

Estimating the Absorption of Volatile Organic Compounds in Four Biodiesels Using the UNIFAC Procedure

Corina M Mateescu, Edison Muzenda, Mohamed Belaid, Saka Abdulkareem and Ayo S Afolabi

Abstract—This work considered the thermodynamic feasibility of scrubbing volatile organic compounds into biodiesel in view of designing a gas treatment process with this absorbent. A detailed vapour – liquid equilibrium investigation was performed using the original UNIFAC group contribution method. The four biodiesels studied in this work are methyl oleate, methyl palmitate, methyl linolenate and ethyl stearate. The original UNIFAC procedure was used to estimate the infinite dilution activity coefficients of 13 selected volatile organic compounds in the biodiesels. The calculations were done at the VOC mole fraction of 9.213×10^{-8} . Ethyl stearate gave the most favourable phase equilibrium. A close agreement was found between the infinite dilution activity coefficient of toluene found in this work and those reported in literature. Thermodynamic models can efficiently be used to calculate vast amount of phase equilibrium behaviour using limited number of experimental data.

Keywords—Biodiesel, Equilibrium, Gas treatment, Infinite dilution, Thermodynamic

I. INTRODUCTION

THE fatty acid methyl esters (FAME) better known as biodiesel is a mixture with high boiling point, low toxicity, low volatility and high dissolving power in organic compounds. These characteristics make biodiesel a suitable solvent in absorption process such as the removal / recovery of volatile organic compounds from industrial waste gas streams. For efficient design of absorption equipment or any other separation processes which are diffusional in nature requires quantitative understanding of vapour liquid equilibrium (VLE). In order to use biodiesel effectively as an absorption solvent for a specific waste gas problem, it is important to determine the activity coefficients at infinite dilution of the VOCs under consideration in biodiesels. Scrubbing of the waste gases using selective high – boiling solvents is a reversible technique, which allows for both the cleaning of the waste gas and recovery of the VOC. In this

study, infinite dilution activity coefficients of VOCs were estimated using the Original UNIFAC model (Fredenslund et al., 1975, 1977) [1], [2].

II. ABSORPTION THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The basic theory for the absorption and desorption cycles is based on Raoult's law modified for non ideality (1).

$$p_i = \gamma_i x_i p_i^o \quad (1)$$

Where p_i is the equilibrium vapour pressure of component i at the system temperature; γ_i is the activity coefficient of component i in the absorbent, x_i is the mole fraction of component i in the liquid; and p_i^o is the vapour pressure of pure component at the system temperature. If the gas stream containing component i is contacted with an absorbing liquid, then the net flow of the component will always be from the gas into the liquid as long as its partial pressure is above the equilibrium vapour pressure of that component in the liquid. On the other hand it will be desorbed if the partial pressure is below the equilibrium level. From (1) it can be deduced that to get essentially complete absorption of any component from an air stream in the absorption tower, then the gas leaving the top of the tower must be in contact with an absorbing liquid essentially free of that component so that its equilibrium vapour pressure is zero. This means that unless chemical absorption is employed, there can be no recycle around the absorption tower itself. In any application, the first absorbent to be considered should be water. However, the use of water is limited in the scrubbing of VOCs as it quickly saturates.

III. GROUP CONTRIBUTION METHODS

The concept of group contribution method provides a correlation between limited experimental data with confidence of activity coefficients of those mixtures where there is little or no experimental data. With a group contribution method we have to know the functional groups which make the molecules. Each molecule is considered as the sum of the functional groups which constitute the molecule. Thermodynamic properties of a solution are then correlated in terms of the functional groups which comprise the mixture. A promising method for calculating activity coefficients from group contribution methods is the UNIFAC (Universal quasi chemical functional group activity coefficient model).

E. Muzenda is with the Department of Chemical Engineering, Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, University of Johannesburg, Doornfontein, Johannesburg 2028, Tel: +27115596817, Fax: +27115596430, Email: emuzenda@uj.ac.za.

C. M Mateescu, Saka Ambali Abdulkareem and Ayo Samuel Afolabi are with the department of Civil and Chemical Engineering, University of South Africa, Private Bag X6, Johannesburg 1710, Tel: +27 11 471 3671, Fax: +27 11 471 3054, Email: mateecm@unisa.ac.za

A. The UNIQUAC Model

The UNIQUAC (Universal quasi chemical) is an activity coefficient model used to describe phase equilibrium [3] [Abrahams, Prausnitz 1975]. This is a lattice model and has been derived from first order approximations of interacting molecule surfaces in statistical thermodynamics. However, this model is not thermodynamically consistent due to its two liquid mixture approach. In this approach the local concentration around one central molecule is assumed to be independent from the local composition around another type of molecule. The UNIQUAC model also serves as the basis of the development of the UNIFAC group contribution method.

