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Two-way valorization of blast furnace slag: synthesis of precipitated calcium carbonate and zeolitic heavy metal adsorbent --Manuscript Draft--

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Corresponding Author:	Rafael M Santos, Ph.D. Sheridan Institute of Technology Brampton, Ontario CANADA
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author E-Mail:	rafael.santos@alumni.utoronto.ca
Corresponding Author's Institution:	Sheridan Institute of Technology
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Evangelos Georgakopoulos, M.Sc.
First Author Secondary Information:	
Other Authors:	Evangelos Georgakopoulos, M.Sc. Yi Wai Chiang, Ph.D. Vasilije Manovic, Ph.D.
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	
Abstract:	The aim of this work is to present a zero-waste process for storing CO ₂ in a stable and benign mineral form, while producing zeolitic minerals with sufficient heavy metal adsorption capacity. To this end, blast furnace slag, a residue from iron-making, is utilized as the starting material. Calcium is selectively extracted from the slag by leaching, using acetic acid (CH ₃ COOH) of specific concentration (2M) as the extraction agent. The filtered leachate is subsequently physico-chemically purified, then carbonated to form precipitated calcium carbonate (PCC) of high purity (<2 wt% non-calcium impurities, according to ICP-MS analysis); sodium hydroxide is added to neutralize the regenerated acetate. The morphological properties of the resulting calcitic PCC are tuned for potential application as a filler in papermaking. In parallel, the residual solids from the extraction stage are subjected to hydrothermal conversion in caustic solution of specific composition (2M NaOH) that leads to the predominant formation of a particular zeolitic mineral phase (detected by XRD), namely analcime (NaAlSi ₂ O ₆ •H ₂ O). Based on its ability to adsorb Ni ²⁺ , as reported from batch adsorption experiments and ICP-OES analysis, this product can potentially be used in wastewater treatment or environmental remediation applications.
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Question	Response
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To: Editorial Board, Journal of Visualized Experiments

Re: Submission of revised invited manuscript to JoVE

September 1st, 2016

Dear Editor,

We hereby submit the revised manuscript titled "Two-way valorization of blast furnace slag: synthesis of precipitated calcium carbonate and zeolitic heavy metal adsorbent" that we would like to be considered for publication in Journal of Visualized Experiments.

We have revised the manuscript according to all reviewers' and editors' comments and suggestions, and have provided thorough responses in a separate file. We have used tracked-changes to ease of identification of all revisions. If you find that our revisions meet your expectations, we kindly request your approval for publication.

Please feel free to contact us about issues encountered in the submitted material with regards to its content or format, to or clarify any other concern.

Sincerely,

Rafael M. Santos (ORCID 0000-0002-8368-8618)
Professor, School of Applied Chemical and Environmental Sciences
Email: rafael.santos@alumni.utoronto.ca; rafael.santos@sheridancollege.ca

TITLE:

Two-way valorization of blast furnace slag: synthesis of precipitated calcium carbonate and zeolitic heavy metal adsorbent

AUTHORS:

Georgakopoulos, Evangelos
Department of Offshore, Process and Energy Engineering
Cranfield University
Cranfield, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom
e.georgakopoulos@cranfield.ac.uk

Santos, Rafael M.
School of Applied Chemical and Environmental Sciences
Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
Brampton, Ontario, Canada
rafael.santos@alumni.utoronto.ca

Chiang, Yi Wai
School of Engineering
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
chiange@uoguelph.ca

Manovic, Vasilije
Chair in Carbon Systems Engineering
Centre for Combustion, Carbon Capture and Storage
Cranfield University
Cranfield, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom
v.manovic@cranfield.ac.uk

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Santos, Rafael M.
School of Applied Chemical and Environmental Sciences
Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
Brampton, Ontario, Canada
rafael.santos@alumni.utoronto.ca

KEYWORDS:

Blast furnace slag, waste valorization, CO₂ utilization, mineral carbonation, hydrothermal conversion, heavy metal adsorption, precipitated calcium carbonate, zeolite

SHORT ABSTRACT:

A protocol for the parallel production of precipitated calcium carbonate and zeolitic material from blast furnace slag via mineral carbonation and alkaline hydrothermal conversion, respectively, is presented. The performance of the zeolitic material towards nickel adsorption is tested.

LONG ABSTRACT:

The aim of this work is to present a zero-waste process for storing CO₂ in a stable and benign mineral form while producing zeolitic minerals with sufficient heavy metal adsorption capacity. To this end, blast furnace slag, a residue from iron-making, is utilized as the starting material. Calcium is selectively extracted from the slag by leaching with acetic acid (2 M CH₃COOH) as the extraction agent. The filtered leachate is subsequently physico-chemically purified and then carbonated to form precipitated calcium carbonate (PCC) of high purity (<2 wt% non-calcium impurities, according to ICP-MS analysis). Sodium hydroxide is added to neutralize the regenerated acetate. The morphological properties of the resulting calcitic PCC are tuned for its potential application as a filler in papermaking. In parallel, the residual solids from the extraction stage are subjected to hydrothermal conversion in a caustic solution (2 M NaOH) that leads to the predominant formation of a particular zeolitic mineral phase (detected by XRD), namely analcime (NaAlSi₂O₆·H₂O). Based on its ability to adsorb Ni²⁺, as reported from batch adsorption experiments and ICP-OES analysis, this product can potentially be used in wastewater treatment or for environmental remediation applications.

INTRODUCTION:

The indirect carbonation of industrial residues rich in alkaline metals has been widely researched as part of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology¹⁻⁴. Some amount of CO₂ can be stored efficiently, permanently, and in a manner that is benign to the atmosphere. However, while valuable materials are formed, there is a part of the technique that remains inadequately explored. In the indirect carbonation process, calcium is selectively extracted from the material and subsequently subjected to carbonation under controlled conditions. However, the waste valorization process generates solid residues from the material; these residues are not further processed or exploited after the calcium extraction stage. Processing routes that reduce the production of such residues, or even that eliminate them, should be found. To this end, recently, there has been an effort to develop and optimize a process by which, by using blast furnace (BF) slag as the starting material, a zero-waste mineral sequestration of carbon, accompanied with the formation of useful minerals, can be achieved^{5,6}.

Several waste materials are qualified as efficient reactants for CO₂ mineralization. Among them, iron- and steel-making slags present considerably higher experimental CO₂ uptakes than every other industrial waste⁴. The attractiveness of BF slag for waste valorization lies in its qualities (chemical, mineral, and morphological properties) and the potential applications of the material⁵. It is a by-product of the iron-making process, wherein impurities from iron ore are removed in a pyrometallurgical process. Based on the way it is cooled down after its separation from the molten iron, four different types of slag are generated: (i) air-cooled (*i.e.*, crystalline), (ii) granulated (*i.e.*, vitrified), (iii) expanded (*i.e.*, foamed), and (iv) pelletized.

Although the production of precipitated calcium carbonate (PCC) using the indirect carbonation of BF slag is a process that has managed to attract much attention^{7,8}, the hydrothermal conversion of slag for the production of zeolitic minerals is a technology that has been studied and developed only during recent years⁹⁻¹¹. However, in none of the cases has it been considered as a technique that could be used in combination with the indirect carbonation of BF slag in order to achieve the symbiotic formation of PCC and zeolites. Following the two-way valorization process herein described, these two techniques are coupled to accomplish the sufficient sequestration of CO₂ while also obtaining zeolitic minerals and eliminating any potential solid residues. According to this procedure, CO₂ is stored in the calcium that was extracted from slag by acid leaching via a mineral carbonation reaction⁵. To achieve the suitable PCC product properties for applications in papermaking (mineralogy, particle size distribution, and particle morphology), the leachate from the extraction stage is first physico-chemically purified⁶. In parallel, zeolitic minerals are formed in a caustic solution via the hydrothermal conversion of the solid residues resulting from the calcium extraction stage⁵.

Zeolite is an aluminosilicate mineral. It occurs naturally, but it can also be industrially produced on a large scale. Numerous unique zeolite frameworks have been identified, leading to various applications for the materials. For example, they can be used as catalysts in several industrial sectors^{12,13}; they are found in detergents and in construction materials as additives in asphalt, concrete^{14,15}, and Portland cement^{16,17}; and they also have applications in the medical¹⁸⁻²⁰ and agricultural²¹⁻²³ domains. Furthermore, due to their large specific surface areas and their cation exchange capacities, zeolites can also be used as sorbents²⁴⁻²⁷. These particular sorbents can also be used to directly treat heavy metal-laden streams, such as wastewater or contaminated groundwater²⁸⁻³¹. In this study, the zeolitic material produced from BF slag via the two-way valorization process is, for the first time, tested as an adsorbent for a heavy metal, namely, nickel.

For the proposed symbiotic process, an extraction agent amiable to both the PCC and zeolite formation should be used. Thus, the choice of a suitable extractant is critical. Among the several leaching agents applied in prior research on both indirect carbonation^{7,8} and hydrothermal conversion^{10,11} of BF slag, acetic acid was selected as the most promising. Hydrochloric acid¹⁰ exhibits detrimental effects on both the generation of PCC and on the leaching selectivity, causing significant losses in the quantities of Si and Al in the leachate solution. On the other hand, formic acid¹¹ has proved to be efficient, since it manages to efficiently remove Ca and Mg from the slag while presenting remarkable leaching selectivity, leaving both the Si and the Al undisturbed. However, it presents a lower acid dissociation constant than acetic acid³³, suggesting that the precipitation of calcium carbonate should be more readily achievable after the employment of acetate solutions as the extraction agent. It has also been shown that, in some cases, such as with the use of succinates³⁴ and oxalates³⁵, non-carbonate precipitates form in place of PCC. Eloneva *et al.*³⁶ compared sixteen extracts for calcium removal from steelmaking slags and found acetic acid to be the most efficient (best performance between 0.5 M and 2 M extractant concentrations) and most successful (highest calcium recovery at ~100%).

