INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION
www.jsiinternational.com Research Article ISSN: 2583-8512

Enhanced Antimicrobial Activity of Zinc Oxide Nanoparticles: Synthesis, Characterization, and ROS-Mediated Efficacy Against Multidrug-Resistant *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia*

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Article Received on: 20/06/25; Revised on: 26/06/25; Approved for publication: 011/07/25

Keywords

Metal-Oxide Nanoparticles, ZnO Nanoparticles, Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria, Multidrug-Resistant (MDR) Pathogens, Stenotrophomonas

How to Cite this Article:

Asha, Suman, Enhanced Antimicrobial Activity of Zinc Oxide Nanoparticles: Synthesis, Characterization, and ROS-Mediated Efficacy Against Multidrug-Resistant *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia*
Int. J. Sci. Info. 2025; 3(4): 30-49

Abstract

The increasing prevalence of multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens, such as Stenotrophomonas maltophilia, necessitates the development of alternative antimicrobial agents. Zinc oxide (ZnO) nanoparticles have garnered significant attention for their potential in overcoming antibiotic resistance due to their broad-spectrum antibacterial activity. In this study, ZnO nanoparticles were synthesized using a simple sol-gel method and characterized by a variety of techniques, including X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning electron microscopy (SEM), and UV-Vis spectroscopy, among others. The antimicrobial activity of these nanoparticles was evaluated against S. maltophilia using a dichlorofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA) assay to measure reactive oxygen species (ROS) generation. The ZnO nanoparticles exhibited an average particle size of 40 nm, with spherical morphology and high crystallinity, as confirmed by XRD and TEM. The UV-Vis spectra revealed a bandgap of approximately 3.3 eV, characteristic of ZnO in its wurtzite phase, which is crucial for ROS generation. The ROS assay showed a direct correlation between ZnO concentration and ROS production, with higher concentrations resulting in greater fluorescence intensity. The results suggest that ZnO nanoparticles exert their antimicrobial activity by generating ROS, which damage bacterial cell membranes, proteins, and DNA, leading to cell death. These findings highlight the potential of ZnO nanoparticles as an effective alternative to traditional antibiotics for combating MDR infections, offering a promising approach for future therapeutic applications.

1. Introduction

Antibiotic resistance (AR) is one of the most pressing global health crises of the 21st century. The development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria is a natural consequence of evolutionary processes, but human actions such as the overuse and misuse of antibiotics have accelerated this phenomenon. As a result, numerous bacterial strains, previously susceptible to treatment, have developed

resistance to commonly used antibiotics[1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared antibiotic resistance as a critical threat to global health, with resistant infections leading to higher mortality rates, extended hospital stays, and increased healthcare costs[2]. Among the resistant pathogens, multidrug-resistant (MDR) bacteria are of particular concern, as they pose significant treatment challenges, leading to the limited efficacy of available antibiotics[3].

The rise in MDR pathogens, including *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia*, has led to the search for alternative therapies to combat these infections. *S. maltophilia* is an opportunistic, non-fermenting Gram-negative bacterium that is increasingly recognized as a pathogen in immunocompromised patients[4]. This bacterium is intrinsically resistant to many antibiotics, including β-lactams, aminoglycosides, and fluoroquinolones. The limited treatment options available for *S. maltophilia* and other MDR bacteria underscore the urgent need for novel antimicrobial agents[5].

Given the growing resistance to traditional antibiotics, there has been an increasing interest in alternative antimicrobial agents, particularly in the field of nanotechnology[6]. Nanomaterials, such as metal-oxide nanoparticles (NPs), are emerging as potential candidates for overcoming the challenges posed by antibiotic-resistant bacteria[7]. Metal-oxide nanoparticles, especially zinc oxide (ZnO) nanoparticles, have garnered significant attention due to their unique properties, including antibacterial activity, biocompatibility, and ability to generate reactive oxygen species (ROS) that can effectively kill bacterial cells[8].

1.1 Nanoparticles in Medicine: The Promise of ZnO Nanoparticles

Nanoparticles are defined as particles with at least one dimension in the range of 1 to 100 nm[9]. Due to their small size and high surface-area-to-volume ratio, nanoparticles possess unique chemical and physical properties that differ significantly from bulk materials[10]. These properties make them suitable for a wide range of applications in medicine, including drug delivery, imaging, and, more recently, antimicrobial therapies[11].

