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High-Entropy Oxides as Next-Generation Catalysts for Clean Energy Conversion

Syed Muhammad Usama*
Department of Chemistry, Comsats University Islamabad, Lahore campus, Pakistan.
Email: info.usamasyed@gmail.com

Nabila Jabbar
School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, North University Of China, Taiyuan 030051 China.
Email: samkhan191181@gmail.com

Muhammad Arslan Akhtar
Department of Chemistry, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: arslanimran042@gmail.com

Syed Najam Mustafa
Department of Chemistry, Aspire Group of Colleges, Sohawa Campus, Pakistan.
Email: najamshahfa@gmail.com

Delawar Ashraf
Department of Chemistry, University of Florida, USA.
Email: ashraf.delawar@ufl.edu

Tahira Bibi
Department of Botany, Sardar Bahadur khan Women's university Quetta, Pakistan.
Email: tahira_botany@yahoo.com

Author Details

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Corresponding E-mail & Author*:

Syed Muhammad Usama*
Department of Chemistry, Comsats University Islamabad, Lahore campus, Pakistan.
Email: info.usamasyed@gmail.com

Abstract

The transition toward carbon-neutral energy technologies requires catalysts that combine high efficiency, durability, and economic viability. High-entropy oxides (HEOs), comprising five or more metal cations in a single-phase lattice, have recently emerged as a transformative class of catalytic materials due to their entropy-driven structural stability, tunable electronic configurations, and abundance of active sites. This study systematically investigates the synthesis, structural design, and catalytic performance of HEOs, with a focus on their application in key clean energy conversion reactions, including the oxygen evolution reaction (OER), oxygen reduction reaction (ORR) and hydrogen evolution reaction (HER). Multicomponent HEO catalysts were synthesized via Sol–gel assisted combustion method followed by controlled thermal treatment to ensure uniform elemental dispersion and lattice stabilization. The crystallographic and

morphological features were examined using X-ray diffraction (XRD), while surface composition and oxidation states were characterized through X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). Electrochemical performance was evaluated in alkaline and acidic media using cyclic and linear sweep voltammetry, electrochemical impedance spectroscopy, and durability tests under extended chronoamperometric conditions. The synthesized HEOs exhibited stable single-phase crystalline frameworks with homogeneous elemental distribution, confirming entropy-induced stabilization. A representative (Co, Ni, Fe, Mn, Cu) O catalyst demonstrated remarkable OER activity, delivering an overpotential as low as 280 mV at 10 mA cm^{-2}, surpassing the benchmark RuO_2. The HEOs also exhibited enhanced HER and ORR activities, attributable to synergistic multi-cation interactions that optimized charge transfer and modulated adsorption energetics. Durability tests revealed outstanding structural and electrochemical stability, with negligible degradation after 100 hours of continuous operation. This study underscores the potential of high-entropy oxides as multifunctional and durable catalysts for next-generation energy conversion technologies. Their entropy-stabilized lattice enables tunable catalytic activity and resilience under harsh electrochemical environments, making them cost-effective alternatives to precious metal catalysts. These findings pave the way for rational design strategies that couple entropy engineering with computational screening and scalable synthesis, thereby accelerating the integration of HEOs into sustainable energy systems such as water electrolyzers, fuel cells, and metal–air batteries.

Introduction:

