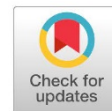


Research Article

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Magmatic Differentiation and Silica Saturation Trend in the Alkaline Volcanic Suite of Jabal Al Hasawna, West Central Libya

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Received:

13 December 2025

Accepted:

05 May 2026

Publish online:

31 August 2026

Abstract

Magmatic differentiation is one of the important factors that leads to the diversity seen in igneous rocks. This work aims to understand the processes that occurred in the alkaline magma that produced these volcanic rocks in the Jabal Al Hasawna region. The study was conducted as a follow-up to a preliminary report prepared by the Libyan Industrial Research Centre in 1978 on the volcanic rocks in the study area. The study concentrated on the major elements of the rocks being examined. The research paper is based on twenty-four samples, classified as one quartz-trachyte, five trachyte, nine phonolite and eight nepheline-phonolite samples. The work indicates that, through magmatic differentiation processes, an undersaturated alkaline melt differentiated into an oversaturated alkaline magma that formed volcanic lava flows, perhaps in multiple batches. The study concluded that differentiation processes occurred in the remaining magma, rather than primitive processes, claiming that the mantle signature may not have been present, although relying on major elements alone may not be sufficient to track this matter. Therefore, the study needs more data relating to rare elements, and this is one of the limitations of this work.

Keywords: Magmatic Differentiation; Silica Saturation; Major Elements; Volcanic; Hasawna; Phonolites.

INTRODUCTION

Jabal Al Hasawna is considered one of the volcanic provinces in Libya, like Jabal al-Sawda and Jabal Al Haruj al-Aswad in central Libya. These are believed to have formed in an intracontinental setting as an extension of the African tectonic plate that affected and formed the Sirte Basin (Elshaafi & Gudmundsson, 2016).

Jabal Al Hasawna is predominantly composed of alkaline basaltic and phonolite volcanic rocks that came to the surface as lava flows during the Tertiary period (Jurak, 1978a). Like other volcanic regions in Libya, Jabal Al Hasawna has not been investigated in depth. Although Jabal Al Hasawna is adjacent to Jabal al-Sawda, a difference in volcanic rocks can be observed, namely the presence of phonolite in Jabal Al Hasawna, while it is absent in Jabal al-Sawda (Jurak, 1978a).

The volcanic rocks in the Jabal Al Hasawna area were classified into four groups, namely quartz-bearing alkaline trachyte, which was found only in one location, and this rock represents the oversaturated volcanic rocks of the Tertiary period (Jurak, 1978a). The second type is alkaline trachyte, which does not contain nepheline. The third type is phonolite, which contains about 10% nepheline. The fourth type is nepheline-rich phonolite, where the nepheline content exceeds 20% and some-



times reaches 50% (Jurak, 1978a). Trachytes and phonolites are found not only in Jabal Al Hasawna but have also been documented, in minor quantities, among the extrusive igneous rocks of Jabal Gharyan (Lustrino, et al., 2012).

It is worth noting that phonolite contains the mineral eudialyte, and this mineral is often found in alkali pegmatite and syenite, and is rarely found in phonolite (Bordet, Freulon, & Le Franc, 1955). The eudialyte mineral in the phonolite rock in the Hasawna region was formed at a late stage of rock formation and it has a volatile nature and contains small proportions of rare earth elements (REE) (Busrewil & Oun, 1991).

LOCATION OF STUDY AREA:

Jabal Al Hasawna is located approximately 300 km south of Misurata city. It is a desert area covered with Tertiary volcanic rocks, located in west-central Libya. The study location lies between latitudes $28^{\circ} 00' N$ and $28^{\circ} 40' N$ and longitudes $13^{\circ} 45' E$ and $14^{\circ} 25' E$ (Figure 1).

