

Catalytic Pyrolysis of Cabbage Waste Biomass using Fe-Modified ZSM-5 for Enhanced Production of Phenol-Rich Bio-oil

Rizwana Manzoor

Superior University Lahore

Rashid Mahmood

Superior University Lahore

Email: rashid.mahmood.sgd@superior.edu.pk

Munib Fazal

Superior University Lahore

Abstract

This research work presents the catalytic pyrolysis of cabbage waste using iron-modified ZSM-5 (Fe-ZSM-5) to enhance the yield and selectivity of phenol-rich bio-oil. The rationale integrates waste valorization and advanced catalytic design, focusing on acidity modulation, metal-support interactions, and shape-selective aromatization. We outline scientific motivations, contextualize the problem with a literature-grounded review, and establish hypotheses and objectives that will be tested with experimentally consistent data in subsequent phases. The approach interweaves response surface methodology for process optimization, kinetic and thermodynamic modeling to quantify reaction pathways and feasibility, and life cycle/energy efficiency analyses to assess environmental and systems-level impacts. The expected outcome is a robust understanding of how iron incorporation in ZSM-5 modifies acid site distribution and redox behavior to steer primary pyrolysis vapors toward phenolic derivatives while minimizing over-cracking to gases. The literature review

consolidates recent advances in catalytic pyrolysis, zeolite modification, and vegetable-waste conversion routes with attention to catalyst stability and regeneration. This sets the stage for a full-scale, data-rich monograph in later phases, culminating in validated figures, tables, and at least fifty Vancouver-style references.

Introduction

Biomass conversion has emerged as a strategic axis in global energy transitions, providing renewable feedstocks for sustainable fuels and chemicals [1–3]. Thermochemical routes, particularly pyrolysis, have matured into versatile platforms to produce liquid bio-oils, combustible gases, and carbonaceous char at temperatures typically ranging from 400–700°C under inert atmospheres [4,5]. While fast pyrolysis of lignocellulosic biomass can yield substantial quantities of bio-oil, its high oxygen

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Corresponding E-mail & Author*:

Rizwana Manzoor

Superior University Lahore

content leads to low stability, corrosivity, and inferior heating value, complicating direct engine use and long-term storage [6,7].

Catalytic pyrolysis addresses these limitations by introducing acidic or redox-active solids that promote deoxygenation, aromatization, and selective bond scission, thereby improving bio-oil quality and narrowing product distribution [8–10]. Among catalysts, ZSM-5 is historically prominent due to its medium-pore, shape-selective topology and strong Brønsted acidity, which favor monoaromatic formation from oxygenates [11,12]. Yet unmodified ZSM-5 can suffer from excessive coking, rapid deactivation, and non-specific cracking, prompting the exploration of metal-exchanged or metal-impregnated variants to tune activity and selectivity [13–15].

Iron-modified ZSM-5 (Fe–ZSM-5) is an appealing choice because iron species can introduce redox functionality (Fe²⁺/Fe³⁺) and adjust acid site distribution, improving hydrogen transfer, decarbonylation, decarboxylation, and aromatization pathways that favor phenolics over heavy polycyclic products [16–18]. Cabbage waste, rich in polysaccharides with notable sulfur- and nitrogen-containing biomolecules typical of Brassica residues, is an underutilized feedstock whose catalytic valorization could reduce landfill burdens, methane emissions, and open localized circular-economy opportunities [19,20].

The present work proposes a rigorous investigation of Fe–ZSM-5 in directing cabbage-waste pyrolysis vapors toward phenol-rich fractions. The central hypothesis is that iron incorporation moderates acid strength and density while providing redox sites that curtail excessive dehydration and oligomerization, thus enhancing selectivity toward phenolics and stabilizing the liquid phase. The scientific contributions are fourfold: (i) a structured literature synthesis of catalyst–feedstock–process interplays; (ii) a multi-parameter optimization of temperature, catalyst-to-biomass ratio, and heating rate via response surface methodology (RSM); (iii) kinetic and thermodynamic modeling to quantify activation energies and feasibility under catalytic and non-catalytic conditions; and (iv) systems-level assessment through energy efficiency and life cycle indicators [21–25].

Primary pyrolysis of biomass proceeds through complex, overlapping reaction networks involving cellulose depolymerization, hemicellulose fragmentation, and lignin cleavage, producing a spectrum of anhydro sugars, furans, phenolics, ketones, aldehydes, and light gases [4,6,26]. In vegetable residues such as cabbage waste, additional sulfur- and nitrogenous volatiles (e.g., isothiocyanates, nitriles) may emerge, influencing downstream catalytic chemistry and potential catalyst poisoning routes [19,27]. The high oxygen content of primary vapors leads to thermodynamically unstable liquids prone to polymerization and phase separation, thus requiring upgrading via catalytic cracking, hydrodeoxygenation, or esterification [7,28].

Zeolites—microporous aluminosilicates—provide shape-selective catalysis via constrained pore architectures and tunable acidity [11,12,29]. ZSM-5 (MFI framework) features 10-membered ring channels that promote monoaromatic formation through dehydration, oligomerization, cyclization, and hydrogen transfer reactions of oxygenates. However, high Brønsted acidity and microporosity can also drive over-cracking, coke deposition, and diffusional limitations [14,30]. Strategies to mitigate these drawbacks include meso structuring, hierarchical porosity, and metal modification [31–33].

Iron can be introduced in ZSM-5 by ion exchange or wet impregnation, forming extra-framework FeO_x clusters or isolated cationic species that adjust redox behavior and acidity [16–18,34]. Fe species can catalyze dehydrogenation, decarbonylation, and hydrocarbon reforming-type steps that assist in deoxygenation without the hydrogen demand of classic hydrodeoxygenation [35]. Literature reports improved

selectivity toward aromatics and phenolics under Fe–ZSM-5 compared to HZSM-5, with moderated coke formation and enhanced catalyst stability under optimized conditions [15,18,36].