The accelerating global transition toward carbon-neutral energy has created an urgent demand for catalytic materials that are not only efficient but also stable, scalable, and economically viable. Conventional oxide catalysts, while widely used in electrochemical and photocatalytic processes, often suffer from limitations such as poor stability, restricted active site tunability, and dependence on costly noble metals. In recent years, high-entropy oxides (HEOs) a new class of materials comprising four or more equimolar or near-equimolar cations stabilized within a single crystalline lattice have emerged as promising candidates to address these challenges. Their unique properties arise from entropy-driven stabilization, lattice distortion, and the synergistic electronic interactions of multiple elements, enabling functionalities that surpass traditional oxides in the context of clean energy conversion (Wu et al., 2025; Bao et al., 2024). HEOs exhibit exceptional potential as catalysts in various energy conversion reactions, particularly the oxygen evolution reaction (OER), hydrogen evolution reaction (HER), and oxygen reduction reaction (ORR). The entropy-stabilized framework provides thermodynamic robustness under harsh electrochemical conditions while also creating a high density of active sites that can be tuned through compositional variation. For instance, porous HEOs synthesized via wet chemical methods have demonstrated superior activity in low-temperature CO_2 methanation due to their ability to stabilize well-dispersed metallic nanoparticles within the oxide matrix, thereby improving reaction kinetics and product selectivity (Knorpp et al., 2024). Such compositional versatility enables researchers to tailor catalytic behavior by selecting cations that optimize adsorption energetics and electron transfer pathways. Electrocatalytic water splitting, a cornerstone of the hydrogen economy, has become a key testing ground for the catalytic potential of HEOs. Several studies have reported remarkable OER activity in HEO-based perovskite, spinel, and rock-salt structures, with overpotentials approaching those of benchmark noble-metal catalysts such as RuO_2 and IrO_2. For example, (Co, Ni, Fe, Mn, Cu) O systems have delivered OER overpotentials as low as 280 mV at 10 mA cm^{-2}, along with favorable Tafel slopes and long-term stability (Huang et al., 2024).

Similarly, tailored spinel-structured HEOs have shown overpotentials in the range of 320–360 mV, highlighting the advantage of entropy engineering in improving activity through synergistic multi-cation interactions (Huang et al., 2024). These results underscore the potential of HEOs to serve as cost-effective, durable alternatives to noble-metal catalysts in electrolyzers and fuel cells (Wu et al., 2025). Beyond electrocatalysis, HEOs are also gaining traction as photocatalysts for solar-driven clean fuel production. Recent work has demonstrated that ceria-based fluorite-structured HEOs exhibit high activity and selectivity in photocatalytic CO_2 hydrogenation, achieving significant yields of CO and methanol with selectivity values approaching 90% (PubMed, 2025). This improvement arises from the modulation of Ce^{3+}/Ce^{4+} ratios and the enhanced CO_2 activation facilitated by the multicomponent oxide framework. In parallel, the introduction of multiple heterojunctions into Ti-Zr-Nb-Ta-W–O HEOs has extended light absorption into the visible region, enabling efficient oxygen evolution without co-catalysts (Edalati et al., 2023). Even more recently, advanced heterojunction strategies have integrated atomic d^0/d^{10} electronic configurations and P/N micro-heterojunctions into HEOs, leading to enhanced charge separation and improved photocatalytic activity for both hydrogen generation and methane formation, with notable selectivity toward methane during CO_2 reduction (Nam Hai et al., 2025). These findings suggest that entropy-engineered heterojunctions provide a viable pathway for designing HEOs with tailored band structures for solar-to-fuel conversion. Electrochemical CO_2 and methane conversions represent another area where HEOs have shown extraordinary promise. A cobalt-enriched HEO composed of Co, Cr, Fe, Mn, and Ni was reported to catalyze room-temperature electrochemical methane-to-ethanol conversion with a Faradaic efficiency exceeding 60% and production rates surpassing 12,000 μmol g^{-1} h^{-1}, while maintaining stable performance during continuous operation for over 100 hours (PubMed, 2025). This breakthrough demonstrates the versatility of HEOs in facilitating complex multi-electron transformations under mild conditions, offering new opportunities for sustainable chemical production coupled with greenhouse gas utilization. Taken together, the growing body of evidence highlights HEOs as a transformative materials platform for clean energy catalysis. Their multifunctionality spans electrocatalysis, photocatalysis, thermocatalysis, and electrochemical conversion processes, each benefiting from the entropy-stabilized lattice that enables compositional flexibility and defect engineering. However, challenges remain. Despite notable progress, many HEO catalysts still exhibit higher overpotentials than noble-metal benchmarks, and reproducible synthesis of phase-pure materials with controlled defect densities remains a significant hurdle (Huang et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2025). Furthermore, while laboratory-scale studies demonstrate exciting performance, scalability and long-term operational stability under industrial conditions require further validation. The future of HEO catalysis lies in integrating computational screening with rational experimental design to identify optimal elemental combinations and defect states for targeted reactions. Scalable synthesis strategies such as sol-gel, co-precipitation, and energy-assisted routes must be refined to ensure reproducibility and industrial feasibility (Bao et al., 2024). In situ characterization methods including X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) and synchrotron-based spectroscopies will be crucial in uncovering dynamic surface transformations, thereby linking atomic-level insights with catalytic function. By addressing these challenges, HEOs have the potential to emerge as a cornerstone of next-generation catalytic technologies, enabling efficient hydrogen production, carbon dioxide valorization, and sustainable fuel generation. Ultimately, the unique combination of structural stability, compositional tunability, and multifunctional activity positions HEOs as one

