

SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERIZATION OF NiS/ZrS₂ NANOPARTICLES BY ELECTROCHEMICAL METHOD: PHOTODEGRADATION KINETICS OF METHYLENE BLUE DYE AND INVESTIGATION OF ITS ANTIBACTERIAL ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study reports the synthesis and characterization of novel NiS/ZrS₂ nanocomposite particles via a facile electrochemical method and evaluates their photocatalytic and antibacterial potential. Zirconium sulphide (ZrS₂), with a direct band gap of 2.48 eV, is a promising semiconductor for optical applications. The electrochemical synthesis produced NiS/ ZrS₂ nanoparticles, whose structural, morphological, compositional, and optical properties were investigated using X-ray diffraction (XRD), Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy, Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy with Energy Dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (FESEM/EDAX), and UV-Visible (UV-Vis) spectroscopy. XRD analysis confirmed the crystalline nature of the composite, while FESEM revealed its surface morphology and EDAX verified elemental composition. Optical studies utilizing UV-Vis spectroscopy were employed to determine the band gap energy, and FTIR identified functional groups. The photocatalytic performance of the synthesized nanoparticles was assessed by studying the degradation kinetics of Methylene Blue (MB) dye under light irradiation. The results demonstrated efficient photodegradation, highlighting the material's potential for environmental remediation of organic pollutants. Furthermore, the NiS/ ZrS₂ nanoparticles exhibited significant antibacterial activity against both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, specifically *Bacillus subtilis*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*. This work presents a straightforward synthesis route for a multifunctional NiS/ ZrS₂ nanocomposite with promising applications in photocatalysis and biomedical fields.

Keywords: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles, Methylene Blue Dye, Electrochemical Method, Antibacterial Activity, Photocatalysis

RASAYANJ. Chem., Vol. 19, No. 2, 2026

INTRODUCTION

A lot of attention has recently been paid to semiconductor nanocrystals because of their special optical and physicochemical characteristics.¹ The applications for metal sulphide nanoparticles are numerous, ranging from cosmetics to therapeutics and diagnostics. They exhibit enhanced electrical and structural integrity, improved magnetic properties, and increased optical activity. The excellent chemical and physical properties of the nanoparticles vary according to their size.² The last twenty years have seen a rapid advancement in the different methods used to fabricate nanoparticles.³⁻⁴ Because of the layered structures that result from van der Waals interactions, sulfide metal is widely used. Because of sulphur's high polarizability, low melting point, and volatilization, nonstoichiometric material is produced. Comparing the Ni-S system to other transition metal sulphides, the phase diagram is more complicated. Because of their low cost, high electrical conductivity, large theoretical capacitance, and environmentally favorable qualities, extensive research has focused on metal sulphides.⁵⁻⁸ NiS is a crucial component of an inorganic transition metal that, either through doping or temperature-dependent, exhibits a metal-insulator transition.⁹

The measured properties of ZrS₂ include a band gap of 1.68 eV and a stoichiometry approximating the ideal chalcogen-to-metal ratio of 2.¹⁰⁻¹¹ Because of its great corrosion resistance, zinc is a transition metal that is mostly used as an opacifier and refractory. It is also occasionally used as an alloying agent.

Although zirconium has no known biological function, compounds containing Zirconium are used in numerous biomedical applications, such as knee and hip replacements, dental implants, and other restorative procedures.¹²⁻¹⁴ In this regard, NiS/ZrS₂ nanocomposites were created using a novel electrochemical technique, and their catalytic effects on the antibacterial activity and photocatalytic degradation of Methylene Blue dye were noted.

EXPERIMENTAL

Materials and Apparatus

The chemicals used for the study of electrochemical synthesis of NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles were of analytical grade purity. Sodium sulphide, Ni, and Zr wires were purchased from Alfa Aesar Pvt Ltd. All experiments were conducted using deionised water generated by a PURELAB Ultra purification system.

