

**Article**

**Synthesis and Characterization Iron Oxide Nanoparticles ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs) For Removal of Eriochrome Black T Form Aqueous Solution: Experimental and DFT Study**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this work is to explore the elimination of Eriochrome Black T from a water solution using iron oxide nanoparticle adsorbent.  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs were produced using the green process and characterized using a variety of methods, including EDX, XRD, and SEM. Batch adsorption tests were conducted with a number of variables, including contact duration, effect PH, and temperature. The results revealed that Eriochrome Black T had the maximum removal efficacy on  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs after 150 minutes of contact. The equilibrium data were well suited to the Freundlich model. Kinetic studies show that the pseudo-second-order model may represent Eriochrome Black T methods of adsorption. the thermodynamic investigation indicate the adsorption process is a exothermic and spontaneous in nature.

We performed DFT calculations using Gaussian 09 with B3LYP/6-311G(d,2p) basis sets to study the interaction between Eriochrome Black T dye (EBT) and  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs. The results indicate significant shifts in highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO), and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) energies and an increased energy gap, suggesting chemisorption and decreased stability of the EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs complex compared to isolated  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs.

**Keywords:** Adsorption, DFT study, Eriochrome Black T dye, Green method,  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs, Nanomaterials.

**1. Introduction**

Pollution considered as a major problem that threatens the environment which has harmful effects on animals, plants, and human beings [1,2]. It causes poison of the soil and water sources

and the erosion of the gaseous atmosphere through increasing different anthropogenic activities such as incessant combustion of fossil fuels, which release gaseous pollutants, disposal of organic waste into water streams, destroying aquatic life, forest destruction and causing poor and polluted air quality, damaging the soil fertility via plastic waste littering [3]. Water pollution due to industrial and human activities is the main cause that leads to 80% of diseases worldwide. According to United Nations reports, there are about 1.1 billion people who do not have access to safe drinking water, and most of them are from poor and developing countries [4,5]. Major water contaminants are categorized into pathogens, inorganic and organic chemicals which include heavy metals, dyes, plastics, oil, pesticides, and volatile organic compounds (VOC) [6,7]. Dyes are Complicated unsaturated organic materials that can absorb light and give clear colors to the visible region [8]. In addition, it is a substance chromophore distinguished with absorbing spectrum parts of the visible region [9]. Eriochrome black T (EBT) is a commonly found dye in wastewater, a reactive and acidic dye with a conjugated azo (-N=N-) group as a chromophore [10,11]. EBT can be harmful to human health and the environment, while also harming aquatic organisms [12,13].

Nanomaterials are an intriguing class of materials that includes a wide variety of samples with at least one dimension between 1 and 100 nm [14,15]. Nanomaterials also have many excellent physicochemical properties, including, large surface area, small size, high chemical reactivity, cost-effectiveness and strong adsorption capacity [16,17]. Among nanomaterial is iron oxide nanoparticle, The three primary types of Iron oxide FeO, Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> [18,19]. On other hand,  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs (hematite) is an important categories of Iron oxide that has unique size and shape-dependent characteristics and a wide variety of potential applications [20,21]. Among these applications is the field of purifying polluted water, which has promising prospects as an adsorbent for clean-up  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs have high surface areas, many active sites, and a high capacity for adsorption of dyes and heavy metals [22] Various types of iron oxide nanoparticles have been synthesized using extracts from plants and their parts [23]. Plant extracts commonly contain terpenoids, sugars, alkaloids, polyphenols, proteins, and phenolic acids [24], which are responsible for the reducing and stabilization of metal oxide nanoparticles [25].

The aim of this study is to synthesize iron oxide nanoparticles ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs) by the green method and use them as adsorbents to remove Eriochrome Black T dye from an aqueous solution.

## **2. Experimental part**

### **2.1. Materials**

Ocimum basilicum plant. Anhydrous iron nitrate (Sigma Aldrich supplied analytical grade purity 95%). De-ionized water.

### **2.2 Preparation of plant extract**

The collected leaves were washed with tap water to eliminate dust particles. To eliminate moisture, the leaves were washed with deionized water and shade-dried for 7 days. The dried leaves were pulverized in a grinder mixer and stored in the dark at room temperature. To create the plant extract, combine 5 g of dried leaf powder with 50 mL of deionized water in a 100-mL flask. Mix thoroughly on a magnetic stirrer with a heated plate at 60 °C for 10 minutes. The resulting extract was filtered. The filtrate was used immediately or stored at 4°C for future use.