The following protocol describes in detail the lab-scale experimental process that leads to the formation of high-purity PCC and a zeolitic material, with potential uses as paper fillers and heavy metal sorbents, respectively. BF slag is the starting material. The testing procedures applied for the assessment of the synthesized zeolitic material as an adequate heavy metal sorbent are also outlined.

PROTOCOL:

1. Calcium extraction from blast furnace slag

Note: Due to the detrimental effect of acidity on leaching selectivity, the extraction of calcium takes place in two steps, using half the molarity of acetic acid (CH_3COOH) that would be used in a single step.

1.1) Grind the BF slag using a mortar and pestle and sieve it to particle size below 2 mm.

1.2) Unseal an autoclave reactor that is equipped with a dual-impeller stirrer, a heating/cooling jacket, a pressure gauge, and a thermocouple. Make sure that the interior of the reactor vessel and the components protruding from the reactor head (stirrer shaft; impeller; and thermocouple well, which acts as a baffle) are clean and free of any impurities that may interfere with the calcium extraction process. If they are not, wash them thoroughly.

1.3) Weigh 100 g of the sieved BF slag (<2 mm) and place it in the vessel. Add 731 mL of CH_3COOH (2 M) to the vessel and seal it. Make sure that the sealed reactor is properly fastened to its support.

1.4) Place the heating jacket in the proper position, so that it covers almost the whole vessel. Set the heating temperature to 30 °C and start mixing the slurry at 1,000 rpm. Wait until the temperature at the interior of the reactor reaches the set point (approximately 15 min), and then leave the slurry to mix at the aforementioned conditions for 60 min.

1.5) Once the acid extraction time has elapsed, remove the heating jacket, unseal the reactor, and pour the slurry from the reactor into a beaker. A drain valve can also be used, but the coarse solids may block the passage.

1.6) Vacuum-filter the slurry to separate the leachate solution from the residual solids; use filter paper with pore size of 8 μm or less. Process the solids immediately (wet cake), or leave them to dry at ambient temperature for processing at a later time.

Note: The leachate can be stored at ambient temperature, but it should preferably be further processed (purified and carbonated) shortly afterwards to avoid the uncontrolled precipitation of dissolved compounds.

1.7) Wash both the reactor head and the vessel with DI water to make sure that no residue from the acid or the slag is left behind.

1.8) Place the dry, solid residue from the first Ca extraction step in the vessel and add 731 mL of CH_3COOH (2 M). Repeat the same procedure (step 1.5) to mix the solids with the acid (at 30 °C and 1,000 rpm for 60 min).

1.9) At the end of the second extraction step, place the post-extraction slurry into centrifuge tubes. Use large-capacity tubes (e.g., 50 mL or greater) and follow standard centrifugation practices, such as ensuring equal weight in each tube.

1.9.1) Separate the solids from the leachate by centrifuging the slurry at $2,500 \times g$ for a minimum of 10 min. Slowly pour the supernatant into a new bottle while keeping the solids in the tubes.

Note: The separation of the solids (suspended silica and residual BF slag) from the calcium acetate-rich liquid phase is thus achieved.

1.10) Recover the solid residue resulting from the second extraction step from the tubes and re-suspend them in DI water. Perform another round of centrifugation to remove residual soluble acetates. Recover the washed solids and allow them to dry under ambient conditions.

1.11) Combine the solutions from both the first extraction filtration (filtrate) and the second extraction centrifugation (supernatant) to obtain the post-extraction leachate.

2. Physico-chemical purification of the post-extraction leachate

Note: Despite the separation of solids from the leachate solution (step 1.9), the resulting supernatant still contains soluble or colloidal impurities. The most important of these impurities are silica, magnesium, and aluminum. According to previously-published work³², silica solubility in pure water is proportional to the temperature of the solution (*i.e.*, by decreasing the temperature of pure water, the solubility of silica also decreases). Although the leachate solution is not pure water, it has been found that subjecting the supernatant from the solid-liquid separation of the post-extraction slurry to cooling results in further silica removal (compared to centrifugation alone)². On the other hand, magnesium and aluminum impurities are present in the supernatant in the form of acetates. In order to significantly reduce their solubility, they must be transformed to insoluble metal hydroxides by pH adjustment².

2.1) Add concentrated NaOH solution (50% w/w) to the supernatant, such that the final concentration of NaOH in the supernatant is 1.25 M; this will increase the pH to around 8.4, thus converting the magnesium and aluminum acetates to their significantly less soluble form of hydroxides. Add the caustic solution slowly while stirring and measuring the pH.

2.2) Place the NaOH-enriched supernatant in the refrigerator and cool it down to 1 °C to cause the extra precipitation of silica.

2.3) Once cooled, vacuum filter the solution using filter paper with a pore size of 0.45 µm; t. The micro-filtration of the solution results in the further removal of silicon and of the precipitated impurities of magnesium and aluminum.

3. Carbonation of the purified leachate

Note: Due to the regeneration of acetic acid upon carbonation, NaOH is used as an additive to buffer the acidity, which inhibits calcium precipitation. For the production of a purer PCC, NaOH should be used in a sub-equimolar concentration with respect to that of the CH₃COOH used in the extraction step (2 M).

3.1) Pour the purified leachate into the autoclave reactor. Check both its vessel and cap components to verify that they are clean of residue from previous uses in order to avoid impurities interfering with the carbonation reactions. Add concentrated NaOH (50% w/w) to the vessel, such that the final NaOH concentration in the purified leachate solution is 1.7 M, in order to neutralize the regenerated CH₃COOH during carbonation. Seal the reactor and carefully fasten it to its support.

3.2) Place the heating jacket of the reactor in the proper position. Adjust the heating temperature to 30 °C and start mixing the slurry at 1,000 rpm. Wait until the interior of the reactor reaches the desired temperature (approximately 15 min). Start the carbonation of the mixture by introducing to the reactor CO₂ of high purity (99.5%) at 2 bar; run for 60 min.

3.3) At the completion of carbonation, remove the heating jacket, depressurize and unseal the reactor, and pour the carbonated slurry into a beaker.

Note: A drain valve can also be used after depressurization, as the solids are fine.

3.4) Vacuum-filter the resulting slurry to separate the solid precipitates from the solution; use filter paper with a pore size of 8 µm or less. Rinse the filter cake thoroughly with DI water under vacuum to remove soluble sodium.

Note: The marked reduction in the conductivity of the rinse filtrate can be used to confirm the rinse end-point.

3.5) Oven-dry the solid material at 105 °C for 24 h to retrieve the PCC.

4. Hydrothermal conversion of the extraction solid residues

Note: For hydrothermal conversion, calcium-depleted residual solids from the blast furnace slag acetic acid extraction were used. After each extraction run (including both steps), less than

50 wt% of the initial mass can be recovered (due to calcium extraction and the partial loss of colloidal silica in filtration and depending on the filter paper porosity used). Thus, multiple batches of extraction are needed to generate the mass of solids used in the hydrothermal conversion step.

4.1) Place 60 g of the dry, residual solids from the calcium extraction into a clean autoclave reactor. Add 300 mL of 2 M NaOH solution. Seal the reactor and fasten it to its support.

4.2) Place the heating jacket of the reactor in the proper position. Adjust the heating temperature to 150 °C and start mixing the slurry at 300 rpm. Wait for approximately 45-50 min, until the interior of the reactor reaches the desired temperature. Leave the slurry to mix at the aforementioned conditions for 24 h.

4.3) At the completion of the hydrothermal conversion, remove the heating jacket and allow the reactor to cool down for 60 min, to approximately 35 °C. The reactor jacket's cooling circuit can also be used to speed cooling.

4.3.1) Unseal the reactor and pour the converted slurry into a beaker.

4.4) Vacuum-filter the slurry to separate the converted solids from the solution; use filter paper with a pore size of 8 µm or less. Rinse the solids thoroughly with DI water under vacuum to remove the excess caustic.

Note: The marked reduction in conductivity of the rinse filtrate can be used to confirm the rinse end point.

4.5) Oven-dry the filtered material at 105 °C for 24 h to obtain the hydrothermally-converted material.

4.6) Disaggregate the granular material using a mortar and pestle and sieve the resulting material to a particle size <0.85 mm.

5. Heavy metal adsorption tests with the zeolitic product

Note: Ni²⁺ is selected as the heavy metal for investigation. Contaminated solutions with different initial heavy metal concentrations were synthesized. Initial heavy metal concentrations of 2-200 mg/L were chosen as appropriate for the needs of the present study.

5.1) To prepare the contaminated solutions for the equilibrium experiments, use a micro-pipette to add an appropriate amount of 1,000 mg/L analytical-grade standard solution of Ni²⁺ into 1 L of ultra-pure water in a volumetric flask to produce solutions of the desired Ni²⁺ concentrations (2 mg/L, 10 mg/L, 20 mg/L, 100 mg/L, and 200 mg/L).

