

Optimization of heat exchanger network in the dehydration process using utility pinch analysis

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Abstract—Pinch analysis was applied to optimize the heat exchange network used in the moisture removal processes of energy plants. The moisture removal process absorbs moisture from natural gas using glycol as an absorbent, and the recycling process then separates moisture from the H₂O-rich glycol in a regenerator column by applying the principle of vapor-liquid equilibria. For the dehydration process of a natural gas plant, the heat and mass flows are properly established and calculated by means of a static process model for a utility system embedded in the process based on the properties of natural gas. The results of the calculation generate a T-H composite curve that can be used to compare the pinch and to assess the installation and operating costs for the target temperature. The results show that approximately 61% of the total heat supply can be replaced with low-pressure steam, depending on the optimization of the heat exchanger network of the moisture removal process. Further, the annual operating costs can be reduced by about 17% in this case.

Keywords: Dehydration Process, Heat Exchanger Network, Pinch Analysis, Plant Engineering, Cold Region

INTRODUCTION

Numerous energy plants that consist of several processing stages have been devoting a huge amount of their efforts to improving the efficiency of their systems and reducing greenhouse gases emission. These plants are increasing in size and becoming more sophisticated, so there is greater interest in reducing operating costs and maximizing heat conduction [1,2].

Most large plants that use various complex heat exchange networks utilize exergy theory, pinch analysis, mathematical programming, or stochastic optimization to optimize the processing systems [3-5]. Linnhoff et al. [6] explained complex mathematical methods that are involved in heat exchange network design via the pinch analysis with a pictorial overview and provided insight into the concept of composite and network curves. However, large-scale plants that did not operate in a unit process could not use Linnhoff's design and showed limitations in the analysis of heat exchange processes. Ebrahim et al. [7] showed that the pinch analysis method has been used for over 20 years since its introduction and reported the results in terms of energy reduction, a decrease in the initial investment fee, and the effective operation of heat exchange networks in the industry. Geldermann et al. [8] incorporated the pinch analysis method into an integrated process design to reduce the operating costs. Furthermore, they designed an effective heat exchange method with the corresponding network for plants using a solvent to process auto-

mobile surfaces and dehydration operations. The pinch analysis method was used to integrate various heat exchange systems, leading to a reduction in the operating costs and an improvement on their efficiency [9]. Smith et al. [10] combined Linnhoff's pinch method and a complex mathematical programming method to improve the heat exchange system in crude oil distillation process. The results showed an overall reduction of almost 23% in energy. Moreover, they found that the pinch method could be improved by combining it with a complex mathematical programming method to optimize a large-scale plant operating system.

Typically, when a conventional heat exchange system is analyzed by using the pinch method, heat transfer occurs between hot fluids above the pinch point while heat transfer between cold fluids occurs below the pinch point. The accurate placement of heat exchangers in a system eliminates the additional cross-pinch heat exchangers in the system, and energy production becomes closer to the target production [11,12]. Yoon et al. [13] used the pinch method to improve heat exchange networks in plants that use ethylbenzene and found that the total annual cost could be reduced by 5.6% by improving the heat exchanger in the distillation process. Furthermore, the reduction in operating costs was more drastic than the cost incurred in improving the actual processing system. Tuan et al. [14] implemented the pinch method to improve the production processing stages for a gelatin-based three-effect evaporator. Two cases were considered for the improvement: first, a simple enhancement of the heat exchange network by implementing the pinch method, and second, the installation of additional heat pumps in the system and also implementing the pinch method. The results showed that applying the pinch method to an existing operational system

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was sufficient without additional pumps.

This study applied pinch analysis to the dehydration process of liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants using triethylene glycol (TEG, $C_6H_{14}O_4$) to improve the heat transfer efficiency. In this effort, the pinch point on a composite curve was optimized to obtain the outer limit for an overall improvement in the heat exchange networks of various energy plants.

ANALYSIS MODEL AND METHOD

1. Moisture Removal Process

The pretreatment for natural gas liquefaction consists of sweetening and dehydration processes, as shown in Fig. 1, to remove impurities (including carbon dioxide and sulfur) and moisture from gas by using absorbents such as amine and glycol to stabilize the subsequent liquefaction process. Removing moisture from natural gas in a dehydration process prevents corrosion and mechanical damage of equipment that may result from the formation of hydrates.