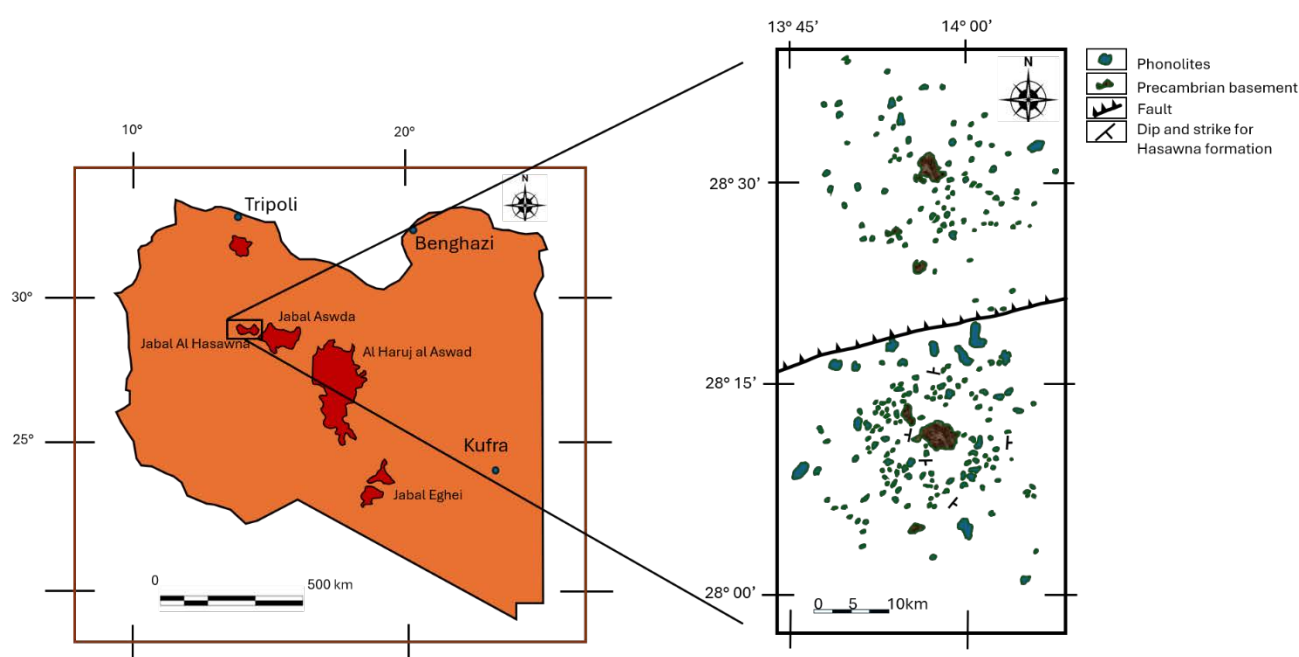


Figure: (1). Map of Libya showing the location of Jabal Al Hasawna within the Cenozoic volcanic flows (Modified after (Capitanio, Faccenna, Funicello, & Salvini, 2011)) and distribution of phonolites in the Jabal Al Hasawna region (Jurak, 1978a).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this research relies on the geochemical analysis of rock samples, which includes determining the percentage of major oxides in 24 rock samples. These analyses were obtained from the explanatory booklet prepared by the Industrial Research Center for the Al-Hassuna region. The rock analysis, performed using laboratory methods, involves grinding the rock samples and then using X-ray spectroscopy to obtain the percentages of the major oxides that constitute the igneous rock under study.

However, it should be noted that no sample analyses were conducted in this study; rather, the data were derived from previously published analyses, which were clearly cited. The current study builds upon previous research, providing explanations not addressed in earlier studies. This is char-

acteristic of scientific research that builds upon and starts where previous research left off. While the analysis in the previous study included the percentages of the major elements, it did not explain them within the context of magmatic differentiation. Therefore, this study aims to complement that work and add scientific explanations based on the principles of magmatic differentiation and silica saturation trend.

The methodology relies on the use of the GCDkit application, which establishes binary relationships between major elements, particularly between silica and other elements such as iron, magnesium, potassium and others, and classifies the extrusive igneous rocks that are the subject of this study.

