

Influence of Deposition of rGO-TiO₂ and rGO-SiO₂ Films Order on the Properties of Electron Transport Layers

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The titanium dioxide (TiO₂) film has been the first consideration of the electron transport layer (ETL) production for perovskite solar cells (PSCs) using a dip procedure. In which TiO₂ layer has outstanding properties like the potential of injecting electrons between layers and stability. However, the intrinsic free electrons lost still happen on the ETL. To enhance the electrical properties of ETL, rGO was incorporated into TiO₂ (Tr) and SiO₂ (Sr), where this Sr layer is another ETL layer to form an electron transport dual-layer through optimized order deposition. In this work, the conductivity values of 4 different conditions were evaluated to select the suitable ordered fabrication of a dual-layer. Encouraging, the Tr/Sr dual-layer along with using duration in dipping step (denoted as Tr/(Sr+dip)), reaching the changing of the band gap energy (E_g), and larger grain size gained up to 15.95 nm, this certain reason might significantly ascribe boosting conductivity of ETL gained up to 604×10^{-4} S/cm, including evidence from the reduced strain in the ETL lattice to 0.053. Eventually, this work revealed that the synergistic production of TiO₂ and SiO₂, with further incorporation of rGO into each ETL on a dual-layer, enables enhanced electrical properties, which is beneficial to the improvement of solar application quality in the future.

Keywords: titanium dioxide, silicon dioxide, reduced graphene oxide, conductivity, strain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Perovskite solar cells (PSCs) have been widely researched to develop the photovoltaic field. Typically, the PSCs consist mainly of an n-type semiconductor layer, also known as the electron transport layer (ETL), an intrinsic layer (i-type or perovskite layer), and a p-type semiconductor layer, also known as the hole transport layer (HTL) [1]. Expectation of optimization of PSCs performance has been studied with several technologies, improvements on ETL to generate electrons and enhance electron transport on the perovskite device, particularly [2]. To induce the ETL on the PSC, attaining a low resistance route of electron mobility or high charge mobility is required due as this layer is close to the electrode (e.g., gold (Au), silver (Ag), aluminum (Al), indium-doped tin oxide (ITO), fluoride-doped tin oxide (FTO), and so on), and the perovskite layer [3]. Furthermore, the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) of ETL should be close to the LUMO of the perovskite layer and the electrode to decrease electron-hole pair recombination, thereby reinforcing charge transfer, which is called energy level matching [4]. Several researchers refer to the versatility of ETLs, these of tungsten disulfide (WS₂), cuprous oxide (Cu₂O), ceric dioxide (CeO₂), indium-gallium-zinc-oxide (IGZO), PCBM, titanium dioxide (TiO₂), tin dioxide (SnO₂), zinc oxide (ZnO), nickel oxide (NiO), etc. These electron transport materials are extensively studied to garner a higher quality of ETLs, which leads to improved power conversion efficiency (PCE) on PSCs [5]. Specifically, titanium dioxide (TiO₂) has been applied as ETL in PSCs, which has been widely reported and studied by many research groups, due

to the critical merits of TiO₂ thin films, for example, increasing the injection of electrons between layers, enhancing stability, reducing reflection, and improving light absorption [6, 7]. Conversely, the electrical properties of TiO₂ film still have a problem involving the intrinsic free electrons lost, leading to the conductivity being mitigated to less than 10^{-7} S/cm at room temperature for pristine TiO₂ film [8]. To address the low conductivity in a TiO₂ film, silicon dioxide (SiO₂) is introduced as another kind of ETL to synergize with TiO₂ to form a dual-layer ETL film for enhancing conductivity in this work [9]. Since SiO₂ has a low refractive index similar to TiO₂ and acts as an ETL when doped with certain significant material, it synergizes with TiO₂ through suitable energy level matching. Furthermore, the SiO₂ layer acts as a buffer layer or passivation layer to resist reaction with the next layer fabrication [10]. The optical property of the TiO₂ layer can show absorption of the phonon energy in the wavelength range from 290 to 400 nm [11], while the absorption of the phonon for a SiO₂ layer is in the range of 337 to 341 nm [12]. Nevertheless, the electrical properties of dual layers between TiO₂ and SiO₂ might have flaws due to the low electric conductivity of $< 10^{-7}$ S/cm on the pristine SiO₂ layer still appearing [13]. Consequently, a suitably arranged deposition for a dual-layer fabrication was further required to improve conductivity. Besides, the reduced graphene oxide (rGO) is incorporated into a dual-layer to enhance the conductivity property [14]. Due to rGO having the unique potential to suppress the coupling of electron and hole, leading to enabling boosting the electrical properties by using incorporating it into the main materials [15].

