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Authors' Information

- ▶ [Editorial Board](#)
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- ▶ [Volume 4 No.1 No.2 No.3 No.4 No.5 \(2011\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 5 No.1 No.2 No.3 **No.4** \(2012\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 6 No.1 No.2 No.3 \(2013\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 7 No.1 No.2 No.3 \(2014\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 8 No.1 No.2 \(2015\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 9 No.1 No.2 \(2016\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 10 **No.1 No.2** \(2017\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 11 **No.1 No.2 No.3 No.4 No.5 No.6 No.7 No.8 No.9 No.10 No.11 No.12** \(2018\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 12 **No.1 No.2 No.3 No.4 No.5 No.6 No.7 No.8 No.9 No.10 No.11 No.12** \(2019\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 13 **No.1 No.2 No.3 No.4 No.5 No.6 No.7 No.8 No.9 No.10 No.11 No.12** \(2020\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 14 **No.1 No.2 No.3 No.4 No.5 No.6 No.7 No.8 No.9 No.10 No.11 No.12** \(2021\)](#)
- ▶ [Volume 15 **No.1 No.2** \(2022\)](#)
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INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PUBLICATION HOUSE

International Journal of Engineering Research and Technology (IJERT)

Volume 13, Number 12 (2020)

Contents

Characterization of Calcia Stabilized Zirconia Synthesis for Solid Oxide Fuel Cell Electrolytes through Precipitation Method

pp. 4011-4015

M. Nurbanasari, D.G. Syarif, M.J. Fahmy, Y. Irwan and A.P. Siswanto

Tower Wake Distortion Effect: A Comprehensive Review of Methods and Applications

pp. 4016-4032

Maduako E. Okorie and Freddie Inambao

Energy Audit On Primary Municipal Facilities: Reflection of Municipality's Energy Consumption as a Direct Consumer of the Energy Utility (Eskom)

pp. 4033-4047

Melusi Nhleko and Professor Freddie L. Inambao

Role of Sense of Place in the Use of Communal Spaces as Places for Social Interaction at an Owned Low-Cost Flats Bendungan Hilir II

pp. 4048-4064

Joni Hardi, Prof. Liliany Sigit Arifin and Yohanes Basuki Dwisusanto

Membrane Modeling and Simulation for a Small Scale Reverse Osmosis Desalination Plant

pp. 4065-4083

Randy Ncube and Professor Freddie L. Inambao

Trends: Energy Efficiency and Energy Security

pp. 4084-4117

Jerusha Joseph and Freddie L. Inambao

Application of Resampling Techniques in Orthogonal Regression

pp. 4118-4124

Anwar Fitrianto, Tan Sin Yun and Wan Zuki Azman Wan Ahmad

Experimental Analysis of a Thermoelectric-(Vapor Compression) Hybrid Domestic Refrigerator

pp. 4125-4133

Yasser Abdulrazak Alghanima, Osama Mesalhy and Ahmed Farouk Abdel Gawad

A New Passive-Active Method of Protection from Dynamic Vortex Atmospheric Structures: Physical Foundations, Technical and Economic Advantages

pp. 4134-4138

M.E. Romash, A.Y. Varaksin and M.V. Protasov

Transformation Space Due To Conflict (A Case Study of Kuta, Bali, Indonesia)

pp. 4139-4145

Agung Wahyudi, Imam Buchori, Joesron Ali Syahbana and C. Widi Pratiwi

Dual Scalar Aharonov-Bohm Effect and the Photon Mass

pp. 4146-4150

Maribel C. P'erez Pirela and Miguel E. Rodriguez R. y

Accuracy Improvement Technique of Big Data based LBS System

pp. 4151-4155

Changbae Mun

Dynamic Shear Rheometer to Measure the Improvement of Asphalt Properties with the Addition of Buton Natural Asphalt-Rubber (BNA-R)

pp. 4156-4162

Sigit Pranowo Hadiwardoyo, R. Jachrizal Sumabrata and Nurul Wahjuningsih

Modeling the Impacts of Liquid Entry Pressure on Membrane Performance during Oil-Water Separation

pp. 4163-4170

P. B. Sob

The Effect of Spelling with User's Mother Tongue on P300 Speller Performance

pp. 4171-4176

Leena A. Alhajjaj, Sarah S. Alrumiah, Jowharah F. Alshobaili and Dina M. Ibrahim

System Design of Big data based regional information service

pp. 4177-4182
Changbae Mun

A Study on Selective Recovery of Silicon from Used Solar Cell using Cavitation Effect

pp. 4183-4190
Dong-Hyun Lee and Jei-Pil Wang

Modelling the Effect of Pressure Waves and Velocity of Flow on Membrane Performance During Oil-Water Separation

pp. 4191-4198
P.B SOB

IoT and Sign Language System (SLS)

pp. 4199-4205
Samar Mouti and Samer Rihawi

Optimal Protection Coordination in Microgrids using a Hierarchical Clustering Algorithm

pp. 4206-4210
Sergio Danilo Saldarriaga Zuluaga, Jesús María López Lezama and Nicolás Muñoz Galeano

Modelling the Separability Process of Oil-Water Molecular Motion for Stable and Efficient Wettability Process

pp. 4211-4217
P.B SOB

A Methodology for Obtaining Voltage and Current Ripples of Power Electronics Converters with a Fixed Node on their Output

pp. 4218-4221
Nicolás Muñoz Galeano, Jesús María López Lezama and Fernando Villada Duque

Minimum Cost, Minimum Interference and Minimum Load (M3) Gateway Deployment Algorithm for Multi-radio Multi-channel Wireless Mesh Networks

pp. 4222-4229
N Bhushana Babu D, E V Krishna Rao and K S N Murthy

Recognizing Audience Feedback through Facial Expression using Convolutional Neural Networks

pp. 4230-4235
M.Kanipriya, R. Krishnaveni and M. Krishnamurthy

A Novel TLBO Optimization Technique for the Stability Improvement of Multimachine Power Systems Using UPFC Controllers

pp. 4236-4244
D. Sree Chandana Bhargavi and T.R.Jyothsna

Performance Evaluation of Data Provenance System with Blockchain-Based Cloud Environment

pp. 4245-4250
Yurim Kwon, Eun-Kyu Lee and Junghee Jo

Word Embedding-based Text-to-Scene Conversion

pp. 4251-4254
So-Young Park, Bowon Choi, and Jaewook Lee

Efficiency Optimization Model for 802.11ac WLAN Networks

pp. 4255-4261
Héctor Manuel Herrera Herrera, Octavio José Salcedo Parra and Danilo Alfonso López Sarmiento

Solid Additives and their Lubrication Effects on Polyetheretherketone Polymers – A Review

pp. 4262-4268
Taiwo Lolade Ladipo, Leonard Masu and Patrick Nziu

Chemical and Morphological Characterization of Coconut Shell Powder, Epoxy Resin and Coconut Shell Powder/Epoxy Resin Composites

pp. 4269-4275
AM Andezai, LM Masu and M Maringa

Modeling the Scattering of Nanoparticles during Jet Spray Coating for Stable and Efficient Wettability During Oil/Water Separation

pp. 4276-4281
S. Metsing, P. B. Sob, A. A. Alugongo and T. B. Tengen

Topology Optimization of Automotive Body Structures: A review

pp. 4282-4296
M. Matsimbi A, P. K. Nziu A, L. M. Masu A and M. Maringa

Bioplastics Properties of Fish Scales and Their Effects on the Mechanical Properties in Biocomposites: A Review

pp. 4297-4304
D. O. BICHANG'A, L. M. MASU and P. K. NZIU

Reformulation of the Indonesian Air Quality Index Based on Field Measurement of Ambient Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2)

pp. 4305-4310
Arief Sabdo Yuwono, Dela Angelina, Supandi, Khairun Nisa and Chusnul Arif