From these relationships, magmatic evolution in the region might be explained and understood, and this may also help to understand the tectonic conditions of the area and perhaps link them to the region as a whole, or at least contribute to enriching scientific research in the study area, especially since igneous rocks in Libya have not received the same level of attention as sedimentary rocks. Although the study was based on valuable data on the major elements in the rock samples, the study did not address the quality of those data, and this is also considered one of the limitations of the study.

Geological Setting

Jabal Al Hasawna is one of five volcanic provinces in Libya, running in a southeast-northwest direction and covering an area of 66,000 square kilometers (Goudarzi, 1980), (Lustrino, et al., 2012). These regions, from south to north, are Jabal Eghei, Al Haruj Al-Sawda, Jabal Al Hasawna, Jabal Al-Sawda, and Jabal Gharyan in northwestern Libya. Geologically, Jabal al-Hasawna is located within the Qarqaf arc, which is the southern boundary of the Ghadames basin and the northern boundary of the Murzuq basin. The igneous rocks of Jabal Al Hasawna consist of a group of volcanic (extrusive) rocks that are often alkaline in composition. They consist of alkaline basalt, phonolite, and alkaline trachyte (Jurak, 1978a), which formed in the Cenozoic Era (Klitzsch, 1968).

These rocks resulted from the magma erupting to the surface, not at plate boundaries, especially since Libya lies within the African Craton, but rather these volcanic bodies resulted from a weakening of the continental crust caused by the reactivation of pre-existing structures due to tectonic movements such as those that formed the Sirte Basin (Abdelmoniem & Mohamed, 2014).

The volcanic flows in Jabal Al Hasawna result from passive rifting that occurred through the interaction of the African and European plates which began late in the Mesozoic Era. This allowed magma to rise to the surface through the pre-existing faults that were formed as a result of this passive rifting (Abdelmoniem & Mohamed, 2014), (Finlay, Abdelmoniem, & Darren, 2014), (Elshaafi & Gudmundsson, 2016). Although the melt that formed these rocks is an evolved one which has gone through several stages and is not a primitive magma, a study in southern Libya, specifically in the Wadi Eghei, documents a melt with a mantle signature, represented by mantle xenoliths (Radivojević, Erić, Turki, Toljić, & Cvetk, 2014).

Classification of Volcanic Rocks in Study Area

All the rocks investigated in this work are intermediate (52–64% silica) volcanic igneous rocks, and they are also alkaline in composition (10–16% alkalis) (Figure 2). They are generally divided into phonolite and trachyte. Phonolite is further divided into two types: nepheline-phonolite, which is a rock undersaturated with silica, and phonolite. Trachyte is divided into trachyte and quartz-bearing trachyte, as the latter contains quartz crystals.