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Preparation of rGO-incorporated ETL on the fluoride-doped tin oxide (FTO) glass substrates has been suggested using abundant approaches, such as spin coating, sol-gel, spraying, evaporation, dipping, chemical bath deposition (CBD), etc. [16]. In the example case, the production of an ETL via spin coating has been reported to not be sufficient for obtaining a uniform film surface when compared with the dipping method, affecting the reduced electrical conductivity property [17].

Thus, the dip coating is selected as a facilitating method for fabricating ETL and an effortless process for covering a substrate of $1 \times 1 \text{ cm}^2$. In this work, the order of deposition of rGO-incorporated TiO_2 and SiO_2 was assessed within the same duration in the dipping process to determine the optimal specimen for producing a dual layer on ETL.

The investigations of all specimens have been considered in the fields of optical properties, electrical properties, and morphological properties using a ultraviolet-visible (UV-Vis) spectrophotometer, a Hall-effect equipment, and an X-ray diffraction (XRD) technique, respectively [18].

2. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

2.1. Preparation of ETLs

Fluoride-doped tin oxide (FTO, TEC7, 7 ohm/sq) glass substrate was cleaned with deionized (DI) water, acetone (merck, purity $\geq 99.5\%$), and ethanol (merck, purity $\geq 99.9\%$), respectively, before being used as a substrate for depositing ETLs. TiO_2 (titanium (IV) oxide, aerioxide (R) P25, purity $\geq 99.5\%$) and SiO_2 (nanopowder, amorphous, purity $> 98.5\%$) powders were dispersed in 1 m of ethanol with the weights of $7.98 \times 10^{-2} \text{ g}$ and $6.09 \times 10^{-2} \text{ g}$, respectively. After incorporating rGO into the TiO_2 and SiO_2 solutions, they are designated as Tr and Sr, respectively. In this work, 4 different conditions for ETL fabrication were evaluated by analyzing the sequence of deposition on the FTO glass substrate with duration of 60 seconds in the dipping step (marked as dip) and without duration in the dipping step for both a single layer and a dual-layer, wherein a single layer referred to a Tr and Tr+dip layer, and a dual-layer referred to Tr followed by Sr (marked as Tr/Sr), and Tr followed by Sr+dip (marked as Tr/(Sr+dip)), respectively, as illustrated in Fig. 1.

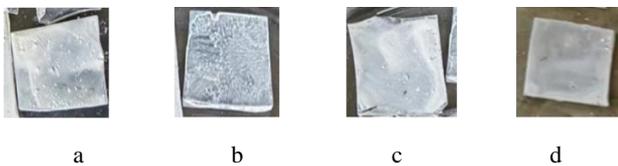


Fig. 1. The 4 different real experiment specimens: a–Tr; b–Tr + dip; c– Tr/Sr; d– Tr/(Sr + dip)

Actually, these 4 different conditions have been selected and considered, because without flakiness, breakage, and peeling of ETL on FTO. After the dipping step was finished, specimens were placed on a hot plate at 100°C for 10 minutes to remove residual solvent, and then moved to a heat furnace at 500°C for 60 minutes to form ETL. Lastly, keep all samples out of the furnace to cool down to room temperature, as shown in Fig. 2.

