

## Fabrication of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO Nanocomposite by Ultrasonication Wave Method and Its Application for Antibacterial

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### Abstract

The spread of diseases caused by bacteria seriously threatens human health. Alternative materials with antibacterial effects are needed to overcome this problem, such as Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO. This study aims to determine the activity of the antibacterial inhibition zone on Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposites. The Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite fabrication used the ultrasonication wave method. Characterization was performed using X-ray diffraction (XRD), Fourier Transforms Infrared (FTIR), and antibacterial activity tests. The results of the XRD analysis showed that the average crystal size was about 42 nm for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, 36 nm for ZnO, and 39 nm for Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO. The FTIR results on the nanocomposite showed the characteristics of the Fe-O group at the absorption peak of 874.93 and 691.29 cm<sup>-1</sup>, while at 436.56 cm<sup>-1</sup> indicated the presence of Zn-O compound bonds. The Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite with a weight ratio (1:10) showed good effectiveness in inhibiting *S. aureus* and *E. coli* bacteria at concentrations of 0.8 mg/m and 1 mg/ml. Meanwhile, in *E. coli* bacteria, the average diameter of the inhibition zone was relatively low. Thus Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite has the potential to be applied in antibacterial applications.

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### Introduction

Human health is currently facing a significant threat to the spread of diseases caused by pathogenic bacteria. In addition, developing new bacteria resistant to antibiotic drugs also poses a serious problem [1]. Suppose antibiotic medications are used at high doses. In that case, they can cause toxicity in the blood and, if taken at low doses, can lead to increased bacterial resistance at the site of infection [2]. In this case, antibiotics become ineffective at killing bacteria. Based on these problems, an alternative nanoparticle material with an antibacterial effect is needed to replace antibiotics [3]. In particular, metal oxide nanoparticles have great opportunities for antibacterial applications [4]. In this case, nano-

sized metal oxide materials that have received widespread attention in previous studies are iron oxide ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ ) and zinc oxide ( $\text{ZnO}$ ) nanoparticles [5].

$\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles are superparamagnetic iron oxide with good separation properties from solution due to their magnetic potential. These magnetic properties are essential in biomedical applications that can inhibit and kill pathogenic bacteria [6]. However, these nanoparticles have high aggregation and oxidation, which can cause deformation of the crystal structure [7]. Therefore, these  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  need to be surface modified for better stability. So alternative materials are required to improve the surface layer of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  [8]. In this case, one of the biocompatible materials that can use in biomedical applications is zinc oxide ( $\text{ZnO}$ ) nanoparticles [9-10].  $\text{ZnO}$  nanoparticles are n-type semiconductor materials with a wide band gap of 3.1 - 3.3 eV and vibrant energy of 60 meV at room temperature [11].  $\text{ZnO}$  nanoparticles' properties include good selectivity, low toxicity, heat resistance, and high stability [12].  $\text{ZnO}$  nanoparticles have been previously investigated as non-toxic to human cells [13]. Thus, incorporating  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles as a filler and  $\text{ZnO}$  as a binder or matrix makes a nanocomposite material that can improve its structure and properties and act as an antibacterial agent that can form new compounds [14].

Nanoparticles  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  coated with  $\text{ZnO}$  ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$ ) give better results in the biomedical field because of the biocompatible (non-toxic) nature of  $\text{ZnO}$ , which quickly penetrates cells, increases the durability of the catalyst, and can reduce the aggregation  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles [13]. Metal oxide nanocomposites exhibit good antibacterial properties and inhibit *Escherichia coli* bacteria's growth (gram-negative). and *Staphylococcus aureus* (gram-positive) [15]. Roefinard & Bahari (2017) investigated the antimicrobial properties of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$  nanocomposite using the sol-gel method with a molar ratio of 1:10 and 1:20, proving that at a percentage of 1:10, it showed promising results used as a treatment application in cancer cells MCF-7. Madhubala & Kalaivani's (2018) report studied  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$  nanocomposites with ratios of 1:5, 1:10, and 1:20. It has been known that inhibiting bacterial growth is best shown in a ratio of 1:10. Likewise to the research of Arunima Rajan et al. (2019),  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}/\text{rGO}$  nanocomposite by hydrothermal method shows the best antibacterial activity at a concentration of 1 mg/ml. Meanwhile, Thanh et al. (2020) study the ultrasonic-coprecipitation process. He demonstrated the effectiveness of antibacterial applications at a concentration of 1 mg/ml  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}/\text{chitosan}$  nanocomposite.

