

Enhanced fluoride adsorption on aluminum-impregnated kenaf biochar: adsorption characteristics and mechanism

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1 **Enhanced fluoride adsorption on aluminum-impregnated kenaf biochar:**
2 **adsorption characteristics and mechanism**

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19 **Conflicts of interest:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

20

21 **Authors' contributions**

22 **Moon-Yeong Choi:** Writing-original draft, Experiment, Data analysis; **Chang-Gu Lee:**

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37 All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

38 The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the

39 corresponding author on reasonable request.

40

41 **Abstract**

42 The fast-growing plant kenaf was pyrolyzed to biochar, and the biochar was impregnated with
43 aluminum to improve its fluoride adsorption capacity. The Al-impregnated kenaf biochar (Al-
44 KNF-BC) was pyrolyzed at different temperatures (300–700 °C). The specimen treated at
45 300 °C (Al-KNF-300) showed the highest fluoride adsorption capacity. The kinetics and
46 equilibrium adsorption of fluoride by Al-KNF-300 followed the pseudo-second-order and
47 Langmuir models, respectively. According to the Langmuir model, the maximum fluoride
48 adsorption capacity of Al-KNF-300 is 13.93 mg/g. The enthalpy and entropy of fluoride
49 adsorption by Al-KNF-300 were 37.80 kJ/mol and 124.1 J/mol·K, respectively. Fluoride
50 adsorption by Al-KNF-300 was favorable at pH values as low as pH 3, and the effect of anion
51 competition followed the order $\text{HCO}_3^- > \text{SO}_4^{2-} > \text{NO}_3^- > \text{Cl}^-$. In experiments with different
52 adsorbent dose, the maximum adsorption efficiency of 99.23% was obtained at an adsorbent
53 concentration of 16.67 g/L, at which the fluoride concentration decreased from 100 mg/L to
54 <1.5 mg/L (the drinking water standard). Al-KNF-300 is an effective and inexpensive
55 adsorbent for removing fluoride from contaminated water to meet drinking water standards.

56

57 **Keywords:** kenaf, biochar, fluoride removal, impregnation, Al-based adsorbent

58

59

60 **1 Introduction**

61 Fluoride occurs naturally and is released from rocks into water, air, and soil; it is naturally
62 present in groundwater, freshwater, chlorine sources, and rainwater in urban areas. Fluoride is
63 used in many dental products to strengthen tooth enamel and prevent cavities. Studies have
64 shown that fluoride can be added to drinking water at low concentrations to reduce the
65 incidence of tooth decay in local populations, and many developed countries fluoridate their
66 tap water (Podgorny and McLaren 2015; Jones et al. 2005). However, prolonged exposure to
67 drinking water with a high fluoride concentration can have side effects such as dental and
68 skeletal fluorosis, which can damage bones and joints. The population affected by fluorosis has
69 increased over the past 50 years, and 260 million people worldwide are estimated to be affected
70 by fluorosis (Amini et al. 2008). The World Health Organization guideline for the fluoride
71 content at which drinking water becomes unhealthy is 1.5 mg/L (World Health Organization
72 2017). Additionally, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the
73 maximum contaminant level of fluoride in public water systems is 4 mg/L; the secondary
74 maximum contaminant level is 2 mg/L, which requires special notice to the EPA (US
75 Environmental Protection Agency 2020). Fluoride concentrations of 0.01–3 mg/L in freshwater
76 and 1–35 mg/L in groundwater have been observed in some natural water systems (Tripathy et
77 al. 2006). Because excess fluoride is harmful to humans, safe treatment of contaminated water
78 is needed to make the water drinkable.

79 Methods commonly used for the defluorination of water include adsorption (Chen et al.
80 2010; Çengelöglu et al. 2002; Turner et al. 2005), precipitation (Turner et al. 2005; Chang and
81 Li 2007), ion exchange (Samadi et al. 2014), electrodialysis (Amor et al. 2001), and membrane
82 filtration (Elazhar et al. 2009). Adsorption is the most commonly used method because it is
83 cost-effective, easy to apply, and able to remove fluoride even at low concentrations. The

84 performance of the adsorption system depends on the characteristics of the adsorbent, and in
85 recent decades, various adsorbents have been developed for the removal of fluoride from
86 drinking water. Many materials have been tested, such as activated aluminum oxide (Tang et
87 al. 2009a; Ahamad et al. 2018; Ghorai and Pant 2004), amorphous aluminum oxide (Li et al.
88 2001), Al-modified biochar (Meilani et al. 2021), an Fe- and Ca-based adsorbent (Biswas et al.
89 2007), clam shell (Lee et al. 2021b; Choi et al. 2021), egg shell (Lee et al. 2021a), clay
90 (Karthikeyan et al. 2005; Chen et al. 2011), bone charcoal (Leyva-Ramos et al. 2010; Medellin-
91 Castillo et al. 2007), metal oxides (Dhillon et al. 2017), and zeolites (Sun et al. 2011). As
92 fluoride forms strong bonds with Al and Ca, Al- and Ca-based adsorbents are generally used
93 for fluoride removal. Ca-based adsorbents have a low fluoride reduction limit (>2 mg/L) and
94 are not suitable for drinking water treatment (Wang and Reardon 2001; Fan et al. 2003). By
95 contrast, Al compounds have a strong affinity for fluoride; they are porous materials with high
96 fluoride adsorption capacity and can lower the fluoride concentration to 2 mg/L (Farrah et al.
97 1987; Tchomgui-Kamga et al. 2010). The surface of aluminum oxide is lipophilic and
98 positively charged, and pore structure is easily formed by process control (Zhou et al. 2021).
99 Activated alumina can also remove other toxic elements in groundwater such as arsenic and
100 selenium (Farooqi et al. 2007; Tang et al. 2009a). Al-based materials can be used as fluoride
101 adsorbents; however, aluminum oxide is expensive, and its optimal pH for fluoride adsorption
102 is in the acidic range, limiting its practical application in drinking water (Li et al. 2001).
103 Therefore, it is desirable to fabricate an Al-based adsorbent material that is cheaper and more
104 environmentally friendly, but equally effective in removing fluoride from drinking water.

105 Methods of manufacturing Al-based adsorbents for improving fluoride removal include
106 doping (Rojas-Mayorga et al. 2015) and loading (Fan et al. 2021) on carbon-based materials
107 such as biochar. Biochar is obtained by pyrolyzing biomass in an anoxic environment; it is rich

108 in carbon, inexpensive, stable, and environmentally friendly (Ahmed et al. 2016). Previous
109 studies have shown that the chemical structure, surface roughness, and specific surface area of
110 biochar are affected by the biomass pyrolysis conditions (Mohan et al. 2014; Zhou et al. 2021).
111 Biochar obtained under the optimal pyrolysis conditions can be a suitable adsorbent material.
112 However, its fluoride adsorption is limited, and it requires modification (Meilani et al. 2021).
113 Because biochar has a complex pore structure and abundant functional groups, it can be loaded
114 with Al, which has a strong affinity for fluoride (Mian and Liu 2018).

115 In this study, kenaf biochar is used as an adsorbent. Kenaf (*Hibiscus cannabinus*) is an
116 annual grass with a short growth cycle that belongs to the family *Malvaceae*. It can grow to
117 more than 3 m in 3 months under varying weather conditions and moderate ambient conditions
118 (with small amounts of pesticides and herbicides) (Azwa and Yousif 2013; Sellers 1999;
119 Nishino et al. 2003). Kenaf fibers are composed of cellulosic hemicellulose and lignin;
120 cellulosic material, which is known to be an effective adsorbent, makes up approximately 47%
121 of the plants (Malik et al. 2017). In addition, studies have shown that both the outer shell and
122 inner core of kenaf stems contain fibrous components, which enhance adsorption (Shamsuddin
123 et al. 2016). Thus, the high productivity and adsorption potential of kenaf make it a suitable
124 biomass material for use as an adsorbent. Kenaf has been used to remove various contaminants
125 such as dyes (Mahmoud et al. 2012), Cu (Hasfalina et al. 2012), Cr (Borna et al. 2016), rare
126 earth elements (Rahman et al. 2017), Ni (Hasfalina et al. 2010), triclosan (Cho et al. 2021), and
127 fluoride (Yusof et al. 2015) from aqueous solutions. In a previous study, fluoride adsorption
128 using kenaf modified with *N*-trimethylammonium yielded a maximum adsorption capacity of
129 13.98 mg/g (Yusof et al. 2015). However, the chemical used for modification is expensive, and
130 the fluoride reduction limit is 2 mg/L or more, making it unsuitable for drinking water treatment.