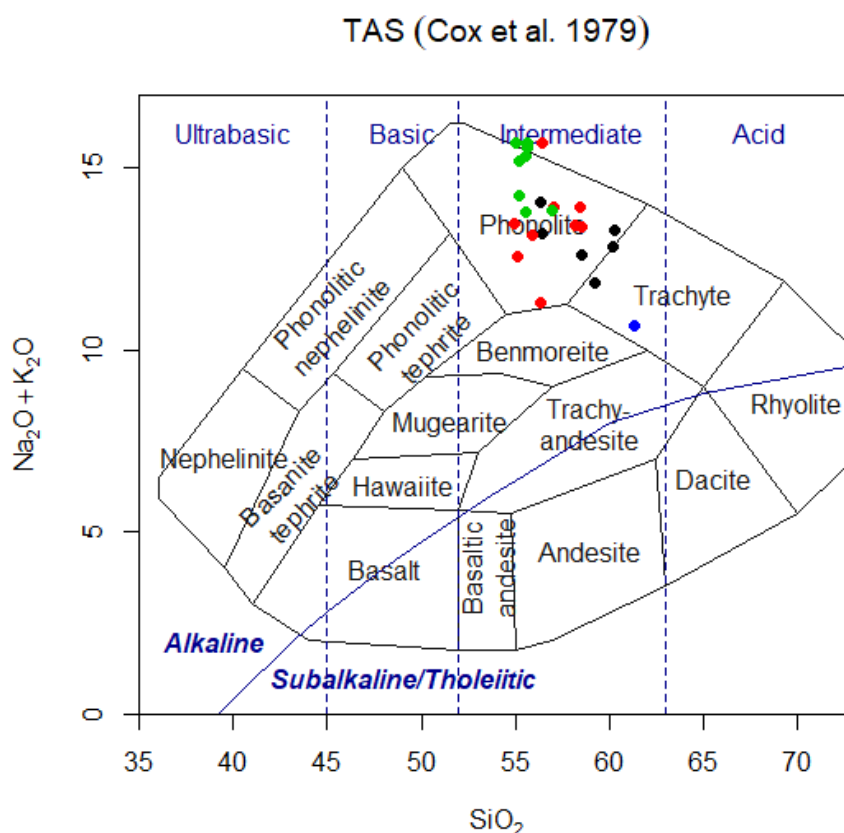


Figure: (2). Location of extrusive rocks of Jabal Al Hasawna showing the distribution of phonolite and trachyte samples (Cox, Bell, & Pankhurst, 1979)

Geochemistry and Magma Evolution

It is well established that the primitive magma has a lower silica content because it comes from the mantle. In addition, whenever a magmatic differentiation process occurs, the amount of silica increases relatively. This is due to differential crystallization. In the study samples, the work attempts to understand the rock-forming magma through the relationships between silica and other elements. In order to understand the evolution of the magma that formed these rocks, a relationship based on major elements must be established.

The major elements in oxide form were obtained through the analysis of extrusive igneous rock samples from the study area (Table 1). These relationships involve silica on the x-axis and another oxide on the y-axis (Harker Plots). From these relationships, the study attempts to understand the origin and formation of the magma. A detailed presentation (Figure 3), analysis, and interpretation of these relationships follow.

1. Silica versus Alumina (SiO_2 vs Al_2O_3)

Quartz-bearing alkali trachyte has the highest SiO_2 (~61%) and the lowest Al_2O_3 (~16.8%). Alkali trachyte has SiO_2 content (~59–60 %) and Al_2O_3 is about (~17.5–18.5 %), which is lower than that of phonolites. On the other hand, phonolite has SiO_2 contents of about (~55–58%) and relatively high Al_2O_3 (~18–20%). Nepheline phonolite, which crystallized from undersaturated magma, has the lowest silica contents SiO_2 (~54–56%) but the highest Al_2O_3 (~20–21.5%). There is an inverse relationship between silica and alumina in the studied samples (Figure 3a).

This inverse relationship is consistent with the magma differentiation process. This is attributed to the relatively high silica content compared to other elements, resulting from the consumption of these elements in the formation of mafic minerals during the early stages of magma crystallization.

2. Silica versus Magnesium (SiO₂ vs MgO)

Fractional crystallization of magnesium-rich phases played an important role in the evolution of the magma. Conversely, a lower magnesium content indicates magma evolution following the removal of magnesium-rich minerals through fractional crystallization. The variation in magnesium content in the phonolite samples may indicate multiple batches of magma or may reflect phenocryst accumulation of magnesium-rich crystals. It is observed from the plot (Figure 3b) that the less evolved magma forms nepheline-phonolite, while quartz-bearing trachyte crystallizes from a more evolved magma, which results in it being less mafic.

Table (1): Major element analyses of the studied lava-flow samples of Jabal Al Hasawna (Jurak, 1978a).

