Factors Influencing Chemical Absorption of CO_2 and H_2S in biogas: A Review

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Abstract—**Absorption is a process in which a substance (solute) is brought into contact with a solvent normally for a purpose of separation, which can be either physical or chemical. pH and concentration of the solvent, temperature of both the gas and the solvent, and absorbing surface area influence the absorption process. pH affect the absorption rate and if an acid or base is added into the system the absorption rate is lowered. Concentration of carbon dioxide in the gas stream and the loading rate influence the rate of absorption. MEA has an optimum absorption rate at liquid temperature of 35 ˚C. Ammonia has high removal efficiency at ambient temperature and there exists a direct relationship between absorption rate and temperature. Absorption of CO_2 with sodium hydroxide is normally done at a temperature range of -1-16 ˚C (30-60 ˚F). Calcium oxide requires high temperature for absorption ranging from 300-390 ˚C, while 22-80 ˚C is used for H_2S absorption with K_2CO_3. A linear increase results from heating the CO_2 gas stream prior to absorption. The rate of absorption is influenced by the contact area between the absorbing fluid and the gas.**

Keywords—**Absorption rate, efficiency, solvent, temperature**

I. Introduction

Absorption is a process in which a substance (solute) is brought into contact with a solvent normally for a purpose of separation, which can be either physical or chemical. Physical absorption occurs when a gas is absorbed into a liquid with no reaction taking place. For instance, carbon dioxide is absorbed into water. On the contrary, a chemical reaction occurs when the gas is absorbed into the solvent for chemical absorption. An example is carbon dioxide absorption into alkanolamine solutions [1]. For gas absorption to occur, the gas is firstly contacted with the liquid through bubbling or passing it over streams of the liquid [2]. A counter current flow configuration is normally preferred in absorption mainly because a large surface area for mass transfer is needed for an effective absorption.

Factors affecting absorption include pH of the solvent and the concentrations and temperatures of both the gas and the solvent [3]. Kibicho et al. [4] suggested that different solvents perform differently upon heating and that the temperature of both phases influence the reaction mechanism. Subsequently, rate of absorption involves a complex relationship between time, turbulence and temperature. Hsu et al. [3] studied the effect of temperature in the ranges of 25-75 ˚C and recorded that 75 ˚C resulted in best absorption. Therefore an opportunity to investigate a temperature above 75 ˚C exists.

NaOH is a good CO_2 absorbent, but KOH proved to be even better because when its used for the same process it captures 27% more CO_2 and only uses 125 kWhr/ton CO_2 energy [4]. A solvent is considered economically attractive if it has low energy requirements, can be regenerated easily, does not impose environmental impacts and cost effective.

The purpose of this work was to unpack the factors that affect absorption of CO_2 and H_2S into chemical solvent for biogas purification. With the main focus being temperature, concentration and pH of the liquid without neglecting the gas phase. This work will however be further studied in laboratory conditions at a later stage to validate the results with available literature.

II. Factors Affecting the Absorption

A. *pH of the solvent*

pH affects the absorption process and therefore, the absorption rate. Addition of acid or base leads to low absorption rate [3]. When KOH and NaOH were used, the optimum pH was found to be 13.3 and 12.9, respectively [5]. Ammonia and amines had the best pH value of 11.5-12 [3]. Fig. 1 shows the effect of pH on CO_2 absorption using MEA and ammonia. In a study conducted by Wubs et al [6] reaction kinetics of H_2S with ferric chelates of EDTA and HEDTA were established. From a stirred cell reactor with a varying pH (4-10), it was established that pH plays an important role in oxidative absorption.