Effects of Offset Oblique Circular Cross Bores on Elastic Pressurized Thick-Walled Cylinders

pp. 4311-4317
P. K. NZIU and L. M. MASU

The Design Method Follows Finance in Architecture Case Study: RW 015 Office Building, Pluit, Indonesia

pp. 4318-4326

Naniek Widayati Priyomarsono and Rudy Trisno

Genetic Algorithm Tuned Optimal Gabor Filter and Golden Image Subtraction for Defect Detection in Patterned and Unpatterned Fabric

pp. 4327-4335

D.I. Oni, A.E. Amoran, R.S. Diarah and B.O. Alabi

A Hybrid Approach Based on Non Linear Approximation and Holistic Descriptor for Efficient Image Retrieval

pp. 4336-4343

Shweta Salunkhe, Dr. S.P.Gaikwad and Dr. S.R. Gengaje

Aken Infrastructure: The Abstract Model of a User Authentication and Attribute Sharing Infrastructure for the Cyberspace of the Future

pp. 4344-4362

Tibor Roskó

Digital Learning Media of Surakarta Hadiningrat Sultanate Museum

pp. 4363-4367

Endah Sudarmilah, Mutiara Layang Fatimah and Tri Sagirani

Designing Thematic Learning Media for Elementary School Students

pp. 4368-4374

Arif Setiawan, Yustika Nurbaiti and Endah Sudarmilah

Edugame Augmented Reality as Learning Media for Human Blood Circulation System

pp. 4375-4384

Endah Sudarmilah and Asiyah Nur Kholifah

The Implementation of Hydroponic Automation System and Monitoring Through the BLYNK Application

pp. 4385-4393

Devi Afriyantari Puspa Putri and Titis Prasetyo

The Comparative Analysis of Hybrid Genetic Algorithm Feature Selection Method and Particle Swarm Optimization on the High Dimensional Data

pp. 4394-4401

Maryam, Annas Fagiat and Arfian Ardiansyah

Development of a Method for Forming an Optimal Portfolio of Regional Projects to Achieve Strategic Regional Development Targets

pp. 4402-4416

Lev S. Mazelis, Kirill I. Lavrenyuk, Andrey A. Krasko and Elena V. Krasova

Methodological Aspects of Regional Investment Risk Management

pp. 4417-4420

Svetlana Igorevna Grudina and Alla Igorevna Podgornaja

Decrease in the Transport Process Indicators Due To Wear of the Elements of the Power Unit of the Truck

pp. 4421-4426

Ruslan Nailevich Engalychev, Aleksandr Tikhonovich Kulakov, Elena Petrovna Barylnikova and Irina Petrovna Talipova

Impact of Changes in the Business Environment on the Management of Modern Companies

pp. 4427-4431

Khanif Sharifz?anovich Mullakhmetov, Ruslan Duferovich Sadriev, Rinat Abdullaevich Bikulov and Elvira Ructemovna Gafiyatullina

Creation of a Fuzzy Model for Verification of Malicious Sites Based on Fuzzy Neural Networks

pp. 4432-4438

Oleg Yuryevich Panishev, Ekaterina Nikolaevna Ahmedshina, Dina Vladimirovna Kataseva, Alexey Sergeevich Katasev and Amir Muratovich Akhmetvaleev

Risk Management as Governmentality in Organization

pp. 4439-4449

Siti Afiqah Zainuddin, Nik Alif Amri Nik Hashim, Tahirah Abdullah, Siti Rohana Mohamad, Nur Izzati Mohamad Anuar, Siti Nurul Shuhada Deraman and Zaimatul Awang

Economic Indicators of AAOIFI Internal Audit Project

pp. 4450-4453

Firdaus Ilyasovna Kharisova and Irina Valeryevna Novikova

Influence of Structural Characteristics of Harrow Teeth on the Dynamics of Their Abrasive Wear And Resource Forecast

pp. 4454-4463

Leonid Prokopovych Shustik, Victor Vasylyovych Pogoriliy, Volodymyr Ivanovych Kravchuk, Oleksiy Anatoliyovych Hrynenko, Mykola Dmytrovych Zanko and Tetyana Leonidivna Babynets

Analysis of the Cross-Sectorial Balance and the Importance of the Oil Industry in the Development of the National Economy of the Russian Federation

pp. 4464-4468

Dmitry Vladimirovich Rodnyansky, Evsin Maxim Yurievich, Makarov Ivan Nikolaevich and Levchegov Oleg Nikolaevich

Blockchain as a Part of the Digital Economy in Financial Sphere

pp. 4469-4474

Lilia Mirgazyianovna Yusupova, Irina Arkadevna Kodolova, Tatyana Viktorovna Nikonova, Madina Irekovna Agliullina and Zarina Irekovna Agliullina

Economic Problems of Russia's Grain Complex Competitiveness System in the World Market

pp. 4475-4479

Alina R. Battalova, Ruslan Sh. Tukhvatullin, Farit N. Mukhametgaliev, Landysh F. Sitdikova. and Farida F. Mukhametgalieva

Determinants of Emerging Markets Companies Investment Economical Behavior

pp. 4480-4493

Renat Dashkin and Andrey Ankudinov

Economic Factors Affecting Financial Viability of the Small and Middle Enterprises: Case SMEs Processing Agricultural Products in the Republic of Tatarstan

pp. 4494-4499

Ode Agbatchi. Christian and Ajupov Ajdar. Airativich

Financial Risk Management of Companies Operating in the Oil Sector in the Context of Globalization Based on the COVID-19 Economic Impact

pp. 4500-4504

Margarita Davydovna Mironova and Linar Gatiyatovich Ibragimov

Gr-Strategies Specifications in Emerging Economies

pp. 4505-4508

Aidar Zakirov and Aigul Zaripova

Impact of Financial Structure on the Economic Profitability of Enterprises: Case of SME Processing Agricultural Products in the Republic of Tatarstan

pp. 4509-4516

Ode Agbatchi. Christian and Ajupov Ajdar. Airativich

Integration Processes and Their Role in the Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Oil Industry and Regulation

pp. 4517-4522

Dmitry Vladimirovich Rodnyansky, Yana Stanislavovna Yasnitskaya, Anna Aleksandrovna Avtsinova, Ryazantseva Elena Anatolyevna and Bashlykov Timofey Vasilyevich

Internalizing of Externalities through Blockchain Technology in the Economic System

pp. 4523-4527

Marat Rashitovich Safullin, Mikhail Valerievich Savelichev, Leonid Alekseevich Elshin and Vadim Olegovich Moiseev

Major Financial and Economic Trends in the Development of the Petrochemical Complex in the Republic of Tatarstan

pp. 4528-4538

Aida Safina, Chulpan Danieva and Zarina Sirazieva

Modern Economic Management Model Efficiency Business and Criticism Traditional Budgetings

pp. 4539-4542

Andrei Yurievich, Sokolov and Aliya Serdarovna Abdullaeva

Modern Russian Economy Face Challenges of Sound Financial Management Household

pp. 4543-4546

Lilia Mirgaziyanovna Yusupova, Irina Arkadevna Kodolova, Tatyana Viktorovna Nikonova and Sofia Ildarovna Galieva

Economic Development and Objective Signs of Illegal Receipt and Disclosure of Trade, Tax and Bank Secrets

pp. 4547-4550

Yulia Igorevna Selivanovskaya, Mariya Vyacheslavovna Talan and Irina Mikhailovna Sboeva

Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction with Science Education to Student of Junior High School in Merapi Mountain Areas, Indonesia

pp. 4551-4557

Rizki Arumning Tyas and Pujianto, Suyanta

Local Wisdom in Poda Na Lima: Mandailing Society Philosophy of Life

pp. 4558-4563

Ikhwanuddin Nasution, Pertampilan Sembiring and Haris Sutan Lubis

Criminology Perspective on Criminal Acts in Malacca Strait

pp. 4564-4568

Ediwarman and Wessy Trisna

Do the Ecotourism Destination Interesting for Millennial Tourism?

pp. 4569-4579

Irawan and Andrie Elia

The Role and the Influence of Entrepreneurship on the Russian Economy

pp. 4580-4584

Lilia Mirgaziyanovna Yusupova, Irina Arkadevna Kodolova, Tatyana Viktorovna Nikonova and Asrorov Akmal Anvarovich

Synergy of Local Wisdom Values and Governmental Programs in Cultural Village Social Enterprises

pp. 4585-4590

Intiyas Utami, Aprina Nugrahesthy Sulisty Hapsari and Yohanes Yakobus Werang Kean

Leadership, Reward and Whistleblowing: Experimental Study of Governmental Internal Auditor

pp. 4591-4596

Halim Dedy Perdana, Nafsiah Mohamed, Corina Joseph and Intiyas Utami

Sustainability of Micro-Enterprises: Role of Indonesian Government

pp. 4597-4601

Yusmansyah, Nafsiah Mohamed, Farah Aida Ahmad Nadzri and Wiwik Utami

Analysis of Russian Judicial Practice in Cases of Information Security

pp. 4602-4605

Alexandra Yuryevna Bokovnya, Ildar Rustamovich Begishev, Igor Izmailovich Bikeev, Ilhamiya Ruslanovna Almuhamedova, Diana Davletovna Bersei and Natali Borisovna Nechaeva

Developing Interactive Multimedia for History Subject in Senior High School

pp. 4606-4615

Leli Yulifar and Ema Agustina

Improving Students' Creative Thinking Skills through Google Classroom Assisted GO_KAR Model during the Covid-19 Pandemic

pp. 4616-4621

Sri Astutik Handayani, Yuni Sri Rahayu and Rudiana Agustini

An Integrated Approach to the Construction of Energy-Saving Trigereneration Systems for Objects of the Agro-Industrial Complex

pp. 4622-4626

Dmitry I. Surzhik, Oleg R. Kuzichkin and Gleb S. Vasilyev

The genetic coefficient for learning algorithm in imbalanced data of software quality: A case study of the decision making system for selecting the SMART project for initiating projects based on the concept of Smart City

pp. 4627-4634

Tipaporn Supamid and Surasak Mungsing

Pilot Model of the Embedded Reconfigurable Real Time Computing System

pp. 4635-4645

Alexey I. Martyshkin

Modernization of the Drying drum Design for Organic Fertilizers

4646-4652

Sergei N. Kokoshin and Boris O. Kirgintsev

Modeling the Dynamic Properties of Communication Channels in UAV-based Networks based on Spectral Piecewise Linear Approximation Method

pp. 4653-4657

Dmitry I. Surzhik, Gleb S. Vasilyev and Oleg R. Kuzichkin

Methods of Deposit Thicjness Control in Heat Exchanges

pp. 4658-4661

Ayrat Irekovich Badriev and Vilen Nasibovich Sharifullin

Automatic Testing for Web Application Using HP-ALM Tool

pp. 4662-4665

Rijwan Khan, Ayman Qahmash and Mohammad Rashid Hussain

A Review of Methods Used to Determine the Overall Stiffness of Unitary Automotive Body Structures

pp. 4666-4678

M. Matsimbi, P. K. Nziu, L. M. Masu and M. Maringa

Hyers-Ulam-Rassias stability of nonlinear fractional differential equation with three point integral boundary conditions

pp. 4679-4685

Muniyappan Palaniappan

Congestion Control Scheme for Cognitive Radio Networks using MAQ

pp. 4686-4692

Mala B.M, Manjushree S, Kavya G and Saritha A K

The Effects of Large Vibration Amplitudes on the non Linear Free and Forced Response of Fully Clamped Functionally Graded Skew Plates

pp. 4693-4700

H. Moulay Abdelali and R.Benamar

Efficient Identity-Based Batch Signature Scheme to Reduce Energy Consumption at Mobile Receivers

pp. 4701-4705

Jagadeesha R and Thippeswamy K

Evaluation of the Fluid-Structure Interaction of a Hydrokinetic Turbine Blade by Computational Fluid Dynamics and Finite Element Analysis

pp. 4706-4711

Juan Diego Betancur G, Juan Gonzalo Ardila M, Edwin Lenin Chica A, Jonathan Andrés Graciano U and Sebastián Velez García

Value Chain Analysis of Preserved Fish

pp. 4712-4719

Sawang Panjun

Washout Filter Based Control of Two Hodgkin-Huxley Neurons Coupled By Electrical Synapses

pp. 4720-4733

Resat O'zgu'r DORUK, and Abobakar Belhasan Mohamed ZARGOUN

Parametric Study of Design of Retaining Walls by a Derivative-Free Algorithm

pp. 4734-4740

Carlos Millán-Paramo, Euriel Millán-Romero and Fernando Jove Wilches

Seismic Damage Index as a Function of Seismic Vulnerability for Structures in Non-Structural Masonry and Reinforced Concrete, in City of Sincelejo

pp. 4741-4745

Álvaro Rafael Caballero Guerrero, Helena Caballero Guerrero and Fernando Jove Wilches

Soak Testing of Web Applications Based on Automatic Test Cases

pp. 4746-4750

Rijwan Khan, Ayman Qahmash and Mohammad Rashid Hussain

Structural Characterization and Seismic Vulnerability Analysis of Buildings Located in the Historic Center of Sincelejo

pp. 4751-4757

Helena Caballero Guerrero, Álvaro Rafael Caballero Guerrero and Fernando Jove Wilches

Geopolymer Masonry Bricks production using Phosphogypsum and Fly Ash (Air-Dried samples) – A Detailed Feasibility study

pp. 4758-4772

Jagmohan Vijay Jandhyala, Prof. H. Sudarsana Rao and Prof. Vaishali. G. Ghorpade

Generation of a Map of Seismic Events that Occurred in Colombia during the Last Decade

pp. 4773-4778

Fernando Jove Wilches, Carlos Millán-Paramo and Euriel Millán-Romero

Determination of the impact of natural disasters within the Colombian territory using Geographic Information Systems

pp. 4779-4786

Fernando Jove Wilches, Carlos Millán-Paramo and Euriel Millán-Romero

Correlation models between CBR values and the results of index tests in granular subgrade soils in northern Colombia

pp. 4787-4793

Fernando Jove Wilches, Carlos Millán-Paramo and Euriel Millán-Romero

Classification of Electric Propulsion Installations of the Ship Propulsion Systems

pp. 4794-4798

Aleksy Fedorovich Burkov, Viktor Viktorovich Mikhanoshin, Vagarshak Radikovich Avetisyan and Kha Van Nguen

Instrumental Distortion Correction Method for the ETM + Scanner on Landsat-7 Multispectral Satellite Images

pp. 4799-4803

Dmitriy Mozgovoy, Roman Tsarev, Dmitriy Svinarenko, Aleksy Danichev and Andrey Karnaukhov

Automated Complex of Anti-Birds Airport Protection

pp. 4804-4806

Abdurakhmonov Sultonali, Kuldashov Obbozjon Khokimovich, Fayzimatov Bahodir Numonovich, Mirzazhanov Mahmud Ahmadovich and Bilolov Inomjon Uktamovich

