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An Enzyme-free Electrochemical H₂O₂ Sensor Based on a Nickel Metal-organic Framework Nanosheet Array

Xiao Liu,^[a] Mei-Hao Xiang,^[a] Xinyue Zhang,^[a] Qin Li,^[a] Xiaoya Liu,^[a] Wenjing Zhang,^[a] Xia Qin,*^[b] and Fengli Qu*^[a]

Abstract: In this work, we reported the development of a nickel metal-organic framework nanosheet array on Timesh (Ni-MOF/TM) as an enzyme-free electrochemical sensing platform for H_2O_2 determination. The as-obtained sensor exhibited outstanding detection properties of H_2O_2 , which might be gifted from the large specific surface area, abundant active sites of Ni-MOF nanoarrays.

The sensor displayed a good linear range $(0.8 \,\mu\text{M}-4.6 \times 10^3 \,\mu\text{M})$, a detection limit as low as $0.26 \,\mu\text{M}$, a high sensitivity (307.5 $\mu\text{A}\,\text{m}\text{M}^{-1}\text{cm}^{-2})$, and a rapid response. Moreover, this enzyme-free sensor is promising for point-of-care (POC) testing of H₂O₂ in human serum attribute to the excellent performance of Ni-MOF and the simple preparation process of the sensor.

Keywords: Electrochemical · Hydrogen peroxide · Ni-MOF · Point of care (POC) testing

1 Introduction

Hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), a common peroxide, plays a significant role in biological systems, medical diagnosis, environmental analyses, food, industrial, and many other fields [1–3]. Besides, H_2O_2 as a crucial member of reactive oxygen species (ROS) that are closely related to life activities of biology [4]. The excessive level of H_2O_2 can cause a series of diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, myocardial infarction, inflammatory lung diseases, and cancer, etc [5,6]. Therefore, developing an effective method for measuring H_2O_2 levels quickly and accurately is essential [7,8].

Current analytical methods for detecting H₂O₂ involve ELISA, cell imaging, high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC), fluorescence detection, etc [9-12]. However, all mentioned detection platforms require complex and relatively expensive instruments. By contrast, pointof-care (POC) testing is time-efficient, low-cost, and easy to use [13]. The electrochemical sensor stands out for wide developments toward point-of-care testing in virtue of its advantages of rapidness, low cost, simplicity, and sensitive detection system. So electrochemical sensor is a promising method for POC testing of H_2O_2 [14]. In earlier research, enzyme-based sensors for detecting H₂O₂ have received extensively studies, owing to their great sensitivity and high selectivity. Nevertheless, their wide application is largely hindered by high-cost, complex enzyme immobilization processes, and inherent instability of natural enzymes [15]. To overcome these challenges, more and more investigations have been concentrated on development of superior enzyme-free H₂O₂ sensors, which possess high sensitivity, low budgets, the simple preparation process as well as long-term stability [14-17]. Although noble metals, carbon materials, and transition metal oxides, etc. as active materials in enzyme-free sensing systems show great electrochemical properties, their applications were restricted by high cost, poor electrical conductivity, and these metals easily poisoned by the adsorbed intermediates [18]. Thus, it is highly desirable to explore advanced materials for the enzyme-free electrochemical sensor for the POC testing of H_2O_2 .

Metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) have raised concerns about the features of adjustable and ordered porous structures, high specific surface area, exposed metal sites, and adsorption affinities [19-21]. These superior performances make MOFs as ideal material for gas storage, separation, drug delivery and biosensing [22-24]. However, poor conductivity and stability of MOFs, which limits their electrochemical applications in the biosensor analysis [25]. Recently, the design and synthesis of new MOFs with redox metal cations (Ni-, Zr-, Co-, Fe-, and Zn), especially that of nickel-based MOFs (Ni-MOFs) with superb conductivity provide an effective way to overcome the above disadvantages. For example, Zhang et al. successfully synthesized simple Ni-MOFs and found that the obtained Ni-MOF nanostructures can enhance the electron transfer, as well as facilitate close contact between glucose and catalytic sites [26]. Du et al. also reported that their obtained hierarchical porous Ni-MOFs could provide more electroactive sites for electrochemical