Various methods have been widely used to synthesize  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$  nanocomposites. It including hydrothermal [1], ultrasonication [17], coprecipitation [18], and sol-gel [19], sonochemical [20], and biosynthetic [21]. The ultrasonication method has not been carried out of the several methods mentioned. The ultrasonication method is a method that utilizes high-frequency ultrasonic waves that are radiated into a solution so that it will cause collisions between particles to break large crystal aggregates into small crystal aggregates up to nanoscale. In addition, this method is effective, inexpensive, and environmentally friendly and requires a short time of experimentation [17]. Based on the results above, we researched to analyze  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$  nanocomposites using ultrasonication. It has a weight ratio of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ :  $\text{ZnO}$  of 1:5, 1:10, and 1:15, which can be applied for antibacterial. The existence of different mass variations of  $\text{ZnO}$  aims to observe the best performance of nanocomposites from those studied previously. And can determine the formed phase, elemental analysis and

antimicrobial properties after the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO composite is formed. The synthesis results will be analyzed using X-Ray Diffraction (XRD), Fourier transforms infrared (FTIR) and antibacterial test.

### Experimental Method

The materials needed in the research are Tulungagung mineral sand, 37% HCl (Merck), 12 M NaOH, ZnO (smart-lab), water distilled, filter paper and aluminium foil. At the same time, the equipment used in this research is a magnet, digital balance, beaker glass, spatula, hotplate stirrer, funnel, Erlenmeyer flask, ultrasonic cleaner and oven.

Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles were synthesized using the coprecipitation method, referring to the research of Hefdea & Rohmawati (2020); Tulungagung mineral sand was separated using a bar magnet as much as 20 grams. Then it was dissolved with 53 ml of 37% HCl at 70°C. The solution formed was filtered using filter paper, and the filtrate was titrated with 12M NaOH at 70°C until a precipitate was formed. Furthermore, the precipitate formed was rinsed with distilled water then filtered and put in an oven at 100°C for 3 hours.

The commercial product Zinc Oxide (ZnO) was prepared to prepare Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposites with a ratio of 1:5, 1:10 and 1:15. The first step is 1 gram of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> in ultrasonication for 30 minutes with a frequency of 40 kHz. Then the solution is stirred by adding ZnO until the solution is mixed. After that, let stand until the water content and sediment are separated. It removed the water content, and the precipitate was filtered in an oven at 90°C for 3 hours.

The structural properties of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, ZnO and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO were observed using the PAN analytical X'pert PRO system X-ray diffraction. The characterization XRD has an operation of Cu-K $\alpha$  1.5406, voltage 40 kV, current 30 mA and 2 $\theta$  angle range 10°- 80°. The phase composition and crystallinity of the synthesized results formed in the sample were identified using Qual-X and Origin software for later analysis. Calculations were carried out using the Debye-Scherrer to determine the average crystal size, such as:

$$D = \frac{0.89 \lambda}{\beta \cos \theta} \quad [1]$$

Where D is the crystal size in nm,  $\lambda$  is the X-ray wavelength in nm,  $\beta$  is the width of the highest peak at half the height in radians, and  $\theta$  is the most increased peak diffraction angle in degrees. the calculation of the degree of crystallinity is calculated through the origin program and microsoft excel with the formula:

$$crystallinity (\%) = \frac{Total \ area \ of \ main \ peaks}{total \ area \ of \ all \ peaks} \times 100\% \quad [2]$$

