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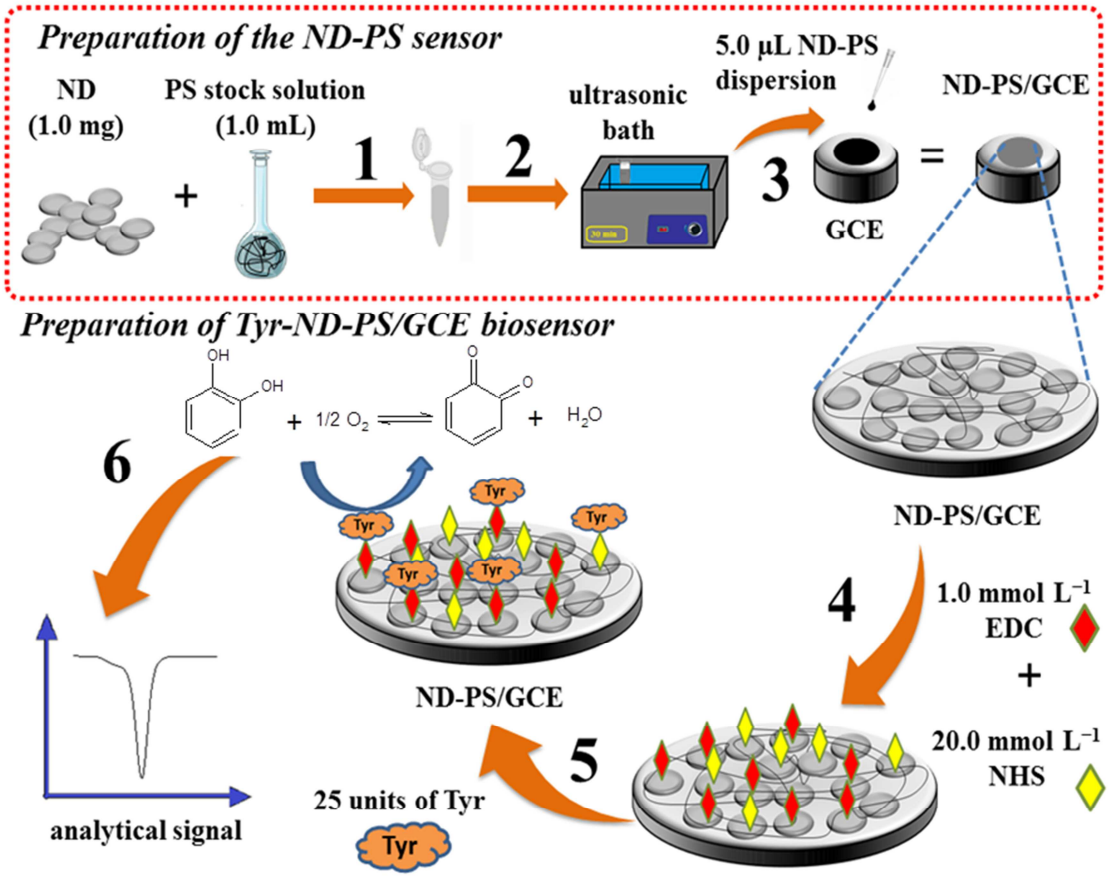

Electrochemical biosensor made with tyrosinase immobilized in a matrix of nanodiamonds and potato starch for detecting phenolic compounds

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Abstract

The envisaged ubiquitous sensing and biosensing for varied applications has motivated materials development toward low cost, biocompatible platforms. In this paper, we demonstrate that carbon nanodiamonds (NDs) can be combined with potato starch (PS) and be deposited on a glassy carbon electrode (GCE) in the form of a homogeneous, rough film, with electroanalytical performance tuned by varying the relative ND-PS concentration. As a proof of concept, the ND/PS film served as matrix to immobilize tyrosinase (Tyr) and the resulting Tyr-ND-PS/GCE biosensor was suitable to detect catechol using differential pulse voltammetry with detection limit of 3.9×10^{-7} mol L^{-1} in the range between 5.0×10^{-6} and 7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1}. Catechol could also be detected in river and tap water samples. This high sensitivity, competitive with biosensors made with more sophisticated procedures and materials in the literature, is attributed to the large surface area and conductivity imparted by the small NDs (< 5nm). In addition, the ND-PS matrix may have its use extended to immobilize other enzymes and biomolecules, thus representing a potential biocompatible platform for ubiquitous biosensing.

Keywords: Biopolymer; nanodiamonds; potato starch; catechol detection; biosensing; tap and river water sample.

1. Introduction

Sensing and biosensing are bound to become ubiquitous with the exciting developments in the Big Data movement [1] with the Internet of Things [2], and the prospects of computer-assisted diagnostics systems [3]. Many are the requirements for such ambitious endeavours to be turned into reality as sensors and biosensors may need to be integrated into wearable and/or implantable devices [4]. The large number of methodologies already employed for detection will have to be explored and even adapted or extended, and the same applies to the materials used for making the sensing units. When remote monitoring is desired, for instance, principles of detection based on optical measurements are usually preferred [5]. In other applications such as monitoring water quality and the environment or detecting food contamination or diseases [6], electroanalytical techniques could be preferred. Common to the stringent requirements alluded to is the need of low cost technologies. Analytical tools that require expensive, sophisticated equipment and trained personnel to operate them are not suitable.

