Utilization of Coconut Shell as Cr₂O₃ Catalyst Support for Catalytic Cracking of Jatropha Oil into Biofuel

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Abstract

Coconut shell waste is a waste that has a high carbon content. Carbon in coconut shell waste can be converted into activated carbon having a large surface area. This potential property is suitable to apply the coconut shell as catalyst support. To increase the catalytic activity, metal oxides such as Cr₂O₃, are impregnated. The purpose of this study is to synthesize Cr₂O₃/carbon catalyst and test its catalytic activity on catalytic cracking of Jatropha oil. The first stage was the synthesis of activated carbon and the determination of its proximate and ultimate. The second step was impregnation to produce Cr₂O₃/carbon catalyst. Furthermore, X-Ray Diffraction to determine crystallinity, Surface Area Analyzer to identify its surface area and Fourier Transform Infrared to analyze functional groups. Then the catalytic activity was tested on the catalytic cracking of Jatropha oil. In addition, the chemical compound composition and biofuel selectivity of the catalytic cracking product was determined using Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometer. Proximate analysis results showed that activated carbon contains 9%, 1%, 23%, and 67% of water, ash, evaporated substances, and bound carbon, respectively. The results of the ultimate analysis resulted in carbon (C), hydrogen (H), and nitrogen (N) contents of 65.422%, 3.384%, and 0.465%, correspondingly. The catalyst crystallinity test showed the presence of Cr₂O₃ peaks at 2Θ: 24.43°, 33.47° and 36.25° according to JCPDS No. 84–1616. In the absorption area of 400-1000 cm⁻¹ and the range of 2000 cm⁻¹ showed the presence of Cr-O stretching due to Cr₂O₃ adsorbed into the activated carbon structure. The surface area of activated carbon and Cr₂O₃/carbon catalysts with a concentration of 1.3, and 5% was 8.930 m²/g; 47.205 m²/g; 50.562 m²/g; and 38.931 m²/g, respectively. The catalytic activity test presented that the best performance was showed by Cr₂O₃/carbon catalyst with a concentration of 5% indicated by conversion of Jatropha oil into biofuel of 67.777% with gasoline selectivity, kerosene, and diesel of 36.97%, 14.87%, and 15.94%, correspondingly.

1. Introduction

Biofuel is alternative energy to substitute petroleum sourced from vegetable or animal material. Jatropha curcas oil is one of the most potential vegetable materials used as raw material for biofuel production because it is easily produced and non-edible. The oil content in the castor bean core is around 50% [1]. Jatropha oil contains 16–18 carbon atoms in each molecule, while petroleum contains 8–10 carbon atoms (gasoline) and 12–18 carbon atoms (diesel). The higher carbon atom content of Jatropha oil results in higher viscosity (thicker) when compared to petroleum viscosity [2]. For this reason, a process which enables to reduce the number of carbon atoms from Jatropha oil is necessary.

Conversion of Jatropha oil into biofuel can be carried out by catalytic cracking. Catalytic cracking is the
process of terminating a heavy fraction compound into a mild fraction with the help of a catalyst. The catalyst customarily applied is heterogeneous because it is easy to separate from the product and can be regenerated. Aziz et al. [3] used natural zeolite as a catalyst in catalytic cracking of *Jatropha curcas* oil (*Jatropha curcas L.*) into biofuel. The optimum process conditions were obtained at 375°C, 2 hours, a catalyst with a size of 180 μm and 5% concentration with selectivity to gasoline 34.52%, kerosene 11.87%, and diesel 13.64%. Meanwhile, Noviavet et al. [2] used a Co/Mo Montmorillonite pillared TiO₂ catalyst in castor oil hydrocracking. The yield of the product is 77.7127% at a temperature of 500°C, a gas flow rate of 2.5 mL/s, and 2 grams of the amount of catalyst.

