
Multi-Functional Fe₃O₄-Au Hybrid Nanostructures for Catalytic Studies

A thesis submitted to
Indian Institute of Science Education and Research Pune in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the BS-MS Dual Degree Program

by

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April, 2024

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Certificate

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled '***Multi-Functional Fe₃O₄-Au Hybrid Nanostructures for Catalytic Studies***' towards the partial fulfillment of the BS-MS dual degree program at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, represents study/work carried out by **Angela Dilraj Kadlas** at **Indian Institute of Science Education and Research** under the supervision of **Dr. Pramod P. Pillai**, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, during the academic year 2023-2024.



Angela Dilraj Kadlas

27 March 2024



Dr. Pramod P. Pillai

Dedicated to

Mummy, Papa, Eureka, Deep, and All Loved Ones

Declaration

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in the report entitled '***Multi-Functional Fe₃O₄-Au Hybrid Nanostructures for Catalytic Studies***' are the results of the work carried out by me at the Department of Chemistry, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, under the supervision of Dr. Pramod P. Pillai and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree. Wherever others contribute, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussions.



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20191202

27 March 2024



Dr. Pramod P. Pillai

Acknowledgment

My graduation stands as an important milestone in my life. My journey would have been incomplete without the presence of a few people who hold a significant role in shaping my academic and personal life. I want to take this opportunity to thank each one of them for their help and presence.

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, **Dr. Pramod P. Pillai**, for his constant support and guidance throughout my tenure in his group. I'll always be grateful for all his advice and suggestions to succeed academically and in life. Because of him and the NanoAlchemy group, I aspire to pursue my career in science, and I'll always be thankful to them.

I want to thank my Thesis Advisory Committee member, **Dr. Nirmalya Ballav**, for his valuable suggestions during my thesis. Also, I would like to thank **Prof. Jayant B. Udgaonkar** (Former Director, IISER Pune), **Prof. Sunil Bhagwat** (Director, IISER Pune), **Prof. Nirmala Ballav** (Chair, Department of Chemistry, IISER Pune) and **Department of Chemistry** for all the academic and research facilities.

Sumit Roy, who was always there for me. No matter what mess I made, he was there for me. I am grateful to have received a mentor like him who taught me how to think and do research. From the bottom of my heart, "Thank you, Sumit Bhaiya, for everything."

The **Nanoalchemy Group**, my *family away from home*. I was fortunate to have found seniors and labmates like them. I learned a lot from everyone. **Kashyap Ji, Pradyut bhaiya, Indro bhaiya, Ankit bhaiya, Vanshika di, Shreya di, Adhra di, Namitha, Sujitha and Mridul** made lab feel like home.

I am thankful to all my professors at IISER Pune since they greatly fostered my interest in science. I sincerely thank **Dr. Angshuman Nag** and **Professor Anirban Hazra** for inculcating my interest in physical chemistry. I would also like to thank **Mr. Santosh Khilare** and **Mr. Prashant Kale** from the physics department, who helped me devise an over-headed stirrer for my experiments.

All my friends have made a massive contribution to making my time at IISER Pune memorable. I have all the fun memories and unfiltered conversations I had with **Shruti, Kumar, Somen, Namitha, Darshini, Daksh, Soham, and Aashay**. I wish I could say goodbye to **Nilesh** because he was an angel. My juniors **Namith, Sampada, Jassi, Bhavik, Ananya, Bhavesh, Pratiksha, and Manish** gave me a fantastic company. I cannot imagine my life at IISER without these wonderful people. Thank you, guys, for being there for me.

I am indebted to **Singh Uncle** and **Singh Aunty**, my first teachers. Their presence is and will always be crucial in my life. I am thankful to my **parents** for supporting and believing me throughout. They have always been my strength during the tough times we had. I am grateful to everyone for their presence in my life.

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Abstract

Most of the intriguing properties at the nanoscale lie in the complex hybrid state rather than in the individual counterparts. Therefore, there is a need to create hybrid nanostructures that exhibit advanced optoelectronic properties such as better charge extraction, higher mechanical stability, coupling of inherently different sets of functions, etc. These hybrid architectures are beneficial because they allow one to take advantage of both the inherent features of each component separately. In this project, we have synthesized a hybrid nanostructure of Fe_3O_4 -Au nanoparticles for using both the plasmonic and magnetic properties in catalytic and photocatalytic studies. The hybrid structure was well-characterized through various spectroscopy and microscopy techniques. For catalytic property of the hybrid Fe_3O_4 -Au structure, an AuNP-based model catalytic 4-nitrophenol (PNP) to 4-aminophenol (AMP) reduction reaction was performed. The plasmonic property of AuNPs was also utilized for the photocatalytic ferricyanide reaction. The hybrid structure's magnetic property allowed us to carry out several catalytic cycles without losing any catalytic activity. In short, our work depicts the importance of hybrid nanoarchitecture in catalytic studies.

Introduction

With the continuous increase in energy demand, a need to develop a sustainable and reliable energy source has drawn much attention worldwide. One of the emerging ways is to harvest energy from electromagnetic radiation for energy production and storage, functional chemical transformations, etc. ^[1-8] Proper materials that can interact with sunlight efficiently and use the enormous energy stored in the sunlight for breaking and forming of various chemical bonds are crucial. Over the past few decades, nanostructures that exhibit optical and electrical activity, stability, and so on have gained immense significance. They show different properties because of the quantum confinement effect and significant surface-to-volume ratio, in contrast to their bulk counterparts. ^[9] In semiconductor nanoparticles, upon electromagnetic irradiation an electron is excited from its valence band to the conduction band. On the other hand, plasmonic metal nanoparticles (e.g., Au and Ag NPs) are known to have a 'sea of electrons' which, upon visible light irradiation, start to oscillate, and a resonance condition is achieved which is termed as localized surface plasmon resonance (LSPR) when the electromagnetic radiation's frequency aligns with the electrons' oscillation. ^[18-19] Both these nanostructures are known to have high molar extinction coefficients, due to which they can absorb massive amounts of light and generate large number of high-energy charge carriers that can be used for thermodynamically uphill chemical transformations (e.g., H₂O splitting, N₂ reduction, NO₃⁻, CO₂ reduction, etc.). As a result, both metal and semiconductor nanoparticles are well known for their unique light harvesting properties, thereby cementing a special place in catalysis and photocatalysis. ^[10-15, 18-23]

However, it was observed that the emerging properties could be efficiently harvested from the assembly of particles rather than individual counterparts, for example, Au-TiO₂, Au-Pd, and Au-Rh nanoparticles. This has led to extensive research in enhanced and emerging properties through the design and development of hybrid materials. Such a hybrid structure is also essential because we can utilize different properties in a single system. Such hybrid systems are generally prepared through in-situ synthesis or the self-assembly approaches. ^[24-25] One of the fascinating combinations is to couple plasmonic and magnetic properties. Magnetic nanoparticles, especially

magnetite (Fe_3O_4) NPs, are being explored for their high magnetic susceptibility and low toxicity, and they are employed in MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), self-assembly, catalysis, etc. [26-27] While LSPR of plasmonic nanoparticles such as AuNPs are investigated for various sensing, photocatalytic, and photothermal applications. [28] Therefore, it is interesting to couple magnetic and plasmonic NPs to realize the inherently absent properties of the individual components in hybrid structures.

