Synthesis and characterisation of control porosity resorcinol formaldehyde based carbon aerogels under different conditions
Abbas, Qaisar; Mirzaeian, Mojtaba; Swanson, Hannah

Published in:
Materials Science & Smart Materials (MSSM)

Published: 01/01/2018

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

This is an Open Access item distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERISATION OF CONTROL POROSITY RESORCINOL FORMALDEHYDE BASED CARBON AEROGELS UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

Q. Abbas1*, M. Mirzaeian2* and H. Swanson3

1. School of Engineering and Computing, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, UK; email: qaisar.abbas@uws.ac.uk email: mojtaba.mirzaeian@uws.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Highly porous carbon aerogels are synthesised by sol-gel polymerisation of resorcinol (R) and formaldehyde (F) using sodium carbonate (C) as catalyst followed by carbonization under steady flow of argon (Ar). The effect of resorcinol / catalyst (R/C) ratio and carbonization temperature on the porous structure of resultant gels and carbons was investigated using nitrogen adsorption-desorption measurements at -196 ºC. By controlling the R/C ratio between 100 – 500 and carbonization temperature between 800 – 1000 ºC carbon aerogels with specific surface areas (SSA) ranging between 537 – 687 m²g⁻¹ and average pore size in the range of 1.80 – 4.62 nm can be produced. It has been shown that carbonization had significant effect on the porous structure of the resultant carbon aerogels, decreasing the pore size and increasing the microporosity of the carbon due to the shrinkage of the nanostructure and the formation of microporosity within the gel structure. Substantial change in microstructure of carbon aerogels was observed at carbonization temperature of 800 ºC which resulted in highest specific surface area and pore volume without any considerable change in average pore size. BET specific surface area and pore volume increased from 687 to 1775 m²g⁻¹ and 0.24 to 0.94 cm³g⁻¹ respectively whereas the pore size remained constant (around 2nm) after physical activation of the carbon aerogels using CO₂ as an activation agent.

Keywords: Carbon aerogels, Specific surface area, Carbonisation, Activation agent

1 INTRODUCTION

Carbon materials have been used in wide range of application such as adsorbent for gas separation, catalytic processing, water purification, environmental protection and electrode materials for various energy storage devices. Extensive research studies have been conducted in order to produce carbon materials with desired porous properties for their use in practical applications in particular area. However, for each specialised application tailoring of various parameters such, pore size, specific surface area and pore size distribution with ease of processability in a cost effective manner is still a challenge. Resorcinol- formaldehyde (RF) based organic / carbon aerogels first synthesised by Pakela et al[1-3] according to poly-condensation reaction mechanism which is analogous to the sol-gel synthesis of inorganic oxides[4]. The increasing popularity of these aerogels is due to controllability of textural parameters such as surface area and pore size as a functional of different synthesis parameters e.g. type of organic precursor, drying and curing methods and carbonization / activation conditions. By controlling these synthesise parameters carbon aerogels with desired structural properties tailored for each application can be produced [5-7].

In present study, resorcinol- formaldehyde (RF) based organic / carbon aerogels with control porosity have been prepared and effect of various synthesis parameters including resorcinol/ catalyst ratio, carbonisation / activation temperature, CO₂ flow rate on various porous parameters (average pore size, pore size distribution, specific surface area , pore volume and wettability have been assessed.

2 EXPERIMENTAL

2.1 Synthesis of R/F gels

Resorcinol (R) formaldehyde (F) aerogels were prepared by polycondensation reaction between resorcinol and formaldehyde according to the procedure explained elsewhere [5, 8].

2.2 Carbonization of R/F aerogels (RFC)

The dried RF aerogels were carbonized at different temperatures to investigate the effect of pyrolysis conditions on the porous structure of carbon aerogels the procedure explained elsewhere [9].
2.3 Activation of R/F aerogels (RFCA)
Carbon samples were activated by physical activation at different temperatures using CO₂ as activation agent the procedure explained elsewhere [10].

3 PHYSICAL CHARACTERIZATIONS
The porous structure of RF aerogels and carbon was characterized by a Tri-Star adsorption analyser (Micromeritics). The samples were evacuated in a vacuum oven at 80 °C at 5 mbar for 24 h and then they were further purged in a nitrogen flow at elevated temperatures (80 °C for gels samples and 300 °C for carbons) in a Flowprep system (Micromeritics) prior to the adsorption/desorption measurements. BET method was used for surface area measurements, t-plot method was used for micropore analysis, and BJH method using adsorption branch of the isotherm was used to calculate pore size distribution. The total pore volume was determined from the adsorbed volume of nitrogen at saturation pressure (P/P₀ = 0.99) [11].