Electrochemical Synthesis of NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles

The process used to synthesise the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles is an electrochemical method. Figure-1 depicts the process of the experiment. The 20ml of 0.2M Na₂S solution is used to dip the two metal wires, Ni and Zr. The platinum electrode is connected to the positive terminal of the cathode, and the Ni and Zr metal wires to the Negative terminal of the battery. With constant stirring, the experiment was conducted for two hours using a potential of 10V and a current of 15 mA. During electrolysis, the anode and cathode were separated by 2 cm. The Ni and Zr wires begin to dissolve during the electrolysis process, releasing Ni and Zr ions. These ions then electrochemically react with Na₂S to produce sulfide along with Ni and Zr ions. The possible mechanism for the electrochemical synthesis of NiS/ZrS₂ is shown in Scheme-1. After obtaining the solid, it is thoroughly cleaned of any unreacted Na₂S using double-distilled water. To remove salt and hydroxide contaminants, the material is centrifuged and calcined for two hours at 750 °C.¹⁵

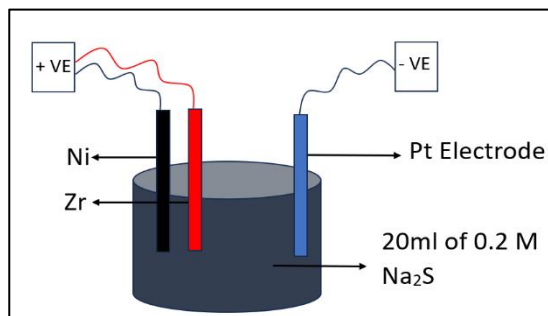
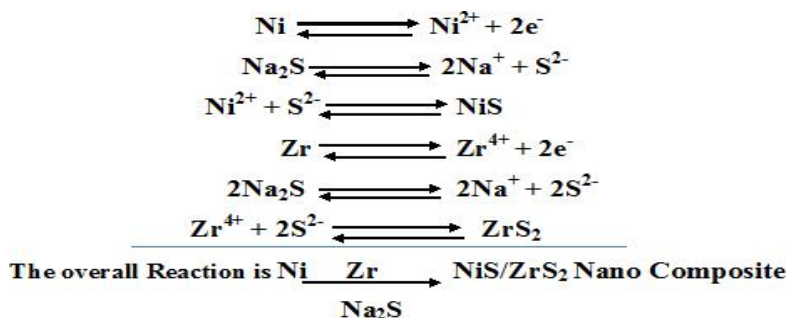


Fig-1: Electrochemical Synthesis Setup for NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles



Scheme-1: Electrochemical Synthesis Mechanism of NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles

Evaluating Photocatalytic Activity

A 3×10^{-5} M Methylene Blue dye solution was prepared by dissolving it in distilled water. The prepared NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles' photocatalytic activities were assessed using this solution as a test contaminant. The investigation was conducted in tungsten-halogen ultraviolet light to verify the efficiency of NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles. A centrifuge tube was filled with 20 millilitres of dye solution in order to measure the photocatalytic activity. The catalyst was dispersed, and the dye solution percentage transmittance was

noted after centrifuging at 800 rpm. Reports of Chemical oxygen demand (COD) have been made using the dichromate oxidation method both prior to and following the deterioration of the Methylene Blue dye solution. COD values were obtained using the following expression.¹⁶

$$\text{COD} = \frac{(\text{Blank-Sample}) \times \text{NFAS} \times 8000}{V_{\text{sample}}} \quad (1)$$