In this project, we employ Fe_3O_4 -Au hetero nanostructures for catalytic and photocatalytic applications. One of the significant challenges associated with nanoparticle catalysis is the separation of catalysts after the reaction, which also creates obstacles for the easy analysis of the reaction mixture. This challenge can be overcome by installing magnetic nanoparticles in plasmonic nanoparticles. Iron oxide is known to be magnetic, which would ensure a separation under external magnetic field. [26-27] According to literature reports, iron oxide acts as a semiconductor. When present in a heterostructure, they can provide better charge separation, provided they form heterojunction and their energy levels match with the counterpart. [27] In this project, we have synthesized and characterized Fe_3O_4 -Au hybrid nanostructures. Further, we explored these hybrid structures for model catalytic 4-nitrophenol reduction and photocatalytic one electron reduction of ferricyanide (details on these catalytic reactions are given in Section 1.1). More importantly, the magnetic properties of Fe_3O_4 NPs in the hybrid was used for the easy separation of the catalyst, which enabled us to perform multiple catalytic cycles without any compromise in the catalytic activity. In short, our work provides a simple, yet effective strategy to achieve recyclability in NP catalysed reactions, while retaining the excellent catalytic activity.

1.1. Gold-Catalyzed Reactions:

1.1a) Passive Catalysis

Metal nanoparticle catalysis is widely studied because it exhibits unusual behavior at the nanoscale compared to its bulk counterparts. Metal nanoparticles are known to participate in chemical transformations passively. They provide their surface to adsorb the substrates to overcome the kinetic barrier, thus facilitating the reaction. A widely used model reaction to inspect the passive participation of nanoparticles is p-nitrophenol (PNP)

to p-aminophenol (AMP/PAP) in the presence of borohydride (BH_4^-) which is the reducing agent. PNP and borohydride ions are adsorbed on the surface of Au nanoparticles, where the Langmuir-Hinshelwood mechanism facilitates electron transfer between the two moieties. Though PNP reduction is a thermodynamically feasible reaction it only progresses in presence of a catalyst. [29-31]

1.1b) Active Catalysis

Plasmonic metal nanoparticles are known to have large number of mobile charge carriers. The free electron cloud oscillates continuously in the external field upon electromagnetic irradiation. [9,28] The charge carriers stay in phase with the external field and internal polarization reaches equilibrium if the driving force frequency is relatively low. **(Fig. 1.1.a).** [28] A resonance condition is achieved at frequencies higher than the driving force. In presence of external electromagnetic field with frequency higher than driving force, the internal polarization is developed as a result of charge oscillation in the nanoparticle lagging behind by a phase of $\pi/2$ with respect to the external field. When the system is excited at its resonant frequency, the internal polarization increases rather than cancelling out the driving force. Plasmonic metal nanoparticles exhibit significant charge polarization and an increase in oscillation amplitude when excited at their resonant frequency. This results in plasmonic amplification of the particle's near field. **(Fig. 1.1.b).** This condition is termed localized surface plasmon resonance (LSPR). [28]

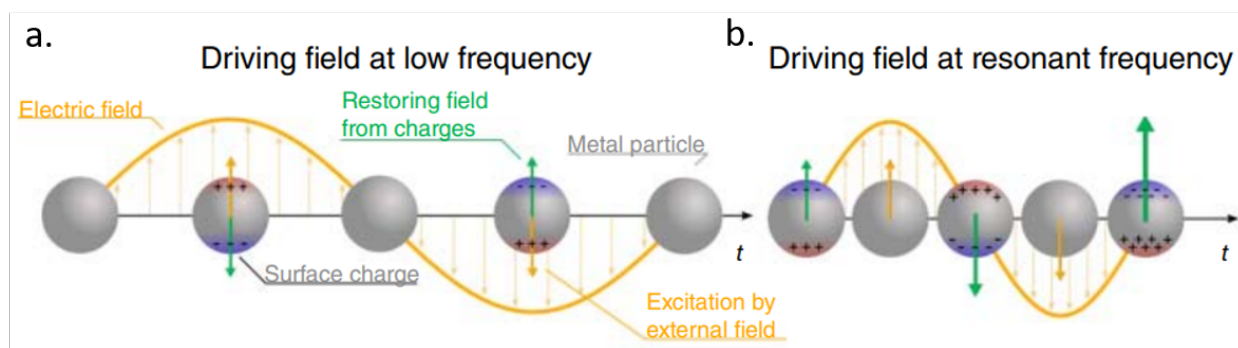


Figure 1.1: Schematic depiction of oscillation of charge carriers in a metal nanoparticle at a) low and b) resonant frequency. Adapted with permission. [28] Copyright 2021, Wiley-VCH.

Localized surface plasmon resonance undergoes Landau damping by dephasing, followed by radiative or nonradiative decay at the femtosecond timescale. [9,28,32]

Radiative decay happens via emitting photons (luminescence or scattering), which is dominant for larger particles (>50 nm), and nonradiative decay occurs by the formation of hot charge carriers, which is dominant for smaller particles. ^[9] In nonradiative pathways, hot charge carriers are formed in two ways: interband excitation, here electrons transition from low-lying filled d band to the empty sp band above the Fermi energy level (ϵ_f) in a metal nanoparticle. In intraband excitation, electrons transition from filled sp band to the empty sp band, which is above the Fermi energy level. ^[28] Following these transitions, non-fermi electronic distribution is created via Landau dampening (within 100 fs), which thermalizes internally by electron-electron, electron-phonon, and phonon-phonon scattering. Ultimately, by dissipating heat, the nanoparticle lattice achieves thermal equilibrium with the surrounding. ^[32] To employ plasmonic nanoparticles for photocatalytic applications, they should be photoexcited first for the formation of hot charge carriers. Various light-driven chemical reactions are facilitated by the extraction of these hot charge carriers. ^[33]