131 Therefore, in this study, an Al-biochar complex was prepared by Al impregnation and
132 thermal decomposition of kenaf to improve the fluorine adsorption capacity. Al-impregnated
133 kenaf biochar (Al-KNF-BC) was prepared at various pyrolysis temperatures, and the fluoride
134 adsorption capacity of the samples was compared. In addition, the fluoride adsorption
135 mechanism of Al-KNF-BC was physically and chemically analyzed using field emission
136 scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM), Brunauer–Emmett–Teller (BET) analysis,
137 thermogravimetric analysis/differential thermal analysis (TGA/DTA), X-ray diffraction (XRD)
138 analysis, and Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy. The adsorption mechanism of
139 the Al-KNF-BC sample with the highest fluoride adsorption capacity was analyzed using
140 kinetics, equilibrium, and thermodynamic adsorption experiments and model analysis. In
141 addition, the effects of pH, the presence of competing anions, and adsorbent dose on fluoride
142 adsorption were investigated.

143

144 **2. Materials and Methods**

145 **2.1 Production of Al-impregnated kenaf biochar**

146 The kenaf used as the base material for Al impregnation was procured from the Agricultural
147 Research Institute (Jeonbuk, Korea). The chemical composition and physical properties of
148 kenaf are available in the literature (Kim and Um 2020; Cho et al. 2021). Only the stem of the
149 kenaf was used, not the leaves and roots; the stem was ground and then sieved to 425 μm . It
150 was washed with deionized water to completely remove impurities and dried in an oven at
151 80 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 24 h.

152 Al impregnation was performed with reference to the optimal Al content determined by the
153 response surface methodology in a previous study (Meilania et al. 2021). To impregnate the
154 kenaf with a surface $\text{Al}(\text{OH})_3$ layer before thermal decomposition, 500 mL of a 0.741 M (5.89%)

155 aluminum chloride (AlCl_3 , Sigma-Aldrich, USA) solution was first placed in a stirred reactor.
156 Next, 50 g of dry kenaf was added and thoroughly soaked. The mixture was neutralized to pH
157 7 by the addition of a 10 M NaOH (Samchun, Korea) solution with stirring at 150 rpm. Under
158 these conditions, the kenaf surface in the mixture is modified by a strong chelation reaction
159 with Al, and the adsorbed Al^{3+} is present mainly in the form of $\text{Al}(\text{OH})_3$ at pH 7 (Mahfoudhi
160 and Boufi 2020). The mixture was stirred for 4 h to prepare a homogeneous slurry. The slurry
161 was dried in an oven at 110 °C to obtain Al-impregnated kenaf (Al-KNF).

162 To pyrolyze the Al-KNF, a sample was injected into a stainless steel tube (L/D: 55/5.5 cm),
163 which was heat-treated in a muffle furnace (CRFT 830S, Dongseo Science Co., Ltd., Korea) at
164 300, 400, 500, 600, or 700 °C for 1 h. To maintain anoxic conditions, which are required for
165 pyrolysis, an inert gas (N_2 gas, >99.9%) was injected at a flow rate of 0.5 L/min to purge the
166 inside of the tube, and the heating rate was 20 °C/min. The Al-KNF-BC samples pyrolyzed at
167 each temperature are denoted as follows: Al-KNF-300, Al-KNF-400, Al-KNF-500, Al-KNF-
168 600, and Al-KNF-700.

169 Fluoride adsorption by the Al-KNF-BCs prepared at various pyrolysis temperatures was
170 compared. A 1000 mg/L fluoride solution was prepared by dissolving 2.2101 g of sodium
171 fluoride (NaF , Sigma-Aldrich, USA) in 1 L of deionized water and then diluted five times to
172 200 mg/L. All materials were weighed using an analytical electronic balance with a
173 reproducibility of 0.1 mg. Al-KNF (0.1 g) was placed a 50 mL conical tube, and 30 mL of a
174 200 mg/L fluoride solution was injected with a pipette. The conical tube was placed in an
175 incubator and stirred at 25 °C and 100 rpm for 12 h for the reaction. The reacted mixture was
176 first filtered using a qualitative filter paper (No. 2, Advantec, Japan) with a pore size of 5 μm .
177 It was then filtered using a syringe filter (Advantec, Japan) with a pore size of 0.45 μm . The

178 fluoride in the filtered solution was adsorbed using ion chromatography (DX-120, Dionex,
179 USA), and the residual fluoride concentration was measured.

180

181 **2.2 Adsorption characterization**

182 Several characterization methods were used to determine the chemical composition,
183 morphology, and fluoride adsorption reaction mechanism of Al-KNF-NT (not treated) and
184 pyrolyzed Al-KNF-BC samples. All samples were washed with deionized water and dried
185 before FE-SEM and XRD measurements. The surface morphology of the samples was
186 observed by FE-SEM (S-4700, Hitachi, Japan). Energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDS)
187 was performed using an instrument attached to the scanning electron microscope to investigate
188 the elemental composition. The specific surface area of Al-KNF was calculated using the BET
189 equation and observations of the adsorption/desorption of N₂ gas. TGA was performed using a
190 thermogravimetric analyzer (Pyris 1, PerkinElmer, USA) at 30–700 °C with a heating rate of
191 10 °C/min in N₂ gas. The crystal structure of the samples was determined by XRD analysis
192 (SmartLab, Rigaku, Japan). Functional groups on the biochar surface were identified by FTIR
193 spectroscopy (Nicolet 6700, Thermo Fisher Scientific, UK).

194

195 **2.3 Data analysis**

196 The amount of fluoride adsorbed per unit mass of adsorbent was calculated using the mass
197 balance equation:

$$q_e = \frac{(C_i - C_e) \times V}{m} \quad (1)$$

198 where C_i (mg/L) is the initial fluoride concentration, C_e (mg/L) is the residual fluoride
199 concentration at equilibrium, V (L) is the solution volume, and m (g) is the adsorbent dose.

200 The fluoride adsorption efficiency (%) of the adsorbent was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Adsorption efficiency (\%)} = \frac{(C_i - C_e)}{C_i} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

201 The mathematical expressions (nonlinear fits) of the pseudo-first-order (PFO) and pseudo-
 202 second-order (PSO) kinetic models are shown in Eqs. (3) and (4), respectively (Lagergren 1898;
 203 Ho and Mckay 1998).

$$q_t = q_e(1 - e^{-k_1 t}) \quad (3)$$

$$q_t = \frac{k_2 q_e^2 t}{1 + k_2 q_e t} \quad (4)$$

204 where q_t (mg/g) and q_e (mg/g) are the amounts of fluoride adsorbed at time t (h) and equilibrium,
 205 respectively, and k_1 (h^{-1}) and k_2 (g/mg·h) are the PFO and PSO adsorption rate constants,
 206 respectively.

207 The nonlinear mathematical expressions of the Langmuir and Freundlich isotherm models
 208 are shown in Eqs. (5) and (6), respectively (Langmuir 1916; Freundlich 1907).

$$q_e = \frac{Q_{\max} K_L C_e}{1 + K_L C_e} \quad (5)$$

$$q_e = K_F C_e^{\frac{1}{n}} \quad (6)$$

209 where Q_{\max} (mg/g) and K_L (L/mg) are the maximum adsorption capacity of the adsorbent and
 210 the Langmuir constant related to the adsorption energy of the adsorbent, respectively. K_F (mg/g
 211 (mg/L) $^{-1/n}$) and n (-) are the Freundlich constant and adsorption strength, respectively.

