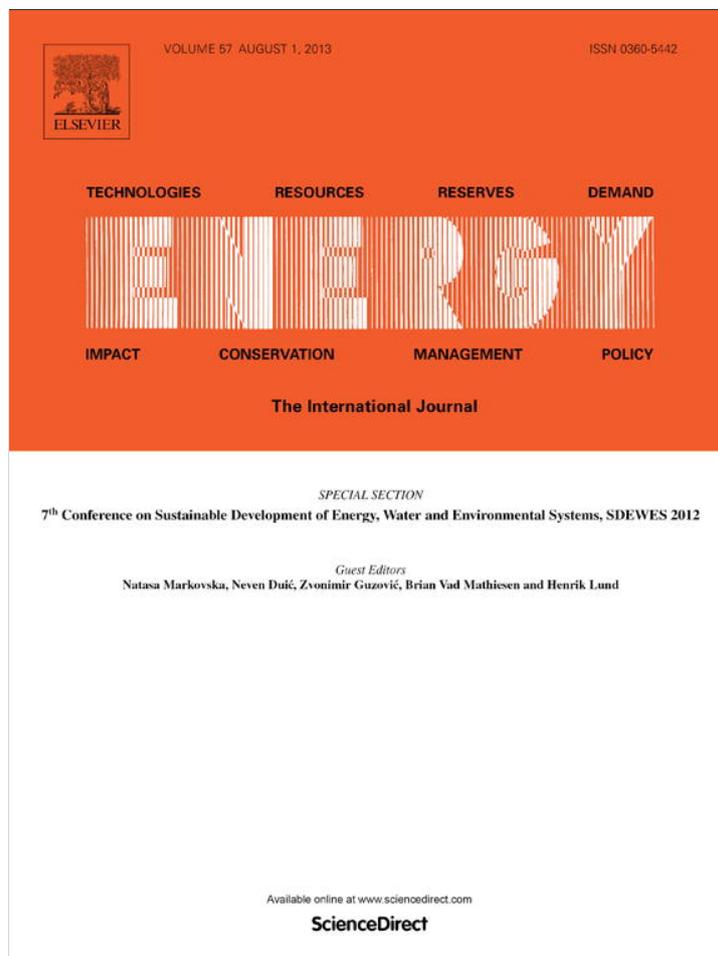


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## Optimization of catalyst-free production of biodiesel from *Ceiba pentandra* (kapok) oil with high free fatty acid contents



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### ABSTRACT

Catalyst-free biodiesel production from non-edible *Ceiba pentandra* (kapok) oil via supercritical methanol transesterification was demonstrated in this work. The supercritical transesterification experiments were performed in a batch reactor at temperatures of 250–350 °C, pressures of 10–18 MPa, reaction times of 120–600 s, and methanol to oil molar ratios of 15:1–35:1. Response surface methodology (RSM) and four-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were applied for the design and optimization of the experiments with respect to temperature, pressure, reaction time, and molar ratio of methanol to oil simultaneously. The response (i.e., FAME yield) was fitted by a quadratic polynomial regression model using least square analysis in a five-level-four-factor central composite design (CCD). The optimum conditions were found as follows: methanol to oil molar ratio of 30:1, temperature of 322 °C, pressure of 16.7 MPa, and reaction time of 476 s with FAME (fatty acid methyl ester) yield of 95.5%. The significance of the reaction parameters toward FAME yield was in the order of methanol to oil molar ratio > reaction time > pressure > temperature.

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### 1. Introduction

The compliance of energy demands for transportation and industrialization purposes in most countries still relies on the fossil fuel sources. However, fossil fuels are non-renewable energy sources and will be totally depleted in the near future. Furthermore, the engine emissions produced from the combustion of fossil fuels contain high amounts of air pollutants therefore raising environmental concerns. Biodiesel (BD) has been highlighted as an attractive renewable fuel for addressing the issues concerning non-sustainable petro-diesel sources and environmental awareness in the society. Compared with petrol-diesel fuel, biodiesel is more environmentally friendly due to low emitted air pollutants (e.g., unburned hydrocarbons, NO<sub>x</sub>, CO<sub>x</sub>, and particulate matters) from its combustion. Furthermore, it is biodegradable, less toxic, safe for handling and storage, has excellent lubricity, and provides energy density similar to conventional petro-diesel therefore it can be directly used without

any modifications of engine and refueling station [1]. Because of some benefits of biodiesel in conjunction with its renewability, sustainability, and environmental friendliness, the developments of this liquid fuel as a substitute for petro-diesel are moving rapidly.

Several technologies are available for biodiesel production such as microemulsion [2], direct use and blending of diesel/oil [3], thermal cracking (pyrolysis) [4], and transesterification (alcoholysis) [5]. Among them, the most popularly used method is transesterification in the presence of a catalyst (e.g., liquid acids or bases, enzymes, or solid catalysts). Endalew et al. developed various metal oxides doped with alkali metal (i.e., lithium) or rare earth metal (i.e., lanthanum) as heterogeneous catalysts for the transesterification of FFA-rich jatropha oil in a single-step reaction [6]. A similar work has been conducted by Jain and Sharma to prepare biodiesel from crude jatropha oil via a two-step catalyzed transesterification process [7]. Two kinds of catalysts were used namely sulfuric acid in the pretreatment step and sodium hydroxide in the subsequent process. Meng and colleagues have studied NaOH-catalyzed transesterification for the production of biodiesel from treated waste cooking oil [8]. They found that the catalyst concentration of 1 wt% gave maximum conversion efficiency under mild operating condition. The feasibility of the base-catalyzed biodiesel production from palm cooking oil and waste frying oil has been evaluated by Peng-Lim et al. [9] and Uzun et al. [10],

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respectively. However, the catalytic biodiesel production has several drawbacks such as time-consuming due to low reaction rate and corrosion risk for acid-catalyzed; high sensitivity to free fatty acid (FFA) and water contents in the oil feedstock and difficulty in the separation of biodiesel and catalyst from soap for alkaline catalyst; high cost and deactivation risk of the active sites for both enzyme and heterogeneous catalysts. Moreover, biodiesel production employing liquid catalysts requires complex and costly treatments for the acidic or alkaline wastewater. Recently, the catalyst-free technique for biodiesel production has been considered to be able to mitigate the drawbacks of catalytic biodiesel production from both technical and environmental viewpoints. Supercritical transesterification (SC-TE) has proven as an attractive technique for high yield and high purity biodiesel production without involving any catalyst and generating toxic wastewater [11,12]. Other advantages of this route include fast reaction kinetics, ease separation of products, and tolerance to FFA and water contents in the oil feedstock because esterification of free fatty acid (FFA) and transesterification of triglycerides proceed simultaneously [12].

