International Journal of Transcontinental Discoveries (IJTD), ISSN: 3006-628X
Volume 10, Issue 1, January-December, 2023
Available online at: https://internationaljournals.org/index.php/ijtd
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Carbon Electrode Preparation in Alkaline Fuel Cells

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Article history: Received: 26 April 2023, Accepted: 04 June 2023, Published online: 10 June 2023

ABSTRACT

The idea of the present work is associated with the investigation of perspectives for enhancement of carbon electrodes towards the application in alkaline fuel cells or AFC with consideration of such criteria as electrochemical activity, stability, and cost. It recalls the history of employing non-precious metal catalysts or NPMCs, porous carbon materials, and surface modification for improved catalytic activity and catalytic stability. Some important findings are identified with the prospect of using NPMCs as potential candidates for replacement with platinum-based catalysts, and the advantages of nitrogen and phosphorus doping in porous carbons. The study directs attention to the specific interactions between the catalyst-support and the enhancement of the material characteristics of AFC to promote sustainable energy solutions in the future.

Keyword: Carbon electrodes, Alkaline fuel cells or AFCs, Non-precious metal catalysts or NPMCs, Electrochemical performance, Porous carbon structures, Surface functionalization, Catalyst-support interaction

INTRODUCTION

Carbon electrodes have significant function in AFCs and they are used to support the catalyst materials as well as acting as the electrode where the electrons are generated. Its preparation is vital in determining the overall efficiency, durability and cost of fuel cells. These electrodes are generally designed to exhibit high electrical conductivity and corrosion resistance along with high porosity so as to provide larger surface area to the reactants for better catalytic activity.

It includes the choice of proper carbon materials like carbon black, graphite or carbon nanotube and then the proper modification of such materials via thermal, chemical reaction or surface grafting. Such measures are meant to enhance the electrochemical performance and compatibility to the condition within the alkaline region. In this introduction, the necessity of the carbon electrode preparation and its significance for the development of the future generations of the Alkaline Fuel Cells is described.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Carbon electrode synthesis for alkaline fuel cells

According to Li et al. 2011, Appropriate cathodic catalysts that contain carbon, nitrogen, and different metals that are not precious were investigated for AFC applications. Synthesis of catalysts and post-treatment of catalysts were designed and improved to raise their electrocatalytic performance for ORR in alkaline media. NPMCs synthesised from carbon that mainly supported ethylenediamine type transition of metal composite precursors along with subjected treatment of heat were found to possess the activity of ORR similar towards that Pt/C.

Within the specific tests of membrane of anion exchange or cell of AEM fuel which is the open circuit potential of the NPMC was mainly noted to be 0.97 volts at the temperature of 50 °C along with maximum power density was mainly noted to be 177 milliwatts in per square centimeter.

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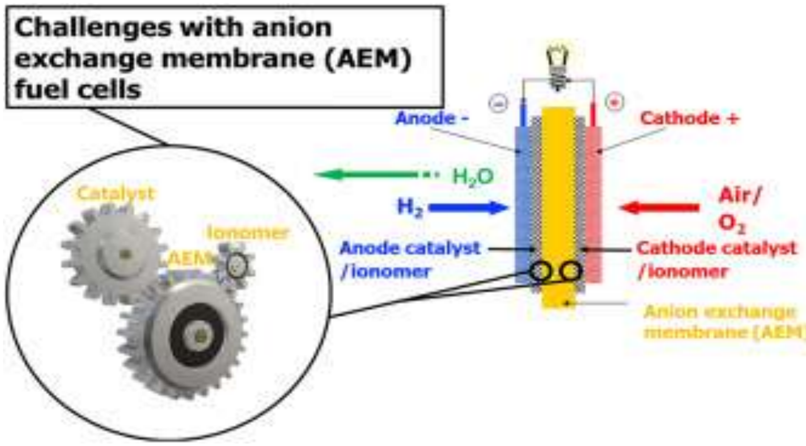

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Figure 1: Alkaline Fuel Cell Technology

Catalyst-support interaction in carbon electrodes AFCs

According to Ozoemena, 2016, The ADAFC is an efficient, sustainable source of power for customers and portable applications such as laptops, MP3 players and mobile phones. Compared to PEMFCs, ADAFCs have key benefits associated with AEMs, easier alcohol fuel management, higher volumetric energy densities, and enhanced reaction kinetics in the alkaline environment. This review discusses fresh developments of nanostructured electrocatalysts and AEMs particularly in light of instinct design and synthesis approaches towards non-precious metal catalysts within ADAFCs. It mainly covers catalysts and choices, synthesis, along with supports with relevance towards other fuel cells, sensors along with metal-air batteries.