Electrochemical sensors that can be made of cheap materials, and be miniaturized into portable devices [7], seem strong candidates for fulfilling the requirements of ubiquitous sensing. It is in this context that our team have tried to exploit carbon-based materials and natural starch from tapioca and potato in matrices for sensors and biosensors [8, 9]. In this paper, more specifically, we employ carbon nanodiamonds (NDs) and potato starch to immobilize the enzyme tyrosinase, with which detection of catechol (CAT) is performed with differential pulse voltammetry. The choice of NDs was inspired by the successful use of carbon nanomaterials in biosensing [10-14] owing to their possible high conductivity, mechanical strength, ease with which they are modified, and biocompatibility. In fact, the success in applications of carbon nanotubes and graphene has stirred significant research into other forms of

nanostructured carbon, which have been found in many cases equally efficient for applications with the advantage of lower cost of production. Indeed, carbon black, printex carbon, carbon nano-onions and carbon nanodiamonds (NDs) have all been used in electroanalytical applications [13, 15, 16].

Some of these carbon forms are not new at all. NDs, for instance, were first synthesized in the 1960s [17] with irradiation of graphite by shock waves generated by detonation of a mixture of TNT (2-methyl-1,3,5-trinitrobenzene, $(C_6H_2(NO_2)_3CH_3)$ and RDX (hexogen, $C_3H_6N_6O_6$). After detonation, the remaining soot was filled with ND particles, which were purified via oxidation and/or treatment with mineral acids. In recent years, NDs have been produced with a commercial-scale detonation technique, laser ablation, and plasma-assisted chemical vapour deposition [18]. NDs are made of gray particles smaller than 10 nm within a tetrahedral structure of sp^3 hybridized carbons, delocalized π bonds, and oxygen functional groups on their surfaces [19, 20]. These characteristics make NDs versatile [21], e.g. to use as carriers for anticancer drugs [22], in sensors and biosensors [23-26] to detect antibodies [24], glucose [25], haemoglobin [26], and cytochrome c [27].

While ND themselves can serve as matrix in a film form for building biosensors [15], synergy may be reached if they are associated with a natural biopolymer such as potato starch. Indeed, we shall show here that the electroanalytical performance can be varied significantly depending on the relative concentration of NDs and potato starch (PS). We chose PS due to its physicochemical stability, simplicity of manipulation, biocompatibility, abundance and low cost. It is formed by two classes of carbohydrates with ca. 20% m/m of amylose and 80% m/m amylopectin [28, 29], which confer stability and resistance. PS also has functional groups leading to a high solubility in water when heated [30], thus permitting to obtain stable, homogeneous dispersions.

As a proof-of-principle, we employed the NDs/PS matrix to immobilize tyrosinase with which we detect catechol ($C_6H_4(OH)_2$, CAT), a phenolic compound produced by phenol hydroxylation using H_2O_2. CAT was selected because it has been investigated extensively, including with detection in river water samples [31-38], and therefore we compare the performance of our electrochemical biosensor with a considerable body of literature. CAT is a toxic pollutant originating from pesticides, plastics and from residues from refineries and petrochemical industries. Because such residues containing CAT are sometimes improperly discharged into the environment, there is a potential hazard for human health [39].

2. Experimental

2.1. Materials and Methods

NDs (nanopowder, < 10-nm particle size), Tyr 1000 unit/mg (from mushroom), CAT, KCl, $NaNO_3$, $Pb(NO_3)_2$, $CaCl_2.2H_2O$, Na_2SO_4, $SnCl_2$, $K_3[Fe(CN)_6]$, $K_4[Fe(CN)_6]$, acetic acid, 1-ethyl-3-[3-dimethylaminopropyl] carbodiimide (EDC) and N-hydroxysuccinimide (NHS) were acquired from Sigma-Aldrich. PS was purchased at a local supermarket from Yoki® (brand name). Ultrapure water (resistivity > 18.0 MΩ cm) from a Millipore Milli-Q system (Billerica, USA) was used to prepare all solutions. The 0.20 mol L^{-1} phosphate buffer solutions (pH 5.7 to 8.0) were prepared with Na_2HPO_4 and NaH_2PO_4 from Sigma-Aldrich and used as supporting electrolytes.

The morphology of NDs-PS biopolymer films was recorded using scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDX) with a LEO-440 microscope (Zeiss-Leica), and with transmission electron microscopy (TEM) with a FEI TECNAI G2F20 microscope at an acceleration voltage of 200 kV. The NDs were studied using the Nicolet iS50 Fourier transform-infrared (FT-IR)

spectrometer (Thermo Scientific). Differential pulse voltammetry (DPV) and cyclic voltammetry measurements were conducted with an Autolab PGSTAT-30 (Ecochemie) potentiostat/galvanostat, coupled to a microcomputer controlled by 4.9 GPES software. A three-electrode cell was used with a counter electrode (platinum plate), a reference electrode of Ag/AgCl (3.0 mol L^{-1} KCl), and a working electrode (GCE, PS/GCE, NDs-PS/GCE or Tyr-ND-PS/GCE). Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) analysis was performed with 5.0×10^{-3} mol L^{-1} $K_3[Fe(CN)_6]/K_4[Fe(CN)_6]$ in a 0.10 mol L^{-1} KCl solution using NOVA software. The frequency ranged from 0.10 to 100 kHz, in an open circuit potential, with an amplitude of 10 mV.