Indonesia is a tropical country that has abundant natural resources from the plantation, agriculture, marine, or forestry sectors. Among these, kapok (*Ceiba pentandra*) tree, also known as silk-cotton tree, is a tall plant from Malvaceae family that widely distributed in the tropical rainforests. Some parts of this plant are of high economic value used as timber and pod. Kapok pod comprises of fiber (about 17%) that is primarily utilized in making pillows and mattresses while the resulting seeds end merely as a waste. The seed contains a fairly high non-edible oil (about 40 wt%, dry basis) and therefore can be utilized as a potential biomass feedstock for biodiesel production. The production of kapok oil (KSO) in Indonesia reaches 15,000 tons in 2010 and sixty percents of them can be found in Java regions. In addition, the cultivation technique of kapok plant is quite simple with relatively short harvesting time (every 4–5 months) hence ensuring its feasibility as a sustainable biomass feedstock for the large-scale production of biodiesel.

The studies about biodiesel production from kapok oil via alkali-catalyzed transesterification have been recently reported in the literatures [13,14]. In the present work, we conduct catalyst-free one-step transesterification of FFA-rich kapok oil to biodiesel with supercritical methanol as the reacting alcohol. So far, there is no report available about the transesterification of kapok oil to biodiesel via a non-catalytic route. Besides, the application of one-step supercritical transesterification for biodiesel production still rarely reported, particularly using low grade or unrefined oil feedstock. In this case, the most frequent technique used is through a two-step process viz. hydrolysis of fatty acid esters using sub/supercritical water, followed by supercritical methyl/ethyl esterification of fatty acids into methyl/ethyl esters. For example, Minami and Saka [15], Kusdiana and Saka [16], and Ilham and Saka [17] firstly treated triglycerides in oils/fats in subcritical water for the hydrolysis reaction to produce fatty acids and these fatty acids are further converted to methyl esters through supercritical esterification. They reported that by applying two-step process above, the reaction can be conducted at more convenient conditions and the backward reaction between glycerol and fatty acid methyl ester can be suppressed. In the case of one-step supercritical transesterification process, the most commonly used feedstocks are purified vegetable oils containing low free fatty acids (less than 1%), as employed by Gui et al. [18] and Tan et al. [19,20].

With regards to statistical design and optimization of supercritical transesterification process, most of previous studies only emphasize three experimental parameters. For example, Gui et al. [19], Tan et al. [20], and Patil et al. [21] deal with optimization studies of temperature, reaction time, and alcohol to oil molar ratio of the catalyst-free biodiesel production from purified palm oil and *Nannochloropsis* sp. wet algae, respectively. Another study conducted by Sawangkeaw

et al. [22] also focuses on the statistical design of supercritical methanol transesterification of refined palm kernel oil (PKO) to obtain a reliable three-parameter model for the process optimization with respect to temperature, pressure, and methanol/oil molar ratio. However, it should be recognized that at least four key parameters are needed to be statistically analyzed and optimized for the industrial process operation of supercritical-based biodiesel production. The alcohol to oil molar ratio and reaction time may be of relevance to the efficiency and economic aspects of the process while pressure and temperature may be associated with the design of high-pressure reactor system. Given this, the design of experiment and optimization of supercritical methanol transesterification of kapok oil into biodiesel in this work was conducted by incorporating four reaction parameters namely methanol to oil molar ratio, temperature, pressure, and reaction time using response surface methodology (RSM) and four-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). To this end, the present work provides an insight regarding the non-catalytic production of biodiesel from non-edible and underutilized kapok oil, which is not only opened a broader strategy to overcome the depletion of crude oil reserves worldwide, specifically in Indonesia country but also enriching the state-of-the-art in biodiesel research field.

## 2. Experimental sections

### 2.1. Materials

Kapok oil was obtained from Subali Makmur Co., Ltd located in Pati, Central Java and used without further treatment. The acid value of the oil was determined by titration against standardized 0.25 M KOH solution by following ASTM D5555-95 test method [23] and found to be 19.84 mg KOH/g oil. The water content in the oil was analyzed on a Mettler-Toledo V20 compact volumetric KF titrator and found to be 0.02%. The fatty acids composition of kapok oil was analyzed on a Shimadzu GC-2014 equipped with a flame ionization detector (FID) and a Restek Rtx-65TG fused silica capillary column (30 m × 0.25 mm × 0.10 μm). Helium (99.99%) was used as the carrier gas at a column flow of 40 ml/min. The injection volume was 1 μl with a split ratio of 1:40. The temperatures of the injector and detector were operated at 365 °C. The temperature of column oven was initially programmed at 50 °C for 1 min, elevated to 350 °C at 50 °C/min, ramped to 365 °C at 1 °C/min, and held for 5 min. The results are shown in Fig. 1.

Methanol (99.8%, A.R. Grade) and anhydrous heptane (99%, A.R. Grade) were purchased from Merck, Germany. Methyl palmitate,

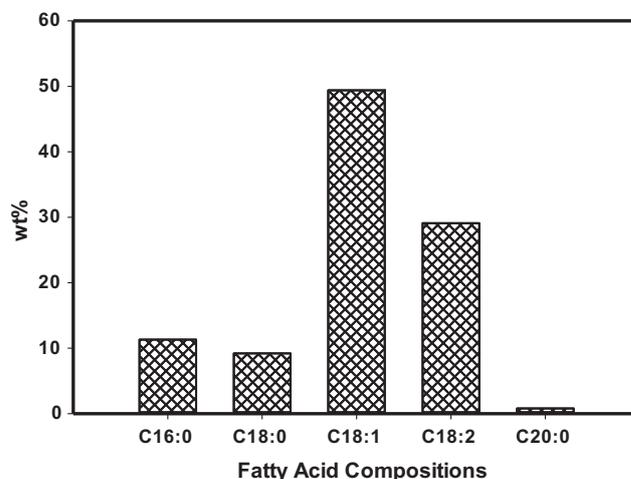


Fig. 1. Fatty acid compositions of kapok oil (C16:0 = palmitic acid, C18:0 = stearic acid, C18:1 = oleic acid, C18:2 = linoleic acid; C20:1 = gadoleic acid).

methyl stearate, methyl oleate, methyl linoleate, and methyl arachidate with a purity of 99% were supplied by Sigma Aldrich, Singapore and used without further purification. These compounds were used as the reference standards for the determination of FAME yield. Methyl heptadecanoate (99.5%, Fluka) was used as an internal standard in the analysis of FAME contents.

