

Short Communication

rGO-Co-MoS₂ Composite as Highly Active Electrocatalysts for Hydrogen Evolution Reaction

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MoS₂, Co-MoS₂ and rGO-Co-MoS₂ were synthesized successfully by a simple hydrothermal method. microstructures and Raman spectra of the samples were investigated by X-ray diffraction analysis and Raman spectroscopy. The result indicate that the peaks at 14.4°, 33.0° and 58.4° may be assigned to (002), (100) and (110) plane of pure MoS₂, respectively. The crystallinity of MoS₂ may be restrained by cobalt doping. D band and G band of amorphous carbon can be seen in the rGO-Co-MoS₂. XPS result indicated that the rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ is mainly consisted of S, Mo, Co, C and O, respectively. The electrochemical performance test results show that rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ presents the lowest overpotentials of 205 mV at a current density of 10 mA cm⁻² and the smallest Tafel slope, indicating cobalt doping and rGO hybrid can improve electrocatalytic activity for HER. In addition, The sample also exhibit good electrocatalytic stability in the acid condition.

Keywords: rGO-Co-MoS₂; Hydrothermal synthesis; Hydrogen evolution reaction;

1. INTRODUCTION

The excessive use of fossil fuels aggravates air pollution and global warming. Therefore, it is increasingly urgent to develop a clean and renewable fossil fuel alternative[1]. In the strategic research of developing alternative energy, building energy infrastructure with hydrogen as the main carrier and

providing cheap and clean energy will become the direction of future efforts [2]. Because water is a rich and renewable hydrogen source, electrolyzed water provides hope for sustainable hydrogen production and technical support for hydrogen energy regeneration. However, the high cost of electrolyzed water limits the industrial application of this technology [3]. In the past few decades, with the increase of population, automobiles and energy appliances, the demand for energy has increased dramatically, resulting in a large consumption of fossil fuels[4]. Hydrogen is the best fuel for the next generation of clean and renewable energy[5]. Electrochemical technology is one of the existing efficient hydrogen production technologies[6-8]. At present, the commercial electrocatalysts for hydrogen production are mainly precious metals such as platinum (Pt), and the development of high-efficiency electrocatalysts composed of abundant elements on earth will significantly reduce the cost of electrocatalysis[9, 10]. In recent years, researchers have developed excellent non noble metal catalysts and achieved fruitful results through breakthroughs in the field of nanoscience and nanotechnology. Among them, molybdenum disulfide is the most representative catalyst in the transition metal sulfide[11]. Because of its unique layered structure and electrochemical activity, its application in the field of electrocatalytic water decomposition has been widely concerned and has been explored as potential alternatives for HER [11-14]. It's called typical Graphene-based materials due to their structure and properties [15-17]. MoS₂ is widely used photocatalytic and electrocatalytic studies of hydrogen evolution reactions (HER) [18].

In this paper, pure MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, and rGO-Co-MoS₂ power were prepared via simple hydrothermal process. The samples were designed as a work electrode and electrocatalytic performance have been tested by the three-electrode electrochemical workstation (CHI660E) in 0.5mol/L H₂SO₄ solution. Compared to MoS₂ and Co-MoS₂ power, the rGO-Co-MoS₂ exhibits superior electrocatalytic performance.

2. EXPERIMENTAL

2.1. Preparation of sample

All chemical reagents with analytical purity were used without further purification. In a typical synthesis of MoS₂, 240mg thioacetamide and 120mg sodium molybdate dehydrate were dissolved in 40 mL of deionized water. Then, the mixed solution was transferred into a 50 mL Teflon-lined stainless steel autoclave, which was maintained at 220 °C for 24 h. After the reaction, the autoclave drops to room temperature. The final products were washed with water and absolute ethanol for several times and dried at 60 °C for 24 h. The Co-MoS₂ sample was synthesized by adding 58mg cobalt nitrate hexahydrate in the process of MoS₂ synthesis. The rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ samples was prepared by adding 5mg, 10mg and 20mg graphene oxide in the preparation of Co-MoS₂ samples, respectively.