2.2. Preparation of NDs-PS dispersion and biosensor fabrication

Commercial PS (1.0 mg) was dispersed in 5.0% (v/v) acetic acid aqueous solution and left under stirring for one hour at 85°C. The resulting suspension was stored under refrigeration. A scheme to fabricate NDs-PS/GCE and Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE sensors is shown in Figure 1. Step 1 consists in dispersing 1.0 mg of NDs in 1.0 mL of PS solution and then using ultrasonication for 30 min (step 2). 5.0 μL of NDs-PS were dropped on the GCE surface (Ø = 3.0 mm) (step 3), previously cleaned as described in [40]. The NDs-PS/GCE platform was dried during 12 h at room temperature. Tyrosinase was immobilized covalently using a solution containing 1.0×10^{-3} mol L^{-1} of EDC and 20×10^{-3} mol L^{-1} of NHS for 2 h (step 4) followed by immersion in a solution containing 100 μL of 0.20 mol L^{-1} phosphate buffer (pH 6.6) and 25 units of Tyr (step 5). The Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE biosensor was used to detect CAT in river and tap water samples (step 6).

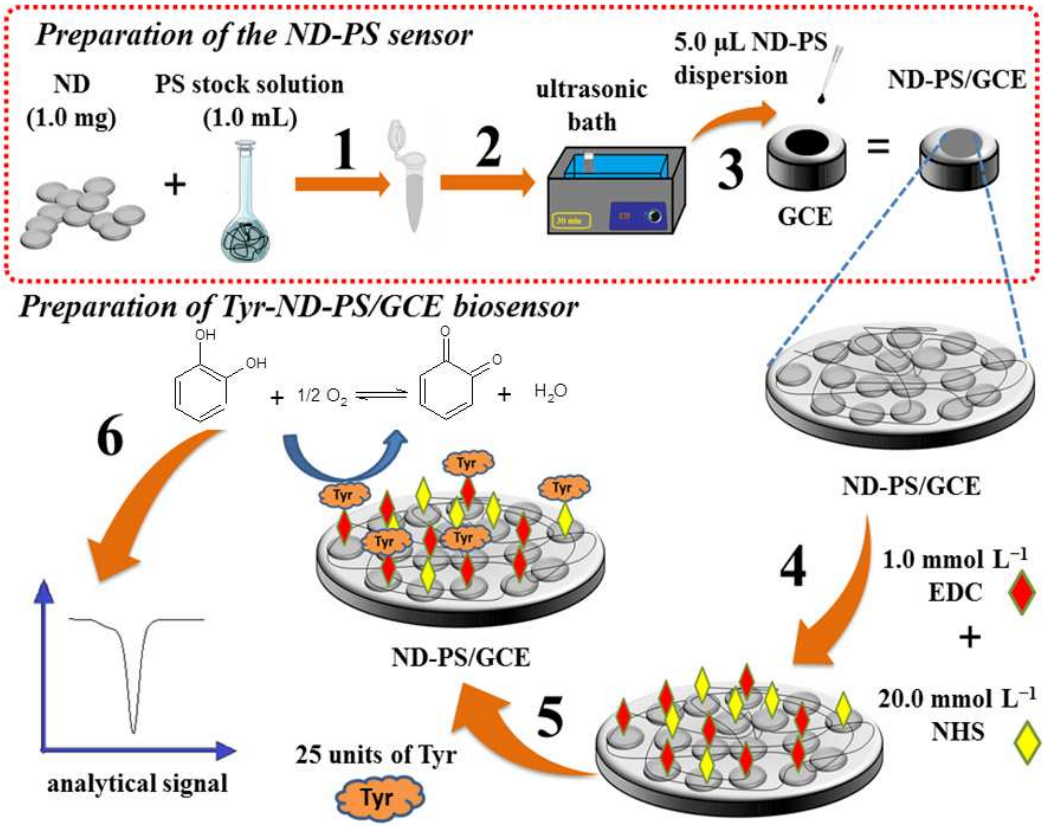


Figure 1. Scheme of ND-PS/GCE and of Tyr-ND-PS/GCE preparation. Step 1: ND was dispersed in PS solution. Step 2: ND-PS dispersion was ultrasonicated for 30 min. Step 3: 5.0 µL of the ND-PS were dropped on the GCE surface. Step 4: ND-PS/GCE was immersed in a solution containing 1-ethyl-3-[3-dimethylaminopropyl] carbodiimide (EDC) and N-hydroxysuccinimide (NHS) for 2 h. Step 5: ND-PS/GCE was immersed in a solution containing 25 units of Tyr. Step 6: Detection of CAT in samples of tap and river water with the Tyr-ND-PS/GCE biosensor.

2.3. Water samples collection and analytical procedures

Tap water samples (or distribution water) were collected in the Araras city (SP – Brazil) with geographical coordinates: 22°18’22.6’’S 47°22’52.1’’O, while the river water samples was taken from the Monjolinho River, located in São Carlos city (SP – Brazil) with geographical coordinates: 21°59’11’’S 47°52’55’’O. River water samples

were filtered through a 3-µm filter paper (Nalgon) for removal of small leaves and suspensions. Tap water was used without any prior treatment. All samples were stirred, homogenized, and fortified with known amounts of CAT. The tap water samples were identified as A (2.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT), B (4.7×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT), and C (7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT), while the river water samples were D (2.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT), E (4.7×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT), and F (7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT).