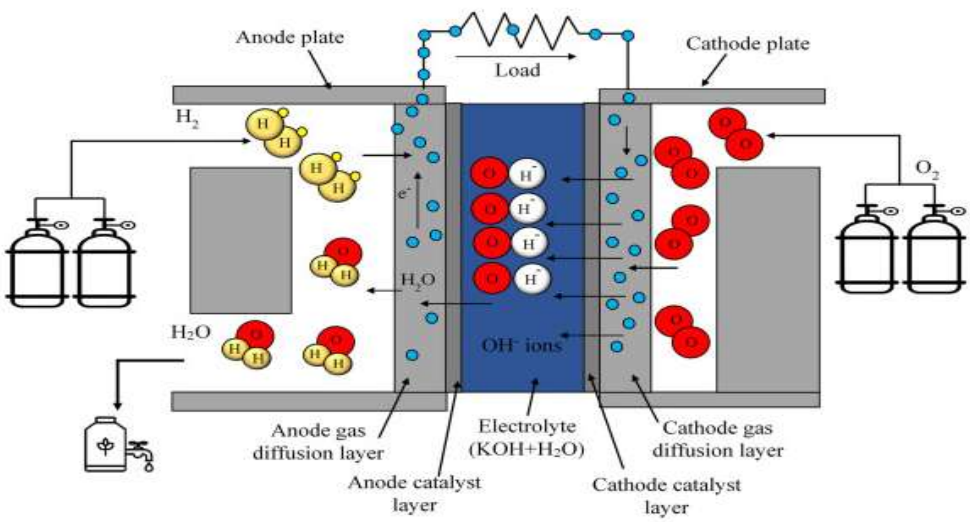

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Figure 2: Overview of Alkaline Fuel Cell

Porous carbon structures in alkaline fuel cells

According to Borghei et al. 2017, This research offers green chemistry for preparation of N,P-doped porous carbon originating from coconut shell residues at high conversion efficiency with 46 percent for oxygen reduction in alkaline medium. The materials possess excellent electrocatalytic activity and are therefore used as cathode catalysts in alkaline fuel

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cells. Phosphoric activation in a single-step resulted surface area of 1216 $m^2 g^{-1}$ and pore volume of 1.15 $cm^3 g^{-1}$ with 72 percent of mesopores. Urea gave a cheap path towards nitrogen doping. This particular type of carbon displayed equal activity with some commercial Pt-C catalysts, a better tolerance with methanol crossover, and better long-term stability in oxygen reduction reactions under alkaline solutions derived from biomass.

