



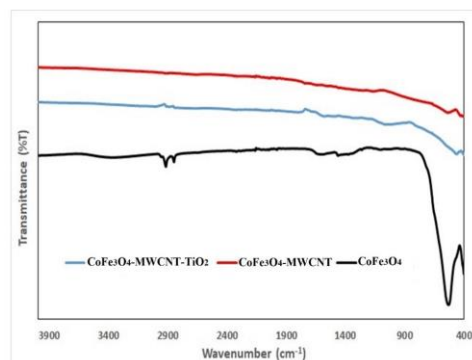
FAST AND PRECISE $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2/\text{MWCNT}$ -BASED VOLTAMMETRIC SENSOR PREPARATION FOR SALBUTAMOL DETERMINATION

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Salbutamol is an important drug that opens the medium and large air spaces in the lungs. In this study, CoFe_3O_4 , $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$, and $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2/\text{MWCNT}$ modified electrode structures are prepared separately to determine the effect of each modification agent on salbutamol responses. The prepared electrodes are firstly structurally characterized by the FT-IR technique. The surface morphology and structure of electrodes are then analyzed by SEM, and AFM techniques. EDX analyses were performed to clarify this structural change on the electrode surface. The salbutamol activity of the modified electrodes is determined by DPV in 0.1 M PBS. The modified electrode shows a linear response in the concentration range of 2–18 μM salbutamol, and an R^2 value of 0.9587 is achieved. LOD and LOQ of the modified electrode are determined as 1.39 μM and 22.87 μM , respectively. Considering the reproducibility of the experimental results, non-interference of the interfering species, and the measurement range, it is determined that it can be successfully used to figure out the concentration of salbutamol in physiological fluids and commercial form.



INTRODUCTION

As a result of increasing urbanization and industrial growth, the living space of today's modern people is faced with important environmental problems such as global warming,¹ air pollution, and acid rain.² Especially due to rapid industrialization, the level of air pollution has reached warning levels. With increasing air pollution, the incidence of important respiratory diseases has increased in modern humans.^{3,4} Among these diseases, there is a progressive increase in the incidence of asthma.⁵ Asthma is a chronic disease that obstructs the airways and

makes breathing difficult.⁶ Especially allergens, smoke, cold and polluted air, and irritating cleaning products play a triggering role. Progressive asthma, wheezing, shortness of breath, and coughing lead to a decrease in the quality of life. Another disease indirectly affected by environmental pollution is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).^{7,8} Similarly, salbutamol is one of the most widely used components medically in all disorders affecting the lungs, such as asthma, COPD, upper respiratory tract infections, and exercise-induced bronchoconstriction.^{9,10}

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Salbutamol ($C_{13}H_{21}NO_3$, 239,311 g/mol) is a short-acting β_2 adrenergic receptor agonist that causes the expansion of the alveoli, especially in the lung structure^{11,12} and improves the patient's breathing quality. However, it is very important to adjust the concentration of salbutamol to be used to account for the progression of the disease. Another important parameter in salbutamol administration is that its duration of action is quite short, that is, it can respond rapidly. For this reason, there is a need for analytical techniques that can make accurate and sensitive measurements that respond to the salbutamol measurement in a timely manner. Techniques such as HPLC,¹³⁻¹⁵ GS-MS,^{16,17} UV,^{18,19} and gel electrophoresis^{20,21} are generally used in the measurement of salbutamol. However, these techniques are analytical techniques that require lengthy preprocessing stages and costly devices. There is also a need for efficient and trained personnel. It is not possible to intervene for a long period of analysis in the patient to whom the drug is given. For these reasons, electrochemical techniques that can measure salbutamol faster come to the fore. Although sensor studies containing CNT,²²⁻²⁴ nanoparticles,²⁵⁻²⁷ and some nano-sized coatings exist in the literature, the desired sensor structures in terms of fast sensitivity and blood concentration range could not be obtained, so there is no commercialized amperometric salbutamol sensor in the literature.

Within the scope of this study, a fast sensor structure was designed to fill this gap in the literature and not be affected by interfering species. We used $CoFe_3O_4$ ²⁸ and TiO_2 ²⁹ semiconductor structures together to ensure the rapid oxidation of the electrode surface in the developed sensor design. In addition, the MWCNT^{28,30} structure was included in the structure for the fast conduction of the released electrons and to increase the electrode surface area. Especially with the anionic outer surface structure of TiO_2 , the anionic interfering species in the blood and physiological fluids are kept away from the electrode surface. Thus, modified electrodes based on $CoFe_3O_4/TiO_2/MWCNT$ can be used as an alternative sensor since they can read in a short time and are not affected by interfering species.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Characterization of $CoFe_3O_4/TiO_2/MWCNT$ modified electrode

Within the scope of the study, electrodes modified with $CoFe_3O_4$, $CoFe_3O_4/MWCNT$, and $CoFe_3O_4/MWCNT/TiO_2$ structures were prepared. In these electrodes for the analysis of the salbutamol structure, initially, the chemical structure of the surface after the modification was studied.