Optimization of Natural and Economic Systems within the Land and Property Complex in the City of Kurgan in Accordance with the Study of Environmental Risks Using Topic Mapping Technologies

pp. 4807-4815

Marina Podkovyrov, Anatoly Oleynik and Natalia Tirsikh

Comparison of the Efficiency of Compression Algorithms for Multispectral Satellite Imagery

pp. 4816-4819

Dmitriy Mozgovoy, Roman Tsarev, Dmitriy Svinarenko, Roman Kuzmich and Oleg Ikonnikov

Formation of Technical Policy of Motor Transport in the Republic of Uzbekistan

pp. 4820-4822

Sherbek Erbekov

Perspective Drilling Methods, Non-Technological Holes in Polymeric Composite Materials

pp. 4823-4831

Bahodir Numanovich Fayzimatov, Fayzimatov Shukhrat Numanovich and Yunusali Yuldashalievich Khusanov

Methodic of Determination of Coefficient Value of Heat Flow Distribution at the Processes of Drilling and Milling

pp. 4832-4834

Hasanov Vagif Gadzhan ogly, Mustafayev Amir Gochu ogly, Aliyeva Irada Kerim kyzy, Hasanova Leila Agamverdi kyzy, Aliyev Hammed Misir ogly and Abdullayeva Ainur Ramiz kyzy

Experience of Using "GIS" Technology in the Development of Geoecological Maps

pp. 4835-4838

Askar N. Nigmatov, Salauat J. Abdireimov, Anvar Rasulov and Mayra E. Bekaeva

Composition of Engineering and Geodesic Works During the Forensic Land Survey

pp. 4839-4842

Anatoliy Mikhaylovich Oleynik

Utilization of Wood Chemical Production Waste in Wood Composite Materials Technology

pp. 4843-4845

Plotnikov Nikolay Pavlovich and Plotnikov? Galina Pavlovna

Computer Simulation of Wind Flow in the Urban Residential Planning Stage

pp. 4846-4848

Salieva Noilya Mukhamedovna

Formalization of Impact of Information on the Human Behaviour for Automatization of Calculation of the Marketing Influence

pp. 4849-4854

Michael Vladimirovich Samosudov

An Approximate Determination of Local Stresses in the Walls of Steel Crane Girders of an I-Section

pp. 4855-4860

Sklyadnev A.I

Improvements in the Functioning of the Information System for Monitoring and Forecasting Emergency Situations in the Republic of Altai

pp. 4861-4865

Irina Pozharkovaa, Alexander Pupkov, Roman Tsareva, Tatiana Yamskikh, Kirill Zhigalov and Ionut Cristian Scurtu

Concept of "Scientific Revolutions" in Nature and Society Knowledge-Based Systems

pp. 4866-4869

Sergey L. Turkov

Effectometrics of Transport Technological System

pp. 4870-4879

Anatolii M. Berestovoi, Ivan O. Berestovoi, Sergii G. Zinchenko, Olha A. Khliestova and Vladimir An. Senatosenko

Detoxication and Neutralization of Toxic Industrial Waste Components for Production of Sulfur-Containing Binding Construction Materials

pp. 4880-4884

B.R. Isakulov, M.D. Dzhumabaev, Kh.T. Abdullaev, Zh.O. Konysbaeva and S.I. Shalabaeva

Construction and Calculation of a Distributed Levitation Screen of Electromagnetic Transducers to Control the Thickness of the Winding

pp. 4885-4891

Ilham M. Seydaliyev

Managing Hydrological Risk in the Urbanized Territories in the Framework of Implementing the Concept of Smart Cities Territories

pp. 4892-4898

Michail V. Bolgov, Irina U. Oltyan, Elena V. Aferyeva and Dmitry O. Kopytov

Development Reflective Optical Sensor for Blood Cholesterol Measurement Using LED Infrared 940 nm

pp. 4899-4907

Usman Umar, Syafruddin Syarif, Ingrid Nurtanio and Indrabayu

Performance Analysis of a Novel Decomposition based PWM Scheme of Dual-Inverter Fed Open-End Winding Five-Phase Motor Drives with DC-link voltage ratio of 2 : 1

pp. 4908-4914

I.N.W Satiawan, I.B. F. Citarsa and I.K. Wiryajati

A study about Narrative Structure and Immersion Theory on Interactive Game

pp. 4915-4923

Jia-Ni Li and Seok-Kyoo Kim

Spatial Distribution for Enterprises of Innovative Clusters in Economic Space of Region

pp. 4924-4929

Dmitry L. Napol'skikh

Statistical and Structural-Entropic Analysis of Main Trends of Road Traffic Accident Rate: Comparison of India and Russia

pp. 4930-4942

Artur I. Petrov and Dmitrii A. Zakharov

Review of Status of Wind Power Generation in South Korea: Policy, Market, and Industrial Trends

pp. 4943-4952

Ji-Won Hwang, Jung Keun Kook, Han-Bin Jeong, Ju-Hyun Mun and Sanghee Kim

Participatory Architectural Design and Construction Framework in Primary Schools with Reference to a Local Case Study in Egypt

pp. 4953-4965

Eng. Ibrahim Samy Sayed Saleh, Prof. Dr. Mostafa Refaat Ahmed Ismail and Prof. Dr. Ahmed Atef Eldesouky Faggal

User Preference and Input Analysis in Architectural Design and Construction Using Participatory Frameworks with Reference to a Case Study in Egyptian Primary School

pp. 4966-4975

Eng. Ibrahim Samy Sayed Saleh, Prof. Dr. Mostafa Refaat Ahmed Ismail and Prof. Dr. Ahmed Atef Eldesouky Faggal

Design Considerations and Comparative Analysis of Cross Layer Approaches for Terrestrial & Underwater Wireless Sensor Networks

pp. 4976-4991

B. Umarani and A.R. Naseer

Study of Water Balance for Irrigation in Coastal Areas Jember District

pp. 4992-4999

Noor Salim and Nanang Saiful Rizal

Evaluation of Using Standard Mobile OFDM Signals for Short-Range Radar Sensors

pp. 5000-5004

Elena Omelyanchuk, Andrey Tikhomirov, Ilya Muraviev, Niek Molenkamp and Olga Simonova

Development of a Monitoring System Automatic Power Meter at the "Gunung Salak" Geothermal Power Plant, Sukabumi, Indonesia

pp. 5005-5011

Muhamad Muslih, Nunik Destria Arianti and Somantri

A DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEMATIC IN-SILICO ANALYSIS FOR RNA-Seq ANOPHELES GAMBIAE DATA

pp. 5012-5027

Marion Adebisi, Samuel Oladayo Olawepo and Micheal Olaolu Arowolo

Energy and Data Communication Delay Aware Routing in WSN

pp. 5028-5032

G. Vishnupriya and R. Ramachandran

Evaluation on the Effectiveness of Priority Seats for the Pregnant Women on Railroad Vehicles in South Korea

pp. 5033-5046

Mizuno Tomomi and Tokuda Katsumi

Ballistic Failure Mode of Apus Bamboo Strips Reinforced Epoxy Composite Materials

pp. 5047-5050

Sofyan Djamil, NPG Suardana, Agustinus Purna Irawan and IKG Sugita

Integrating Dehydration and Natural Gas Liquids Processes for Maximization of Natural Gas Liquids Production

