

Viricidal activity of silicon dioxide nanoparticles against cowpea aphid borne mosaic virus

ABSTRACT

The management of viruses in cowpea is a challenging task and the use of nanoparticles (NPs) presents a promising opportunity for novel antiviral strategies. This study evaluates the viricidal activity of silicon dioxide nanoparticles (SiO_2NPs) against cowpea aphid-borne mosaic virus (CABMV) under controlled conditions. Silicon dioxide nanopowder formulation was used in this study. The virus, molecularly characterized as CABMV, was maintained through mechanical transmission. Pre- and post-inoculation of virus followed by NP foliar spray at different concentrations were done in local lesion host, *Chenopodium amaranticolor*, and propagative host, cowpea. The studies using various concentrations of SiO_2NPs on *C. amaranticolor* and cowpea revealed that pre- or post-inoculation of the virus combined with a foliar spray of SiO_2NPs at 1000 ppm is an effective treatment, exhibiting no local lesions compared to 34 local lesions in the viral control. In cowpea, among the various concentrations tested, foliar application of SiO_2NPs at 1000 ppm before CABMV inoculation reduced the vulnerability index (VI) to zero, followed by SiO_2NPs at 500 ppm, which achieved a VI of 2.77 compared to viral control (VI = 94). The efficacy of NP treatment was further validated by assessing the viral titre using DAS-ELISA, with treated plants showing a sevenfold reduction in viral titre compared to the control. A significant reduction in the number of local lesions in *C. amaranticolor* and the vulnerability index in cowpea demonstrated the pronounced impact of SiO_2NPs on viral particles. Simultaneous inoculation of the virus and NPs showed reduced, diffused local lesions on leaves treated with viral sap-containing NPs, compared to a higher number of intact lesions in the control. This reduction is likely due to the disintegration of viral particles by NP treatment, leading to decreased disease severity. These findings further emphasize the potential of SiO_2NPs in mitigating the severity of cowpea aphid-borne mosaic disease.

Keywords: CABMV, Diffused local lesions, Vulnerability index, DAS-ELISA, RT-PCR

1. INTRODUCTION

Cowpea, an annual tropical grain legume, plays a vital role in human nutrition, particularly in developing countries across the tropics and subtropics. Known as the "poor man's meat," cowpea is a cost-effective protein source, containing approximately 25% protein and 64% carbohydrates (Bressani, 1993). Viral diseases are significant biotic stressors severely impacting cowpea production at all growth stages of the crop. Cowpea viral diseases result in poor pod formation and quality and are a major constraint in most parts of the world. To date, 20 different viruses have been reported to infect cowpea

(Hampton *et al.*, 1997; Thottappilly and Rossel, 1997). Among them, the most damaging viruses contributing to yield losses is the cowpea aphid-borne mosaic virus (CABMV, family *Potyvirus*, genus *Potyvirus*). Most of the worldwide commercial varieties and landraces of cowpea are susceptible to viruses. Taiwo *et al.*, 1982 observed that the CABMV caused the most aggressive and severe symptoms compared to the cowpea mottle virus. CABMV is a significant seed-borne pathogen that inflicts substantial damage on cowpea. Once established in seedlings as seed-borne inoculum, these viruses are further disseminated within fields by insect vectors. The emergence of new viral strains through evolution, coupled with an expanding host range that undermines host resistance, presents a considerable challenge to effective management. Consequently, controlling viral diseases remains a major hurdle in cowpea cultivation. It is essential to devise effective management strategies to combat the losses caused by viruses in economically important crops. The emergence of Nanophytovirology in managing plant viral diseases by defense induction and biostimulation is quite promising. The potential of nanoparticles (NPs) in plant disease management is increasingly recognized. Their advantages lie in their extremely small size, large surface area, and strong reactivity (Jeevanandam *et al.*, 2018). The unique physicochemical properties of NPs enhance interactions with viruses, often leading to effective virus suppression. Numerous studies have highlighted the efficacy of NPs against various phytoviruses, showing promising results. Silver nanoparticles have been reported as effective antiviral agents (Jain and Kothari, 2014). El-Sawy *et al.*, 2017 demonstrated reduced disease severity and delayed symptoms in tomatoes infected with the tomato leaf curl virus when treated with silicon nanoparticles. In the present investigation, the antiviral activity of silicon dioxide nanoparticles was evaluated against CABMV in cowpea.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Symptomatology and maintenance of virus

Virus-infected plants displayed symptoms such as vein-banding, vein clearing, mosaic patterns, stunted growth, leaf distortion, reduced leaf area, severe chlorosis, and leaf deformation. Purposive sampling was done and infected leaf samples were collected from Thrissur and Palakkad districts of Kerala. A disease score chart (scale of 0–5) was prepared to assess disease severity based on the vulnerability index (Fig.1).