212 The thermodynamic parameters were calculated as follows:

$$\Delta G^0 = -RT \ln(K_e) \quad (7)$$

$$\ln(K_e) = \frac{\Delta S^0}{R} - \frac{\Delta H^0}{RT} \quad (8)$$

$$K_e = \frac{aq_e}{C_e} \quad (9)$$

213 where ΔG^0 (kJ/mol), ΔS^0 (J/mol·K), and ΔH^0 (kJ/mol) are the changes in the standard Gibbs
214 free energy, enthalpy, and entropy, respectively; a (g/L) is the adsorbent dose; q_e (mg/g) is the
215 maximum adsorption amount; T (K) is the absolute temperature; and R (=8.314 J/mol·K) is the
216 universal gas constant.

217

218 **2.4 Adsorption experiments**

219 Fluoride adsorption experiments were conducted to examine the kinetics, equilibrium, and
220 thermodynamics and the effects of pH, ion competition, and adsorbent dose. In all experiments,
221 the adsorbent was Al-KNF-300, which had the highest adsorption capacity per unit mass in the
222 previous experiment. In addition, unless otherwise specified, in all experiments, 0.1 g of
223 adsorbent and 30 mL of 100 mg/L fluoride solution were reacted in a 50 mL conical tube, and
224 the conical tube was shaken for 12 h at 100 rpm in an incubator at 25 °C. In the kinetic
225 experiment, a 100 mg/L fluoride solution was injected, and the reaction time (0.25–72 h) was
226 varied at a constant temperature (25 °C). In the equilibrium isotherm experiment, the
227 concentration of the initial fluoride solution (5–150 mg/L) was varied at a constant temperature
228 (25 °C), and the reaction was conducted for 12 h. In the thermodynamic experiment, the
229 reaction temperature was varied (15, 25, and 35 °C), and the reaction was performed in a 100
230 mg/L fluoride solution for 12 h. The adsorption experiment using fluoride solutions of different
231 pH was performed after the pH of the 100 mg/L fluoride solution was adjusted to 3, 5, 7, 9, and
232 11 using 0.1 M NaOH and 0.1 M HCl solutions. Fluoride adsorption experiments with different
233 competing anions were performed using 1 mM and 10 mM NaHCO₃, Na₂SO₄, NaCl, and
234 NaNO₃ in a 100 mg/L fluoride solution. Reagents (HCl, NaOH, NaHCO₃, Na₂SO₄, NaCl, and
235 NaNO₃) of reagent grade were purchased from Samchum (Korea). In the adsorption experiment

236 on the effects of adsorbent dose, 3.33, 6.67, 10, 13.33, and 16.67 g/L of the adsorbent was
237 injected to react with the fixed volume (30 mL) of 100 mg/L fluoride solution.

238

239 **3. Results and Discussion**

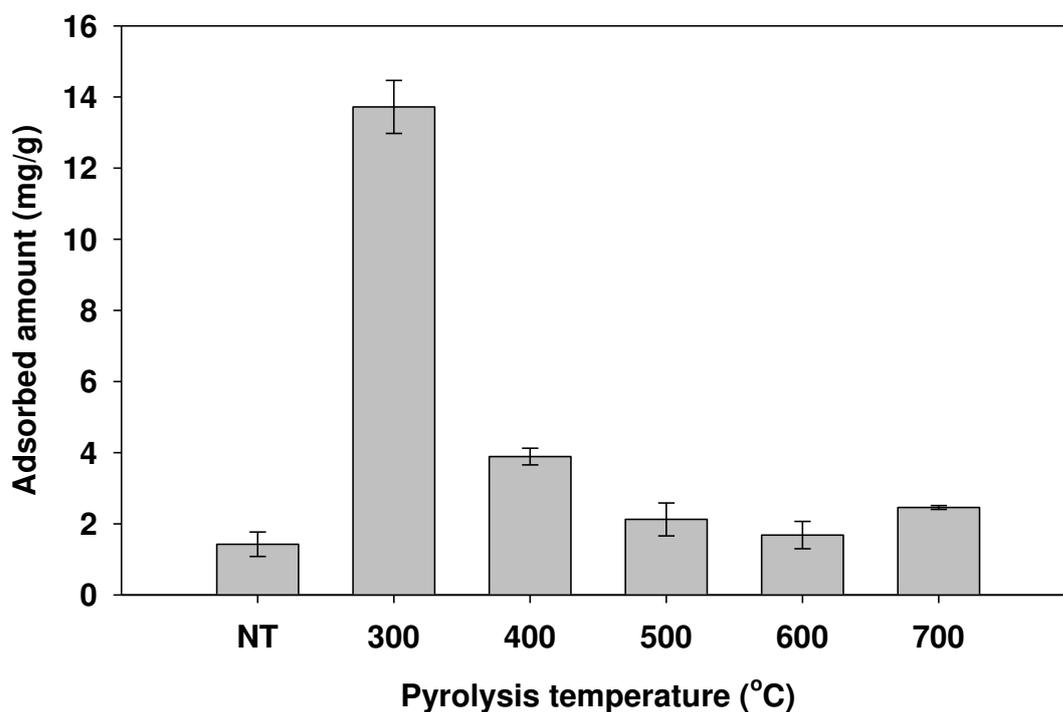
240 **3.1 Characteristics of Al-KNF**

241 Fig. 1 shows the amount of fluoride adsorbed by the untreated and biochar samples (Al-
242 KNF-NT and Al-KNF-BC, respectively). The amount of fluoride adsorbed per unit mass of Al-
243 KNF increased sharply to 13.72 mg/g for the sample pyrolyzed at 300 °C, which is
244 approximately 9.6 times that of Al-KNF-NT (1.43 mg/g). At pyrolysis temperatures above
245 400 °C, the amount of fluoride adsorbed decreased and did not differ significantly from that of
246 Al-KNF-NT. To determine why Al-KNF-300 showed the highest fluoride adsorption and
247 investigate the adsorption mechanism, physical and chemical analyses of Al-KNF were
248 performed.

249 The surface morphology and physical properties of Al-KNF were observed using FE-SEM
250 and BET analysis, as shown in Fig. S1 and Table 1. The surface of Al-KNF has a thin porous
251 structure unique to biochar and becomes rough with increasing pyrolysis temperature. The
252 reason is that pores and cracks are formed on the biochar surface as volatiles are generated and
253 escape during heat treatment, increasing the porosity of the structure (Abdel-Fattah et al. 2015).
254 The surfaces of Al-KNF-NT and Al-KNF-300 contain no crystal-like material, possibly
255 because of the presence of amorphous aluminum. However, material that is assumed to be
256 nano- and microsize Al particles (Al_2O_3) is distributed on the surface of the Al-KNF-BCs
257 pyrolyzed at 400–700 °C, which was confirmed by the XRD results (Mahfoudhi and Boufi
258 2020; Sun et al. 2008).

259 The BET specific surface area of Al-KNF-NT was not measured because the pores of Al-
260 KNF were blocked by the AlCl_3 and NaOH used for impregnation. The BET results show that
261 the clogged pores of Al-KNF-NT cannot adsorb fluoride; consequently, less fluoride is
262 adsorbed compared to the other adsorbents. The specific surface area of the Al-KNF-BCs
263 increased from 27.24 to 79.29 m^2/g as the pyrolysis temperature increased from 300 to 700 $^\circ\text{C}$,
264 and the pore volume and pore size increased with increasing specific surface area. The reason
265 is that the cracking of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin with oxidation depends on pyrolysis
266 temperature; thus, more micropores are created and the internal surface area increases with
267 increasing temperature (Zhuang 2021). Because the observed pore size of the Al-KNF-BCs is
268 4–22 nm, which is much larger than the radius of the fluoride atom (1.33 Å), F^- may be
269 dispersed into the inner layer of Al-KNF. However, these physical changes (surface roughness
270 and specific surface area), which might increase the adsorption potential of Al-KNF, cannot
271 fully explain the high fluoride adsorption of Al-KNF-300.