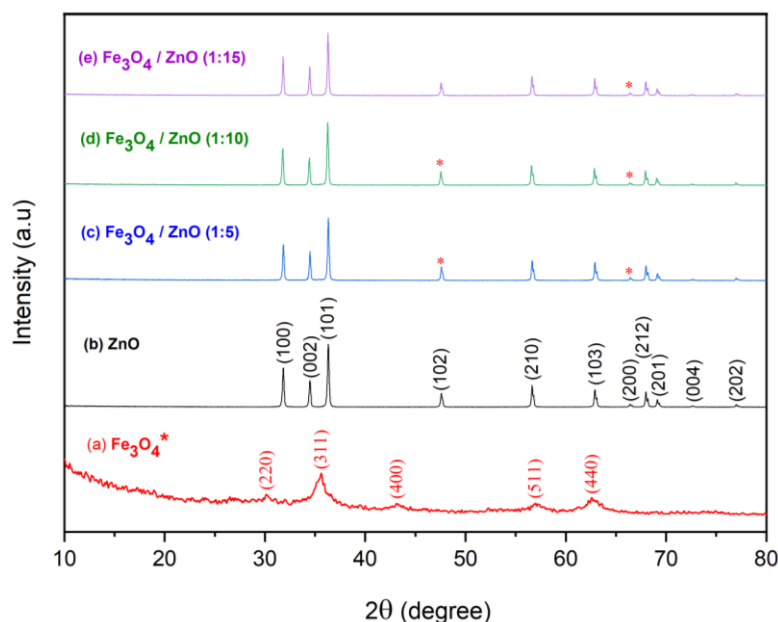
Then the samples in powder form were tested for FTIR (Fourier Transform Infrared) type Shimadzu FTIR-8400 to determine the functional groups and absorption peaks with a wave number range of 400 - 4000 cm<sup>-1</sup>. The output data from the FTIR is obtained as a graph of the relationship between transmittance and wavenumber. An Antibacterial activity test was carried out to determine the inhibition zone of bacterial activity in the sample using the Kirby Bauer disk diffusion method using two bacteria, Escherichia coli (Gram-negative) and Staphylococcus aureus (Gram-positive), with concentrations of 0.8 and 1 mg/ml. This sample was dissolved in water distilled and then ultrasonicated for 30 minutes by

sterilization through UV irradiation. The paper disc is wholly immersed in the solution. The suspension of the two bacteria (OD600 nm 0.1) was put in 100  $\mu$ l in a petri dish and rubbed on the surface of Muller Hinton Agar (MHA) media with a cotton swab sterile. It placed a paper disk containing 20  $\mu$ l of the test compound with a specific concentration on the surface of the MHA. Incubation was carried out for 24 hours at a temperature of 30°C. The clear zone formed around the disc was expressed as the inhibitory power of the compound against bacterial growth. This estimated results regarding the area of inhibition with a calliper in millimetres.

## Result and Discussion

### XRD Characterization

The data of the results of XRD to analyse determine the phase, crystal structure, and crystal size of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ , ZnO and  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$ . Figure 1(a) diffraction peaks of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  are located at  $2\theta = 30.11^\circ, 35.58^\circ, 43.10^\circ, 56.91^\circ$  and  $62.58^\circ$ . It is indicated by the hkl indices (220), (311), (400), (511) and (440), respectively. The maximum diffraction peak of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  is located at an angle of  $35.58^\circ$  with crystal orientation (311). This diffraction angle corresponds to the JCPDS card number 00-900-5837, proving that  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  has an inverted cubic spinel structure, is in the space group  $\text{Fd}\bar{3}\text{m}$  (227) and shows a magnetite phase. Crystal size results from  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  formula Debye-Scherrer of 42 nm and produces a degree of crystallinity of 47,08%.



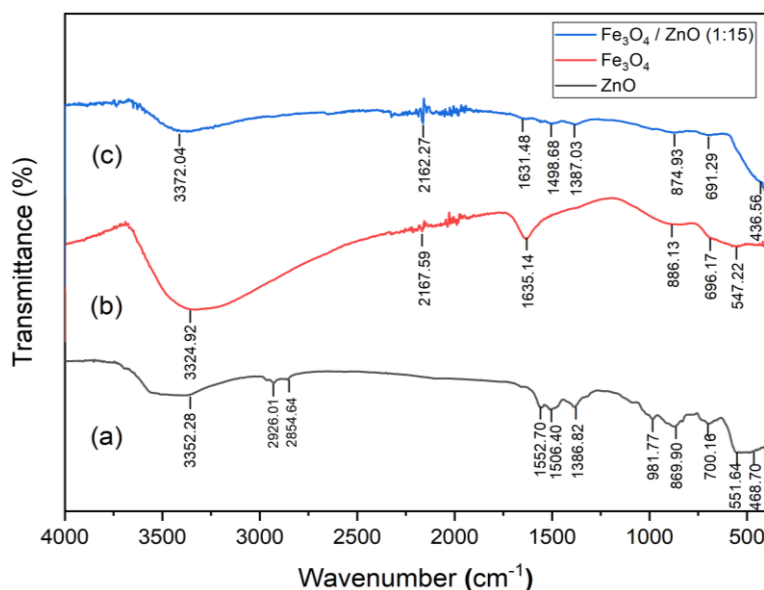
**Figure 1.** Sample XRD characterization results of (a)  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  (b) ZnO and nanocomposite  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4/\text{ZnO}$  (c) 1:5 (d) 1:10 (e) 1:15

