SCIENTIFIC CULTURE
www.sci-cult.com

SCIENTIFIC CULTURE, Vol. 12, No. 5, (2026), pp. 510-531
Open Access. Online & Print

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.1250043

REACTIVE ENGINEERED BIOCHAR FROM AGRICULTURAL WASTES AND ITS APPLICATION FOR WATER PURIFICATION

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Received: 01/12/2025
Accepted: 02/01/2026

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ABSTRACT

The remediation of water contaminated with toxic oxy-anions and persistent antibiotics remains a significant challenge. This study addresses this issue by designing a novel, multifunctional sulfur-iron engineered magnetic biochar (S-Fe-BC) from corn stover for the simultaneous removal of hexavalent chromium (Cr (VI)) and sulfamethoxazole (SMX). The material was synthesized through a sequential process of pyrolysis, magnetite (Fe_3O_4) impregnation, and sulfidation, resulting in a composite with integrated magnetic separability (28.4 emu/g), a reactive FeS shell and a porous carbon matrix. Comprehensive characterization confirmed successful functionalization and revealed key structure-property relationships. Batch experiments demonstrated high Langmuir adsorption capacities of 118.9 mg/g for Cr (VI) and 65.1 mg/g for SMX. Mechanistic investigations using XPS and radical quenching elucidated distinct removal pathways, that are; Cr (VI) was primarily reduced to less toxic Cr (III) by surface Fe^{2+}/S^{2-} species (82% conversion), while SMX was eliminated via adsorption followed by peroxydisulfate-activated catalytic degradation, driven mainly by sulfate radicals. In competitive binary systems, S-Fe-BC showed preferential removal of Cr (VI). The material maintained robust performance in a complex synthetic water matrix and exhibited excellent reusability over five cycles with >78% capacity retention and minimal metal leaching. A preliminary techno-economic analysis suggested viable production costs. This work provides a sustainable, multifunctional adsorbent-catalyst and a detailed mechanistic framework for tackling complex inorganic-organic water pollution.

KEYWORDS: Engineered biochar; Sulfur-iron modification; Hexavalent chromium; Sulfamethoxazole; Co-contamination; Reductive adsorption; Advanced oxidation process; Magnetic separation; Water treatment.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Context

The provision of safe and potable water is among the pillars of sustainable development and public health. Pollution of water sources is the universal issue. The problem of heavy metals is one of the most dangerous and stubborn groups of aquatic pollutants which is brought about by the complex group of anthropogenic activities including the rapid industrialization, unsustainable farming practices, and un-opportune waste management (Jha & Patil, 2023). Unlike organic contaminants, the heavy metals are non-biodegradable and thus they may be long lived, bioaccumulate to form the food chain and be biomagnified in the food chain. This has become a major and growing environmental issue due to the fact that these toxic materials are leached into water bodies like rivers, lakes and ground water which is the primary source of drinking water, irrigation and fish life.

The health consequences of exposure to heavy metals contained by polluted water on the human health are very devastating and far-reaching. The continuum of acute and chronic pathologies is associated with the chronic exposure of the intake of lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), mercury (Hg), and arsenic (As). They include neurotoxic effects, irreversible injury to the kidney system, hepatic dysfunction, and heart diseases, and they also pose the risk of a broad spectrum of many cancers (Jha and Patil, 2023). The toxicity is not attached to any particular individual element, the interactions formed between different metals can be more adverse, which makes the active interaction of the different metals with the water more complicated thus making the situation with the concurrent contamination of the water by a range of metals.

Such pollution needs good water treatment technologies to handle. Conventional methods of heavy metal extraction such as chemical precipitation, ion exchange and membrane filtration are developed. However, they tend to be crippled by enormous deficiencies that restrain their viability and generality especially in resource-starved settings. The primary drawbacks are the high operation costs, high power consumption, generation of toxic secondary sludge, which must be disposed of once more, and, in the majority of instances, are not efficient to act upon water with low concentrations of target metals (Mondal et al., 2023). The technological gap shows that there is a need to create the alternative, cheaper, and successful remediation materials according to the principles of green chemistry and a circular economy.

1.2. Evolution of Biochar

Biochar has been considered as a very promising adsorbing material in the pursuit of sustainable adsorbent. Earlier, the long-term stability and beneficial characteristics of the pyrogenic carbon were referred by the anthropogenic addition of charcoal that is a carbon-rich compound in the soils, as it was the case with the highly fertile Terra Preta soils of the Amazon (Mondal et al., 2023). The biochar produced in the present-day world, and produced by the thermochemical pyrolysis of biomass via the oxygen-deprived atmosphere (pyrolysis) brings back this ancient knowledge and uses it to the modern environmental engineering.

There are some basic properties of pristine biochar that makes it a suitable base material when purifying water. The ability to convert waste products (e.g., rice husk, wood chips, crop residues) of agricultural products and forestry products into directly usable products gives the prospect of making value out of the waste itself, transforming a waste problem into a resource solution. Nature of biochar, e.g. porous structure, high specific surface area, the presence of surface functional groups (e.g., -OH, -COOH) poses an intrinsic tendency to biochar in the sequestration of various contaminants by the following mechanisms that are physical adsorption, ion exchange, and complexation.

However, untreated and high-quality biochar tends to operate in a non-selective mode which might not be sufficient to meet high standards of contaminated water of low concentration and heavy-toxicity levels of the heavy metals or complex organic pollutants. Pyrolysis conditions and feedstock are directly proportional to its adsorption capacity and selectivity, and the conditions cannot be optimum in all the desired contaminants. This weakness has given rise to a paradigm shift in research to the use of biochar to informed design of engineered or functionalized biochar.

Engineered biochar is the intended after-synthesis of the base material to enhance the physicochemical properties, add functionality of the material as desired. It is an engineering that goes pass the natural performances of biochar into an inclusive adsorbent to a high performance, reactive material that could be utilized in a specific remediation procedure. Its overall goal is to improve desirable properties, e.g. porosity, density of active site (surface), magnetic properties to be easy to separate or catalyst moieties to degrade pollutants and to generate a next-generation material to employ in more advanced use in water treatment.

1.3. Knowledge Gaps and Research Problem

The biochar strategic engineering which has crossed the natural limits of an uncontaminated form of biochar has created an essential pathway of sophisticated water remediation technologies. The massive literature review of the studies confirms that the application of adjusting approaches, including the use of heteroatomic components, acid/alkali treatment, and impregnation of metal oxides, are highly effective to modify the surface chemistry, porosity, and functionality of biochar to meet a specific pollutant (Wang and Wang, 2021; Yu et al., 2022). These engineered methodologies can also enhance adsorption capacities to a significant level, and can also provide new reactive behavior, and would put biochar at the frontline as a versatile material of other applications than adsorption.

However, the recent survey on authoritarianism shows that there are still major gaps in knowledge, which make it difficult to apply laboratory innovations to real-world, practical situations.

Previously, there has been a paradigm of proof of concept that is predominant in the field where only single pollutants were tested in ideal condition. Wang and Wang (2021) also add in the majority of the studies that engineered biochar were compared against the individual model contaminants i.e., isolated heavy metal ion or isolated organic dye, in simplified synthetic solutions. The approach fails to factor in the complex matrices of real wastes because they contain multiple co-existing ions, natural organic solids and variable pH and therefore, could cause competitive adsorption and have a significant impact on the removability. The performance was high in the controlled laboratory experiments under controlled conditions, therefore, it may not be reasonable to predict the performance in a situation that is relevant to the environment.

Secondly, it is urgently required to develop multifunctional engineered biochar that would be applicable to the concomitant removal of different elements of contamination. Although there is an intent to make a change, as Yuan et al. (2022) point out, in reality, the wastewater effluents tend to be complicated pollutants, including toxic metals, organic micropollutants, and nutrients. Synthetic and design of biochar with general decontamination properties, e.g. metal complexation sites, organic degradation catalytic active sites and anion capture groups, is also a significant challenge.

Thirdly, in the long term, stability test, environmental friendliness, and viable reusability of engineered biochar are not usually done comprehensively. It is one of the bottlenecks of the implementation that is required to make it sustainable. The central problems are that the possibility of leaching impregnated metals or modified components exists and it can result in a subsequent pollution and there are no potent processes on how to regenerate and reuse the used biochar through a series of cycles. Sustainability of the agricultural wastes' application is nullified in the event of finite lifespan of the synthesized substance or the occurrence of leaching, thus comprehensive assessment guidelines with the capacity to encompass adsorption capacity to the initial cycle should be employed (Yuan et al., 2022).

Finally, there is indeed a perceived disparity between high material production and testing under circumstances that are similar to reality of actual conditions of use. Both reviews indirectly indicate that the gap needs to be filled by the studies analyzing the newly engineered biochar in even more complex media that is binary pollutant systems and actual wastewater samples. This is required to ascertain the fouling behavior, competitive and performance durability that are the key data of any plausible scale-up design as well as techno-economic study (Wang and Wang, 2021; Yuan et al., 2022).

Therefore, the need to design, synthesize and validate a novel reactive engineered biochar using agricultural waste that is evidently modified to be utilized in multifunctional decontamination, stability and reusability in complex aqueous systems is the primary research question that will be answered by this dissertation. This paper will go beyond the standard of individual pollutants to create a material with desired functional properties, numerically test its performance and stability in the conditions more representative of real-life water treatment problems.

1.4. Research Aim and Objectives

This research project is likely to promote the creation of engineered biochar in the field of water purification resting on the definite gaps that are identified, i.e. the need to create multifunctional substances that may work under complex conditions and lacks widespread research regarding their stability. Recent studies have clearly demonstrated the potentiality of directed biochar engineering. For example, for hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) removal, the modification techniques have already been applied and resulted in the improvement of the hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) removal, which is a common and deadly heavy metal (Chen et al., 2024). Simultaneously, the development of magnetic biochar composites has proven the possibility of simultaneous complete removal of heavy metals and antibiotics, such as lead and tetracycline, which has

triggered the transition to a multifunctional design (Huang et al., 2024). More specific biochar-based systems are also designed to adsorb the sulfonamide antibiotic sulfamethoxazole (SMX) which is one of the most frequently emerging pollutants (Wang and Li, 2024).

However, this study aims to provide a new niche. The specific and the especially important rationale, particularly of Cr(VI) and SMX two metal-antibiotic pairs with incomparably and challenging chemistries, has not been sought with a sulfur-enhanced iron-modified biochar albeit the concomitant removal of a few metal-antibiotic combinations has been investigated. Moreover, behavior and stability of such a designed material under conditions of environmental interest and not just in simplified systems containing single pollutant are not tested.

Therefore, the general aim of the study is to design, manufacture and critically evaluate a novel co-engineered mag biochar of sulfur-iron, which is founded on corn stover to remove hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) and sulfamethoxazole (SMX) simultaneously in aqueous medium with regard to the functionality in complex media.