2.2. Characterization

The microstructure of samples were measured by means of X-ray diffraction analysis (XRD, TD-3500) with the CuK α radiation ($\lambda=1.5418 \text{ \AA}$) at 30 kV and 40 mA. Raman spectra of the samples were

investigated on a Raman spectroscopy (inVia-Reflex, Renishaw). Surface morphology of samples were tested by field emission scanning electron microscopy (FE-SEM, S-4800). Chemical components and valence states were characterized by X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS, Thermo, ESCALAB 250).

2.3. Electrochemical measurements

Electrochemical performance tests were carried out on an electrochemical workstation (CHI660E) with a standard three-electrode system, which composed of a catalyst coated carbon paper working electrode, an Ag/AgCl reference electrode and a carbon cloth counter electrode. The 10 mg catalyst powder was dissolved in isopropyl alcohol (400 μL) and Nafion (5.0 wt%, 25 μL) solution, and then treated with ultrasound for 60 minutes to form a homogeneous ink. The dispersion was loaded on carbon paper with an area of $1.0 \times 1.0 \text{ cm}^2$. Subsequently, the carbon paper coated with the catalyst was put into a vacuum drying oven at $60 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ to dry for 10 hours to obtain the working electrode. The potentials vs. Ag/AgCl were converted to the reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE) using the following relationship [19]:

$$E_{\text{RHE}} = E_{\text{Ag/AgCl}} + 0.059 \times \text{pH} + 0.1976 \text{ V} \quad (1)$$

where E_{RHE} is the converted potential vs. RHE and $E_{\text{Ag/AgCl}}$ is the experimentally measured potential against Ag/AgCl reference.

The HER polarization curves were tested with a scan rate of 10.0 mV s^{-1} at room temperature in N_2 -saturated $0.5 \text{ mol H}_2\text{SO}_4$, respectively. All potentials were iR-compensated. And the presented current density was normalized to the geometric surface area. All the polarization curves were the steady-state ones after several cycles. The electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) test was carried out by applying an AC voltage of 5.0 mV amplitude in the frequency range of 10^5 to 0.01 Hz and recorded at -0.3 V .

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 1 presents the XRD patterns of MoS_2 , Co-MoS_2 , rGO-5-Co-MoS_2 , rGO-10-Co-MoS_2 and rGO-20-Co-MoS_2 samples, respectively. Three characteristic peaks at 14.4° , 33.0° and 58.4° for pure MoS_2 could be attributed to (002), (100) and (110) plane, respectively [8, 20, 21]. Intensity of the characteristic peak for the MoS_2 decreases when cobalt is added. This suggests crystallinity of MoS_2 may be restrained by cobalt doping. The result is similar to those of previous study, which report that the diffraction peak intensity of MoS_2 was inhibited by the addition of graphene [22]. Addition of rGO has little effect on diffraction peak intensity of MoS_2 . In addition, characteristic diffraction peaks from sulfide of cobalt and rGO were not observed in the XRD patterns, which may be owing to the low content and detection limit of instrument. It was confirmed in other subsequent representations.

