



## Preparation and Characterisation of $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$ ( $0 \leq x \leq 0.3$ ) as Cathode Materials for Intermediate Temperature Solid Oxide Fuel Cell (SOFC)



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### Abstract

Intermediate temperature solid oxide fuel cells (IT-SOFC) working at 600-800 °C attracted considerable attention as compared to the traditional SOFCs as highly clean efficient power generation source. In this frame this paper focuses on the preparation and characterization of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  ( $x=0, 0.1, 0.2$  and  $0.3$ ) as cathode material for IT-SOFC.  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  ( $x=0, 0.1, 0.2$  and  $0.3$ ) powders were prepared using the Pechini method. The effect of Cu doping on the crystal structures of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  were investigated using x-ray diffraction (XRD).  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ ,  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.9\text{Cu}_0.1\text{O}_9$  and  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.8\text{Cu}_0.2\text{O}_9$  samples have a similar crystal structure of that reported for  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  indicating monoclinic phase compounds whereas  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.7\text{Cu}_0.3\text{O}_9$  sample has orthorhombic  $\text{CaCuO}_2$  as a minor phase and a monoclinic  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  as a major phase. The sinterability of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ ,  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.9\text{Cu}_0.1\text{O}_9$  and  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.8\text{Cu}_0.2\text{O}_9$  samples was studied. The effects of sintering time and temperature on the microstructure, homogeneity of the prepared electrodes and the adhesion to an anode supported cell were studied using scanning electron microscopy (SEM). The effect of ball milling time on the particle size distribution of the prepared samples was reported. The electrochemical properties of Cu-CCO-GDC composite cathodes were studied. The lowest area specific resistance was obtained for 50 wt% GDC-50 wt%  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_3.8\text{Cu}_0.2\text{O}_9$  composite cathode showing that it could be a promising cathode material for IT-SOFC.

Keywords:  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ ; Cu doping; SOFC; Cathode materials; microstructure

### 1. Introduction

The research in Solid Oxide Fuel Cells (SOFC) aims to diminish the working temperature to intermediate temperature range (500-700 °C) to diminish the running expenses, to enhance the materials compatibility, to reduce the time for startup and to acquire long time durability [1–3]. However, the decrease of the operating temperature results in increasing the electrolyte ohmic losses and also decreasing the electrocatalytic activity at the cathode which in turn results in decreasing the electrochemical performance at the cathode [4,5].

There are many interests at present in improving the electrochemical performance of the cathode by finding new cathode materials for intermediate temperature Solid Oxide Fuel Cells (IT-SOFC). The state of the art SOFC cathode

materials are the perovskite  $(\text{La,Sr})(\text{Co,Fe})\text{O}_3$  (LSCF),  $(\text{La,Sr})\text{CoO}_3$  (LSC),  $(\text{La,Sr})\text{MnO}_3$  (LSM), and  $(\text{La,Sr})\text{FeO}_3$ . These materials have good catalytic activity for oxygen reduction, high oxide ion conductivity, and high electronic conductivity. Among these cathodes, the major drawbacks of the cobalt based oxides are the chemical and thermal expansion compatibilities with the standard electrolytes such as yttrium doped zirconia (YSZ), gadolinium doped ceria (GDC) or  $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Sr}_x\text{Ga}_{1-y}\text{Mg}_y\text{O}_3$  (LSGM) [6]. Other structures have been suggested to reduce the thermal expansion coefficient (TEC), among them are perovskites, layered perovskites [7] and layered Ruddlesden-Popper phases  $\text{A}_{n+1}\text{B}_n\text{O}_{3n+1}$  ( $\text{A}$ =rare earth/alkaline earth;  $\text{B}$ =transition metal), such as  $(\text{La,Sr})_{n+1}(\text{Fe,Co})_n\text{O}_{3n+1}$  [8].