272



273

274 **Fig. 1.** Fluoride adsorption capacity of Al-KNF obtained at various pyrolysis temperatures
 275 (initial F concentration: 100 mg/L, adsorbent dose: 3.33 g/L, reaction temperature: 25 °C, time:
 276 12 h)

277

278 **Table 1.** Elemental composition and physical properties of Al-KNF

Temperature (°C)	Elemental composition ^a						Physical properties ^b		
	C %	O %	Na %	Al %	Cl %	O/C	Specific surface area (m ² /g)	Pore volume (cm ³ /g)	Pore size (nm)
Not treated	21.9	35.8	0.2	29.1	12.9	1.6	-	-	-
300	58.3	31.2	1.5	6.0	3.0	0.5	27.24	0.031	4.62
400	61.7	26.0	1.9	6.6	3.8	0.4	72.73	0.072	3.94
500	65.1	22.0	1.2	8.2	3.5	0.3	67.28	0.082	4.89
600	60.0	24.1	1.0	11.8	2.6	0.4	79.11	0.101	5.11

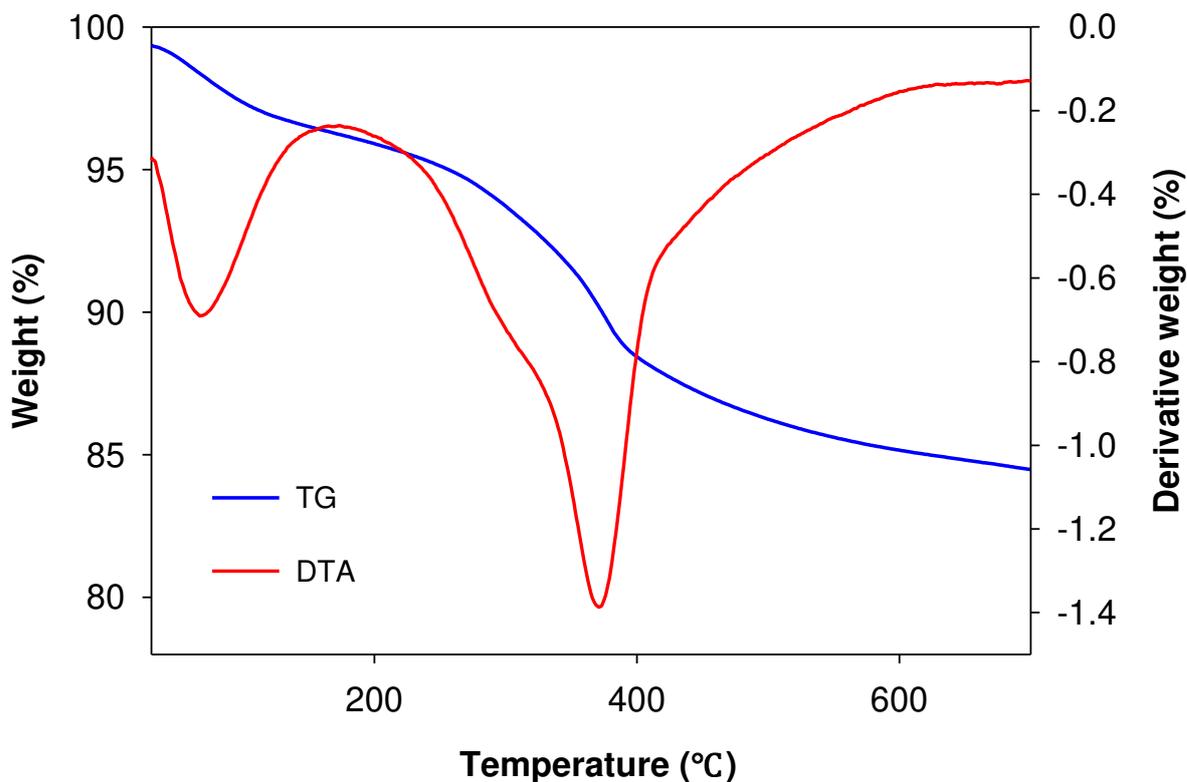
700	42.6	26.4	1.8	25.8	3.4	0.6	79.29	0.102	5.16
-----	------	------	-----	------	-----	-----	-------	-------	------

279 ^a Obtained by EDS

280 ^b Obtained by BET method

281

282 TGA/DTA revealed a decrease of 15.5% in the total weight of Al-KNF at temperatures of
 283 30–700 °C, as shown in Fig. 2. Approximately 4.5% of the weight loss is attributed to moisture
 284 loss, because the weight loss up to 200 °C is due to the evaporation of adsorbed water on the
 285 material surface. The sharp peak in the DTA curve from 200 to 420 °C is represented by two
 286 curves. The highest peak in the DTA curve appears at 370.2 °C. The overall weight loss (7.6%)
 287 up to 200–420 °C may be due to the decomposition of cellulose and hemicellulose in kenaf
 288 (Ferrara et al. 2014). Here, the sharp weight loss up to 240–300 °C may result from the removal
 289 of surface functional groups and hydroxyl groups generated by co-precipitation (Ding et al.
 290 2018; Ebadi et al. 2021). The moderate weight loss at 420–700 °C may be due to loss of C, that
 291 is, the continuous breakdown of lignin (Cho et al. 2021).



292

293 **Fig. 2.** Thermogravimetric (TG) weight and differential thermal analysis (DTA) of Al-KNF in
 294 the temperature range of 30-700 °C

295

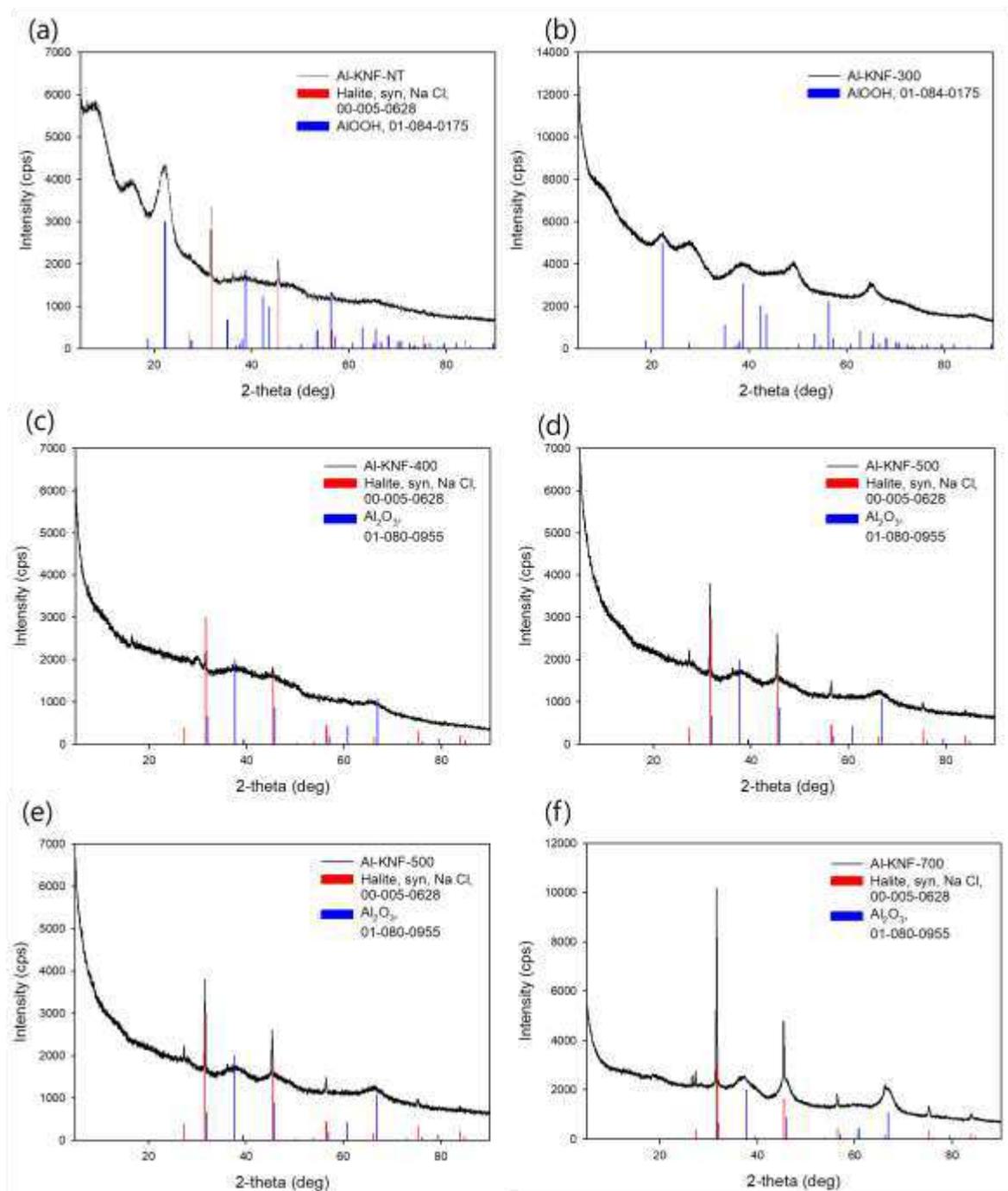
296 Table 1 shows the results of elemental analysis of Al-KNF using EDS. Al-KNF is composed
 297 mainly of C, O, Na, Al, and Cl. Here, Na and Cl may indicate the presence of NaCl produced
 298 during Al impregnation and not removed by washing. According to Table 1, Al-KNF-NT has a
 299 Cl content of 12.9%, which was not easily removed by washing. Chlorine remaining on the
 300 surface of Al-KNF-NT may compete with fluoride and interfere with fluoride adsorption on
 301 the adsorbent surface. This fact may explain why Al-KNF-NT adsorbed less fluoride than Al-
 302 KNF-300 despite the high Al content. In addition, as the pyrolysis temperature of Al-KNF-BC
 303 increases (>500 °C), the C content decreases and the Al content increases. The decrease in C
 304 content is attributed to the combustion of organic matter with increasing carbonization