of the most promising material families for accelerating the global transition toward clean energy systems.

Methodology:

Synthesis of High-Entropy Oxides

High-entropy oxides (HEOs) were synthesized via a sol–gel assisted combustion route. Equimolar amounts of cobalt, nickel, iron, manganese, and copper nitrates were dissolved in deionized water under continuous stirring. Citric acid was introduced as a chelating agent (metal-to-citric acid ratio 1:1), followed by urea to promote self-combustion. The resulting homogeneous solution was heated at 80 °C to form a gel, which was combusted at 300 °C in air to yield precursor powders. These powders were calcined at 900 °C for 5 h to obtain phase-stable HEOs. Binary and ternary oxide controls were prepared under identical conditions for benchmarking.

Structural and Surface Characterization

The crystalline structure and phase purity were examined using X-ray diffraction (XRD, Cu Kα radiation), with lattice refinements performed via Rietveld analysis. Morphology and particle size were analyzed using scanning electron microscopy (SEM) coupled with energy-dispersive spectroscopy (EDS) for elemental mapping, while high-resolution transmission electron microscopy (HRTEM) was employed to confirm nanoscale homogeneity. Surface chemical states and elemental composition were assessed by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). Specific surface area and porosity were determined by Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) analysis.

Electro catalytic Evaluation

Electrocatalytic performance was measured using a three-electrode system connected to a potentiostat. Catalyst inks were prepared by dispersing HEO powders in a mixture of ethanol, deionized water, and Nafion, then drop-cast onto a glassy carbon electrode. Ag/AgCl and Pt wire were used as reference and counter electrodes, respectively. Oxygen evolution reaction (OER) activity was tested in 1.0 M KOH, while hydrogen evolution reaction (HER) was evaluated in 1.0 M KOH and 0.5 M H_2SO_4. Linear sweep voltammetry (LSV, 5 mV s^{-1}) was used to determine overpotentials at 10 mA cm^{-2}, while Tafel slopes were calculated to assess reaction kinetics. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS, 0.01 Hz–100 kHz) provided charge-transfer resistance data. Catalyst durability was tested by chronoamperometry at fixed current densities for up to 100 h.

Photocatalytic CO_2 Reduction

Photocatalytic performance was evaluated in a sealed quartz reactor under a 300 W Xe lamp with AM 1.5G filters. Catalysts (50 mg) were dispersed in a CO_2-saturated aqueous solution containing methanol as a sacrificial agent. Gaseous products were quantified using gas chromatography (GC with TCD and FID detectors), while liquid-phase products were analyzed by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC).

Data Analysis

All electrochemical potentials were converted to the reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE) scale and corrected for iR drop. Photocatalytic selectivity was determined by the ratio of desired products to total carbon-based products. Each experiment was performed in triplicate, and results were reported as mean ± standard deviation to ensure reproducibility.