The parameters used in the DPV technique were optimized as follows: scan rate 25 mV s^{-1}, amplitude 100 mV, modulation time 30 ms, pH = 6.6. The limit of detection (LOD) was calculated as $3 \times SD/S$, where *SD* is the standard deviation of the 10 background measurements and *S* is the slope of the analytical curve. The repeatability studies were conducted in a solution containing 1.2×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT. Selectivity studies were performed with 9.0×10^{-5} mol L^{-1} CAT solution in the presence of potential interfering substances such as KCl, $NaNO_3$, $Pb(NO_3)_2$, $CaCl_2.2H_2O$, Na_2SO_4, and $SnCl_2$. The biosensor Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE was stored in phosphate buffer solution in a refrigerator at 4 ^oC during the long-term stability studies.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Electrochemical detection of CAT

Typical differential pulse voltammograms are shown in Figure 2, where the reduction current (0.1 V vs. Ag/AgCl) recorded with the Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE surface is the highest due to the enzymatic catalysis of Tyr. The mechanism of detection can be described with the tyrosinase enzyme catalysing biological reactions of phenols hydroxylation and conversion of o-diphenols to o-quinone [41]. These catalytic effects should enhance the CAT analytical signal when compared to the non-enzymatic devices [42] as it clear with the comparison in Figure 2 for NDs-PS/GCE (without enzyme) in

(c). The peak near 0 V appeared due to the reduction of Cu^{2+} ions in the active centre of the biomolecule. In addition, the results confirm that the enzyme was efficiently linked onto the NDs-PS biopolymer surface. This may represent a new strategy to immobilize biomolecules, alternative to traditional methodologies using chitosan and dihexadecylphosphate [43].

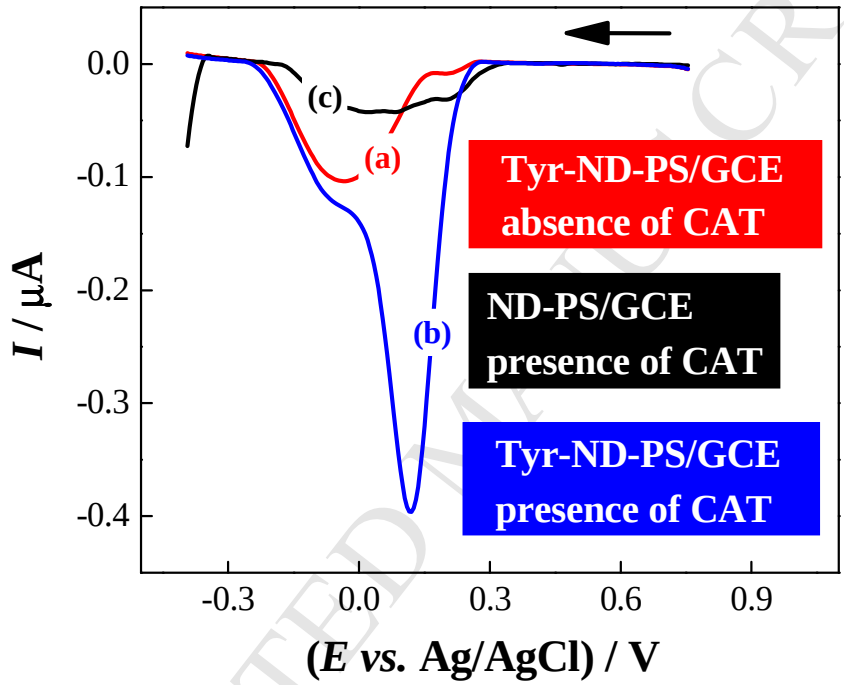


Figure 2. DP voltammograms in the absence of catechol (CAT) in **(a)** and in the presence of 1.0×10^{-5} mol L^{-1} CAT with Tyr-ND-PS/GCE biosensor in **(b)**. Catechol detection (1.0×10^{-5} mol L^{-1}) at ND-PS/GCE in **(c)**. Measurements were carried out in 0.20 mol L^{-1} phosphate buffer (pH 6.6).

The cathodic peak current increased linearly in the CAT concentration range between 5.0×10^{-6} and 7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} according to DPV data in Figure 3. A calibration curve in the inset was obtained from I (µA) = $-$ 5.1×10^{-7} + 0.023 C_{CAT} (µmol L^{-1}) with a linear correlation (r) of 0.992 and LOD of 3.9×10^{-6} mol L^{-1}.