B. The UNIFAC model

The UNIFAC method is a semi-empirical system for the prediction of non-electrolyte activity estimation in non-ideal mixtures. UNIFAC uses the functional groups present on the molecules that make up the liquid mixture to calculate activity coefficients. By utilizing interactions for each of the functional groups present on the molecules, as well as some binary interaction coefficients, the activity of each of the solutions can be calculated. The principle, procedure, assumptions and the equations of the UNIFAC are well documented in literature including the works of [4] – [7].

IV. PROCEDURE

The calculations were performed using the Microsoft Excel program which offered highly acceptable simulation values

A. Combinatorial Part

- Obtain v , Q_i and R_i for each of the functional group
- Calculate r_i by using

$$r_i = \sum v_k^i R_k \quad (2)$$

- Then calculate q_i by using

$$q_i = \sum v_k^i Q_k \quad (3)$$

- Then calculate l_i by using

$$l_i = 5(r_i - q_i) - (r_i - 1) \quad (4)$$

- Then calculate ϕ_i by using

$$\phi_i = \frac{x_i r_i}{\sum_j x_j r_j} \quad (5)$$

- Then calculate θ_i by using

$$\theta_i = \frac{x_i k_i}{\sum_j x_j q_j} \quad (6)$$

- Therefore calculate $\ln \gamma_i^c$ by using

$$\ln \gamma_i^c = \ln \frac{\phi_i}{x_i} + 1 - \frac{\phi_i}{x_i} - \frac{z}{x_i} q \left(\ln \frac{\phi_i}{\theta_i} + 1 - \frac{\phi_i}{\theta_i} \right) \quad (7)$$

B. Residual Part

- Obtain A_{mn} values
- From there calculate ψ_{mn} from

$$\psi_{mn} = \exp \left[\frac{-a_{mn}}{T} \right] \quad (8)$$

- Then calculate X_m by using

$$X_m = \frac{\sum_j v_m^i x_j}{\sum_{j,n} v_n^i x_j} \quad (9)$$

- Then calculate θ_m by using

$$\theta_m = \frac{Q_m x_m}{\sum_n Q_n x_n} \quad (10)$$

- Then calculate Γ_k and $\Gamma_k^{(i)}$ from

$$\ln \Gamma_k = Q_k \left[1 - \ln \left(\sum_m \theta_m \psi_{mk} \right) - \sum_m \frac{\theta_m \psi_{mk}}{\sum_n \theta_n \psi_{nm}} \right] \quad (11)$$

- Thereafter calculate $\ln \gamma_i^r$ from

$$\ln \gamma_i^r = \sum_k v_k^i (\ln \Gamma_k - \ln \Gamma_k^i) \quad (12)$$

- Then, $\ln \gamma_i^\infty = \ln \gamma_i^c + \ln \gamma_i^r$ (13)

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE I
MOLE FRACTION BASED INFINITE DILUTION ACTIVITY COEFFICIENTS IN 4
BIODIESELS

VOC	Biodiesels			
	Methyl Palmitate	Methyl Oleate	Methyl Linolenate	Ethyl Stearate
Pentane	0.667	0.654	0.805	0.603
Hexane	0.739	0.766	0.747	0.686
Heptane	0.801	0.684	0.786	0.753
Triethylamine	0.785	0.8	0.795	0.729
Toluene	0.454	0.619	1.06	0.44
Xylene	0.715	0.463	0.887	0.718
Cyclohexane	0.671	0.66	0.613	0.616
Butylacetate	0.78	0.773	0.805	0.72
Diethylether	0.625	0.628	0.916	0.566
Chloroform	0.8	0.707	0.581	0.707
Acetone	1.798	1.959	2.235	1.595
Ethyl methyl ketone	1.521	1.782	1.833	1.365
Isobutyl methyl ketone	1.211	1.163	1.217	1.081