In Figure 1(b), the eleven diffraction peaks of ZnO nanoparticles are located at angles of  $2\theta = 31.82^\circ, 34.48^\circ, 36.31^\circ, 47.59^\circ, 56.64^\circ, 62.90^\circ, 66.42^\circ, 67.99^\circ, 69.12^\circ, 72.60^\circ, 76.99^\circ$  with hkl values (100), (002), (101), (102), (110), (103), (112) and (201). The maximum diffraction peak is at  $36.31^\circ$  with the hkl plane (101), according to JCPDS card number 00-900-4178. The angle shows that ZnO has a hexagonal structure, is in the space group  $\text{P}63\text{mc}$  (186) and a zincite phase. The results obtained found the average crystal size to be 36.76 nm and produces a degree of crystallinity of 52,92%.

The diffraction peak of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite was observed in Figure 1 (c-e). The rise that confirms the presence of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> nanoparticles in Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposites is indicated by an asterisk (\*). The greater the mass of ZnO, the more Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> is on the nanocomposite surface, which can be seen in Figure 1. However, distinguishing the three nanocomposite samples lies in the magnitude of the intensity. It stands out at 36.31° for 1:5, 36.28° for 1:10, and 36.25° for 1:15 nanocomposites Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO. It can see in graph 1 that as the mass of ZnO increases, the presence of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> disappears on the nanocomposite surface. The magnitude of the intensity stands out at an angle of 36.31° for 1:5, 36.28° for 1:10, and 36.25° for 1:15. It indicates of peak indicating the presence of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> on the nanocomposite surface decreases with increasing ZnO concentration from a ratio of 1:5 to 1:15. This result also proves that in the largest nanocomposite (Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO 1:15), the crystal size decreased significantly as the mass ratio of ZnO increased. It implies that the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> is wholly covered by the ZnO surface [16].

### FTIR Characterization

The results of FTIR characterization on Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>, ZnO, and Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO samples (1:15) are shown in Figure 2. The FTIR test was carried out using infrared spectroscopy to determine the functional groups in the bonds of organic and inorganic compounds in wavenumber values of 4000 - 400 cm<sup>-1</sup>.