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The well-known thermoelectric material,  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  (CCO), is one of the candidates that could be used as a cathode for IT-SOFC because its thermal expansion coefficient is well matched with that of GDC; it has also good compatibility with GDC and it also has good chemical durability [6,9]. Several authors were interested in improving the thermoelectric properties of CCO [10–17]. However, few studies are found on the electrochemical performance of CCO as a cathode for IT-SOFC. Nagasawa et al [6] have prepared CCO and studied its structure, chemical, mechanical adaptability and electrochemical performance as a candidate for IT-SOFC. For improving the CCO electrochemical performance, A. Rolle et al [18] have investigated the effect of several parameters on the cathode performance such as pore former, electrolyte and cathode composition. Moreover, A. Rolle et al [19] have investigated the effect of current collectors. Yehia et al [20] have synthesized and evaluated  $\text{Ca}_{3-x}\text{La}_x\text{Co}_4\text{O}_{9+\delta}$  as cathode material for proton conducting fuel cells. The lowest polarization resistance ( $R_p=0.64 \Omega\cdot\text{cm}^2$  at  $600^\circ\text{C}$ ) have been obtained by Samson et al [9] for 40 wt% CCO-60wt%  $\text{Gd}_{0.1}\text{Ce}_{0.9}\text{O}_2$  composition. Recently, Zou et al have prepared and evaluated  $\text{Ca}_{3-x}\text{Bi}_x\text{Co}_4\text{O}_{9-\delta}$  as cathode material for IT-SOFC [21]. Also, Zou et al [22] have studied the effect of transition metal ions dopants on the electrochemical performance of  $\text{Ca}_{2.9}\text{Bi}_{0.1}\text{Co}_4\text{O}_{9-\delta}$  cathode. Guo et al [23] have studied composite of 50 wt% CCO and 50 wt%  $\text{La}_{0.7}\text{Sr}_{0.3}\text{CoO}_3$  as a candidate material for IT-SOFC cathode. The electrochemical properties and the transport properties of CCO and Sr, Bi, Pb and La-doped CCO have been presented by Mignardi [23]. Thoretton et al. [24] have studied the oxide ion diffusion and the kinetics for the oxygen transfer at the surface of CCO where it was found that at  $700^\circ\text{C}$ , the diffusion coefficient ( $D^*$ ) is  $2.7\cdot 10^{-10} \text{cm}^2\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$  and the surface exchange coefficient ( $K^*$ ) is  $1.6\cdot 10^{-7} \text{cm}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$ . The good ionic and electronic conduction of CCO makes it fascinating cathode material for SOFC. Other studies for improving the performance of CCO as cathode material have been found [21,23,25–28]. Several authors were interested in improving the thermoelectric properties of CCO by Cu doping [29–32]. The Cu-doping at Co-site induces a significant decrease of the resistivity for CCO while the electronic correlation almost remains unchanged [30]. On the foregoing literature survey, Cu-doped CCO system is not evaluated as IT-SOFC cathode. The aim of the present work is the preparation and characterization of Cu-doped CCO with special interest in the investigation of the

influence of Cu concentration systematically on the structural, microstructural, shrinkage and the electrochemical properties of CCO to be used as a cathode for SOFC.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Materials

$\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  was prepared using polymeric precursor route based on Pechini method [33] which had been used in the preparation of many metal oxides [34,35].  $\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2\cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (99-103%, Alfa),  $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (99%, Merck),  $\text{Cu}(\text{NO}_3)_2\cdot 3\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (99.5 %, Alfa),  $\text{C}_6\text{H}_8\text{O}_7\cdot\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (99.5-100.5%, Merck) and  $\text{C}_2\text{H}_4(\text{OH})_2$  (99.5%, Merck) were used as starting materials.

### 2.2. Sample Preparation

Aqueous cobalt nitrate and calcium nitrate solutions were mixed, considering the desired stoichiometry of the metal oxides in the final ceramic powder. Citric acid (CA) was then added to chelate metal cations at the CA:cations molar ratio of 4:1. After dissolving the CA, ethylene glycol (EG) was added into the solution at CA:EG molar ratio of 1:1.5. The solution was stirred for 30 minutes for homogenization and heated up to  $100^\circ\text{C}$  and kept under stirring until a gel was formed. Then the temperature is increased gradually up to  $300^\circ\text{C}$ . The charred gel is heated in air in a muffle furnace at  $200^\circ\text{C}$  for 2 h and then at  $600^\circ\text{C}$  for 2 h. The resulted black foam is heated at  $800^\circ\text{C}$  for 5 h in air and the resulting powder was milled using a planetary ball mill (Retsch, PM 400) for 15 minutes. Fig. 1 shows the flow chart of the preparation of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ .  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  powder samples ( $x=0.1, 0.2$  and  $0.3$ ) were prepared using the same method.

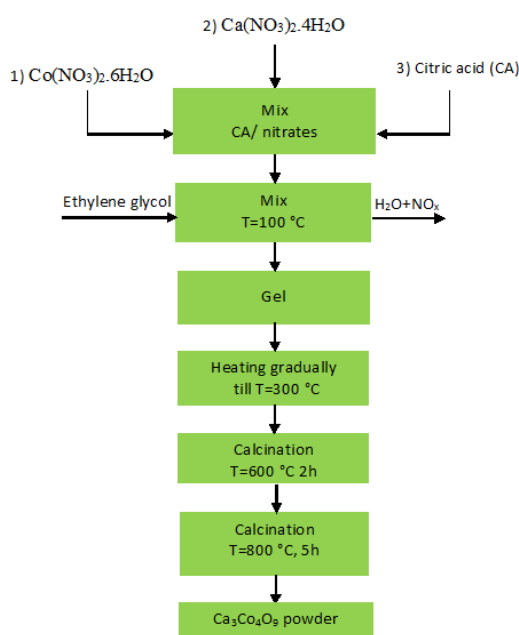


Fig. 1 Flow chart for the preparation of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  powder.

