

TRANSESTERIFICATION OF CROTON MEGALOCARPUS OIL OVER  
TUNGSTEN TRIOXIDE LOADED ON SILICA MESOPOROUS-  
MACROPARTICLES

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*A special dedication to my beloved parents,*

*Puad Mat Yassin and Shariffah Osman*

*To my siblings, my beloved nephews*

*&*

*To all my friends*

*Thank you for everything.*

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## ABSTRACT

Production of biodiesel has been seen as a quantum jump in recent years due to its ability to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG). Biodiesel produces better quality of exhaust gas emission that helps in minimizing the greenhouse effect. In this study, non-edible *Croton megalocarpus* oil was converted to biodiesel by transesterification process in heterogeneous catalysis over tungsten trioxide supported on silica mesoporous-macroparticles ( $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$ ). The SMP was successfully synthesized by hydrolysis of TEOS in the mixed solvent of water and acetone using CTAB as template at room temperature. Meanwhile,  $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  catalysts were prepared by impregnation, followed by drying and calcination at 823 K. The properties of  $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  were characterized using XRD, FTIR,  $\text{N}_2$  physisorption, FESEM and TEM. The  $2\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  catalyst has high surface area, large pore size, and high acidity. The enhancement of Lewis acid sites induced high activity in the transesterification of *Croton megalocarpus* oil. Increased acidity effectively enhanced the catalytic performance of  $2\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  as a heterogeneous catalyst in biodiesel production. The optimal parameters obtained for the transesterification process were: reaction temperature (348 K), reaction time (68 min), and methanol to oil molar ratio (1:7), and catalyst dosage (4 wt%). Response surface methodology (RSM) based on central composite design (CCD) was used to optimize the catalyst dosage (3 to 6 wt%), methanol to oil molar ratio (4 to 13), reaction temperature (318 to 363 K), and reaction time (45 to 112 min) of the transesterification process. Using the optimal conditions determined by RSM, the conversion yield of *Croton megalocarpus* oil reached 93.1 % at 345 K with the methanol to oil molar ratio of 9:1, reaction time of 45 min, and catalyst dosage of 4.5 wt%, respectively. Overall, this study shows that  $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  has the potential to be applied as a catalyst in future biodiesel production.

## ABSTRAK

Penghasilan biodiesel menyaksikan lonjakan besar sejak kebelakangan ini disebabkan keupayaannya untuk mengurangkan gas rumah hijau (GHG). Biodiesel menghasilkan pelepasan gas ekzos dengan kualiti lebih baik yang dapat membantu meminimumkan kesan rumah hijau. Dalam kajian ini, minyak *Croton megalocarpus* tidak boleh dimakan telah ditukar kepada biodiesel melalui proses transesterifikasi dalam pemangkinan heterogen menggunakan tungsten trioksida berpenyokong silika mesolintang-zarah makro ( $WO_3/SMP$ ). SMP telah berjaya disintesis melalui hidrolisis TEOS di dalam pelarut campuran air dan aseton dengan menggunakan CTAB sebagai templat pada suhu bilik. Sementara itu, mangkin  $WO_3/SMP$  telah disediakan melalui kaedah pengisitepuan, diikuti dengan pengeringan dan pengkalsinan pada 823 K. Sifat mangkin  $WO_3/SMP$  telah dicirikan menggunakan XRD, FTIR, penyerapan-penyahjerapan gas nitrogen, FESEM dan TEM. Mangkin  $2WO_3/SMP$  mempunyai luas permukaan yang tinggi, saiz liang yang besar, dan keasidan yang tinggi. Peningkatan tapak asid Lewis  $WO_3/SMP$  telah mendorong kepada kenaikan aktiviti transesterifikasi minyak *Croton megalocarpus*. Peningkatan keasidan telah meningkatkan prestasi pemangkinan  $2WO_3/SMP$  dengan berkesan sebagai mangkin heterogen dalam penghasilan biodiesel. Parameter optimum yang diperoleh untuk proses transesterifikasi ini adalah: suhu tindak balas (348 K), masa tindak balas (68 min) dan nisbah molar metanol kepada minyak (1:7), dan dos mangkin (4.wt%). Kaedah permukaan respons (RSM) berdasarkan reka bentuk komposit pusat (CCD) digunakan untuk mengoptimumkan dos mangkin (3 hingga 6 wt%), nisbah molar metanol kepada minyak (4 hingga 13), suhu tindak balas (318 hingga 363 K), dan masa tindak balas (45 hingga 112 min) bagi proses transesterifikasi. Dengan menggunakan keadaan optimum yang ditentukan oleh RSM, hasil pertukaran minyak *Croton megalocarpus* mencapai 93.1% pada 345 K metanol kepada minyak dengan nisbah molar 9:1, masa tindak balas 45 min, dan dos mangkin ialah 4.5 wt%, masing-masing. Pada keseluruhannya, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa  $WO_3/SMP$  berpotensi digunakan sebagai mangkin dalam pengeluaran biodiesel pada masa hadapan.

