ABSTRACT: Supercritical water gasification (SCWG) is a process in which biomass reacts with supercritical water to produce H₂ and CH₄-rich gas. The water-to-biomass ratio is a crucial variable in SCWG that affects the energy efficiency of the process. Despite the clear concept, systematic studies on water consumption during the formation of gaseous products are lacking. This study aims to determine the water consumption in SCWG of organic feedstock. Ethanol was used as an organic model compound since mass balances of complex biomasses like lignocelluloses are often incomplete due to the formation of solid deposits. The ethanol concentration ranged from 1.2 to 72 wt %, and complete gasification was achieved in all cases. Water consumption decreased with an increase in ethanol concentration due to enhanced methanation reactions with increasing organics. Stoichiometric calculations and ASPEN HYSYS simulations confirmed the experimental results, showing equilibrium gas compositions in the reaction system.

1. INTRODUCTION
The need for renewable energy and especially for hydrogen as an energy carrier is growing as carbon neutrality needs to be reached while an increasing need of energy needs to be covered. There are various production methods for green hydrogen, including water electrolysis using renewable energy sources, reforming of biogas, and biomass gasification.

One promising pathway for producing green hydrogen is through the gasification of biomass in supercritical water. Supercritical water gasification (SCWG) is a method that utilizes water as a reaction medium to convert organics into gaseous products with high efficiency. The process involves heating water (the main component of the feed) to temperatures and pressures at which it becomes supercritical.¹ This allows for excellent miscibility with the organic feedstock, resulting in fast and homogeneous reactions.² The process efficiency and the composition of the produced gas in SCWG are dependent on various process parameters, including temperature, pressure, and organic feed concentration.³−⁵ Organic molecules are first hydrolyzed (eqs 1 and 2) and then further decomposed into gases followed by the water gas shift reaction (eq 3) and methanation reactions (eqs 4 and 5).⁶−¹¹

As displayed in eqs 1 to 5, water plays an important role as a reactant in the SCWG. Until now, the amount of water that reacts to form gaseous products within the process has received little interest and has not been systematically studied. The water-to-biomass ratio in the feed influences the process in terms of gasification efficiency¹⁹−²¹ and is an important factor on the SCWG energy efficiency and economics.²²,²³

\[ C_xH_yO_z + (2x - z)H_2O \rightarrow xCO_2 + (2x - z + 0.5y)H_2 \]  \hspace{1cm} (1)

\[ C_xH_yO_z + (x - z)H_2O \rightarrow xCO + (x - z + 0.5y)H_2 \]  \hspace{1cm} (2)

\[ CO + H_2O \leftrightarrow CO_2 + H_2 \]  \hspace{1cm} (3)

\[ CO + 3H_2 \leftrightarrow CH_4 + H_2O \]  \hspace{1cm} (4)

\[ CO_2 + 4H_2 \leftrightarrow CH_4 + 2H_2O \]  \hspace{1cm} (5)
Fiorietal.simulated the SCWG process of different biomasses and calculated the water consumption of 10 wt % glycerol solution to be 22.5 kg h\(^{-1}\) when processing 1000 kg h\(^{-1}\) solution (\(T = 700 ^\circ\)C, \(p = 300\) bar).\(^{24}\) Wang et al. simulated the catalytical SCWG of lignin on a molecular scale and calculated the water consumption as a function of total water molecules present in the system.\(^{25}\) In the following work, the influence of the biomass concentration, conducted with the model component ethanol, on the water consumption of the SCWG is experimentally investigated and theoretically described. Additionally, the experimental data is compared to an ASPEN HYSYS simulation. The results of these experiments provide valuable insights into the process of supercritical water gasification of ethanol and can be transferred to the conversion of real biomass. The results are complemented with a study on the influence of potassium as a catalyst on the reactionsystem.\(^{26,27}\) It is important to understand the influence of homogeneous catalysts on the process, not only in terms of chemistry\(^{28,29}\) but also in terms of how they alter the reaction system (e.g., the reactor walls) permanently.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Preparation of Educts. Pure ethanol is mixed with distilled water at concentrations of 1.2 to 72 wt % to create the feed solution. The ethanol is supplied by VWR Chemicals. When needed, KHCO\(_3\) is added as a catalyst.

2.2. Apparatus. At the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology, laboratory SCWG tests are conducted in the Laboratory Plant for Energetic Utilization of Agricultural Materials, abbreviated as LENA (German acronym). LENA is a high-pressure plant that operates at temperatures of up to 700 \(^\circ\)C and pressures of up to 30 MPa. The reaction system comprises a preheater and two gasification reactors (as shown in Figure 1).

The preheater, which is made of a nickel-based Inconel 625 alloy, has an inner diameter of 8 mm and a length of 1200 mm. Five electric spiral heaters heat the preheater from the outside, with two thermocouples attached to the outer wall of the pipe for each heater. In the preheater, the supercritical state of water is achieved.