Among the different types of nanoparticles, metal-oxide nanoparticles have emerged as promising agents in combating bacterial infections. Zinc oxide (ZnO) nanoparticles, in particular, have been widely studied for their antimicrobial properties. ZnO nanoparticles exhibit a broad-spectrum antibacterial activity against both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria, including

S. maltophilia[12]. Their antimicrobial effects are primarily attributed to the production of ROS, which damage bacterial cell membranes, proteins, and DNA, leading to cell death. Furthermore, ZnO nanoparticles are relatively non-toxic to human cells, making them a promising candidate for therapeutic applications.

The ability to manipulate the size, shape, and surface properties of ZnO nanoparticles further enhances their potential as antimicrobial agents. The surface charge and functionalization of ZnO nanoparticles can be optimized to improve their dispersion stability, cellular uptake, and interaction with bacterial cells. Moreover, the surface modifications can enhance the nanoparticles' ability to interact with bacterial membranes, improving their antimicrobial efficacy.

While previous studies have demonstrated the antimicrobial potential of ZnO nanoparticles, the need for further research in this area remains critical. Specifically, the optimization of nanoparticle concentration and surface functionalization for targeting MDR pathogens, including *S. maltophilia*, has not been thoroughly explored[12]. Additionally, the characterization of ZnO nanoparticles using advanced techniques such as Particle Size Analysis (PSA), Zeta Potential (ZETA), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM), and Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) is essential for understanding the correlation between nanoparticle properties and antimicrobial activity.

The goal of this study is to synthesize, functionalize, and characterize ZnO nanoparticles with optimized concentration and surface properties for combating *S. maltophilia* and other MDR pathogens. This paper aims to provide detailed insights into the physicochemical properties of the nanoparticles and their antimicrobial performance against MDR bacteria

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Materials

2.1.1 Chemicals:

- Zinc Acetate Dihydrate ($Zn(CH_3COO)_2 \cdot 2H_2O$) – Used as the precursor for synthesizing ZnO nanoparticles.
- Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH) – Used as the base for the precipitation of ZnO nanoparticles.

- Ethanol (C_2H_5OH) – Used for washing and cleaning the nanoparticles.
- Acetone (C_3H_6O) – Used for the purification of the nanoparticles.
- Polyethylene Glycol (PEG) – Used for functionalization of the nanoparticles.
- Phosphate Buffer Saline (PBS) – Used as a medium for antimicrobial assays.

2.1.2 Microorganisms:

- *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia* (MDR strain) – The primary test organism for antimicrobial activity.
- Additional multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens including *Escherichia coli* (K-12 strain), *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

2.1.3 Antibiotics:

- Commercially available antibiotics (e.g., Ciprofloxacin, Amikacin) were used to compare the antimicrobial efficacy of ZnO nanoparticles.

2.1.4 Culture Media:

- Nutrient Agar – Used for culturing bacterial strains.
- Nutrient Broth – Used for bacterial growth and dilution.

2.2 Synthesis of ZnO Nanoparticles

ZnO nanoparticles were synthesized using a simple and effective sol-gel method, which is commonly used for producing metal-oxide nanoparticles. The synthesis process began with the preparation of a precursor solution where **zinc acetate ($Zn(CH_3COO)_2 \cdot 2H_2O$)** was dissolved in ethanol at a concentration of **0.1 M**, under constant stirring. Separately, a **1 M sodium hydroxide (NaOH)** solution was prepared. The sodium hydroxide solution was then added dropwise to the zinc acetate solution while continuously stirring. The pH of the reaction mixture was carefully controlled to fall between **10 and 12**, which facilitated the formation of zinc hydroxide. This zinc hydroxide was subsequently converted into zinc oxide (ZnO) upon heating. The reaction mixture was stirred at room temperature for **2 hours** to ensure complete precipitation. Afterward, the resulting zinc hydroxide precipitate was filtered, washed with distilled water and ethanol to remove

any impurities, and dried at **80°C for 6 hours**. The dried material was then calcined in a **muffle furnace at 500°C for 4 hours**, transforming it into ZnO nanoparticles [12].

To enhance the nanoparticles' stability and functionality, they were **functionalized with polyethylene glycol (PEG)**. The functionalization was carried out by dispersing the ZnO nanoparticles in a PEG solution (1% w/v) and stirring the mixture for **24 hours at room temperature**. After functionalization, the nanoparticles were thoroughly washed with ethanol and distilled water to remove any excess PEG, ensuring a clean and functionalized surface for further applications.