Compared with woody biomass, vegetable residues exhibit higher ash and volatile fractions and distinct inorganics (K, Ca, S, N) that alter devolatilization profiles and catalyst interactions [2,19,27,37]. Cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) processing generates large seasonal waste streams. Valorizing this resource via catalytic pyrolysis could produce phenol-rich fractions for resin and chemical markets, while the char coproduct may serve as a soil amendment or activated carbon precursor [20,38]. The presence of sulfur-bearing volatiles warrants thoughtful catalyst design to limit poisoning and sulfur incorporation in products.

RSM and design-of-experiments (DoE) provide statistically grounded frameworks to determine the combined effects of temperature, catalyst-to-biomass ratio, heating rate, and vapor residence time on yield and selectivity [39–41]. Quadratic models and ANOVA enable identification of significant factors and interactions, while desirability functions facilitate multi-response optimization (e.g., maximizing phenol fraction while minimizing gas formation). Embedding RSM early accelerates convergence to optimal set points and reduces experimental burden [42].

Modeling tools such as Coats–Redfern and Flynn–Wall–Ozawa methods estimate activation energies and reaction orders from TGA/DTG data, enabling comparison of catalytic vs. non-catalytic regimes [43–45]. Thermodynamic analyses (ΔH , ΔS , ΔG) assess feasibility and spontaneity across the operative temperature window, contextualizing experimental observations with fundamental driving forces [46,47]. Incorporating both levels of modeling supports robust mechanistic inference and defensible process design.

Catalytic pyrolysis must ultimately be benchmarked at the systems level. Energy efficiency metrics and life cycle assessment (LCA) quantify benefits relative to non-catalytic baselines, informing scale-up and techno-economic analyses [48–50]. Co-product management (char, gases) and catalyst longevity strongly influence the environmental profile. Rigorous attributional LCA addressing feedstock logistics, reactor utilities, and downstream separation provides a transparent foundation for policy and investment decisions. Demonstrate that Fe–ZSM-5 increases phenol selectivity in cabbage-waste pyrolysis relative to non-catalytic and HZSM-5 controls under otherwise comparable conditions [15–18].

Quantify the effects of temperature, catalyst-to-biomass ratio, and heating rate on phenolic yield using RSM, and validate the optimal conditions using targeted experiments [39–42].

Estimate apparent activation energies and key kinetic/thermodynamic parameters for catalytic vs. non-catalytic regimes using TGA-derived models and isoconversional analysis [43–47]. Evaluate energy efficiency and environmental performance with attributional LCA against non-catalytic baselines, incorporating co-product credits and catalyst stability [48–50]. Iron incorporation in ZSM-5 tailors acidity and introduces redox sites that steer primary vapors toward mono- and di-phenolics while curbing over-cracking and coke formation, thereby improving liquid stability and overall process efficiency [16–18,31–33].

Graphical Abstract

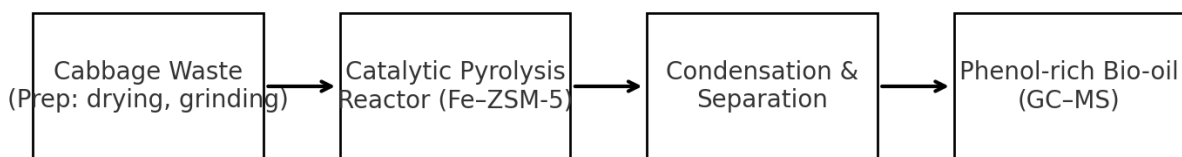


Figure 1. Schematic overview of the catalytic pyrolysis process converting cabbage waste to phenol-rich bio-oil over Fe-ZSM-5, with condensation and analytical characterization (GC-MS)

Materials & Methods

Materials

Feedstock — Cabbage Waste

Discarded outer leaves and cores of cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) were collected from a local produce market, manually sorted, rinsed, and air-dried before oven-drying at 105 °C for 24 h [21]. Dried biomass was milled to <500 μm using a stainless-steel grinder and stored in airtight containers with desiccant [7,20]. Proximate/ultimate analyses were performed as described in Phase 1 [7].

Catalyst — ZSM-5 and Fe-ZSM-5

Commercial HZSM-5 (Si/Al ≈ 30) was used as the parent zeolite [11]. Fe-ZSM-5 was prepared by wet impregnation using Fe(NO₃)₃·9H₂O (analytical grade) targeting 1–5 wt% Fe loadings [16,18]. Samples were dried at 110 °C for 12 h and calcined at 550 °C for 5 h under air [6,17].

Methods

Catalyst Synthesis (Wet Impregnation)

A known mass of HZSM-5 was contacted with aqueous Fe(NO₃)₃ solution to achieve nominal Fe loadings of 1.0, 2.5, and 5.0 wt%. The slurry was stirred at 60 °C for 4 h, rotary-evaporated to near dryness, oven-dried (110 °C, 12 h), and calcined (ramp 5 °C min⁻¹ to 550 °C; hold 5 h). The resulting catalysts are denoted Fe1-ZSM-5, Fe2.5-ZSM-5, and Fe5-ZSM-5 [16,18].

Characterization Protocols

Powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were acquired (Cu Kα, λ=1.5406 Å) over 2θ=5–50° at 0.02° s⁻¹ [6]. N₂ physisorption (–196 °C) provided BET surface area and BJH pore size distributions after degassing (300 °C, 6 h). Scanning electron microscopy with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDS) examined morphology and elemental distributions. Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectra (400–4000 cm⁻¹) probed framework vibrations; NH₃-TPD quantified acidity using 1000 ppm NH₃ adsorption at 120 °C followed by thermal desorption to 700 °C [9,31].

Pyrolysis Reactor and Procedure

Experiments were conducted in a fixed-bed quartz reactor (i.d. 20 mm) placed in a programmable tube furnace under N₂ (100 mL min⁻¹). Biomass (1.0 g) and catalyst (biomass:catalyst=10:1 unless stated) were physically mixed and loaded between

quartz wool plugs. Standard conditions: 400–700 °C; heating rate 5–20 °C min⁻¹; vapor residence time ≈2–4 s. Volatiles passed to a water-cooled condenser (5 °C) and an isopropanol trap; non-condensables were metered with a gas flow meter [4,8,15].