## 2.2. Supercritical transesterification (SC-TE) experiments

The supercritical methanol transesterification experiments were performed in a 50 ml high pressure batch reactor. The reactor was custom-made by a local company from 316SS-grade stainless steel and equipped with a K-type thermocouple, a pressure gauge, and an external electric heater. The maximum working pressure and temperature of the system are 30 MPa and 400 °C, respectively. The reactor was also connected to a nitrogen cylinder (15 MPa, 99.99%) and reciprocating horizontal piston-pump was used to introduce pressurized nitrogen to the system.

The reaction operating procedure was described as follows: A known amount of methanol and KSO was loaded to the reactor to give a methanol/oil molar ratio of 15:1, 20:1, 25:1, 30:1, and 35:1. The reactor was purged with a certain amount of nitrogen to remove air and build-up some pressure in the reactor prior to heating. The methanol/KSO mixture was then heated from room temperature to desired reaction temperatures (250 °C, 275 °C, 300 °C, 325 °C, and 350 °C) at a heating rate of 20 °C/min. The temperature was controlled within  $\pm 2$  °C and pressure was monitored by a pressure gauge in order to maintain isothermal and isobar reaction conditions. Zero reaction time was defined when the temperature and pressure in the system reached the set values. After zero reaction time reached, the mixture was stirred by a magnetic bar at 500 rpm for a prescribed time (120 s, 240 s, 360 s, 480 s, and 600 s). Subsequently, the reactor was rapidly cooled to room temperature and the mixture was removed from the vessel. The mixture was placed in a separation funnel for the phase separation between methyl ester and glycerol. The top phase (methyl ester) was taken and the residual methanol was vacuum-evaporated using an IKA® RV-10 rotavapor at 100 °C for 1 h. The purified product was then subjected to gas chromatography analysis for FAME contents assay.

## 2.3. Analysis of FAME contents

The FAME contents in the product were analyzed on a Shimadzu GC-2014 equipped with a FID and an Agilent narrowbore DB-Wax capillary column (30 m  $\times$  0.25 mm  $\times$  0.25  $\mu$ m) as the stationary phase. Prior to injection, the sample was filtered using a 0.22  $\mu$ m PVDF syringe filter membrane and diluted in heptane. A given amount of 0.1 g/ml methyl heptadecanoate solution was added to the sample. The as-prepared sample was taken using a micro-syringe (1  $\mu$ l) and injected into the column in a splitless mode. The analysis conditions were provided in detail as follows: carrier gas = helium at a constant linear velocity of 40 cm/s; FID temperature = 300 °C; injector temperature = 250 °C; oven temperature = 50 °C for 2 min, ramped to 250 °C at 10 °C/min and held at 250 °C for 8 min. Identification of methyl ester peaks in the samples was conducted by comparing retention time with the reference standards. The yield percentage of fatty acid methyl esters (wt%) in the product was calculated by the following equation:

$$\text{FAME (wt\%)} = 100 \left( \frac{\sum A_{\text{ME}} - A_{\text{int}}}{A_{\text{int}}} \times \frac{V_{\text{int}} C_{\text{int}}}{m} \right) \quad (1)$$

where  $\sum A_{\text{ME}}$  is the total peak area of methyl esters,  $A_{\text{int}}$  is the peak area of methyl heptadecanoate internal standard,  $V_{\text{int}}$  is the volume of internal standard solution added to the sample (ml),  $C_{\text{int}}$  is the

concentration of internal standard solution (g/ml), and  $m$  is the mass of the sample (g).

## 2.4. Characterizations of biodiesel fuel properties

The fuel properties of biodiesel were characterized in terms of cetane index, flash point, cloud point, acid value, relative density, and kinematic viscosity. The results were compared with ASTM standard for biodiesel (ASTM D6751 [24]). All analyses were performed based on the standard test method as described in ASTM D613 for cetane index [25], ASTM D93 for flash point [26], ASTM D97 for pour point [27], ASTM D664 for acid value [28], ASTM D1480 for relative density [29], and ASTM D445 for kinematic viscosity [30].

## 2.5. Statistical design of the experiments and process optimization

Statistical design and process optimization of the experiments were performed by response surface methodology (RSM) and four-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using Minitab software (Version 16.2.1). The optimized reaction parameters were methanol to oil molar ratio, temperature, pressure, and reaction time. The encoded parameters and corresponding levels used in the experimental design are listed in Table 1. The choice of the factor levels of pressure and temperature used in this experimental design is based on the critical point of the reacting alcohol in which higher pressure and temperature above the critical pressure and critical temperature of methanol are both required to induce the formation of supercritical methanol in the system. The experiments were performed in randomized order and after the completion of all experimental runs, the responses (i.e. FAME yield) were fitted with a quadratic polynomial regression model using least square analysis. For reproducibility test, all data points were triplicated with their averages used as the result while the central data point (0,0,0) was replicated seven times and represented as a single data for each experiment.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Effects of reaction parameters

#### 3.1.1. Methanol to oil molar ratio

Stoichiometrically, methanol to oil molar ratio of 3:1 is required to form three moles of fatty acid methyl esters (biodiesel) and one mole of glycerol. In supercritical transesterification process, the molar ratio of methanol to oil used is significantly higher than stoichiometric amount. This can be explained on the basis that a large excess molar ratio of methanol to oil is required to bring the reaction system to supercritical state. Moreover, a large excess molar ratio of methanol to oil was purposely used to drive the chemical equilibrium to the right-hand side based on Le Chatelier's principle and ensures high conversion of triglycerides within short time. The conversion of triglycerides into fatty acid methyl esters

**Table 1**

The encoded parameters and their corresponding levels used in the design of experiments.