### 2.3. Sample Characterizations

Chemical analysis was performed on the previously prepared samples to adjust the stoichiometry on Agilent 5100 Inductively Coupled Plasma – Optical Emission Spectrometer (ICP-OES) with Synchronous Vertical Dual View (SVDV). It was found that all samples possess the calculated amount of Co, Ca and Cu. The phase compositions for all the prepared samples were identified using X-ray diffraction (XRD) using (Bruker, D4) with Cu-K $\alpha$  radiation at room temperature. The particle size distribution was measured using (Retsch, LA-950). The sinterability was measured using (Netzsch, DIL-402C) dilatometer from room temperature to 800 °C for CCO and from room temperature to 850 °C and to 900 °C for all the prepared samples in air with a heating rate of 5 °C/min. For the preparation of CCO ink, 23.5 wt % of ethyl cellulose-terpineol was added to CCO sample and terpineol was added to adjust the viscosity then the mixture was homogenized by the three roll mill (Exakt 80E, Germany). The same method of ink preparation was applied for all the CCO based samples and for 50wt%  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ -50wt%  $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$  ( $x_0$ -GDC), 50 wt%  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.9}\text{Cu}_{0.1}\text{O}_9$ -50 wt%  $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$  ( $x_{0.1}$ -GDC), 50wt %  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.8}\text{Cu}_{0.2}\text{O}_9$ -50 wt %

$\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$  ( $x_{0.2}$ -GDC) composite cathodes. The ink was screen printed on anode supported cells. The cathodes were dried at 60 °C in air for about 1 h. To study the effect of sintering time on the cathodes microstructures,  $x=0$ -0.1 cathodes were sintered at 500 °C for 1 h then at 900 °C for different sintering time (3, 4 and 5 h).  $X=0.1$ -0.2 cathodes because of stability reasons were sintered at 500 °C for 1 h then 850 °C for different sintering time (2, 3, 4, and 5 h). The cross-section microstructure of all the sintered cathodes was characterized by (Hitachi, TM-1000) scanning electron microscope. Impedance spectroscopy measurements were performed using the Solartron, SI 1260 analyzer in the 1.0 mHz-1.0 MHz domain. The imposed signal amplitude during measurements was verified to be low enough (50 mV) for a zero DC polarization current approximation, with respect to the linearity of the electrical response. Gold electrodes were used as current collectors. Measurements were performed in air from 600 to 800 °C.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. X-ray diffraction

The XRD patterns of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  ( $x=0, 0.1, 0.2$  and  $0.3$ ) samples prepared by pechini method are shown in Fig. 2.  $X=0$ -0.2 samples agree well with the JCPDS (21-139) and the reported data for  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  [36,37] indicating monoclinic phase compounds whereas traces of additional orthorhombic phase of  $\text{CaCuO}_2$  were detected for  $x=0.3$  sample. It can be observed that the diffraction peaks slightly shifted towards lower theta value as the concentration of Cu increases until the  $x=0.2$  sample. The shift in the diffraction peaks might be due to the difference in the ionic radii between Cu ions and Co ions. In the Cu-doped  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  system, the Cu ions might substitute Co ions in  $\text{CoO}_2$  layers or in the  $\text{Ca}_2\text{CoO}_3$  layers. The standard ionic radius of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ion is 0.73 Å whereas the ionic radius is 0.545 Å for  $\text{Co}^{3+}$  ion in  $\text{CoO}_2$  layers and is 0.745 Å for  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  ion in  $\text{Ca}_2\text{CoO}_3$  layers. Accordingly,  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  ions will substitute  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  ions in  $\text{Ca}_2\text{CoO}_3$  layers [30].

The shift in the diffraction peaks of  $x=0.2$  sample is similar to that of  $x=0.3$  sample. This might be attributed to Cu ions substituting Co ions like  $x=0.2$  sample and the excess of Cu ions form  $\text{CaCuO}_2$  phase. The average crystallite size was calculated for all the sample using Scherrer Equation (1):

$$L = \frac{\kappa\lambda}{\beta \cos\theta} \quad (1)$$

Where  $L$  is the average crystallite size,  $\lambda$  is the wavelength of the used x-ray,  $K=0.9$ ,  $\beta$  is the full width at half maximum intensity (FWHM),  $2\theta$  is peak position. The calculated average crystallite size was presented in Table 1. Cu doping resulted in increase in the average crystallite size.