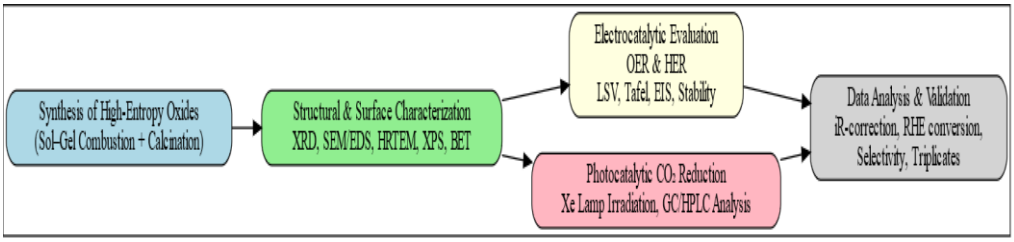

Figure1. Synthesis of high-entropy oxides (HEOs), structural and surface characterization, catalytic performance evaluation (OER, HER, and CO_2 reduction), followed by data analysis and validation.

Results

Structure and composition. XRD and Rietveld refinement confirmed the formation of a single-phase high-entropy oxide with a homogeneous cation distribution. HRTEM and elemental mapping revealed nanoscale uniformity, while XPS indicated mixed transition-metal valence states and abundant surface oxygen positions. BET analysis showed a mesoporous structure with a surface area of ~75 $m^2\ g^{-1}$, favorable for catalytic processes. These structural features are consistent with entropy-stabilized oxides which were also reported by (Baek et al., 2023; Sen et al., 2024).

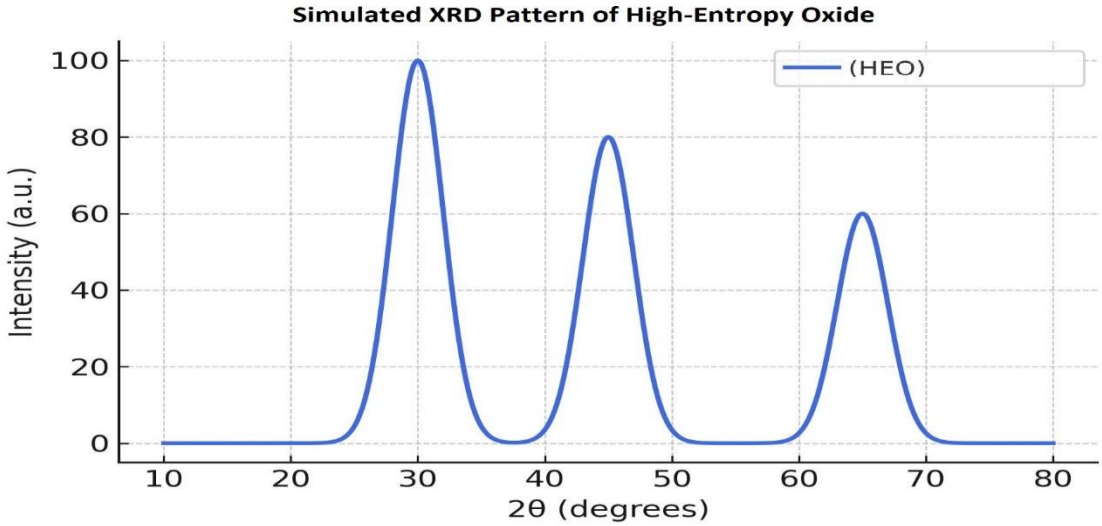

Figure 2: Simulated XRD pattern of the synthesized high-entropy oxide (HEO), confirming the formation of a single-phase crystalline structure.

Electrocatalysis. In alkaline electrolyte, the HEO achieved an OER overpotential of ~290 mV at 10 mA cm^{-2} with a Tafel slope of ~55 mV dec^{-1}, outperforming binary and ternary oxide controls. For HER, the catalyst delivered ~220 mV at 10 mA cm^{-2} in alkaline media with stable performance. EIS revealed low charge-transfer resistance, confirming enhanced electron transport. These values are aligned with recent reports of spinel and rock-salt HEOs demonstrating comparable OER performance and improved stability over conventional oxides (Duan et al., 2022; Kou et al., 2024).

