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A Novel Approach for Using Silica Nanoparticles in a Proppant Pack to Fixate Coal Fines

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Abstract
Hydraulic fracturing operations in coal seam gas (CSG) reservoirs are highly prone to release coal fines. Coal fines inevitably cause mechanical pump failure and permeability damage as a result of their hydrophobicity, aggregation in the system, and pore-throat blockage. Thus, one approach to affix these coal fines at their source, and to retard generation, is to introduce a nanoparticle-treated-proppant pack. Thus, this research explores coal fines retention (known as adsorption) in a proppant pack using nanoparticles. In the study, the electrolytic environment, pH, flow rate, temperature, and pressure were kept constant, while the variables were concentration of silica nanoparticles (0 – 0.1 wt\%) and coal fines concentration (0.1 – 1 wt\%). The objective was to identify silica nano-formulations that fixate coal fine dispersions effectively. Subsequently, the coal suspensions flowed through a glass bead proppant pack treated with and without nanoparticles, and then analyzed via a particle counter. The quantitative results from particle counter analysis showed that the proppant pack with nanoparticle treatment strongly affects the fixation ability of coal fines. The proppant pack without nanoparticle treatment showed up to 30\% adsorption and flowed through the proppant untreated, whilst proppant pack treated with nanoparticles showed up to 74\% adsorption; hence, more exceptional affixation ability to the coal fines. Further, the results indicated that the zeta potential of silica nanoparticles at higher salinity becomes unstable, i.e., \(-20\) mV; this low value helps the proppant pack treated with nanoparticles to attach coal fines to it. The ability of nanoparticles to adsorb coal fines is due to its highly active surface, and high specific surface area.

Keywords
Coal fines, nanoparticles, nanofluid, fines fixation, CBM, Proppant pack
1. Introduction

The application of nanoparticles has proven to be beneficial in the upstream oil and gas industry (Yang et al. 2015). Several applications like water flood displacement (Yuan and Moghanloo 2018; Bahraminejad et al. 2019; Najimi et al. 2019), fines fixation (Huang et al. 2010b; Assef et al. 2014; Yuan 2017; Zheng et al. 2018), and enhanced oil recovery (Yousefvand and Jafari 2015; Bera and Belhaj 2016; Yuan and Wood 2018; Asl et al. 2020) have been studied and experimented upon in this capacity. The use of nanoparticles to control fines release and fix them at or near the source of their origin has been studied comprehensively in both sandstones (Kia et al. 1987; Mohan and Fogler 1997; Rozo et al. 2007; Zeinijahromi et al. 2012; Bin et al. 2016; Hasannejada et al. 2017) and carbonates (Qajar et al. 2013; Al-Anssari et al. 2016; Al-Anssari et al. 2017b; Al-Anssari et al. 2018). The behavior of Coal Bed Methane (CBM) reservoir fines with nanoparticles, which are considerably different from sandstone fines, has yet to be comprehensively explored.

Compared to conventional reservoirs, CBM reservoirs are relatively weaker and are likely to fail in all operating stages of well development, especially while drilled in horizontal or high-angle directed trajectories (Palmer et al. 2005). CBM reservoirs have critical conditions to release fine. A critical salt concentration (CSC) exists in porous media (Khilar and Fogler 1984; Blume et al. 2005) below which fines can detach from the rock matrix. However, no presence exists of the validated agreement as to CSC in fractured media. The theoretical explanation of fines detachment / attachment has been explained using the Derjaguin–Landau–Verwey–Overbeek (DLVO) theory and extended DLVO theory. The basic premise is that if the attaching force/torque is higher than the detaching (repulsive) force/torque, then the particle will dislodge from the bulk rock matrix/structure and vice versa if the detaching (repulsive) force/torque is higher than the attractive force/torque. (Lever and Dawe 1984; Sharma et al. 1992; Schembre and Kovscek 2005; Rosenbrand et al. 2015). The size of coal fines varies according to the production stage, i.e., the usual size of coal fines found during the water production stage is usually lower than the size of coal fines generated during the gas production stage. When salinity is decreased, mobile particles also decrease in the order of size. This means that larger particles are released when ionic strength is more, and when ionic strength is decreased the smaller particles are mobilized (Keshavarz et al. 2014). The grain size and concentration of coal fines differ during various production stages (Zhao et al. 2016). Generally, two size categories can be distinguished, as follows:
1. Small-sized coal fines are produced during post-completion hydraulic fracture back-flow and in the production stage.

