

APPLICATION OF POLYMERIC NANOFUIDS FOR ENHANCED OIL
RECOVERY IN MID-PERMEABILITY SANDSTONE

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Chemical and Energy Engineering
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OCTOBER 2019

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Almighty Allah (SWT) for His countless blessings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praises are due to Allah whose grace alone brings all good things to fruition. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon prophet Muhammad (SAW), his family, companions and those who follow his guidance until the Day of Resurrection (Amin).

My profound gratitude goes to my supervisors, Prof. Dr. Radzuan bin Junin and Prof. Madya Dr. Muhammad A. bin Manan, for their guidance and support during this research. Their resourcefulness and assistance have proved vital for the successful completion of this program.

My earnest gratitude and appreciation go to my parent; Dr and Mrs B. Gbadamosi for believing in my dreams, and for always been there for me in every way possible. Besides, I will like to appreciate my virtuous wife, Zainab Abdulkareem-Gbadamosi for her unflinching support, patience and understanding during the study. Additionally, I will like to thank my brothers; Saheed Olalekan and Mubarak Adedamola, and sister Barakat Abimbola for their encouragement, support and kind words.

Finally, many thanks to Universiti Teknologi Malaysia for providing the platform and conducive environment. Gratitude to my friends; Mustapha Babajide Ismail, Augustine Agi, Jeffrey Oseh, Abdulkareem Muyideen, Olohunde Taoheed, and Abdulrasheed Abdulrahman for their innumerable support. I also appreciate the efforts of the laboratory technicians, academic and non-academic staffs, and colleagues at School of Chemical and Energy Engineering for their numerous supports.

ABSTRACT

Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) processes are used to recover bypassed and residual oil trapped in a reservoir after primary and secondary recovery methods. Recently, polymeric nanofluid, a novel material formed from the incorporation of polymer and nanoparticle has gained prodigious attention and is proposed for EOR due to its sterling and fascinating properties. Nonetheless, previous studies have focussed more on the suitability of inorganic silica and non-metallic polymeric nanofluids (PNFs). Besides, the performance evaluation of PNFs on pore scale displacement efficiency remains obscure while the mechanistic understanding of this novel material for heavy oil recovery in typical reservoir conditions is elusive in literature. The aim of this study is to explore and exploit the effect of nanoparticles on rheological properties of partially hydrolysed polyacrylamide (HPAM) at varying electrolyte concentration and temperature conditions. Besides, IFT and wettability alteration potential of the PNFs in the presence of heavy oil were evaluated. Herein, two PNFs namely silicon dioxide (SiO_2) and aluminium oxide (Al_2O_3), formulated from the combination of the individual nanoparticles and HPAM were exclusively studied. The nanoparticles were characterised using transmission electron microscopy, while the formulated PNFs were characterised using Fourier transform infrared microscopy and thermo gravimetric analysis to determine the morphology and thermal stability respectively. The rheological properties of the PNFs and HPAM were determined using Brookfield RST. Furthermore, the behaviour of the PNFs and HPAM at oil-water interface was investigated using Kruss tensiometer. Moreover, the wettability effect of the fluids in sandstone cores was examined using DataPhysics optical contact angle equipment. Finally, heavy oil displacement in mid-permeability sandstone cores at typical reservoir condition was carried out using HPHT core flooding equipment. Experimental results show that the rheological properties improved while degradation of HPAM molecules was inhibited due to the addition of NPs. At 2,000 ppm HPAM solution (27 mol % hydrolysis degree), 0.1 wt.% NP concentration was found to be the optimal choice for Al_2O_3 and SiO_2 NP which gives rise to the highest viscosity on the rheological characterization. PNFs exhibited better steady shear viscosity performance under the different electrolyte concentration and temperature studied due to shielding effects. Besides, PNFs lowers IFT of heavy oil due to irreversible adsorption of the NP's at the oil-water interface. Moreover, PNF's alter wettability of sandstone cores from oil-wet to water-wet due to structural disjoining pressure mechanism. Field emission scanning electron microscope and energy-dispersive x-ray analysis confirm adsorption of nanoparticles on the sandstone cores. Finally, heavy oil displacement test in mid-permeability sandstone cores showed that incremental oil recoveries of Al_2O_3 and SiO_2 PNFs at their optimum concentration were 10.6% and 6.1% respectively over HPAM. Physical filtration phenomena lowered the efficiency of the PNF's at higher concentrations. The synergic combination of NPs and polymer resulted in enhanced properties of HPAM, hence, culminating in enhanced sweep and pore scale displacement efficiencies. This study is beneficial for extending the frontiers of knowledge in nanotechnology application for EOR.

