

# Polyaniline–sodium montmorillonite clay nanocomposites: effect of clay concentration on thermal, structural, and electrical properties

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Received: 16 May 2011 / Accepted: 21 July 2011  
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**Abstract** A simple and facile method was used to synthesize polyaniline (PANI) nanocomposites with sodium montmorillonite clay ( $\text{Na}^+$ -MMT) using in situ intercalative oxidative polymerization. Aniline was admixed with  $\text{Na}^+$ -MMT at various concentrations, keeping the aniline monomer in the reaction mixture constant. The intercalation of PANI into the clay layers was confirmed by X-ray diffraction studies in conjugation with electron microscope techniques and FTIR spectra, particularly by the narrowing of the Si–O stretching vibration band confirmed the interaction between PANI and the clay. The employed route offers the possibility to improve the thermal properties with simultaneously controlled electrical conductivity. Thermal studies show an improved thermal stability of the nanocomposites relative to the pure PANI. Depending on the loading of the clay, the room temperature conductivity values of these nanocomposites varied between  $2.0 \times 10^{-4}$  and  $7.4 \times 10^{-4} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ , with the maximum at 44 wt% PANI concentration. The decrease of electrical conductivity at high PANI concentration was ascribed to the decrease of the structural ordering of PANI in the nanocomposite.

## Introduction

Polyaniline (PANI) is an extensively exploited conducting polymer because of its economic viability, easy processability, good stability, and controllable electrical conductivity. Various dopants were employed to tune the conductivity of PANI, its composites and blends to meet technological requirements [1–6]. These properties made possible to use PANI as an electrode in lithium ion batteries [7], dye sensitized solar cells [8], microwave absorber in electromagnetic shielding [9], anticorrosion coatings [10], sensors [11], and electrochromic devices [12]. In order to further improve the properties of PANI, its confinement into nanoscale inorganic environments has been adopted. Hybrid composites such as lamellar nanocomposites based on PANI with various layered host materials, such as oxyhalides ( $\text{FeOCl}$ ) [13], transition metal oxides ( $\text{V}_2\text{O}_5$ ,  $\text{MoO}_3$ ) [14, 15], and chalcogenides ( $\text{MoS}_2$ ,  $\text{MnPS}_3$ ) [16–18] have been explored. These PANI/inorganic nanocomposites possess a variety of unique characteristics based on interactions at a molecular level. Thus, the combination of a conducting polymer with an inorganic host-layered silicate provides a way for obtaining new conducting nanocomposites with much improved mechanical, thermal, electrical, and optical properties. Among other inorganic layered host materials, montmorillonite (MMT) clay is one of the most abundantly employed one owing to its low cost, good chemical resistance, and its ability to be intercalated efficiently. Nanocomposites composed of MMT clay with various polymers and copolymers, such as polyamide 6/polystyrene blend [19], epoxy resin [20], polyurethane [21], and polyester-based polyurethane [22] have been reported, which demonstrate novel properties, such as improved tensile strength and modulus, flame retardancy, reduced gas permeability, improved adhesive properties,

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and decreased thermal expansion coefficient compared with classical composites because of the high aspect ratio of individual platelets and the large available surface area [13–22]. Considering these facts in this study, MMT clay was exploited as an inorganic host for the synthesis of PANI-based nanocomposites. Intercalation polymerization is a promising strategy to confine the polymer chains within the nanometer size inorganic galleries. In the intercalation polymerization, the inorganic layers serve as a template, in which organic guest monomer in sub nanometer size is introduced. The template can provide a synergistic effect that leads to structures with properties that cannot be attained from the individual counterparts, e.g., to a high degree of structural ordering and consequently to a high anisotropy of electrical conductivity [23] and high thermal and oxidative stability [24–27].

Intercalated and/or exfoliated nanocomposites can be prepared by intercalation polymerization depending upon monomer/clay ratio. In the past, PANI/MMT were synthesized by emulsion intercalation [28–31], electrochemical [32, 33], inverse emulsion polymerization [34], in situ intercalation [35, 36], and mechanochemical intercalation method [37, 38]. A higher intercalation level of PANI inside the clay gallery was achieved when the MMT was chemically modified by various organic molecules before the polymerization [39–41].

Lee et al. synthesized intercalated PANI/MMT nanocomposites with various PANI fractions [42] and found that the type of physical interaction between the clay and PANI as well as the electrical conductivity and thermal stability of the composites are consistently related to the structure of the nanocomposites as found from X-ray diffraction analysis. Celik et al. [43] also found that the intercalated PANI/MMT nanocomposites have high thermal stability because of the intercalation of PANI between clay layers, which was confirmed by the increase in inter-layer spacing by about 0.53 nm.

Nascimento et al. [44] followed a protocol for the preparation of PANI–MMT composites reported by Kim et al. [28, 29], and using combination of X-ray diffraction, scanning electron microscopy, and X-ray absorption near silicon *K*-edge data, they found that the morphology of PANI–MMT nanocomposites depends strongly on the PANI/MMT content ratio and confirmed that PANI has an emeraldine salt (ES) form for all PANI–MMT materials prepared. The electrical conductivity values of composites increased with increased PANI content from  $10^{-4}$  to  $10^{-1}$  S cm $^{-1}$ , with a typical percolation behavior. The percolation threshold was occurred below 60 wt% of the PANI concentration.