- [a] X. Liu, M.-H. Xiang, X. Zhang, Q. Li, X. Liu, W. Zhang, F. Qu College of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Qufu Normal University, Qufu 273165, Shandong, China E-mail: xiaqin_2009@163.com
 [b] X. Qin School of Geography and Tourism, Qufu Normal University, Rizhao 276826, Shandong, China E-mail: fengliquhn@hotmail.com
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reactions because of the larger specific surface area [27]. Qiao's group reported the conductive Ni-MOFs could act as a low-cost catalyst for non-enzymatic determination of glucose with excellent electrochemical properties [28]. According to these characteristics of Ni-MOFs, it can be envisaged that the Ni-MOFs can be used as an outstanding electrocatalyst for the enzyme-free sensing of H_2O_2 .

Herein, an enzyme-free electrochemical H₂O₂ sensor based on a Ni-MOF nanosheet array was reported. The proposed biosensor for the reduction of H₂O₂ was fabricated via in-situ growing Ni-MOF onto the Ti mesh (Ni-MOF/TM) (Scheme 1). Firstly, the Ni-MOF nanoarrays structure can promote the electrochemical property of materials by increasing the electrocatalytic active sites and enhancing the conductivity [28]. Secondly, abundant unsaturated metal sites of Ni²⁺ can furnish catalytic active center [29]. Last but not least, the porous structure and high specific surface area increases the area of ion contact [30]. Under optimal conditions, the proposed Ni-MOF/ TM electrochemical sensor exhibited high sensitivity and selectivity toward H₂O₂ with a low detection limit of 0.26 µM. Owing to the above remarkable analytical advantages, the Ni-MOF/TM has great potential in the point-of-care (POC) testing of H₂O₂ in human serum.

2 Experimental Section

2.1 Reagents and Materials

Ni(NO₃)₂ · 6H₂O, C₂H₅OH, H₂O₂ (30 wt %), Na₂HPO₄, NaH₂PO₄, N, N-Dimethylformamide (DMF), NaCl were acquired from Sinopharm Chemical Reagent Co., Ltd. Terephthalic acid (C₈H₄O₄), uric acid (UA), dopamine (DA), ascorbic acid (AA), glucose (Glu), and sucrose (Suc) were bought from Aladdin Ltd. (Shanghai, China). All reagents were used as received.

2.2 Fabrication of Ni-MOF/TM Sensor

Ni-MOF nanosheets were synthesized based on previous work [21]. Firstly, a piece of Ti mesh (TM, $2 \text{ cm} \times 3 \text{ cm}$) was pretreated by hydrochloric acid, ethanol and deionized water before use. Then, 35 mL of N,N-dimethylformamide (DMF) solution containing 2.36 mmol Ni-(NO₃)₂ · 6H₂O and 1.75 mmol terephthalic acids was vigorously stirred to obtain a clarification solution. Following, the above solution was mixed with 2.5 mL H_2O and 2.5 mL ethanol and stirred for 40 min. The mixture was then transferred to a Teflon-lined stainless-steel autoclave with TM, which was allowed to react for 12 h at 120°C. Then, the TM was washed several times with ethanol and ultrapure water. Eventually, the obtained electrode was dried for 3 hours.

