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IrO_x-Pt electrode for electro-oxidation of ethanol for alkaline type direct ethanol fuel cell: An excellent CO-tolerant catalyst

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Abstract

In this study, iridium oxide layer deposited on Pt surface (IrO_x-Pt) was utilized to explore ethanol oxidation reaction (EtOR) in alkaline medium. To fabricate the catalyst, cleaned Pt surface was scanned from 0 V to +1 V vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl) in Ir₂O₃·xH₂O colloidal suspension for 10 incessant cycles. A cyclic voltammogram recorded in 0.1 M NaOH solution corroborated the presence of IrO_x by showing the appearance of a distinct redox pair

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3 on the Pt surface, with E_{pa} at -0.31 V and E_{pc} at -0.27 V. Energy dispersive mapping verified
4 the uniform deposition of IrO_x on Pt, and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy showed that IrO_x
5 contains both Ir^{III} and Ir^{IV} species. The results of cyclic voltammetric analysis indicated that
6 the activity of the pure Pt catalyst towards EtOR was approximately 1.3 times greater than
7 that of IrO_x-Pt. However, the CO-tolerant ability of the Pt catalyst was roughly 3.5 times
8 lower than that of IrO_x-Pt. The results of the stability test indicated that the current density
9 associated with EtOR on the IrO_x-Pt electrode experienced a decrease of approximately 18%
10 with a standard deviation of 1.15% after undergoing 500 consecutive cycles. In contrast, the
11 Pt electrode exhibited a decrease in activity of nearly 50% with a standard deviation of 1.53%
12 under similar experimental conditions. The study on scan rate dependence revealed that the
13 electrode reaction was a process limited by mass transfer.
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25 **Keywords:** *Iridium oxide; Pt electrode; CO tolerance; Ethanol oxidation reaction; Fuel cell.*
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30 1. Introduction

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32 The global reliance on fossil fuels has long been a matter of concern due to both the finite
33 availability of these resources and their involvement in global warming. Energy experts have
34 made a prediction based on current and anticipated future rates of fuel consumption that the
35 depletion of fossil fuel reserves may occur by the turn of the twenty-first century.¹ Moreover,
36 as a result of the substantial combustion of fossil fuels, the emission of greenhouse gases has
37 escalated to an unprecedented level in the world. Consequently, the global temperature is
38 increasing at an alarming rate, leading to catastrophic alterations in the climate.²
39 Anthropogenic activities have caused a rise in global temperature of approximately 1.01 °C
40 since 1880.^{3,4} The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has forecasted that
41 there will be a rise in global temperature of around 1.5 °C between the years 2030 and 2050,
42 should the current rate of increase persist.⁴ Therefore, today's world is in dire need for
43 alternative energy source to maintain the sustenance of human race. In the context of this
44 concern, fuel cell technology, alongside renewable energy sources, has garnered significant
45 global attention as it has the potential to effectively deliver clean and sustainable power.
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57 In recent years, there has been significant interest in the use of liquid fuel-based fuel cells,
58 specifically those utilizing alcohol, as a means of generating electricity.^{5,6} The alcohol-based
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3 fuel cell is generally recognised as direct alcohol fuel cell (DAFC) where simple alcohols are
4 directly used as fuel. Among simple alcohols, methanol is preferred as fuel because it is
5 cheap, abundant and easy to store.⁵ But the venomous nature of methanol cannot be ignored
6 as its exposure can cause lifelong blindness and even death.⁷ Methanol-based fuel cell can
7 also be dangerous as it is easily combustible and has low boiling point.⁸ Given these possible
8 risks, ethanol can be a perfect alternative to methanol because of its low toxicity and higher
9 boiling point.^{9,10} Meanwhile, methanol and ethanol are oxidized by releasing 6 and 12
10 electrons, respectively. Hence, energy density of ethanol is sufficiently larger than that of
11 methanol.¹¹

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13 Direct ethanol fuel cell (DEFC) can be categorized into two types based on pH of electrolyte:
14 (I) Acidic DEFC; (II) Alkaline DEFC.⁹ Generally, alkaline type DEFC is preferred over
15 acidic type because: (I) higher $[\text{OH}^-]$ enhances the kinetics of EtOR; (II) metals other than
16 platinum (Pt) e.g., palladium (Pd), gold (Au), silver (Ag), show good catalytic activity in
17 EtOR.^{9,11-17} The suitability of Pt as an anode material, and also as a cathode material, for fuel
18 cells such as DEFC, methanol fuel cells, hydrogen fuel cells, etc. is widely recognized.^{9,18-20}
19 However, its efficacy tends to diminish over time due to the irreversible adsorption of
20 intermediate species, specifically carbon monoxide (CO) in EtOR process, as previously
21 reported.^{9,18,21}

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23 Several works have been conducted to get rid of CO poisoning and to increase catalytic
24 activity of Pt catalyst. For instance, Fujiwara and others studied the ethanol oxidation
25 reaction by co-electrodeposited Pt-Ru (ruthenium) electro-catalysts.²² Their investigation
26 revealed that the presence of Ru facilitates the reaction between chemisorbed species,
27 specially adsorbed CO and the oxidant. Hasan *et al.* developed a series of anode materials
28 based on Pt, Pd and poly 1,8-diaminonaphthalene to investigate EtOR in alkaline medium.²³
29 To prepare the catalysts, they firstly conducted electro-polymerization experiment to modify
30 GC by poly1,8-diaminonaphthalene and the resultant electrode was then modified with single
31 and bimetallic Pt, Pd via electro-deposition method. Among the developed catalysts,
32 bimetallic system in combination with poly 1,8-diaminonaphthalene, was reported to be
33 superior in terms of current density, onset potential, long term stability and most importantly,
34 CO tolerance. To enhance the performance of Pt in EtOR, Du and co-workers synthesised
35 core-shell type nano-alloy of Pt and SnO_2 (tin oxide) via polyol method.²⁴ According to their
36 research, incorporation of SnO_2 nanoparticles promotes C-C bond splitting of ethanol on Pt
37 catalyst and consequently, complete oxidation of ethanol was increased by at least three times
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3 than that on Pt. Again, Lui *et al.* developed monodisperse and homogeneous Pt₃Sn
4 nanoparticles via co-reduction of Pt and Sn salts in organic solution to promote complete
5 oxidation of ethanol.²⁵ Li and colleagues conducted research aimed at enhancing the
6 selectivity of the C1 pathway, specifically with regards to the cleavage of C–C bonds in
7 ethanol.²⁶ Firstly, they fabricated carbon supported anode materials consisting of SnO₂ centre
8 embellished with bimetallic composites of Pt, Ir (iridium) and Rh (rhodium). Among the
9 anode materials, they found Pt/Ir bimetallic combination as effective catalyst for complete
10 oxidation of ethanol via promoting C1-pathway. They also found that high loading of Ir metal
11 reduced onset potential of EtOR and increased selectivity of C1-pathway. For DEFC,
12 Ribeiro *et al.*²⁷ and Tayal *et al.*²⁸, independently synthesised a series of carbon supported
13 catalysts where they incorporated Ir and Sn to enhance the activity of Pt. Both groups found
14 the ternary combination of Pt, Ir and Sn as the most effective catalyst for EtOR in terms of
15 current density and CO tolerance. Note that both groups used different route to synthesize the
16 catalysts. Ribadeneira *et al.* investigated EtOR at 323 K by means of Pt-based bimetallic and
17 trimetallic catalysts supported on carbon.²⁹ They used alcohol reduction process to prepare
18 array of catalyst based on Pt, Ru, Sn and Ni (nickel) metals for DEFC. In terms of ethanol
19 oxidation current density, trimetallic combination of Pt, Ru, and Ni showed superior
20 response. Fang *et al.* developed Ir alloyed Pt nanorods for the purpose of studying EtOR.³⁰
21 Their findings revealed a noteworthy faradic efficiency of 61.21% for the C1 pathway and a
22 remarkable ability to tolerate against CO adsorption.
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39 The preceding discourse indicates that the process of alloying or modifying Pt with other
40 transition metals, such as Sn, Ru, and Ir, is commonly employed to enhance the resistance of
41 the Pt catalyst to CO adsorption. The prevailing theory regarding the alloying of Pt with Sn,
42 Ru, and Ir posits that these metals adsorb OH⁻ ions, which serves as an oxidizing agent for
43 adsorbed CO on Pt.^{31–34} Moreover, Sn and Ir have a weakening effect on the Pt-CO bond
44 through the downshift of the d band of Pt.^{24,25,28} Sn and Ru based Pt composites are widely
45 utilized as CO tolerant anode material, but their preparation in most of the case is a lengthy
46 process that requires the use of sophisticated instruments. The dissolution of these catalysts
47 during prolonged cycling is also a limitation, as acknowledged in literature by Ridgon *et al.*³³
48 With regards to the metal Ir, it is evident in earlier discussion that alloying with Pt enhance
49 the CO tolerance and ethanol oxidation ability of Pt. But the utilisation of Ir metal without
50 associating with Pt or other metals exhibits the CO poisoning phenomenon during EtOR.⁹
51 Despite this fact, the Ir metal or its oxide, particularly IrO₂, has been utilized directly in EtOR
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3 or to enhance the performance of other catalyst like Pt, Sn, Ru, RuO₂ in EtOR.^{30,35–41}
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5 Furthermore, the utilization of Ir metal oxide as an electrode material has been investigated
6 for various applications, including the oxidation of organic molecules,^{42,43} oxygen evolution
7 reaction,^{44–53} oxygen reduction reaction,⁵⁰ pH sensing.⁵⁴ According to reports, Ir species,
8 particularly iridium oxide, exhibit a high degree of stability in various aqueous environments
9 and do not experience corrosion.^{42,43} As far as current knowledge extends, the potential of
10 mixed oxide of Ir, that is IrO_x, has yet to be fully investigated as a viable option for anode
11 material in alcohol-based fuel cells, particularly in terms of its CO-tolerant properties. As
12 previously stated, oxophilic metals are employed to attenuate the Pt–CO bond, leading to the
13 displacement of adsorbed CO from Pt sites and/or promoting the oxidative elimination of
14 CO.²⁵ It is also pertinent to note that the presence of oxygen-containing materials
15 significantly enhances the kinetics of EtOR in an alkaline condition.²¹ Since IrO_x is an
16 oxygen-rich material, so it has the potential to serve as a co-catalyst, specifically as a CO
17 anti-poisoning agent for Pt in EtOR.
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28 Therefore, we fabricated an IrO_x-Pt electrode by means of simple electro-deposition
29 technique to investigate EtOR. Primarily, the fabricated electrode was subjected to
30 characterization through the use of cyclic voltammetric method. In addition, the surface
31 morphology and chemical composition were analyzed utilizing a scanning electron
32 microscope (SEM) in conjunction with energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy. Subsequently,
33 the voltammetric method was employed to assess the catalytic efficacy, CO-tolerance
34 capacity, and certain kinetic information of EtOR on the fabricated electrode.
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41 **2. Experimental**