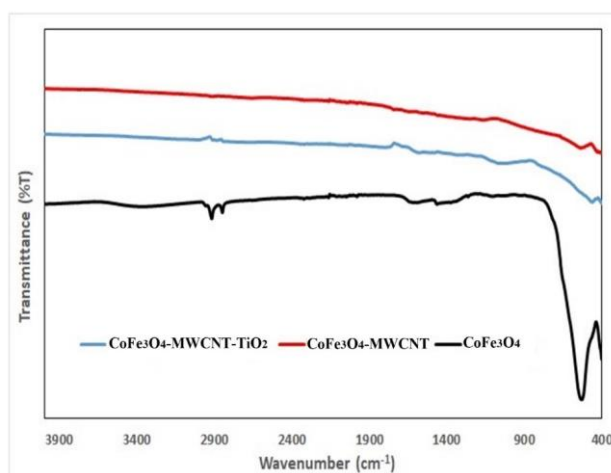


Fig. 1 – FT-IR spectra of $CoFe_3O_4$ (black line), $CoFe_3O_4/MWCNT$ (red line), and $CoFe_3O_4/MWCNT/TiO_2$ (blue line) modified electrodes.

Figure 1 shows the Attenuated Total Reflectance (ATR) – Fourier Transform Infrared (FT-IR) spectrum of $CoFe_3O_4$, the sharp peaks at 694 cm^{-1} and 567 cm^{-1} belong to $Co-O-Fe$ ³¹ and $Fe-O-Fe$,³² respectively. In addition, H bond peaks belonging to $-OH$ groups originating from the

surface structure confirm the $Co-Fe-O$ structure on the surface as a broadband peak in the range of $3000-3600\text{ cm}^{-1}$.³³ For the $CoFe_3O_4/MWCNT$ modified electrode surfaces, a decrease in peak intensities are observed due to the CNT included in the structure, and $C=C$ around 1625 cm^{-1} and $C-C$

single bond at 1375 cm^{-1} which indicates the presence of NT in the structure.³⁴ Furthermore, for the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified electrode surface, in addition to the Co-Fe-O peaks around 694 and 570 cm^{-1} , very broad Ti-O-H peaks are observed in the range of $1000\text{-}11100\text{ cm}^{-1}$.³⁵ In addition, the band intensity in the $3000\text{-}3600\text{ cm}^{-1}$ range increased, indicating that TiO_2 is included in the structure.

Figure 2 shows the Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) images of the 3 modified electrode structures for different magnifications. In Fig. 2a, it is clear that the CoFe_3O_4 structure is pure, clean, and homogeneously coated on the surface. This structure forms a homogeneous

cavity on the electrode surface. Thanks to this cavity, the electrode surface area increases, and the measurement sensitivity increases. In the surface coating obtained from CoFe_3O_4 in Fig. 2b, both CoFe_3O_4 and CNT structures are seen. Especially the tubular structures originating from the CNT structure are morphologically seen on the surface which are much more clearly observed at higher magnifications. In Fig. 2c, a mixed surface is formed to reflect all three components. With the addition of TiO_2 , a semiconductor, to the structure, the roughness on the electrode surface increases. In addition, due to the TiO_2 structure, voids are formed on the surface and some planar regions are formed.