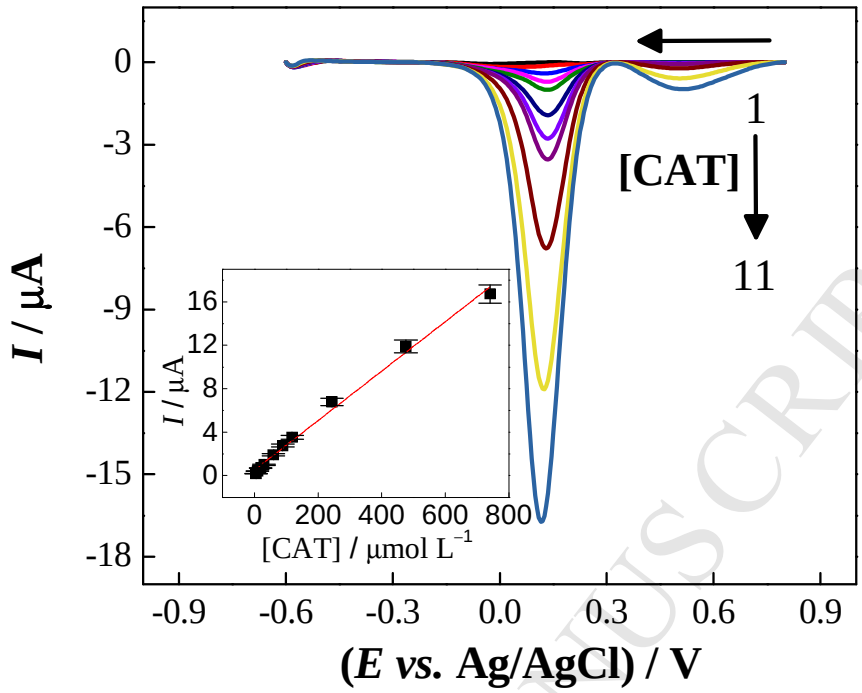


Figure 3. DP voltammograms for detecting CAT from 5.0×10^{-6} to 7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} in 0.20 mol L^{-1} phosphate buffer (pH 6.6) using Tyr-ND-PS/GCE. The inset shows the analytical curve (n = 3).

Intra-day and inter-day repeatability tests were conducted with five measurements using 1.2×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT solutions. The relative standard deviations (RSD) were 3.7 and 4.0%, respectively. The low percentages suggest a satisfactory precision of the proposed procedure. Possible effects from interferents were checked using solutions with 9.0×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} of CAT to which appropriate amounts of $CaCl_2.2H_2O$, KCl, $NaNO_3$, Na_2SO_4, $Pb(NO_3)_2$ and $SnCl_2$ were added to reach a final concentration of 9.0×10^{-4} mol L^{-1}. The percentages of change in current signals were 0.5, 4.1, 3.6, 8.8, 3.13, 6.9% for $CaCl_2.2H_2O$, KCl, $NaNO_3$, Na_2SO_4, $Pb(NO_3)_2$ and $SnCl_2$, respectively, indicating the selectivity of the method (Figure S1 in the Supporting Information). The long-term stability of the biosensor was studied using a

1.2×10^{-4} mol L^{-1} CAT solution, and the measured current was constant during 17 days (Figure S2 in the Supporting Information). Therefore, there is no difficulty with stability for using these sensing units in disposable devices.

The Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE biosensor was used to detect CAT in tap and river water samples (A to C were tap water samples and D to F were river water samples). Each water sample was prepared with different CAT concentrations, measured in three replicates for each sample and the results are shown in Table S1 in the Supporting Information. As can be inferred from the recovery results, which varied from 80 to 118%, the maximum interference from the water sample matrix was 20.0%. This specification is suitable for detecting CAT in the environment.

The performance of the Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE biosensor was compared with other tyrosinase-containing biosensors, with the analytical features listed in Table 1. Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE performed similarly to previous biosensors in terms of linear range and LOD, but was advantageous with regard to easy preparation, fast response and selectivity. Also significant is the non-toxic, low resistivity and environmentally friendly nature of PS.

Table 1. Comparison between Tyr-ND-PS/GCE and tyrosinase-containing biosensors for CAT quantification.

Sensor	Linear range (mol L^{-1})	LOD (mol L^{-1})	Ref.
PEDOT-rGO-Fe_2O_3-PPO/GCE*	4.0×10^{-8} to 6.2×10^{-5}	7.0×10^{-9}	[33]
Tyr-MWNTs-PDDA/GCE**	2.0×10^{-6} to 1.0×10^{-4}	6.6×10^{-7}	[35]
MWNT-Nafion-Tyr/GCE	1.0×10^{-6} to 1.9×10^{-5}	1.3×10^{-7}	[36]
Tyr/ZnO/GCE	1.0×10^{-5} to 4.0×10^{-2}	6.0×10^{-6}	[37]
Tyr-PO4–PPy/Pt***	1.0×10^{-5} to 1.2×10^{-4}	8.4×10^{-7}	[38]

Tyr-ND-PS/GCE	5.0×10^{-6} to 7.4×10^{-4}	3.9×10^{-7}	This work

*PEDOT-rGO-Fe_2O_3-PPO/GCE = poly (3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) - reduced graphene oxide - Fe_2O_3 nanoparticles - polyphenol oxidase / glassy carbon electrode

**Tyr-MWNTs-PDDA/GCE = tyrosinase - multi-walled carbon nanotubes - polydiallyldimethylammonium chloride / glassy carbon electrode

***Tyr-PO_4-PPy/Pt = Tyr - PO_4 – polypyrrole / platinum electrode

3.2. Electrochemical features of the NDs-PS/GCE biopolymer

The NDs-PS/GCE sensor had lower ΔEp ($\Delta E_p = E_{pa} - E_{pc}$) and higher current than PS/GCE or GCE, as shown in Figure 4a. This indicates an increase in conductivity and surface area promoted by synergy between NDs and PS. However, an excess of NDs on the GCE surface leads to a decrease in peak currents as seen in Figure S3 in which the NDs mass in the NDs-PS biopolymer increased from 1.0 to 3.0 mg. The Nyquist diagrams in Figure 4b were fitted with a Randle's modified equivalent circuit [R_s(CPE[$R_{ct}Z_W$])], where R_s is the solution resistance, R_{ct} is the charge transfer resistance, *CPE* is a constant phase element and Z_W is the Warburg impedance. R_{ct} in ascending order was NDs-PS/GCE (163.4 Ω) < PS/GCE (318.8 Ω) < GCE (716.2 Ω), which confirms the faster electron transfer for NDs-PS/GCE in comparison to bare GCE and PS/GCE.