The dry natural gas resulting from pretreatment processes is then cooled and liquefied in a subsequent liquefaction process that utilizes propane and refrigerant mixtures. Further, the fractionation process of the natural gas results in ethane, propane, butane, and others, and nitrogen is then freed in the following step.

The moisture removal process indicated by the dotted line in Fig. 1 consists of two systems: the supply system of natural gas containing moisture and the supply system of glycol that absorbs and removes moisture. As shown in Fig. 2, the introduced wet gas containing moisture is discharged through the dry gas outlet after its moisture is removed by glycol in the contactor tower. In general, the rich glycol that absorbs moisture from natural gas is heated to 100–110 °C in the heat exchange with lean glycol, and it is supplied to the regenerator column. This stream is then flashed, resulting in the formation of the H_2O -rich gas phase and the solvent-rich liquid phase on basis of the principle of the vapor-liquid equilibrium. Subsequently, the H_2O -rich gas phase is released through the vapor outlet, and the solvent-rich liquid phase is heated to 200–210 °C

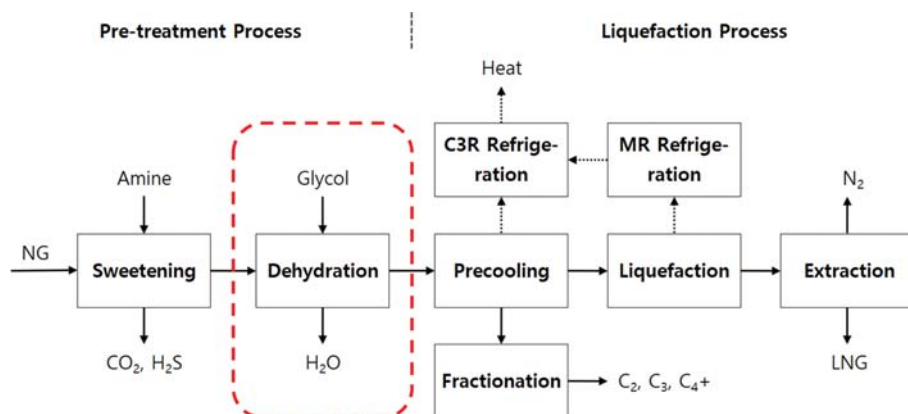


Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of the liquefied natural gas plant.

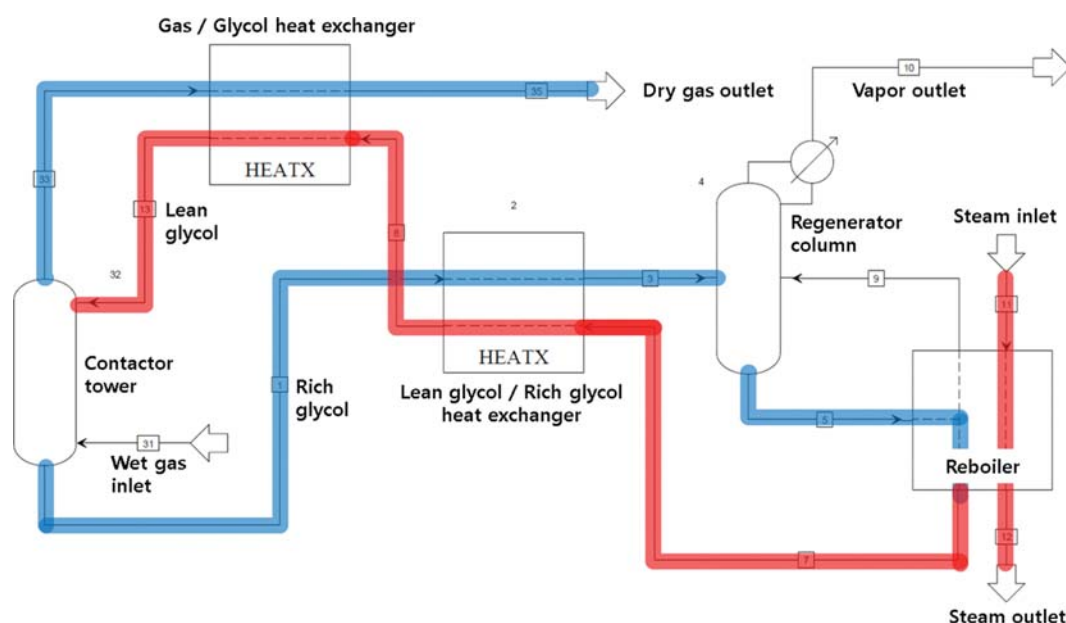


Fig. 2. Typical flow diagram for a glycol dehydration process.