pp. 5055-5065

Ahmed Ali Masnour, Walaa Mahmoud Shehata and Fatma Khalifa Gas

Performance of a Split Bregman Method for a TVL1-type of Image Restoration Model

pp. 5066-5077

Hyo Jin Lim and Jae Heon Yun

Combined Approach for Treating Stochastic Vector Optimization Problem

pp. 5078-5082

Ahmed A. Elsayy, Adel M. Widyan and Atheer S. Alqudhaibi

Effect of Piezoelectric Thickness Ratio on the Deflection of Laminated Hybrid Composite Plates

pp. 5083-5094

D. Dhanunjaya Raju and V. V. Subba Rao

Quality Management Systems (QMS) and Organizational Performance

pp. 5095-5104

Juan Manuel Andrade, Gerardo Duque Gutierrez and Fernando Fierro Celis

Investigating Factors that Affect Purchase Intention of Visitors of E-commerce Websites Using a High Scoring Random Forest Algorithm

pp. 5105-5112

Martha Teiko Teye and Yaw Marfo Missah

Hole Filling And Image Fusion Approach For RGBD Database

pp. 5113-5122

Aniketh A. Gaonkar, Narayan T. Vetrekar and Rajendra S. Gad

Enabling Financial Inclusion By Technology Led Last-Mile Delivery Of Banking Services

pp. 5123-5128

Govind Korekar and Dr. Anuja Agarwal

Finding Accuracy of Utterance of Language Model

pp. 5129-5134

Nadeem Ahmed. Kanasro, Najma Imtiaz Ali, Ghulam Muhammad, Mujeeb U Rehman Maree and A.G Memon

Spread of Avian Influenza- A Mathematical Approach

pp. 5135-5141

Bhanu Sharma, Pooja Khurana and Deepak Kumar

A Content-Based Retrieval Model with Combinational Features and Indexing for Distributed Video Objects

pp. 5142-5148

Nithya Kaliaperumal, Akansha Das and Vijayakumar Balakrishnan

Design Challenges of Securing IoT Devices: A survey

pp. 5149-5165

Matasem Saleh, NZ Jhanjhi, Azween Abdullah and Raazia Saheer

Evolution of Smart Grid Assessment Methods: Science Mapping and Performance Analysis

pp. 5166-5175

Eliseo J. Zarate P., Ana. L. T. S. Da Motta and Juan H. Grados G

Level Design of Platform Games Using Interest Curves

pp. 5176-5181

Seongmin Kim, Kyungeun Park and Taesuk Kihl

Exploring the future of Li-Fi

pp. 5182-5189

Vilma Fernandes, Jivan Parab and Gourish Naik

Bluetooth Based Automation System Using Android App

pp. 5190-5195

Jolan Baccay Sy and Shaik Irfan

Structural Equation Model for Analyzing the Factors Affecting Construction Safety Cost of Vertical Residential Buildings in Indonesia

pp. 5202-5212

Ratih Fitriani and Yusuf Latief

Co-designed implementation of the PRESENT cryptographic algorithm for an ARM-based System on Chip

pp. 5213-5218

Edwar Jacinto Gómez, Fredy H. Martínez S. and Fernando Martínez Santa

Support of Mobility Models for the Decentralized Multi-layer UAV Networks Assisting VANET Architecture (DMUAV)

pp. 5219-5226

N. Vanitha and G. Padmavathi

Hybrid Firefly Optimization with Double Q-learning for Energy Enhancement in Cognitive Radio Networks

pp. 5227-5232

Jyoti Sharma, Surendra Kumar Patel and V. K. Patle

Simulation of Perovskite channel Thin Film Transistor

pp. 5233-5239

Mohammad Kaifi and S. K. Gupta

Mathematical Statement of Dynamic Factors Affecting the Development of Electron Government

pp. 5240-5246

Nishanov Akhram Khasanovich, Saidrasulov Sherzod Norboy ogli, Babadjanov Elmurad Satimbaevich, Mamasaidov Ulugbek Egamberdievich and Toliev Khurshid Ilhamovich

The Influence of Outdoor Temperature and Storage Conditions on Stability of Biodiesel and Blends: Acidity and Hygroscopicity Behavior

pp. 5247-5251

Nur Allif Fathurrahman, Cahyo Setyo Wibowo, Riesta Anggarani, Lies Aisyah and Maymuchar

Prediction the Turnover of Retail Trade Using Analysis of Time Series

pp. 5252-5261

Nadezhda Anatolevna Opokina

Validation of Embedded System Courses in Product-Based Learning- 3D

pp. 5262-5267

Dian Noviantri, Wakhinuddin Simatupang, Hansi Effendi, Ambiyar, Tongam E Panggabean, Leni Marlina, M. Fakhriza, Unung verawardina and Yunesman

Modeling of Nonlinear Control Systems for Thermoelectric Cooling and Regenerative Systems Based on Peltier Modules

pp. 5268-5273

Oleg R. Kuzichkin, Gleb S. Vasilyev and Dmitry I. Surzhik

Modeling a Transport-Level Telecommunication Management Service of Thermoelectric Systems Based on Petri Nets

pp. 5274-5282

Oleg R. Kuzichkin, Vladimir T. Eremenko, Gleb S. Vasilyev, Alexey V. Eremenko, Dmitry I. Surzhik and Sergey V. Eremenko

Sensorless Field-Oriented Control of Doubly-Fed Induction Motor Drive

pp. 5283-5292

Maxim Bobrov

Design PV System for Any Building: a case between conventional solar cell and Nano Solar Cell

pp. 5293-5300

Ali N. Hamoodi, Aseel TH. Ibrahim and Safwan A. Hamoodi

APCS Software Integration Based on Opc Server

pp. 5301-5304

Lyalya Bakieva Khuzyatova and Lenar Ajratovich Galiullin

Car Access Control Automation

pp. 5305-5308

Almaz Kharisovich Tazmeev and Lenar Ajratovich Galiullin

Definition of Transition Parameters between Coordinate Systems for Documentation on Territory Planning For Geospatial Support of State Registers

pp. 5309-5316

Andrey A. Tesalovsky, Yuri M. Avdeev, Aldanysh A. Nurumov, Olga Yu. Voronkova, Svetlana D. Danshina and Olga G. Grigorieva

Nonlinear Boundary-Value Problem for Differential Equations of Shell Theory of Timoshenko Type

pp. 5317-5327

Liliya Sergeevna Kharasova

Solvability of One Problem for Differential Equations of Shell Theory of Timoshenko Type

pp. 5328-5334

Liliya Sergeevna Kharasova

System Analysis of the Influence of External Factors on the Load of a Truck Transmission

pp. 5335-5338

Almaz Dinaisovich Samigullin, Aleksey Yurevich Barykin, Rayaz Khalimovich Takhaviev and Damir Imamutdinovich Nuretdinov

Microclimate Control in a Production Shop Using a Fuzzy Controller

pp. 5339-5343

Rustem Raisovich Ziyatdinov, Aleksandr Borisovich Maksimov and Ramil Takhirovich Nasibullin

Analysis of Methods for Calculating Means of Securing Cargo

pp. 5344-5348

Vladimir Arkadievich Nazarov, Damir Imamutdinovich Nuretdinov, Radik Fanisovich Ildarkhanov and Rayaz Khalimovich Takhaviev

Learning Style as a Variable to Develop a Smart Learning Management System

pp. 5349-5353

Yeka Hendriyani, Sukardi, Ambiyar and Hansi Effendi

Development of Smart Learning Media Model Based on Android

pp. 5354-5364

Dony Novalindry, Muhammad Adri, Titi Sriwahyuni, Asrul Huda, Yasdinul Huda, Dedy Irfan, Putra Jaya, Dochi Ramadhani and Sartika Anori