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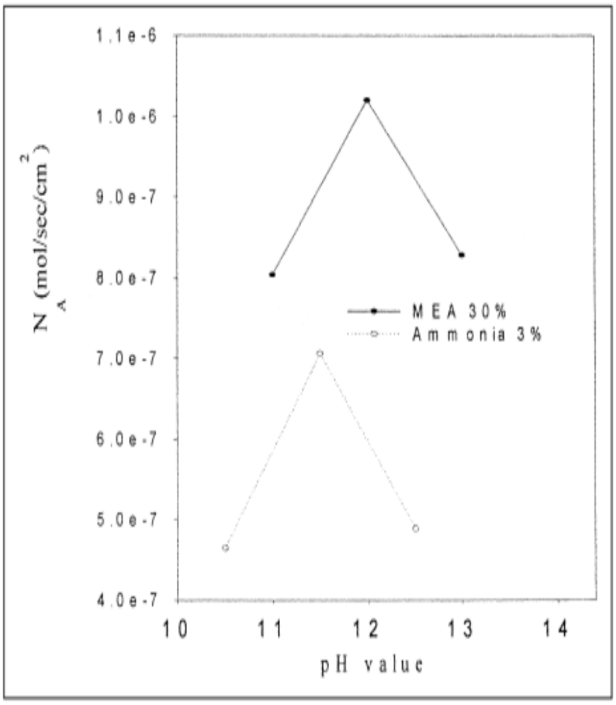

Fig. 1. The effect of pH value on the absorption rate of CO_2 into various aqueous absorbents [3].

B. *Concentration of the absorbent*

Concentration plays an important role in absorption. Factors that affect the absorption include: (i) gas loading rate, (ii) increase in solution viscosity which decrease diffusion coefficient and absorption rate [7]. H_2S absorption rate is directly proportional to the concentration of K_2CO_3 in the solution [7]. The same author/s further showed that the rate of CO_2 absorption increases initially and then decreases as the concentration solution increase [7]. It must be taken into account that the concentration of the CO_2 in the gas stream influences the absorption rate [8, 9]. Since the absorption of CO_2 decreases towards the end of the cycle, its amount of CO_2 in the solution may increase at that stage [8]. The absorption effect increases with higher absorption rate for MEA, DEA and NH_3(aq) to the range of and mol/sec/cm^2 [3].

C. *Reaction temperature*

Temperature is an important parameter of any chemical, biological, and physical reactions. Chemical absorption is influenced by temperature and the effect it has is discussed in this section.

Amines

Monoethanolamine (MEA) is a primary amine commonly used as a solvent in chemical absorption. Hsu et al [3] studied absorption of MEA at temperature range of 25-75 ˚C and 15% gas concentration at a flow rate of 2L/min together with 30% solvent. As presented in Fig. 2, it can be observed that MEA is a good absorbent. An absorber-desorber setup containing packed absorption column with 6 theoretical stages and packed desorption column of 10 theoretical stages was used by Pellegrini et al [10] for simulation of the absorption process with MEA. A removal efficiency of 80% has a MEA to CO_2 ratio above 3 with a solvent concentration of 20% wt required [10]. The removal efficiency at different solvent to CO_2 ratios is shown in Fig. 3. Ardisorn et al [11] reported that increasing the liquid temperature to 35 ˚C improved the absorption reaction rate, but a decline in the absorption rate was observed for temperature further than 35 ˚C. An inverse relationship between temperature and absorption rate was observed by Zare et al [12] and Lars [13] as a result of the reaction zone relocation in the absorption column.

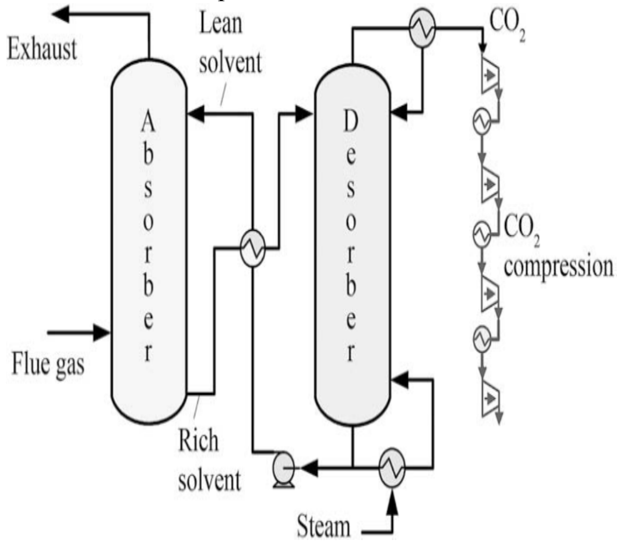

Fig. 2. Schematic diagram of absorption section for CO_2 scrubbing with MEA and DGA solutions [10].