Reaction parameter	Encoded factor	Factor levels				
		-2	1	0	1	2
Pressure (MPa)	$X_1$	10	12	14	16	18
Time (s)	$X_2$	120	240	360	480	600
Temperature (°C)	$X_3$	250	275	300	325	350
Methanol to oil molar ratio	$X_4$	15:1	20:1	25:1	30:1	35:1

takes place sequentially as follows [31]: (i) the reaction between methoxide anion and the carbonyl carbon of triglyceride to form methyl ester and diglyceride; (ii) the reaction between methoxide anion and the carbonyl carbon of diglyceride to form methyl ester and monoglyceride; and (iii) the reaction between methoxide anion and the carbonyl carbon of monoglyceride to form methyl ester and glycerol.

Besides transesterification of triglycerides into methyl esters as the main reaction, some side reactions might also occur [32,33]: (1) hydrolysis of triglycerides to produce fatty acids and glycerol; (2) esterification of fatty acids to produce methyl esters and water; and (3) glycerol–methanol reactions that associated with thermal degradation and etherification (or methanolysis) to produce ether- and/or ester-based oxygenated compounds and water. In the early period of the process (heating period), the reaction extent of esterification was limited due to poor miscibility of methanol in the oil; consequently this reaction mainly took place at the interface area between methanol and oil. Poor miscibility of methanol in the oil might also due to the minor concentration of methyl esters in the triglyceride phase [34]. Since the initial water content in KSO is fairly small (about 0.02%) and the rate of esterification reaction is restricted, the hydrolysis of triglycerides and glycerol–methanol reactions may not feasible to occur. Therefore, it can be concluded that esterification reaction acts as the promoter for other side reactions. Additionally, it can be confirmed that the triglyceride contents in the oil feedstock are essentially unchanged and the resulting methyl esters from esterification of fatty acids can be ignored during heating period.

With increasing temperature and pressure in the system, the mixture of methanol–oil becomes more homogeneous. Accordingly, the reaction extent of esterification becomes greater thereby water molecules are starting to accumulate in the system. This phenomenon would make some amounts of triglyceride and methanol are not available for transesterification reaction due to partial hydrolysis of triglyceride and glycerol–methanol side reactions, hindering the formation of fatty acid methyl esters. Since a large excess of methanol existed and both hydrolysis and glycerol–methanol reactions occur in lesser extents than transesterification, it can be implied that the formation of methyl esters in the system still predominant, favoring high yield biodiesel production.

Fig. 2a shows the effect of methanol to oil molar ratio toward the experimental FAME yield at a constant pressure (14 MPa) and temperature (300 °C) for reaction time of 120–600 s. From this figure, it can be seen an increase in FAME yield about 2.5-fold by increasing methanol to oil molar ratio from 15:1 to 30:1 regardless the effect of reaction time. At higher methanol to oil molar ratio, the contact between oil and methanol molecules becomes more

frequent hence higher conversion of triglycerides into FAMES. A further increase in methanol/oil molar ratio to 35:1 would lead to an insignificant change in FAME yield as compared to that obtained at a methanol/oil molar ratio of 30:1 throughout reaction time in this work, revealing the saturation miscibility condition of supercritical methanol in the oil phase at an applied temperature and pressure. Accordingly, supercritical methanol and oil cannot form more homogenous mixture beyond a molar ratio of 30:1 therefore leaving the excess reactant species (supercritical methanol that not reacted with triglyceride) in the mixture. The unreacted supercritical methanol would undergo glycerol–methanol reactions to form oxygenated compounds with ether and/or ester-based functional groups that can be used as biodiesel additives to improve the combustion quality [35].

### 3.1.2. Temperature and pressure

Temperature and pressure are both regarded as the critical parameters in the supercritical transesterification process because these parameters tune the density and solubility of the fluid at supercritical state. The effects of temperature and pressure on the supercritical methanol transesterification of KSO were studied at temperatures ranging from 250 °C to 350 °C and pressures from 10 MPa to 18 MPa while maintaining a methanol to oil molar ratio at 25:1. The use of high temperature in the supercritical transesterification process can be explained by considering that thermal energy is required for inducing the phase transition of methanol from liquid to supercritical phase. The critical pressure ( $P_c$ ) and critical temperature ( $T_c$ ) of methanol are 7.85 MPa and 240 °C, respectively. This phase transition is an endothermic process therefore thermal energy is initially applied for the vaporization of methanol by overcoming liquid's chemical potential (i.e. intermolecular forces) and further used to raise temperature of methanol vapor surpassing its critical temperature. Moreover, high temperature may render a weakening effect on the hydrogen bonding of hydroxyl group in methanol, decreasing its dielectric constant and increasing its miscibility in the oil. In other hand, the phase transition of liquid oil to supercritical state may not be observed due to high boiling point of triglyceride moieties thereby thermal energy supplied to the system is used for the partial vaporization of oil.

The effects of temperatures and pressures on FAME yield are given in Fig. 2b and c, respectively. From these figures, it can be seen similar trends of experimental results, that is higher FAME yields at elevated temperatures and pressures. As shown in Fig. 2b, the yield of FAME was about 55% at 250 °C and it was increased progressively to the highest point of about 90% by increasing temperature from 250 °C to 350 °C and lengthening transesterification time from 120 s to 600 s at a constant pressure of 14 MPa and methanol to oil