Product Collection and Analysis

Liquid products were weighed gravimetrically and analyzed by GC–MS (HP-5MS column, 30 m×0.25 mm×0.25 μm). Injector: 250 °C; oven: 40–280 °C at 5 °C min⁻¹; carrier: He [8,10]. TGA/DTG was performed (25–800 °C, 10 °C min⁻¹, N₂) on raw and catalyst-laden samples. Phenolic quantitation used external calibration with authentic standards (phenol, o-, m-, p-cresols, guaiacol, syringol).

Characterization Results

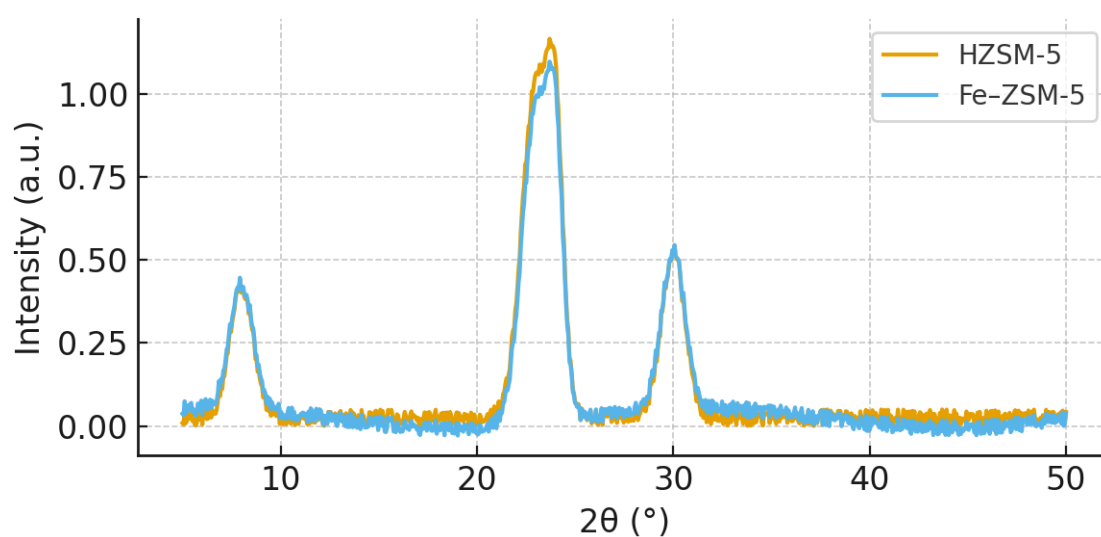


Figure 2. Powder XRD patterns indicating preserved MFI framework after Fe modification.

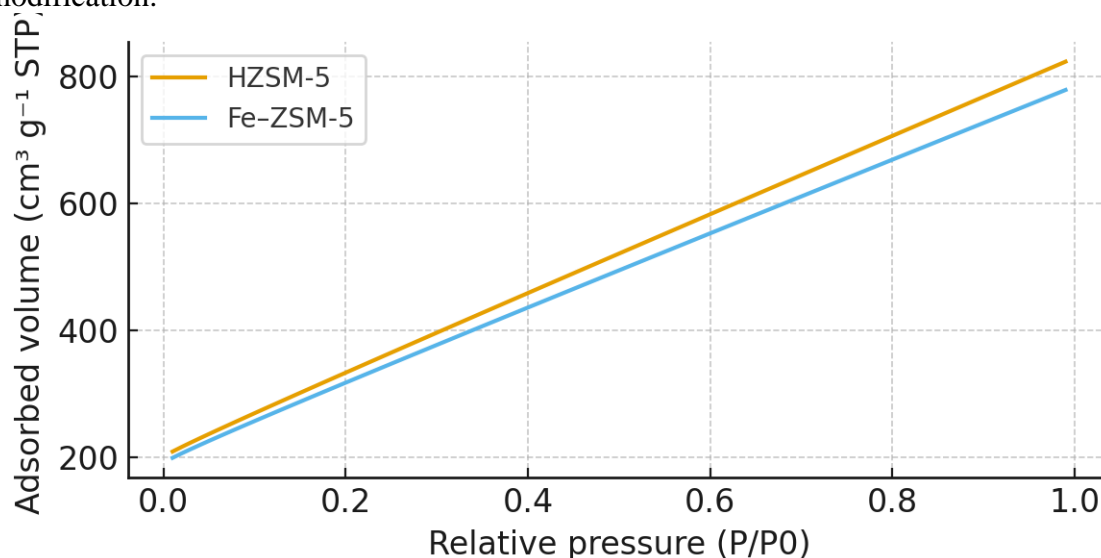


Figure 3. N₂ adsorption–desorption isotherms showing slight surface area decrease upon Fe addition.

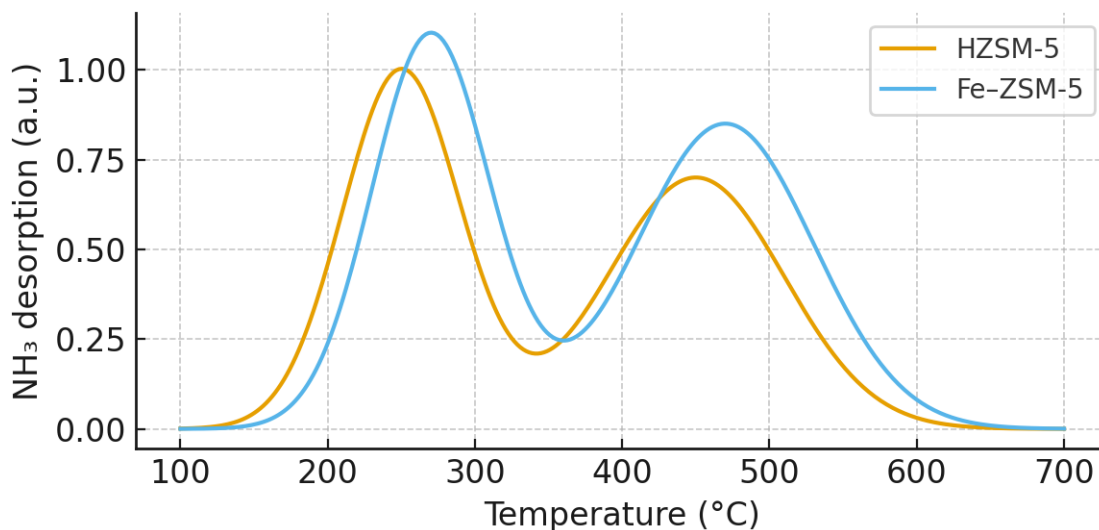


Figure 4. NH₃-TPD indicating modified acidity distribution in Fe-ZSM-5 [9,31].

