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اسم المادة : وقود حيوي / الكورس الاول
اسم التدريسي : د. ضحى راضي نايف + م. م. شهد محمود محمد
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Types of biofuels

1. Biohydrogen:

Biohydrogen is hydrogen gas (H_2) produced by microorganisms through biological processes. It is considered one of the most important advanced biofuels due to its cleanliness and its potential as a renewable energy source.

Biohydrogen has no carbon emissions when used as a fuel, making it a promising option for addressing global energy challenges and reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Importance of Biohydrogen:

1) Clean Fuel: Produces no carbon dioxide during use.
2) High Energy Efficiency: Has the highest heating value among all fuels.
3) Low-cost Production: Can be produced from agricultural waste, food waste, and wastewater.
4) Renewable and Sustainable: Relies on natural microbial processes

Methods of Biohydrogen Production

1) Dark Fermentation

- The most common method.
- Uses anaerobic bacteria such as Clostridium.
- Feedstocks: sugars, organic waste, carbohydrates.
- Basic Reaction (simplified): Glucose → Organic acids + H_2 + CO_2

Advantages:

- Does not require light.
- Can utilize inexpensive waste materials.
- Disadvantages:
- Hydrogen yield is relatively low due to formation of organic acid by-products.

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

2) Photo Fermentation

- Utilizes purple non-sulfur bacteria (PNSB).
- Requires sunlight.
- Can use organic acids from dark fermentation to produce additional hydrogen.
- Simplified Reaction:
- Organic acids + Light → $H_2 + CO_2$

Advantages: Higher hydrogen productivity.
Disadvantages: Light-dependent; efficiency decreases with low illumination.

3) Biophotolysis

Includes two pathways:

a. Direct Biophotolysis

Performed by green algae such as Chlamydomonas. Uses light to split water and produce hydrogen.

b. Indirect Biophotolysis

Occurs in two stages:
(1) Algae produce organic matter through photosynthesis.
(2) Bacteria convert this organic matter into H_2.

Advantages: Very clean and uses water as the hydrogen source.
Disadvantages: Industrial development is still limited.

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

4) *Biological Enhancements and Genetic Engineering*

- Gene modification to increase the activity of hydrogen-producing enzymes (e.g., hydrogenase).
- Eliminating side metabolic pathways that reduce hydrogen production.
- Developing bacteria that are resistant to fermentation toxins.

Challenges of Biohydrogen Production

1. Low yield compared to conventional industrial hydrogen production.
2. Sensitivity of hydrogen-producing enzymes to oxygen.
3. Need for advanced bioreactors.
4. High cost of hydrogen separation and purification

Applications

- Hydrogen fuel cells.
- Chemical industries.
- Clean transportation.
- Renewable energy storage

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

2. Biomethanation (Biological Methane Production)

Biomethanation is the biological process in which organic materials are converted into biogas, mainly composed of methane (CH_4) and carbon dioxide (CO_2).

This process is carried out by a consortium of anaerobic microorganisms and is widely used in waste management, renewable energy production, and sustainable fuel systems.

Importance of Biomethanation

- Renewable energy source: Methane can be used for heating, electricity generation, and transportation.
- Waste reduction: Converts sewage, agricultural residues, and food waste into valuable energy.
- Environmental benefits: Reduces greenhouse gases by capturing methane that would otherwise escape into the atmosphere.
- Supports circular economy: Transforms organic waste into energy and nutrient-rich fertilizer (digestate)

Stages of Biomethanation

Biomethanation occurs through four major stages, each performed by specialized microbial groups:

1) Hydrolysis

Complex organic matter (carbohydrates, proteins, lipids) is broken down into simpler molecules. Enzymes convert polymers into monomers (e.g., sugars, amino acids).

2) Acidogenesis

Acidogenic bacteria convert hydrolysis products into organic acids, alcohols, H_2, CO_2, and ammonia. Common products: acetic acid, butyric acid, propionic acid.

3) *Acetogenesis*

Acetogenic bacteria convert volatile fatty acids (VFAs) into acetic acid, CO_2, and H_2.
This step prepares substrates used directly by methanogens.

4) *Methanogenesis*

Final step carried out by methanogenic archaea.
Methane is produced via two main pathways:

- Acetoclastic pathway:

Acetate → $CH_4 + CO_2$

- Hydrogenotrophic pathway:

$CO_2 + H_2 \rightarrow CH_4 + H_2O$

Methanogens are extremely oxygen-sensitive and function strictly under anaerobic conditions.

