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Article

Copper Ion Coordination with Organic Linkers for Biotechnology: Materials Science and Biological Applications

Farah Khan [1,*]

[1] University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
* Correspondence: Farah Khan, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Abstract: Copper-based coordination polymers and metal-organic frameworks represent a rapidly expanding frontier in biotechnology applications, offering unique advantages through their tunable structural properties and inherent bioactivity. This comprehensive review examines the current state of copper ion coordination with organic linkers, focusing on their materials science foundations and diverse biological applications. The investigation encompasses the fundamental coordination chemistry of copper centers, structural design principles for biomedical applications, and emerging therapeutic strategies including anticancer treatments and wound healing applications. Recent advances in copper-mediated cuproptosis mechanisms have opened new avenues for targeted cancer therapy, while the antimicrobial properties of copper-based frameworks show promise for infection control and tissue regeneration. The structural versatility of these materials, achieved through systematic ligand modification and secondary building unit engineering, enables precise control over biological activity and biocompatibility. Current challenges include optimizing stability in biological media, controlling copper ion release kinetics, and minimizing cytotoxicity while maintaining therapeutic efficacy. This review synthesizes recent developments in copper coordination chemistry for biotechnology, highlighting breakthrough applications in drug delivery, biosensing, and regenerative medicine. The analysis reveals significant potential for copper-based coordination materials in next-generation biomedical technologies, with particular emphasis on their role in personalized medicine and targeted therapeutic interventions.

Keywords: copper coordination; metal-organic frameworks; biotechnology applications; cuproptosis; biomedical materials; coordination polymers

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1. Introduction

The intersection of coordination chemistry and biotechnology has emerged as one of the most promising research frontiers in contemporary materials science, with copper-based coordination compounds leading significant advances in therapeutic applications and biomedical device development. Copper, as an essential trace element in biological systems, plays crucial roles in numerous enzymatic processes and cellular functions, making copper-based coordination materials particularly attractive for biomedical applications [1]. The unique electronic properties of copper ions, including their ability to exist in multiple oxidation states and form diverse coordination geometries, provide exceptional versatility in designing functional materials for biotechnology applications [2].

The development of copper-based metal-organic frameworks and coordination polymers has revolutionized the approach to creating bioactive materials with controlled

properties and targeted functionalities. These materials combine the inherent biological activity of copper with the structural tunability provided by organic linkers, enabling the design of sophisticated systems for drug delivery, antimicrobial treatments, and tissue engineering applications. The ability to modify organic linkers systematically allows for precise control over pore size, surface properties, and biological interactions, making these materials highly adaptable to specific biomedical requirements [3].

Recent advances in understanding copper-mediated biological processes, particularly the discovery of cuproptosis as a distinct form of programmed cell death, have opened new therapeutic avenues for cancer treatment and other medical applications. This copper-dependent cell death mechanism provides a novel approach to targeted therapy, leveraging the selective accumulation of copper in diseased tissues [4]. The integration of this understanding with advances in coordination chemistry has led to the development of sophisticated copper-based therapeutic systems with enhanced selectivity and reduced side effects.

The structural diversity achievable through copper coordination chemistry enables the creation of materials with tailored properties for specific biotechnology applications . From simple mononuclear complexes to complex three-dimensional frameworks, copper-based coordination materials can be designed to meet diverse requirements including controlled drug release, selective binding of biomolecules, and targeted delivery to specific cellular compartments [5]. This structural versatility, combined with the inherent bioactivity of copper, positions these materials at the forefront of biomedical innovation .

2. Fundamental Aspects of Copper Coordination Chemistry

2.1. Coordination Geometries and Electronic Properties

Copper ions exhibit remarkable flexibility in their coordination behavior, adopting various geometries ranging from tetrahedral to octahedral arrangements depending on the nature of the coordinating ligands and the oxidation state of the metal center. The most common oxidation states of copper in biological and materials applications are Cu(I) and Cu(II), each displaying distinct coordination preferences and electronic properties that influence their biological activity and materials performance [1]. Cu (I) typically adopts tetrahedral or linear coordination geometries, while Cu (II) commonly forms square planar, square pyramidal, or octahedral complexes with characteristic Jahn-Teller distortions.