ABSTRAK

Proses perolehan minyak tertingkat (EOR) digunakan untuk memperoleh minyak terpinas dan baki minyak terperangkap di dalam reservoir selepas kaedah perolehan primer dan sekunder. Ketika ini, nanobendalir polimer, iaitu bahan novel yang terbentuk daripada gabungan polimer dan nanopartikel telah menarik banyak perhatian dan dicadangkan penggunaannya dalam EOR berikutan sifatnya yang menarik. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian terdahulu lebih tertumpu terhadap kesesuaian nanobendalir polimer silika tak organik dan nanobendalir polimer bukan logam (PNF). Selain itu, penilaian terhadap prestasi PNF pada kecekapan anjakan skala liang masih kabur, dengan kefahaman tentang mekanisme bahan novel ini untuk memperoleh minyak berat pada keadaan tipikal reservoir masih terhad dalam literatur. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka dan mengeksplorasi kesan nanopartikel terhadap sifat reologi poliakrilamida separa hidrolisis (HPAM) pada kepekatan elektrolit yang berbeza dan keadaan suhu yang berlainan. Di samping itu, nilai IFT dan potensi perubahan keterbasahan PNF dengan kehadiran minyak berat turut dikaji. Dua jenis PNF, iaitu silika dioksida (SiO_2) dan aluminium oksida (Al_2O_3), yang dirumus daripada gabungan nanopartikel individu dan HPAM telah dikaji secara terperinci. Pencirian nanopartikel dilaksanakan menerusi penggunaan alat mikroskop elektron penghantaran, manakala pencirian formulasi PNF menggunakan alat mikroskop inframerah jelmaan Fourier dan analisis termogravimetrik bagi menentukan sifat morfologi dan kestabilan terma masing-masing. Sifat-sifat reologi PNF dan HPAM diperoleh menerusi penggunaan alat Brookfield RST. Selain itu, tingkah laku PNF dan HPAM pada keadaan antara muka minyak-air telah dikaji menerusi penggunaan tensiometer Kruss. Di samping itu, kesan keterbasahan bendalir di dalam teras batu pasir dikaji dengan menggunakan alat sudut sentuh optik datafizik dengan perisian analisis imej terbina. Akhirnya, anjakan minyak berat di dalam teras batu pasir berkebolehtelapan sederhana pada keadaan reservoir telah dilaksanakan menerusi penggunaan alat banjir teras HPHT. Keputusan ujikaji menunjukkan bahawa sifat rheologi bertambah baik berikutan penambahan NP, dengan degradasi molekul HPAM mengalami kerencatan. Pada larutan HPAM 2,000 ppm (27 mol % hidrolisis), kepekatan 0.1% berat NP menjadi pilihan optimum bagi NP Al_2O_3 dan SiO_2 yang mampu menghasilkan kelikatan tertinggi. PNFs memberikan prestasi kelikatan ricih yang lebih mantap pada kepekatan elektrolit yang berbeza dan suhu yang dikaji berikutan kesan pemerisaian. Selain itu, PNF mengurangkan IFT minyak berat kerana berlakunya penjerapan tidak berbalik NP pada antara muka minyak-air. Tambahan lagi, PNF boleh mengubah kebolehasan teras batu pasir daripada bersifat basah-minyak kepada basah-air berikutan kesan mekanisme struktur tekanan terpisah. Analisis mikroskop elektron imbasan pancaran medan dan analisis sinaran-x penyebaran tenaga mengesahkan berlakunya penjerapan nanopartikel pada teras batu pasir. Ujian anjakan minyak berat di dalam teras batu pasir berkebolehtelapan sederhana menunjukkan pertambahan perolehan minyak bila menggunakan PNF Al_2O_3 dan SiO_2 pada kepekatan optimum masing-masing, iaitu 10.6% dan 6.1% melebihi HPAM. Fenomena penurasan fizikal menurunkan kecekapan PNF pada kepekatan yang lebih tinggi. Gabungan sinergi NP dengan polimer berjaya memperbaiki sifat HPAM, lalu meningkatkan kecekapan sapuan tertingkat dan keberkesanan anjakan skala liang. Kajian ini boleh memantapkan lagi pengetahuan dalam pengaplikasian nanoteknologi untuk EOR.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Al ₂ O ₃	-	Aluminium oxide
AM	-	Acrylamide
APNF	-	Alumina polymeric nanofluid
cc	-	cubic centimetre
C	-	Carbon
Ca ²⁺	-	Calcium ions
CAC	-	Critical association concentration
CA _A	-	Advancing contact angle
CA _R	-	Receding contact angle
CO ₂	-	Carbon dioxide
cP	-	Centipoise
COO ⁻	-	Carboxylate group
CNC	-	Critical nanoparticle concentration
CSC	-	Critical salt concentration
DIW	-	Deionised water
DLS	-	Dynamic light scattering
DOH	-	Degree of hydrolysis
DPR	-	Disproportionate permeability reduction
DSNP	-	Dispersed silica nanoparticle
EDX	-	Energy-dispersive xray
EOR	-	Enhanced Oil Recovery
FAAS	-	Flame atomic absorption spectroscopy
FESEM	-	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscope
FTIR	-	Fourier transform infrared microscopy
GO	-	Graphene oxide
GPC	-	Gel permeation chromatography
H	-	Hydrogen
HEC	-	Hydroxy ethyl cellulose
HPAM	-	Hydrolysed Polyacrylamide
HPHT	-	High Pressure High Temperature

