Sintering temperature effect on optical properties of zinc oxide thin film on glass substrate prepared by sol-gel spin coating method

L. Rumiyanti1,*, D Aryanto2, S Garcia3, Syafriadi4, I Firdaus5

1Department of Physics, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Lampung, Jl. Sumantri Brojonegoro no 1, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia
2Indonesian Institute of Science - LIPI, Research Center of Physics, Puspitek Serpong, Tangerang, Indonesia
3Email: lenirumiyanti@fmipa.unila.ac.id1,*

Abstract. Research on the optical properties of the ZnO thin film with the use of sol-gel method and spin coating method using 0.5 M concentrate solution of (Zn(CH3COO)2·2H2O) and 30 mL isopropyl alcohol as a solvent has been carried out. The production process of ZnO solution and the fabrication of the thin film with the optical properties test of the thin film are included in the scope of this research. UV-Vis Spectroscopy is used to obtain the transmittance and absorbance values on each wavelength and the band gap energy value using the Tauc Plot method. The transmittance value obtained is directly proportional with the temperature. The absorbance value obtained is inversely proportional with the temperature due to higher temperature causes the reaction rate to become faster and in turn causes the absorbance value to become lower. The band gap energy value obtained is on the range of 3.23 eV – 3.27 eV and it fit with the literature.

1. Introduction
Zinc oxide (ZnO) is an inorganic compound and a type-n semi-conductor material with band gap energy of 3.2 eV to 3.3 eV on room temperature. It is tough and brittle on most temperature but could be forged between 100°C to 150°C and above 210°C [1]. It is an important semi-conductor material because it has wide band gap energy. It is used in several applications such as transparent conductor, solar cell windows, gas sensor and photovoltaic instrument [2]. Zinc oxide (ZnO) can have piezoelectric property which is caused by its wurtzite crystal structure. The commonly used materials in material science especially on thin film research are SnO2, WO3, TiO2, ZnO, and others. This research used ZnO because it has high photo-catalyst efficiency in regard of other semi-conductor materials. It high photo-catalyst efficiency is caused by the generation of hydrogen peroxide (H2O2) [3-5].

Zinc oxide (ZnO) thin film can be synthesized by both vacuum based method such as pulsed laser deposition (PLD), chemical vapor deposition (CVD), sputtering, laser ablation and spray pyrolysis [5] and solution based method such as chemical bath deposition, sol-gel process, electro deposition and hydrothermal [6]. This research used the sol-gel process of solution based method to synthesize the
material. The sol-gel process is a solution based method that can produce good, simple and low cost small or wide thin film [7]. It can produce material with high homogeneity and with desired controllable material composition [8]. A “sol” is a colloidal solution which has dispersed solid phase and liquid phase as its dispersing agent [9]. Gelation or “gel” is a growth process through polymer condensation or particle grouping [10].

This research chooses the spin coating method for thin film growth processing. It is an easy and fast method. The thin film made by this method has a high homogeneity. The thickness of the thin film can be controlled using time and spin speed of the spin coater [11]. The spin coating process consists of four stages which is deposition, spin up, spin off and evaporation [12].

The knowledge of electrons on a crystal structure which is arranged inside the energy band and is separated by energy space of non-orbital electrons is needed to know the value of the electric conductivities. This energy space of non-orbital electrons is called a band gap and is the result of the interaction of the electron conductivity with the core ion of the crystal structure [13]. A plot of $(\alpha h\nu)^2$ versus $\nu$ made by extrapolating the linear part of the curve to the zero absorption line gives the value of the band gap energy for a direct allowed transition [14].

Ultraviolet-visible (UV-Vis) spectroscopy is consist of a spectrometer which produce light spectrum with specific wavelength and a spectrophotometer which is an instrument for calculating the intensity of transmitted or absorbed light spectrum [15]. This research used varied sintering temperature of 300°C, 400°C and 500°C to ascertain the effect of temperature toward the optical properties of zinc oxide thin film on glass substrate using the UV-Vis spectrophotometer.

