

# STUDYING THE ELECTROCHEMICAL PROPERTIES OF POTASSIUM-DOPED SODIUM-MANGANESE OXIDE CATHODE MATERIALS FOR SODIUM-ION BATTERIES

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## Abstract

The development of layered sodium manganese oxide cathode materials with high capacity and long life is one of the keys to boosting the performance of sodium-ion batteries (SIBs), but it remains a great challenge. In this work, a potassium doped P2-type sodium manganese oxide,  $\text{Na}_{0.8}\text{K}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.9}\text{O}_2$  (NKMO), is developed as a high-capacity and long-lasting cathode for high-performance SIBs. Sodium-potassium-manganese oxide  $\text{Na}_{0.8}\text{K}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.9}\text{O}_2$  was synthesized by a conventional solid-state reaction method. Crystal structure and morphology of the NKMO material were investigated by X-ray diffraction (XRD), scanning electron microscopy (SEM), and energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX). The NKMO material was utilized to fabricate CR2032-type coin cells, and later evaluated for its electrochemical characteristics. The electrochemical characteristics of NKMO were evaluated through cyclic voltammetry (CV), electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS), and galvanostatic charging-discharging (GCD) at different current densities on a NEWARE battery testing system. The NKMO material had a superior initial charge and discharge capacity, approximately  $130 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  and  $125 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$ , respectively, within the voltage range of 1.5-4 V at a current density of 0.1 C. Remarkably, the capacity remained stable at  $100 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  even after 100 cycles. These findings indicate that NKMO is a highly promising cathode material for sodium-ion batteries.

**Keywords:** Sodium-ion battery; sodium manganese oxide; cathode materials; solid-state reaction.

## 1. Introduction

The rapidly increasing energy demand has resulted in the aggravating environmental pollution, which has compelled the development of renewable energy resources including geothermal, wind power, and solar energy [1-5]. However, its intrinsic disadvantages of intermittency and regional disparity make it necessary to

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develop reliable large-scale electric energy storage devices [6]. Lithium-ion batteries (LIBs) have been considered as the dominate power supply for consuming electronics and electric vehicles due to their high energy density and long cycle life. However, the cost of Li is constantly increasing due to its scarcity, so scientists are trying to find alternative sources of materials. Fortunately, sodium-ion batteries (SIBs) could well meet these requirements due to the much higher abundance of sodium in the Earth's crust compared to lithium. Additionally, the similar physical and chemical properties of sodium and lithium make sodium-ion batteries promising candidates in the near future [7, 8].

The structure and operating principles of sodium-ion and lithium-ion batteries are quite similar. However, due to the larger radius of sodium ions compared to lithium ions, the intercalation and extraction capabilities of sodium ions within electrode materials are less efficient. The larger radius of  $\text{Na}^+$  ions results in sluggish kinetics, significant volume changes during sodiation and desodiation, lower capacity, and shorter cycle life for sodium-ion batteries (SIBs). Consequently, to develop high-performance SIBs, it is crucial to explore suitable electrode materials, particularly cathode materials with exceptional properties. There are reported cathode materials meeting the requirement such as AMO<sub>2</sub>, AMPO<sub>4</sub> (i.e., A is alkali metals and M is transition metals), and phosphates polyanions [9-23].

Among AMO<sub>2</sub>-type materials, a variety of P2-type layered-structure materials have been reported for SIBs, primarily due to their superior energy density relative to other materials [9-16]. In particular, manganese-based oxides exhibit moderate electrochemical performance, with a notable emphasis on their high cycling stability. For example, Sauvage *et al.* demonstrated reversible insertion and extraction of  $\text{Na}^+$  ions in pure  $\text{Na}_{0.44}\text{MnO}_2$  with an initial capacity of approximately  $80 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  at 0.1 C. However, after 50 cycles, only half of the original capacity was retained [17]. Some for instance other, Caballero *et al.* reported that P2- $\text{Na}_{0.66}\text{MnO}_2$  cell had a capacity of  $160 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$ , which rapidly decreased to  $60 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  after 10 cycles [18]; P2- $\text{Na}_{0.7}\text{MnO}_2$  material showed the similar characteristics in which the capacity of the material was  $140 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  and remained at  $70 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  after 20 cycles [19]; P2-type  $\text{Na}_{0.53}\text{MnO}_2$  exhibited a discharge capacity of  $120 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  at 0.2 C, and the capacity reduced to about  $90 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  after 50 cycles [20].

