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ScienceDirect
Journal of Molecular Catalysis B: Enzymatic 47 (2007) 129–134
JOURNAL OF MOLECULAR CATALYSIS B: ENZYMATIC
www.elsevier.com/locate/molcatb

Influence of ionic liquids as additives on sol–gel immobilized lipase

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Received 13 April 2007; received in revised form 4 May 2007; accepted 4 May 2007
Available online 10 May 2007

Abstract

The immobilization of lipase from *Candida rugosa*, using ionic liquids as additives to protect the inactivation of lipase by released alcohol and shrinking of gel during sol–gel process, was investigated. The influence of various factors, such as structure of ionic liquids, content of ionic liquids and types of precursor in the sol–gel process on the activity and stability of immobilized lipase was also studied. The highest hydrolytic activity of immobilized lipase was obtained when the hydrophilic ionic liquid, $[C_2mim][BF_4]$, was used as an additive, while the highest stability of immobilized lipase was obtained by using hydrophobic ionic liquid, $[C_{16}mim][Tf_2N]$. Therefore, the binary mixtures of these ionic liquids as additives were used to obtain the optimal immobilized lipase, which shows both high activity and stability. The hydrolysis and esterification activities of lipase co-immobilized with the mixture of 1:1 at molar ratio of $[C_2mim][BF_4]$ and $[C_{16}mim][Tf_2N]$ were 10-fold and 14-fold greater than in silica gel without ionic liquids (ILs), respectively. After 5 days incubation of this immobilized lipase in *n*-hexane at 50 °C, 84% of initial activity was remained, while the residual activity of the lipase immobilized without ILs was 28%.
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Keywords: Binary mixture; Ionic liquid; Lipase; Sol–gel; Co-immobilization

1. Introduction

Sol–gel-derived silica glasses are most popularly used for the immobilization of biomolecules due to their porosity, transparency, chemical stability and convenient preparation [1]. A very large number of enzymes have been immobilized within sol–gel glasses. Although sol–gel immobilized enzymes usually exhibit better activity and stability than free enzymes [2–4], there are some drawbacks in the sol–gel immobilization process. One is the shrinkage of gel during condensation and drying process, which may cause denaturation of enzymes. The released alcohols during the hydrolysis of silicon alkoxide can also inactivate enzymes [5]. The slow diffusion rate of substrate in silica matrices can lower activity of the immobilized enzymes [6]. One way to overcome these drawbacks would be the use of additives to stabilize enzymes within sol–gel matrices. Sugars, amino acids, polyols and surfactants have been used to increase activity and stability of various enzymes. These additives can increase activity and stability of immobilized enzymes by altering hydration of enzyme and reducing shrinkage of gel. They can also influence gel properties by participating in condensation reactions with free silanol groups [7–9].

Ionic liquids (ILs) are organic salts that melt below 100 °C. Unlike traditional solvents, ILs are comprised entirely of ions [10]. The interest in ILs stems from their potential as 'green solvents' [11] because of their non-volatile character and thermal stability, which makes them potentially attractive alternatives for volatile organic solvents. Recently, many groups have reported that ILs have great potential as alternative reaction media for biocatalysis and their use enhanced the reactivity, selectivity and stability of enzyme [12–14]. Specifically, the interesting property of IL as a stabilizer of lipase is their insolubility in hydrophobic organic solvents, because lipases are usually used in organic solvents to carry out various synthetic reactions. Moreover, ILs-coated lipases showed significantly enhanced activity in organic solvents [12,15,16]. ILs co-immobilized with enzyme in silica can also increase the activity and stability of enzyme [1,17,18]. In this study, we used various ILs and binary

Abbreviations: $[C_nmim]^+$, 1-alkyl-3-methylimidazolium; $[BF_4]^-$, tetrafluoroborate; $[PF_6]^-$, hexafluorophosphate; $[Tf_2N]^-$, bis[(trifluoromethyl)sulfonyl] amide

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doi:10.1016/j.molcatb.2007.05.002

mixtures of ILs as additives in the sol–gel immobilization to protect the inactivation of lipase during sol–gel immobilization process. The influence of various factors, such as structure of ionic liquids, content of ionic liquids and types of precursor in the sol–gel process on the activity and stability of immobilized lipase was also investigated.

2. Experimental procedures

2.1. Materials

All ILs were synthesized and purified by C-TRI (Suwon, Korea) and had a residual chloride content of less than 30 ppm. ILs were dried in vacuum oven at 60 °C for several days before use. Commercial *Candida rugosa* lipase (Type VII) was purchased from Sigma (St. Louis, USA). Tetramethyl orthosilicate (TMOS), tetraethyl orthosilicate (TEOS), methyltrimethoxysilane (MTMS), benzyl alcohol, benzyl acetate and vinyl acetate were provided by Aldrich (Steinheim, Germany). All other chemicals used in this work were of analytical grade and were used without further purification.