The electronic configuration of copper ions plays a crucial role in determining their reactivity and biological interactions. Cu (II) with its d9 configuration exhibits paramagnetic behavior and strong interactions with biological molecules, particularly those containing nitrogen, oxygen, and sulfur donor atoms [6]. This electronic structure enables copper complexes to participate in redox reactions, generate reactive oxygen species, and interact with cellular components in ways that can be exploited for therapeutic purposes. The ability of copper to cycle between different oxidation states makes it particularly effective in catalytic processes and biological electron transfer reactions.

The coordination environment of copper centers significantly influences their stability, solubility, and biological activity. Organic linkers containing nitrogen-based heterocycles, carboxylate groups, and phosphonate functionalities provide diverse coordination modes that can be systematically modified to tune the properties of the resulting coordination compounds [7]. The selection of appropriate organic linkers enables control over the dimensionality of the coordination network, with implications for porosity, stability, and biological accessibility of the copper centers.

2.2. Structural Design Principles

The rational design of copper-based coordination materials for biotechnology applications requires careful consideration of several structural parameters that influence both materials properties and biological performance. The connectivity between copper centers and organic linkers determines the overall architecture of the coordination

network, affecting properties such as porosity, flexibility, and stability in biological media [8]. Table 1 summarizes the key structural parameters and their influence on biological applications.

Table 1. Structural Parameters and Their Biological Implications.

Parameter	Low Connectivity	High Connectivity	Biological Impact
Dimensionality	0D-1D chains	2D-3D networks	Affects diffusion and cellular uptake
Pore Size	< 5 Å	> 20 Å	Controls drug loading and release
Stability	Moderate	High	Influences biocompatibility
Flexibility	High	Low	Affects responsive behavior
Surface Area	< 100 m^2/g	> 1000 m^2/g	Determines interaction capacity

The choice of organic linkers plays a pivotal role in determining the biological compatibility and functionality of copper coordination materials. Biocompatible linkers such as amino acids, nucleotide bases, and naturally occurring organic acids provide excellent starting points for developing materials with enhanced biological performance [6]. These linkers not only provide structural stability but can also contribute additional biological functionality through their own interactions with cellular components.

Secondary building units represent another crucial aspect of structural design, as they determine the local coordination environment of copper centers and influence the overall topology of the coordination network [9]. The systematic modification of secondary building units through the introduction of auxiliary ligands or structural modulators enables fine-tuning of properties such as pore size distribution, surface chemistry, and mechanical stability. This approach has been particularly successful in developing materials with controlled release profiles and targeted biological activity.

2.3. Stability and Biocompatibility Considerations

The stability of copper coordination materials in biological environments represents a critical factor determining their practical applicability in biotechnology applications. Biological media contain numerous competing ligands, including proteins, amino acids, and other biomolecules that can potentially disrupt the coordination network and alter the intended biological activity [10]. Understanding and controlling these interactions is essential for developing materials with predictable performance and acceptable safety profiles.

The kinetics of copper release from coordination materials must be carefully balanced to achieve therapeutic efficacy while minimizing toxicity. Rapid release can lead to local copper accumulation and associated cytotoxicity, while insufficient release may result in inadequate therapeutic effects [9]. The design of coordination materials with controlled release kinetics requires consideration of factors such as the strength of metal-ligand bonds, the presence of competing ligands in biological media, and the stability of the coordination network under physiological conditions.

Biocompatibility assessment of copper coordination materials involves evaluation of both the intact coordination compounds and their degradation products. The organic linkers used in these materials must be non-toxic and preferably biodegradable to metabolites that can be safely eliminated from the body [11]. Similarly, the copper ions released during the degradation of these materials must be within acceptable limits to avoid copper-related toxicity while maintaining biological activity. This balance requires careful optimization of both the coordination chemistry and the overall materials design.