Doping other transition metals into manganese-based oxide has improved the cycling ability and rate capability of the manganese-based oxide such as Pang *et al.* reported that doping of Co and Cu generated a synergetic improvement of multi-metallic ions that improved electrode kinetics of P2-type  $\text{Na}_{2/3}\text{Mn}_{1/2}\text{Co}_{1/3}\text{Cu}_{1/6}\text{O}_2$  oxide. The material had a capacity of  $118.2 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  at a current density of  $10 \text{ mA.g}^{-1}$  and

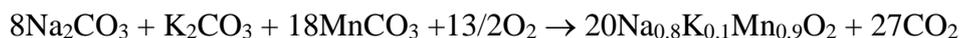
retained 66% of its capacity after 100 cycles [21]. In addition, Jianyin Wang *et al.* reported that doping Cu of P2 - $\text{Na}_{0.7}\text{Mn}_{0.9}\text{Cu}_{0.1}\text{O}_2$  material has achieved a capacity of  $130 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  at a current 0.1 C, and exhibited a stable cycle performance, also as a capacity retention of 80% obtained after 100 cycles [22].

On the other hand, doping alkaline metals into manganese-based oxide also improved the cycling ability and rate capability of the manganese-based oxide. For example, Liangtao Yang and colleagues had successfully synthesized P2- $\text{Na}_{0.67}\text{Mn}_{0.6}\text{Ni}_{0.2}\text{Li}_{0.2}\text{O}_2$  in which a partial amount of manganese ions were randomly substituted by the lithium and nickel ions. The P2- $\text{Na}_{0.67}\text{Mn}_{0.6}\text{Ni}_{0.2}\text{Li}_{0.2}\text{O}_2$  exhibited a specific capacity of  $115 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  and  $80 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  at current densities of 0.1 C and 1 C, respectively, and the capacity retained of 95.6% after 100 cycles at 0.1 C [23]. In this work, we doped potassium into sodium manganese oxide-based materials (NKMO). The results showed that the electrochemical properties of NKMO materials were significantly improved. The specific results are presented in the following section.

## 2. Experiments

### 2.1. Synthesis of NKMO materials

Potassium-doped sodium-manganese oxide material (NKMO) was synthesized by a solid-state reaction method. A mixture of sodium carbonate ( $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ , Sigma-Aldrich), potassium carbonate ( $\text{K}_2\text{CO}_3$ , Sigma-Aldrich), and manganese carbonate ( $\text{MnCO}_3$ , Sigma-Aldrich) was mixed at a molar ratio of Na:K:Mn = 0.8:0.1:0.9. Then the mixture was ball milled at 100 rpm for 1 hour. The balls used were quartz with a diameter of 8 mm, and the weight ratio of the balls to the materials was 50:1. The obtained mixed powders were heat-treated at  $500^\circ\text{C}$  for 10 hours in the air to remove carbonates. The resulting product was then calcined at  $750^\circ\text{C}$  for 24 hours to obtain the  $\text{Na}_{0.8}\text{K}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.9}\text{O}_2$  (NKMO) material. The reaction creating NKMO during calcination can be illustrated by the following equation:



Then, the synthesized NKMO materials were analyzed to determine their morphological, structural, and electrochemical properties.

