

**Synthesis, Characterisation, and Cytotoxic Activity of New Schiff Base Prepared Using 3,3'-Diamino Benzidine and its Complexes with Cu (II), Co (II), and Ni (II) Against Oesophageal Cancer Cell Line (SK-GT-4)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The chemistry of condensed Schiff base compounds, including their potential for drug development and other biological properties, has been the subject of numerous experiments. Amines are important to medicinal chemistry since they are available as natural compounds and are the building blocks of several currently marketed drugs. This study used the condensation reaction between 3,3'-diaminobenzidine and 2-hydroxy-1-naphthaldehyde to synthesise a new chemical compound (Schiff base). Transition metal complexes containing copper(II) (Cu(II)), cobalt(II) (Co(II)), and nickel(II) (Ni(II)) were then created by reacting the ligand with the respective metal chlorides in a molar ratio of 2:1. A range of spectroscopic and characterisation tests were conducted on the ligand and its metal complexes to confirm their structural geometry. Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) tests were performed on the novel ligand as a product using proton NMR (<sup>1</sup>H-NMR), carbon NMR (<sup>13</sup>C-NMR), mass spectrometer, ultraviolet-visible (UV-Vis) absorption, infrared (IR) and molecular weight determination, molar conductance, and magnetic measurement techniques. The cytotoxicity of the Schiff base ligand and its complexes against the SK-GT-4 cell line, a model for oesophageal cancer, was evaluated using the 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay. The results showed that the Co(II) combination was highly active against the SK-GT-4 cells. Additionally, this substance was evaluated biologically and toxicologically on healthy cells. The complex was notable for its remarkable selectivity, allowing it to efficiently target and eradicate cancer cells while causing the least damage to healthy cells.

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**Keywords:** Cancer cell, Cytotoxic Activity, Schiff base, 2-Hydroxy-1-naphthaldehyde, 3,3'-Diaminobenzidine.

**Introduction**

The creation of flexible ligand-based compounds is a popular topic in coordination chemistry due to their erratic framework connection and possible uses in magnetic, ion exchange, porous, luminescence, and optical devices. Furthermore, because complexes with a metal-organic framework can be activated against diseased cells, particularly cancer cells, without harming healthy cells, they may be valuable in biomedicine. The field of coordination chemistry is a subfield of inorganic chemistry. One strategy of coordination chemistry is the rational design of organic blocking ligands and the use of organic/inorganic bridging ligands to create species with a metal-organic framework.<sup>1,2</sup> The structurally significant role of Schiff bases in inorganic chemistry can be seen by their ability to form stable complexes with most transition metal ions in the periodic table, their various biological uses, ease of production, chelating qualities, and extraordinary stability.<sup>3</sup> Schiff bases are derivatives of aldehydes or ketones where an azomethine or imine group (>C=N-) takes the place of the carbonyl group (C=O).

Schiff bases, which are generated by condensing carbonyl compounds with primary amines,<sup>4</sup> have displayed a range of pharmacological benefits, such as antioxidant qualities,<sup>5</sup> antibacterial effects,<sup>6</sup> anticancer potential,<sup>7,8</sup> and antifungal efficacy.<sup>9</sup> Their applications, including molecular docking studies, antibacterial research, and thermodynamic studies of the formation of complexes with metal ions, have been the focus of multiple inquiries.<sup>10,11</sup> This study used ethanol as a solvent to create a new ligand by reacting 3,3'-diaminobenzidine with 2-hydroxy-1-naphthaldehyde. Specific metal ions were then used to generate metal complexes. Tetra-coordination with binuclear metal centres was present in all the resultant complexes. It was discovered that the di-nuclear nickel (Ni<sub>2</sub>L) complex was diamagnetic, but the di-nuclear cobalt (Co<sub>2</sub>L) and di-nuclear copper (Cu<sub>2</sub>L) complexes both displayed paramagnetic characteristics. According to the hybridisation studies, the Cu and Co complexes showed sp<sup>3</sup> conformation, while the nickel complex showed dsp<sup>2</sup> hybridisation. The 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay was used to test the cytotoxicity of the Schiff base ligand and its complexes against the SK-GT-4 cell line, a model for oesophageal cancer. The results showed that the cobalt(II) (Co(II)) complex was highly active against the SK-GT-4 cells. Additionally, at IC<sub>50</sub> = 462.5, the compound was tested biologically and toxicologically on normal cells, and the complex showed remarkable selectivity by efficiently identifying and killing the cancer cells while causing the least damage to the healthy cells.