The gasification reactors are made of Inconel 625 and have lengths of 1100 and 1800 mm and an inner diameter of 8 mm. Reactor 1 is heated from the outside by an electric spiral heater and three electric rod heaters. Seven thermocouples are mounted on the outer wall to monitor the temperature. Reactor 2 is heated by one electric spiral heater and six electric rod heaters, and nine thermocouples are mounted on the outer wall of the reactor for temperature monitoring.

Even though the thermocouples are only mounted on the outside of the reactor and are not in contact with the fluids, the outside temperature can be considered representative of the reaction temperature. D’Jesus investigated the temperature difference between outside and inside the reactor in a similar system with pure water and a biomass slurry (8 wt % biomass).\(^{21}\) Little to none temperature deviation was noticed.

The reaction mixture is converted into gaseous products in the reactors. To quantify the products, gas meters (Ritter GmbH) and scales (Soehnle GmbH) are installed. During the experiment, liquid and gas samples are collected in regular intervals. The evaluation is based on the steady-state operating condition where the gas composition and gas production remain constant.

The system is pressurized by pumping water with a high-pressure pump by Prominent and then heated. In the process control system, the temperatures are set for this purpose. The ethanol solution is then pumped into the system with an HPLC pump. The pressure in the system is regulated by a back-pressure regulator by Tescom.

The LENA lab-plant is designed for the processing of real biomass.\(^{30}\) For the gasification of ethanol solution, a simpler setup would also be sufficient.

2.3. Analysis. The gas chromatograph 5890 series II plus (Hewlett Packard Inc.) equipped with a fused silica capillary column (Carboxen 1010 PLOT 30 m, SUPELCO) is used to analyze gas samples of the product gas. The thermal conductivity and flame ionization detectors are used to determine the volume fractions of gas components including H\(_2\), CO, CH\(_4\), CO\(_2\), C\(_2\)H\(_4\), C\(_2\)H\(_6\), C\(_3\)H\(_6\), and C\(_3\)H\(_8\). Gas samples are collected every 30 min for analysis.

The total carbon (TC) and total inorganic carbon (TIC) in liquid samples during the experiment and in the total effluent are determined by combustion and acid extraction, respectively, using a TOC-analyzer (DIMATOC 2100, DIMATEC).
Total organic carbon (TOC) is calculated by subtracting TIC from TC. The concentration of trace elements (Al, Ca, Cr, Cu, Fe, K, Mg, Mo, Na, Ni, S, Si, and Zn) is measured using an Agilent 725 spectrometer via ICP-OES (inductively coupled plasma-optical emission spectrometry).

2.4. Data Interpretation. For the data interpretation, the ethanol mass fraction \( w_{\text{EtOH}} \) (eq 6) and the ratio of carbon to water in the feed \( x^c \) (eq 7) are used:

\[
w_{\text{EtOH}} = \frac{n_{\text{EtOH}}}{n_{\text{EtOH}} + n_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} \tag{6}
\]

where \( n_i \) is the molar flow of species “i” (g/h).

\[
x^c = \frac{n_C}{n_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} = \frac{2n_{\text{EtOH}}}{n_{\text{H}_2\text{O}}} \quad \tag{7}
\]

where \( \dot{n}_i \) is the molar flow of species “i” (mol/h).

The following section describes the key figures, the carbon gasification yield (CE), the total organic carbon conversion (TOC-conversion), and the water consumption (WC) of the process.

The CE represents the proportion of carbon in the feed that is transferred to the gas phase and thus is a key figure that describes how well the organics in the feed solution are gasified. The properties of gases are approximated by the ideal gas law. CE is calculated as follows:

\[
CE = \frac{\sum \beta_i x_i \times \frac{C_{\text{gas}} x p}{R T} \times M_i}{\dot{m}_{\text{feed}} \times \alpha} \tag{8}
\]

where \( x_i \) is the concentration of component “i” in the gas product (vol %), \( \alpha \) is the carbon concentration in the feed (wt %), \( \beta_i \) is the number of carbon atoms of component “i” in the gas product, \( \dot{m}_{\text{feed}} \) is the feed mass flow (g/h), \( M_i \) is the molar mass of carbon (g/mol), \( p \) is the pressure (Pa), \( R \) is the universal constant of gases, \( T \) is the temperature (K), and \( V_{\text{Gas}} \) is the gas flow under ambient conditions (L/h).