Recently, Bober et al. [45] reported the series of PANI/MMT nanocomposites prepared by surface and intercalative

polymerization methods using various types of clay with the constant molar ratio of aniline hydrochloride/APS oxidant, 0.2:0.25. The conductivity of nanocomposites in both approaches was found to be lower than pure PANI.

The intercalated PANI/MMT nanocomposites preparation and properties reported till the date either have used different oxidants, or varied the aniline monomer amount with respect to the clay, or monomer to dopant ratio. The conductivity of these nanocomposites showed lower values than pristine PANI [28, 29, 36, 45]. The reason could be the lack of connectivity between intercalated PANI chains [35, 36], or a change in the nature of these polymeric chains.

However, in previous articles, the effect of clay loading has been studied only for PANI/MMT nanocomposites prepared by ex-situ polymerization or emulsion intercalation polymerization, and systematic studies showing the dependence of structure on the clay concentration and the effect of structure variation on the thermal and electrical properties of the composite are rather scarce and show diverse results.

Contrary to the previous studies, the objective in this study is to investigate a possible influence of MMT clay loading on extent of intercalation, morphology, electrical and thermal properties of intercalated PANI/MMT nanocomposites prepared by in-situ intercalative polymerization using APS oxidant. An attempt has been made to understand the relationship between clay loading and the structure–property relationship. Surprisingly, we observed that the conductivity increases with increasing MMT concentration for MMT content up to 60 wt%, showing higher value of the conductivity for the composite than for the pure PANI. The enhanced thermal stability along with the increased conductivity of these nanocomposites might be important for many industrial applications like EMI shielding or polymer electrodes for batteries and solar cells.

## Experimental section

### Materials

Aniline (Merck, Germany) was distilled twice under reduced pressure before use. Hydrochloric acid (HCl) used as a dopant and ammonium persulfate (APS) ((NH $_4$ ) $_2$ S $_2$ O $_8$ ) as an oxidant (Merck, Germany) were used as received. Commercial sodium montmorillonite (Na $^+$ -MMT), Cloisite $^{\text{®}}$  Na $^+$  Nanoclay, Na $_{0.65}$ [Al, Fe] $_4$ Si $_8$ O $_{20}$ (OH) $_2$  was supplied by the Southern Clay Product, USA, and was grinded and dried in a vacuum oven at 120 °C for 24 h before use.

## Synthesis of PANI/MMT clay nanocomposites (PNC)

PANI/MMT nanocomposites were prepared by the initial intercalation of MMT using aniline monomer and subsequent polymerization of aniline in the galleries as described previously [36, 42, 46].

Firstly, various amount of Na<sup>+</sup>-MMT clay was dispersed in 100 mL of deionized water using ultrasonication for 5 h to allow swelling of the Na<sup>+</sup>-MMT clay. Then, 20 mL (0.21 mol) of aniline was added drop wise, followed by the addition of pre-cooled 1 M HCl. The mixture was stirred for 15–20 min until the aniline monomer was fully intercalated into the Na<sup>+</sup>-MMT, and a clear dispersion was formed. Then, pre-cooled 11.5 g (0.05 mol) APS solution (dissolved in 1 M aqueous HCl) was added drop wise, and the mixture was stirred for another 4 h in an ice bath at 0 °C. The obtained dark blue green precipitate of the PANI/MMT composite was filtered out of the reaction mixture, and washed several times with deionized water and methanol to remove unreacted monomer and HCl and dried under vacuum at 80 °C for 24 h. For comparison, pure PANI in ES form was also synthesized under the same condition without adding MMT clay.

The PANI/MMT nanocomposites with various MMT content prepared within this study are referred in the following text as PNC-X, where X denotes the concentration in wt% of the clay with respect to the monomer amount in the reaction mixture (Table 1).

## Characterizations

Wide-angle X-ray scattering (WAXS) pattern of pure MMT clay and PNC containing different concentrations of MMT clay were obtained using powder diffractometer HZG/4A (Freiberger Praezisionsmechanik GmbH, Freiberg) with Cu K $\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 0.1542$  nm, 40 kV, 45 mA, Ni-filter, and reflection geometry). WAXS scans were performed at ambient temperature within the interval  $1.4^\circ < 2\theta < 20^\circ$  with  $0.1^\circ$  step.

Field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM) images of pure PANI, MMT clay, and PNC were observed using a FESEM SUPRA 40VP, Carl Zeiss NTS GmbH, while high resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) images and selected area diffraction pattern (SADP) patterns were obtained with FEI Technai 20 U Twin transmission electron microscope at 200 kV. The following procedure for the sample preparation was adopted: PANI, MMT or PNC powders were first dispersed in THF using ultrasonication to get uniform dispersion that was subsequently drop cast on the carbon coated Cu grid and left to dry.

FTIR spectra were recorded on a Bruker spectrophotometer in the range 4,000–400 cm<sup>-1</sup> with the resolution 2 cm<sup>-1</sup>. Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) was performed with Perkin Elmer TGA 7 thermogravimetric (TG) analyzer, operated with Pyris 1 Advanced Kinetics software. The measurements were performed from room temperature to 800 °C at a heating rate of 10 °C/min in the nitrogen atmosphere (N<sub>2</sub> flow 20 mL/min) or alternatively in air.