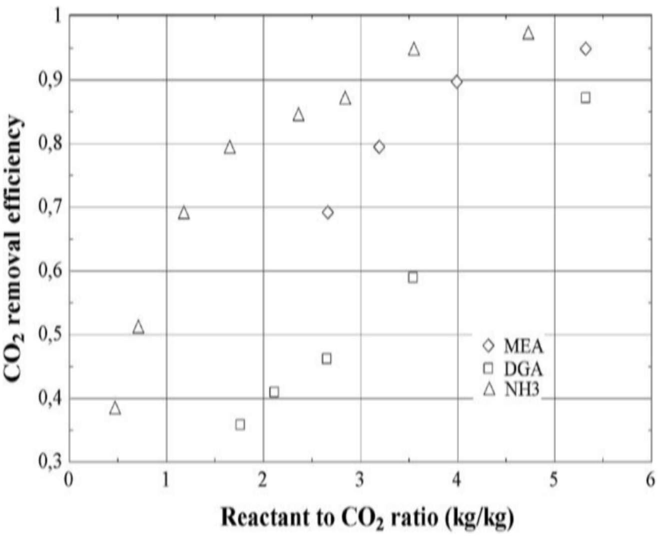

Fig. 3. CO_2 removal efficiency at T =20 ˚C of MEA, DGA and NH_3 at different solvent to CO_2 ratios [10].

Ammonia

Ammonia can be used to reduce all acid pollutants in gases with CO_2 included. Hsu et al. [3] used 3% aqueous NH_3 solvent at temperatures of 25, 50 and 75 ˚C. They observed that absorption rate is directly proportional to the temperature. It has also been reported that ammonia has a better absorption capacity and best absorbent qualities [3, 10, and 14]. According to G. Pellegrini et al. [10], the advantage of using ammonia is that it has low energy requirements for absorption. In a simulation study, using solvent concentration of 0.02-0.2 % wt, the same researchers showed that ammonia had very high removal efficiency at ambient temperature. They further mentioned that 80% removal efficiency was achieved which means a ratio of 1.5 NH_3 to CO_2 requiring 7% wt solvent. Fig. 2-3 shows the effect of operating temperature on NH_3 absorption and CO_2 removal efficiency at different temperatures, respectively.

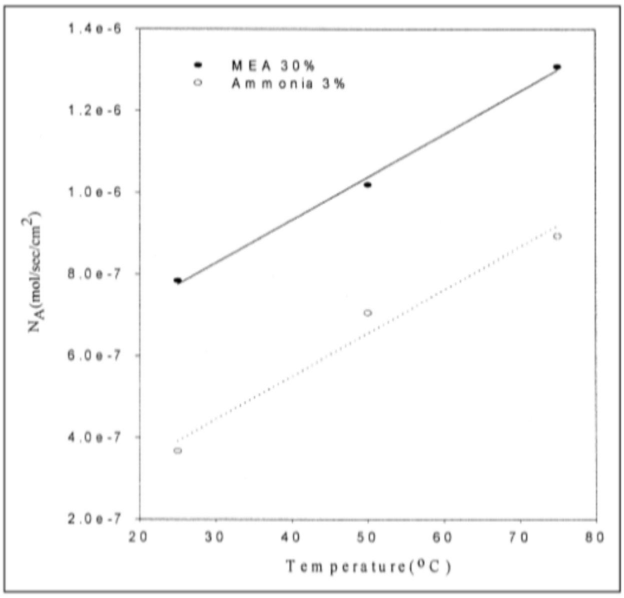

Fig. 4. The effect of operating temperature on the absorption rate of CO_2 into MEA and aqueous NH_3 absorbents [3].