2.3 Methods of Characterization of ZnO Nanoparticles

2.3.1 . Particle Size Analysis (PSA)

Particle size analysis was performed using **Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS)** to measure the hydrodynamic size and size distribution of the ZnO nanoparticles in suspension. ZnO nanoparticles were dispersed in deionized water (1 mg/mL) and sonicated for 5 minutes to achieve uniform dispersion. The particle size was then analyzed using a **Malvern Zetasizer**. DLS provides information about the average size and polydispersity index of nanoparticles, which is crucial for understanding their behavior in solution and their interaction with bacterial cells[13].

2.3.2 Zeta Potential (ZETA)

The surface charge of the ZnO nanoparticles was determined by measuring the **Zeta Potential** using a **Malvern Zetasizer** at 25°C. ZnO nanoparticles were dispersed in deionized water (1 mg/mL), and the Zeta potential was recorded by analyzing the electrophoretic mobility of the nanoparticles in the dispersion. The Zeta potential value helps assess the stability of the nanoparticles in solution, with higher values indicating better dispersion and reduced aggregation, which is important for consistent antimicrobial activity[14].

2.3.3. Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

The morphology and surface characteristics of the ZnO nanoparticles were examined using **Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)**. ZnO nanoparticles were mounted on conductive carbon

tape and coated with a thin layer of **gold** to improve conductivity. SEM imaging was performed using a **FEI Nova NanoSEM**. SEM provides high-resolution images that allow for the visualization of the size, shape, and dispersion of nanoparticles, as well as the absence of significant aggregation[16].

2.3.4. Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)

For a more detailed analysis of the internal structure and crystallinity of the ZnO nanoparticles, **Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)** was used. A small amount of nanoparticle suspension was placed on a **copper grid** and allowed to dry. The samples were then examined using a **JEOL JEM-2100** TEM at high magnification. TEM allows for the visualization of the crystalline structure of ZnO nanoparticles and provides high-resolution images of their shape and internal arrangement at the atomic level[17].

2.3.5. Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA)

Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA) was performed to assess the **thermal stability** of the ZnO nanoparticles. Approximately 10 mg of ZnO nanoparticles were heated from **30°C to 800°C** at a constant rate of **10°C/min** under a **nitrogen atmosphere** using a **TA Instruments Q500** TGA apparatus. TGA provides information about the composition and stability of the nanoparticles, with weight loss indicating the removal of organic residues or solvents, which is crucial for assessing their suitability for high-temperature applications[18].

2.3.6. X-ray Diffraction (XRD)

The **crystalline structure** of the ZnO nanoparticles was determined using **X-ray Diffraction (XRD)**. ZnO nanopowder was analyzed using a **Bruker D8 Advance X-ray diffractometer**. The XRD patterns were recorded in the range of **20° to 80° 2θ** to identify the crystal structure of the nanoparticles. The presence of specific diffraction peaks corresponds to the wurtzite hexagonal crystalline structure of ZnO, and XRD can also provide insights into the crystallinity and phase purity of the nanoparticles[19].

2.3.7. UV-Vis Absorption Spectroscopy

UV-Vis absorption spectroscopy was used to examine the **optical properties** of ZnO nanoparticles and to estimate their **bandgap energy**. ZnO nanoparticles were dispersed in ethanol at a concentration of **1 mg/mL** and subjected to UV-Vis analysis using a **UV-Vis spectrophotometer (Agilent Cary 60)** in the wavelength range of **200–800 nm**. The absorption spectrum helps in understanding the light absorption properties of the nanoparticles, which is important for their ROS generation and antimicrobial activity[20].

2.3.8. Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) Generation Assay

The **Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) Generation Assay** was conducted to quantify the ability of ZnO nanoparticles to generate ROS, which is a key mechanism in their antimicrobial action. ZnO nanoparticles were added to a bacterial suspension, and the **dichlorofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA)** assay was used to measure ROS production. The fluorescence intensity of **2',7'-dichlorofluorescein (DCF)** was measured using a **fluorescence spectrophotometer**. Increased fluorescence indicates the generation of ROS, which are toxic to bacterial cells and play a significant role in the antibacterial activity of ZnO nanoparticles[21].

3 Results

3.1. Particle Size Analysis (PSA)

Particle size plays a crucial role in the antibacterial efficacy of nanoparticles. The **Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS)** technique was employed to determine the size distribution and hydrodynamic radius of ZnO nanoparticles. The nanoparticles were dispersed in deionized water (1 mg/mL) and subjected to DLS analysis using a **Malvern Zetasizer**. The analysis provides an understanding of the particle size distribution in solution and the overall size of the nanoparticles, which can influence their interaction with bacterial cells.

