A benchmark study on the thermal conductivity of nanofluids


1Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA
2Illinois Institute of Technology, 10 W. 33rd St., Chicago, Illinois 6016, USA
3Olin College of Engineering, Olin Way, Needham, Massachusetts 02492, USA
4Kent State University, Williams Hall, Kent, Ohio 44424, USA
5Materials Research Center, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), 110 8th Street, Troy, New York 12180, USA
6Texas A&M University, MS 3367, College Station, Texas 77843, USA
7School of Energy Engineering, Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology, San 194 Banyeon-ri, Eonyang-eup, Ulju-gun, Ulsan Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea
8Tokyo Institute of Technology, 2-12-1 Ookayama, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 152-8550, Japan
9Commissariat à l’Énergie Atomique (CEA), IRAMIS, 91191 Gif sur Yvette, France
10METSS Corporation, 300 Westdale Avenue, Westerville, Ohio 43082, USA
11Department of Aerospace Engineering, University of Naples, P.le V. Tecchio 80, 80125 Naples, Italy
12SASOL of North America, 2201 Old Spanish Trail, Westlake, Louisiana 70669-0727, USA
13University of Leeds, Clarendon Road, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom
14Department of Mechanical Engineering and Materials Science, University of Pittsburgh, 648 Benedum Hall, 3700 O’Hara Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15261, USA
15Department of Mechanical Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, Chennai 600036, India
16Université Libre de Bruxelles, Chimie-Physique E.P. CP 165/62 Avenue P. Heger, Bat. U3D, Bruxelles 1050, Belgium
17Department of Chemical and Processing Engineering, Silesian University of Technology, ul. M. Strzody 7, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
18Department of Nuclear Engineering, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7909, USA
19Zurich Research Laboratory, IBM Research GmbH, Saumerstr. 4, CH-8803 Rüschlikon, Switzerland
20Department of Mechanical and Process Engineering, Silesian University of Technology, ul. M. Strzody 7, 44-100 Gliwice, Poland
21Department of Aerospace & Mechanical Engineering, Korea Aerospace University, 100, Hwajeon-dong, Deogyang-gu, Goyang-city, Gyeonggi-do 412-791, Republic of Korea
22School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Nanyang Technological University, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798, Singapore
23Institute for Thermodynamics, Helmut-Schmid University Hamburg, D-22039 Hamburg, Germany
24National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), MS 863, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899, USA
25Korea University, Anam-dong, Sungbuk-ku, Seoul 136-713, Republic of Korea
26School of Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology-Kharagpur, West Bengal 721302, India

a)Author to whom correspondence should be addressed. Electronic mail: jacopo@mit.edu. Tel.: +1(617)253-7316.
I. INTRODUCTION

Engineered suspensions of nanoparticles in liquids, known recently as “nanofluids,” have generated considerable interest for their potential to enhance the heat transfer rate in engineering systems, while reducing, or possibly eliminating, the issues of erosion, sedimentation and clogging that plagued earlier solid-liquid mixtures with larger particles. According to SciFinder Scholar, in 2008 alone 189 nanofluid-related publications (journal articles and patents) appeared (see Fig. 1), and it is estimated that more than 300 research groups and companies are engaged in nanofluids research worldwide. Furthermore, several review papers on nanofluid heat transfer have been published1–7 and recently even a book entirely dedicated to nanofluids has been released.8

In spite of the attention received by this field, uncertainties concerning the fundamental effects of nanoparticles on thermophysical properties of solvent media remain. Thermal conductivity is the property that has catalyzed the attention of the nanofluids research community the most. As dispersions of solid particles in a continuous liquid matrix, nanofluids are expected to have a thermal conductivity that obeys the effective medium theory developed by Maxwell over 100 years ago.9 Maxwell’s model for spherical and well-dispersed particles culminates in a simple equation giving the ratio of the nanofluid thermal conductivity \( k \) to the thermal conductivity of the basefluid \( k_f \)

\[
\frac{k}{k_f} = \frac{k_p + 2k_f + 2\phi(k_p - k_f)}{k_p + 2k_f - \phi(k_p - k_f)},
\]

where \( k_p \) is the particle thermal conductivity and \( \phi \) is the particle volumetric fraction. Note that the model predicts no explicit dependence of the nanofluid thermal conductivity on the particle size or temperature. Also, in the limit of \( k_p \gg k_f \) and \( \phi \ll 1 \), the dependence on particle loading is expected to be linear, as given by \( k/k_f = 1 + 3\phi \). However, several deviations from the predictions of Maxwell’s model have been reported, including:

- a strong thermal conductivity enhancement beyond that predicted by Eq. (1) with a nonlinear dependence on particle loading,10–16
- a dependence of the thermal conductivity enhancement on particle size and shape; and15,17–25
- a dependence of the thermal conductivity enhancement on fluid temperature.20,26–28

To explain these unexpected and intriguing findings, several hypotheses were recently formulated. For example, it was proposed that:

- particle Brownian motion agitates the fluid, thus creating a microconvection effect that increases energy transport.
• clusters or agglomerates of particles form within the nanofluid, and heat percolates preferentially along such clusters; \(^{34-39}\) and
• basefluid molecules form a highly ordered high-thermal-conductivity layer around the particles, thus augmenting the effective volumetric fraction of the particles. \(^{32,38,40,41}\)