DC electrical conductivity was measured in ambient conditions at room temperature using two-probe method in a serial connection of the sample, electrometer Keithley 617, and home made stabilized DC power supply. The samples were in a form of pressed pellets prepared by press designed for IR samples preparation (diameter 1.3 cm, load 6.6 ton in air). The conductivity was calculated from the conductance taken in the linear part of volt–amp characteristics, the area, and distance between the electrodes.

## Results and discussion

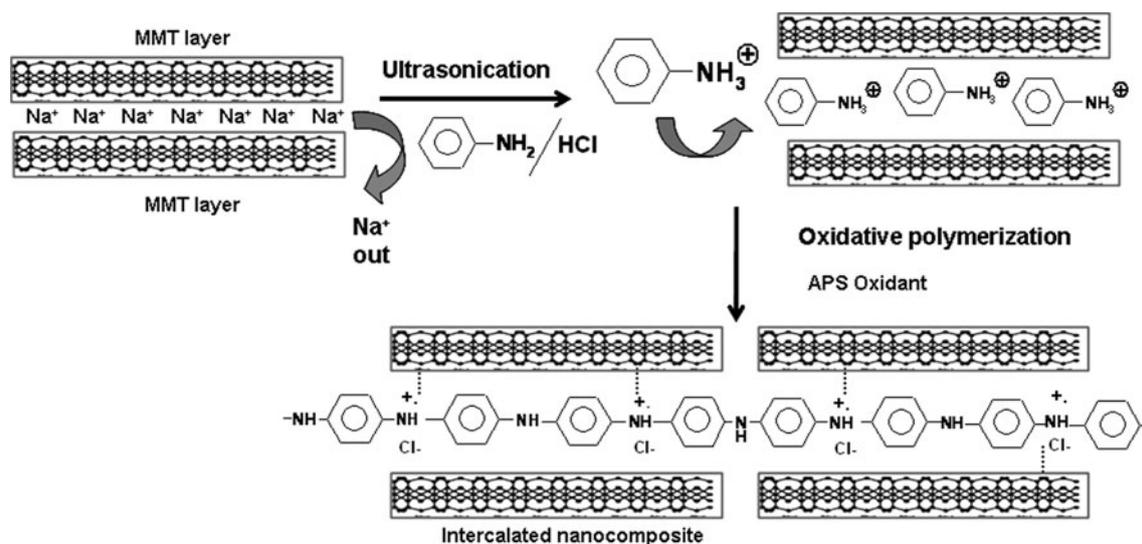
### Synthesis and structure of prepared PANI/MMT nanocomposites

The intercalation and polymerization mechanism of PANI in the MMT environment is depicted in Fig. 1. The initial intercalation of the aniline monomer into the interlayer

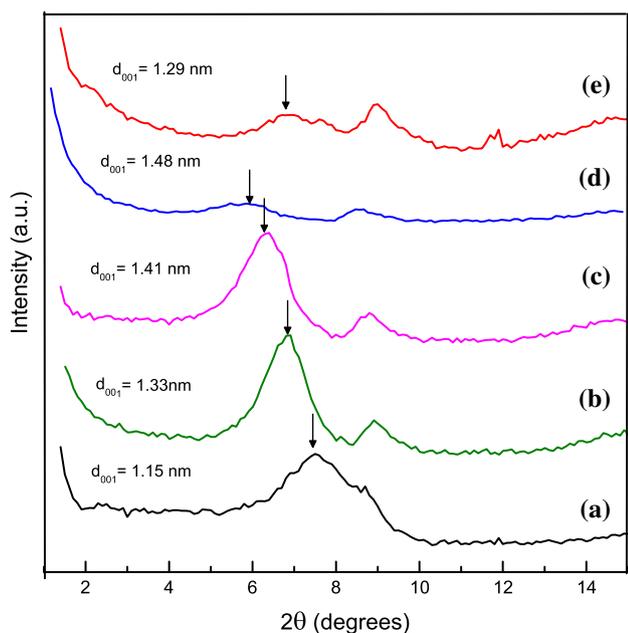
**Table 1** Polymerization characteristics and various parameters of prepared PANI/MMT nanocomposites

| Sample  | Clay loading (wt%) with respect to monomer amount (20 g) | PANI content in PNC <sup>a</sup> (wt%) | Peak angle $2\theta$ | Scattering vector $q$ (Å <sup>-1</sup> ) | Interlayer $d$ -spacing (nm) | Room temp. Conductivity $\sigma_{rt}$ (S cm <sup>-1</sup> ) |
|---------|--|--|----------------------|--|------------------------------|---|
| PANI-ES | 0  | 100                                    | –                    | –  | –                            | $1.6 \times 10^{-4}$  |
| PNC-2.5 | 2.5  | 90                                     | 6.871                | 0.488                                    | 1.29                         | $2.0 \times 10^{-4}$  |
| PNC-5   | 5  | 81                                     | 5.991                | 0.425                                    | 1.48                         | $2.4 \times 10^{-4}$  |
| PNC-15  | 15   | 60                                     | 6.228                | 0.446                                    | 1.41                         | $2.9 \times 10^{-4}$  |
| PNC-25  | 25   | 44                                     | 6.663                | 0.473                                    | 1.33                         | $7.4 \times 10^{-4}$  |
| MMT     | –  | 0                                      | 7.677                | 0.545                                    | 1.15                         | $1.1 \times 10^{-6}$  |