Contact angle measurements were carried out using a CAM 200 goniometer system manufactured by KSV Ltd based on video captured images and automatic image analysis using CAM software. 6M KOH was used as the probe liquid for the determination of contact angles.

Raman spectroscopy was carried out on an “In via Raman microscope (Renishaw, UK)” with 514.5 nm diode laser excitation in the range of 1000 cm⁻¹ and 3000 cm⁻¹ to evaluate the vibrational properties of the electro-active material.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
4.1 BET analysis of the samples
Figure 1 shows the N₂ adsorption-desorption isotherms of RF gels. All isotherms show a type IV isotherm with H2-type hysteresis loop which is the indicative of well-developed micro and mesoporosity within the gel structure [12]. Samples with R/C ratio of 100, show a microporous structure with the absence of the hysteresis loop. For samples with R/C ratio of 200 – 400 steep increase in pore volume in lower P/P₀ indicate the presence of microporosity followed by a hysteresis loop which is indicative of mesoporosity. The hysteresis loops become wider at higher P/P₀ for samples with higher R/C ratios particularly for samples with R/C ratios of 400 and 500 indicating well-developed mesoporous structures [5].This indicates the development of mesoporosity and formation of larger mesopores during gelation process at higher R/C ratios.

Pore size distribution (PSD) of the RF gels is shown in Figure 2. It can be seen that the average pore size increases with increase in R/C ratio. Sample with R/C ratio of 100 shows very narrow PSD with the maxima around 2 nm. Increasing the R/C ratio to 200 increases the pore diameter above 3 nm. For the sample with R/C ratio of 500, PSD curves are even wider and pore diameter is increased to nearly 8 nm. This in mainly due to the formation of larger clusters at higher R/C ratios during the gelation process which result in inter-particle paths acting as the pores with in the structure of the final gels [13].

Table 1 Porosity parameters of aerogel samples with different R/C ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>R/C</th>
<th>S_BET (m²g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V_total (cm³g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V_micro (cm³g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V_messo(cm³g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V_micro %</th>
<th>V_meso%</th>
<th>D_ave(nm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RF100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>0.0714</td>
<td>0.0058</td>
<td>0.0656</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>0.2406</td>
<td>0.0111</td>
<td>0.2296</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF300</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>0.4282</td>
<td>0.0028</td>
<td>0.4254</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF400</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>0.5624</td>
<td>0.0052</td>
<td>0.5572</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF 500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>0.6409</td>
<td>0.0075</td>
<td>0.6334</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>7.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 summarizes the porosity parameters of the gel samples. As seen the mesoporosity of the samples increases with the increase in R/C ratio and this behaviour is well consistent with pore size distribution where pore size increases from 2.6 nm to 7.97 nm for samples with R/C ratios of 100 and 500 respectively.
Figure 1 N\textsubscript{2} adsorption–desorption isotherms of R/F aerogels with different R/C ratios.

Figure 2 Pore size distribution of RF aerogels with different R/C ratios.

Figure 3 shows adsorption-desorption isotherms of the aerogel with R/C ratio of 200 used as the precursor for the preparation of the carbon aerogels and the isotherms for carbon aerogels produced at different temperatures. It can be observed that carbonization results in enormous increase in the specific surface area for all samples. A significant increase in volume adsorbed at lower P/P\textsubscript{0} < 0.2 shows the development of microporosity whereas hysteresis loops at relative pressure P/P\textsubscript{0} between 0.4 – 1.0 indicates the presence of messo-porosity in the samples [14]. A decrease in adsorbed volume at temperatures above 800 °C can be the result of the collapse of the pore structure at high temperatures [15].
Figure 3  N₂ adsorption–desorption isotherms of carbon aerogels produced at different temperatures.

Figure 4 shows the pore size distribution curves for carbon aerogels obtained at different temperatures. The PSD curves show a bimodal trend for carbons indicating the presence of both micropores centered around 2 nm and small mesopores centered around 4 nm within their structure [16]. This is mainly due to the opening of close micropores during the pyrolysis process. It can be seen that due to the structural change and release of volatile matters during the carbonisation process the level of mesoporosity in the resultant carbons also decreases. This means the carbonisation opens more micropores and at the same time decreases the level of mesoporosity as a result structural change as a result of the release of light components of the gel at elevated temperatures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>S_BET (m²g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V_total (cm³g⁻¹)</th>
<th>V.micro%</th>
<th>V.meso%</th>
<th>D.ave (nm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RF 200</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>0.2406</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC 200-700 °C</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>0.3321</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC 200-800 °C</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>0.3373</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC 200-850 °C</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>0.3269</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC 200-900 °C</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>0.3214</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC 200-1000 °C</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>0.3149</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The specific surface area increases due to carbonization of the gel samples with highest surface area obtained at 800 °C. However for carbons produced at temperatures above 800 °C a gradual decrease in surface area is observed. Temperature of 800 °C is the most effective for the development of the pore structure of the gel and increasing the carbonization temperature beyond this temperature results in the collapse of the carbon structure and decrease in the porosity. The temperature of 800 °C is considered as the optimum temperature for the preparation of carbon aerogels with different R/C ratio.