42 **2.1. Chemicals**

43 Potassium hexachloroiridate (K₂IrCl₆), ethanol (C₂H₅OH), sodium hydroxide (NaOH),
44 sulphuric acid (H₂SO₄), and hydrochloric acid (HCl) are the chemicals that were used to
45 conduct all the experiments. These chemicals were purchased from Sigma Aldrich and used
46 without further refining.
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53 **2.2. Synthesis of Ir₂O₃·nH₂O colloidal suspension**

54 Following the synthetic route established by Baur et al., K₂IrCl₆ was used to prepare colloidal
55 solution of Ir₂O₃·xH₂O.⁵⁵ The synthesis process is shortly described below:
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3 The process was initiated through dissolving 0.13 g of K_2IrCl_6 in 10 mL 0.1 M HCl solution
4 by maintaining 90–105 °C temperature for around 60 minutes. Once the solution was
5 prepared, absolute C_2H_5OH of 1.5 mL was added and gently boiled the mixture at around 105
6 °C temperature with moderate agitation. To maintain constant volume, required amount of
7 deionized water was added at the time of boiling. After boiling the solution at around 105 °C
8 temperature for 120 minutes, 100 μ L of absolute C_2H_5OH was again added to the solution.
9 Maintaining 10 minutes time interval, the addition of C_2H_5OH was taken place until the
10 colour of the solution changed from reddish black to clear blue. And the addition was
11 continued to the point where blue colour remained unchanged upon further addition of
12 ethanol. It should be noted that the boiling temperature, around 105 °C, was maintained
13 during the addition of C_2H_5OH . After that, we carried on boiling for another 60 minutes to
14 remove excess C_2H_5OH . After vaporization, the heat source was turned off and the resultant
15 solution was left at room temperature to cool down. Finally, 0.5 M NaOH solution was
16 carefully added until the pH value reached at 12.0. Note that, N_2 environment was maintained
17 during NaOH addition. The resultant colloidal solution of $Ir_2O_3 \cdot xH_2O$ was then used to
18 modify electrode.
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31 **2.2. Electrochemical experiments and electrode fabrication**

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33 Electrochemical workstations *e.g.*, CHI 660E (CHI Instruments, USA) and Autolab
34 PGSTAT128N were used to conduct all the electrochemical investigations. The
35 electrochemical experiments were conducted in a one-compartment electrochemical cell
36 configured with conventional three-electrode system, where a Teflon coated polycrystalline
37 Pt electrode having diameter of 3 mm was served as working electrode, Pt wire was used as
38 auxiliary electrode and Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl) was served as reference electrode. To ensure
39 contamination-free surface, Pt electrode was gone through a series of treatments. The
40 cleansing process was initiated through polishing the Pt surface with alumina slurry (0.03
41 μ m) for 10 minutes. Then, the electrode was properly washed with deionized water and
42 sonicated in 0.1 M H_2SO_4 solution for 10 minutes. At that point, the electrode was
43 voltammetrically activated though repeated cycling in the potential range of -0.2-1.5 V (vs.
44 Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) at 0.1 $V s^{-1}$ scan rate for 20 minutes.
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55 Electrodeposition method was used to immobilise IrO_x layer on Pt electrode surface. In this
56 method, the contamination-free Pt surface was placed in the colloidal solution of $Ir_2O_3 \cdot xH_2O$
57 and scanned in the potential range of 0.0 to 1.0 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) at 0.1 $V s^{-1}$ for 10
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3 repeated cycles. After that, the resultant electrode, denoted as IrO_x-Pt, was scanned in 0.1 M
4 NaOH solution to confirm the presence of IrO_x layer on Pt surface.⁵⁵ Finally, the Pt and IrO_x-
5 Pt electrodes were utilized as working electrode to explore the ethanol oxidation reaction
6 (EtOR) in 1.0 M NaOH. Note that, inert atmosphere was maintained though purging N₂ gas
7 under room temperature (25 ± 2 °C).
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13 **2.3. Characterization**

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15 The oxidation states of chemical components and chemical composition of IrO_x-Pt were
16 investigated by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) using a delay-line detector (DLD)
17 spectrometer (Kratos Axis-Ultra; Kratos Analytical Ltd.) with an Al K α radiation source
18 (1486.6 eV). The conductive carbon tape was used to attach the sample, and each spectrum
19 was calibrated to the C 1s peak at 284.8 eV as the inner reference. Obtained spectra were
20 fitted using XPSPEAK 4.1 software with the subtraction of the background by Shirley
21 method. In case of bare Pt surface, the valence and chemical states were determined using a
22 methodology analogous to that employed for the IrO_x-Pt catalyst.
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30 The surface morphology and the chemical composition of IrO_x-Pt were characterized through
31 a scanning electron microscope (SEM) coupled with energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy
32 (EDX, TM3030Plus miniscope; Hitachi Ltd.). The conductive carbon tape was used to attach
33 the sample, and the images were taken with the irradiation voltage of 15 keV. In addition,
34 SEM) imaging and EDX investigations have been carried out on the unmodified Pt surface
35 using a procedure similar to that employed for the IrO_x-Pt catalyst.
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45 **3. Results and Discussion**