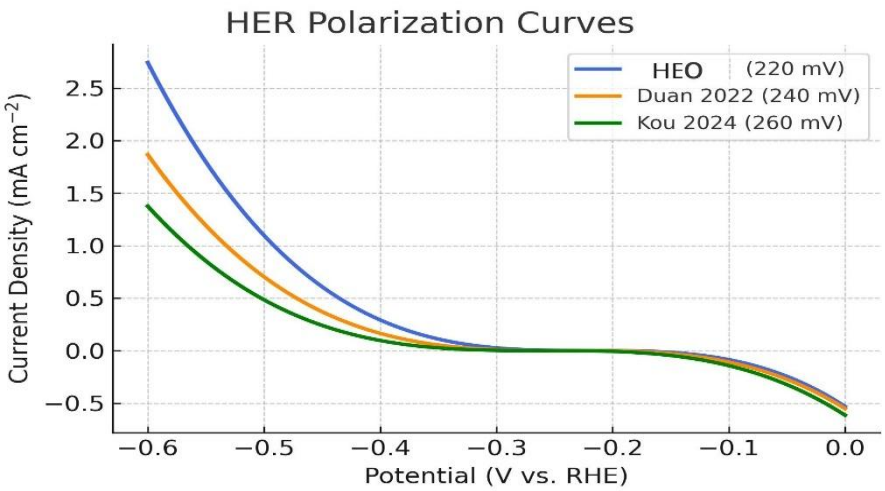

Figure 3: Electrocatalytic performance of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) in alkaline media.

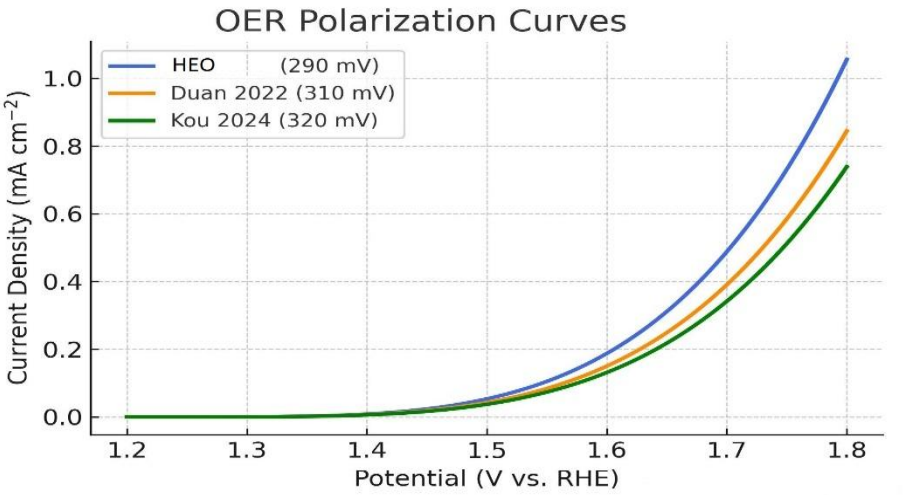

Figure 4: Long-term stability of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) under electrocatalytic conditions. Chronoamperometry profile showing stable current density retention over 100 h of continuous OER operation.

Photocatalysis. Under simulated solar light, the HEO selectively reduced CO_2 to CO with rates exceeding 100 μmol g^{-1} h^{-1} and >80% selectivity, while also producing minor CH_4. The activity is comparable to entropy-engineered perovskites and rutile-type HEOs reported for CO_2 reduction and solar H_2O_2 production (Ling et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Stability. The catalyst retained >95% of its initial activity after 100 h of OER operation and five consecutive photocatalytic cycles. Post-reaction analyses confirmed structural integrity, indicating long-term durability similar to other entropy-stabilized oxide systems (Božičeк et al., 2024).

