

# Synthesis and Application of Iron Oxide/Silica Gel Nanocomposite for Removal of Sulfur Dyes from Aqueous Solutions

Naser Tavassoli<sup>a</sup>, Reza Ansari<sup>a\*</sup>, Zahra Mosayebzadeh<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Chemistry, School of Science, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran.

\*Correspondence should be addressed to Dr. Reza Ansari, Email: [ransari271@guilan.ac.ir](mailto:ransari271@guilan.ac.ir)

## A-R-T-I-C-L-E-I-N-F-O

### Article Notes:

Received: Oct. 2, 2016

Received in revised form:  
Jan. 29, 2017

Accepted: Feb. 21, 2017

Available Online: Feb 28,  
2017

### Keywords:

Adsorption  
Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> coated silica  
Sulfur dye  
Isotherm  
Iran.

## A-B-S-T-R-A-C-T

**Background & Aims of the Study:** water pollution by synthetic organic dyes is mainly regarded as environmental and ecological critical issues worldwide. In this research, magnetite iron oxide/silica gel nanocomposite (termed as Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG) was synthesized chemically and then used as an effective adsorbent for removal of sulfur dyes from aqueous solution.

**Materials and Methods:** The various parameters such as pH, sorbent dosage, initial dye concentration, contact time and dye solution temperature were investigated in a batch system. The equilibrium data were analyzed by Langmuir and Freundlich isotherm models.

**Results:** The experimental data fit well with pseudo-second-order kinetic model ( $R^2 \geq 0.998$ ) and conformed better to Langmuir isotherm model ( $R^2 \geq 0.997$ ). The maximum adsorption capacity for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG obtained from the Langmuir model was 11.1mg/g. Evaluation of thermodynamic parameters proved that the adsorption process was normally feasible, spontaneous and exothermic.

**Conclusion:** It can be concluded that the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG can be considered as a cost-effective and an environmental friendly adsorbent for efficient removal of sulfur dyes from aqueous solutions.

**Please cite this article as:** Tavassoli N, Ansari R, Mosayebzadeh Z. Synthesis and Application of Iron Oxide/Silica Gel Nanocomposite for Removal of Sulfur Dyes from Aqueous Solutions. Arch Hyg Sci 2017;6(2):214-220.

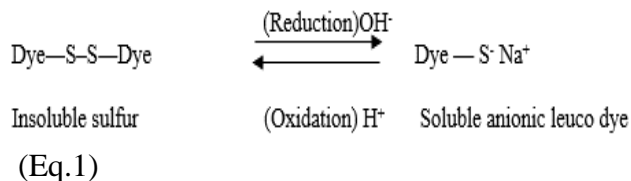
## Background

Water is crucial to survive all living organisms on the earth, and access to safe drinking-water is important as health and development issue at a national, regional and local levels (1). One of today's environmental challenges is the excessive use of dyes for industrial and domestic activities which it contaminates the ground and surface water; therefore, it is important to remove these dangerous organic compounds from water and wastewater prior to discharge into the environment (2-5). Water pollution by synthetic organic dyes used in textile, cosmetics, pulp and paper industries

etc., is mainly regarded as environmental and ecological critical issues worldwide (4-7). These industries produce considerable unfixed dyes that in turn impart strong color, expelling of these dyes into water bodies, produce a large quantity of dyeing wastewater which needs to treatment before being discharged into waterways.

Due to the aromatic structures, synthetic dyes have chemical stability; thus, they are difficult to biodegrade, oxidizing and photo degradation, giving water undesirable color, diminish light penetration and oxygen gas solubility, so, photosynthetic reactions of aquatic plants, will be decreased, having toxic effects on human health (8,9).

Sulfur dyes are synthetic organic ones, manufactured by the thionation or sulphurisation of organic compounds containing nitro or amino group, and is mainly used for dyeing cellulose fibers in terms of volume. They are extremely colored, water insoluble and have to be converted to water soluble (leuco form) before application to textile material (Eq.1).