Table 1. Properties and composition of natural gas

| Properties | | | Composition | | |
|----------------|-------------------|---------|-------------|--------------------------------|--------|
| Name | Unit | Value | Name | Formula | [mol%] |
| Vapor fraction | - | 1.0000 | Nitrogen | N ₂ | 4.98 |
| Mole flow | kmol/h | 271.2 | Methane | CH ₄ | 87.06 |
| Mass flow | kg/h | 4,972.9 | Ethane | C ₂ H ₆ | 5.07 |
| Enthalpy | 10 ⁶ W | 0.2 | Propane | C ₃ H ₈ | 1.98 |
| Entropy | kcal/kg·K | 2.4 | i-Butane | C ₄ H ₁₀ | 0.44 |
| MW | kg/kgmol | 18.33 | n-Butane | C ₄ H ₁₀ | 0.45 |
| Pressure | bar_a | 70.0 | i-Pentane | C ₅ H ₁₂ | 0.01 |
| Temperature | °C | 15.0 | n-Pentane | C ₅ H ₁₂ | 0.01 |

with help of the regeneration steam in the reboiler. The liquid phase, which consists of H₂O-lean glycol, is cooled to approximately 50 °C by using the rich glycol, and then the dry gas from the contact tower in succession before it is recycled to the contactor tower to absorb the moisture from natural gas [15].

Table 1 shows the composition of the natural gas used in this study. The Peng-Robinson equation of state (PR-EOS) [16] is widely applicable to hydrocarbon-based phase equilibrium calculations under a wide range of temperature and pressure conditions. Thus, the PR-EOS was used to obtain the enthalpy required to calculate the heat engine efficiency and the power for closure of the heat and material balances in this work.

Briefly, PR-EOS is given by

$$P = \frac{RT}{V-b} - \frac{a(T)}{V(V+b)+b(V-b)} \quad (1)$$

The parameters a and b are as follows.

$$a(T) = 0.45724 \frac{(RT_c)^2}{P_c} \alpha(T_r, \omega)$$

$$b = 0.07780 \frac{RT_c}{P_c}$$

$$\alpha(T_r, \omega) = [1 + (0.37464 + 1.54226\omega - 0.26992\omega^2)(1 - T_r^{1/2})]^2$$

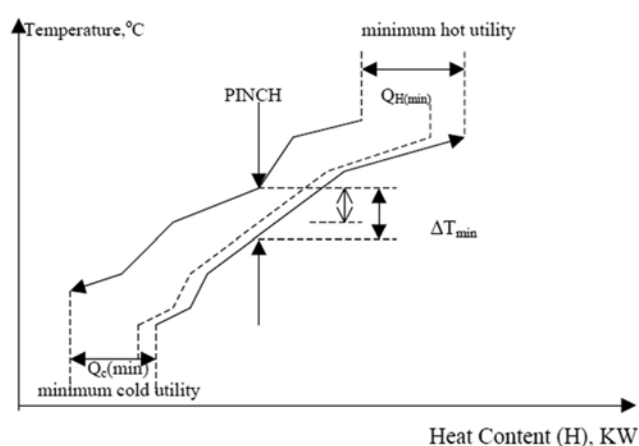
where T_r and P_r are the reduced temperature and pressure, respectively, and ω is the acentric factor suggested by Pitzer [17].

This work configured and analyzed the heat exchanger network by using Aspen HYSYS, Aspen Energy analyzer, and their built-in parameters extensively.

2. Pinch Analysis

The pinch analysis is a method that minimizes the energy consumption of a relevant process by calculating a thermodynamically feasible energy target (minimum energy consumption) and by optimizing the bootstrap system, energy supply method, and process operating conditions to reach the target. It is also referred to as process integration, heat integration, energy integration, or pinch technology [18].