<sup>a</sup> Determined by weight measurement



**Fig. 1** Schematic route of the synthesis of intercalated PANI/MMT clay nanocomposites



**Fig. 2** WAXS pattern of **a** pure MMT clay, **b** PNC-25, **c** PNC-15, **d** PNC-5, and **e** PNC-2.5

spacing of the clay was driven by the exchange of  $\text{Na}^+$  cations in the  $\text{Na}^+$ -MMT clay with anilinium cations. Their subsequent oxidative polymerization with APS yielded PANI in a form of emeraldine salt (ES). The degree of intercalation in synthesized intercalated nanocomposites was confirmed by the WAXS diffraction pattern (Fig. 2). The peak at  $2\theta \approx 7.7^\circ$  observed for pure MMT (Fig. 2a) corresponds to the periodicity in the direction perpendicular to the (001) plane of the clay. In the PNCs (Fig. 2b–e), this peak was observed at lower  $2\theta$  values, indicating

increased interplanar distance in the MMT crystals. The  $d$ -spacing values ( $d_{001}$ ) were calculated from the peak position of WAXS pattern using Bragg's equation  $d = 2\pi/q$ , where  $q$  is the magnitude of scattering vector defined as  $q = (4\pi/\lambda) \sin(\theta)$ .  $\lambda$  is the X-ray wavelength, and  $2\theta$  is the scattering angle [46]. The position of (001) peak, and corresponding  $d$ -spacing are shown in Table 1. With the increase in PANI content (Fig. 2b–d), the  $d$ -spacing was first increased from the value  $d_{001} = 1.15$  nm for pure  $\text{Na}^+$ -MMT clay up to the maximum value  $d_{001} = 1.48$  nm, which reached for PNC-5 having about 81 wt% of PANI (Fig. 2d). At this concentration, the WAXS diffraction pattern is less resolved suggesting lower ordering of structure in the PNC. With further increase in PANI content, slight decrease of the interplanar spacing was observed to the value  $d_{001} = 1.29$  nm for the PNC-2.5 (Fig. 2e). The diffraction patterns also exhibit a small peak corresponding to the undisturbed MMT, while no evidence for the exfoliation was found.

Previously published results on the changes of interplanar spacing of MMT with the PANI content are not consistent. For example, Lee et al. [46] reported the increase in basal spacing of MMT in the nanocomposites from 0.97 to 1.40 nm up to 12.5 wt% of PANI followed by a decrease at higher PANI content, while the same authors reported [42] the increase in basal spacing from 0.97 nm up to the 1.45 nm for 75% PANI content can be found. Further, Celik et al. [43] also reported the increase in basal spacing up to 1.52 nm at 75% PANI content, which is quite comparable to our results (Table 1). The maximum 0.4 nm expansion in the  $d_{001}$  spacing found in our study fits well to the values published on similar systems [35, 36, 42, 45, 46] and confirms the insertion of PANI chains between the silicate layers and the formation of intercalated

PANI/MMT nanocomposites as well as the limitation, and even decrease of the inter-plane spacing at higher PANI concentrations.

### Morphology

Microstructures of the PANI/MMT composites, pristine MMT, and pure PANI as observed by FESEM are compared in Fig. 3a–d. The layered structure of pristine MMT is clearly observed (Fig. 3a), while pure PANI has a granular structure (clusters or globules) as seen in Fig. 3d. In the PNCs with increasing PANI content (Fig. 3b–c), the structure changes from prevailing plate-like structure to a globular one, pointing that at higher monomer/MMT ratio the polymerization is not limited only into the MMT galleries. PANI partially covers the clay platelets surface because of columbic interaction between the positive charge located at the nitrogen atom of PANI and negative charged on the surface of the clay. Moreover, at the excess of the monomer some part of it stays free in the reaction mixture and the polymerization can proceed partially in the bulk, yielding free polymer not anchored on the clay surface. The PANI-coated clay particles can be easily aggregated because of their large aspect ratio.