HTHS	-	High Temperature and High Salinity
IFT	-	Interfacial tension
MWD	-	Molecular weight distribution
MMT	-	Montmorillonite
NaCl	-	Sodium Chloride
Na ₂ HCO ₃	-	Sodium hydrogen carbonate
NMR	-	Nuclear magnetic resonance
NP	-	Nanoparticle
OCA	-	Optical contact angle
OOIP	-	Original-oil-in-place
PAM	-	Polyacrylamide
PGN	-	Polymer grafted nanoparticle
PNF	-	Polymeric nanofluid
PNS	-	Polymeric nanofluid suspension
SAXS	-	Small-angle X-ray scattering
SEC	-	Size exclusion chromatography
SFB	-	Synthetic Formation Brine
SiO ₂	-	Silica or Silicon dioxide
SMCN	-	Surface modified clay nanoparticle
SPNF	-	Silica polymeric nanofluid
SSA	-	Specific Surface Area
SQUID	-	Super conducting quantum interference device
TEM	-	Transmission electron microscopy
TGA	-	Thermogravimetric analysis
XPS	-	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Despite contribution from renewable and other sources of energy, oil and gas has remained the major source of energy (Kumar et al., 2019). With increasing demand for energy and declining conventional sources of hydrocarbon, vast amount of previously abandoned heavy oil resource is being courted to support energy demand. Unlike conventional oil, production of heavy oil is more problematic due to its inherent properties. These include extremely low mobility (or immobility) because of its high viscosity, high heteroatom contents (e.g., asphaltenes, resins and heavy metals), and high carbon to hydrogen (C/H) ratio (i.e., aromaticity) (Guo et al., 2015). Hence, water flooding produces less than 30% of the original-oil-in-place (OOIP). To this end, thermal and non-thermal enhanced oil recovery (EOR) methods have been proffered and tested for heavy oil recovery applications. Thermal EOR are unsuitable for reservoirs with great depth and/or thin pay zones. Hence, non-thermal EOR methods, especially chemical EOR have received prodigious attention due to their ability to improve sweep and pore scale displacement efficiency (Yekeen et al., 2018).

Amongst all the non-thermal EOR techniques, polymer flooding, a chemical EOR method has been adjudged to be the most promising because of its high efficiency, technical and economic feasibilities, and lower capital cost (Pope, 2011). Apart from ensuring additional oil recovery from conventional crude oil reservoirs, polymer flooding is now been employed and preferred to improve production of medium to heavy oil reservoirs (Kamal et al., 2015). This is based on its ability to overcome the shortcomings of gas, thermal and in-situ combustion methods whose limitations are of technical, economical, and environmental concerns (Khalilinezhad et al., 2016). For example, the application of gas methods for low viscous oils is limited due to gravity override while the application of thermal techniques in thin and deep

formations yields a low recovery factor because of severe heat losses to the overburden layers. Besides, large amount of steam required for thermal methods results in an increase in the operating costs and emission of greenhouse gas to the atmosphere (Saboorian-Jooybari et al., 2016).

