



Acetalization of carbonyl compounds catalyzed by acidic ionic liquid immobilized on silica gel

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 December 2010
Received in revised form 20 June 2011
Accepted 15 August 2011
Available online 22 August 2011

Keywords:

Acetalization
Heterogeneous catalysis
Silica-gel
Ionic liquids
Imidazole

ABSTRACT

Imidazolium-silica heterogeneous catalyst (SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄) was prepared by immobilization of acidic ionic liquid 1-(propyl-3-sulfonate) imidazolium hydrosulfate ([[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄) on silica-gel using tetraethoxysilane (TEOS) as silica source in this study. The properties of the samples were characterized by FT-IR, SEM and TG/DSC. The results suggested that [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had been successfully immobilized on the surface of silica-gel and the immobilized ionic liquid catalyst SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had good thermal stability. The original smooth surface of silica-gel was covered with [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ and a rough surface of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was formed, but the size of particles had no obvious change. Moreover, SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ exhibited high catalytic activity for a series of acetalization and could be recovered easily. After reused for 10 times in the synthesis of benzaldehyde ethanediol acetal, the catalyst could still give satisfactory catalytic activity.

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1. Introduction

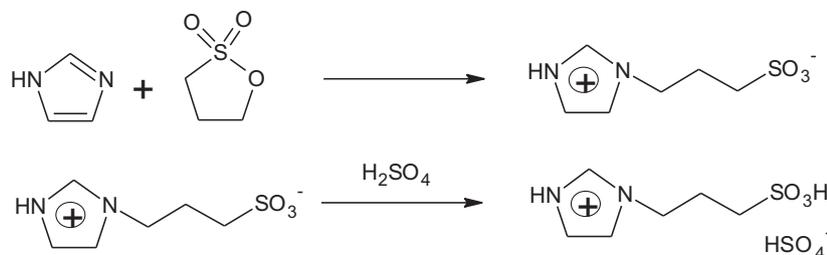
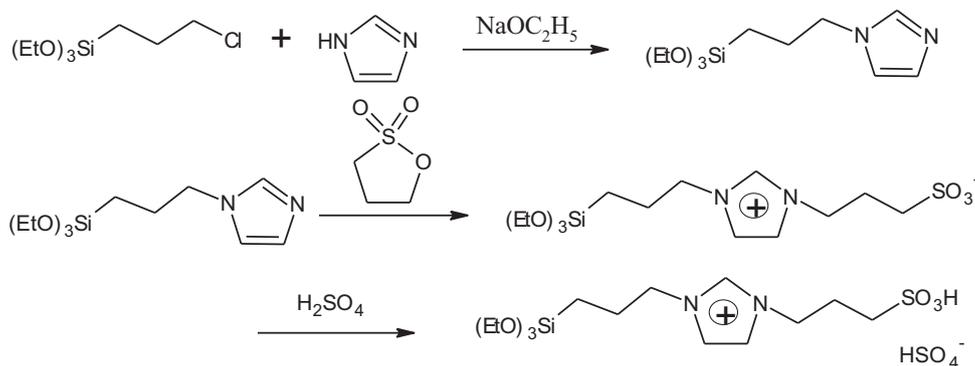
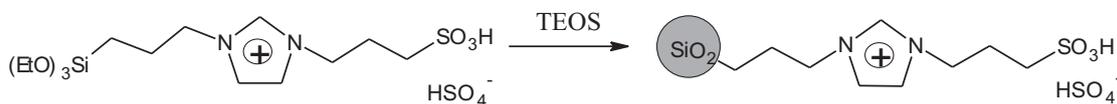
Acetalization of carbonyl compounds with alcohols to form acetals was one of the most useful methods for protecting carbonyl compounds in organic synthesis. Conventionally, this reaction was carried out in the presence of a protonic acid catalyst such as sulfuric acid or hydrochloric acid. Although these homogeneous acids showed satisfactory catalytic performance for this reaction, they caused the problems of tedious purification process of the product, large amount of acidic wastes, corrosion of equipments, and severe environmental pollution [1–4]. All these disadvantages made acetalization inefficient and uneconomical. Therefore, there was an urgent need to develop environmentally friendly and high efficient catalysts for acetalization.