**Materials and Methods***Cell line sources and cell culture maintenance*

An oesophageal cancer model, the SK-GT-4 cell line, was acquired from the IRAQ Biotechnology Cell Banking Centre in Basrah and cultured in an RPMI-1640 medium supplemented with 10% foetal bovine serum, 100 units/mL of the antibiotic penicillin, and 100 g/mL

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of minocycline. The cells were cultivated at 37°C in 5% carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), reseeded twice or three times a week at 70% viability, and passed with trypsin-ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (trypsin-EDTA).<sup>12</sup>

#### Spectral analyses

All the compounds were used without additional purification after being purchased from Ark Pharm, Inc., TGI Group, BDH Pharma, LLC; Scharlab S.L., and Honeywell International Inc. Trypsin-EDTA was obtained from Capricorn Therapeutics, Inc., dimethylformamide (DMF) from Santa Cruz Biotechnology, the RPMI-1640 medium from Gibco™, MTT stain from Sigma Pharmaceuticals, LLC, foetal bovine serum from Gibco™, and a CO<sub>2</sub> incubator from Cypress Diagnostics. For the other materials used for the toxicity investigations, micropipettes were purchased from Cypress Diagnostics, cell culture plates from Thermo Fisher Scientific, a laminar flow hood from K.K. Scientific Co., Ltd., and a microtiter reader from Thermo Fisher Scientific. All the instruments in this study were from the Department of Chemistry, University of Basrah. The melting points of the produced compounds were measured in capillary tubes using a Griffin apparatus. The reaction was examined using thin-layer chromatography plates made of silica gel. A Bruker® ARX-400 spectrometer, proton nuclear magnetic resonance (<sup>1</sup>H-NMR) at 400 MHz, and carbon NMR (<sup>13</sup>C-NMR) at 100 MHz were employed. Tetramethyl silane served as the internal standard, and deuterated dimethyl sulfoxide served as the internal solvent (<sup>1</sup>H-NMR: DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>: δ 2.5 ppm and water at 3.35 ppm; <sup>13</sup>C-NMR: DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>: δ 39.52 ppm). A Shimadzu® 1700 double-beam spectrophotometer was used to measure the wavelength in a Shimadzu® 8400 Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometer. Molar conductivity was measured using a Wissenschaftlich-Technische Werkstätten GmbH (WTW®) D-82362 machine. Magnetic susceptibility was measured using a Sherwood Scientific® auto magnetic susceptibility balance machine in the Chemistry Department of Al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad. The electrospray ionisation mass spectra (ESI-MS) were recorded with methyl cyanide using the Waters Alliance® high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) system and the Quattro® micro API mass spectrometer in Tehran, Iran.

#### Synthesis of the Schiff base

Four to five drops of glacial acetic acid and 0.04 mol of 2-hydroxy-naphthaldehyde were dissolved in 15 mL of ethanol to complete the synthesis depicted in Figure 1. 3,3'-diaminobenzidine (0.01 mol) was dissolved in 10 mL of ethanol in multiple stages. The aldehyde solution was then progressively mixed with the amine solution during reflux. The refluxing process continued for 18 hours. The mixture was filtered once the refluxing was completed, and methanol was used to recrystallise the resultant product.<sup>7</sup>

#### Preparing the metal complexes

To establish the 1:2 chelate complexes between the ligand and the metal, a Schiff base solution (0.01 mol) was created at a molar ratio of 2 DMF: 4 Ethanol: 4 Methanol. This mixture was mixed with a hydrated metal chloride salt solution dissolved in 10 mL of ethanol. A total of 5 hours was spent refluxing the resultant mixture. Following the reaction's completion and the solvent's evaporation, the complexes were separated, repeatedly cleaned with dry diethyl ether, and vacuum-dried. A comprehensive summary of the physical characteristics and analytical information of these complexes is presented in Table 1.<sup>13</sup>

#### Biological processes

The cytotoxic effects of the complexes were assessed in 96-well plates in the MTT cell viability experiment. The seeding density was 1 × 10<sup>4</sup> cells per well.<sup>14</sup> The test chemicals (ligand and its complexes) were added at different concentrations (62.5-1000 µg/mL for each component) to the cells after 24 hours or when they reached a confluent monolayer. The viability of the cells was evaluated 72 hours after the treatment. In the experiment, the medium was removed, and 28 µL of a 2-mg/mL MTT solution was added, after which the cells were incubated for 2 hours at 37°C. Then, 100 µL of dimethyl sulphide (DMSO) was used to dissolve the resultant crystals following the disposal of the MTT after the incubation period.