The T-H composite curve in the pinch analysis combines hot streams that release heat into one stream and cold streams that absorb heat from another stream and represents them on one graph that shows the change in the enthalpy change (y-axis) with temperature (x-axis). In addition, the pinch analysis uses the grand com-

**Fig. 3. Energy targets and pinch with composite curves.**

posite curve, which represents the changes in heat supply and demand within the process. In addition, it is possible to examine the amount of heat exchange between an external utility and the process flow by using a balance curve, in which a utility stream is added to the composite curve.

As shown in Fig. 3, the point where the vertical distance between the hot stream composite curve and cold stream composite curve is minimized is referred to as the “pinch point,” and the temperature of this point is referred to as the “pinch temperature.” The temperature that can reach the energy target (ΔT_{min}) must be determined between the hot and the cold stream composite curves in a system that is vertically separated by the pinch point.

The procedure for the pinch analysis is as follows. First, hot, cold, and utility flows are identified in the chemical process, and the temperature, specific heat, and enthalpy data are extracted from each flow. Second, after the minimum approach temperature difference (ΔT_{min}) is set, the composite curve and the grand composite curve are created. Third, the minimum energy consumption is calculated by performing energy targeting. Fourth, the minimum approach temperature difference is determined so that the total cost of the equipment (capital cost) and energy cost can be minimized. Finally, a heat exchange network is designed on the grid curve, which is improved using the pinch method.

3. Estimation Equation for the Yearly Operating Cost

The energy cost and capital cost are calculated to examine eco-

where C.C is the initial investment cost, a is the installation cost of the heat exchanger, and b and c are the duty/area-related cost set coefficients of the heat exchanger. Area and Shells are the heat transfer area of the heat exchanger and the number of heat exchanger shells, respectively [13,19].

The total annual cost is calculated by substituting Eqs. (2) and (3) into Eq. (4).

$$\text{T.A.C.} = A \times \Sigma(C.C + E.C) \quad (4)$$

Here, A is given by

$$A = \frac{\left(1 + \frac{\text{ROR}}{100}\right)^{PL}}{PL} \quad (5)$$

where T.A.C. is the total annual cost, A is the annualization factor, ROR is the rate of return, which is the investment capital recovery rate and is fixed at 10%, and PL is the plant life, which is the service life of the plant heat exchanger network and is assumed to be 15, 20, or 25 years.

RESULTS

Fig. 4 presents the definition of the hot stream and cold stream flows for the moisture removal process, and the static process model for the moisture removal process and utility system was constructed as shown in Fig. 5. In addition, the heat and material balances were calculated based on the material properties of natural gas, as presented in Table 1 [20]. The utility cost index is shown in Table 2 and the results are summarized in Table 3.

In Fig. 5, 'Feed' (30 °C, 6,200 kPa, 4,981 kg/h) indicates the flow of natural gas including carbon dioxide and sulfur, which are removed in the amine treater. In TEG Contactor, which is the contactor tower, the moisture contained in Feed is removed by means of TEG. In addition, the remaining trace amounts of TEG and moisture (H₂O) are removed in Remove TEG and MolSieve, respec-

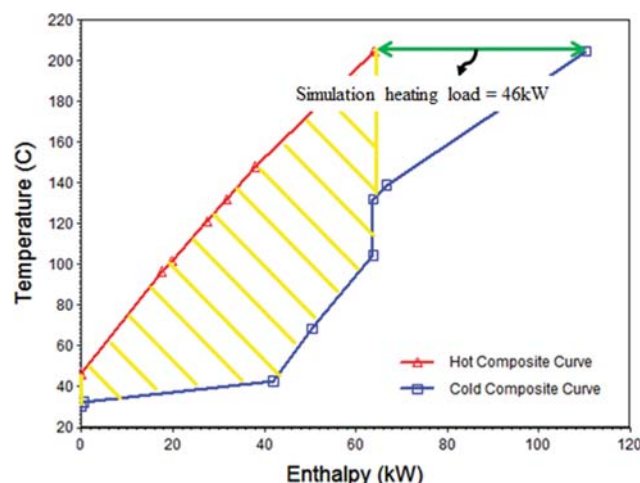


Fig. 6. T-H composite curve.

tively. This sweetened and dehydrated gas flow resulting from this process is then directed to a subsequent liquefaction process.

