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Review Article

A Review of Nanomaterials for Ecological Bioenergy Production: Modern Trends and Predictions

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Abstract

The necessity to investigate alternative energy sources with substantial potential has been highlighted by the world's dependence on fossil fuels for energy production. Prioritizing sustainable energy solutions is imperative in light of the current energy dilemma, which is made worse by a growing population and depleting fossil fuel supplies. Recent decades have seen significant advancements in biofuels, including biodiesel, bioethanol, and biohydrogen. These biofuels, which are made from inexpensive, renewable resources including plant, microbial, and algae biomass, present a hopeful future. Governments throughout the world, including India, are working to increase their capacity to produce renewable energy. The biggest obstacles to the broad use of biofuels, however, continue to be their expensive production costs and the labor-intensive procedures required. The unique physicochemical properties of nanomaterials, such as high surface area, catalytic activity, and tunable electronic characteristics, enable breakthroughs in energy conversion processes. With its distinct benefits for the production of biofuel, nanotechnology has become a game-changing solution. Nanomaterials' unique structural characteristics and nanoscale size have greatly increased the efficiency of biofuels and accelerated the transformation of waste into energy. This paper examines the latest developments in the application of different nanoparticles, the difficulties in doing so, and the potential of nanotechnology in the manufacture of biofuels in the future.

Introduction

Conventional fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and gas, account for the majority of primary energy use today. This leads to sustainability issues such as dwindling fossil fuel supplies, environmental effects, and significant price swings. Global climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and the high need for energy have prompted many experts to create innovative ways to replace fossil fuels. About 80% of the energy generated by global renewable energy carriers comes from biomass, one of the alternative energy sources.

The consumption of fossil fuels is increasing, and people are aware that this means that during the next few decades, the supply of fuels generated from petroleum will run out. Our dependence on petroleum-derived fuels is mostly due to worries about their negative effects on the economy, ecology, and energy conservation. To reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, a lot of work has been done to develop a new energy source [1]. Biofuels have lately acquired international recognition as a fossil fuel substitute because of their unique qualities. Almost every continent uses a variety of plant resources as feedstock for the manufacture of biofuel, such as fruits, vegetables, sugarcane, corn, palm oil, soybeans, jatropha, and fruit wastes. Biodiesel can either augment or replace diesel derived from fossil fuels, unlike the majority of other biofuels.

Additionally, these Nanoparticles (NP) can display a variety of morphologies, which has expanded their uses across a range of industries [2]. Furthermore, nanostructured materials react with other molecules at a faster rate than big particles. The applications and advantages of different nanoparticles are used to introduce the principles of nanotechnology. Applications of nanotechnology to biomass, such as lignocellulosic and microalgal biomass, are then covered in the next section. The latest developments in the nanotechnology-based biofuel sector are then discussed, including the use of nano-catalysts to increase biofuel yields and nano-additives to improve the performance of fuel blends [3]. Additionally covered is the use of nanoparticles in MFCs to convert chemical energy into electrical energy. To offer insights into the future development of bioenergy production utilizing nanomaterials, upcoming projects, and problems are also discussed. This study's thorough comparison analysis will advance the field of bioenergy by giving interested researchers a comprehensive picture of how nanotechnology might enhance the production of bioenergy. With a variety of photosynthetic species, microalgae are being studied extensively as a feedstock for third-generation biofuels [4]. Microalgae have become an alternative feedstock for biofuels due to their high carbon dioxide uptake, quick productivity, and capacity to grow in hostile settings.