**Table 1:** Characteristic of ligands and their complexes

| Comp. No.         | M.P     | Yield % | M.F  | Colour       | M.Wt          |
|-------------------|---------|---------|--|--------------|---------------|
| L                 | 288-290 | 79      | C <sub>46</sub> H <sub>38</sub> N <sub>4</sub> O <sub>4</sub>                      | Red          | <b>830.94</b> |
| Cu <sub>2</sub> L | >300    | 78      | [Cu <sub>2</sub> (C <sub>46</sub> H <sub>38</sub> N <sub>4</sub> O <sub>4</sub> )] | Red-Brown    | <b>952</b>    |
| Co <sub>2</sub> L | >300    | 75      | [Co <sub>2</sub> (C <sub>46</sub> H <sub>38</sub> N <sub>4</sub> O <sub>4</sub> )] | Bright black | <b>944</b>    |
| Ni <sub>2</sub> L | >300    | 71      | [Ni <sub>2</sub> (C <sub>46</sub> H <sub>38</sub> N <sub>4</sub> O <sub>4</sub> )] | Black        | <b>945</b>    |

The plates were shaken and incubated at 37°C for >15 minutes to achieve full solubilisation.<sup>15</sup> A microplate reader was used to detect absorbance at the test wavelength of 620 nm. Every experiment was carried out in triplicate. Using the following formulae, the percentage of cytotoxicity, or the inhibition rate of cell growth, was determined:

$$\text{Proliferation rate (PR)} = (B / A) \times 100,$$

Where: A and B represent the mean optical densities of the untreated and treated wells, respectively.

$$\text{The inhibition rate (IR) formula was } IR = 100 - PR.^{16}$$

#### Biological activity

After 72 hours of incubation, the Schiff base ligand and its complexes were tested for cytotoxicity against the SK-GT-4 cell line, a model for oesophageal cancer, using the MTT assay. The findings demonstrated notable activity of the Co(II) complex against the SK-GT-4 cells. Moreover, this compound was subjected to biological and toxicological assessments with normal cells. Notably, the complex displayed exceptional selectivity by effectively targeting and eliminating cancer cells while minimising harm to healthy cells.<sup>17</sup>

#### Characteristics of the synthesised compounds

##### Schiff base ligand

It was red and yielded 79% at M.P of 288-290°C. The mass-to-charge ratio (m/z) was 831.40 [M+1], 389.05 (base peak), <sup>1</sup>H-NMR (DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>, 400MHz, □ppm), H4 (4H □=10.8ppm) (CH=N), H5(4H □=15.3ppm) (OH), H6(4H □=8.5ppm), H7(4H □=8.12ppm), H9 (4H □=7.6ppm), H1 (2H □=6.5ppm), <sup>13</sup>C-NMR (DMSO-d<sub>6</sub>), C1(□=193ppm), C3-C8 (□=120-130ppm), C11(□=164ppm), and C10 (□=138ppm). The FTIR (vcm<sup>-1</sup>) was 2980 C=H(Alipha), 3034 C=H(Ar), 1620 C=N, 1562 C=C(Ar), 3431 OH, and 1483 C-N. The UV-Vis (nm) transition was 322.5((π→π\*) and 362.5((π→π\*)) (Figures 1, 5, 6, 7, and 11).<sup>18</sup>

##### Schiff base complexes

The di-nuclear cobalt (Co<sub>2</sub>L) complex was bright black and yielded 75% at M.P >300°C. The m/z was 472.15 (base peak), 943 [M]. The FTIR (vcm<sup>-1</sup>) was 2922 C=H(Alipha), 3041 C=H(Ar), 1642 C=N, 1524 C=C (Ar), 3440 O-H, 1430 C-N, and 819 M-N. The UV-Vis (nm) transition was 374 (n-π\*), 446 (d-d), and 496 (d-d) (Figures 4, 10, and 13). The di-nuclear nickel (Ni<sub>2</sub>L) complex was black and yielded 71% at M.P >300°C. The m/z was 340.9 (base peak), 943.8 [M]. The FTIR (vcm<sup>-1</sup>) was 2920 C=H(Alipha), 3037 C=H(Ar), 1614 C=N, 1533 C=C(Ar), 3387 O-H, 1325 C-N, and 814 M-N.