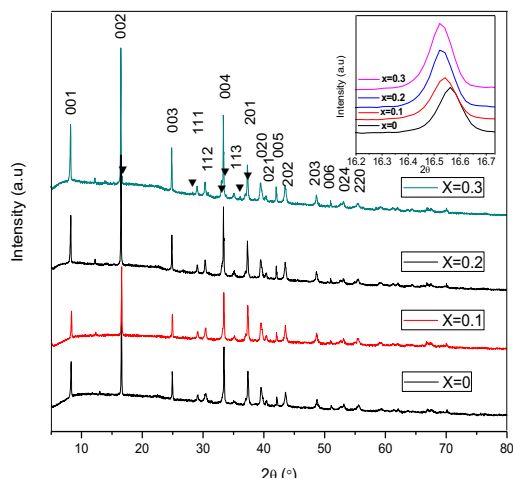


Fig. 2 X-ray diffractograms of the prepared samples. ▼ symbol represents the orthorhombic phase of  $\text{CaCuO}_2$ .

Table 1

The average crystallite size of the prepared samples.

Sample	Average crystallite size (nm)
X=0	71
X=0.1	73
X=0.2	74
X=0.3	75

### 3.2. Sinterability

Due to the XRD-analysis which shows that  $x=0.3$  sample is composed of a mixture of phases, samples  $x=0-0.2$  were selected for further experiments.

The thermal expansion coefficient of both  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  (CCO) and 70 wt % CCO-30 wt % GDC have been reported by Nagasawa et al [6]. Dilution of CCO by 30 mole % GDC slightly shifted its expansion coefficient from  $9-10 \times 10^{-6} \text{ }^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$  to  $10-11 \times 10^{-6} \text{ }^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$  and interestingly, both of them are matched well with that of the standard GDC electrolyte ( $\sim 10 \times 10^{-6} \text{ }^\circ\text{K}^{-1}$ ).

$\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  crystallizes in a monoclinic elementary cell, which is divided in two sublattices:

sublattice H which is the hexagonal  $\text{Cd-I}_2$  type layers  $[\text{CoO}_2]$  and sublattice RS which is the rock salt blocks  $[\text{Ca}_2\text{CoO}_{3-\delta}]$ . Both sublattices have the same lattice parameters  $a$  and  $c$  but differ in the  $b$  lattice parameter where  $b_H$  is  $b$  lattice parameter for sublattice H whereas  $b_{RS}$  is  $b$  lattice parameter for sublattice RS [6]. Nagasawa et al [6] performed HT-XRD experiments to evaluate the anisotropy of the thermal expansion along the distinct crystallographic axes. It is found that the lattice parameters  $a$ ,  $b_H$  and  $c$  increases as the temperature increases till  $775 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . At this temperature, a change of the slope is detected which is attributed to the change in the cobalt spin state. The lattice parameter  $b_{RS}$  is found to be nearly constant as the temperature increases. The cobalt electronic configuration changes from  $\text{Co}^{3+}$  to  $\text{Co}^{4+}$  within the  $\text{Cd-I}_2$  layers as deduced from the change in the slope of  $a$ ,  $b_H$  and  $c$  in addition to the less temperature dependence of  $b_{RS}$ .

The same trend of linear thermal expansion ( $\Delta L/L_0$ ) as a function of temperature detected by Nagasawa et al [6] for CCO was detected for our prepared samples (CCO, Cu-doped CCO samples) when the samples are heated up to  $800 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ ,  $850 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  and  $900 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  where ( $\Delta L/L_0$ ) increases as the temperature increases (Figs.3-4).

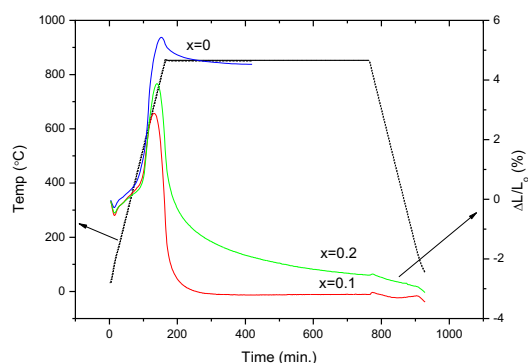


Fig. 3 Sinterability of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  ( $x=0-0.2$  samples) after dilatometry at  $850 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}/10 \text{ h}$  as a function of temperature and time.