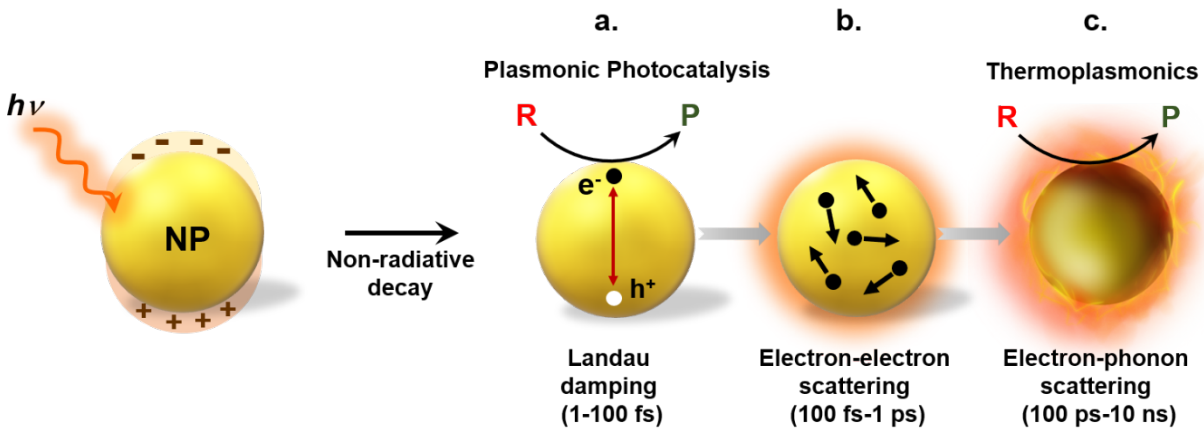


Figure 1.2: Plasmon relaxation dynamics. Because of plasmonic excitation, the local electric fields dissipate the energy in two ways: radiative or nonradiative decay paths. Hot charge carriers and heat are produced via nonradiative decay. (a) At $t = 0$, plasmon excitation decays non-radiatively to produce a hot charge carrier distribution that takes 1–10 fs to generate before being thermalized by electron–electron scattering, (b) electron–phonon scattering, and (c) phonon–phonon scattering. Ultimately, the energy is released into the surrounding as heat.

Materials and Methods

2.1. Materials and Reagents

Iron (III) chloride hexahydrate ($\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 97%, SRI), ethylene glycol (98%, Avra), polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP, average MW~55,00), sodium acetate (99%, Rankem), chloroauric acid trihydrate ($\text{HAuCl}_4 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$, $\geq 99.9\%$, Sigma-Aldrich), 4-nitrophenol ($\geq 99\%$, Sigma-Aldrich), sodium citrate tribasic dihydrate ($\geq 99.0\%$, Sigma-Aldrich), sodium borohydride ($\geq 99\%$, Sigma-Aldrich), ethanol absolute ($>99\%$, Alsucrose corporation), potassium Hexacyanoferrate ($\geq 99\%$, Sigma-Aldrich), Milli-Q water.

2.2. Synthesis

2.2a) Synthesis of multicore Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles

The Fe_3O_4 NPs were synthesized by modifying a previous report.^[34] In a typical experiment, $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (114 mg) was dissolved in ethylene glycol (72.6 mL) in a round bottom flask followed by PVP (400 mg) once it reached 60°C under vigorous stirring conditions. Then, sodium acetate (853 mg) was added to the solution. The reaction mixture was heated in an oven for four hours at 200°C in a Teflon autoclave. The mixture was gradually cooled over a 12-hour period. The final mixture was twice centrifuged (6500 rpm, 4 min) with ethanol and once with Milli-Q water. Finally, the nanoparticles were dispersed in 75 mL Milli-Q water.

2.2b) Synthesis of Au nanoparticles

The Au NPs were synthesized according to a modified literature report.^[35] In a typical experiment, 2.7 mL $\text{HAuCl}_4 \cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (25 mM) was added to 270 mL Milli-Q water and heated to 95°C . Subsequently, 8.1 mL sodium citrate (38.7 mM) was added. After 10 min, the nanoparticles were stored in the fridge until further use.

2.2c) Synthesis of hybrid Fe_3O_4 -Au nanoparticles

The Fe_3O_4 NPs were synthesized following a modified previous report.^[34] 10 mL of Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles were separated using a magnet; then, the solution was removed, and the previously prepared 21 mL of citrate capped Au NP were added. The solution was sonicated for three hours and stirred in a vortex mixer for two hours. The product was dispersed into 3 mL of milli-Q water after being repeatedly washed with a magnet.

2.3. Characterization

2.3a) Transmission electron microscopy (TEM)

On the Jeol JEM2200FS (200 kV) apparatus, the Transmission Electron Microscopic (TEM) investigations were conducted. After letting the sample rest undisturbed for about ten minutes, diluted AuNP solutions were drop-cast onto 400 mesh carbon-coated copper grids (Ted Pella Inc.). Following the samples' complete vacuum drying, imaging was done.

2.3b) X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS)

Thermo Scientific K-Alpha fully integrated, monochromated small-spot X-ray photoelectron spectrometer (XPS) instrument was used to perform X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy. The Fe₃O₄-Au nanoparticle sample was dried completely by lyophilization before the spectra were recorded.

2.4. Catalytic Reduction

UV-vis absorption spectroscopy (SHIMADZU UV-3600 plus UV-VIS-NIR spectrophotometer) was used to track the kinetics of all Fe₃O₄-Au NP mediated reduction reactions. The UV-vis absorption spectra were obtained at one-minute intervals in a 3 mL cuvette (path length = 1 cm). In order to conduct time-dependent kinetic studies, the reactant's absorbance at its λ_{max} was tracked over time. All tests were performed at room temperature. The molar extinction coefficient for Au nanoparticles was taken to be $5.4 \times 10^7 \text{ M}^{-1}\text{cm}^{-1}$. [36-37]

2.4a) Catalytic reduction of p-nitrophenol (PNP)

The standard Au NP-mediated catalytic reduction of p-nitrophenol (PNP) by BH₄⁻ ions involved mixing in a cuvette 300 μL of 0.1 M NaBH₄, 100 μL of Fe₃O₄-Au NP solution, and 6 μL of 50 mM PNP and milli-Q water. UV-vis absorption spectroscopy was used to monitor the progress of the reaction. The absorbance at ~400 nm (nitrophenolate ion) decreases gradually with time with increase in absorbance at ~300 nm (aminophenolate ion), confirming the reduction process.