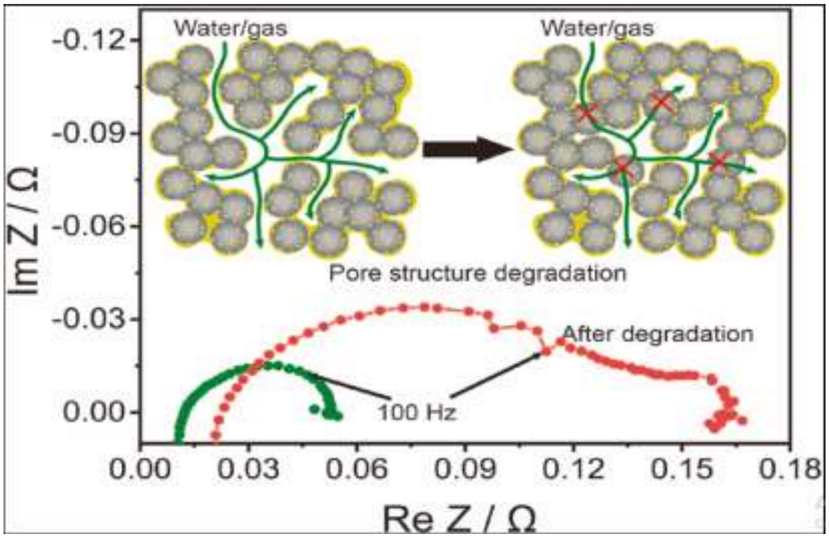

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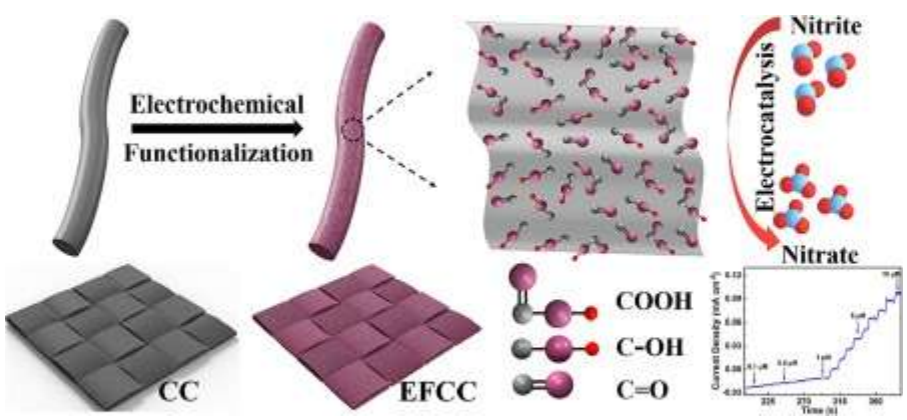
Figure 3: Alkaline Polymer Electrolyte Fuel Cells

Surface functionalization of carbon electrodes AFCs

According to Zhou and Liu, 2013, The use of CNTs as electrode material for supercapacitors has received much attention due to the foregoing feature. This work will show a basic procedure for growing films of CNT immediately upon carbon cloths for AFSCs. The introduced conductive network of 3D also specifically offers favorable diffusion of ions along with mechanical type flexibility. It mainly delivers a specific type of capacitance of 106.1 $F.g^{-1}$, stability up towards long cycle to 100,000 cycles with a particular 99 percent retention, energy density of 2.4 $\mu W\ h\ cm^{-2}$, along with overall power density of 19 $mW\ cm^{-2}$. The specific type of AFSC also specifically assures that performance is mainly retained under the specific deformation, 63 kPa pressure, along with 100 degree centigrade operating temperatures. Three particular elements within series drive an LED for 60 seconds after a 5 second charge as a breakthrough within flexible electronic appliances.



(Source: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/)

Figure 4: Surface Functionalization of Carbon

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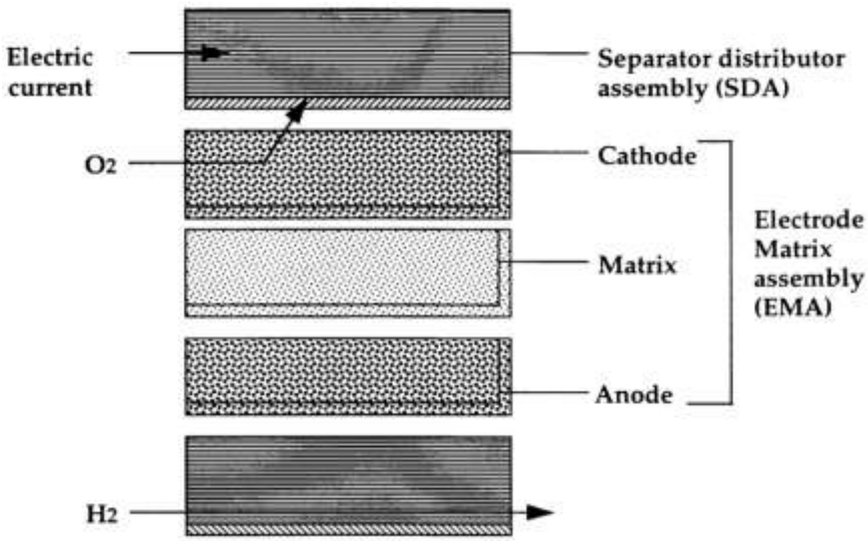
Electrochemical properties of carbon electrodes AFC