#### **2.2.1. Synthesis of iron oxide nanoparticles ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs)**

0.02 molar of aqueous iron nitrate Fe(NO<sub>3</sub>)<sub>2</sub>, was synthesized by dissolving 5 g of it in 50 mL of non-ionic water and adding 5 g of plant extract by dissolving 5 g of it in 50 mL of non-ionic water with sonication for 10 minutes using the ultrasonic device. After that, 20 mL of 1N NaOH solution was added to the solution. After that, the solution was sonicated for 15 minutes using the ultrasonic. A brown precipitate appeared due to iron hydroxide Fe(OH)<sub>2</sub>. It was separated using centrifugation and washed multiple times with deionized water. Thereafter, the precipitate was dried at 90 °C for about three hours. Then it was calcined at 480 °C for 3 hours.

### **2.3. Experimental adsorption**

Adsorption tests were performed using Eriochrome Black T (C<sub>20</sub>H<sub>12</sub>N<sub>3</sub>O<sub>7</sub>SNa) at various concentrations (5, 10, 15, 20, and 25 ppm). The adsorbent was added in various quantities (0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.15 and 0.2 g) add 10 ml of a mixture including a specific concentration of Eriochrome Black T. The volumetric container and its contents were then placed in a shaker vacuum and swirled continuously at 120 rpm. With period time in the range of 10–160 minutes, equilibrium time was achieved at 90 minutes. The mixture was then centrifuged for 15 min for separation ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs). Following adsorption, the dye solution's absorbance was UV/vis spectroscopy was

performed at an effective wavelength of 539 nm. The amount of adsorbate and removal efficiency were calculated according to the following equation [26,27]:

$$Q_e = \frac{(C_0 - C_e)V}{M} \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

$$R\% = \frac{(C_0 - C_e)}{C_0} \times 100\% \dots\dots\dots(2)$$

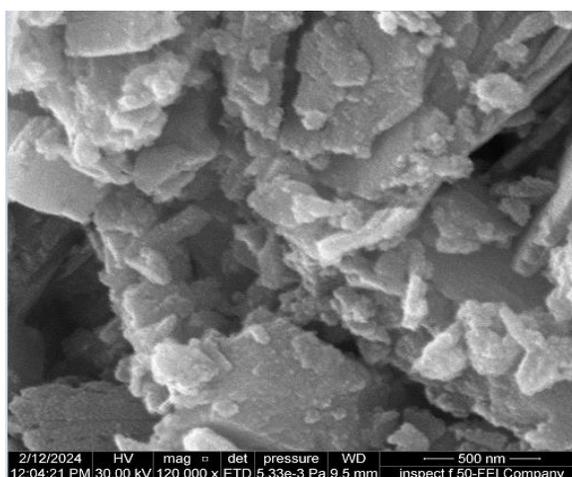
where  $C_0$  is concentration of Eriochrome Black T at initial time,  $C_e$  is concentration of Eriochrome black at equilibrium time,  $V$  is the volume of dye solution (L), and  $M$  is mass of nanomaterial.