The function of zeolites and TiO₂ is a catalyst supports. Zeolites are minerals in nature that are of limited availability. Likewise, TiO₂ is a synthetic compound, and the price is high. Another type of catalyst support that can be applied is activated carbon since it has a large surface area of around 300–3500 m²/g [4]. A large surface area will affect the rate of reaction. The greater the surface area of the catalyst, the higher the reaction rate.

In this study, the raw material used for the manufacture of activated carbon came from coconut shell waste. So far, coconut shells have only been used as briquettes [5, 6, 7] or adsorbents [8, 9]. Conversion of coconut shell to activated carbon (catalyst support) increases the economic value of the coconut shell. It also reduces the cost of biofuel production when using a coconut shell as catalyst support. Kurniawan et al. [4] synthesized activated carbon from coconut shells with activation using 3M phosphoric acid, producing a surface area of 386.447 m²/g. Ain et al. [10] used activated carbon (synthetic) as a buffer for the Ru–Sn/C catalyst for the hydrogenation of hexadecanoic acid to 1-hexadecanol. The advantages of activated carbon as a supported catalyst are a large surface area, resistant to acids, stable at high temperatures, and inert [11]. The active catalyst components used are usually derived from transition metals such as Cr, Ni, Mo [12], Pd [13], and Fe [14] because they have vacant d orbitals. The presence of vacant d orbitals allows the availability of Lewis acid groups so that they can provide an active site of the catalyst [15]. In this study, chromium was used because it had higher acidity, smaller pore size, and high surface area [16].

This research varied the concentration of Cr₂O₃ impregnated into activated carbon by 1, 3, and 5%. The characteristics of the resulting catalysts were analyzed using X-Ray Diffraction (XRD), Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR), and Surface Area Analyzer (SAA). The catalytic activity test was conducted in a reactor batch at 375°C for 5 hours. The resulting product was then analyzed its chemical composition using Gas Chromatography–Mass Spectroscopy (GC–MS) to determine the conversion and selectivity of the resulting biofuel.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Equipment and Materials

The equipment used consisted of a glass (pyrex), a grinding mill, a set of reactor batch (stainless steel), a LECO CHN638 ultimate analyzer, a Gas Chromatography–Mass Spectroscopy (GC–MS) Shimadzu QP 2010, a X–Ray Diffraction (XRD) Rigaku Mini Flex 600, a Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) Shimadzu, and a Quantachrome NovaWin’s Surface Area Analyzer (SAA). The materials used were coconut shell waste obtained from the Cipete Block A Market, South Jakarta, *Jatropha* oil (Hensa Kimia), H₂PO₄ (Merck, 85%), Cr (NO₃)₃·9H₂O (Merck, 99.99%), distilled water and ethanol (70%).

2.2. Synthesis of Activated Carbon

The coconut shell was cleaned from dirt and cut into smaller sizes. After that, it was put into the furnace for carbonization to be carried out at a temperature of 450°C for 2 hours. The resulting carbon was crushed until smooth and soaked in 300 mL of 3M phosphoric acid (H₃PO₄) solution for 7 hours. Activated carbon was then washed with hot water till neutral pH was achieved and then dried [4]. The activated carbon produced was tested for proximate analysis, including water, ash, volatile substances, bound carbon, and ultimate analysis, including C, H, and N contents.

2.3. Production of CrO₃/carbon catalysts

Chromium nitrate (Cr(NO₃)₃·9H₂O) divided into three parts with a different mass that was 1.576; 4.738 and 7.890 grams were dissolved in 20 mL distilled water and stirred until homogeneous. Every sample was then added activated carbon (28.423; 25.261 and 22.109 grams), stirred at 60°C for 3 hours and evaporated. The sample was then dried at 120°C in the oven and then calcined at 450°C for 1 hour to produce a CrO₃/carbon catalyst.