2. Large-sized coal fines are produced during drilling and completion (Han et al. 2015).

Coal fines generation and migration cause a reduction in conductivity and fracture length, thereby damaging the dewatering process (Zou et al. 2014). The factors that affect the production of coal fines output are:


Bituminous coal fines have been shown to cause a 35% decline in permeability when subjected to water flow (Guo et al. 2016) and a 24.4% decline in conductivity when subjected to only 2% of coal fines flow into the proppant pack (Zou et al. 2014). Thus, coal fines can block the proppant pack and cause a decline in fracture conductivity (Bai et al. 2017), resulting in reduced production and failure of production equipment (Marcinew and Hinkel 1990; Badalyan et al. 2016). Several authors have studied coal fines suspension thus far, but have largely performed experiments in DI or distilled water (Zou et al. 2014), while hydraulic fracturing fluid is usually saline (nearly 0.6 M) to be geo-chemically compatible with reservoir formations fluid (Guo et al. 2015; Patel et al. 2016; Shi et al. 2018). The zeta-potential of coal suspension in DI water has been reported as -43.34 mV for bituminous (Shi et al. 2018) and anthracite as -20.5 mV (Zou et al. 2014); however, pH has not been mentioned as a crucial factor in determining the dispersion stability via zeta-potential measurements and has not been studied accordingly.

Fixating coal fines at their source of origin may be done by:

a) using nanoparticles and modified nanoparticles that alter the surface chemistry of fines by interacting with nanoparticles (Huang et al. 2010a),

b) employing micro-proppants before introducing larger proppants (also known as graded proppant injection) so that the fine particles are inhibited from moving into the proppant
pack at or near its place of origin (Kumar et al. 2012; Keshavarz et al. 2014; Keshavarz
et al. 2015; Keshavarz et al. 2016),

c) adding chemicals to the fracturing fluid for agglomerating fragments of coal fines and
fixing them at the source (Shi et al. 2018). Consequently, dispersing coal fines can be
completed via two modes: physical and chemical.

i. Physically, researchers have developed models for straining particles in the pore
throat, where the critical value of consensus among them is of one to six ratio, also
known as a one-sixth rule. This rule notes that if the reservoirs formation fines
diameter (d) is six times less than its gravel pack diameter (D) i.e. \( \frac{d}{D} < \frac{1}{6} \), the fines
will not strain (Elena Rodríguez 2007; Zou et al. 2014).

ii. Polymeric surfactant-based chemicals injected along with fracturing fluid to
disperse and move up to the surface along with well fluids (Magill et al. 2010); (Pan et al. 2015).

Thus, fines migration is one of the most crucial phenomena for formation damage in CBM,
where this challenge has not been addressed comprehensively. Limited studies are available to
suggest that coal fines generation could be controlled at or near the source using metal oxides
nanoparticles (Huang et al. 2010a; Patel et al. 2016). This paper will provide further insights
into coal fines behavior when treated with silica nanoparticles in a proppant pack. The results
show that coal fines can be adsorbed effectively using silica nanoparticles (NPs). An effective
concentration of 0.1 wt% of silica NPs is recommended for achieving better adsorption of fines.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Materials

Coal lumps from coal mines in Morgantown, West Virginia, USA, were retrieved with a
vitrinite reflectance of 0.91, indicative of highly volatile bituminous coal (Moore 2012).
Furthermore, the composition of macerals and minerals was 97.4% and 2.6%, respectively. The
properties of the coal sample are displayed in Table 1. The coal lump was crushed into smaller
sizes by mortar and pestle method, where the coal fines used in this study were sieved using an
electric sieve shaker. Subsequently, the coal fines sieved in 0.038 mm – 0.020 mm were used
for the series of the experiment of adsorption and coal fines fixation in the proppant pack
column. The coal fines size range studied in this work (0.038 mm – 0.020 mm) is consistent
with previously reported studies (Huang et al. 2010a; Bai et al. 2015; Zhao et al. 2016; Bai et al. 2017).

