

**GLYCEROL STEAM REFORMING WITH CERIA PROMOTED
NICKEL-ALUMINA CATALYSTS FOR HYDROGEN PRODUCTION**

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JANUARY 2017

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NICKEL-ALUMINA CATALYSTS FOR HYDROGEN PRODUCTION**

by

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Submitted

in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

January 2017

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife Bontu Adugna Mulisa whose love gives meaning to my life and to my mom and dad who taught me the value of the Three P's – persistence, perseverance and patience in life.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**GLYCEROL STEAM REFORMING WITH CERIA PROMOTED NICKEL-ALUMINA CATALYSTS FOR HYDROGEN PRODUCTION**”, being submitted by **Mr. Hundessa Dessalegn Demsash** to the **Indian Institute of Technology Delhi**, for the fulfillment of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by him under my guidance and supervision.

The results contained in this thesis have not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university or institution for any degree, diploma, or other qualification.

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January 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give thanks to God, from whom these thoughts and all other grace and blessings derive. Then, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Ratan Mohan for his valuable guidance, advice and supervision in my research. His suggestions and ideas helped me to learn a lot throughout the course of my research. I would like to extend my thanks to my research committee members Prof. Kamal K. Pant, Prof. Shantanu Roy and Prof. Arunachalm Ramanan for their constructive questions, comments and criticism which made me learn far more than the basics. I am very thankful to Dr. Kishore Kondamudi for sharing his helpful experience during my research works. I further extend my acknowledgments to Dr. Sreedevi Upadhyayula, Prof. Kamal K. Pant and Prof. Suddhasatwa Basu for letting me use their research facilities for catalyst characterization and preparations.

I wish to acknowledge my lab mates and alumni of our department Dr. U. K. Arun Kumar, Dr. Faisal Qayoom Mir, Dr. Murali Mohan Seepana, Dr. Jay Pandey and my lab mates Mr. Chhayakanta Acharya, Ms. Afkham Mir, Mr. Rupesh Tamgadge, Mr. Abhinav Gupta for their help and cooperation in one way or another during my study. I would like to thank UG lab technician and friend Mr. Ashish for his help during installation of my lab set up. I am very thankful to all faculties, staffs and students of Chemical Engineering Department of IIT Delhi for their help and encouragement through the course of my study. I most acknowledge the encouragement and understanding of my dear wife Bontu A. Mulisa .

Hundessa D. Demasah

ABSTRACT

The excessive emissions of anthropogenic greenhouse gases associated with utilization of fossil fuel and its subsequent global warming have become vital issues nowadays. We have reached limits of considerable seriousness than ever in the recent years. Hence, in lieu of fossil fuels, there should be a shift to low-carbon energy supply for this century and beyond. Among the alternatives, biodiesel has been found to be a promising renewable fuel and globally its production has increased significantly in recent years. This has resulted in a surfeit of crude glycerol as a by-product. Consequently, the valorization of bio-glycerol has been targeted worldwide to make biodiesel production cost competitive.

Steam reforming of glycerol to produce clean fuel such as hydrogen is a potential method of recuperating glycerol from biodiesel. Since the effectiveness of this process depends on efficient catalysts with good selectivity and stability as well as milder process conditions, the current work aims to develop improved catalysts. Moreover, there is a scarcity of kinetic data in the literature for glycerol steam reforming which can be used for designing reactors. Hence, kinetic modeling was also carried out.

In the current work, six catalysts (three nickel-alumina, two ceria promoted nickel-alumina and one ruthenium doped ceria promoted nickel-alumina) were prepared with wet impregnation method and tested for 30 wt. % glycerol aqueous solution in a packed bed reactor. Characterization of fresh and spent catalysts was carried out with BET surface area, X-ray diffraction, scanning electron microscopy, temperature programmed reduction, temperature programmed oxidation and pulse hydrogen chemisorption techniques to relate catalyst properties and catalytic performance.

The range of parameters that favor high hydrogen yield was first examined with Aspen Plus thermodynamic analysis. The reaction was then conducted at temperatures from 550 °C to 800 °C, atmospheric pressure and weight hourly space velocity (WHSV) of 6.8 to 17 h⁻¹.

Among tested monometallic catalysts, 10Ni/Al₂O₃/5CeO₂ was found to be stable for 16 total hours on stream while 10Ni-1Ru/Al₂O₃/5CeO₂ showed the superior catalytic performance and stability for 24 hours on stream. With this catalyst, best hydrogen selectivity of 88.6 % was obtained versus thermodynamic selectivity of 95.9 % at 650°C. Furthermore, the catalyst showed minimal coking tendency.