2.5. Photocatalytic Reduction

UV-vis absorption spectroscopy (SHIMADZU UV-3600 plus UV-VIS-NIR spectrophotometer) was used to track the kinetics of all Fe₃O₄-Au NP mediated photocatalytic reduction reactions. The reaction mixture's UV-vis absorption spectra were obtained at fifteen-minute intervals in a 3 mL cuvette (path length = 1 cm). In order to conduct time-dependent kinetic studies, the reactant's absorbance at its λ_{max} was tracked over time. All tests were performed at room temperature.

2.5.a) Photocatalytic reduction of Ferricyanide

The photocatalytic activity of Fe₃O₄-Au NPs was investigated for ferricyanide reduction to ferrocyanide. At room temperature, the reaction was carried out in a 3 mL quartz cuvette, illuminated by two 3W Blue LEDs (465nm, ~60mW/cm²). A mixture of 880 μ L 5M EtOH (hole scavenger), 250 μ M potassium ferricyanide, and 400 μ L Fe₃O₄-Au NPs was purged with Ar for 15 minutes before irradiation. Ferricyanide reduction was monitored over 2 hours by measuring the change in the absorbance at 420 nm, corresponding to ferricyanide.

2.6. Determination of Conversion, Reaction rate (k') and Rate constant (k)

Assuming that the conversion of reactant to product was pseudo-first-order with respect to PNP concentration, the rate of catalytic reduction reaction was calculated. In the case of PNP reduction reaction, the decrease in the concentration (conversion at time t) of p-nitrophenolate at 400 nm was calculated using Beer-Lambert law, where 18300 M⁻¹cm⁻¹ was used as the molar extinction coefficient of p-nitrophenolate^[38] i.e.,

$$\text{Conversion } (t) = - \frac{(A_{400 \text{ nm}}(t) - A_{400 \text{ nm}}(t = 0))}{18300}$$

The rate of catalytic reduction reaction was determined by assuming the conversion of reactant to the product was first-order in the ferricyanide reduction reaction. In the case of the ferricyanide reduction reaction, the decrease in the concentration (conversion at time t) of ferricyanide at 420 nm was calculated using Beer-Lambert law, where 1050 M⁻¹cm⁻¹ was used as the molar extinction coefficient of ferricyanide^[39] i.e.,

$$Conversion(t) = -\frac{(A_{420\text{ nm}}(t) - A_{420\text{ nm}}(t=0))}{1050}$$

The reaction rate was determined by fitting the conversion vs. time (t) plot with a function given below

$$c = c_0 (1 - e^{-kt})$$

Here, c_0 stands for initial concentration of PNP and ferricyanide in PNP and ferricyanide reduction reactions respectively and k stands for the rate constant of the reaction. Rate of reaction is represented below

$$\frac{dc}{dt} = c_0 \cdot k \cdot e^{-kt}$$

Reaction rate at $t = 0$ is given as

$$k' = \frac{dc}{dt}(t=0) = c_0 \cdot k$$

The following equation determined the rate constant, k

$$k = \frac{k'}{c_0}$$

Where c_0 was taken as 10^{-4} M in the case of PNP and corresponding of ferricyanide in ferricyanide reduction.

2.7. Calculation of conversion yield (%)

The conversion yield was calculated by monitoring the decrease in ferricyanide absorbance at ~420 nm.

2.7a) External quantum yield calculation (ϕ_{EQY})

The external quantum yield (ϕ_{EQY}) was calculated using the following equation

$$\phi_{EQY} = \frac{\text{molecules of product formed}}{\text{number of incident photons per second}} \times 100$$

$$\phi_{EQY} = \frac{\text{moles of product formed} \times N_A}{\frac{E\lambda t}{hc}} \times 100$$

Here, N_A is Avogadro number, E is excitation energy, λ is wavelength of the excitation source, t is total time of irradiation in seconds, h is Plank's constant and c is speed of light.

The moles of product formed are calculated as follows:

$$\text{moles of product formed} = \text{concentration} \times \text{volume}$$

$$\text{moles of product formed} = \frac{\text{Absorbance of product (at 420 nm)}}{\epsilon l} \times 3 \times 10^{-3} \text{ L}$$

$$\text{moles of product formed} = \frac{0.248}{1050} \times 3 \times 10^{-3} \text{ L}$$

$$\text{moles of product formed} = 7.08 \times 10^{-7} \text{ moles}$$

The incident power is 35 mWcm^{-2} and area of cuvette is 4 cm^2 . So, the excitation energy is:

$$\text{Excitation energy} = \text{Incident power} \times \text{Area of cuvette}$$

$$\text{Excitation energy} = 35 \text{ mWcm}^{-2} \times 4 \text{ cm}^2$$

$$\text{Excitation energy} = 140 \text{ mW or } 140 \text{ mJs}^{-1}$$

The number of incident photons per second is:

$$\frac{E\lambda t}{hc} = \frac{0.140 \text{ Js}^{-1} \times 465 \text{ nm} \times 7200 \text{ s}}{6.626 \times 10^{-34} \text{ Js}^{-1} \times 3 \times 10^8 \text{ ms}^{-1}} = 2.36 \times 10^{21}$$

Finally, substituting the values of moles of product formed and number of incident photons per second

$$\phi_{EQY} = \frac{7.08 \times 10^{-7} \times 6.023 \times 10^{23}}{2.36 \times 10^{21}} \times 100 = 0.018$$