2. Materials and methods

Digital scale, beaker, spatula, micropipette, fume hood, magnetic stirrer, ultrasonic cleaner, spin coater and desiccator are the instrument used in this research. This research also used zinc acetate dihydrate (Zn(CH₃CO₂)₂·2H₂O), isopropyl alcohol (C₃H₈O), ethanolamine (C₂H₇NO), hydrochloric acid (HCl), ethanol (C₂H₅OH), acetone (C₃H₆O) and distilled water (H₂O) as its material. The research scheme can be seen in Figure 2. This research consists of three main stages which is the production of ZnO solution, the fabrication of ZnO thin film and the optical properties test.
The production of ZnO solution consists of two parts which is the solution mixing and the solution sedimentation. For the first part, 0.5 M zinc acetate dihydrate (Zn(CH$_3$CO$_2$)$_2$·2H$_2$O) is mixed with isopropyl alcohol (C$_3$H$_8$O) and stirred using magnetic stirrer with 3000 Rpm setting on room temperature until it attain homogeneity. For the second parts, ethanolamine (C$_2$H$_7$NO) was dripped into the solution until it became colorless or transparent on 70°C for 1 hour and then settled it for 24 hours for the completion of solution sedimentation process.

The fabrication of ZnO thin film is done by coating the substrate using the spin coating method. It consists of three parts which is the substrate cleaning, the spin coating process and the varied sintering temperature conditioning. For the first parts, the substrates are cleaned using ultrasonic cleaner mixed with acetone (C$_3$H$_6$O) for 5 minutes and then mixed again with ethanolamine (C$_2$H$_7$NO) and distilled water for 5 minutes. For the second parts, the cleaned substrates coated in ZnO solution are placed on the spin coater with 4000 Rpm setting. The coated substrates then transferred on the hot plate for 5 minutes on 110°C and then repeat the whole process for a second time. For the third parts which is the varied sintering temperature conditioning, the ZnO thin film then placed inside the furnace for sintering on 300°C, 400°C and 500°C temperature for 1 hour.

The optical properties test of the ZnO thin film is done using UV-Vis spectrophotometer. It is used to acquire the transmittance value, the absorbance value and the band gap energy using the Tauc plot method.

2.1 Absorbance value calculation
The relation between absorption coefficient ($\alpha$) and incoming photon energy ($h\nu$) can be written as;
(ahv)^{1/n} = b(hv - Eg) \quad (1)

hv is photon energy, b is a constant, Eg is optical band gap energy of the semi-conductor material and n is an exponent which depend on the type of the transition inside the material. For a direct allowed transition n = ½ and for indirect allowed transition n = 2. The absorption coefficient (α) is calculated using the absorbance data or transmittance data for each wavelength as shown in the Beer-Lambert equation:

\[ I = I_0 \exp(-\alpha t) \] \quad (2)

I is the light intensity transmitted through the sample film, \( I_0 \) is the incoming light intensity and t is the thickness of the sample film. Absorbance value (A) is written as:

\[ A = \log_{10} \frac{10}{I} = -\log T \] \quad (3)

2.2 Band gap energy calculation

Optical band gap energy of the thin film can be calculated using Urbach equation;

\[ \alpha h v = C (h v - E_g)^{1/2} \] \quad (4)

C is a transitional characteristic parameter of photon energy, h is Planck’s constant, and v is the light frequency. E is optical band gap energy of the thin film which can be written as;

\[ E = h v = \frac{hc}{\lambda} \] \quad (5)

h is Planck’s constant (6.262·10^{-34}Js), c is the light speed constant (3·10^8 m/s) and \( \lambda \) is the light wavelength.

3.3. Result and discussion

3.1 Material synthesis

This research used the varied sintering temperature of 300°C, 400°C and 500°C to ascertain the effect of temperature towards the optical properties of ZnO thin film. It consists of three main stages which are the production of ZnO solution, the fabrication of ZnO thin film and the optical properties test using UV-Vis spectrophotometer. The production process of ZnO solution is done using 0.5 M concentrate solution of zinc acetate dihydrate (Zn(CH₃CO₂)₂·2H₂O). The fabrication of ZnO thin film is consists of three parts which is the substrate cleaning, the spin coating process and the varied sintering temperature conditioning. The substrates are cleaned using acetone (C₃H₆O) and the spin coating process is done using the spin coater with 4000 Rpm setting. The varied sintering temperature conditioning is done by sintering the substrate using the furnace on 300°C, 400°C and 500°C for 1 hour. The optical properties test is done using the UV-Vis spectrophotometer to acquire the transmittance value, the absorbance value and the band gap energy using the Tauc plot method. The differences of the thin film pattern in this research can be seen in Table 1.
Table 1. The result of the fabrication of ZnO thin film

| Temperature (°C) | Highest Transmittance Value (%) |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 300°C            | 80                               |
| 400°C            | 77.5                             |
| 500°C            | 85.9                             |

3.2 Transmittance value

The transmittance value graph of ZnO thin film acquired using UV-Vis spectrophotometer can be seen in Figure 3. It is shown from the graph that at 240 nm to 360 nm wavelength there is an incline in transmittance value curve. The highest transmittance value occurred at 80% for thin film sintered in 300°C, at 77.5% for thin film sintered in 400°C and at 85.9% for thin film sintered in 500°C. The result of the transmittance value of ZnO thin film can be seen in Table 2. The transmittance value obtained is directly proportional with the sintering temperature.