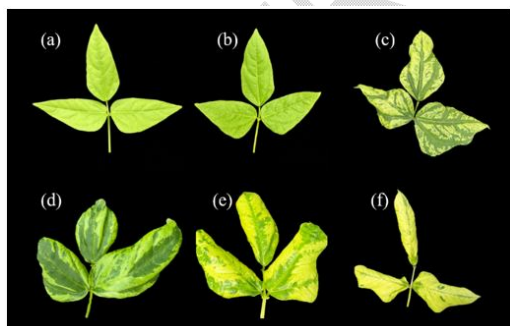


Fig 1. Disease score chart (a) **Score 0** (No symptoms) (b) **Score 1** (Slight vein-clearing & mosaic symptoms) (c) **Score 2** (Vein banding symptoms) (d) **Score 3** (Severe vein banding and cupping of leaves) (e) **Score 4** (Severe mosaic, vein-banding & reduction in leaf area) (f) **Score 5** (Chlorosis and severe mosaic)

The virus was maintained through sap transmission to susceptible cowpea (Var. Anaswara) and *Chenopodium amaranticolor*, which is the local lesion host of the virus, under insect-proof glasshouse conditions. The symptom development was monitored and documented on both hosts. The viral inoculum was maintained in susceptible cowpea plants and inoculated using potassium phosphate buffer (0.01 M, pH 7.2). Severe mosaic symptoms were selected, and leaf samples were homogenized in a 1:2.5 sample buffer ratio, using a pre-cooled mortar and pestle. The inoculum was then applied to cowpea leaves at the cotyledonary stage and *C. amaranticolor* leaves at the 8-leaf stage, with celite dusted on the leaves to facilitate abrasion. Viral sap was gently applied along the veins, and the leaves were rinsed with distilled water after inoculation. Evening hours were identified as optimal for inoculation, and regular observations were conducted to record symptom development and the time taken for symptoms to appear.

2.2 Molecular detection of virus

The virus was identified at the molecular level using reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR). RNA was extracted from 100 mg of infected cowpea leaf tissue (Var. Anaswara), and ground with liquid nitrogen and polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP), followed by the addition of 1 mL of Trizol reagent and 10 μ l of β -mercaptoethanol. The homogenate was incubated at room temperature, mixed with chloroform, and centrifuged at 10,000 rpm. The RNA was precipitated with ice-cold isopropanol, rinsed with 75% ethanol, air-dried, and resuspended in RNase-free water. RNA quality and concentration were assessed spectrophotometrically (OD 260/280) and electrophoretically on a 2% agarose gel stained with ethidium bromide. The total RNA was converted into complementary DNA (cDNA) using the G-Biosciences cDNA synthesis kit, incubating 1 μ g of RNA at 42°C for 20 min. and then inactivating at 85°C for 5 min. The quality of the synthesized cDNA was also assessed spectrophotometrically. RT-PCR was conducted using Takara Emerald AmpR GT PCR Master Mix (2X-Premix) with cDNA as the template and specific primers for cowpea aphid-borne mosaic virus. A 20 μ l reaction mixture was prepared, and the cycling conditions were optimized with an annealing temperature of 54°C for the coat-protein gene-specific primers CABMV – F (5'–GGA TGC GGA GAA TCT GTG–3') and CABMV – R (5'–GAT TGA CGT CCC TTG CAG–3'), targeting an expected amplicon size of 812 bp (Bhadramurthy and Bhat, 2009).

2.3 Serological detection of virus by DAS-ELISA

The serological detection was carried out using a specific antiserum for cowpea aphid-borne mosaic virus (DSMZ -PV RT-0417) following the standard procedure (Clark and Adams, 1977). Antibody for CABMV was diluted in coating buffer in the ratio of 1:1000 and 200 μ l was added to each well of a microtiter plate. The plate was covered and incubated at 37°C for 4 hours, then washed three times with phosphate buffer saline tween (PBS-T), including a soaking step, and blotted dry. Samples were extracted at 1:20 (w/v) in extraction buffer (PBS-T), and 200 μ l aliquots were added to duplicate wells, followed by overnight incubation at 4°C. After washing, 200 μ l of enzyme-conjugated antibody, diluted in conjugate buffer, was added, and plates were incubated at 37°C for 4 hours. Following another wash, 200 μ l of freshly prepared substrate (1 mg/mL para-nitrophenyl-phosphate in substrate buffer) was added to each well and incubated at 37°C for 60 min. Results were assessed by measuring the absorbance at 405 nm in an ELISA- reader (BIO-RAD iMark™ microplate reader).