### 2.2. Material characterizations

The crystal structure of NKMO was verified using X-ray diffraction (XRD) with a Siemens D5005 diffractometer, employing Cu-K $\alpha$  radiation ( $\lambda = 1.54 \text{ \AA}$ ) over a  $2\theta$  range of  $10\text{-}70^\circ$  with a step size of  $0.05^\circ$ . The morphology of the NKMO material was examined through scanning electron microscopy (SEM) using a JEOL JSM-6490

microscope. The microscope was also used to analyze composition of the NKMO materials via energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX).

The electrochemical performance of NKMO was assessed using cyclic voltammetry (CV) and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) on a Metrohm Autolab PGSTAT 302 N. The charge-discharge capacities at various current densities, ranging from 1.5 V to 4.0 V, were measured using a NEWARE battery testing system (GCD).

The electrochemical measurements were conducted using CR2032-type sodium-ion batteries, with NKMO as the cathode, sodium foil as the anode, a polypropylene (PE) membrane as the separator, and a solution of 1 M NaClO<sub>4</sub> in a mixture of ethylene carbonate/diethylene carbonate (EC/DEC, 1:1 by volume) as the electrolyte. The CR2032 coin cells were assembled in a glove box with oxygen and moisture levels below 0.1 ppm, and stabilized for 24 hours before testing. For the preparation of the electrode materials, a slurry was formed by mixing the active material (NKMO), black carbon (super P), and polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF) binder in a weight ratio of 8:1:1 in N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone (NMP). This slurry was then uniformly coated onto 20 μm-thick aluminum foil by tape casting, dried at 100°C in a vacuum oven for 12 hours, and cut into sheets.

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1. Structural and morphological characterization

The phase structure of the synthesized NKMO materials is illustrated in Fig. 1. As depicted in Fig. 1a, the XRD pattern of the NKMO material can correspond to the hexagonal P2-structure, which belongs to the P6<sub>3</sub>/mmc space group. The diffraction peaks observed at 16.01°, 31.25°, 36.75°, 38.32°, 45.68°, 49.15°, 62.52°, 65.14°, and 67.52° are accurately identified as the (002), (004), (100), (101), (102), (103), (104), (106), (110), and (008) planes, respectively. To extract more valuable information from the XRD data, the lattice parameters were calculated using UnitCell software, and the estimated parameters were  $a = b = 2.862 \text{ \AA}$  and  $c = 11.128 \text{ \AA}$ . Compared to the JCPDS #27-0751 standard ( $c = 11.12 \text{ \AA}$ ), the  $c$  value of NKMO is higher, indicating a greater distance between the adjacent O-Mn-O slabs in the NKMO [24-27]. This increased distance contributes to the enhanced stability of the NKMO structure. The higher  $c$  value results in shift towards lower  $2\theta$  angles in the the diffraction peaks. The increase in lattice constant compared to the standard can be attributed to the phase appearance of Na<sub>0.612</sub>K<sub>0.056</sub>MnO<sub>2</sub> material ( $a = b = 2.868 \text{ \AA}$  and  $c = 11.134 \text{ \AA}$ ), where the larger ionic radii of K<sup>+</sup> compared to Na<sup>+</sup> lead to a larger interlayer space [25]. In addition, we synthesized Na<sub>0.8</sub>Mn<sub>1.0</sub>O<sub>2</sub> (NMO) material samples under similar conditions to NKMO for comparison. Calculation based on XRD result of the obtained NMO material gave

$a = b = 2.862 \text{ \AA}$  and  $c = 11.122 \text{ \AA}$ . The  $c$  value of NMO ( $c = 11.122 \text{ \AA}$ ) is smaller than that of NKMO ( $c = 11.128 \text{ \AA}$ ).