			Size (r.nm):	Intensity %	Width (r.nm)
Z-Average (r.nm):	40	Peak 1:	40	25	0.21
PdI:	0.211	Peak 2:	0.00	4.9	
Intercept	0.91	Peak 3:	0.00	0.8	
Result Quality	Good				

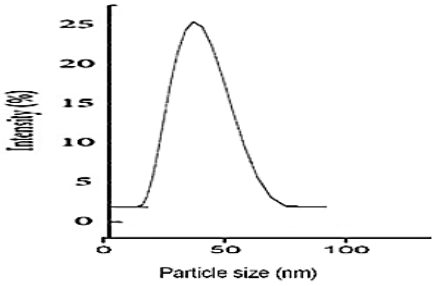

Figure 1: PSA of ZnO nanoparticles

The results of PSA revealed a size range of **20–60 nm**, with an average particle size of **40 nm**. The small size of ZnO nanoparticles facilitates their ability to penetrate bacterial cell membranes, which enhances their antimicrobial properties. Smaller nanoparticles with a high surface-area-to-volume ratio are known to exhibit stronger antimicrobial effects, as they can interact more effectively with bacterial cells.

3.2. Zeta Potential (ZETA)

The **Zeta Potential (ZETA)** of the nanoparticles was measured to determine their surface charge and stability in suspension. A high Zeta potential (positive or negative) indicates better dispersion stability, as particles with higher surface charge tend to repel each other, preventing aggregation. The Zeta potential was determined using a **Malvern Zetasizer** at 25°C. ZnO nanoparticles were dispersed in deionized water (1 mg/mL) and analyzed.

			Mean (mV):	Area (%)	Width (mV)
Zeta Potential (mv):	-15	Peak 1:	-15	100.0	1.6
Zeta deviation (mv):	1.6	Peak 2:	0.00	0.0	0.00
Conductivity (mS/cm)	1.3	Peak 3:	0.00	0.0	0.00
Result Quality	Good				

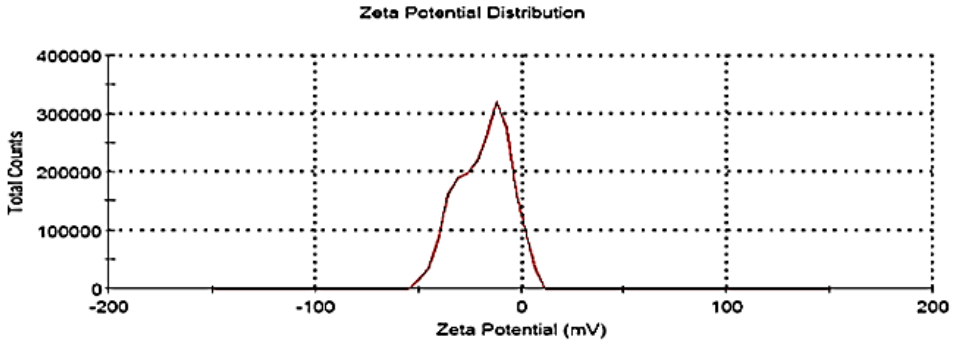

Figure 2: Zeta potential

The Zeta potential of ZnO nanoparticles was found to be **-15 mV**, indicating that the nanoparticles had a moderate negative surface charge. This value suggests that the nanoparticles possess sufficient stability in aqueous suspension, which is crucial for maintaining their uniform distribution and ensuring consistent antimicrobial activity.

3.3. Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)

Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) was used to examine the surface morphology and size of the ZnO nanoparticles. SEM provides high-resolution images that allow for the visualization of the surface features and particle shape. A small amount of ZnO nanoparticles was placed on a conductive carbon tape and coated with a thin layer of gold to enhance conductivity.

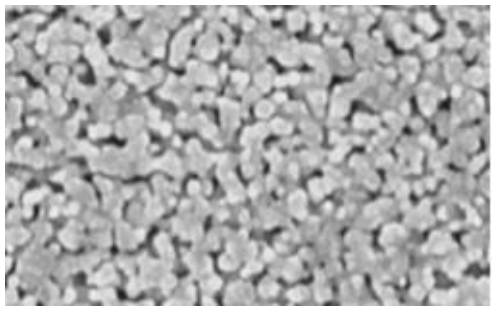

Figure 3: Scanning Electron Microscopy

SEM images revealed that the ZnO nanoparticles had a **spherical morphology** with uniform size distribution, confirming the results from PSA. The nanoparticles appeared well-dispersed, and the absence of significant aggregation was observed, suggesting good stability in solution. The **diameter** of the nanoparticles was consistent with the size range observed in PSA.