To achieve this objective, the following specific objectives are developed:

- To extract and characterize a series of engineered biochar of corn stover including pure biochar, iron impregnated magnetic biochar (Fe-BC), and sulfur-iron co-modified magnetic biochar (S-Fe-BC). The nature of such physicochemical properties (surface area, porosity, functional groups, crystallinity, magnetic susceptibility, and surface chemistry) will be fully described to formulate structure-property relationships.
- To quantify the efficacy and the mechanistic mechanism of the elimination of Cr(VI) and SMX with the synthesized substances separately. Based on batch experiments, adsorption kinetics, isotherms and thermodynamics of each pollutant was determined. It was explained by the use of advanced spectroscopy (e.g., XPS, FTIR) of reconstructed biochar.
- To study the competitive behavior and consequent removal of Cr (VI) and SMX in a system where they are contaminated. The influence of a pollutant on the kinetics and capacity of the other will be experimented to know whether there is a synergistic or antagonistic influence of the materials to the materials in order to know the actual multifunctional capacity of the material.
- To test the stability, reusability, and performance strength of the S-Fe-BC material which is the best. It does so by (i) leaching tests to establish the quantity of iron or sulfur that can be released, (ii) a series of adsorption-desorption to test the regeneration potential and its capacity retention and (iii), batch tests in a synthetic water environment containing competing ions ($Ca2^{+}$, Mg^{2+}, Cl-, SO_4^{2+}) and natural organic matter (humic acid) to test the conditions in which it will be used.
- To propose one model of the mechanism of simultaneous elimination of Cr (VI) and SMX by S-Fe-BC through the combination of the finding of all goals. The model will describe the interaction between the redox, adsorption, and catalytic reactions between the biochar and water interface that will be the basic contribution to designing the next generation reactive adsorbent.

2. AGRICULTURAL WASTE AS PRECURSOR RESOURCE

The circular economy is based on the hyped production of lignocellulosic farming waste products into useful products. Production of biochar is one such way of doing it, through which waste streams can be converted to rice husk, sugarcane bagasse and corn stover into stable carbonaceous products. One of the most important factors that influence the physicochemical properties of the resulting biochar, including elemental composition (C, H, O, N, S), ash content, and natural mineralogy is feedstock (Kumar et al., 2021). These intrinsic properties are the ones which consequently influence other properties like porosity, surface area and the natural occurrence of surface functional groups which are crucial in the performance of adsorption. Even though this would contribute to the waste management challenge, local wastes like corn stover would also be useful in developing a sustainable and low-cost precursor supply chain to manufacture biochar in large scale (Nanda et al., 2021).

2.1. Activation Fundamentals Pyrolysis

Biomass is converted into biochar by the pyrolysis of biomass using thermochemical treatment under limited oxygen concentration. The process parameters including pyrolysis temperature greatly determine the final-product. Generally speaking, the hotter the pyrolysis (usually, between 300-700^{o}C) is, the faster the carbonization, aromatization, and specific surface area increase. Lower the level of volatile matter is and the fewer oxygen-containing functional groups it contains (Singh et al., 2022; Yaashikaa et al., 2022). The heating rate and the

residence time further modify the yield as well as the structure of the pore.

Pure biochar is further increased to enhance its porosity through post-synthetic activation that in most instances is necessarily limited. Physical activation is one in which steam or CO_2 at high temperature are employed to preferentially gasify the carbon atoms that constitute a more porous network (Kumar et al., 2021). Chemical activation brings about a more radical structural change and typically is performed using an agent like potassium hydroxide (KOH), phosphoric acid (H_3PO_4), or zinc chloride ($ZnCl_2$) followed or concomitantly by pyrolysis. They are desiccants and prevent the establishment of tar and promote the development of highly porous, often microporous, structure with a vast surface area, which is extremely beneficial in terms of physisorption process (Singh et al., 2022).

2.2. Engineered Biochar: Strategies of functionalization

In spite of the fact that activation increases the porosity, engineering or functionalization is supposed to provide biochar with the desired chemical reactivation and novel properties. The following way can be divided into these plans:

Mineral/Metal Oxide Impregnation: In this method of loading biochar with metal (oxy)hydroxide minerals (ex.: Fe, Mg, Al, La), the active sites of ligands interchange reaction, surface precipitation, and Lewis acid-base reactions. It is particularly effective when it comes to the elimination of oxyanions (e.g. phosphate, arsenate) and the immobilization of heavy metals (Wang et al., 2022). Iron impregnation especially is an initial process that culminates into generation of magnetic biochar composites.

Magnetization: Biochar is ferromagnetic with the addition of iron oxides (primarily magnetite (Fe_3O_4) or maghemite (Fe_2O_3). This allows easy separation of used adsorbent with treated water in an external magnetic field to overcome one of the most important practical problems of using powder adsorbent and possible reuse (Yan et al., 2022).

Heteroatom Doping: Addition of heteroatom (i.e. nitrogen (N), sulfur (S) or phosphorus (P) to the carbon matrix modifies the density of the local electrons, and presents charged active sites. N-doping that is achieved by treatment with ammonia or nitrogen containing precursors, e.g. urea, can enhance a basicity, electron-donating ability and catalytic power of the material in a persulfate activation system (Ding et al., 2024).

Sulfidation: Biochar containing iron could be altered using sulfur (e.g, Na_2S, dithionite) to form iron sulfide (e.g., FeS, FeS_2). This modification makes the reducing performance and transfer of electrons of that particular material highly potent in the reducing elimination of pollutants like Cr(VI) and catalysis of advanced oxidation reactions (Zhou et al., 2022).

2.3. Cleansing Acts of Biochar Engineered Pollutants

It is not only that the removal of contaminants by the built-up biochar is rarely a one-mechanism reaction, but such a reaction is commonly a complex of physical and chemical reactions:

Physical Adsorption & Pore-Filling: This is regulated by Van der Waals forces or by entrapment of the pollutants into the porous network, especially at high-surface-area.

Surface Complexation & Ion Exchange: Oxygen-based functional groups (-COOH, -OH) and impregnated metal species have the potential to enable the formation of strong inner-sphere complex with metal ions. Cationic metals are also removed by cation exchange with inbuilt alkali/alkaline earth metals (K^+, Ca^{2+}, Mg^{2+}).

Precipitation & Co-precipitation: This is of particular concern to the metal-loaded biochar, where the dissolved metals can be precipitated as either hydroxides, carbonates or phosphates onto the biochar.

Redox Reactions: Engineered biochar with reductive moieties (e.g. zero-valent iron, Fe(II) complexes, sulfur compounds, etc.) can directly reduce pollutants. The best-known case is the reduction of highly toxic Cr(VI) to less toxic and less mobile Cr(III), which is further reduced most typically to Cr(III), or complexed (Zhou et al., 2022).

Degradation Catalyzing Bio mimicked biochar: N-doped or metal-composited biochar can be used as a catalyst or catalyst support to catalyze peroxydisulfate (PDS) or peroxy monosulfate (PMS) to generate reactive oxygen species (e.g. $SO_{4\text{-}}$, $SO_{4\text{-}}$, and O_2) to degrade organic pollutants like antibiotics. (Ding et al., 2024; Yan et al., 2022).

2.4. Gaps in Applications and Trends in Research

The current research has been evidenced to be extremely effective in controlled settings but on closely examination, it is revealed that there are still gaps. Most of the literature discusses the studies of a single pollutant in deionized or unstirred water, which is not reflective of the complex nature of real wastewater, which is an aqueous solution that contains numerous pollutants and counterions (Kumar et al., 2021).

3. CLEANING AND DRYING OF BIOMASS

The biomass undergoes an extreme cleaning process to remove the extrinsic impurities. It then washed sequentially with tap water followed by deionized (DI) water (resistivity: 18.2 MOcm, Millipore Synergy UV to eliminate the adhering soil particles, dust and water-soluble salts. Wet biomass shall be put on stainless-steel trays and dried (Binder ED Series) at 105 + 2^{o}C within a duration of 48 hours to achieve a constant dry weight (< 5% moisture content) of the biomass and hence prevent microbial activity and stabilize the moisture point where pyrolysis takes place.

3.1. Downsizing and Fractionation

The dried corn stover undergo mechanical reduction using cutting mill (Retch SM 300), the bottom sieve of 2.0 mm and running speed of 1500 rpm. The roughly spread material would be further grounded in a planetary ball mill (Retch PM 400) of 15 minutes in the same constant rotational velocity of 300 rpm to the material so that the homogeneity of the particles would be enhanced. The resulting powder shall be fractionated using mechanical sieve shaker (Retch AS 200) and certified stainless-steel sieves. The 0.5-1.0 mm fraction of the particle will be separated, weighed and stored as airtight in labeled glass bottles in a desiccator with silica gel inside it till it is used. The choice of this fraction will provide the maximum heat and mass transfer during the pyrolysis process and minimize the channeling effects in the subsequent batch tests.

3.2. Raw Feedstock Proximate and Ultimate Analysis

The prepared feedstock will be analyzed under proximate and ultimate analysis then the process of pyrolysis will take place using a representative sample of the feedstock.

The Proximate Analysis was performed according to ASTM D1762-84. Thermogravimetric analyst (TGA, PerkinElmer STA 8000) shall be employed to identify moisture (M), volatile matter (VM), quantity of ash (A) as well as fixed carbon (FC). It is performed as follows; the sample (10 mg) is heated in a platinum crucible, heating to 105^{o}C under N_2 to ascertain M, heating to 950^{o}C under N_2 at 50^{o}C/min to ascertain VM and heating to the air (750^{o}C) to ascertain A. FC = 100% - M% - VM% - A.

Ultimate analysis of carbon (C), hydrogen (H), nitrogen (N) and sulfur (S) was done using an Elemental Analyzer (Elementar vario MICRO cube). The difference between the content of oxygen (O), content of carbon (C), hydrogen (H), nitrogen (N) sulfur (S) and Ash will be calculated as; Oxygen content (O)% = 100% - C%- H% - N% - S%.

3.3. Manufacturing of Pristine and Engineered Biochar

The pyrolysis process will be performed in an electrically heated, horizontal, internal diameter of 5 cm, 100 cm long, furnace made of high-purity quartz (Thermo Scientific Lindberg/Blue M). The sample is put in K-type thermocouple calibrated and in direct contact with the sample crucible to monitor and regulate temperature using a PID controller (2^{o}C).

Procedure: For the production of corn stover, about 25.0 -1.0 g of the stover was put into a shallow, high-purity alumina combustion boat (CoorsTek). The boat will be placed in the centre of the quartz tube. The creation of an entirely oxygen-free environment will be performed by a 30 minutes' purge of the system with ultra-high-purity (UHP) of N2 gas (99.999% Airgas) at a flow rate of 500 mL/min. The pyrolysis program was, ramping 600^{o}C in ambient atmosphere at 10^{o}C/min constant heating rate, 120min residence time at 600^{o}C followed by passive cooling to <50^{o}C at constant N_2 flow (Singh et al., 2022). TGA analysis of the feedstock was used to determine the rate at which heating occurred and temperature which was used to ensure that the carbon yield was as high as possible and the graphitization promoted and tar reduced.

Post-pyrolysis Processing: The black solid (BC) was subsequently beat scraped off, weighed in order to determine the gravimetric yield and milled in an agate mortar. Thereafter, it was subjected to two-step purification (Soxhlet extraction with acetone/ethanol 1:1 (v/v) mixture for 6 hours; to remove tars and condensable organics) and the hot DI water (80^{o}C) hot water bath purification (solid to liquid ratio of 1: 20 w/v) under stirring conditioned with a magnetic stirrer to a stable neutral pH (7.0 + 0.3) of the product. The dried purified BC will be placed in a desiccator to eliminate water by drying it in a vacuum oven (Binder VD) at temperatures below 80^{o}C for12 hours and sieving to a particle size of less than 150 um.