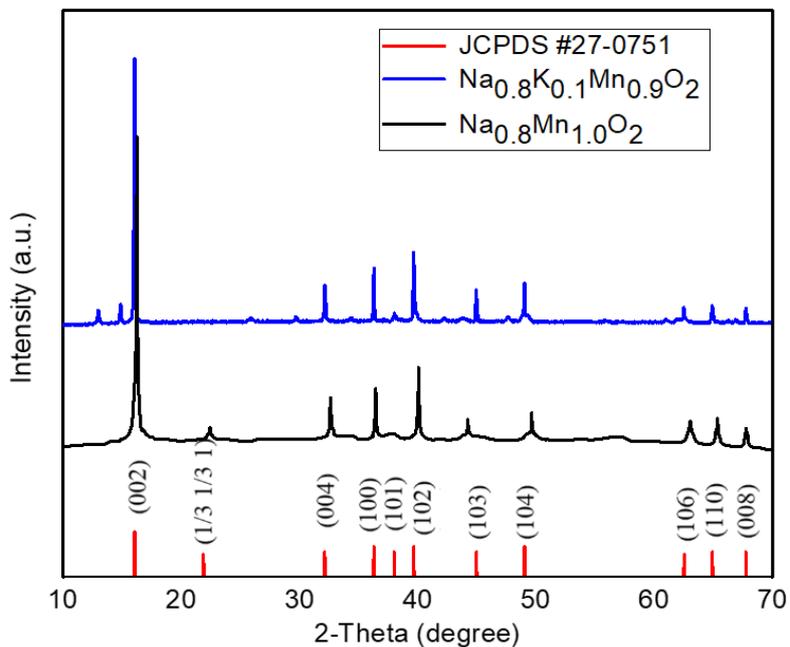


Fig. 1. XRD pattern of NKMO materials.

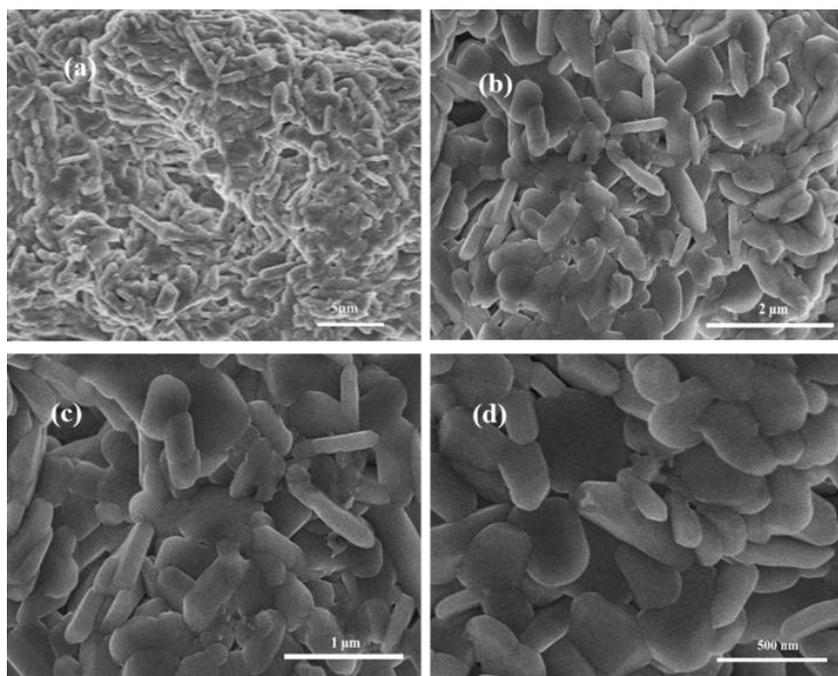


Fig. 2. SEM images of NKMO material at different magnifications; (a) ten thousand times; (b) twenty thousand times; (c) thirty thousand times; (d) fifty thousand times.

The morphology of the NKMO material was confirmed through scanning electron microscopy (SEM), as illustrated in Fig. 2. The SEM images at magnifications of ten thousand times, twenty thousand times, thirty thousand times, and fifty thousand times are displayed in Figures 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d, respectively. These images reveal that the NKMO material particles are polyhedral in shape, with sizes ranging from 300 nm to 1  $\mu\text{m}$ .