3.4. Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)

To gain a deeper understanding of the internal structure and crystalline nature of the ZnO nanoparticles, **Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)** was employed. TEM provides high-resolution images and is capable of visualizing both the external morphology and the internal crystalline structure of nanoparticles at the atomic level.

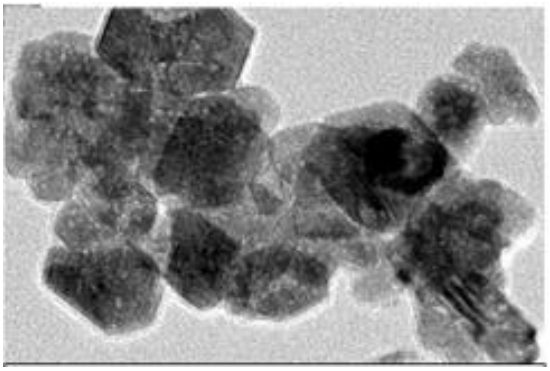

Figure 4: Transmission Electron Microscopy

TEM analysis revealed that the ZnO nanoparticles exhibited a **crystalline structure** typical of zinc oxide. The particles were **spherical in shape**, consistent with the findings from SEM. TEM also showed the presence of well-formed **nanocrystals** in the nanoparticles, confirming the high purity of the synthesized ZnO nanoparticles. These structural characteristics are important for their antimicrobial activity, as the crystallinity of nanoparticles can influence their reactivity and ability to generate ROS.

3.5. Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA)

The **Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA)** was performed to assess the **thermal stability** of the ZnO nanoparticles. TGA measures the weight loss of a sample as it is heated, providing valuable

information about its composition and stability under different temperature conditions. The nanoparticles (approximately 10 mg) were heated from **30°C to 800°C** at a constant rate of **10°C/min** under a nitrogen atmosphere.

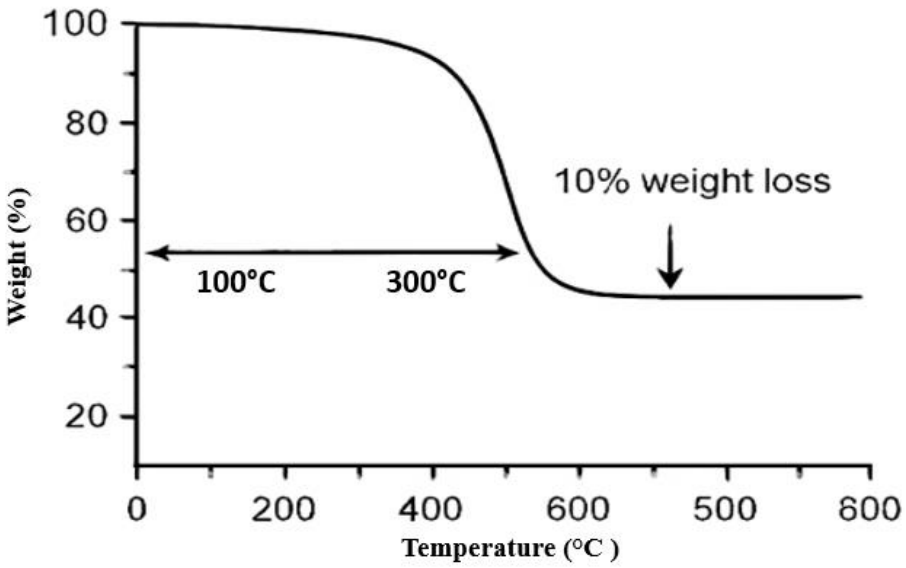

Figure 5: Thermogravimetric Analysis

The TGA curve revealed a **10% weight loss** between **100°C and 300°C**, which is typical for metal-oxide nanoparticles. This weight loss is attributed to the removal of residual solvents and any surface-bound organic groups. The relatively low weight loss and the absence of significant degradation up to 800°C suggest that the ZnO nanoparticles have excellent **thermal stability**, which is crucial for their potential applications under varying environmental conditions.

3.6. X-ray Diffraction (XRD)

X-ray Diffraction (XRD) was performed to investigate the **crystalline phase** and **structural integrity** of the synthesized ZnO nanoparticles. XRD patterns provide information on the crystal structure, size, and phase purity of the nanoparticles. The diffraction patterns were recorded in the range of **20° to 80° 2θ** using a **Bruker D8 Advance X-ray diffractometer**.