The UV-Vis (nm) transition was 330 (n- $\pi^*$ ), 392 (n- $\pi^*$ ), 417 (MLCT), 490 (MLCT), 585 (d-d), 593 (d-d), and 621 (d-d) (Figures 3, 8, and 14). The di-nuclear copper ( $\text{Cu}_2\text{L}$ ) complex was red-brown and yielded 78% at M.P  $>300^\circ\text{C}$ . The  $m/z$  was 121 (base peak), 957.35 [M]. The FTIR ( $\text{cm}^{-1}$ ) was 2789 C=H(Alipha), 3039 C=H(Ar), 1602 C=N, 1535 C=C(Ar), 3444 OH, 1454 C-N, and 810 M-N. The UV-Vis (nm) transition was 275 ( $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ ), 340 (n- $\pi^*$ ), 437 MLCT, and 775 d-d (Figures 2, 9, and 12).

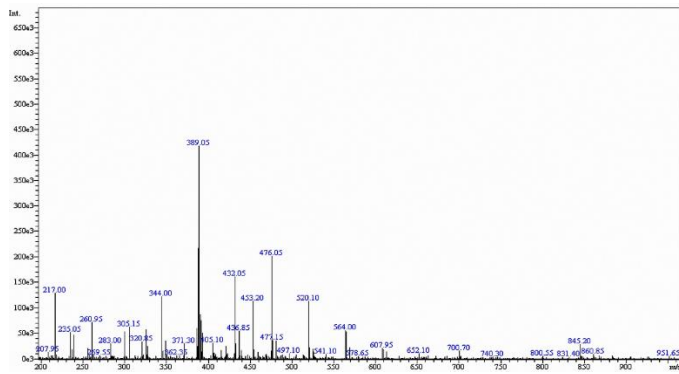
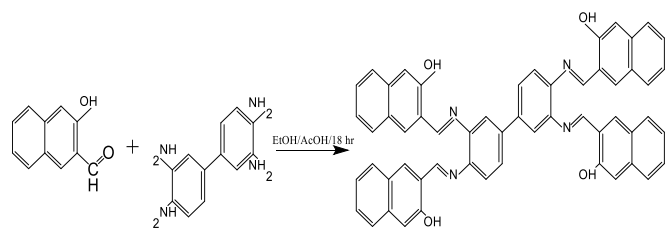


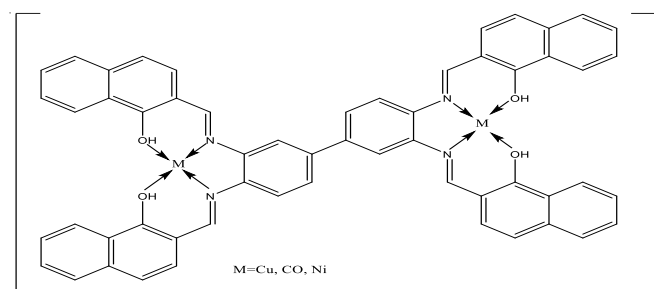
Figure 1. Mass spectra of ligand

## Results and Discussions

The importance of Schiff base compounds in contemporary medicine is growing, especially in treating cancer. First, a good yield was obtained by evaluating the simplicity of the one-pot multicomponent reaction utilising 2-hydroxy-naphthaldehyde in the presence of glacial acetic acid in ethanol at reflux for 18 hours with 3,3'-diaminobenzidine (Scheme 1). The successful synthesis of the Schiff base ligand and its structures was confirmed using mass spectrometry and NMR spectroscopy. In the  $^1\text{H}$ -NMR spectra, a singlet was found at 10.82 ppm, which was attributed to the azomethine proton ( $\text{CH}=\text{N}$ ), while several singlets were detected between 8-7 ppm, suggesting the presence of aromatic protons.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the  $^{13}\text{C}$ -NMR spectra for the compound showed multiple lines between 120-140 ppm for the C=C aromatic rings of naphthaldehyde, a line at 40 ppm attributed to carbon atoms (C-N), and a line at 193 ppm belonging to carbon atoms in C=N.<sup>20</sup> The mass spectrum analysis of the Schiff base ligand identified many fragments with different relative abundances and  $m/z$ . Its chemical structure was represented by a noticeable peak at 831.40  $m/z$ .