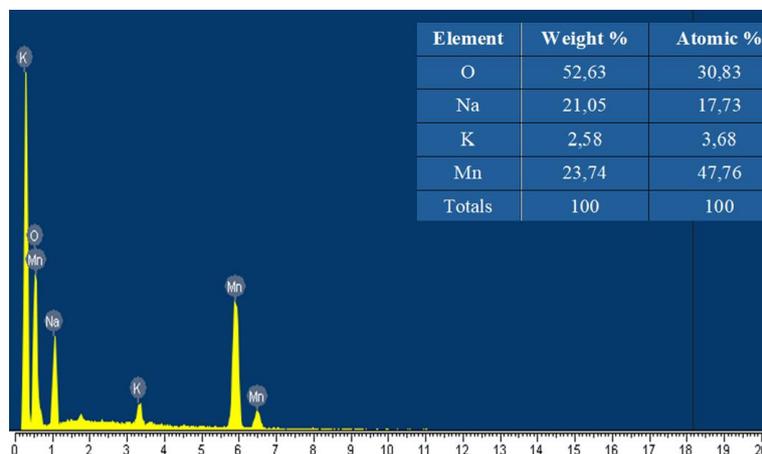


Fig. 3. Energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX) result of NKMO.

The composition of the NKMO material was evaluated using energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX), as depicted in Fig. 3. The result indicated that the synthesized NKMO material comprised Na, K, Mn, and O elements. The atomic ratio of Na, K, Mn, and O was approximately 0.8:0.1:0.9:2, aligning with the initially used precursor ratio.

### 3.2. Electrochemical properties

Figure 4a illustrates the charge and discharge profiles of the NKMO material at a current density of 0.1 C (12 mA.g<sup>-1</sup>) within a voltage range of 1.5 to 4.0 V. The overlapping of the initial charge and discharge curves indicates exceptional cyclability of the NKMO material. The charge capacity and discharge capacity of the first cycle are approximately 130 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> and 125 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. The charge-discharge curves show two voltage plateaus: 2.0 to 2.75 V and 3.6 to 4.0 V during the charge process, and 3.8 to 3.5 V and 2.6 to 1.6 V during the discharge process. The observed voltage plateaus likely correspond to the oxidation and reduction processes of Mn<sup>4+</sup>/Mn<sup>3+</sup> and Mn<sup>3+</sup>/Mn<sup>2+</sup> during the charge and discharge processes, respectively [28].

A thorough analysis of the initial three cycles' charging and discharging outcomes reveals that NKMO materials exhibit superior electrochemical properties compared to sodium manganese oxide-based materials. This demonstrates that doping potassium into sodium manganese oxide significantly enhances the sodium ion insertion and extraction

processes. As shown in Table 1, the charge-discharge capacity of NKMO materials surpasses that of various sodium manganese oxide-based materials.

*Table 1. Comparison of discharge capacity of NKMO material with previously reported sodium manganese oxide-based materials*