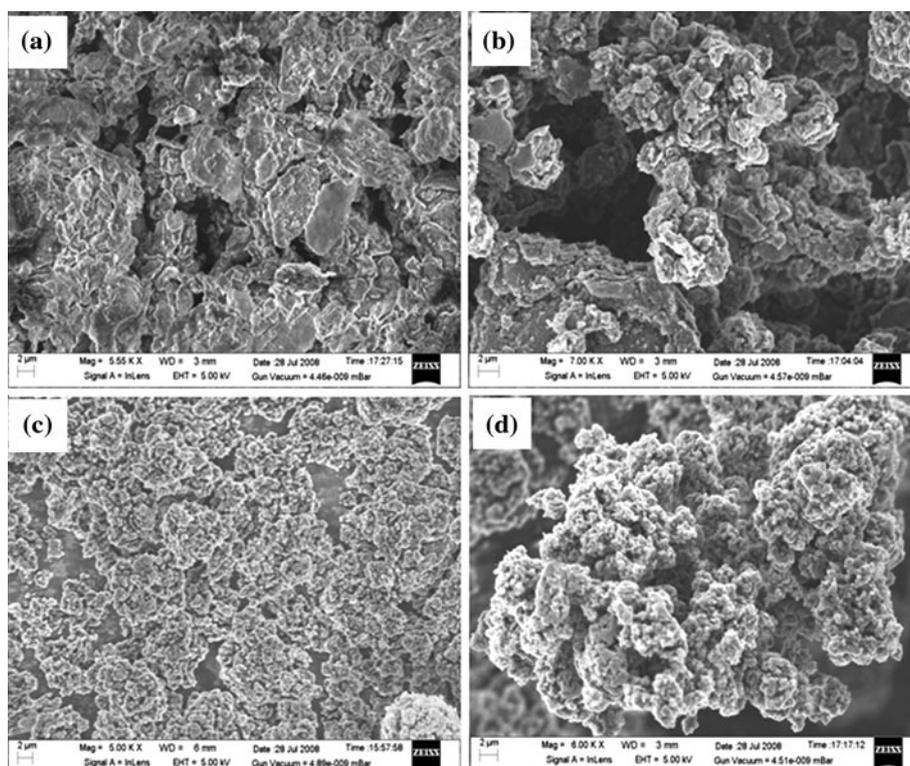
In order to identify the intercalated structures of the nanocomposites more clearly, we acquired high resolution transmission electron microscope (HRTEM) images for PNC-2.5 sample, as shown in Fig. 4 for different scale

bars. Dark stripes represent the clay platelets (marked with arrows), and the gray/white areas represent the polymer matrix. Even at the lowest MMT content, the TEM image shows that the composite contains a considerable part of stacked layers, which is consistent with the results of X-ray diffractogram (Fig. 2e). SADP (inset of Fig. 4b) shows some diffusion rings, suggesting that the prepared composite contains non negligible fraction of the crystalline phase.

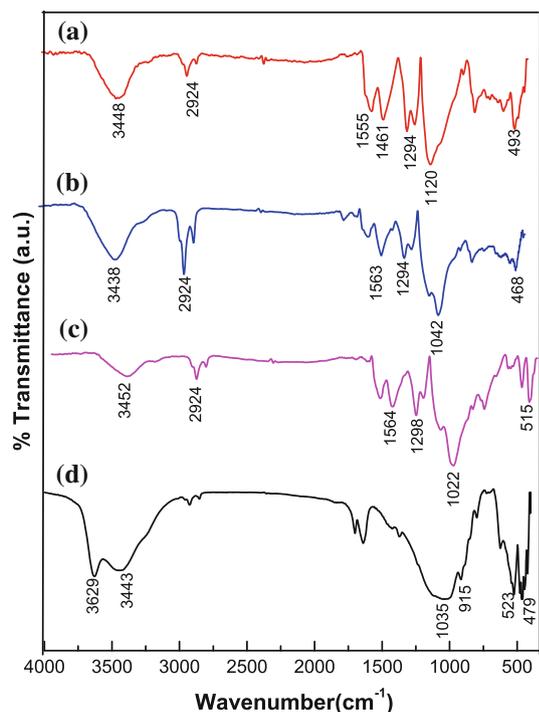
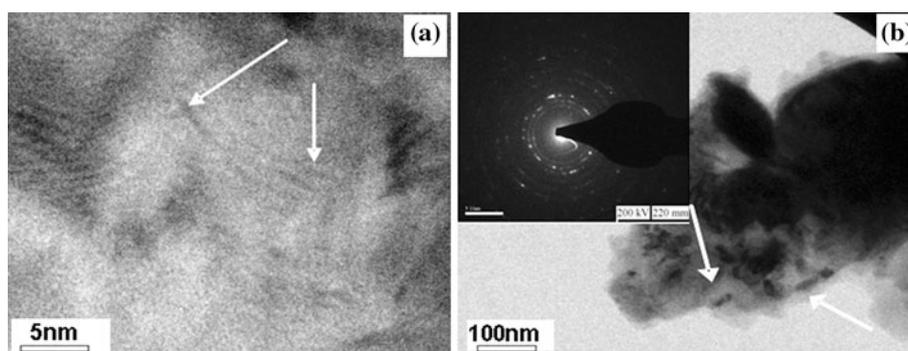
### FTIR spectra

FTIR spectroscopy was used to investigate the chemical structure of the PNC and interactions between the PANI and MMT. Figure 5 shows the FTIR spectra of pure MMT clay, pure PANI (ES), and PNC samples with various clay loadings. The characteristic bands of pure MMT clay can be assigned according to the literature as  $3629\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{O-H}}$ ),  $3443\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{Mg-O}}$ ),  $915\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\delta_{\text{Al-OH}}$ ),  $523\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{Si-O-Al}}$ ), and  $479\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\delta_{\text{Si-O-Si}}$ ) (Fig. 5d). The broad absorption band in the  $1,350\text{--}750\text{ cm}^{-1}$  region involves four Si–O stretching modes of the MMT: three of them in plane ( $1,120$ ;  $1,048$ ; and  $1,025\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), and one out-of-plane mode ( $1,080\text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) [47]. Pure PANI–ES (Fig. 5a) is characterized by the vibrations at  $1,294\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{C-N}}$  in secondary aromatic amine),  $1,555\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{C=C}}$ , quinoid ring),  $1,469\text{ cm}^{-1}$  ( $\nu_{\text{C=C}}$ , benzenoid ring), and  $1,120\text{ cm}^{-1}$  (vibrational mode of  $\text{B-NH}^+=\text{Q}$  structure, which is formed