TABLE II
WEIGHT FRACTION BASED INFINITE DILUTION ACTIVITY
COEFFICIENTS IN 4 BIODIESELS

VOC	Biodiesels			
	Methyl Palmitate	Methyl Oleate	Methyl Linolenate	Ethyl Stearate
Pentane	2.5	2.668	3.262	2.613
Hexane	2.318	2.635	2.534	2.487
Heptane	2.162	0.546	2.295	2.348
Triethylamine	2.098	2.343	2.297	2.253
Toluene	1.334	3.41	1.965	1.492
Xylene	1.821	2.478	1.275	2.113
Cyclohexane	2.155	2.325	2.129	2.289
Butylacetate	1.817	1.972	2.027	1.936
Diethylether	2.281	2.513	3.613	2.385
Chloroform	1.406	1.363	1.104	1.437
Acetone	8.371	9.998	11.256	8.583
Ethyl methyl ketone	5.705	7.327	7.433	5.915
Isobutyl methyl ketone	3.849	4.049	4.183	3.969

The mole and weight fraction based infinite dilution activity coefficients are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The values of the infinite dilution activity coefficients found in this work are generally very low well below 100. This is the opposite when compared to the most important industrial solvent water, which exhibits great non nonideality with organics. These results show that the four biodiesels can be used to scrub volatile organic compounds from contaminated industrial air effluents.