3. Biomedical Applications and Therapeutic Strategies

3.1. Anticancer Applications and Cuproptosis Mechanisms

The discovery of cuproptosis as a distinct copper-dependent form of programmed cell death has revolutionized the approach to copper-based anticancer therapeutics,

providing new opportunities for selective cancer treatment with reduced side effects compared to traditional chemotherapy approaches [3]. Cuproptosis involves the disruption of mitochondrial respiration through copper-mediated aggregation of fatty acid synthesis enzymes, leading to cell death in rapidly dividing cancer cells that have high metabolic demands. This mechanism provides selectivity for cancer cells over normal cells, which typically have lower copper requirements and better copper homeostasis mechanisms.

Copper coordination compounds designed for anticancer applications leverage both the inherent cytotoxicity of copper ions and the targeting capabilities provided by carefully selected organic linkers [4]. These materials can be designed to accumulate preferentially in tumor tissues through enhanced permeability and retention effects, active targeting mechanisms, or pH-responsive release systems. The coordination environment of copper centers can be tuned to control the rate of copper release and optimize the balance between therapeutic efficacy and systemic toxicity.

Recent developments in copper-based anticancer agents have focused on overcoming drug resistance mechanisms that limit the effectiveness of traditional platinum-based chemotherapeutics. Copper coordination compounds can bypass many resistance pathways due to their distinct mechanism of action and cellular targets [12]. Table 2 compares the characteristics of different copper-based anticancer strategies.

Table 2. Copper-Based Anticancer Strategies.

Strategy	Mechanism	Target	Selectivity	Clinical Status
Cuproptosis induction	Metabolic disruption	Mitochondria	High	Preclinical
ROS generation	Oxidative stress	Multiple	Moderate	Clinical trials
DNA binding	Direct interaction	Nucleus	Low	Approved drugs
Enzyme inhibition	Specific targeting	Proteases	High	Development
Combination therapy	Multiple pathways	Various	Variable	Investigation

The development of copper coordination polymers for anticancer applications has shown particular promise due to their ability to provide controlled and sustained copper release while maintaining structural integrity during circulation [13]. These materials can be designed with responsive elements that trigger copper release in the acidic environment of tumor tissues or in response to specific biological markers associated with cancer progression.

3.2. Antimicrobial Properties and Infection Control

The antimicrobial properties of copper have been recognized for millennia, and modern coordination chemistry has enabled the development of sophisticated copper-based materials with enhanced antimicrobial activity and controlled release characteristics [10]. Copper coordination compounds exhibit broad-spectrum antimicrobial activity against bacteria, viruses, and fungi through multiple mechanisms including generation of reactive oxygen species, disruption of cell membranes, and interference with essential cellular processes. The multifaceted nature of copper's antimicrobial action makes it difficult for microorganisms to develop resistance, providing a significant advantage over single-target antimicrobial agents.

The design of copper coordination materials for antimicrobial applications requires careful consideration of the balance between antimicrobial efficacy and biocompatibility with host tissues. Materials intended for use in medical devices or implants must provide sufficient antimicrobial activity to prevent infection while avoiding cytotoxicity to surrounding healthy tissues [14]. This balance can be achieved through controlled release mechanisms that maintain therapeutic copper concentrations at the material surface while limiting systemic exposure.

Recent advances in copper-based antimicrobial materials have focused on developing responsive systems that activate in the presence of infection markers such as bacterial enzymes or changes in local pH [9]. These smart materials can provide on-

demand antimicrobial activity, reducing the risk of resistance development and minimizing side effects associated with continuous antimicrobial exposure. Table 3 summarizes the antimicrobial mechanisms and applications of different copper coordination systems.

Table 3. Antimicrobial Mechanisms of Copper Coordination Materials.