Figure 3. The transmittance value of ZnO thin film graph

Table 2. The transmittance value of ZnO thin film result

It shown in Figure 3 that at 360 nm to 1000 nm wavelength the transmittance value appears to be constant. The UV light spectrum has a wavelength around 400 nm. The wavelength from 360 nm to 1000 nm has higher chance to be transmitted through the thin film because of it. The transmittance value appears to be constant because the UV light spectrum is being transmitted through the thin film.

Absorbance Value
The absorbance value graph of ZnO thin film acquired using UV-Vis spectrophotometer can be seen in Figure 4. It is shown from the graph that at 360 nm wavelength there is a decline in absorbance value curve. The lowest absorbance value occurred at 5.4% for thin film sintered in 300°C, at 4.5% for thin film sintered in 400°C and at 4.3% for thin film sintered in 500°C. The result of the absorbance value of ZnO thin film can be seen in Table 3. The absorbance value obtained is inversely proportional with the sintering temperature. It is inversely proportional due to higher sintering temperature causes the reaction rate of the material to become faster. The faster reaction rate of the material in turn causes the absorbance value to become lower.

![Figure 4. The absorbance value of ZnO thin film graph](image)

**Table 3. The absorbance value of ZnO thin film result**

| Temperature (°C) | Lowest Absorbance Value (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| 300°C           | 5.4                         |
| 400°C           | 4.5                         |
| 500°C           | 4.3                         |

It shown in Figure 4 that at 360 nm to 1000 nm wavelength the absorbance value appears to be constant. The UV light spectrum has a wavelength around 400 nm. The wavelength from 360 nm to 1000 nm has lower chance to be absorbed by the thin film because of it. The absorbance value appears to be constant because the UV light spectrum is not being absorbed by the thin film.

### 3.3 Band gap energy value

The band gap energy calculation of semi-conductor material needs to be done. It gives implication to the differences in the material properties. The properties depend on the absorption coefficient at each photon frequency [16]. The band gap energy value of ZnO thin film is obtained by plotting the absorbance value data using direct allowed transition equation [17].

![Figure 5.](image)

The graph relation between \((\alpha h\nu)^2\) and \((h\nu)\) can be seen in Figure 5. The band gap energy value is shown by intersecting the curve shown in the graph with the horizontal axis. The band gap energy is the energy that needed by the electron to move from the valence band to the conduction band. Zinc oxide is a compound that has band gap energy value around 3.2 eV to 3.3 eV, it has electrical and optical properties and mostly used as photoconductor and integrated sensor [18]. The band gap energy value obtained is inversely proportional with the sintering temperature. It is on the range of 3.23 eV to 3.27 eV which is shown in Table 4. This value is in accordance with the existing literature.
Figure 5. The band gap energy value of ZnO thin film graph

Table 4. The Tauc plot result of ZnO thin film

| Temperature (°C) | Band Gap Energy (eV) |
|------------------|----------------------|
| 300°C            | 3.27                 |
| 400°C            | 3.22                 |
| 500°C            | 3.26                 |

The band gap energy became lower along with the increase of the absorbance value. The higher the energy that the material absorbs caused the band gap energy value to decrease. The decrease is relatively small which is around 0.1 eV to 0.5 eV. The band gap energy graph obtained is smooth because it uses the same molarity which is 0.5 M for each sample. If the band gap energy value became smaller there might be more chances for the electrons to move from the valence band to conduction band and in turn changes the properties of the thin film to be more conductive.

4. Conclusions
The conclusion based on this research is as follow. The transmittance value obtained is directly proportional with the sintering temperature. The highest transmittance value is 85.9% at 500°C sintering temperature. The absorbance value obtained is inversely proportional with the sintering temperature. It is inversely proportional due to higher sintering temperature causes the reaction rate of the material to become faster. The faster reaction rate of the material in turn causes the absorbance value to become lower. The lowest absorbance value is 4.3% at 500°C sintering temperature. The band gap energy value obtained is inversely proportional with the sintering temperature. The band gap energy value obtained is on the range of 3.23 eV to 3.27 eV.

5. References
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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Indonesian Institute of Science - LIPI, Research Center of Physics for providing UV-Vis Spectroscopy facilities. The work is supported by Ministry of Science and Technology, Indonesia.