Analysis and implications

X-Ray Diffraction (XRD) Analysis

The X-ray diffraction (XRD) pattern for the synthesized NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles is presented in Fig.-2(a). The dominant diffraction peaks of NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles appear at 2 theta and are confirmed by the XRD data. These peaks are 35.77, 40.54, and 48.93 planes of (021), (211), and (131) with reference to JCPDS card number 65-2117 for NiS.¹⁷ The 2 theta in degrees of 30.14, 50.33, and 62.66 planes of (002), (110), and (004), respectively, with reference to JCPDS card number 03-1099 for ZrS₂.¹⁸ Based on the Debye-Scherrer equation ($D = k\lambda/\beta\cos\theta$), analysis of the X-ray diffraction data presented in Fig.-2(b) indicates that the synthesized NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles possess an average crystallite size of approximately 2.27 nm and exhibit a hexagonal crystal structure. In the Debye-Scherrer equation, λ denotes the wavelength of the incident X-ray beam, β represents the full width at half maximum of the measured diffraction peak, θ is the corresponding Bragg angle, and k is a dimensionless shape factor, commonly taken as 0.9.¹⁹

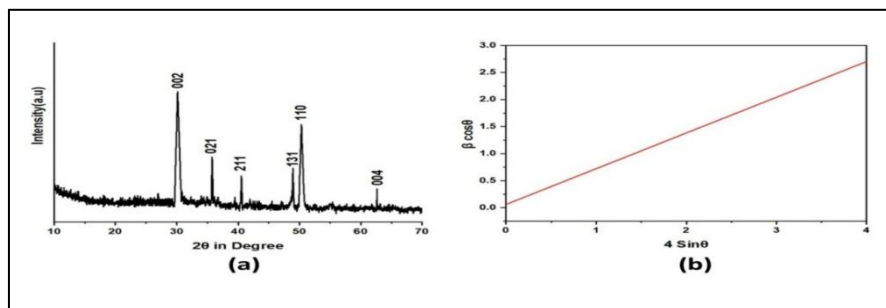


Fig.-2: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles (a) XRD Pattern, and (b) WH Plot

Ultra Violet-Visible Spectra

The optical absorption spectra of the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles have confirmed that the observed blue shift in the absorption spectrum can be attributed to an increase in the band gap energy caused by the nanoscale particle size.¹⁹ The synthesised NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles, as seen in Fig.-3, have a maximum intensity peak in the UV region at 420.23 nm shown in Fig.-3 (a). In addition, dye degradation occurs much more slowly in the presence of sunshine than it does in the ultraviolet. The synthesised nanoparticles are photoactive when exposed to ultraviolet light, as evidenced by the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles' UV-visible spectrum, which spans 200–800 nm. Using the Tauc plot, the band gap of synthesised NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles was determined by plotting $(\alpha h\nu)^{1/2}$ versus $h\nu$. The synthesised NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles were found to have band gap energy of 2.48 eV shown in Fig.-3 (b).

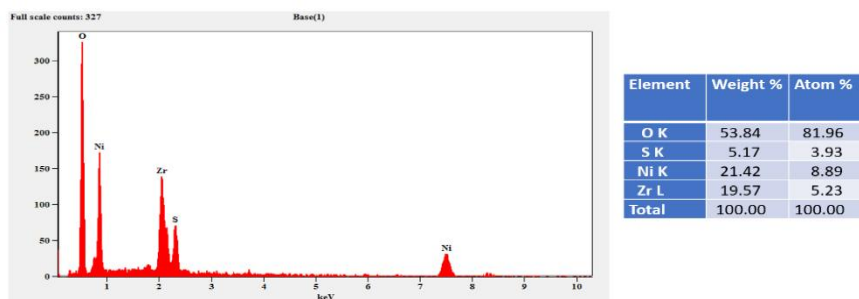


Fig.-3: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles (a) Ultra Violet-Visible Spectra, and (b) Tauc Plot

Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

High-resolution microscopy, or SEM, provides detailed surface information about solid materials. It is evident from Fig.-4 that the particles were aggregated with Nisand Zr. When viewed at various magnifications, the SEM image reveals that the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles have a spherical structure. The SEM image displays NiS that has been randomly distributed along with smaller-sized ZrS₂ grains seen in Fig.-4.