46 **3.2. Fabrication of IrO_x-Pt electrode**

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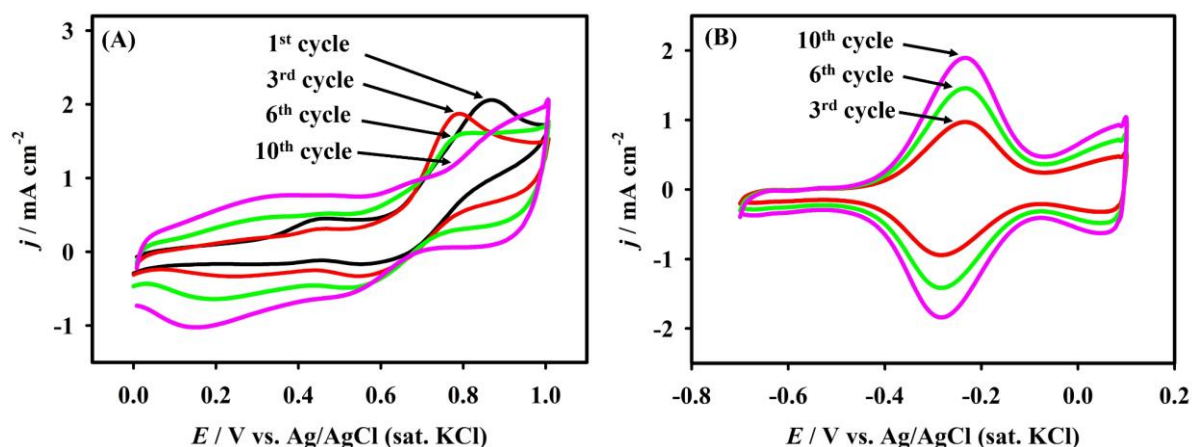
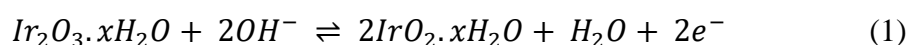


Figure 1. (A) Cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x film growth on Pt electrode obtained in Ir₂O₃·xH₂O colloidal solution by incessant scanning from 0 V to +1.0 V for 10 cycles at 0.1 V s⁻¹ scan rate, (B) Characteristic cyclic voltammograms of developed IrO_x-Pt surface in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH at 0.1 V s⁻¹ after each three deposition cycles.

Cyclic voltammetric technique was used to deposit IrO_x onto Pt electrode surface. To do this, a clean Pt electrode was placed in a one-compartment electrochemical cell containing Ir₂O₃·xH₂O colloidal solution and was then repeatedly scanned from 0 to +1 V against Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl) at scan rate 0.1 V s⁻¹. For optimal surface coverage, the deposition scan was limited to 10th cycle as per report of Baur *et al.*⁵⁵ The obtained cyclic voltammograms concerning the development of IrO_x onto Pt surface are shown in **Fig. 1(A)**. According to Baur *et al.* the peak at *ca.* 0.87 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) in 1st cycle belong to generation of oxygen from hydroxide ion which gradually shifted and diminished in next cycles⁵⁵. Additionally, the gradual current increment and the development of redox waves in the potential range of 0 V to +0.6 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) reflects the formation of iridium oxide layer onto Pt surface. According to Baur *et al.* the iridium oxide undergoes oxidation reaction on Pt surface during positive potential scanning and the reaction (1) also takes place on the Pt electrode surface to form insoluble layers of iridium oxide.⁵⁵



To perceive of the loading of iridium oxide layer, the Pt electrode was transferred to basic solution after every three deposition cycles and was scanned in potential range of -0.7 V to 0 V vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl) at 0.1 V s⁻¹ scan rate. **Figure 1(B)** represents the resultant cyclic voltammograms recorded in N₂-saturated 1.0 M NaOH solution. It is seen from this figure that a distinct redox pair is appeared on the Pt surface displaying anodic peak potential, E_{pa} , at -0.31 V and cathodic peak potential, E_{pc} , at -0.27 V with respect to Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl).

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3 According to Rivera et al. this surface confined redox duo belongs to $\text{Ir}^{\text{III}}\text{O}_x/\text{Ir}^{\text{IV}}\text{O}_x$ ⁵⁶. The
4 current associated with $\text{Ir}^{\text{III}}/\text{Ir}^{\text{IV}}$ transition gradually intensified with the increment of
5 deposition cycle and reached to optimal level at 10th deposition cycle. Therefore, the resultant
6 IrO_x -Pt electrode after 10th deposition cycle was utilized for electrochemical oxidation of
7 ethanol.
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10 11 12 **3.2. Characterization**

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14 To confirm the oxidation state and identify the chemical species of IrO_x , XPS was conducted.
15 **Figure 2** shows the (A) Ir and Pt 4f and (B) O 1s XPS spectra before (black) and after (red)
16 the IrO_x deposition on Pt electrode, respectively. After the deposition, peaks corresponding to
17 IrO_x were observed in Ir 4f (**Fig. 2(A)**) and O 1s (**Fig. 2(B)**) regions, while peak positions of
18 Pt 4f_{7/2} and 4f_{5/2} did not change before and after the deposition. The peak observed in O 1s
19 region of Pt (black line in **Fig. 2(B)**) was probably assignable to oxygen components from
20 surface adsorbed water or the carbon species. Obtained spectra were fitted well considering
21 two components in Ir 4f region and three components in O 1s region. Ir 4f_{7/2} and 4f_{5/2} peak
22 positions (**Table S1**) were consistent with those of IrO_2 and Ir_2O_3 , indicating that Ir^{III} and Ir^{IV}
23 species coexist in IrO_x ⁵⁷. The $\text{Ir}^{\text{III}}:\text{Ir}^{\text{IV}}$ ratio was estimated to be 0.30: 0.70 calculated from
24 the deconvoluted peak area (**Table S1**). For O 1s, three peaks were assignable to the O^{2-} ,
25 OH^- and hydrating H_2O , respectively with the area ratio of $\text{O}^{2-}:\text{OH}^-:(\text{hydrating H}_2\text{O}) =$
26 0.46: 0.49: 0.05 (**Table S2**) ^{23,58}. A considerable amount of OH^- species exists, suggesting the
27 partial replacement of O^{2-} to OH^- in Ir_2O_3 or IrO_2 , leading to the formation of such species as
28 $\text{IrO}(\text{OH})$ or $\text{IrO}(\text{OH})_2$ ^{59,60}.
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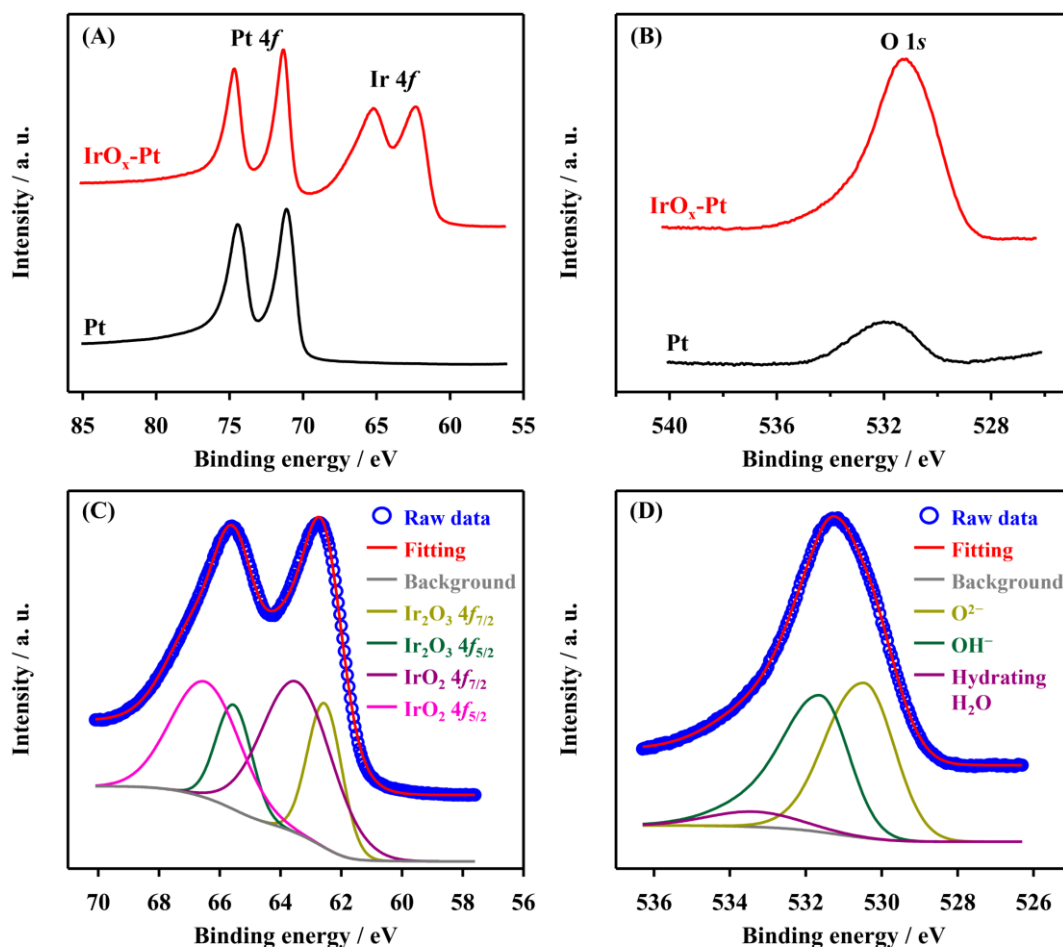