The Role of Energy Investments in the Middle East Policy of Russia

pp. 5365-5372

Aitach Durmaz and Elmira Habibullina

Design and Performance Analysis of Developed Computer Vision Measurement Application for End Mill Cutting Tool

pp. 5373-5378

Waluyo Adi Siswanto, Chong Bin Hong, Rasidi Ibrahim, Zulafif Rahim and Neexon Khoo

The Analysis and Implementation of Remote Production Monitoring System in Manufacturing Industries

pp. 5379-5385

Wijianto, Nadiatul Azwa, Aishah Ahmad, Rasidi Ibrahim, Nor Azah Samsudin and Norman Mohamad

Comparative Performance Analysis of Kruskal and Prim MST Algorithms

pp. 5386-5391

Peace O. Ayegba, Aderemi E. Okeyinka, Marion Adebiji, Emmanuel O. Asani, Joyce A. Ayoola and Goodness C. Ben

Blood Pressure Pulse Transient Time of Intermittent Fasting Subjects

pp. 5392-5399

Omer Hamid, Azarudeen Mohamed Arif, Montasir Mohamed Mansour, Anwar Al-Shrouf, Abdulsalam AlHumaidi Al-Mutairi and Khalid Dakhilallah Al-Shalawi

Housing and Settlement Development in Indonesia

pp. 5400-5407

Entang Adhy Muhtar and Budiman Rusli

A Review on Automated Bone Age Measurement Based on Dental OPG Images

pp. 5408-5422

Fatemeh Sharifonnasabi, NZ Jhanjhi, Jacob John, A. Alaboudi and Prabhakaran Nambiar

Investigating The Effect of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction Case Study: Ride-Hailing Service in Malaysia

pp. 5423-5428

Wan Farha Wan Zulkiffli, Munirah Mahshar, Nik Alif Amri Nik Hashim, Nur Izzati Mohamad Anuar and Mohd Zulkifli Muhammad

Analysis of the Relation between Financial Literacy and Entrepreneur

pp. 5429-5435

Nur Farahiah Azmi, Siti Rohana Mohamad, Hazriah Hasan, Siti Nurul Shuhada Deraman, Tahirah Abdullah, Siti Salwani Abdullah and Nik Alif Amri Nik Hashim

Rheological and Electrical Properties of Industrial Polymers

pp. 5436-5439

Israa Meften Hashim and Israa Faisal Ghazi

Comparative Analysis Between Smart Buildings Projects (SBP) in Egypt and Worldwide

pp. 5440-5450

Samar El-Motasem, Laila M. Khodeir and Ali Fathy Eid

Social behavior in an area of Medellin through Agent-Based Simulation

pp. 5451-5458

Martha Catalina Ospina, Yony Ceballos, Albert Miyer Suarez Castrillon and Sir-Alexci Suarez Castrillon

Influence of Wind Catcher on Thermal Performance of the Central Zone of a Heritage Building in a Moderate Climate: A Case Study

pp. 5459-5462

Ali Alzaed

The Effect of Thermal Insulation for Heritage Mosques Roofs on Indoor Thermal Comfort Temperature: Case study in Taif city, Saudi Arabia

pp. 5463-5468

Ali N. Alzaed

The Positive Impact of the Lockdown on the Atmosphere and Climate in Downtown, Amman, Jordan Using Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing

pp. 5469-5480

Eng .Esraa Fawaz abdalaziz alayed

Application of Remote Sensing and GIS in Geomorphology and Flash Flood Hazard (Case study of Wadi Namera, Jordan)

pp. 5481-5499

Eng .Esraa Fawaz AlAyed

Characterization of Calcia Stabilized Zirconia Synthesis for Solid Oxide Fuel Cell Electrolytes through Precipitation Method

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Abstract

Indonesia has abundant natural resources which are potential to be converted into alternative renewable energy sources to offset the increasing future demand of electrical energy. One of them is Calcia (CaO) which is generally used to stabilize zirconia in order to form Calcia stabilized Zircon (CSZ). The latter is known as a solid electrolyte material in solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC). This fuel converts chemical energy into electrical energy with the advantage of having good impacts on the environment as well as a renewable fuel. An important part of SOFC is the electrolyte, in which ions flow from the cathode to the anode. The electrolyte is made from zirconia, which needs to be stabilized in a cubic phase to be able to flow the ions. Currently, Yttria has been widely used as a zirconia stabilizer in SOFC solid electrolytes. However, Yttria material is generally expensive and it is not widely available especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this research focused on producing CSZ from $Zr(OH)_4$ which was extracted from local zircon sand ($ZrSiO_4$) and synthesized with CaO to produce CSZ powder by precipitation method. The CSZ powder was then transformed into pellets by compacting and sintering at the temperature of 1250°C. CSZ powders and pellets were characterized using X-ray diffraction (XRD) testing to determine the crystal structure and Scanning Electron Microscopy with Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy to analyse the microstructure. The XRD test results on CSZ powders and pellets showed a pattern that was in accordance with that typically found for CSZ powders and pellets. Micro structural analysis showed that the porosities were still observed and there was an element of silicon impurity.

Keywords: CSZ, fuel cell, pellet, XRD, precipitation

I. INTRODUCTION

Solid oxide fuel cell (SOFC) is a renewable energy source that is formed through the reaction of chemical substances into electric energy. This new emerging fuel is lately preferred because of its superiority in terms of good environmental impact and renewable fuel. The SOFC is an electrochemical energy conversion based, that converts chemical energy into electrical energy [1,2]. It consists of 3 important components, namely anode, cathode and solid electrolyte. Electrolytes play

an important role in a SOFC to facilitate ions flow from the cathode to the anode [3].

Currently, solid electrolyte materials in zirconia-based solid oxide fuel cells have been widely studied because they are considered as new emerging alternative fuel with promising research milestones [4-6]. Zirconia has polymorph properties which are influenced by temperature. The 3 polymorphs are: i) monoclinic that occur at lower temperature of 1170 °C, ii) tetragonal occurs in the range of 1170-2370 °C, and iii) cubic in the range of 2370-2700 °C [7,8]. The most stable polymorphic phase is the one that has the lowest free energy under given conditions (i.e. composition, temperature, and pressure) [9]. The cubic phase is the most stable phase that is capable of flowing oxygen ions. In order to achieve a stable cubic phase at lower temperatures, the addition of an oxide is required. Calcia (CaO) is an oxide that was considered as the most suitable material as a zirconia stabilizer to produce the calcia stabilized zircon (CSZ). The required criteria for a good electrolyte are high ionic conductivity, high density, and minimum porosity at the grain boundaries [10]. This research focused on electrolytes made from the CSZ. The CSZ used is the result of previous process of $ZrSiO_4$ zircon sand extraction to obtain $Zr(OH)_4$. After getting the $Zr(OH)_4$, synthesis process was further conducted using the precipitation method to obtain CSZ electrolyte. Multi crystal structural characterization was further conducted using X-ray diffraction (XRD) and Scanning Electron Microscopy with Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (SEM-EDS) tests for CSZ powder and pellets. The study results revealed the characteristics of Calcia stabilized zircon synthesis to contribute to development of Solid Oxide Fuel Cell in the future.