3.3.1. Synthesis of Iron-Impregnated Magnetic Biochar (Fe-BC) via Co-precipitation

The Fe-BC will be synthesized through in-situ co-precipitation mechanism that ensures the maximum dispersion of uniformly dispersed magnetite (Fe_3O_4) nanoparticles (Yan et al., 2022).

Collection Ferric chloride hexahydrate ($FeCl_3$,$6H_2O$, ACS reagent), ferrous sulfate heptahydrate ($FeSO_4 7H_2O$, Reagent Plus,99.0, Sigma-Aldrich) and sodium hydroxide pellets (NaOH, ACS reagent, 97.0, Fisher Scientific).

Procedure:

Solution Preparation: 0.5 M mixed iron stock solution will be made by adding $FeCl_3$6H2O (13.51 g) and $FeSO_4$7H_2O (6.95 g) to 100 mL of deoxygenated DI water (sparged with N_2, 30 min) and gently stirring the mixture to allow the reaction to reach a 2:1 stoichiometric ratio of Fe_{3+} and Fe_{2+}.

Biochar Dispersion: 10.00 + 0.05 g of the untouched BC will be dispersed in 200 mL of DI water in a 500 mL three-neck round-bottom flask with a mechanical stirrer, reflux condenser and N_2 input. Such suspension will occur with the ultrasonication of 40 kHz (Branson 450 Digital Sonifier) for 30 minutes as a whole to guarantee complete exfoliation and wetting.

Impregnation and Precipitation: A drop-wise addition of iron stock solution (or 1 mL/min) will be added to the intense stirring of the BC suspension maintained at a temperature of 60 + 2°C in a temperature-controlled oil bath. An addition of 60 minutes will also be made to the mixture after all the additions to achieve homogeneous adsorption of the Fe ions on the BC matrix.

Basification and Aging: 2 mL/min of a 5.0 M NaOH solution will subsequently be added in drop portions to the reaction mixture until the pH value perceives 11.0 + 0.1. The black precipitate will propose the formation of magnetite. It is going to be reacted under the stirring conditions of N_2 and stirred continuous at 60°C for120 minutes.

Separation and Washing: The flask was removed off the heat and the product was separated instantly as a consequence of a strong neodymium permanent magnet ($N5_2$, 50 mm x 50 mm x 25 mm). The solid will then be washed using DI water (5 x 100 mL) and absolute ethanol (3 x 50 mL) till the washing products are clear and the pH level is neutral. The final product (Fe-BC) will be dried under vacuum (60°C for 24 hours).

3.3.2. Development of Sulfur-Iron Co-modified Magnetic Biochar (S-Fe-BC) using Chemical Sulfidation

The alteration of the surface iron oxides in Fe-BC to reactive iron sulfides (e.g., mackinawite FeS) was done by sulfidation (Zhou et al., 2022).

Reagents Sodium sulfide nonahydrate (Na_2S,9H2O, crystal, ACS reagent, 98.0%, Sigma-Aldrich). All of the solutions were prepared in anaerobic glovebox (Coy Lab, atmosphere: 95% N_2, 5% H_2) with deoxygenated DI water to maintain S_2-oxidized.

Procedure: In the anaerobic glovebox, dried Fe-BC (500 grams + 0.05 gram) was transferred to a serum bottle (250 mL). 100 ML of 0.1 M Na_2S solution (an anaerobic preparation) was treated in the bottle, such that solid-liquid proportion is 1: 20 (w/v). Butyl rubber septum was applied to the bottle to close it and an aluminum crimp cap was employed.

The capped bottle was transferred to orbital shaker (New Brunswick scientific Innova 44) located on glovebox and swirled at 150 rpm and at a controlled temperature of 25 + 1°C and leave to spin over 6 hours. Kinetic preliminary studies argued that this time is sufficient to attain full sulfidation with minimum polysulfide.

Reaction; The anaerobic glovebox was reacted by opening it into the bottle. Product magnetic separation was conducted and then washed with three aliquots (50 mL of each) of deoxygenated DI water, two aliquots (25 mL of each) of deoxygenated absolute ethanol.

S-Fe-BC was dried in vacuum (0.1 atm) in the antechamber of the glovebox at 60°C in the process of 12 hours. The substance was stored in a closed vial under the N_2 atmosphere until further use to maintain the reduced sulfur species.

3.4. High-level Physicochemical Characterization

The protocol of thorough characterization was in BC, Fe-BC, and S-Fe-BC.

3.4.1. Textural and Surface Area Analysis

At -196°C N_2 adsorption-desorption isotherms of high-resolution gas sorption was established (Micromeritics 3Flex). Every analysis was performed with about 100 mg of the degassed sample (150°C for 12h under vacuum). Within the relative pressure (P/P 0) values of 0.05-0.30, the specific surface area (S BET) will be determined by the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) technique. The volume of the total pores (V 0 total) was determined as the amount of N_2 adsorbed at P/P 0 = 0.99. Non-Local Density Functional Theory (NLDFT) model of carbon-slit pores was used in deriving the pore size distribution (PSD) using the adsorption branch of the isotherm. The t-plot method will distinguish differentiation in the microporous and mesoporous areas of the surfaces (Singh et al., 2022).

3.4.2. Crystallographic and Phase Analysis

Bruker D8 ADVANCE diffractometer was used to record XRD patterns based on Cu Ka X-ray source (l = 1.5406 A, 40 V and 40 mA). The measurements have a 2nd range of 5° to 80° C equivalent to a step size of 0.02° and step dwell of 2s. The phases were identified based on the comparison of the diffraction peaks with the known reference patterns in the international Centre of diffraction Data (ICDD) PDF 4+ database by

Bruker DIFFRAC.EVA software. The estimation of crystal size of crystallites in majority phases (e.g. magnetite), was done by calculating the Scherrer equation on the most intense peak with an instrumentally corrected broadening correction (LaB6 standard).

3.4.3 Morphological and Elemental Mapping

The high-resolution surface morphology of 5 nm of iridium (Quorum Q150T ES) was measured using the instrument known as Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy (FE-SEM) to sputter coat the samples to charge them off. Each voltage was increment at rate of 5kV and the working distance will be 4mm with Elemental composition and distribution mapping (C, O, Fe, S and possibly Cr) using Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDS) which is annexed to SEM with the acquisition time of 60s per map. Photos transferred to a JEOL JEM-2100F operating at 200 kV as Images Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) and High-Resolution TEM (HRTEM). Sampling was accomplished through a mixture of a minute amount of powder in ethanol due to the sonication and drop-casting onto a lacey copper grid of a carbon surface (Ted Pella).

3.4.4. Functional Group Analysis and Surface Chemical State

Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR): Spectra was measured on the basis of the Thermo Scientific Nicolet iS20 spectrometer with a diamond Attenuated Total Reflectance (ATR) accessory. The sum of 64 scans was added to a region of between 4000 and 400 cm-1 with a resolution of 4 cm-1 of each sample. The peaks was assigned by using the literature that has been already determined on the functional groups in biochar (e.g., O-H 3400 cm-1, C=O 1700 cm-1, C-O 1200 cm-1, Fe-O 580 cm-1).

X-ray Photoelectron Spectroscopy (XPS): Thermo Scientific K-Alpha using monochromatic Al Ka X-rays source (1486.6 eV) was used to identify the elemental composition and the chemical states of the surfaces. The scan of the surveys was undertaken at the pass energy of 50 eV and the high-resolution scan in the region of C1s, O1s, Fe_2 P, S 2p, N 1s, Cr 2p was conducted with pass energy of 20eV. All spectra were corrected to include a charge after using the adventitious carbon C 1s peak (284.8 eV) as the reference point. Data processing will be done using thermo Advantage software including peak deconvolution with Shirley Background and Gaussian-Lorentzian (G-L) lines shapes.

Raman Spectroscopy: The degree of graphitization/disorder in the carbon matrix shall be analyzed through the Renishaw in Via Qontor confocal Raman microscope and the use of a 532 nm Nd: YAG laser. The Spectra was acquired at the wavelengths of 500- 3500 cm-1. Ratio between intensity of D-band (disorder, approximately 1350 cm -1) and the G-band (graphitic, approximately 1580 cm -1) was calculated (ID /IG).

3.4.5. Magnetism and Thermal Characteristics

Magnetization: M-H loops at room temperature (77K) were measured at Vibrating Sample Magnetometer (VSM, Lake Shore 7404) whereby the magnetic field was of +20,000 to -20,000 Oe. The saturation magnetization (M s), coercivity (H c) and remnant magnetization (M r) was obtained using the hysteresis loops.

Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA): A TGA/DSC 3 + (Mettler Toledo) was used to identify the stability (thermal). The heating of the sample was conducted in the range of 30°C to 900°C at 10°C/min under 50 mL/min of synthetic air (20 percent O2, 80 percent N_2) flow.

3.4.6. Point of Zero Charge Determination of pH

The pH drift method was employed to measure the ph. In each of the 11 centrifuge tubes, 20 mL of 0.01M NaCl solution was added to a 20mL centrifuge tube. They were brought to the values of 0.1M HCl or NaOH. Each tube was subsequently added with 20mg biochar sample. After 48 hours of temperature 25°C, the tubes were covered and shaken with the aim of attaining equilibrium. The final pH is obtained. The point of intersection of the curve and DpH = 0 is known as the pH PZC.

3.5. Choice of the pollutants and Stock Solution Preparation.

The potassium dichromate ($K_2Cr_2O_7$, ACS reagent, 99.5%, Sigma-Aldrich) was used to prepare Hexavalent Chromium. The stock solution of Cr(VI) 1000mg /L: 2.829g of $K_2Cr_2O_7$ was dissolved in 1L of water. Dilution of working solutions was appropriately done on daily basis. Every solution of Cr(VI) was put in amber glass at 4°C.

Organic Pollutant: Sulfamethoxazole ($C_{10}H_{11}N_3O_3S$, H_2O) 98-percent chemical purity, Sigma-Aldrich). To ensure that a 500 mg/L inventory solution is prepared, 0.500 g of SMX in 1 L of methanol (HPLC grade) was dissolved in aqueous solution because of its low aqueous solubility. Additional aqueous operating standards was evaporated with an aliquot of the methanol stock under the mild flow of N_2 and replenished with DI water to bring the methanol to the final concentration of less than 1% (v/v) to minimize the influences of co-solvents.

3.5.1. Quantification Methods of Analysis

Cr(VI) Analysis: The spectrophotometric method of the standard method 1,5-diphenylcarbazide (DPC) (USEPA Method 7196A) was used to determine the concentration of Cr(VI). Simply put, the sample filtered in 5 ml of the aliquot have 0.22 um nylon syringe filtered out and acidified in 0.5 mL of 1:1 of H_2SO_4. Next 0.5 mL of 0.25 solution (w/v) of DPC in acetone was added. The mixture was left to rest after 10 minutes to develop the color in its entirety (violet-pink). The absorbance at 540 nm was measured using a UV-Vis spectrophotometer (Shimadzu UV-2600) in the case of the reagent blank. A 6-point Calibration curve (0.1-5.0 mg/L) was established at a daily basis (R2>0.999).