According to Farma et al. 2013, Green monoliths or GMs were synthesised using potassium hydroxide or KOH 5 wt percentage, nanotubes of carbon 5 wt percentage along with carbon grains from oil palm empty fruit bunch fiber 90 wt percentage. The overall monoliths were mainly carbonized at the temperature of 600, 700, along with 800°C within N_2 followed by activation within CO_2 at the temperature of 800°C The structural, electrical, and porosity features of the activated carbon monoliths or ACMs were then determined. Electrochemical measurements further indicated that ACM7 and ACM8 based composites had better specific capacitance of 77 and 85 Fg^1, energy of 2.2 $Whkg^{-1}$ and 2.1 $Whkg^1$ and power 156W $kg^1$and 161 W kg^1respectively than the ACM6. In view of these results, one can note that the greatest electrode performance for supercapacitors is achieved when carbonization and activation temperatures are optimized.



(Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/245146799/figure/)

Figure 5: Design Principle of AFC Cell

Methods

In the context of the preparation of carbon electrodes for AFCs, secondary methods can supplement primary ones to assess experience and innovations. The study adopts a deductive research approach to developing and testing the hypotheses concerning the performance of carbon electrodes gathered from literature and earlier studies. Interpretivism philosophy is adopted by researchers in an effort to gain an understanding of the detailed practices of preparation of carbon electrodes in context to documented methods and their impacts in AFC application. This approach pays a lot of attention to context, meaning construction, and the need to understand what insights mean. The research design employs an integrative approach which draws from scientific literature including technical journals and conference proceedings, as well as trade and industry reports on the different techniques of carbon electrode preparation (Varga et al. 2018). Secondary data collection refers to the process of collecting material that has already been published, concentrating on experimental arrangements, materials employed, as well as results in AFC uses.

The secondary data analysis techniques used in this study are content analysis, and thematic analysis where the researcher looks for patterns in the methodologies used for carbon electrode synthesis. This approach aids in identifying the relationships between preparation methods and electrochemical performance, surface area, conductivity, and stability of the electrodes in alkaline environments.

RESULT

The preparation of carbon electrodes of alkaline fuel cells or AFCs has undergone certain changes in the material science and advanced technology to enhance the electrochemical performance, durability and cost effectiveness of the electrodes.

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Non-Precious Metal Catalysts (NPMCs)

In the previous studies of Li et al. (2011), it has been found that NPMCs derived from carbon-supported ethylenediamine-transition metal composite precursors by heat treatment exhibit ORR performance similar to that of Pt/C. These NPMCs were tested in anion exchange membrane fuel cells or AEMFCs and demonstrated an open circuit potential of 097 V and the maximum power density of 177 mW cm^{-2} at 50 °C. This underscores the feasibility of NPMCs to act as prospective substitutes to expensive metal catalysts in AFCs.

Catalyst-Support Interaction

Ozoemena (2016) describes the benefits of alkaline direct alcohol fuel cells or ADAFCs for which there are some advantages compared with the traditional PEMFCs, such as easier fuel handling, higher energy density, and better reaction kinetics. A brief review of the factors affecting ADAFC performance and emphasis on nanostructured electrocatalysts and Anion Exchange Membrane or AEM is then presented (Kruusenberget al. 2010). The optimal choice of supports for non-precious metal catalysts represents one of the major challenges that determine the efficiency of ADAFCs having certain relationships with other electrochemical processes, for example, metal-air batteries and sensors.

Porous Carbon Structures

Borgheiet al. (2017) examined the effectiveness of porous carbon with N and P doping obtained from coconut shell residual towards ORR in alkaline electrolyte. The synthesized materials equated to 1216 $m^2 g^{-1}$ and 1.15 $cm^3 g^{-1}$ pore volume with mesopore composition of 72 percent. These porous carbon electrodes have shown the same electrocatalytic performance as the commercial Pt/C catalyst, in addition to superior resistance to methanol crossover effect and stability for oxygen reduction reactions in AFCs.

