Effect of transition metals (Mo, Mn and Co) on mesoporous ZSM-5 catalyst activity in carbon dioxide reforming of methane

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Abstract. This paper investigates the effect of transition metals (Mo, Mn and Co) on mesoporous ZSM-5 support in carbon dioxide reforming of methane reaction. The mesoporous ZSM-5 support was synthesized by micro emulsion technique and the metals were loaded by wet impregnation method. It was observed that ZSM-5 supported Co catalyst had higher surface area in comparison to other catalysts, which could favour well dispersion and wider utilization of active component. In addition, the ZSM-5 supported Co catalyst exhibited the highest methane and carbon dioxide conversions of 69 % and 65 % respectively at 850°C. The Co species were more active to decompose methane and carbon dioxide compared to Mo and Mn loaded catalysts. Hence, loading Co on mesoporous ZSM-5 produce an active catalyst in carbon dioxide reforming methane reaction.

1. Introduction
The challenge for cleaner energy sources has continued to receive tremendous attention due to lingering issues of climate change, global energy crisis and tropospheric air quality [1,2]. Hence, processes for conversion of harmful molecules into valuable products are being pursued. Syngas (H₂/CO) is a valuable intermediate for production of chemicals via Fischer-Tropsch process, methanol and oxygenates synthesis [3–5]. Carbon dioxide reforming of methane (CRM) involves conversion of natural gas and carbon dioxide into syngas. The process is considered a viable route to produce pure syngas with H₂/CO ratio of unity. During the transformation process, methane reacts with an equimolar amount of carbon dioxide over a catalyst to yield syngas according to: CH₄ + CO₂ ⇌ 2CO + 2H₂. As such, it is an auspicious technology to address the issues of the two greenhouse gases with high global warming potentials [6]. The emission problems associated with carbon dioxide could be sequestered by CRM process that is cheap as considered to current carbon capture technologies [7]. The critical issue associated with CRM is the fabrication of highly active and stable catalyst. The catalyst system must be robust to impede carbon deposition and high temperature sintering. A variety of support materials has
been developed for CRM such as KCC-1 [3], Al₂O₃ [8], SBA-15[9], MSN [10], SiO₂ [7] and zeolite [11].

The nature of support material is pivotal in controlling the dispersion of metal particles and the stability of active metal particles. CRM has been studied with noble metal (Pt, Rh, Pd, Ru, Ir) based catalysts. Noble metal catalysts displayed remarkable coke resistance, stability and activity [6]. However, their high cost is a major demerit for application as an industrial CRM catalyst. In this scenario, other non-noble metals (Ni, Co, Fe) with low cost becomes potential option. Transition metal catalysts show reasonable performance in CRM reaction with the noble metals producing superior activity and high coke resistance [3]. Reasonable methane and carbon dioxide conversion was recorded by Ni/MCM-41 catalyst at reaction temperature of 750°C [12]. ZSM-5 support with 8 wt.% Ni produced reasonable syngas from CRM reaction [13]. Similarly, the incorporation of nickel on hydroxyapatite support displayed high CRM activity [14]. In addition, Zeng et al. prepared 20% Co/Ɣ-Al₂O₃ catalyst, which showed good potential as an active CRM catalyst [15]. Thus, the present study investigates the activity of transition metals (Mo, Mn and Co) supported on mesoporous ZSM-5 catalyst in CRM reaction. In this paper, a mesoporous ZSM-5 support was synthesized via micro emulsion technique and employed as carrier material in CRM reaction. This study focused on the activity of mesoporous ZSM-5 supported Mo, Mn and Co catalysts in production of syngas from CRM reaction.

2. Experimental

2.1. Materials

The materials used in this study are: Tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS), Urea, 1-butanol (C₄H₇OH), Cetyltrimethylammonium bromide (CTAB), ammonium nitrate (NH₄NO₃) and ZSM-5 seed (Si/Al= 23) (MERCK Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia). MoO₃, Mn(NO₃)₂·4H₂O and Co(NO₃)₂·6H₂O were used as Mo, Mn and Co precursors respectively obtained from Merck Co. Industrial grade gases (CH₄, CO₂, H₂, N₂ and O₂) were used in catalytic testing. H₂ was used as reducing agent, while N₂ and O₂ were used as carrier and pre-treatment gases respectively.