SMX Analysis: The determination of SMX concentrations was done using High-Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC, Agilent 1260 Infinity II) with a quaternary pump, autosampler, thermostatic column compartment, and diode array detector (DAD). The separation was obtained on a reversed-phase ZORBAX Eclipse Plus C18 column (4.6 x 150 mm, 5 um) at 30°C. The mobile phase will consist of 0.1% formic acid in water (A) and acetonitrile (B) with a flow rate of 1.0 mL/min: 0-5 min, 10% B; 5-15 min, 10-60% B; 15-18 min, 60% B; 18-20 min, 60-10% B; and a 5 min re-equilibrium. The volume of injections was 20 uL. The SMX was identified at 265nm wavelength and with retention time of about 9.5 minutes. It was a seven-point external calibration curve (0.5-50 mg/L) (R2 > 0.999) (Ding et al., 2024).

Total Fe and S Leaching Analysis: In the case of leaching tests, the concentrations of the total Fe and S in the TCLP leachate of Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emission Spectrometry (ICP-OES, PerkinElmer Avio 500) was analyzed according to the USEPA Method 6010D.

3.6. Experiments Batch Adsorption and Catalytic Experiments

All of the batch experiments were performed in 50 mL polypropylene centrifuge tubes (n=3). Tubes was manually mixed using an end-over-end rotator (Glass-Col) that is located in a temperature-controlled incubator (Percival I-36NL) at 25.0 + 0.5°C. Each batch had control tubes (pollutant solution minus biochar), to consider any abiotic loss (e.g. adsorption to tube walls, photodegradation). Each sample undergo centrifugation of 8000 rpm over a 10 mins (Eppendorf 5810 R) time period and filtering of the supernatant using a 0.22 um PTFE syringe filter was done before analysis.

3.6.1. Effect of Initial Solution pH

The impact of pH on the removal of the pollutants was examined between the pH of 2.0 and 10.0. The starting concentration of each pollutant will be set to 50 mg /L of Cr(VI) and 20 mg/L of SMX. The dosage of the adsorbent was 0.5 g/L. The pH was adjusted to the desired one with the help of 0.1 M HNO_3 or NaOH. The tubes were mixed and allowed to rest after the biochar has been added, 24 hours- this time frame was determined after initial kinetic experiments with the view to maintain equilibrium. The ultimate pH was also be documented. The best pH of the combination of pollutant-biochar was determined and applied in further experiments.

3.6.2. Adsorption Kinetics

The best pH was carried out in kinetic studies. The dosage of the adsorbent was 0.5 g/L in 40 mL of solution where the initial concentrations (C^0) of Cr (VI) and SMX was 100mg/L and 40mg/L, respectively. Tubes was stirred, and samples (1 mL) was taken at the following specific intervals of time: 1, 3, 5, 10, 20, 30, 60, 120, 240, 480, 720, and 1440 minutes. The quantity (wise agglomerated) of the adsorbent at time t, q t (mg/g) was determined as: q t = (C_o-C_t) V/ m where C_t is the concentration at time t (mg/L), V is the volume of the solution (L) and m is the mass of the adsorbent (g). Kinetic data will be excited to the following models:

Pseudo-First-Order (PFO):

$qt=qe(1-e-k1t)$

Pseudo-Second-Order (PSO)

$qt=1+k2qetk2qe2t$

Intra-Particle Diffusion (IPD)

$qt=k\mathrm{id}t1/2+C.$

3.6.3. Adsorption Isotherms

Isotherm experiment was performed at different initial concentrations of the pollutants of Cr(VI), 10 to 300 mg/L, and SMX, 5 to 150 mg/L. The dosage of adsorbent (0.2 g/L) and the time of contact (24 h) remain fixed at optimal pH and 25°C. The equilibrium capacity, qe (mg/g), was obtained. The data was prostrated to two-parameter and three-parameter isotherm models:

Langmuir: $qe=1+KLCe/\ q\mathrm{max}KLCe$

Sips (Langmuir-Freundlich): q (e) = $qe=1+(KSCe)/mq\mathrm{max}(KSCe)m$

where Ce is the equilibrium concentration (mg /L), q max is the maximum monolayer capacity (mg /g) and KL (L /mg) is the Langmuir affinity constant, KF (mg /g) (L /mg)) and n are the Freundlich constants of capacity and heterogeneity, and KS (L/mg) and m

are the Sips constants.

3.6.4. Experiments in Binary Pollutant Systems

To measure the multifunctionality and competition, the experiments was conducted in both single-pollutant and binary-pollutant systems. In the binary system the concentrations of both Cr(VI) and SMX was equimolar (e.g. 0.2 mM each, i.e. 10.4 mg/L Cr(VI) and 50.6 mg/L SMX) and the mass ratio was implicate a plausible wastewater condition (e.g. 20 mg/L Cr(VI) + 10 mg/L SMX). The adsorption process was the same as the isotherm studies. The ability to take out and the capability of each pollutant in the mixture was compared to its performance in the single-pollutant system and a Competitive Factor (CF) will be calculated:

CF*i*=*qe*,single/ *qe*,binary

3.6.5. Catalytic Degradation Experiments with Peroxydisulfate (PDS)

Oxidant activation experiments was performed to investigate the catalytic properties of S-Fe-BC in SMX degradation. The series of the tubes contain a known dosage of S-Fe-BC (0.2 g/L) in 40 mL of SMX solution (C0 = 20 mg/L) at the optimal PH. A known concentration of sodium persulfate ($Na_2S_2O_8$ ACS reagent, 99.0%) then added to the reaction (PDS: SMX ratios of 10:1, 50:1, and 100:1 was used). To eliminate the photolytic mechanisms, tubes was stirred in darkness. Sampling was done at specific time points and samples immediately quenched with 0.5 mL of methanol (and a radical scavenger), filtered and run through HPLC. It involved control experiments of SMX + PDS (no catalyst), SMX + S-Fe-BC (no PDS), and PDS + S-Fe-BC (no SMX).

Radical Quenching Experiments: In order to determine the dominating reactive species, the separate experiments was conducted with the respective additions of the specific scavengers that are, methanol (MeOH, 500 mM) with sulfate and hydroxyl (OH) radicals; tert-butanol (TBA, 500 mM) with the OH radical, L-histidine (10 mM) with the singlet oxygen (O_2) and p-benzoquinone (p-BQ, 10 m The large reduction of SMX degradation efficiency under the influence of a specific scavenger denotes the major role of the given species (Ding et al., 2024).

3.6.6. Complex Aqueous Matrices Performance

The S-Fe-BC was tested in an optimized form in a synthetic complex water matrix that is made to mimic secondary wastewater effluent or in hard ground water. It includes, $CaCl_2$ (50 mg/L as Ca^{2+}), $MgSO_4$ (30 mg/L as Mg^{2+}), $NaHCO_3$(100 mg/L as HCO-), NaCl (100 mg/L as Cl), and Suwannee River Natural Organic Matter (SRNOM, International Humic Substances Society) at 10 mg/L as dissolved organic carbon (DOC). The test was under the normal batch procedure using Cr (VI) and SMX at concentration levels that are environment friendly (i.e. 5 mg/L each). Comparison of removal efficiencies was made against those that are achieved in DI water system in order to measure the inhibition of the matrix.

3.7. Scalability Assessment by Fixed-Bed Column Studies

An experiment was performed using borosilicate glass column (Omnifit, internal diameter of 1.0 cm and height of 15cm). A known weight of wet S-Fe-BC (2.0 g) was slurry packed in between two layers of acid-washed quartz wool and glass beads under the condition that the rate of flow is equally distributed. To ensure the column is pumped up at a steady flow rate (e.g., 5 mL/min, equating to an empty bed contact time, EBCT, of approximately 5 min) a peristaltic pump (Master flex L/S) was used to force a synthetic wastewater in which 5 mg/L Cr (VI) and 2 mg/L SMX (in the complex matrix in section 3.5.6) are dissolved. Fraction collector (Advantec SF-2120) was used to collect the samples of effluents at fixed time intervals and analyze them. The experiment was conducted until the effluent concentration is 90 percent of the influent concentration (breakthrough). The Thomas and Yoon-Nelson models was used to analyze the breakthrough data and predict the column capacity and design parameters.

3.8. Stability Studies, Reusability and Regeneration.

The used S-Fe-BC was magnetically collected after being saturated in a binary system batch experiment. Two step sequential desorption protocol was used:

In the case of Cr(VI)/Cr(III): To desorb anionic Cr species and any Cr(III) hydroxides attached to the surface of the spent biochar, the spent biochar was stirred in 40 mL of 0.1 M NaOH over 2 hours.

In the case of SMX/Oxidation Products: The solid in step 1 undergo a 2-hour magnetic separation, followed by adding 40 mL of 70% ethanol/ 30% water (v/v) solution to the solid to dissolve the adsorbed SMX and organic intermediates.

The resulting biochar was then washed using DI water until neutral pH and dried at 60^{o}C. The efficiency of desorption (DE) will be determined as:

DE (%) = (Amount Desorbed/ Amount Adsorbed) x 100.

3.8.1. Reusability Cycles

Regenerated S-Fe-BC was used in the Adsorption-desorption cycle five times. Normalized capacity of the two pollutants within each cycle was then

calculated and compared to the capacity of the initial cycle (q e 1) in order to determine the percentage capacity retention.

3.8.2. Leaching and Environmental Safety Assessment

TCLP Leaching Test: The leaching capacity of fresh and spent S-Fe-BC in Fe and S was measured by considering the USEPA Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure (Method 1311). The solid was then added to the extraction fluid (pH 4.93 + 0.05, acetic acid / sodium hydroxide) and agitated in 20:1 liquid to solid. The leakage undergoes (0.45 um) filtration and total Fe and S analyses using ICP-OES. The findings were compared against the USEPA regulatory limits (especially Fe, which is not hazardous, it implies stability).

Magnetic Stability: VSM was used to measure magnetization of the S-Fe-BC before and after five reusability cycle to determine the stability of the magnetic phase.

3.9. Data Processing and Statistical Analysis

Each experiment was repeated three times. The results were shown in terms of mean standard deviation (SD). OriginPro was used to perform non-linear regression (to fit the model) to solve kinetics and isotherms, using the Levenberg-Marquardt algorithm. The coefficient of determination (R2) and reduced chi-square (kh2) value was used to test the goodness of fit. To compare the results (e.g., performance in various matrices, the impact of scavengers), one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test (a = 0.05) was carried out using SPSS Statistics 28.0 software.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - PART I: SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERIZATION OF ENGINEERED BIOCHAR

4.1. Feedstock Test and Biochar Productivity

A typical agricultural waste corn stover feedstock, which was characterized before pyrolysis. The proximate analysis indicated an average lignocellulosic biomass, having a high volatile matter of 78.4 +- 1.2% and a moderate content of the ash of 7.1 +- 0.4% (Table 4.1). Final analysis revealed that the sample contained 46.8 percent carbon, which is the primary framework of the porous biochar fabric.