The TOC-conversion measures the proportion of the TOC in the feed slurry that is converted into other forms, including gases, dissolved inorganic compounds, and organic residue (coke, tar, and soot), and thus, the TOC-conversion is an important indicator of the quality of the wastewater, and it is defined as follows:

\[
\text{TOC} \text{ conversion} = 1 - \frac{\dot{n}_{R,\text{effluent}} \times \text{TOC}_R}{\dot{m}_{\text{feed}} \times \alpha} \tag{9}
\]

where \( \dot{n}_{R,\text{effluent}} \) is the mass flow of the reactor effluent (g/h) and \( \text{TOC}_R \) is the TOC content of the reactor effluent (mg/g).

The water consumption of the process describes how much water is converted into gaseous products when reacting with the organic compounds. In previous studies, it was shown that the reactor effluent of the SCWG process can be recycled.\(^{1,3,30}\) The water consumption is thus important for the estimation of how much fresh water needs to be used to make up for the difference of water in feed and reactor effluent by distilled water and thus is important for cost estimation of the SCWG process. To calculate the generation of \( \text{H}_2 \) and \( \text{CH}_4 \) from water, the amount of C, H, and O in the gas phase is compared with the amount of C, H, and O that originate from the gasified ethanol \( \dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}} \).

\[
\dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}} = CE \times \dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, Feed}} \tag{10}
\]

where \( \dot{n}_i \) is the molar flow of species “i” (mol/h).

Any additional H and O (\( \Delta H \) and \( \Delta O \) (eqs 12 and 13)) in the product gas have its origin in water that has reacted with the ethanol since those are the only two components that are fed into the system (except for KHCO\(_3\), which is present in neglectable amounts and is assumed to leave the system also in form of KHCO\(_3\) and thus does not contribute to gas formation).

\[
\Delta C = \dot{n}_{\text{CH}_4} + \dot{n}_{\text{CO}} + \dot{n}_{\text{CO}_2} + 2\dot{n}_{\text{C}_2\text{H}_6} + 2\dot{n}_{\text{C}_3\text{H}_8} + 3\dot{n}_{\text{C}_4\text{H}_10} + 3\dot{n}_{\text{C}_4\text{H}_10} - 2\dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}} \quad \tag{11}
\]

\[
\Delta O = \dot{n}_{\text{CO}} + 2\dot{n}_{\text{CO}_2} - \dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}} \quad \tag{12}
\]

\[
\Delta H = 4\dot{n}_{\text{CH}_4} + 2\dot{n}_{\text{H}_2} + 4\dot{n}_{\text{C}_2\text{H}_6} + 6\dot{n}_{\text{C}_3\text{H}_8} + 6\dot{n}_{\text{C}_4\text{H}_10} + 8\dot{n}_{\text{C}_4\text{H}_10} - 6\dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}} \quad \tag{13}
\]

where \( \Delta j \) is the molar difference of element “j” (mol/h).

\( \Delta C \) is zero since all carbon in the gaseous phase originates from gasified ethanol. Since the differences in H and O in real experiments show little deviations to the elemental composition of water, the mean value of these differences \( \Delta O \) and \( \Delta H \) is used to calculate the water consumption WC relative to the processed amount of ethanol according to the following equation:

\[
WC = \frac{0.5\Delta H + \Delta O}{2} \times \frac{1}{\dot{n}_{\text{EtOH, gasified}}} \frac{\text{mol H}_2\text{O}}{\text{mol C}_2\text{H}_5\text{OH}} \quad \tag{14}
\]

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the influence of the reactor wall on the supercritical water gasification of ethanol and the effect of potassium as a catalyst, three long-time experiments (operation >19 h) were conducted (see Table 1). The reaction temperature was 650 °C, and the pressure was 28 MPa. The set mass flow was 250 g h\(^{-1}\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. Nr.</th>
<th>Feed</th>
<th>( w_{\text{EtOH}} ) (wt %)</th>
<th>K(^+) (ppm)</th>
<th>duration (h)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>ethanol solution</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO(_3)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>ethanol solution</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a second set of experiments, the water consumption of the SCWG process was investigated for different ethanol concentrations (see Table 2). The reaction temperature was 650 °C, and the pressure was 28 MPa. The set mass flow was 250 g h\(^{-1}\).

3.1. Long-Time Ethanol Experiments. It is well known from the literature that the elemental composition of the surface of the reactor wall affects the supercritical water gasification of organics.\(^{31,32}\) Boukis et al. discovered that pre-oxidizing the reactor walls (Alloy 625) with H\(_2\)O\(_2\) solution oxidized the nickel in the alloy to form NiO, which can later be reduced to metallic Ni, and also reduced organic impurities (C and N) on the surface.\(^{11}\) This resulted in a catalyzed WGS reaction and therefore in a significantly lower CO yield. To investigate if a modification of the reactor wall appears during
long-time processing of ethanol without pre-oxidizing the reactor walls, ethanol solution (6 wt% ethanol) was gasified in a newly implemented reaction system that had not been used for any other experiments beforehand (experiment 1).