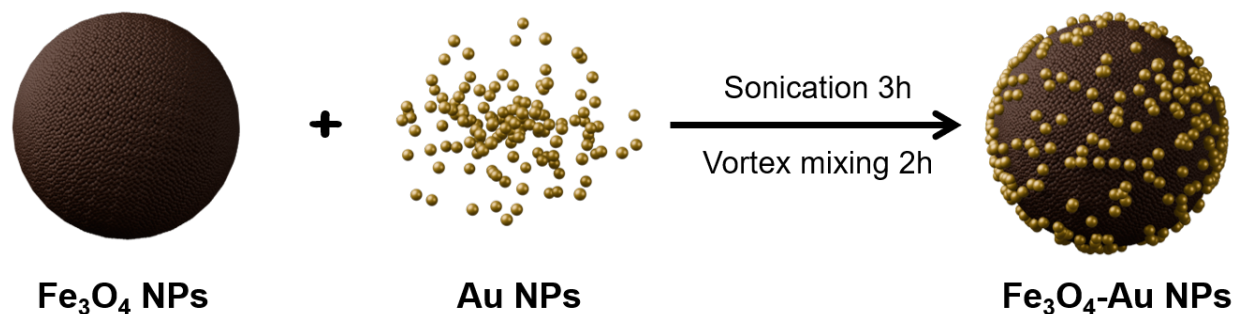
Results and Discussion

A hybrid of plasmonic gold and magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles gives room to study a variety of gold-catalyzed and photocatalyzed reactions, where the hybrid nanoparticles can be recovered after every reaction due to their magnetic activity and can be recycled, ensuring efficient repeated use of the material. The recyclability of the hybrid nanostructures was examined in a model 4-nitrophenol reduction reaction and model $1e^-$ ferricyanide reduction reaction. The 4-nitrophenol reaction proceeded by adsorption of substrates (BH_4^- ions and PNP) on the surface of Au NPs, which helped to overcome the kinetic barrier of the reaction. Model $1e^-$ ferricyanide reduction reaction proceeds by forming hot charge carriers in Au NPs upon light irradiation. The hot electrons are efficiently extracted for reduction reaction and hot holes for oxidation reaction.

3.1. Synthesis and characterization of Fe_3O_4 -Au nanoparticles

Multicore Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles were synthesized through a modified polyol-mediated solvothermal synthesis. [34] In a typical reaction mixture, ferric chloride hexahydrate was dissolved in ethylene glycol (a short-chain polyol that allows clustering for multicore particles), followed by the addition of PVP (capping agent) and sodium acetate (helps in the hydrolysis of Fe^{3+} ions). [34, 40-41]

In accordance with previous literature reports, citrate capped AuNPs (11.5 ± 0.5 nm) were synthesized and adsorbed onto these iron oxide nanoparticles. **Scheme 3.1** provides a schematic depiction of the synthesis process. Absorption spectra of Fe_3O_4 and hybrid Fe_3O_4 -Au nanoparticles are shown in **Figure 3.1.a**.



Scheme 3.1: Schematic representation of iron oxide-gold hybrid nanoparticles synthesis.

The synthesized PVP-capped Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles were characterized with diffuse reflectance spectroscopy (DRS) and transmission electron microscopy (TEM). Absorption spectra of Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles were recorded (**Figure 3.1.a**). TEM images confirmed that these multicore nanoparticles were formed from clustering ~ 5 nm Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles (**Figure 3.1.c**). UV-Vis absorption and transmission electron microscopy characterized the synthesized citrate-capped Au nanoparticles. These nanoparticles exhibited their characteristic red wine color with LSPR peak at ~ 518 nm (**Figure 3.1.b**), with an estimated size of ~ 10 nm (**Figure 3.1.d**).

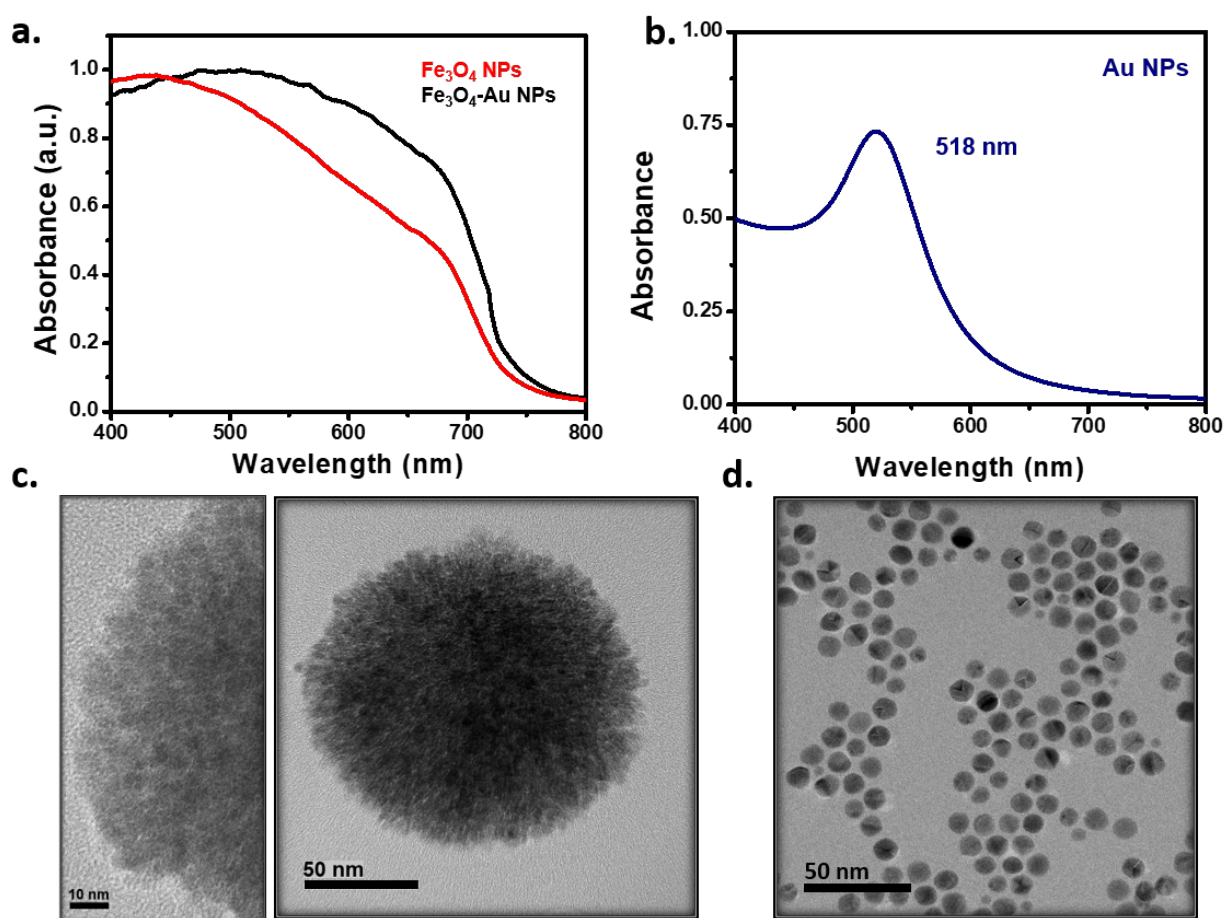


Figure 3.1: Characterization of Fe_3O_4 and Au nanostructures. (a) absorption spectra (DRS) of Fe_3O_4 (black) and Fe_3O_4 -Au (red) nanostructures (b) UV-Vis absorption spectra of citrate-capped Au NPs. A representative TEM image of (c) multicore iron oxide nanoparticles formed of ~ 5 nm Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles and (d) Au nanoparticles.