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**LIST OF SYMBOLS**

K	-	Kelvin
h	-	Hour
mL	-	Mililiter
nm	-	Nanometer
min	-	Minute
$\theta$	-	Theta
wt. %	-	Weight percentage
%	-	Percentage
$2\theta$	-	Bragg Angle
$^{\circ}\text{C}$	-	Degree Celcius
g	-	gram

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

SMP	-	Silica mesoporous-macroparticles
WO <sub>3</sub>	-	Tungsten trioxide
TEOS	-	Tetraethyl orthosilicate
CTAB	-	Cetyltrimethylammonium bromide
XRD	-	X-Ray Diffraction
FESEM	-	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopic
TEM	-	Transmission Emission Microscopic
BET	-	Brunauer Emmet and Teller
FID	-	Flame Ionization Detector
FTIR	-	Fourier Transformer Infra-Red
GC	-	Gas Chromatography
FAME	-	Fatty acid methyl ester
FFA	-	Free fatty acid
RSM	-	Response surface methodology
ASTM	-	American Society for Testing and Materials
ENs	-	European Standards
CCD	-	Centre composite site

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Nowadays, global warming and crisis of fuels are of the main global current issues. Many countries have encouraged alternatives to overcome these problems. In recent years, biodiesel has received great attention in the production of engine fuels. Biodiesel can be defined as liquid fuel similar to petroleum diesel but with better quality of exhaust gas emission compared to the petroleum diesel (Helwani *et al.*, 2009 and Singh *et al.*, 2010). This is due to combustion process of using biodiesel which does not contribute to a net rise in the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and hence, it minimizing the intensity of greenhouse effect. In addition, biodiesel is better than diesel fuels in terms of sulphur content, flash point, aromatic content and biodegradability. Biodiesel is also a non-toxic, biodegradable, renewable fuel that can be produced from a range of organic feedstock including fresh or waste vegetable oils, animal fats, and oil seed plants (Prafulla *et al.*, 2009).

The major component in vegetable oils and animal fats for the biodiesel production is triacylglycerol (TAG). In biodiesel production, when triglyceride reacts with an alcohol, the three fatty acid chains are released from the glycerol skeleton and combined with methanol to yield fatty acid methyl esters (FAME) and glycerol as the by product (Ramachandran *et al.*, 2013 and Corro *et al.*, 2013). The resulting biodiesel typically comprises of alkyl fatty acid (chain length C<sub>14</sub>-C<sub>22</sub>) esters of short-chain alcohols, primarily, methanol or ethanol.

The source of biodiesel comes from vegetable oils and animal fats. Most of the biodiesel produce using vegetable oils. Vegetable oils can be classified into two which are edible oil and non-edible oil. Edible oil such as soybeans oil, rapeseed oil, canola oil, sunflower oil, and coconut oil is defined as the oil derived from plants which can be consumed as a part of food for human. Non-edible oil is derived from vegetables that cannot be eaten by human such as jatropha oil, croton oil, tobacco seed oil, sesame oil and others. Currently, more than 95% of the biodiesel is synthesized from edible oil using various types of catalyst. However, there are many claims that a lot of problems may arise due to the competition between food supply and automotive fuels. It is believed that large-scale production of biodiesel from edible oils may bring global imbalance to the food supply and demand market. Moreover, edible oil feedstocks costs are far expensive to be used as fuel (Ivana *et al.*, 2012). However, there will always be a competition between edible and non-edible oil plants for land usage (Searchinger *et al.*, 2008 ).