Mechanism	Target Organisms	Effectiveness	Application Area	Release Control
ROS generation	Bacteria, viruses	High	Surfaces, coatings	Continuous
Membrane disruption	Bacteria, fungi	Moderate	Implants, devices	Controlled
Protein denaturation	All microbes	High	Wound dressings	pH-responsive
DNA damage	Bacteria, viruses	Variable	Water treatment	Contact-based
Enzyme inhibition	Specific pathogens	High	Targeted therapy	Triggered

The incorporation of copper coordination compounds into advanced wound dressing materials has shown exceptional promise for treating chronic wounds and preventing surgical site infections [6]. These materials can provide sustained antimicrobial activity while promoting wound healing through copper's role in collagen synthesis and angiogenesis. The ability to tune the release kinetics of copper from coordination materials enables optimization for different wound types and healing stages, providing personalized treatment approaches for complex wound management scenarios.

3.3. Drug Delivery and Targeted Therapy Systems

Copper-based coordination materials have emerged as versatile platforms for drug delivery applications, offering unique advantages including high drug loading capacity, controlled release mechanisms, and inherent therapeutic activity [2]. The porous nature of many copper coordination frameworks enables the encapsulation of therapeutic molecules through various mechanisms including physical adsorption, chemical binding, and host-guest interactions. The ability to modify the pore size and surface chemistry of these materials through systematic ligand selection provides precise control over drug loading and release characteristics.

The development of targeted drug delivery systems based on copper coordination materials has focused on achieving selective accumulation in diseased tissues while minimizing exposure to healthy organs [15]. This selectivity can be achieved through passive targeting mechanisms such as the enhanced permeability and retention effect in tumor tissues, or through active targeting using specific ligands that recognize overexpressed receptors on target cells. The incorporation of targeting elements into the coordination framework enables the development of multifunctional systems that combine drug delivery with diagnostic capabilities.

Stimuli-responsive copper coordination materials represent an advanced approach to controlled drug delivery, enabling triggered release in response to specific biological conditions or external stimuli [16]. These systems can be designed to respond to changes in pH, temperature, redox potential, or the presence of specific enzymes, providing spatial and temporal control over drug release. Table 4 outlines the characteristics of different stimuli-responsive mechanisms in copper-based drug delivery systems.

Table 4. Stimuli-Responsive Drug Delivery Mechanisms.

Stimulus	Response Type	Release Trigger	Target Condition	Control Precision
pH change	Protonation	Acidic environment	Tumor, inflammation	High
Redox potential	Bond cleavage	Reducing conditions	Intracellular	Very high
Temperature	Phase transition	Hyperthermia	Localized heating	Moderate

Enzymes	Degradation	Specific proteases	Disease markers	Very high
Light	Photochemical	External irradiation	Targeted area	Maximum

The integration of copper coordination materials with advanced drug delivery technologies has led to the development of sophisticated theranostic systems that combine therapeutic and diagnostic functions in a single platform [7]. These systems can provide real-time monitoring of drug distribution and therapeutic response while delivering targeted treatment, enabling personalized medicine approaches with optimized dosing regimens and reduced side effects.

4. Advanced Applications and Emerging Technologies

4.1. Biosensing and Diagnostic Applications

The unique electronic properties and coordination versatility of copper centers make them excellent candidates for developing sensitive and selective biosensing systems with applications in clinical diagnostics, environmental monitoring, and food safety assessment [13]. Copper coordination compounds can function as biosensors through various mechanisms including changes in optical properties upon analyte binding, electrochemical responses to target molecules, and structural modifications that alter material properties in detectable ways. The ability to tune the coordination environment of copper centers enables the development of sensors with high specificity for particular biomolecules or physiological conditions.

Electrochemical biosensors based on copper coordination materials have shown exceptional performance in detecting clinically relevant analytes such as glucose, urea, and various biomarkers associated with disease states [9]. The redox activity of copper centers provides excellent electron transfer properties, enabling sensitive detection of analytes through direct electrochemical processes or through catalytic amplification mechanisms. The incorporation of recognition elements such as enzymes or antibodies into copper coordination frameworks creates highly selective biosensing platforms with enhanced stability and performance characteristics [17].