Scheme (1): The process of synthesising the Schiff base ligand



Scheme (2): The process of synthesising the metal complexes

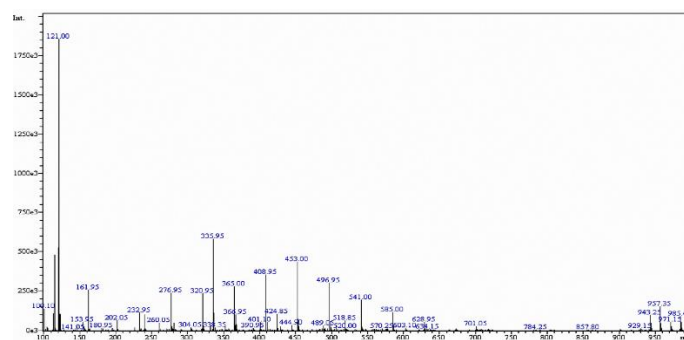


Figure 2. Mass spectra of  $\text{Cu}_2\text{L}$

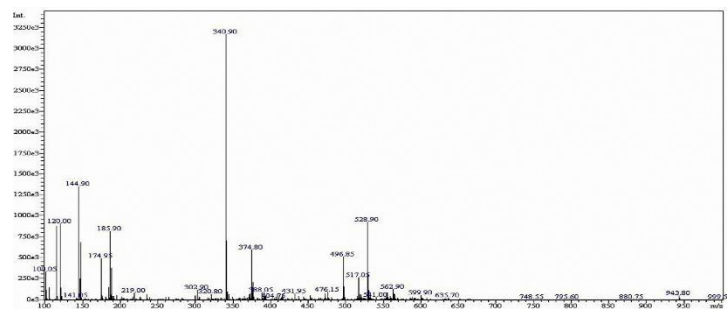


Figure 3. Mass spectra of  $\text{Ni}_2\text{L}$

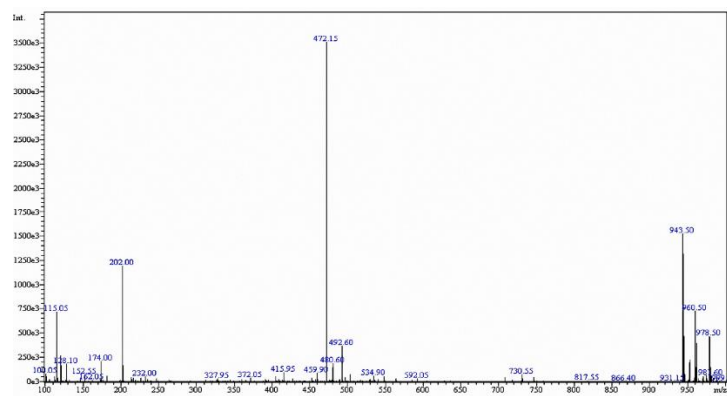


Figure 4. Mass spectra of  $\text{Co}_2\text{L}$

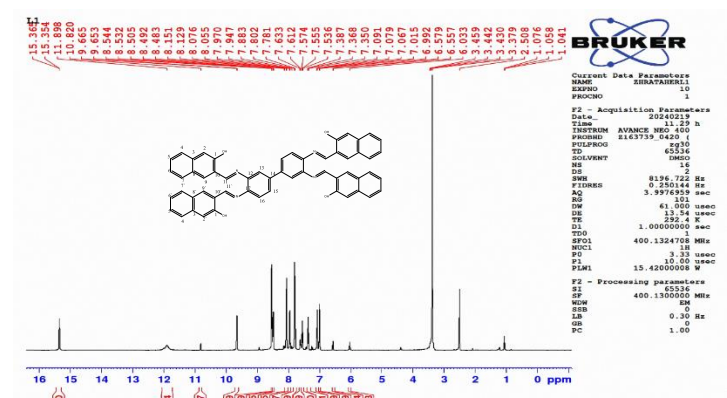


Figure 5.  $^1\text{H}$ -NMR spectra of ligand

A ligand-to-metal ratio of 1:2 was used to create the synthetic complexes. The results obtained from several analytical techniques by refluxing the Schiff base ligand with metal chlorides for the Co(II), Ni(II), and Cu(II) ions in a mixture of solvents containing 2 DMF: 4