305 temperature, and a slight decrease in the C content simultaneously causes a high mineral
306 content (Stefaniuk et al. 2015). The O/C ratio of Al-KNF decreased during heat treatment,
307 indicating increased hydrophobicity and fewer polar groups (Zhang et al. 2011).

308 The XRD patterns of Al-KNF indicate the crystallinity of the samples (Fig. 3). The
309 reflection peaks are identified as NaCl, AlOOH, and Al₂O₃ (JCPDS card numbers 05-0628, 84-
310 0175, and 80-0955, respectively). These minerals are present because AlCl₃ was used to
311 impregnate the kenaf surface with Al, and this result is consistent with the EDS data. The line
312 broadening of the XRD patterns of the prepared sample indicates small particle size or
313 amorphous boehmite structure (Sun et al. 2008). As the pyrolysis temperature increases, the Al
314 peak becomes sharper because of the crystallization of Al. In addition, in the Al-KNF-BCs
315 treated at ≥ 400 °C, Al is present in the form of aluminum oxide rather than aluminum hydroxide
316 because of dehydration, which is consistent with the results of other studies (Sun et al. 2008;
317 Zhang et al. 2019). Amorphous Al is more effective at adsorbing fluoride because the
318 dissolution of Al is more pronounced in the amorphous phase than in the crystalline phase
319 (Harrington et al. 2003). In addition, the amorphous form of aluminum hydroxide exhibits
320 better defluorination performance than aluminum oxide, probably owing to the presence of
321 hydroxyl groups, which supply abundant electrons (Chen et al. 2022). Consequently, Al-KNF-
322 300 (which contains aluminum hydroxide) adsorbs more fluoride than the specimens pyrolyzed
323 at ≥ 400 °C (which contain aluminum oxide) in this experiment.

324

325



327

328 **Fig. 3.** XRD patterns of Al-KNF: (a) Al-KNF-NT, (b) Al-KNF-300, (c) Al-KNF-400, (d) Al-
 329 KNF-500, (e) Al-KNF-600, and (f) Al-KNF-700

330

331 Fig. S2 shows the FTIR spectra of Al-KNF-NT and the Al-KNF-BCs pyrolyzed at each
332 temperature. The broad band centered at 3300–3400 cm^{-1} can be attributed to the stretching
333 vibration of the OH group, and the libration band derived from the OH^- group is clearly visible
334 at 660 cm^{-1} (Rapacz-Kmita et al. 2005). The peak near 2140–2100 cm^{-1} indicates weak triple-
335 bond stretching of C and C. The 1602 cm^{-1} peak is due to aromatic ring stretching oscillations
336 (C=C and C=O), indicating the formation of carbonyl-containing groups and initial
337 aromatization of the precursor (Guo and Rockstaw 2006; Liu et al. 2015). This peak was most
338 intense at a thermal decomposition temperature of 300 °C and tended to decrease as the thermal
339 decomposition temperature increased. This result indicates that the carboxyl groups are
340 decomposed at high temperature, and the aromatization of the activation mixture increases
341 (Guo and Rockstaw 2006). The peaks of Al-KNF-400 and Al-KNF-500 at 1165–1252 cm^{-1} are
342 attributed to C–O stretching oscillations and indicate that the samples contain organic
343 substances such as carboxylic acids and alcohol anhydrides (Lin et al. 2009). At higher
344 pyrolysis temperatures (600 and 700 °C), the broad OH band at 3300–3400 cm^{-1} and C–O
345 stretching oscillations at 1165–1252 cm^{-1} decreased and ultimately disappeared. The
346 adsorption band in the range of 500–800 cm^{-1} from Al-KNF-NT to Al-KNF-400 is
347 characteristic of the Al–O–H band (Jagtap et al. 2011). However, the Al-KNF-BCs heated
348 above 500 °C showed only the Al–O–Al adsorption band, indicating the complete
349 transformation of AlOOH to Al_2O_3 because of dehydration (Zhang et al. 2019).

350 Al-KNF-300 adsorbed more fluoride than Al-KNF-NT because pyrolysis created pores
351 and Cl^- was washed out after pyrolysis. In comparison with the other Al-KNF-BCs, Al-KNF-
352 300 had lower surface roughness and a smaller specific surface area; no significant difference
353 in Cl content was found. Therefore, the adsorption mechanism of Al-KNF-300 cannot be
354 interpreted solely in terms of these physical changes and Cl content. At pyrolysis temperatures

355 above 400 °C, the Al peak became sharper because of Al crystallization, and the Al on the
356 surface of the Al-KNF-BCs was changed from AlOOH to Al₂O₃. FTIR analysis confirms that
357 the Al–O–H band of the Al-KNF-BCs disappeared when the pyrolysis temperature exceeded
358 500 °C, indicating the removal of the hydroxyl group at high pyrolysis temperatures.
359 Aluminum hydroxide has more hydroxyl groups than aluminum oxide and thus is advantageous
360 for adsorption, and amorphous Al has better solubility than crystalline Al. Consequently, the
361 adsorption performance of Al-KNF-300, which is more amorphous and has Al in the form of
362 aluminum hydroxide on the surface, is superior to that of the other Al-KNF-BCs.