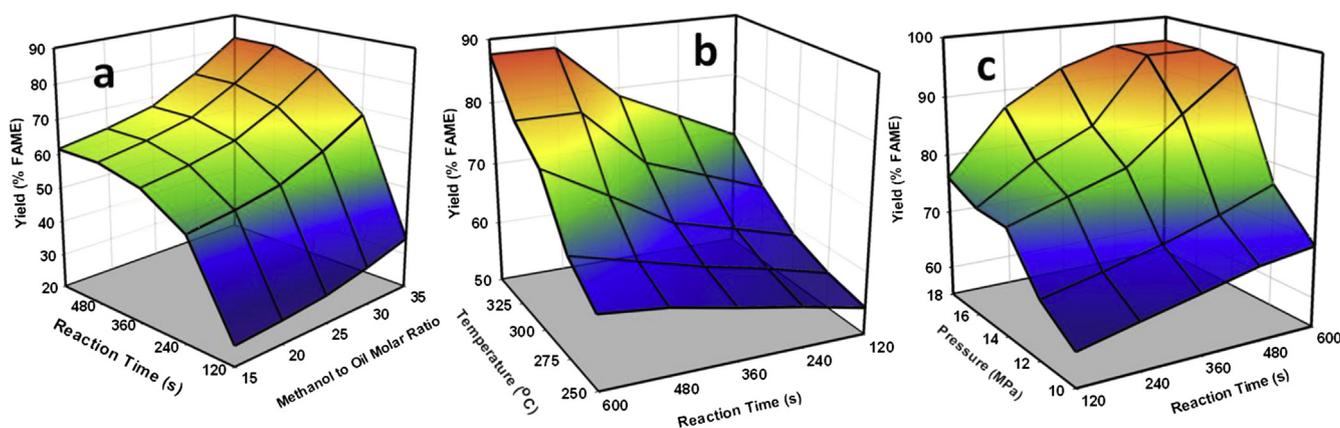


Fig. 2. Experimental trends of FAME yield as a combined interaction between reaction time and methanol to oil molar ratio (a), temperature (b), and pressure (c).

molar ratio of 25:1. Increasing temperature above 350 °C would lead to partial thermal degradation of mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acid methyl esters in the mixture such as methyl stearate, methyl oleate, and methyl linoleate, as reported previously by Shin et al. [36]. Therefore, temperature of 350 °C was selected as the maximum point for supercritical methanol transesterification of KSO in this work.

Similar results are found in Fig. 2c in which the conversion of triglycerides into FAMEs enlarges with the increase of pressure and reaction time at a constant temperature of 300 °C and methanol to oil molar ratio of 25:1. At higher pressure, supercritical methanol in the system becomes denser and its solubility (or solvation strength) in the oil increased. Accordingly, supercritical methanol and oil form more homogeneous mixture at higher reaction pressures thus facilitating transesterification of triglycerides into methyl esters.

### 3.1.3. Reaction time

The effect of reaction time was investigated by conducting the experiments at different periods of time from 120 s to 600 s. Fig. 2a–c displays the 3D plot of reaction time and FAME yield with incorporation of another reaction parameter. In these figures, it can be seen a gradual increase in FAME yield by extending reaction time from 120 s to 600 s. It is obvious that the prolonged reaction time allows a longer contact between oil and supercritical methanol in the mixture thereby larger portions of triglycerides and free fatty acids are converted to fatty acid methyl esters through transesterification and esterification reactions, respectively.

### 3.2. Statistical analysis and process optimization

Biodiesel production via supercritical alcohol transesterification method requires large excess of reactant and is an energy-intensive process because of high pressure and temperature involving in the process. Therefore, the statistical analysis and process optimization are both crucial importance for economic consideration in the industrial process operation. In this work, RSM was applied for determining the optimum reaction conditions for supercritical methanol transesterification of KSO that incorporates methanol to oil molar ratio, temperature, pressure, and reaction time simultaneously. A central composite design (CCD) with five-level-four-factor was used to design the reaction parameters and FAME yield as the response and the results are presented in Table 2. A second-order (quadratic) polynomial regression model was employed to fit the response using least square analysis. The mathematical expression of the quadratic polynomial model is given as follows:

$$Y = k_0 + \sum_{i=1}^4 k_i X_i + \sum_{i=1}^4 \sum_{j=1}^4 k_{ij} X_i X_j \quad (2)$$

where  $Y$  is the response,  $k_0$ ,  $k_i$ , and  $k_{ij}$  are the regression coefficients,  $X_i$  and  $X_j$  are the design parameters. The response plots were constructed from the fitted model by using Minitab software (Version 16.2.1) and the results are displayed in Fig. 3A–F. The multiple regression coefficients of the model obtained by least square fitting are tabulated in Table 3. From this table, it can be noted that all linear and quadratic and interaction model terms of  $X_1 * X_2$  and  $X_2 * X_3$  are found to be crucial in maximizing FAME yield with  $p$ -values (calculated probability) less than the significance level ( $\alpha$ -level) of 0.05. The adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R_{adj}^2$ ) for the fitted model was 0.94, which means that 94% of the total variance investigated was attributed by reaction parameters. By inserting the fitted values of the regression coefficients (Table 3)

**Table 2**

Central composite design for the response and corresponding parameters.

Experimental run	Reaction conditions				FAME yield (%)
	$X_1$	$X_2$	$X_3$	$X_4$	
1	1	-1	1	1	69.8
2	-1	-1	1	-1	52.8
3	0	0	0	0	63.9
4	-1	1	1	-1	65.5
5	-1	-1	1	1	64.5
6	0	0	0	0	65.2
7	1	1	-1	-1	65.3
8	0	0	2	0	75.8
9	1	1	1	-1	78.3
10	-1	-1	-1	1	59.4
11	-1	-1	-1	-1	48.6
12	0	0	0	0	63.2
13	0	0	0	2	67.4
14	1	-1	-1	1	64.4
15	0	0	0	0	63.8
16	2	0	0	0	75.7
17	1	-1	-1	-1	52.7
18	-1	1	-1	-1	54.6
19	1	1	-1	1	79.7
20	-1	1	1	1	79.8
21	1	1	1	1	95.5
22	1	-1	1	-1	57.2
23	-1	1	-1	1	66.6
24	0	-2	0	0	58.6
25	0	0	-2	0	58.3
26	-2	0	0	0	58.7
27	0	0	0	0	64.2
28	0	0	0	0	63.4
29	0	2	0	0	78.7
30	0	0	0	0	63.8
31	0	0	0	-2	28.3

into Eq. (2), the following quadratic polynomial model for the calculation of FAME yield is obtained:

$$Y = 63.9286 + 4.3792X_1 + 6.5042X_2 + 4.4625X_3 + 7.6208X_4 + 1.3564X_1^2 + 1.7189X_2^2 - 1.3189X_3^2 - 3.4811X_4^2 + 2.0938X_1 * X_2 + 0.3312X_1 * X_3 + 0.4437X_1 * X_4 + 2.1062X_2 * X_3 + 0.6938X_2 * X_4 + 0.4313X_3 * X_4$$