Sample	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
SiO ₂	61.31	60.26	60.22	59.26	58.56	58.51	58.48	58.17	57.02	56.95	56.43	56.41
Al ₂ O ₃	16.83	18.28	18.03	17.72	19.09	18.17	18.96	20.1	18.55	21.3	20.69	21.67
Fe ₂ O ₃	3.89	2.6	3.22	2.64	2.27	3.51	2.22	2.44	2.88	1.94	1.96	2.15
FeO	0.69	2.2	1.6	2.6	1.63	1.28	2.35	1.3	1.02	1.51	1.28	0.81
MgO	0.26	0.08	0.19	0.6	0.07	0.38	0.05	0.17	0.43	0.24	0.03	0.34
CaO	1.51	0.92	0.97	2.17	1.36	1.39	0.99	1.39	1.61	1.59	1.02	1.15
Na ₂ O	6.79	8	7.8	7	8.05	7.4	8.45	8.09	8.55	8.9	9.9	8.32
K ₂ O	3.87	5.3	5.05	4.85	5.35	5.2	5.5	5.34	5.4	4.94	5.8	4.88
TiO ₂	0.19	0.11	0.11	0.48	0.2	0.12	0.19	0.39	0.31	0.33	0.2	0.4
P ₂ O ₅	0.4	0.09	0.08	0.16	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.23	0.08	0.26	0.06	0.08
MnO	0.18	0.22	0.21	0.22	0.23	0.27	0.27	0.19	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.16
volatiles	3.77	1.27	1.88	1.6	2.57	3.04	1.84	1.85	3.28	1.35	1.93	2.92
Total	100.23	100.86	100.88	100.1	100.23	100.03	100.17	100.51	99.05	100.67	100.27	99.56

Sample	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
SiO ₂	56.35	56.34	55.94	55.68	55.66	55.53	55.52	55.24	55.2	55.15	55	54.97
Al ₂ O ₃	20.43	19.4	19.38	21.25	20.91	21.12	20.29	21.13	20.5	19.96	21.63	19.49
Fe ₂ O ₃	1.86	2.55	3.18	1.76	2.06	1.69	2.45	1.93	2.17	2.87	1.63	3.5
FeO	1.96	1.54	1.22	1.23	1.3	1.33	0.73	1.25	0.8	0.73	1.33	0.61
MgO	0.45	0.3	0.2	0.12	0.1	0.22	0.08	0.08	0.39	0.57	0.17	0.24
CaO	2.18	2.92	1.82	1.41	1.43	2.15	0.54	1.42	1.26	1.07	1.62	1.38
Na ₂ O	8.53	7.07	7.25	9.5	9.55	7.85	10.85	9	8.89	8.58	9.64	8.58
K ₂ O	5.52	4.22	5.9	6.2	6	5.95	4.5	6.2	5.37	3.99	6.05	4.89
TiO ₂	0.6	0.23	0.31	0.26	0.31	0.38	0.26	0.26	0.29	0.42	0.34	0.3
P ₂ O ₅	0.14	0.25	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.07	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.26	0.07	0.04
MnO	0.19	0.25	0.34	0.16	0.18	0.14	0.29	0.2	0.24	0.19	0.18	0.29
volatiles	1.38	4.24	4.06	1.79	1.75	2.93	3.82	2.57	4.24	5.46	2	5.05
Total	100.25	99.53	100.39	100.37	100.27	100.1	100.8	100.5	100.36	99.06	100.33	99.68

Volatiles = CO₂, Cl, S, and H₂O

3. Silica versus Iron (SiO_2 vs FeO)

The Harker SiO_2 vs FeO plot (Figure 3c) shows a direct relationship for the studied samples. Generally, the diagram illustrates the fractional crystallization of iron-bearing silicate minerals. It is observed that the quartz-bearing trachyte rock sample represents a more evolved magma. Quartz-bearing alkali trachyte, which is the most evolved magma in the studied samples, has a very low FeO content ($\sim 0.6\%$), which means that Fe-rich minerals have been fractionated out and removed from the melt. Alkali trachyte samples have FeO ranging from 0.75% – 2.5% , which represents moderately evolved magma. The wide range of iron content within these rock samples may be due to crystallization of Fe-Ti oxides such as magnetite and ilmenite, or might be due to accumulation of iron-rich phenocrysts such as clinopyroxene and amphibole.