A new field of study called nanotechnology is being used to improve human welfare in a variety of fields, including agriculture, bioenergy production, medicine, and environmental sustainability [5]. Biofuel research is rapidly using nanotechnology and nanomaterials to reduce costs and increase product quality [6]. Using nanoparticles for biofuel synthesis provides several benefits due to their tiny size and distinctive qualities, including stability, adsorption capacity, crystallinity, and catalyst activity. They also have a high surface area-to-volume ratio. Metal oxide nanoparticles are frequently used in biofuel production because of their extra characteristics that boost recovery potential [7]. It has been demonstrated that using nanotechnology in conjunction with gasification, pyrolysis, hydrogenation, and anaerobic digestion may effectively produce biofuels. The features of nanomaterials make them an attractive choice for maximizing and enhancing the production of biofuel and bioenergy. This review is innovative because it makes use of the most recent information regarding the applications, challenges, and prospects of Nanoparticles (NPs) in the manufacture of biofuel.

Nanomaterials are poised to revolutionize the production of environmentally friendly bioenergy by making it more efficient, affordable, and sustainable. Current trends include the development of specialized nanomaterials, the use of sustainable and biodegradable options, and the creation of nanomaterials with multiple functions. These advancements are being applied to improve biofuel production and bioenergy storage. It is predicted that nanomaterials will lead to significant improvements in efficiency, cost reduction, and overall sustainability in the bioenergy sector. They are also expected to be integrated with other technologies like AI to further optimize bioenergy production. However, challenges related to toxicity, scalability, stability, and regulation need to be addressed to ensure their safe and effective implementation.

Researchers likely view the future of nanomaterials in eco-friendly bioenergy production with hopeful optimism, while also acknowledging the significant challenges that lie ahead. They probably recognize the tremendous potential of nanomaterials to transform bioenergy by making it more efficient, affordable, and sustainable, seeing them as crucial for a greener energy future.

Global perspective on biofuel and bioenergy

The global energy crisis has grown to be a serious problem that is influencing the expansion of economies all over the world. A 5.4% increase in 2023 will more than make up for the 5% drop in global energy demand in 2020. Biofuels and bioenergy can be utilized as a substitute to address this massive demand. As seen in Figure 1, the production of biofuels has increased dramatically worldwide in recent years. Recent developments focused on biofuel in a green environment, primarily in Europe, the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, Argentina, and other nations, are a result of the growth in biofuel production in European countries. To boost demand for agricultural products, enhance air quality, and improve energy security, these nations are progressively requiring biofuels made in their own countries. Brazil and the United States were the biggest producers of biofuels in 2018 (IEA, 2018). Together, they are responsible for two-thirds of the primary scenario production in 2024 and 40% of the projected growth in biofuel output from 2019 to 2024. Europe is the world's richest producer of ethanol and biodiesel.

Nanotechnology in bioenergy

Research on biofuels is progressively using nanotechnology and nanomaterials to increase production quality at a low cost. Nanoparticles are perfect for producing biofuel because of their high surface-to-volume ratio and special qualities like crystallinity, adsorption, and catalytic activity. Compared to alternative sources, they provide many benefits for the synthesis of biofuel. Because of their extra characteristics that help with biofuel recovery, carbon and metal oxide nanoparticles are used as catalysts to facilitate the manufacture of biofuels. The potential of nanomaterials for producing environmentally friendly bioenergy was covered by Pandey (2022) who also described how they may be utilized to improve the efficiency of bioenergy conversion and storage in biofuels such as bioethanol and biodiesel.

These days, nanomaterials can be used in battery technology. The use of nanotechnology in the production of

Figure 1: Global Biofuel Production in million tons (Source: AMI IGC: Agricultural Market Information Company (AMI) Department plant production Editor in charge: Wienke von Schenck Editors: Svenja Herrmann, Nadja Pooch [26]).

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battery components for electric vehicles was studied by Lu, et al. [8]. The two main issues with electric vehicles are battery life and recharge timeframes. This problem is addressed by using battery-powered nanomaterial. According to Khan, et al. [9], the nanoparticles improve the batteries' performance and storage capacity. Transesterification can be used to transform triglycerides into biofuels. Hydrogenation, gasification, anaerobic digestion, and nanotechnology have all been demonstrated to be successful processes for the production of biofuel. The microbial fuel cell offers a variety of easily accessible nano-catalysts for the production of biofuel, such as nanotubes, nanosheets, and nanoparticles.