**Fig. 3** FESEM images of **a** pure MMT, **b** PNC-2.5, **c** PNC-2.5, and **d** PANI–ES



**Fig. 4** HRTEM images and SADP pattern of PNC-2.5 shown at different scale bars. White arrows show the clay platelets



**Fig. 5** FTIR Spectra of **a** pure PANI-ES, **b** PNC-2.5, **c** PNC-25, and **d** pure MMT clay

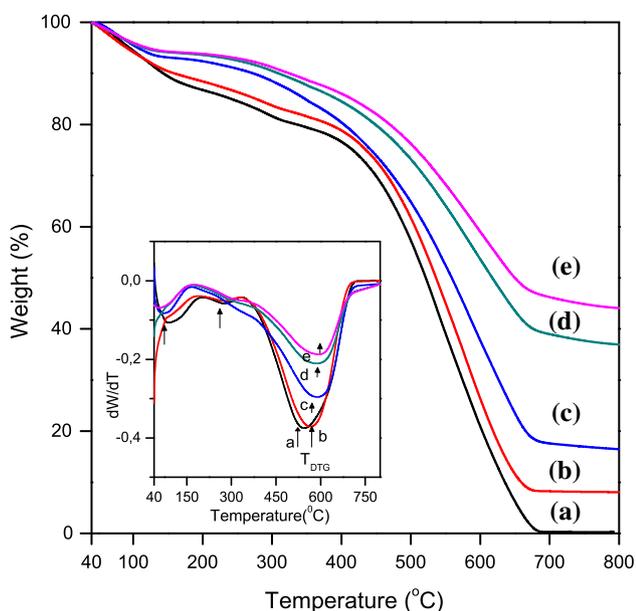
during protonation process and which is associated with an extended electron delocalization and increased electrical conductivity of PANI [42, 46, 48]. The spectrum of the PNC-2.5 composite (Fig. 5b) is dominated by the IR spectrum of the pure PANI-ES spectrum since the composite contains only minor fraction of the MMT. The increase of the relative peak intensity at 1042, 522, and 468  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  can be explained as an overlap of the absorption bands of PANI with the strong absorption peaks of MMT. In the spectrum of PNC-25 composite (Fig. 5c), both the characteristic peaks of the clay and PANI are clearly visible, however, the spectral features in the regions 1,350–750  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  cannot be explained using a simple superposition of both components. Cole [47] used FTIR

spectroscopy for characterizing the state of the intercalation and exfoliation in polymer nanocomposites prepared from montmorillonite-based nanoclays. The authors stated that the Si–O-stretching band envelope is affected by both the chemistry of the montmorillonite and the presence of intercalant. It was shown that the shape of the clay band envelope in the 1,350–750  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  region changes with the degree of processing because of the changes in the quality of intercalation/exfoliation. He showed that out-of-plane Si–O mode of MMT near 1,070–1,080  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  is particularly sensitive and can be considered as an indicator of the clay intercalation in a polymeric matrix. In another study [49], the Si–O bands envelope was analyzed in detail by decomposing it into four components: peak I (1,115  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), II (out-of-plane mode, 1080  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), III (1,045  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), and IV (1,024  $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ), and it was found that the shape and position of these peaks changes with the variation of water content, the greatest shift being observed for the peak II that becomes more prominent as the interlayer spacing increases because of their separation by adsorbed water. In generally, in unintercalated MMT clay the band associated with the out-of-plane Si–O vibration is broadened due to coupling of vibrations from the closely packed adjacent layers. As these layers become separated from each other, this coupling effect is suppressed and the narrowing of the absorption band occurs. In addition, it can be expected that the in-plane Si–O vibration mode in the silica in the tetrahedral layer could be restricted because of the interaction with intercalant. As a result, the corresponding absorption bands can be narrowed [47, 49]. This maybe the case of the MMT intercalated with PANI, where the formation of hydrogen bonding between the basal oxygen and nitrogen atom in PANI polymer can be expected. The analysis of the IR spectra of these nanocomposites is complicated because of the fact that in the region in which both the polymer and MMT are most sensitive to the structural and chemical changes like protonation, hydrogen bonding or intercalation, the characteristic bands of MMT and PANI overlap. Nevertheless, the narrowing of Si–O band envelope between 1,100 and 1,000  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  in PNC may be used as an

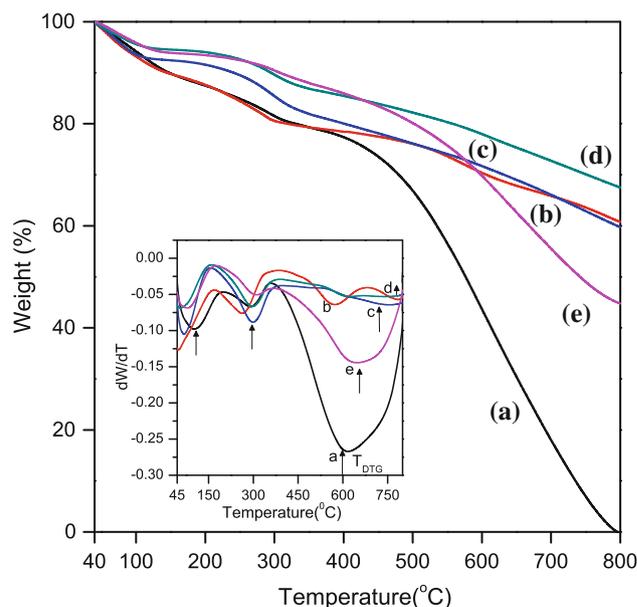
evidence for the efficient intercalation of PANI between the clay layers.