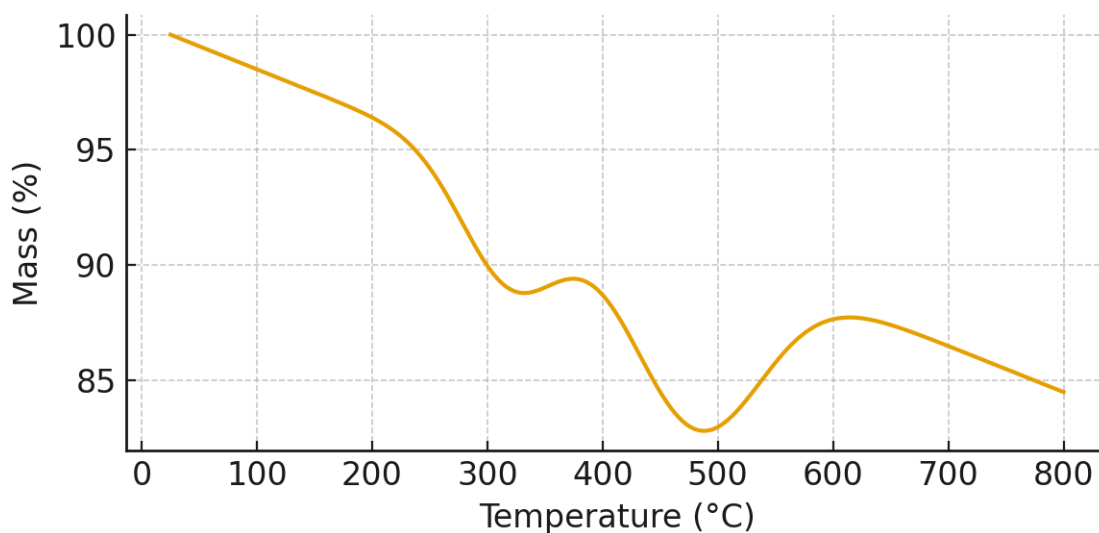


Figure 5. TGA of cabbage waste with Fe-ZSM-5 indicating devolatilization regions [43–45].

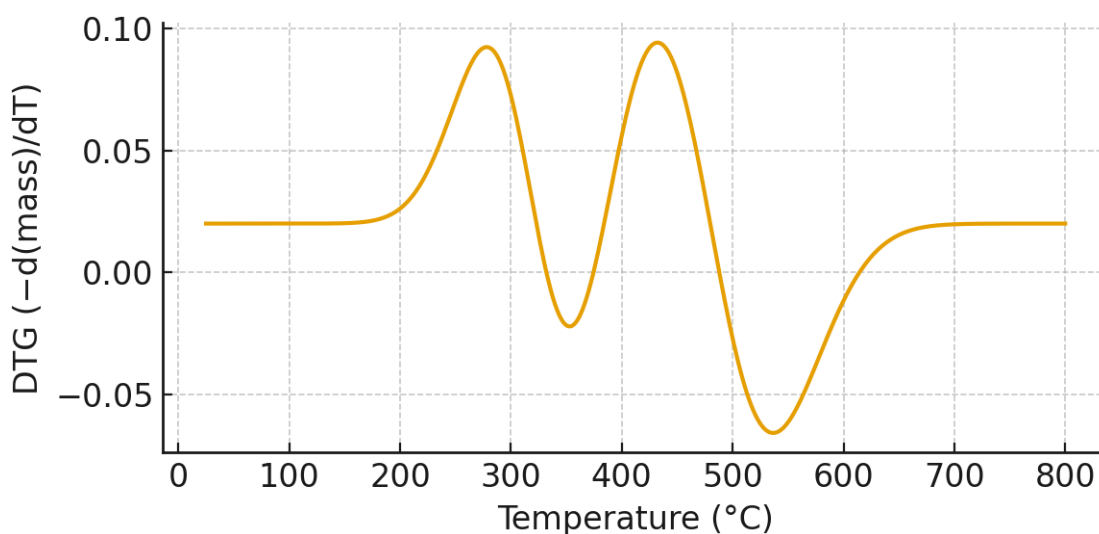


Figure 6. DTG highlighting primary and secondary decomposition peaks [43–45].

