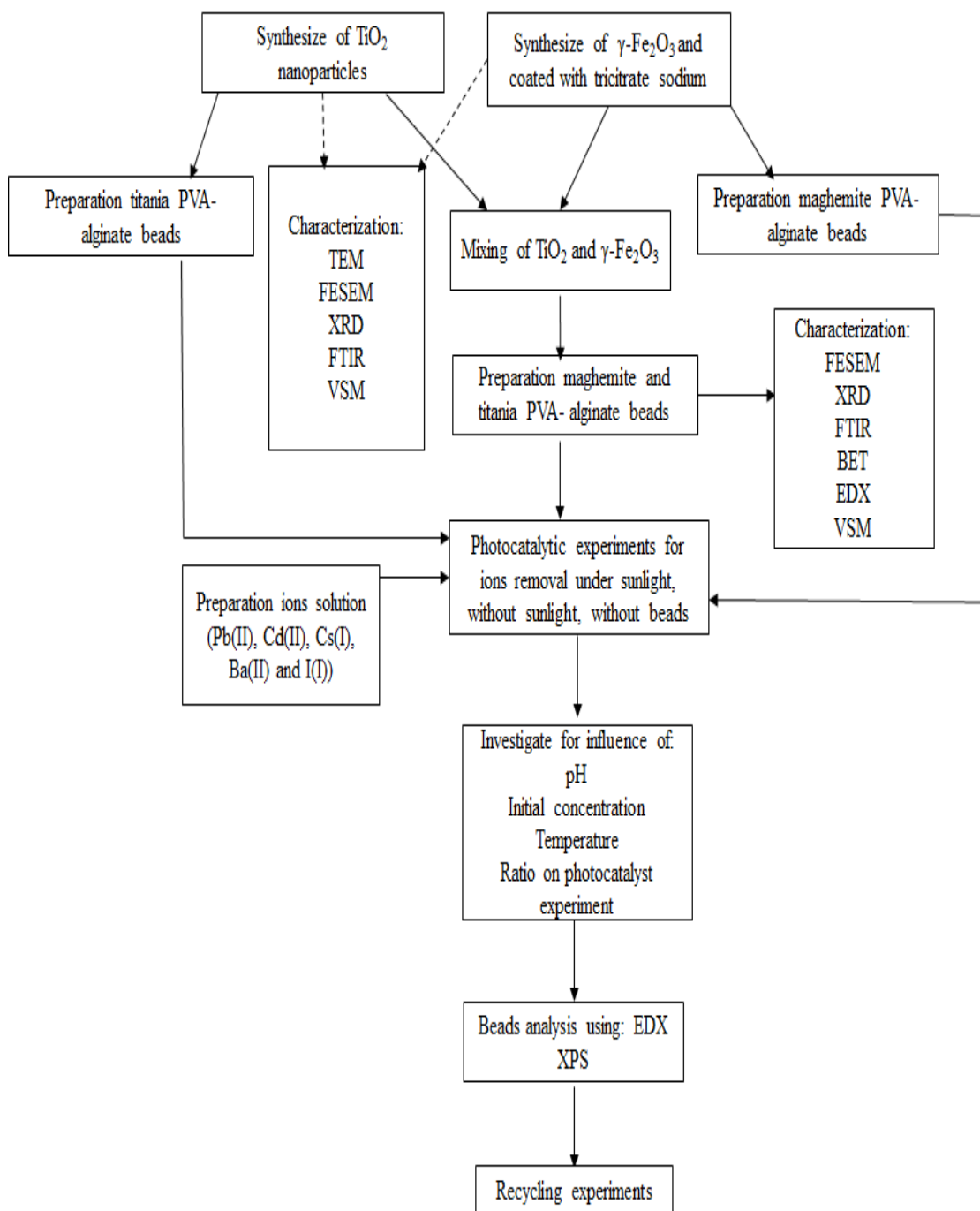
- 1) To remove heavy metals such as: Pb(II) and Cd(II), Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I) from aqueous solution using the synthesized maghemite and titanium oxide nanoparticles embedded in PVA-alginate beads.
- 2) To investigate the influence of pH, initial concentration of ions, temperature and ratio of maghemite and titanium oxide nanoparticles on the photocatalytic removal of mentioned heavy metal and radioactive ions.
- 3) To evaluate the kinetic models for the prepared photocatalyst.
- 4) To determine the mechanism of process for every ion removal.
- 5) To investigate the recycling and regeneration of beads for future use.