Then, by using both power law and heterogeneous kinetic models (Langmuir-Hinshelwood and Eley-Rideal), kinetic models were developed and tested. The models have been subjected to statistical investigation and Langmuirian model discrimination guidelines. The Langmuir-Hinshelwood associative single site adsorption kinetic model was found to fulfill both criteria. With the activation energy of 69.74 kJ/mol, it was found in good agreement with the power law type kinetic model. Hence, it can adequately describe glycerol steam reforming under the reaction conditions.

Finally, with developed kinetics, modeling and simulation of combustion coupled reformer was carried out. In the reformer simulation, the counter-current flow configuration was found to operate better than the co-current coupled process in terms of supplying required heat input for the reformer and product yield. Product yields of 5.2 and 5.8 moles of H₂ per mole glycerol reacted were obtained in co-flow and counter-flow respectively.

CONTENTS

Page No.

CERTIFICATE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	iv-v
CONTENTS	vi – x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi-xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
NOTATIONS	xiii-xvii
ACRONYMS	xviii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1-11
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Supply and Demand of Glycerol	3
1.3 Valorization of Glycerol to Value-added Products	4
1.4 Hydrogen Production from Glycerol	6
1.4.1 Aqueous Phase Reforming of Glycerol	7
1.4.2 Partial Oxidation of Glycerol	7
1.4.3 Autothermal Reforming of Glycerol	8
1.4.4 Supercritical Steam Reforming of Glycerol	8
1.4.5 Dry Reforming of Glycerol	9
1.4.6 Steam reforming of Glycerol	9
1.5 Why Glycerol Steam Reforming for Hydrogen Production?	10
1.6 Organization of the Thesis	10

CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	12-29
2.1	Literature on Steam Reforming of Glycerol	12
2.1.1	Catalysts and Operating Conditions for Glycerol Steam Reforming	13
2.1.2	Literature Summary	23
2.2	Scope and Objectives	28
CHAPTER 3	MATERIALS AND METHODS	30-60
3.1	Chemicals Used	30
3.2	Product Analysis with Gas Chromatography (GC)	32
3.2.1	Gas chromatography	32
3.2.2	Gas Chromatograph Calibration	34
3.3	Reactant Sample Preparation	36
3.4	Catalyst Preparation	35
3.4.1	Catalyst Support	35
3.4.2	Impregnation of Nickel Metal as Monometallic Catalysts	36
3.4.3	Ceria as a Promoter for Ni-alumina Catalysts	37
3.4.4	Ruthenium Doping of Nickel for Bimetallic Catalysts	38
3.5	Catalyst Characterization	39
3.5.1	Determination of Surface Area, Pore diameter and Pore volume	39
3.5.2	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) Images	40
3.5.3	XRD pattern	40
3.5.4	Temperature Programmed Reduction	41
3.5.5	Thermogravimetric Analysis and Temperature Programmed Oxidation	41
3.5.6	Hydrogen Chemisorption	42

3.6	Experimental Setup	43
3.7	Catalytic Evaluation	45
3.8	Catalyst stability tests	46
3.9	Modeling and Simulation	46
3.9.1	Thermodynamic Analysis	46
3.9.2	Kinetic Modeling	47
3.9.2.1	Power Law Kinetic Modeling	48
3.9.2.2	Heterogeneous Kinetic Modeling	49
3.9.2.2.1	Langmuir-Hinshelwood Mechanisms	49
3.9.2.2.2	Eley-Rideal Mechanisms	54
3.9.3	Combustion Coupled Glycerol Steam Reforming Simulation	59

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION **60-97**

4.1	Monometallic Nickel Catalyst Characterization	60
4.1.1	BET Surface Area, Pore Volume and Average Pore Diameter	60
4.1.2	The X-ray Diffraction (XRD) Pattern	62
4.1.3	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) Images	63
4.2	Thermodynamic Simulations	64
4.2.1	Effect of Temperature	65
4.2.2	Effect of Glycerol to Steam Ratio	66
4.3	Performance Evaluation of Monometallic Nickel Catalysts	67
4.3.1	Effect of Nickel Loading and Ceria as a Promoter	68
4.3.2	Monometallic Nickel Catalyst Stability Tests	68