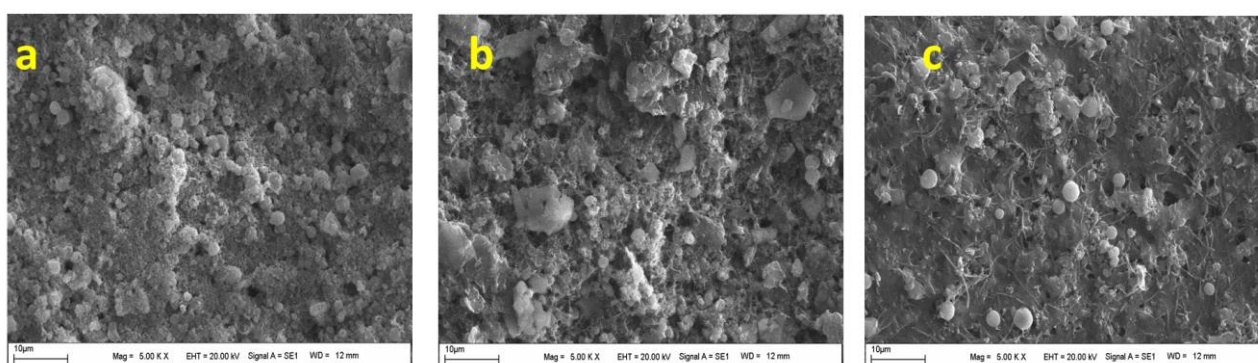


Fig. 2 – SEM images of the modified electrodes: a – CoFe_3O_4 ; b – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$; c – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{TiO}_2/\text{MWCNT}$.

Figure 3 displays the energy dispersive X-ray analysis (EDX) spectra of the related surface structures. Figure 3a shows the spectrum of pure CoFe_3O_4 . Only Co, Fe, and O peaks are seen on this spectrum. When the spectrum structure is analyzed, the $K\alpha$ peak of O is observed at 0.383 KeV . For the Fe atom, $K\alpha$ and $K\beta$ peaks were detected at 0.706 and 6.465 KeV , respectively. For the Co atom, $K\alpha$ and $K\beta$ peaks were observed at 0.766 and 6.929 KeV , respectively. In Fig. 3b, in addition to these peaks, peaks belonging to the C element were also observed in the structure. Especially C peaks at 0.227 KeV indicate the existence of MWCNT in the structure.

In the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified electrode structure in Fig. 3c, peaks belonging to Co, O, Fe, C, and Ti elements were clearly determined. The Ti element included in the structure proves the presence of TiO_2 . In general, $K\alpha$ and $K\beta$ peaks of Ti element are observed at 0.452 and 4.510 KeV values. Due to the O element, $K\alpha$ of oxygen was detected at 0.523 KeV . For Fe and Co, $K\alpha$ and $K\beta$ peaks are clearly seen at $0.706\text{-}6.412$, and $0.778\text{-}6.929$, respectively.

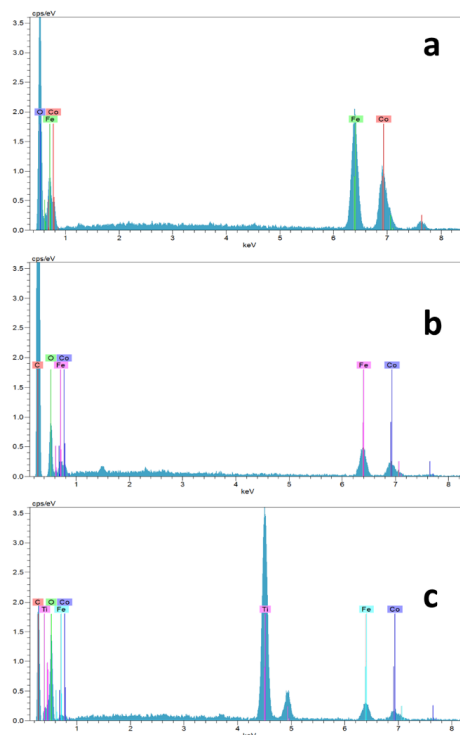


Fig. 3 – EDX images of modified electrodes: a – CoFe_3O_4 ; b – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$; c – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$.

Another important parameter in electrochemical systems is the growth of the electrode surface. Because, as the surface area increases, the rate of reaction in the Helmholtz layer increases. For this reason, the surface areas and morphologies of the electrodes were determined by the Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) technique depicted in Fig. 4. According to Fig. 4a, a fractal electrode surface spherical morphology is observed on the CoFe_3O_4 -modified electrode surface. With the addition of MWCNT to the structure, more uniform areas were seen in certain regions shown in Fig. 4b. In addition, in Fig. 4b, the surface cavities widened and deeper voids were observed. In Fig. 4c, more pointed peaks

were obtained with the addition of TiO_2 to the structure, and two different morphologies of both spherical and more pointed areas can be mentioned at elevations. With the addition of MWCNT and TiO_2 , long and linear morphologies began to appear on the electrode surface. Accordingly, the electrode surface area also increased. The surface areas of CoFe_3O_4 , $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$ and $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ were determined as 292.66 ± 0.43 , 375.12 ± 0.19 and $397.66 \pm 0.52 \mu\text{m}^2$, respectively. As in line with SEM images, the largest surface area was observed for $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$. Therefore, it has been considered to provide an ideal sensor structure.