Figure 2. (A) and (B) XPS spectra of Pt (black) and IrO_x-Pt (red) in (A) Ir and Pt 4f regions and (B) O 1s region. (C) and (D) Fitting results of (C) Ir 4f and (B) O 1s XPS spectra of IrO_x-Pt electrode.

The surface morphology and the chemical composition of the IrO_x-Pt electrode were investigated by SEM and EDX. **Figure 3** shows the SEM images (A) before and (B) after the electrochemical deposition of IrO_x on Pt electrode. After the deposition, particles up to 10 μm were observed on the Pt surface. It was clearly confirmed from 2D EDX mappings of IrO_x-Pt electrode (**Fig. 3(C)** and (**D**)) that Ir and O distribute almost uniformly on Pt electrode. EDX spectra (**Fig. S1**) indicated that only Ir and O exist on Pt-electrode after the deposition, with Ir and O contents of 3.12 and 34.06 atomic%, respectively (**Table S3**). It is worth noting that the oxygen content was much higher than that expected from IrO₂ or Ir₂O₃. Excess oxygen was probably derived from the hydration water or the replacement of O²⁻ to OH⁻, as revealed from XPS results.

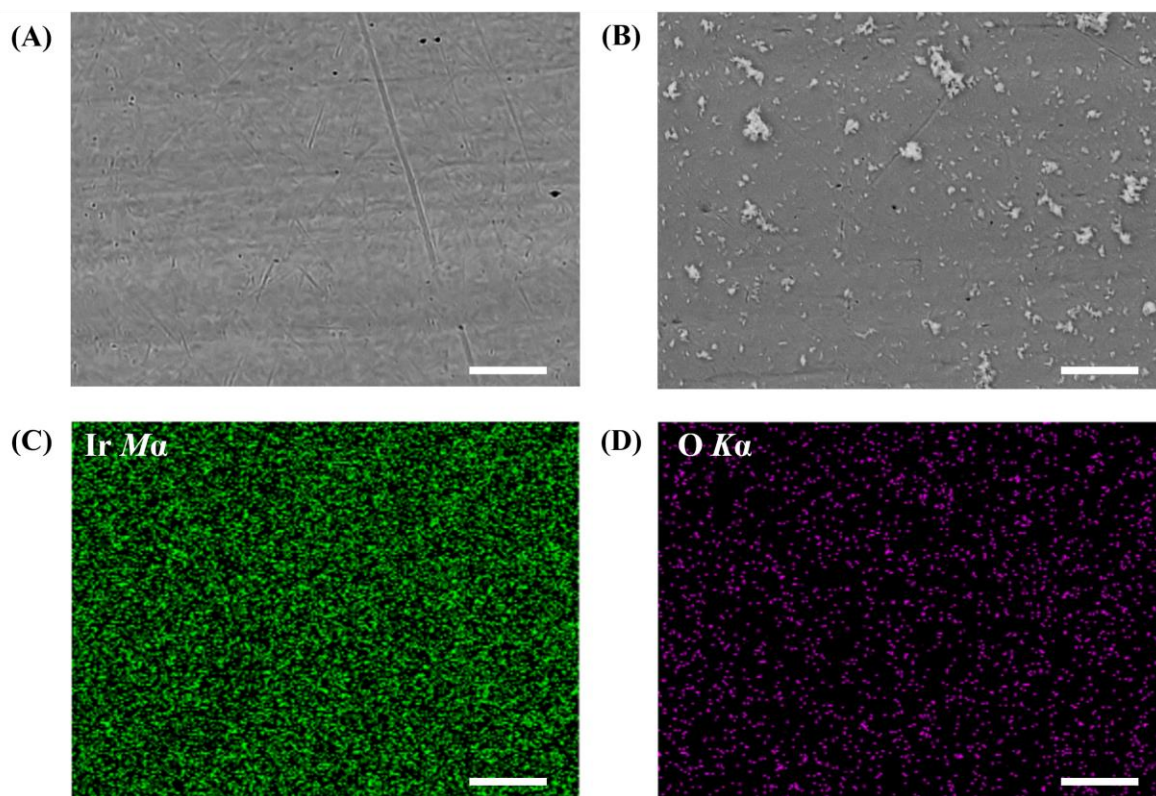
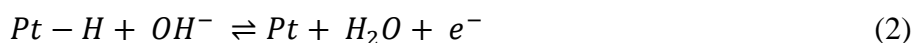


Figure 3. (A) and (B) SEM images of (A) Pt and (B) IrO_x-Pt electrodes. (C) and (D) 2D elemental mapping of (C) Ir and (D) O with the same field of view as (B). Scale bar: 5 μm for all panels.

3.3. Electrochemical characterisation of IrO_x-Pt

To examine the properties of the IrO_x-Pt electrode, electrochemical experiments were also carried out. In 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution, bare Pt shows the voltammogram as given in **Fig. 4(A)**. According to Banik et al., the voltammogram of bare Pt in NaOH solution can be divided into three regions with the exclusion of the potential region where hydrogen evolution reaction takes place.⁶¹ The first region (denoted as Region-I), which is in between -0.7 to -0.48 V vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl), corresponds to desorption (forward scan) and adsorption (reverse scan) of H⁺ ions on Pt electrode surface as per reaction (2).⁶¹



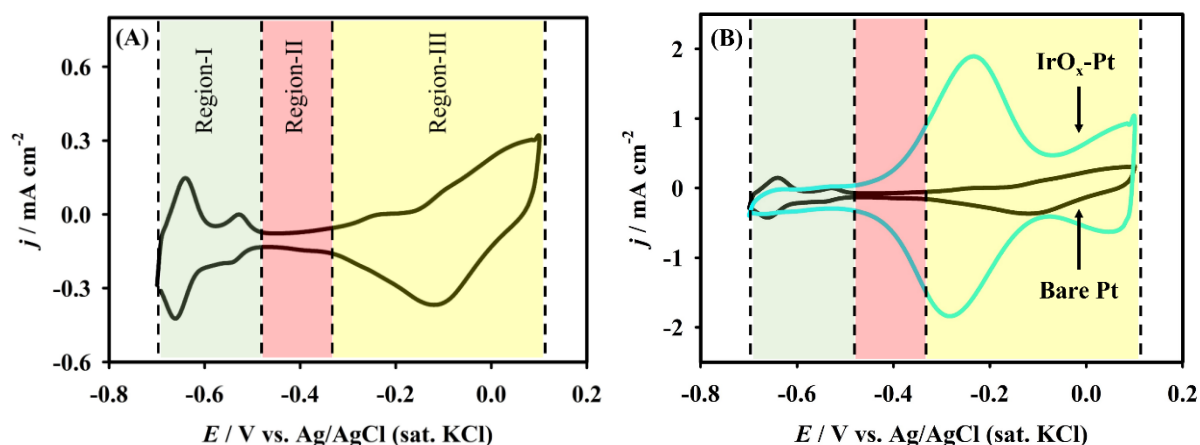
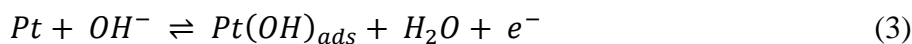


Figure 4. (A) Cyclic voltammogram of bare Pt surface obtained in 1.0 M N_2 -saturated NaOH solution at scan rate of 0.1 V s^{-1} , (B) Cyclic voltammograms of both bare Pt and $\text{IrO}_x\text{-Pt}$ electrodes in 1 M N_2 -saturated NaOH solution at scan rate of 0.1 V s^{-1} .