2.4. Catalyst Characterization

Surface area analysis was carried out using the Surface Area Analyzer (SAA). 0.1 gram of sample was put in an empty tube then degassing for 2 hours at 200°C while flowing 275 KPa of N₂ gas and cooled. After degassing, the sample was analyzed immediately. N₂ gas flowed at 275 KPa and 20 Psi H₂ gas. The analysis conditions were then adjusted. The analysis time was around ± 5 hours per sample. The catalyst crystallinity test uses X–Ray Diffraction (XRD). The crystallinity test was carried out at a voltage of 40 kV and a current of 25 mA with an angular range of 5-90°. The identification of functional groups was conducted using Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR). Samples were mashed together with KBr in a ratio of 1:10 and measured at wavelengths of 500–4000 cm⁻¹.

2.5. Catalyst Activity Test on *Jatropha* Oil Cracking Catalytic

10 mL of *Jatropha curcas* oil and 0.5 gram of Cr₂O₃/carbon catalyst were put into the reactor batch. The reactor heater was run to 375°C, then the stirrer was
ignited, and the reaction time was calculated for 5 hours. The product was removed from the reactor and separated from the catalyst.

2.6 Analysis of Jatropha Cracking Catalytic Cracking Products

Catalytic cracking products of *Jatropha curcas* oil were tested for their chemical composition using Gas Chromatography–Mass Spectrometry (GC–MS). A sample of 1 μL was injected into the column (DB5–MS UI stationary phase, 30 m; 0.25 mm; 0.25 μm and Helium gas mobile phase). The resulting chromatogram data were then compared with the standards database so that the chemical compounds produced can be determined. From the product area data produced, product selectivity can be calculated for each CrO3/Carbon catalyst. Biofuel selectivity is calculated using the formula [17]:

\[
\text{Selectivity} = \frac{\text{Area of biofuel}}{\text{Total of product area}} \times 100\%
\]

The results are expressed in terms of the weight percentage of the mass of each compound for each compound. The results express the limit of composition for each compound, where:

\[\text{Limit} = \left(\frac{\text{Mass of the compound}}{\text{Mass of the whole compound}}\right) \times 100\%\]

The ultimate analysis results, as listed in Table 2, show carbon (C) content of 65.422%, hydrogen 3.384%, and nitrogen 0.465%. This result also shows that the quality of activated carbon produced meets SNI standards that require a minimum carbon content of 65%. The ultimate analysis results for carbon content are in line with the bound carbon levels produced in the proximate analysis.

### Table 1. Result analysis of proximate of activated carbon

| Parameter           | Content (%) | SNI 06–3730–1995 (%) |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Water               | 9.756       | Max. 15              |
| Ash                 | 0.961       | Max. 10              |
| Volatile substances | 22.660      | Max. 25              |
| Bound carbon        | 66.623      | Min. 65              |

### Table 2. Result of the ultimate of activated carbon

| Element | Content (%) |
|---------|-------------|
| C       | 65.422      |

3.2 Characterization of CrO3/Carbon Catalyst

Figure 1 shows the XRD patterns of activated carbon and CrO3/Carbon catalysts at concentrations of 1%, 3%, and 5%. The activated carbon produced has an irregular shape, and there are no sharp peaks. This shows that activated carbon has an amorphous phase [19]. A wide-angle range and a soft peak in the range of 24° indicate the phase for activated carbon [20]. The CrO3/Carbon XRD patterns show CrO3 peaks at 2θ 24.52°; 33.61°; 36.25° with hkl index (012, 104, and 110) according to JCPDS No. 84–1616. The peaks at 2θ 24°; 33°; and 36° are the typical peaks for CrO3 [21, 22]. The peaks are not very clearly seen because the amorphous phase of carbon is more dominant, but as shown in Table 3, it appears that the increase in CrO3 concentration increases the intensity of the peaks.
Table 3. Peak intensity of CrO$_3$/carbon catalyst

| CrO$_3$/carbon 1% | CrO$_3$/carbon 3% | CrO$_3$/carbon 5% |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 2θ (°) | Intensity (°) | 2θ (°) | Intensity (°) | 2θ (°) | Intensity (°) |
| 24.27° | 10.0 | 24.80° | 292.6 | 24.43° | 422.9 |
| 33.61° | 6.1 | 33.46° | 179.5 | 33.47° | 259.4 |
| 36.21° | 2.7 | 36.20° | 78.1 | 36.25° | 112.9 |