Due to their good wet- light fastness, low-cost and rapid processing, consumption of these kinds of dyes remains high. An approximate production of these dyes was more than 105 tons in the world annually. Averagely 25% of sulfur dyes are remained in waste streams, so it is important environmentally and ecologically, to remove these pollutants from waste water before discharging into hydrosphere (10,11).

There are two major remediation methods for color removal, including physico-chemical and biological treatments. As mentioned above, due to stability of dye molecule, biological treatment is not effective for removal of all dyes. Among physico-chemical methods, adsorption is one of the most effective, promising and superior to the others. Some characteristics such as easy operation, flexibility, economically feasible etc, make that this method has been used for good removal of wide variety of dyes in wastewater streams (10-12). Moreover dye chromospheres will be changed or collapsed by adsorption; this process can remove the whole dyeing molecules and their fragments and also control the biochemical oxygen demand in the effluent (10-13). Silica gel as an inert and non-toxic material with high specific surface area (~800 m<sup>2</sup>/g), porosity and high efficiency for functionalization with various ligands allocated

to a wide range of biomedical and treatment applications.

The hydroxyl (OH) groups on the surface of silica can be functionalized to improve specialty silica gels with unique stationary phase characteristics. These properties make silica as a convenient material for iron oxide shielding and functionalization (14,15). Magnetic modification of low-cost adsorbent could result in materials which is useful for biotechnology and environmental applications (16). Adsorption process by magnetic separation technology combined with inexpensive adsorbents has been widely used in environmental purification.

#### Aims of the study:

In the current investigation, iron oxide/silica gel nanocomposite (Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG) was synthesized, then used as a low-cost, cost-effective, and environmentally friendly to the treatment of sulfur dye. With their large surface areas, these particles can readily adsorb sulfur dye from aqueous solutions.

#### Materials & Methods

All chemicals which used in the study were from analytical grade and obtained from Merck Co. The reagents were used as received without further purification.

The stock solution was prepared by adding of 0.10 M Na<sub>2</sub>S solution and 0.50 g of the sulfur blue 15 (C.I. 53540, CAS 1327-69-1, dye content 95%) in 1.0 L of distilled water under constant stirring, and the temperature was slowly increased to 90 °C, which was maintained at this state for 30 min. Finally, we were obtained practical solutions of varying concentrations for further experiments.

Iron oxide magnetic coated silica was prepared by co-precipitation method as described before after some modifications (17): 20 g of silica powder (in spherical sizes of 0.50 to 1.0 mm diameters), 1.48 g FeCl<sub>2</sub>.4H<sub>2</sub>O and 4.0 g FeCl<sub>3</sub>.6H<sub>2</sub>O, were loaded into a 250 mL flask containing 60 mL of de-ionized water, at determined temperature, under refluxing

condition in  $N_2$  atmosphere and adding 25% ammonia solution with continuous stirring. Final particles were then rinsed with de-ionized water and separated by low speed centrifugation from un-reacted magnetite. The resulting particles then dried at temperature about  $60^\circ C$  for 4 h in an oven and were stored in a glass vial for further use.

The sulfur dye in aqueous media was determined spectrophotometrically by a single beam Perkin-Elmer UV-VIS spectrophotometer in  $\lambda_{max}=520$  nm at pH 10.0 and quantified using a calibration graph which was obtained from the standard solutions prepared from the standard sulfur dye solution in distilled water in the concentration range of 1.0–100.0  $mg L^{-1}$ .

The calibration curve shows that the Beer's law is obeyed in this concentration range. A Metrohm pH meter (model 827) with a combined double junction glass electrode was

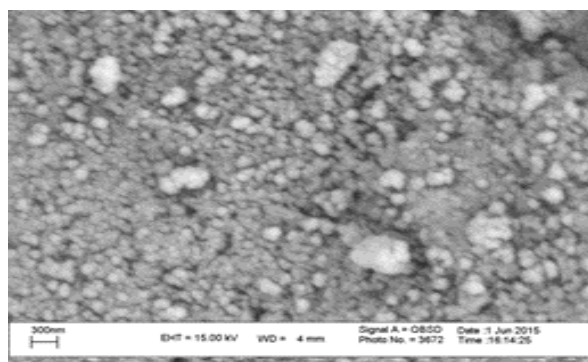
used for pH measurements. Dilute NaOH and HCl solutions were used for pH adjustment.

