

Systematic screening of DMOF-1 with NH₂, NO₂, Br and azobenzene functionalities for elucidation of carbon dioxide and nitrogen separation properties

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Abstract: In this study, dabco MOF-1 (DMOF-1) with four different functional groups (NH₂, NO₂, Br and azobenzene) has been successfully synthesized through systematic control of the synthesis conditions. The functionalised DMOF-1 is characterized using various analytical techniques including PXRD, TGA and N₂ sorption. The effect of the various functional groups on the performance of the MOFs for post-combustion CO₂ capture is evaluated. DMOF-1s with polar functional groups are found to have better affinity with CO₂ compared with the parent framework as indicated by higher CO₂ heat of adsorption. However, imparting steric hindrance to the framework as in Azo-DMOF-1 enhances CO₂/N₂ selectivity, potentially as a result of lower N₂ affinity for the framework.

Keywords: metal-organic framework; DMOF-1; ZIF-8; CO₂ capture and separation

Since its first report in 2004 [1], Dabco MOF-1 (DMOF-1) has been widely investigated, particularly because it has a flexible framework [2,3]. Other investigations have also shown the promising application of this material for gas storage [4–6]. In this study, we then aim to further investigate the applicability of this material for post-combustion CO₂ separation by functionalizing the parent framework with various functional groups. By changing the synthesis mixture of DMOF-1, various functionalized DMOF-1s could then be successfully synthesized (Table S1 and Scheme S1). As can be seen in Figure 1 both NH₂-DMOF-1 and Azo-DMOF-1 crystallized in a rod-shape form while the DMOF-1, Br-DMOF-1 and NO₂-DMOF-1 crystallized in a cubical form.

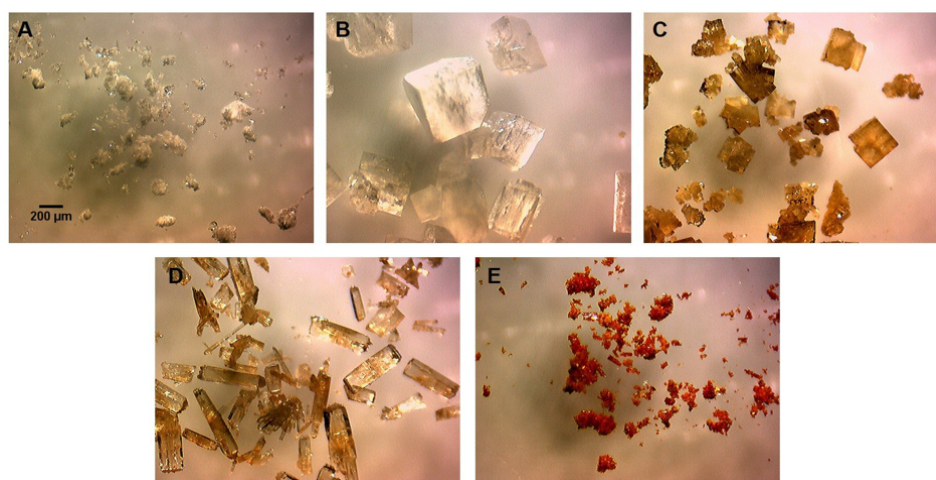


Figure 1. Microscope image of DMOF-1 (A), Br-DMOF-1 (B), NO₂-DMOF-1 (C), NH₂-DMOF-1 (D) and Azo-DMOF-1 (E) synthesized in this study (the scalebar is identical for all panels).

The product crystallinity was assessed using powder X-ray diffraction (PXRD). As can be seen in Figure 2 (A), all the synthesized materials are highly crystalline with the PXRD diffraction patterns

of the functionalized DMOF-1s closely matching that of the non-functionalized DMOF-1, with a few notable differences. Firstly, the intensity of the first two peaks of Br-DMOF-1 are identical, which might be caused by crystals that crystallize in an orthorhombic space group with a rhomboidal pore shape compared with the distorted pore shape from its parent structure [7,8]. There is also a slight difference observed in the PXRD diffraction pattern of the Azo-DMOF-1 at lower angles where the peak slightly shifts to a lower value. This might be caused by the accommodation process of the bulky structure from the azobenzene ligand [9]. As previously suggested, the presence of the benzene ring from the azobenzene functionality might slightly alter the DMOF-1 parent framework to more closely resemble the PXRD pattern of benzene-loaded DMOF-1 [1].

