Characterization of Nanorods Obtained by Mixing 20%SnO₂ + 80% In₂O₃ Thin Films Prepared by Sol-Gel Method

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Abstract: In this work a mixing SnO₂ and In₂O₃ precursors solutions were prepared by sol-gel method. About this mixture, thin films were elaborated by dip coating and were followed by annealing in air. Nanorods were obtained and were appeared for 20% SnO₂ + 80% In₂O₃ of mixture. The morphology composition and structure layers were studied by scanning electron microscopy and X ray diffraction. The optical transmission of these films is in the order of (up to 95%), with a band gap of 3.27eV. The best film showed a significant decrease of its square resistance $R_\square$ (down to 12 $\Omega/\square$). This result is an excellent value obtained by sol-gel method.

Keywords: In₂O₃, SnO₂, thins films, square resistance, morphological properties, XRD analysis, AFM images

1. Introduction

As an important Transparent conducting oxides (TCO), Indium oxide (In₂O₃) and SnO₂ were attracted considerable attention due to their special optical and electrical properties. Indium oxide (In₂O₃) has attracted considerable attention because of its high electron affinity and increasingly extensive application in solar cells [1]-[4], sensors [5], nanoscale transistors [6], and flat –panel display materials [7]. More recently, there has been considerable attention on the synthesis of In₂O₃ nanostructures in order to endow nanomaterials with additional properties or potential application [8]. On the other hand, tin oxide (SnO₂) as a n-type semiconductor, have a variety of application as optical filters, heat deflectors, high–stability resistors, covering layers for fiber optical systems, switches, detecting elements of ecological monitoring sensors measuring the concentration of toxic [9] and explosive gases[10]-[13], transparent electrodes [14]-[15].

To grow In₂O₃ and SnO₂ thins films several techniques have been used such as cathode sputtering [16]-[17], canon ray evaporation [18], Pulverization with subsequent pyrolysis [19], laser pulse evaporation [20]-[21] and sol-gel deposition [22]-[23].

In the present work, we report the synthesis and characterization of films obtained by mixture of two solutions of In₂O₃ and SnO₂.

2. Experimental

(100-x)% SnO₂+ x %In₂O₃ precursors mixture was prepared using sol-gel method where x is 0, 20, 40 and 80 of mixture. SnO₂ was prepared by dissolving 3.4g of tin chloride dihexahydrate (SnCl₂, 2H₂O) in 42.5 ml of ethanol and 7.5ml of acetic acid. The solution was stirred at 60°C for 2h to yield a clear yellow and homogeneous solution, the solution was stored 72h before used. InCl₃ was prepared by dissolving 1.59g indium chloride (InCl₃) in 18 ml of acetyl acetone (CH₃CH₂COCH₃), the solution was stirred at 80°C for 12h to yield a clear brown solution.

Both solutions were mixed with different percentage of In₂O₃ ranging from 0%, to 80%, under magnetically stirring for 10 min at room temperature to obtain a homogenous sol; a glass substrate was dipped in the solution. The deposited films were dried at 150°C for 10min.

The dip coating and drying processes were repeated twice to deposit relatively thick thin films. Finally, the annealing temperature was elevated to 500°C for 1 hour.

Surface morphology of prepared thin films was investigated using scanning electron microscopy (SEM) (JEOL JSM 7001F field emission) and Atomic force microscopy (AFM) (PACIFIC NANOTECHNOLOGY). X ray diffraction (XRD) (BRUKER – AXS D8) spectrum was recorded to examine the crystal structure.

The optical property was examined by UV-VIS spectrometer (Hitach V3000). The index factor was determined by fitting method [24].

3. Results and Discussions

The XRD patterns of synthesized SnO₂-In₂O₃ thin films calcined at 500°C for 1h are showing in Fig. 1. The XRD patterns of all samples shows the dominant peaks which represent the indices of (110) and (101) planes, respectively, correspond to rutile SnO2 phase (ASTM file N° : 6-416). The average crystallite size was found to be 83.37nm. Moreover, it can be observed that the peak intensities progressively decrease with increasing In₂O₃ precursor percentage, possibly indicating that an increase in the In₂O₃ percentage retards the crystallization process of the SnO₂ [25]. When the SnO₂ oxide was mixing with 40% and 80% of In₂O₃ percentage, the two phases appear (Fig. 1c and Fig. 1d, the first one with peaks appearing to indices of (222), (200) and (211) planes corresponding to the cubic In₂O₃ phase (JCPDS...
Card N° 06-0416) [26], and the second of rutile SnO₂; these results indicate that the incorporation of In₂O₃ precursor percentage delay rutile SnO₂ phase formation. For 80% of In₂O₃, a separation of the In₂O₃ phase was observed with average crystallite size about 83.98 nm. This implies that as long as the In₂O₃ phase is preserved and is significantly separated from the SnO₂-In₂O₃ mixed oxides phase, therefore an excess of In₂O₃ inside the matrix of the rutile SnO₂ phase.