### 3. Results and discussion

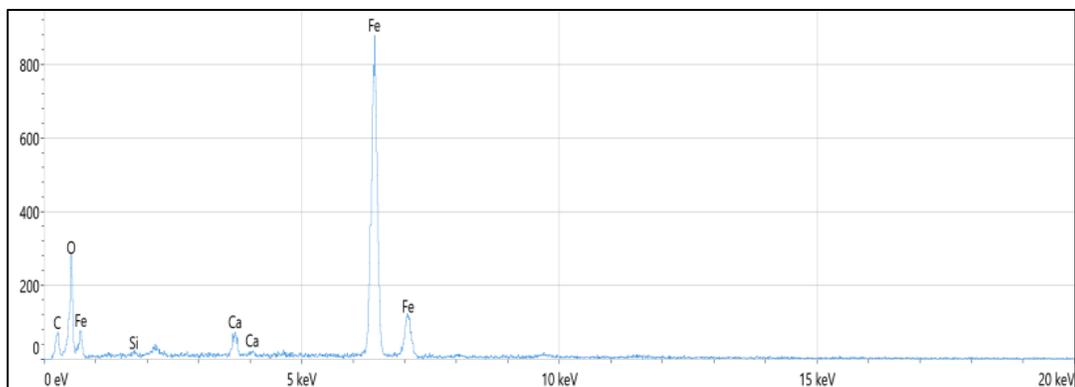
#### 3.1. Characterization

3.1.1. The SEM image and EDX spectra for the  $Fe_2O_3$ -NPs are shown in Figure 1. SEM images of  $\alpha$ - $Fe_2O_3$  NPs revealed Plate-like structure formation was observed in  $\alpha$ - $Fe_2O_3$  NPs with agglomeration form. The agglomeration of NPs that appeared in the SEM images was likely due to magnetic nature of these particles [28].

In the EDX spectra (Figure1-b), the peaks around 0.8, 6.2, and 6.9 keV are related to the binding energies of Fe. Therefore, the EDX spectra for the  $Fe_2O_3$ /plant extract confirmed the presence of  $Fe_2O_3$ -NPs in the BS aqueous extract without any impurity peaks.

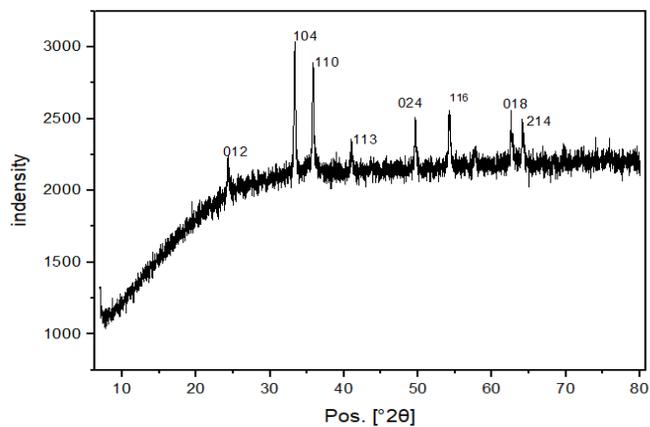


**Figure (1-a): SEM image of  $\alpha$ - $Fe_2O_3$  NPs**



**Figure (1-b): EDX image of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**

3.1.2. The  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs diffraction peaks were centered at  $2\theta = 24.2^\circ$ ,  $33.49^\circ$ ,  $35.67^\circ$ ,  $40.94^\circ$ ,  $49.57^\circ$ ,  $54.2^\circ$ ,  $62.2^\circ$ , and  $63.0^\circ$ . The diffraction peaks correspond to (012), (104), (110), (113), (024), (116), (0 1 8), and (2 1 4), respectively. All the reported diffractions are perfectly indexed with JCPDS card 33-0664, implying a single-phased  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NP with a rhombohedral crystal structure [29]. The average size of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs was found to be 35.96.



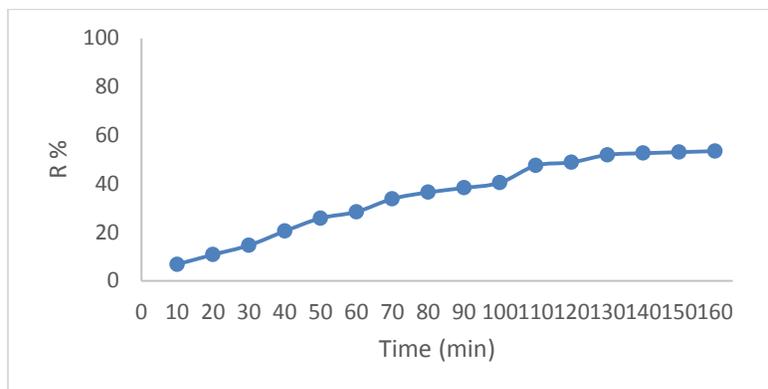
**Figure 2: XRD of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**

## 3.2. Adsorption study

### 3.2.1. Effect of the contact time

The effect of contact time was studied by adding 0.01 g of ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs) to 10 mL Eriochrome Black T Solution (50 ppm) at 25°C with a stirring speed of 120 rpm in various intervals of time (10-160) minutes. Fig.5 shows the effect of contact time in adsorption of, it is observed that

