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Electronic Supplementary Information

Nb-doped layered FeNi phosphide nanosheets for highly-efficient overall water splitting under high current densities

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1. Experimental

1.1 Fabrication of NiFe LDH-Nb2O5/PNF

For getting a clear reactive substrate, the NF $(1 \times 3 \text{ cm})$ was respectively washed with acetone and 10 wt % hydrochloric acid solution for 10 minutes in an ultrasonic device, and the sample was rinsed three times with absolute ethanol and deionized water, respectively. Then, the washed NF was contained in an air-oven at 50 ℃ for 4 hours and weigh the sample mass. Subsequently, both sides of the NF substrate were treated by the DBD plasma for about 15 min (PNF). The NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF was successfully fabricated with a facile hydrothermal method. In brief, 1.5 mmol Ni(NO3) \cdot 6H \cdot O, 0.167 mmol Fe(NO₃)₃·9H₂O, 0.333 mmol NbCl₅, 5 mmol urea and 2.5 mmol NH₄F were dissolved into 20 ml deionized water and stirred by a magnetic device until a uniform solution was formed. The prepared solution and PNF (1×3 cm) were added into a 30 mL reactive autoclave and kept at 150 °C for 10 hours. After the reaction, the autoclave was cooled down to 20 ℃ and the fabricated samples were repeatedly cleared with 99.9 % ethanol and deionized water for 3 times. Finally, the samples were dried for 6 hours at 50 ℃ for subsequent reactions. In addition, the catalysts fabricated with different reaction parameters were also explored for the comparison purposes.

1.2 Fabrication of Ni12P5-Fe2P-NbP/PNF structures

The prepared NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF (1 \times 1 cm) and 0.2 g red phosphorus powder were put into the corundum boats. The red phosphorus powder was placed in the upstream position, and the NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF was placed in the downstream location of the tube reactor. Then, the tubular furnace was heated to 500 °C at a heating rate of 5 °C min⁻¹ and maintained for 2 h under a nitrogen ambient condition. As a result, the NiFeNb phosphide was obtained after it was cooled to room temperature, and the catalyst mass formed on the PNF surface was also detected (2.5 mg cm-2).

1.3 Structure characterization

The surface structure of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP$ nano-flakes on PNF was detected by using the fieldemission scanning electron microscope or transmission electron microscope, as well as their EDS mapping images. The evolution of the crystal phases and the elemental states of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP$ before and after HER and ORE processes were analyzed by using X-ray diffractometer (XRD) and Xray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS), respectively. The frame structure of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$ after a prolonged electrolysis was detected by a Raman spectrometer. Noted that all the measuring systems and testing conditions are similar with those used in our previous work.^{S1}

1.4 Electrochemical evaluation

The electrochemical properties of the resulting catalysts were tested in a standard three-electrode cell in 1 M KOH solution (pH 14) by using an electrochemical workstation (Model: CHI 660E, Shanghai Chenhua Instrument Co, Ltd) at 25 ℃. The testing cell contained a working electrode of electrocatalyst, a reference electrode of Hg/Hg₂Cl₂ (saturated KCl solution) and a counter electrode of carbon rod. All obtained potentials were calibrated to a reversible hydrogen electrode (RHE) using the calculation method given in reference. ^{S2} In brief, the catalyst was cut into 0.5×0.5 cm (0.25 cm⁻²), and activated by a cyclic voltammetry (CV) scanning for 800 cycles to ensure the stability and accuracy of detected results. Then, the measurements of linear sweep voltammetry (LSV), *iR*-compensating LSV, electrochemical impedance spectroscopy (EIS), the electrochemical active surface area (ECSA), and turnover frequency (TOF) values were performed with similar methods reported in the previous works.^{S3-S5} For comparison, the electrocatalytic performances of PNF coated with 20 wt % Pt/C for HER electrode and $RuO₂$ for OER electrode, which has the same loading rate as $Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP$ (2.5

mg cm-2), were also studied. In addition, the electrocatalytic durability and stability of the as-prepared catalysts were indicated by the measured chronoamperometric curves $(I-t)$ at j_{100} and j_{300} for 100 h. Furthermore, a simple drainage method was used to detect the generation efficiency of hydrogen and oxygen, and the volume of exhaust gas was recorded each 10 minutes. Finally, a two-electrode cell equipped with $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$ electrodes was assembled to explore the bifunctional performance of the catalyst for overall water splitting, as well as to measure the long-term *I-t* curve under the constant current density of j_{10} .

1.5 Theory simulations

Herein, the density functional theory (DFT) calculations are performed following the similar methods explained previously.^{S4} Briefly, the interaction between the ions and electrons is described according to the projector augmented wave (PAW) method. The vacuum layer is set to 20 Å along the perpendicular direction of the atomistic models to inhibit the interaction between periodical cells. The kinetic cutoff energy was set to 500 eV along with the *k*-point mesh of 2×2×1 for all the cells. In terms of the structural optimization, atomic positions, shape and volume of all the cells can relax in all directions until the total energy and forces are converged within less than 10^{-5} eV per atom and 0.01 eV \AA ⁻¹, respectively.