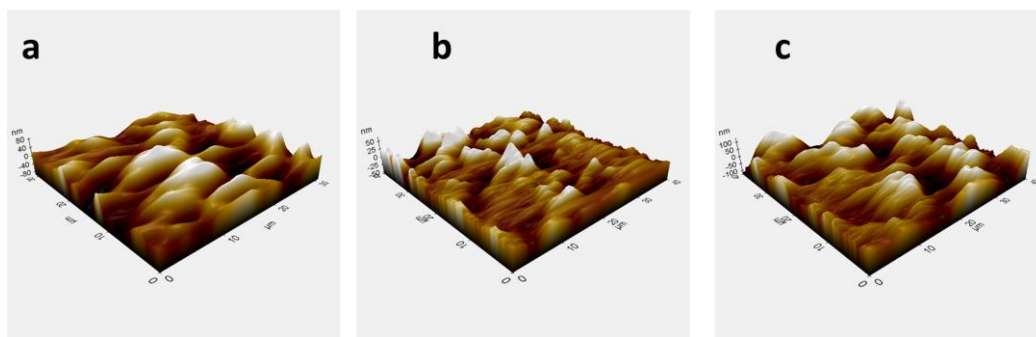


Fig. 4. –AFM images: a – CoFe_3O_4 ; b – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$; c – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified electrodes.

To clearly show the change in the electrode surface area due to these coatings on the surface, surface AFM images are given in Fig. 5 in comparison with the bare electrode. According to these images, while the bare

electrode surface was quite flat and smooth, all other electrode surfaces had cavities and fractal surface morphologies. Therefore, it can be clearly stated that the electrode sensitivity has increased.

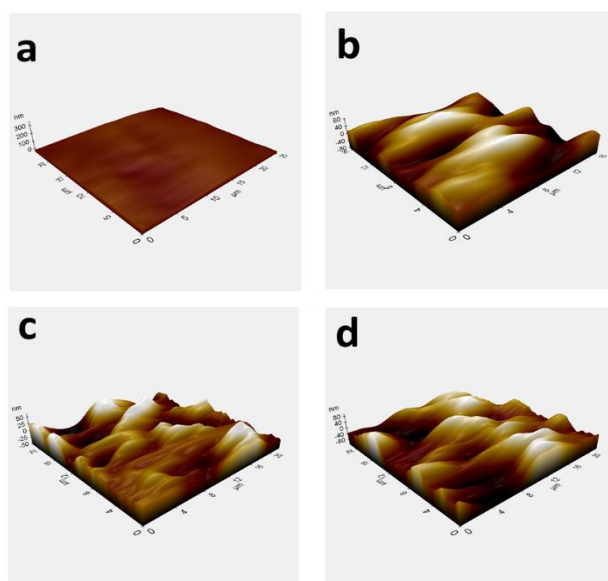


Fig. 5 – AFM images: a – bare GCE; b – CoFe_3O_4 ; c – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$; d – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ electrodes.

Figure 6 shows in detail the surface roughness measurements of the modified electrodes obtained compared to the bare electrode surface. In these measurements, it is clearly seen that the surface roughness for the bare GCE surface is around +10; -20 nm. With the introduction of CoFe_3O_4 into the structure, a surface roughness around +50; -27 nm was observed. With MWCNT added to the structure, partial decreases and partial increases in the surface profile were observed.

This change in the system is mainly due to the partial agglomeration of MWCNT, and a surface roughness around +15; -30 nm was observed. With the addition of TiO_2 structure to the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$ structure, the surface roughness was measured as +40; -30 nm and +55; -75 nm in certain regions. Compared to other modified electrodes, the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ structure exhibited a more ideal and rough morphology.