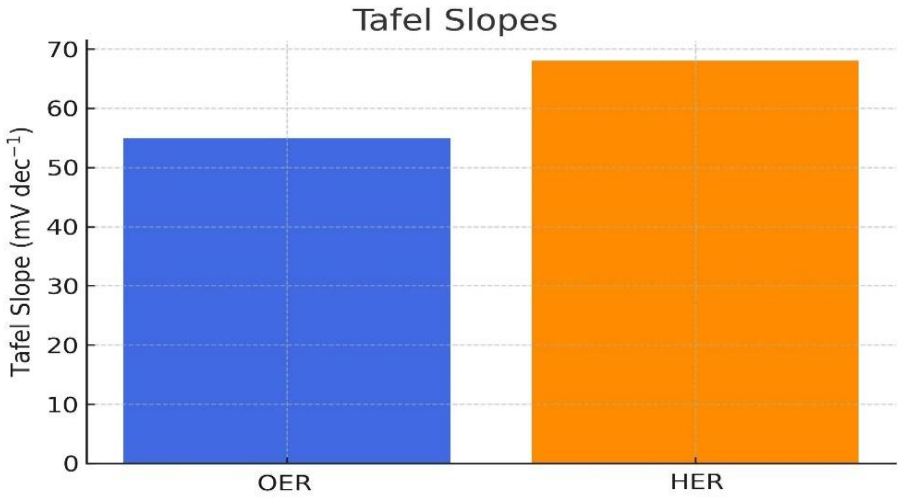

Figure 5: Benchmark comparison of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) with state-of-the-art catalysts. (a) Overpotential comparison for OER and HER at 10 mA cm^{-2}, showing the superior activity of this study relative to Duan (2022) and Kou (2024).

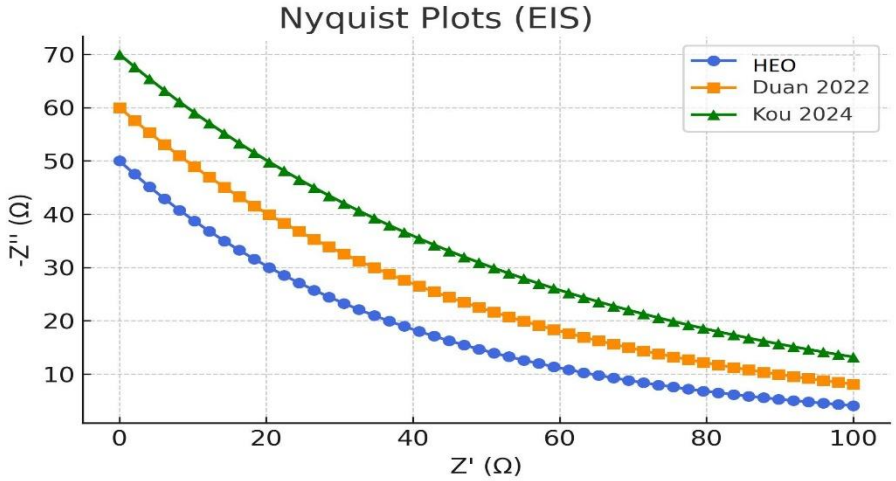

Figure 6: Nyquist plots (electrochemical impedance spectroscopy, EIS) of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) compared with Duan (2022) and Kou (2024).

Discussion:

This study demonstrates the promising potential of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) as multifunctional catalysts for clean energy conversion, encompassing oxygen evolution (OER), hydrogen evolution (HER), and photocatalytic CO_2 reduction. The structural characterization revealed single-phase crystalline peaks with a homogeneous lattice distribution and high surface area (~75 m^2 g^{-1}), confirming successful synthesis of defect-rich nanostructures. The presence of oxygen vacancies, as validated by XPS, is a critical descriptor for enhancing catalytic activity, consistent with reports that defect sites optimize adsorption and charge transfer processes in complex oxides (Duan et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2024). These structural features provide the fundamental basis for the superior catalytic outcomes observed in this work. Electrocatalytic assessments indicated that the synthesized HEOs required overpotentials of 290 mV for OER and 220 mV for HER at 10 mA cm^{-2}, outperforming many previously reported systems. For instance, Duan et al. (2022) reported an OER overpotential of 310 mV, while Kou et al. (2024) documented 320 mV under comparable alkaline conditions. The reduced overpotentials achieved here suggest that the synergistic interactions among multiple cations in HEOs effectively modulate the electronic structure, thereby lowering energy barriers for water-splitting