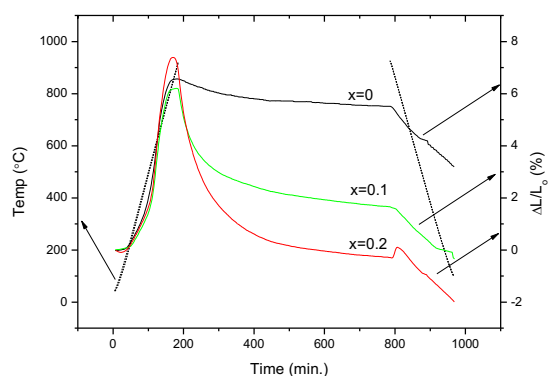


Fig. 4 Sinterability of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  ( $x=0-0.2$  samples) after dilatometry at  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}/10\text{ h}$  as a function of temperature and time.

From Figs. 3-4, it is clear that there is no sinterability shrinkage observed for  $x=0$  sample at  $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  and  $850\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . There is slight improving in the sinterability shrinkage of  $x=0$  sample at  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . This could be attributed to progressive oxygen loss which is in agreement to Oide et al [38] where on heating in air at  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , progressive oxygen loss is detected and  $\delta$  is about 0.01. From Fig. 3 it was found that Cu doping reduces the temperature at which the shrinkage starts to take place and also the shrinkage is higher for Cu-doped samples than the undoped CCO.  $x=0.1$  sample (10 mole % Cu-doped CCO sample), the rate of shrinkage is higher than that of undoped CCO. This might be due to Cu segregates at the grain boundaries and improve the diffusivity of ions increasing the density. No shrinkage was detected for  $x=0.1$  sample after about 300 min. The rate of shrinkage of  $x=0.2$  sample is lower than  $x=0.1$  sample. XRD at room temperature was performed to detect the crystal structure of the samples after dilatometry up to  $850\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  (Fig. 5). No phase transformation or decomposition was detected for all the samples after cooling at room temperature. Better crystallinity was detected for all the samples after dilatometry experiments up to  $850\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ .

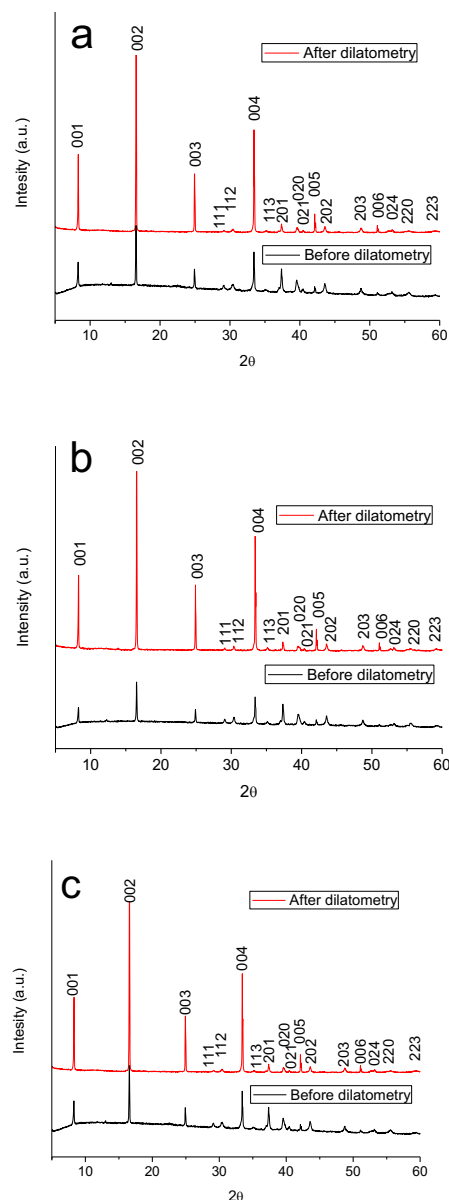


Fig. 5 XRD patterns of a)  $x=0$ , b)  $x=0.1$  and c)  $x=0.2$  samples performed before and after dilatometry tests carried up to  $850\text{ }^\circ\text{C}/10\text{ h}$ .

At  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  (Fig. 4), the rate of shrinkage of the  $x=0.1$  is higher than that of the undoped CCO sample. Moreover, the rate of shrinkage of  $x=0.1$  sample is lower than that of  $x=0.2$ . No phase transformation or decomposition was detected for the undoped CCO or  $x=0.1$  samples after the dilatometry tests (Fig. 6). Unfortunately, the  $x=0.2$  sample decomposed during sintering at  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  where traces of additional phases such as the

rhombohedral phase of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_2\text{O}_6$ , orthorhombic phase of  $\text{Cu}_6\text{O}$ , and hexagonal phase of  $\text{CoO}_{1.92}$  phases were detected (Fig. 7).