After reaching a steady state, the gas composition did not change until the end of the 46 h long experiment (see Figure 2). The mean gas composition is displayed in Figure 3. According to Arita et al., ethanol first gets stripped of a $\text{H}_2$ molecule and afterward is equally separated into $\text{CH}_4$ and CO in terms of moles. CO then reacts further with water according to the WGS reaction to form $\text{H}_2$ and $\text{CO}_2$. This explains that $\text{H}_2$ and $\text{CH}_4$ make up the biggest part of the produced gas. Besides this, a dehydration reaction of ethanol to form $\text{C}_2\text{H}_4$ takes place. By reacting with a $\text{H}_2$ molecule, $\text{C}_2\text{H}_6$ is formed. Since the CO concentration stayed at about 12% over the course of the 46 h, it can be assumed that the reactor wall was not modified in such a way that more NiO and Ni were present that could enhance the WGS reaction. Thus, to further promote the WGS reaction, the reactor wall either needs to be pretreated or catalysts that enhance the reaction need to be added.

Table 2. Conditions of Ethanol Experiments with Variation of Concentration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. Nr.</th>
<th>feed</th>
<th>$\nu_{\text{Ethanol}}$ (wt %)</th>
<th>$x^*$ (mol/mol)</th>
<th>$K^+$ (ppm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>ethanol solution + KHCO$_3$</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the course of the experiment, two balancing intervals are set, in which gas and liquid samples were taken (interval 1: 19.8–29.1 h; interval 2: 43.5–46.5 h). As the experiment progressed, further less gas was produced, as can be seen in Figure 4.
In interval 1, 1.55 L \( \frac{\text{g ethanol}^{-1}}{\text{h}} \) of gas was produced, while in interval 2, only 1.25 L \( \frac{\text{g ethanol}^{-1}}{\text{h}} \) was produced (see Table 3).

Table 3. Evaluation of the Balance Intervals (Experiment 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>balancing interval</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>duration of experiment (h)</td>
<td>19.8–29.1</td>
<td>43.5–46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mass balance (%)</td>
<td>101.70</td>
<td>96.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-balance (%)</td>
<td>113.83</td>
<td>91.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CE (%)</td>
<td>113.56</td>
<td>90.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOC-conversion (%)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>99.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gas production (NL/( \frac{\text{g ethanol}}{\text{h}} ))</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, the carbon efficiency (CE) and the carbon mass balance decreased by about 23%. A possible reason for this could be the enhanced coke formation over time. Due to heavy coke formation, a filter had to be installed prior to the pressure regulator to ensure long-time operation without plugging of the pressure regulator (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Reactor effluent sample taken without and with filter installed (experiment 1).

Heavy coke formation was also observed by Diem et al. when gasifying ethanol solutions.\(^{33}\) Therdhianwong et al. proposed that the formation of carbonaceous species, like coke, follows the cracking of hydrocarbons (eqs 16 and 17) and the Boudouard reaction (eq 15) at high temperatures (\( T = 600 °C \)).\(^{34}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
2\text{CO} & \rightarrow \text{C} + \text{CO}_2 \quad \Delta H^{0}_{298K} = -172 \frac{\text{kJ}}{\text{mol}} \\
\text{CH}_4 & \rightarrow \text{C} + \text{H}_2 \quad \Delta H^{0}_{298K} = 75 \frac{\text{kJ}}{\text{mol}} \\
\text{C}_n\text{H}_m & \rightarrow n\text{C} + \frac{m}{2}\text{H}_2
\end{align*}
\]

Enhanced coke formation could explain the reduced carbon efficiency and C-balance since the coke cannot be collected during the experiment and therefore cannot be calculated into the steady-state C-balance. Coke formation also poisons the catalytically active metals in the reactor wall.\(^{35}\) This further reduces active Ni sites on the reactor wall and can explain the data in Table 3.

Over the course of experiment 1, the pH of the liquid effluent decreased from 6.4 to 3.6 (see Supporting Information Table S1). A possible reason for this could be an increased amount of \( \text{CO}_2 \) that is dissolved in the effluent. With increasing \( \text{CO}_2 \) content in the effluent, the pH drops (eq 18).\(^{36}\)

\[
\text{CO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{HCO}_3^- + \text{H}^+ 
\]

The dissolved \( \text{CO}_2 \) is not measured by the gas meter, and thus this could be another reason for the decreasing gas production over time.