All experiments were done in the batch system to study the effects of solution pH, initial concentration, adsorbent dosage and temperature on the adsorption of sulfur dye on  $Fe_3O_4/SG$  composite.

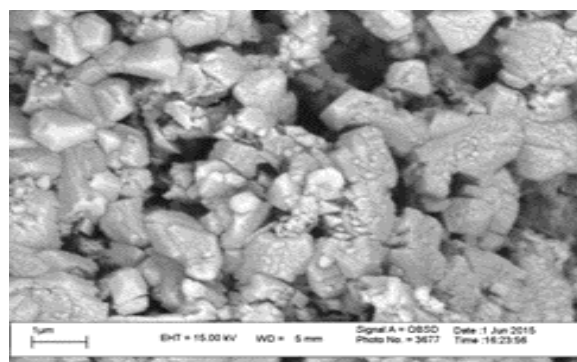
## Results

### Morphological structure

The Scanning Electron Microscopy technique (SEM) has been known as a primary tool for characterizing the surface morphology and fundamental physical properties of the adsorbent. Fig.1 (a) and (b) shows the SEM images of the  $Fe_3O_4/SiO_2$  composite adsorbent before and after the dye treatment.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1) a: SEM micrographs of the  $Fe_3O_4/SiO_2$  (before dye treatment), b: SEM Micrographs of the  $Fe_3O_4/SiO_2$  (after dye treatment).

### Effect of solution pH

The dye solution pH, as one of the most important factors, effects on the surface charge of the adsorbent and the dissociation of functional groups on the active sites of the adsorbent (18). The percentage removal of sulfur dye at different pH values (2 to 8) is plotted in Fig. 2.

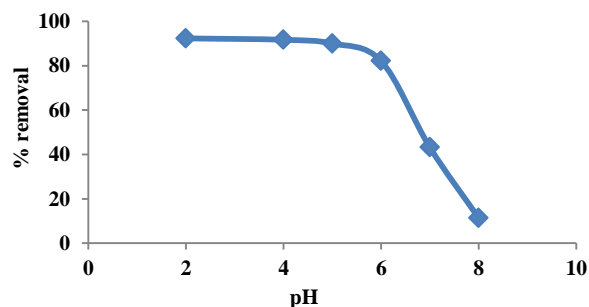


Figure 2) Effect of solution pH on dye removal (initial dye concentration=100 mg/L, adsorbent dosage=0.25 g, agitation speed=150 rpm, and temperature=298 K).

### Effect of sorbent dosage

Different weights of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG (varied from 0.10 to 0.30 g) were exposed to the dye solution for 1 hour. The obtained results are illustrated in Fig. 3.

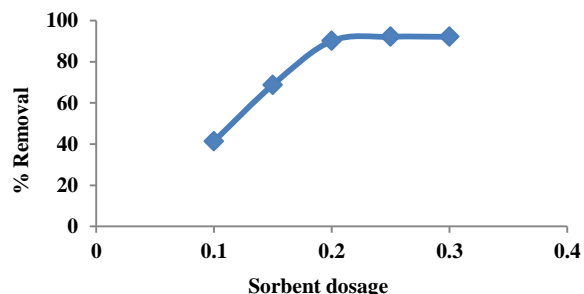


Figure 3) Effect of sorbent dosage on dye removal (initial sulfur dye concentration= 100 mg/L, pH=5, and temperature=298 K).

### Effect of contact time

In this investigation, the effect of agitation time on dye removal at the various initial dye concentrations was studied. The obtained results are shown in Fig. 4.