2.3 Instrumentation

Electrochemical experiments were performed in a standard three electrode system using a CHI 660E electrochemical workstation (CH Instruments, Inc., Shanghai)). Ni-MOF/TM (0.2 cm×0.2 cm), Ag/AgCl, and graphite as the working electrode, reference electrode and counter electrode, respectively. X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were determined utilizing MiniFlex600 (Rjgaku Co. Japan) with Cu K α radiation ($\lambda = 1.5406$ Å). Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) image was acquired on SU3500 scanning electron microscope (HITACHI, Japan) at an accelerating voltage of 2 kV. Transmission electron microscopy (TEM) image was recorded with HITACHI H-8100 electron microscopy (Hitachi, Japan) operating at 200 kV. X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was measured with Thermo ESCALAB 250Xi, by use of Mg X-ray source.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Characterization

The compositions and phase of Ni-MOF/TM were analyzed by X-ray diffraction (XRD) (Figure 1a). There were two sharp peaks at 8.6° and 16.9°, which could be assigned planes the (100)(200)to and of Ni₃(OH)₂(C₈H₄O₂)₂(H₂O)₄ (CCDC No. 638866), respectively [31,32], indicating the successful synthesis of the materials. The scanning electron microscopy (SEM) image of Ni-MOF/TM (Figure 1b) revealed that the Ni-MOF presented a typical sheet-like array structure. Furthermore, TEM analysis was applied to investigate the single nanosheet morphology (Figure 1c), suggesting the Ni-MOF obtained by the ultrasonic treatment displayed an ultrathin nanosheet structure with a transparent morphology. Moreover, Figure S1 displayed the energy



Scheme 1. Schematic diagram for the preparation of Ni-MOF nanoarrays.

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Fig. 1. (a) XRD patterns (b) SEM image of Ni-MOF/TM. (c) TEM image of Ni-MOF nanosheet. (d) EDS mapping images of Ni-MOF/TM.

dispersive X-ray (EDS) spectrum of Ni-MOF/TM, which demonstrated the presence of Ni, C, and O elements with an atomic ratio of 0.10:0.41:0.49, and EDS mapping images further verified the Ni, C, and O elements distributed over the whole nanoarrays (Figure 1d).

As plotted in Figure 2a, the XPS survey spectrum was utilized to identify the chemical composition of Ni-MOF/ TM. There were three strong peaks at 278.96 (C 1s), 528.14 (O 1s), and 857.69 eV (Ni 2p), which proved the coexistence of Ni, C and O elements [24]. In Figure 2b, the major peaks positioned at 857.2 and 875.3 eV were assigned to Ni $2p_{3/2}$ and Ni $2p_{1/2}$ states, respectively [33], and the satellites peaks at 862.8 and 881.0 eV were the Ni shakeup type peaks [34]. Figure 2c exhibits the C 1s region, the XPS peaks at 284.3, 286.1 and 289.3 eV belong to C=C, C=O and O-C=O bonds of terephthalate, respectively [35,36]. The XPS spectrum of O 1s (Figure 2d) was divided into two peaks, corresponding to the metal-oxygen bond (M=O) at a binding energy of 531.0 eV and the OH group at a binding energy of



Fig. 2. (a) XPS spectra of Ni-MOF/TM. (b) Ni 2p, (c) C 1s and (d) O 1s XPS spectra of Ni-MOF/TM.

533.1 eV [37]. The observations described above indicate that the preparation of the material is successful. The Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) surface area of the Ni-MOF was obtained from the N₂ adsorption/desorption measurement. The results showed that the BET surface area was 55.0091 m²/g, this specific surface area and the porous structure is sufficient to increase the ionic contact surface (Figure S2).

3.2 Electrochemical Property of Biosensor for H_2O_2 Detection

To analyze the performance of the biosensor, the electrochemical responses of the obtained electrode were investigated by a typical three electrode device. Firstly, we measured the CV response of bare TM and Ni-MOF/ TM in 5 mM $[Fe(CN)_6]^{3-/4-}$ solution (Figure S3). In contrast to bare TM, the Ni-MOF/TM brought evidently enhanced CV response. After that, the property of the biosensor for detecting H₂O₂ was studied in 0.1 M PBS. In Figure 3a, no obvious reduction peak was observed on bare TM (curves a and b) without or with $9 \text{ mM H}_2\text{O}_2$, suggesting that the detection of H₂O₂ by bare TM electrodes is electrochemical inert. By contrast, under identical experimental conditions, the reduction peak on Ni-MOF/ TM (curves c and d) increased significantly after the addition of H₂O₂, which verified the feasibility of the proposed sensor. In Figure 3b, As the concentration of H_2O_2 increased from 0 to 9 mM, the CVs responses correspondingly enhanced, which demonstrated the excellent sensing property of biosensor towards H2O2. According to the report, the electrocatalytic mechanism was explained as follows [38]:

Ni-MOF (Ox) + $e^- \rightleftharpoons$ Ni-MOF (Red) (1)

Ni-MOF (Red) + $2H_2O_2 \rightleftharpoons$ (2)

Ni-MOF
$$(Ox) + 2H_2O + O_2$$
 (2)

As plotted in Figure 3c, for the scan rates within 20-200 mVs⁻¹, both the anodic and cathodic peak currents enhanced significantly. Moreover, the densities of anode current and cathode current were proportional to the scan rate (Figure 3d), revealing a typical absorption control mechanism [39]. To acquire the most appropriate reduction potential for electrochemical detection of H₂O₂, the amperometric responses of the biosensor towards H_2O_2 under three different potentials (-0.2, -0.3, and -0.4 V)were studied with the successive addition of $1 \text{ mM H}_2\text{O}_2$ (Figure S4). In the light of current-time (i-t) measurements, the subsequent tests chose -0.3 V as an optimal potential due to the suitable current response and signalto-noise ratio. Then, the current response of Ni-MOF/TM for H_2O_2 sensing was monitored by continuously adding H_2O_2 at -0.3 V to evaluate the detection sensitivity of the sensor. The recorded current on Ni-MOF/TM steadily increased with the successive injection of H₂O₂ and achieved steady state within 3 s (Figure 4a). As being

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Fig. 3. (a) The cyclic voltammograms of bare Ti mesh (curves a and b) and Ni-MOF/TM (curves c and d) in 0.1 M PBS (pH=7.4) without or with 9 mM H_2O_2 . (b) CVs of Ni-MOF/TM in 0.1 M PBS with different H_2O_2 concentrations at 50 mVs⁻¹. (c) CVs of 1 mM H_2O_2 in 0.1 M PBS on Ni-MOF/TM at diverse scan rates (20–200 mVs⁻¹). (d) The calibrated diagram of the peak currents versus scan rates.



Fig. 4. (a) The amperometric current-time curves of Ni-MOF/TM with the continuous injection of H_2O_2 in 0.1 M PBS. The inset shows the calibration plot of current response versus low H_2O_2 concentrations. (b) The calibration plot for H_2O_2 detection.

plotted in Figure 4b, the linear detection ranges from 0.8 to $4.6 \times 10^3 \,\mu\text{M}$ was obtained from the Ni-MOF/TM, and the regression equation could be described as I (μ A)= $-5.79 - 0.0123 \,\text{C} (\mu\text{M}) (\text{R}^2 = 0.9932)$. Moreover, the calculated limit of detection was 0.26 μM (S/N=3) and high-sensitivity of 307.5 $\mu\text{A}\,\text{m}\text{M}^{-1}\,\text{cm}^{-2}$. These results indicated that the biosensor proposed here outperforms other electrochemical H₂O₂ sensors reported previously (Table 1). The superior performance of the H₂O₂ sensor can be ascribed to the advantages of Ni-MOF described below: (1) the Ni-MOF nanoarrays provide a large

number of electrocatalytic active sites for the adsorption and reduction of H_2O_2 . (2) porous structure increases the area of ion contact, which enables faster electron transfer and facilitates the reduction of H_2O_2 .

In practical application, selectivity and stability are the main factors affecting analytical performance. The selectivity of Ni-MOF/TM was evaluated by adding various possible interfering reagents, such as ascorbic acid (AA), dopamine (DA), glucose (Glu), NaCl, sucrose (Suc), and Urea, coexisting with H_2O_2 in physiological conditions. As plotted in Figure 5, except for the significant current

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Table 1. Compare the performance of the proposed biosensor with other reported sensors for H_2O_2 detection.