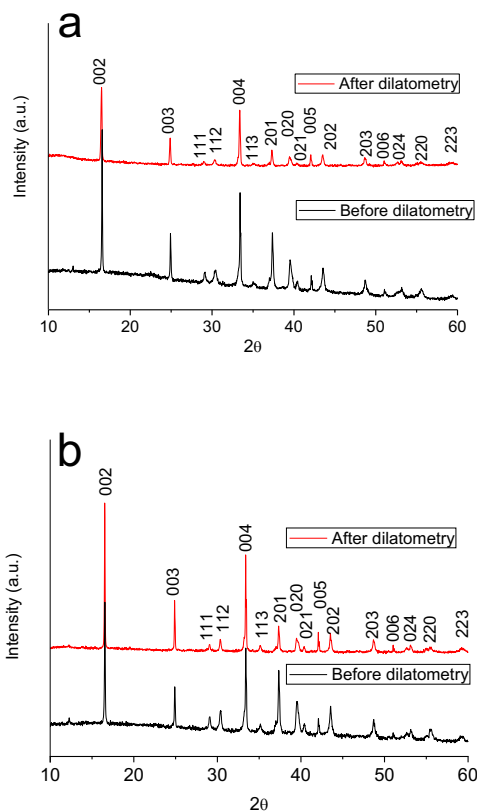


Fig. 6 XRD patterns of a)  $x=0$ , b)  $x=0.1$  samples performed before and after dilatometry tests carried out up to  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}/10\text{ h}$ .

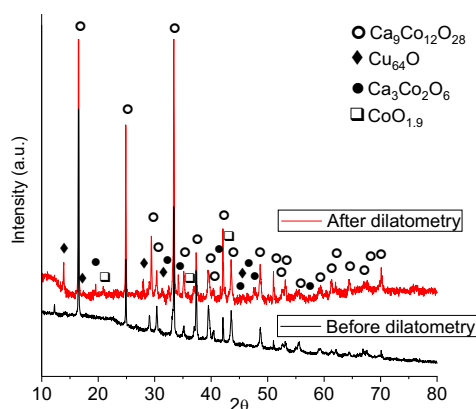


Fig. 7 XRD patterns of  $x=0.2$  sample before and after dilatometry tests up to  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}/10\text{ h}$ .

### 3.3. Particle size distribution

After Pechini's method preparation, it was found that all the particles appeared to have strong agglomeration and there are two particle size distributions observed and some of the grains have size higher than  $100\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  (Fig. 8a). The particle size ( $d_{50}$ ) was determined to be  $9.55\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  for  $x=0$  sample after the Pechini's method of preparation. For improving the screen printability, the powders were ball milled for various durations to reduce the grain size. It was found that after ball milling of the  $x=0$  sample for 2 h in ethanol using a roller bench mill, a unimodal particle size distribution in the range of about 1 to  $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  was observed and the particle size  $d_{50}$  was determined to be  $4.6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  (Fig. 8 b). After ball milling for 8 h, a bimodal distribution was observed and the particle size  $d_{50}$  was determined to be  $3.86\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  (Fig. 8c). After ball milling for 16 and 40 h, there is no valuable reduction in the particle size obtained and the particle size was determined to be  $3.60$  and  $3.68\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  respectively. Table 2 shows the particle size ( $d_{50}$ ) for  $x=0$  sample after pechini method and after ball milling for 2, 8, 16 and 40 h.

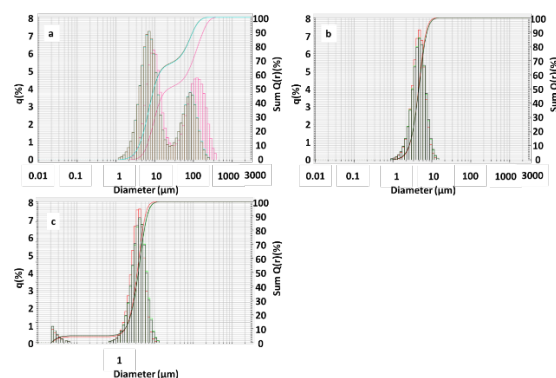


Fig. 8 Particle size distribution of  $x=0$  sample after a) pechini preparation, b) ball milling for 2 h and c) ball milling for 8 h.

Table 2

Particle size of  $x=0$  sample after pechini method and after ball milling for 2, 8, 16 and 40h.