Figure 4c and 4d show cyclic voltammograms at scan rates from 50 to 350 mV s^{-1} with the corresponding I_a (anodic peak current) *vs.* $\nu^{1/2}$ (square root of scan rate) curves shown in the insets. With the Randles-Sevcik equation: $I_a = 2.69 \times 10^5 A C D^{1/2} n^{3/2} v^{1/2}$ where I_a is the anodic peak current (A), A is the electroactive area (cm^2), C is the concentration of $[Fe(CN)_6]^{3-}$ solution (mol cm^{-3}), D (7.6×10^{-6} cm^2 s^{-1}) [44] is the diffusion coefficient of the molecule in solution (cm^2 s^{-1}), n is the number of electrons

involved in the redox reaction and v is the potential scan rate (V s^{-1}). The estimated electroactive area was 0.10 and 0.080 cm^2 for NDs-PS/GCE and GCE, respectively, suggesting an increase of 25%.

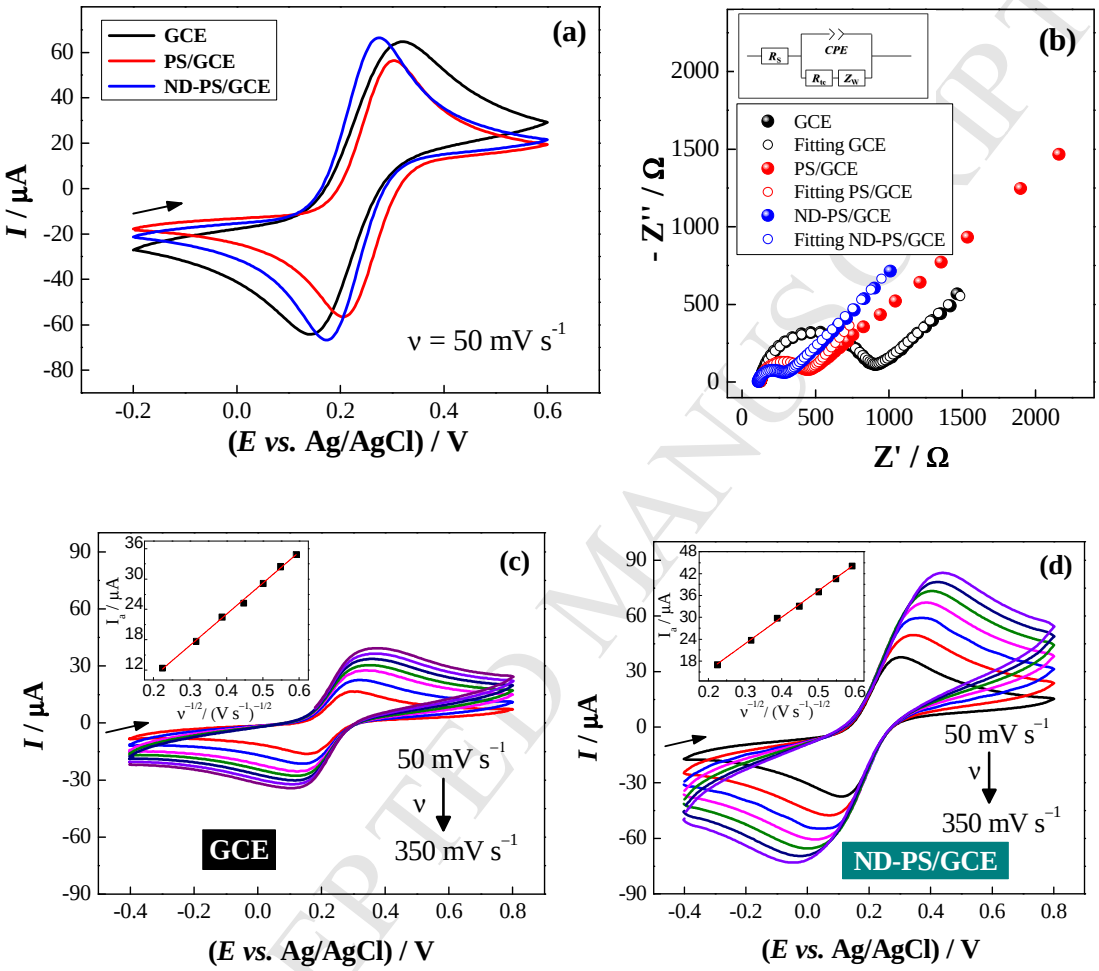
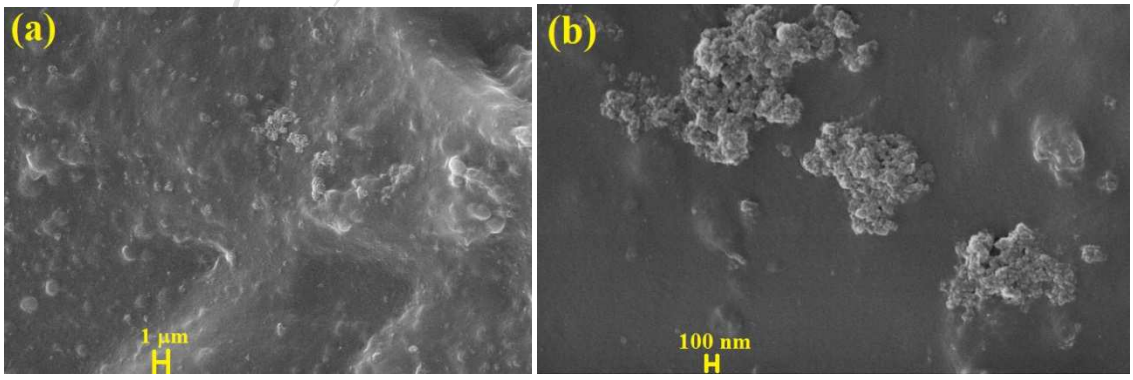
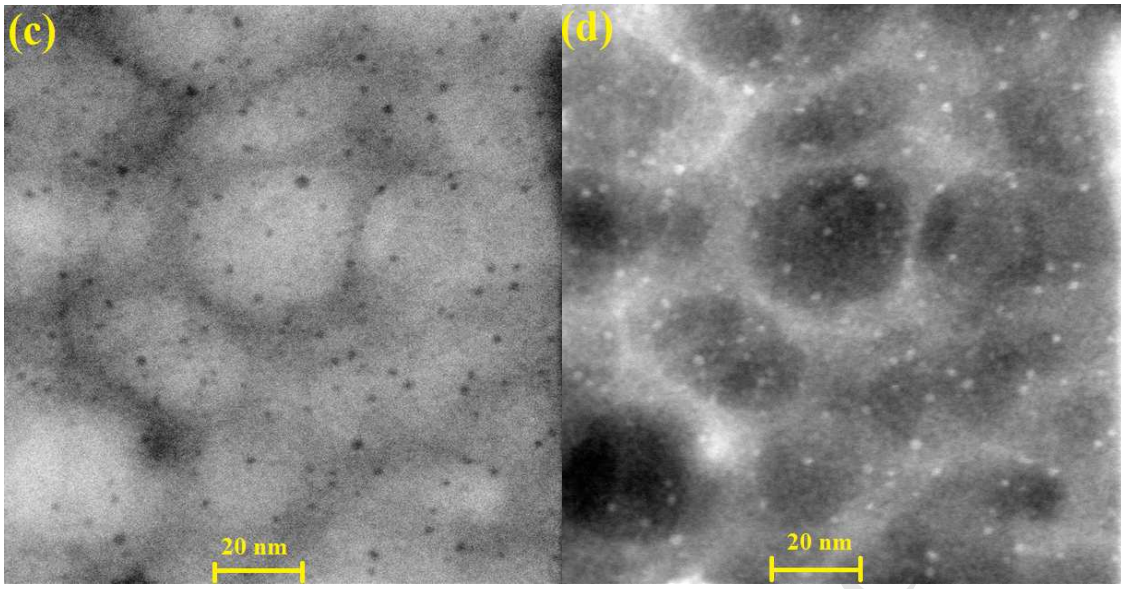