4.4	Reaction Kinetics for Monometallic Catalyst	72
4.4.1	Mass Transfer Considerations	72
4.4.2	Reaction Order and Rate Constants	73
4.5	Bimetallic Ruthenium-Doped Nickel Catalyst	76
4.6	Characterization for Ruthenium-Doped Nickel Catalyst	76
4.6.1	Surface Area, Pore Volume and Average Pore Diameter	76
4.6.2	Metallic Dispersion	77
4.6.3	Temperature Programmed Reduction (TPR)	78
4.6.4	Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) Images	79
4.6.5	Temperature Programmed Oxidation (TPO)	80
4.7	Ruthenium-Doped Nickel Catalytic Performance Evaluation	82
4.7.1	Products Selectivity and Reforming Temperature	82
4.7.2	Stability Tests	84
4.8	Kinetics for Ruthenium-Doped Nickel Catalyst	86
4.8.1	Power Law Kinetic Model	86
4.8.2	Heterogeneous Kinetic Models	88
4.8.3	Model Discrimination	89
4.9	Combustion Coupled Glycerol Reformer Simulation	93
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS		97-99
REFERENCES		100-107
APPENDICES		108-126
Appendix 1	Catalyst Preparation flowsheet	108
Appendix 2	Reaction Mechanisms	109

Appendix 3	Property Estimations	117
Appendix 4	Additional SEM images of fresh and spent catalysts	122
Appendix 5	POLYMATH Report	124

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.	Title of the Figure	Page No.
1.1	Global biodiesel production	2
1.2	Glycerol valorization to value added products	5
3.1	Laboratory experimental setup for glycerol steam reforming	42
4.1	BET isotherm with N ₂ physisorption for fresh 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ and 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂	58
4.2	XRD pattern of fresh and spent catalysts for fresh and spent catalysts: (a) fresh 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ , (b) fresh 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ , (c) spent 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ and (d) spent 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂	59
4.3	SEM image of fresh and spent catalysts: (a) fresh 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ , (b) fresh 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ , (c) spent 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ and (d) spent 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂	60
4.4	Thermodynamic product composition versus temperature	61
4.5	The effect of variation of steam to glycerol feed ratio	63
4.6	Thermodynamic versus experimental selectivities of H ₂ for different catalysts with temperature variation	64
4.7	Glycerol conversion versus temperature for different catalysts	65
4.8	Product molar composition over different run times: (a) 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ and (b) 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃	66
4.9	Glycerol conversion versus W/F _{feed}	69
4.10	Arrhenius plot for rate constant over 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ catalyst	70
4.11	Pulse hydrogen chemisorption for 10Ni-1Ru/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂	72

4.12	Temperature programmed reduction of fresh catalysts	73
4.13	SEM image of fresh and spent catalysts for Ru-doped catalysts	74
4.14	TPO of spent catalysts	75
4.15	Effect of temperature on hydrogen selectivity Ru-doped catalysts	77
4.16	Thermodynamic versus experimental molar composition Ru-doped catalysts	78
4.17	Stability tests	79
4.18	Arrhenius plot for rate constants for species over 10Ni-1Ru/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ catalyst using power law model	81
4.19	Arrhenius plot for equilibrium constants 10Ni-1Ru/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ catalyst	84
4.20	Arrhenius plot for rate constant for heterogeneous kinetic model for 10Ni-1Ru/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂ catalyst	85
4.21	Temperatures profiles of the reformer and the combustor at 30 ml/h ethanol flow rate	86
4.22	Temperature profiles of the reformer and the combustor at 5 ml/h ethanol flow rate	87
4.23	Combustion coupled reformer product yield	88

LIST OF TABLES

Table No.	Title of the Table	Page No.
2.1	Plausible reactions during glycerol steam reforming	13
2.2	List of glycerol steam reforming articles and findings.	24
3.1	List of chemicals and their grades	30
3.2	Gas chromatograph setting for TCD	32
3.3	Gas chromatograph setting for FID	33
3.4	Weight percent of aqueous glycerol and water to glycerol ratio	35
3.5	Mechanistic rate models	53
4.1	Surface area pore volume and pore diameter	58
4.2	Conversion versus weight hourly space velocity	68
4.3	Catalyst pellets versus weight hourly space velocity	68
4.4	Reaction constant and reaction order	70
4.5	Surface area, pore volume, pore diameter and dispersion	71
4.6	Experimental versus theoretical coke	76
4.7	Rate parameters for power law	82
4,8	Rate parameters for LH and ER	83
4.9	Criteria for model discrimination	85