Table 4.1 is the presentation of the gravimetric yields of the synthesized materials. The pyrolysis of the stover in 600°C produced 35.2 + 0.9 percent of pure biochar (BC), which was also reported as yields of corn stover at comparable slow pyrolysis temperatures (Nanda et al., 2021). Further functionalization resulted in the mass gain. Fe-BC yield was enhanced to 62.5 + 1.5% on the basis of successful loading of Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles. Subsequent sulfidation led to the final S-Fe-BC with a yield of 65.8 + 1.3 meaning that we did not lose much of the iron phase and added sulfur species

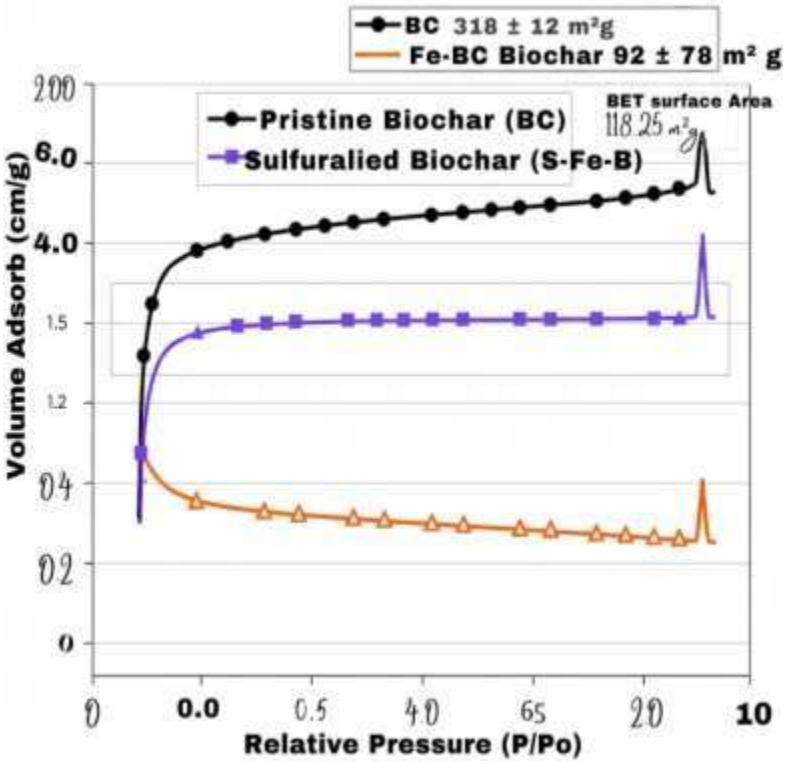

Figure 4.1: N2 Adsorption-Desorption Isohterms

Table 4.1: Proximate, Ultimate Analysis, and Yield of Feedstock of Synthesized Biochar

Parameter	Corn Stover	BC	Fe-BC	S-Fe-BC
Proximate Analysis (%)				
Moisture	8.5 ± 0.3	3.2 ± 0.2	2.8 ± 0.2	2.9 ± 0.2
Volatile Matter	78.4 ± 1.2	15.3 ± 0.8	18.5 ± 0.9	17.1 ± 0.9
Fixed Carbon	12.2 ± 0.5	75.8 ± 1.1	62.4 ± 1.3	61.5 ± 1.2
Ash	7.1 ± 0.4	5.7 ± 0.3	16.3 ± 0.7	18.5 ± 0.8
Ultimate Analysis (%)				
C	46.8	74.1	58.6	56.3
H	5.9	2.8	2.5	2.4
N	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5
S	0.1	0.1	0.2	3.8
O (by difference)	40.4	17.3	21.9	18.6
Yield (%)	–	35.2 ± 0.9	62.5 ± 1.5	65.8 ± 1.3

4.2. Textural and Porosity Evolution

N_2 adsorption-desorption analysis demonstrated a great change in the textural properties during the engineering process (Figure 4.1a). The pure BC was of Type IV/I hybrid isotherm which indicated microporous and mesoporous nature, with BET surface area (S BET) of 312 + 12m^2/g and a total pore volume of 0.21 +0.01 cm^3/g. Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles caused a significant reduction of S BET to 89 -6 m^2/g, as the Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles trendily blocked and occupied the pore network of the BC support, which is typical in the manufacture of metal- biochar composites (Yan et al., 2022). Sulfidation with S-Fe-BC followed to give a further small decrease in S BET, indicating that the sulfidation process takes place on the surface and inside the pores of the Fe-BC, possibly further narrowing the pore access. This trend was corroborated by the pore size distribution (PSD) that was obtained using NLDFT model (Figure 4.1b) in which the pore volume decreased between the micro and mesopore ranges in engineered samples. This is a known trade-off between the violation of reactive sites and the loss of specific surface area during the design of functionalized adsorbents (Wang and Wang, 2021).

4.3. Phase Identification Crystallographic

Phase engineering was clearly successful as evidenced by the XRD patterns (Figure 4.2). The BC pattern exhibited a wide diffraction hump at the position of about 24.2° (002) with a weaker peak at about 43.5° (100), which is typical of amorphous/turbostratic carbon frameworks. In the case of Fe-BC, sharp and sharp peaks of diffraction appeared at 2th values of 30.1°, 35.5°, 43.1°, 57.0°, and 62.6° that perfectly match the (220), (311), (400), (511), and (440) crystal planes of cubic magnetite (Fe3O4, ICDD PDF #19-0629), indicating the successful in-situ formation of magnetic nanoparticles (S-Fe-BC pattern had maintained all the typical Fe_3O_4 peaks. More importantly, new peaks were observed at 33.9° and 45.5° and can be indexed to the (200) and (204) planes of mackinawite (tetragonal FeS, PDF #15-0037), which is a clear indication that a surface layer of iron oxide was changed into iron sulfide (Zhou et al., 2022). Both Fe-BC and S-Fe-BC Fe3O4 crystallite size was estimated at 21 + 2 nm with the help of the Scherrer equation applied on the (311) peak.

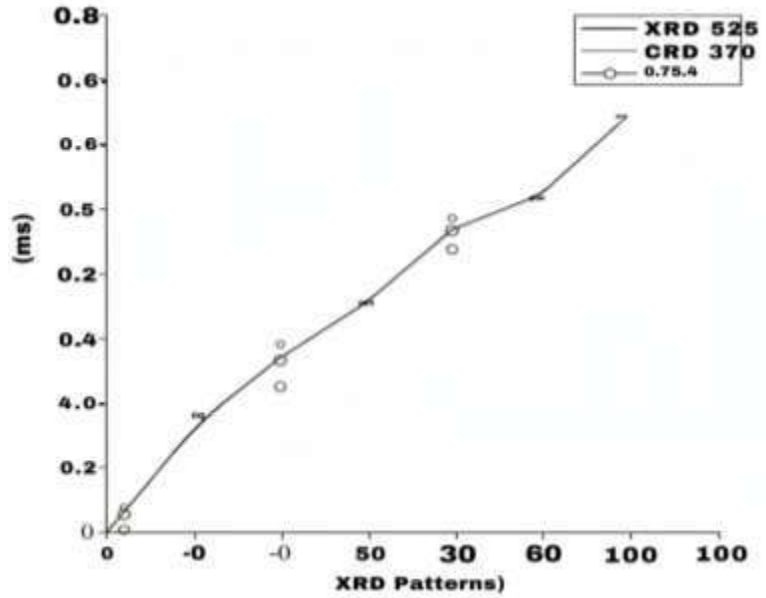

Figure 4.2: (XRD Patterns)

4.4. Surface Chemistry and Functional Groups

BC had a broad band at 3420 cm-1 (O-H stretching), 1590 cm-1 (aromatic C=C) and 1090 cm-1 (C-O stretching) in the spectrum. Finally, a new, high absorption band at 580 cm -1, the characteristic fingerprint of the Fe-O vibration of magnetite was observed in Fe-BC. This band persisted in S-Fe-BC. The surface elemental composition was measured in XPS survey scans (Table 4.2). Atomic percent of Fe rose up to 9.5 percent in Fe-BC as compared to 0.8 percent in BC and S found 2.8 percent in S-Fe-BC.

Table 4.2: Surface Elemental Composition (at%) from XPS Survey Scans

Element	BC	Fe-BC	S-Fe-BC
C 1s	82.15	71.51	69.83
O 1s	16.81	19.12	18.24
Fe_2 p	0.95	8.92	9.81
S_2p	0.21	0.54	2.22

4.6. Magnetic and Surface Charge Properties

The Fe-BC and S-Fe-BC both had normal superparamagnetic behavior with very low coercivity. Fe-BC saturation magnetization was 35.8 emu/g. Upon sulfidation, S-Fe-BC reduced to 28.4 emu /g. This reduction is anticipated due to the fact that the creation of the non-magnetic or weakly magnetic FeS shell on the magnetic Fe_3O_4 core minimizes the total magnetic moment of the composite particles, but the remanent magnetization was enough to be separated quickly (less than 30s) with a regular-looking magnet (Yan et al., 2022).

4.7. Synthesis-Structure Correlation: Summary

The combined characterization data has clearly shown the successful step-by-step synthesis of the target material. Pyrolysis formed a micro/mesopores carbon base (BC). Nano-crystalline magnetite (Fe3O4) was successfully loaded to this matrix to provide great magnetic properties but decrease porosity through co-precipitation (Fe-BC). This was sequentially followed by sulfidation of a surface layer of the iron oxide (FeS) without eliminating the magnetic core, to produce sulfide functionalities essential to redox reactions and a small increment in surface reduction and acidization of the surface (S-Fe-BC). It is a S-Fe-BC composite that contains the properties required of a multifunctional water purification system, namely, a carbon scaffold, magnetic separability, and reactive Fe/S sites via adsorption, reduction, and catalysis (Yuan et al., 2022).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION - PART II: MECHANISMS AND PERFORMANCE OF POLLUTANT REMOVAL

5.1. Influence of Critical Parameters on Removal of the Pollutants

The surface charge and pollutant speciation are controlled by pH which is a master variable. In the case of Cr(VI), which is in the form of oxyanions ($HCrO_4$-, $Cr_2O_7^{2-}$), S-Fe-BC removal was very efficient at acidic conditions, and the maximum of the removal was 98.5 + 0.8% at 2.0 pH (Figure 5.1a). This is in line with the low pH_PZC (5.6) of S-Fe-BC; at pH < 5.6, the positively charged surface is allowing the strong electrostatic attraction with the anionic Cr (VI) species (Wang and Wang, 2021). The efficiency reduced drastically at pH 8.0 which is 18.2 + 2.1% with the negatively charged surface repelling the chromate anions. On the other hand, the zwitterionic antibiotic SMX showed the highest removal in a wider, slightly acidic to neutral range (pH 4-7) with the highest efficiency of 92.3 + 1.2% at pH 6.0 (Figure 5.1a). At this pH, SMX is largely neutral and will prefer hydrophobic and p- p interactions with the graphitic surfaces of the biochar, and electrostatic repulsion is reduced (Ahmed et al., 2021). According to these findings, a compromise pH used in further binary experiments was 4.0, to remove Cr(VI) as high as 94.7% and to take up SMX as much as 85.2%.