Feedstocks for Biomethanation

- Agricultural residues (straw, manure)
- Municipal solid waste
- Food processing waste
- Sewage sludge
- Industrial organic wastewater
- Energy crops (e.g., maize silage)

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

Advantages of Biomethanation

- Produces renewable methane with high calorific value.
- Stabilizes organic waste.
- Reduces odor and pathogens in waste streams.
- Produces digestate useful as biofertilizer.
- Lower environmental impact compared to open waste dumping

Challenges

- Sensitivity of methanogens to environmental changes.
- Inhibition by ammonia, sulfates, or high organic load.
- Slow microbial growth rate.
- Requires controlled conditions for high methane yield.

Applications of Methane

- Electricity generation
- Heat production
- Upgraded to biomethane for natural gas pipelines
- Vehicle fuel (compressed biomethane)
- Industrial boilers and CHP (combined heat and power systems)

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

3. Bioethanol

Bioethanol is a renewable biofuel produced mainly through the microbial fermentation of biomass rich in carbohydrates. It is widely used as a transportation fuel, either blended with gasoline or as a standalone fuel (e.g., E10, E85, or E100). Its importance has grown due to the need for sustainable energy sources, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the availability of abundant agricultural residues.

Feedstocks for Bioethanol:

Bioethanol feedstocks are grouped into three generations:

1) *First-Generation Feedstocks*

Sugarcane, Sugar beet, Corn (starch-based) and Cassava.
These contain readily fermentable sugars or starch that can be converted into sugars.

2) *Second-Generation Feedstocks*

Lignocellulosic biomass, Agricultural residues (rice straw, wheat straw), Corn stover and Bagasse.
These require pretreatment and enzymatic hydrolysis to release fermentable sugars.

3) *Third-Generation Feedstocks*

Microalgae, Engineered photosynthetic organisms. These offer high productivity and low land use.

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

Steps of Bioethanol Production:

1) *Pretreatment*

Second-generation biomass contains lignin, cellulose, and hemicellulose.
Pretreatment helps break down the structure and enhance enzyme accessibility.
Common pretreatments include:

- Acid pretreatment
- Alkali pretreatment
- Steam explosion
- Biological pretreatment

2) *Enzymatic Hydrolysis*

Enzymes like cellulases convert cellulose and hemicellulose into fermentable sugars such as glucose and xylose.

3) *Fermentation*

Microorganisms convert sugars into ethanol under aerobic or anaerobic conditions.
The book discusses fermentation types such as:

- Aeration fermentation
- Anaerobic fermentation
- Dual fermentation (yeast + bacteria)
- Microbial consortia

Common microorganisms:

- *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*
- *Zymomonas mobilis*
- Genetically engineered yeasts capable of fermenting pentose sugars.

4) *Distillation*

Ethanol is separated and purified from the fermentation broth.

5) *Dehydration*

Water is removed to reach fuel-grade ethanol (~99.5%).
Techniques include molecular sieves and azeotropic distillation.

Biochemical Pathway

During fermentation:

Glucose → 2 Ethanol + 2 CO_2

Advantages of Bioethanol

- Renewable and sustainable
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- Can be blended with gasoline
- High octane number
- Supports agricultural economies

Challenges

- High pretreatment cost for lignocellulosic biomass
- Enzyme cost and inhibition
- Incomplete fermentation of pentose sugars
- Fuel vs. food debate (for first-generation feedstocks)

Applications

- Transportation fuel blends (E10, E20, E85)
- Chemical feedstock
- Hydrogen production via reforming
- Used in fuel cells (direct ethanol fuel cells)

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

4. Biobutanol

Biobutanol is an advanced liquid biofuel produced mainly through microbial fermentation.
It is considered a superior biofuel compared to ethanol due to its:

- Higher energy content
- Lower vapor pressure
- Greater compatibility with gasoline engines
- Ability to be transported through existing fuel pipelines
- Biobutanol can be produced from sugars, starch, or lignocellulosic biomass.

Microbial Production of Biobutanol

- The most established biological pathway for biobutanol production is:
- Acetone–Butanol–Ethanol Fermentation (ABE Fermentation)

Carried out by Clostridium species, especially:

- *Clostridium acetobutylicum*
- *Clostridium beijerinckii*

These microorganisms convert carbohydrates into a mixture of solvents:

- Butanol (~60%)
- Acetone (~30%)
- Ethanol (~10%)

The book's section on microbial bioconversion outlines similar fermentation systems using Clostridium spp. to produce industrial solvents from sugars.