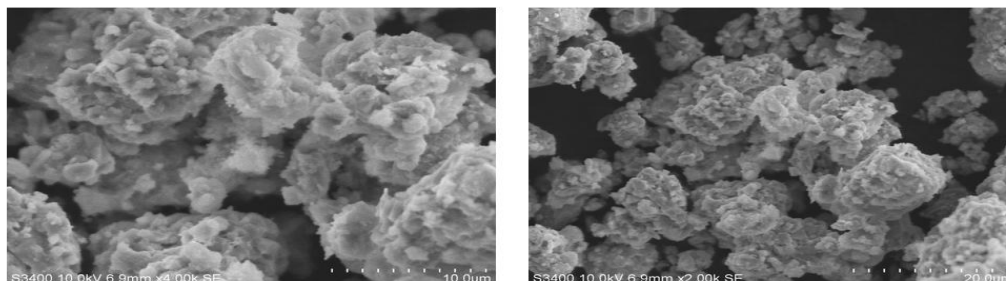


Fig.-4: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles SEM Images

EDAX

Ni, Zr, S, and O were confirmed to be present in the nanomaterial by the EDAX mapping. The values obtained indicate Ni percentage, which is higher compared with the Zr, and S was lower compared to all the elements shown in Fig.-5.

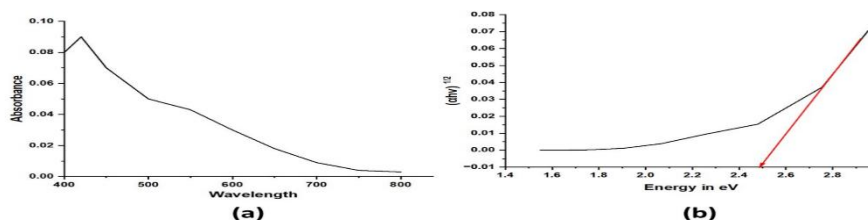


Fig.-5: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles EDAX Mapping Graph

Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FT-IR) Spectra

The functional groups present in the substance were identified by Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy, as shown in Fig.-6. A Perkin Elmer spectrometer was employed to determine the modes of vibration of the chemical bonds in the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles FT-IR spectra. These modes have been recorded between 500 and 4000 cm⁻¹. Chemically bound hydroxyl groups are indicated by the wide peak at 3241.90 cm⁻¹. The Metal-Oxygen is associated with the three peaks at roughly 1088.58, 1597.99, and 3271.90.²⁰

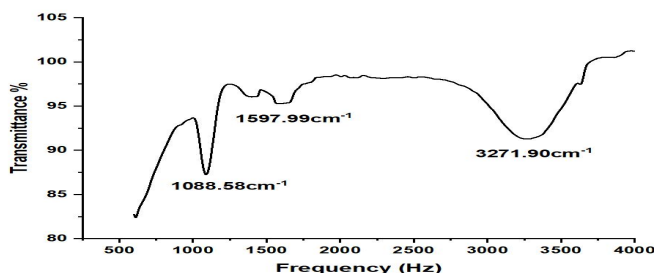


Fig.-6: NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles FTIR Spectra

Degradation Kinetics and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) Analysis

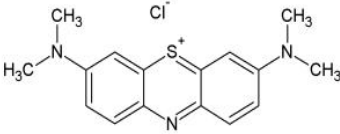
Effect of Concentration of Methylene Blue Dye

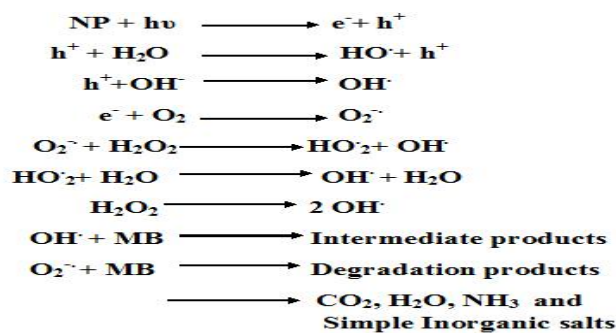
Methylene blue (MB), commonly referred to as basic blue 9, was selected as the cationic dye mentioned in Table-1.²¹ The effect of dye concentration was investigated using a series of four methylene blue