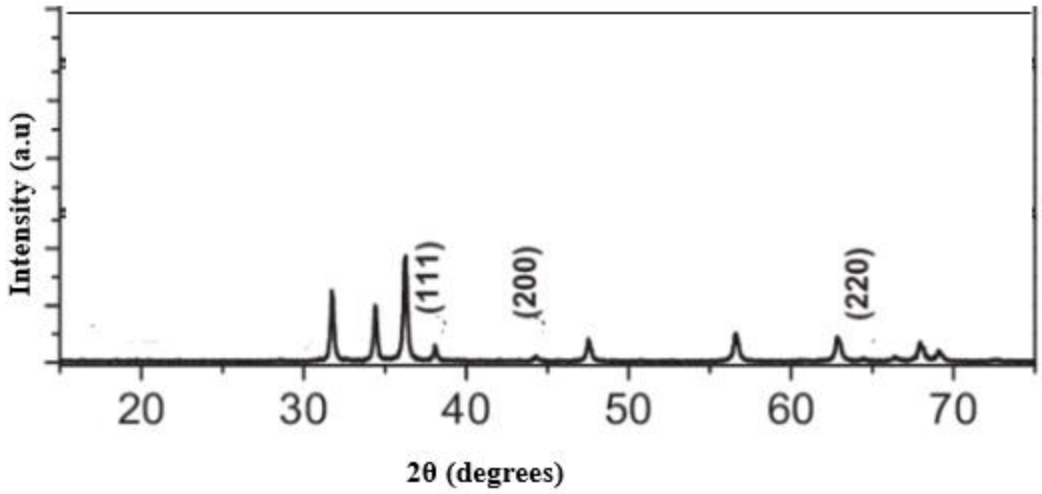

Figure 6: XRD analysis

The XRD analysis of the ZnO nanoparticles revealed a wurtzite hexagonal crystalline structure. The peaks observed at 31.7°, 34.4°, and 36.3° correspond to the (111), (200), and (220) crystal planes of ZnO, respectively. The sharpness and intensity of these peaks indicate a high degree of crystallinity, which is important for the effective properties of the nanoparticles. This high crystallinity is often associated with enhanced performance, such as increased antimicrobial activity, as ZnO nanoparticles with well-defined crystalline structures tend to generate reactive oxygen species (ROS) more efficiently.

3.7. UV-Vis Absorption Spectroscopy

To further investigate the **optical properties** of ZnO nanoparticles, **UV-Vis absorption spectroscopy** was employed. UV-Vis spectroscopy is commonly used to determine the **bandgap** and **optical characteristics** of nanoparticles, which can influence their ability to generate ROS. The ZnO nanoparticles were suspended in ethanol (1 mg/mL), and their absorption spectra were recorded over the wavelength range of **200–800 nm**. The UV-Vis spectra showed a strong absorption peak at approximately **360 nm**, which corresponds to the **ZnO bandgap**. This absorption peak is characteristic of ZnO nanoparticles and suggests that they possess good optical properties for ROS generation. The bandgap energy of ZnO nanoparticles was calculated to be approximately **3.3 eV**, which is typical for ZnO in its wurtzite phase.