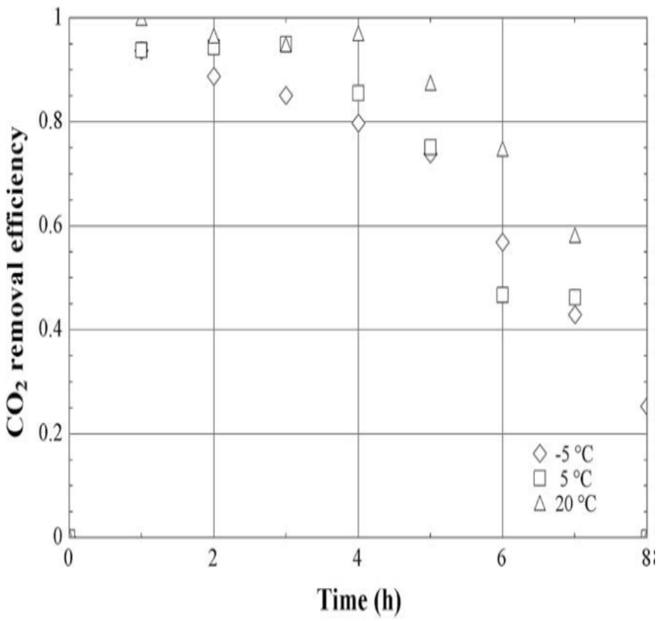

Fig. 5. CO_2 removal efficiency by ammonia solution (5% wt. NH_3 in H_2O) at different temperatures [10].

Sodium Hydroxide

. Sodium hydroxide reacts with carbon dioxide by path shown in Eqs (1) to (3) which is first order with respect to CO_2 and OH [15].

$$CO_2 + OH^- \rightarrow HCO_3^- \tag{1}$$

$$HCO_3^- + OH^- \rightarrow CO_3^{2-} + H_2O \tag{2}$$

$$CO_2 + 2OH^- \rightarrow CO^{2-} + H_2O \tag{3}$$

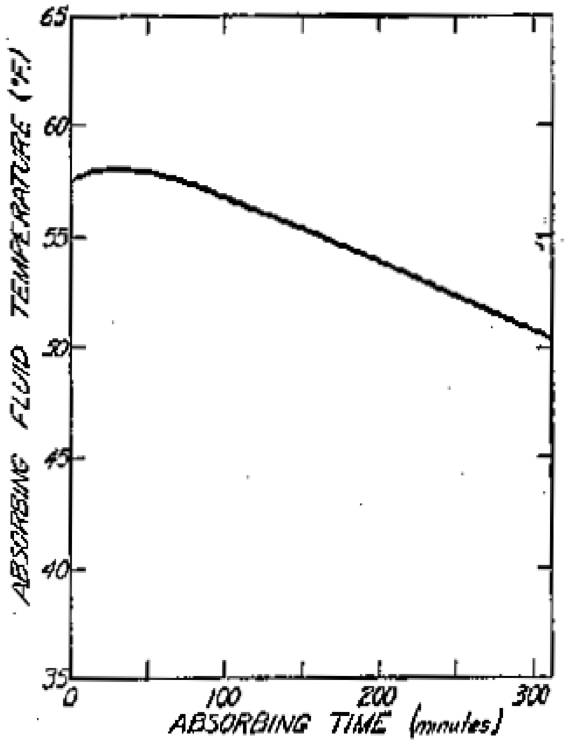

Fig. 6. Absorption fluid temperature and residence time [8].