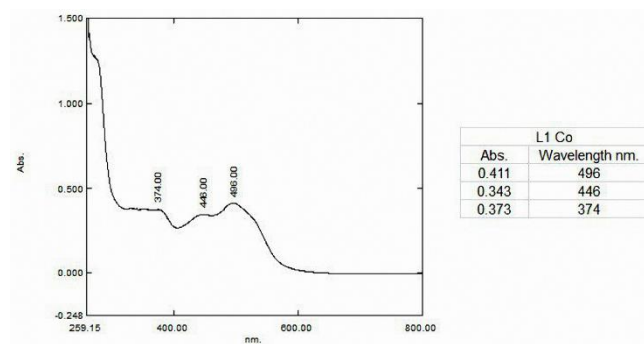
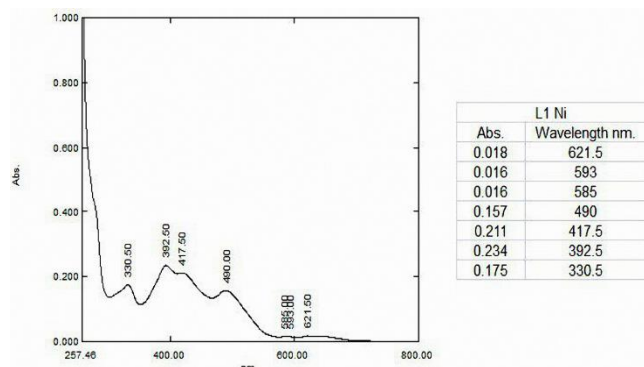
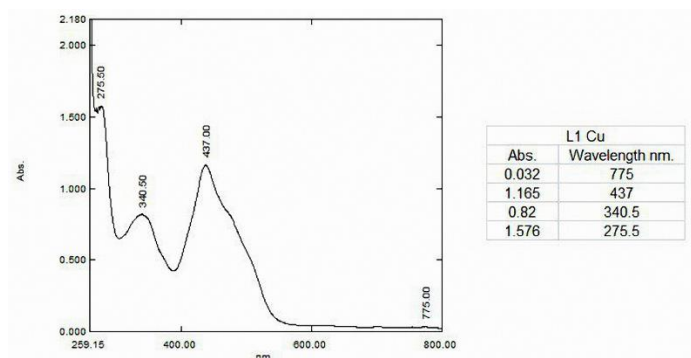


**Table 2:** The FT-IR spectral data (cm<sup>-1</sup>) for the Schiff base ligand and its complexes

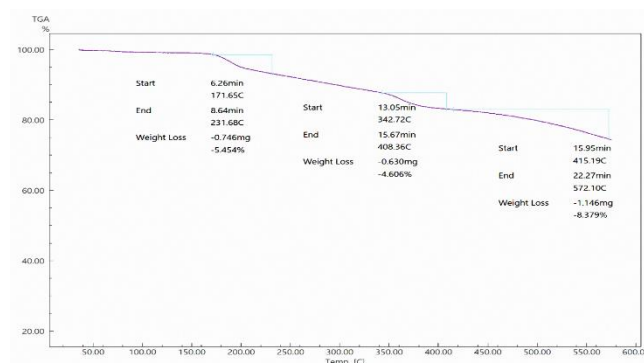
| Sym.              | C-H (Alipha) | C-H(Ar) | C=N  | C=C-(Ar) | O-H  | C-N- | M-N-       |
|-------------------|--------------|---------|------|----------|------|------|------------|
| L                 | 2980         | 3034    | 1620 | 1562     | 3431 | 1483 | ---        |
| Cu <sub>2</sub> L | 2789         | 3039    | 1602 | 1535     | 3444 | 1454 | <b>810</b> |
| Co <sub>2</sub> L | 2922         | 3041    | 1642 | 1524     | 3440 | 1430 | <b>819</b> |
| Ni <sub>2</sub> L | 2920         | 3037    | 1614 | 1533     | 3387 | 1325 | <b>814</b> |

**Table 3:** Conductivity, Magnetic moment, and electronic spectra for ligand and its complexes

| Compound          | Absorption bands(nm) | Transition                  | Conductivity S.cm <sup>2</sup> .mol <sup>-1</sup> | $\mu_{eff}$ |
|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---|-------------|
| Ligand            | 322.5                | ( $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ ) | -----   | -----       |
|                   | 362.5                | ( $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ ) |   |             |
| Cu <sub>2</sub> L | 275                  | ( $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ ) | 15  | <b>1.95</b> |
|                   | 340                  | (n- $\pi^*$ )               |   |             |
|                   | 437                  | MLCT                        |   |             |
|                   | 775                  | d-d                         |   |             |
| Co <sub>2</sub> L | 374                  | (n- $\pi^*$ )               | 22  | <b>2.55</b> |
|                   | 446                  | d-d                         |   |             |
|                   | 496                  | d-d                         |   |             |
| Ni <sub>2</sub> L | 330                  | (n- $\pi^*$ )               | 14  | -----       |
|                   | 392                  | (n- $\pi^*$ )               |   |             |
|                   | 417                  | MLCT                        |   |             |
|                   | 490                  | MLCT                        |   |             |
|                   | 585                  | d-d                         |   |             |
|                   | 593                  | d-d                         |   |             |
|                   | 621                  | d-d                         |   |             |