The morphology and chemical composition of hybrid Fe₃O₄-Au nanoparticles were well characterized through TEM and X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS). The absorption spectra of hybrid Fe₃O₄-Au nanoparticles were recorded (**Figure 3.1.a**). TEM images confirmed the adsorption of Au nanoparticles onto Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles (**Figure 3.2.a**). Ultimately, structural characterization of Fe₃O₄-Au nanoparticles, XPS investigations were performed. ^[42] All significant elements namely Fe, Au, C, and O were present in the heterostructures, according to XPS survey spectra. (**Figure 3.2.b**). The Au 4f area has two peaks in the XPS spectra for Au, and they are attributed to the core-energy levels Au 4f_{5/2} and Au 4f_{7/2}. (**Figure 3.2.c**). Similarly, Fe₃O₄ nanoparticles showed two peaks for Fe²⁺ (2p_{3/2} and 2p_{1/2}) and two peaks for Fe³⁺ (2p_{3/2} and 2p_{1/2}) along with their satellite peaks (**Figure 3.2.d**). The catalytic and photocatalytic characteristics of AuNP-based hybrid systems were examined after their structural composition and morphology were confirmed for model 4-nitrophenol reduction and model one electron ferricyanide reduction. After purification, the hybrid structures were magnetically separated with a neodymium magnet within a minute (**Figure 3.2.e**).

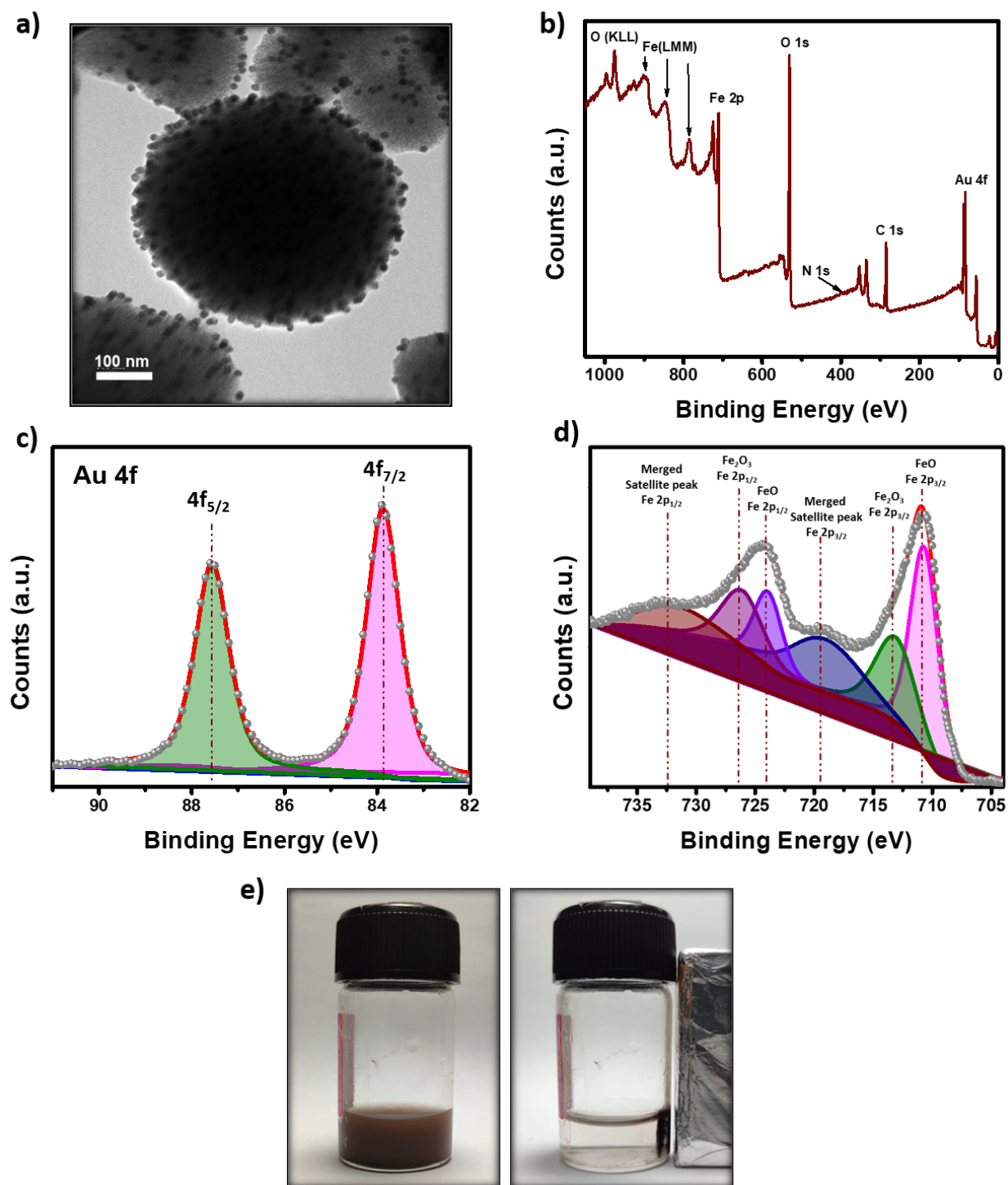


Figure 3.2. Characterization of hybrid Fe_3O_4 -Au nanostructures. (a) A TEM image of Au NPs adsorbed on Fe_3O_4 NPs. (b) All significant elements present in the heterostructures, according to XPS survey spectra. XPS spectra of (c) Au 4f core-level and (d) Fe 2p core-level, confirming the presence of both Fe^{2+} and Fe^{3+} oxidation states in Fe_3O_4 -Au nanostructures. (e) Optical images of before and after magnetic separation within a minute.

3.2. Catalytic reduction of *p*-nitrophenol

We employed Fe₃O₄-Au nanostructures to catalyze *p*-nitrophenol (PNP) to *p*-aminophenol (AMP) reduction reaction. The negatively charged substrates (BH₄⁻ and 4-nitrophenolate ions) get adsorbed onto the Au surface, catalyzing the reaction via the Langmuir-Hinshelwood mechanism (**Figure 3.3**).^[29-31] Borohydride ions react with the surface of metal nanoparticles and transfer hydride ions onto it. Simultaneously, nitrophenolate ions also get adsorbed on the nanoparticle's surface, and the electron transfer happens between nitrophenolate ion and the surface adsorbed hydride ions followed by dissociation of 4-aminophenol from the metal surface.