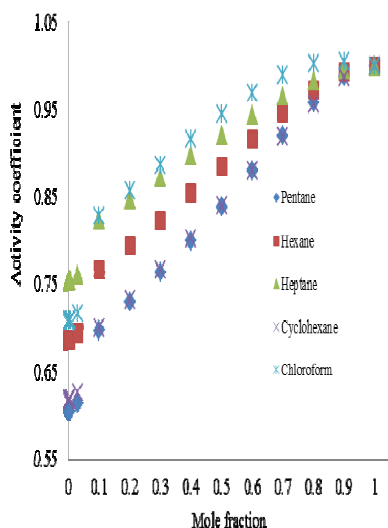


Fig. 1a Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl palmitate

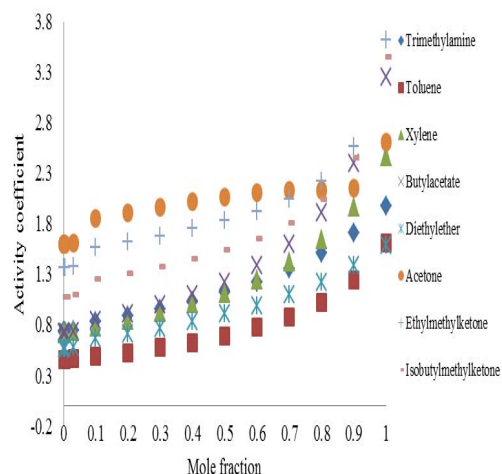


Fig. 1b Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl palmitate

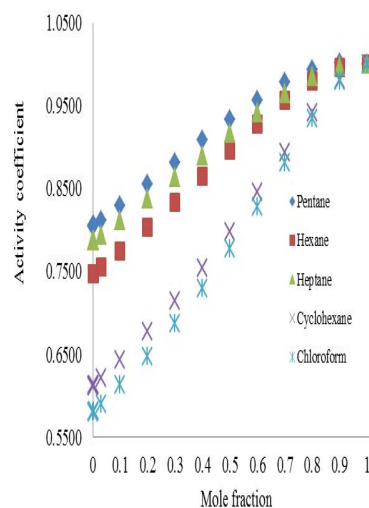


Fig. 2a Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl linolenate

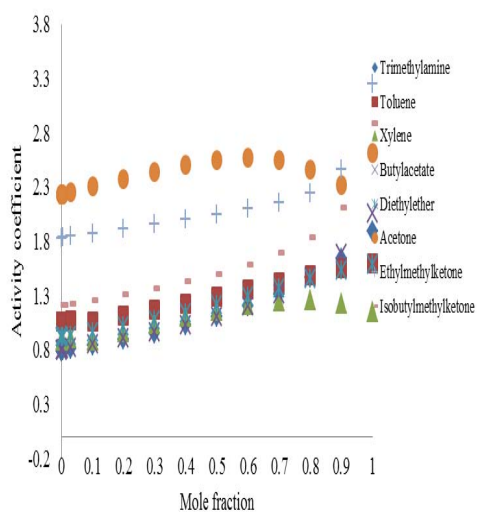


Fig. 2b Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl linolenate

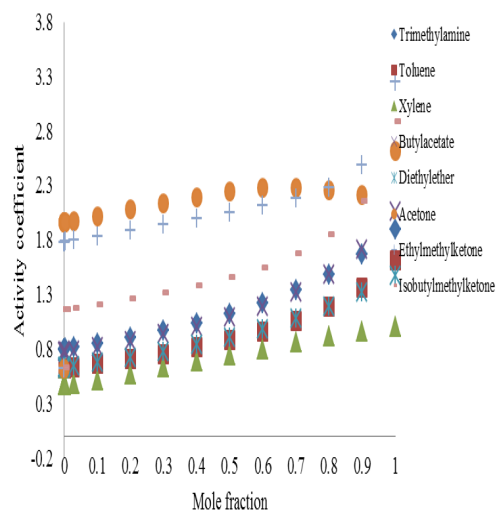


Fig. 3b Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl oleate

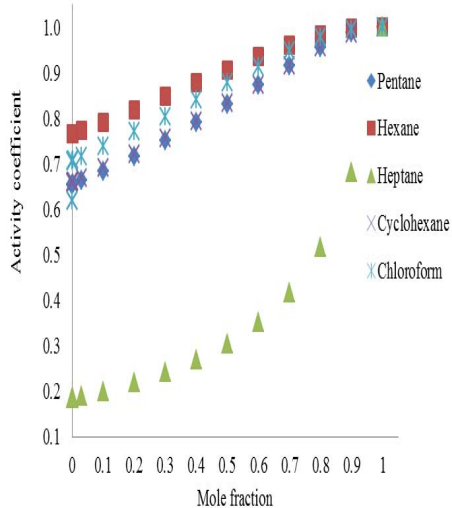


Fig. 3a Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in methyl oleate

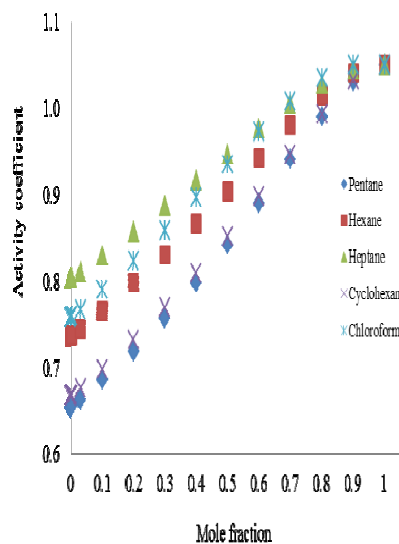


Fig. 4a Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in ethyl stearate

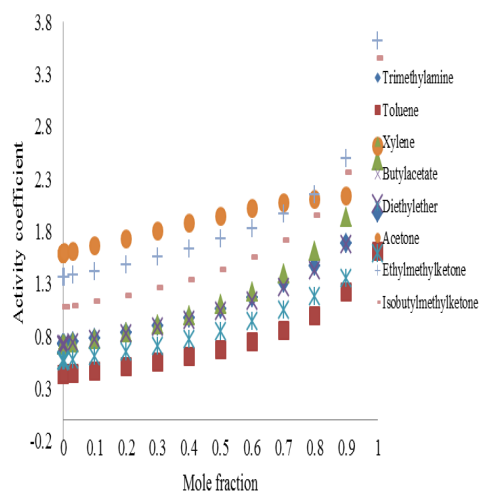


Fig. 4b Variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction in ethyl stearate

Figs 1a to 4b show the variation of activity coefficients with mole fraction. All the eight graphs show some high negative deviations especially figs 1a, 2a, 3a and 4a. Figs 1a, 2a, 3a and 4b show a typical variation where activity coefficients increase with mole fraction approaching 1 as the mole fraction approaches 1.

The feasibility of a waste gas treatment using biodiesel can only be justified after careful economic considerations. In addition to the initial investment costs, the economic estimation will depend mostly on the operating costs which are mainly governed by the amount of solvent circulating in the process. The VLE data for different VOCs in waste gases can be used to determine the required amount of biodiesel for the absorption process. The UNIFAC procedure was used to estimate the VLE data for different organics in the four biodiesels.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the vapour liquid equilibrium data for 13 volatile organic compounds in four biodiesels using the UNIFAC procedure. The UNIFAC procedure like other group contribution methods can reliably predict phase equilibrium data, and are time and cost saving. The required properties of the main component of biodiesel are widely available in most data bases. Biodiesel is a good absorption medium for volatile organic compounds considered in this work because of the very low activity coefficients, i.e. good solubility in the solvent.

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Corina M Mateescu is a Lecturer in Chemical Engineering Department at the University of South Africa (UNISA), and Work Integrated Learning Coordinator (WIL). She obtained a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering from the University of "Babes-Bolyai", Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Cluj-Napoca, Romania in 1995.