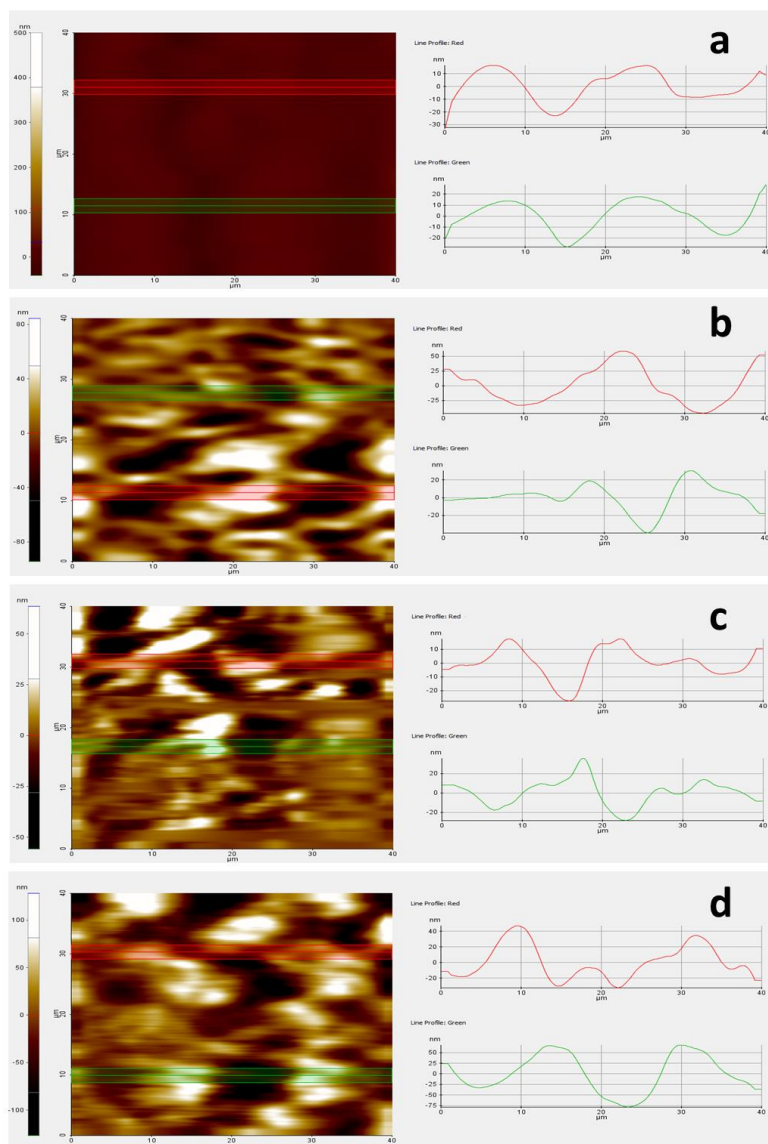


Fig. 6 – a – Bare GCE; b – CoFe_3O_4 ; c – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$; d – AFM roughness images of $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ electrodes (40×40 magnification).

2. Optimization of CoFe_3O_4 , $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$ and $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ -modified electrodes

Figure 7 shows differential pulse voltammetry (DPV) results of bare GCE, CoFe_3O_4 ,

$\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$, and $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCEs in 0.1 M phosphate buffer salt (PBS pH 7). It is clear that the highest response belongs to $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ and peaks at approximately 100 mV.

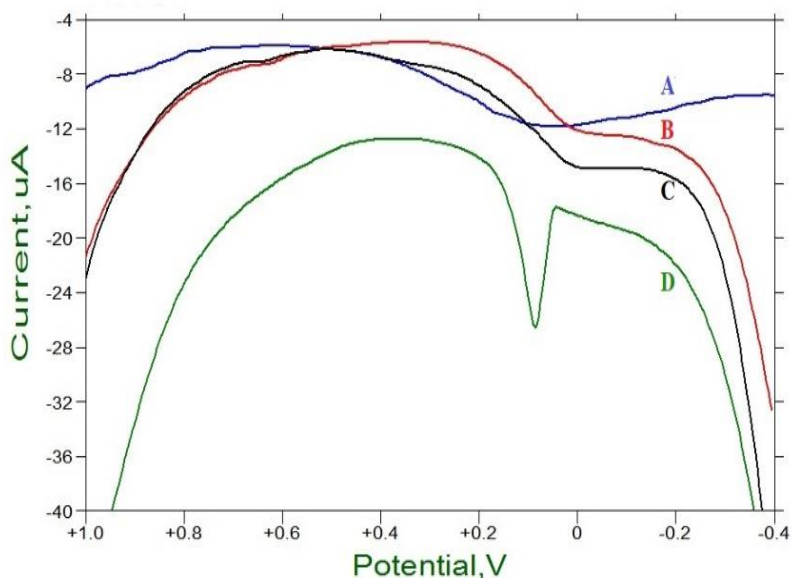


Fig. 7 – Electrode behavior in PBS electrolyte: A – Bare GCE (blue line); B – CoFe_3O_4 (red line); C – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$ (black line); D – $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ (green line) electrodes.