Region-II (-0.5 to -0.34 V) is considered as ‘double-layer region’ where only capacitive current is observed.⁶¹ Lastly, the region beyond -0.34 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) is denoted as Region-III where adsorption of OH^- ions on Pt surface is observed in forward scan and the corresponding reverse reaction is found at *ca.* -0.12 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) as per reaction (3).⁶¹



However, it is seen from **Fig. 4(B)** that the characteristic feature of Pt electrode vanished after immobilisation of IrO_x on the Pt surface. At the same time, a distinct redox duo displaying E_{pa} at -0.31 V and E_{pc} at -0.27 V (vs. Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl)) was seen to appear in 1.0 M NaOH solution. Therefore, the appearance of redox wave confirmed the formation of IrO_x layer on Pt surface.

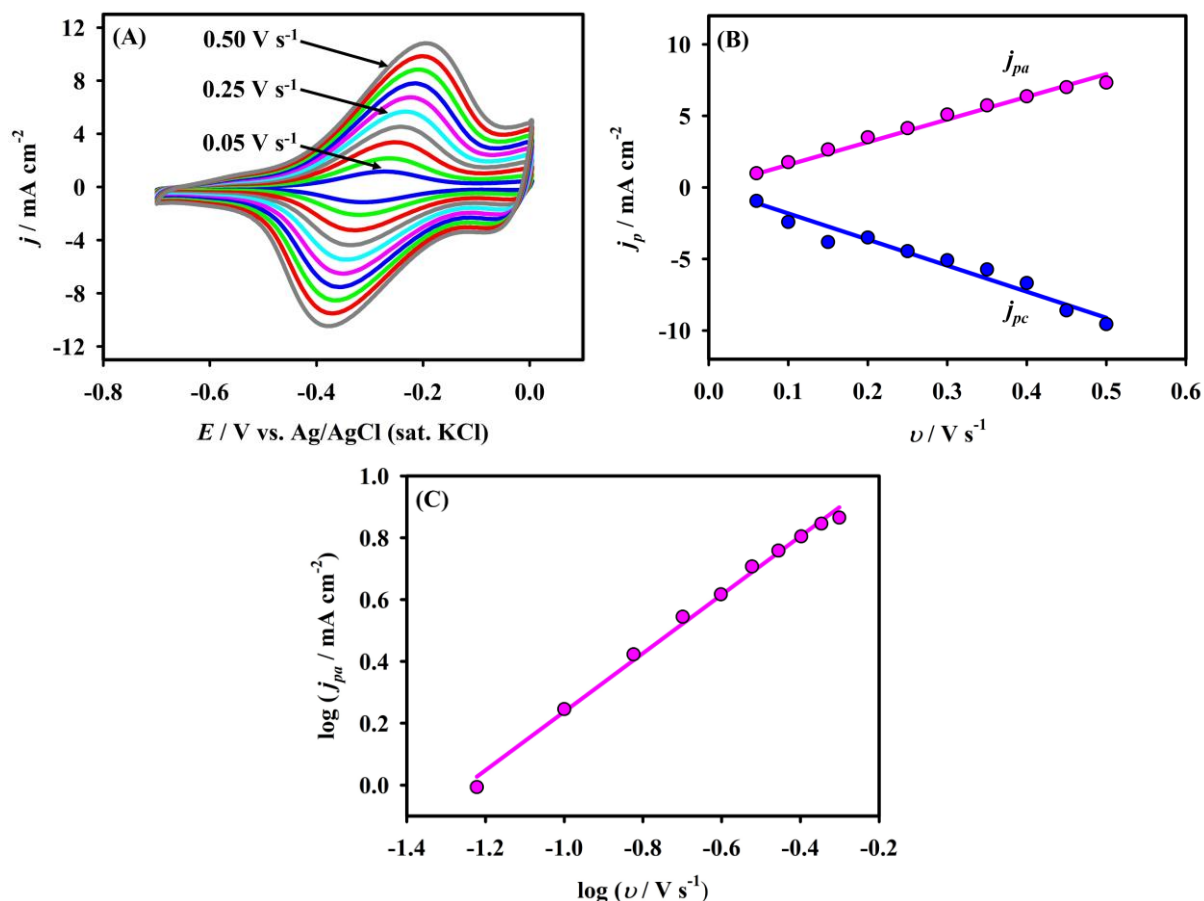


Figure 5. (A) Scan rate dependent cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x-Pt electrode in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution, (B) Linear relationship between peak current densities of redox waves and scan rates, (C) Logarithmic relationship between anodic peak current densities and scan rates.

To evaluate several features of IrO_x layer, the scan rate dependent cyclic voltammograms were recorded by utilizing the IrO_x-Pt electrode in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution. From the **Fig. 5(A)**, it is clear that both anodic and cathodic peak current density increased with the increment of scan rate from 0.05 to 0.50 V s⁻¹. The nature of CVs in scan rate study remained unaltered on subsequent potential scanning suggesting that the IrO_x layer was unwaveringly attached to the Pt surface⁶². Therefore, to estimate average surface concentration (*Γ*) of IrO_x on Pt surface, the peak current densities (both anodic and cathodic) were plotted against variable scan rates as per equation (4),^{63,64} which formed straight lines having *r*² : 0.99 (see **Fig. 5(B)**)

$$j_p = \frac{n^2 F^2 \Gamma \nu}{4RT} \quad (4)$$

Where, j_p stands for peak current density (anodic or cathodic), n stands for number of electron transfer (in this case, $n = 1$), F stands for the Faraday's constant (96485 C mol^{-1}), Γ represents average surface concentration, v stands for scan rate, R represents molar gas constant ($8.314 \text{ J K}^{-1} \text{ mol}^{-1}$), T represents temperature (298 K). Therefore, the active IrO_x species concentration (Γ) was calculated to be $(1.81 \pm 0.13) \times 10^{-8} \text{ mol cm}^{-2}$.

3.4. Electro-oxidation of ethanol

Typical cyclic voltammograms of EtOR on bare Pt and IrO_x -Pt electrodes are presented in **Fig. 6(A)**. Note that the reaction medium was 1 M N_2 -saturated NaOH solution. It is seen from the figure that the voltammogram regarding EtOR has imperfect hysteresis loop lying in the potential range of -0.4 to 0.0 V with respect to Ag/AgCl (sat. KCl). For Pt electrode, the loop consists of intense anodic and cathodic oxidation waves at *ca.* -0.16 V and -0.21 V , respectively. The forward going wave was obtained for ethanol oxidation, whereas the wave found during reverse scan was due to the oxidation of adsorbed intermediate species, mainly CO, formed in anodic scan¹⁸.