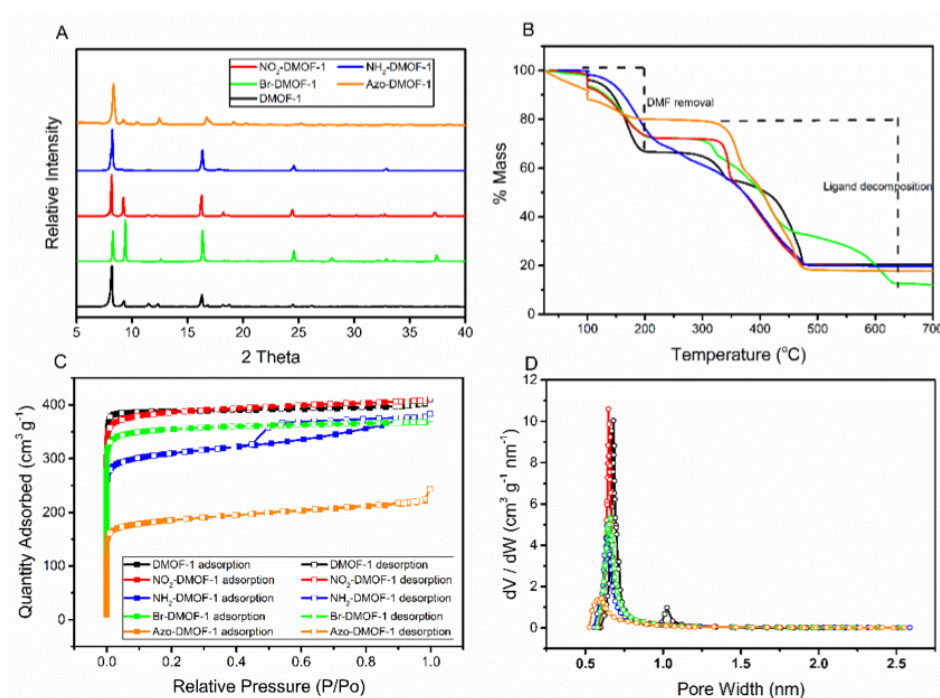


Figure 2. PXRD diffraction pattern (A), TGA analysis (B), N₂ sorption at 77 K (C) and pore width distribution (D) of functionalized DMOF-1s synthesized in this study.

The thermal stability of the materials was evaluated by heating in air in a thermogravimetric analyser, with the combined results presented in Figure 2 (B). Regardless of the DMOF-1 functionalisation, there are three different stages of mass loss. The first region likely results from the removal of DMF from the framework as DMF was the solvent used to synthesize the materials. The second and third step could then be ascribed to the two-step structural decomposition of the framework, since the MOFs were built from two different ligands which may decompose at distinctly different temperatures. However, a different behaviour was found in NH₂-DMOF-1. It was found that almost no stable region could be observed between 200–300 °C as observed with the rest of the MOFs. Rather, the mass was observed to continuously decrease within this range. As will be explained later, this behaviour might be caused by structural imperfection exhibited by the NH₂-DMOF-1 that might also impact its thermal stability behaviour.

The porosity of all functionalized DMOF-1 was analyzed via N₂ sorption isotherm collected at 77 K, and the results are presented in Figure 2 (C). Almost all the DMOF-1s synthesized in this study exhibit type-1 adsorption isotherms indicating the microporous structure of the functionalized DMOFs. However, a hysteresis does exist for NH₂-DMOF-1 which suggests the presence of a mesoporous region. This finding then confirms a recent study showing the hysteresis obtained in NH₂-DMOF-1 which might be caused by the presence of 1D Zn₂(H₂O)₂(NH₂-BDC) and amorphous NH₂-DMOF-1 structure during the formation of perfect crystalline NH₂-DMOF-1 [10]. Their presence then contributes in

building linker defects and a more flexible structure in the final DMOF-1 resulting in a mesoporous structure.

Table 1. Surface properties of functionalized DMOF-1s.

Material	BET Surface Area $\text{m}^2.\text{g}^{-1}$	Max Pore Volume $\text{cm}^3.\text{g}^{-1}$	Median Pore Width nm
DMOF-1	1161	0.601	0.68
NO_2 -DMOF-1	1175	0.596	0.66
NH_2 -DMOF-1	961.3	0.478	0.65
Br-DMOF-1	1074	0.548	0.66
Azo-DMOF-1	579.8	0.285	0.64

Table 1 then presents the BET surface area, maximum pore volume and median pore width of the MOFs used in this study. As can be seen, functionalizing DMOF-1 framework with NO_2 and Br does not then seem to negatively impact its surface property as they have a comparable value with the parent framework. Meanwhile lower surface area and pore volume exhibited by the NH_2 -DMOF-1 compared with both NO_2 -DMOF-1 and Br-DMOF-1 might be explained by the presence of structural imperfection as shown above in the hysteresis explanation in its N_2 sorption. In case of Azo-DMOF-1, the lowest surface area and pore volume is likely be caused by the bulkier structure of azobenzene functionality than for the other functional groups. In contrast, all the functionalized DMOF-1s had lower pore width in the range of 0.63–0.68 nm compared with its parent DMOF-1 which was found around 0.69 nm. The slight reduction of pore width could then be explained by the presence of various protruding functional groups inside the frameworks.