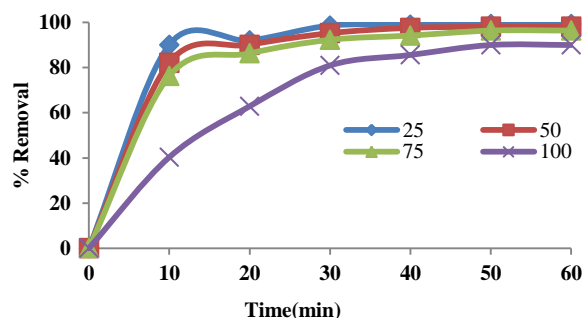


Figure 4) Effect of dye concentration on sorption of sulfur dye onto Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG (adsorbent dosage=0.20 g, pH=5, agitation speed=150 rpm, temperature=298 K).

### Adsorption isotherms

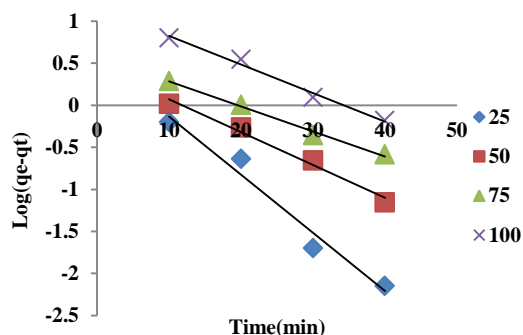


Figure 6) Pseudo-first-order kinetics plots for sulfur dye adsorption at different initial dye concentration (T=298 K).

The plot  $\frac{1}{q_e}$  versus  $\frac{1}{C_e}$  related to the adsorption of sulfur dye on the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG composite adsorbent at room temperature is shown in Fig. 5.

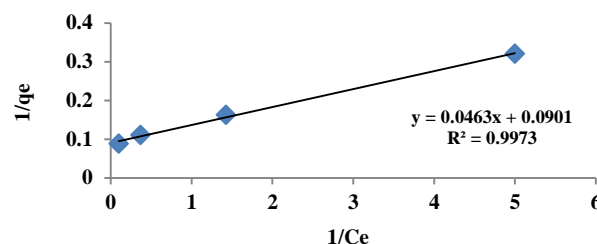
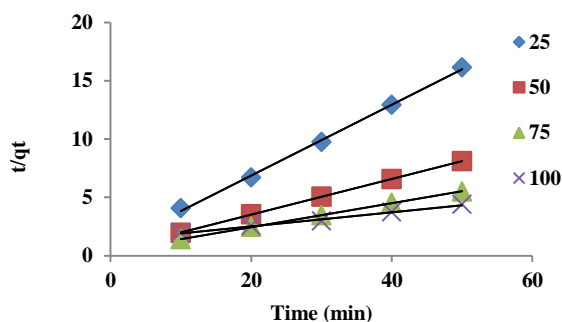


Figure 5) Langmuir isotherm obtained for sorption of sulfur dye at 298K (initial dye concentration=25-100 mg/L, sorbent dosage=0.20g and agitation speed=150 rpm).

### Adsorption kinetics

Adsorption processes and suitability of an adsorbent for removal of a special adsorbate is usually described through graphs known as isotherm. For isotherm investigation, the initial concentration of adsorbate is varied then the amount of adsorbate on the adsorbent as a function if its pressure or concentration at constant temperature is plotted. From linear plot of  $\log (q_e - q_t)$  versus  $t$  for the pseudo-first-order model (not shown), and  $t/q_t$  versus  $t$  for the pseudo-second-order (shown in Fig.6), the kinetic parameters in both models were calculated. Table 1 gives the values of the parameters for the pseudo-first-order and second-order kinetic models.



**Table 1) Adsorption kinetic parameters of sulfur dye onto Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG at 298 K.**

C <sub>0</sub>	Pseudo- first-order kinetic model				Pseudo- second-order kinetic model		
	q <sub>e,exp</sub>	q <sub>e1,cal</sub>	k <sub>1</sub>	R <sup>2</sup>	q <sub>e2,cal</sub>	k <sub>2</sub>	R <sup>2</sup>
25	3.10	3.59	0.159	0.969	3.30	0.119	0.998
50	6.16	2.88	0.089	0.985	6.53	0.052	0.999
75	9.03	3.81	0.066	0.990	9.80	0.026	0.999
100	11.20	14.52	0.075	0.988	16.66	0.002	0.990

**Table 2) Thermodynamic parameters for adsorption of sulfur dye onto Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG**

T (K)	ΔG <sup>0</sup> (kJ/mol)	ΔH <sup>0</sup> (kJ/mol)	ΔS <sup>0</sup> [kJ/(mol k)]	R <sup>2</sup>
298				
308	- 5.44	-77.92	-0.24	0.991
318				

### Adsorption thermodynamic

To study the effect of temperature on sulfur dye removal, adsorption experiments were performed at three different temperatures. The results are given in Table 2.