2.4 Characterization and preparation of nanoparticle suspension for treatments

SiO₂ NPs purchased from Sisco Research Laboratories PVT. LTD. was used in the present study. The silicon nanoparticle had an average primary particle size of 15 nm and

purity percentage, of 99.5%. The NPs were characterized using FE-SEM (Fig 3). To prepare a homogeneous nanoparticle suspension, the nanopowder was suspended in double-distilled water, the suspension was sonicated for 30 min. using a probe sonicator.

2.5 Assay for antiviral activity of silicon dioxide nanoparticles

One mL of nanoparticle formulation of each concentration was added to one mL of CABMV crude sap, and the mixture was thoroughly mixed to ensure uniformity. 50,100, and 200 ppm of SiO₂NP suspension were prepared and mixed with viral sap. This mixed suspension was then incubated for 10 min. to allow for optimal interaction between the nanoparticles and the viral particles. Following the incubation period, the mixture was used for inoculating *C. amaranticolor* plants, facilitating the assessment of the effect of nanoparticles on viral infection in the host plants. This was done to evaluate the potential antiviral activity of the nanoparticles against CABMV.

2.6 Pre-and post-inoculation studies in *Chenopodium* and cowpea

Leaves of *C. amaranticolor* at the 8-leaf stage and Cowpea (Var. Anaswara) at the cotyledonary leaf stage were treated with nanoparticles both before and after virus inoculation. For the pre-inoculation studies, the plants were first challenge-inoculated with a freshly prepared virus inoculum, followed by a foliar spray of nanoparticles 24 hours later. For post-inoculation, nanoparticle formulation was sprayed at various concentrations 24 hours before challenge inoculation with CABMV. 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000 ppm of SiO₂ NP suspension were prepared and used. Based on the scoring of plants subjected to various treatments, the vulnerability index (VI) was calculated by using the formula given by Bos, 1982.

$$VI = \frac{(0n_0 + 1n_1 + 2n_2 + 3n_3 + 4n_4 + 5n_5)}{n_t(n_c - 1)} \times 100$$

- VI – Vulnerability Index
n₀, n₁,..... n₅ – Number of plants in disease category of 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
n_t – Total number of plants
n_c – Number of categories

2.7 Statistical analysis

Data generated from the experiment were subjected to ANOVA. Analyses were conducted using the statistical software KAU GRAPES 1.1.0 (Gopinath *et al.*, 2021) and evaluated the statistical significance of the analysis results at a probability value (p-value) ≤ 0.05. The result's significance was indicated in letters in descending order where (a > b > c) and the same letters indicated equal significance. All results were represented as means of triplicate with the corresponding standard deviations (SD).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cowpea plants showing varied diseased symptoms were observed and the symptoms were documented. The cowpea infected with CABMV had severe vein banding symptoms, leaf distortion, and mosaic symptoms. The virus from the infected leaves could be successfully transferred to the propagation host, cowpea (*Vigna unguiculata* var. Anaswara) as well as the local lesion host *Chenopodium amaranticolor* by mechanical inoculation with 0.01M phosphate buffer. There are reports of *C. amaranticolor* as a good host for potyvirus producing chlorotic local lesions (Hollings, 1956; Bock, 1973). Here in this study, chlorotic local lesions were observed 7 days after mechanical inoculation and later turned necrotic in *C. amaranticolor*. In cowpea, most inoculated plants showed systemic symptoms, and the symptoms were observed in emerging trifoliate with slight vein-clearing

symptoms initially, followed by severe vein banding and distortion of leaf size. The mechanical transmission rates were 97.45% in *C. amaranticolor* and 98.13% in cowpea (Table 1).

The virus cultured in cowpea and *C. amaranticolor* was molecularly confirmed as CABMV (Fig 2). The virus was identified as a strain of Bean common mosaic virus showing more than 95% similarity to CABMV. The sequence was deposited in NCBI with accession number PQ511232. Further studies were carried out using this virus culture maintained in cowpea.