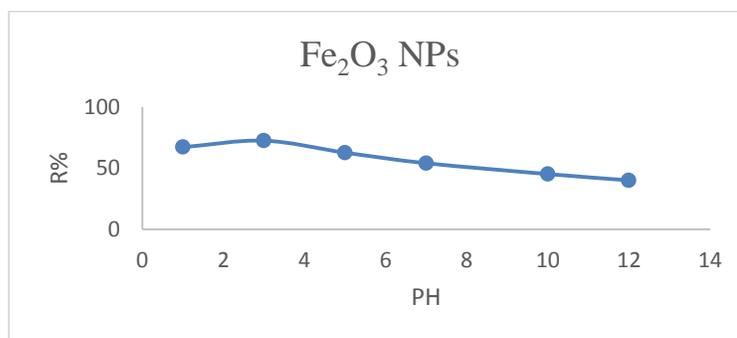
the removal efficiency increases directly with the increase the contact time, reached equilibrium within 150 min. after that, the rate of the adsorption process became constant, in order to saturate the active sites with adsorbate molecules [30].



**Figure 3: Effect time of adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**

### 3.2.2 Effect of PH

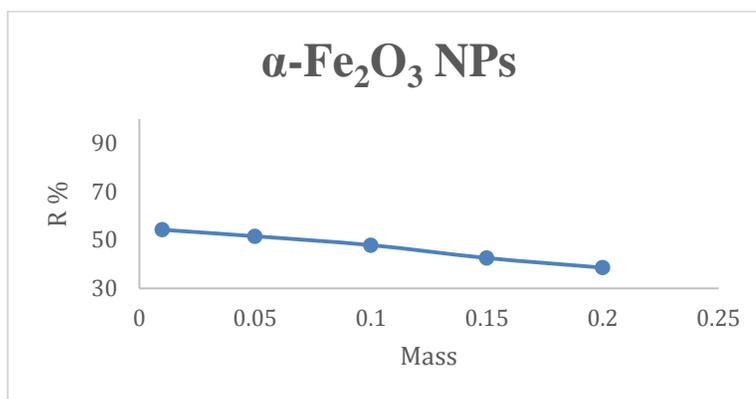
One of the most essential characteristics explored was the acidity function (pH), along with the fixation of other parameters [31]. This study was carried out in different acidity function (PH 1, 3, 5, 7, 10, and 12), but the rest of the variables remained constant. The results revealed that the Eriochrome Black-T dye was removed more in the acidic environment than in the neutral and basic environments, which is attributable to the presence of extra H<sup>+</sup> ions competing with the dye's anionic groups for adsorption sites. However, adsorption of dye decreases in the basic environment due to the anionic groups in the dye cause electrostatic repulsion between OH<sup>-</sup> groups. This describes the ion exchange mode of adsorption [32].



**Figure 4: Effect PH of adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**

### 2.2.3 Effect of the dosage of adsorbent

The effect of the dosage of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs on the removal efficiency of EBT was studied, as shown in figure (5). Through this study it was found the adsorption decrease with increase of adsorbent mass, the greater the agglomeration due to the decrease in surface area and thus the decrease in the number of active sites on the surface of the adsorbent, this can be attributed to the magnetic nature of iron oxide particles.



**Figure 5: Effect mass of adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs**

### 3.2.4 The effect of Temperature and thermodynamic parameter

At a given temperature range of 288 to 328, the effect of temperature on the adsorption of Eriochrome Black T onto  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  adsorbent was investigated. When the temperature increased from 288 to 328 K, that indicate that the Eriochrome Black T may move from the solution phase to the adsorbent surface due to greater adsorption at greater temperatures due to the increased kinetic energy of dye molecules.