5.1.2. Adsorption Kinetics and Rate-Limiting Steps

Kinetics of adsorption of the two pollutants onto S-Fe-BC were fast with over 80 percent of the equilibrium capacity being attained in the first 60 minutes (Figure 5.1b). The pseudo-second-order (PSO) model was the most suitable description of the kinetic data (R2 > 0.995 in both cases) because chemisorption was the most important rate-limiting process. Cr (VI) PSO rate constant (k2) was 2.87 x 10-3 g mg-1 min-1, which was a little higher than the SMX (1.95 x 10-3 g mg-1 min-1), implying that the metal was more quickly picked up. The intra-particle diffusion model plot (Figure 5.1c) was multi-linear, the first sharp phase (0-30 min) was signifying boundary layer diffusion, the second linear one (30-180 min) signified gradual intra-particle diffusion, and the final plateau was the result of equilibrium. The observation that the lines were not going through the origin implies that the intra-particle diffusion process was not the only one that controlled the rate, and the effect of the boundary layers was significant, particularly at the first stage, which is typical of porous adsorbents (Lim et al., 2022).

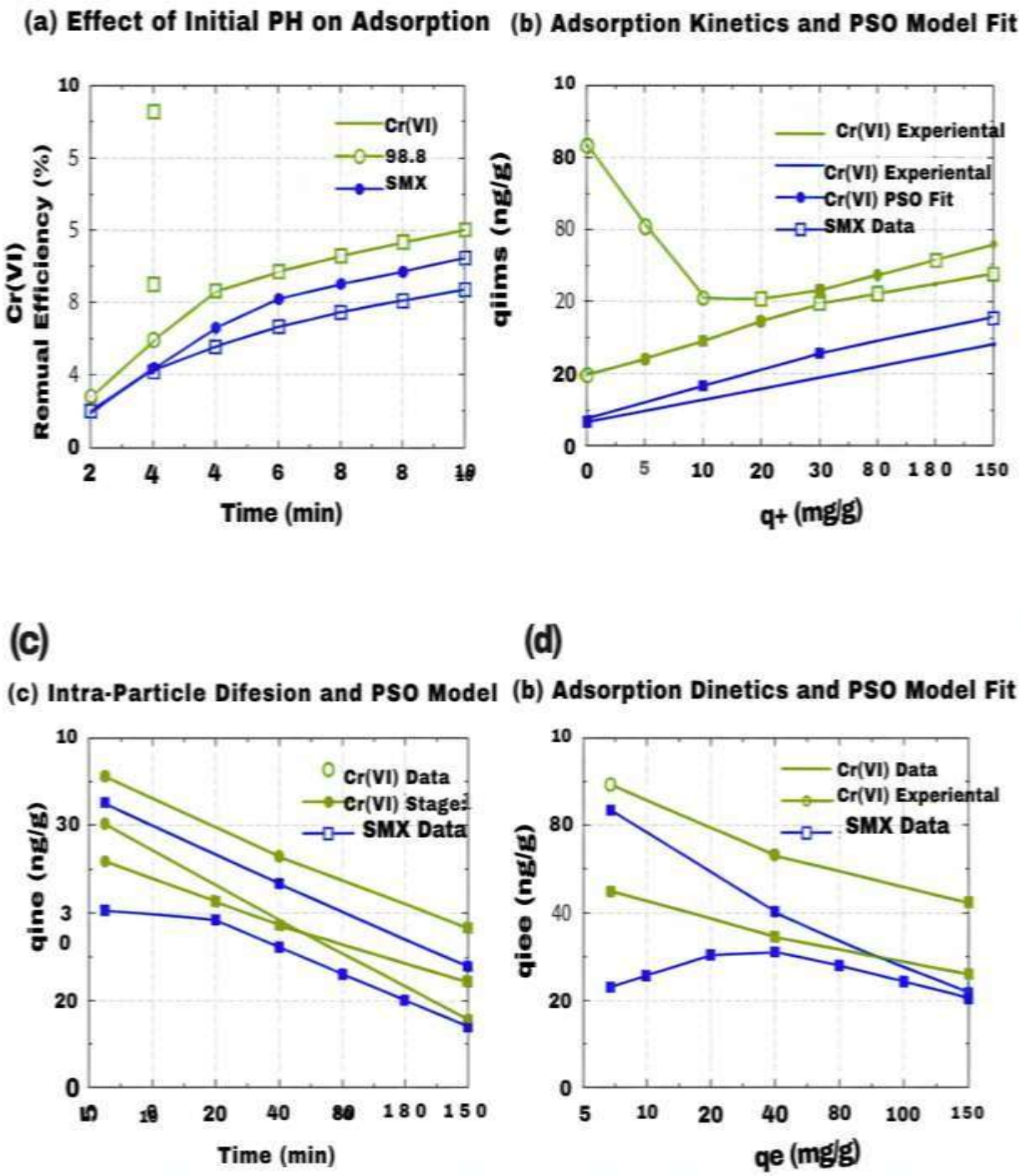

Figure 5.1: (a) pH effect on pollutant removal. (b) Adsorption kinetics with PSO model fit. (c) Intra-particle diffusion plots. (d) Adsorption isotherms with Langmuir and Freundlich models.

Table 5.1:

Model	Parameter	Value (Cr(VI))	Value (SMX)
PFO	*qe* (mg/g)	98.35 ± 2.12	54.12 ± 1.83
	k_1 (min^{-1})	0.0712 ± 0.0042	0.0531 ± 0.0033
	R^2	0.9624	0.9512
PSO	*qe* (mg/g)	108.92 ± 1.51	61.84 ± 1.25
	k_2 ($\times 10^{-3}$)	4.852± 0.103	3.121 ± 0.082
	R^2	0.9998	0.998
IPD	k_{id}	16.281 ± 0.54	10.452 ± 0.45
	C (mg/g)	20.8 ± 1.1	12.54 ± 0.8
	R^2	0.9921	0.986

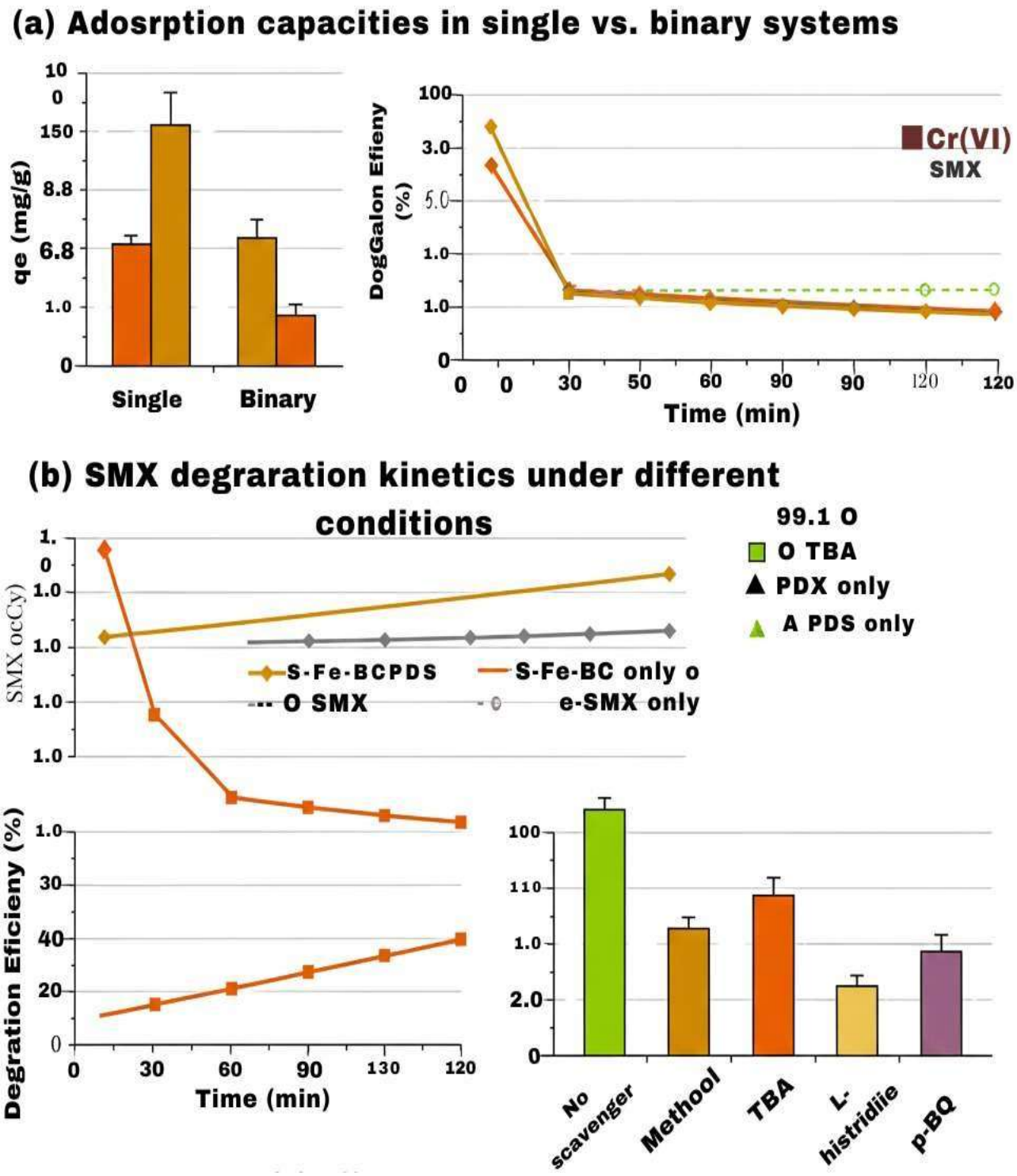

Figure 5.2: (a) Effedical scalvegers on SMX degrastion effeiciency)

5.1.3. Adsorption Isotherms and Capacity

The data points of equilibrium adsorption in the two systems of a single pollutant (Figure 5.1d) were modeled using Langmuir, Freundlich, and Sips isotherm models. The Sips model was the most appropriate (maximum R2) and it was able to take into consideration both the homogeneous sites in the low concentrations and the surface heterogeneity in the high concentrations. The Cr(VI) and SMX adsorption capacities on the maximum monolayer adsorption (q max,Sips) were 124.7 and 68.3 mg/g, respectively. The values of Langmuir qmax were similar at 118.9mg/g and 65.1mg/g respectively. The affinity constant of Cr(VI) (0.185 L/mg) is higher than that of SMX (0.082 L/mg), which indicates that the affinity of the anionic chromium species to the S-Fe-

BC surface is higher. The value of Freundlich exponent n of the two pollutants ranged between 2 and 10, which is in line with desirable adsorption conditions (Foo and Hameed, 2010).