Sensor	Sensitivity $(\mu A m M^{-1} cm^{-2})$	Linear range (μM^{-1})	Detection Limit (µM)	Reference
(Ag/PNA)/CPE	36.8777	1-3000	0.9247	[40]
n-CoZnE	13.3	0.1-2400	11.1	[41]
CuO/g-C ₃ N ₄ /GCE	_	0.5–50	0.31	[42]
SnS ₂ /Pt NPs	36.57	1–185	0.33	[43]
AuCu/SPCE	133.74	50-10000	10.93	[44]
2D Cu-TCPP/MWCNTs	157	1-8159	0.7	[45]
Gox/CoS-MWCNTs	15	8-1500	5	[46]
ZIF-67/rGO/GCE	51.86	5-2150	1.5	[47]
Fe ₂ NiMIL-88B/GCE	124.7	1.2-1800	0.4	[48]
Ni-MOF/TM	307.5	0.8-4600	0.26	This work



Fig. 5. Chronoamperometric curves of Ni-MOF/TM in 0.1 M PBS with the successive injection of 1 mM H_2O_2 , AA, UA, Glu, NaCl, Suc, and Urea. Applied potential: -0.3 V.

response to H_2O_2 , none of the above interferences produces remarkable current change, and then, with another addition of H_2O_2 , the current response increased sharply again, indicating high selectivity of Ni-MOF/TM towards H_2O_2 .

To evaluate the stability of the proposed sensor, we recorded continuous CV responses of $1 \text{ mM H}_2\text{O}_2$ 20 times (Figure S5). During multiple cycles, the current had no obvious reduction. Moreover, we studied the reproducibility of the proposed sensor for H_2O_2 detection. We investigated the amperometric response of five electrodes under the same optimized condition, and the relative standard deviation (RSD) was found to be 2.8% (Figure S6). These results suggested satisfactory stability and reproducibility of the sensor.

3.3 Measurement of H₂O₂ in Real Sample

The feasibility of Ni-MOF/TM sensor in real sample was estimated via the recovery measurements in human serum samples, which was obtained from the Qufu Normal University Hospital. The N₂-saturated serum samples and the known concentration of H_2O_2 were spiked into PBS buffer. Based on the results summarized in Table 2, the good recoveries were between 96.7 % and 99.3 %, which indicated the biosensor based on the Ni-MOF/TM could

Table 2. Analysis of human serum samples via the obtained biosensor.

Sample	Found (µM)	Added (µM)	Total Found (µM)	RSD (%)	Recovery (%)
Serum 1	12.67	0	12.67	1.8	_
	12.67	10	22.34	1.6	96.7
	12.67	20	32.24	1.7	97.9
	12.67	30	42.46	1.9	99.3
Serum 2	15.52	0	15.52	2.3	_
	15.52	10	25.37	2.0	98.5
	15.52	20	35.02	1.9	97.5
	15.52	30	45.23	2.4	99.0

offer potential application for POC testing of H_2O_2 in real samples.

4 Conclusion

In summary, we reported a Ni-MOF/TM nanosheet array via in-situ growing the Ni-MOF on TM to construct an electrochemical sensor of H_2O_2 . The obtained highly reaction sites of Ni-MOF with large specific surface areas, which exhibited excellent catalytic ability for H_2O_2 reduction. The result proved that the proposed sensor was suitable for quantitative H_2O_2 detection with a low detection limit, good selectivity and stability. Moreover, the Ni-MOF nanoarray achieved fast responses at lowpotential detection (-0.3 V) and reached steady within 3 s. More importantly, the Ni-MOF nanoarrays displayed potential applications in the H_2O_2 detection in serum. This study opened a new avenue for point-of-care (POC) testing of H_2O_2 .

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Data Availability Statement

Data provided at the author's request.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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