A further evaluation was then carried out to study the performance of various functionalized DMOF-1s for post-combustion CO_2 capture application since the polar functional groups could improve the CO_2 adsorption and separation property in MOFs [11]. This study was then carried out first by measuring the CO_2 uptake capacity of all the MOFs both at 273 and 298 K with the results presented in Figure ?? (A) and (B), respectively. First, as can be seen, the CO_2 uptake of DMOF-1 was found to be around 4.2 and 1.6 mmol g^{-1} at 273 and 298 K. These values are also comparable with other findings reported on DMOF-1 [12]. Once functionalized ligands were used in DMOF-1, varieties were observed regarding this value. The CO_2 adsorption capacity in Br-DMOF-1 was observed to be around 4.6 and 1.9 mmol g^{-1} at 273 and 298 K, respectively. Meanwhile an increasing trend could be observed both in NH_2 -DMOF-1 and NO_2 -DMOF-1. In NH_2 -DMOF-1, this value could be increased to be around 5.5 and 2.5 mmol g^{-1} at 273 and 298 K, respectively. Meanwhile for NO_2 -DMOF-1, the CO_2 adsorption capacity was found to be around 5.8 and 2.5 mmol g^{-1} at 273 and 298 K, respectively. In contrast, a decreasing trend could be observed in Azo-DMOF-1 as its CO_2 uptake capacity was found to be around 2.8 and 1.4 mmol g^{-1} at 273 and 298 K, respectively.

From these results, it could be observed that although both NH_2 -DMOF-1 and NO_2 -DMOF-1 have lower surface area compared with the DMOF-1, both amino and nitro group could be considered as polar groups that could enhance the interaction between the MOF framework and CO_2 resulting in overall increase in CO_2 uptake [11,13]. This is also corroborated by the CO_2 heat of adsorption of both MOFs which are found to be around 23 and 25 kJ mol^{-1} for NO_2 -DMOF-1 and NH_2 -DMOF-1, respectively, as can be seen in the inset of Figure 3 (B). These values are higher compared with the parent MOF which was found to be around 20 kJ mol^{-1} which is comparable with other findings [5,14,15]. The higher CO_2 heat of adsorption value exhibited by both NO_2 -DMOF-1 and NH_2 -DMOF-1 then indicates more favourable interaction between CO_2 and both frameworks rather than DMOF-1. Meanwhile a decreasing trend in CO_2 uptake in Azo-DMOF-1 is expected since it has the lowest surface area compared with the rest of the MOFs used in this study. This then results in the overall reduction of CO_2 uptake capacity of Azo-DMOF-1. Interestingly, the decreasing trend of CO_2 uptake in Azo-DMOF-1 was not accompanied by the decrease of CO_2 heat of adsorption which was found to be around 28 kJ mol^{-1} at high coverage. This value is even higher than both NH_2 -DMOF-1 and

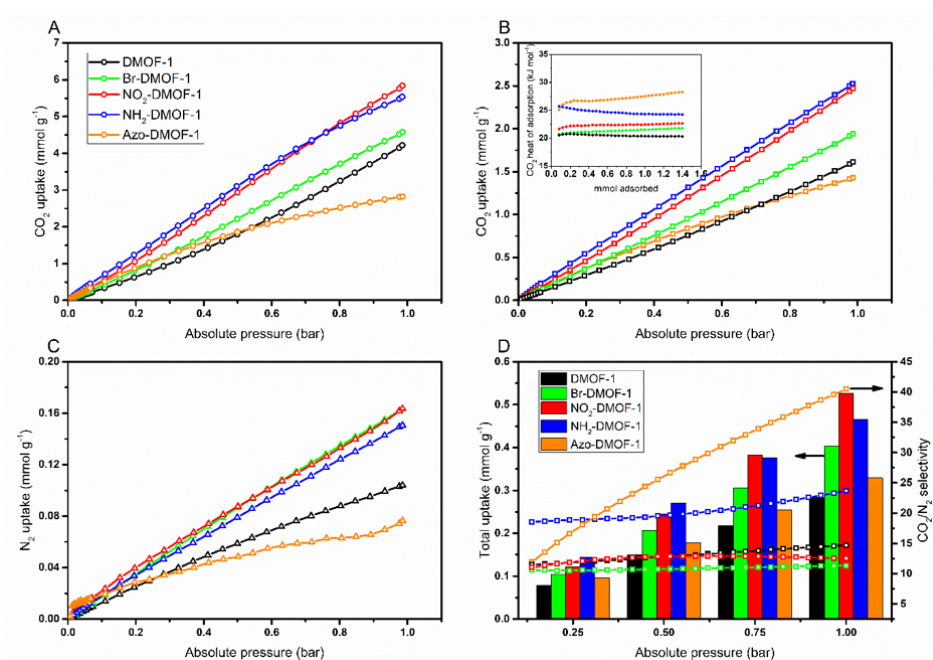


Figure 3. CO₂ adsorption at 273 K (A) and 298 K (B), N₂ uptake at 298 K (C) and CO₂/N₂ (15:85) IAST selectivity at 298 K (D) of the functionalized DMOF-1s. Inset of Figure 3 (B): CO₂ heat of adsorption of functionalized DMOF-1s.