**Figure 13.** UV-visible spectrum of Co<sub>2</sub>L**Figure 14.** UV-visible spectrum of Ni<sub>2</sub>L.**Figure 12.** UV-visible spectrum of Cu<sub>2</sub>L.

The mass did not change when the temperature was <170°C. In the first stage, when the temperature was between 171-231°C, 5.45% of the weight was lost. In the second stage, when the temperature was between 342-408°C, 4.6% of the weight was lost. In the last stage, when the

**Figure 15.** TG curve of Co<sub>2</sub>L.

temperature was between 415-572°C, 8.37% of the weight was lost (Figure 15). The Ni<sub>2</sub>L complex: The complex disintegrated in stages. A change in mass was observed when the temperature was between 58-147°C, indicating that crystallisation had occurred.

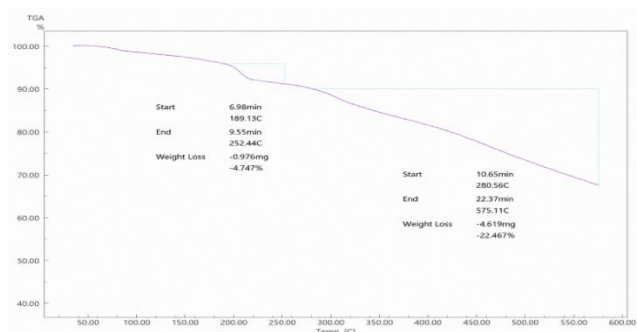
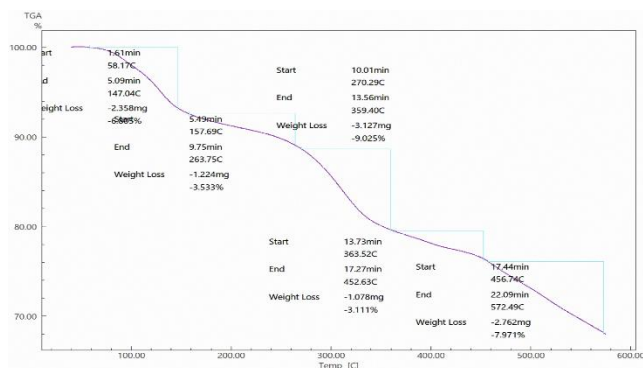
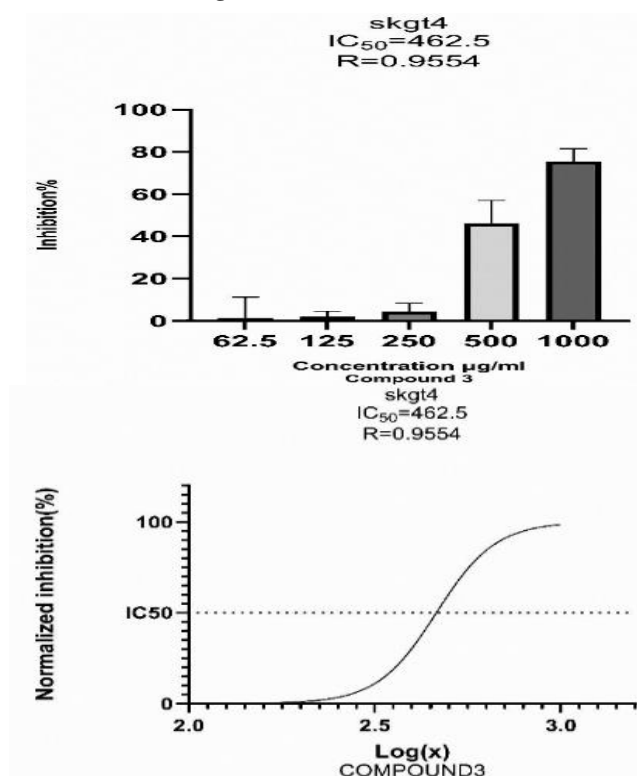
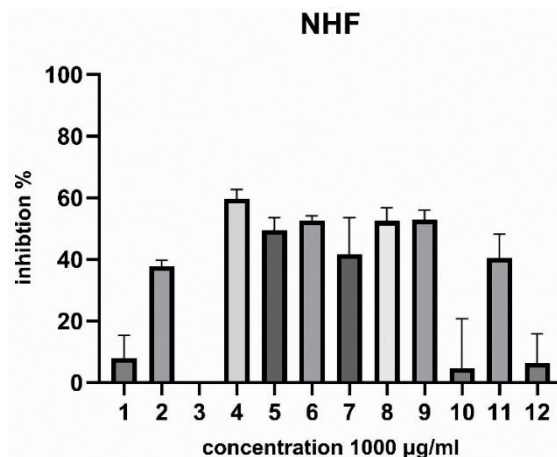
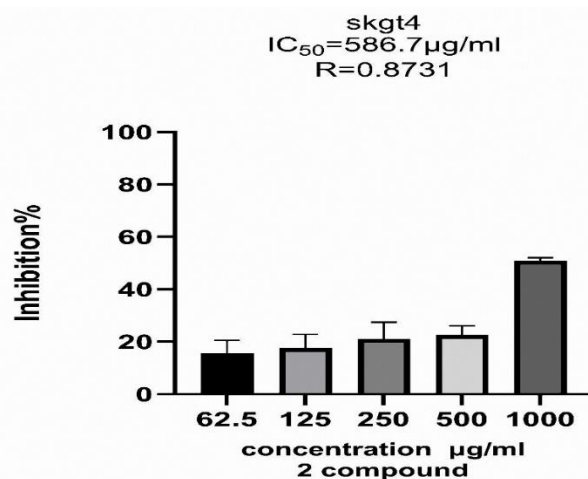
Figure 16. TG curve of Cu<sub>2</sub>L.Figure 17. TG curve of Ni<sub>2</sub>L.Figure 18. Rate inhibition of SK-GT-4 cell line treated with five replicates of concentrations(µg/ml) from Co (II) complex with IC<sub>50</sub> in µg/ml.