Table 1. Mechanical transmission of CABMV in *C. amaranticolor* and cowpea

Sl No.	Crop / Variety	Days taken for symptom development	Mechanical transmission (%)	Nature and Type of symptom
1	<i>Chenopodium amaranticolor</i>	9-10	97.45	Definite chlorotic spots with a yellow halo later necrotize at the center
2	Cowpea (Anaswara)	7-8	98.13	Vein banding, vein clearing, and slight mosaic symptoms

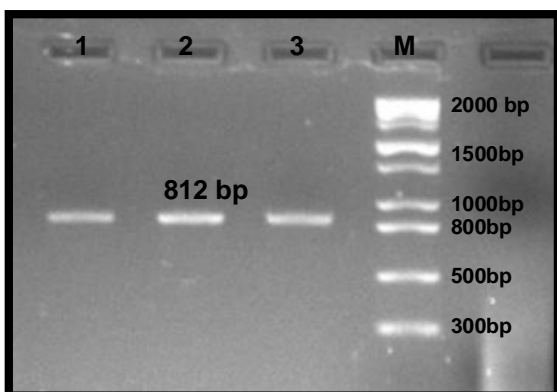


Fig 2. 2% Agarose gel profile of PCR products with CABMV-specific primer
Lanes 1, 2 & 3: PCR products Lane M: 1kb ladder

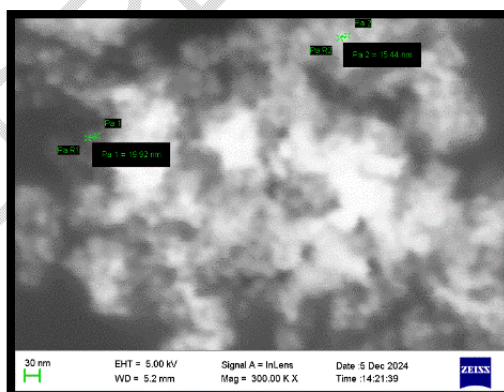


Fig 3. Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopic image of SiO₂ Nanoparticles

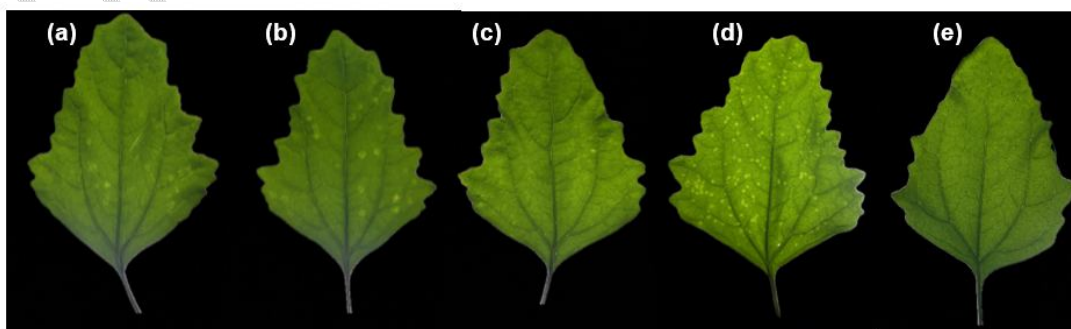


Fig 4. Efficacy of NPs against virus on simultaneous inoculation of NP and virus to *C. amaranticolor*. (a), (b) & (c) diffused local lesions in 50, 100 and 200 ppm of SiO₂ NPs (d) intact chlorotic local lesions in viral control (e) Absolute Control.

The virucidal effects of nanoparticles (NPs) on viral particles represent an area of considerable scientific interest. A direct inoculation study was conducted to investigate the direct action of NPs, where viral sap mixed with NPs was inoculated onto *C. amaranticolor*. The evaluation of silicon dioxide nanoparticles (SiO₂NPs) in this co-inoculation study revealed notable results. Apart from a reduction in the number of local lesions, diffused spots were observed on the leaves, in contrast to the intact chlorotic spots seen in viral control plants (Fig. 4). Among the tested concentrations of SiO₂NPs—50 ppm, 100 ppm, and 200 ppm—200 ppm proved most effective, resulting in the least number of local lesions (4), compared to 36 in the viral control (Table 2). SiO₂NPs at 50 ppm and 100 ppm also reduced lesion counts to 6 and 10, respectively. The interaction between the virus and nanoparticles likely reduced the infectivity of viral particles by causing disintegration or impairing their movement and stability. Nanoscale particles possess unique physicochemical properties that enable them to bind to and potentially destroy viral particles effectively. Such nanoparticles have demonstrated virucidal activity against various viruses, significantly lowering their infectivity. Cai *et al.*, (2019) reported similar findings, demonstrating the antiviral activity of ZnONPs and SiO₂NPs against TMV in vitro. Their study revealed that the direct interaction of metal nanoparticles with TMV resulted in capsid protein injury, aggregation, and disintegration of the virus, further highlighting the potential of nanoparticles in antiviral applications. Similar studies conducted by El-Dougduget *et al.*, (2018) demonstrated that AgNPs bind to the coat protein of Potato virus Y and tomato mosaic virus, thereby inhibiting viral replication. Liu *et al.*, (2024) reported the protective and therapeutic effects of biosynthesized copper oxide nanoparticles (CuONPs) against tobacco mosaic virus (TMV). Spraying CuONPs at a concentration of 100 mg/L conferred protection to plants by fracturing TMV particles, enhancing plant immunity, and promoting plant growth. The interaction between the virus and SiO₂NPs likely contributed to the reduction in viral titre and the milder symptom expression observed in this study.