The thermodynamic parameters reveal specific information about the mechanism and nature of the adsorption process [33]. The thermodynamic parameters were determine using the following equations [34,35]:

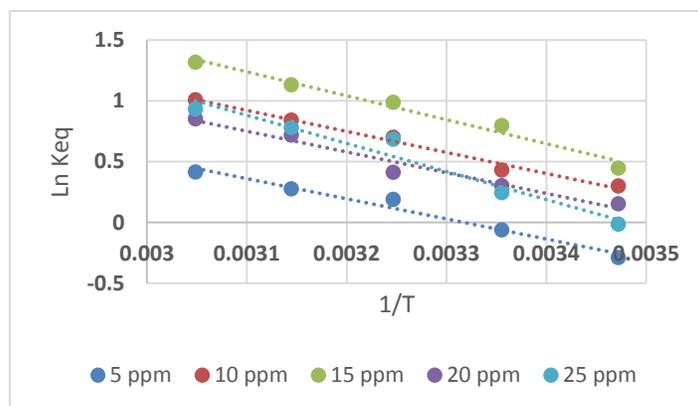
$$\ln \ln (Ke) = \frac{-\Delta H}{RT} + \frac{\Delta S}{R} \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

$$Ke = \frac{Q_e}{C_e} \dots\dots\dots (4)$$

$$\Delta G = \Delta H - T\Delta S \dots\dots\dots (5)$$

where  $K_e$  is an equilibrium constant,  $R$  is a gas constant (8.314 J/mole.K), and  $T$  is the temperature (K)

As shown in Table 1, the values of  $\Delta G$  and  $\Delta H$  is negative at all temperatures, suggest that the adsorption process is exothermic and spontaneous in nature [36]. And the values of  $\Delta S$  is positive indicating that the more randomness of the system [37].



**Figure 6: Van't Hoff plots of EBT adsorption onto ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs) at different temperature.**

**Table (1). Thermodynamic parameters for the adsorption of EBT onto ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs)**

$\Delta H$ (kJ/mole)	$\Delta S$ (J/mole)	$\Delta G$				
		288	298	308	318	328
-13.78	45.711	-26.94	-27.4	-27.86	-28.31	-28.77
-14.38	52.253	-29.43	-29.95	-30.48	-31	-31.52
-16.37	61.051	-33.95	-34.57	-35.18	-35.79	-36.4
-14.19	50.207	-28.65	-29.15	-29.65	-30.15	-30.65
-19.23	66.935	-38.51	-39.18	-39.84	-40.51	-41.18

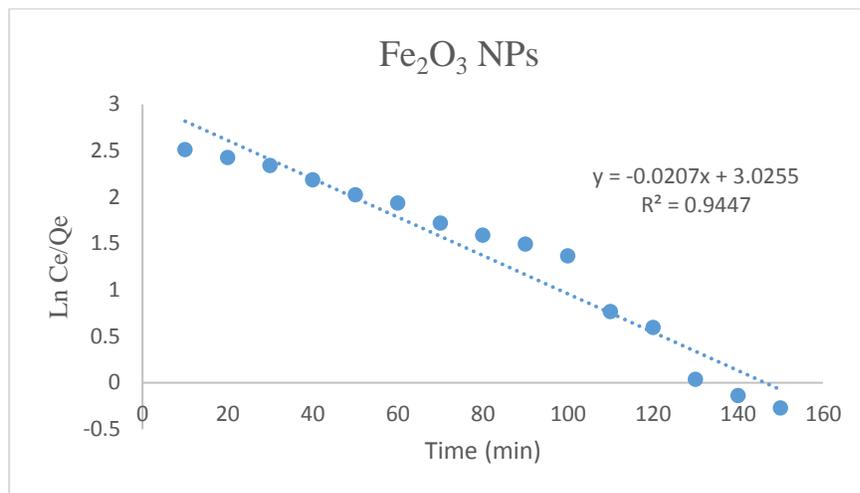
### 3.2.5 Adsorption Kinetics

Kinetic study of adsorption process is necessary to obtain effective and useful information about the adsorption mechanism, that depends on the chemical and physical characteristics [38] [39]. The experimental data was described by pseudo-first-order model (PFOM) and pseudo-second-order (PSOM) model. The formulae pseudo-first-order equation [40]:

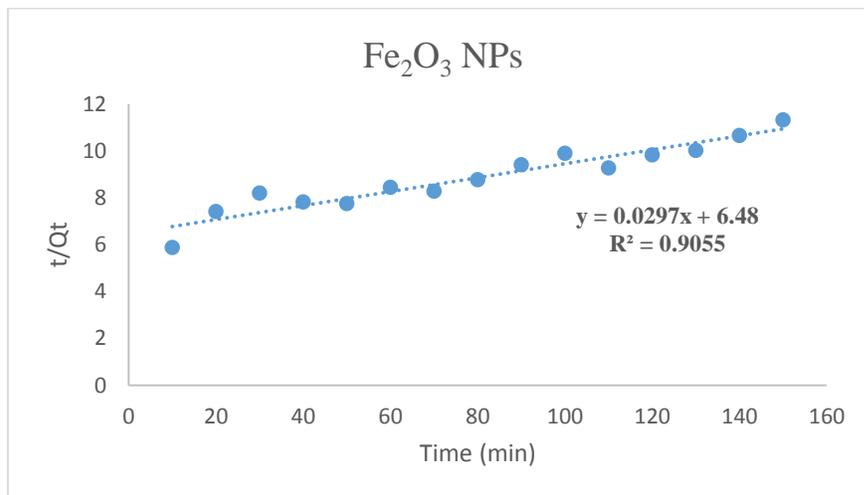
$$\ln(q_e - qt) = \ln(q_e) - k_1t \dots(6)$$

The pseudo-second-order equation [41]:

$$\frac{1}{qt} = \frac{1}{k_2q_e} + \frac{t}{q_e} \dots(7)$$



**Figure 7: PFOM plots for the adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs at 298 K**



**Figure 8: PSOM plots for the adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs at 298 K**

The kinetic information may be accurately described by a pseudo-first-order model with a high correlation coefficient ( $R^2 > 0.9447$ ) of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs. The assumption is that the adsorption rate is controlled by the diffusion of dye molecules on the surface of  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs [42].

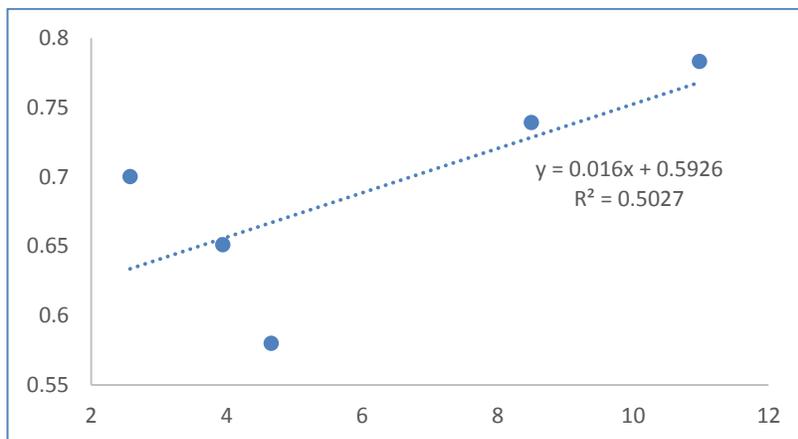
**3.2.6 Adsorption Isotherms**

Adsorption isotherms provide crucial details adsorption capacity and properties of the surface of adsorbent which aid in understanding the interaction between the adsorbate and adsorbent [43,44]. In this study, The Freundlich and Langmuir isotherm models were then used to evaluate the adsorption of Eriochrome Black T onto ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs). These models are represented by Equations (8) and (9), respectively [45] [46]:

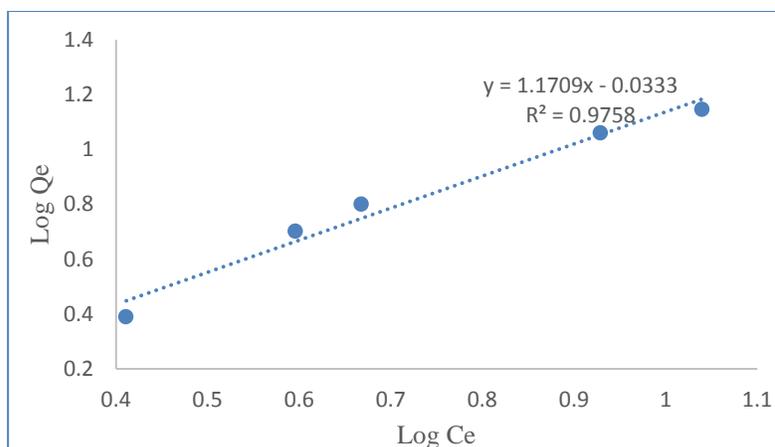
$$\frac{C_e}{q_e} = \frac{1}{(q_{max}) K_L} + \frac{C_e}{q_{max}} \dots\dots\dots(8)$$