In recent years, ionic liquids as being environmental-friendly reaction media had attracted significant attention for their unique properties, such as high thermal stability, negligible vapor pressure, tunable acidity and selective dissolvability [5–10]. Acidic ionic liquids including the Lewis and the Brønsted ones had proved to be efficient catalysts for acetalization [1,11–14]. However, several drawbacks of ionic liquids, such as unendurable viscosity, high cost, tedious purification procedure of the product and requirements of long reaction time for acetalization, restricted their widespread practical applications [15,16].

In order to solve these problems mentioned above, immobilized ionic liquid catalysts combining the advantageous characteristics of ionic liquids, inorganic acids and solid acids had been proposed [17]. In 2007, Sugimura et al. [18] investigated the copolymerization of 1-vinylimidazolium based acidic ionic liquid with styrene and its use as effective and reusable catalyst for acetal formation under mild reaction condition. In 2009, this research group further investigated the immobilization of metal chlorides on imidazolium-styrene copolymer [19]. The catalyst (GaCl₃) was demonstrated to be an efficient heterogeneous catalyst for acetalization. Recently, a novel nano-solid acid catalyst [20] was prepared by a facile two-step preparation procedure. It possessed an excellent performance for acetalization of the carbonyl under mild reaction conditions, and could be reusable without significant loss in catalytic activity. In all the literatures reported above, styrene or Fe₃O₄ were used as solid supports. Silica-gel was one of the most commonly used inorganic supports. It could be synthesized easily in a controllable way by hydrolysis of TEOS [21]. And the produced mesoporous silica-gel possessed the excellent characteristics of stable mesoporous structure, high surface area, controllable pore size, and good mechanical strength and thermal stability. These excellent characteristics made the produced mesoporous silica-gel an attractive solid support for the preparation of immobilized ionic liquid catalyst [22–24]. However, there were few studies about the preparation of silica-supported acidic ionic liquid catalyst using TEOS as silica source and its application for acetalization. And the preparation of immobilized Brønsted acidic ionic liquid [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ by chemical covalent bond, to our knowledge, was still absent from the literature.

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Scheme 1. Preparation of $[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$.Scheme 2. Preparation of $\text{CIPTES-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$.Scheme 3. Preparation of $\text{SG-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$.

In this study, we reported our efforts at exploring silica-supported Brønsted acidic ionic liquid catalyst $\text{SG-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$ using TEOS as silica source. FT-IR, SEM and TG/DSC were employed to characterize the properties of samples. Moreover, the catalytic activity and reusability performance of the immobilized ionic liquid catalyst used for acetalization were also examined.

2. Experimental

2.1. Chemical reagents

Imidazole (99%), 1,3-propane-sultone (99%), 3-chloropropyltriethoxysilane (CIPTES, 98.8%), $\text{EO}_{20}\text{PO}_{70}\text{EO}_{20}$ (P123, Aldrich), TEOS, ether and other chemicals (AR grade) were commercially available and used without further purification.

2.2. Preparation of ionic liquid $[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$

First, imidazole (6.8 g) was dissolved in ethanol (100 mL), and equal-molar 1,3-propane-sultone was slowly added. The mixture was stirred at room temperature for 24 h and filtered to get the white precipitate. Subsequently, the product was washed with ethanol for several times and dried in vacuum at 60°C for 6 h. Second, the formed solid was dissolved in water, and equal-molar sulfuric acid was slowly dropped. After the dropping was finished, the mixture was heated up to 60°C gradually and then stirred for 12 h [25]. Finally, the formed colorless liquid was washed with ether for 3 times and dried in vacuum at 50°C for 12 h (Scheme 1).