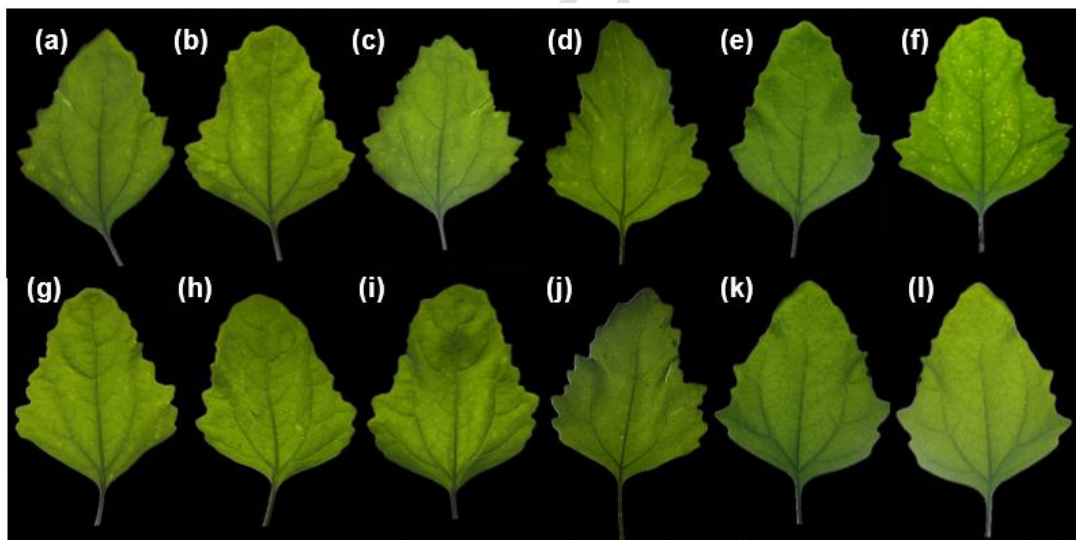
Table 2. Symptom development on simultaneous inoculation of NP and virus to *Chenopodium amaranticolor*

Sno.	Treatments	Local Lesions*	Percent disease inhibition over viral control
1	SiO ₂ 50 ppm	06.33 ± 1.155 ^c	81.73
2	SiO ₂ 100 ppm	10.33 ± 3.215 ^c	70.19
3	SiO ₂ 200 ppm	04.00 ± 1.732 ^b	88.45
4	Viral control	34.66 ± 2.309 ^a	-
5	Absolute control	00.00 ± 0.000 ^d	-
CD – 0.94		P Value – 0.00	

* Mean of three replications. In each column figure followed by same superscript do not significantly differ according to DMRT

The efficacy of nanoparticles SiO₂NPs in curative and protective strategies was assessed through pre- and post-inoculation studies using a local lesion host and further

confirmed in the propagative host, cowpea. Pre-inoculation of the virus via mechanical inoculation, followed by foliar application of SiO₂NPs at varying concentrations, resulted in a significant reduction in the average number of local lesions compared to the viral control (34 lesions) in *C. amaranticolor*. All tested concentrations of SiO₂NPs demonstrated a notable decrease in lesion numbers (Fig. 5). A decreasing trend in lesion count was observed with increasing concentrations of SiO₂NPs, with 100 ppm showing 9 lesions, 200 ppm showing 8 lesions, and no local lesions observed at 1000 ppm in pre-inoculation studies (Table 3). In post-inoculation studies, where a foliar spray of SiO₂NPs was applied before virus inoculation, the lesion count was significantly lower compared to the viral control. This prophylactic approach proved to be more effective than the curative method, where the virus was inoculated first, followed by NP application. SiO₂NPs at 1000 ppm completely suppressed local lesion formation, with no lesions observed, while foliar sprays at 50 ppm and 200 ppm resulted in an average of 3 local lesions each (Table 3). Additionally, symptom expression in SiO₂ nanoparticle-treated plants was delayed by 3-4 days compared to the viral control, where symptoms appeared within 7 days post-inoculation. Silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) with a size of 12.6 nm were evaluated for their impact on the tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) in *Solanum tuberosum*. The findings revealed a notable suppression of local lesions and a decrease in TSWV infection (Shafie *et al.*, 2018). El-Dougdouget *al.*, 2018 reported that the tomato plants treated with AgNPs at a concentration of 50 ppm exhibited a greater reduction in disease severity, disease incidence, and relative viral concentration compared to other tested concentrations. Additionally, AgNPs at 50 ppm significantly decreased the average number of local lesions caused by tomato mosaic virus in *N. glutinosa*.