Surface Functionalization and Electrochemical Properties

Zhou and Liu (2013) revealed that carbon nanotubes or CNTs exhibited high capability as the electrode material for the development of supercapacitors. Their method for synthesizing CNT films on carbon cloths for the AFSCs, displayed good ion diffusion, flexibility along with high performance signifying a specific capacitance of 106.1 F g^{-1} and stability up to 100,000 cycling (Aytaç et al. 2011). It is found that this research could have application for enhancing the mechanochemical properties of carbon electrodes in AFCs.

Electrochemical Performance of Carbon Monoliths

Farma et al. (2013) produced green monoliths incorporating oil palm empty fruit bunch fiber, carbon nanotubes, and potassium hydroxide and subjected them to carbonization and activation. The electrochemical performance of the resulting activated carbon monoliths or ACMs was superior to that of the previous material, with specific capacitance values of 77 Fg^{-1} and 85 Fg^{-1} for ACM7 and ACM8, respectively (Basu and Basu, 2010). These electrodes also revealed that energy and power densities are high depending on C and A temperatures for better performance of the electrodes in supercapacitors and fuel cells.

DISCUSSION

Preparation of carbon electrodes for AFCs has been changed over the years to enhance electrochemical properties, stability and costs. NPMCs have displayed good performance and their use has been advocated as more effective than using the expensive platinum-based catalyst. In the present work, Li et al. (2011) illustrated that NPMCs derived from carbon-supported ethylenediamine-transition metal composites and expressed that the performance of such material is similar to Pt/C in the case of ORR and possesses great competence for strong applications in AEMFC which in result make the suitable for AFC applications (Li et al. 2013). Ozoemena (2016) also focused on additional advantages of ADAFCs that include ease of handling of the fuel, improved reaction kinetics and scrutiny on the best way to enhance the interaction between the catalyst and support.

In further studies of challenging porous carbon structures, Borgheiet al. (2017) investigated structures of nitrogen and phosphorus in coconut shell residues to achieve non-noble electrocatalytic activity and performances compared to Pt/C coupled with enhanced anti-methanol crossover properties. Zhou and Liu (2013) examined fabrication of CNT films for supercapacitors and revealed potentiality of increasing flexibility and stability of the carbon electrodes beneficial for AFCs (Wang et al. 2013). Farma et al. (2013) pointed out that the values of carbonization and activation temperatures have a great influence on the electrochemical characteristics of carbon monoliths and emphasized that the material process had a great impact on the improvement of electrode performance.

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Future Directions

Possible types of directions for further research scoped to carbon electrodes for AFCs to include the further refinement of material properties along with manufacturing techniques with a particular view to improving the overall cells' electrochemical performance, stability and economic viability. They may further be focused on the improvement of new NPMCs that are more effective than expensive platinum-based catalysts and the costs of production are relatively low. It is also important to mainly investigate additional types of support materials that specifically enhance the catalyst-support type relations which are very crucial for sustainable functioning of AFC. Another main thing is more research in the area of porous carbon structures with doping (Antolini and Gonzalez, 2010). This will lead to improved ORR performance and methanol tolerance. Research on incorporating CNTs with other nanofillers to provide better flexibility, durability as well as enhanced electrical conductivity of the designed AFC electrode is possible. Enhancing specific types of carbonisation and activation type processes is still essential to obtain the best BET surface area, pore size distribution, and electrochemical performance for meaningful long term application.

CONCLUSION

Here mainly conclude that this is important for the enhancement of energy systems like AFCs by using the relevant carbon electrodes. Based on the literature review, study reveals that non-precious metal catalysts or NPMCs from carbon supported composites are possible replacement of expensive platinum based catalysts of the same or even better electro-catalytic activity. The proper type of tailoring of catalyst-support interactions, the application of porous carbon scaffolds, as well as the surface chemistry modification of carbon materials have shown important types of enhancement of electrochemical properties. In addition to that, the particular application of carbon nanotubes or CNTs and other nanomaterials, there are possibilities of increasing the overall flexibility, conductivity, and the long term stability. Further type investigation into optimizing preparation type methods together with modification of the characteristics of the used materials will mainly play a very critical role within the development of AFC technology for its application within real-world uses in the future.

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