3. Effect of Support Electrolyte

Figure 8 displays the DPV measurements that were performed from -0.4 to $+1.0$ V with $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ different four alternative electrolytes which are named 0.1 M KCl, 0.1 M NaOH, 0.1 M PBS (pH 7) and 0.05 M NaOAc (pH 5). As compared to the results of the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ electrode (Fig. 7), the current responses obtained from these electrodes are higher than $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ electrode. To specify the potential of the considered anodic peak of salbutamol in each of these supporting electrolytes,

you would need to perform electrochemical experiments using cyclic voltammetry or other relevant electrochemical techniques. The anodic peak potential is the potential at which the oxidation of salbutamol occurs, and it will likely vary in each of these electrolytes due to factors like ionic strength, pH, specific ion effects, buffer capacity, and electrode material.

Among them, 0.1 M PBS (pH 7) to provide the best properties. Since the optimum support electrolyte for the prepared modified electrodes was determined to be PBS buffer, 0.1 M PBS (pH 7) was used as the electrolyte in the following studies.

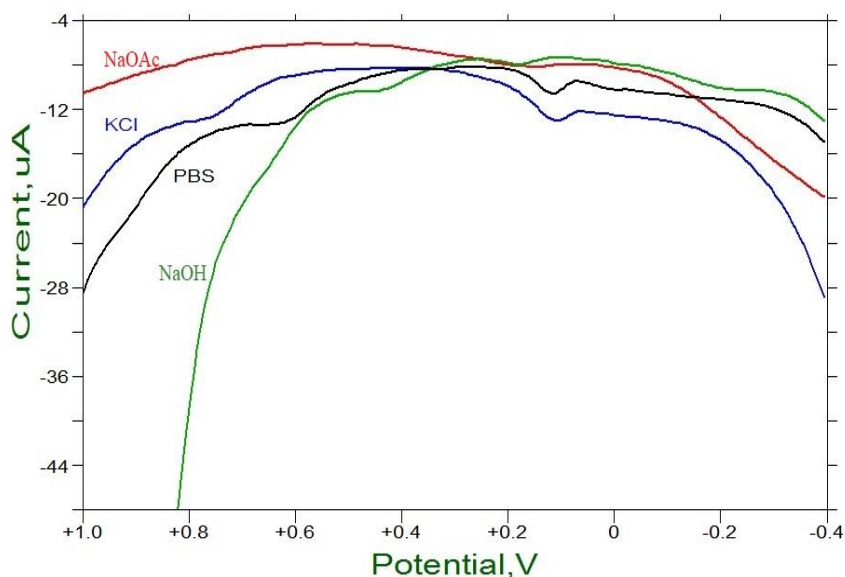


Fig. 8 – Effect of Support Electrolyte on modified $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ (red line) NaOAc, (blue line) KCl, (black line) PBS, and (green line) NaOH).

4. Calibration curve

Figure 9 shows the DPV behavior of CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ modified GCE electrode for 11 different concentrations of salbutamol in the range of 2 μM-18 μM and inset of Fig. 9b shows the calibration graph with R²= 0.9587. The LOD and LOQ values of the modified electrode were calculated as 1.39 μM and 22.87 μM, respectively.

Furthermore, a time base (TB) was performed at 650 mV to determine the salbutamol response time of CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ modified GCE which is shown in Fig. 10. Based on this experiment, the response time was found to be very short by four seconds. Figure 11 shows the reproducibility results of the CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ electrode and we observed that there is a 6% decrease in response after four measurements.

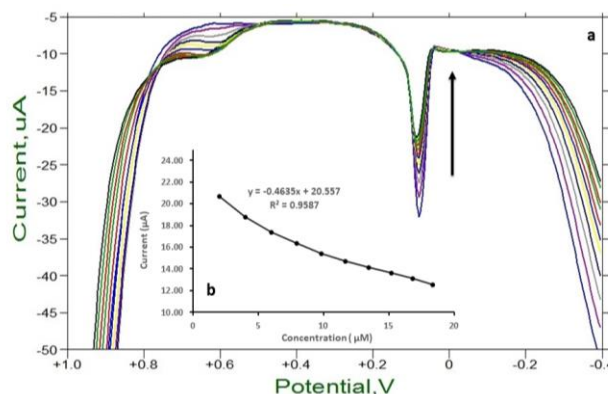


Fig. 9 – DPV responses of CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ modified GCE electrode in the range of 2 μM-18 μM (a) and calibration curve for increasing (inset) (b).