2.2. Catalyst Preparation

In this study, microemulsion synthesis technique coupled with ZSM-5 seeds crystallization was adopted to prepare mesoporous ZSM-5 according to the previous reported procedure [16,17]. Metal loading was fixed at 5 wt% for all samples via wet impregnation method. The catalysts prepared were denoted as MoZ, MnZ and CoZ representing Mo, Mn and Co loaded mesoporous ZSM-5 catalysts respectively.

2.3. Catalyst Characterization

The phase of the prepared catalysts was confirmed by utilizing a Bruker D8 X-ray diffraction (XRD) analyzer. Specific surface area of all synthesized catalysts was determined from N₂ adsorption–desorption (at 77 K) in an analyzer (Beckman Coulter SA 3100). Catalytic tests were carried out in a micro catalytic fixed bed reactor over different temperature range 550-850°C. 20 mg catalyst with 40–60 meshes size was packed into the isothermal reaction zone of the fixed bed reactor.

Pre-treatment was done for an hour at 850°C under O₂ flowrate of 50 mL min⁻¹. Thereafter, reduction was done at 850°C under H₂ flow rate of 50 mL min⁻¹ which was maintained for 1 h. Then, the gaseous feed comprising of CH₄:CO₂:N₂ in a ratio of 1:1:3 were fed into the reactor at flow rate of 100 mL min⁻¹. An online gas chromatograph device (Agilent GC, 7820 N) was used to continuously detect and analyze the product gases. Product sampling at the considered temperatures were conducted an hour after commencement of the reaction. The sampling for each reaction run is 20 min. The feed conversion and corresponding products yield were computed by the following equations:

\[
CH_4 \text{ conversion } = \frac{F(CH_4)_{in} - F(CH_4)_{out}}{F(CH_4)_{in}} \times 100
\]

\[
CO_2 \text{ conversion } = \frac{F(CO_2)_{in} - F(CO_2)_{out}}{F(CO_2)_{in}} \times 100
\]
\[ H_2 \text{ yield} = \frac{F(H_2)_{\text{out}}}{2[F(CH_4)_{\text{in}}]} \times 100 \] (3)
\[ CO \text{ yield} = \frac{F(CO)_{\text{out}}}{[F(CH_2)_{\text{in}}+F(CO_2)_{\text{out}}]} \times 100 \] (4)

3. Results and discussion

The X-ray diffractogram of the synthesized catalysts are shown in figure 1. From the XRD analysis, reflections were observed corresponding to ZSM-5 structure as indicated by sharp diffraction peaks in 20 range of 5–10 and 20–26 respectively [16,18]. The intensity of peaks (figure 1) below 10° slightly increased in the order CoZ > MnZ > MoZ. These might be due to Al removal from the framework, which did not invoke significant damage to the lattice [19]. The peak intensities of ZSM-5 supported Co catalyst had obvious increase, which may be attributed to increase of framework Si species [20]. Furthermore, XRD patterns of MoZ and MnZ seem to be identical. There exist no Mo and Mn species peaks in the XRD patterns, while CoZ demonstrated presence of Co\(_3\)O\(_4\) cubic phase by diffraction peaks at 20 = 31.3°, 36.7°, 45.1°, 55.9°, 59.8° and 65.5° (JCPDS 01-076-1802) [21].

![Figure 1. X-ray diffractogram of the catalysts.](image)

Generally, activity of a supported catalyst is significantly related to surface area. Catalyst system with large surface area promote well dispersion and wider utilization of active metals component which result in high CRM performance [22]. Figure 2 illustrates the N\(_2\) physisorption isotherms and the estimated pore volumes of the catalysts are presented in Table 1.