solutions with varying molarities (1×10^{-5} , 2×10^{-5} , 3×10^{-5} , and 4×10^{-5}) with constant weight NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles serving as a catalyst. The colour change was measured using a spectrophotometer, and the log %T (percentage of light transmitted) against time plot revealed a linear trend of the reaction, demonstrating that Methylene Blue discolouration was present in Fig.-7(a). According to Table-2 rate constant values, the reaction rate falls as the Methylene Blue dye concentration raises. Increased dye concentration strongly colours the solution. This decreases the travel length of photons entering the solution, slowing their arrival at the catalyst surface. Consequently, there are fewer. Scheme-2 illustrates the production of $\cdot\text{OH}$ hydroxyl free radicals and the possible photodegradation pathway mechanism of MB dye is shown in Scheme-3. Consequently, photodegradation efficiency is reduced.²² The COD values for the Methylene Blue dye solution are displayed in Table-1, both prior to and following the degradation depicted in Fig.-7(b). The photocatalyst's photodegradation efficiency was calculated using the following formula (2).

$$\text{Photodegradation Efficiency} = \frac{\text{Starting COD} - \text{Ending COD}}{\text{Starting COD}} \quad (2)$$

Table-1: Properties of Methylene Blue Dye

Dye	Chemical Formula	Molar Mass	Wavelength	Structure
Methylene Blue	$\text{C}_{16}\text{H}_{18}\text{N}_3\text{S}\text{Cl}$	319.9g/mol	660nm	



Scheme-2: Free Radical Species Generation during the Photodegradation of Methylene Blue [MB] Dye

Table-2: Effect of different Concentrations of MB Dye on the Rate of Degradation under UV Light

10^{-5} [MB]	$k \times 10^{-3} \text{ sec}^{-1}$	Degradation Duration in minutes	Chemical Oxygen demand values (mg L^{-1})	
			Initial Degradation	Final Degradation
1.0	7.7	50	416	16
2.0	9.0	80	592	32
3.0	9.6	100	848	16
4.0	12.7	130	1040	24

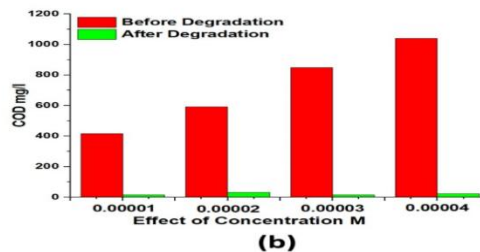
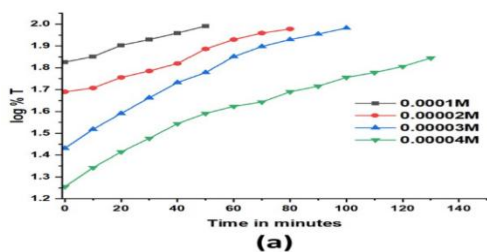


Fig.-7: (a) Effect of Methylene Blue Concentration on Degradation Rate Under UV Light, (b) COD Values

Effect of Catalyst Loading

In order to investigate the impact of catalyst loading, four distinct catalyst dosages ranging from 0.005g, 0.01g, 0.02g, and 0.03g were used, with the dye concentration remaining constant. As seen in Fig.-8(a), the study's findings showed that the Methylene Blue dye solution's degradation efficiency rise as the catalyst's weight grew from 0.005 g to 0.03 g. Furthermore, the photocatalytic activity of the catalyst declines as the catalyst weight is increased above 0.03 g. This is because the NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles agglomerate at increasing concentrations, this reduces the availability of active sites on the catalyst and promotes light scattering. Less light tends to flow through the sample as a result. The current study found that 0.03g/20 mL⁻¹ photocatalyst loading is economically optimal. Table-3 and Fig.-8 (b) demonstrate degradation rate constants for different catalyst concentrations and COD values.