II. METHODOLOGY

Foremost step of the research was the production of CSZ. It was started with extracting ZOC ($ZrOCl_2 \cdot 8H_2O$) obtained by grinding 100 grams of local $ZrSiO_4$ and 180 grams of NaOH using the caustic fusion method with calcination for 3 hours at 700 °C. Furthermore, the grinding was carried out until it became a powder. Then 20 grams of the powder were mixed with 150 ml of distilled water. This process was repeated 6 times to ensure that the solution and sediment could not be separated anymore, and to reach the pH of 6-7. The next step was to produce $Zr(OH)_4$ by drying process in the furnace at

the temperature of 110 °C. After drying, then leaching process was carried out using a magnetic stirrer for 2 hours, using 5M HCl at 90 °C then it was cooled down to the room temperature for a night until a sodium silicate precipitate was formed. The process was then followed by filtration to obtain a $ZrClO_2$ solution. The $ZrClO_2$ solution obtained from the extraction process was then precipitated by adding ammonia until the yellow colour of the solution turned afterwards. The next step was washing using distilled water until the sediment was formed. This process was repeated until the pH 8.5-9 of the solution was reached. The filtrate was taken from the filtration process, and followed by drying in a furnace at 150 ° to be converted into $Zr(OH)_4$ powder.

The process of producing CSZ through the precipitation method was carried out by mixing 5.7 grams of $Zr(OH)_4$ which was previously dissolved with 5M HCl and 0.45 grams of CaO. Note that the 0.45 grams of CaO had been dissolved in advance with 20 ml 1M HCl. The mixing process was carried out using a magnetic stirrer at the temperature 90 °C. Then ammonia was added until the yellow colour of the solution turned white and formed sediment, and was allowed to settle. The next stage was the filtration stage to obtain sediment. The sediment was then calcined at 800 °C for 3 hours to obtain the CSZ powder. Pelletized CSZ was made from CSZ powder by compacting it, then sintering at 1250 °C for 3 hours. The synthesized materials of CSZ pellets were characterized by powder XRD and microstructure analysis for CSZ pellets by performing SEM-EDS.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

III.1 Sample Analysis of $Zr(OH)_4$

Fig. 1 shows the XRD pattern of the $Zr(OH)_4$ powder test results which was made as a starting material for CSZ production while Fig. 2 presents the standard XRD pattern for $Zr(OH)_4$ powder.

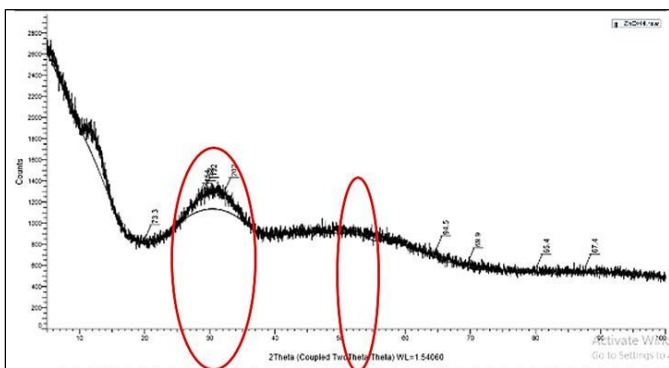


Fig.1 XRD pattern of $Zr(OH)_4$ Powder.

By comparing the results presented in both figures (see red circles in Fig.1 and Fig. 2), it can be seen that there are peaks

similar to the standard XRD pattern of $Zr(OH)_4$, i.e, at the peak of 30° and 53° which are indicated by red circles.

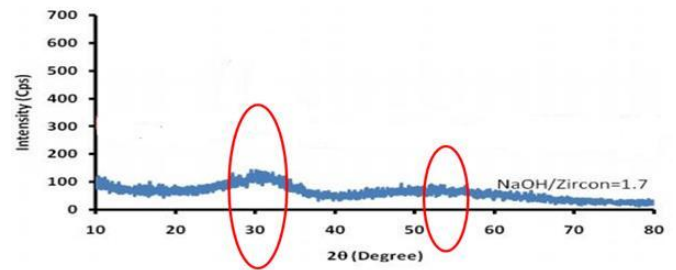


Fig. 2 XRD standard pattern of $Zr(OH)_4$ powder (indicated by red circle).

A. Analysis of CSZ Powder

The result of XRD analysis on CSZ powder is shown in Fig. 3.

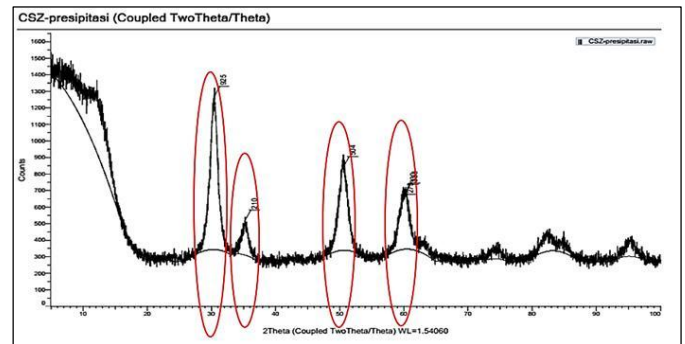


Fig. 3 XRD pattern of CSZ powder.

The pattern of XRD test results in Fig. 3 was then compared to the standard CSZ powder as shown in Fig. 4.

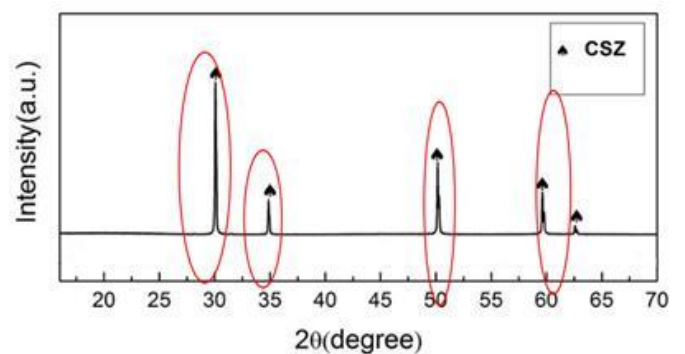


Fig. 4 XRD standard pattern of CSZ powder.

The analysis of XRD pattern by comparing the XRD pattern of CSZ synthesized powder with the precipitation method in Fig. 4 shows the similarity of the patterns to the standard

XRD pattern of CSZ powder, which occurs at the peaks of 30°, 35°, 50°, and 60°.

B. Analysis of CSZ Pellet

The XRD pattern of CSZ pellet is presented in Fig. 5. This result was then compared again to the standard XRD pattern for the CSZ pellet as shown in Fig. 6.

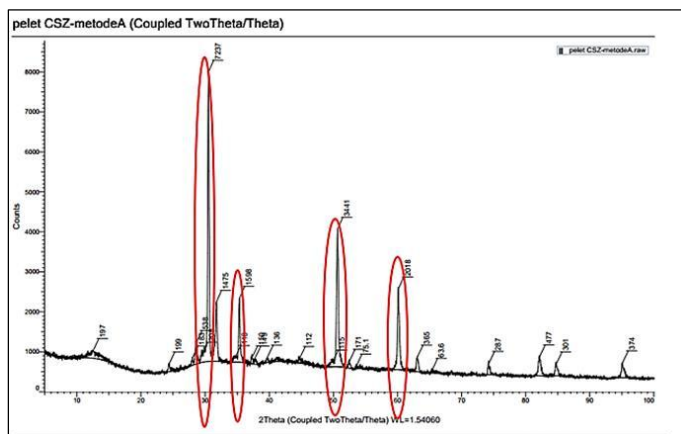


Fig. 5 XRD pattern of CSZ Pellet.

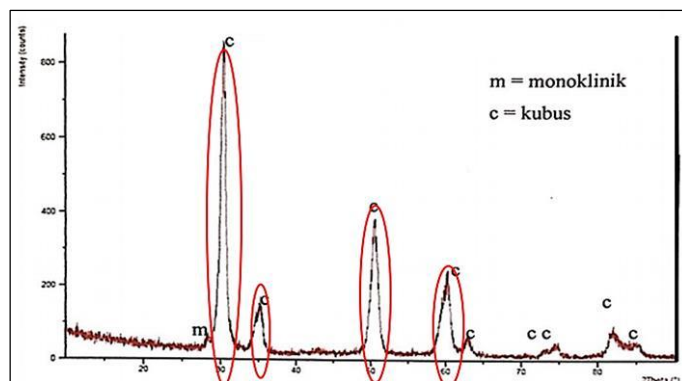


Fig. 6 XRD Standard Pattern of CSZ Pellet.