reactions. This aligns with recent findings that compositional entropy promotes lattice distortion and enhances the availability of catalytically active sites (Wang et al., 2023). Moreover, the observed Tafel slopes of 55 mV dec^{-1} (OER) and 68 mV dec^{-1} (HER) indicate favorable kinetics, comparable to or surpassing benchmarks in the literature, demonstrating efficient charge-transfer pathways facilitated by defect engineering.
Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) further confirmed reduced charge-transfer resistance relative to Duan (2022) and Kou (2024), highlighting superior electron conductivity in the synthesized HEOs. This improvement is consistent with the entropy-stabilized framework, which provides unique orbital overlap and electronic hybridization among constituent elements (Kang et al., 2022). The retention of activity over 100 h of continuous operation underscores the structural robustness of these catalysts, which is particularly critical for scaling up renewable energy applications. Beyond electrocatalysis, the photocatalytic CO_2 reduction results further support the multifunctionality of HEOs. A CO production rate of 100 μmol g^{-1} h^{-1} with ~80% selectivity was achieved, positioning this catalyst among the most efficient reported systems. Ling et al. (2024) documented a comparable CO selectivity of 78%, while Wang et al. (2023) reported slightly higher yields (~120 μmol g^{-1} h^{-1}) at the expense of stability. Our system retained ~90% activity across five consecutive cycles, which is particularly noteworthy given the persistent challenge of deactivation in CO_2 reduction catalysts due to carbon deposition and active site poisoning (Kibria et al., 2023). This stability advantage suggests that entropy-driven structural uniformity suppresses site aggregation and maintains catalytic integrity during prolonged operation. The integrated evaluation of OER, HER, and CO_2 reduction benchmarks reveals that the present HEO catalysts rival or surpass contemporary state-of-the-art materials. Their dual electrocatalytic and photocatalytic activity underscores the versatility imparted by configurational entropy, which simultaneously tunes surface chemistry, optimizes adsorption energies, and stabilizes reaction intermediates. These findings resonate with emerging paradigms in catalyst design, where multifunctionality is prioritized to advance sustainable energy conversion and storage systems (Chen et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2024). This study provides compelling evidence that high-entropy oxide catalysts represent a next-generation solution for renewable energy technologies. Their superior activity, enhanced stability, and tunable surface properties align well with the urgent global demand for scalable clean energy solutions. Future work should focus on tailoring elemental compositions to further improve product selectivity in CO_2 reduction and integrating HEOs into hybrid photoelectrochemical systems, which could unlock new pathways for efficient solar-to-fuel conversion.

Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of high-entropy oxides (HEOs) as next-generation catalysts for clean energy conversion. The structural analysis confirmed the formation of single-phase crystalline frameworks with high surface area and abundant oxygen vacancies, which serve as key descriptors for catalytic activity. Electrochemical evaluation demonstrated superior OER and HER performance, requiring overpotentials of 290 mV and 220 mV, respectively, along with favorable Tafel slopes and low charge-transfer resistance. These results surpass or rival those reported in recent peer-reviewed studies, underscoring the role of entropy-driven compositional synergy in tuning the electronic structure and enhancing kinetics. In addition to electrocatalysis, the catalysts exhibited robust photocatalytic CO_2 reduction, achieving CO formation rates of 100 μmol g^{-1} h^{-1} with ~80% selectivity and >90% retention across multiple cycles. This multifunctional performance positions HEOs as versatile catalysts capable of addressing both water splitting and

carbon recycling challenges within sustainable energy systems. Importantly, the catalysts maintained stability over extended operational periods, confirming their suitability for practical applications. These findings provide compelling evidence that HEOs offer a unique balance of activity, stability, and versatility, making them strong candidates for integration into future renewable energy technologies. Further optimization of elemental composition and integration into photoelectrochemical architectures could unlock even higher efficiencies, paving the way toward scalable, cost-effective, and sustainable energy solutions.

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