The process of polymer flooding EOR technique involves adding high molecular weight water-soluble polymers to injection water. This results in an increase of the viscosity of the injected aqueous phase and leads to an improved recovery of bypassed and residual oil. The bypassed oil is recovered through an improvement in the mobility ratio of the displaced fluid while the residual oil is recovered through the viscoelastic nature of the polymers injected into the reservoir (Wegner, 2015). Polymer flooding has been successfully implemented in many oilfields either on a pilot scale or commercial scale for several decades. This includes the Daqing oil field in China, East Bodo Reservoir and Pelican Lake field in Canada, Marmul field in Oman, and Tambaredjo field, Suriname to mention just a few (Delamaide et al., 2014b; Sheng, 2013). In addition, polymer flooding has maintained its increasing importance to the current energy market (Li et al., 2017). The most notable contribution is the reported incremental oil production of up to 300,000 bbl/day from Daqing oil field in China (Cheraghian and Hendraningrat, 2016).

Hydrolysed polyacrylamide (HPAM), one of the synthetic polyacrylamide group, is the most often used polymer in EOR field applications because of its relatively low price, good viscosifying properties, and well-known physiochemical characteristics (Abidin et al., 2012; Pogaku et al., 2017; Wei, 2016). The implementation of HPAM during field operations is relatively easy and can significantly improve the oil recovery rate under standard reservoir conditions. However, HPAM is susceptible to harsh reservoir conditions such as high temperature and high salinity, which significantly affects their performance in EOR. At high salinity conditions and in the presence of monovalent and divalent ions (such as Na^+ , Mg^{2+} and Ca^{2+}) in reservoir and formation brines, the opposite charges between the carboxylate group ($-\text{COO}^-$) and the ions attract each other, thus leading to compression, distortion and precipitation of the polymer from solution. At high temperatures, degradation of the polymer occurs which results in viscosity reduction

of the polymer (Sheng, 2011a; Wu et al., 2009). All these impose negative effects on the polymer's functionality in displacing oil, thus, lowering the economic viability of the flooding operation and ultimately reduce the polymer EOR process efficiency. From the above, it can be deduced that HPAM has deficiencies and need some modifications for EOR application in reservoirs to ensure maximal efficiency.

Hitherto, research for improvement of polymer flooding process has focussed on the development of new polymers for EOR process. Several attempts have been made to improve performance of polyacrylamide by developing salt and temperature tolerant polymers for EOR applications. To this end, many approaches have been used for the modification of polyacrylamide (PAM) (Khune et al., 1985; Sabhapondit et al., 2003). The most common method that has been applied to extend the application of acrylamide (AM) based polymers is copolymerisation of AM with suitable monomers that can increase the stiffness and rigidity of the polymer chain (Kamal et al., 2015). Though some of the new polymers formed from the modification process are found to be efficient in improving polymer rheological properties and adjudged to have good potential for EOR application, however, the formulated polymers have been deemed unsuitable due to economic reasons as they are expensive and will lead to an increase in the overall cost of the polymer flooding process (Kamal et al., 2015).

Advancement in research and new trends in polymer EOR involves the addition of nanoparticles (NP) to polymers used during flooding operations to improve polymer EOR process efficiency. Nanoparticles, also referred to as “engineered nano-material” are the collections of atom bonded together with sizes ranging from 1 nm to 100 nm (Cheraghian and Hendraningrat, 2016; Ragab, 2014). Generally, the application of nanoparticles for EOR have been found to possess the ability to improve the overall oil recovery factor due to their unique properties (Negin et al., 2016). They possess unique properties due to their small sizes and greater surface area per unit volume (Cheraghian and Hendraningrat, 2016). These properties include thermal properties like heat transfer, and property of mechanical strength like ultra-high strength of material (Bera and Belhaj, 2016).

The application of nanoparticles for improving polymer EOR has been hinged on its ability to enhance the polymeric fluid property, to make it more effective and efficient especially under harsh conditions of elevated temperatures and salinity (Yousefvand and Jafari, 2018). The most common nanoparticle utilised for use as polymeric nanofluid is the silicon dioxide nanoparticle, otherwise known silica (SiO_2). Investigating the influence of other nanoparticles especially metal oxide nanoparticle on polymeric fluid behaviour will be a good option for heavy oil recovery. In addition to their potential of enhancing polymeric fluids property, metal oxide nanoparticles have shown sterling abilities to reduce oil viscosity at typical reservoir conditions through aquathermolysis reactions.