In many countries, edible oils are not produced enough to meet requirements for human and they must be imported. Hence, the price of biodiesel produced from edible oils much higher than that of petrodiesel. Therefore, non-edible oils from jatropha, karanja, neem, mahua and other plants are the only possibility for biodiesel production (Jain and Sharma, 2010). Croton megalocarpus oil is one of the most promising potential oil sources for biodiesel production. It is a non-edible transparent liquid of brownish colour obtained from the seeds of croton megalocarpus plant. Besides, it is a low-cost and economical non-edible crop that is suitable for biodiesel production (Kafuku *et al.*, 2010b). The croton plant is indigenous to the northern part of Tanzania and has been used locally to provide shade. Compared to other non-edible oil crops such as jatropha curcas, croton megalocarpus requires relatively less water footprint and fertilization during cultivation stage which can reduce land usage for the plants (Kafuku *et al.*, 2010a).

Vegetable oils can be converted into biodiesel using four ways such as blending, micro-emulsions, pyrolysis and transesterification (Ma and Hanna, 1999; Srivastava and Pasad, 2000). The reversible transesterification reactions are the most common method of converting triglycerides from oils into biodiesel. In addition, the

main factors affecting transesterification reaction and produced esters yield are type of catalyst, reaction temperature, reaction time, pressure and molar ratio of alcohol and oil. The transesterification reaction can be non-catalyzed or catalyzed by an acid, a base or an enzyme. In traditional transesterification process, KOH or NaOH is used as the homogenous catalyst and methanol as the lower alcohol. The advantage of this process is that it produces high yield of methyl esters under mild condition and in shorter the reaction time (Surbhi *et al.*, 2011). Although the transesterification rate is very rapid when these homogenous alkaline catalysts are used, a large amount of water is required to wash the produced biodiesel leading to generation of large amount of wastewater containing liquids of high basicity or acidity which are not environmentally benign (Guan *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the use of heterogenous catalysts brings advantages such as reusability, easier catalyst and product separation, reduction in the amount of wastewater produces and less sensitivity to the presence of water in feedstock (Kafuku *et al.*, 2010a). Besides, heterogenous catalysts are non-corrosive and are environmentally benign, thus being ecologically and economically important in catalysis filed systems with no disposal problems.

Recently, researchers have been focusing on heterogenous catalyst that could be used to replace the homogenous catalyzed in the biodiesel reaction. Heterogenous catalytic reaction converts triglyceride into methyl ester and glycerol as the by products slowly but produces biodiesel in a very feasible and economical way due to the reusability and easier separation (Sakai *et al.*, 2009). Different heterogenous catalytic activities exist for various feedstock with different process conditions. The effectiveness of the heterogenous catalytic reaction is based on the activity of the solid catalyst used. There are two types of heterogenous catalyst for biodiesel production, such as base and acid catalyst. In general, solid base catalysts are more active than solid acid catalysts requiring relatively shorter reaction times and lower reaction temperatures (Borges and Diaz, 2012). However, solid acid catalysts have several advantages over solid base catalyst, in which the reaction is less affected by the presence of water and free fatty acids (FFA). Besides, it has the ability to carry out the esterification of free fatty acids by utilizing the high free fatty acids contained in the feedstock.