Nanoparticles in biofuel production

The enormous surface area and magnetic behavior of nanoparticles under a magnetic field facilitate their simple separation from a biofuel cell and help with the recycling of enzymes. To make biofuels, a support system made up of several nanoparticles is used to build a nano-catalyst. This contains Carbon Nanotubes (CNTs) and magnetic nanoparticles. Acid-functionalized metals, metal oxides, and other heterogeneous catalysts are also employed.

Application of nanoparticles in biofuel production: Nanoparticles have garnered a lot of interest lately because of their potential to enhance many stages of the biofuel production process. By leveraging their unique physical, chemical, and catalytic properties, nanoparticles can significantly boost the yield, sustainability, and efficiency of biofuels. There are several applications and potential benefits for each type of nanoparticle. The finding that stable catalysts for enzyme immobilization, such as carbon nanotubes, carbon nanosheets, and carbon nanofibers, are both cost-effective and efficient has also enhanced the production of biofuel. The application of nanoparticles in biofuels is shown in Figure 2.

Nanocatalysts

Nanocatalysts are emerging as highly effective materials in the production of biofuels due to their enhanced surface area, tunable properties, and high catalytic efficiency. Various types of nanocatalysts have been explored for the production of biofuels such as bioethanol, biodiesel, biohydrogen, and bio-oil.

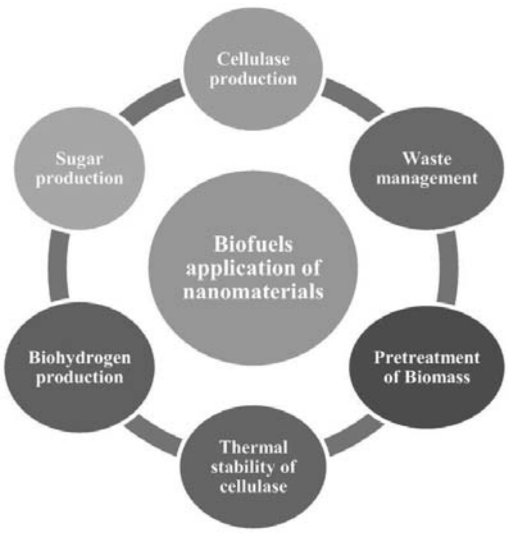

Figure 2: Biofuels applications of nanomaterials [10].

Metal-based nanocatalysts are among the most commonly studied for biofuel production. These materials, often made by reducing metal salts into nanoparticles, provide high surface-to-volume ratios and excellent catalytic activity. Platinum (Pt) and Palladium (Pd) Nanocatalysts are used for hydrogenation reactions and in biohydrogen production through water splitting or biomass reforming. Their high activity towards hydrogenation makes them valuable for biofuel upgrades, such as producing biofuels with reduced oxygen content. Nickel nanoparticles are widely used in the hydrogenation and hydrodeoxygenation of bio-oils, as well as in transesterification reactions for biodiesel production. Ni-based catalysts help in breaking down biomass into simpler hydrocarbons. Copper (Cu) Nanocatalysts are used in catalytic reactions for bioethanol production, particularly in the catalytic conversion of lignocellulosic biomass into biofuels. Cu nanoparticles are also involved in reactions that involve glycerol conversion to biofuels. Ruthenium (Ru) and Rhodium (Rh) Nanocatalysts are used in the production of hydrogen from biomass-derived materials and in improving the quality of biofuels by upgrading bio-oils.

Metal oxide nanocatalysts

Metal oxides can provide high surface reactivity, making them ideal for biofuel production processes such as transesterification and catalytic cracking.