| Electrode materials  | Discharge capacity (mAh.g <sup>-1</sup> ) | References |
|--|---|------------|
| P2-Na <sub>0.44</sub> MnO <sub>2</sub>   | 101                                       | [18]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.67</sub> Mn <sub>0.6</sub> Ni <sub>0.2</sub> Li <sub>0.2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>   | 115                                       | [23]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.85</sub> Li <sub>0.17</sub> Ni <sub>0.21</sub> Mn <sub>0.64</sub> O <sub>2</sub>                                      | 105                                       | [29]       |
| P2-Na <sub>1.0</sub> Li <sub>0.2</sub> Mn <sub>0.8</sub> O <sub>2</sub>  | 112                                       | [30]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.8</sub> Li <sub>0.12</sub> Ni <sub>0.22</sub> Mn <sub>0.66</sub> O <sub>2</sub>                                       | 120                                       | [31]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.67</sub> Ni <sub>0.33</sub> Mn <sub>0.67</sub> O <sub>2</sub>   | 86.8                                      | [32]       |
| P2-Na <sub>2/3</sub> Mn <sub>0.67</sub> Ni <sub>0.22</sub> Cu <sub>0.05</sub> Ti <sub>0.02</sub> Al <sub>0.02</sub> O <sub>2</sub> | 107                                       | [33]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.66</sub> Ni <sub>0.25</sub> Mn <sub>0.55</sub> Ti <sub>0.2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>                                       | 114                                       | [34]       |
| P2-Na <sub>0.67</sub> Mn <sub>0.65</sub> Ni <sub>0.2</sub> Mg <sub>0.15</sub> O <sub>2</sub>                                       | 105                                       | [35]       |
| NKMO   | 125                                       | This study |

Figure 4b shows the charge-discharge capacities of the NKMO material over 100 cycles at a current density of 0.1 C. The specific capacity of the material gradually declines to around 100 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> by the 100th cycle. The capacity remains about approximately 80% of its initial cycle. The cyclic efficiency of the synthesized NKMO material surpasses that of several reported cathode materials [17-23].

Figures 4c and 4d depict the charge-discharge profiles and specific capacity of NKMO material at various current densities: 0.1 C, 0.2 C, 0.5 C, and 1 C. The discharge capacity notably decreases from approximately 125 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> at 0.1 C (from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> cycle) to around 110 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> at 0.2 C (from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> cycle), then to about 80 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> at 0.5 C (from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> cycle), and finally to roughly 40 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup> at 1 C (from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> cycle). Upon reverting the current density back to 0.1 C (from the 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> cycle), the capacity recovers to about 120 mAh.g<sup>-1</sup>, demonstrating that the NKMO material maintains structural stability even after undergoing charge-discharge cycles at elevated current densities.

Figure 5a presents the cyclic voltammetry (CV) scan of the NKMO material. The CV scan was conducted over a voltage range of 1.5 to 4.0 V at a scanning rate of 0.2 mV.s<sup>-1</sup> using the Metrohm Autolab PGSTAT 302 N. During the scan, the working electrode was connected to the battery's positive terminal, while the counter and reference electrodes were connected to the negative terminal.