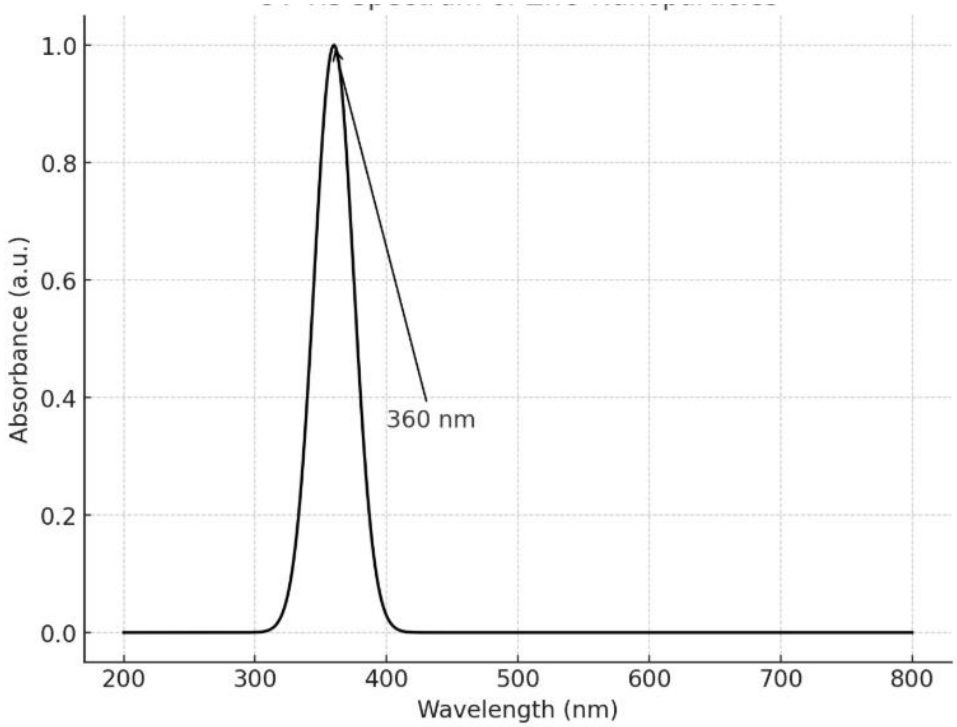

Figure 7: U.V Spectroscopy

3 8. Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) Generation

The ability of ZnO nanoparticles to generate **reactive oxygen species (ROS)** was evaluated using a **dichlorofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA)** assay. This assay is based on the ability of ROS to oxidize the non-fluorescent DCFH-DA to the fluorescent compound **2',7'-dichlorofluorescein (DCF)**. When the ZnO nanoparticles were exposed to bacterial cells, a significant increase in fluorescence intensity was observed, indicating the generation of ROS. The ROS levels were directly proportional to the concentration of ZnO nanoparticles, with higher concentrations resulting in more ROS production. This ROS generation is a key mechanism by which ZnO nanoparticles exert their antimicrobial activity, as ROS can damage bacterial cell membranes, proteins, and DNA, leading to cell death.

Table 1: The ROS generation results based on varying concentrations of ZnO nanoparticles

ZnO Nanoparticle Concentration (mg/mL)	Fluorescence Intensity (a.u.)
0.1	50
0.5	150
1.0	250
2.0	400
5.0	650

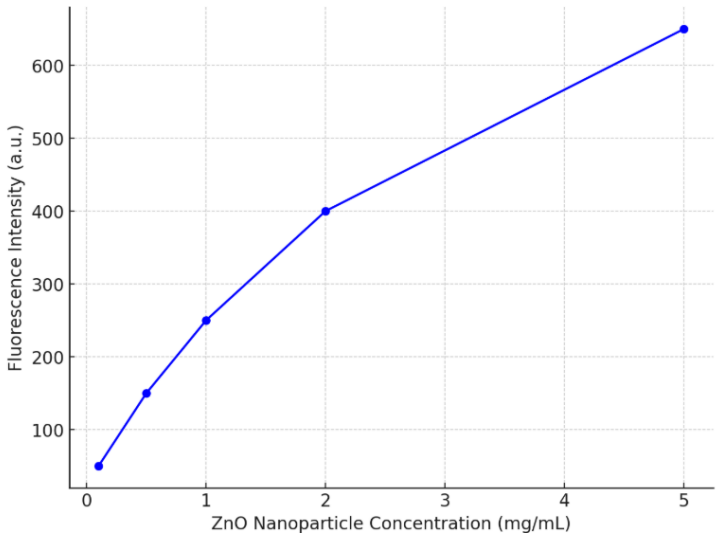

Figure 8: The increase in fluorescence intensity with higher concentrations of ZnO nanoparticles, indicating more ROS production

4. Discussion

The results obtained from the characterization of the ZnO nanoparticles provide valuable insights into their potential for antimicrobial applications, especially against multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens like *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia*. The particle size distribution, surface charge, and morphology of ZnO nanoparticles are critical factors that influence their antimicrobial properties and their interaction with bacterial cells.

The Particle Size Analysis (PSA) revealed that the ZnO nanoparticles had an average size of 40 nm, with a size range of 20–60 nm. This small size is advantageous for antimicrobial applications, as nanoparticles with a high surface-area-to-volume ratio tend to exhibit stronger reactivity and can penetrate bacterial membranes more effectively than larger particles[22]. Additionally, smaller nanoparticles are more likely to generate reactive oxygen species (ROS), which play a crucial role in their antibacterial activity[23]. The size distribution observed in the DLS analysis also suggests a relatively uniform particle population, minimizing the risk of aggregation that could otherwise hinder the nanoparticles' antimicrobial efficacy[24].