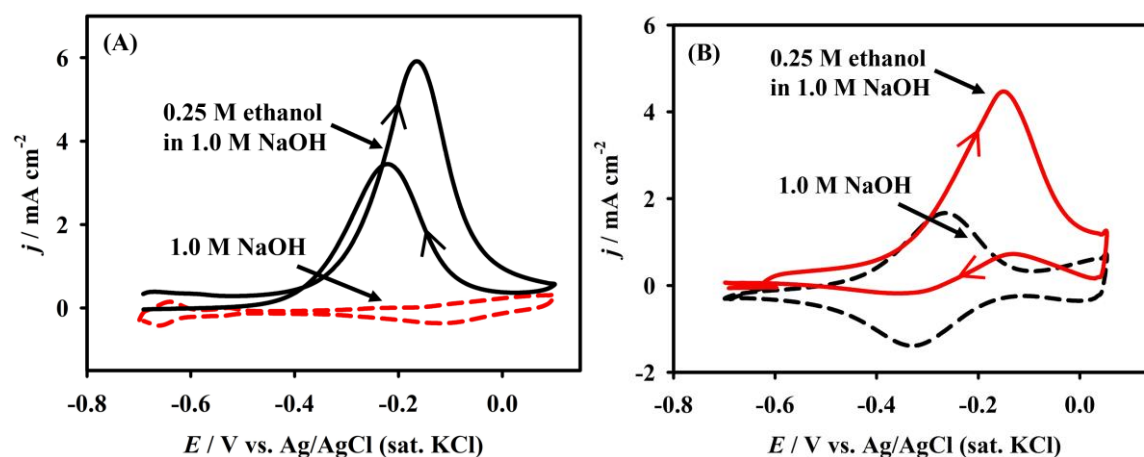


Figure 6. (A) Cyclic voltammograms of bare Pt in 1.0 M N_2 -saturated NaOH solution having 0.0 M and 0.25 M ethanol at 0.1 V s^{-1} scan rate, (B) Cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x -Pt in 1.0 M N_2 -saturated NaOH solution having 0.0 M and 0.25 M ethanol at 0.1 V s^{-1} scan rate.

In case of IrO_x -Pt electrode, both anodic and cathodic waves are less intense compared to the waves obtained for Pt electrode, as shown in **Fig. 6(B)**. On top of that the peak potentials of the forward and backward waves have also been shifted towards positive direction due to presence of IrO_x layer on Pt surface. But the onset potential of EtOR on Pt and IrO_x -Pt electrode is almost identical and interestingly, the onset potential of CO oxidation reaction on

IrO_x-Pt electrode is also like that on bare Pt electrode. This observation leads to the conclusion that the Pt surface plays the main role in the electrocatalysis of ethanol. At this point, it seems that the IrO_x layer impeded rather than promoting the catalytic activity of the Pt surface. However, the forward to backward peak current density ratio (j_{pf}/j_{pb}) reveals an intriguing property of electro-catalysts, namely their tolerance to the build-up of adsorbed intermediate species produced by EtOR.^{15,23} Therefore, the ratio of j_{pf} and j_{pb} was calculated from the respective EtOR cyclic voltammograms and plotted with respect to the electro-catalyst (See **Fig 6(A) & (B)**). It is seen that the IrO_x-Pt has higher tolerance ratio compared to Pt, signifying the higher resistance to accumulation of adsorbed intermediate species on catalytic sites (See **Fig. S4**).

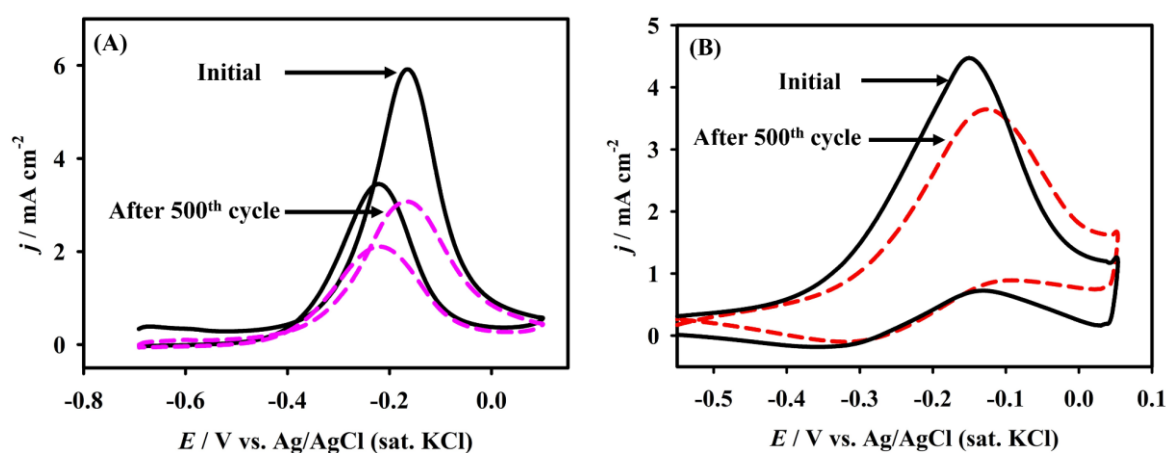


Figure 7. (A) Comparative cyclic voltammograms of bare Pt in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution having 0.25 M ethanol at 0.1 V s⁻¹ recorded initially and after 500 incessant cycling in 0.25 M ethanol solution, (B) Comparative cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x-Pt in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution having 0.25 M ethanol at 0.1 V s⁻¹ recorded initially and after 500 incessant cycling in 0.25 M ethanol solution.

To validate the tolerance ratio, stability test of the electrodes was taken place in 1.0 M NaOH solution containing 0.25 M ethanol. **Figure 7(A)** represents the comparison of CVs of Pt electrode, taken initially and after 500 incessant cycles in 0.25 M ethanol solution at scan rate of 0.1 V s⁻¹. It is obvious from the figure that the peak current density decreased by around (50±1.53) % after 500 cycles. Such current fall is a clear indication of Pt surface deactivation, which is consistent with the tolerance ratio of Pt. According to Lai *et al.*, the main reason behind the deactivation is adsorption of intermediate species, mainly CO, which form strong bond with Pt atoms and keeps the Pt surface unexposed to ethanol molecules.¹⁸ On the contrary, the initial current response of IrO_x-Pt electrode dropped by (18±1.15) % after 500

incessant cycles in 0.25 M ethanol at scan rate of 0.1 V s⁻¹. This result clearly indicates that the IrO_x layer protects the Pt surface from unwanted accumulation of intermediate species. Furthermore, the stability test was performed for two more times to validate the primary data and almost similar results were obtained. To make it easily apprehensible, the comparison between the initial peak current density and final peak current density (obtained after 500 cycles) was plotted with respect to the respective electrode, known as bar diagram, (See **Fig. S5**). Based on the results of the stability test and prior literature, it has been observed that the accumulation of adsorbed CO on the active sites of Pt leads to the deactivation of the Pt catalyst in the course of the EtOR process. (See scheme 1). As a result, the current response rapidly decreases upon subsequent cycling in ethanol solution.

Next, the data presented in **Table 1** is intended to provide a thorough comparison of the durability and resistance to CO adsorption exhibited by Pt-metal oxide catalysts that have been previously documented. It is obvious that the catalyst we developed is capable of oxidizing ethanol with appreciable longevity while also showing outstanding CO adsorption resistance.

Table 1. A comparative representation of relevant parameters for EtOR on varying Pt-Metal Oxide catalysts

Catalyst	Condition	j_{pf} and v	j_{pb} and v	j_{pf}/j_{pb}	Durability	b	Ref
Pt-CeO ₂ /C	1.0 M ethanol + 1.0 M KOH at 30 °C	19 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	12 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	1.6	–	–	65
Pt-ZrO ₂ /C	1.0 M ethanol + 1.0 M KOH at 25 °C	27 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	25 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	1.1	–	117 mV dec ⁻¹	66
Pt-RuO ₂ /C/BDD	1.0 M ethanol + 0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C	72 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.01 V s ⁻¹	80 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.01 V s ⁻¹	0.9	Produced 33 % of the initial current density after 2500 s	140 mV dec ⁻¹	67
SnO ₂ @Pt/C	1.0 M ethanol + 0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C	265 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	215 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	1.23	Produced 17 % of the initial current density after 600 s	–	68
Pt-ATO/MWCNT	1.0 M ethanol + 1.0	1300 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at	1000 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at	1.30	Produced 37 % of the initial	–	69