The TEG feed (50 °C, 6,205 kPa, 563 kg/h) absorbs moisture from the feed flow in TEG Contactor, and rich TEG (27 °C, 6,205 kPa, 285 kg/h), which contains the absorbed moisture, is supplied to TEG Regenerator after heating to 105 °C in L/R HEX (heat exchanger). Regen Btms (205 °C, 103 kPa, 563 kg/h), which is a regenerated absorbent by dehydration in TEG Regenerator, is cooled to 50 °C in L/R HEX and NG/TEG HEX in succession. This stream is then directed to TEG Contactor after being pressurized to 6,205 kPa by the P-100 pump.

Based on these results, the T-H composite curve and grand composite curve, respectively, presented in Figs. 6 and 7, were created to compare the pinch. In these figures, the areas with deviant crease lines represent the areas for which the amount of heat was gained or lost between the hot streams and cold streams in the heat exchange. The hot and cold composite curves in Fig. 6, respectively,

Table 3. Heat/Material balance of the hydration process

| Name | Feed | Dry gas | Product | TEG feed | Rich TEG | Sour gas | Regen btms |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Vapor fraction | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 1.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 1.0000 | 0.0000 |
| Temperature [°C] | 30.00 | 32.61 | 43.40 | 50.00 | 30.78 | 102.00 | 205.00 |
| Pressure [kPa] | 6200 | 6190 | 6155 | 6205 | 6200 | 101 | 103 |
| Mole flow [kmol/h] | 271.63 | 271.27 | 271.26 | 4.01 | 4.37 | 0.36 | 4.01 |
| Heat flow [kJ/h] | -2.0e+7 | -2.0e+7 | -2.0e+7 | -3.0e+6 | -3.1e+6 | -6.3e+4 | -2.8e+6 |
| Enthalpy [kJ/kmol] | -7.4e+4 | -7.4e+4 | -7.3e+4 | -7.5e+5 | -7.1e+5 | -1.7e+5 | -7.0e+5 |
| Nitrogen [mol%] | 0.0497 | 0.0497 | 0.0497 | 0.0000 | 0.0062 | 0.0747 | 0.0000 |
| Methane [mol%] | 0.8681 | 0.8689 | 0.8690 | 0.0000 | 0.0185 | 0.2240 | 0.0000 |
| Ethane [mol%] | 0.0510 | 0.0510 | 0.0510 | 0.0000 | 0.0032 | 0.0384 | 0.0000 |
| Propane [mol%] | 0.0213 | 0.0213 | 0.0213 | 0.0000 | 0.0022 | 0.0271 | 0.0000 |
| i-Butane [mol%] | 0.0044 | 0.0044 | 0.0044 | 0.0000 | 0.0002 | 0.0025 | 0.0000 |
| n-Butane [mol%] | 0.0045 | 0.0045 | 0.0045 | 0.0000 | 0.0002 | 0.0029 | 0.0000 |
| i-Pentane [mol%] | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 |
| n-Pentane [mol%] | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0001 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0001 | 0.0000 |
| TEG [mol%] | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.0000 | 0.9262 | 0.8498 | 0.0006 | 0.9262 |
| H ₂ O [mol%] | 0.0009 | 0.0001 | 0.0000 | 0.0738 | 0.1197 | 0.6297 | 0.0738 |

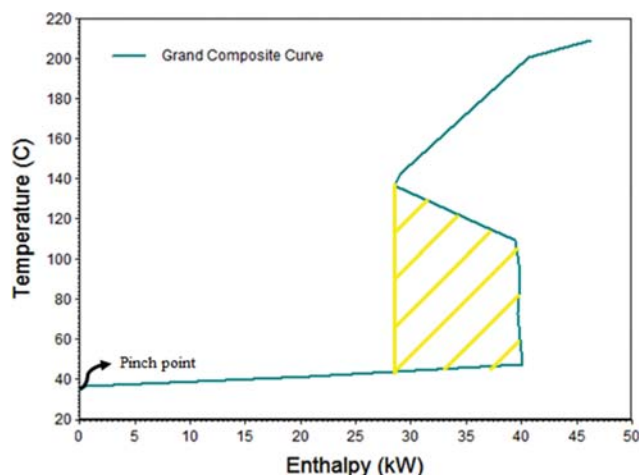


Fig. 7. T-H grand composite curve.

represent the removed and added heat flows in the heat exchange.