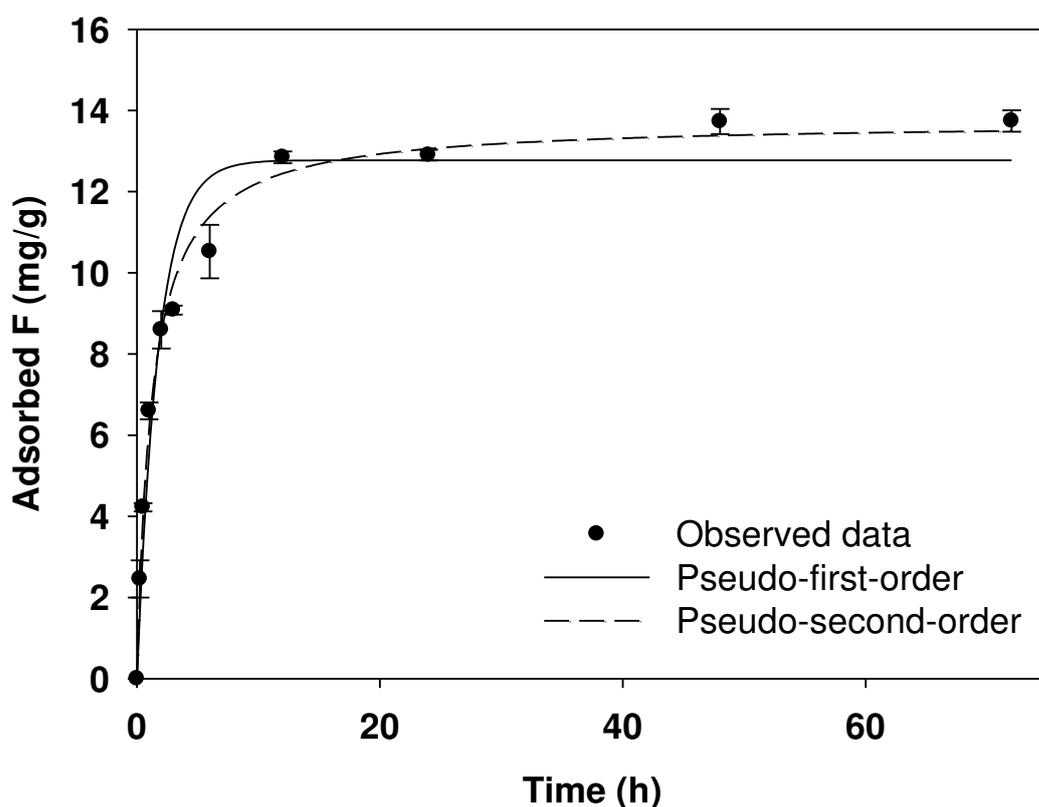
363

364 **3.2 Kinetic adsorption by Al-KNF-300**

365 The kinetic adsorption of fluoride by Al-KNF-300 was performed at a constant reaction
366 temperature (25 °C) for various reaction times (0.25–72 h). The standard deviation of the
367 experimental results was ±2%. Fluoride adsorption increases rapidly from 2.46 to 10.52 mg/g
368 at the beginning of the process (0.25–6 h). Subsequently, the adsorption rate decreases until it
369 approaches equilibrium at 12 h (12.85 mg/g). The adsorption then increases slightly (by <1
370 mg/g) to 13.74 mg/g at 72 h. Therefore, a fluoride adsorption equilibrium time of 12 h was
371 used in further adsorption experiments. Here, fluoride adsorption requires a concentration
372 gradient between the solution and adsorbent. Initially, many sorption sites are available, and
373 thus the adsorption rate is high. Later in the process, the adsorption site availability and
374 concentration gradient decrease, and the adsorption rate also decreases (Ramos-Vargas et al.
375 2018).

376 Nonlinear regression analysis using the PFO and PSO models was applied to the results of
377 the kinetics experiments using the parameter values listed in Table S1. Because the PSO model
378 has a higher correlation coefficient ($R^2 = 0.992$), it can be said to explain the experimental data

379 better. In addition, the equilibrium adsorption value (q_e ; mg/g) obtained using the PSO model
380 exactly matches the equilibrium value of the experimental data (13.73 mg/g). Therefore, it can
381 be concluded that the PSO model is preferable to the PFO model for explaining fluoride
382 adsorption by Al-KNF-300. This result suggests that the adsorption rate is controlled by either
383 electron exchange between the adsorbent and solution or chemical adsorption related to the
384 valence force due to shared anions (Wang et al. 2018; Mayakaduwa et al. 2016; Feng et al.
385 2011).
386



387
388 **Fig. 4.** Results of kinetics experiment on Al-KNF-300 and nonlinear regression analysis of
389 PFO and PSO models (initial F concentration: 100 mg/L, adsorbent dose: 3.33 g/L, reaction
390 temperature: 25 °C, time: 0.25, 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 6, 12, 24, 48, and 72 h)

391

392 3.3 Equilibrium isotherm of Al-KNF-300

393 An equilibrium adsorption experiment using Al-KNF-300 was performed at a constant
394 temperature (25 °C) with various initial concentrations (5–150 mg/L). Fig. S3 shows the
395 relationship between the adsorption amount and residual concentration after adsorption. When
396 the initial fluoride concentration was low (5–30 mg/L), more than 95% of the fluoride was
397 removed, indicating that the fluoride concentration of most fluoride-contaminated groundwater
398 (1–35 mg/L) can be reduced to below the drinking water limit (<1.5 mg/L) (Tripathy et al. 2006;
399 World Health Organization 2017). However, as the fluoride concentration increased, the
400 residual concentration increased, and the adsorption amount reached equilibrium. This
401 equilibrium occurs because F⁻ occupies all of the surface active sites (Chen et al. 2016;
402 Tchomgui-Kamga et al. 2010). In the experiment, equilibrium was first reached at an initial
403 fluoride concentration of 100 mg/L, and 14.22 mg/g of fluoride was adsorbed at the highest
404 fluoride concentration of 150 mg/L. Because Al-KNF-300 can remove fluoride to some extent
405 even at high fluoride concentrations, all batch tests except for the equilibrium test were
406 performed at an initial fluoride concentration of 100 mg/L.

407 Equilibrium isotherm analysis of adsorption equilibrium data can reveal the adsorption
408 capacity, which is very important in the design of adsorption systems (Iriel et al. 2018). The
409 results of this equilibrium experiment were modeled using equilibrium isotherm models (the
410 Langmuir and Freundlich models) and the parameter values listed in Table S2. The correlation
411 coefficient (R^2) values show that the Langmuir model fits the data for fluoride adsorption by
412 Al-KNF-300 much better than the Freundlich model. Therefore, it can be inferred that the
413 adsorbate molecules do not interact, and adsorption occurs in a monolayer on a homogeneous
414 surface (Salifu et al. 2013). The Q_{\max} value (13.93 mg/g) given by the Langmuir model of
415 fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 is similar to the equilibrium value in the experimental data

416 (14.22 mg/g). The fluoride adsorption capacity obtained in this study was compared with that
 417 of various natural and synthetic adsorbents (Table 2). Because direct comparison with other
 418 adsorbents is difficult, the initial fluoride concentration, particle size, pH, and temperature are
 419 presented along with the fluoride adsorption amount. The results show that Al-KNF-300 has a
 420 relatively high fluoride adsorption capacity (in the moderate to high range) compared to the
 421 other adsorbents. In addition, the particle size of the adsorbent used for fluoride removal in the
 422 literature varies from tens to thousands of micrometers, and Al-KNF-300 has a large particle
 423 size (450 μm) despite its effective fluoride adsorption ability. Adsorbents with larger particles
 424 are more accessible to filter out of aqueous solution than nano-/microsize adsorbents because
 425 they do not require further treatment for separating them from the treated water.

426

427 **Table 2.** Fluoride adsorption capacity of Al-KNF-300 and various other adsorbents

Adsorbent	Maximum adsorption capacity (mg/g)	Initial fluoride concentration (mg/L)	Particle size (μm)	pH	Temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)	Reference
Laterite	0.5	1–50	2000	8	-	Iriel et al. (2018)
Montmorillonite clay	1.485	-	75	-	30	Karthikeyan et al. (2005)
Kanuma mud	1.558	5–50	150	6.9	30	Chen et al. (2011)
Stilbite zeolite modified with Fe(III)	2.31	5–40	-	6.7	-	Sun et al. (2011)
Activated aluminum oxide	2.41	2.5–14	2000– 5000	7	-	Ghorai and Pant (2004)

Fe–Al-impregnated granular ceramic	3.6	5–40	30–150	<6	27	Das et al. (2005)
Magnetic corn stover biochar	4.11	1–100	595–297	8	25	Mohan et al. (2014)
Waste carbon slurry	4.31	10	-	7.58	25	Gupta et al. (2007)
Corn stover biochar	6.42	1–100	595–297	8	25	Mohan et al. (2014)
Iron–tin mixed oxide	10.47	10–50	140–290	6.4 ± 0.2	25	Biswas et al. (2009)
Bone char	11.9	1–20	-	3	25	Medellin-Castillo et al. (2007)
Al-modified kenaf biochar	13.73	5–150	425	7	25	This study
N-trimethylammonium-modified kenaf	13.98	5–80	1000–2000	5.2	25	Yusof et al. (2015)
Mesoporous aluminum oxide	14.26	20–250	-	6	30	Lee et al. (2010)
Protonated chitosan particles	15.87	-	-	7	30	Kusrini et al. (2015)
Quicklime	16.67	10–50	150	6.61	25 ± 2	Islam and Patel (2007)
Rare-earth-modified aluminum oxide	26.45	2–200	-	6	25	He et al. (2019)