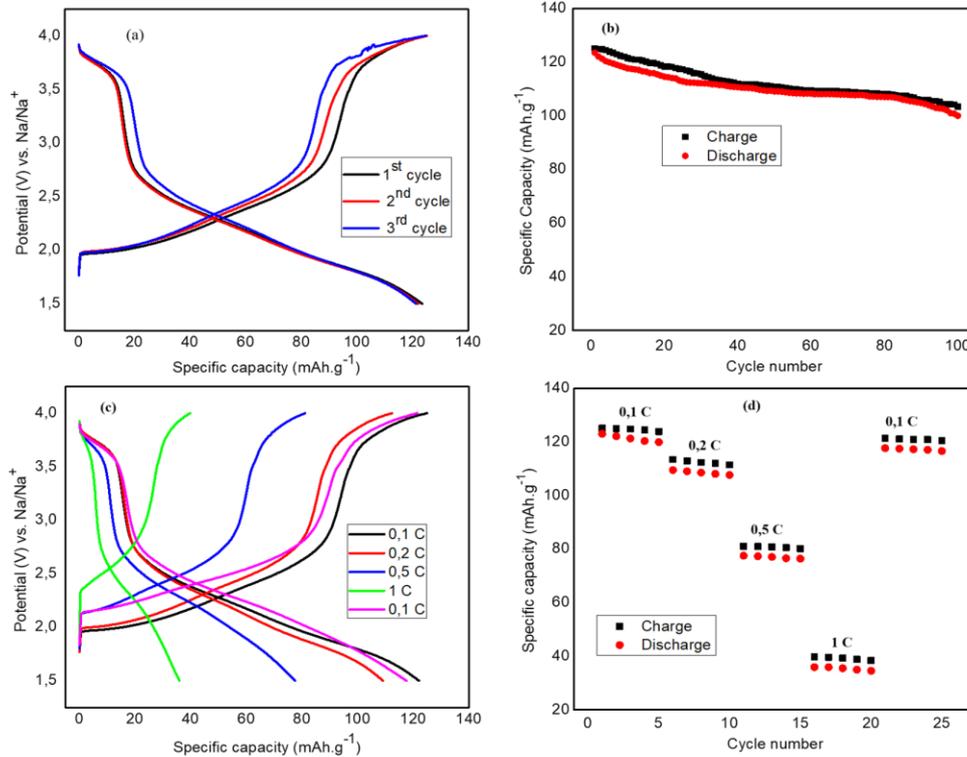


Fig. 4. (a, b) - The charging-discharging profiles of NKMO at 0.1 C; (c, d) - The charging-discharging profiles at different current densities.

The CV spectrum reveals pairs of peaks corresponding to the voltage plateaus observed during the charge-discharge processes. Peaks at approximately 1.6 V and 2.2 V are indicative of the oxidation and reduction processes of Mn<sup>3+</sup>/Mn<sup>2+</sup>, while peaks at 2.75 V and 3.9 V correspond to the oxidation and reduction processes of Mn<sup>4+</sup>/Mn<sup>3+</sup> in the NKMO electrode material. The substantial area under these peaks demonstrates the high specific capacities of the NKMO material.

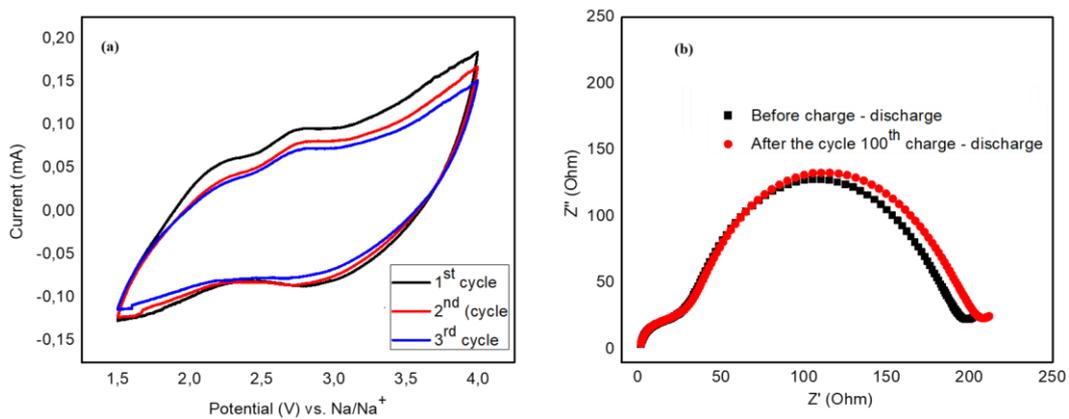


Fig. 5. (a) The CV curves of NKMO at 0.2 mV. s<sup>-1</sup>; (b) Nyquist plots of the NKMO materials.

The electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) characterization was performed across a frequency range from 1 MHz to 0.1 Hz to assess the electrochemical reaction kinetics, as depicted in Fig. 5b. The Nyquist plots of the NKMO material, both before the first cycle and after the 100<sup>th</sup> cycle, exhibit a small semicircle at high frequencies and a larger semicircle at low frequencies. The Nyquist plots of the NKMO material, both before the first cycle and after the 100<sup>th</sup> cycle, exhibit a small semicircle at high frequencies and a larger semicircle at low frequencies. These semicircles likely correspond to the charge transfer processes involving  $\text{Mn}^{3+}/\text{Mn}^{2+}$  and  $\text{Mn}^{4+}/\text{Mn}^{3+}$ . This behavior is also reflected in the CV spectrum with the corresponding peak pairs and in the charge-discharge curve with the associated voltage plateaus. The total impedance is also relatively low, indicating that the material maintains stability during the reversible intercalation and extraction of  $\text{Na}^+$  ions into the NKMO structure.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The sodium manganese oxide-based materials are potential cathode materials for sodium-ion batteries. However, these materials experience capacity loss during cycling process due to phase transitions along with the insertion and desertion of  $\text{Na}^+$ . In this study, we successfully doped potassium into sodium manganese oxide-based materials. The electrochemical properties of sodium manganese oxide-based materials can be significantly improved by doping potassium into them. Our XRD, SEM, and EDS results confirm that the NKMO material has a hexagonal P2-structure, as compared to the JCPDS #27-0751 standard. The NKMO material particles range in size from approximately 300 nm to 1  $\mu\text{m}$ , with a combinatorial formula of  $\text{Na}_{0.8}\text{K}_{0.1}\text{Mn}_{0.9}\text{O}_2$ . The electrochemical properties of NKMO materials are evaluated by cyclic voltammetry (CV), charge-discharge with constant current density, and electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS). The NKMO material has a high specific discharge capacity of 125  $\text{mAh}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$  at the first cycle. The discharge capacity remains about 100  $\text{mAh}\cdot\text{g}^{-1}$  after 100 cycles. The results suggest that the NKMO material is a potential cathode material for sodium-ion batteries.

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## NGHIÊN CỨU TÍNH CHẤT ĐIỆN HÓA CỦA VẬT LIỆU CATÔT OXIT NATRI-MANGAN PHA TẠP KALI CHO PIN NATRI-ION

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**Tóm tắt:** Việc phát triển vật liệu cực dương oxit natri mangan nhiều lớp có dung lượng cao và tuổi thọ dài là một trong những chìa khóa để tăng hiệu suất của pin ion natri (SIB), nhưng vẫn là một thách thức lớn. Trong bài báo này, một oxit natri mangan loại P2 pha tạp kali,  $\text{Na}_{0,8}\text{K}_{0,1}\text{Mn}_{0,9}\text{O}_2$  (NKMO), được phát triển như một vật liệu cực dương có dung lượng cao và tuổi thọ dài cho SIB hiệu suất cao. Oxit natri-kali-mangan  $\text{Na}_{0,8}\text{K}_{0,1}\text{Mn}_{0,9}\text{O}_2$  được tổng hợp bằng phương pháp phản ứng trạng thái rắn thông thường. Cấu trúc tinh thể và hình thái của vật liệu NKMO đã được nghiên cứu bằng phương pháp nhiễu xạ tia X (XRD), kính hiển vi điện tử quét (SEM) và quang phổ tán xạ năng lượng tia X (EDX). Vật liệu NKMO được sử dụng để chế tạo pin dạng đồng xu loại CR2032 và sau đó được đánh giá các đặc tính điện hóa thông qua các phép đo quét thế vòng tuần hoàn (CV), phép đo phổ trở kháng điện hóa (EIS) và phép sạc-xả ở các mật độ dòng điện khác nhau. Vật liệu NKMO có dung lượng sạc và xả ban đầu vượt trội lần lượt là  $125 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  và  $123 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  trong khoảng 1,5 - 4 V ở mật độ dòng điện 0,1 C. Dung lượng vẫn được duy trì ở mức  $100 \text{ mAh.g}^{-1}$  sau 100 chu kỳ. Kết quả cho thấy vật liệu NKMO là vật liệu cực dương đầy hứa hẹn cho pin ion natri.

**Từ khóa:** Pin natri-ion; natri mangan oxit; vật liệu catốt; phản ứng trạng thái rắn.

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