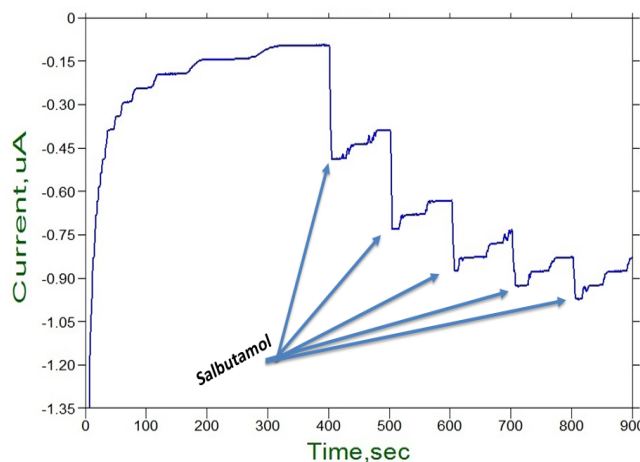


Fig. 10 – Time Base responses of Salbutamol on CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ modified GCE (PBS, pH 7).

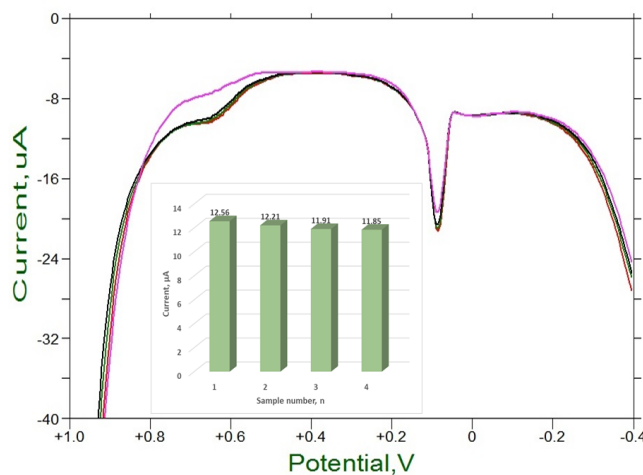


Fig. 11 – 100 μL salbutamol reproducibility assay with CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ modified GCE electrode (PBS, pH 7).

Figure 12 shows salbutamol results of $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCE for different electroactive and electro-inactive species, in order to determine the performance of $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCE with respect to ascorbic acid, oxalic acid, lactose, sucrose, and uric acid. We observed that $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCE responded not only for electroactive species such as ascorbic acid, oxalic acid, and uric acid but also for inactive species such as lactose and sucrose. Therefore, $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$

modified GCE might behave inertly many electroactive substances exist in blood and other physiological body fluids and is also not affected by other electrode surface contaminants that are not electroactive. Accordingly, they might use direct and sensitive measurements of salbutamol in biomedical applications. In addition, for instantaneous measurements, the $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCE is faster than other techniques used for this purpose in medical applications, making it stand out as a salbutamol sensor.

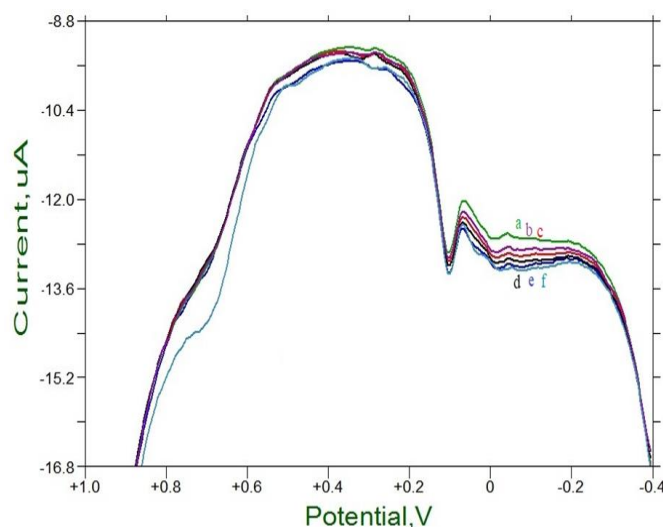


Fig. 12 – a-ascorbic acid; b-oxalic acid; c-uric acid; d-lactose; e-sucrose; f- salbutamol responses of $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ modified GCE (PBS, pH 7).

EXPERIMENTAL

1. Reagent and Equipment

Salbutamol, potassium dihydrogen phosphate (KH_2PO_4), sodium mono hydrogen phosphate (Na_2HPO_4), and *N,N*-dimethylformamide (DMF) were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich chemical company. Sodium acetate (CH_3COONa), acetic acid (CH_3COOH), potassium chloride (KCl), sodium chloride (NaCl), hydrochloric acid (HCl), and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) were purchased from Merck. CoFe_3O_4 and MWCNT structures were purchased from Sigma-Aldrich. All aqueous stock solutions and electrolyte solutions were produced with ultra-pure water. All electroanalytical studies were performed at room temperature. All the solutions were stored at room temperature.