NO₂-DMOF-1 and comparable with other MOFs designed for CO₂ capture [16–19]. This then indicates a more favourable interaction between CO₂ and the framework which could be caused by the Lewis acid-base interaction between the CO₂ and azobenzene functionality [20].

Ideal Adsorbed Solution Theory (IAST) was then employed to further evaluate the CO₂/N₂ separation performance [21]. A scenario of 15:85 mixture of CO₂:N₂ was used for the calculation in order to simulate the flue gas composition from a coal-fired power plant [22]. The result is then presented in Figure 3 (D). First, it could be seen that the CO₂/N₂ selectivity of DMOF-1 was found to be around 15 with a total uptake to be around 0.28 mmol g^{−1}. This value is also comparable with previous findings when studying DMOF-1 for CO₂/N₂ separation [14,15]. For the functionalized DMOF-1s, it could be seen that their uptake capacity could be increased compared with the parent MOF. This might be explained by the higher CO₂ uptake capacity and heat of adsorption of the functionalized DMOF-1 which could increase both the capacity and affinity between the functionalized DMOF-1 and the CO₂. However, only NH₂-DMOF-1 and Azo-DMOF-1 showed a higher CO₂/N₂ selectivity value compared with DMOF-1 while a slight decrease was observed both for NO₂-DMOF-1 and Br-DMOF-1. The CO₂/N₂ selectivity for Azo-DMOF-1 and NH₂-DMOF-1 was found to be around 40 and 25, respectively. This selectivity value is comparable, or higher in case of Azo-DMOF-1, with other MOF designed for post-combustion CO₂ capture such as PCN-88 [23], Ni-AG15 [24] and Ni-MOF-1 [25].

This phenomenon could then be explained two ways. First, higher CO₂ heat of adsorption observed in functionalized DMOF-1 might help to increase its affinity with CO₂ resulting in higher selectivity. However, this could not fully explain the phenomenon as higher selectivity was not observed in all functionalized DMOF-1s and the Azo-DMOF-1 had higher selectivity compared with the NH₂-DMOF-1. Therefore, another mechanism might play a role which is more related with N₂ interaction with the framework. It could be seen in Figure ??3 (C) that all the N₂ uptake curves in Azo-DMOF-1 were different to the rest of the functionalized DMOF-1s. The trend was observed to be plateauing rather than linearly increasing as observed with the rest. This might then indicate that the affinity of N₂ with Azo-DMOF-1 is weaker than with the NH₂-DMOF-1. A decrease in N₂ affinity

towards porous framework have also been reported previously in organic-based porous materials [26]. With higher N₂ concentration than CO₂ in the feed composition, this also means that the competitive adsorption in Azo-DMOF-1 might be less demanding than in the NH₂-DMOF-1 since the framework of the former is more N₂-phobic compared with the later. As a result, the CO₂ would have higher tendency to adsorb on the surface of Azo-DMOF-1 and thus higher selectivity was obtained. This phenomenon was also previously observed with azobenzene-based porous materials where higher CO₂/N₂ was observed because of the lower affinity between the framework and N₂ [26]. This then highlights the benefit of having azobenzene functionality in DMOF-1 apart from the potential to use UV light as a sustainable source for material regeneration after the CO₂ capture [9,27].

In conclusion, this study has shown that functionalizing DMOF-1s with various functional groups within its framework is beneficial to increase their affinity towards CO₂ as indicated by higher CO₂ heat of adsorption and resulting in higher CO₂ uptake capacity. However, in case where competitive adsorption occurs between CO₂ and N₂, functionalizing the DMOF-1 with azobenzene group seems to have the best impact since the steric effect of the azobenzene could also impart an additional N₂-phobic environment in the framework resulting in higher CO₂/N₂ selectivity. However, in case where CO₂ concentration is higher and less adsorption competition occurs, this steric effect might not be so beneficial since it also hinders the CO₂ adsorption on the surface resulting in slightly lower selectivity and lower CO₂ uptake capacity.

Supplementary Materials: Supplementary materials are available in the separate document. The data files are available from the open repository <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3332915>

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