Experimental confirmation of these mechanisms has been weak; some mechanisms have been openly questioned. For example, the microconvection hypothesis has been shown to yield predictions in conflict with the experimental evidence. \(^{25,42}\) In addition to theoretical inconsistencies, the nanofluid thermal conductivity data are sparse and inconsistent, possibly due to (i) the broad range of experimental approaches that have been implemented to measure nanofluid thermal conductivity (e.g., transient hot wire, steady-state heated plates, oscillating temperature, and thermal lensing), (ii) the often-imcomplete characterization of the nanofluid samples used in those measurements, and (iii) the differences in the synthesis processes used to prepare those samples, even for nominally similar nanofluids. In summary, the possibility of very large thermal conductivity enhancement in nanofluids beyond Maxwell’s prediction and the associated physical mechanisms are still a hotly debated topic.

At the first scientific conference centered on nanofluids (Nanofluids: Fundamentals and Applications, September 16–20, 2007, Copper Mountain, Colorado), it was decided to launch an international nanofluid property benchmark exercise (INPBE), to resolve the inconsistencies in the database and help advance the debate on nanofluid properties. This article reports on the INPBE effort, and in particular on the thermal conductivity data. Other property data collected in INPBE (prominently viscosity) will be reported in a separate publication in the near future. The article is structured as follows. The INPBE methodology is described in Sec. II. The nanofluid samples used in the exercise are described in Sec. III. The thermal conductivity data are presented in Sec. IV. The thermal conductivity data are compared with the effective medium theory predictions in Sec. V. The findings are summarized in Sec. VI.

II. INPBE METHODOLOGY

The exercise’s main objective was to compare thermal conductivity data obtained by different organizations for the same samples. Four sets of test nanofluids were procured (see Sec. III). To minimize spurious effects due to nanofluid preparation and handling, all participating organizations were given identical samples from these sets and were asked to adhere to the same sample handling protocol. The exercise was “semiblind,” as only minimal information about the samples was given to the participants at the time of sample shipment. The minimum requirement to participate in the exercise was to measure and report the thermal conductivity of at least one test nanofluid at room temperature. However, participants could also measure (at their discretion) thermal conductivity at higher temperature and/or various other nanofluid properties, including (but not necessarily limited to) viscosity, density, specific heat, particle size and concentration. The data were then reported in a standardized form to the exercise coordinator at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and posted, unedited, at the INPBE website (http://mit.edu/nse/nanofluids/benchmark/index.html). The complete list of organizations that participated in INPBE, along with the data they contributed, is reported in Table I. INPBE climaxed in a workshop, held on January 29–30 2009 in Beverly Hills, California, where the results were presented and discussed by the participants. The workshop presentations can also be found at the INPBE website.

III. TEST NANOFLUIDS

To strengthen the generality of the INPBE results, it was desirable to select test nanofluids with a broad diversity of parameters; for example, we wanted to explore aqueous and nonaqueous basefluids, metallic and oxidic particles, near-spherical and elongated particles, and high and low particle loadings. Also, given the large number of participating organizations, the test nanofluids had to be available in large quantities (>2 l) and at reasonably low cost.

Accordingly, four sets of test samples were procured. The providers were Sasol (set 1), DSO National Laboratories (set 2), W. R. Grace & Co. (set 3), and the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez (set 4). The providers reported information regarding the particle materials, particle size and concentration, basefluid material, the additives/stabilizers used in the synthesis of the nanofluid, and the material safety data sheets. Said information was independently verified, to the extent possible, by the INPBE coordinators (MIT and Illinois Institute of Technology, IIT), as reported in the next sections. Identical samples were shipped to all participating organizations.

A. Set 1

The samples in set 1 were supplied by Sasol. The numbering for these samples is as follows:

1. alumina nanorods in de-ionized water,
2. de-ionized water (basefluid sample),
3. alumina nanoparticles (first concentration) in polyalpha-olefins lubricant (PAO) + surfactant,
4. alumina nanoparticles (second concentration) in PAO + surfactant,
5. alumina nanorods (first concentration) in PAO + surfactant,
6. alumina nanorods (second concentration) in PAO + surfactant, and
7. PAO + surfactant (basefluid sample).

The synthesis methods have not been published, so a brief summary is given here. For sample 1, alumina nanorods were simply added to water and dispersed by sonication. Sample 2, de-ionized water, was not actually sent to the participants. The synthesis of samples 3–7 involved three steps. First, the basefluid was created by mixing PAO (SpectraSyn-10 by Exxon Oil) and 5 wt% dispersant (Solsperse 21000 by Lubrizol Chemical), and heating and stirring the mixture at 70 °C for 2 h, to ensure complete dissolution of the dispersant. Second, hydrophilic alumina nanoparticles