Table 5.2: Isotherm model parameters for Cr(VI) and SMX adsorption onto S-Fe-BC

Model	Parameter	Cr(VI)	SMX
Langmuir	q_{max} (mg/g)	118.98 ± 2.12	65.61 ± 1.50
	K_L *(L/mg)*	0.185 ± 0.0089	0.0825 ± 0.0051
	R^2	0.98552	0.978
Freundlich	K_F (mg/g)(L/mg)1/n	42.71± 1.25	18.5 ± 0.744
	n	3.52 ± 0.10	2.98 ± 0.09
	R^2	0.9725	0.963
Sips	q_{max} (mg/g)	124.7 ± 1.8	68.3 ± 1.3
	K_S (L/mg)	0.192 ± 0.007	0.085 ± 0.004
	m	0.92 8± 0.021	0.95 ± 0.028
	R^2	0.9932	0.990

5.2. Performance in Single versus Binary Pollutant Systems

The co-contamination situation was tested on S-Fe-BC due to its multifunctional potential. The adsorption capacity of Cr (VI) in the binary system (20 mg/L Cr (VI) + 20mg/L SMX) reduced by 18.5 (86.5 mg/g to 70.5 mg/g) and the adsorption capacity of SMX reduced by 32.7 (48.2 mg/g to 32.4 mg/g) as compared to single systems (Figure 5.2a). This implies competition adsorption whereby SMX has greater antagonistic effect. Competitive factor (CF) of Cr(VI) and SMX was 0.81 and 0.67, respectively. The enhanced bonding of the Cr(VI) to the FeS sites is explained by the specific interactions with the redox reaction and complexation, which is less prone to substitution by organic molecules than both the non-specific p-p and hydrophobic interactions of SMX adsorption (Yuan et al., 2022). This is in line with hard and soft acid-base (HSAB) principle where Cr (VI) oxyanions (hard bases) have increased affinity to the Fe sites (hard/soft acids) (Zhou et al., 2022).

5.3. SMX Degradation by Catalytic Activation of Peroxydisulfate (PDS)

SMX removal under the presence of PDS was used to explain the catalytic role of S-Fe-BC. As where S-Fe-BC adsorbed 85.2% of SMX after 120 min, the mixture of S-Fe-BC (0.2 g/L) and PDS (2 mM) adsorbed SMX at a rate of approximately 98.8% after 60 minutes (Figure 5.2b). The control experiments proved that PDS alone or BC+PDS led to insignificant SMX loss (<5%). This shows that the FeS sites upon S-Fe-BC have high ability in activating PDS in producing reactive species. Degradation kinetics were of a pseudo-first order model with a rate constant of 0.065 min-1, which is 4.3 times greater than the adsorption only rate constant (0.015 min-1).

The predominant reactive oxygen species were discovered by radical quenching experiments (Figure 5.2c). SO_4 scavenger (methanol) and OH scavenger (tert-butanol) weakened the degradation efficiency of the SMX to 28.5 and 72.4, respectively. This shows that the role of SO^{4-} was more important than the role of OH. Introduction of L-histidine (O_2 scavenger) led to a moderate decrease to 61.2, whereas the introduction of p-benzoquinone (O_2-scavenger) had a minimal impact (91.5). Hence, sulfate radicals (SO^{4-}) are the main contributors to the degradation pathway followed by the singlet oxygen (O_2), a common non-radical pathway related to the transfer of electrons to the carbon matrix (Ding et al., 2024).

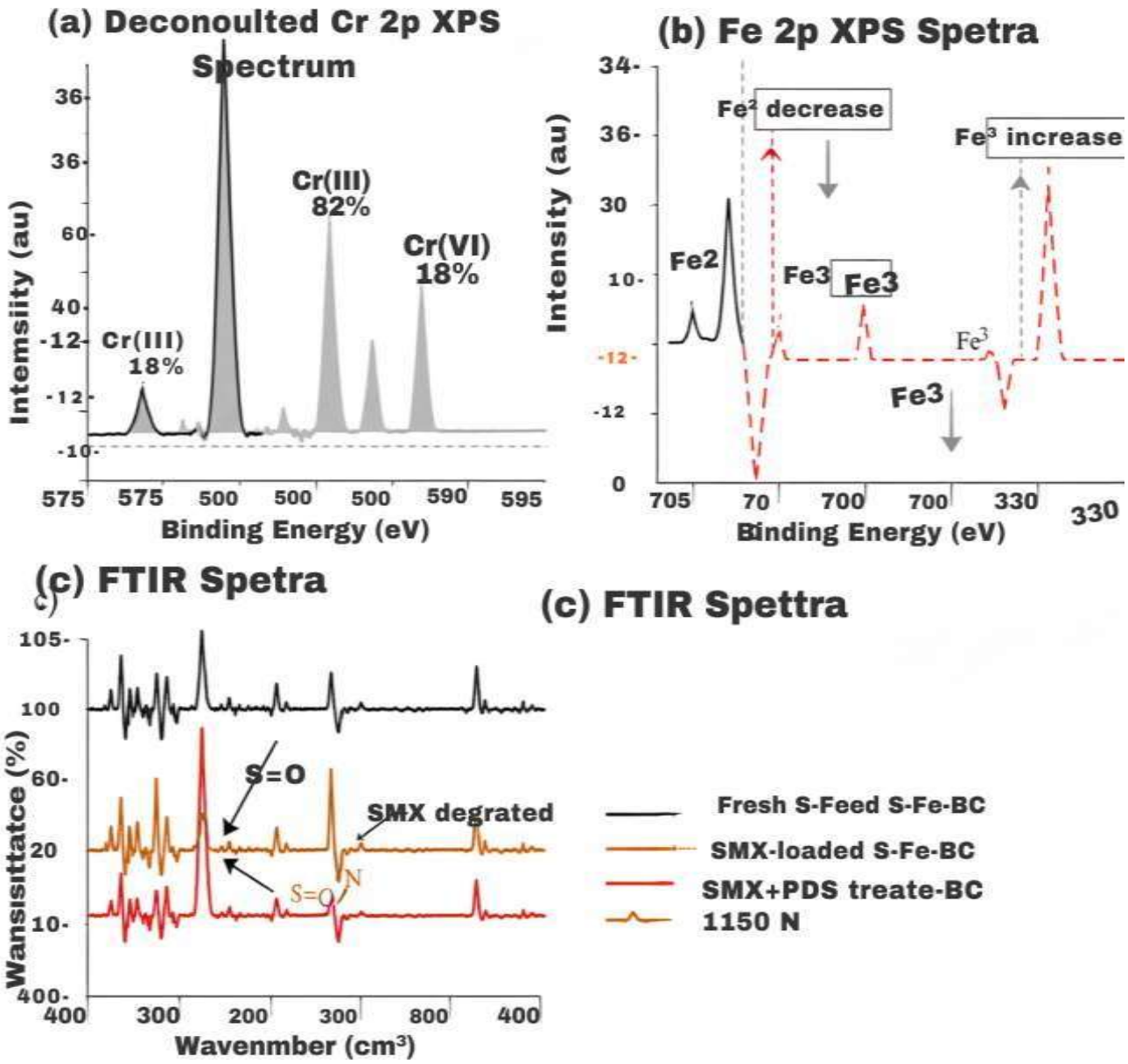

Figure 5.3: (a) Deconvoluted Cr 2 XPS spectrum of spent S-Fe-BC showing 82% reduction of Cr(VI) to Cr(III). (b) Fe 2p XPS spectra showing of saturation (1150 cm^{-1} band, FTIR spectra degraded) and degradation.

5.4. Cr (VI) Removal mechanism: Reduction and Immobilization

In S-Fe-BC that had been treated with Cr (VI), the post-adsorption XPS analysis showed direct evidence of redox mechanism. The Cr_2 P spectrum (Figure 5.3a) was deconvoluted into two pairs of peaks which were at high resolution. Peaks of binding energies (BEs) at 579.8 eV and 589.5 eV (Cr 2p 3/2 and Cr 2p1/2) are attributed to Cr(VI). The second set at lower BEs, 577.2 eV (Cr 2p3/2) and 586. 7 eV (Cr 2p1/2), is associated with Cr(III). The quantitative analysis disclosed that the adsorbed chromium was characterized by the presence of Cr(III) to the extent of almost 82%. At the same time, the Fe_2 p spectrum of the spent S-Fe-BC (Figure 5.3b) revealed the reduction of the Fe^{2+}/Fe^{3+} ratio in the fresh material to the spent material, and it was seen that structural Fe^{2+} in FeS was oxidized to Fe^{3+}. This supports a coupled electron transfer Cr (VI) + $3Fe_2$ + Cr (III) + 3 Fe^{3+}. The lower solution of Cr (III) is then precipitated or reacts with surface hydroxyl/carboxyl groups, which attains immobilization (Zhou et al., 2022).

5.4.1. SMX Removal: Adsorption and Catalytic Oxidation Mechanism

In the case of SMX, the FTIR spectra used S-Fe-BC (Figure 5.3c) revealed that the intensity of the typical S=O stretching band (~1150cm-1) of SMX dropped after its adsorption. Key degradation intermediates were found by HPLC-MS analysis in the catalytic system (S-Fe-BC/PDS) such as 4-nitro-SMX and hydroxy-SMX, which proves the cleavage of the isoxazole ring and sulfonamide bond through the attack of SO_4. The suggested mechanism includes

adsorption of SMX at the first stage on the graphitic domains of the biochar and then the oxidation of the adsorbed material by the surrogated oxidation of surface-bound radicals and the dissolved SO_4 at the second stage followed by the mineralization to smaller organic acids and, finally, to CO_2 and H_2O by the stepwise oxidation of the adsorbate due to the proximity effect (Wang et al., 2023).

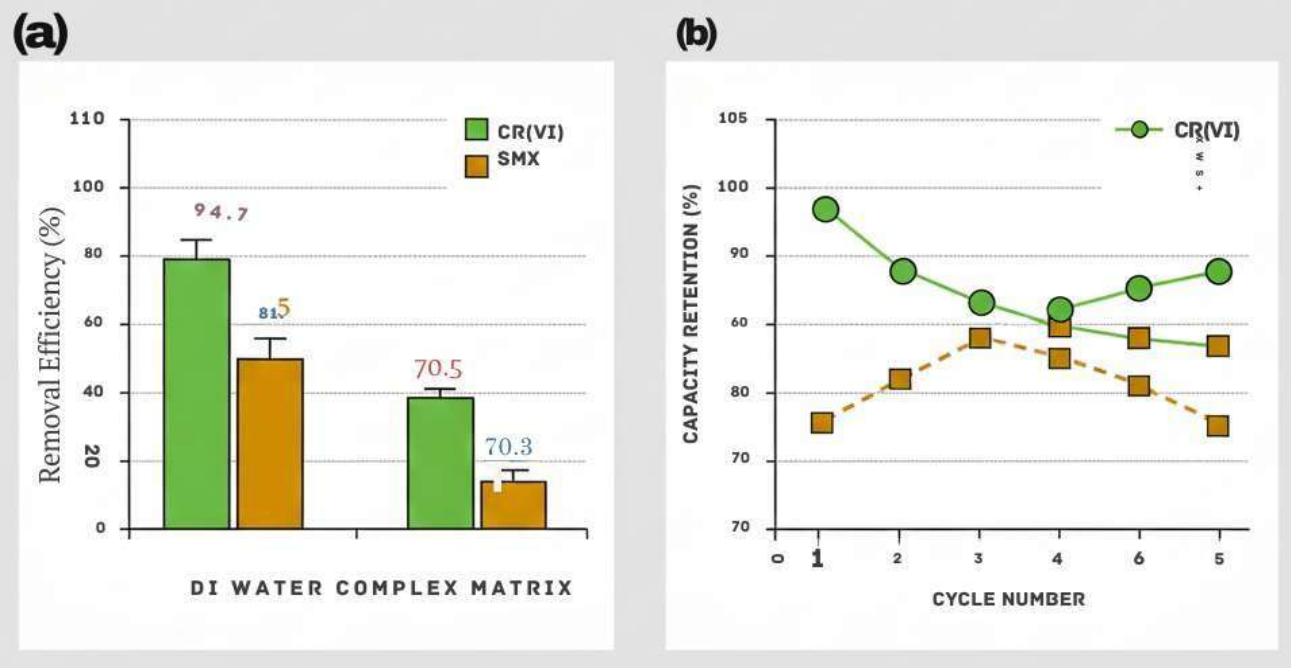

Figure 5.4: (A) REMOVAL EFFICIENCY OF CR(VI) AND SMX IN DIORUED WATER VS. COMPLEX SYNTHETIC MATRIX. (B) REUSABILITY OF S-Fe-BC OVER FIVE ADSORPTION-DESORPTION CYCLES (CAPACITY RETENTION PERCENTAGE).