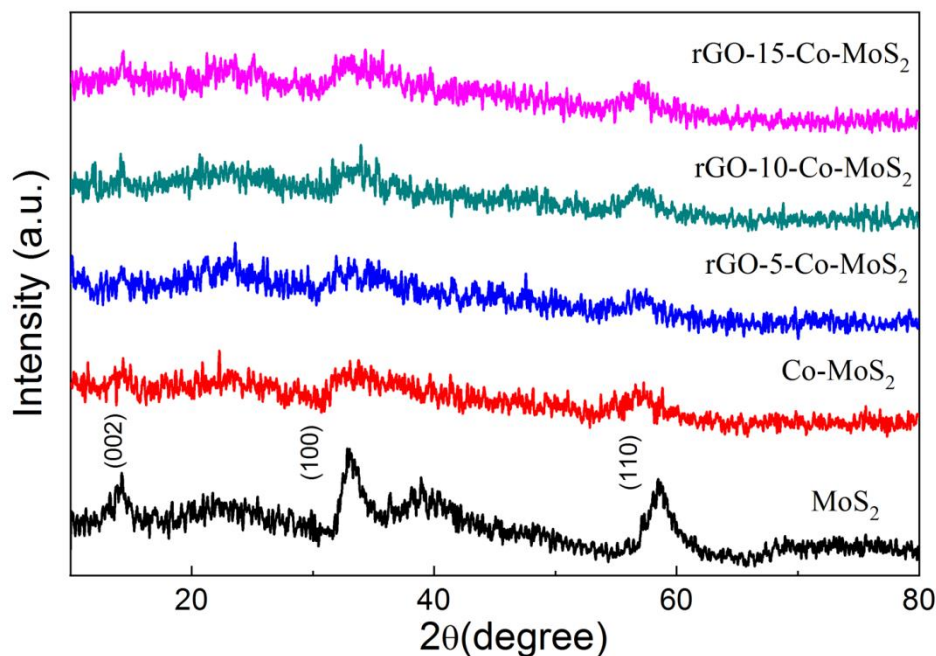


Figure 1. XRD patterns of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂.

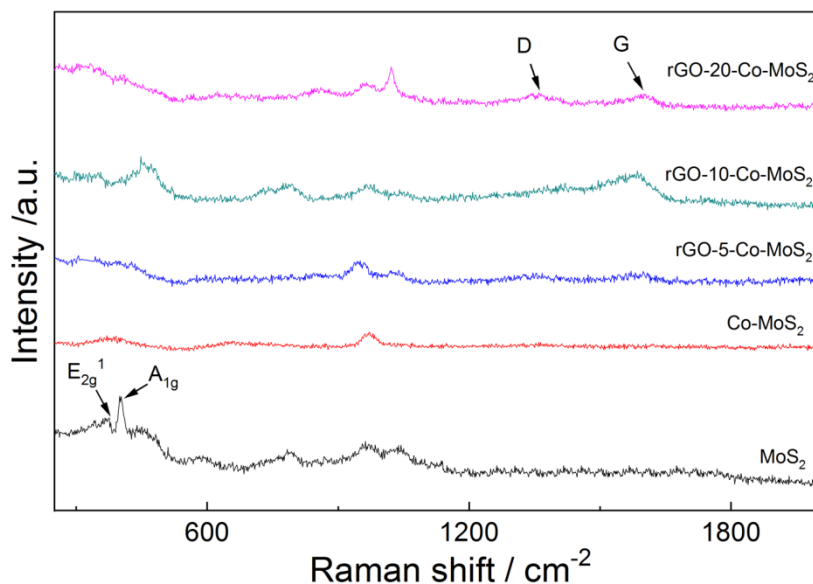


Figure 2. Raman spectra of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂.

Fig. 2 shows the Raman spectrum of the MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂, respectively. It can be seen that two Raman characteristic peaks for the pure MoS₂ sample at 372 cm⁻¹ and at 402 cm⁻¹ are indexed to the E_{2g}¹ and A_{1g}, which are corresponded to the in-plane vibration phonon mode of Mo-S and the out-of-plane vibration phonon mode of S atoms, respectively [23]. When cobalt is added, the intensity of the Raman characteristic peaks decrease, indicating that the crystallinity of MoS₂ decreases. The incorporation of rGO has little effect on its

Raman characteristic peaks of MoS₂. The results are consistent with the XRD test results. The other two Raman characteristic peaks at about 1369 and 1590 cm⁻² may be attributed to D and G bands of amorphous carbon, corresponding to the graphitized carbon and disordered carbon. The formation of graphitized carbon will help improve catalyst conductivity and catalytic activity[24].