2.3. Preparation of $\text{CIPTES-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$

Imidazole (6.8 g) and sodium ethoxide (6.8 g) were dissolved in ethanol (100 mL), and the mixture was stirred at 70°C for 8 h to give sodium imidazole [26]. Subsequently, CIPTES (24.05 g) was added drop-wise and the mixture was refluxed for 12 h under N_2 atmosphere. The formed orange suspension was filtered to remove NaCl precipitate from the solution [27]. The solvent was removed by rotatory evaporation under reduced pressure and a yellowish oil containing *N*-(3-propyltrimethoxysilane)imidazole was obtained.

1,3-Propane-sultone (12.2 g) was slowly added into the solution of equal-molar *N*-(3-propyltrimethoxysilane)imidazole and ethanol (100 mL). The mixture was stirred at 50°C for 8 h and ethanol was removed by rotatory evaporation under reduced pressure. Then H_2SO_4 was added drop-wise. The solution was stirred at 60°C for another 12 h. Finally, the formed $\text{CIPTES-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$ was washed with ether for 3 times and dried in vacuum at 50°C for 5 h (Scheme 2).

2.4. Preparation of immobilized ionic liquid catalyst $\text{SG-}[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$

$[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$ -functionalized silica-gel was synthesized with the molar ratio of the mixture as follows: 4 TEOS: x CIPTES- $[(\text{CH}_2)_3\text{SO}_3\text{H-HIM}]\text{HSO}_4$:0.027 P123:16.2 HCl:100 H_2O , with $x=0.125, 0.25, 0.375, 0.5$. In a typical synthesis, P123 (1.58 g) was dissolved in H_2O (18.0 g) and HCl (5.89 g). After TEOS (8.32 g) was added and pre-hydrolyzed for 1.5 h at 45°C , CIPTES modified Brønsted acidic ionic liquid (2.46 g, $x=0.5$) was added successively. Then the mixture was carried out at

Table 1Catalytic performance of various catalysts for acetalization of benzaldehyde and ethanediol.^a

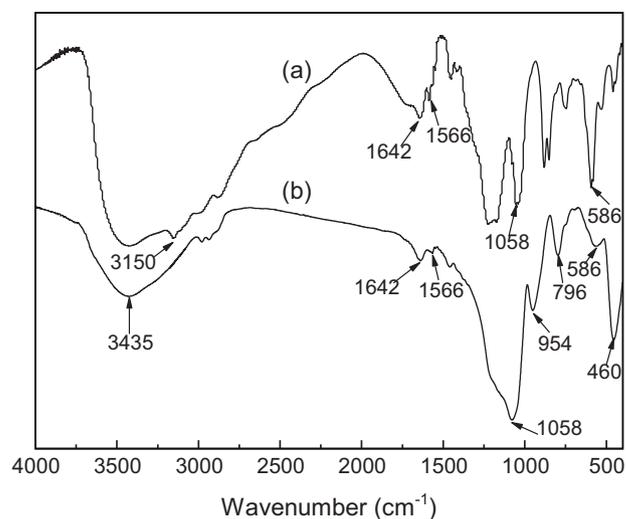
Entry	x	Reaction temperature (°C)	Yield (%) ^b
1	0.125	60	85.3
2	0.25	60	89.4
3	0.375	60	90.2
4	0.5	60	96.8
5	0.5	50	93.0
6	0.5	70	93.5

^a Benzaldehyde (70 mmol), ethanediol (126 mmol), catalyst (0.61 g, 4% of the total mass of benzaldehyde and ethanediol), cyclohexane (8 mL), 110 °C, 1.5 h.^b Yield was achieved by GC analysis.

different temperatures for a certain time to form the final product. The whole process was operated under N₂ atmosphere. The precipitate was filtered, subsequently washed with acetone, ether and ethanol, and then refluxed in ethanol for 24 h to remove the template P123. Finally, the formed immobilized acidic ionic liquid was dried in vacuum at 60 °C for 6 h (Scheme 3).