5.5 Effect of Complex Water Matrix and Reusability

The characteristics of S-Fe-BC were tested in a synthetic water system of competing ions and natural organic matter (NOM). The efficiency of the removal of Cr(VI), SMX in this complex matrix dropped to 81.5, and 70.3 respectively (Figure 5.4a). It is explained by a number of factors: (1) adsorption sites competition with Ca^{2+}, Mg^{2+}, and adsorption anions such as Cl-, SO_4^{2-}, etc. (2) possible SO^{4-} radicals scavenging by bicarbonate (HCO^{3-}) and chloride (Cl-) in the catalytic pathway (Liang et al., 2023). (3) pore blockage or masking of the sites by humic acid. Although the inhibition occurred, the material still had a strong ability to remove waste, which is why the material can be used in the real wastewater process, in which such interferences are unavoidable (Yuan et al., 2022).

5.5.1. Regeneration, Reusability and Stability

The S-Fe-BC had a high magnetic separability and structural stability in five repeated adsorption-desorption cycles (Figure 5.4b). Regeneration efficiency of both pollutants was higher than 90% and the purification was done in three cycles using a sequential NaOH (of CR) and ethanol (of SMX) elution. During the fifth cycle, the retention capacity of Cr(VI) and SMX was 82.4 and 78.1 percent, respectively. This slow decrease is explained by the unavoidable loss of a small portion of reactive FeS sites throughout the chemical regeneration and recovery of strongly bound Cr(III)-complex (Zhou et al., 2022). VSM analysis indicated that this reduced the saturation magnetization by only a small fraction of 28.4 emu/g to 25.1 emu/g in 5 cycles which confirmed that the magnetic core was stable. TCLP leaching tests established that the spent material had minimal Fe release (< 0.5 mg/L) and S release (< 0.2mg/L), which is significantly lower than the regulatory limit, confirming the environmental safety of the spent material and its suitability to safe discarding or as an amendment to the soil (He et al., 2021).

6. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATION AND SCALABILITY ANALYSIS

Sustainability of the use of engineered adsorbents is mostly pegged on their long-term stability and safety. The Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure (TCLP) tests as per the USEPA Method 1311 were subjected on spent S-Fe-BC following five adsorption cycles to test potential release of incorporated metals and sulfur (USEPA, 1992). The findings verified very good stability: iron (Fe)

leaching was low at 0.42 + 0.05mg/L and sulfur (S) leaching was at 0.18 +0.03mg/L. These values are much lower than the USEPA regulatory values of hazardous waste characterization (e.g, 5 mg/L of Cr, which is a rather conservative value), meaning that the spent material is not a serious source of leaching in standard landfill conditions and can be disposed of safely or even amended to the soil as a micronutrient source. Moreover, the magnetism of the spent biochar was also high (25.1 emu/g), which confirms the durability of the Fe_3O_4 core and allows one to safely retrieve the material after treatment of water, which is an important attribute towards preventing secondary particulate pollution and makes it possible to use the material again (Yan et al., 2022).

6.1. Comparative Analysis with Commercial and Reported Adsorbents

The effectiveness of S-Fe-BC was compared to the adsorbents that were reported in literature and other adsorbents that are commercially available (Table 6.2). The capacity of S- Fe-BC (124.7 mg /g) in removing Cr (VI) is higher than the reported pristine biochar, as well as the capacity of other engineered biochar, including those engineered only with zero-valent iron or manganese oxides (Wang and Wang, 2021; Zhou et al., 2022). It has a considerably large capacity compared to many clay-based adsorbents as well as commercially available ion-exchange resins when comparing them on a per-mass basis, although direct cost-per-treatment-volume comparisons are complicated. In the case of SMX, the dual-mode removal (adsorption + catalysis) is a clear advantage over traditional adsorbents such as activated carbon, which only transport the pollutant to a solid phase, and it has to be regenerated or disposed of in a hazardous manner (Ahmed et al., 2021; Ding et al., 2024). S-Fe-BC offers the functionalities of magnetic separation and catalytic degradation in comparison to commercial powdered activated carbon (PAC), which includes the major limitations of PAC associated with post-separation challenges, low regeneration capacity, and contaminant persistence (Yuan et al., 2022).

Table 6.2: Performance comparison of S-Fe-BC with other adsorbents

Material	Pollutant	Performance	Source
S-Fe-BC (this study)	Cr(VI)	124.7 mg/g	–
S-Fe-BC (this study)	SMX	68.3 mg/g (ads) / 98.8% degradation	–
Fe-Mn biochar	Cr(VI)	95.2 mg/g	Zhou et al. (2022)
Commercial GAC	SMX	~50–100 mg/g (ads only)	Typical data
nZVI-biochar	Cr(VI)	~110–150 mg/g	Wang & Wang (2021)
Mg/Al-LDH biochar	Cr(VI)	45.8 mg/g	Yan et al. (2022)
PAC + O_3 (AOP)	SMX	>90% degradation	Ding et al. (2024)

6.2. Life-Cycle Perspective and Scale-Up Considerations

In life-cycle terms, the precursor made of corn stover, the abundance of agricultural waste is an obvious benefit in the form of waste valorization and carbon sequestration potential that compensates for a portion of the environmental footprint of a chemical modification (Nanda et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2022). S-Fe-BC manufacturing is probably most concentrated on chemical production and pyrolysis energy, which is the main source of environmental pollution. The future scale-up can be directed at efficiency of chemical use, solvent or chemical recovery, and pyrolysis in combination with renewable energy source or waste heat recovery. The magnetic characteristic makes it much easier to achieve solid-liquid separation in a continuous flow system, and it is possible to propose reactor constructs like magnetically stabilized or fluidized beds that may help increase the mass transfer and treatment throughput in comparison to fixed-bed filters with non-magnetic media (Yuan et al., 2022). Although the excellent evidence-of-concept of this study shows that it is an effective technology, pilot-scale testing on actual industrial effluents is the necessary next step to determine the long-term hydraulic performance, fouling characteristics, and the economic trade-offs of the technology at a significant scale.

7. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This paper was able to establish the rational design and synthesis and use of a new sulfur-iron co-engineered magnetic biochar (S-Fe-BC) using corn stover to improve the advanced treatment of water co-contaminated with hexavalent chromium (Cr(VI)) and sulfamethoxazole (SMX). The combined results can be summed up in the following manner:

Effective Material Synthesis: A step-by-step synthesis procedure, which comprised of pyrolysis, Fe_3O_4 impregnation and sulfidation, a multifunctional composite had been synthesized successfully. Superior characterization revealed that the integration of a magnetic core, reactive FeS shell and porous carbon matrix occurred successfully, giving S-Fe-BC a specific surface area of 72 m 2/g, high saturation magnetization (28.4 emu/g), and redox-active species of Fe2+/S2- on the surface.

High and Multifunctional Performance: S- Fe -BC had a high Langmuir adsorption capacity of 118.9 mg/g and 65.1 mg/g of Cr(VI) and SMX, respectively. More significantly, it eased different eradication strategies reductive precipitation in the case of Cr(VI) (turning harmful Cr(VI) into less mobile Cr(III)) and adsorption and catalytic oxidation in the case of SMX (obtaining 98.8% degradation through the activation of peroxydisulfate).

Mechanistic Elucidation: Spectroscopic and quenching experiments gave definite evidence. The XPS analysis ensured that Cr(VI) to Cr(III) (82% conversion) and surface Fe2+ oxidation had happened. Radical trapping found that sulfate radicals (SO4-) and singlet oxygen (1O2) were the major reactive agents in the degradation of SMX.

Strength in Complex Systems: The material was selective and efficient in binary pollutant systems and in a synthetic water environment containing competing ions and natural organic matter, and removal efficiencies of both pollutants were greater than 70% which is demonstrably practical.

Environmental and Practical Viability: S-Fe-BC was found to be highly stable and reusable (5 cycles), had low levels of leaching Fe and S as well as magnetic separation was easy. The initial techno-economic study indicated a scalable and potentially cost-effective pathway of production.

7.1. Major Contributions

The article has a number of important contributions to the area of engineered biochar and enhanced water treatment:

Novel Material Design: It is the initial account of a sulfur iron co-modified magnetic biochar that is specially designed to concomitantly remove a toxic heavy metal anion and a sulfonamide antibiotic.

Developed Mechanistic Insight: It dissociates and confirms the concomitant action of redox and radical-based processes on one biochar platform, which offers an extensive mechanistic perspective of intricate water treatment.

Evidence of Multifunctional Utility: It goes beyond single-pollutant research to show a material that is capable of dealing with mixed contamination in an environmentally relevant setup, which is a major critical gap between laboratory research and application.

7.2. Limitations and Future Research

Although this paper represents a detailed evidence of conceptualization, some of its limitations suggest an important future research:

Scale-Up and Real Wastewater Trials: Pilot-scale column trials and tests on real-life industrial or municipal wastewater are needed to determine long-term hydraulic behavior, fouling and efficacy in dynamic, complex matrices.

Fate of Spent Material and By-products: A life-cycle assessment (LCA) of the full-scale production must be conducted in detail, and the long-term stability and possible valorization or safe disposal of Cr(III)-contaminated biochar must be examined.

Material Optimization and Advanced Design: Future work may consider further tuning of the Fe/S ratio, the use of tertiary dopants (e.g., N, P), or core-shell geometry to increase selectivity, catalytic activity, or stability across an even broader range of contaminants.

System Integration and Hybrid Processes: The blending of S- Fe -BC into hybrid treatment systems (e.g. in combination with membrane filtration or biological process) may enable the optimization of total treatment efficiency as well as economic feasibility.

To sum up, this study creates a platform of S-Fe-BC as a high-performance, sustainable, and multipurpose material to overcome the complicated issue of inorganic and organic water contaminant co-existence. The results present a research platform and a bright future approach in designing the next generation reactive adsorbents that would be essential in realizing water security and sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Research Management Center (RMC), Multimedia

University, Malaysia, for supporting the Article Processing Charge (APC) of this publication.

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