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/contact person</th>
<th>Experimental method(^\text{a}) for thermal conductivity measurement (Ref.)</th>
<th>Generated data for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Set 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argonne National Laboratory/E. V. Timofeeva</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC(^{b})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEA/C. Reynaud</td>
<td>Steady-state coaxial cylinders(^{c})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese University of Hong Kong/S.-Q. Zhou</td>
<td>Steady state parallel plate(^{d})</td>
<td>V(^{e})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO National Laboratories/L. G. Kieng</td>
<td>Supplied nanofluid samples</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETH Zurich and IBM Research/W. Escher</td>
<td>THW and parallel hot plates(^{f})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmut-Schmidt University Armed Forces/ S. Kabelac</td>
<td>Guarded hot plate(^{g})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois Institute of Technology/D. Venerus</td>
<td>Forced Rayleigh scattering(^{h})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur/ I. Manna</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Institute of Technology, Madras/T. Sundararajan, S. K. Das</td>
<td>THW(^{i})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research/J. Philip</td>
<td>KD2, THW(^{k})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent State University/Y. Tolmachev</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea Aerospace University/S. P. Jang</td>
<td>THW(^{l})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea Univ./C. Kim</td>
<td>THW(^{m})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METSS Corp./F. Botz</td>
<td>THW(^{n})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT/J. Buongiorno, L.W. Hu, T. McKrell</td>
<td>THW(^{o})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT/G. Chen</td>
<td>THW(^{p})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanyang Technological University/K. C. Leong</td>
<td>THW(^{q})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIST/M. A Kedzierski</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC, V, D(^{m})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina State University-Raleigh/J. Eapen</td>
<td>Contributed to data analysis</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olin College of Engineering/R. Christianson, J. Townsend</td>
<td>THW(^{t})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Mary University of London/D. Wen</td>
<td>THW(^{u})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPI/P. Keblinski</td>
<td>Contributed to data analysis</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASOL of North America/Y. Chang</td>
<td>Supplied nanofluid samples</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silesian University of Technology/A. B. Jarzebski, G. Dzido</td>
<td>THW(^{v})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota School of Mines and Technology/H. Hong</td>
<td>Hot Disk(^{w})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford University/P. Gharagozloo, K. Goodson</td>
<td>IR thermometry(^{x})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas A&amp;M University/J. L. Alvarado</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology; Tokyo Institute of Technology/I. C. Bang, J. H. Kim</td>
<td>KD2 Pro</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université Libre de Bruxelles, University of Naples/C. S. Iorio</td>
<td>Modified hot wall technique(^{y}), Parallel plates(^{z})</td>
<td>TC, V, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Leeds/Y. Ding</td>
<td>KD2 and parallel hot plates(^{aa})</td>
<td>TC, V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Pittsburgh/M. K. Chyu</td>
<td>Unitherm(^{bb}) 2022 (Guarded heat flow meter)</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez/J. G. Gutierrez</td>
<td>THW(^{cc})</td>
<td>TC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{b}\)TC=thermal conductivity.

\(^{c}\)Reference 61.

\(^{d}\)A publication with detailed information about this apparatus is not available.

\(^{e}\)V=viscosity.

\(^{f}\)Reference 62.

\(^{g}\)Reference 63.

\(^{h}\)Reference 33.

\(^{i}\)Reference 64.

\(^{j}\)Reference 65.

\(^{k}\)Reference 66.

\(^{l}\)Reference 19.

\(^{m}\)D=density.

\(^{n}\)Reference 67.

\(^{o}\)Reference 68.

\(^{p}\)Reference 69.

\(^{q}\)Reference 70.

\(^{r}\)Reference 71.

\(^{s}\)Reference 28.

\(^{t}\)Reference 72.

\(^{u}\)Reference 73.
or nanorods (in aqueous dispersion) were coated with a monolayer of hydrophobic linear alkyl benzene sulfonic acid and then spray dried. Third, the dry nanoparticles or nanorods were dispersed into the basefluid.

Table II reports the information received by Sasol along with the results of some measurements done at MIT and IIT. Figure 2 shows transmission electron microscopy (TEM) images for samples 1 and 3. TEM images for samples 4–6 are not available.

**B. Set 2**

The samples in set 2 were supplied by Dr. Lim Geok Kieng of DSO National Laboratories in Singapore. The numbering for these samples is as follows:

1. gold nanoparticles in de-ionized water and trisodium citrate stabilizer and (2) de-ionized water+sodium citrate stabilizer (basefluid sample).

The nanofluid sample was produced according to a one-step "citrate method," in which 100 ml of 1.18 mM gold(III) chloride trihydrate solution and 10 ml of 3.9 mM trisodium citrate dehydrate solution were mixed, brought to boil and stirred for 15 min. Gold nanoparticles formed as the solution was let cool to room temperature. Table III reports the information received by DSO National Laboratories along with the results of some measurements done at MIT and IIT. Figure 3 shows the TEM images for sample 1.

**C. Set 3**

Set 3 consisted of a single sample, supplied by W. R. Grace & Co. Silica monodispersed spherical nanoparticles and stabilizer in de-ionized water. The silica particles were synthesized by ion exchange of sodium silicate solution in a proprietary process. A general description of this process can be found in the literature. Grace commercializes this nanofluid as Ludox TM-50, and indicated that the nanoparticles are stabilized by making the system alkaline, the base being deprotonated silanol (SiO−) groups on the surface with Na+ as the counterion (0.1–0.2 wt % of Na ions). The dispersion contains also 500 ppm of a proprietary biocide. Grace stated that it was not possible to supply a basefluid sample with only water and stabilizer “because of the way the particles are made.” Given the low concentration of the stabilizer and biocide, de-ionized water was assumed to be the basefluid sample, and designated “sample 2,” though it was not actually sent to the participants. Table IV reports the information received by Grace along with the results of some measurements done at MIT.