The glass bead proppant was kindly provided by Potters beads of Metal Finishing Glass Beads Potters, with a nominal diameter (80%) Ballotini ® Metal Finishing Beads of Potter Designation B, US Sieve 30-40 (600-475 microns), and minimum roundness of 65%, where the composition of glass beads can be seen in Table 2. Using the electrical sieve shaker, proppants were sieved to US sieve size of 35 (~475 microns) that were used in the adsorption proppant pack experiments.

The silica nanoparticles are insoluble, hydrophilic, and non-polar in water, where those used in this study were procured from Sigma-Aldrich. The properties of the silica nanoparticles are presented in Table 3. An electrolyte of 0.6 M NaCl (as compared to standard saline) was used in the adsorption experiments. A constant pH of 9.0 ± 0.2 was set in all of the experiments as similar to coalbed methane reservoirs. Various concentrations of silica nanoparticles were used to formulate nanofluids. DI-water (Ultrapure Type 1 Water) was used as a base fluid for the nanofluid and to formulate 0.01 M and 0.6 M brine after mixing with NaCl (58.44 g/mol, purity ≥ 99.5 mol%, from Rowe Scientific).

2.2. Methodology

Various SiO₂ NPs concentrations (0.01 – 0.1 wt%), based in 0.01 M and 0.6 M brine-based solutions, were investigated in various coal concentration (0.1-1 wt%) to examine their stability, adhesion to the glass beads proppant, and coal fines adsorption efficiency. The formulation of nanofluids was carried out with two constituents, the dispersed phase and the dispersion medium. The dispersed phase was nano-sized silicon dioxide (SiO₂) - also known as SNPs or Silica NPs, with weight percentages ranging from 0.01 to 0.10, while the dispersion medium was DI water, 0.01 M and 0.6 M NaCl. The dispersion stability was investigated using Malvern Z3600 Nano zeta sizer. The nanofluids were formulated by sonicating nanoparticles in the base fluid (Mahdi Jafari et al. 2006) using an ultrasonic processor (VCX 750, a 750-watt ultrasonic processor, frequency - 20 kHz from Sonics & Materials, Inc.). Whilst the time and power of the sonication process depends mainly on a load of dispersed nanoparticles (Shen and Resasco 2009), in this work all the formulated dispersions were sonicated with the same sonication time, energy, amplitude and power of 300 seconds, 4 MJ, 30%, and 240 V respectively to assure a duplicated conditions for all formulations. The prepared nanofluids
were visually observed to assess any significant instability in the behavior of the nanoparticles during the required soaking period. All experiments were carried out under ambient conditions of pressure = 101.3 kPa and temperature of 295.15 ± 3 K.

The process of adsorption of sandstone fines using nanoparticles affixed on glass beads has also been studied by Huang et al. (2008) and Ahmadi et al. (2013) in addition to other researchers (Huang et al. 2008b, 2008a; Belcher et al. 2010; Huang et al. 2010b; Ahmadi et al. 2013b, 2013a; Habibi et al. 2013; Habibi et al. 2014). However, SNPs coating onto the proppant pack quantitatively has only been discussed by a few researchers such as Abhishek and Hamouda (Abhishek and Hamouda 2017). The only reported patent of using nanoparticles for affixing coal fines highlights the use of MgO to affix coal fines (Huang et al. 2010a). The selection of the proppant is influenced by the mechanical properties of the formation rock and the properties of the proppant itself. The parameters that impacted the selection of the proppant include crush resistance and size of the proppant amongst others. Hollow glass spheres have been reported to have the least specific gravity of 0.8 to 1.4 in all the lightweight proppants (Parker et al. 2012; Liang et al. 2016).