The pre-and post-inoculation studies were conducted on cowpea plants and

Fig. 5. Efficacy of different concentrations of NPs on pre- and post-inoculation of virus in *C. amaranticolor* based on local lesions, Pre inoculation (a) SiO₂ NP 50ppm (b) SiO₂ NP 100ppm (c) SiO₂ NP 200ppm (d) SiO₂ NP 500ppm (e) SiO₂ NP 1000ppm (f) Viral control, Post inoculation (g) SiO₂ NP 50ppm (h) SiO₂ NP 100ppm (i) SiO₂ NP 200ppm (j) SiO₂ NP 500ppm (k) SiO₂NP 1000ppm (l) Absolute control

observed for two weeks to verify the reduction in disease severity. Disease severity in cowpea was evaluated using the vulnerability index (VI), which was derived from disease scores. A VI of less than 20 indicates a higher tolerance to virus inoculation. In cowpea, foliar application of SiO₂ NPs at 1000 ppm before virus inoculation demonstrated the best

control, with a VI of zero, as no symptoms were observed for up to two weeks in treated plants. Across all treatments in cowpea, the VI was significantly lower compared to the viral control, which exhibited the highest VI of 94 (Fig. 6). SiO₂ NPs at 1000 ppm were followed by 500 ppm, with a VI ranging from 5 to 9 in pre-inoculation studies and 2 to 6 in post-inoculation studies (Table 3). In studies involving pre-inoculation of the virus, followed by foliar application of SiO₂ at concentrations of 1000 ppm, 500 ppm, and 100 ppm, the treatments demonstrated good efficacy with 100%, 94%, and 85% reduction in VI, respectively. In a prophylactic (post-inoculation) approach, foliar application of SiO₂NPs at 1000 ppm, 500 ppm, and 200 ppm was found to be highly effective, resulting in 100%, 97%, and 87% reduction in VI compared to the untreated viral control. A threshold level of NP dosage is needed to induce resistance and inhibit viral particles at the same time. In the present investigation, SiO₂NPs 1000 ppm on both prophylactic and curative approaches were observed with lower VI and reduced viral titre indicating 1000 ppm as the optimum dosage for reducing disease severity. El-Shazly et al., 2017 found that potato plants treated with AgNPs at a concentration of 0.1 µg/µL exhibited a decrease in both virus concentration and disease incidence 24 hours post-inoculation with Potato virus Y. The use of chitosan NPs at a concentration of 100 µg/mL significantly reduced alfalfa mosaic virus (AMV) accumulation levels, decreased disease severity, and induced systemic resistance compared to the control (Abdelkhalik *et al.*, 2021). The study by de Jesús Rivero-Montejo *et al.*, (2023) demonstrated that the application of zinc oxide nanoparticles (ZnONPs) at a concentration of 200 mM effectively reduced the viral titre of Pepper huasteco yellow vein virus (PHYVV) in the two tested jalapeño pepper varieties. The effectiveness of ZnONPs was found to depend on both the pepper variety and the timing of nanoparticle application. The underlying mechanism of action of nanoparticles may likely be due to restricted virus mobility and the induction of plant resistance through the activation of defense enzymes.