## 1.5 Scope of research

In order to achieve the objectives mentioned, the following need to be performed:

- 1) The titanium oxide nanoparticles and maghemite nanoparticles were synthesized by hydrothermal and coprecipitation methods respectively.
- 2) The nanoparticles were characterized by FESEM, FTIR, XRD and VSM.
- 3) The  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  coated with trisodium citrate and  $\text{TiO}_2$  nanoparticles prepared were then embedded in PVA and alginate in the form of beads.
- 4) Maghemite and titania PVA-alginate beads were characterized by FESEM, EDX, FTIR, XRD.
- 5) Photocatalytic experiments to remove heavy metal ions (Pb(II), Cd(II), Ba(II)) and radioactive ions (Cs(I), Ba(II) and I(I)) from aqueous solution were performed. The influence of pH ( $2 < \text{pH} < 12$ ), initial concentration (50, 100 and 200mg/L), temperature (25, 35 and 45°C) and ratio of  $\text{TiO}_2/\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  (1:1, 1:10 and 1:60) of solution on removal rate of heavy metals and radioactive ions were investigated.
- 6) The solution of heavy metal ions (Pb(II), Cd(II), Cs(I), Ba(II)) and iodine ions were prepared by using deionized water.
- 7) Control of experiments were performed: i) process under sunlight, ii) without sunlight, iii) using only maghemite beads and iv) using only titania beads.
- 8) The concentrations of heavy metal ions were measured by using AAS analysis and the concentration of iodine ion were measured by using ICP-MS.
- 9) Finally the recycling tests were performed for the various beads.
- 10) The kinetics of photoreduction activity for the various heavy metals and radioactive ions were also determined using first and second order model. The isotherm kinetic model was also applied.
- 11) The mechanisms of various metals removal were determined using XPS analysis.

The overall experimental approach is summarized in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1** Schematic diagrams summarizing the overall experimental approach

## 1.6 Significance of study

The significance of the study is the combination of titanium oxide and maghemite nanoparticles in the PVA-alginate beads. The introduction of titanium oxide is believed to enhance the removal of heavy metals and radioactive ions from aqueous solution due to decrease the band gap of TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles.

Previous studies (Idris *et al.*, 2010; Idris *et al.*, 2012) have shown that  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles in PVA-alginate beads have been used successfully as adsorbents to remove Pb(II) and Cd(II). The  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles in PVA- alginate beads were only used to reduce Cr(VI) to Cr(III) via photocatalyst. Thus, in this research an effort is made to improve the performance in removal of some heavy metal ions such as: Pb(II), Cd(II) and Ba(II) and radioactivity ions such as: Cs(I) and I(I) by using photo catalyst beads containing both TiO<sub>2</sub> and  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles embedded in the PVA-alginate beads. In addition the optimum experimental conditions, kinetics of ions removal and reusability of maghemite and titania PVA - alginate beads were also determined.

## 1.7 Organization of thesis

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. In the first chapter, the background of research and problem statement are presented. The objectives of research, scope and significance of the study are also included in this chapter. Chapter two contains the literature review on the removal of heavy metal ions using different methods, ranging from the traditional to the state of the art technique. Also, semiconductor photocatalysts were introduced in this chapter. Chapter three is devoted to the detailed account of research methodology. Synthesis of maghemite and titanium oxide nanoparticles were explained in this chapter. The process for removal of heavy metal ions and iodine ion were explained in this chapter. Some operative parameters such as: pH, initial concentration, temperature and ratio of titania to maghemite

nanoparticles used to determine maximum metal removal are detailed. Chapter four is dedicated to experimental results and discussions; which includes details for removal of every heavy metal ions and iodine ion, kinetic of removal and mechanism of process for every heavy metal ions and iodine ion. Finally, chapter five highlights the conclusions of this research and promising prospects are proposed.

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