N₂ adsorption–desorption isotherms of the carbons and activated carbons at different activation temperatures are shown in Figure 5.
The isotherms show a sharp increase in the amount of gas adsorbed at low pressures in the range of $P/P_0 < 0.01$ indicating the development of microporosity in carbon structure due to the physical activation. This is followed by a hysteresis loop in $P/P_0$ range $0.4-0.9$ which represents the development of mesoporosity within the activated carbon samples [17]. The lower part of the hysteresis loops represent the filling of the mesopores while the upper parts represent the emptying of the mesopores [18]. With the increase in activation temperature the volume of gas adsorbed increases due to the development of porosity in the samples.

Pore size distribution (PSD) of carbon / activated carbon aerogels is represented in Figure 6 indicating all samples are predominantly microporous in nature with a pore size distribution centred around 2 nm.

Table 3 shows the results of porosity analysis where significant increase in pore volume and specific surface area can be observed with the average pore size remained constant around 2nm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>$S_{BET}$ (m²/g)</th>
<th>$V_{total}$ (cm³/g)</th>
<th>$V_{micro}$ %</th>
<th>$V_{meso}$ %</th>
<th>$D_{avg}$ (nm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFC 100-800</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>0.2420</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA 100-800-750</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>0.2981</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA 100-800-800</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>0.3707</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA 100-800-850</td>
<td>1687</td>
<td>0.8413</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA100-800-900</td>
<td>1775</td>
<td>0.9394</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Raman spectroscopy

Figure 7 shows the Raman spectra of carbons activated at different temperatures. Activation results in well-developed porous structure however activation at very high temperatures and at higher degree of burn off, can result in decrease in the degree of graphitization [17]. Peaks shown in Figure 4 around 1340 and 1600 cm\(^{-1}\) are the characteristics peak of such carbon material [19]. The ratio I\(_D\)/I\(_G\) of the relative intensity of the D and G band is proportional to the number of defect sites in carbon, the higher the ratio is lower the degree of graphitization is [20].

![Raman spectra of RFCA 100-800 activated at different temperatures.](image)

Increase in activation temperature increase the I\(_D\)/I\(_G\) values as listed in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Activation Temperature (°C)</th>
<th>D Peak (cm(^{-1}))</th>
<th>G Peak (cm(^{-1}))</th>
<th>I(_D)/I(_G)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RFCA100 - 800</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>1610</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA100 - 800</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1340</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFCA100 - 800</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Contact angle measurements

The wettability of carbon /activated carbon aerogel was investigated using 6M KOH as a probing liquid. Appropriate surface modification, surface roughness, surface energy and the type of electrolyte adopted can have a significant effect on the wettability of the surface. It has been observed that nitrogen or oxygen modified surfaces interact with aqueous electrolyte with increased wettability due to the presence of nitrogen or oxygen functional groups [21]. Reduction in contact angle from 125° to 91° for carbon and activated carbons was witnessed as shown in table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>RFC100-800</th>
<th>mRFC100-800</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact angle</td>
<td>125°</td>
<td>91°</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. CONCLUSIONS

Resorcinol-formaldehyde aerogels were synthesised by sol–gel polycondensation reaction. Effect of R/C ratio, carbonization / activation temperature on physical properties such as the porous structure, degree of graphitization and wetting behaviour was assessed. Increase in R/C ratio led to increase in pore size of
aerogels whereas decrease in average pore size along with increase in specific surface area was witnessed which can be credited to the release of volatile maters and opening of closed micropores after carbonization for temperatures up to 800 °C. Increasing the carbonization beyond 800 °C decreases the pore volume and surface area of the resultant carbons as a result of the collapse of their porous structure. Threefold increase in specific surface area of carbon aerogel samples was observed after activation whereas average pore size remained unchanged (around 2nm). Improved wetting behaviour was observed with the reduction in contact angle from 125º to 91º after activation which can be attributed to the introduction of oxygen functional groups. Samples became more amorphous in nature with the increase in activation temperature.

REFERENCES