Ball milling time (h)	Particle size $d_{50}$ ( $\mu\text{m}$ )
Without ball milling	9.55
2	4.6
8	3.86
16	3.60
40	3.68



### 3.4. Effect of sintering time and temperature

For the cathodes sintered at  $850^\circ\text{C}$  ( $x=0.1$ - $0.2$  samples), it was found that as the sintering time increases (2, 3, 4 and 5 h), there is no noticeable change in the porosity observed for  $x=0.1$  (Fig. 9 a, b, c and d) and also for  $x=0.2$  sample. For the cathodes sintered at  $900^\circ\text{C}$  ( $x=0$ - $0.1$ A samples), it was found that as the sintering time increases (3, 4 and 5 h) there is no noticeable change in the porosity observed. Fig. 10 (a, b, c and d) shows the SEM images of the cross sections of cathodes sintered at  $500^\circ\text{C}$  for 1 h and then for 3 h at  $850^\circ\text{C}$ . Fig. 11 (a, b, c and d) shows the SEM images of the cross sections of cathodes sintered at  $500^\circ\text{C}$  for 1 h and then for 3 h at  $900^\circ\text{C}$ . For all the  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  cathodes, the cathodes have homogeneous microstructure. The adhesion of the cathode on the anode supported cell is correct. In the mixed ionic and the electronic conductors, the electrode's reactivity could be improved by mixing the electrode material with the electrolyte material due to the expansion of a triple phase boundary (TPB) [22]. In this frame, composite cathodes are prepared and reported in Table 3 for studying the microstructure, homogeneity and the adhesion to an anode supported cell. From Fig.10 c and d and Fig.11 c, and d it is clear that all the composite cathodes have homogeneous microstructure. The contact of the cathode to the anode supported cell looks sufficient and it seems that GDC grains form a continuous network.

Table 3

Name, cathode composition and the thermal treatment for the prepared composite cathodes.

Name	Composition	Thermal treatment
$x_{0.1}$ -GDC	50 wt% $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.9}\text{Cu}_{0.1}\text{O}_9$ -50 wt% $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$	500 for 1h and then $850^\circ\text{C}$ for 3 h
$x_{0.2}$ -GDC	50wt % $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.8}\text{Cu}_{0.2}\text{O}_9$ -50 wt % $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$	500 for 1h and then $850^\circ\text{C}$ for 3 h
$x_0$ -GDC	50wt% $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ -50wt% $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$	500 for 1h and then $900^\circ\text{C}$ for 3 h
$x_{0.1A}$ -GDC	50 wt% $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.9}\text{Cu}_{0.1}\text{O}_9$ -50 wt% $\text{Gd}_{0.2}\text{Ce}_{0.8}\text{O}_2$	500 for 1h and then $900^\circ\text{C}$ for 3 h

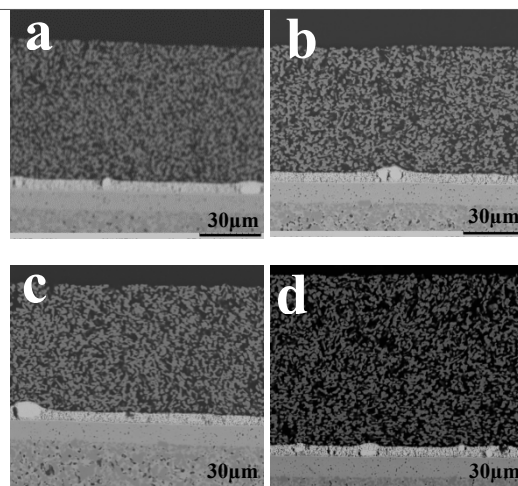


Fig. 9 SEM images of the cross sections of  $x=0.1$  cathodes sintered at  $850^\circ\text{C}$  for a) 2 h, b) 3 h, c) 4 h and d) 5 h.

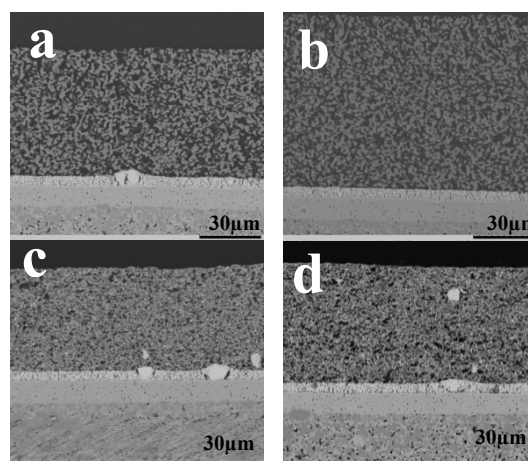


Fig. 10 SEM images of the cross sections of a)  $x=0.1$ , b)  $x=0.2$ , c) ( $x_{0.1}$ -GDC) and d) ( $x_{0.2}$ -GDC) cathodes sintered at  $850^\circ\text{C}$  for 3 h.