Table 3. Efficacy of different concentrations of NPs on pre- and post-inoculation of virus onto *C. amaranticolor* and cowpea

Pre/post	Treatments	Average local lesions*	Percent inhibition over viral control	Vulnerability index*	Percent inhibition over viral control
Pre-inoculation silicon	SiO ₂ 50 ppm	8.66±2.30 ^b	74.7	16.66± 08.33 ^d	82.36
	SiO ₂ 100 ppm	9.33±9.29 ^b	72.6	13.88± 12.72 ^{de}	85.30
	SiO ₂ 200 ppm	8.66±0.57 ^b	74.7	33.33± 08.33 ^b	64.71
	SiO ₂ 500 ppm	5.33±2.08 ^{bc}	84.4	05.55± 04.80 ^{ef}	94.12
	SiO ₂ 1000 ppm	0.00±0.00 ^c	100	00.00± 00.00 ^t	100
Post inoculation silicon	SiO ₂ 50 ppm	3.00±1.73 ^c	91.1	22.22± 04.81 ^{cd}	76.47
	SiO ₂ 100 ppm	1.66±1.52 ^c	95.2	30.55± 09.61 ^{bc}	67.65
	SiO ₂ 200 ppm	0.66±.57 ^c	98.2	13.88± 04.80 ^{de}	85.30
	SiO ₂ 500 ppm	2.66±4.61 ^c	92.3	02.77± 04.80 ^f	97.07
	SiO ₂ 1000 ppm	0.00±0.00 ^c	100	00.00± 00.00 ^t	100
Control	Viral control	34.66±2.30 ^a	-	94.44± 04.81 ^a	-
	Absolute control	0.00 ± 0.00 ^c	-	00.00± 00.00 ^t	-
Local lesions (CD – 1.54, P Value – 0.0)			Vulnerability index (CD – 3.07, P Value-0.0)		

* Mean of three replications. In each column figure followed by same superscript do not significantly differ according to DMRT

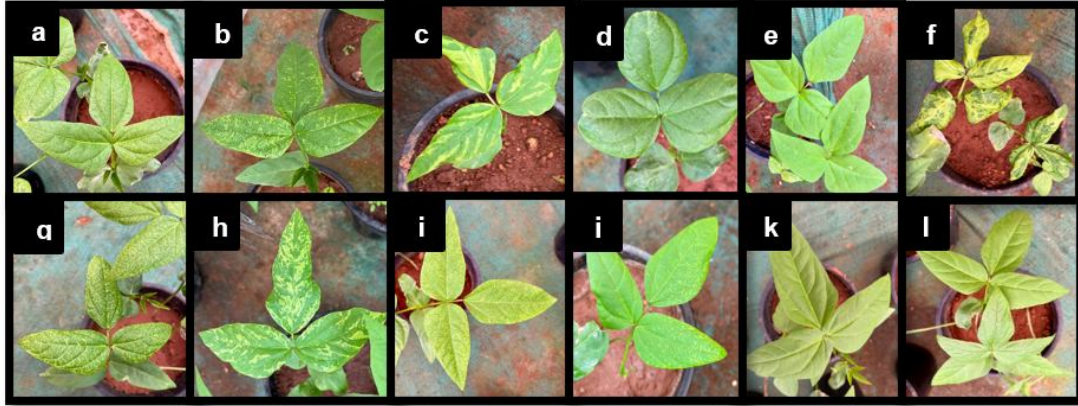


Fig 6. Efficacy of different concentrations of SiO₂NPs on pre- and post-inoculation studies in cowpea based on VI

Pre-inoculation (a)50ppm (16.6) (b)100ppm (13.8) (c)200ppm (33.3) (d)500ppm (5.5) (e)1000ppm (0) (f)Viral control (94.4) **Post-inoculation**(g)50ppm (22.2) (h)100ppm (30.5) (i)200ppm (13.8) (j)500ppm (2.7) (k)1000ppm (0) (l)Absolute control (0)

Viral symptom expression is not an absolute confirmation of reduction in viral titre in plants, hence the reduction in viral titre was further confirmed by DAS ELISA in selected treatments. ELISA results showed a lower titre in treatments with a reduced fold increase in absorbance for samples taken from SiO₂NP-treated plants. A two-fold increase in absorbance at 405 nm compared to the healthy negative control was considered positive for the virus, and the increase in absorbance was used to estimate viral concentration. Viral control plants showed a 14.5-fold increase in absorbance at 405 nm relative to the healthy control, indicating a high viral titre in virus-inoculated plants. In plants treated with SiO₂NPs at 1000 ppm before virus inoculation, the viral concentration was significantly reduced, as indicated by only a two-fold increase in absorbance compared to the viral control. Although these plants appeared symptomless and healthy upon visual inspection, DAS-ELISA confirmed the presence of the virus, albeit with a much lower titre than in the viral control. The less viral titre at 1000ppm on post-inoculation studies indicates the curative effect of SiO₂NPs against CABMV. In contrast, plants subjected to pre-inoculation of the virus followed by SiO₂NPs 100 ppm foliar spray showed a 10-fold increase in absorbance, reflecting a relatively high viral concentration. However, the viral titre in these plants was still lower than in the viral control. Post-inoculation SiO₂NPs treatments at 200 ppm and 1000 ppm showed significantly lower viral titre, with only 1.9-fold and 2.5-fold increases, respectively (Table 4). Similar studies were reported by Abdelkhalek et al. (2021), where the ELISA test revealed that alfalfa mosaic virus-inoculated control plants exhibited the highest viral concentration, with an ELISA value of 0.991, compared to 0.0585 in mock-inoculated control plants. Among the chitosan NPs treatments, the inactivating treatment was the most effective, showing an ELISA value of 0.083, followed by protective and curative treatments with values of 0.380 and 0.293, respectively. The antiviral activity of Si NPs has been reported against phytoviruses (Elsharkawy and Mousa, 2015; El-Sawy et al., 2017, Sangwan et al., 2023). Foliar application of SiNPs (100nm) before challenge inoculation with the virus along with ginger and horsemint extract delayed tomato yellow leaf curl virus (TYLCV) symptoms and disease severity in tomato plants (El-Sawy et al., 2017).