**D. Set 4**

The samples in set 4 were supplied by Dr. Jorge Gustavo Gutierrez of the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez.
TABLE III. Characteristics of the set 2 samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Au loading</th>
<th>Particle size</th>
<th>Stabilizer concentration (trisodium citrate)</th>
<th>pH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>MIT(^a)</td>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>MIT(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0010 vol %</td>
<td>0.0009 vol %(^d)</td>
<td>20–30 nm</td>
<td>14.8 nm ave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DSO</td>
<td>MIT(^b)</td>
<td>IIT(^c)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Measurements by inductive coupled plasma (ICP). ICP has an accuracy of 0.6% of the reported value for gold in the concentration range of interest.

\(^b\)Number-weighted average size of particles, measured by DLS. The range indicates the spread of two nominally identical measurements. DLS systemic uncertainty is of the order of ±10 nm.

\(^c\)Measurements by DLS. The values reported are the number-weighted average and the range at the full-width half maximum for six measurements.

\(^d\)Assumed density of gold is 19.32 g/cm\(^3\).

\(^e\)Within the detection limit of ICP.

\(^f\)Not applicable.

(UPRM). A chemical coprecipitation method was used to synthesize the particles.\(^{44}\) The set 4 sample numbering is as follows:

1. Mn–Zn ferrite (Mn\(_{1.2}\)–Zn\(_{1.2}\)–Fe\(_2\)O\(_4\)) particles in solution of stabilizer and water and
2. solution of stabilizer (25 wt %) and water (75 wt %) (basefluid sample).

The stabilizer is tetramethylammonium hydroxide or (CH\(_3\))\(_4\)NOH. Table V reports the information received by UPRM along with the results of some measurements done at MIT. Figure 5 shows the TEM images for sample 1.

IV. THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY DATA

The thermal conductivity data generated by the participating organizations are shown in Figs. 6–18, one for each sample in each set. In these figures the data are anonymous, i.e., there is no correspondence between the organization number in the figures and the organization list in Table I. The data points indicate the mean value for each organization, while the error bars indicate the standard deviation calculated using the procedure described in Appendix A. The sample average, i.e., the average of all data points, is shown as a solid line, and the standard error of the mean is denoted by the dotted lines to facilitate visualization of the data spread. The standard error of the mean is typically much lower than the standard deviation because it takes into account the total number of measurements made to arrive at the sample average. Each measurement technique is denoted by a different symbol, and averages for each of the measurement techniques are shown. The measurement techniques were grouped into four categories: the KD2 thermal properties analyzer (Decagon), custom thermal hot wire (THW), steady state parallel plate, and other techniques. Outliers (determined using Peirce’s criterion) are shown as filled data points and were not included in either the technique or ensemble averages.

It can be seen that for all water-based samples in all four sets most organizations report values of the thermal conductivity that are within ±5% of the sample average. For the PAO-based samples the spread is a little wider with most organizations reporting values that are within ±10% of the sample average. A note of caution is in order: while all data reported here are nominally for room temperature, what constitutes “room temperature” varies from organization to organization. The data shown in Figs. 6–18 include only measurements conducted in the range of 20–30 °C. Over this range of temperatures, the thermal conductivity of the test fluids is expected to vary minimally; for example, the water thermal conductivity varies by less than 2.5%. Where deionized water was the basefluid (Figs. 7 and 16), the range of nominal thermal conductivity of water for 20–30 °C is shown as a red band plotted on top of the measured data.

Figures 19–26 show the thermal conductivity “enhance-
TABLE IV. Characteristics of the set 3 samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Silica (SiO$_2$) loading</th>
<th>Na$_2$SO$_4$ concentration</th>
<th>Particle size</th>
<th>pH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grace/MIT</td>
<td>Grace/MIT$^a$</td>
<td>Grace/MIT$^b$</td>
<td>MIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>49.8 wt %</td>
<td>43.6 wt % a</td>
<td>0.1–0.2 wt % of Na</td>
<td>0.27 wt % of Na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.1 vol %c</td>
<td>26.0 vol %c</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2$^d$</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Measured by inductive coupled plasma (ICP). ICP has an accuracy of 0.6% of the reported value.

$^b$Number-weighted average size of particles, measured by dynamic light scattering (DLS). The range indicates the spread of three nominally identical measurements. DLS systemic uncertainty is of the order of ±10 nm.

$^c$Assumed density of silica (SiO$_2$) is 2.2 g/cm$^3$.

$^d$Sample 2 is simply de-ionized water, which was assumed to be the basefluid sample, but was not actually sent to the participants.

$^e$Not applicable.

TABLE V. Characteristics of the set 4 samples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Particle loading</th>
<th>Particle composition</th>
<th>Particle size</th>
<th>pH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UPRM/MIT</td>
<td>UPRM/MIT$^a$</td>
<td>UPRM/MIT</td>
<td>MIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.17 vol %b</td>
<td>Mn$<em>{12}$–Zn$</em>{12}$–Fe$_2$ d</td>
<td>Mn ~ 15 at. %, Zn ~ 14 at. %, Fe ~ 71 at. %</td>
<td>7.4 nm$^e$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a$^g$</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Atomic fraction of metals measured by energy dispersive x-ray spectroscopy (EDS).