Currently, all researchers are focusing on exploring new and sustainable solid acid catalysts for biodiesel production. In addition, it is understood that solid acid catalysts have strong potential to replace liquid acid catalyst. Besides, it can carry out esterification and transesterification simultaneously (Jitputti *et al.*, 2006). The ideal solid acid catalyst for transesterification reaction should have characteristics such as an interconnected system of large pores, a hydrophobic surface area and high concentration of strong acid sites (Loterio *et al.*, 2005). One of the potential catalysts is Heteropolyacid (HPA) as it possesses strong Brønsted acidity and high water tolerance. Besides, other materials such as clays, zeolite, ion exchange resin, carbon material, metal oxide as well as sulphated metal oxides,  $\text{WO}_3/\text{ZrO}_2$ , supported on different supports such as zirconia, activated carbon, silica and tantalum are also used as the heterogeneous catalysts. These catalysts have uniform pore structures that provide an advantage on the surface. The surfaces are hydrophobic in order to promote preferential adsorption of oily hydrophobic species on the catalyst surface and it avoids deactivation of catalytic sites by strong adsorption of polar by products like glycerol or water.

Therefore, this study focuses on the non-edible croton megalocarpus oil for production of biodiesel using of tungsten trioxide ( $\text{WO}_3$ ) supported by silica mesoporous-macroparticles (SMP) as catalyst. It is expected that  $\text{WO}_3$  would increase the acidity of the catalyst and increase the performance of the catalytic activity. Silica is more preferred to be used as a support because it can provide a high surface area that can increase the dispersion of the metal. Besides, based on literatures, a few important properties of support should be implemented in order to increase the catalytic activity of the catalyst. The main properties for the catalyst are spherical shape, high surface area, high pore size and stability at a high temperature.

Therefore, the aim of the present work is to prepare the silica mesoporous-macroparticles (SMP) and tungsten trioxide loaded on silica mesoporous-macroparticles ( $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$ ) and to analyze of the characterization of the physical and chemical properties. The catalytic performance of these catalysts will be investigated in the biodiesel production from croton megalocarpus oil and the biodiesel will be tested according to the ASTM standard. Besides that, response surface methodology

(RSM) will be used to statistically evaluate and optimize the biodiesel production process catalyzed by  $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  catalyst with four different variables such as methanol to oil molar ratio, temperature, catalyst loading and time.

## 1.2 Problem Statement and Hypothesis

Croton oil is a non-edible oil that has not been explored widely in the biodiesel production. According to Kafuku *et al.*, (2010b), croton oil is a promising non-edible feedstock for biodiesel production, for which it has been successful in achieving the conversion of fatty methyl ester (FAME) up to 88%. During the process, it uses homogenous catalyst in the reactions which needs additional neutralization and separation steps for the final reaction mixture. Because of these problems, a great deal of interest has recently been observed for use of heterogenous catalyst.

Since Croton oil has high FFA content (  $>2\%$  ), the selection of solid acid catalyst would be preferable. However, research on direct use of solid acid catalyst for biodiesel production has not been encouraged due to its limitations such as slow reaction rate and possible undesirable side reactions. The catalytic performance of a reaction dependent on structure, strength of acidity/basicity, surface area and stability of solid acid/base catalyst (Corma, 1995).

According to Makoto *et al.*, (1988),  $\text{WO}_3$  posses high acidity and can be a potential candidate to be used in this study. It has been found that the use of mesoporous silica contributed to a better diffusion. Silica mesoporous-macroparticles is a good support catalyst due to the high surface area, macropartices size with circle shape and high pore size. Therefore, it is expected that SMP can be effectively used as a support for  $\text{WO}_3$  and further enhances its catalytic activity.

### 1.3 Objectives of study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. prepare and characterize the physicochemical silica mesoporous-macroparticles (SMP) and tungsten trioxide supported on SMP ( $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$ ) catalysts.
- ii. investigate the catalytic performance of the catalyst prepared for the biodiesel production from croton megalocarpus oil.
- iii. optimize the transesterification of the Croton oil by Response Surface Methodology (RSM).

### 1.4 Scope of Study

In order to complete the objectives of this study, this research cover three aspects. The first aspect is to synthesize SMP by sol-gel method. The  $\text{WO}_3$  will be loaded on SMP with various  $\text{WO}_3$  loading (1, 2, 3.5, and 5 wt.%) by impregnation method (Ruslan *et al.*, 2011 and Choung *et al.*, 1983). Then, characterization of the physicochemical properties of the catalysts will be conducted using X-Ray diffractometer (XRD),  $\text{N}_2$  adsorption-desorption, transmission electron microscope (TEM), field emission scanning electron microscope-energy dispersion X-Ray (FESEM-EDX), Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy and IR adsorbed pyridine. Adsorption of pyridine as a probe molecule for FTIR has been accepted as a general practice to classify the type of acids, either a Lewis or Bronsted acid site on the surface of the catalyst.