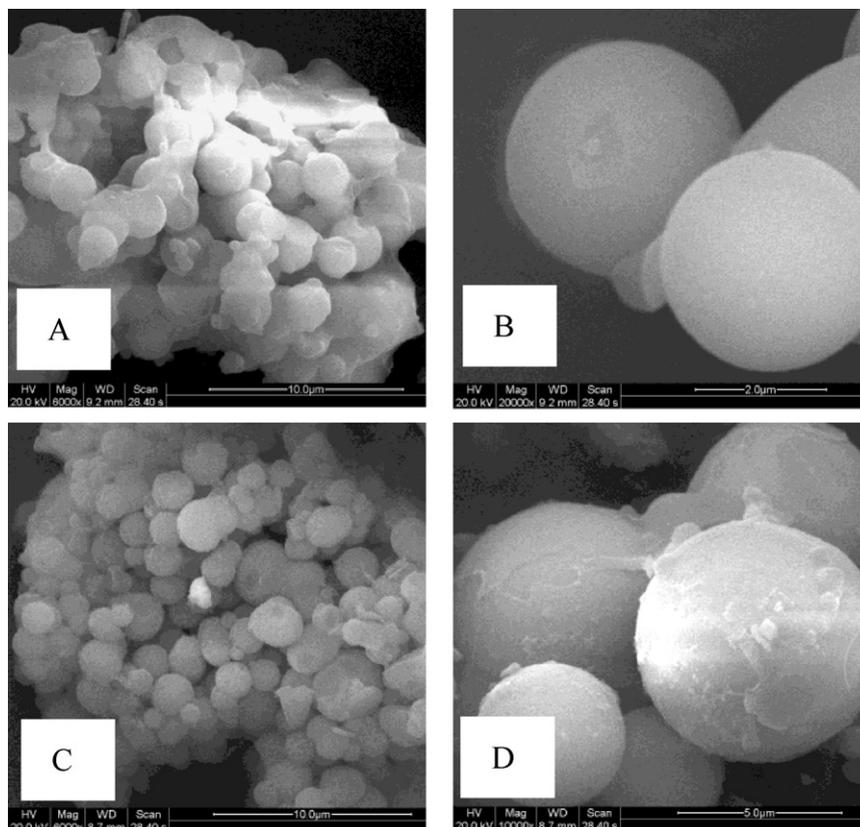
2.5. Characterization

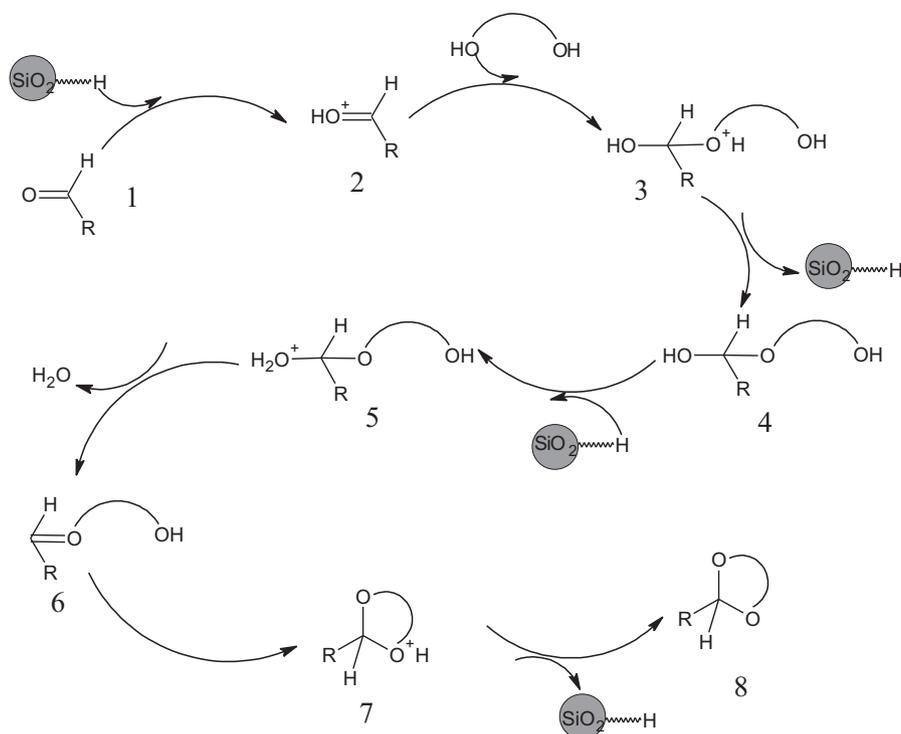
Fourier transform infrared (FT-IR) spectra of the samples in the range of 400–4000 cm⁻¹ were carried out on a Thermo Nicolet 870 spectrophotometer with anhydrous KBr as standard. Scanning electron microscope (SEM) QUANTA200 (FEI, Holland) was employed to characterize the average diameters and surface morphologies of silica-gel and SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄. The thermal properties were examined by a NETZSCH STA 409PC thermo gravimetric and differential scanning calorimetry (TG/DSC) analyzer with a heating rate of 10 °C per minute under a dynamic N₂ atmosphere and the temperature was ranging from 35 °C to 800 °C.

**Fig. 1.** FT-IR spectra of [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ (a), and SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ (b).

2.6. Acetalization and analysis

Taking the acetalization of benzaldehyde with ethanediol as an example, the typical procedure was performed as follows: benzaldehyde (7.42 g, 70 mmol), ethanediol (7.81 g, 126 mmol), catalyst (0.61 g, 4% of the total mass of benzaldehyde and ethanediol), and cyclohexane (8 mL, as a water-carrying agent) were charged successively into a 250 mL round bottom flask with a reflux condenser, a water segregator and a magnetic stirrer. Then the reaction was allowed to proceed at desired temperature for 1.5 h. All the reactions were analyzed using a gas chromatograph

**Fig. 2.** The whole and magnified SEM images of silica-gel (A and B), and SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ (C and D).



Scheme 4. Mechanism of acetalization over SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄.