$^b$Determined from magnetic measurements.

$^c$Measurements by inductive coupled plasma (ICP). Assumed density of 4.8 g/cm$^3$ for Mn–Zn ferrite. ICP has an accuracy of 0.6% of the reported value.

$^d$The molar fraction of Mn and Zn was determined from stoichiometric balance.

$^e$Average magnetic particle diameter.

$^f$Number-weighted average size of particles, measured by dynamic light scattering (DLS). The range indicates the spread of four nominally identical measurements. DLS systemic uncertainty is of the order of ±10 nm.

$^g$Not applicable.

FIG. 5. Set 4—TEM pictures of sample 1. The nanoparticles have irregular shape and approximate size <20 nm, thus consistent with the nominal size of ~7 nm stated by UPRM.

FIG. 6. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 1, set 1.

FIG. 7. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 2 (basefluid), set 1.

FIG. 8. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 3, set 1.
FIG. 9. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 4, set 1.

FIG. 10. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 5, set 1.

FIG. 11. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 6, set 1.

FIG. 12. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 7, set 1.

FIG. 13. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 1, set 2.

FIG. 14. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 2, set 2.

FIG. 15. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 1, set 3.

FIG. 16. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 2 (basefluid), set 3.

FIG. 17. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 1, set 4.

FIG. 18. (Color) Thermal conductivity data for sample 2 (basefluid), set 4.
FIG. 19. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 1, set 1.

FIG. 20. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 3, set 1.

FIG. 21. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 4, set 1.

FIG. 22. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 5, set 1.

FIG. 23. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 6, set 1.

FIG. 24. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 1, set 2.

FIG. 25. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 1, set 3.

FIG. 26. (Color) Thermal conductivity enhancement data for sample 1, set 4.
Table VI. Summary of INPBE results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Sample description*</th>
<th>Measured thermal conductivity*&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt; (W/m K)</th>
<th>Measured thermal conductivity ratio&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt; k/k&lt;sub&gt;f&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Predicted thermal conductivity ratio&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt; k/k&lt;sub&gt;f&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Lower bound</th>
<th>Upper bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set 1</td>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>Alumina nanorods (80x10 nm&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>0.627 ± 0.013</td>
<td>1.036 ± 0.004</td>
<td>1.024</td>
<td>1.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>De-ionized water</td>
<td>0.609 ± 0.003</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 3</td>
<td>Alumina nanoparticles (10 nm)</td>
<td>0.162 ± 0.004</td>
<td>1.039 ± 0.003</td>
<td>1.027</td>
<td>1.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 4</td>
<td>Alumina nanoparticles (10 nm)</td>
<td>0.174 ± 0.005</td>
<td>1.121 ± 0.004</td>
<td>1.083</td>
<td>1.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 5</td>
<td>Alumina nanorods (80x10 nm&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>0.164 ± 0.005</td>
<td>1.051 ± 0.003</td>
<td>1.070</td>
<td>1.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 6</td>
<td>Alumina nanorods (80x10 nm&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
<td>0.182 ± 0.006</td>
<td>1.176 ± 0.005</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>1.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 7</td>
<td>PAO+surfactant</td>
<td>0.156 ± 0.005</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set 2</td>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>Gold nanoparticles (10 nm)</td>
<td>0.613 ± 0.005</td>
<td>1.007 ± 0.003</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>Water+stabilizer</td>
<td>0.604 ± 0.003</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set 3</td>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>Silica nanoparticles (22 nm)</td>
<td>0.729 ± 0.007</td>
<td>1.204 ± 0.010</td>
<td>1.008</td>
<td>1.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>De-ionized water</td>
<td>0.604 ± 0.002</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set 4</td>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>Mn–Zn ferrite nanoparticles (7 nm), 0.17 vol % in Water + stabilizer</td>
<td>0.459 ± 0.005</td>
<td>1.003 ± 0.008</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>Water+stabilizer</td>
<td>0.455 ± 0.005</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Nominal values for nanoparticle concentration and size.

*Sample average and standard error of the mean.

*Calculated with the assumptions in Appendix B.

*Not applicable.

The INPBE database is summarized in Table VI. Comparing the data for samples 3, 4, 5, and 6 in set 1, it is noted that, everything else being the same, the thermal conductivity enhancement is higher at higher particle concentration, and higher for elongated particles than for near-spherical particles. Comparing the data for samples 1 and 5 in set 1, it is noted that the thermal conductivity enhancement is somewhat higher for the PAO basefluid than for water. The set 2 data suggest that the thermal conductivity enhancement is negligible, if the particle concentration is very low, even if metal particles of high thermal conductivity are used. On the other hand, the set 3 data suggest that a robust enhancement can be achieved, if the particle concentration is high, even if the particle material has a modest thermal conductivity. All these trends are expected, based on the effective medium theory, as will be discussed in Sec. V below.