4. Silica versus Calcium (SiO_2 vs CaO)

The relationship between silica and calcium is inverse (Figure 3d), which is normal during the development of alkaline magmas where the proportion of silica increases relatively with the decrease of calcium. This indicates fractional crystallization of plagioclase and clinopyroxene, and their removal from the system as the magma continues to evolve. This leads to the withdrawal of calcium in the early and middle stages of magma crystallization. Quartz trachyte, with a calcium content of approximately (1.2%), is the most evolved rock formed from calcium-poor magma. The remaining magma is very quartz-rich and highly alkaline. Alkali trachyte, with a calcium content ranging from (1.3% to 2.2%), supports the removal of plagioclase and pyroxene from the system. Phonolite has a calcium content ranging from (1.0 to 2.5%), which indicates a mid-evolved melt.

5. Silica versus (SiO_2 vs $\text{Na}_2\text{O}+\text{K}_2\text{O}$)

The plot (Figure 3e) reveals the development of the melt and also provides insight into its alkalinity. Nepheline phonolite has a high alkalinity content (10% - 12%). This supports the claim that it was not formed from primitive magma but from residual melt. That is because primitive magmas have low alkalinity and low silica contents. Phonolites contain a lower percentage of silica (56% – 58%) and a lower alkali content (9% – 11%) compared to nepheline phonolite. Phonolites appear scattered in the diagram, which may give the impression of multiple magma pulses. This is consistent with interpretations obtained from previous diagrams such as calcium, iron, and magnesium versus silica plots.

6. Silica versus Titanium (SiO_2 vs TiO_2)

The presence of titanium in magma is most often represented by oxide minerals such as ilmenite or titanite. This means that the titanium content in the magma decreases as these minerals crystallize, thus depleting the magma of this element. In other words, the higher the silica content (progress of magma differentiation), the lower the titanium content (Figure 3f). The early crystallization of pyroxene may also have contributed to the development of titanium-poor magma. However, the trachyte samples exhibit a somewhat random distribution, ranging from low to high titanium content, which could indicate accumulation of titanium- and iron-rich phases within these samples.