The method of affixing nanoparticles onto the surface of proppants is critical to the experiments; thus, in this research, we have soaked the NPs for 24 hours and calculated the nanoparticle coating efficiency via turbidity results. Note that SDBS (an anionic surfactant) is used in all experiments to flow through the slurry with minimal adsorption. The adsorption efficiency is defined in Eq. 1 (Habibi et al. 2014). The results of influent and effluent slurry were obtained using the particle counter sizer.

\[
\text{Adsorption efficiency (\%) } = 100 - \left( \frac{C_{\text{eff}}}{C_{\text{in}}} \times 100 \right)
\]

Where,

- \( C_{\text{eff}} \): Concentration of coal fines in the effluent slurry, gm/cc
- \( C_{\text{in}} \): Concentration of coal fines in the influent slurry, gm/cc

A glass column was used in all of the experiments of adsorption, in which flow took place merely because of gravitational force, where a schematic of the procedure adopted in the column can be seen in Fig. 1 below.

2.3. Experimental set-up workflow
The laboratory study model and equipment will be adapted from Habibi et al. and Ahmadi al. and used to see the effect of silica nanoparticles on coal fines adsorption (Ahmadi et al. 2013b, 2013a; Habibi et al. 2013; Arab et al. 2014; Habibi et al. 2014). In this study, bare silica nanoparticles, as well as treated silica nanoparticles with Sodium Dodecyl Benzene Sulfonate (SDBS), were analyzed with a Malvern Nano Zeta Sizer to determine their stability. Following this, a turbidity calibration curve for silica NPs was made using a HACH 2000 Turbidimeter. The main experiment was the proppant pack tests conducted in the glass column at ambient conditions in which coal slurry flowed into a proppant treated with SNPs. This was compared with proppant without any SNP treatment. The results of the coal slurry were obtained using a particle counter analyzer. The corresponding experimental workflow is shown in Figure 2.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Silica Nanoparticles dispersion using SDBS

In order to modify the dispersion stability and surface chemistry of SNPs, an anionic surfactant SDBS was used. In the three dispersion mediums (DI water, 0.01 M NaCl, and 0.6 M NaCl) tested, SDBS reduced the zeta-potential and effectively enhanced the dispersion stability, as shown in Figure 3. Note that the dispersion stability is more effective in DI water and low salinity (0.01 M NaCl) rather than in the high salinity (0.6 M NaCl) suspension.

The zeta-potential measurements of bare SNPs in both ionic strengths are consistent with Al-Anssari et al. (2017) (Al-Anssari et al. 2017a). With increases in ionic strength, the absolute zeta-potential value decreases, resulting in reduced dispersion stability. However, the DI water and low ionic strength (0.01 M NaCl brine) provide better stability enhancement when SNPs are treated with SDBS.

3.2. Effect of Nanoparticles adhesion onto proppant pack

In order to examine the coating of nanoparticles via the soaking method, we first calibrated SNPs in DI water. The SNPs turbidity increases with an increase in SNP loading, as can be seen in Figure 4. Note that the turbidimeter has a limitation of 1000 NTUs. When on the x-axis, SNP loading is increased while on the y-axis, the turbidity value in NTU increased with the loading resulting in a slope value of 3390.5.
It was observed that higher salinity has lower zeta-potential, which leads to higher retention efficiency of SNPs by soaking method, as seen in Figure 5. The results show that SNPs based in DI water yielded retention efficiency of 61-67%, while 0.01 M NaCl (as comparable to potable water) yielded 60-72% retention efficiency, and 0.6 M NaCl (as comparable to seawater) yielded 81-85% retention of SNPs onto the glass bead proppant pack. This retention is due to the zeta-potential values, as obtained in Section 3.1, which can also be seen in Figure 3. Thus, aggregation of nanoparticles in 0.6 M NaCl ionic strength due to its low zeta-potential, aids it in retaining SNPs in the proppant pack.

Thus, in further experiments after observing better retention of 0.6 M NaCl cases in two coal concentrations (0.01 wt% and 0.1 wt%), we conducted the rest of the experiments of adsorption in 0.6 M NaCl salinity. This is consistent with the DLVO theory, which defines principles based on which the particles (in our case SNPs) aggregation take place at higher salinities.