equipped with an FID detector (SP6800A, SE-54 capillary column 30 m × 0.25 mm × 0.3 μm). The same procedures were carried out for the other acetalization of aldehydes by alcohols.

In a recycling experiment, SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was recovered by decantation, and collected for catalytic reusability test after dried under 100 °C for 2 h. The procedures for recycling experiment were the same as described above.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Catalytic performance of catalysts prepared under different conditions

In order to obtain the appropriate preparation conditions for SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄, effects of molar ratio of IL to TEOS and reaction temperature on catalytic performance of catalysts were investigated in the acetalization of benzaldehyde and ethanediol. The results were shown in Table 1. The more CIPTES-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was added, the higher yield of benzaldehyde ethanediol acetal was obtained (Table 1, entries 1–4). When *x* increased up to 0.5, the high yield of 96.8% was achieved. It was unnecessary to further increase the amount of ionic liquid. With a rise in temperature (Table 1, entries 4 and 5), the molecular movement was intensified and the collision probability between silica-gel and CIPTES-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ increased correspondingly. However, a further increase of temperature (Table 1, entries 4 and 6) also enhanced the collision of CIPTES-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ itself which led to a decrease in the yield of benzaldehyde ethanediol acetal [28]. Next, the catalyst (Table 1, entry 4) was characterized as follows.