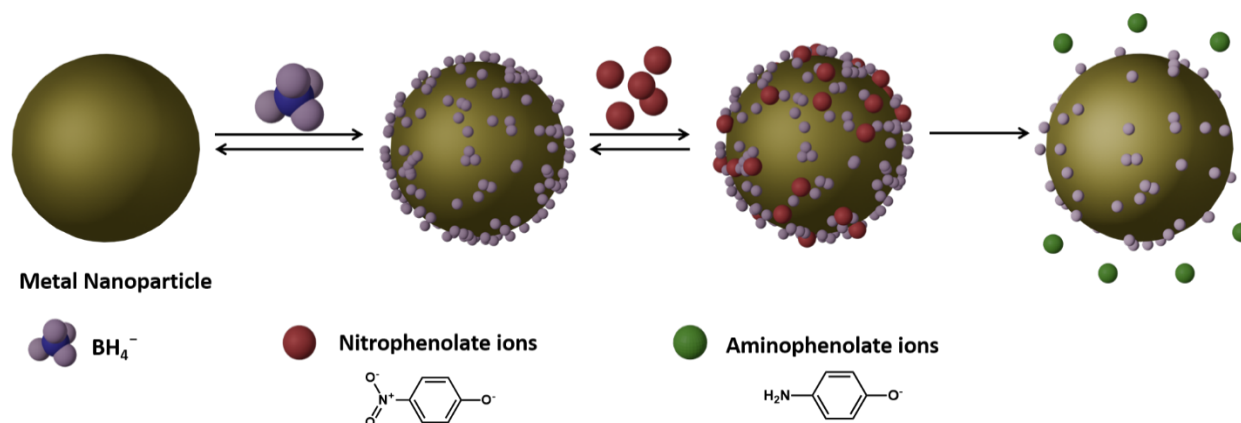


Figure 3.3: Schematic representation of Langmuir-Hinshelwood electron transfer mechanism on the surface of metal nanoparticles. Adapted with permission. [31] Copyright 2022, The Royal Society of Chemistry.

UV-Vis absorption spectroscopy was used to monitor the progress of the reaction. The absorbance at ~400 nm for nitrophenolate ion decreased with time and increased at ~300 nm, corresponding to aminophenol, confirming the reduction process.^[29] Because of the presence of excess amounts of BH₄⁻ over PNP, the reaction kinetics follows pseudo-first-order kinetics, and based on the conversion vs. time plot, the reaction's rate constant (*k*) was calculated to be ~0.35 min⁻¹.^[29,38] The heterogeneous aspect of the catalyst was demonstrated through the easy separation of the catalyst in the presence of

an external magnet, which enabled us to perform recyclability experiments. Interestingly, we obtained five cycles without a significant decrease in the % conversion yield.

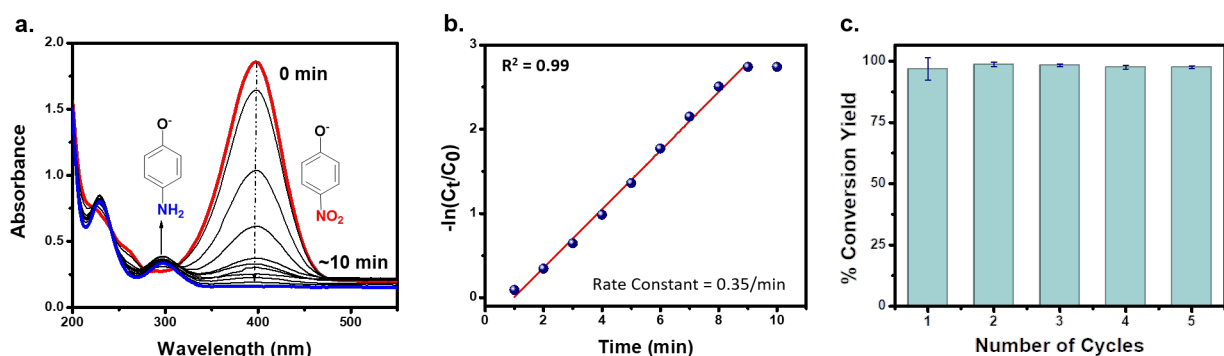


Figure 3.4. Recyclable catalytic reduction of PNP over $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ NPs. (a) UV-vis absorption changes of nitrophenolate ion in the presence of BH_4^- and $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ nanoparticles. A decrease in the absorption of PNP ion at ~ 400 nm and the appearance of a new band ~ 300 nm corresponding to PNA was observed. (b) A pseudo-first-order analysis plot by tracking the PNP absorption changes at 400 nm. (c) The retention of the catalytic properties of $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ NPs for five cycles.

3.1 a) Temperature-dependent catalytic study

Next, detailed temperature-dependent kinetic studies were performed to deduce the activation energy of the reaction in the presence of the hybrid structures. The kinetics of the reaction at different temperatures was monitored at 400 nm, which decreased over time, confirming the reduction of PNP (**Figure 3.5.a**). Following the Arrhenius equation, the reaction rate was faster at higher and slower at lower temperatures. Reactions at lower temperatures were associated with longer induction time, which justifies the slower rate. The apparent activation energy for the PNP reduction reaction was estimated to be ~ 45 kJ/mol from $\ln k$ versus $1/T$ plot (**Figure 3.5.b**).