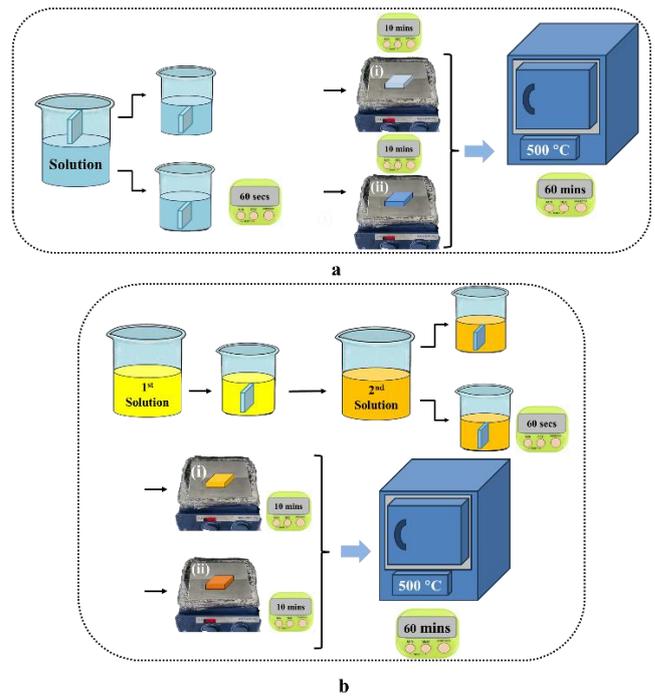


Fig. 2. The illustration of ETL fabrication by the dipping method for: a–a single layer: i–Tr; ii–Tr + dip; b–a dual-layer: i–Tr/Sr; ii–Tr/(Sr + dip)

2.2. Characterization of ETL

The elucidation of the ETL properties can be presented using various techniques. For example, the optical property was observed by determining the light absorption edge using the UV-vis spectrophotometer (Genesys 50/150/180). The electrical property of a sample size of $1 \times 1 \text{ cm}^2$ was evaluated with key parameters, such as conductivity (σ), resistivity (ρ), charge mobility (n), and charge carrier concentration (μ), which was implied from the Hall Effect measurement (Linseis HCS 1) at room temperature, ultimately, the identify and analyze phases of each ETL were achieved using the measurement of the XRD technique (the Rigaku X-ray diffraction meter Miniflex600, with Cu target, the wavelength (λ) of 1.54 \AA , and 2θ is in the range of 10° to 60°).

2.3. Evaluation of ETL properties

2.3.1. The band gap energy (E_g) calculation

The light absorption edge from the light transmission graph can be calculated to assess the band gap energy (E_g) from the equation of $E_g = hc/\lambda$, where h is Planck's constant of $6.63 \times 10^{-34} \text{ J}\cdot\text{s}$, c is defined as the light speed of $3 \times 10^8 \text{ m/s}$, and λ is the wavelength [19].

2.3.2. The crucial parameters to explain the electrical property

The electrical property is a pivotal key factor to indicate the ETL performance, regarding parameters like conductivity (σ), charge mobility (n), resistivity (ρ), and charge concentration (μ). These significant parameters are obtained using the Hall-effect equipment. Whereby the σ is estimated using the following fundamental formula: $\sigma = (L/V) \cdot (I/A)$, where V is defined as the voltage, I is referred

to as the distance between each probe (in this work, the specimen has a size of $1 \times 1 \text{ cm}^2$), and A is the area of the cross-section of the specimen [20]. In addition, the σ can be calculated from the equation: $\sigma=1/\rho=R_H A/L$, where R_H is the sheet resistance [21].