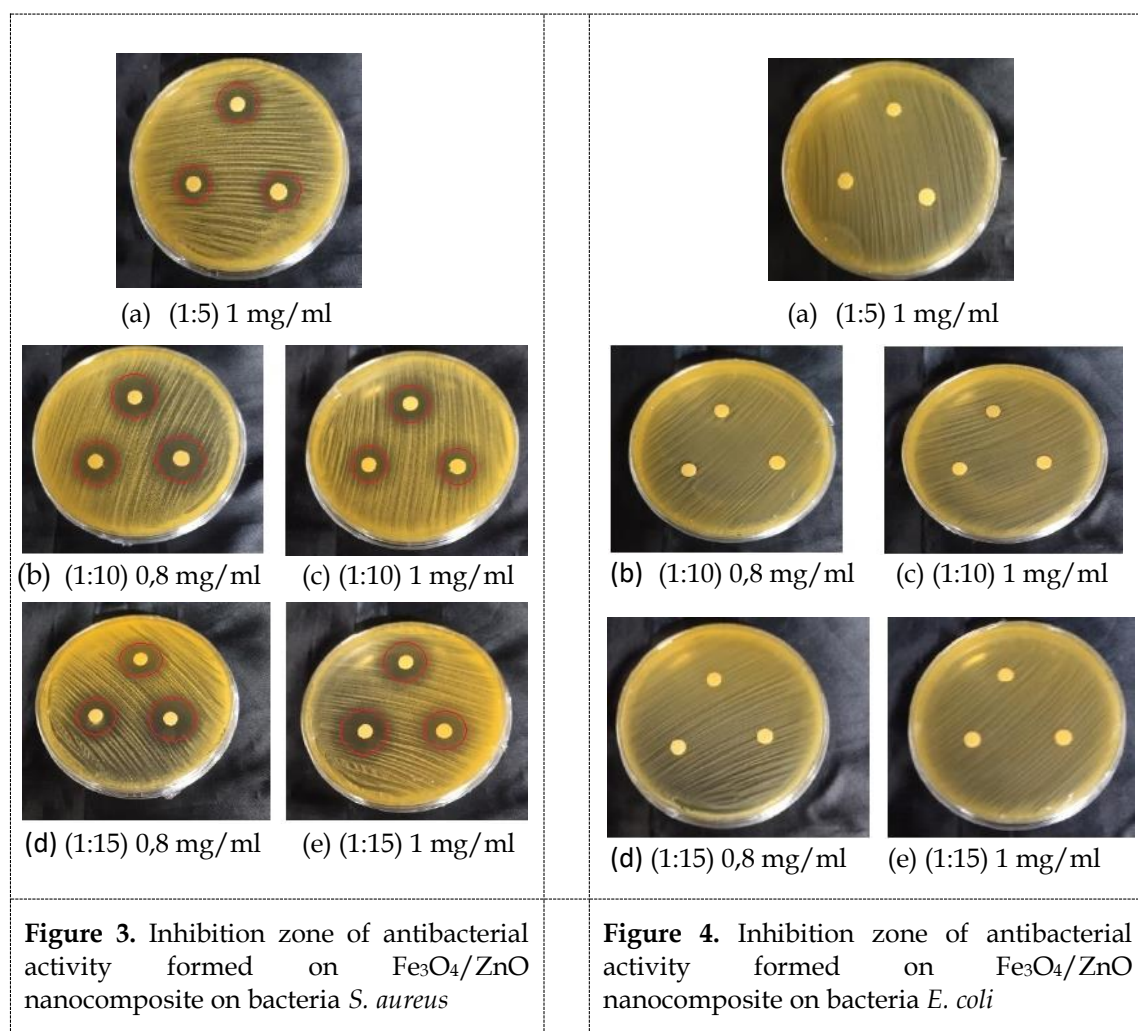
**Figure 2.** FTIR characterization of (a) ZnO (b) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> (c) Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO (1:15)

In Figure 2(a), the absorption tape of the Zn–O bond is found at a wave number of 468.70 cm<sup>-1</sup> [23]. While Figure 2(b) demonstrated the presence of iron structures in the synthesis of nanoparticles, a Fe–O compound bond is located at a wave number of 547.22 cm<sup>-1</sup> [11]. In Figure 2(c), the absorbance peaks at wave numbers 3372.04 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 1631.48 cm<sup>-1</sup> show the organic compound bonds determined by the strain vibrations and bending vibrations of the OH hydroxyl group due to water absorbance vibrations [16,24,25].

**Table 1.** Functional group of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposites

No	Peak from synthesis (cm <sup>-1</sup> )	Peak from references (cm <sup>-1</sup> )	Bond type	References
1	3372.04	3400	O-H stretching	[2]
2	2162.27	2344 , 2360	C=O	[3][2]
3	1631.48	1630 ,1633	O-H bending	[4][2]
4	1498.68 , 1387.03	1479 , 1368	C=O	[5][3]
5	874.93	864 , 898	Fe-O tetrahedral	[6][7]
6.	691.29	676 , 716	Fe-O octahedral	[3][7]
7.	436.56	430 , 443, 450, 453	Zn-O	[4][2][5][8]

### Antibacterial Activity Test



Furthermore, the vibration peak appears at wave number 2162.27 cm<sup>-1</sup>, which identifies the shape of the CO<sub>2</sub> in the air [26-27]. At wave numbers around 1498.68 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 1387.03 cm<sup>-1</sup>, a strain vibration of the C=O bond occurs during the synthesis process of reactive carbon [28]. New absorption peaks appeared on the nanocomposite surface at 874.93 cm<sup>-1</sup> and 691.29 cm<sup>-1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>, indicating the presence of oxygen and iron vibrations identified as characteristic peaks of Fe-O groups [1,20,23]. While at a wave number of about 436.56 cm<sup>-1</sup> confirms the presence of Zn-O compound bonds on the nanocomposite surface [29]. For more details, in Table 1 below, the experimental results of the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite functional group data are presented, and various references from previous research results are compared.

