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Influence of sintering temperature on microstructure and electrical properties

of Er₂O₃ added ZnO-V₂O₅-MnO₂-Nb₂O₅ varistor ceramics

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Abstract

The effect of sintering temperature (950 – 1100 °C) on the densification, microstructure and nonlinear electrical properties of 0.5 mol. % Er₂O₃ added ZnO-V₂O₅-MnO₂-Nb₂O₅ ceramics powder mixture was investigated. Microstructural characterizations by XRD and SEM coupled with EDS microanalyses confirm the development of equiaxed ZnO grains surrounded by different secondary phases, mainly Er-rich spinel phases in the intergranular layers and triple points. Image analyses reveal that the average size of ZnO grain increases from 1.8 to 7.2 µm with increasing sintering temperature from 950 to 1100 °C. Coarsening of grain structure is found to reduce the breakdown field (10286 to 2584 V cm⁻¹), and nonlinear exponent (150 to 26). The donor concentration, N_D increases from 2.2×10^{17} to 4.9×10^{17} cm⁻³ with increasing sintering temperature from 950 to 1100 °C, whereas, the depletion layer width, ω decreases from 56.4 nm to 37.8 nm. Typically, a fine-grained (1.8 µm) and dense (95% TD) varistor sample possessing a high value of nonlinear exponent ($\alpha = 150$); enhanced breakdown field (10286 V cm⁻¹) and leakage current density of 0.18 mA cm⁻² could be made by conventional sintering technique at a reasonably lower temperature of 950 °C from the chosen multicomponent ZnO varistor system.

Keywords: Oxide materials; Ceramics; Sintering; Grain boundaries; Nonlinear exponent; Varistor *Corresponding author: E-mail: tapatee@vecc.gov.in; Tel.: +91 33 23184462; fax: +91 33 23346871.

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