5.2) In capped plastic bottles, disperse 1 g of the hydrothermally-converted material resulting from step 4.6 in 100 mL of each synthetically-prepared contaminated solution.

5.3) Add concentrated NaOH (2 M at first and 0.5 M closer to the end point) dropwise to adjust the pH of the solutions to 4-5. Continuously stir the solution at a low speed using a magnetic stirring bar on a stirring plate. Monitor the pH while adding the NaOH by using a pH electrode soaked in the solution.

5.4) Place the bottles in a shaker incubator and agitate them at 160 rpm and 20 °C for 24 h.

5.5) After mixing, add concentrated HCl (2 M at first and 0.2 M closer to the end point) dropwise to the solution to readjust the pH to 4-5. During the adjustment, continuously stir the solution at a low speed using a magnetic stirring bar on a stirring plate. Monitor the pH continuously while adding the HCl by using a pH electrode soaked in the solution.

5.6) Place the slurry in centrifuge tubes. Separate the solids from the solution by using a laboratory centrifuge at 2,500 x *g* for 5 min. Carefully pour the supernatant solution to a new bottle while keeping the solids in the centrifuge tube.

5.7) Acidify the solution with HNO₃ (2 wt% nitric acid concentration) to reduce the pH to <2.

Note: This step is performed to ensure that the ions remain in solution during storage (at ambient temperature) prior to further manipulation and analysis.

5.8) Determine the equilibrium concentration of the investigated heavy metal in the supernatant by using ICP-OES.

Note: Solutions are diluted by a factor of 10-100x using 2 wt% HNO₃ diluent, such that the expected concentration falls in the linear range of the instrument calibration (0-2 mg/L). Yttrium, at 2 mg/L, is added to each diluted sample as an internal standard. The ICP-OES instrument is operated based on the manufacturer's recommendations for the analysis of metals in wastewaters³⁷. Alternate techniques for the determination of nickel concentration in solution, such as ICP-MS and AAS, are also suitable for this step.

5.9) Calculate the amount of heavy metal adsorbed per g of the adsorbent at equilibrium (q_e) using the following formula:

$$q_e = \frac{(C_o - C_e) \cdot V}{m}$$

where C_o is the initial concentration (μmol/mL) of the heavy metal ions in the solution, C_e is the equilibrium concentration of the heavy metal ions in the solution (μmol/mL), V is the volume of the contaminated solution (mL), and m is the mass of the dry adsorbent (g).

REPRESENTATIVE RESULTS:

To test the carbonate precipitates for purity and yield, several instrumental techniques can be applied. The elemental composition (including major and minor components) can be determined either by inductively-coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-OES), by inductively-coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) or atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS) following acid digestion (in HCl), or by X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) with the sample in powder or pellet form. XRF is less sensitive for minor components (<1 wt%). More details and examples are found in De Crom *et al.*⁶ These results will demonstrate if undesired impurities are present and will help determine, by mass balance, the efficiency of converting the calcium content of the original slag into PCC. The mineral composition is best determined by X-ray powder diffraction (XRD). The resulting diffractogram provides qualitative information about the presence of crystalline mineral phases. Quantification of the relative amounts is made by Rietveld refinement technique (with an accuracy of around $\pm 2-3$ wt%). More details and examples can be found in Santos *et al.*³⁸ These results will verify if the process conditions or impurities affect the crystallization process, generating additional undesired phases besides calcite (CaCO_3). Particle size distribution (PSD) and mean particle diameter are best determined by wet (DI water) laser diffraction. More details and examples can be found in De Crom *et al.*⁶ These results are used to assess if the PCC meets the requirements of its intended application (*i.e.*, papermaking), which usually specify an upper cut-off size and a span of distribution.

The elemental composition of the post-extraction leachate and post-carbonation products, as well as the XRD pattern and volume-based PSD of the post-carbonation precipitates, are presented in Figures 1 and 2. ICP-MS technique was used to measure the content (wt%) of certain metals (Ca, Mg, Al, and Si) in the composition of the leachate after the Ca extraction stage and before its carbonation. The use of analytical-grade acetic acid (2 M) as the leaching agent resulted in a Ca extraction of approximately 90% (Figure 1a). According to the results, an even higher extraction efficiency was detected for magnesium (almost 100%), another metal that can be efficiently carbonated but under more intensive conditions.

The behavior of silica and aluminum during the extraction stage was also investigated. To successfully produce aluminosilicate-based zeolitic minerals through hydrothermal conversion, but also to avoid contamination of the synthesized PCC with undesired elements, both silica and aluminum should remain in the solid phase during the extraction process. According to the results, acetic acid exhibited a satisfactorily-limited leaching of silica and aluminum, with almost 92% of silica and 62% of aluminum remaining unaffected during the leaching process (Figure 1b).

The carbonation of the purified leachate solution resulted in the production of PCC with desirable characteristics, as depicted in Figure 2. Based on the XRD diagram (Figure 2b), the mineral phase that was mainly synthesized was that of calcite (88.2 wt%), whereas small quantities of nesquehonite ($\text{Mg}(\text{HCO}_3)(\text{OH}) \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$; 3.2 wt%) and magnesian calcite ($\text{Ca}_{1-0.85}\text{Mg}_{0.015}\text{CO}_3$; 2.8 wt%) were also present. From the PSD analysis of the material (Figure 2c), it became clear that the mean particle size was small and the particle size distribution was narrow.

In parallel with carbonation, the solid residues from the extraction stage were subjected to hydrothermal conversion. Characterization of the hydrothermally-converted material, to verify the production of the zeolitic minerals and to assess the morphology, was conducted as follows. The elemental composition is most readily obtained by XRF. Trace-element determination requires acid digestion followed by ICP-OES, ICP-MS, or AAS, with the digestion carried out using sequential acid dissolution (HNO₃-HF or HNO₃-HClO₄-HF) to dissolve the silica phase. While there is no specific elemental composition targeted for the converted material, this analysis helps clarify the mineral composition determined by XRD. XRD analysis, to determine mineral composition, the PSD and mean particle diameter were determined similarly to carbonate precipitates, as aforementioned. Specific surface area, pore volume, and mean pore diameter were determined by nitrogen adsorption, with the isotherms interpreted according to Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) multi-point theory. Samples should be initially degassed under vacuum at 350 °C for 4 h. More details and examples can be found in Chiang *et al.*⁵

The Ca, Mg, Al, and Si content in the hydrothermally-converted material, determined by using the ICP-OES technique, is shown in Figure 3a, whereas their mineralogical composition, determined from XRD patterns, is shown in Figure 3b. The mean particle size and size distribution, obtained from the PSD analysis, is shown in Figure 3c. The resulting material is mineralogically characterized by the presence of two main phases: analcime (NaAlSi₂O₆·H₂O) and tobermorite (Ca₅(OH)₂Si₆O₁₆·4H₂O). The existence of the latter in the converted extraction residues justifies the notable calcium content (22.5 wt%) that was detected in the chemical composition of the material, as it was analyzed using XRF. Silica (37.2 wt%) and aluminum (11.2 wt%) were the other primary elements, whereas magnesium was present in amounts of approximately 4 wt%. Based on the PSD analysis, the volume moment (De Brouckere) mean particle diameter (D[4,3]) of the converted materials was 86.6 µm, whereas the size distribution ranged from 0.594 µm to 1.11 mm. Nitrogen adsorption analysis confirmed the formation of mesoporous material (46.0-nm mean pore diameter), with the specific surface area and pore volume of the hydrothermally-converted material, respectively, increasing from 4.89 m²/g to 95.23 m²/g and from 0.014 mL/g to 0.610 mL/g over the original slag.

The equilibrium adsorption isotherms of Ni²⁺ onto the hydrothermally-converted material, before and after the pH adjustment of the equilibrated adsorbent-adsorbate solution, as well as the fitting of the experimental data to the linearized Langmuir, Freundlich, and Temkin adsorption models are shown in Figure 4.

The Langmuir model is based on some reasonable assumptions that characterize the chemisorption process. According to them, the surface of the adsorbent only offers a fixed number of adsorption sites, with identical shapes and sizes, characterized by identical adsorption capacity. The adsorbed material forms only one layer (thickness of one molecule) on the surface of the adsorbent, and the temperature is constant. Mathematically, the Langmuir model is expressed by the following equation:

$$q_e = \frac{D_m \cdot k \cdot C_e}{1 + k \cdot C_e}$$

where C_e is the equilibrium concentration of adsorbate in solution ($\mu\text{mol}/100\text{ mL}$), q_e is the amount of metal adsorbed per g of adsorbent at equilibrium ($\mu\text{mol}/\text{g}$), D_m is the theoretical maximum monolayer coverage capacity of the adsorbent ($\mu\text{mol}/\text{g}$), and k is the Langmuir isotherm constant ($100\text{ mL}/\mu\text{mol}$).

The Freundlich isotherm is not constrained by the assumptions required in the Langmuir model. Instead, it describes the physical adsorption process that can be applied to adsorbents with heterogenous surfaces. The adsorption sites, distributed all over the adsorbent's surface, are characterized by different affinities for the adsorbate, whereas the adsorbed material forms more than one layer on the surface of the adsorbent. The Freundlich model is mathematically expressed as:

$$q_e = K_f \cdot C_e^{1/n}$$

where K_f and n are the Freundlich isotherm constants, corresponding to adsorption capacity and adsorption intensity, respectively.