ZnO nanoparticles are commonly used in the transesterification process of biodiesel production due to their basic properties that help in esterification and transesterification reactions. TiO_2 is used in photocatalytic reactions to produce biohydrogen or for converting glycerol into biofuels. It also helps in the improvement of biodiesel production through transesterification processes. Aluminum Oxide (Al_2O_3) Nanocatalysts are utilized in the cracking and reforming of biomass and bio-oils, as well as in the synthesis of biofuels from renewable feedstocks.

Bimetallic nanocatalysts

Bimetallic nanoparticles (composed of two metals) have been found to offer enhanced catalytic performance by leveraging synergistic effects between the two metals. These catalysts are particularly useful in complex reactions like hydrodeoxygenation, hydrogenation, and deoxygenation.

Ni-Pt and Ni-Ru Nanocatalysts are used in the hydrodeoxygenation of bio-oils, where they help in removing oxygenates to improve the energy content of the biofuels. Cu-Ni and Cu-Zn Nanocatalysts are effective in reforming reactions for biohydrogen production from biomass or in the conversion of glycerol into biofuels.

Carbon-based nanocatalysts

Carbon-based nanocatalysts such as Carbon Nanotubes (CNTs), graphene, and activated carbon have gained attention

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in biofuel production due to their high surface area, excellent electrical conductivity, and chemical stability.

Carbon Nanotubes are used in bioethanol production from biomass by catalyzing the conversion of sugars into ethanol through fermentation. CNTs are also employed in the production of biodiesel through transesterification processes. Graphene-based nanocatalysts are studied for catalytic processes like transesterification, hydrogenation, and biomass gasification for biofuel production. Activated Carbon Nanocatalysts are often used in catalytic reactions for biodiesel production, as well as for bio-oil upgrading, due to their ability to adsorb and catalyze reactions.

Zeolite nanocatalysts

Zeolites are microporous aluminum silicate minerals that can act as excellent catalysts in a range of biofuel production processes. When modified at the nanoscale, zeolites offer high surface area and acidic/basic sites that improve catalytic efficiency.

Microporous Zeolites and similar zeolites are used in catalytic cracking and biomass conversion to biofuels, particularly for bio-oil upgrading and the production of hydrocarbons. Mesoporous Zeolites can be tailored for specific biofuel applications such as the conversion of triglycerides to biodiesel and the upgrading of bio-oils.

Enzyme-based nanocatalysts

Enzyme catalysis at the nanoscale has also gained attention for its high specificity and mild reaction conditions. Enzymes can be encapsulated within nanomaterials or immobilized on nanoparticle surfaces. Lipase Nanocatalysts are widely used in biodiesel production through the transesterification of triglycerides. Nanostructured supports improve the stability and reusability of lipases. Cellulase nanocatalyst enzymes are used in the hydrolysis of cellulose into fermentable sugars, which can then be converted into bioethanol.

Composite nanocatalysts

Composite nanocatalysts, which combine two or more types of nanomaterials (e.g., metal nanoparticles with carbon or metal oxides), are designed to enhance the overall catalytic performance for biofuel production. Ni/CeO_2 Composite Nanocatalysts are used for hydrogen production through biomass gasification or reforming, where ceria provides oxygen storage capability, and nickel enhances hydrogen production efficiency. $Cu/ZnO/Al_2O_3$ Composite Nanocatalysts composites are used for the production of biofuels through the conversion of glycerol into higher-value fuels like propylene or ethanol. Photocatalysts are used to harness light energy to drive chemical reactions, often used in biofuel production processes such as the splitting of water to produce hydrogen or the conversion of CO_2 into fuels. Titanium Dioxide (TiO_2) and Zinc Oxide (ZnO) Photocatalysts are employed in photocatalytic water splitting to generate hydrogen, a clean biofuel. They also play a role in converting biomass into biofuels under light irradiation.