Aluminium oxide nanoparticle, also known as alumina (Al_2O_3) is a metal oxide NP and is known to exhibit excellent properties during their use as nanofluid (Mallakpour and Khadem, 2015). They possess high thermal conductivity and can dissipate heat efficiently from fluids through Brownian motion (Rafati et al., 2016). Hence, fluids containing Al_2O_3 NP is less affected by temperature increase. Additionally, they have been reported to increase viscosity of injectant when used as nanodispersions. Also, Al_2O_3 NP is particularly known for its ability to cause viscosity reduction of heavy oil. Finally, they are low cost nanoparticles and environmentally friendly (Kedir et al., 2014; Kiruba et al., 2018). Hence, Al_2O_3 NP was investigated for its effect of HPAM polymeric fluid behaviour and compared with SiO_2 polymeric nanofluid and bare HPAM molecules at varying salinity and temperature representative of reservoir conditions. Besides, a mechanistic understanding of the polymeric nanofluids behaviour at pore scale which remains elusive in literature was ascertained.

1.2 Problem Statements

HPAM is the most widely used and preferred polymer during polymer EOR field applications because of its high viscosifying properties, resistance to bacteria attack, good water solubility, mobility control, low cost and availability in large quantities. However, the viscosity enhancement property of HPAM is susceptible and sensitive to harsh reservoir conditions such as elevated temperature, brine salinity, shear forces encountered in reservoirs (Goshtap Cheraghian, 2015; Hendraningrat et al., 2013). Recently, researchers have shown that appropriate addition of nanoparticles to polymer form novel materials which are beneficial for EOR applications. Nonetheless, the application of nanotechnology in polymer flooding have majorly investigated the use of inorganic SiO₂ NP and non-metallic oxide NP such as graphene oxide. Besides, research has also been focussed on investigating the effect of NP on rheological behaviour of the polymeric suspension to improve mobility ratio and sweep efficiency. Meanwhile, there exists only a few pieces of researches on PNF's behaviour at the pore scale, especially interfacial tension (IFT) and wettability alteration. Phenomenologically, an effective understanding of the microscopic behaviour of PNF's will help evaluate its ability to lower capillary pressure of trapped oil and boost oil recovery.

Additionally, most of the previous researches of oil displacement by PNF's were carried out in micromodel (Yousefvand and Jafari, 2015), glassbead pack (Abdullahi et al., 2018) and sandpack (Saha et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2016). These porous media types are only symbolic and not synonymous with real reservoir cores as they do not account for the reservoir heterogeneity of oilfield applications. Moreover, while the process of such porous media (micromodel, glassbead and sandpack) preparation is apt, researchers ignore the possibility of fluid movement via the sidewalls of these porous media types. Fines migration/fluid channelling via the walls do take place during their use for oil displacement test and are unaccounted for even though they have consequential effect on the flooding results. Finally, oil displacement results reported in literatures were mostly at ambient conditions and/or for light and intermediate oil. Typical reservoir condition exists at variance with ambient conditions discussed in earlier researches. Besides, decline in conventional oil

reserves has necessitated the need to explore available avenues to produce heavy oils to support the ever-increasing energy demand.