The grand composite curve in Fig. 7 shows the hot and cold stream composite curves from Fig. 6 on the T-H composite curve. Fig. 7 shows the area where heat is exchanged between the hot streams and the cold streams and the area where heat is exchanged with the utility along with the amount. This figure becomes the basis for the selection of the utility, and the analysis in Figs. 6 and 7 confirms that no utility is required below the pinch point (cooling) while approximately 46 kW of utility is required above the pinch point (heating).

The balanced composite curve and the utility composite curve obtained by adding high-pressure steam heating (250 °C, 5,000 kPa) utility to the composite curves in Figs. 6 and 7 are presented in Figs. 8 and 9, respectively. In these figures, the areas with deviant crease lines represent the heat duty of the utility and the amount of heat exchange between the hot streams and cold streams occurring in the heat exchange. The results show that the amount of heat that is exchanged increases with the area of the deviant crease lines, and the energy cost also increases accordingly. To minimize the energy cost, also on a basis of the results, it is advisable to reduce the dif-

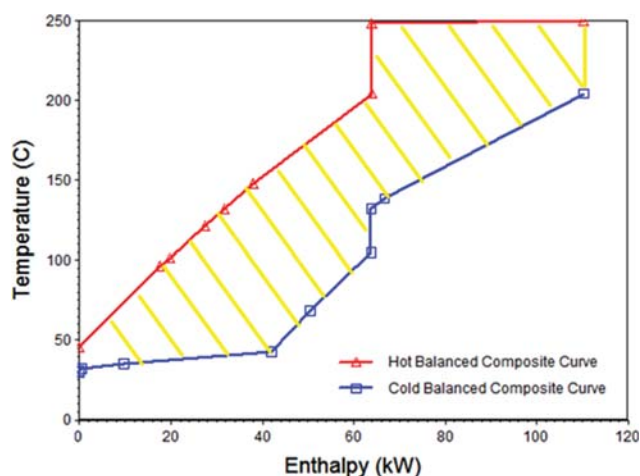


Fig. 8. Balanced composite curve with one utility.

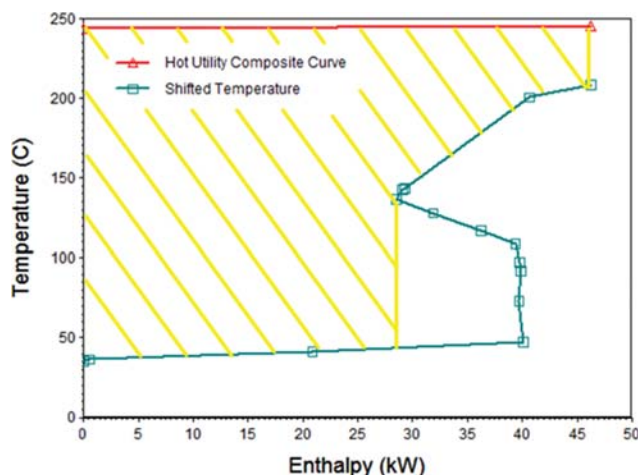


Fig. 9. Utility composite curve with one utility.

ferences between the heat exchange temperatures using several levels of low-level utilities.

To investigate the possibility of replacing the high-pressure steam used in Fig. 9 with medium-pressure steam (175 °C, 1,500 kPa) or low-pressure steam (125 °C, 500 kPa), the balance composite curves and utility composite curves were obtained by setting the minimum approach temperature difference to 8.5 °C with various grades of steam (i.e., high-pressure, medium-pressure, and low-pressure steam) as a heat source. Based on the resulting curves shown in Figs. 10 and 11, approximately 102.9 MJ/h (61%) and 21 MJ/h (13%) could be replaced by low-pressure steam and medium-pressure steam, respectively, which corresponds to approximately 74% of the total heat supply. However, since the area that could be replaced with the medium-pressure steam is only 13% of the total heat supply, adding only low-pressure steam as a heat source was deemed to be effective considering the installation cost. Taking into account this result, the balance composite curve and the grand composite curve obtained by using high-pressure steam or low-pressure steam as a heat source were constructed as shown in Figs. 12 and 13, respectively. These results are used to conjecture that the process