A. Effects of the experimental approach on the thermal conductivity measurements

Table I reports the experimental techniques used by the various organizations to measure thermal conductivity, and provide, when available, a reference where more information about those techniques can be found. Transient, steady-state, and optical techniques were used to measure thermal conductivity. There are transient measurement techniques that require the immersion of a dual heating and sensing element in the sample, such as the transient hot wire (THW) and transient hot disk techniques. The THW technique is based on the relationship between the thermal response of a very small (<100 μm) diameter wire immersed in a fluid sample to a step change in heating and the thermal conductivity of the fluid sample. The THW technique was used by over half of the participating organizations, many of which used a custom built apparatus. The KD2 thermal properties analyzer made by Decagon, an off-the-shelf device that is based on the THW approach, was also used. The transient hot disk technique is similar to the THW technique, except that the heater/sensor is a planar disk coated in Kapton. In steady-state techniques such as the parallel plate and coaxial cylinder methods, heat is transferred between two plates (or coaxial cylinders) sandwiching the test fluid. Measurement of the temperature difference and heat transfer rate across the fluid can be used to determine the thermal conductivity via Fourier’s law. The thermal comparator method, also a steady-state method, measures the voltage difference between a heated probe in point contact with the surface of the fluid sample and a reference, which can be converted to thermal conductivity using a calibration curve of samples of known conductivity. In the forced Rayleigh scattering method, an optical grating is created in a sample of the fluid using the intersection of two beams from a high-powered laser. The resulting temperature change causes small-scale density changes that create a refraction index grating that can be detected using another laser. The relaxation time of the refraction index grating is related to the thermal diffusivity of the fluid from which the thermal conductivity can be evaluated.
The measurement techniques were grouped into KD2, custom THW, parallel plate, and other (which include thermal comparator, hot disk, forced Rayleigh scattering, and coaxial cylinders). Thermal conductivity and enhancement data for each measurement technique are shown in Figs. 6–26.

For each of the four measurement technique groupings, the average thermal conductivity is shown on the plot and is indicated by the solid line. In the custom THW data on Figs. 6 and 7, there is one measurement that is well above the average in both figures. This was the only THW apparatus with an uninsulated wire. Typically an insulated wire is used in this method to reduce the current leakage into the fluid. The higher thermal conductivity measured here may be a result of that effect. Excepting the outliers, all the measurement techniques show good agreement for de-ionized water (Figs. 7 and 16). For the PAO basefluid (Fig. 12) the uninsulated hot wire measurement (organization 14) is no longer an outlier. PAO is not as electrically conductive as water, and the current leakage effect should be less of an issue for this fluid.

As described in Appendix A, a fixed effects model was used to determine whether differences in the data from different measurement techniques are statistically significant. Because of the low number of data points in the parallel plate and other categories, only the KD2 and custom hot wire techniques were compared. For all the samples in sets 1, 2, and 3, the KD2 thermal conductivity average is lower than the custom THW average. The fixed effects model shows that this is a statistically significant difference for samples 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7, in set 1, and sample 2 in set 3. In set 4, the KD2 average is higher than the Custom THW, but this difference is statistically significant only for sample 2 (the water+stabilizer basefluid for the ferrofluid). It is not clear why the KD2 measurements are lower than the THW measurements for all fluids except those in set 4. Finally, in most cases, there is less scatter in the KD2 data for the PAO-based nanofluids than the water-based nanofluids. This may be due to the higher viscosity of the PAO, which counteracts thermal convection during the 30 s KD2 heating cycle.

It is difficult to make specific conclusions about thermal conductivity measurements using the parallel plate technique due to the low number of data points and the amount of scatter for some samples (see Figs. 13–15). Additional measurements would be needed to determine if there is a systematic difference between the parallel plate technique and other techniques.

Although the thermal conductivity data show some clear differences in measurement technique, these differences become less apparent once the data are normalized with the basefluid thermal conductivities (Figs. 19–26). A comparison of the KD2 and THW techniques was again performed using the fixed effects model. The only statistically significant difference between the two techniques was for set 1, sample 4 (Fig. 21), the 3% volume fraction alumina-PAO nanofluid.

This study shows that the choice of measurement technique can affect the measured value of thermal conductivity, but if the enhancement is the parameter of interest, the measurement technique is less important, at least for the KD2 and THW techniques. Therefore, to ensure accurate determinations of nanofluid thermal conductivity enhancement using these techniques, it is important to measure both the basefluid and nanofluid thermal conductivity using the same technique and at the same temperature.

V. COMPARISON OF DATA TO EFFECTIVE MEDIUM THEORY

Equation (1) is valid for well-dispersed noninteracting spherical particles with negligible thermal resistance at the particle/fluid interface. To include the effects of particle geometry and finite interfacial resistance, Nan et al. generalized Maxwell’s model to yield the following expression for the thermal conductivity ratio:

\[
\frac{k}{k_f} = 3 + \phi(2\beta_{11}(1 - L_{11}) + \beta_{33}(1 - L_{33}))
\]

where for particles shaped as prolate ellipsoids with principal axes \(a_{11} = a_{22} < a_{33}\)

\[
L_{11} = \frac{p^2}{2(p^2 - 1)} - \frac{p}{2(p^2 - 1)^{3/2}} \cosh^{-1} p,
\]

\[
L_{33} = 1 - 2L_{11}, \quad p = a_{33}/a_{11},
\]