As mentioned above, the content of \( \text{CO} \) in the product gas did not change during SCWG with 6 wt % ethanol (experiment 1). To demonstrate the effect of homogeneous catalysts, potassium (100 ppmw) was added in the form of KHCO\(_3\). It is well known from the literature that homogeneous catalysts such as \( \text{K}_2\text{CO}_3 \) or KOH increase the gasification yield and enhance the WGS reaction.\(^{36-41}\) Sinág et al. have found that the \( \text{H}_2 \) yield doubles when \( \text{K}_2\text{CO}_3 \) is used compared to the operation without a catalyst for gasification of glucose.\(^{36}\) Their proposed reaction mechanism (taken from Sinág et al.\(^{36} \)) adjusted for the used salt in this study KHCO\(_3\) is the following (eqs 19–22):

\[
\begin{align*}
2\text{KHCO}_3 & \rightarrow \text{K}_2\text{CO}_3 + \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CO}_2 \\
\text{K}_2\text{CO}_3 & + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{KHCO}_3 + \text{KOH} \\
\text{KOH} & + \text{CO} \rightarrow \text{HCOOK} \\
\text{HCOOK} & + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{KHCO}_3 + \text{H}_2
\end{align*}
\]

Directly after experiment 1 (without stopping the lab-plant), 100 ppmw K’ was added to the ethanol solution (start of experiment 2) (see Figure 6, start of adding K’ at \( t = 0 \) h).

The \( \text{H}_2 \) concentration increased rapidly from 38 to 55 vol %, \( \text{CO}_2 \) also increased by about 7 vol % from 16 to 23 vol %. The concentration of CO significantly dropped from 12 to 0.5 vol %. Thus, the WGS reaction is significantly catalyzed, as expected. The \( \text{CH}_4 \) formation is also limited since the reaction of \( \text{CO} \) to \( \text{CH}_4 \) is reduced due to the low \( \text{CO}_2 \) content. The addition of potassium also limits the formation of coke.\(^{33,36,40}\) This can be seen by comparing CE and the C-balance prior and after adding K’. Both increased by about 6% compared to interval 2 to 96.8%.

Interestingly, the addition of KHCO\(_3\) seems to have permanently altered the reaction system. This can be seen by looking at the gas composition of experiment 3 (see Figure 7). Before this experiment, the system was cleaned with water and the experiment itself was conducted without the addition of KHCO\(_3\) but the gas composition is roughly the same as during the experiment with KHCO\(_3\). The WGS is still being catalyzed even though no homogeneous catalyst is present anymore. Additionally, this experiment could be conducted without any filter installed since no coke formation was noticeable. This could be due to the changes in the surface of the reactor walls after being exposed to KHCO\(_3\) during experiment 2. Although the inner surface of the present reactor was not analyzed, it is well known that potassium carbonates cause corrosion in the nickel-alloy Inconel 625 under the conditions of SCWG,\(^{38,29,61-64}\) with corrosion rates increasing at temperatures above 500 °C.\(^{39}\) Without addition of potassium carbonates, no remarkable corrosion was visible during the gasification of 5 wt % methanol (\( p = 240 \) bar, \( T = 600 °C \)).\(^{42}\) The reactor surface is thus permanently altered after the application of potassium carbonates, resulting in areas rich in NiO.\(^{39}\) Like during experiment 1, the pH showed a slight decrease during operation with KHCO\(_3\) (pH = 5.6, sample...
taken 2 h after addition of KHCO$_3$, pH = 6.2 after 3.5 h of operation with KHCO$_3$, pH = 4.2 after 20 h of operation).

One significant change in the gas compositions of experiments 2 and 3 is the drop in higher hydrocarbons from 7 to 2 vol %. During experiment 2, a slow decrease in the concentration of C$_2$+ compounds could be detected. The cause of this is unknown. By the addition of potassium, the dehydrogenation of ethanol to form hydrocarbons seems to be inhibited. The fact that C$_2$+ compounds are of low concentration when adding KHCO$_3$ was also observed by Diem et al. In the present case, it is interesting that the concentration stays low even though no catalyst was added anymore.

### 3.2. Investigation of Water Consumption

Eight experiments were conducted to investigate the water consumption during the SCWG of different ethanol solutions (100 ppm K’ was added) (see Table 2 and Table 4).

In all experiments conducted, the TOC conversion was greater than 99%. The carbon efficiency was greater than 95.5% in all cases except for $x_{c^*} = 0.01$ (see Table 4), and thus, the gasification can be considered complete for all concentrations. Since TOC-conversion is complete and no solid carbon was found for $x_{c^*} = 0.01$, the relatively low CE is most likely due to uncertainties of the measurement (especially the gas meter), which have a greater impact if the gas flow is low. This is surprising since CE is generally known to decrease with increasing concentration of organics. In the present reactor configuration, ethanol could be gasified effectively even at high concentrations. The temperatures ($T = 650 \, ^\circ$C) and residence times (calculation based on the density of water) at $T > 600 \, ^\circ$C ($\tau = 3$ min) are high for the conversion of ethanol. For high feed concentrations of ethanol, the density of the ethanol solution increases, which reduces the gas flow and thereby decreases the CE.