3.2. Catalyst characterization

3.2.1. FT-IR

To confirm the immobilization of active component [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ on the support silica-gel, FT-IR

spectroscopic studies were carried out. First, the characteristic peaks of [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ around 586 cm⁻¹, 1642 cm⁻¹, 1566 cm⁻¹ and 1058 cm⁻¹ could be clearly observed in Fig. 1a and b. They were ascribed to C–H, C=C, C=N stretching vibrations of the imidazole ring [29], and S=O symmetric stretching vibrations of the –SO₃H group, respectively [30,31]. The band at 3150 cm⁻¹ was assigned to N–H stretching vibration of [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ [32]. Meanwhile, typical peaks of Si–O–Si of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ could be observed around 460 cm⁻¹, 769 cm⁻¹ and 954 cm⁻¹ in Fig. 1b. And the band at 3435 cm⁻¹ was assigned to the O–H of physical adsorbed water. However, the peak of N–H at 3150 cm⁻¹ of [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ which existed in Fig. 1a totally disappeared in the spectrum of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ in Fig. 1b. This observation suggested that [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had been immobilized on silica-gel by chemical covalent bond via the route shown above.

3.2.2. SEM

Fig. 2 shows the average diameters and surface morphologies of silica-gel and SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄. It was seen that the spherical silica-gel particles were agglomerated together and in the size of 2–5 μm (Fig. 2A). After the immobilization of ionic liquid, the size of the obtained SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had no obvious change (Fig. 2C). At a high magnification, the surface of silica-gel was rather smooth (Fig. 2B). However, it was found that the surface of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was much rough (Fig. 2D). This finding demonstrated that ionic liquid [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had been immobilized on the surface of silica-gel.

3.2.3. TG/DSC

As shown in Fig. 3, TG/DSC analysis was employed to investigate the thermal stability of the chemically modified silica-gel since the observed weight loss was associated with the loss of the organic components attached to the surface.

The small amount of weight loss within 200 °C in Fig. 3a was attributed to the desorption of physical adsorbed water and

Table 2
Acetalization of different aldehydes and alcohols in SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄.^a

Entry	Aldehydes	Alcohols	Time (h)	Yield (%) ^b	Selectivity (%) ^c
1	Benzaldehyde	Ethanediol	1.5	95.2	100
2	Benzaldehyde	1,2-Propanediol	2	93.0	100
3	Benzaldehyde	1,4-Butanediol	3	87.1	100
4	Benzaldehyde	Neopentyl glycol	1	98.5	100
5	Furfural	Ethanediol	3	85.0	100
6	Furfural	1,2-Propanediol	1.5	95.9	100
7	Furfural	Neopentyl glycol	0.5	97.4	100
8	Phenylacetaldehyde	Ethanediol	2.5	98.4	100
9	Phenylacetaldehyde	1,4-Butanediol	2.5	94.1	100

^a Aldehyde (70 mmol), alcohol (126 mmol), catalyst (4% of the total mass of aldehyde and alcohol), cyclohexane (8 mL), 110 °C.

^b Yield was achieved by GC analysis.

^c Selectivity for acetal.

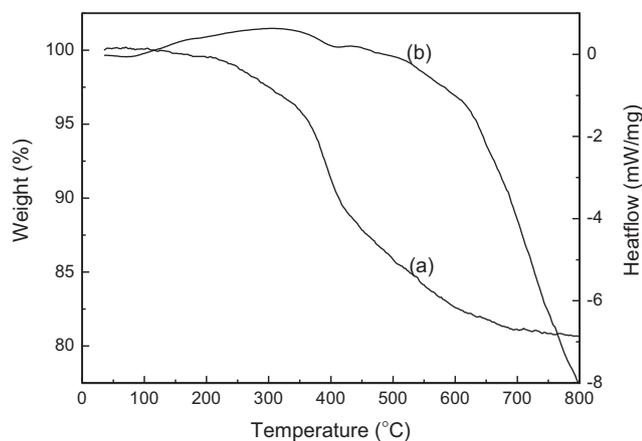


Fig. 3. TG (a)/DSC (b) patterns of silica-gel SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄.