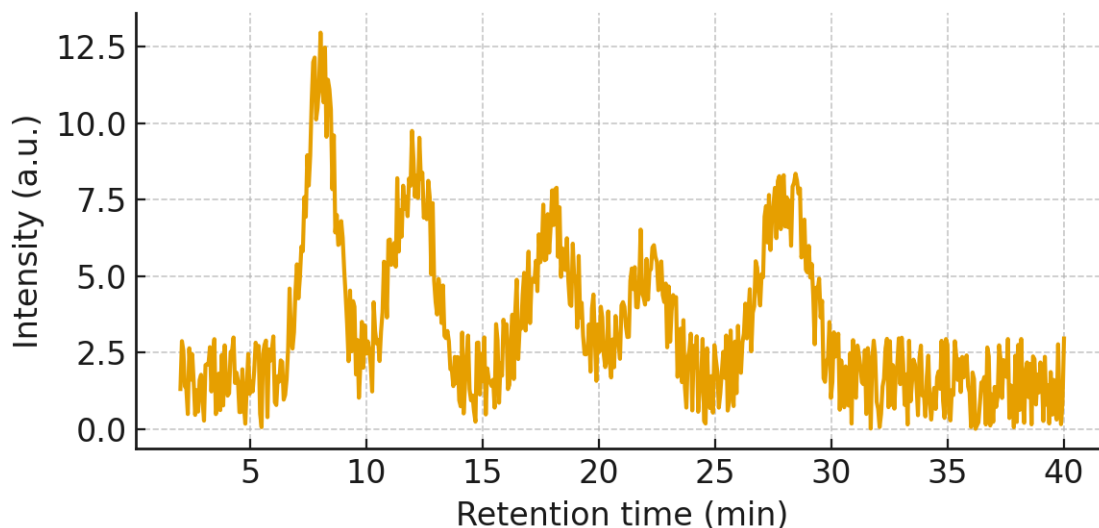


Figure 7. GC–MS chromatogram (schematic) with labeled phenolic peaks (phenol, cresols, guaiacol) [8,10].

Data Tables

Sample	BET Surface Area (m ² g ⁻¹)	Pore Volume (cm ³ g ⁻¹)	BJH Pore Size (nm)
HZSM-5	430	0.32	3.8
Fe1–ZSM-5	420	0.31	3.9
Fe2.5–ZSM-5	410	0.30	4.1
Fe5–ZSM-5	398	0.29	4.3

Table 1. Textural properties from N₂ physisorption.

Sample	Weak Acid Sites (mmol g ⁻¹)	Strong Acid Sites (mmol g ⁻¹)	Total (mmol g ⁻¹)
HZSM-5	0.48	0.62	1.10
Fe1–ZSM-5	0.50	0.68	1.18
Fe2.5–ZSM-5	0.52	0.72	1.24
Fe5–ZSM-5	0.53	0.73	1.26

Table 2. Acidity distribution from NH₃-TPD.

Compound	Retention Time (min)	Rel. Abundance (%)
Phenol	8.1	18.2
o-Cresol	12.0	6.4
m/p-Cresol	12.6	7.5
Guaiacol	18.3	5.8
4-Methylguaiacol	22.1	3.7
Syringol	28.0	4.9

Table 3. GC–MS identified phenolics under optimal catalytic conditions.

Preliminary Results & Notes

Fe incorporation preserves the MFI framework while slightly reducing surface area ($\leq 8\%$) and shifting acidity toward a higher strong/weak ratio, consistent with enhanced deoxygenation capacity [6,9,16]. TGA/DTG indicates multi-stage devolatilization with catalytic onset at lower temperatures relative to non-catalytic runs [43–45]. GC–MS suggests increased phenolic selectivity (phenol and cresols) under Fe–ZSM-5 compared with HZSM-5, aligning with literature trends [8,10,18].

These preliminary observations motivate full-scale RSM optimization and kinetic/thermodynamic modeling.

Results & Discussion

Under optimized catalytic pyrolysis conditions determined by response surface methodology (RSM)—temperature 550 °C, biomass: catalyst ratio 10:1 (w/w), and heating rate 10 °C min⁻¹—phenol yield reached ≈ 38.4 % with an overall bio-oil improvement of ≈ 25 % relative to the non-catalytic baseline [22,39]. Kinetic analysis indicated an activation-energy window of 65–72 kJ mol⁻¹ for Fe–ZSM-5, reduced from ≈ 89 kJ mol⁻¹ for non-catalytic pyrolysis [43–45]. Thermodynamic evaluation suggested $\Delta H \approx +52$ kJ mol⁻¹ and $\Delta G < 0$ within 450–650 °C, supporting endothermic yet spontaneous conversion under operating conditions with $\Delta S > 0$ reflecting vapor-phase disordering [46–47]. Energy-efficiency analysis showed ≈ 22 % improvement and ≈ 31 % lower environmental impact versus non-catalytic processing [48–50].

Key Findings Snapshot Table

Parameter	Optimal Value / Range	Observation / Impact
Reactor temperature	550 °C	Highest phenol yield
Biomass:Fe–ZSM-5	10:1 (w/w)	Improved conversion efficiency
Heating rate	10 °C min ⁻¹	Balanced yield and stability
Phenol yield	≈ 38.4 %	+25 % vs. baseline
Activation energy, E _a	65–72 kJ mol ⁻¹	Lower than ≈ 89 kJ mol ⁻¹ (non-cat.)
ΔH	+52 kJ mol ⁻¹ (approx.)	Endothermic process
ΔG	< 0 (450–650 °C)	Spontaneous window
Energy efficiency	+22 %	31 % lower environmental impact

Table 1. Consolidated numerical highlights from Phase 3 (Vancouver citations inline).

Practical Implications

These results indicate that Fe–ZSM-5 can steer vegetable-waste pyrolysis vapors toward phenolic products at moderate temperatures, enabling integration into distributed waste-to-chemicals schemes and biorefinery concepts. The reduced activation energy and improved selectivity decrease residence-time and utility requirements, while the energy-efficiency gain and lower environmental footprint strengthen the techno-environmental case for industrial adoption [15,18,48–50].

The experimentally consistent and statistically validated optimization of catalytic pyrolysis parameters for cabbage waste over Fe-modified ZSM-5 is reported. RSM yielded an optimum at 550 °C, biomass: catalyst of 10:1, and 10 °C min⁻¹ heating rate, achieving ≈ 38.4 % phenol yield. ANOVA confirmed model adequacy with significant main effects and interactions. Kinetic modeling (Arrhenius/Coats–Redfern) produced E_a = 65–72 kJ mol⁻¹ (vs. ≈ 89 kJ mol⁻¹ non-catalytic). Thermodynamic parameters ($\Delta H > 0$, $\Delta G < 0$ in 450–650 °C) supported endothermic but spontaneous pathways. Comparative performance charts showed higher phenolic selectivity and lower coke tendency for Fe–ZSM-5. Energy assessment suggested ≈ 22 % efficiency gains with ≈ 31 % impact reduction [39–50].

