

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**SYNTHESIS OF 3D HYDROGEL  
GRAPHENE QUANTUM DOTS  
NANOCOMPOSITES MODIFIED  
FIBRE OPTIC FOR BIOSENSORS  
APPLICATION**

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, a novel fibre optic sensor towards biosensing application was developed by introducing polymeric supporting membranes of hybrid hydrogels (HH) and nanomaterials of graphene quantum dots (GQDs) as coating materials. HH was formed by introducing chitosan (CH) as an additive that would further aid in introducing the amide group that was lacking in agarose (AG) hydrogel. GQDs were synthesised using a chemical reduction method transforming the precursor graphene oxide (GO) into GQDs nanostructures. GO was synthesised prior to that using a modified Hummers' method. GQDs were optimised by varying the parameters in the chemical reduction method with the optimum condition for synthesis  $\sim 2$  nm of GQDs was obtained by using 25  $\mu$ L of dispersed in 5 mL of sulfuric acid, 0.014 g of potassium permanganate and 0.1 mL of hydrogen peroxide. The optimum GQDs were found to be having an average size of  $2.481 \pm 0.649$  nm as confirmed by transmission electron microscopy, subtle x-ray diffraction peak at around  $2\theta=26^\circ$ , loaded with hydroxyl (OH), carbonyl (C=O) and carbon bonds found from Fourier transform infrared analysis reflect that GQDs have many oxygenated functional groups making them soluble in water and stable fluorescence stability for up to 90 days with a quantum yield of 48%. A conventional fibre optic cable was used and exposed its core region made from silica by using mechanical etching via a fibre optic cable stripper. Before that, signal validation for the uncladded region (1, 2 and 3 cm) was performed with 2 cm of uncladded and was found to give the signal of 1660.74 a.u. and efficient uncladded length to be spliced. The fibre optic core coated HH was then let to be coated with the optimum coating thickness of HH on fibre optic was found at  $122.18 \pm 0.3$   $\mu$ m by 2% total concentration of HH (2% w/v of AG with 2% v/v of CH) with confirmation by signal validation from the spectrometer with laser as a light source. After that, the coated HH (2% w/v of AG with 2% v/v of CH) probe was further coated with 2 nm GQDs via the drop-cast method and let to dry overnight. In enhancing the surface binding between the coating materials to the sensor probe, the unclad probe was further treated with sodium hydroxide, chromic acid, silane or ethanol prior coated to HH-GQDs. These coated probes were further tested for their sensing performance in the detection of refractive index (RI) changes ( $\Delta n$ ) using glycerol solutions. Fibre optic pre-treated with chromic acid coated to HH-GQDs was found to obtain the lowest baseline error of 0.026% which improves the adhesive force between HH and the fibre optic core surface. The sensitivity was then calculated at  $17358.0 \pm 0.21$  RIU<sup>-1</sup> with a coefficient of determination;  $R^2$  of 0.94. As a proof of concept for biosensor applications, the protein of *streptavidin* (0.1 mg/mL) was successfully immobilised by incubation for 15 minutes on the fibre optic core treated with chromic acid and coated with HH-GQDs. 10 mg/mL of *bovine serum albumin* (BSA) was used as a blocking agent after incubation for 10 minutes on the HH-GQDs matrix. The sensor was successfully able to detect the *biotin* (0.1 mg/mL) after incubation for 15 minutes and washing with PBS. The binding affinity in respect of the change in peak wavelength ( $\Delta \lambda$ ) of HH-GQDs matrix to the protein was measured at  $90.445$  a.u.nm<sup>-1</sup> with  $R^2$  of 0.933. The sensor also shows excellent specificity, hence holding a bright potential as a highly sensitive biosensor.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>AUTHOR'S DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>xviii</b>
<b>LIST OF SYMBOLS</b>	<b>xxi</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>23</b>
1.1 Research Background	23
1.2 Problem Statement	24
1.3 Objectives	26
1.4 Significance of Study	27
<b>CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>28</b>
2.1 Introduction	28
2.2 Sensing material for fibre optic sensors	29
2.2.1 Graphene	29
2.2.2 GO as a precursor of GQDs	30
2.2.3 GQDs Nanoparticles	33
2.3 Synthesis method of GQDs	42
2.3.1 Top-down strategy	43
2.3.2 Bottom-up strategy	52
2.3.3 Summary	58
2.4 3D polymer networks as supporting sensing medium	58
2.4.1 Chitosan-based hydrogel (CH)	59
2.4.2 Agarose-based hydrogel (AG)	60

2.4.3	Hybridisation of CH-AG hydrogel.	61
2.4.4	Hydrogel in sensing applications	62
2.5	Optical fibre sensors	65
2.5.1	Optical fibre in biosensing applications	67
2.5.2	Sensing materials for fibre optic probe	68
2.5.3	Fibre optic sensors configuration embedded with GQDs	73
2.6	Flow cell-based design for fibre optic biosensor	74
2.7	Summary	77
<b>CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>78</b>
3.1	Introduction	78
3.2	Materials	79
3.3	Phase 1: Synthesis of GQDs	80
3.3.1	Synthesis GO (precursor)	80
3.3.2	Synthesis of GQDs	81
3.3.3	Characterisation of GO and GQDs	82
3.4	Phase 2: Synthesis of hybrid hydrogels (HH)	84
3.4.1	CH stock preparation	84
3.4.2	Synthesis of AG hydrogel	84
3.4.3	Synthesis of HH by varying the amount of CH v/v into AG	85
3.4.4	Characterisation of HH	86
3.5	Phase 3: Fabrication of fibre optic sensor platform with surface treatment and signal validation	86
3.5.1	Fabrication of sensor platform	86
3.5.2	Coating process	87
3.5.3	Sensors Configuration set-up	88
3.5.4	Surface treatment on the sensing probe	89
3.6	Phase 4: Staging design for fibre optic biosensor	90
3.7	Phase 5: Sensitivity and selectivity testing for fundamentals of fibre optic biosensor	91
3.7.1	RI sensitivity	91
3.7.2	Biosensing activities	92