Biodiesel

The future of biodiesel as a fuel source could be substantial. Because it is mostly composed of biomass or biodegradable renewable energy sources, which lower combustion emissions, it is environmentally benign [11]. The current demands for biofuel cannot be met with the quantities that are now available. Microalgae, a non-edible raw resource, is therefore becoming more and more significant in the modern economy for the generation of biofuel. Because of their high energy yield, quick growth, and high biomass production, microalgae can be useful in the manufacture of biofuel. The most important raw ingredient for the manufacturing of biodiesel is vegetable oils [12]. But because of the intense competition they face, their use in food production and cooking is getting more and more expensive. Inedible oils, animal fats, frying oils, soaps, and greases are examples of inexpensive biodiesel feedstock. According to recent research immobilized enzymes were utilized to convert soybean oil and methanol into biodiesel, and following four cycles of the biocatalyst use, no decrease in activity was noted.

An enzyme was added to a magnetic microsphere on Fe_3O_4/polystyrene-metacrylic acid to create biodiesel from soybean oil. Sol-gel self-combustion techniques were utilized to create calcium oxide (CaO) and magnesium oxide (MgO) nanoparticles for a study. CaO nanoparticles performed better than MgO nanoparticles in terms of biodiesel yield. To create biodiesel from Chinese tallow seed oil, Wen, et al. [13] impregnated a KF/CaO nanocatalyst with a size of 30 nm - 100 nm. Research revealed that nanocatalysts produced biodiesel, indicating their potential for use in the biodiesel sector [14]. In a different study, Bidir, et al. (2021) [15] looked into nanoparticles in the production of biofuel and found that incorporating nanoparticles into biodiesel can enhance the performance of a diesel engine. As mentioned above, interdisciplinary cooperation between biotechnology and nanotechnology is a possible way to boost the production of biodiesel. Reusable, reliable, and effective nanobiocatalytic systems could increase the profitability of biodiesel.

Biohydrogen

Biological mechanisms that use less energy and release less CO_2 can be used to produce biohydrogen, a second-generation biofuel. There are several methods for producing biohydrogen, including dark fermentation, water biophotolysis, photo-fermentation, and indirect biophotolysis. Each method has advantages and disadvantages. The most extensively researched and documented methods in the literature are photo and dark fermentation due to the availability of inexpensive organic substrates, including food and industrial waste [16]. Several studies used nanomaterials to study biohydrogen production. According to a study, at the same concentration of mg/L of iron sulfate, the largest cumulative hydrogen generation was observed in both the bulk and nanoparticle forms of the substance [17]. The active site of this enzyme, hydrogenase, has to contain iron and nickel.

Numerous research has demonstrated that the addition of these metals to the fermented solution enhances the outcomes

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of the dark fermentation bioprocess, which produces hydrogen. The amount of biohydrogen produced increased when Ni and graphene nanoparticles were introduced to the anaerobic digestion process of industrial waste that contained mono-ethylene glycol (used in the manufacturing of petrochemicals). Wimonsong, et al. [18] report that dark fermentation using sucrose as a substrate for the production of biohydrogen was conducted using metallic nanocatalysts supported by hydrotalcite. Thus, it is evident that different types of nanosystems have affected biohydrogen synthesis techniques by raising different production parameters.

Bioethanol

Enzymes (magnetic nanoparticles) are being employed in nanosystems to optimize the manufacture of second-generation ethanol from agricultural waste, hence increasing ethanol production. Nanosystems based on lignocellulose biomass are still in their infancy. Ethanol is a non-food substitute with several benefits, such as reduced conversion costs and a small environmental impact [19]. The biofuel sector has been looking for innovative biocatalysts to suit the growing demand for ethanol. A cellulase enzyme complex with the following properties could be used to produce E2G from lignocellulose trapped in magnetic nanoparticles: greater pH, higher substrate affinity, higher storage stability, temperature tolerance, and reusability in processes [20]. Lupoi and Smith employed an entrapment technique to fix the glucosidase enzyme on polymer magnetic nanofibers to generate cellulosic ethanol. The enzyme glucosidase transforms cellobiose into glucose, which microbes can use to make bioethanol. The nanocellulose derived from pine needles had good mechanical and thermal strength, according to Rana, et al. [21]. One of the interesting ways to turn pine needles into bioenergy, they said, is gasification. The development of new technologies, such as nanosystems, however, requires optimization and consideration of physical, chemical, and biological aspects.