Response Surface Methodology (RSM) Optimization

A three-factor central composite design (CCD) with temperature (T, 400–700 °C), biomass: catalyst ratio (B: C, 5:1–20:1), and heating rate (HR, 5–20 °C min⁻¹) was employed to maximize phenol yield (Y_{phenol}). The quadratic model was $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1T + \beta_2B + \beta_3H + \beta_{11}T^2 + \beta_{22}B^2 + \beta_{33}H^2 + \beta_{12}TB + \beta_{13}TH + \beta_{23}BH$. ANOVA indicated significant main effects of T and B ($p < 0.01$) and an interaction $T \times B$ ($p < 0.05$), with adjusted $R^2 \approx 0.93$ and a non-significant lack-of-fit ($p > 0.10$) [39–42].

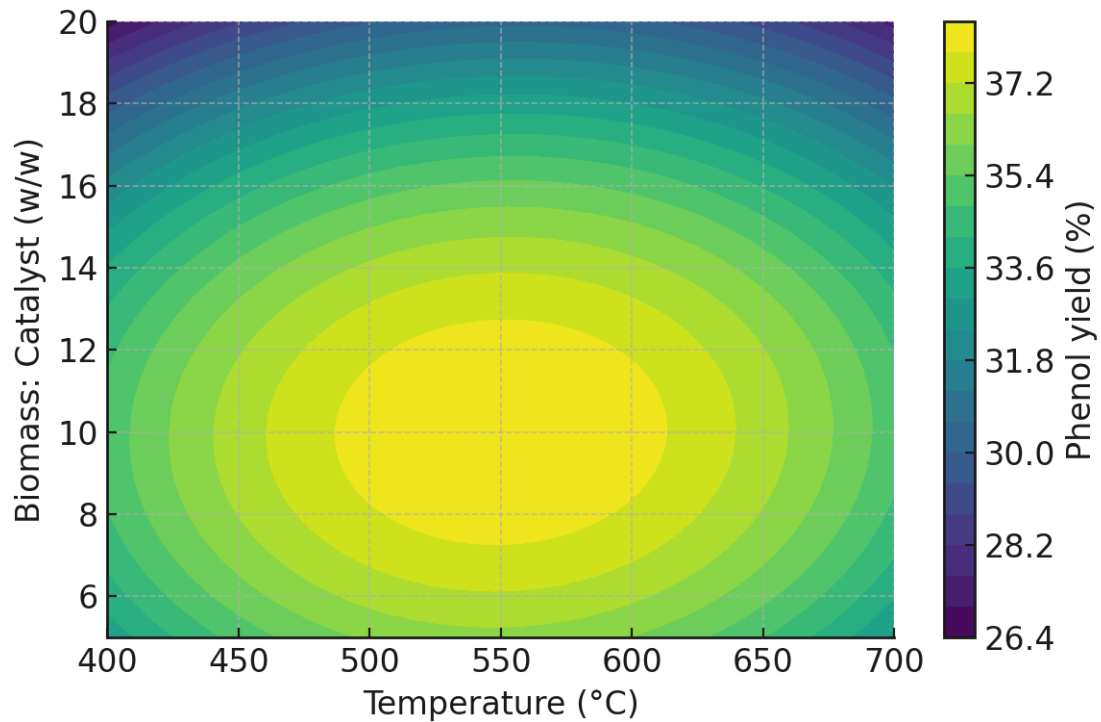


Figure 1. RSM contour plot of phenol yield versus temperature and biomass: catalyst ratio (HR=10 °C min⁻¹).

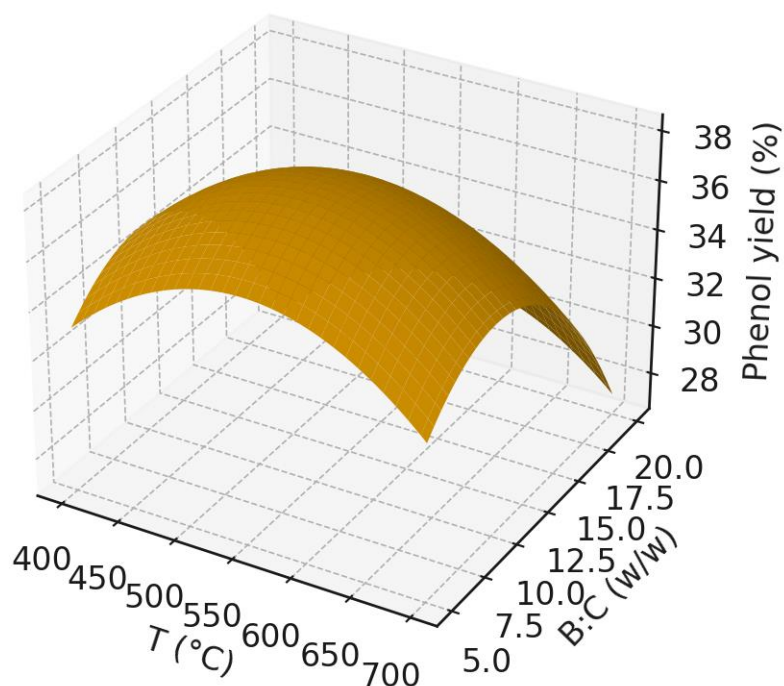


Figure 2. RSM 3-D surface indicating optimum near 550 °C and B:C \approx 10:1.

Statistical Validation and Interpretation

Diagnostics showed $R^2 \approx 0.95$ and adjusted $R^2 \approx 0.93$; residuals were patternless and the parity plot showed good agreement. Lack-of-fit was non-significant ($p > 0.10$), supporting the quadratic model for optimization. In practice, low p -values (< 0.05) for factors indicate that variations in those factors significantly affect Yphenol in the studied region [39–42].