According to HER dynamics, the hydrogen intermediate was adsorbed onto surfaces of $Ni₁₂P₅$, $Fe₂P$ and NbP, denoted as H^{*}. The reaction could be expressed as:

- * + H⁺ → H* + e⁻
- $H^* + H^* \rightarrow H_2$

In terms of OER dynamics, the intermediates of O, OH and OOH ions were absorbed on to substrate surfaces, termed as O^* , OH^* and OOH^* . The reaction could be expressed as:

$$
* + OH+ + e+ \rightarrow OH*
$$

OH* + OH⁺ + e⁻ \rightarrow O^{*} + H₂O
O* + OH⁺ + e⁻ \rightarrow OOH^{*}
OOH* + OH⁺ + e⁻ \rightarrow O₂ + H₂O

where * stands for an active site on the catalyst surface. OH*, O*, OOH* and H* represent different adsorbed intermediates. Since the Gibbs free energy (ΔG) can be obtained under the set of standard conditions ($T = 298.15$ K, $pH = 14$, external potential = 0), and it can be calculated as follows:

$$
\Delta G = \Delta E + \Delta ZPE - \Delta TS
$$
,

where ∆E serves as the absorbed energy between the reactant and product in the reaction. Furthermore, △ZPE and △TS denote the difference of zero-point energy and entropic contribution, respectively.

2. Supplementary Figures

Figure S1. The effects of Ni(NO₃)₂ concentration on the HER and OER performances of NiFe LDH- $Nb₂O₅/PNF$. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S2. The effects of Fe/Nb ratios on the HER and OER performances of NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S3. The effects of hydrothermal temperature on the HER and OER performances of NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S4. The effects of hydrothermal reaction time on the HER and OER performances of NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S5. The effects of red phosphorus amounts on the HER and OER performances of Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), and (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S6. The effects of phosphating reaction temperature on the HER and OER performances of $Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF.$ (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S7. The effects of phosphating reaction time on the HER and OER performances of $Ni_{12}P_5$ -Fe2P-NbP/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S8. The effects of DBD treatment on the HER and OER of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP$ electrocatalysts. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S9. SEM images of NiFeP_x/PNF (a) and NiNbP_x/PNF (b).

Figure S10. The HER and OER performances for $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$, NiFeP_x/PNF, and NiNbPx/PNF. (a) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for HER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, (b) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (a), (c) Polarization curves in 1 M KOH for OER and the insert is the corresponding Nyquist plots, and (d) The Tafel plots derived from the data in (c).

Figure S11. The high resolution XPS spectra of NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF. (a) Ni 2p, (b) Fe 2p, (c) Nb 3d, and (d) O 1s.

Figure S12. The morphology and crystal structures of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$ after 100 h HER processes at a current density of *j*³⁰⁰ in 1 M KOH solution. (a) Low and (b) High resolution SEM images, (c) Low and (d) High magnification TEM images, and (e) The elements mapping of Ni, Fe, Nb, P and O distributed on the nanosheet.

Figure S13. The XRD patterns of the Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF after 100 h HER and OER processes at a current density of j_{300} in 1 M KOH.

Figure S14. High resolution XPS spectra of Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF after 100 h HER and OER tests at a current density of j_{300} in 1 M KOH. (a) Ni 2p, (b) Fe 2p, (c) Nb 3d, (d) P 2p, and (e) O 1s.

Figure S15. Raman spectra of Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF undergoing long-term HER and OER processes.

Figure S16. The H₂ amount of Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF generated at a current density of 10 mA cm⁻².

Figure S17. The morphology and crystal structures of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$ after 100 h OER processes at a current density of *j*³⁰⁰ in 1 M KOH. (a) Low and (b) high resolution SEM images, (c) Low and (d) high magnification TEM images, and (e) The elements mapping of Ni, Fe, Nb, P and O distributed on the nanosheet.

Figure S18. The O_2 amount of $Ni_{12}P_5$ -Fe₂P-NbP/PNF generated at a current density of 10 mA cm⁻².

Figure S19. Adsorption of H on the (103) surface of NbP, involved in the HER process.

Figure S20. Gibbs free energy of NbP in the HER process.

Figure S21. Adsorption geometries of the intermediates OH^{*}, O^{*} and OOH^{*} on the Nb-Ni₁₂P₅ (a) and Nb-Fe₂P (b) in the OER process.

Figure S22. The structure of the heterojunction formed by $Ni_{12}P_5$ and Fe₂P.

Figure S23. CV curves of electrocatalysts at a scan rate from 20 to 200 mV s⁻¹ in 1 M KOH (left) and the calculated C_{dl} (right), (a) NF, (b) PNF, (c) NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF and (d) Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF.

3. Supplementary Tables

Table S1. The atomic concentration of different samples.

Table S2. The elemental composition of $Ni_{12}P_5-Fe_2P-NbP/PNF$ from ICP-OES.

Table S3. Comparison of electrocatalytic HER activity of various nonprecious catalysts in 1.0 M KOH electrolyte.

Table S4. TOF for Pt/C/PNF, NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF and Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF at the overpotential of 40, 60, 80, 100, 150 and 200 mV in the HER process.

Table S5. The Mass Activity (MA) for Pt/C/PNF, NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF and Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF in the HER process.

Table S6. Comparison of evolved H₂ amount occurred on the various nonprecious catalysts electrodes.

Table S7. Comparison of electrocatalytic OER activity of various nonprecious catalysts in 1.0 M KOH electrolyte.

Table S8. TOF for Pt/C/PNF, NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF and Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF at the overpotential of 220, 250, 280, 310 and 340 mV in the OER process.

Table S9. The Mass Activity (MA) for Pt/C/PNF, NiFe LDH-Nb₂O₅/PNF and Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF in the OER process.

Table S10. Comparison of the evolved O₂ amount generated on the various nonprecious catalysts electrodes.

Table S11. Comparison of the full water-splitting performances of Ni₁₂P₅-Fe₂P-NbP/PNF with other state-of-the-art electrocatalysts in 1.0 M KOH.

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