\[
\beta_{ii} = \frac{k_{ii} - k_f}{k_f + L_{ii}(k_{ii} - k_f)}, \quad k_{ii} = \frac{k_p}{1 + \gamma L_{ii} k_p/k_f},
\]

\[
\gamma = (2 + 1/p) R_{bd} k_f/(a_{ii}/2),
\]

and \(R_{bd}\) is the (Kapitza) interfacial thermal resistance. The limiting case of very long aspect ratio in the theory of Nan et al. is bounded by the nanoparticle linear aggregation models proposed by Prasher et al., Kebinski et al., and Eapen. Obviously, Eq. (2) reduces to Eq. (1) for spherical particles \((p = 1)\) and negligible interfacial thermal resistance \((R_{bd} = 0)\), as it can be easily verified. Equation (2) predicts that, if \(k_p > k_f\), the thermal conductivity enhancement increases with increasing particle loading, increasing particle aspect ratio and decreasing basefluid thermal conductivity, as observed for the data in INPBE set 1. More quantitatively, the theory was applied to the INPBE test nanofluids with the assumptions reported in Appendix B. Figure 27 shows the cumula-
tive accuracy information of the effective medium theory for all the INPBE data. Two curves are shown: one for zero interfacial thermal resistance (upper bound), and one for a typical value of the interfacial resistance, $10^{-8}$ m$^2$ K/W.\textsuperscript{54-56} It can be seen that all INPBE data can be predicted by the lower bound theory with $< 17\%$ error, while the upper bound estimate predicts $90\%$ of the data with $< 18\%$ error.

The above data analysis demonstrates that our colloidal-dy stable nanofluids exhibit thermal conductivity in good agreement with the predictions of the effective medium theory for well-dispersed nanoparticles. That is, no anomalous thermal conductivity enhancement was observed for the nanofluids tested in this study. As such, resorting to the other theories proposed in the literature (e.g., Brownian motion, liquid layering, and aggregation) is not necessary for the interpretation of the INPBE database. It should be noted, however, that the ranges of parameters explored in INPBE, while broad, are not exhaustive. For example, only one nanofluid with metallic nanoparticles was tested, and only at very low concentration. Also, the temperature effect on thermal conductivity was not investigated.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

An international nanofluid property benchmark exercise, or INPBE, was conducted by 34 organizations participating from around the world. The objective was to compare thermal conductivity data obtained by different experimental approaches for identical samples of various nanofluids. The main findings of the study were as follows.

1. The thermal conductivity enhancement afforded by the tested nanofluids increased with increasing particle loading, particle aspect ratio and decreasing basefluid thermal conductivity.

2. For all water-based samples tested, the data from most organizations deviated from the sample average by $\pm 5\%$ or less. For all PAO-based samples tested, the data from most organizations deviated from the sample average by $\pm 10\%$ or less.

3. The classic effective medium theory for well-dispersed particles accurately reproduced the INPBE experimental data; thus, suggesting that no anomalous enhancement of thermal conductivity was observed in the limited set of nanofluids tested in this exercise.

4. Some systematic differences in thermal conductivity measurements were seen for different measurement techniques. However, as long as the same measurement technique at the same temperature conditions was used to measure the thermal conductivity of the basefluid, the thermal conductivity enhancement was consistent between measurement techniques.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was made possible by the support of the National Science Foundation under Grant No. CBET-0812804. The authors are also grateful to Sasol and W. R. Grace & Co. for donating some of the samples used in INPBE. Special thanks to Mr. Edmund Carlevale of MIT for creating and maintaining the INPBE website.

APPENDIX A: STATISTICAL TREATMENT OF DATA

For each fluid sample, the thermal conductivity raw data $(x_{ij_1}, x_{ij_2}, \ldots, x_{ij_m})$ from the $i$th organization were processed to estimate the organization’s mean $(\bar{x}_i)$ and standard deviation $(s_i)$, respectively, as

$$\bar{x}_i = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{j=1}^{m} x_{ij} \quad \text{and} \quad s_i = \sqrt{\frac{1}{m-1} \sum_{j=1}^{m} (x_{ij} - \bar{x}_i)^2} \quad (A1)$$

The values of $\bar{x}_i$ and $s_i$ for each organization are shown in Figs. 6–18 as data points and error bars, respectively. The normality of the $x_{ij}$ data sets was checked using the Shapiro–Francia $W^*$ test\textsuperscript{57} and found to be satisfactory. Peirce’s criterion\textsuperscript{28} was used to identify outliers which were not included in the sample average and variance calculations described below, but are shown in Figs. 6–18 as filled data points.

The analysis of data among different organizations was carried out using the random effects model.\textsuperscript{57} In the random effects model, an assumption is made that the conclusions from the analysis can be applied to a wider class of measurements of which the $n_i$ populations (or organizations, in this case) are a representative subset. The model assumes that

$$x_{ij} = \mu + \alpha_i + e_{ij}, \quad (A2)$$

where $\mu$ is the estimator of the sample mean, $\alpha_i$ is the systematic error for each organization (which are treated as random errors among organizations), and $e_{ij}$ is the random or unexplained error for each measurement. It is helpful to note that

$$\alpha_i = \bar{x}_i - \mu,$$

$$e_{ij} = x_{ij} - \bar{x}_i. \quad (A3)$$

It is assumed that $\alpha_i$ and $e_{ij}$ are normally distributed with zero means and standard deviations of $\sigma_\alpha$ and $\sigma_e$, respectively. The normality of the $e_{ij}$ data sets was checked using the Shapiro–Francia $W^*$ test and found to be satisfactory. This analysis assumes that standard deviations within the organizations are equal ($\sigma_e=\sigma_e$). This was checked by performing pair-wise F-tests on $\sigma_e$.