2.3.3. The grain size and lattice distortion

The information from an XRD measurement can be used to calculate the grain size (D) of the material [22]. The computation of the D can be evaluated from relation between the full width at half maximum of the diffraction peak (FWHM, denoted as B), the Scherrer's constant of 0.9 (K), the wavelength of 0.15406 nm (λ), and the half value from the 2θ peak position using the data from the XRD measurement (θ), is given by Debye Scherrer's equation: $D = K\lambda/B\cos\theta$ [23]. Additionally, the data set in XRD enables speculation of strain (ε) in the crystal lattice using the Williamson-Hall formula: $\varepsilon = (\beta\cos\theta)/(4\sin\theta)$, where β is the peak broadening [24].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The optical properties of 4 different specimens were measured in the range of 300–800 nm, as depicted in Fig. 3 a. Observed that the intensity of the light transmission graphs was reduced, and the E_g was also decreased after adding rGO. Generally, the band gaps of pristine TiO_2 and SiO_2 layers are reported to be in the ranges of 3.20–4.04 eV and 3.85–8.30 eV, respectively [25]. In this work, the E_g of Tr, Tr + dip, Tr/Sr, and Tr/(Sr + dip) were obtained at 3.43 eV, 3.31 eV, 3.28 eV, and 3.25 eV, respectively, as depicted in Fig. 3 b. Herein, the changing E_g might be influenced by the effect of the ordering deposition of ETL and by incorporating rGO into ETL.

Moreover, the pivotal parameter results enable the justification of the electrical properties of 4 different specimens, like the conductivity (σ), resistivity (ρ), mobility (n), charge concentration (μ), as illustrated in Fig. 4. To clarify the pivotal parameters derived from the Hall effect measurement at room temperature for all specimens, as tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Pivotal parameters for the evaluation of the electrical properties at room temperature using the Hall effect equipment

Condition	$\sigma \times 10^{-4}$, S/cm	$\rho \times 10^3$, Ω/cm	$n \times 10^{22}$, $\text{cm}^2/\text{V}\cdot\text{s}$	$\mu \times 10^{14}$, $1/\text{cm}^3$
T	6.74	1.48	0.36	1.16
Tr	87.00	0.12	3.91	4.14
Tr + dip	188.00	0.18	5.63	7.99
Tr/Sr	44.30	0.23	1.36	2.04
Tr/(Sr + dip)	604.00	0.02	9.09	18.3

Either the incorporation of rGO in the TiO_2 and SiO_2 layers or the organization of the order of fabrication of ETL are significantly affected the σ , leading to the improvement of the electrical properties of the ETLs. For example, the σ value of the TiO_2 and SiO_2 layers can be improved after adding rGO by three orders when compared to the σ value of both layers, which have been reported before by certain research groups to be approximately 10^{-7} S/cm [8, 13]. Also, the composite of rGO into TiO_2 has been suggested to

reinforce σ , reaching up to 188.3×10^{-4} S/cm using spin coating techniques [26].

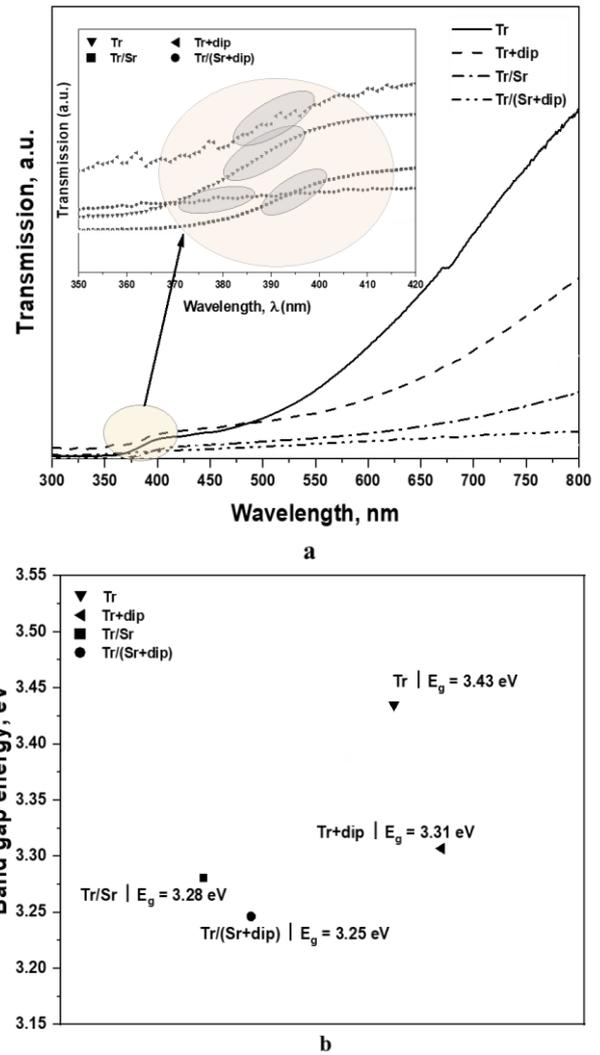


Fig. 3. a—the transmission graphs of 4 different conditions. The inset depicts the range of the light absorption edge (marked with an ellipse) that is used to calculate the E_g ; b—the presentation of the E_g of all specimens