Table-3: Effect of Catalyst Loading on Rate of Photodegradation Under UV Light

Catalyst in grams	$k \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ (sec}^{-1}\text{)}$	Degradation duration in minutes	Chemical Oxygen demand values (mg L ⁻¹)	
			Initial Degradation	Final Degradation
0.005	3.4	130	848	16
0.01	8.3	130	848	32
0.02	12.7	100	848	16
0.03	5.5	130	848	48

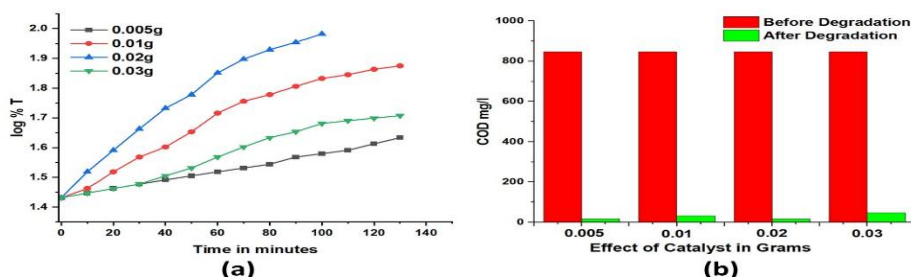


Fig.-8: (a) Effect of Catalyst Loading on Degradation Rate of MB Dye Solution Exposed to UV Light, and (b) COD Results

Effect of pH

When assessing the photodegradation reaction in an aqueous medium, one of the key variables to consider is the pH of solution. The influence of pH was studied at values of 4.0, 6.5, and 8.0, while keeping all other parameters unchanged. Results indicate a consistent increase in photodegradation efficiency across this range, with the highest rate observed at pH 8.0. Consequently, a pH of 8.0 was selected as optimal due to its higher degradation performance. Corresponding rate constants and COD values for this pH dependency are presented in Table-4 and Fig.-9(a) and 9(b)

Table-4: Effect of pH on Photodegradation of Methylene Blue Dye under UV Light

pH	$k \cdot 10^{-3} \text{ (sec}^{-1}\text{)}$	Degradation duration in minutes	Chemical Oxygen demand values (mg L ⁻¹)	
			Initial Degradation	Final Degradation
4.0	5.5	100	848	32
6.5	7.9	100	848	24
8.0	12.7	100	848	16

Temperature Effect

One of the key elements influencing the rate of photodegradation is temperature. The impact of temperature on the degradation of Methylene Blue dye was investigated. The findings demonstrate that degradation efficiency improves at elevated temperatures, with an initially modest reaction rate at lower temperatures. The process becomes considerably more effective at higher temperatures, primarily due to

an increase in the diffusion rate. This acceleration confirms that raised temperatures enhance the overall degradation kinetics²³. The specific parameters used in this experiment are provided in Table-3. Corresponding rate constants and COD values related to the temperature effect are detailed in Table-5 and illustrated in Fig.- 10(a) and 10(b). Table-6 indicates the thermodynamic parameters at the three different temperatures.

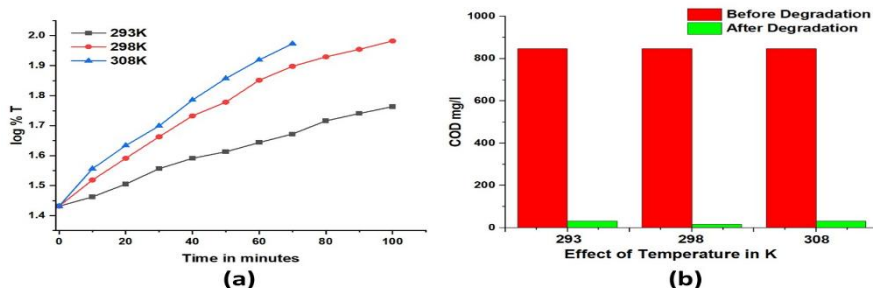


Fig.-9: (a) Effect of pH Degradation Rate of MB Dye Solution and (b) COD Values

Table-5: Effect of Temperature on the Rate of Photodegradation of Methylene Blue Dye under UV Light