### Discussion

The surface of composite was coarse-grained because of the presence of both Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> and SiO<sub>2</sub>. The existence of high surfaces area reduces the mass transfer resistance and facilitates the diffusion of dye molecules, which may prove suitable for dye removal.

The sorption of dye was also affected by pH of solution. The removal percentage, was increased from 10 to 90% when pH was decreased from 8 to 5. With decreasing of solution pH, the number of positively charged active sites increased due to the protonation of the surface of the adsorbent. Consequently, the electrostatic interaction between the surface of the adsorbent and the sulfur dye anions increased, which resulted in increased adsorption. As the results show at highly acidic medium the removal percentage decreased. We suppose that the strongly acidic solution caused the destruction and dissolution of iron oxide; it is therefore recommended pH between 4 and 5. Moreover it was found that, with increase in pH the degree of color removal decrease and no significant color removal was occurred, this is

because of the presence of excess hydroxide ions, which competed with the negatively charged sulfur dye for adsorption sites.

In the adsorbent dosage study, it was found that with increasing the dosage of sorbent, removal percentage of the dye is also increased gradually (Figure 3). This result is expectable, because with increasing the amount of sorbent, more adsorption sites will be available. 90% of the dye sorption was observed for 0.20 g of the adsorbent dosage. After that, the increase was little. Then, we applied this amount as optimal value in our further investigations in this research.

In the investigation of the contact time, it was found that the removal of sulfur dye is occurred quickly and large amounts of the dye was removed within 40 min and then reach the equilibrium in 50 min. However a tiny decrease of the dye adsorption was occurred to the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG after 20 min of contact time; this phenomenon maybe because of the dissolution of the sulfur dye adsorbed on the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/SG, which could be an evidence to demonstrate the adsorption is also a physical process. Linear forms of Langmuir and Freundlich equations were used for isotherm studies (19):

$$\frac{1}{q_e} = \frac{1}{q_m} + \frac{1}{K_L q_m C_e} \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$$

Where  $q_e$  is the amount of sulfur dye adsorbed at equilibrium time (mg/g),  $C_e$  is the equilibrium concentration of sulfur dye in solution (mg/L),  $q_m$  (mg/g) and  $k_L$  (L/mg) are the maximum adsorption capacity and Langmuir adsorption constant respectively. The linearized form of Freundlich isotherm can be written as below:

$$\text{Log}q_e = \log k_F + \frac{1}{n} \log C_e \quad (\text{Eq.3})$$

Where,  $k_F$  [mg/g (L/g)<sup>1/n</sup>] and  $n$  are Freundlich constants which are represent the adsorption capacity and intensity of adsorption, respectively.

Examining the equilibrium sorption data, using above mentioned adsorption models, the high value of the correlation coefficient  $R^2$  derived for the adsorbent indicates that, this adsorption process was better described by Langmuir isotherm model (Figure 5). It was clear that, adsorption takes place at fixed and specific homogeneous sites within the adsorbent. Based on Langmuir adsorption isotherm, maximum adsorption capacity (monolayer coverage) was 11.1 mg/g.