Figure 2 shows the FTIR spectra of activated carbon and CrO$_3$/carbon catalysts. In activated carbon, wave number at 3637.75 cm$^{-1}$ shows the most massive absorption band of the hydroxyl group (O-H). Septianiet al. [19] also stated that the hydroxyl group (O-H) appeared in the region of the 3300-3399 cm$^{-1}$ wave range assigned as the Bronsted acid site. In addition, there is also a carbonyl group (C=O) observed at 1716.65 cm$^{-1}$. Mentari et al. [23] stated that the absorption peak at 1820-1600 cm$^{-1}$ indicates the presence of the C=O group, where this group is a typical group present in activated carbon. Moreover, the peak observed at 1591.27 cm$^{-1}$ indicates the presence of an aromatic group (C=C). The presence of the C=C group shows high carbon content.

The absence of significant changes in the position of the absorption band indicates the impregnation of CrO$_3$ into activated carbon, but there was a slight shift in the absorption band at 400-1000 cm$^{-1}$ and 2000 cm$^{-1}$. This shift is due to CrO$_3$ adsorbed into activated carbon. CrO$_3$/carbon catalyst spectra of 1%, 3%, and 5% lead to the presence of new absorption around 800 cm$^{-1}$. Rahmani et al. [24] stated that the addition of the transition metal into the material support only causes a slight change in the position of the absorption band. The new peak is also observed at 2054.19 cm$^{-1}$; 2027.19 cm$^{-1}$; 2002.11 cm$^{-1}$ attributed to the Cr-O vibration coming from CrO$_3$. In addition, the appearance of weak absorption peaks in regions 570 and ~ 635 shows typical absorption peaks for the vibrations of CrO$_3$ metal oxides [21, 25].

Figure 2. FTIR spectra of activated carbon and CrO$_3$/carbon catalysts of 1%, 3% dan 5%

The surface area of activated carbon and catalysts produced can be seen in Table 4. Activated carbon has a surface area of 8.930 m$^2$/g while CrO$_3$/carbon catalysts of 1%, 3%, and 5% produced a surface area of 47.205 m$^2$/g; 50.562 m$^2$/g; and 38.931 m$^2$/g. CrO$_3$ impregnation on the surface of the activated carbon buffer increased the catalyst surface area. This happened because the CrO$_3$ particles entered into the activated carbon pores, so they are well supported. This resulted in the interaction between CrO$_3$, which acts as an active component providing the catalyst active site and the reactants occurred more quickly.

Fanani et al. [26] also found an increase in the surface area of the catalyst when Cr was applied to activated carbon. The area of activated carbon with the addition of chromium metal increased from 1527.80 m$^2$/g to 1652.58 m$^2$/g. According to Lillo-Ródenas et al. [27], the increase of the catalyst surface area is due to the pores becoming more open after chemical activation and impregnation of the metal led to the surface area of the catalyst became larger. The increase in the surface area occurs at a concentration of 1% to 3%. The surface area of the catalyst represents the active surface, which can interact with the reactants. The reactant molecule will move freely before experiencing adsorption on the surface of the catalyst, then reacts to generate a product.

The surface area of 5% CrO$_3$/carbon catalyst is 38.931 m$^2$/g smaller than 1% and 3% CrO$_3$/carbon catalysts. This is due to the addition of more metal concentration resulted in competition among the transitions metals to diffuse into the supporting pores [28]. It also can be caused by the high concentration of CrO$_3$, leading to an agglomeration of metal oxide particles; as a result, the formation of unevenly distributed aggregate on the pore surfaces thereby reducing the surface area [29].

Table 4. The surface area of activated carbon and CrO$_3$/carbon catalysts

| Catalyst                | Surface area (m2/g) |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Activated carbon       | 8.930               |
| CrO$_3$/carbon 1%      | 47.205              |
| CrO$_3$/carbon 3%      | 50.562              |
| CrO$_3$/carbon 5%      | 38.931              |

3.3. CrO$_3$/carbon catalyst activity test

The results of GC-MS analysis show that the Jatropha oil fatty acid constituents used as raw material for making biofuels can be seen in Table 5 and Figure 3.

