Vanadium Substitution of LiFePO$_4$ Cathode Materials To Enhance the Capacity of LiFePO$_4$-Based Lithium-Ion Batteries

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ABSTRACT: The mechanism of enhancing the capacity of the LiFePO$_4$ cathodes in lithium ion batteries by the addition of a small amount of vanadium, which locate on the lithium site and induce lithium vacancies in the crystal structure, is reported in this article. As a result, the capacity increases from 138 mAh/g found for pristine LiFePO$_4$ to 155 mAh/g for the V-added compound, and the conductivity increases from $4.75 \times 10^{-4}$ S/cm for the LiFePO$_4$ without V addition to $1.9 \times 10^{-2}$ S/cm for the V-added compound. A possible model to facilitate the enhancement of conductivity and capacity is described with evidence supported by X-ray powder diffraction, X-ray absorption spectroscopy, and neutron powder diffraction data.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the various cathode materials used in lithium ion batteries, lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO$_4$) has attracted great interest because of its environmental friendliness, low cost, long cycling life, and high specific energy.$^1$ Nevertheless, in order to compete with the electrochemical performances of other commercial cathode materials, such as LiCoO$_2$, LiMnO$_2$, etc., the capacity of LiFePO$_4$ needs to be significantly improved. The low capacity of pristine LiFePO$_4$ is due to the relatively low electronic conductivity and low diffusion rate of Li$^+$ ions within the structure, which limits the amount of Li$^+$ ions that can be extracted and hence limits the further commercial development of this material.$^{1,2}$ The electronic conductivity can be improved by coating a layer of carbon$^{3,4}$ and by adding transition metals.$^{5,10}$ In addition, the Li$^+$ ion diffusion rate and the amount of lithium extracted from LiFePO$_4$ can be manipulated by synthesizing nanometer grain sizes,$^{10,11}$ as well as by adding transition metals.$^{12,14}$ Therefore, in this work, to maximize electronic conductivity, minimize Li$^+$ ion diffusion lengths, maximize Li$^+$ ion diffusion rates in LiFePO$_4$ particles, the addition of transition metals to nanometer-sized LiFePO$_4$ is the most viable method. This scheme results in an improvement in both the capacity and electronic conductivity simultaneously. Although some reports of the surface coating of LiFePO$_4$ particles with metal oxides such as ZrO$_2$,$^{15}$ and ZnO$^{16}$ demonstrated significant improvements in capacity retention, the enhancement is found to be lower than what is afforded by cation (transition metal) substitution into the LiFePO$_4$ crystal structure.

In this work, we will investigate the mechanism of improving the electrochemical properties of a pristine LiFePO$_4$ by fabricating nanometer sized cathodes with V incorporated into the LiFePO$_4$ crystal structure preferentially at the M1 site. In many previous studies, cationic substitution to the Fe site (M2 site) in LiFePO$_4$ usually results in higher ionic mobility and Li$^+$ diffusion coefficient as a result of the cell volume expansion and the probable weakening of the Li$^+$–O interactions.$^{13,14,17}$ The result can be named as pillar effect,$^{18,19}$ which supports the layered crystalline structure to avoid collapse during the lithiation and delithiation cycles. The weakening of the Li$^+$–O interactions lowers the charge transfer resistance and thus improves the reversibility of lithiation and delithiation also. However, only a limited number of reports$^{5,20}$ showed that cationic substitution to the Li site (M1 site) is probable, and it results in the production of Li vacancies that increases the capacity of LiFePO$_4$, which is significantly different to the pillar effect previously reported.

In the following, we will describe the evidence for (a) the vanadium substitution at the lithium (M1) site in the LiFePO$_4$.
crystal structure, (b) the mechanism of the conductivity and capacity enhancement, and (c) the electrochemical properties of charging and discharging rates from 0.2 to 20 C affected by the vanadium substitution effect. The experimental methods includes several techniques, such as X-ray powder diffraction (XRD), neutron powder diffraction (NPD), and X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) including X-ray absorption near edge structure (XANES) and extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) analysis. The investigation on the correlations between the structure and electrochemical properties will be reported in the following.

2. EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

Cathode materials consisting of LiFePO4 with different concentrations of V2O5 were manufactured by Advanced Lithium Electrochemical Co., Ltd. (ALEEES) via a modified sol–gel process. The process used precursors of LiOH·H2O (99.9%, Aldrich), FeC2O4·2H2O (99%, Aldrich), and NH4H2PO4 (97%, Aldrich), which were dissolved in deionized water. Stoichiometric quantities of V2O5 (99.9%, Aldrich) was added into the solution, followed by the addition of citric acid and mixing. The resulting suspension was mixed with 5 wt % sucrose and spray-dried using a hot air stream with an inlet pressure of 0.2 MPa. Inlet and outlet temperatures of the dryer were 220 and 100 °C, respectively. The powders were subsequently calcined at 800 °C for 12 h in a N2 atmosphere and cooled to room temperature to yield the final product, LiFePO4·V.

For the electrochemical tests, LiFePO4·V was mixed with carbon black and polyvinylidene fluoride in a weight ratio of 85:8:7 to form the cathode material, and then assembled into a 2032-type coin cell with a lithium metal anode and 1 M lithium hexafluorophosphate in an ethylene carbonate/dimethyl carbonate solution as the electrolyte. The coin cell was assembled inside an argon-filled glovebox. Room-temperature galvanostatic cycling was carried out between 2.5 and 4.2 V at 0.2 C (where 1 C is equal to the charge of the battery in one hour). To understand the discrepancy of the discharging process at different C-rates, 18650-type cells were prepared to perform the measurements at various discharging and discharging rates between 0.2 C (34 mAg−1) and 20 C (3.4 Ag−1). All electrochemical experiments were conducted under ambient conditions.