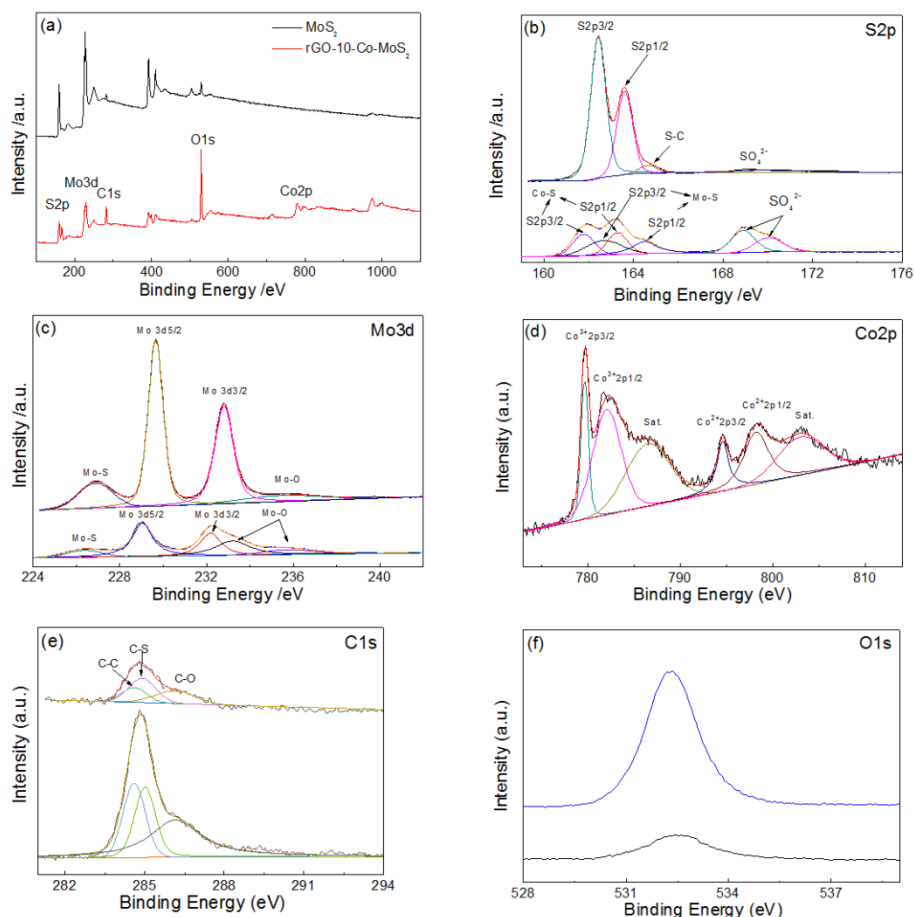


Figure 3. (a) XPS survey spectra and high-resolution XPS spectra of (b) S2p, (c) Mo3d, (d) Co2p, (e) C1s and (f) O1s for MoS₂ and rGO-10-Co-MoS₂.

Fig.3a shows the XPS survey spectrum of MoS₂ and rGO-10-Co-MoS₂. It can be seen that the sample is mainly consisted of S, Mo, Co, C and O. Fig.3b presents high resolution S2p XPS spectra, which can be simulated into several sub-peaks. In the S2p XPS spectrum of MoS₂, two peaks centered at about 162.4 eV and 163.6 eV, corresponding to the S2p_{3/2} and S2p_{1/2} binding energies of S²⁻ in MoS₂, respectively[25]. The peaks centered at about 164.7eV and 170.1 eV were attributed to the C-S and SO₄²⁻ species, respectively. In the S2p spectra of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂, the peaks located at 161.7 eV and 163.3 eV may be indexed to the S2p_{3/2} and S2p_{1/2} binding energies of Co-S bond [19]. Two peaks at 162.7 eV and 164.5 eV may be assigned to the S2p_{3/2} and S2p_{1/2} binding energies of S²⁻ in MoS₂[26]. Two peak centered at 168.8 eV and 170.1 eV are assigned to the SO₄²⁻ species, which may be attributed to partial oxidation of sulfur species. Fig. 3c shows the high-resolution Mo3d spectra for the MoS₂ and