Table 5. Composition of fatty acid in Jatropha oil

| Peak no | Retention time (minutes) | Component             | Area percentage (%) |
|---------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1       | 19.342                   | Palmitic acid (C16:0) | 9.84                |
| 2       | 21.714                   | Linoleic acid (C18:2) | 33.83               |
| 3       | 21.816                   | Oleic acid (C18:1)    | 37.44               |
| 4       | 22.188                   | Stearic acid (C18:0)  | 15.59               |
| 5       | 24.467                   | Eicosenoic acid (C20:1) | 3.30          |
fraction (gasoline). So it can be concluded that the Cr$_2$O$_3$/carbon 5% catalyst showed the best results with the conversion of castor oil into biofuel by 67.77% and 36.961% gasoline selectivity; 14.875% kerosene and 15.941% diesel.

Table 7. The selectivity of biofuel product

| Catalyst       | Selectivity (%) |
|----------------|-----------------|
|                | Gasoline  | Kerosene | Diesel  |
| Cr$_2$O$_3$/carbon 1% | 24.748     | 14.061   | 13.014  |
| Cr$_2$O$_3$/carbon 3% | 30.626     | 14.597   | 15.223  |
| Cr$_2$O$_3$/carbon 5% | 36.961     | 14.875   | 15.941  |

Catalytic cracking of fence Jatropha oil can occur through 2 stages, namely the formation of oxygenated components such as fatty acids, ketones, aldehydes, esters, and others caused by the decomposition of triglyceride molecules [28]. These are evidenced by the presence of fatty acids in fence Jatropha oil cracking results. The reaction is as follows:

\[
\text{Triglyceride} \rightarrow RCOOH + R\text{CH}_2\text{CH}_3 + R\text{COOCH}_3 + CO_2
\]

The second stage is indicated by cracking oxygenated compounds to form hydrocarbons [31]. Oxygenated compounds will break the C-O and C-C bonds by breaking the carbon chain at the beta position. Breaking of the C-O and C-C bonds through 2 reaction routes i.e., the decarboxylation and the decarboxylation reactions. Decarboxylation reaction is a reaction to break the carboxylic bonds to produce CO$_2$ gas and hydrocarbons [32]. Decarboxylation reaction example in jatropha curcas oil is the conversion of stearic acid becomes heptadecane by cracking process as follows:

\[
\text{C}_{17}\text{H}_{35}\text{COOH} \rightarrow \text{C}_{17}\text{H}_{36} + \text{CO}_2
\]

Decarboxylation reaction is a reaction indicating the release of the ester group to produce hydrocarbons, CO$_2$, and H$_2$O. Decarboxylation reaction example is the decomposition of undecanoic acid to decane (cracking results) as follows:

\[
\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_{22}\text{O}_2 \rightarrow \text{C}_{10}\text{H}_{20} + \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CO}
\]

4. Conclusion

Activated carbon from coconut shell waste can be used as a Cr$_2$O$_3$/carbon catalyst supporting material. The XRD pattern of the catalyst showed typical peaks of Cr$_2$O$_3$ observed at 2θ 24.52°; 33.61°; 36.25°. The vibration modes observed at 400–1000 cm$^{-1}$ and 2000 cm$^{-1}$ indicate the presence of Cr–O stretching due to Cr$_2$O$_3$ adsorbed into activated carbon. The surface area of activated carbon is 8.930 m$^2$/g while the Cr$_2$O$_3$ catalyst 1%, 3%, and 5% are 47.205 m$^2$/g; 50.562 m$^2$/g; and 38.931 m$^2$/g. The best catalytic activity test shows the best concentration of Cr$_2$O$_3$/activated carbon catalyst is 5% with the conversion of castor oil to 67.777% biofuel, 36.97% gasoline selectivity, 14.87% kerosene, and 15.94% diesel.

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