Finally, the Temkin model assumes that the adsorption heat of all the molecules of the layer linearly decreases with coverage due to the adsorbent-adsorbate interactions, whereas the binding energies are uniformly distributed. The Temkin model is expressed by the following equation:

$$q_e = \frac{R \cdot T}{\Delta Q} \cdot \ln(K_0 \cdot C_e)$$

where R is the universal gas constant (8.314 J/mol/K), T is the temperature (K), ΔQ is the variation of adsorption energy ($(\text{J/mol}) \cdot (\text{g}/\mu\text{mol})$), and K_0 is the Temkin isotherm equilibrium binding constant ($100\text{ mL}/\mu\text{mol}$).

The values of the coefficients for all the applied models were calculated based on the plotted adsorption isotherms (Figure 4a) and the linear forms of the Langmuir, Freundlich, and Temkin equations (Figure 4b-4d). The coefficient values, along with the linear equations, are presented in Table 1. Finally, comparisons between the experimental data and the theoretical adsorption isotherms of Ni^{2+} onto the activated material for the three different adsorption models are presented in Figure 5. Based on the contour of the graphs and the high proximity of the experimental results to the theoretical isotherm curves, it has been verified that the newly-formed sorbent material can be effectively used as a Ni^{2+} adsorbent.

By comparing the fitted results presented in Figure 5a and 5b, as well as the regression coefficients (R^2) for the Langmuir and Freundlich models (Table 1), it is clear that the Langmuir equation is the one that better describes the experimental data. This implies that the adsorption of Ni^{2+} ions on the converted material is a monolayer adsorption and that its nature is that of a chemisorption process. In order to further analyze the nature of the investigated

adsorption, we also attempted to fit the Temkin model to the experimental data. From the graph shown in Figure 5c and its high R^2 (Table 1), it is clear that the Temkin model also fits the experimental data well. Based on the positive values of the variation of adsorption energy (ΔQ), it can be concluded that the adsorption is exothermic.

Figure legends:

Figure 1. Acetic acid extraction. Concentration of Al, Ca, Mg, and Si in the leachate solutions (first step, second step, and in total) resulting from the reaction between acetic acid and ground, granulated BF slag at 30 °C, 1000 rpm and for 60 min.

Figure 2. Calcium carbonate precipitates. (a) Composition of the carbonate precipitate, expressed in weight percentage per element, normalized to 100% total. (b) XRD diagram of the post-carbonation precipitate. (c) Particle size distribution of the post-carbonation precipitate. Reproduced from De Crom *et al.*⁶ with permission from Elsevier (3879261230348).

Figure 3. Hydrothermally-converted material. (a) Composition of the hydrothermally-converted material, expressed in weight percentage per element, normalized to 100% total. (b) XRD diagram of the hydrothermally-converted material. (c) Average particle size distribution of the hydrothermally-converted material.

Figure 4. Adsorption isotherms. (a) Adsorption isotherm data of Ni^{2+} on the zeolitic material before and after the pH adjustment. (b-d) Fitting of the experimental data to the linearized Langmuir, Freundlich, and Temkin adsorption models.

Figure 5. Experimental and simulated data proximity. Comparison between the experimental data (exp) and the simulated adsorption isotherms (calc) of Ni^{2+} onto the zeolitic material according to the (a) Langmuir, (b) Freundlich, and (c) Temkin models.

Table 1. Adsorption isotherm parameters for the Ni^{2+} adsorption onto the zeolitic material. Equations of, and fitted parameters from, linearized Langmuir, Freundlich, and Temkin adsorption models.

DISCUSSION:

Although the indirect carbonation^{7,8} and the hydrothermal conversion^{9,10} of BF slags have been widely researched as separate processes, their coupling for the symbiotic synthesis of PCC and zeolitic minerals has only recently been proposed⁵, and the methodology is herein presented in detail. The most critical step of the process is the sufficient (almost total) extraction of Ca and the limited leaching of silica and aluminum from the BF slag during the extraction phase. The high amount of calcium in the leachate secures a high rate of PCC synthesis after carbonation and inhibits the generation of large amounts of undesired phases (*e.g.*, tobermorite, hydrogarnet ($\text{Ca}_3\text{Al}_2(\text{SiO}_4)_{3-y}(\text{OH})_{4y}$)) among the hydrothermally-converted products⁹. On the other hand, the preservation of the greatest part of Si and Al in the post-extraction solid residues is of instrumental importance for the formation of zeolitic minerals.

To this end, among the several extractants investigated in the literature^{7,8,10,11,34-36}, acetic acid was selected as the most suitable for the aim of this study. The particular extraction agent causes the release of high amounts of calcium from the slag to the solution, while ensuring the retention of the largest part of Si and Al in the resulting residues. This promotes the parallel formation of PCC and zeolites. The acetic acid-to-calcium molar ratio used in each extraction step was 2:1 (based on the mass of slag, the calcium content of the slag, and the volume of acetic acid solution), meaning that the total ratio over two extraction steps was 4:1. Since calcium acetate has an acetate-to-calcium ratio of 2:1, double the stoichiometric amount was used, as was found necessary by Chiang *et al.*⁵

In order to limit the presence of undesired impurities in the generated PCC, the leachate solution should be subjected to further purification before being carbonated; this is another novelty of the proposed symbiotic process. In earlier work, the PCC quality (chemical purity, mineral composition, particle size and shape) was negatively affected by impurities. For the synthesized PCC to be qualified as paper filler, certain criteria must be met. The produced PCC should be characterized by high chemical purity (min. 98 wt% Ca), homogenous mineralogical structure, small average particle size, and narrow size distribution⁶. As presented in the Representative Results section, the proposed process affords these characteristics. The precipitated carbonate is of high purity and has a calcium content of 98.1 wt% (Figure 2a).

The optimization of the hydrothermal conversion process resulted in the production of a material with the ability to act as a heavy metal adsorbent. The optimization was made by finding the most suitable combination of temperature, NaOH concentration, and reaction time. Tobermorite is one of the undesirable mineral phases that can form; its layered crystal structure leads to reduced specific surface area³⁹, a trait important for sorbents, though it has been reported that tobermorite can act as a sorbent through an ion-exchange mechanism⁴⁰. Nonetheless, the mineral phase that dominates the converted material in this study, under optimal conditions, is that of analcime (Figure 3b). It is a zeolite that has been reported to have a notable heavy metal adsorption capacity^{41,42} and can thus be used for the removal of toxic contaminants from wastewaters, as shown herein.

The potential use of this material as a sorbent was investigated for nickel removal from water. The pH levels of the synthetically-prepared contaminated solutions of Ni²⁺ were controlled to 4-5 during the test, first, to prevent dissolution of the material in the initial acidic environment of the synthetic solution, and, second, to adjust the pH to the level typically found in heavy metal remediation conditions⁴³. Three different isotherm models, namely Langmuir, Freundlich, and Temkin, were applied in order to characterize the adsorption processes (Figures 4 and 5), with the Langmuir model proving to be the most appropriate. It should be noted that the D_m values attributed to the unadjusted equilibrium adsorbent-adsorbate solutions are higher than those corresponding to the equilibrium solutions after the adjustment. This is explained by the rise in pH that takes place during the adsorption reactions occurring in the solution until it reaches its equilibrium. A higher pH (>5) causes nickel to precipitate as Ni(OH)₂, according to geochemical modeling and experimental studies by Santos *et al.*⁴⁴, which in turn inflates the D_m value. This type of heavy metal should not be accounted as the actual adsorption capacity of the tested

material. In an effort to avoid such biased measurements, the pH of the equilibrated adsorbent-adsorbate solution was re-adjusted to ~5.0 by adding drops of concentrated hydrochloric acid. The lower q_e values (Figure 4a), and consequently, the more conservative Ni adsorption estimate of the pH-adjusted solution, can thus be obtained.

The techniques described herein have the potential to be adapted to the exploitation of other materials as sources of Ca, Al, and Si for the synthesis of PCC and zeolites. Potential materials other than blast furnace slag can include steelmaking slags, incineration ashes, mining and mineral processing tailings, construction and demolition waste, natural minerals, etc. Not all of these materials contain the same proportions of Ca, Al, and Si as BF slag (which is what makes BF slag particularly attractive), but nonetheless, they can still be used to produce PCC, zeolites, or other mineral-derived products (*e.g.*, aggregates⁴⁵ or pozzolanic materials) through similar processing techniques (some combination of extraction, precipitation and/or chemical conversion). Also, the zeolitic materials produced from BF slag or other minerals should be tested for other wastewater or remediation applications, as they likely have adsorption capacity for other heavy metals, such as Cd, Pb, and Zn⁴⁶. Economics (the need to pay for virgin materials versus the avoidance of disposal fees for waste materials, or the financial return on utilizing the products for higher- or lower-value applications) should play a role in the identification of a suitable mineral feedstock. Substitution of other process inputs (acetic acid, sodium hydroxide, and concentrated CO₂) by less costly or more easily-recoverable alternatives should also be considered to improve processing costs.

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DISCLOSURES:

We have nothing to disclose.