The profiles of the calculated FAME yield with incorporation of two design parameters are represented as surface response plots in Fig. 3A–F. Fig. 3A describes the effects of pressure ( $X_1$ ) and reaction time ( $X_2$ ) for maximizing FAME yield. It can be seen the significance of both parameters toward FAME yield at the highest level (i.e.  $P = 18$  MPa and  $t = 600$  s) as the curvature lines of pressure vs. FAME and time vs. FAME rise sharply by changing the levels of one parameter from the lowest to the highest while keeping another parameter in the highest point. This observation is consistent with experimental results (Fig. 2c), that is higher FAME yields at higher pressure and longer reaction time. However, the calculated FAME yield in this response plot can exceed 100%, indicating some errors due to the limitation of regression analysis by Minitab software that associated with two-parameter interaction at the highest level and/or less appropriate fitted values of the regression coefficients for interaction terms of  $X_1 * X_3$ ,  $X_1 * X_4$ ,  $X_2 * X_4$ , and  $X_3 * X_4$  since the  $p$ -values of these terms exceeded the significance level. Similar results were observed in Fig. 3B that represents the two-parameter correlation between reaction time ( $X_2$ ) and methanol/oil molar ratio ( $X_4$ ) against FAME yield at constant pressure and temperature. As shown in this figure, lengthening transesterification time from 120 s to 600 s for methanol to oil molar ratios of 15:1–35:1 is responsible in

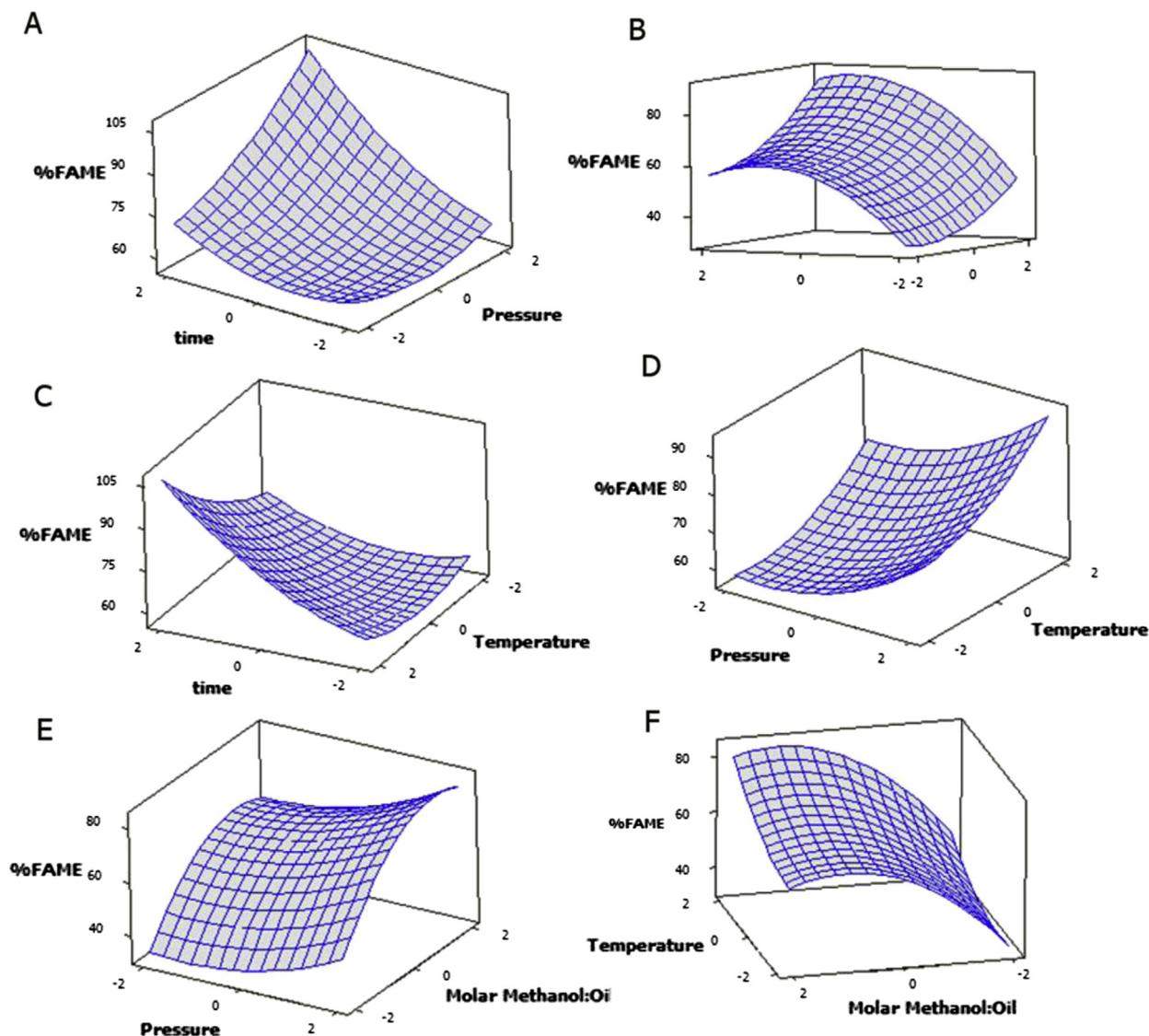


Fig. 3. Response surface plots of FAME yield with two design parameters interaction.

maximizing FAME yield. Meanwhile, FAME yield was hardly affected by the increasing levels of molar ratio of methanol to oil from 0 (25:1) to 2 (35:1) regardless the change in reaction time. This may indicate that the formation of fatty acid methyl esters is