Based on the comparison between the XRD pattern and the standard XRD pattern of the CSZ pellet, it is obviously seen that the CSZ pellet has a cubic phase according to the standard pattern (indicated by red circles).

C. SEM-EDS Analysis of CSZ Pellet

SEM-EDS results from the CSZ pellet sample are presented in Figs. 7a,b, 8 and 9 below.

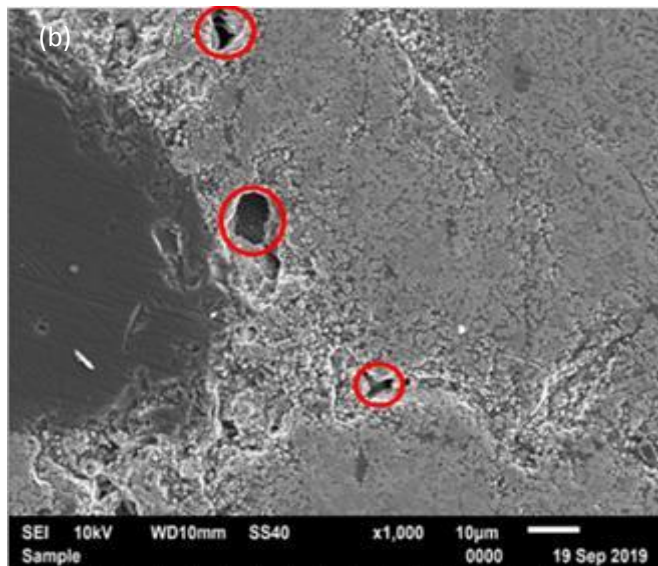
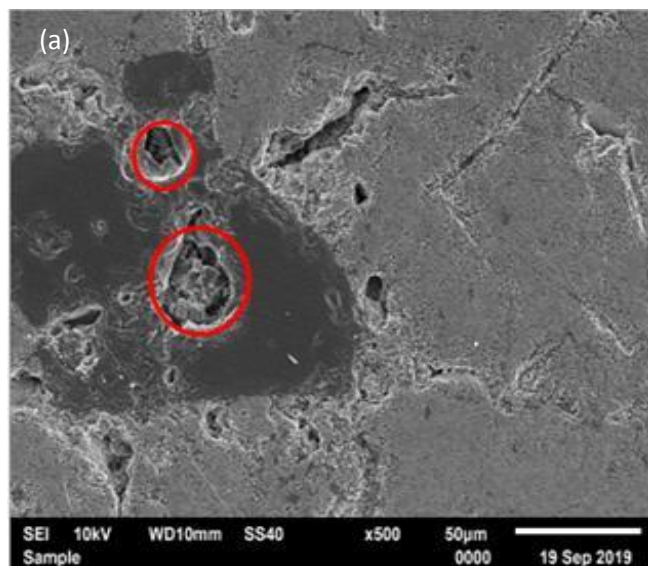


Fig. 7 SEM Images of CSZ Pellet.

The SEM microstructure images in Figs. 7a and 7b show that the CSZ pellet sample has an inhomogeneous microstructure with porous regions or defects as indicated by red circles (Figs. 7). Because of these defects, the density of the pellet became lower, although it appeared to have higher density in the defect-free regions. The defects in the pellets are attributed to the agglomeration of fine CSZ particles. The agglomeration of ultra-fine primary particles due to surface forces, liquid, or a solid bridge is a common phenomenon which in turn leads to poor compaction and inhomogeneous densification during sintering [11,12]. Other possible factors that cause the defects

are: powder synthesis method, particle size distribution, and post-processing of the powders. The synthesis method determines various powder characteristics including phase purity and homogeneity of the dopant concentration [12]. The selected zone for SEM-EDS analysis of the CSZ pellet is shown in Fig. 8 and the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses using SEM-EDS of CSZ pellet are presented in Fig. 9 and Table 1, respectively.

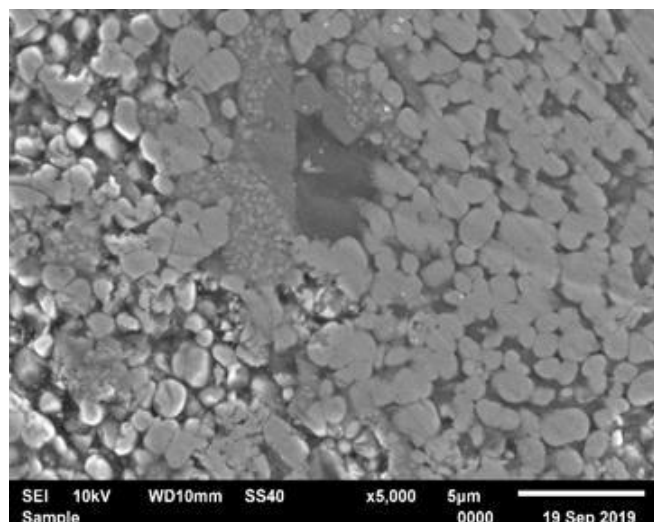


Fig. 8 SEM image of surface CSZ pellet with EDS analyses of selected zone.

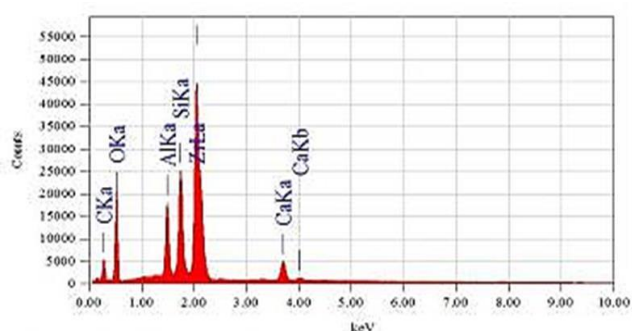


Fig. 9 SEM-EDS qualitative analyses of CSZ pellet.

Table 1. SEM-EDS quantitative analysis of CSZ pellet.

Elements	% mass
Zr	28.77
Ca	1.74
Si	5.11
Al	3.75
O	37.55
C	23.08

Qualitative analysis of SEM-EDS in Fig. 9 on the small grains (see Fig. 8 for selected zone) clarifies the presence of a number of elements, namely C, O, Al, Si, Zr and Ca. Meanwhile, quantitative analysis of SEM-EDS on the same selected area in Table 1 shows that this region contains impurity of silica of 5.11% of its total mass while the standard guided that the content should be below 1%. Presumably, Silica was segregated in this area and the inhomogeneity of the chemical composition that occurs in CSZ pellets could be caused by the poor compaction of the CSZ powder which in turn led to the density gradients in the green pellets.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the aforementioned data analysis and findings, the following conclusions were drawn as follows;

1. $Zr(OH)_4$ which was made as a starting material for the manufacture of CSZ obtained from the extraction process of the caustic fusion method was observed to be able to produce good $Zr(OH)_4$.
2. The CSZ powder produced through the synthesis process of the precipitation method was in accordance with the standard XRD pattern which was indicated by 2θ peaks formed at 30, 35, 50, 60 degrees.
3. CSZ pellets made with a composition of 82:12 % molarity by the synthesis process of precipitation method were able to form a cubic phase, with the, which did not wash or decrease the pH.

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