rGO-10-Co-MoS₂, which can be fitted by several sub-peaks. For the MoS₂, two peaks central at 229.6 and 232.8 eV may be indexed to the Mo 3d_{5/2} and Mo 3d_{3/2} of Mo⁴⁺. The peak centered at 235.8 eV is attributed to the MoO₃ due to slight oxidation of the sample surface. The peak centered at 226.8 eV may be attributed to the S 2s, corresponding to the S species of Mo-S band [27]. For the rGO-10-Co-MoS₂, two peaks located at about 229.1 and 232.2 eV may be assigned to the Mo 3d_{5/2} and Mo 3d_{3/2} of Mo⁴⁺, respectively. Two peaks located at 233.2 and 235.8 eV are also attributed to the MoO₃. The peak located at 226.4 eV is also assigned to the S 2s. Due to the strong interaction between rGO and MoS₂, the Mo 3d peaks of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ shift to the lower binding energies compared with MoS₂[26]. Fig.3d provides high-resolution Co 2p spectrum of the rGO-10-Co-MoS₂. The Co 2p spectrum can be fitted into six sub-peaks. Three peaks centered at 779.6 eV, 782.0 eV and 786.5 eV are assigned to Co 2p_{3/2}, Co 2p_{1/2} and corresponding satellite peak of Co³⁺[28]. The other three peaks centered at 794.5 eV, 798.2 eV and 803.0 eV are indexed to Co 2p_{3/2}, Co 2p_{1/2} and corresponding satellite peak of Co²⁺. The results indicated that the cobalt exists in the form of bivalent and trivalent in the rGO-10-Co-MoS₂[29]. Fig.3e shows the high-resolution C 1s spectra of the MoS₂ and rGO-10-Co-MoS₂. The C 1s peak can be deconvoluted into three peaks with binding energies of 284.6, 284.9 and 286.1, corresponding to C-C, C-S and C-O, respectively[26]. Fig.3f presents the high resolution O 1s XPS spectra of the MoS₂ and rGO-10-Co-MoS₂. The symmetrical peaks centered at about 532.4 eV may be assigned to the hydroxyl groups on the surface of the samples [30].

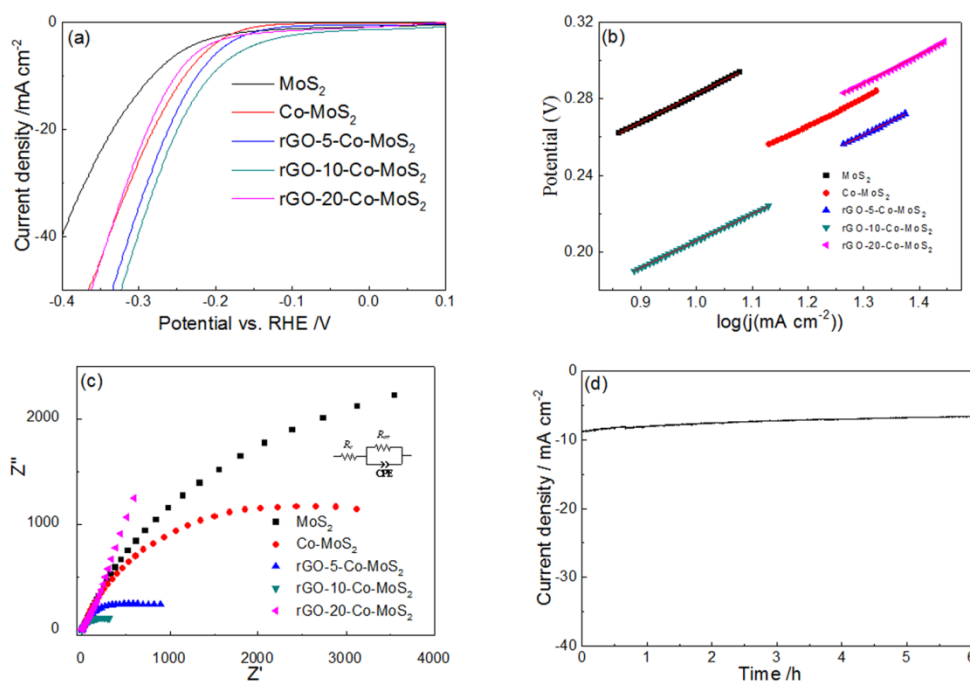


Figure 4. (a) LSV polarization curves of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ in 0.5M H₂SO₄ acid environment, respectively; (b) Tafel plots derived from (a); (c) Nyquist plots of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ at an overpotential of -0.3V in 0.5M H₂SO₄ solution, the inset shows the equivalent electric circuit model; (d) *I-t* curve of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ for 6h.