Figure 19. Rate inhibition of normal cell line (NHF) with concentration (1000 µg/ml) from L-Co (compound 3)

More specifically, it represented the loss of a molecule due to the crystallisation of water, with 6.8% of the weight lost. In the second stage, the temperature was between 157-263°C, resulting in a 3.5% reduction in weight, indicating the loss of two molecules of H<sub>2</sub>O. In the third stage, when the temperature was between 270-359°C, 9.02% of the weight was lost. In the fourth stage, the temperature was between 363-452°C, and 3.1% of the weight was lost. In the last stage, the temperature was between 456-572°C, resulting in a 7.9% reduction in weight (Figure 17). The Cu<sub>2</sub>L complex: The thermal analysis was conducted in two stages. The mass did not change when the temperature was <180°C, indicating the high thermal stability of the complex. In the first stage, the temperature was between 189-252°C, and 4.47% of the weight was lost. In the second stage, the temperature was between 280-575°C, resulting in a 22.4% reduction in weight (Figure 16).

Figure 20. Rate inhibition of cancer cell line (SK-GT-4) with concentration (1000 µg/ml) from [Cu<sub>2</sub>L] (compound 2).

## Conclusion

Three novel metal complexes were produced using a tetra nucleation ligand, and these were subjected to various in-depth characterisation methods, such as analytical and physicochemical techniques. The supposed composition was verified by FTIR, <sup>1</sup>H-NMR, <sup>13</sup>C-NMR, mass, and electronic changes. Electric conductivity and magnetic susceptibility measurements provided additional evidence, indicating that the Cu(II) and Co(II) complexes had a square planar geometry while the Ni(II) complex had a square pyramidal geometry. Based on the cytotoxicity of the Schiff base ligand and its complexes (Figure 18-

20), the Co(II) complex was found to be highly active against SK-GT-4 cells and is thus a promising candidate for further development as an anticancer agent due to its potent anti-tumour activity, and promising pharmacokinetic properties, opening up avenues for the design of novel metal-based therapeutics.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Authors' Declaration

The authors hereby declare that the work presented in this article is original and that any liability for claims relating to the content of this article will be borne by them.

### Acknowledgements

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