The standard random effects model uses a weighted average as the sample average (taking into account the number of data points reported by each organization),

$$\mu = \bar{x} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} n_i \bar{x}_i. \quad (A4)$$

We believe that this definition overemphasizes the contributions from organizations that reported many data points. For the purposes of this study, a more appropriate estimator of the sample mean is an unweighted average of organization averages given in the following equation:
This way, each organization contributes equally to the ensemble average. This estimator has been analyzed in the literature\(^57\) and its variance is given by

\[
\sigma^2 = \text{Var}(\bar{x}) = \frac{1}{I} \sum_{i=1}^{I} \left( \frac{\sigma_n^2}{n_i} + \sigma_{e}^2 \right),
\]

where

\[
\sigma_{e}^2 = \frac{1}{(N-I)} \sum_{i=1}^{I} (n_i - 1) \sigma_n^2,
\]

\[
N = \sum_{i=1}^{I} n_i,
\]

\[
\sigma_n^2 = \frac{(\text{MSA} - \sigma_{e}^2)}{n_o},
\]

\[
\text{MSA} = \frac{1}{(I-1)} \left( \sum_{i=1}^{I} n_i \overline{x}_i^2 - N \overline{x}^2 \right),
\]

\[
n_o = \frac{1}{I-1} \left( \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{I} n_i^2}{N - \frac{1}{I} \sum_{i=1}^{I} n_i} \right).
\]

The standard error (\(\sigma\)) of the unweighted average is shown in Figs. 6–18 as dotted lines plotted above and below the sample average. The literature shows that the estimator (A5) is preferred over the estimator (A4) if \(\sigma_{e}^2 > \sigma_{e}^2\).\(^57,59\) The statistical analysis shows that this condition is satisfied for the INPBE data.

Thermal conductivity enhancements were determined from the ratio of the nanofluid thermal conductivity to the basefluid thermal conductivity and are given as \(y\). If an organizational mean for a given fluid sample was identified as an outlier in the thermal conductivity analysis, it was not excluded here in determining enhancements. A second round of applying the Peirce criterion excluded those enhancements that were outliers.

The standard deviation (error bars) of the thermal conductivity enhancements (data points) for individual organizations shown in Figs. 19–26 were calculated by propagating the standard deviation of the numerator and denominator.\(^60\) That is, if \(y = x_{ni}/x_{bf}\), then:

\[
\begin{align*}
\sigma_{\text{enh}} (y) &= \sqrt{\left( \frac{\sigma_{ni}}{x_{ni}} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{\sigma_{bf}}{x_{bf}} \right)^2}.
\end{align*}
\]

The procedure for calculating the thermal conductivity enhancement sample average and its variance was based on Eqs. (A5)–(A11), where the thermal conductivity for each organization, \(\bar{x}_i\), is replaced by the thermal conductivity enhancement for each organization, \(\bar{y}_i\), and \(n_i\) is the harmonic average of the total number of measurements used to calculate the enhancement.

To compare the different measurement techniques, the fixed effects model was used.\(^57\) For each technique, the technique average and the variance were determined using Eqs. (A5)–(A11) above. For an unbalanced data set (one in which there are a different number of data points for each measurement technique to be compared), the approximate Tukey–Kramer intervals were used, which depend on the probability statement,

\[
P\left(\mu_i - \mu_{i'} \in \bar{y}_i - \bar{y}_{i'} \pm q_{a,k} \frac{1}{\sqrt{n_i}} \left[ \frac{1}{2} \frac{1}{n_i} \right]^{1/2}, \quad \text{all } i,i' \right) = 1 - \alpha,
\]

where \(q_{a,k} \alpha\) is the upper \(\alpha\) point of the “studentized” range distribution for \(k\) (the number of measurement techniques compared) and \(\nu\), the degrees of freedom \((N-k)\). If the interval given in Eq. (A12) does not contain zero for any combination of two measurement techniques, then the difference in technique mean is statistically significant.

**APPENDIX B: ASSUMPTIONS USED IN THE EFFECTIVE MEDIUM MODEL FOR THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY**

Use of the model of Nan et al. requires input of the values of the particle volumetric fraction (\(\phi\)), particle minimum axis (\(a_1\)), particle aspect ratio (\(\rho\)), particle thermal conductivity (\(k_p\)), basefluid thermal conductivity (\(k_b\)), and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set/sample</th>
<th>(\phi) (%)</th>
<th>(a_1) (nm)</th>
<th>(\rho)</th>
<th>(k_p) (W/m K)</th>
<th>(k_b) (W/m K)</th>
<th>(R_{\text{ef}}) (m² K/W)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/sample 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/sample 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/sample 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/sample 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/sample 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/sample 1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/sample 1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/sample 1</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>0/10⁻⁸</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
interfacial thermal resistance ($R_{th}$). The nominal values used to generate the curves in Fig. 27 are shown in Table VII.