Fig 4. (a) Cyclic voltammograms for 1.0×10^{-5} mol L^{-1} $[Fe(CN)_6]^{3-}$ with GCE, PS/GCE and ND-PS/GCE, scan rate of 50 mV s^{-1}. (b) Nyquist diagrams for GCE, PS/GCE, and ND-PS/GCE for 5.0×10^{-3} mol L^{-1} $[Fe(CN)_6]^{4-/3-}$. (c) Cyclic voltammograms for 1.0×10^{-5} mol L^{-1} $[Fe(CN)_6]^{3-}$ with GCE and (d) ND-PS/GCE at scan rates from 50 to 350 mV s^{-1}. The insets show I_a *vs.* $\nu^{1/2}$ curves. All experiments were performed in 0.10 mol L^{-1} KCl solution.

3.3. Morphology of NDs-PS/GCE

A homogeneous, rough biopolymer film is seen on the SEM micrograph in Figure 5a while Figure 5b highlights the agglomeration of NDs in PS. According to the TEM micrographs in Figures 5c and 5d, NDs are spherical with diameter smaller than 5 nm, being uniformly distributed on the PS biopolymer. The EDX spectrum in Figure 5e shows copper from the grids, in addition to carbon and oxygen from NDs-PS biopolymer, thus indicating the absence of contaminants. The corresponding electron diffraction (SAED) pattern (*inset* in Figure 5e) confirmed the absence of crystallinity in NDs structure. The FTIR spectrum in Figure 5f shows the graphitic nature of the carbon, the hetero-nuclear functional group vibrations and polar bonds with a strong, broad adsorption at 3412 cm^{-1} assigned to O–H stretching. The band at 1730 cm^{-1} is assigned to C=O stretching of COOH groups, while those at 1,622 and 1,130 cm^{-1} can be associated with absorption of ketone groups (C=O) [45]. Bands at 2,925, 2,851 and 1,340 cm^{-1} are assigned to the bending modes of CH_3, CH_2 and C=C [27, 46]. This last one indicates π bonds at the ND surface, which is one of the groups responsible for the material conductivity. The size, uniform distribution and chemical surface of NDs are useful for sensors due to the increase in conductivity and surface area leading to higher electroanalytical signals desired in (bio)sensing devices.