In order to study the mechanism of adsorption, two kinetic models including pseudo-first-order and pseudo-second-order have been employed (20,21). The pseudo-first-order kinetic model can be shown by the following Lagergren kinetic equation:

$$\text{Log}(q_e - q_t) = \log q_e - \frac{k_1}{2.303}t \quad (\text{Eq.4})$$

Where,  $q_e$  and  $q_t$  are the amounts of dye adsorbed (mg/g) at equilibrium and at contact time  $t$  (min) respectively, and  $k_1$  is the pseudo-first-order kinetic constant (1/min). The linear form of this kinetic model is shown below:

$$\frac{t}{qt} = \frac{1}{K_2 q_e^2} + \frac{1}{q_e}t \quad (\text{Eq.5})$$

Where,  $K^2$  is the pseudo-second-order rate constant [g/(mg min)]. Table 1 shows that the

correlation coefficient value obtained for pseudo-second-order kinetic model ( $R^2=0.998$ ) was more than one which value obtained for pseudo-first-order model ( $R^2=0.969$ ). Moreover the  $q_e$  (exp) is closer to  $q_{e2}$  (calc) rather than  $q_{e1}$  (calc).

Therefore, the pseudo-second-order kinetic model validated this removal process more than the pseudo-first-order model. The thermodynamic parameters like the Gibbs free energy change  $\Delta G^\circ$  (kJ/mol), the change in enthalpy  $\Delta H^\circ$  (kJ/mol) and entropy change  $\Delta S^\circ$  [kJ/(mol °k)] were also calculated by means of the following relations (22).

$$\Delta G^\circ = \Delta H^\circ - T\Delta S^\circ \quad (\text{Eq. 6})$$

$$K_C = \frac{C_{Ae}}{C_e} \quad (\text{Eq. 7})$$

$$\ln K_C = -\frac{\Delta H^\circ}{RT} + \frac{\Delta S^\circ}{R} \quad (\text{Eq. 8})$$

Where,  $R$  is the gas constant (8.314 J/mol °K),  $T$  is the temperature of solution in Kelvin,  $K_c$  is the equilibrium constant,  $C_{Ad}$  is the amount of dye adsorbed on solid at equilibrium (mg/L) and  $C_e$  is equilibrium concentration of dye in solution (mg/L).  $\Delta H^\circ$  and  $\Delta S^\circ$  were calculated from the slope and intercept of a plot of  $\ln K_c$  versus  $1/T$  (Table 2). The negative  $\Delta H^\circ$  value confirms the exothermic nature of adsorption. The negative  $\Delta S^\circ$  value shows the decreased randomness at the solid/solution interface during the adsorption process. The negative values of  $\Delta G^\circ$  for the adsorption on  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SG}$  composite are due to spontaneous nature of adsorption.

## Conclusion

$\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  was synthesized via simple co-precipitation method on the surface of silica gel particles ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SG}$ ) and applied for sulfur dye from aqueous solution effectively. Adsorption isotherm study indicated that sulfur dye sorption by the introduced adsorbent ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{SG}$ ) obeys from Langmuir equation that implies chemisorption. Kinetics studies

indicated that the investigated sorption process obeys from pseudo-second-order kinetic model which is also in consistent with chemisorption mechanism. Thermodynamic studies also confirmed that the investigated sorption process is exothermic and the spontaneity of dye removal controls by enthalpy.