Optical biosensors utilizing copper coordination compounds leverage the photophysical properties of copper complexes, including luminescence, absorption changes, and plasmonic effects, to detect target analytes with high sensitivity and selectivity [18]. These sensors can be designed to operate through various mechanisms including fluorescence quenching or enhancement, colorimetric changes, and surface plasmon resonance shifts. Table 5 summarizes the key performance characteristics of different copper-based biosensing approaches.

Table 5. Performance Characteristics of Copper-Based Biosensors.

Sensing Mechanism	Detection Limit	Response Time	Selectivity	Stability	Application Area
Electrochemical	nM to μM	Seconds	High	Excellent	Clinical diagnostics
Fluorescence	pM to nM	Minutes	Very high	Good	Biomarker detection
Colorimetric	μM to mM	Minutes	Moderate	Excellent	Point-of-care testing
Plasmonic	fM to pM	Real-time	High	Good	Research applications
Catalytic	nM to μM	Seconds	High	Excellent	Environmental monitoring

The development of portable and point-of-care diagnostic devices based on copper coordination materials has gained significant attention due to their potential for providing rapid and accurate diagnostic information in resource-limited settings [15]. These devices can be designed to operate without sophisticated instrumentation, using simple colorimetric or electrochemical readouts that can be interpreted visually or with basic electronic devices.

4.2. Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine

Copper coordination materials have emerged as promising scaffolds for tissue engineering applications due to their ability to provide both structural support and biological stimulation for tissue regeneration processes [6]. The inherent bioactivity of copper, including its roles in collagen synthesis, angiogenesis, and cellular proliferation, makes copper-based materials particularly attractive for applications requiring active promotion of tissue healing and regeneration. The porous nature of many copper coordination frameworks provides excellent environments for cell attachment, proliferation, and differentiation while allowing for nutrient transport and waste removal.

The development of copper-based scaffolds for bone tissue engineering has shown exceptional promise due to copper's essential role in bone metabolism and the ability to design materials with mechanical properties matching those of natural bone tissue [16]. These scaffolds can be designed to provide controlled release of copper ions to stimulate osteoblast activity and bone formation while maintaining structural integrity during the healing process. The incorporation of bioactive molecules such as growth factors or bone morphogenetic proteins into the coordination framework enables the creation of multifunctional scaffolds with enhanced regenerative capabilities.

Soft tissue engineering applications of copper coordination materials have focused on developing materials that can support the growth and organization of tissues such as skin, muscle, and neural tissue [17]. These applications require careful tuning of copper release kinetics to provide beneficial effects on cellular processes while avoiding cytotoxicity associated with excessive copper exposure. The ability to modify the surface chemistry and mechanical properties of copper coordination materials through systematic ligand selection enables optimization for specific tissue types and regenerative requirements.

4.3. Environmental and Sustainability Applications

The application of copper coordination materials in environmental remediation and sustainability initiatives represents an important emerging area that leverages the unique properties of these materials for addressing global challenges related to pollution control and resource recovery [12]. Copper coordination frameworks with tailored pore structures and surface functionalities can be designed for selective capture and removal of environmental contaminants including heavy metals, organic pollutants, and emerging contaminants such as pharmaceuticals and personal care products.

Water treatment applications of copper coordination materials have shown particular promise due to their ability to combine multiple purification mechanisms in a single material system [15]. These materials can provide simultaneous removal of contaminants through adsorption, catalytic degradation, and antimicrobial action, offering comprehensive water treatment solutions with reduced system complexity and maintenance requirements. The stability of copper coordination frameworks in aqueous environments and their resistance to fouling make them suitable for long-term water treatment applications.

The development of sustainable copper coordination materials using renewable and biodegradable organic linkers represents an important advancement toward environmentally friendly materials design [14]. These materials can provide effective environmental remediation capabilities while minimizing their own environmental impact through controlled degradation to non-toxic products. The use of bio-derived linkers such as cellulose derivatives, lignin-based compounds, and naturally occurring organic acids enables the creation of coordination materials with excellent environmental compatibility.