Attenuated Total Reflectance (ATR) – Fourier Transform Infrared (ATR–FTIR) analyses were carried out using one Perkin Elmer FT-IR spectrometer to study CoFe_3O_4 , $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$, $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ structures and determine if there is any CoFe_3O_4 , MWCNT, TiO_2 present in the structures in the range $4000 - 400 \text{ cm}^{-1}$. The average spectral resolution was 4 cm^{-1} . The surface properties and morphologies of CoFe_3O_4 , $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}$, and $\text{CoFe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{MWCNT}/\text{TiO}_2$ structures were obtained by LEO EVO-40xVP SEM in which particle beam incident energies from 3 to 30 keV were used. The EDX spectra were corrected

with the ZAF correction, which accounts for the influence of matrix material on the resulting spectra. AFM images and surface roughness of the modified electrode were performed at room temperature using the non-contact mode with the park system XE100 AFM device. DPV studies were performed using a BAS 100BW (Bioanalytical Systems, Inc., USA) potentiostat device equipped with a C3 electrochemical cell with a Faraday cage. The triple electrode system (BASi C3 cell stand) consisted of a glassy carbon study electrode (GCE), Ag/AgCl in saturated KCl solution (Ag/AgCl/sat. KCl) as a reference electrode, and a platinum wire counter electrode. For the cleaning of the electrodes and dissolve the solutions, A Bandelin Sonorex brand RK 100 ultrasonic bath was used. The ultra-pure water was obtained from a Millipore Milli-Q water system.

2. Preparation of Glassy Carbon Electrode (GCE) and cleaning of the modified electrode

Before modification, the bare GCE was cleaned mechanically cleaning velvet pads (BAS, MF-1040) dripping $1.0 \mu\text{m}$, $0.3 \mu\text{m}$, and $0.05 \mu\text{m}$ alumina (Al_2O_3) slurries, respectively. The polished electrode was rinsed successively with ethanol/water, $\text{HNO}_3/\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (1:3 v/v), and sonicated in ultrapure water for 5 min. After the electrode was cleaned, the bare GCE was electrochemically cleaned by applying cyclic voltammetry (CV) in the range -1200 to $+1200 \text{ mV}$ in $0.5 \text{ M H}_2\text{SO}_4$ and scanned 20 times.³⁶ Finally, to remove

impurities, the working electrode surface was cleaned with ultrapure water. Before each modification, GCEs were cleaned mentioned above. All modified electrode surface was cleaned with ultrapure water before and after using the experiment.

3. Preparation of CoFe₃O₄, CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT and CoFe₃O₄/TiO₂/MWCNT electrodes

Firstly, the CoFe₃O₄ nanoparticle structure (0.1 g) was dispersed in DMF (2 mL) and then dripped onto the GCE surface and dried at room temperature. For the second electrode, a certain amount of (90%) CoFe₃O₄ and (10%) MWCNT mixture (0.1 g) was homogeneously dispersed in DMF (2 mL), stirred in an ultrasonic bath for about 1 h, then dripped onto the GCE surface and dried at room temperature. For the third and final modified electrode, 5% TiO₂ was added to the mixture of CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT, and the new mixture (0.1 g) was stirred in DMF (2 mL) for another half hour and dripped onto the GCE surface to be used as the working electrode. After determining the optimum ratio, different amounts (1, 3, and 5 µL) of the CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ mixture were dropped onto the GCE surface and dried at room temperature. The prepared modified electrodes were dried at room temperature for salbutamol determination.

CONCLUSION

In this study, a simple, selective, sensitive, low-cost, and easily prepared electrode was used for the determination of salbutamol using CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT and TiO₂, allowing a short analysis time. We developed an electrode fabricated from carbon-based materials loaded with CoFe₃O₄, MWCNT, and TiO₂ for the detection of salbutamol in physiological fluids. The holistic behavior of salbutamol enhances the accumulation of salbutamol on the electrode surface and increases the electrode sensitivity. The optimum conditions for the detection of salbutamol were 0.1 M PBS (pH 7), +1.0 V; -0.4 V, and a scan rate of 25 mV/sec. The optimized sensor showed linearity, sensitivity, and selectivity in the range of 2–18 µM under optimum conditions. The limits of detection (LOQ) and detection limits (LOD) of the modified electrode were decided as 22.87 µM and 1.39 µM, respectively. In conclusion, a CoFe₃O₄/MWCNT/TiO₂ doped GCE sensor used for salbutamol with good selectivity, good reproducibility, and a wide linear range was developed.

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