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Figure 1

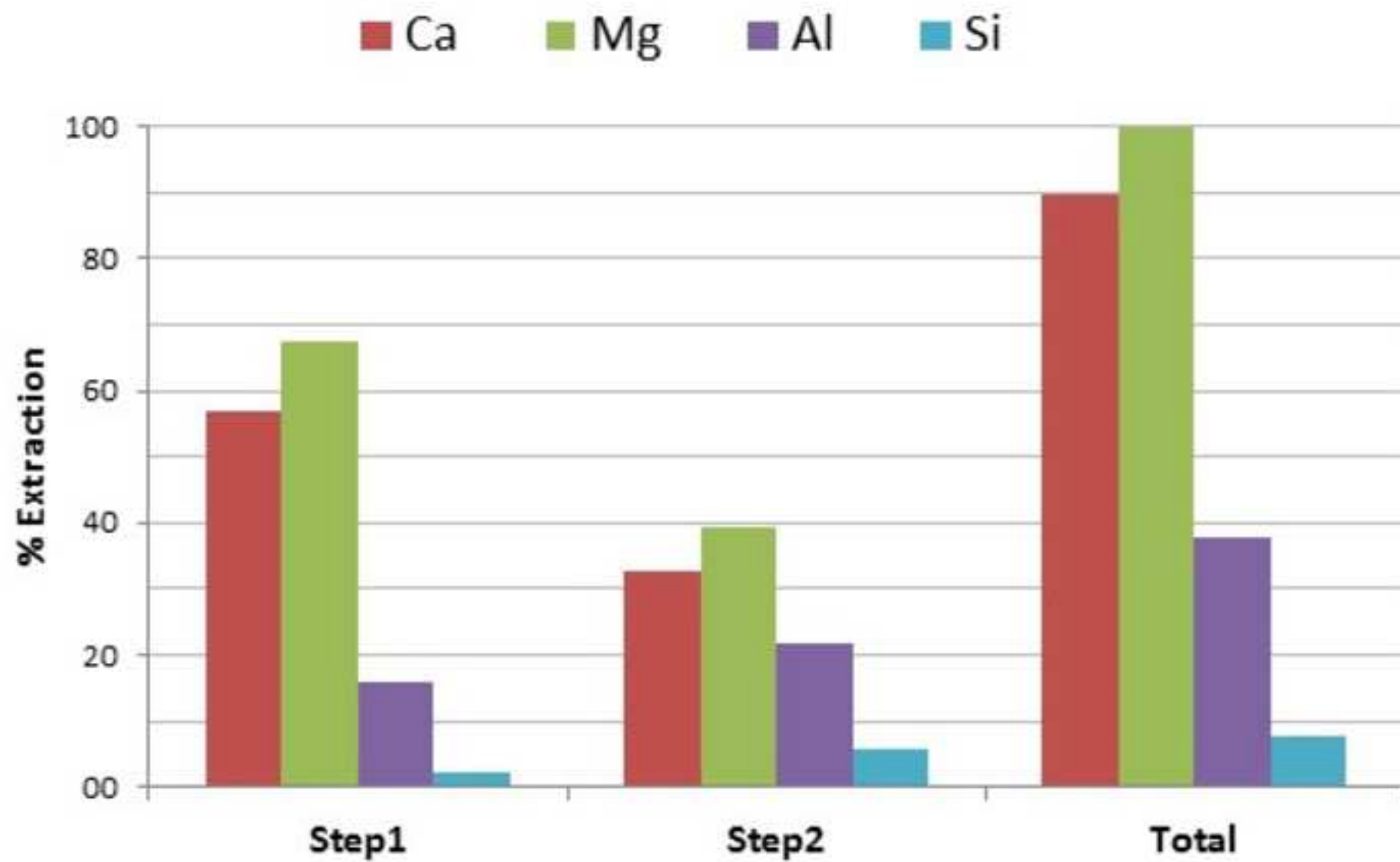


Figure 2

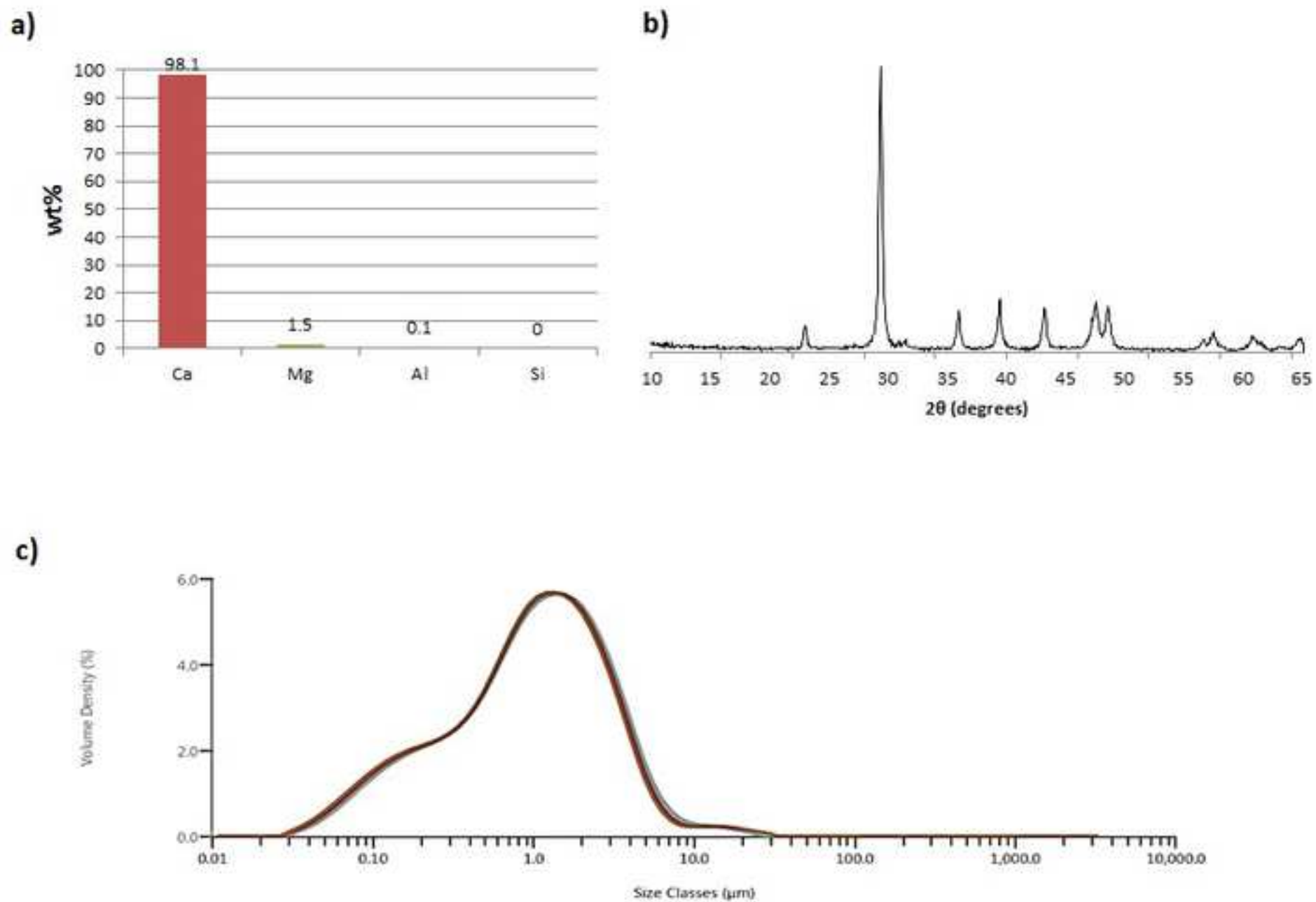


Figure 3