### Thermogravimetric analysis (TGA)

The incorporation of clay into the polymer matrix is known for enhancing the thermal stability of the nanocomposite by acting as a barrier against the penetration of oxygen into the specimen and diffusion of the volatile products generated during decomposition out of the composite. Figures 6 and 7 show the TG curves and their corresponding derivatives, DTG, (inset of Figs. 6, 7) for the pure PANI-ES and for PNC samples containing various amount of clay, measured in air and nitrogen atmosphere, respectively. Pure PANI shows three temperature regions of the weight loss process as seen from the TG and corresponding minima in DTG curves (Figs. 6, 7 inset), indicating the weight loss at each step. The first weight loss region found below 100 °C is attributed to the loss of water and alcohol moieties, and the second one observed in the interval 200–300 °C is explained by the elimination of acid dopant (HCl) [24–27]. The third and major weight loss process (80% of the total weight loss) starts at around 350 °C (in air) and at 400 °C (in nitrogen atmosphere), and it has been assigned to the thermal decomposition of PANI backbone [24–27, 42, 43]. In order to distinguish the PANI stability in the composites from the weight losses of other origins, a careful analysis of the third peak of the DTG spectra was performed, namely the degradation of PANI was calculated as an integral of the corresponding peak. The values for the  $T_{DTG}$  (the temperature at the minimum



**Fig. 6** TGA and DTG curves (inset) of **a** pure PANI-ES, **b** PNC-2.5, **c** PNC-5, **d** PNC-15, and **e** PNC-25 in air at heating rate 10 °C/min



**Fig. 7** TGA and DTG curves (inset) of **a** pure PANI-ES, **b** PNC-2.5, **c** PNC-5, **d** PNC-15, and **e** PNC-25 in nitrogen ( $N_2$ ) atmosphere at heating rate 10 °C/min

of DTG curves corresponding to third weight loss temperature region) and the weight loss due to PANI in PNCs are summarized in Table 2. It can be seen that in oxidative degradation (Fig. 6), as the concentration of MMT clay is increased, the total weight loss of the PNC systematically decreases with decreasing PANI fraction in the nanocomposite. On the other hand, in non-oxidative degradation (Fig. 7), the weight loss is not decreased systematically. The inset (Figs. 6, 7) and Table 2 show the temperature at the minimum of DTG curve ( $T_{DTG}$ ) for pure PANI-ES in air atmosphere is  $\approx 540$  °C (600 °C under  $N_2$ ), attributable to the thermal scission of PANI backbone chains, which shifts to higher temperature in all PNC samples with respect to the clay concentration. The shifting of  $T_{DTG}$  in PNCs confirms that intercalated nanocomposites are more thermally stable than the pure PANI system.

For lower to medium clay fractions, it is noticeable that the amplitude of total weight loss is lower in  $N_2$  than in air atmosphere. The increased stability of the composites in  $N_2$  atmosphere for medium clay concentrations may derive from the barrier effect caused by limited escape of the volatile thermo-oxidation products outside the sample as well as by the limited oxygen diffusion inside the PNC.

In case of PNC-25, containing higher clay amount, the total weight loss in air and in  $N_2$  is similar. The decreased stabilization effect of the MMT in PNCs with higher MMT content maybe explained by the inhomogeneity of the PNC, in which some of the PANI chains reside outside the silicate layers of MMT and facilitate the diffusion of oxygen or products of thermal

**Table 2** TG and DTG results of pure PANI-ES and PNC with different clay loading in air and N<sub>2</sub>

| Sample  | PANI content in PNC-MMT (wt%) | Third major weight loss (%) (in air) | Third major weight loss (%) (in N <sub>2</sub> ) | T <sub>DTG</sub> (°C) (in air) | T <sub>DTG</sub> (°C) (in N <sub>2</sub> ) |
|---------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|--|
| PANI-ES | 100                           | 80                                   | 80   | 540                            | 600  |
| PNC-2.5 | 90                            | 73                                   | 17   | 565                            | 570  |
| PNC-5   | 81                            | 66                                   | 21   | 589                            | 615  |
| PNC-15  | 60                            | 49                                   | 18   | 585                            | 622  |
| PNC-25  | 44                            | 43                                   | 42   | 594                            | 650  |