Mrs. Mateescu joined University of South Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa on the 1st of January 2010. Previously she worked for University of Johannesburg. She is currently pursuing a masters degree on the feasibility of producing petroleum from waste through thermal depolymerisation under the supervision of Dr E Muzenda. Her research interest areas are in phase equilibrium measurement and computation, energy and environment.

She is a team member of a Community Engagement Project-Power girl, a project to enable, educate, and motivate girls to explore, enjoy and become more proficient in mathematics, science and technology. She is also member of Regional Coordinating Committee at Chemical Industries Education & Training Authority, CHIETA.



Edison Muzenda is the Research and Postgraduate Coordinator and head of Environmental and Process Systems Engineering Research Unit in the School of Mining, Metallurgy and Chemical Engineering at the University of Johannesburg, Dr Muzenda holds a BSc Hons (NUST, Bulawayo, ZIM, 1991 - 1994) and a PhD in Chemical Engineering (University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom, 1997 - 2000).

He joined the University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa on the 1st of November 2007. He has more than 15 years experience in academia which he gained at different Institutions: National University of Science and Technology Bulawayo, University of Birmingham, Bulawayo Polytechnic, University of Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg. He is a recipient of several awards and scholarships for academic excellence. His research interests and area of expertise are in phase equilibrium measurement and computation, energy and environment, separation processes and mineral processing.

He has published more than 60 international peer reviewed papers in international scientific journals and conferences. His publications are mainly on measurement and computation of phase equilibrium using group contributions methods, static headspace and the dynamic GLC technique; flotation studies-effect of water quality, microwave pretreatment, pH; Leaching behaviour of copper bearing mattes; wastewater treatment, the characterization of South African zeolites for industrial and environmental applications and unconventional petroleum sources and their environmental benefits. He serves as reviewer of a number of reputable international conferences and journals. He has also chaired sessions at International Conferences. The author is a member of the Scientific and Technical Committee & Editorial Review Board of Natural and Applied Sciences, Africa Representative and International Scientific Secretariat for the World Academy of Science Engineering and Technology, WASET.



Mohamed Belaid obtained Msc Chemical Engineering, UKZN South Africa (2001), BSC Industrial Chemical Engineering, Engineering of organic processes (1994), University of Blida, Algeria, currently is doing PhD at Wits University (South Africa). Mohamed is a senior lecturer at the University of Johannesburg, worked as a lecturer at the University of Kwazulu Natal for over 8 years, a

quality control Engineer for Energy Engineering PTY (South Africa) for two years and Elangeni oil and soap (South Africa) for a period of two years, process Engineer (SAIDAL, antibiotic company, Algeria) for one year.

Mr. Belaid is a member of SAIChE (2003, South Africa institute of Chemical Engineers) and He is a research member at the department of Chemical Engineering, authored and contributed to various publications, both journals and conferences proceedings in environmental engineering,

separation processes, mineral processing, fluidized beds, activated carbon and engineering Education.



Dr. Ayo Samuel Afolabi obtained his BSc (Hons) and MSc at The Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering in 1997 and 2003 respectively. He completed his PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009 specializing in Nanotechnology/Fuel Cell Technology. Dr. Afolabi has lectured in these Universities and currently a senior lecturer in Civil and Chemical Engineering Department, University of South Africa, Johannesburg South Africa.

He has over 25 peer-reviewed journal and conference publications and is a member of professional bodies such as Nigerian Metallurgical Society (NMS), Materials Society of Nigeria (MSN), South Africa Nanotechnology Initiative (SANi), South Africa Institute of Chemical Engineer (SAIChE), The South Africa Institute of Mining & Metallurgy (SAIMM) and The Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum (CIM). His research interests are in carbon nanotechnology, fuel cell technology, materials characterization, corrosion engineering and extractive metallurgy.



Dr Saka Ambali Abdulkareem obtained B.Eng (Honors) and MSc from the Federal University of Technology, Minna Nigeria in 1997 and 2000 respectively. In 2010, He bagged a PhD in Chemical Engineering from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa in Nanotechnology/Fuel cell. He has over 40 peer-reviewed journal and conference publication and a member of Nigerian Society of Chemical Engineers, Nigerian Society of Engineers and South African Institute of Chemical Engineers. His

research interests are Nanotechnology (Carbon Nanomaterials), Fuel cell technology, Environmental engineering, Membrane synthesis and Process development and Evaluation.