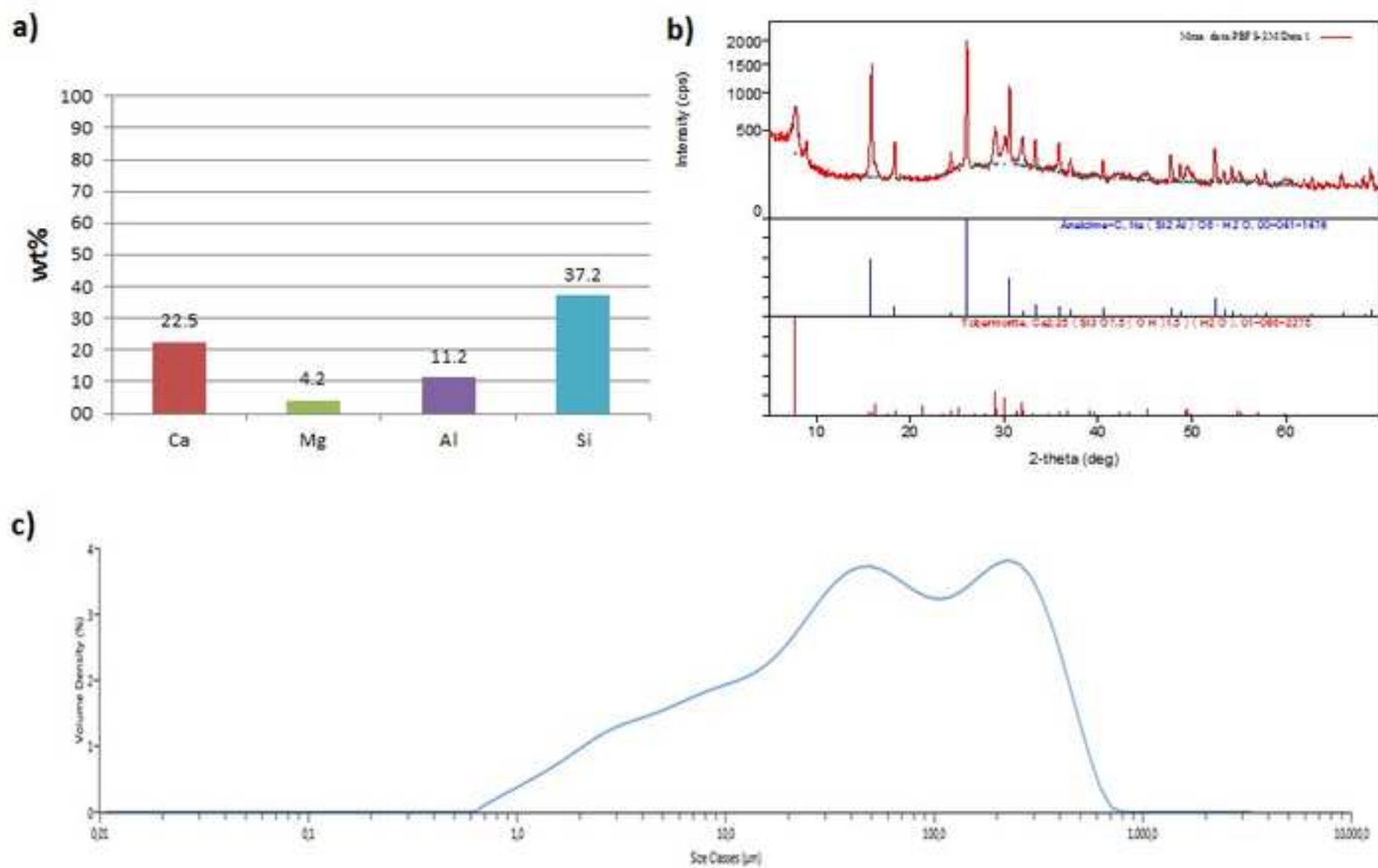
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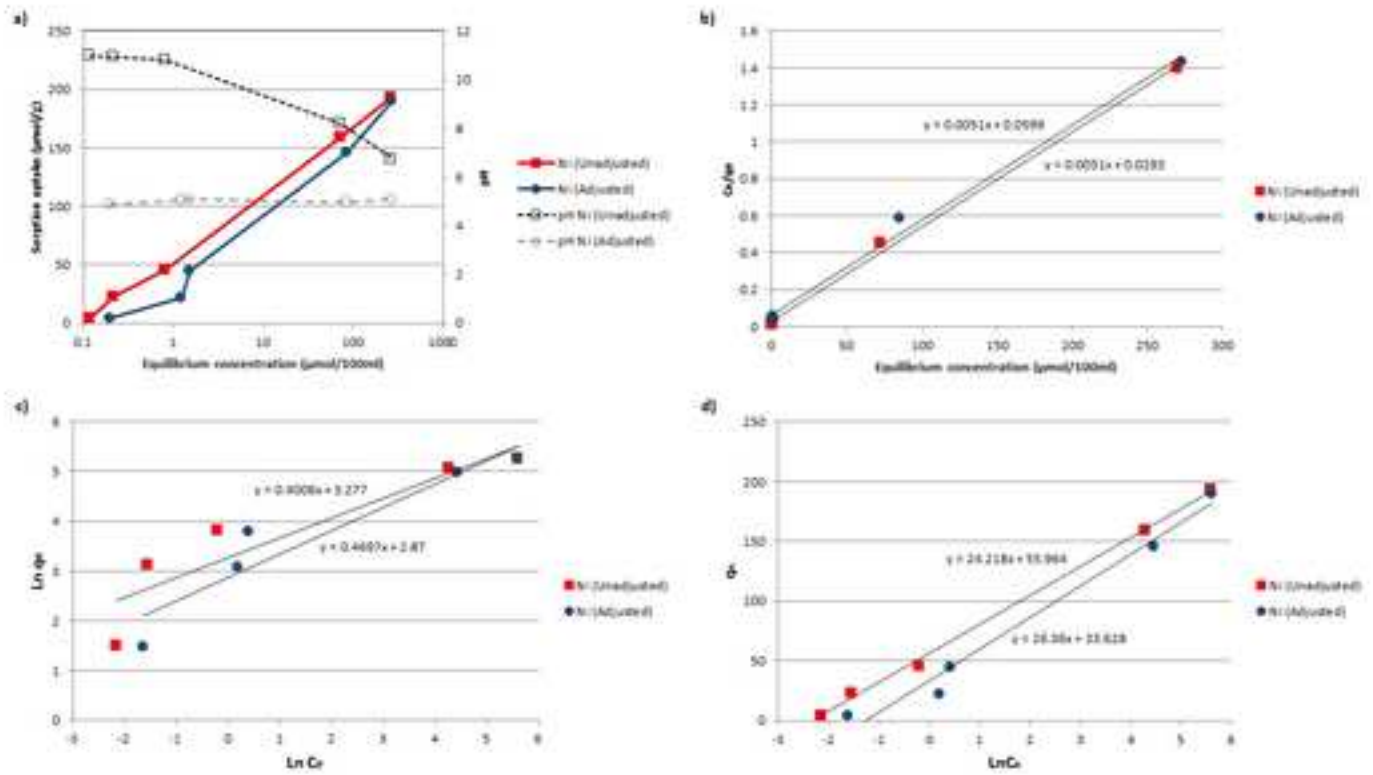
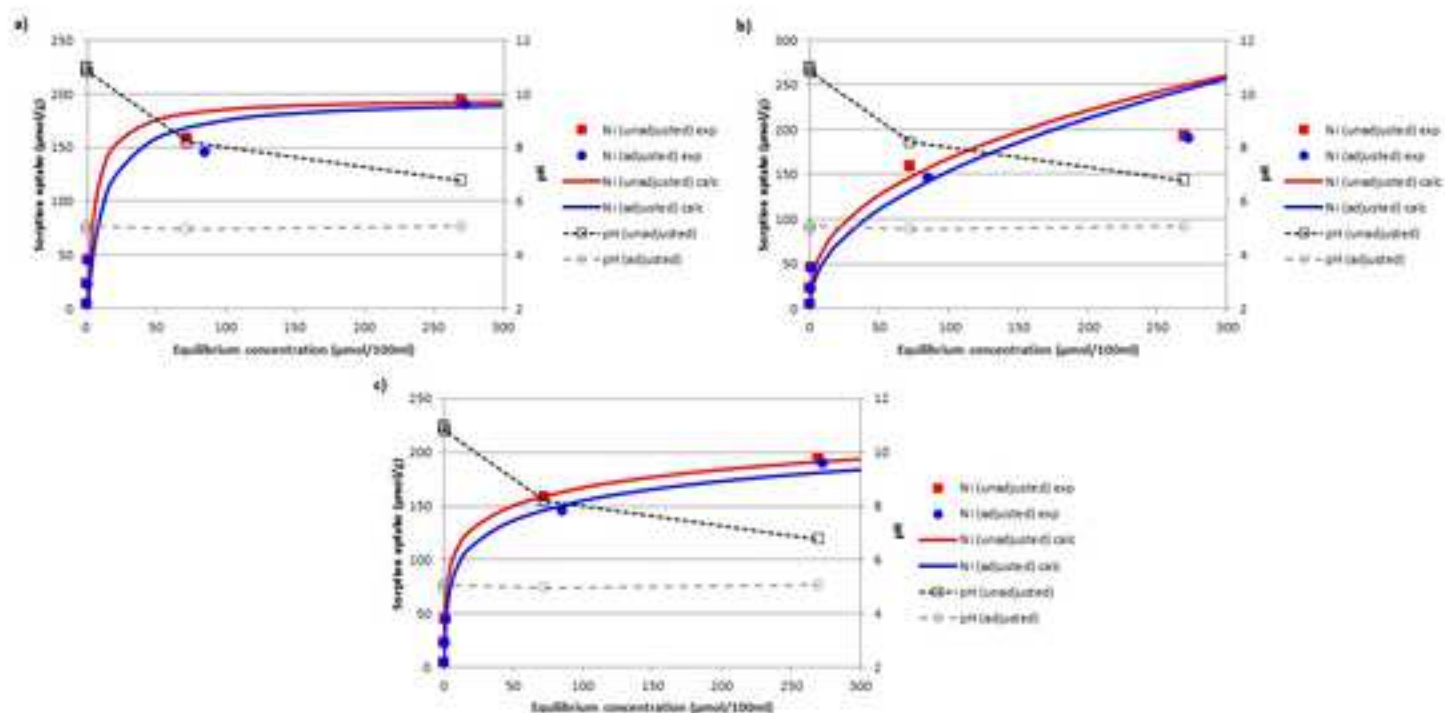