Table 4. Determination of viral titre by DAS-ELISA in different treatments in cowpea

Sno.	Treatment	Absorbance at 405nm*	Fold increase over negative control	Reaction to virus
1	Negative Control	0.012 ±0.016 ^c	-	-
2	Positive Control	0.174 ±0.015 ^a	14.5	+ve
3	Pre- inoculation SiO ₂ 100 ppm	0.120 ±0.102 ^{ab}	10.0	+ve
4	Post-inoculation SiO ₂ 200 ppm	0.023 ±0.032 ^c	01.9	+ve
5	Post-inoculation SiO ₂ 1000 ppm	0.031 ±0.017 ^{bc}	02.5	+ve
CD – 0.066		P Value – 0.009		

*** Mean of three replications. In each column figure followed by same superscript does not significantly differ according to DMRT**

On perusal of the literature, no prior reports on the efficacy of SiO₂NPs against CABMV were reported. In the present study, based on the vulnerability index and the assessment of viral titre by ELISA, prophylactic application of SiO₂NPs 1000 ppm can reduce the disease severity of cowpea aphid-borne mosaic disease in cowpea. Nanoparticles can interact with the virus mainly in two methods; nanoparticles directly inactivate microbes by disrupting processes such as DNA replication, protein synthesis, cell wall formation, electron transport, viral coat protein synthesis, capsid degradation, and genome packaging, and indirectly by enhancing plant defense mechanisms by stimulating the production of enzymes and compounds like peroxidase, polyphenol oxidase, phenylalanine ammonia-lyase, superoxide dismutase, jasmonic acid, and ethylene (Vargas-Hernandez *et al.*, 2020, Rajani *et al.*, 2022, Dutta *et al.*, 2022, Warghane *et al.*, 2024). To balance plant defense responses and virus-NP interactions, low to medium concentrations of NPs are essential. This optimization is critical to effectively activate plant defense systems without causing phytotoxicity, ensuring sustainable antiviral activity. Here in this study, CABMV causes systemic infection in plants and it has a high replication rate as demonstrated by a high vulnerability index (94) and viral titre in (0.174) DAS-ELISA. The findings suggest that higher concentrations of SiO₂NPs are needed to disrupt viral particles or interfere with their replication effectively. Moreover, the prophylactic foliar application of 1000 ppm SiO₂NPs before virus inoculation significantly reduced disease severity compared to the curative approach.

4. CONCLUSION

Recent advancements in Nanophytovirology present promising opportunities for managing viral diseases, though understanding the precise mechanisms behind their effects remains a critical area for future research. The in vitro greenhouse assay conducted in this study highlights the antiviral potential of SiO₂ nanoparticles against cowpea aphid-borne mosaic virus. The pre- and post-inoculation studies exhibited a reduction in the number of local lesions in *C. amaranticolor* and a decrease in the vulnerability index in cowpea (var. Anaswara). These findings suggest that SiO₂NPs possess significant antiviral potential. The reduction in viral replication and viral titre was further validated through DAS-ELISA results. To confirm the field applicability of these findings, further studies involving field assays are essential. Additionally, deeper exploration into the mechanisms by which nanoparticles

induce systemic resistance and their direct and indirect interactions with viruses is necessary to understand their role in disease management better. Integrating nanoparticle treatments with other antiviral management strategies may enhance the control of CABMV while minimizing the need for high nanoparticle doses. Such approaches could pave the way for more sustainable and effective viral disease management solutions.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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