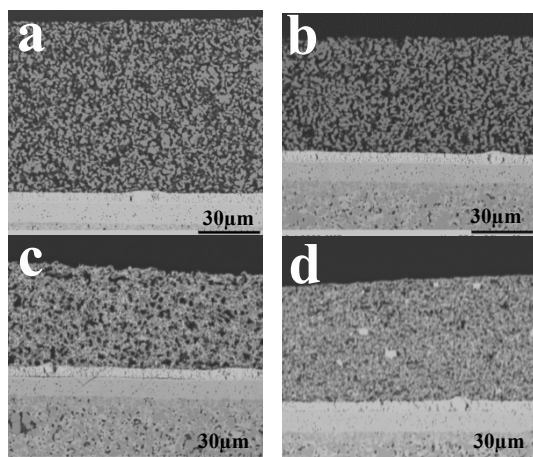


Fig. 11 SEM images of the cross sections of a)  $x=0$ , b)  $x=0.1$ , c)  $(x_0\text{-GDC})$  and d)  $(x_{0.1A}\text{-GDC})$  cathodes sintered at  $900\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  for 3 h.

### 3.5. Electrochemical properties of Cu-CCO-GDC composite cathodes

For the electrochemical performance tests, symmetrical cells of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  and  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathodes were screen printed on screen printed layer of GDC on dense 8 YSZ. The symmetrical cells were then sintered at  $850\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  for 3h. The Fig. 12 shows the typical Nyquist plots of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  and  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathodes in the temperature range of  $600$  to  $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  in air. It is clear that as the temperature increases the overall size of the impedance arcs decreased for both composite cathodes. Fig 13 shows the ASR and the ohmic resistance for the two composite cathodes as a function of temperature in the temperature range from  $600$  to  $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . It is clear that the area specific resistance (ASR) for  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode is lower than that of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$ . The electrochemical performance of the  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode is better than that of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode. This might be due to its relatively better catalytic activity and electrical conductivity. The ohmic resistance of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  is high. This might be due to delamination or presence of secondary phases.

At  $700\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , the ASR of  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  is less than  $0.5\text{ }\Omega\text{ cm}^2$  which is less than the ASR value (about  $1\text{ }\Omega\text{ cm}^2$ ) of hand painted 70 wt% CCO-30 wt % GDC composite cathode prepared by Nagasawa et al [6], the ASR values ( $4.5\text{ }\Omega\text{ cm}^2$  and  $1.5\text{ }\Omega\text{ cm}^2$ ) of screen printed 70 wt% CCO-30 wt % GDC composite cathode with different thickness ( $5\mu\text{m}$  and  $20\mu\text{m}$ ) prepared by Aurelie et al [18] and the ASR values for 30 wt % SDC-70 wt % CCO-Bi0.1 ( $1.39\text{ }\Omega\text{ cm}^2$ ) [22]. Reduction of the ASR value of

$x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  might be attributed to the reduction of the resistivity due to the substitution of Co ions by Cu ions [30] in addition to the thickness and the composition of  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode.  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  is comparable to the previous reported work.

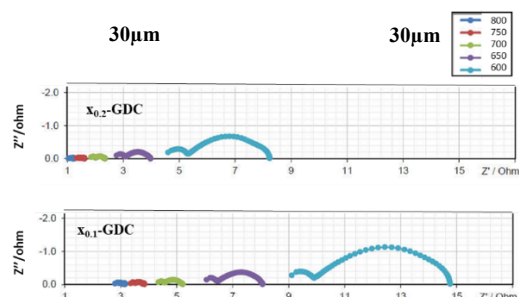


Fig. 12 The impedance spectra of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  and  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  cathodes in air in the temperature range  $600$ – $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ .

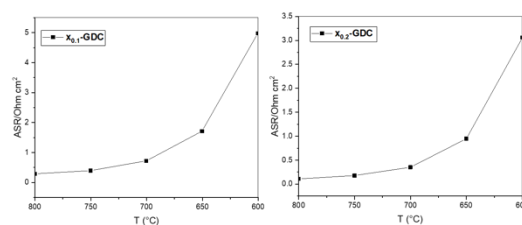


Fig. 13 The ASR and ohmic resistances for  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  and  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  cathodes in air in the temperature range  $600$ – $800\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ .

## 4. Conclusion

The Pechini method was used for the preparation of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{4-x}\text{Cu}_x\text{O}_9$  powders where  $x=0, 0.1, 0.2$  and  $0.3$  with the particular intention of studying the CuO concentration effect on the structural properties, sinterability, and electrochemical performance. All the prepared samples have only the monoclinic phase reported for  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$  (CCO) except the  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_{3.7}\text{Cu}_{0.3}\text{O}_9$  sample have additionally secondary phase as minor. Cu doping improved the sinterability of  $\text{Ca}_3\text{Co}_4\text{O}_9$ . From SEM, all the studied electrodes have a homogeneous microstructure, acceptable porosity and correct adhesion with the anode supported cell. The  $x_{0.2}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode is better than that of  $x_{0.1}\text{-GDC}$  composite cathode.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.



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