Figure 5



Linear Equations		Coefficients	Unadjusted	Adjusted
Langmuir Equation	$\frac{C_e}{q_e} = \frac{C_e}{D_m} + \frac{1}{k \cdot D_m}$	D_m	196.08	196.08
		k	0.174	0.0851
		R^2	0.997	0.993
Freundlich Equation	$ln(q_e) = ln(K_f) + \frac{1}{n} \cdot ln(C_e)$	n	2.50	2.13
		K_f	26.50	17.64
		R^2	0.840	0.893
Temkin Equation	$q_e = \frac{R \cdot T}{\Delta Q} ln(K_0) + \frac{R \cdot T}{\Delta Q} ln(C_e)$	ΔQ	102.30	93.99
		K_0	9.97	3.58
		R^2	0.998	0.978

Name of Reagent/ Equipment	Company	Catalog Number
Acetic acid (CH ₃ COOH)	Caledon Laboratories	1000-1-29
Autoclave reactor	Parr	4525-T-HC-M(HC)
Blast Furnace (BF) slag	ArcelorMittal	-
Carbon dioxide (CO ₂)	Praxair	TBC
Centrifugal Mill	Retsch	ZM100
Centrifuge	Thermo Electron	IEC CL30
Ecoclave reactor	Büchi	Type 3E
Filter paper	Fisher Scientific	P8 (09-795F)
Hydrochloric acid (HCl)	Caledon Laboratories	6025-1-29
Incubator	New Brunswick Scientific	I 24
Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometer (ICP-MS)	Thermo Electron	X Series
Inductively Coupled Plasma Optical Emissions Spectrometer (ICP-OES)	PerkinElmer	Optima 8300
Laser Diffraction Analysis (LDA)	Malvern	Mastersizer 3000
Microbalance	Sartorius	Quintix224-S1
Ni standard solution	Perkin Elmer	N9300136
Nitric acid (HNO ₃)	Caledon Laboratories	7525-1-29
Oven	Fisher Scientific	Isotemp oven
pH meter	Fisher Scientific	AB15
Sodium hydroxide (NaOH)	Caledon Laboratories	7871-6-42
X-ray Diffraction (XRD)	Rigaku	MiniFlex 600
X-ray Fluorescence (XRF)	PANalytical	Zetium
Nitrogen Adsorption	Quantachrome	NOVAtouch

Comments/Description

Glacial ($\geq 99.7\%$).

One liter volume, equipped with dual turbine impeller, baffle and electric heating jacket.

Granulated BF Slag from Ghent (Belgium); Pelletized BF Slag from Hamilton (Canada).

Industrial grade (99.5%).

0.50mm sieve.

To separate solids from liquids.

One liter volume, equipped with turbine impeller, baffle and electric heating jacket.

Porosity: coarse; flow rate: fast.

Reagent grade (36.5%-38.0%).

Orbital shaker with temperature control.

To determine the concentration of Al, Ca, Mg and Si in the post-extraction leachates and post-carbonation liquid medium.

To determine the concentration of Ni in the post-centrifuged equilibrated adsorbent-adsorbed leachate.

To measure the average particle size diameter and particle size distribution (PSD) of the solids.

Four decimals.

Concentration of 1000mg/1000ml.

Reagent grade (68.0%-70.0%).

105°C.

Calibrated with standard solutions before each set of measurements; temperature corrected to 25°C.

Reagent grade (50% W/W).

To characterize mineralogical properties of adsorbant solids.

To characterize chemical composition of solids.

To characterize specific surface area, pore volume and mean pore diameter of solids.



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Author(s):

Evangelos Georgakopoulos, Rafael M. Santos, Yi Wai Chiang, Vasilije Manovic

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Name:	Rafael M. Santos	
Department:	School of Applied Chemical and Environmental Sciences	
Institution:	Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning	
Article Title:	Two-way valorization of blast furnace slag: synthesis of precipitated calcium carbonate and zeolitic heavy metal adsorbent	
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JoVE55062R1: Response to Reviewer Comments

Editorial Comments

1.6 - how is the leachate solution stored (under what conditions)?

Response: The leachate is relatively stable since it is acidic, so it can be stored at ambient temperature. It is best not to store in the fridge since some components may precipitate at lower temperature (this is done later under controlled conditions to purify the leachate). To address the particular comment, the last part of step 1.6 was replaced by: "The leachate can be stored at ambient temperature, but it should preferably be further processed (purified and carbonated) shortly afterwards to avoid uncontrolled precipitation of dissolved compounds. The solids can be further processed immediately (wet cake), or be left to dry at ambient temperature if to be processed later."

1.11 - Please describe centrifuge speeds as "x g" instead of the machine-dependent "rpm".

Response: that value is actually in g, rather than rpm, that was a mistake. So the centrifuge speed was 2500 g. It has been corrected.

5.2.7 - please provide a reference for ICP-OES or cite manufacturer's instructions, if applicable.

Response: The following has been added to 5.2.7: "Solutions are diluted using 2wt% HNO₃ diluent, such that the concentration falls in the linear range of the instrument calibration (0-2 mg/L). Yttrium, at 2 mg/L, is added to each diluted sample as an internal standard. The ICP-OES instrument is operated with basis on the manufacturer's recommendations for analysis of metals in wastewaters.³⁸"

-The highlighted section of the manuscript exceeds our 2.75 page limit for filmable content. Please reduce the highlighting to no more than 2.75 pages.

Response: highlighting is now made only to the specific portions of the procedure that will be filmed. The highlighted text alone (deleting the text not highlighted, which is mainly clarification comments) is now only 2 pages in length. The tasks are simple enough to not require extensive filming.

-Please make sure that your references comply with JoVE's instructions for authors. For more than 6 authors, list only the first author then et al.):

Response: The list of reference has been corrected according to JoVE's instructions. In the two cases that studies were conducted by more than 6 authors, only the first author was listed and then "et al." was added.

•**Formatting:**

-Please remove references to the video.

Response: the reference to the video has been removed.

-Please use "x g" rather than "rpm" for centrifuge speeds. Also, use "x g" rather than "g" alone to avoid confusion with units of mass.

Response: this has been done as suggested.

-References – Please include DOI where available.

Response: DOI were included where available.

•Length exceeds 2.75 pg of highlighted material and should be reduced accordingly.

Response: highlighting is now made only to the specific portions of the procedure that will be filmed. The highlighted text alone (deleting the text not highlighted, which is mainly clarification comments) is now only 2 pages in length. The tasks are simple enough to not require extensive filming.

•Please copyedit the manuscript for numerous grammatical errors, in particular correct use of prepositions. Some examples are listed below:

Response: The manuscript has been proof-read to correct grammatical errors, including the corrections described below.

-1.1, 4.8 – "particles size"

Response: The particular phrase was replaced by "particle size"

-1.4, 3.2, 4.2 – Should be "in the proper position"

Response: "at the proper position" was replaced by "in the proper position" throughout the Protocol section.

-5.2.2, 5.2.4 – Should be “to 4-5”

Response: “at 4-5” was replaced by “to 4-5” wherever required.

-5.2.4 – Please clarify “to avoid accounting the precipitation of metals as adsorption capacity”

Response: Step 5.2.4 has been re-written to provide more clarity. Essentially, without pH adjustment, nickel is removed from solution both via precipitation and adsorption mechanisms. By adjusting the pH to below the precipitation point of nickel, only adsorbed nickel remains in the solid phase, and mass balance of the liquid phase can be done to determine that adsorbed quantity.

-Line 450 – “in more readily formation of PCC”

Response: To correct that, the phrase “However, it presents lower acid dissociation constant than acetic acid, suggesting that the employment of the latter should result in more readily formation of PCC.” Was replaced by the phrase “However, it presents lower acid dissociation constant than acetic acid, suggesting that the precipitation of calcium carbonate should be more readily achievable after employment of acetate solutions as the extraction agent.”

-Line 455 – “should subjected to”

Response: The particular phrase was replaced by “should be subjected to”.

•Additional detail is required:

-1.2 – What is attached to the cap?

Response: this step has been re-written to provide more clarity on the reactor components.

-1.11 – How much should be placed in each test tube?

Response: it depends on the size of centrifuge tube/bottle used (it varies by laboratory, and often laboratories will have several), so it is best not to specify as the amount and size of tube/bottle. It is advisable to use larger tubes/bottles, to minimize the number needed and simplify the work. What is more crucial is the centrifuge speed (g's), time, and what to do afterwards. The section has been revised to improve clarity.

-3.5, 4.5 – Wash with what?

Response: In both instances, DI water. The steps have been revised.

-5.2.1 – Please clarify “activated material”. Is this the material from step 4.8?

Response: Yes (number have now changed). The phrase “Disperse 1 g of the activated material in 100 ml of the contaminated solution” was replaced by the phrase “Disperse 1 g of the hydrothermally converted material resulting from step 4.6, in 100 ml of the contaminated solution.”

-5.2.2, 5.2.4 – How is pH monitored?

The phrase “The solution is continuously stirred, at low speed, using magnetic stirring bar on stirring plate, and the pH is continuously monitored by maintaining a pH electrode soaked in the solution...” was added to these steps.

-5.2.6 – How much acid is added? To what pH?

Response: the amount of acid is based on achieving 2wt% concentration, which should lower the pH to less than 2. The following has been added to clarify: “Acidify the solution with HNO₃ (to 2 wt% nitric acid concentration), in order to reduce its pH to <2. This step is performed to ensure the ions remain in solution during storage (at ambient temperature) prior to further analysis.”

-5.2.7 – Please provide a citation for ICP-OES.

Response: A reference for the ICP-OES method has been provided, as well as a succinct description of the methodology.

1st Reviewer Comments

-Line 60 – Define PCC.