![Figure 2. N\(_2\) adsorption–desorption and the pore size distribution (a) MoZ (b) MnZ and (c) CoZ.](image)
The catalysts portrayed type IV isotherms with H3 hysteresis loops. This signals the existence of non-uniform slit-shaped mesopores structure. The surface area was MoZ= 395 m$^2$/g, Mn= 404 m$^2$/g and CoZ= 419 m$^2$/g respectively. The MoZ catalyst had the lowest surface area as compared to other catalysts. The MnZ and CoZ catalysts displayed higher N$_2$ uptake as compared to MoZ, signifying more porosity. The N$_2$ uptake at partial pressure (P/Po) are characteristics of micropore presence. Furthermore, the step P/Po of 0.2 and 0.9 are attributed to inter and intra particle pores respectively [23,24]. As reported in literatures [25–27], the microemulsion synthesis condition invoke large amount of interparticle pores, which shows the presence of large surface area materials.

**Table 1.** Physical catalytic properties.

| Sample | Surface area (m$^2$/g)$^a$ | Total pore volume (mL/g)$^a$ | Mesopore volume (mL/g)$^b$ |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| MoZ    | 395                      | 0.2626                      | 0.1722                    |
| MnZ    | 404                      | 0.2838                      | 0.1862                    |
| CoZ    | 419                      | 0.2694                      | 0.1925                    |

$^a$Obtain by the BJH method.

$^b$Computed by subtracting micropore volumes from total pore volume.

To determine the effect of prepared catalysts in the CRM process, series of tests were conducted in the micro catalytic fixed bed reactor over 550–850°C temperature range. The results are depicted in figure 3. As can be seen, temperature increase led to enhanced conversion and yield due to the endothermicity of CRM reaction. CoZ displayed high reactants conversion of 69 % and 65 % for CH$_4$ and CO$_2$ respectively. The CoZ catalyst produced the highest activity than other catalysts. This suggest that ZSM-5 supported Co catalyst is highly active for transformation of CH$_4$ and CO$_2$ gases into syngas. These is in accordance with findings in the catalyst characterizations. CoZ catalyst had higher activity as a result of larger amount of pore sizes and higher surface area which lead to better dispersion of active Co species [14]. These observations are affirmed by the XRD and N$_2$ adsorption–desorption analysis. Moreover, these features aid higher CH$_4$ and CO$_2$ adsorption which is pivotal in CRM reaction. Large surface area enhances the adsorption of the reactants. Hence, this observation is directly related to decomposition of CH$_4$ and CO$_2$ dissociation. However, the higher conversion of CH$_4$ than CO$_2$ suggest suppression of side reactions [11].

![Figure 3](image_url). Effect of metal loaded catalysts on (a) CH$_4$ and (b) CO$_2$ conversions.
Figure 4. Effect of metal loaded catalysts on (a) H₂ and (b) CO yield.

It is reported that active metal sites play crucial role in CH₄ adsorption to produce CHₓ fragments [28,29]. Thus, Co species are more active to decompose CH₄ and CO₂ compared to Mo and Mn loaded catalysts. Fayaz et al. achieved initial H₂ and CO yield of 37.5 % and 39 % respectively over 10Co/Al₂O₃ catalyst. This is in accordance with findings of Khan et al. [30] and Zeng et al. [15]. Similarly, the catalysts investigated displayed different effect on product yield as shown in figure 4. The H₂ and CO yield for CoZ is 58 % and 50 % respectively. There is significant difference in CRM activity of the CoZ and other catalysts as seen in figure 4. This performance is due to the higher activity of Co, coupled with the greater adsorption and dissociation of reactants which was remarkable on CoZ than other catalysts.

4. Conclusion
Mesoporous ZSM-5 support was synthesized by micro emulsion technique and the metals were loaded by wet impregnation method. This study revealed that ZSM-5 supported Co catalyst is a highly active catalyst system for CRM reaction as compared to MoZ and MnZ catalysts. Higher surface area resulted in higher activity of CoZ catalyst in CRM. The Co species and mesoporous ZSM-5 support had a beneficial interaction which led to the suitable CRM activity. The Co species were more active to decompose CH₄ and CO₂ compared to Mo and Mn loaded catalysts. Thus, CoZ is an efficient catalyst in the quest for a viable CRM catalyst.

Acknowledgments
This work was supported by the Fundamental Research Grant (Scheme Grant No. FRGS/1/2017/STG07/UTM/01/1) and UTM Transdisciplinary Research Grant (Grant No. 06G53).

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