The antibacterial effectiveness of the three Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO samples could be observed by antibacterial testing using the disc diffusion method on *S. aureus* (Figure 3) and *E. coli* (Figure 4) bacteria with two different concentrations (0.8 and 1 mg/ml). The appearance of a clear zone characterized the disc diffusion method after 24 hours of incubation around the surface of the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO. The antibacterial test results showed that the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO had a higher inhibitory effect on the growth of *S. aureus* bacteria than *E. coli* bacteria. It can see that the antibacterial properties in the composite are indicated by the presence of ZnO [30]. As we know, ZnO is a metal oxide that provides antibacterial effects in various ways, for example, the formation of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and cell wall damage due to localized interactions of ZnO [13]. The diameter of the clear zone of antibacterial activity is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Inhibition zone of nanocomposite samples on *E. coli* and *S. aureus* bacteria with concentrations of 0.8 and 1 mg/ml.

Nanocomposite	Concentration of nanocomposites (mg/ml)	Zone of inhibition (mm)	
		<i>E. coli</i>	<i>S. aureus</i>
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> /ZnO (1:5)	1	6.17 ± 0.28	12.98 ± 0.73
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> /ZnO (1:10)	0,8	6.63 ± 0.43	17.13 ± 0.24
	1	6.70 ± 0.23	14.28 ± 1.70
Fe <sub>3</sub> O <sub>4</sub> /ZnO (1:15)	0,8	6.58 ± 0.23	16.62 ± 1.15
	1	6.65 ± 0.10	16.55 ± 1.35

Table 2 shows the most effective antibacterial test for *S. aureus* bacteria with an inhibition zone of (17.13 ± 0.24) mm at a 0.8 mg/ml concentration. Meanwhile, *E. coli* has a relatively small inhibition zone (6.70 ± 0.23) at 1 mg/ml concentration. Both bacteria showed the highest average inhibition zone in the Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposite sample (1:10). These results indicate that Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO (1:10) nanocomposite is an excellent inhibitor against pathogenic bacteria. Previous studies at a 1:10 nanocomposite ratio showed promising results in toxicity tests [11,16,19]. In the table, it can observe that the bacterial inhibition zone increased in *E. coli* along with the increase in the ratio and concentration of nanocomposites.

Meanwhile, the nanocomposites, which showed antibacterial activity with the largest inhibition zone, were seen in *S. aureus* bacteria. The results of this study follow previous studies showing that *S. aureus* bacteria had higher resistance than *E. coli* [3,31,32]. This is because the high ZnO composition allows the presence of negatively charged free radicals, namely peroxide ions, and superoxide anions. It can be caused cell damage and death by *S. aureus* at a lower concentration (0.8 mg/ml) than *E. coli* which was only effective in killing bacteria found in Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> [33-34]. Thus, the high antibacterial effectiveness against *S. aureus* in Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO (1:10) nanocomposites is believed to cure infectious diseases caused by bacteria, for example, from skin infections, endocarditis and toxic shock syndrome (TSS) [32].

## Conclusion

Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO nanocomposites were successfully synthesized using the ultrasonication method in this research. The results of the XRD analysis showed that the average size of Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub> crystal was 42 nm, ZnO was 36 nm, and the average nanocomposite size was 39 nm. FTIR results on the surface of the nanocomposite showed that the characteristics of the Fe-O group could be identified at the absorption peak of 874.93 and 691.29 cm<sup>-1</sup> while at a wave number of about 436.56 cm<sup>-1</sup> indicated the presence of Zn-O compound bonds. The best bacterial growth inhibition effectiveness was found in *S. aureus* bacteria at 17.13 mm in Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>/ZnO (1:10) nanocomposite at a 0.8 mg/ml concentration. This nanocomposite material can be applied to antibacterial applications.

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