Amorphous							Zhang et al.
aluminum hydroxide	45.23	40–120	-	4	25.15		(2016)
hollow spheres							

428

429 **3.4 Thermodynamic study of Al-KNF-300**

430 A batch test was performed at three temperatures (15, 25, and 35 °C) to evaluate the
431 thermodynamic adsorption mechanism in terms of the effect of reaction temperature on fluoride
432 adsorption by Al-KNF-300. Using these data, the changes in the Gibbs free energy (ΔG^0),
433 enthalpy (ΔH^0), and entropy (ΔS^0) during adsorption can be calculated using the van 't Hoff
434 equation, as shown in Eq. (7). ΔH^0 and ΔS^0 were obtained as the slope and intercept,
435 respectively, in the plots of $\ln(K_e)$ versus $1/T$ in Fig. S4. The calculated thermodynamic
436 parameters are shown in Table S3. ΔG^0 decreased with increasing temperature and was negative
437 at 35 °C. These results indicate that fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 becomes more
438 spontaneous and energetically favorable with increasing system temperature (Ha et al. 2017).
439 In addition, the increase in activation energy with increasing reaction temperature suggests that
440 adsorption is an endothermic process, which is confirmed by the positive enthalpy change ΔH^0
441 (Nascimento et al. 2021). The type of interaction between the adsorbent and adsorbed substance
442 can be classified according to the magnitude of ΔH^0 . In general, the interaction is controlled by
443 physical adsorption when the enthalpy change is 2–20 kJ/mol and by chemical adsorption when
444 the enthalpy change is 80–200 kJ/mol (Chaari et al. 2019; Abdilla et al. 2018; Khan et al. 2015).
445 For this experiment, ΔH^0 is 37.80 kJ/mol, which is between the physical and chemical
446 adsorption ranges, suggesting that both physical and chemical adsorption may occur in the
447 adsorption system (Shahmoradi et al. 2020; Mirsoleimani-azizi et al. 2018). The entropy
448 change (ΔS^0) is 124.41 J/kmol. The positive result indicates an increase in disorder at the

449 solid/liquid interface, which suggests that adsorption is irreversible and stable (Kasperiski et
450 al. 2018; Thue et al. 2016; Meilani et al. 2021).

451

452 **3.5 Effect of solution chemistry on fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300**

453 The solution pH significantly affects the degree of adsorption of fluoride because it controls
454 the interaction at the adsorbent/water interface. Low pH is desirable as the adsorption of anions
455 such as fluoride is associated with the release of OH⁻ from the adsorbent surface (Cengeloglu
456 et al. 2006). Al-KNF-300, a metal oxide adsorbent, is hydrated in a humid environment to
457 generate a surface charge, and the interaction between F⁻ and metal oxides at low pH was
458 modeled assuming the following ligand exchange reaction (Tripathy et al. 2006).

459



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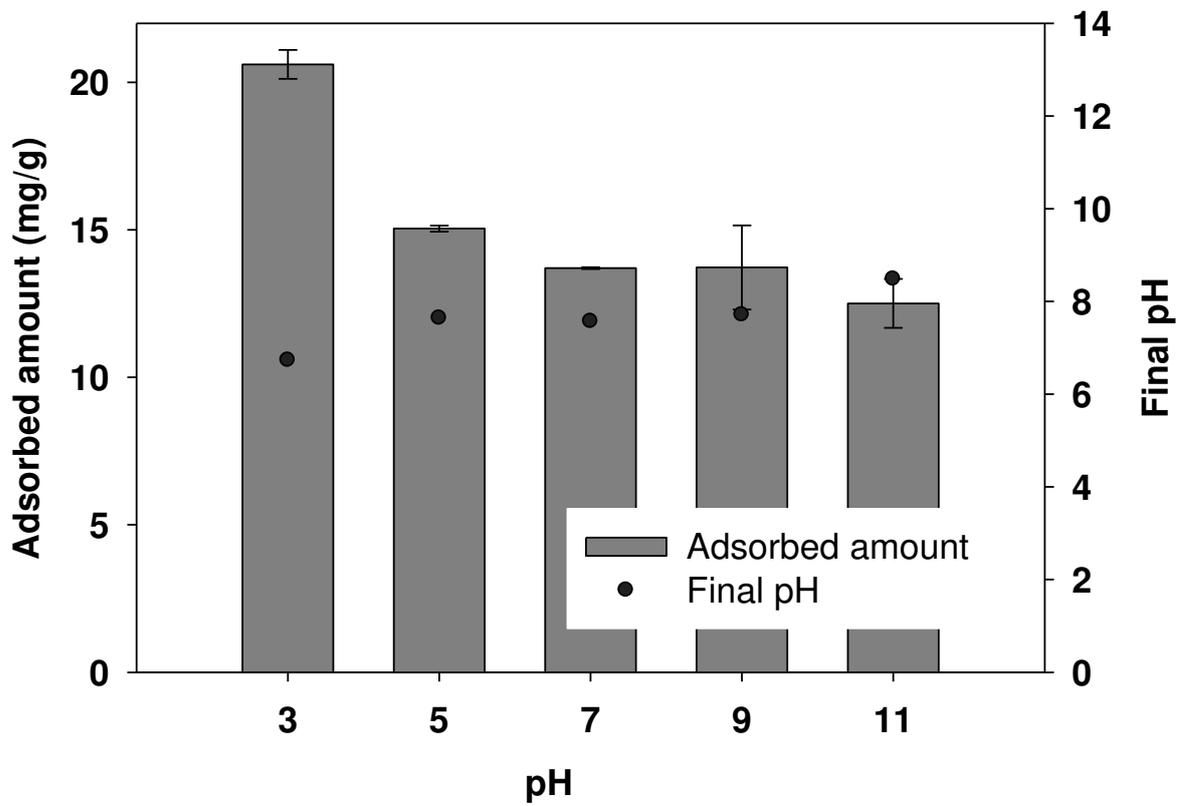
461 M represents a metal ion (here, Al).

462 Fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 was studied in a pH range of 3–11, as shown in Fig. 5.
463 Fluoride adsorption decreased with increasing pH, possibly because of competition between
464 F⁻ and OH⁻ on the adsorbent surface (Babaeiveli and Khodadoust 2013). In addition, at an
465 acidic pH, some F⁻ can combine with H⁺ to form hydrogen fluoride (He et al. 2019). Therefore,
466 a solution pH as low as 3 is effective for fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300.

467 Various anions are typically present in polluted water and can affect fluoride adsorption by
468 Al-KNF-300 because they compete with F⁻ at the active sites on the adsorbent surface.
469 Therefore, adsorption experiments were performed in the presence of HCO₃⁻, SO₄²⁻, Cl⁻, and
470 NO₃⁻, which can compete with fluoride. Each anion was added to the fluoride solution at a

471 concentration of 1 mM or 10 mM to react with the adsorbent; the results are shown in Fig. 6.
472 The magnitude of the negative effects on fluoride adsorption is ordered as follows: $\text{HCO}_3^- >$
473 $\text{SO}_4^{2-} > \text{NO}_3^- > \text{Cl}^-$. This order may be related to the ratio of charges to radii of the anions
474 (Dhillon et al. 2017). Cl^- and NO_3^- form a surface complex consisting of an outer sphere,
475 whereas sulfate forms a surface complex consisting of outer and inner spheres (Tang et al.
476 2009b). Therefore, Cl^- and NO_3^- have less effect on fluoride adsorption than SO_4^{2-} . HCO_3^- has
477 the most significant effect on fluoride removal. The reason is that HCO_3^- is hydrolyzed in
478 aqueous solution, increasing the solution pH, and the alkalization of this solution hinders the
479 adsorption of fluoride (Onyango et al. 2004).