Biogas

As the demand for green energy continues to rise, more researchers are examining how nanomaterials (1 nm - 100 nm) affect the generation of biogas [22]. According to Kadam and Panwar [23], the anaerobic digestion of organic matter by microbes and enzymes, which produce biogas, involves four complex processes. According to experts, several experimental variables, including pH, organic substrates, inoculum concentration, and temperature variations, affect the entire biochemical process. When nanoparticles are present, bacteria can more easily bind to active spots in molecules, which speeds up substrate conversion through hydrolysis [24]. Nanomaterials have a beneficial impact on anaerobic digestion in addition to their high reactivity and selectivity. Su, et al. [25] state that zero-valent iron nanoparticles have promise for greatly increasing the biogas production from waste-activated sludge. Nano-ZnO inhibits waste-activated sludge anaerobic digestion at a much lower level than nano-TiO_2, nano-Al_2O_3, and nano-SiO_2, according to another study. The toxicity of certain additional nanomaterial additions, like Mn_2O_3 or Al_2O_3, harms biogas generation. According to each of these investigations, depending on the biogas's source or the stage at which the nanoparticles are employed, they may affect the production of biogas.

Recent bioenergy production challenges and upcoming projections with nanotechnology

As an alternative to fossil fuels, biofuels are becoming more affordable. Biofuels are therefore regarded as a practical and affordable substitute. To produce biofuel, organic biomass from municipal and agricultural waste, among other sources, is needed. Research is still required to enhance the production of biofuel, though. For lignocellulosic biomass to be valued, cost-effective pre-treatment techniques are required [27]. Since algal biomass is carbon-neutral, abundant in oil, and proliferates, it is utilized in the manufacturing of biodiesel. One possibility is that it will eventually replace fossil fuels in the manufacturing of biodiesel. Growing algal biomass is particularly costly since lipid extraction uses a lot of energy. Large quantities are needed for biofuels, which are beyond the capabilities of current methods. When used as catalysts, nanoparticles can produce biofuel with greater quality, yield, and selectivity. There are plenty of biofuel feedstocks available, and with better processing, we may be able to reduce the future of our demand for fossil fuels substantially. Using existing resources, researchers are trying to enhance the production of biofuel. Historically, food crops like corn, sugarcane, and other lignocellulosic biomass have been used to make biofuels on a massive scale. Nanotechnology is helping to increase the production of biofuels and accelerate the process.

Conclusion

The current review discusses how adding nanoparticles to the biofuel production process greatly enhanced the large surface area-to-volume ratio, high specificity, high reactivity, good dispersion, and other special physical and chemical properties of nanoparticles are primarily responsible for this growth. Magnetic, metal oxide and carbonous nanoparticles have all been effectively employed to increase the generation of biofuel from a variety of substrates. Nanoparticles are also used in the pretreatment phase to boost the digestibility of the substrate, which raises the pace at which biofuel is produced. This process will need to go over several technological challenges to be economically feasible. Researchers must create nanoparticles that are safe for microorganisms, employ less expensive, environmentally friendly nanoparticles, and employ green synthesis techniques that are more effective for biological nanoparticles. It is anticipated that additional developments in nanotechnology will lower production costs and improve sustainability. The development of novel nanomaterials and their uses in bioenergy will influence clean energy in the future. Methods that integrate biotechnology, nanotechnology, and renewable resources have a lot of potential for a sustainable energy future.

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