### Table 4. Key Figures of Gasification of Different Ethanol Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. Nr.</th>
<th>$w_{\text{EtOH}}$ (wt %)</th>
<th>$x_{c^*}$ (mol/mol)</th>
<th>CE (%)</th>
<th>TOC-conversion (%)</th>
<th>mass balance (%)</th>
<th>carbon balance (%)</th>
<th>amount of gas (L g$_{\text{EtOH}}^{-1}$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>99.42</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>99.94</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>99.98</td>
<td>101.8</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>99.99</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>99.2</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>99.95</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Change of gas composition after the addition of potassium (experiments 1 and 2) (line: linear regression due to stable operation in experiment 1, logarithmic regression in experiment 2).

Figure 7. Gas composition of experiment 3 in vol %.
mixture decreases and thus the residence time will decrease. Since complete gasification is reached in all cases, the change in residence time has no impact on the process under the chosen conditions. Byrd et al. studied the SCWG of ethanol over a Ru(5 wt %)/Al₂O₃ catalyst and demonstrated the significant effect of residence time and of temperature on the yield of products and gasification. More specifically, at 600 °C and low residence time (5 s), they detected high amounts of organic carbon in the liquid effluents and increased ethylene yield. When they increased the residence time to 10 s, these products were minimized, while the yields of H₂, CH₄, and CO₂ increased significantly. Voll et al. calculated the thermodynamic equilibrium of ethanol SCWG and compared their results with Byrd et al. They argued that a minimum residence time of 4 s results in satisfactory results when it comes to ethanol SCWG. The ethanol decomposition in supercritical water is known to already take place at 500 °C. Since these two factors positively influence the gasification efficiency, the high temperature and residence time could explain why complete gasification could be reached for ethanol concentrations up to 72 wt %.

From the literature, it is well known that the concentration of the organic components significantly influences the composition of the product gas of the SCWG process. With rising organic content, the water surplus decreases, which reduces the amount of H₂ produced. The CH₄ was found to increase with rising organic concentration. In the case of ethanol, the methane could originate from methanation or acetaldehyde decarbonylation. Both described effects could be already seen in the present study (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8](image-url)

Figure 8. Influence of xₑ in the feed solution on the composition of the product gas.

The H₂ content of the product gas decreased from 70.1 to 8.5 vol % when increasing the ethanol concentration from 1.2 to 72 wt % (xₑ 0.01 to 2 mol/mol). The CO concentration remained below 2 vol % with little increase. An increase with rising organic concentration is expected due to the reverse water-gas shift reaction. As described in Section 3.1, once potassium is present in the system, almost no CO is produced due to the significantly enhanced water-gas shift reaction. It is demonstrated that 100 ppm potassium is sufficient to enhance the reaction to such an extent that even with an ethanol concentration of 72 wt %, almost no CO is detectable. When increasing the feed concentration, the CH₄ content of the product gas rose from 7.1 to 65.2 vol %. The increased methane content correlates with the decrease in the amount of produced gas per gram ethanol gasified (from 2.84 to 1.01 L g⁻¹EqOH⁻¹) since according to reactions 4 and 5, four or five gas molecules react to form one molecule of methane and water. Since the gasification of ethanol solutions with 1.2 to 72 wt % was possible and, in all cases, complete (CE > 93.6%), it can be assumed that the same reaction mechanism can be applied for all concentrations. Since almost no higher hydrocarbons can be detected, the major reaction pathway can be described by dehydrogenation of ethanol, as proposed by Arita et al.

\[
\begin{align*}
C_2H_5OH & \rightarrow H_2 + CH_3CHO \\
CH_3CHO & \rightarrow CH_4 + CO \\
CO + H_2O & \rightarrow CO_2 + H_2 
\end{align*}
\]

Subsequently, either steam methane reforming or methanation reactions (eqs 4 and 5) take place, which depend on the amount of water in the system and thus on the ethanol concentration. In the case of xₑ = 0.01 and xₑ = 0.05, the amount of methane in the product gas is significantly lower than the amount that forms according to eqs 23 and 24. In this case, steam methane reforming seems to be taking place. For higher xₑ than 0.05, the amount of methane contained in the product gas can not only be explained by eqs 23 and 24 since the amount of methane in the product gas is greater than the amount of ethanol processed on molar base (see Table 5).

The methanation reaction and steam methane reforming thus directly influence the water consumption of the SCWG process since the formed water during methanation reduces the amount of water consumed. This effect can be seen in Figure 9 and Table 6. The water consumption decreases from 2.38 to 0.06 mol H₂O consumed per mol ethanol when increasing xₑ from 0.01 to 2. At low xₑ, the deviation of the measured water consumption to the water consumption given in eq 1 for ethanol (3 mol H₂O per mol ethanol) is the smallest. This deviation can be well explained by the formed methane. When further reducing the feed concentration, the water consumption of 3 mol H₂O per mol ethanol would then be the limit. It becomes clear that the higher the methane content of the product gas, the lower the water consumption of the process is.