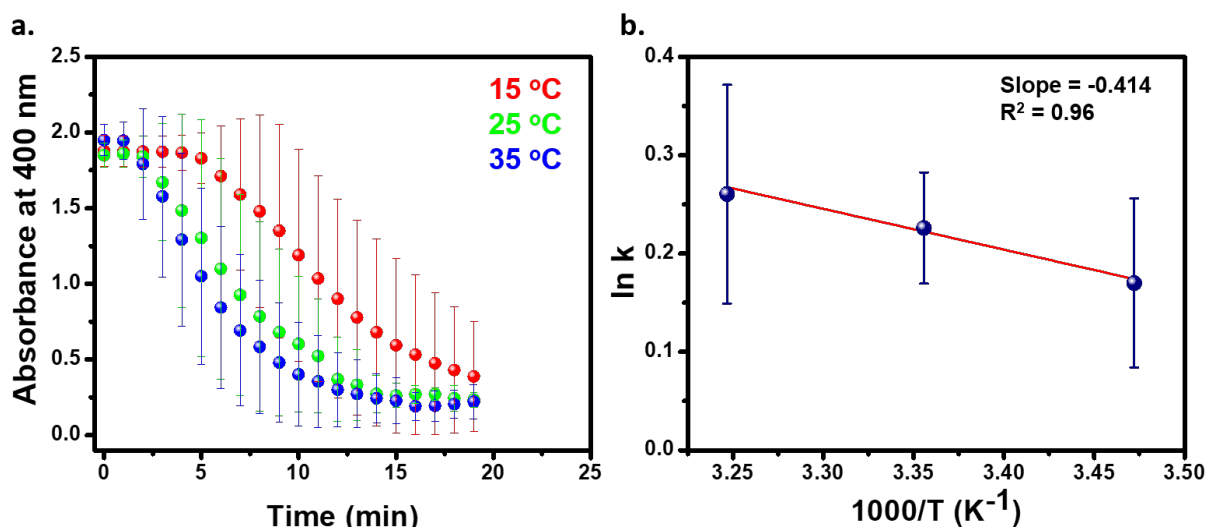


Figure 3.5. Temperature-dependent catalytic study. (a) Temperature-dependent kinetics was monitored at 400 nm at 15°C (red), 25°C (green), and 35°C (blue), respectively. (b) The PNP reduction by BH_4^- plot of $\ln k$ versus $1/T$ in the presence of hybrid $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ NPs.

3.3. Photocatalytic reduction of ferricyanide

The photocatalytic activity of $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ NPs was investigated for the model ferricyanide to ferrocyanide reduction reaction. In a typical reaction mixture, ferricyanide, ethanol (hole scavenger), and $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4\text{-Au}$ were irradiated by two blue (250 mW) LEDs. The photoexcitation of gold nanoparticles leads to the formation of hot charge carriers, which were transferred to the acceptors (ferricyanide and ethanol) to carry out the reduction and oxidation reactions, respectively. [39,43] On the Au NP, an excess electron build-up results from hole scavenging. Au NP develops a substantial steady-state excess of electrons during continuous LSPR activation. Due to this, the quasi-Fermi level rises compared to the Fermi level of Au nanoparticles in the dark. The apparent activation barrier of the reduction from Fe^{3+} to Fe^{2+} is lower than in the dark because of an increase in the chemical potential of the electrons supplied by the photo-charged Au NP relative to the unexcited NP. This decrease in the fermi energy level is due to the light excitation at LSPR. [45]

UV-Vis absorption spectroscopy was used to monitor the progress of the reaction. The absorbance at ~ 420 nm corresponds to ferricyanide decrease with time along with a gradual increase at ~ 240 nm, corresponding to ferrocyanide, confirming the reduction

process (**Figure 3.6.a**). The reaction kinetics follows first-order kinetics, and based on the conversion vs. time plot, the reaction's rate constant (k) was calculated to be $\sim 0.008 \text{ min}^{-1}$ from (**Figure 3.6.b**). The heterogeneous aspect of the catalyst was demonstrated through the easy separation of the catalyst in the presence of an external magnet, which enabled us to perform recyclability experiments. Interestingly, we obtained five cycles without significantly decreasing the % conversion yield (**Figure 3.6.c**).

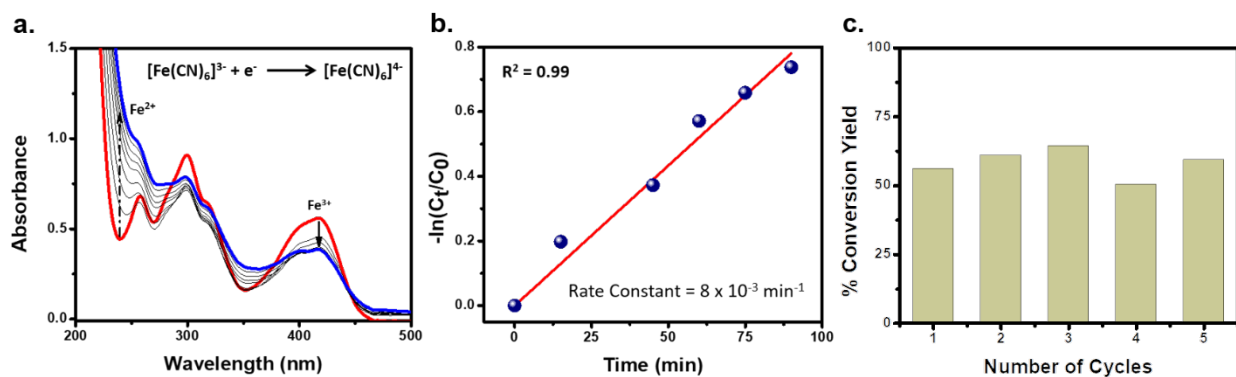


Figure 3.6. Recyclable photocatalytic reduction of ferricyanide by Fe_3O_4 -Au NPs. (a) Spectral changes in the absorption of ferricyanide ions in the presence of Fe_3O_4 -Au NPs. A gradual decrease in the absorption of ferricyanide ion at $\sim 420 \text{ nm}$, along with the appearance of a new band $\sim 240 \text{ nm}$ corresponding to ferrocyanide ion, was observed. (b) A first-order analysis plot by tracking the ferricyanide absorption changes at 420 nm . (c) The retention of the catalytic properties of Fe_3O_4 -Au NPs for five cycles.

Conclusion

Our study reveals a set of properties in a single hybrid system. We could successfully integrate fully functional magnetic and plasmonic properties in a hybrid nanoparticle system. We chose magnetic Fe_3O_4 and plasmonic Au nanoparticles in our hybrid system. The well-defined morphology of Fe_3O_4 -Au hybrid structures was confirmed by TEM imaging, and the chemical composition was confirmed by XPS studies. The catalytic activity of AuNP in the heterostructures was confirmed by model 4-nitrophenol reduction. Further, model one electron photocatalytic reduction of ferricyanide ensured the hybrid structure retained the plasmonic property. The magnetic property of Fe_3O_4 NP in the heterostructure helped us perform recyclability with Au-catalyzed reactions, further confirming the hybrid structure's superiority.

Future Direction

The hybrid structure will be explored for essential and challenging reactions such as N_2 reduction reaction (NRR), NO_2^- and NO_3^- to NH_4^+ production, and CO_2 reduction into valuable fuels. The iron oxide part is expected to adsorb N_2 , NO_3^- , and NO_2^- molecules, and plasmonically active gold nanoparticles will optically activate the adsorbed molecules to transform into NH_3 . These hybrid nanostructures will also be used for biomolecule sensing and preparing photoelectric cells.

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