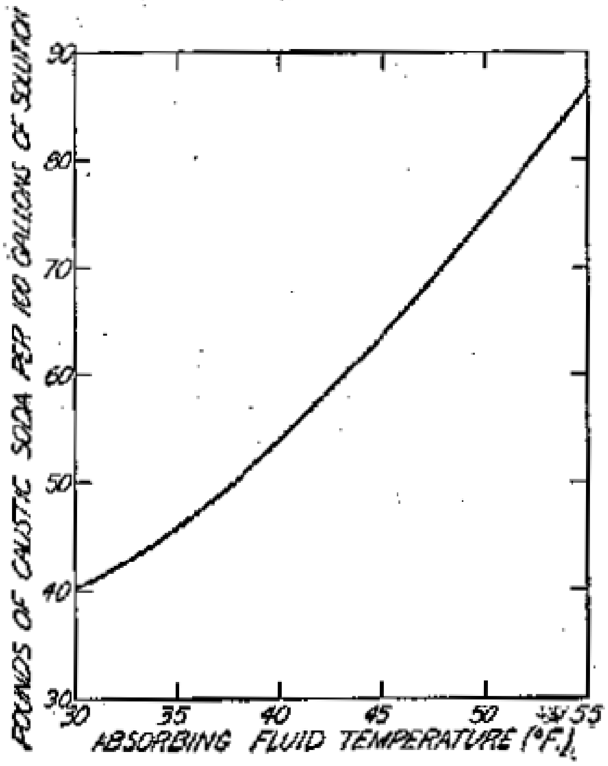

Fig. 7. Absorption temperature characteristics [8].

Temperature range between -1-16 ˚C (30-60 ˚F) was used for absorption of CO_2 in sodium hydroxide. The rate of absorption increases with the increase in temperature. The relationship between the temperature and absorption cycle, as shown in Fig. 5, demonstrated that an increase in temperature is often result in a gradual decrease in the rate of CO_2 absorption at the later stages of the cycle [8]. The temperature of the absorbing fluid is also related to the absorbing system design as shown in Fig 6.

Calcium Oxide and Calcium Hydroxide

When calcium oxide is used to absorb CO_2, the process is reversible and occurs according to the following reaction:

$$CaO_{(s)} + CO_{2(g)} \leftrightarrow CaCO_{3(s)} \quad (4)$$

Sometimes the $CaCO_3$ reacts when it is exposed to water vapour and can result in the formation of $Ca(OH)_2$ as shown in Eq. (5).

$$CaCO_{3(s)} + H_2O_{(g)} \leftrightarrow Ca(OH)_{2(s)} + CO_{2(g)} \quad (5)$$

CaO_3 is effective in absorbing CO_2 completely, but a penalty of high heat requirements has to be paid. According to a study conducted by Nikulshina et al. [16], temperature range of 300-390 ˚C is required. Thus it can be said that CO_2 absorption rate is dependent on temperature. The extent of CO_2 absorption (X_{CO2}) by CaO and $Ca(OH)_2$ as a function of temperature is shown in Fig 8-9 [17]. Which gives a picture that $Ca(OH)_2$ captures more CO_2 as compared to CaO as expected and supported and by other researchers [18].

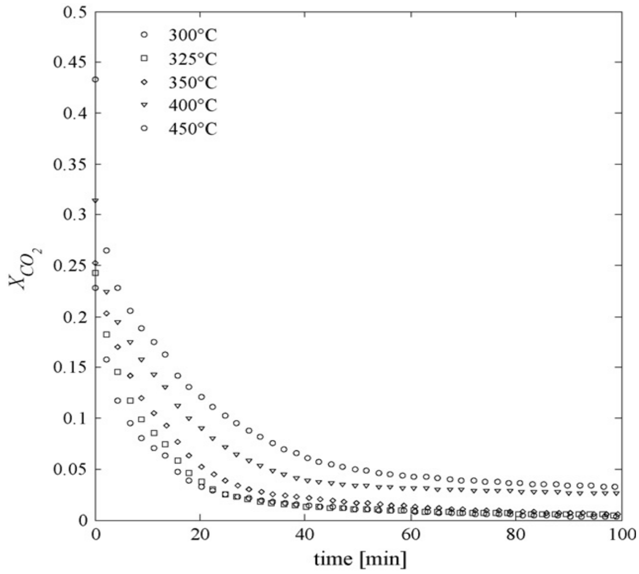

Fig. 8. Extent of CO_2 captured by the carbonation of CaO as a function of time for the isothermal runs of set I in the range 300–450 ◦C [18].