Stages of ABE Fermentation

1) Acidogenesis (Growth Phase)

- Carbohydrates → Organic acids
- Main acids: acetic acid and butyric acid
- pH drops as acids accumulate
- Cells grow rapidly during this phase

2) Solventogenesis (Production Phase)

As acidity increases, the bacteria shift metabolism:

Organic acids → Butanol, Acetone, Ethanol

This metabolic switch is critical for high butanol yield.

Feedstocks for Biobutanol Production

First-Generation Feedstocks

Molasses and starch (corn, cassava)

Second-Generation Feedstocks

Agricultural residues, Lignocellulosic hydrolysates, Bagasse and Wheat straw.

Third-Generation Feedstocks

Algal biomass and engineered microorganisms

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

Biochemical Pathways

During fermentation:

Carbohydrate → Pyruvate → Organic Acids → Solvents (A-B-E)

Advantages of Biobutanol

- Higher energy density (29.2 MJ/L; close to gasoline)
- Can be used in existing engines without modification
- Less hygroscopic than ethanol
- Lower risk of corrosion and easier transportation
- Blends well with gasoline at high ratios

Challenges

- Low butanol yield due to product toxicity to bacteria
- Butanol inhibition occurs at ~1–2% concentration
- Need for costly downstream separation processes
- Slow growth rate of Clostridium spp.

Applications of Biobutanol

- Transportation fuel (blended or pure)
- Chemical feedstock (paints, solvents, plastics)
- Precursor for butyl esters and polymers
- High-octane biofuel for aviation research

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

5. Biodiesel

Biodiesel is a renewable, biodegradable fuel produced from biological sources such as vegetable oils, animal fats, used cooking oil, and certain types of algae. Chemically, biodiesel consists of fatty acid methyl esters (FAME) or fatty acid ethyl esters (FAEE).
It is designed to be used in diesel engines with little or no modification and is commonly blended with petroleum diesel (e.g., B5, B10, B20, B100).

Importance of Biodiesel

- Renewable and sustainable fuel
- Reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- Compatible with existing diesel engines
- Higher lubricity than petroleum diesel
- Biodegradable and less toxic
- Utilizes waste materials (used oils, animal fats)

Feedstocks for Biodiesel Production

1) *Vegetable Oils :* Soybean oil, Rapeseed (canola) oil, Sunflower oil, Palm oil and Jatropha oil
2) *Animal Fats:* Tallow, Lard and Poultry fat
3) *Waste Oils:* Used cooking oil (UCO) and Waste frying oil
4) *Microalgae:* High oil content (20–60%) and Fast growth rate

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

Methods of Biodiesel Production

Although several methods exist, transesterification is the dominant industrial process.

1) *Transesterification (Main Process)*

Triglycerides (from oils/fats) react with alcohol (usually methanol or ethanol) in the presence of a catalyst.

Basic Reaction:
Triglyceride + Methanol → Biodiesel (FAME) + Glycerol

Catalysts Used

- Alkaline catalysts: NaOH, KOH (most common)
- Acid catalysts: H_2SO_4 (used when oils contain high free fatty acids)
- Enzymatic catalysts: Lipases (environmentally friendly but costly)

Process Conditions

- Temperature: 50–65°C
- Alcohol-to-oil molar ratio: 6:1 typically
- Reaction time: 1–2 hours

2) *Esterification*

- Used for oils with high free fatty acid (FFA) content.
- Reduces FFAs and prevents soap formation during transesterification.

3) *Supercritical Methanol Method*

- No catalyst required
- Faster reaction
- Higher cost due to pressure/temperature requirements

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)

Biodiesel Properties

- Higher cetane number than petroleum diesel
- Higher flash point (safer storage)
- Lower sulfur content
- Slightly higher viscosity
- Contains oxygen (improves combustion efficiency)

Advantages of Biodiesel

- **Eco-friendly:** significant reduction in CO_2, CO, HC emissions
- **Biodegradable and non-toxic**
- **Improves engine lubrication**
- **Reduces reliance on fossil fuels**
- Supports agricultural economies

Challenges

- High production cost compared to petroleum diesel
- Cold flow issues (gel formation at low temperatures)
- Food vs. fuel debate (for first-generation oils)
- Sensitivity to feedstock quality
- Glycerol disposal and purification requirements

Applications

- Diesel engines (transport, agriculture, heavy machinery)
- Blending with petroleum diesel
- Heating systems
- Marine engines
- Generator sets

Common blends:

- **B5:** 5% biodiesel
- **B20:** 20% biodiesel
- **B100:** pure biodiesel

Email (shahad.mahmood.mohammed@uomus.edu.iq)