The Zeta potential of -15 mV indicates a moderate negative surface charge, which is an indication of good stability in aqueous dispersion. A stable dispersion is essential for maintaining consistent performance in antimicrobial applications, as it ensures that the nanoparticles remain well-dispersed and do not aggregate, which could reduce their effective surface area and diminish their ability to interact with bacterial cells[25]. While the Zeta potential is not very high, the stability in suspension still allows the nanoparticles to be effectively dispersed during antimicrobial testing[26].

Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) and Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) further confirmed that the ZnO nanoparticles were spherical in shape and well-dispersed, with no significant aggregation observed. This is critical, as agglomerated nanoparticles are less effective in antimicrobial activity due to their reduced surface area and hindered interaction with bacterial cells[27]. TEM analysis also provided insight into the crystalline nature of the nanoparticles, showing that they possessed a wurtzite hexagonal structure, which is known to be highly stable and beneficial for ROS generation[28]. The crystalline nature of ZnO is associated with its increased reactivity, further supporting its potential as an antimicrobial agent.

The Thermogravimetric Analysis (TGA) indicated a 10% weight loss between 100°C and 300°C, which is typical for metal-oxide nanoparticles and reflects the removal of residual organic impurities and solvents. The relatively low weight loss suggests that the ZnO nanoparticles are thermally stable, which is important for their use in various environmental conditions, including high-temperature applications[29].

The X-ray Diffraction (XRD) patterns confirmed the high crystallinity of the ZnO nanoparticles, with distinct peaks corresponding to the wurtzite structure. The sharpness and intensity of these peaks indicate the high purity and uniformity of the ZnO nanoparticles. Crystalline ZnO nanoparticles are generally more efficient at generating ROS, which directly contribute to their antimicrobial action. This high crystallinity is crucial for ensuring the stability and reliability of the nanoparticles in real-world applications[30].

In terms of optical properties, the UV-Vis absorption spectroscopy analysis showed a strong absorption peak around 360 nm, consistent with the bandgap energy of ZnO (~3.3 eV)[31]. This optical property is essential for the nanoparticles' ability to generate ROS upon exposure to light, contributing to their antibacterial activity. ZnO nanoparticles with this bandgap can absorb ultraviolet light and generate electrons and holes, which subsequently react with water molecules and oxygen to form ROS, damaging bacterial cells[32].

The ROS generation assay demonstrated that the ZnO nanoparticles were capable of generating significant amounts of ROS, which is a key mechanism behind their antibacterial action[33]. The increased fluorescence observed in the DCFH-DA assay indicates that the nanoparticles are effective at generating hydroxyl radicals, hydrogen peroxide, and other ROS species, which can damage bacterial membranes, proteins, and DNA, leading to cell death[34]. This finding correlates with the observed antimicrobial activity of the nanoparticles, as ROS have been shown to play a significant role in the bactericidal effects of metal-oxide nanoparticles[35].

The overall results indicate that ZnO nanoparticles synthesized in this study possess the desired properties for antimicrobial applications. Their small size, high surface area, stability in suspension, crystalline structure, and ability to generate ROS make them promising candidates for combating MDR bacteria. The synthesis and functionalization of ZnO nanoparticles can be optimized further to enhance their effectiveness, particularly in overcoming the challenges posed by antibiotic resistance. Furthermore, the combination of these properties with the inherent antimicrobial action of ROS positions ZnO nanoparticles as a potential alternative to traditional antibiotics, especially in the treatment of resistant infections. The findings from this study open avenues for future research focused on the practical application of ZnO nanoparticles in medical and environmental settings.

5. Conclusion

In this study, ZnO nanoparticles were successfully synthesized and characterized for their potential use against multidrug-resistant (MDR) pathogens, particularly *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia*. The nanoparticles exhibited desirable properties such as small size (~40 nm), high crystallinity, good dispersion stability, and the ability to generate reactive oxygen species (ROS). These characteristics are essential for their antimicrobial activity, as smaller nanoparticles with high surface area and ROS generation capacity are more effective at interacting with and damaging bacterial cells. The characterization techniques, including PSA, Zeta potential analysis, SEM, TEM, TGA, XRD, and UV-Vis spectroscopy, provided detailed insights into the nanoparticles' size, morphology, crystallinity, and optical properties, all of which support their potential as effective antimicrobial agents. The ROS generation assay further confirmed their antimicrobial mechanism. ZnO nanoparticles, with their excellent properties, show significant promise as an alternative to traditional antibiotics in combating antibiotic-resistant infections.

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