	M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C		0.05 V s ⁻¹	0.05 V s ⁻¹		current density after 3600 s		
Ni@NiO/Pt	1.0 M ethanol + 0.5 M KOH at 21 °C	M	125 mA cm ⁻² at 0.02 V s ⁻¹	100 mA cm ⁻² at 0.02 V s ⁻¹	1.25	Produced 20 % of the initial current density after 3600 s	87	70
Pt-CeO_{2-x}/GNS	1.0 M ethanol + 1.0 M KOH at 25 °C	M	1370 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	220 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	6.23	94.9 % current density retention after 250 cycles	140	71
1Pt-3CuO/CNT	0.5 M ethanol + 0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C	M	596 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	536 mA mg ⁻¹ Pt at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	1.11	Produced 35 % of the initial current density after 3600 s	108	72
Pt/TiO₂NCs-C	1.0 M ethanol + 0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C	M	0.640 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	0.600 mA cm ⁻² at 0.05 V s ⁻¹	1.1	95 % current density retention after 70 cycles	–	73
Pt-MoO₃/C	1.0 M ethanol + 0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄ at 25 °C	M	0.675 mA cm ⁻² at 0.02 V s ⁻¹	0.418 mA cm ⁻² at 0.02 V s ⁻¹	1.61	Produced 30% of the initial current density after 3600 s	120	74
IrO_x-Pt	0.25 M ethanol + 1.0 M NaOH at 25 °C	M	4.47 mA cm ⁻² at 0.1 V s ⁻¹	0.75 mA cm ⁻² at 0.1 V s ⁻¹	5.96	Around 82 % current density retention after 500 cycles	165	This work

j_{pa} = peak current density during forward scan; j_{pb} = peak current density during backward scan; v = scan rate; b = Tafel slope; C = Carbon; BDD = Boron Doped Diamond; ATO = Antimony Tin Oxide; MWCNT = Multi-Wall Carbo Nano Tube; GNS = Graphene Nano Sheet; CNT = Carbo Nano Tube; NCs = Nano Cubes.

3.5. Scan rate effect

Essentially, the analysis of an electrochemical reaction with respect to scan rate enables an understanding of both its mechanistic and kinetic aspects. For a complicated reaction like the ethanol oxidation reaction, it is rather challenging to extract all the kinetic parameters using the scan rate effect, but we can accurately predict some of the mechanistic features. Therefore, cyclic voltammograms were recorded at variable scan rates (0.05 to 0.6 V s⁻¹) for ethanol oxidation reaction, in which the concentration of ethanol was 0.25 M in 1.0 M NaOH (see **Fig. 8(A)**).

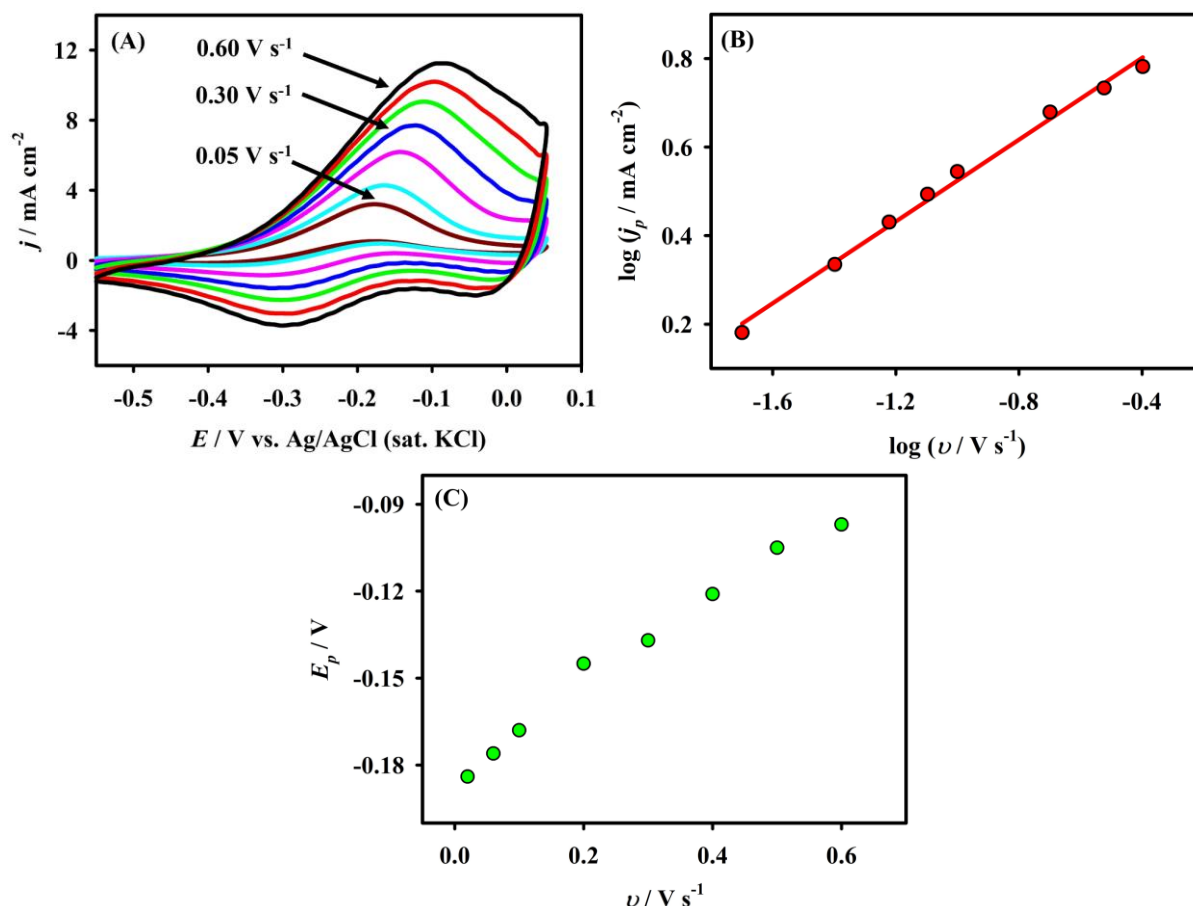


Figure 8. (A) Scan rate dependent cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x-Pt in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH solution having 0.25 M ethanol, (B) Logarithmic relationship between anodic peak current densities and scan rates, (C) Variation of anodic peak potentials with respect to scan rates.

It is conspicuous in the figure that the peak current density increased in magnitude with increased scan rate. To know the nature of the electrode process, logarithmic peak current densities were plotted with respect to logarithmic scan rates, as shown in **Fig. 8(B)**. Linear regression analysis of the logarithmic plot yielded slope value of 0.46 (~ 0.5) with $r^2:0.99$, suggesting a diffusion-controlled electrode process.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷ The peak potential also shifted towards positive potential with the increase in scan rate, which is a sign of an irreversible electrode process (see **Fig. 8(C)**).⁷⁵⁻⁷⁷

3.6. Tafel analysis

At this point, Tafel slope can be a parameter to know the involvement of Ir^(III) to Ir^(IV) transition in catalysis of ethanol oxidation reaction.⁷⁸ By using the famous Tafel equation (5),⁴³ the analysis of the polarization curves in the potential region as marked by the dotted

parallelogram in **Fig. 9(A)** was performed for 1.0 M NaOH having 0.00 M, 0.15 M and 0.25 M ethanol as shown in **Fig. 9(B)**

$$\log j = \left\{ \log j_k - \frac{E^0}{b} \right\} + \frac{E}{b} \quad (5)$$

Where, $b = \frac{2.303RT}{(1-\alpha)F}$, known as Tafel slope for the anodic reaction, and the other symbols have their usual meanings.