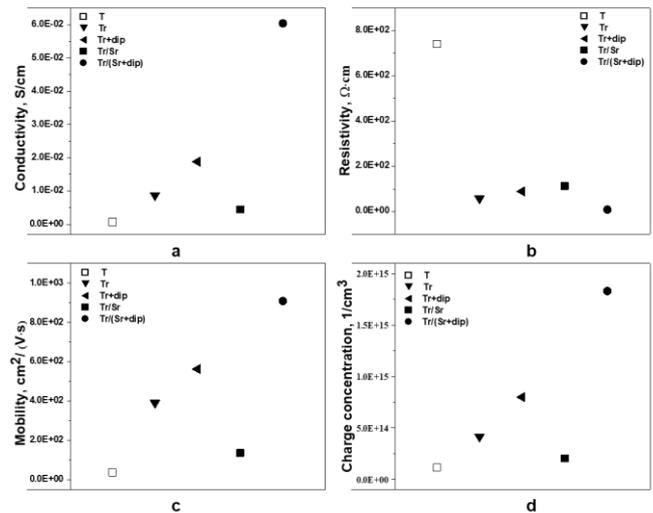


Fig. 4. The electrical parameters for 4 different specimens and the T layer: a—conductivity; b—resistivity; c—mobility; d—charge concentration

While the management of the sequential deposition of ETLs in this work, along with adding rGO into ETL, can boost the conductivity of ETLs up to 604×10^{-4} S/cm for the production of a dual-layer in the condition of the Tr/(Sr + dip) using the dipping approach. To confirm this wonderful result, the investigations of morphology for these specimens should be scrutinized.

Testing the morphology of these specimens can be analyzed using the XRD technique, and evaluating the significant 2θ . In this work, critical 2θ of $25.9^\circ(101)$, $38.3^\circ(004)$, $48.6^\circ(200)$, $52.0^\circ(105)$, and $62.0^\circ(204)$ were ascertained and are used for the determination of the gain size (D), as demonstrated in Fig. 5 [27].

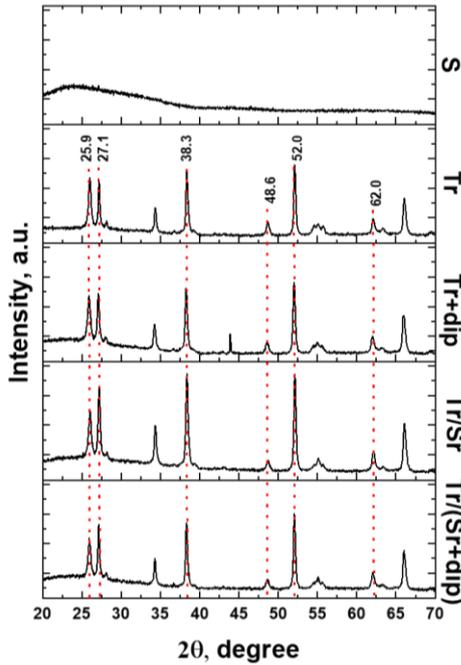


Fig. 5. The XRD pattern for S, Tr, Tr+dip, Tr/Sr, and Tr/(Sr + dip) layers

Among all the selected samples, different-width peaks have been observed, indicating that the morphology of ETL has been affected by strategies of ordered deposition of each ETL and the incorporation of rGO into ETL. The estimations of D for both rGO-doped single layer and dual-layer were noticed as 6.02 ± 0.15 nm for Tr, 15.13 ± 0.39 nm for Tr + dip, 11.67 ± 0.22 nm for Tr/Sr, and 15.95 ± 0.06 nm for Tr/(Sr + dip), respectively, as presented in Fig. 6 a.