**Table 3**  
The fitted values of the multiple regression coefficients for the calculation of FAME yield.

Term	Coefficient	SE coefficient	T	p (α = 0.05)
Constant	63.9286	1.1299	56.580	0.000
X <sub>1</sub>	4.3792	0.6102	7.177	0.000
X <sub>2</sub>	6.5042	0.6102	10.659	0.000
X <sub>3</sub>	7.6208	0.6102	7.313	0.000
X <sub>4</sub>	4.4625	0.6102	12.489	0.000
X <sub>1</sub> <sup>2</sup>	1.3564	0.5590	2.426	0.027
X <sub>2</sub> <sup>2</sup>	1.7189	0.5590	3.705	0.007
X <sub>3</sub> <sup>2</sup>	1.3189	0.5590	2.359	0.031
X <sub>4</sub> <sup>2</sup>	-3.4811	0.5590	-6.227	0.000
X <sub>1</sub> * X <sub>2</sub>	2.0938	0.7473	2.802	0.013
X <sub>1</sub> * X <sub>3</sub>	0.3312	0.7473	0.443	0.664
X <sub>1</sub> * X <sub>4</sub>	0.4437	0.7473	0.594	0.561
X <sub>2</sub> * X <sub>3</sub>	2.1062	0.7473	2.818	0.012
X <sub>2</sub> * X <sub>4</sub>	0.6938	0.7473	0.928	0.367
X <sub>3</sub> * X <sub>4</sub>	0.4313	0.7473	0.577	0.572

no longer occurred because of the saturation miscibility of supercritical methanol in the oil phase at a given temperature and pressure.

The response plot of FAME yield incorporating the interaction between reaction time (X<sub>2</sub>) and temperature (X<sub>3</sub>) is given in Fig. 3C. From this figure, it can be observed a slight increase in the methyl ester yield at the lowest temperature (250 °C) and shortest reaction time (120 s) regardless the change in levels of another parameter. When the temperature is ramped to 350 °C, the yield of methyl ester increases almost linearly at longer reaction time and vice-versa. The resulting response plot shows conformity with experimental results in Fig. 2b and may reveal that the thermal degradation of fatty acid methyl esters in the mixture has not occurred at temperature of 350 °C for reaction time of 120–600 s. From the previous studies [36,37], it can be concluded that the extent of thermal degradation of methyl esters in the mixture is typically controlled by reaction time and temperature in the process. For example, methyl palmitate and methyl oleate remain stable at 350 °C for reaction time up to 20 min and 90 min, respectively while methyl linoleate started to gradually decompose when reaction time was longer than 20 min for the same reaction temperature [36,37].

The response plots of FAME yield as a function of pressure ( $X_1$ ) and methanol to oil molar ratio ( $X_4$ ) and temperature ( $X_3$ ) and methanol to oil molar ratio ( $X_4$ ) are presented in Fig. 3E and F, respectively. In these figures, it can be seen higher significance level of methanol to oil molar ratio than pressure and temperature in maximizing the response. Another observation is the methyl ester yield tends to slightly increase and then remains nearly constant in the curve area of methanol/oil molar ratio between 0 (25:1) and 2 (35:1) in each pressure and temperature level, reflecting saturation miscibility of supercritical methanol in the oil at this condition. This observation is in conformance with experimental results in Fig. 2a. Finally, the two-parameter interaction between pressure ( $X_1$ ) and temperature ( $X_3$ ) toward FAME yield is illustrated in Fig. 3D. It can be seen that increasing temperature and pressure at a constant methanol to oil feed ratio and reaction time led to the increase in FAME yield. This may be attributed to the increasing homogeneity of methanol/oil mixture as a result of the enhanced solvent density and miscibility of supercritical methanol in the oil phase at elevated pressure and temperature.

The profiles of FAME yield with the optimized reaction parameters are shown in Fig. 4. In this figure, it can be seen the contribution of each parameter involved in the supercritical methanol transesterification of KSO with significance level against FAME yield in the order of methanol to oil molar ratio ( $X_4$ ) > reaction time ( $X_2$ ) > pressure ( $X_1$ ) > temperature ( $X_3$ ). The curve profiles of pressure, reaction time, and temperature show similar trends in which FAME yield increases exponentially along the curvature line. The curve profile of methanol to oil molar ratio also indicates a positive effect toward FAME yield up to a certain point and then the yield of the product remains nearly constant at higher molar ratio. The optimum reaction conditions for supercritical methanol transesterification of KSO are as follows: methanol to oil molar ratio of 30:1; temperature of 322 °C; pressure of 16.7 MPa; and reaction time of 476 s with calculated response (FAME yield) of 95.5%. This response value was validated by triplicate experiments under the above optimum condition and it was found an insignificant error of 0.3% between experimental and the calculated response. For comparison purpose, several statistical studies and the optimized reaction parameters for the

**Table 4**

A summary of several statistical studies and the optimized reaction conditions for catalyst-free biodiesel production.

Reaction mixture	Reactor type	Optimized conditions				FAME yield (%)	$R_{adj}^2$
		Alcohol/oil <sup>b</sup>	T (°C)	P (MPa)	Time (min)		
Refined palm oil + SCE <sup>a</sup> [18]	Batch	33:1	349	nd <sup>c</sup>	30	79.20	0.97
Refined palm oil + SCM <sup>a</sup> [20]	Batch	40:1	372	nd	16	81.50	0.96
Wet algae paste + SCM [21]	Batch	9:1	255	nd	25	85.02	0.92
Refined PKO <sup>d</sup> + SCM [22]	Plug flow	42:1	325	18	nd	93.70	0.92
Radish oil + SCM [38]	Batch	39:1	317	nd	27	97.00	0.99
Radish oil + SCE [38]	Batch	39:1	319	nd	22	97.50	0.92
Rapeseed oil + SCM [39]	Batch	50:1	330	21	16	93.60	0.96
Rapeseed oil + SDMC <sup>a</sup> [40]	Batch	42:1	300	20	20	97.40	–
Kapok oil + SCM [this study]	Batch	30:1	322	16.7	7.9	95.50	0.94

<sup>a</sup> SCM (supercritical methanol); SCE (supercritical ethanol); SDMC (supercritical dimethyl carbonate).

<sup>b</sup> The unit is molar ratio, otherwise specified (the unit of alcohol to oil ratio in Ref. [21] is wt/vol).

<sup>c</sup> Not determined.