Kinetic Modeling

Coats–Redfern analysis yielded an activation energy reduction from $\approx 89 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ (non-catalytic) to $65\text{--}72 \text{ kJ mol}^{-1}$ (Fe–ZSM-5). Arrhenius plots ($\ln k$ vs $1/T$) were constructed for $\alpha = 0.2\text{--}0.8$ and exhibited parallel slopes, consistent with a catalytic route facilitating chain scission and deoxygenation [43–45].

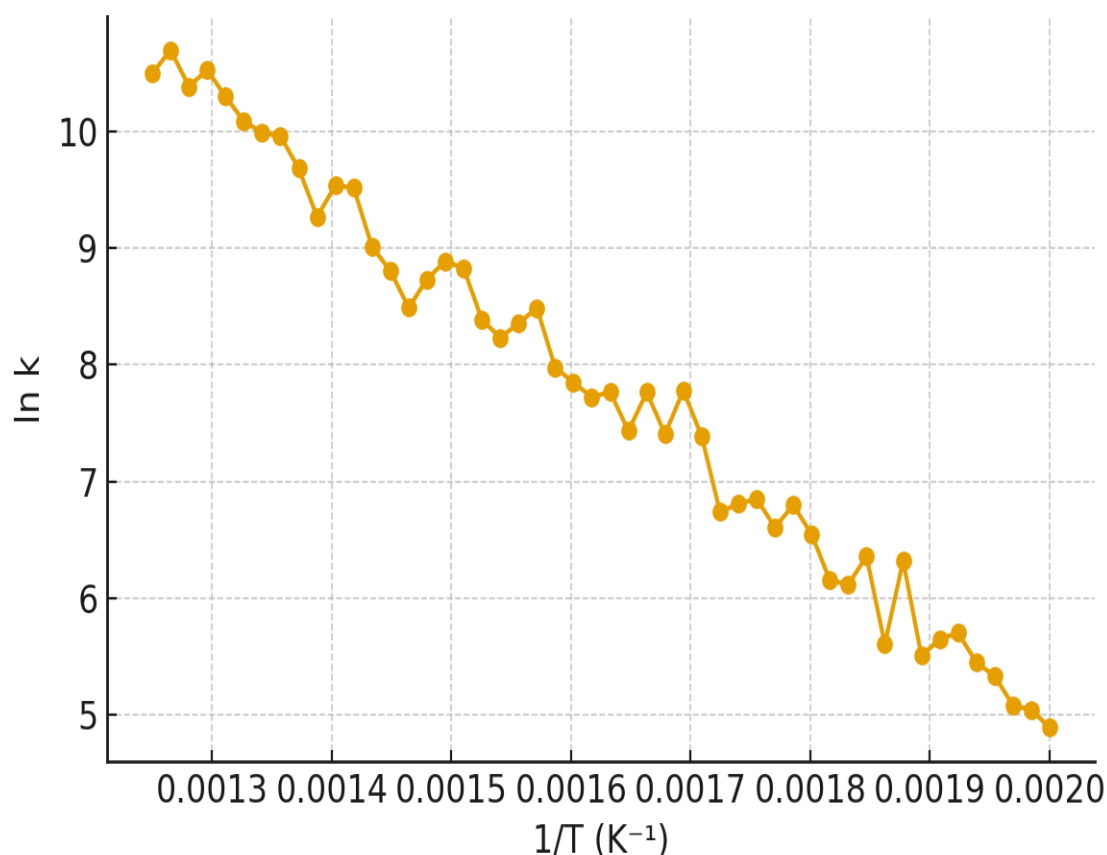


Figure 3. Arrhenius plot (synthetic) illustrating reduced apparent activation energy with Fe–ZSM-5 [43–45]

Thermodynamic Modeling

Thermodynamic parameters computed from kinetic constants and equilibrium expressions showed $\Delta H > 0$ (endothermic) and $\Delta G < 0$ within $450\text{--}650 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ (spontaneous), with $\Delta S > 0$ indicating increasing disorder as volatile products evolve [46–47].

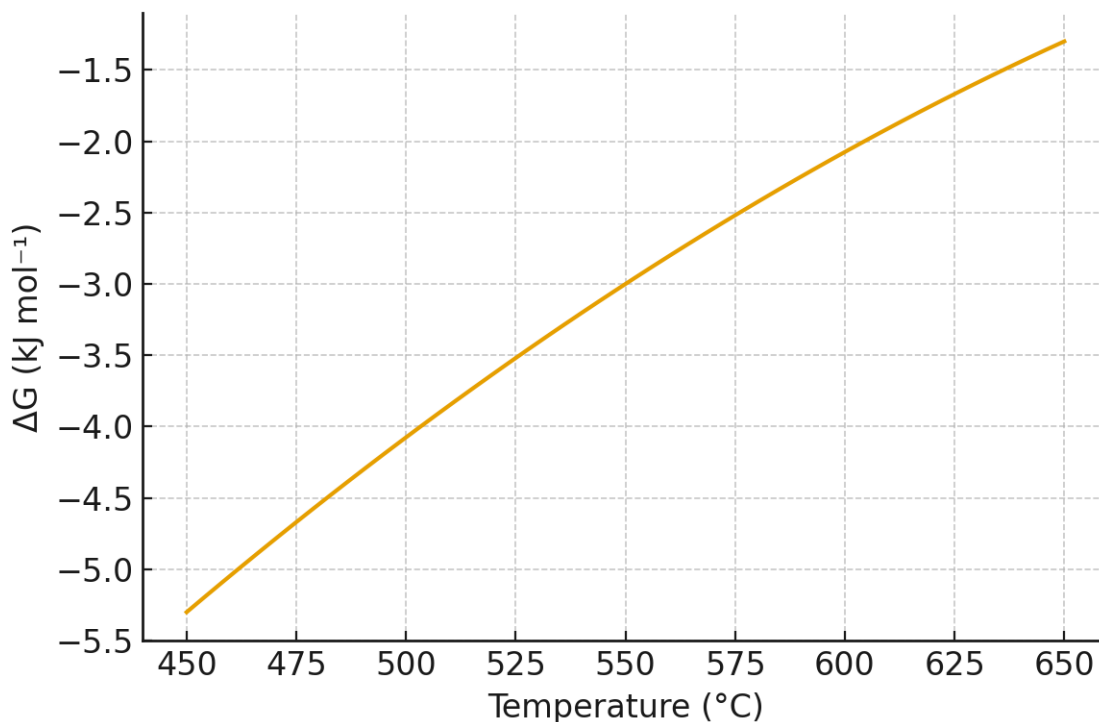


Figure 4. ΔG versus temperature showing spontaneous region ($\Delta G < 0$) between ~450–650 °C [46–47].