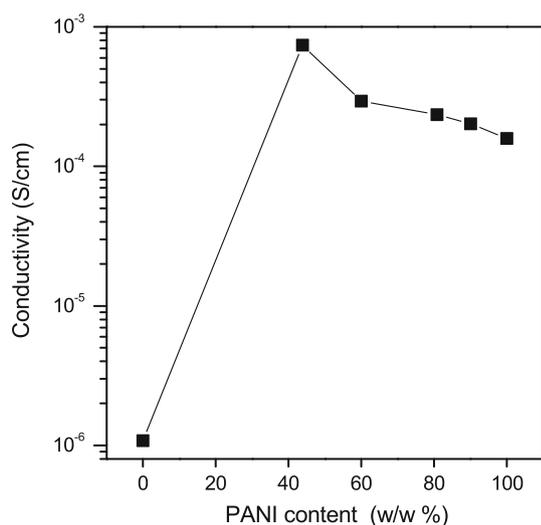
T<sub>DTG</sub> is the temperature at the minimum of DTG curve with regard to the third weight loss

decomposition inside/outside the specimen. It can be easily rationalized by the incomplete disintegration of the MMT powder in the reaction mixture by sonication before the aniline polymerization. As a result, polymerization proceeds with higher probability in the bulk outside the MMT galleries. It is in accordance with the observations made by XRD and SEM.

The enhanced oxidative and non-oxidative thermal stability of the PANI nanocomposites can be attributed to the restricted thermal motion of the PANI in the gallery of the MMT clay (i.e., improved barrier property). These results are in good agreement with the results for PANI/MMT nanocomposites [24–27, 42, 43], and proves that the intercalated nanostructure in PANI and layered silicate nanocomposites is crucial to the enhanced thermal stability in air as well as in the inert atmosphere.

#### Electrical conductivity

The dependence of the electrical conductivity ( $\sigma_{rt}$ ) on the PANI content measured at room temperature is shown in Fig. 8 and the values for pure PANI, MMT, and PNCs with various PANI content are summarized in Table 1. The

**Fig. 8** Room temperature conductivity ( $\sigma_{RT}$ ) of PANI/MMT nanocomposites as a function of PANI content

conductivity of pure MMT,  $\sigma_{rt} = 10^{-6} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ , fits well within the conductivity limits published in the literature [44], and it is of an ionic origin. The conductivity of pure PANI prepared at the same conditions as the polymerization of aniline in the PNCs was measured as  $1.6 \times 10^{-4} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ . Surprisingly, the conductivity of PNCs was found higher than that of pure PANI, reaching the maximum value,  $7.4 \times 10^{-4} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ , for the concentration 44 wt. % of the PANI content in the nanocomposite. The results on the conductivity of similar composites published in the literature are rather scattered. Even higher values  $\sigma_{rt} = 10^{-3} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$  were reported in the literature for the PANI/MMT composite containing 7.2 wt% PANI [36] or  $\sigma_{rt} = 10^{-1} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$  for the nanocomposite containing 80 wt% PANI [31]. In the latter case, the conductivity of pure PANI was about  $10^{-4} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$ . Lee et al. reported  $\sigma_{rt} = 10^{-1} \text{ S cm}^{-1}$  for the composite with 74.7 wt% of PANI, but in this case the composites had a lower conductivity than the pristine PANI with  $\sigma_{rt} = 1.5 \text{ S cm}^{-1}$  [42]. However, the values reported by various authors are difficult to compare since they are influenced by the PANI polymerization method, reaction media, and the oxidant used.

The conductivity of the PNC is composed of the ionic conductivity of MMT originated in Na<sup>+</sup> cations that was inherently contained in MMT and by residual traces of water, and of the electronic conductivity of the oxidized form of PANI. In the pure MMT, the surplus charge on the surface of clay layers is compensated by interlayer Na<sup>+</sup> cations. When aniline monomer is added into the reaction mixture, the anilinium molecules are intercalated into the clay galleries and replaced the Na<sup>+</sup> cations. At higher amount of clay in the reaction mixture, these cations are not replaced completely, hence they contribute to the overall ionic conductivity.

However, the ionic conductivity is of several orders of magnitude smaller than the observed conductivity of the nanocomposites, and its contribution should not cause detectable increase of the conductivity compared with pure PANI. Alternative explanation could be found in the morphology changes of the PANI in the presence of MMT. It has been shown previously that conductive polymers show an enhancement of the conductivity when confined

between clay lamellas, as at this condition the distortion of polymer chains is prevented [23, 41, 50]. Better ordering of the conductive polymer can give rise to higher conductivity.

## Conclusion

X-ray diffractograms together with electron microscopy techniques and FTIR spectra confirm the efficient intercalation of electrically conductive PANI between inorganic clay layers during the in situ intercalative oxidative polymerization of aniline with Na<sup>+</sup>-MMT. No exfoliation was observed even at a low clay concentration, but only wider distribution of inter planar distances occurred at PANI concentrations above 80% with the presence of a fraction of MMT with shorter interplanar distances than in medium PANI concentration. The employed route offers the possibility to improve the thermal properties with simultaneously controlled electrical conductivity. Depending on the loading of the clay, the room temperature conductivity values of these nanocomposites varied between  $2.0 \times 10^{-4}$  and  $7.4 \times 10^{-4}$  S cm<sup>-1</sup>. Contrary to some previously published results, the conductivity showed the highest values at medium PANI concentration and decreased with increasing PANI content. The decrease in conductivity at high PANI concentration was ascribed to the decrease of the structure ordering of PANI in the nanocomposites. The improved thermal stability along with the increased conductivity of these nanocomposites and enhanced mechanical properties maybe of immense interest in many applications like EMI shielding material or polymer electrodes for batteries and solar cells.

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