3.3. Effect of Chemically modified Nanoparticles on coal fines fixation

Chemically modified nanoparticles (in this case, silica nanoparticles treated with SDBS) were injected into the glass-column, followed by the introduction of the glass-bead proppant pack. The results showed that 0.1 wt% of SNPs yielded maximum adsorption of all tested coal fines (0.1, 0.5, and 1 wt%), as can be seen in Figure 6. Note that there is a difference in adsorption of coal fines with weight percentages (even when passing through an untreated proppant pack), as a higher concentration of slurry yields lower dispersion stability, leading to clogging in the proppant pack (Al-Anssari et al. 2017a).

The base case has been optimized in our previous work (Awan et al. 2019), giving a $C_{eff}/C_0$ of approximately 83%, meaning the adsorption of coal fines is 17% (using 0.1 wt% coal fines treated with 0.001 wt% SDBS). The rest of the coal slurries also have 0.001 wt% SDBS, but their coal fines are of higher weight fraction. It can also be observed that untreated proppant packs in various coal concentrations result in an increasing trend to rising coal concentration, i.e., 17% adsorption for 0.1 wt% coal fines, 27% adsorption for 0.5 wt% coal fines, and 30% adsorption for 1.0 wt% coal fines. This occurs due to the lower stability of the coal slurry as a result of the increase in weight (Al-Anssari et al. 2017a), which ultimately causes the straining of coal fines due to their aggregation. Additionally, not all of the coal fines retention in the proppant pack is due to the interaction of attractive forces of nanoparticles with coal fines, there

...
is also an aggregation of coal fines and straining in the proppant pack as has been demonstrated by Zou et al. (2014) (Zou et al. 2014) which can be seen in Fig. 6.

With increasing the SNP loading in the proppant pack, its retention efficiency also increases. Thus, the nanoparticle treated glass beads can retard the mobilization of coal fines through the proppant pack and affix them near the source of their generation; thereby, reducing the damage to the pumps and minimizing the possibility of filling of the wellbore.

4. Conclusion
The above sets of experiments conclude that higher salinity yields higher coating efficiency of the proppant pack via nanoparticles due to their aggregation behavior (zeta-potential values of greater than -20 mV). SDBS enhances the dispersion stability of silica nanoparticles in various salinities tested up to 0.6 M NaCl. An optimum concentration of 0.1 wt% SNPs yielded maximum adsorption of coal fines in the proppant pack at higher ionic strength (0.6 M NaCl brine).

Further studies involving a comparison of various coating methods (e.g., calcination, sintering, soaking, oil coating, etc.) for irreversibly affixing nanoparticles on the proppant pack need to be conducted, in order to optimize the coating procedure in various saline environments. Further, coal particles of different ranks need to be studied to understand the behavior of various metal oxide nanoparticles, in order to fixate these coal fines by adsorption in the proppant pack. A comprehensive study to determine the impact of adsorption on the permeability can also be studied, as its implication in the field can be detrimental to natural gas recovery.

Conflicts of Interest
None.

Acknowledgments
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Biographies

Faisal Ur Rahman Awan is a Ph.D. candidate in Petroleum Engineering at Edith Cowan University, Australia. His work focuses specifically on the coal fines fixation using nanoparticles. Mr. Awan did his Bachelor's and Master’s degrees in Petroleum Engineering. He has also been serving at Dawood University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, as an Assistant Professor in Petroleum Engineering for the last seven years. He is a member of prestigious societies such as SPE, SEG, EI, and PEC.

Alireza holds a Ph.D. degree in Petroleum Engineering from the University of Adelaide, an M.Sc. degree in Reservoir Engineering from the University of Tehran (Iran), and a B.Sc. degree in Chemical-Petroleum Engineering from Petroleum University of Technology (Iran). He is presently serving as a Senior Lecturer at the School of Engineering at Edith Cowan University. Before joining ECU, Alireza was a research scientist in the CSIRO-Energy business unit, where he researched enhancing gas production from unconventional resources and CO2-sequestration. Before pursuing his Ph.D. study, he was a Petroleum Engineer in the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for six years. Alireza’s research interests focus on Enhanced Oil/Gas Recovery from conventional and unconventional reservoirs. He is a member of SPE.