$$\log \log (Q_e) = \log \log (k_f) + \frac{1}{n} \log(C_e) \dots\dots\dots(9)$$

In these equations,  $k_F$  represents the Freundlich constant,  $n$  is a Adsorption intensity.  $q_{max}$  (mg/g) represents the theoretical maximal absorption capacity of dye,  $k_L$  (L/mg) represents the Langmuir constant.



**Figure 9: Langmuir isotherm for adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**



**Figure 10: Freundlich isotherm for adsorption of EBT onto  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs**

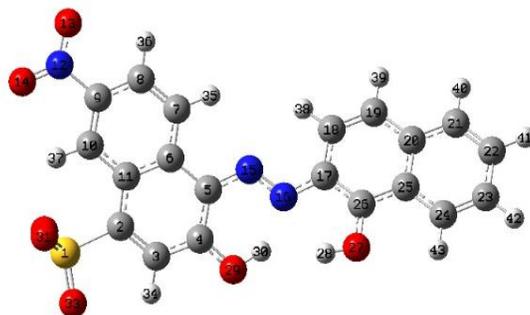
According to the correlation coefficient ( $R^2$ ) values, the Freundlich isotherm models closely suit to the equilibrium data, which suggested the multilayer adsorption [47].

**Table (2): valuate constant Langmuir and Freundlich for the adsorption of EBT**

Langmuir		Freundlich	
KL	-0.01715	Kf	0.6627
RL	1.750547	N	0.673
R <sup>2</sup>	0.5027	R <sup>2</sup>	0.9598

### 3.3 DFT calculations

To get theoretical insights that could support and enhance experimental results, we performed DFT calculations on the interaction of the molecule, Eriochrome black T dye (EBT), and Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs. The compound was built using the ChemDraw of Mopac program, and the equilibrium geometries were found using the Gaussian 09 package. The geometry of the studied molecule in the vacuum medium was calculated using density functional theory (DFT) with the (B3LYP) and 6-311G (d, 2p) basis sets [48,49]. Figure 11 depicts the equilibrium EBT geometry after applying the most precise approaches (DFT (B3LYP/6-311G (d,2p))).



**Figure 11: The equilibrium EBT geometry**

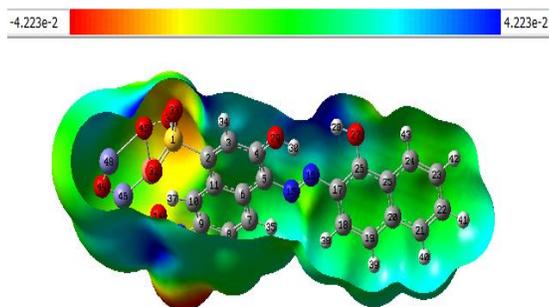
The energies of the border molecular orbitals, the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO), and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) are significant electronic characteristics to evaluate the reactivity and stability of the EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. Table (3) lists the HOMO and LUMO energies, as well as their gaps (in eV), for Eriochrome black T dye, EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs complex were determined at the B3LYP 6- 311G(d,2p). The results show that the adsorption of EBT molecules caused a considerable shift in HOMO and LUMO energies. This impact might be attributable to the chemisorption type of adsorption [50]. Besides, we noticed an increase in the energy gap from (1.3483) ( $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs) to (0.3964 eV) (EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> complex), suggesting that the formed EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs complex is less stable than isolated  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs.

**Table 3: The values of HOMO, LUMO, and the energy gap of EBT,  $\alpha$ -Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs, and EBT- Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs complex**

System	EHOMO	ELUMO	$\Delta E$
Eriochrome black T	-5.8663	-4.1028	1.7634
$\alpha$ -Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> NPs	-5.6399	-4.2916	1.3483
EBT -Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> NPs	-3.2954	-2.8990	0.3964

### 3.3.1. Electronic density distribution

The equitable distribution of electrical charges on the optimal geometry of both adsorbent and adsorbate molecules was computed to determine the nucleophilic & electrophilic attack locations. Figure 12 shows the MEP (molecular electrostatic potential) of (EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs). The results show that the oxygenated groups of Eriochrome black have a large a negative number charge density and are displaced on these functional areas (red color).