Temperature in K	k 10 ⁻³ (sec ⁻¹)	Degradation duration in minutes	Chemical Oxygen demand values (mg L ⁻¹)	
			Initial Degradation	Final Degradation
293	7.7	100	848	32
298	12.6	100	848	16
308	17.4	70	848	32

Table-6: Thermodynamic Parameters for the Photodegradation of Methylene Blue Dye Solution

Temperature (K)	Activation Enthalpy (ΔH [#])(kJ mol ⁻¹)	Activation Entropy (ΔS [#])(kJ mol ⁻¹)	Activation free energy (ΔG [#])(kJ mol ⁻¹)	Energy of activation (E _a)(kJ mol ⁻¹)
293	21.59	-211.51	83.56	
298	21.55	-208.97	83.82	24.03
308	21.47	-209.14	85.87	

Antibacterial Activity

The antibiotic to be tested for effectiveness is loaded into a nutrient agar medium well. The antibiotic diffuses into the medium, and if the antibiotic or antibiotic drug kills or inhibits the microorganism, no growth will occur in the well's immediate vicinity, which is known as the zone of inhibition. The inhibition zone created around the well and the drug's effect are related. *Staphylococcus aureus* (MTCC 96), *Lactobacillus acidophilus* (MTCC 447), and *Bacillus subtilis* (MTCC 443) were the test bacterial strains that were acquired from MTCC, IMTECH, Chandigarh, India. Measurements of the antibacterial activity²⁴⁻²⁵ were made using well diffusion techniques. An approximately 25mL volume of melted Mueller-Hinton agar (Himedia, Mumbai, India) was placed in a sterile Petri plate. Plates were grown for eighteen hours after solidification (with the OD set to 0.6). A sterile L-rod spreader was used to evenly distribute 100 μL of the prepared bacterial suspension, creating a uniform lawn culture on the agar plate. A 6-mm well was made on the agar using a sterilised cork-borer after the microorganisms had been incubated for five minutes. The test samples were placed into the wells at 50 μg/well, 100 μg/well, 150μg/well, and 200μg/well concentrations. As a positive control, 30 μg/ml of *azithromycin* was employed. At 37°C, the plates had been incubated for 24 hours in a bacteriological “incubator. Antibacterial activity was measured by measuring the well's zone of inhibition width employing the antibiotic zone scale (Himedia, Mumbai, India).²⁴⁻²⁵ As can be seen from the zone of inhibition displayed in Fig.-10 and 11, and Table-7, the test samples demonstrated strong antibacterial activity against the test bacterial strains *Bacillus subtilis* (MTCC 443), *Lactobacillus acidophilus* (MTCC 447), and *Staphylococcus aureus* (MTCC 96”).

Table-7: Antibacterial Activity of NiS/ZrS₂ Nanoparticles Against Different Strains of Bacteria

Sample name	Zone of inhibition (millimeter)					Zone of inhibition Standard (millimeter)
	0 (µg/ml)	50 (µg/ml)	100 (µg/ml)	150 (µg/ml)	200 (µg/ml)	
<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	-	17	22	24	26	22
<i>Lactobacillus acidophilus</i>	-	14	18	20	24	17
<i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	-	12	14	17	18	20