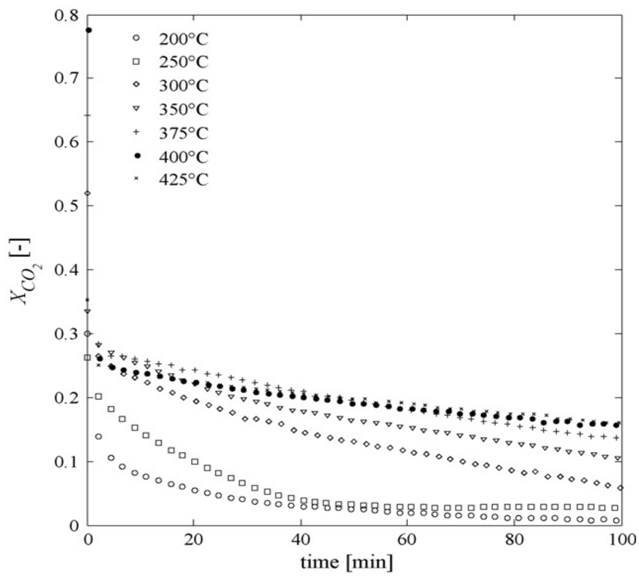

Fig. 9. Extent of CO_2 captured by the carbonation of $Ca(OH)_2$, as a function of time for the isothermal runs of set II in the range 200–425 ◦C [18].

Potassium Hydroxide

In a study conducted by Yih et al [7], K_2CO_3 was used to simultaneously absorb H_2S and CO_2. They observed that increased temperature caused a quick increase in absorption rate of CO_2 while that of H_2S decreases slowly as shown in Fig. 8. CO_2 absorption is liquid-phase mass transfer coefficient and H_2S is gas-phase mass transfer. A temperature range of 22-80 ˚C was used.

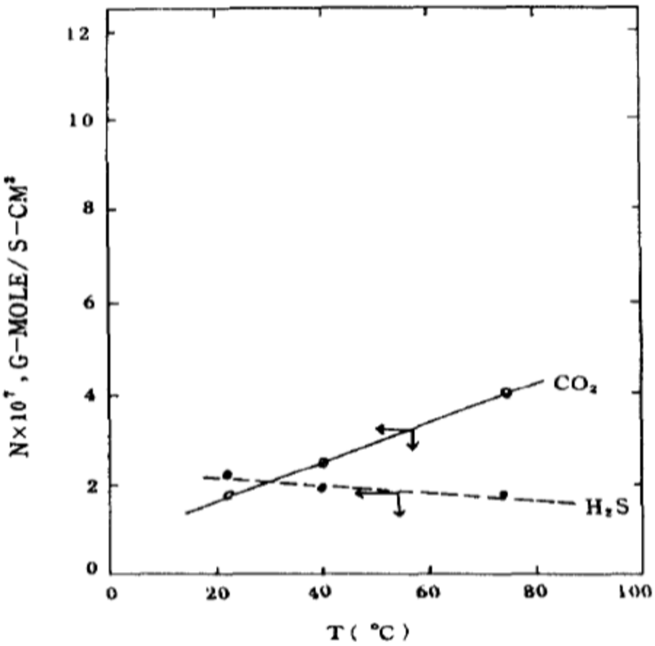

Fig. 10. Absorption rate vs temperature for simultaneous absorption of CO_2 and H_2S in K_2CO_3. [7].

Iron chelates

When $FeCl_2$, $FeCl_3$ or $FeSO_4$ are added to the digester, FeS forms a precipitate which is removed with the digestate because it is insoluble. Ferric chelates can also be used for H_2S absorption and the operating conditions and typical setup are shown in Table 1 and Fig. 11, respectively. Deshmuhk et al [19] proved that the removal of H_2S at both low and high concentration is possible with the ferric chelate oxidative absorption process.