**Figure 12: Distribution of the electron density on the optimized molecular geometries of the EBT - Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs and Eriochrome black.**

### 3.3.2. Adsorption study

We may forecast the adsorption type by comparing  $\Delta E$  interaction values for a hypothesized connection between the surface and the EBT dye. Optimization operations were done using the DFT approach for the surface (EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs). In the first state, we regard the covalent link in AEBT- Nano to be a chemical bonding, whereas the remaining states are considered interactions (physical), as illustrated in Fig. 2. According to TED and ESP calculations, the oxygen atom has a high electron density and hence serves as the active location for these interactions. The large  $\Delta E$  found in this work confirms that the adsorption occurs chemically on the nanostructure surfaces.

$$\Delta E_{\text{phy or chem}} = E(\text{EBT-Nano}) - (E(\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \text{ NPs}) + E(\text{EBT}))$$

$E(\text{EBT-Nano})$  is the energy of the entire system containing the EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs

$E(\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \text{ NPs})$   $E(\text{EBT})$  represents the total energy of the surface only and the Dye only, respectively.

In chemisorption, the  $\Delta E$  equal to 75.995H, whereas, in physisorption is equal to 28.077H (Table 4)

Table 4: Adsorption parameters calculated by the DFT method

Adsorption type	$E(\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \text{ NPs})^a$	$E(\text{EBT-Fe}_2\text{O}_3 \text{ NPs})^a$	$E(\text{EBT})^a$	$\Delta E^a$
Physisorption	-2752.9	-4557.6	-1858.5	53.8129
Chemisorption	-2752.9	-4709.7	-1858.5	98.279

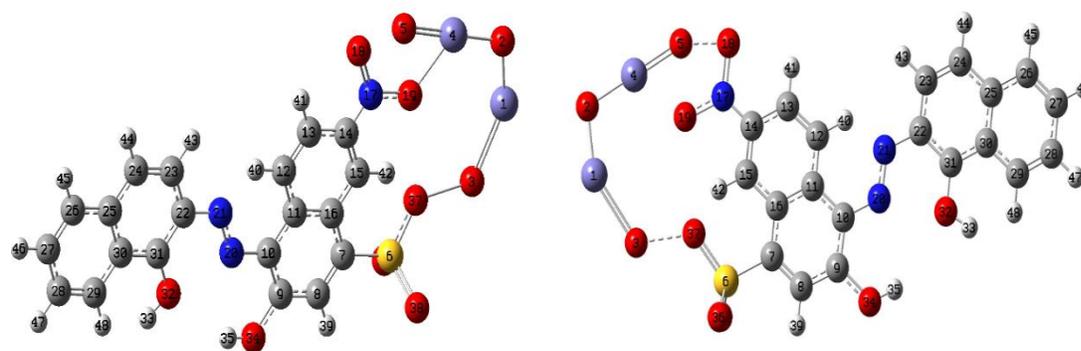


Figure 13: The interaction between the Dye and the surface of adsorbent

## Conclusions

This work investigates the adsorption properties of  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs for Eriochrome black t from polluted water. The  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs was synthesized by the green method, and it was characterized using XRD, EDX, and SEM. Experimental dye adsorption parameters such as contact time, material dosage, and temperature had a positive effect on the adsorption of Eriochrome Black T, and the PH solution exhibited increased EBT removal in the basic medium. The results show that the Freundlich isotherms is well describing the adsorption isotherms. The overall exothermic spontaneous nature of the adsorption on Eriochrome Black T onto  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs is confirmed by a negative value of  $\Delta H$ , and  $\Delta G$ . the pseudo-first-order model best described the kinetic uptake characteristics. The DFT study reveals significant insights into the interaction between Eriochrome black T dye (EBT) and  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs. The adsorption of EBT on  $\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$  NPs leads to a notable decrease in the

energy gap, indicating reduced stability of the EBT-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs complex compared to isolated α-Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs. Furthermore, the large interaction energy in chemisorption confirms strong chemical bonding, highlighting the active role of oxygen atoms in the adsorption process.

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