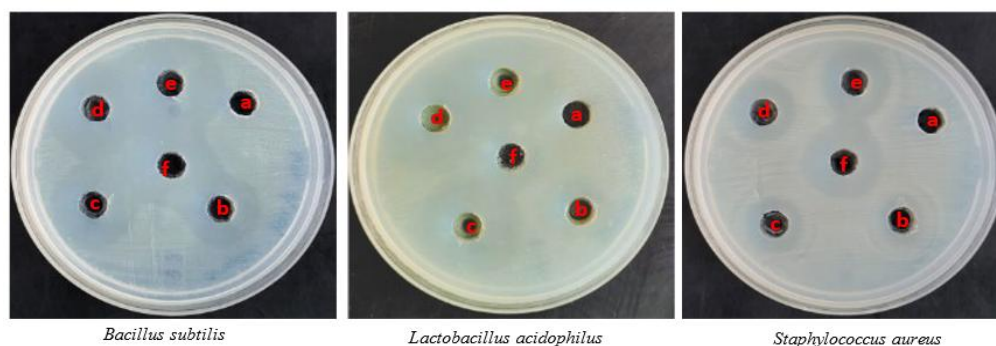


Fig.-10: Antibacterial Activity of Test Sample: a. 0 µg/mL, b. 50 µg/mL, c. 100 µg/mL, d. 150µg/mL, e. 200µg/mL, f. Azithromycin (30µg/mL)

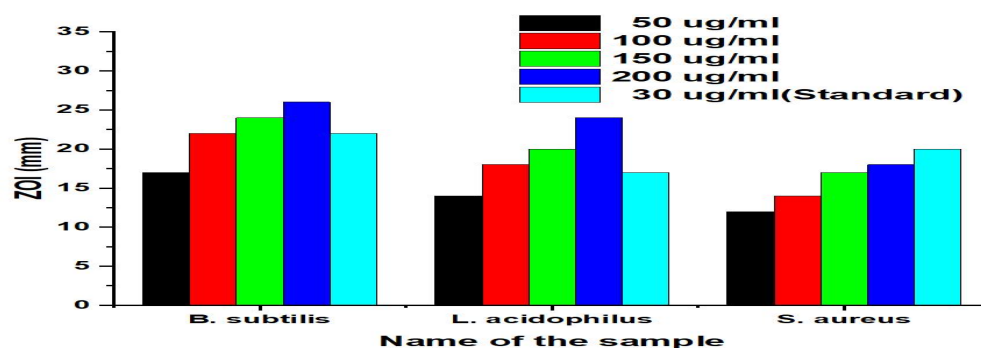


Fig.-11: Antibacterial Activity- Comparison Chart

CONCLUSION

This study presents the synthesis of NiS/ZrS₂ nanoparticles using a novel, cost-effective, and environmentally benign electrochemical method. The photodegradation of these semiconductors offers an eco-friendly way to remove dangerous materials from industrial effluents and wastewater. The dynamics of methylene blue degradation have been studied. According to the kinetics of Methylene Blue dye photodegradation, first-order kinetics should be followed while demineralising the dye. The complete degrading response was verified using the COD experiment. The produced nanoparticles' biological activity as potent antimitotic and antibacterial agents is supported by their ability to limit cell growth by penetrating *Bacillus subtilis*, *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, and *Staphylococcus aureus* cells. When Ni and Zr are present, the rate of photo-catalytic activity is inhibited. UV radiation blocking and cosmetics preparation are possible with the NiS/ZrS₂ nanocomposite.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the late Professor S. Ananda, former Professor and Chairman, UGC–BSR Faculty Fellow, Department of Studies in Chemistry, Manasagangothri, University of Mysore, Mysuru, for his invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout this work. Appreciation is also extended to Yuvaraja's College and the support provided under the IOE, UPE, and CPEPA programs of the University of Mysore.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The present work is related to *SDG-6: Clean Water and Sanitation*. It's Closest for research on water purification and wastewater treatment. All the authors contributed significantly to this manuscript, participated in reviewing/editing and approved the final draft for publication. The research profile of the authors can be verified from their ORCID ids, given below:

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Cite this article as: H. S. Sindhushree *et al.*, *Rasayan J. Chem.*, 19(2), 1069-1078(2026), <https://doi.org/10.31788/RJC.2026.1929560>.

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[RJC-9560/2025]