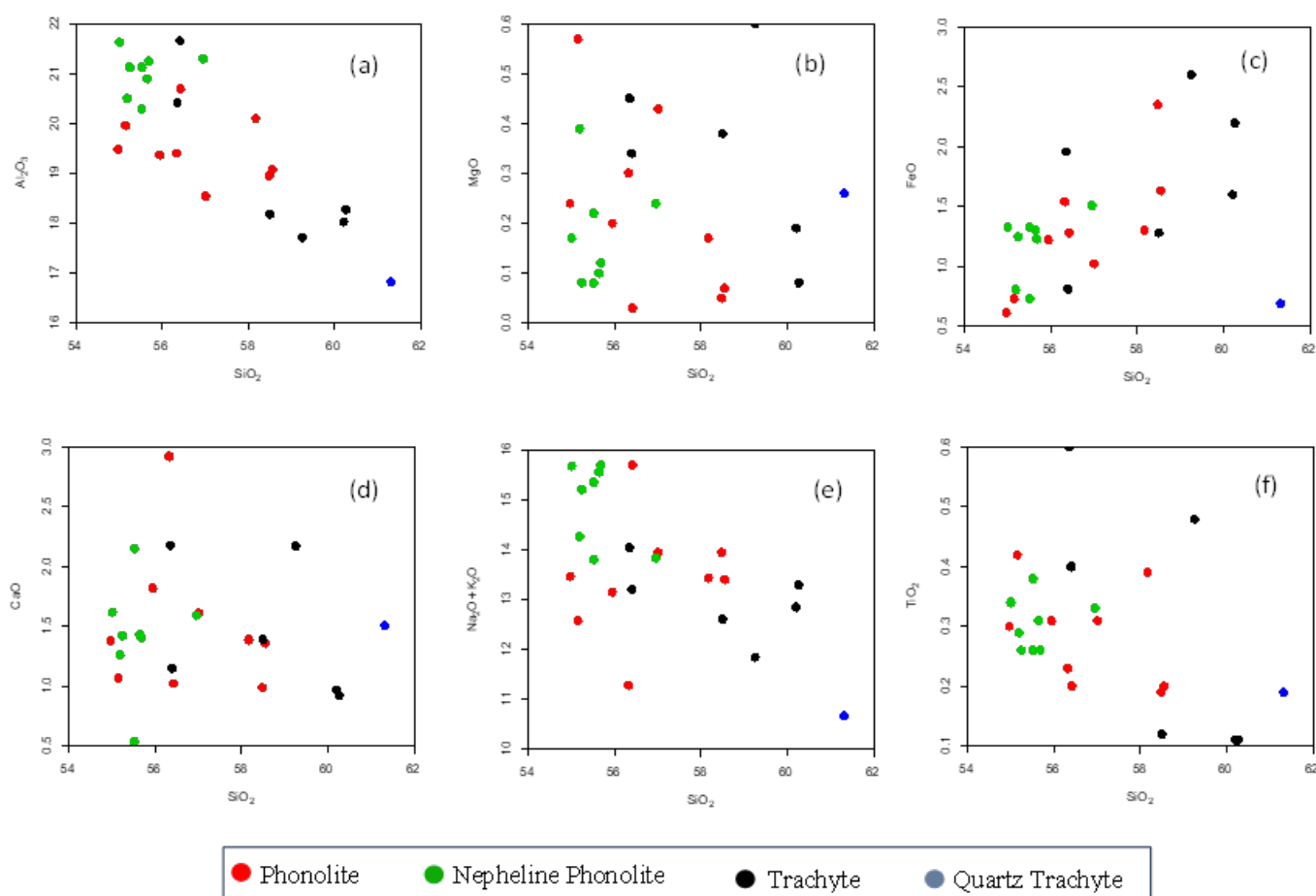


Figure: (3). Harker plots showing SiO_2 vs major elements for all samples: Quartz-alkali trachyte, alkali trachyte, phonolite and nepheline phonolite.

DISCUSSION

Early Fe-Mg mineral crystallization played a significant role in the evolution of the magmatic system that underwent magmatic differentiation. Phonolite samples demonstrate iron enrichment, which is in line with typical alkaline systems. Nepheline phonolites were not formed directly from primitive magma, but rather crystallized from residual melt that underwent a magmatic evolution process. The variation of FeO contents within the samples reflects multiple batches of magma or variable phenocryst accumulation. The alkaline continental rift environment can explain the geological setting of the region. The presence of different types of extrusive igneous rocks in the study area, ranging from nepheline phonolite resulting from silica-poor alkaline magma to quartz trachyte, is likely due to their formation in different lava batches.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed, through geochemical relationships between the major elements, that the volcanic rocks in the study area were formed through magma differentiation processes, predominantly characterized by fractional crystallization. This resulted in four types of rocks representing different stages of magmatic differentiation: nepheline phonolite, phonolite, alkali trachyte, and quartz-bearing alkali trachyte.

The study also showed an increase in silica content as the magma evolved. The crystallization of mafic minerals reduces alumina while increasing silica due to the depletion of alumina from the remaining magma caused by this crystallization. This is further supported by a decrease in calcium and magnesium as the magma undergoes differentiation, also due to the crystallization of mafic minerals such as pyroxene and Ca-plagioclase. Consequently, the remaining magma becomes increasingly rich in silica.

The alkalinity of the magma may indicate that the magma evolved towards increasingly alkaline compositions, which formed nepheline phonolite. This represents a highly evolved, silica-undersaturated residual magma. However, the presence of a scattered distribution of phonolite in the silica-alkali diagram may indicate an open magma system or the possibility of multiple magma pulses.

Overall, there are possibly two paths for magma. The first path, in the differentiation stage, involved the production of highly alkaline, silica-undersaturated magma, which formed phonolite and nepheline phonolite rocks. In contrast, the second path, through differentiation, formed a silica-enriched, low-alkali magma, which resulted in trachyte and quartz trachyte rocks.

Duality of interest: The authors declare that they have no duality of interest associated with this manuscript.

Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

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