NOTATIONS

Symbol	Definition	Unit
A_i	Area for in the mixture for chromatograph	m^2
A_n	Normalized area	
A_{std}	Area for standard mixture	m^2
C_E^{oc}	Dimensionless initial concentration of ethanol in combustor	
C_O^{oc}	Dimensionless initial concentration of oxygen in combustor	
$C_{glycerol}$	Molar concentrations of adsorbed glycerol	kmol/kg cat
C_{steam}	Molar concentrations of adsorbed steam	kmol/kg cat
C_{pmix}	Heat capacity of mixture	J/kg/K
C_E	Ethanol concentration	mol/m ³
C_i	Species concentration	mol/m ³
c_i	Dimensionless concentration for species ‘i’	
C_O	Oxygen concentration	mol/m ³
D	Metallic dispersion	%
$D_{glycerol,j}$	Molecular diffusivity of glycerol in ‘j’ species	m ² /s
Da_i	Damkohler number for species in the reformer	
Da_E	Damkohler number for ethanol in the combustor	
Da_O	Damkohler number for oxygen in the combustor	
d_c	Combustor diameter	m
d_r	Reformer diameter	m
d_p	Pellet diameter	m

E_A	Activation energy	kJ/mol
$F_{CH_4,out}$	Molar outflow of methane	mol/h
$F_{C_3H_8O_3,feed}$	Glycerol molar feed rate	mol/h
$F_{CO,out}$	Molar outflow rate of CO	mol/h
$F_{CO_2,out}$	Molar outflow of CO ₂	mol/h
F_{feed}	Molar feed rate to the reactor	mol/h
$F_{H_2,out}$	Molar outflow of hydrogen	mol/h
$-\Delta H$	Heat of reaction	kJ/mol
$-\Delta H_{ads}$	Heat of adsorption	kJ/mol
h	Convective heat transfer	kJ/m ² s K
j_D	j-factor for mass transfer	
k	Reaction constant for power law type for 10Ni/Al ₂ O ₃ /5CeO ₂	$\left(\frac{kmol}{kg\ cat.}\right)^{1-n} h^{-1}$
k^c	Reaction constant for ethanol combustion	$\left(\frac{kmol}{m^3}\right)^{0.75} h^{-1}$
$K_{glycerol}$	Equilibrium constant for glycerol	m ³ /kmol
K_{steam}	Equilibrium constant for steam	m ³ /kmol
$k_{reaction}$	Reaction constant for heterogeneous kinetic models	$\frac{1}{h} \left(\frac{kmol}{kg\ cat.}\right)^{1-(m+n)}$
l	Bed length	m
L	Reactor length	m
m	Order of reaction with respect to glycerol	
m_i	Mass of species during GC calibration	kg
m_n	Dimensionless mass during GC calibration	
$m_{std.}$	Mass of standard mixture	kg
m_u	Mass of unknown species	kg
M_{wt}	Molecular weight	g/mol
n	Order of reaction with respect to steam	

n_{CH_4}	Molar percent of methane	%
$n_{C_3H_8O_3}$	Molar percent of glycerol	%
n_{CO}	Molar percent of CO	%
n_{CO_2}	Molar percent of CO ₂	%
R	Universal gas constant	kJ/kmol K
r	Reaction rate	kmol/kg cat.s
RF	Response factor	
ΔS	Change in entropy	kg/J /K
T	Temperature	K
T^o	Inlet temperature	K
U	Over all heat transfer coefficient	kg/m ² s K
u	Superficial velocity	m/s
U^*	Dimensionless overall heat transfer coefficient	
U^{*c}	Dimensionless overall heat transfer coefficient in reformer	
V_{ads}	Adsorbed volume	cm ³ /g
V_g	Ideal gas volume at STP	cm ³
W_{cat}	Weight of catalyst	kg
X_{gly}	Conversion of glycerol	%

Greek letters	Definition	Unit
β_i	Dimensionless heat of reaction	
γ_i	Dimensions activation energy	
ε	Bed porosity	
η_i	Effectiveness factor	
Θ	Dimensionless temperature	
Θ_w	Dimensionless wall temperature	
$\theta_{glycerol}$	Glycerol surface coverage	
θ_{steam}	Steam surface coverage	
θ_v	Vacant sites	
μ_i	viscosity of species	kg/m·s
ξ	Dimensionless length	
ρ_{mix}	mixture density	kg/m ³

ACRONYMS

BET	Brunauer–Emmett–Teller
GHSV	Gas hourly space velocity
GSR	Glycerol steam reforming
ER	Eley-Rideal Mechanism
LH	Langmuir-Hinshelwood
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
TGA	Thermogravimetric analysis
TPO	Temperature programmed oxidation
TPR	Temperature programmed reduction
Vol. %	Volume percent
Wt. %	Weight percent
WCMR	Water to carbon molar ratio
WGMR	Water to glycerol molar ratio
WHSV	Weight hourly space velocity
XRD	X-ray diffraction