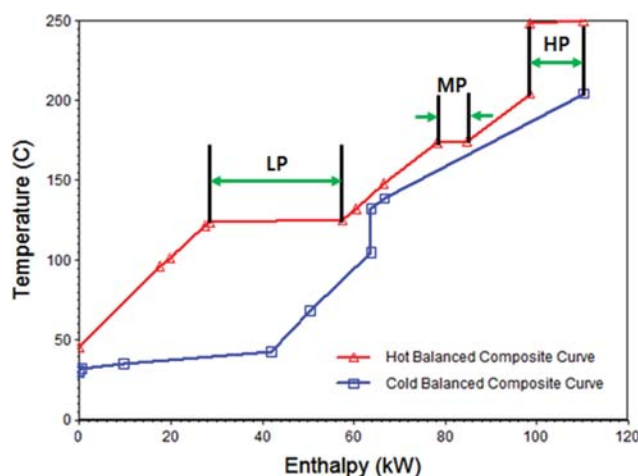


Fig. 10. Balanced composite curve with three utilities.

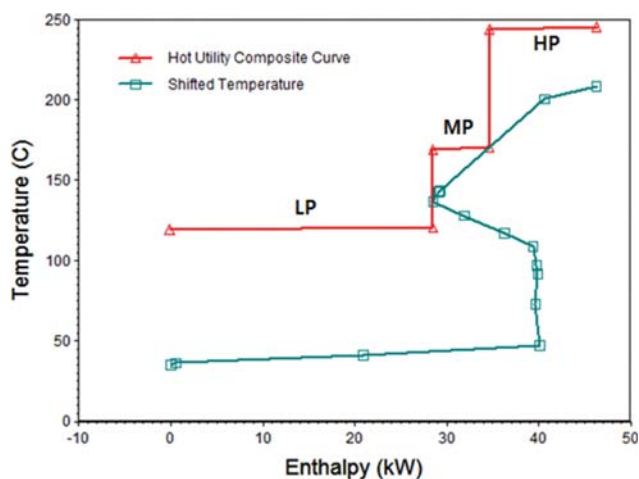


Fig. 11. Utility composite curve with three utilities.

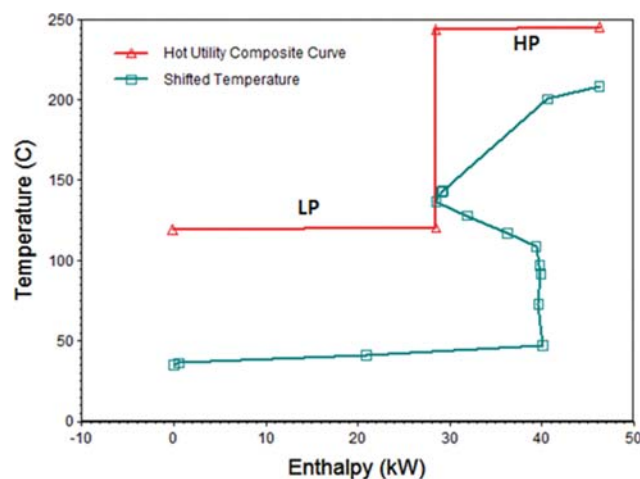


Fig. 13. Utility composite curve with two utilities.

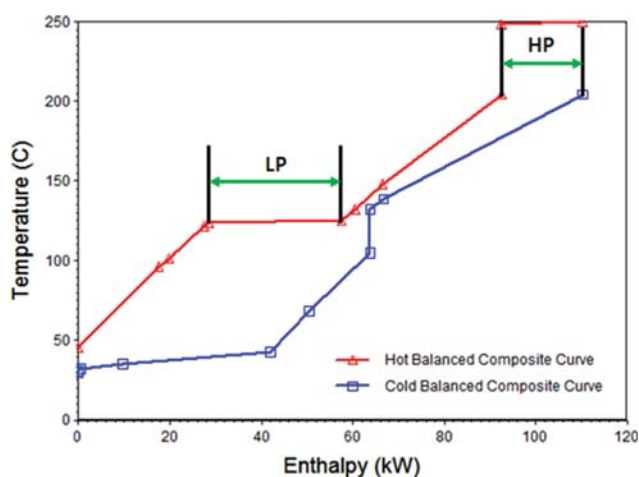


Fig. 12. Balanced composite curve with two utilities.