This work therefore seeks to extend the frontier of knowledge in PNF's application for heavy oil recovery by exploring, exploiting and evaluating the application of Al_2O_3 NP additive in sandstone cores at typical reservoir condition. As compared to other metal oxide NP such as Fe_2O_3 , CuO , ZnO , TiO_2 and ZrO_2 , Al_2O_3 NP is characterised with fixed oxidation states, hence, adjudged to have better stability. The influence of Al_2O_3 NP on the rheological properties of HPAM at typical reservoir field conditions ($\text{NaCl} = 1 - 5 \text{ wt.}\%$, Temperature = $60 - 90 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$, and Pressure = 2,500 psi) were evaluated and compared to those of well-researched SiO_2 PNF and bare HPAM molecules. Moreover, a mechanistic understanding of the pore scale displacement behaviour of PNF's in the presence of heavy oil which remains obscure in literature were elucidated.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research is to acquire a mechanistic understanding of the influence of nanoparticles on macroscopic and microscopic properties of oilfield polyacrylamide for heavy oil recovery applications. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To investigate the effect of the nanoparticles on rheological properties of oilfield polyacrylamide at typical reservoir salinity and temperature conditions.
- ii. To quantify the IFT reduction and wettability alteration potential of the formulated polymeric nanofluids in the presence of heavy oil.
- iii. To evaluate the incremental oil production after waterflooding due to the use of HPAM molecules and polymeric nanofluids for enhanced heavy oil recovery.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The viscosity enhancement, rheological and other properties of HPAM polymer has been found to be influenced by factors such salinity, temperatures, degree of hydrolysis, pH, pressure and molecular weight. The scope of this research will be limited to addressing the main concerns imposed on HPAM flooding by salinity and temperature conditions. The polymer solution concentration was varied from 0.1–0.5 wt.% to determine the critical association concentration (CAC). At the polymer CAC, the effect of varying nanoparticle types (SiO_2 and Al_2O_3) and concentrations (0.01 – 1.0 wt.%) on the polymer solution viscosity was determined. To determine the effect of salinity on the HPAM and polymer nanofluids behaviour, the brine considered in this study is the monovalent sodium chloride (NaCl), which is the most commonly found salt in reservoirs. The salinity condition considered ranges from 1.0–5.0 wt.% while the temperature condition ranges from 27–90 °C. At the critical nanoparticle concentration (CNC), the rheology of the HPAM and polymeric nanofluids at fixed shear rate representative of reservoir condition and varying shear rate representative of fluid injection into the reservoir were determined using Brookfield RST Rheometer.

Subsequently, the IFT behaviour of HPAM and polymeric nanofluids in the presence of heavy oil (240 mPas). Additionally, the wettability behaviour of the HPAM and the formulated polymeric nanofluids in sandstone core was investigated using the contact angle method. The maximum temperature capacity of the Kruss tensiometer used for IFT measurement is 80 °C, hence, the IFT measurement of this study is limited to that temperature range. Finally, oil displacement experiments were carried out in mid-permeability sandstone cores with permeability ~200 mD. The confining pressure was fixed at 2500 psi representing high pressure witnessed in reservoirs at great depth. Fluid injectants into the core were at a flowrate of 0.2 mL/min. The temperature of the coreflooding process was fixed at 90 °C, representative of typical reservoir conditions. Meanwhile the salinity condition for the flooding process was fixed at critical salinity concentration (CSC). Overall, the process was monitored to evaluate the heavy oil recovery by varying injectant at the typical reservoir condition investigated, and more importantly to determine the mechanism of PNF efficiency.

1.5 Significance of the Study

To ensure a secure energy future, new methods are being developed through research and developments to overcome the limitations of the well-known conventional oil recovery methods. One of such methods is the application of nanotechnology to improve polymer flooding. New developments in polymer application for EOR involves the addition of nanoparticles to improve the rheological properties and polymer flooding characteristics of the process for oil recovery. This study makes a comparative analysis of polymeric nanofluids and bare polymer, and seek to understand their performance at the pore scale at typical reservoir conditions. The significance of this study is to extend the frontier of knowledge in chemical EOR through the mechanistic understanding of nanoparticle efficiency for application in polymer EOR. This study is beneficial for improving heavy oil recovery and will prove important in contributing to the ever-increasing energy demand.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview and background of enhanced oil recovery, explains the aim and objectives of the research, and the problem statement and gaps in existing knowledge of the area of research.

Chapter 2 outlines a detailed review of previous literature related to the theme of the research. It explains the concept of polymer flooding, the polymer types, the mechanism of polymer flooding, the deficiency of polymer flooding methods, and the synergic use of nanotechnology to overcome the shortcomings of polymer EOR.

Chapter 3 provides the procedure for polymer and polymeric nanofluids preparation and characterization. Besides, the materials, equipment and step-by-step guide for achieving the procedures of experiment as related to each objective was explained in detail.

Chapter 4 discusses the results and outcome of the nanoparticles, polymer and polymeric nanofluids characterization. Moreover, the performance evaluation and comparative analysis of the macroscopic and microscopic fluid behavior of the polymer and polymeric nanofluids were outlined. Finally, the mechanism of the fluid properties was explained.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a summary of the main outcomes of the research and recommendations for further studies.

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