<sup>d</sup> Palm kernel oil.

catalyst-free biodiesel production reported by several authors are summarized in Table 4. Actually, it can be seen that there is no definite trend or combination of the optimized reaction parameters toward FAME yield for supercritical transesterification process using different kinds of oil feedstocks. By comparing the statistical analysis results that incorporate four reaction parameters simultaneously between the present work and those obtained by Shin et al. [39] and Ilham and Saka [40], the optimized pressure and temperature are both comparable. However, the optimized values of methanol to oil molar ratio and reaction time in this work are lower than those reported by Shin et al. [39] and Ilham and Saka [40] for obtaining FAME yield higher than 90%. Therefore, the optimized supercritical transesterification conditions in

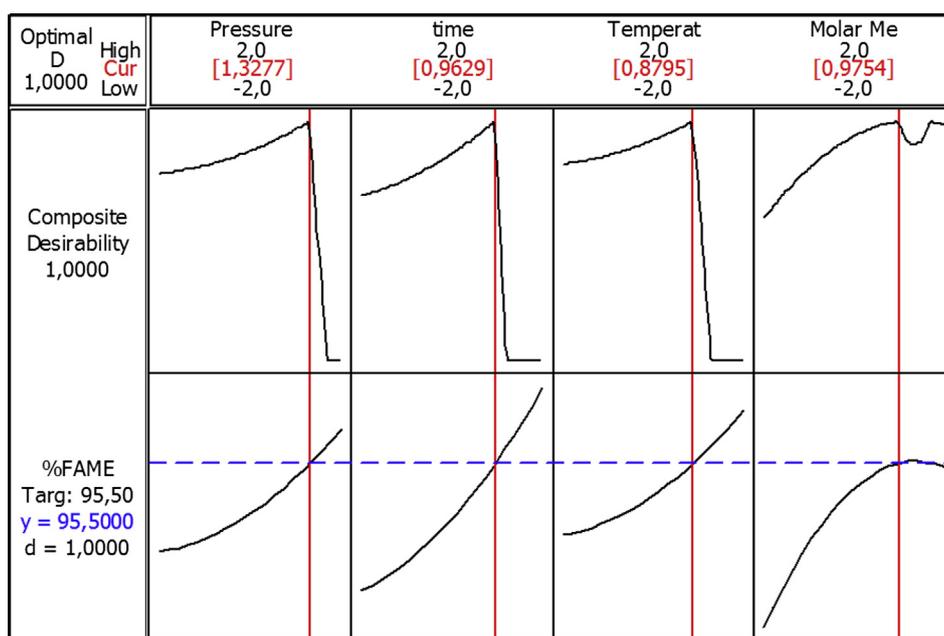


Fig. 4. Profiles of FAME yield with the optimized reaction parameters (D = composite desirability; y = calculated FAME yield; d = desirability).

**Table 5**  
Properties of biodiesel derived from kapok oil (KSO) and *C. oleifera* Abel oil [42] and its comparison with petro-diesel fuel.

Fuel properties	Feedstock		ASTM D6751	Diesel fuel (ASTM D975)
	<i>C. oleifera</i> Abel oil	KSO		
Cetane index	–	57	48–65	38–55
Flash point (°C)	150	154	100–170	60–80
Pour point (°C)	–	0	–15 to 10	–35 to –15
Acid value (mg KOH/g)	0.22	0.19	max 0.5	–
Relative density	–	0.88	0.87–0.9	0.85
Kinematic viscosity (mm <sup>2</sup> /s) at 40 °C	4.54	4.3	1.9–6	1.3–5.5

this work are considered more efficient and economically viable for industrial practice than the two reported studies.

### 3.3. Fuel properties of KSO-derived biodiesel

The fuel properties of KSO-derived biodiesel are summarized in Table 5. As shown in this table, all fuel properties of biodiesel met the standard specifications according to ASTM D6751. The obtained results were also compared with the fuel properties of petro-diesel as specified in ASTM D975 [41] and biodiesel prepared from *C. oleifera* Abel oil [42]. The flash point (or autoignition temperature) of KSO-biodiesel is twice higher than that of petro-diesel fuel, indicating safer handling and storage for this fuel in high temperature environment. Another crucial property of biodiesel that related to the engine performance is kinematic viscosity, characterizing the extent of fluidization and atomization of the fuel when used at low temperature. The kinematic viscosity of KSO-biodiesel is comparable to that of petro-diesel fuel thus ensuring its suitability to be used in the conventional diesel engines without extensive modifications.

A higher cetane index of biodiesel reveals better ignition quality with shorter delay time compared to petro-diesel thereby a more efficient engine performance. In addition, the engine emissions produced from the combustion of biodiesel contain less soot particles than that generated from petro-diesel due to the presence of ester- and/or ether-based oxygenated compounds [35]. The acid value of biodiesel was lower than petro-diesel, representing greater oxidative and thermal stabilities and also longer shelf time of this fuel during transportation and storage. Lower acid value in biodiesel may be due to esterification reaction of free fatty acids into fatty acid methyl esters and water during supercritical transesterification process. The cold flow characteristic of biodiesel is designated as pour point and it was found to be 0 °C for KSO-biodiesel. This value is in conformance with ASTM D6751 and ASTM D975 specifications and can be further lowered by the addition of fuel additives or blending with diesel oil. Compared with fuel properties of biodiesel derived from *C. oleifera* Abel oil, KSO-biodiesel possesses similar characteristics in terms of kinematic viscosity and flash point, possibly due to similarity in the composition of the fuel that comprise the majority of unsaturated fatty acid methyl esters such as methyl oleate and methyl linoleate.

## 4. Conclusions

The non-catalytic production of biodiesel from non-edible and underutilized kapok oil (KSO) via supercritical methanol transesterification has been conducted in this work. Response surface methodology (RSM) and four-way ANOVA have been successfully applied for designing and optimizing the experiments with respect to methanol to oil molar ratio, pressure, temperature, and reaction time. The optimum reaction conditions for the supercritical

methanol transesterification of KSO to biodiesel are as follows: methanol to oil molar ratio of 30:1, temperature of 322 °C, pressure of 16.7 MPa, and reaction time of 476 s with FAME yield of 95.5%. The quadratic polynomial regression model gave a good fit toward experimental results with the adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R_{adj}^2$ ) close to unity (0.94). The profiles of FAME yield with optimized reaction parameters show the significance level of the parameters toward the response in the order of methanol to oil molar ratio > reaction time > pressure > temperature, which conforms the experimental results. The fuel properties of biodiesel prepared from kapok oil are in conformance with ASTM D6751 standard specifications.

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