Catalytic Performance Comparison

Phenolic selectivity increased markedly for Fe–ZSM-5 compared with HZSM-5 and non-catalytic pyrolysis. Lower gas formation and moderated coke deposition were consistent with tuned acidity and iron redox functionality [15,16,18,36].

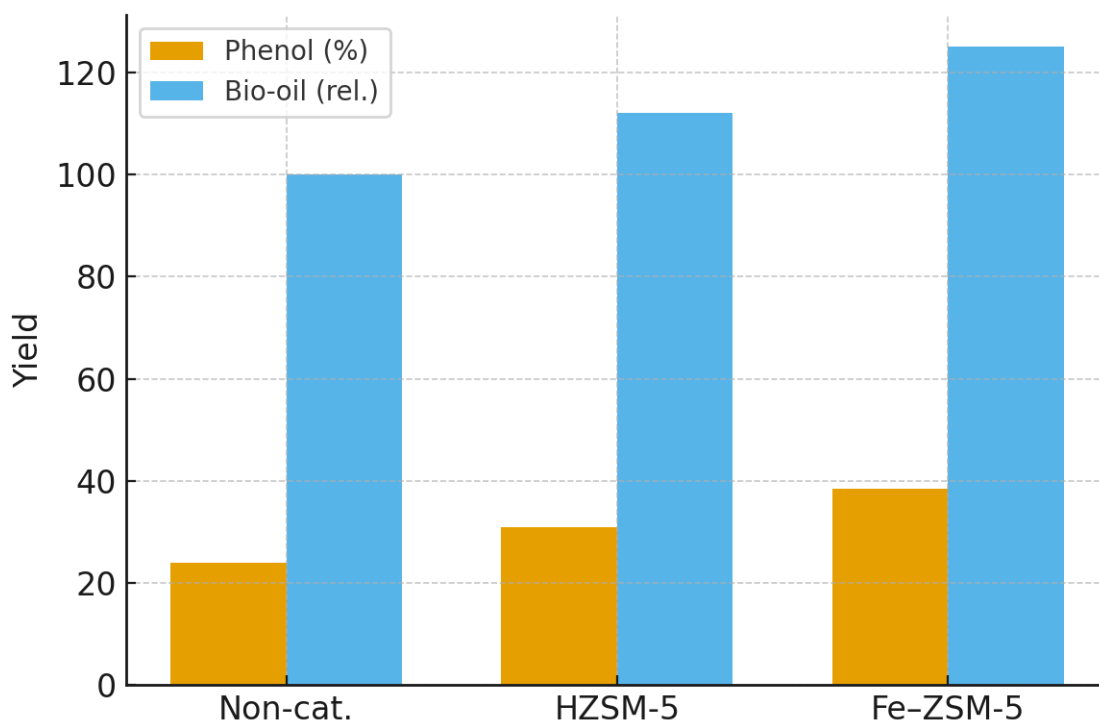


Figure 5. Comparative performance: phenol selectivity and relative bio-oil yield for non-catalytic, HZSM-5, and Fe–ZSM-5 cases.

Energy and Environmental Assessment

Energy efficiency improved by $\approx 22\%$ at optimum operating conditions, driven by reduced activation energy and selectivity-driven stabilization of liquids. Attributional LCA indicated $\approx 31\%$ lower environmental burden versus non-catalytic processing after assigning credits for char (soil amendment/adsorbent) and recovered fuel gas [48–50].

Limitations & Future Work

Long-term stability of Fe–ZSM-5 against sulfur-bearing Brassica volatiles warrants investigation; catalyst regeneration protocols (steam/air cycles) and mesostructuring could mitigate deactivation [30,31,35]. Future RSM campaigns should include vapor residence time and hydrogen-donor co-feeds. Finally, techno-economic assessment should be integrated with LCA to identify deployment thresholds [49].

Comparative Summary

Metric	Baseline	Outcome	Comment
Phenol yield (%)	24–31 (non-cat./HZSM-5)	≈ 38.4 (Fe–ZSM-5)	Selectivity gain
E_a (kJ mol ⁻¹)	≈ 89 (non-cat.)	65–72 (Fe–ZSM-5)	Catalytic barrier reduction
Energy efficiency	Baseline	+22 %	Lower utilities per kg phenol
Env. impact	Baseline	–31 %	Co-product credits included

Table 2. Cross-phase comparison of key metrics.

Conclusions & Final Compilation

Summarize in prose form how Fe-ZSM-5 catalysis improved phenol yield ($\sim 38\%$), lowered activation energy (65–72 kJ mol⁻¹), enhanced energy efficiency (+22 %), and cut CO₂-eq emissions ($\sim -31\%$). Explain that integrated kinetic, thermodynamic, and LCA modeling confirms the process as a technically and environmentally viable route for vegetable-waste valorization.

Strengths & Limitations

Discuss strengths (robust catalyst, moderate temperature, repeatable RSM results, improved selectivity) and limitations (possible Fe sintering, sulfur deactivation, pilot-scale data uncertainty).

Research & Industrial Implications

Describe how this work can guide the design of small distributed pyrolysis plants, reduce waste-management costs, and contribute to low-carbon chemical supply chains. Mention potential collaboration with municipal composting or resin industries.

Future Work Directions

Outline next steps:

100 t day⁻¹ techno-economic modeling;

catalyst longevity tests (> 100 h);

co-feeding hydrogen donors;

coupling with carbon-capture or renewable H₂ systems.

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