TABLE 1: TYPICAL OPERATING CONDITIONS OF IRON CHELATE BASED PROCESSES [19]

Temperature	20-60°C
pH	4-8
Important chelants	EDTA, HEDTA, NTA, DTPA
Iron concentration	1000 to 10000 ppm
Chelant/iron ratio (M)	1.1-2

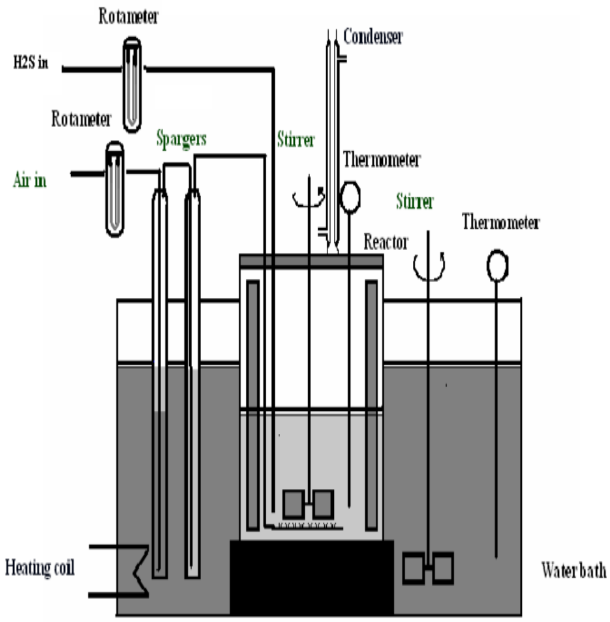

Fig. 11. Experimental setup for oxidative absorption of Hydrogen Sulfide [19].

Heated CO_2

Kibicho et al. [4] investigated the effect of heating the CO_2 gas stream prior to absorption at 25-55 ˚C. They observed that a 33% linear increase for 0.8 lpm liquid load. They further reported that higher liquid loads of 1.4 and 1.8 lpm reduced the heating effect as it resulted in absorption rate increase by 20% and 3%. They believed that this was due to the kinetic energy attained at the reaction zone as the molecules diffuse faster. As a result of the hot CO_2, formation of carbonic acid is enhanced as heat is transferred to the mixture.

Absorbing surface area

Surface area is an important aspect of any chemical reaction. The rate of absorption is influenced by the contact area between the absorbing fluid and the gas. Consequently, surface contact area is proportional to the rate of absorption [8]. Thus, the absorption column configuration also plays an important role in absorption rate.

III. Energy duty requirements

Thermal energy input required for complete CaO-$CaCO_3$ thermochemical cycle is 10.6 MJmol-1 of CO_2 captured. The required thermal energy input for solvent regeneration leads to an energy penalty ranging from 4-5 GJ/t CO_2 captured in post combustion CO_2 capture using amines. This applies for the traditional absorber-desorber process [10, 20]. However, absorption process with ammonia has lower energy requirements because it does not require solvent regeneration heat and separated CO_2 compression. Subsequently, ammonia process requires a great amount of water for exhaust gas washing to prevent emissions to the atmosphere [10]. This, however, still makes the ammonia process economically attractive [21]. Energy requirements for gas scrubbing using alkali metal hydroxide solutions range between 30 to 390 kJ/mol [22].

IV. Conclusion

Chemical absorption has been used in biogas purification and upgrading worldwide. Effective as it is, there are some factors that can influence its efficiency. These factors include: pH of the solvent, concentration, temperature of both the gas and the solvent, effect of heated carbon dioxide and absorbing surface area. Concentration of carbon dioxide in the gas stream and the loading rate influence the rate of absorption. The rate of absorption increases with the increase in temperature. A linear increase results from heating the CO_2 gas stream prior to absorption. The rate of absorption is influenced by the contact area between the absorbing fluid and the gas.

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