Fig. 1: XRD pattern of (a) pure SnO₂, (b) 80%SnO₂+20% In₂O₃, (c) 60%SnO₂+40% In₂O₃ and (d) 20%SnO₂+80% In₂O₃ films annealed at 500°C

Fig. 2 shows the topography of the SnO₂- In₂O₃ thin films deposited at room temperature, with different In₂O₃ precursor percentage. Fig. 2a shows granular microstructure containing regular spherical particles of SnO₂, the roughness parameter Rms is respectively 20.79 nm. Fig. 2b shows an amorphous structure; Fig. 2c shows image of 60% SnO₂ + 40%In₂O₃ film. We note the coexistence of two morphologies with different particles sizes smaller one and the biggest one, the morphology changes significantly with the Indium oxide percentage.

Fig. 2d shows irregular spherical particles corresponding to 20%SnO₂+80% In₂O₃ film, it is rougher and has a large active surface area, with roughness parameter Rms 37.46 nm. The average roughness increases with increasing the In₂O₃ precursor percentage. In the same way, it has been reported that the grain size enlargement is related with the increase of the film thickness [27].

The SEM images of the synthesized SnO₂-In₂O₃ mixed precursors oxides is exemplified in Fig. 3. The SEM image shows the quite uniform-size particles of the pure SnO₂ Fig. 3A in the form of aggregated clusters consisting of many nanoparticles. Fig. 3B shows an amorphous structure without particle. When considering the 20%SnO₂+80%In₂O₃ mixed oxide it can be clearly seen that higher percentage of In₂O₃ led to nanorods formation with 200 nm length and 20nm width without direction and with randomly oriented as expected.

Fig. 3C and Fig. 3D, shows morphology surface at θ=35 °. Once again we can conclude that the particle shape is strongly affected by In₂O₃ mixture percentage.
Figure 3: SEM images of SnO$_2$-In$_2$O$_3$ mixture, (A) pure SnO$_2$, (B) 80%SnO$_2$+20%In$_2$O$_3$, (C) 20%SnO$_2$ + 80% In$_2$O$_3$ (X9500), (D) and (E) Nanorods.

4. Electrical Properties

Fig. 4 shows Electrical properties measurement was done by four probe method, In order to determine square resistance $R$ ($\Omega/\square$) of SnO$_2$-In$_2$O$_3$ thin films. Square resistance $R$ ($\Omega/\square$) of the pure SnO$_2$ films, gives immediately 538.42 ($\Omega/\square$). By addition of 40 % In$_2$O$_3$ ratio to SnO$_2$ leads to significant resistance drop about 284 ($\Omega/\square$). With 80% of In$_2$O$_3$, specific resistance decrease in about 9-10 orders of magnitude, reaching 11.73 ($\Omega/\square$). This low value is strongly performed by increasing the number of charge carriers (electrons) from donors In$^{3+}$ ions incorporated in the interstitial or substitutional sites of Sn$^{2+}$ cation and the presence of nanorods (confirmed by SEM).
5. Optical Properties

Fig. 5 shows the Uv-Vis transmission spectra of SnO₂-In₂O₃ thin films. The films annealed at 500°C for 1 h, with 0%, 20%, 40%, and 80% In₂O₃ mixture exhibit a transmission of 95% in the visible region for all films. It is found that transmission increases with increasing concentration of In₂O₃ mixture. Amorphous film obtained for a mixture of 20% In₂O₃ presents a most transmission and thus exceeds the transmission of pure SnO₂.

Band gap (Eg) of these films has been calculated from transmission spectra using Tauc’s formula [28]:
\[
\alpha h\nu = A (h\nu - E_g)^{1/2}
\]

In which α is the absorption coefficient, hν is the photon energy, and A is constant related to the material. Plot of \((αh\nu)^2\) vs (hν) for SnO₂-In₂O₃ thin films Fig. 5b. It is found that \((E_g)\) decreases with changing the mixture of In₂O₃.

The estimated optical band gap for the pure SnO₂, 40% and 80% of films are found to be 3.77 eV, 3.6 eV and 3.27 eV respectively, which could be assigned due to change in the grains shape or (and) size. The refractive index n and the films thickness t are fitted according to Sellmeier relationship [24], given by:
\[
n(\lambda) = \left( A_n + \frac{B_n\lambda^2}{\lambda^2 - C_n^2} \right)^{1/2}
\]

Where Aₙ, Bₙ, and Cₙ are fitting parameters. The refractive index n was found to be 2.26, 1.45, 1.75, and 2.01 for the 0%, 20%, 40% and 80% of In₂O₃ percentage respectively, the value of the refractive index of SnO₂ seems to be in good agreement with earlier results of [29].

6. Conclusion

In this paper, ITO thin films were elaborated by sol-gel Dip-Coating process. XRD spectra indicate that pure SnO₂ is formed with rutile structure. It is found that addition of 80% Indium-oxide modify the structure of tin-oxide from nanoparticles to nanorods, those nanorods are without orientation. It was found that varying Indium-oxide concentration strongly affects electrical properties, square resistance achieved a value 11.73 (Ω/□), this value has never been obtained by sol gel method. The Uv-Vis spectra show that transmission is about 95% in the visible region for all films.
References