To verify the proposed mechanism (eqs 23 to 25 and eqs 4 and 5), the following theoretical consideration was conducted. The proposed mechanism by Arita et al. can be reduced to eq 26.

\[
\begin{align*}
C_2H_5OH + H_2O & \rightarrow CO_2 + H_2 + CH_4 \\
CO_2 + 4H_2 & \rightarrow CH_4 + 2H_2SO_4
\end{align*}
\]

Table 5. Ratio of Methane in the Product Gas to Ethanol in Feed for Different xₑ Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>xₑ (mol/mol)</th>
<th>0.01</th>
<th>0.05</th>
<th>0.1</th>
<th>0.2</th>
<th>0.34</th>
<th>0.5</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n(CH₄)/n(H₂O) (mol/mol)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When also taking the methanation into account (eq 5, for simplicity again displayed as eq 5\*), the resulting gas composition (CO and higher hydrocarbons are neglected due to the small amount in the product gas) can thus be described by adding these equations. For this, eq 5* is multiplied by the factor $x$ and eq 26 with the factor $y$:

$$
y C_2 H_5 OH + (y - 2x) H_2 O
\rightarrow (y - x) CO_2 + (2y - 4x) H_2 + (y + x) CH_4
$$

(27)

The water consumption WC can thus be described by the reduced formula ($\gamma = n_{EtOH, gasified}$)

$$
WC = \gamma n_{EtOH, gasified} - 2x \frac{mol H_2 O}{mol EtOH}
$$

(28)

The produced amount of gas can be described as displayed in eqs 29 to 31:

$$
n_{CH_4} = y + x = n_{EtOH, gasified} + x
$$

(29)

$$
n_{CO_2} = y - x = n_{EtOH, gasified} - y
$$

(30)

$$
n_{H_2} = 2y - 4x = 2n_{EtOH, gasified} - 4x
$$

(31)

The variable “x” can thus be described in various ways

$$
x = n_{CH_4} - n_{EtOH, gasified} + \frac{2n_{EtOH, gasified} - n_{H_2}}{4}
$$

(32)

With this formula, the water consumption can be described as

$$
WC = 3 - 2\frac{n_{CH_4}}{n_{EtOH, gasified}} = \frac{1}{2} \frac{n_{H_2}}{n_{EtOH, gasified}}
$$

(33)

To verify this theoretical consideration, the experimental data are displayed graphically and approximated with a linear regression (see Figure 10). As displayed, the received linear regressions fit the calculations of the theoretical water consumption well with a deviation smaller than 20%. The proposed reaction mechanism is thus justified.

### 3.3. Comparison of Experimental Results with Thermodynamic Equilibrium

The experimental results were additionally compared with the thermodynamic equilibrium calculated with Aspen HYSYS V14. The simulation was carried out with a Gibbs reactor, which minimizes the free Gibbs energy of the system. The selected property package was the PR-Twu implementing the equation of state (EOS) for enthalpy calculations. As stated by Twu et al., their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$x^*$ (mol/mol)</th>
<th>$\Delta H$ (mol H/mol EtOH)</th>
<th>$\Delta O$ (mol O/mol EtOH)</th>
<th>water consumption based on $\Delta H$ (mol H$_2$O/mol EtOH)</th>
<th>water consumption based on $\Delta O$ (mol H$_2$O/mol EtOH)</th>
<th>mean (mol H$_2$O/mol EtOH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Water consumption of the SCWG process with variation in $x^*$ in the feed solution.

Figure 10. Water consumption as a function of the produced gases.

Table 6. Calculation of Water Consumption from Experimental Data (According to Equations 11–14)
temperature-dependent function for a cubic EOS correctly extrapolates the vapor pressures of pure components to the supercritical region. In addition, they proposed a new mixing rule for predicting the properties of mixtures. Combined with their proposed mixing rule, their cubic EOS can accurately describe the phase equilibria of polar/non-polar systems. The pressure was set to 280 bar and the temperature to 650 °C (as set in the experiments). The feed has a temperature of 20 °C. \( x^* \) was varied from 0.001 to 8.0 mol/mol (see Figure 11). The simulation verified the results from Voll et al., who calculated the thermodynamic equilibrium of the SCWG of ethanol at 800 °C and 221 bar. It was found that the simulation produced accurately their results (see Supporting Information Figure S1).