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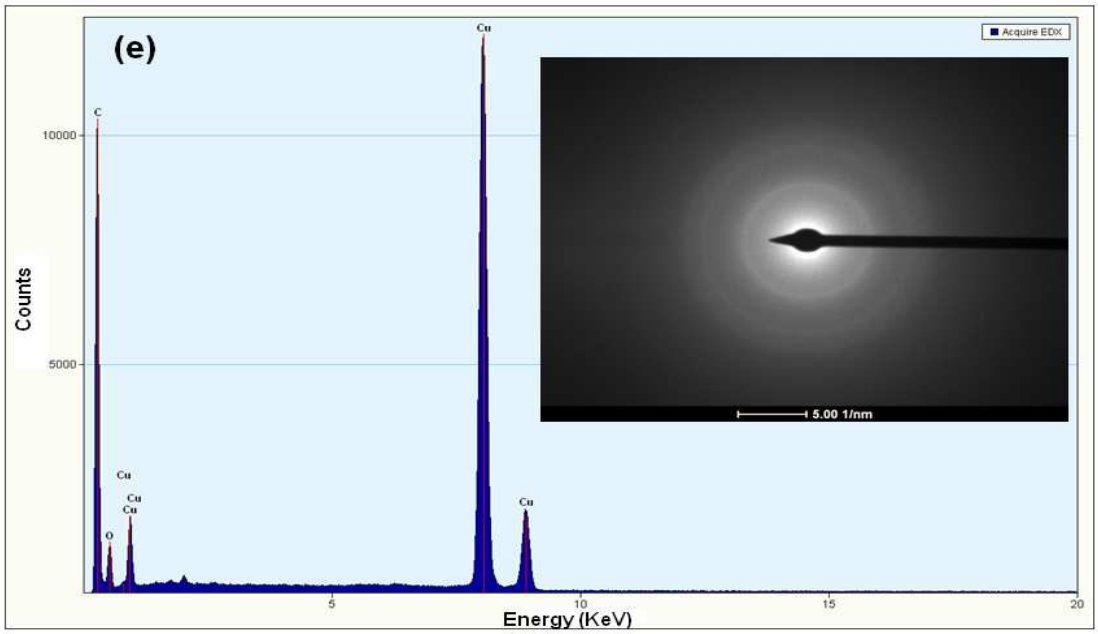
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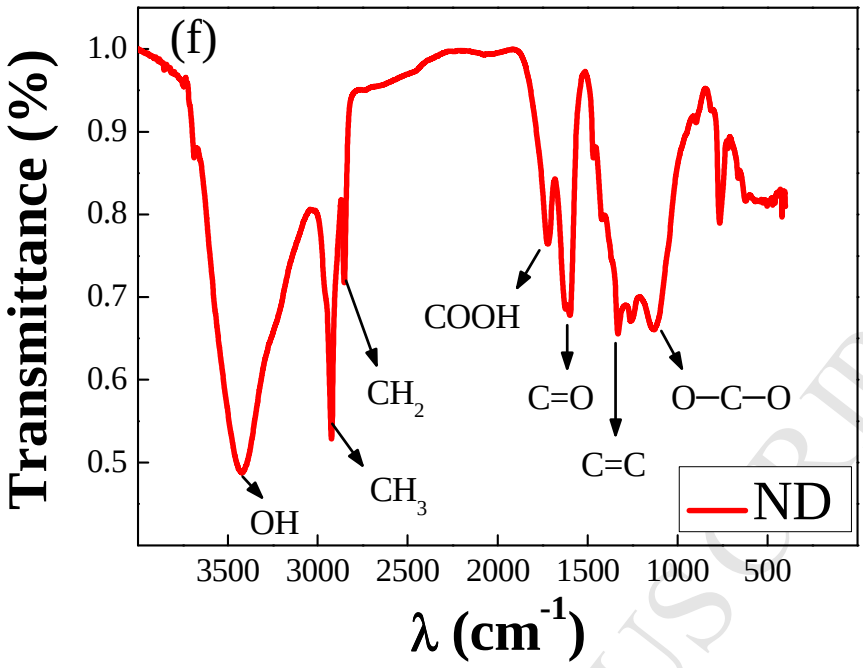

Figure 5. SEM micrographs of ND-PS biopolymer at a magnification of 10,000X (a) and 50,000X (b). TEM micrographs of ND-PS biopolymer in bright field (c) and in dark field (d). Corresponding EDX spectrum of ND-PS and electron diffraction (SAED) pattern of a selected area (inset) (e). FTIR spectrum of ND powder (f).

4. Conclusion

A potential biocompatible matrix made of NDs and PS was employed to immobilize tyrosinase with which CAT was detected in tap and river water samples. A low LOD of 3.9×10^{-6} mol L^{-1} was achieved using the DPV technique due to the large surface area and conductivity promoted by NDs when they were added at an optimized relative concentration. The Tyr-NDs-PS/GCE biosensor exhibited an analytical performance similar to previously reported biosensors with the advantages of easy preparation, fast response, selectivity and relative low cost.

Taken together the results presented here amount to a demonstration that the non-toxic, environmentally friendly PS biopolymer may be combined with NDs and

have their surface properties tuned by varying their relative concentrations in order to optimize electroanalytical performance. The immobilization of tyrosinase was just performed as a proof-of-principle experiment, for NDs/PS can be used as matrix for many other enzymes and biomolecules. The possible biocompatibility of the matrix may be valuable for the needed ubiquitous sensing in IoT and other applications.

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Highlights

Biosensor made with a biocompatible thin film containing nanodiamonds and potato starch, coated with tyrosinase

The biosensor detected catechol with detection limit of 3.9×10^{-7} mol L^{-1} within the range between 5.0×10^{-6} and 7.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1}.

Catechol could also be detected in tap and river water samples.

Estimated cost per sensing unit of only US$ 0.04