The second aspect is to test the catalytic performance of  $\text{WO}_3/\text{SMP}$  catalyst for the biodiesel production from croton megalocarpus oil. The croton megalocarpus oil was investigated for the production of biodiesel while reaction factors such as molar ratio of methanol to oil (4 to 13) (Parafulla *et al.*, 2009), reaction temperature (318 to 363K) (Kafuku *et al.*, 2010a), catalyst dosage (3 to 6 wt.%) (Mandeep *et al.*,

2011), and reaction time reaction time (45 to 112 min) (Kafuku *et al.*, 2010c) were investigated in order to obtain the optimal process conditions.

In this study, statistical analysis of FAME yield was performed using Statsoft Statistica 7.0 software. The FCCCD was used to study the interaction of process variables and to predict the optimum process condition for FAME yield by applying Response Surface Methodology (RSM). Independent variables considered important were reaction temperature ( $X_1$ ), reaction time ( $X_2$ ), reaction catalyst ( $X_3$ ), and reaction of molar ratio ( $X_4$ ). The independent variables were coded to (-1, 1) interval where the low and high levels were coded as -1 and +1, respectively. According to FCCCD, the total number of experiments conducted is 30 with  $2^4$  factorial points, 8 axial points and 2 replicates at the center points. The FAME yield was taken as the response of the experiment design.

## 1.5 Significance of Study

The finding of this study showed that  $WO_3/SMP$  has the potential to be applied in the production of biodiesel for croton megalocarpus oil. The solid acid heterogenous catalyst is suitable to be used with high free fatty acids (FFA) content of non-edible oil. Besides, the advantages of using solid acid catalyst are; the simultaneous esterification and transesterification process, insensitivity to free fatty acid content, and easy separation of the catalyst from the reaction mixtures resulting in lower product contaminations. One of the possible alternative oil crops for biodiesel production is non-edible croton megalocarpus oil primarily available in the African continent. Croton megalocarpus is a pioneer species, grown in cleared parts of natural forest, forest margins, or as a canopy tree. The non-edible croton megalocarpus plant can be grown in areas with mean annual rainfall of 800-1600 mm, mean annual temperature 11-27°C and the production life span of the plant is more than 40 years. The ecosystem in Malaysia is one of the most complex tropical rainforests in the world. The average temperature is 27°C with an average rainfall of

2500 mm a year. This provides a perfect setting for the cultivation of *Croton megalocarpus* in the country.

## **1.6 Thesis Outline**

This study is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, the introduction about the importance of the biodiesel as an alternative for liquid fuel and the application of non-edible oil in the transesterification process using the heterogeneous catalysts were outlined. The research motivation of  $WO_3/SMP$  as a catalyst in the production of biodiesel from Croton oil is also clarified. The problem statement of the current research is stated to give clear objectives of this present study. The scope of study covers the research works performed to meet these objectives.

Chapter 2 or literature reviews covers the research background of biodiesel productions as well as the type of feedstocks and catalysts used in the processes. The properties and mechanistic behavior of the reported catalysts are also reviewed. The principles of optimization by RSM are also included.

Chapter 3 or methodology describes the details of the materials and chemical reagents that are used in the present work, the procedure for the catalyst preparations, characterizations, and transesterification process which include the experiments, setup and data analysis.

In Chapter 4, the results and discussion are presented and comprehensively discussed in three parts. The first part is the characterization of the properties that are possessed by the catalysts. In the second part, the catalytic performance of the catalysts in the transesterification of Croton oil under variable parameters are discussed. Lastly, the properties of the biodiesel are also determined.

Finally, Chapter 5 includes the conclusions of this study and the recommendations for future studies.

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