Response: The term PCC in the abstract section has been defined.

-Line 73 – Needs references.

Response: References have been added for the first phrase of the introduction part.

-Line 142 – Why using 731 ml of CH₃COOH (2M)? Was it calculated for some reason?

Response: this has been clarified in the discussion section as follows: “The acetic acid-to-calcium molar ratio used in each extraction step was 2:1 (based on the mass of slag, calcium content of the slag and volume of acetic acid solution), meaning the total ratio over two extraction steps was 4:1. Since calcium acetate has an acetate-to-calcium ration of 2:1, double the stoichiometric amount is used, as was found necessary by Chiang et al.⁵”

-Line 169 – Is it minimum 10 minutes?

Response: The phrase “at 2500 rpm for 10 min.” has been replaced by “at 2500 rpm for minimum 10 min.”

-Line 178 – Not clear.

Response: The Note part of Protocol’s section 2 has been changed in order to be clearer to the reader.

-Line 181 – A statement is necessary before starting the procedure for example, the procedure can be summarized as:

Response: We understand your suggestion, but we believe it is not appropriate to the journal requirements. The note is not meant as an introduction to each step in the procedure, but rather as a note to highlight some aspect of the procedure. Hence, it does not seem appropriate to include the statement suggested. Looking at other JoVE articles, this does not seem to be a common practice.

-Line 228 – A separate calculation is necessary about the percentage recovery of residue from the slag.

Response: A statement regarding the amount of residual solids resulting after each Ca-extraction stage was made in the Note part of Protocol's section 4.

-4.7 – Not clear! What procedure was adopted in this investigation? Milling or grinding?

Response: The zeolitic material has small primary particles (as observed microscopically), but they become agglomerated upon drying, hence they are disaggregated rather than milled. The description of this step was changed to "Disaggregate the granular material using a mortar and pestle."

-5.2.2 – two 'in order to'; consider for revision.

Response: the step has been revised. A statement has also been added to the discussion section to justify the pH adjustment: "The pH of the synthetically prepared contaminated solutions of Ni^{2+} was controlled to 4-5 during the test to, firstly, prevent dissolution of the material in the initial acidic environment of the synthetic solution, and, secondly, to adjust the pH to that typically found in heavy metal remediation conditions.³⁹"

-5.2.4 – Consider for revision.

Response: revised for clarity and justification has been moved to discussion section.

-5.2.7 – Some other procedure can also be used. So, statement should be rewritten considering other options of analysis.

Response: A statement has been added to suggest alternative forms of measurement: "Alternate techniques for determination of nickel concentration in solution, such as inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) and atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), are also suitable for this step."

-Line 301 – Replace "collected" with "presented"?

Response: The word "collected" was replaced by "presented".

-Line 303 – Why ICP-MS technique was not used to measure Ni^{2+} concentration?

Response: The two phases of the process (carbonation and hydrothermal conversion) were held in different laboratories. That is why two different

methodologies were used to measure the elemental composition of the leachate solution (ICP-MS) and the concentration of Ni^{2+} of the contaminated solutions (ICP-OES). In fact, given the concentration range of the solutions, either technique is suitable in both cases. ICP-MS is more sensitive to very low concentrations, but the concentrations here are of much higher value than the linear calibration range of ICP-MS and ICP-OES, so in both cases the samples undergo dilution prior to analysis.

-Line 305 – Why only acetic was considered as the leaching agent?

Response: This is discussed in the second-to-last paragraph of the introduction. In one of our previous works (Hydrometallurgy 147–148 (2014) 90–94), we tested both acetic acid and succinic acid, and found that only the former allowed precipitation of calcium carbonate upon carbonation. In the case of succinic acid, calcium succinate precipitated. There are also other works in literature (Int. J. Greenhouse Gas Control 9, 334–346) that show that oxalic acid is not suitable, due to precipitation of oxalate. An additional reference has been added to this discussion as follows: “Eloneva et al.³⁶ compared sixteen extracts for calcium removal from steelmaking slags, and found acetic acid to be the most efficient (best performance between 0.5M and 2M extractant concentrations) and most successful (highest calcium recovery at ~100%).”

-Line 319 – Replace “XRD pattern” with “XRD technique”?

Response: “XRD pattern” was replaced by “XRD technique”

-Line 320 – What is PSD analysis?

Response: “PSD analysis” was replaced by “particle size distributions (PSD)”.

-Line 323 – Chemical formula of Nesquehonite?

Response: The chemical formula of Nesquehonite is $\text{Mg}(\text{HCO}_3)(\text{OH}) \cdot 2(\text{H}_2\text{O})$. The chemical formulas of calcite, nesquehonite and magnesian calcite have been added in brackets.

-Line 325 – The phrase is not clear.

Response: The phrase “From the particle size distribution analysis of the material (Figure 2c), it becomes clear that the average particles size is small and the size distribution is within a narrow range.” was replaced by “From the PSD analysis of the

material (Figure 2c), it becomes clear that its mean particle size is small and its particle size distribution is narrow”.

-Line 389 – The material also contains tobermorite gel, which also has ability to adsorb Ni²⁺.

Response: “zeolitic minerals” has been replaced by “sorbent material”. Also, the following has been revised/added in the discussion: “Tobermorite is one of the undesirable mineral phases that can form; its layered crystal structure tends to reduce specific surface area,³⁹ a trait important for sorbents, though it has been reported that tobermorite can act as a sorbent through ion exchange mechanism.⁴⁰”

-Line 441-452 – Some part of this section should be discussed in previous sections.

Response: The original paragraph has been moved to the introduction part. Its place in the discussion part is now taken by the following new paragraph: “To this end, among the several extractants investigated in literature,^{7,8,10,11,34-36} acetic acid was selected as the most suitable for the aim of this study. The particular extraction agent causes the release of high amounts of calcium from the slag to the solution, while retaining the largest part of Si and Al in the resulting residues, promoting that way the parallel formation of PCC and zeolites. The acetic acid-to-calcium molar ratio used in each extraction step was 2:1 (based on the mass of slag, calcium content of the slag and volume of acetic acid solution), meaning the total ratio over two extraction steps was 4:1. Since calcium acetate has an acetate-to-calcium ratio of 2:1, double the stoichiometric amount is used, as was found necessary by Chiang et al.⁵”

-Line 488-498 – Author should write a few lines considering the cost - effectiveness of the developed process: why this process is suitable than other processes?

Response: Economics are definitely important to decide whether a new technology is ready for industrial implementation, but this is not something that JoVE is looking for in their articles. The main objective here is to clarify how experiments are performed so that others can implement a technique, verify the results, or continue developing the technology. Another thing to remember, when it comes to waste valorization, is that the economics depend not only on production costs, but also external factors, e.g.: carbon credits for CO₂ utilization and avoidance of waste disposal fees. The existence of these can swing a process from being tens or hundreds of dollars/euros per tonne (CO₂ or slag) in the red to tens or hundreds in the black. I hope you can understand that this type of analysis is better suited elsewhere. The following has been added to the concluding paragraph to touch on the economics: “Economics (the

need to pay for virgin materials versus the avoidance of disposal fees for waste materials, or the financial return on utilizing the products for higher or lower value applications) should play a role in the identification of a suitable mineral feedstock. Substitution of other process inputs (acetic acid, sodium hydroxide and concentrated CO₂) by less costly or more easily recoverable alternatives should also be considered to improve processing costs.”

2nd Reviewer Comments

–Is there a better way to store the leachate to ensure the solubilized elements stability? Is storage in a fridge would be recommended?

Response: please note that the solubility of silica reduces at lower temperatures (this is used as a purification strategy, under controlled conditions), so it is best to keep the leachate stored at room temperature. The acidity is enough, and the amount of excess acetic acid sufficient, to keep elements in solution for long periods of time. Storage in a fridge is more crucial for samples from environmental leaching tests, in water or weak ionic solution, since the elements in that case will have propensity to precipitate in the absence of solids.

–In the point 1-10, please precise if the term leachate refers to the leachate solution. If yes, please use similar term to keep a uniformity within the text.

Response: The word “leachates” was replaced by “leachate solution”.

–Is there any requirements regarding the filters porosity?

Response: Filters porosities have been added where required.

–Point 3-5, how much water is needed for washing the carbonates?

Response: the amount of wash water should be enough to remove soluble compounds, and more washing is better than too little, so it is difficult to provide a specific value. Instead, we have added the following recommendation: “Marked reduction in conductivity of the wash filtrate can be used to confirm wash end-point.”

–How the authors evaluate the overall carbonation and pcc precipitation or zeolites formation efficiencies? These aspects are missing. For example, mass balance for carbonation/pcc and pore volume measurement for zeolites.

Response: brief descriptions (since they will not be filmed) of the characterization techniques have been added, with appropriate references for more details and examples. Data on specific surface area, pore volume and pore width have also been included in the representative results section, determined by nitrogen adsorption.

Remarks from authors

- Some revisions were made to the protocol section, especially to clarify the recommended liquid-solid separation techniques for each stage. Some terminology was also modified to
- There was a small error in the calculation of one data point on Figures 4 and 5, which have now been revised. This correction does not change any of the discussion.
- The isotherm equation coefficients in Table 1 had been determined numerically instead of analytically (using the linear equations). The values have now been updated to the analytical solution, which is more accurate. This correction does not change any of the discussion.