Furthermore, the lattice distortion, as known strain in the lattice (ε), is used to elucidate the changed morphology of ETL through using information from the XRD pattern. Observed that the ε values are significantly changed after fabricating suitable dual-layer and composited rGO into ETL, as demonstrated in Fig. 6 b. Especially, the lowest ε of 0.053 for the Tr/(Sr + dip) was satisfactorily attained, which further significantly corresponds to the larger grain size.

Thus, the influence of suitable ordered deposition of dual layer and rGO incorporation into each ETL has led to a larger grain size and reduced ε , which has facilitated electron drift. A surprisingly higher conductivity was achieved through a straightforward electron transport

conductive pathway, resulting in the best quality of electrical properties in this study.

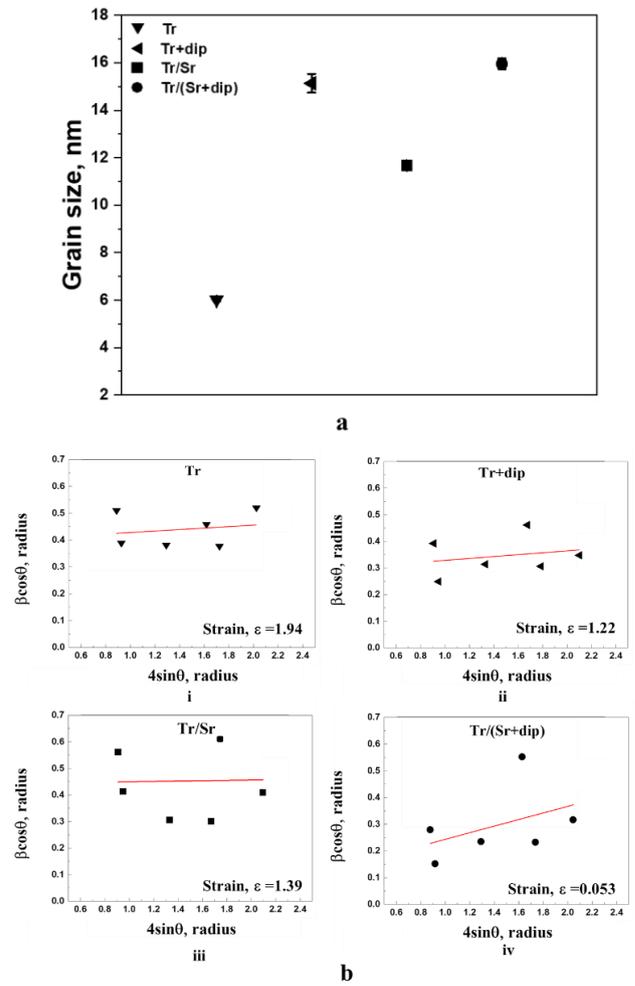


Fig. 6. a – the grain size of all specimens; b – the strain in the lattice: i – Tr; ii – Tr + dip; iii – Tr/Sr; iv – Tr/(Sr + dip)

4. CONCLUSIONS

In brief, the elevated potential of the ETL in this work is comprised of two strategies: 1) a dual layer using optimization of arranged deposition of each ETL, and 2) adding rGO into the ETL. These strategies not only enhanced the quality of the ETL, but the lattice morphology of the ETL has also undergone significant changes.

The Hall-effect measurement enables the revelation and extraction of the critical parameters of 4 different specimens in this experiment. The optimized conductivity has been validated at 604×10^{-4} S/cm, corresponding to a declined strain of 0.053 for the Tr/(Sr + dip) dual-layer, indicating that the ETL was improved when compared with the pristine ETL. Ultimately, a Tr/(Sr + dip) dual-layer on ETL coating fabrication using the ordered dipping process and doping with rGO was successfully attained, which can aid in boosting solar cells or building materials in the future.

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