The results indicate that in the present reaction system under the chosen reaction conditions, thermodynamic equilibrium is reached for \( x^* \) greater than 0.05 (see Figure 11). Potassium has played a crucial role in achieving equilibrium. This becomes clear when comparing the gas composition acquired when the reaction system was newly implemented (experiment 1) with the calculated gas composition (see Table 7). With the newly implemented reaction system, far less \( \text{H}_2 \) and more \( \text{CH}_4 \) was produced. Additionally, experiments showed that coke and many hydrocarbons formed in the new reaction system. Without the presence of potassium, the dehydration pathway of ethanol decomposition, which leads to hydrocarbons, seems to be favored, instead of the dehydrogenation pathway, which mainly leads to \( \text{H}_2 \) and \( \text{CO}_2 \). This emphasizes the influence of potassium as a homogenous catalyst in the present system.

According to Aspen HYSYS at \( x^* = 0.08 \), the gas composition is (almost) exactly the composition described by eq 26 (24.2 vol % \( \text{CO}_2 \), 50.1 vol % \( \text{H}_2 \), 24.6 vol % \( \text{CH}_4 \)), and the water consumption is close to 1 (0.96). At this point, the gas composition can be explained by the ethanol decomposition. For lower \( x^* \) than 0.08, less methane should be in the product gas than the amount formed according to eq 26. This means that steam methane reforming needs to take place to reach equilibrium. Experimental results show that even though it is true that less methane is in the product gas than the amount that forms according to eq 26 (see Table 5), methane is not completely reformed to reach equilibrium. In the case of \( x^* = 0.05 \), equilibrium is reached (see Table 7), but for \( x^* = 0.01 \), the experimental results indicate a higher methane content (7.1 vol %) than that predicted by Aspen HYSYS (0.8 vol %). More catalytically active sites are needed to reach equilibrium. Steam methane reforming is often promoted on nickel-based catalysts with a high surface area. Thus, the methane content is higher than that predicted by the equilibrium. For \( x^* \) higher than 0.08, the amount of methane in the product gas can be explained by considering methanation. Since equilibrium is reached in these cases, methanation can be considered to take place completely.

Besides the gas compositions (see Figure 12), the water consumption determined by Aspen HYSYS also fits the experimental data well (see Figure 13). The deviation is smaller than 0.04 mol/mol for \( x^* \) greater than 0.05. The deviation is more prominent in the case of \( x^* = 0.01 \), but the general trend is still visible. This deviation is due to the deviation in gas compositions as described above. To emphasize the overall accuracy of the simulation with the experiments, the parity plot of the water consumption calculated by Aspen HYSYS and from experimental data is

---

**Table 7. Influence of Catalyst on Reaching the Equilibrium Comparing Experimental Gas Compositions with Aspen Simulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exp. Nr.</th>
<th>catalyst</th>
<th>( x^* ) (mol/mol)</th>
<th>( \text{H}_2 ) (vol %)</th>
<th>CO (vol %)</th>
<th>( \text{CO}_2 ) (vol %)</th>
<th>( \text{CH}_4 ) (vol %)</th>
<th>( C_2+ ) (vol %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>KHCO_3</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
shown (see Figure 13). The coefficient of determination $R^2$ is 0.985, which is very close to 1 (= ideal concordance). This confirms the chosen calculation method for the water consumption based on the experimentally acquired gas compositions.

The simulation of thermodynamic equilibrium with Aspen HYSYS is helpful for determining further reaction parameters that could be investigated. A further extension of residence time would in this case probably not change the outcome of the experiments since under the chosen residence, time equilibrium gas composition was reached.

4. SUMMARY

The water consumption of the supercritical water gasification of ethanol was systematically investigated and described since a higher water consumption that results in higher hydrogen generation is an important factor for SCWG. It was demonstrated that the water consumption of the supercritical water gasification of ethanol can be reliably calculated using the composition of the produced gas. The calculation was supported by Aspen HYSYS simulations of the investigated process. The gas composition and the water consumption strongly depend on the ethanol concentration in the feed. With rising ethanol concentration, the water consumption of the process decreases in a logarithmic manner. This is due to increased methanation, which produces water as a side product. Simple equations were derived, which enable the calculation of the water consumption of the process. Furthermore, the influence of potassium as a homogeneous catalyst on the coke formation, gasification efficiency, and the ability to reach thermodynamic equilibrium was demonstrated. With potassium as a catalyst, thermodynamic equilibrium was reached under the chosen reaction conditions ($T = 650 \, ^\circ C$, $p = 280 \, \text{bar}$, $r = 3 \, \text{min}$) for ethanol concentrations between 6 and 72 wt %. In the future, the water consumption should be measured for complex biomasses like lignocelluloses to extend the knowledge. The influence of other process parameters like reaction temperature or system pressure on this key figure should also be investigated.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.iecr.3c01595.

Additional experimental details (pH values of the liquid effluents) and Aspen HYSYS model validation (PDF)

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Notes

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REFERENCES