2.2. Procedure for sol–gel immobilization of lipase

For the preparation of lipase solution, 1 g of enzyme was added in 10 ml of 0.1 M phosphate buffer (pH 7.0) and shaken for 10 min. After centrifugation, the supernatant was used for immobilization experiments. Protein content of lipase solution was determined with Lowry protein assay kit and its concentration was usually about 14 mg/ml. In a 5 ml glass vial, the mixture of precursor (1 ml), IL (20%, w/v related to the precursor), deionized water (0.5 ml) and 0.1 M HCl (50 μl) was vigorously stirred for 3 h. After a clear solution was formed, lipase solution (1 ml) was added. The solution was vigorously shaken for 30 s on a vortex mixer and then gently shaken until gelation. The reaction vessel was left to stand open and the bulk gel was air-dried at room temperature for 1 day, which was followed by drying in vacuum oven at 30 °C for 12 h. The bulk gel was crushed in a mortar and then the powder was dried in vacuum oven for 12 h again.

2.3. Determination of hydrolytic activity

The 5 mg of immobilized lipase was placed in a conical tube together with 10 ml of 20 mM phosphate buffer (pH 7.0). The reaction was started by adding 0.1 ml of substrate solution prepared by dissolving 50 mM *p*-nitrophenyl butyrate in DMF and carried out at 25 °C in water bath with shaking at 200 rpm. Periodically, 300 μl aliquots were taken and diluted with 300 μl of acetonitrile, and then centrifuged to obtain supernatant. The activity was determined by measuring the increase in absorbance at 400 nm by the *p*-nitrophenol produced during the hydrolysis of *p*-nitrophenyl butyrate [18].

2.4. Determination of esterification activity

The sol–gel immobilized lipase (20 mg) was added to a small magnetically stirred glass vial containing benzyl alcohol (10 mM), vinyl acetate (10 mM) and water saturated *n*-hexane (1 ml) at 40 °C with continuous shaking. Periodically, 20 μl aliquots were taken and diluted with 40 μl of *n*-hexane to analyze. The activity was expressed as micromole of product (benzyl acetate) formed per minute per gram of dry support or protein. To measure the thermal stability of immobilized lipase, esterification was started by adding 0.1 ml of substrate solution containing benzyl alcohol (100 mM), vinyl acetate (100 mM) and *n*-hexane after incubation of immobilized lipase (20 mg) in water saturated *n*-hexane (0.9 ml) at 50 °C.

2.5. HPLC analysis

Benzyl alcohol and benzyl acetate were quantified by HPLC equipped with a reverse-phase C18 column (SYMMETRY®, Waters, USA) with UV detector at 250 nm. The mobile phase was acetonitrile/water (50/50, v/v) containing 100 μl phosphoric acid/l at 1 ml/min [18].

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Sol–gel immobilization procedure using ionic liquids as additives

Recently, we reported that ILs could be used as a stabilizer to protect lipase from the inactivation during sol–gel immobilization process [18]. In the previous protocol, ILs were added to the hydrolyzed solution of TEOS and then lipase was added. By the way, it was found that higher activity of immobilized lipase could be obtained when the mixture of ILs and TEOS was hydrolyzed and then lipase was added. For example, lipase co-immobilized with $[C_2mim][BF_4]$ by the above protocol showed about 10 times higher activity than immobilized lipase prepared by previous protocol (Table 1). The lipases co-immobilized with ILs containing $[BF_4]^-$ showed significantly enhanced activities, while lipases co-immobilized with other ILs showed similar activities (data not shown). Particularly, $[BF_4]$ ILs have been reported as good templates to make mesoporous silica. Zhou et al. proposed that the formation of hydrogen bonds between $[BF_4]^-$ and silanol group plays a crucial role in order to make mesoporous silica by using $[C_4mim][BF_4]$ as template [19]. The sufficient formation of hydrogen bonds after long-term incubation of TEOS and ILs may induce the highly well-ordered silica, which is beneficial to the activity of lipase. Therefore, the influence of various factors in the sol–gel immobilization process on the activity and stability of lipase was studied with modified preparation method for the following study.

3.2. Influence of ionic liquids structure on immobilized lipases

Table 1 shows the hydrolytic activities of lipases immobilized by using ILs as additives in sol–gel process. In these experiments, the 20% (w/v) ILs related to the TEOS were used to prepare the sol. It is worth noting that the specific activities of lipases co-immobilized with ILs were higher than that of lipase immobilized without ILs. Specifically, lipase co-immobilized

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