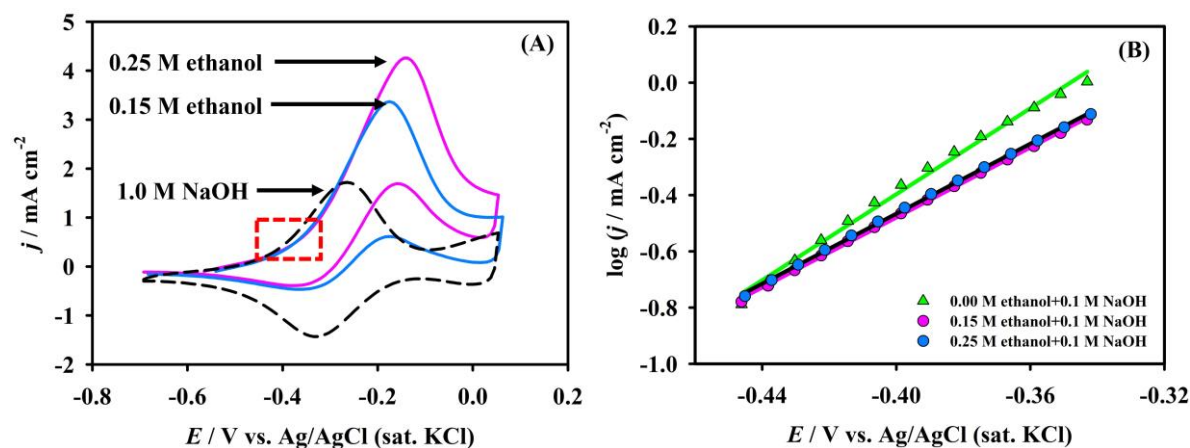
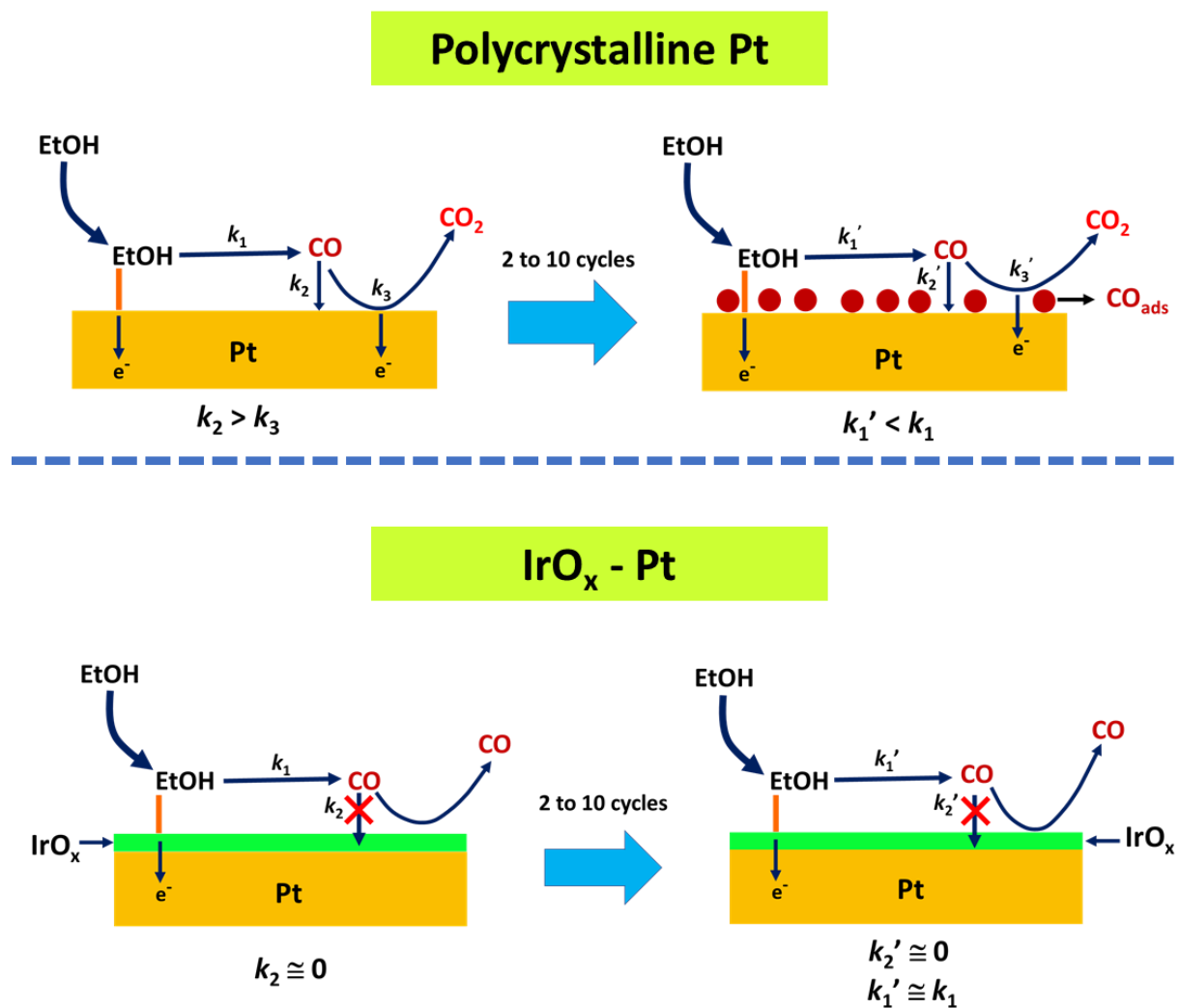


Figure 9. (A) Cyclic voltammograms of IrO_x-Pt in 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH having 0.00 M, 0.15 M and 0.25 M ethanol at 0.1 V s⁻¹, (B) Tafel analysis of polarization curves of 1.0 M N₂-saturated NaOH having 0.00 M, 0.15 M and 0.25 M ethanol by using IrO_x-Pt electrode at 0.1 V s⁻¹.

In absence of ethanol in 1.0 M NaOH, the Tafel slope of IrO_x-Pt was found to be 130 mV dec⁻¹ as per equation (5). Conversely, the Tafel slope of IrO_x-Pt was determined to be 165 mV dec⁻¹ when exposed to 0.15 M and 0.25 M ethanol in a 1.0 M NaOH solution. The dissimilarity observed in the Tafel slope provides evidence that the transition from Ir^(III) to Ir^(IV) does not catalyse the EtOR,⁷⁸ Although the IrO_x layer does not contribute to catalysis, the findings depicted in **Figures 6 and 7** demonstrate that the IrO_x layer applied to the Pt catalyst functions as a layer that inhibits CO adsorption. Due to transition from Ir^(III) to Ir^(IV), IrO_x layer is inherently conductive. This transition occurs just before the oxidation of ethanol, therein the overall oxidation process is not impeded by IrO_x layer. Based on the obtained results and the theories stated in literatures³²⁻³⁴, the overall oxidation process on IrO_x-Pt catalyst is shown in **Scheme 1**.



Scheme 1. Overall ethanol oxidation reaction on polycrystalline Pt and IrO_x-Pt.

4. Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to make Pt surface CO tolerant in attaining EtOR for alkaline type DEFC. The desired tolerance ability was accomplished by immobilising IrO_x as co-catalyst onto Pt surface through simple electrodeposition method. Immobilising precursor was colloidal suspension of Ir₂O₃.nH₂O which was synthesised from solid K₂IrCl₆. The resultant electrode IrO_x-Pt was electrochemically characterized by means of cyclic voltammetric technique. In ethanol oxidation reaction, Pt showed higher current response, but its CO tolerance ability was almost 3.5 times lower than the IrO_x-Pt electrode. This result is also consistent with stability test of the electrodes in which the activity of Pt declined over 500 incessant cycling and retained just (50±1.53) % current density, whereas the activity of IrO_x-Pt electrode decreased by (18±1.15) % after 500 cycles. As the IrO_x-Pt electrode showed

less susceptibility towards CO adsorption in attaining EtOR, therefore it can also be used as CO-tolerant catalyst in methanol oxidation reaction for direct methanol fuel cell.

Authors contribution

Md. Fahamidul Islam: Writing-original draft, experimental and data analysis, **Jahir Ahmed:** Data analysis, review and editing, and funding acquisition, **M. Faisal:** Review and editing, **Jari S Algethami:** Review and editing, **Kentaro Aoki:** Surface analysis and review, **Yuki Nagao:** Surface analysis and review, **Farid A. Haraz:** Review and editing, supervision, and funding acquisition, **Mohammad A. Hasnat:** Conceptualization, writing-review & editing, supervision, and funding acquisition.

Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare

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