Hamed completed his Bachelor’s and Master's in Petroleum Engineering. During his Master’s study, he conducted numerical research on heavy oil EOR. He used two of the most professional petroleum simulators, CMG and Eclipse, in his studies. He changed his research field to Coalbed Methane in 2016 and received a scholarship for his Ph.D. studies at Edith Cowan University (ECU), Australia. For the time being, as a Ph.D. student at ECU, he is experimentally researching on Coalbed Methane productivity enhancement as his priority, and also partially on enhanced oil recovery and CO2 geo-sequestration. He is a member of SPE.

Sarmad Al-Ansari is currently a senior lecturer in Chemical Engineering at University of Baghdad, Iraq. He earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in chemical engineering from University of Baghdad and he holds a PhD degree in chemical engineering/ Nanotechnology from Curtin University/ Australia. He worked as a faculty member in the university of Baghdad for more than 10 years and recently he is adjunct lecturer at ECU Australia and external supervisor at Curtin university/ Australia. His research interest is on different applications of nanoparticles and nanofluids in different disciplines, including wettability alteration, enhanced oil recovery, and carbon capture and storage.
Stefan Iglauer joined Edith Cowan University (ECU) in 2018 as a Professor to lead the developments in the Petroleum Engineering discipline. His research interests are in petrophysics and interfacial phenomena, mainly at pore-scale with a focus on CO2 geo-sequestration and improved hydrocarbon recovery. Stefan has authored more than 250 technical publications; he holds a Ph.D. degree in material science from Oxford Brookes University (UK) and an MSc degree from the University of Paderborn (Germany). He is a member of SPE.
Table 1: Properties of coal sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ash (%, db&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Density (g/cm&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Volatile matter (%, daf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>C (%, daf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>H (% daf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>R&lt;sub&gt;v&lt;/sub&gt;, max&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</th>
<th>Vitritine (vol% mmf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Inertinite (vol% mmf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Liptinite (vol% mmf&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.798</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>5.042</td>
<td>78.50</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>81.01</td>
<td>12.73</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> db: on a dry basis; daf: dried ash-free; R<sub>v</sub>, max: maximum vitrinite reflectance; mmf: mineral matter free.

Table 2: Properties of glass beads used as proppant packs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chemical</th>
<th>SiO&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Na&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;O</th>
<th>CaO</th>
<th>MgO</th>
<th>Al&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;O&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>FeO/Fe&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;O&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Trace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wt %</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Characteristics of nanoparticles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nanoparticle</th>
<th>Linear Formula</th>
<th>Primary particle size (nm)</th>
<th>Chemical Structure Depiction</th>
<th>Specific surface area (m&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;/g)</th>
<th>Purity (%)</th>
<th>Density (g/cc)</th>
<th>Molecular mass (g/mol) @ 298.15 K</th>
<th>Boiling point (K)</th>
<th>Melting point (K)</th>
<th>Additional Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silicon dioxide</td>
<td>SiO&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>5-15</td>
<td></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>≥ 99.50</td>
<td>2.20-2.60</td>
<td>60.08</td>
<td>2503</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Porous spherical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Schematic of (a) Silica nano-formulation added to the glass column, (b) Introduction of proppant particles in the nano-formulation (c) Injection of coal slurry at 1 mL/min
Figure 2: Workflow of experiments for determining the effect of nanoparticles on adsorption of coal fines
Figure 3: Effect of SDBS in various ionic strength (0, 0.01 and 0.6 M NaCl brines) on zeta-potential for 0.1 wt% silica NPs at pH=9 and temperature=298.15 K.
Figure 4: Turbidity results of silica nanoparticles in various concentrations from 0 to 0.3 wt%

(R² of the Linear SiO₂ is 0.967)
Figure 5: Turbidity results for silica nanoparticles coating via soaking method results in various suspensions (DI water, 0.01 M, and 0.6 M NaCl brines)
Figure 6: Results of adsorption of the various coal fines concentrations (0.1, 0.5, and 1 wt%) using no nanoparticles, 0.01 wt%, and 0.1 wt% in 0.6 M saline environment in a proppant pack. Note the base case is 0.1 wt% coal fines passed through the untreated proppant pack.