## Footnotes

### Conflict of Interest:

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Ardani R, Yari AR, Fahiminia M, Hashemi S, Fahiminia V, Saberi Bidgoli, M et al. Assessment of Influence of Landfill Leachate on Groundwater Quality: A Case Study Albourz Landfill (Qom, Iran). Arch Hyg Sci 2016;4(1):13-21.
2. Malakootian M, Mansoorian HJ, Yari AR. Removal of reactive dyes from aqueous solutions by a non-conventional and low cost agricultural waste: Adsorption on ash of Aloe Vera plant. Iran J Health Safe Environ 2014;1(3):117-25.
3. Peng X, Huang D, Odoom-Wubah T, Fu D, Huang J, Qin Q. Adsorption of anionic and cationic dyes on ferromagnetic ordered mesoporous carbon from aqueous solution. J Colloid Interface Sci 2014;430:272-282.
4. Yogesh Kumar K, Muralidhara HB, Arthoba Nayaka Y, Balasubramanyam J, Hanumanthappa H. Low- Cost synthesis of metal oxide nanoparticles and their application in adsorption of commercial dye and heavy metal ion in aqueous solution. Powder Technol 2013;246:125-136.
5. WHO. Guidelines for Drinking- Water Quality. 3rd ed. Geneva: WHO; 2006. (Vol.1)
6. Mahvi AH, Vosoughi M, Mohammadi MJ, Asadi A, Hashemzadeh B, Zahedi A, et al. Sodium Dodecyl Sulfate Modified-Zeolite as a Promising Adsorbent for the Removal of Natural Organic Matter From Aqueous Environments. Health Scope 2016;5(1):e29966.
7. Niri MV, Mahvi AH, Mohammadi MJ, Takdastan A, Zahedi A, Hashemzadeh B. Kinetic Study of the Adsorption of Natural Organic Matter From Aqueous Solution by Surfactant Modified Zeolite. Jundishapur J Health Sci 2015;7(3) e29867.
8. Zhu HY, Jiang R, Fu YQ, Jiang JH, Xiao L, Zeng GM. Preparation, characterization and dye adsorption properties of  $\gamma$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>/SiO<sub>2</sub>/chitosan composite. Appl Surf Sci 2011;258(4):1337-1344.
9. Han R, Zhang S, Zhao W, Li X, Jian X. Treting sulfur black dye wastewater with quaternized poly (phthalazinone ether sulfone ketone) nanofiltration membranes. Sep Purif Technol 2009;67(1):26-30.
10. Nguyen TA, Juang RS. Treatment of waters and wastewaters containing sulfur dyes: A review. Chem Eng J 2013;219:109-117.
11. Bozic M, Kokol V. Ecological alternatives to the reduction and oxidation processes in dyeing with vat and sulphur dyes, Review. Dye Pigments 2008;76(2):299-309.
12. Yagub MT, Sen TK, Afroze S, Ang HM. Dye and its removal from aqueous solution by adsorption: A review. Adv Colloid Interface Sci 2014;209:172-184.
13. Blackburn RS. Natural polysaccharides and their interactions with dye molecules: applications in effluent treatment. Environ Sci Technol 2004;38(18):4905-4909.
14. Zucca P, Sanjust E. Inorganic Materials as Supports for Covalent Enzyme Immobilization: Methods and Mechanisms. Molecules 2014;19(9):14139-14194.
15. Lewandowska-Łacucka J, Staszewska M, Szuwaryński M, Kępczyński M, Romek M, Tokarz W, et al. Synthesis and characterization of the superparamagnetic iron oxide nanoparticles modified with cationic chitosan and coated with silica shell. J Alloys Compd 2014;586:45-51.
16. Xu P, Zeng GM, Huang DL, Feng CL, Hu S, Zhao MH, et al. Use of iron oxide nanomaterials in wastewater treatment: A review. Sci Total Environ 2012;424:1-10.
17. Cem Pang S, Yun Kho S, Fun Chin S. Fabrication of Magnetite/Silica/Titania Core-Shell Nanoparticles. J Nanomaterials 2012;1-6.
18. Crini G, Peindy HN, Gimbert F, Robert C. Removal of C.I. Basic Green 4 (malachite green) from aqueous solutions by adsorption using cyclodextrin-based adsorbent: kinetic and equilibrium studies. Sep Purif Technol 2007;53(1):97-110.
19. Fazeli M, Kazemi Balgeshiri MJ, Alighardashi A. Water pollutants adsorption through an enhanced activated carbon derived from agriculture waste. Arch Hyg Sci 2016;5(4):286-294.
20. Balarak D, Yari AR, Kord Mostafapour F, Mahdavi Y, Joghataei A. Agricultural waste as adsorbent for removal of chromium (VI) from aqueous solution. Arch Hyg Sci 2016;5(4):310-318.
21. Naghizadeh A, Derakhshani E, Yari AR. Study of Kinetic coefficients of a Membrane Bioreactor (MBR) for municipal wastewater treatment. Arch Hyg Sci 2014;2(3):108-113.
22. Igberase E, Osifo P, Ofomaja A. The adsorption of copper(II) ions by polyaniline chitosan beads from aqueous solution: Equilibrium, Kinetic and desorption studies. J Environ Chem Eng 2014;2(1):362-369.