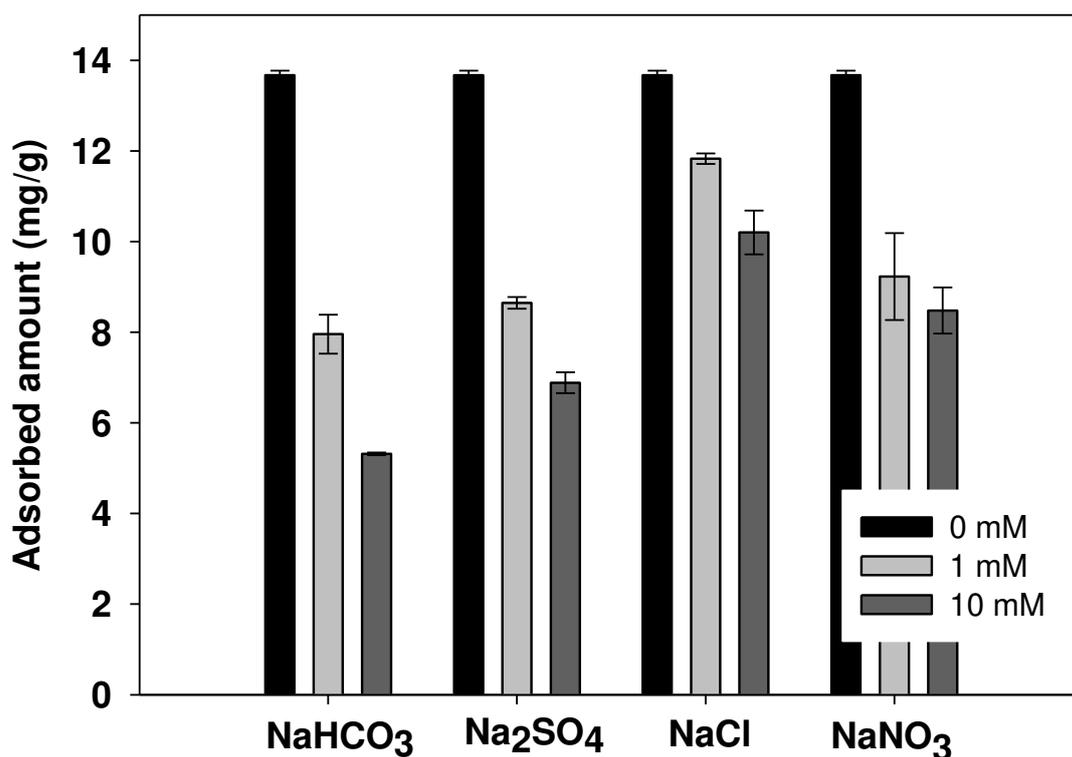
480



481

482 **Fig. 5.** Effect of solution pH on fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 (initial F concentration:
 483 100 mg/L, adsorbent dose: 3.33 g/L, reaction temperature: 25 °C, time: 12 h)

484



485

486 **Fig. 6.** Effect of the presence of anions on fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 (initial F
 487 concentration: 100 mg/L, adsorbent dose: 3.33 g/L, reaction temperature: 25 °C, time: 12 h)

488

489 3.6 Effect of adsorbent dose on adsorption ratio and adsorption capacity

490 The effect of adsorbent dose on fluoride removal was examined using a fluoride
 491 concentration of 100 mg/L and various adsorbent doses (3.33–16.67 g/L). The results are
 492 shown in Fig. S5. As the adsorbent dose was increased from 3.33 to 16.67 g/L, the fluoride
 493 removal efficiency increased from 40.65% to 99.23%. The reason is that the number of active
 494 surface sites for fluoride adsorption increased with increasing adsorbent dose (Salifu et al.
 495 2013). The fluoride adsorption per unit mass of adsorbent decreased as the adsorbent dose
 496 increased. The reason is that the adsorption potential of fluoride per unit mass decreases with
 497 increasing adsorbent dose (Wang et al. 2009). At lower adsorbent doses, all sites are fully
 498 exposed to fluoride adsorption, and the surface saturates more quickly; consequently, q_e

499 increases. By contrast, at higher adsorbent doses, adsorption occurs selectively at lower-energy
 500 sites, and q_e decreases (Biswas et al. 2009).

501 The maximum fluoride adsorption efficiency (%) of Al-KNF-300 obtained in this study
 502 was compared with those of various other adsorbents (Table 3). Because direct comparison
 503 with other adsorbents is difficult, the initial fluoride concentration and adsorbent capacity are
 504 also shown. Al-KNF-300 had higher fluoride removal efficiency than other adsorbents reported
 505 in the literature. In addition, the initial fluoride concentration, which can affect the adsorption
 506 efficiency, was also higher than those in the literature, indicating that Al-KNF-300 can adsorb
 507 sufficient fluoride even at a relatively high fluoride concentration. When a 100 mg/L fluoride
 508 solution was treated with an adsorbent dose of 16.67 g/L, the residual fluoride concentration
 509 was 0.84 mg/L, which is within the acceptable range for drinking water (<1.5 mg/L) (World
 510 Health Organization 2017).

511

512 **Table 3.** Maximum fluoride adsorption efficiency (%) of Al-KNF-300 and various other
 513 adsorbents

Adsorbent	Maximum adsorption efficiency (%)	Initial fluoride concentration (mg/L)	Dose (g/L)	Reference
Laterite	60	3	4	Iriel et al. (2018)
Protonated chitosan particles	72	20	2	Kusrini et al. (2015)
<i>N</i> -trimethylammonium-modified kenaf	77.50	20	1.2	Yusof et al. (2015)
Activated aluminum oxide	80	100	20	Dhawane et al. (2018)
Quicklime	80.60	50	5	Islam and Patel (2007)

Waste carbon slurry	88.20	100	3	Gupta et al. (2007)
Corn stover biochar	91.41	10	10	Mohan et al. (2014)
Al-modified food waste biochar	91.42	300	6.7	Meilani et al. (2021)
Amorphous aluminum hydroxide hollow spheres	94.13	20	1	Zhang et al. (2016)
Magnetic corn stover biochar	97.71	10	10	Mohan et al. (2014)
Al-modified kenaf biochar	99.23	100	16.67	This study

514

515 **4. Conclusion**

516 The stems of kenaf, a plant with high productivity and adsorption potential, were modified
517 to produce Al-impregnated kenaf biochar (Al-KNF-BC) for use as a fluoride adsorbent. Al-
518 KNF-BCs were produced at various pyrolysis temperatures; Al-KNF-300, which was produced
519 at 300 °C, was the most effective adsorbent for fluoride removal. Al-KNF-300 has more pores
520 and a lower Cl content than the material without heat treatment. Amorphous Al was present on
521 Al-KNF-300, whereas Al₂O₃ was present on the other Al-KNF-BCs; the presence of
522 amorphous Al contributed to the high fluoride adsorption capacity of Al-KNF-300. Fluoride
523 adsorption by Al-KNF-300 reached equilibrium at 12 h, and chemisorption is the limiting step
524 in fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300. The Langmuir model was found to be most suitable for
525 modeling fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300, indicating that adsorption occurred in a
526 monolayer on a homogeneous surface. The adsorbed amount per unit mass of Al-KNF-300 at
527 equilibrium was 14.22 mg/g, which is comparable to those of previously reported adsorbents.
528 At an adsorbent dose of 3.33 g/L, Al-KNF-300 reduced the fluoride concentration of 5–30
529 mg/L fluoride solutions to the acceptable drinking water standard (<1.5 mg/L).
530 Thermodynamic adsorption experiments showed that adsorption is an endothermic reaction
531 that increases the randomness. Low pH is favorable for fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300

532 because the adsorbent has a positive surface charge, and there is less competition with OH⁻ at
533 low pH. The effect of anion competition on fluoride adsorption by Al-KNF-300 followed the
534 order HCO₃⁻ > SO₄²⁻ > NO₃⁻ > Cl⁻. With increasing adsorbent capacity, the fluoride adsorption
535 efficiency increased to 99.23%, but the fluoride adsorption amount per unit mass of adsorbent
536 decreased. Al-KNF-300 is an inexpensive, value-added product that can remove fluoride from
537 fluoride-contaminated water and bring the fluoride concentration to the drinking water standard.

538

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