may be modified as shown in Fig. 14 to optimize the process in the aspect of energy efficiency. That is, a heat exchanger is installed in the Rich TEG-Regen Feed flow to supply heat from the low-

Table 4. Summary of results/Summary of data analysis

| | Base case | Target | Optimized |
|----------------------------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| Heating cost [\$ /year] | 34,364 | 27,587 | 28,535 |
| Heating load [kW] | 46.47 | 46.30 | 46.47 |
| Cooling load [kW] | 0.18 | 0.00 | 0.18 |
| Area [m ²] | 4.917 | 8.51 | 7.140 |
| New area [m ²] | - | - | 3.104 |
| Shell | 4 | 10 | 6 |
| New shell | - | - | 3 |
| New area cost [\$] | - | - | 32,470 |
| Savings [\$ /year] | - | - | 5,829 |
| Payback [year] | - | - | 5.574 |

pressure steam, and another heat exchanger is placed in front of the reheater to reduce the thermal load of the TEG regenerator reheater and to supply heat from the [Regen Btms]-[Lean from L/R] flow. To examine the improvement in thermal performance due to the modifications, the target ($\Delta T_{min}=8.5^{\circ}\text{C}$) data are compared with an existing process system (shown in Fig. 4). The energy cost and

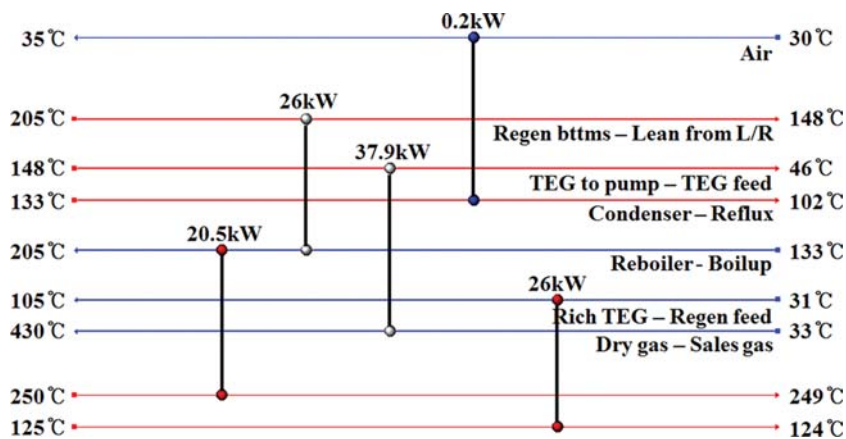


Fig. 14. Grid diagram of suggested model.

initial investment cost were evaluated, and the results are summarized in Table 4. While the annual operating cost for moisture removal from an LNG output of 100 TPD was estimated to be approximately \$34,364, the annual operating cost was \$28,535 when heat was supplied to the low-level section using low-pressure steam (125 °C, 500 kPa), as shown in Fig. 14. Therefore, the suggested modification brought about a savings of approximately \$5,829 (17%) compared to existing configurations of the utilities.

CONCLUSION

A pinch analysis was modeled and performed for the moisture removal process from natural gas in an LNG plant processing system, and the process improvement was investigated by considering the energy target and economic efficiency.

The hot streams and cold streams in the dehydration process and the utility system were properly defined. Based on the static process model and the resulting composite curve data for the moisture removal process and the utility system, the differences between the heat exchange temperatures were confirmed to be reduced by using several levels of low-level utilities.

When the energy target temperature was set closer to $\Delta T_{min} = 8.5$ °C in the moisture removal process and low-pressure steam was added to the glycol supply and regeneration systems, approximately 61% (102.9 MJ/h) of the total heat supply could be replaced with low-grade steam. In this case, the annual energy cost was reduced by approximately 17%.

In the future, various influencing factors, such as a commercial-scale moisture removal process, the physical properties of the supplied natural gas, and the heat exchanger type, will also be considered in a comprehensive manner.

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