Fig.4a presents the content LSV polarization curves for evaluating the electrocatalytic HER performance of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ samples, respectively. The overpotentials at a current density of 10 mA cm⁻² are 281, 240, 224, 205 and 252 mV, for MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂, respectively. It can be seen that the pure MoS₂ exhibits the inferior electrocatalytic HER performance, while the moderate Co doping can effectively improved MoS₂ HER performance. rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ displays the optimum electrocatalytic HER performance, suggesting that adding appropriate rGO amount in the Co-MoS₂ can effectively regulate the electrocatalytic HER performance. Table 1 compares the performance of our rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ electrocatalyst with several noble metal free HER electrocatalyst. The overpotentials of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ close to or lower than the results reported in the literature.

Table 1. Summary of the HER catalytic activity of similar electrocatalyst

Electrocatalyst	Electrolyte	Overpotential η (mV)	j (mA·cm ⁻²)	Ref.
rGO-10-Co-MoS ₂	0.5M H ₂ SO ₄	205	10	This work
Ni@NC-800	1M KOH	205	10	32
Ni nanopowders	1M KOH	270	20	33
Ni NPs @ MWCNTs	1M KOH	220	20	34
NiP ₂ @ carbon cloth	1M KOH	102	10	35
CoS/NC@MoS ₂ composites	0.5 M H ₂ SO ₄	77	10	36

In order to further evaluate effect of the Co doping and rGO composition on the electrocatalytic activity, the Tafel plots (Fig. 4b) of the samples derived from the LVS polarization curves. The corresponding Tafel slopes of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ are 147, 146, 145, 140 and 149 mV dec⁻¹, respectively. The smaller Tafel slope exhibits a preferable reaction kinetics in the HER process for rGO-10-Co-MoS₂. Fig. 5c shows the electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS) curves of the MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂, respectively. The charge transfer resistance (R_{ct}) can be calculated by fitting EIS curves using equivalent circuit (inset of Fig.4c). The R_{ct} values of MoS₂, Co-MoS₂, rGO-5-Co-MoS₂, rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ and rGO-20-Co-MoS₂ are 13137, 3780, 999.3, 495.2 and 6.62×10^{11} Ω , respectively. The rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ shows the lowest R_{ct} value, indicating the best electron conductivity and easier charge transfer at the electrode/electrolyte interface of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ as compared with other samples, which are conducive to improve its electrocatalytic HER activity[31]. The long-term catalytic stability of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ is measured by time-dependent current density curves. Fig. 4d presents the current-time curve of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ catalyst. Slight decrease has been seen for the current density. This result indicate that the sample of rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ exhibits the outstanding HER catalytic stability for 6h. The rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ represents excellent electrocatalytic activity for HER and stability, which could be explained as below: i) conductive cobalt its sulfide could effectively reduce the

internal resistance and interface resistance between electrode and electrolyte. ii) Coupling of rGO and MoS₂ will be conducive to produce more electronic transmission channels and active sites.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, rGO-Co-MoS₂ composites were synthesized via one-step hydrothermal method. The rGO-Co-MoS₂ composites exhibit good electrocatalytic activity and stability in the acid condition for HER. The rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ presents the lowest overpotentials of 205 mV at a current density of 10 mA cm⁻² and the smallest Tafel slope. The rGO-10-Co-MoS₂ shows little change of current density after 6h. The results indicated that cobalt doping and rGO hybrid is an effective method to improve electrocatalytic activity for HER.

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