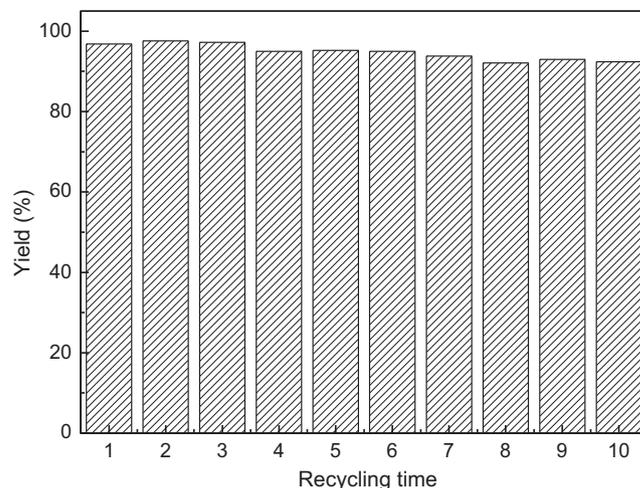


Fig. 4. Recycling of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ for the synthesis of benzaldehyde ethanediol acetal.

residual solvent. Correspondingly, an obvious endothermic peak appeared around 70 °C in Fig. 3b. When the temperature further increased to 350 °C, the weight of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ decreased rapidly. The reason might be that the organic components of ionic liquid and the propyl of CIPTES separated from the surface of silica-gel. Correspondingly, endothermic peaks at 410 °C appeared. Finally, it was observed that the chemically modified silica-gel exhibited good thermal stability under 350 °C and the residual weight of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was about 80% around 700 °C.

3.3. Catalytic activity of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ for acetalization

In order to investigate the scope and limitation of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ as catalyst for acetalization, different aldehydes and alcohols as the reactants were also tested and the results were summarized in Table 2. It could be found that SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ could give high catalytic activity for acetalization. Good to excellent yields ranging from 85.0% to 98.5% were obtained in all systems under investigation. And it should be pointed out here that selectivities to the desired products were all 100% over SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄.

The reusability of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was evaluated in the acetalization of benzaldehyde and ethanediol. The results were shown in Fig. 4. It was apparent that SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ showed good reusability for the reaction. The catalyst could be reused for 10 times without significant loss of catalytic activity.

3.4. Mechanism for acetalization

In the present work, the possible mechanism for acetalization of aldehydes with alcohols over SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was consistent with the reported ones [11,14]. As shown in Scheme 4, in the first step, the carbonyl group of aldehyde 1 took a proton from the immobilized ionic liquid catalyst. The protonated carbonyl group 2 was activated for nucleophilic addition of O atom of the alcohol. After deprotonation, the hemiacetal 4 was formed. Then the hemiacetal 4 was protonated again. After loss of water, the oxonium ion 6 was formed. It accepted a second alcohol hydroxyl group to form 7 and subsequent deprotonation gave the acetal 8.

4. Conclusion

The immobilized acidic ionic liquid catalyst SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was prepared and applied in acetalization of aldehydes with alcohols in this study. After characterization, it was found that [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ had been successfully immobilized on the surface of silica-gel by chemical covalent bond and the immobilized ionic liquid catalyst had good thermal stability. The original smooth surface of silica-gel was covered with [(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ and a rough surface of SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ was formed, but the size of particles had no obvious change. SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ showed good catalytic performance for a series of acetalization. Satisfactory yields of 81.0–98.5% were achieved under appropriate reaction conditions. The immobilized ionic liquid catalyst could be recovered easily and reused for 10 times for the synthesis of benzaldehyde ethanediol acetal without significant loss of catalytic activity. In conclusion, the immobilized

ionic liquid catalyst SG-[(CH₂)₃SO₃H-HIM]HSO₄ prepared in this study was proved to be an excellent recyclable heterogeneous catalyst for the synthesis of acetals and showed potential application in industry.

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