5. Future Perspectives and Challenges

5.1. Technological Advancement Opportunities

The future development of copper coordination materials for biotechnology applications presents numerous opportunities for technological advancement through the

integration of emerging scientific understanding and advanced materials design strategies. The growing knowledge of copper's role in biological systems, particularly in areas such as neurodegeneration, immune function, and metabolic regulation, provides new targets for therapeutic intervention and diagnostic applications [1]. The development of materials that can interact selectively with these biological pathways while maintaining biocompatibility represents a significant opportunity for advancing precision medicine approaches.

Advances in computational materials design and artificial intelligence offer unprecedented opportunities for accelerating the discovery and optimization of copper coordination materials with tailored properties for specific biotechnology applications [15]. Machine learning algorithms can be trained on existing materials databases to predict the properties of new coordination compounds, enabling rapid screening of potential candidates and reducing the time and cost associated with experimental materials development. The integration of high-throughput synthesis and characterization techniques with computational design approaches promises to revolutionize the pace of materials discovery in this field.

The development of multifunctional copper coordination materials that combine therapeutic, diagnostic, and monitoring capabilities in single platforms represents a major opportunity for advancing personalized medicine and improving patient outcomes [2]. These theranostic systems can provide real-time feedback on treatment efficacy, enable dose optimization, and reduce the number of medical interventions required for effective treatment.

5.2. Scientific and Technical Challenges

Despite the significant promise of copper coordination materials for biotechnology applications, several fundamental scientific and technical challenges must be addressed to realize their full potential in clinical and commercial applications [18]. The complexity of biological systems and the multiple factors that influence the performance of these materials in vivo present significant challenges for predicting and controlling their behavior in real-world applications. Understanding the interactions between copper coordination materials and the complex mixture of proteins, cells, and other biological components present in living systems requires sophisticated experimental approaches and theoretical models.

The scalable synthesis of copper coordination materials with consistent quality and properties represents a major technical challenge that must be overcome for commercial viability [9]. Laboratory-scale synthesis methods often rely on conditions and procedures that are not easily translated to large-scale production, requiring the development of new synthetic approaches that can maintain product quality while reducing costs and environmental impact. The standardization of characterization methods and quality control procedures is essential for ensuring the reproducibility and reliability of these materials in biotechnology applications.

Regulatory approval processes for copper coordination materials in biomedical applications present complex challenges due to the novel nature of these materials and the limited precedent for their evaluation by regulatory agencies [10]. The development of appropriate testing protocols, safety assessment methods, and quality standards requires close collaboration between researchers, industry, and regulatory bodies to ensure that these materials can be safely and effectively translated to clinical use while maintaining innovation incentives.

6. Conclusion

The field of copper ion coordination with organic linkers for biotechnology applications has emerged as a dynamic and rapidly expanding area of research that combines fundamental coordination chemistry with cutting-edge biomedical technologies. The unique properties of copper-based coordination materials, including their tunable structures, inherent bioactivity, and versatile functionality, position them as

essential components in the development of next-generation biomedical systems. The comprehensive examination of current research and applications reveals the significant potential of these materials for addressing critical challenges in healthcare, environmental protection, and sustainable technology development.

The advancement of copper coordination chemistry for biotechnology applications has been driven by fundamental improvements in understanding the relationships between molecular structure, materials properties, and biological activity. The ability to systematically modify coordination environments and organic linkers has enabled the development of materials with precisely controlled properties for specific applications ranging from targeted cancer therapy to environmental remediation. The integration of these materials with emerging technologies continues to expand their potential applications and improve their performance characteristics.

The future of copper coordination materials in biotechnology lies in the continued integration of advanced materials design with biological understanding and emerging technologies. The development of smart, responsive materials that can adapt to changing biological conditions and provide autonomous therapeutic responses represents the next frontier in this field. The potential for these materials to contribute to personalized medicine, sustainable healthcare technologies, and global health initiatives makes continued research and development in this area a priority for the scientific community and society as a whole.

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