The crystal structures were determined by synchrotron XRD performed at beamlines BL01C2 and BL17A1 in the National Synchrotron Radiation Research Center (NSRRC), Taiwan. Further structural information was obtained using NPD, performed on the high-resolution powder diffractometer, Echidna21 in Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). The refinement of structural models with XRD and NPD data was based on the conventional Rietveld method using GSAS implemented with the EXPGUI interface. XAS data were collected at the wiggler-equipped beamlines BL17C1, BL16A1, and BL07A1 in NSRRC.22 Photon energies were calibrated to the V and Fe K-edge absorption energies. The data were analyzed by IFEFFIT-based program packages.25 The pseudo radial structure function (RSF) for the central absorbing atom was obtained from Fourier transformation of the k3-weighted EXAFS oscillations over the k range of 2.7–14.1 Å−1. The V distribution inside LiFePO4 nanoparticles was mapped by an energy dispersive spectrometer (EDS) under a high-resolution transmission electron microscope with lateral resolution of less than 0.2 nm.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. X-ray Powder Diffraction. XRD patterns of pristine LiFePO4 and LiFePO4·V samples are shown in Figure 1. The main peaks of all samples can be indexed to an orthorhombic olivine structure. In Figure 1, the pristine LiFePO4 contains a LiPO4 impurity phase (marked by a star), which might be formed from the excess Li during sample fabrication. The minor phase, LiV2O5 (marked by a cross) was also found in LiFePO4·V samples when 5% V was added. The grain size of LiFePO4 and LiFePO4·V were estimated to be 71 and 77 nm, respectively, based on the Scherrer equation. In addition, the EELS mapping of the TEM data reveals that V is uniformly distributed in the LiFePO4·V sample, which means that V is incorporated into the LiFePO4 matrix without phase separation or segregation. Details of the structural parameters derived from XRD data are summarized in Table 1. The volume of the unit cell of LiFePO4·V (291.45 Å3) is slightly larger than pristine LiFePO4 (291.3 Å3). All crystal axes expand slightly after the addition of V atoms. We propose that adding V acts as a nucleation seed to help the crystalline growth and promotes the dissolution of the impurity phases. In both cases, we find full Fe occupancy at the M2 site, which implies that no Fe is replaced by V in the unit cell of LiFePO4·V. Unfortunately, the occupancy of Li cannot be refined precisely from the XRD pattern due to the X-ray being insensitive to lithium. Therefore, XAS and NPD were also used together for further analysis.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>sample</th>
<th>lattice (Pnmb)</th>
<th>reliability factors</th>
<th>Δχ²</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a (Å)</td>
<td>b (Å)</td>
<td>c (Å)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6.0074</td>
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<tr>
<td>LiFePO4·V(1%)</td>
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<td>LiFePO4·V(5%)</td>
<td>6.0022</td>
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Figure 1. X-ray powder diffraction pattern of LiFePO4, LiFePO4·V(1%), and LiFePO4·V(5%) with 12 keV X-rays and refined using LiFePO4 models with GSAS. The star indicates the impurity phase of LiPO4 in the pristine LiFePO4 sample. The cross indicates the cluster-type phase of LiV2O5 in LiFePO4·V sample.
3.2. X-ray Absorption Spectroscopy. The measured XANES and Fourier transformed EXAFS data of LiFePO₄:V at the V K-edge are shown in Figures 2 and 3. XANES is highly sensitive to the electronic structures around V; and EXAFS reveals the atomic structural characteristics around the local environment of V. The differential curves of the XANES data of LiFePO₄:V (1%) together with two standard reference samples, V₂O₅ and V₂O₃, are shown in the inset of Figure 2. In Figure 2, the pre-edge feature of V, which denotes the 1s → 3d quadrupole transition due to a combination of stronger vanadium 3d → 4p orbital coupling and the vanadium 3d orbitals hybridized with the oxygen 2p orbitals, is the most salient feature for determining the oxidation state of the absorbed atom and the symmetry of its surrounding environment. The white line indicates the dipole-allowed transition 1s → 4p. The reference V₂O₅ contains V in a distorted octahedral structure with three splitting 3d states, and the reference V₂O₃ contains V in a distorted square-pyramidal structure with only two split 3d states. As shown in the inset of Figure 2, the differential curves reveal that the local structure of 1% V additive in LiFePO₄ is similar to the distorted octahedral structure found in V₂O₅ instead of the primitive square-pyramidal structure found in V₂O₃. XANES data reveals that 5% V additives in LiFePO₄ show different electronic configurations relative to 1% V additives, and thus the sample with 5% V additives is likely to be a complex mixture spectrum with V₂O₅ phase. From the chemical shift of the K-edge, the V additives exhibit an averaged oxidation state around 4⁺. The ionic radius of V⁴⁺ in the octahedral coordination environment, determined by EXAFS, is about 0.72 Å, which is smaller than the radius of Li⁺ (0.76 Å) and Fe²⁺ (0.78 Å) but much larger than P³⁺ (∼0.4 Å). The P site has a feature of tetrahedral coordination environments and the small radius of P³⁺, which are unlikely to be substituted by V. Moreover, the normalized peak intensity of the white line is larger than that of the references samples, which indicates emptier 4p states in the V-added samples and creates more positive holes to give rise to a p-type conductor behavior. From Figure 3, curves (a) and (e) show the fitted RSF of V and Fe K-edge with no phase correction for the LiFePO₄:V. The fitting parameters are summarized in Table 2. The curves (b), (c), and (d) are the calculated RSF of Li, P, and Fe for LiFePO₄, respectively, using the IFEFFIT-based program packages and with default Debye–Waller factors. From curves (a) and (e), the V and Fe core atoms have distinctly different RSF spectra in LiFePO₄:V, illustrating that the V and Fe atoms in LiFePO₄:V have different local surrounding environments. Comparing these five curves, the local environment of V in LiFePO₄:V samples is only similar to that of the lithium environment, suggesting that V is located at the Li (M1) site and not at the Fe (M2) or P sites, which is also consistent with the XRD and NPD data. Using the curves (a) and (b) in Figure 3, we observe that the bond length of the first shell of V is shorter than that of Li, implying that the next-nearest neighbor Li of LiFePO₄:V has a longer bond length of Li–O and weaker interactions with its surroundings.

3.3. Neutron Diffraction. NPD patterns of both LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄:V samples are shown in Figure 4. Neutrons are generally more sensitive to the lighter elements than X-rays, and thus, careful Rietveld analysis was undertaken to compare pristine LiFePO₄ to LiFePO₄:V, and the pertinent details for the final models are listed in Table 3. NPD data sets were collected using the sample cans with the same size and for the same time on all samples, but the diffraction patterns are only subtly different. Similar structural parameters are derived from NPD as XRD data with respect to unit cell parameters and Fe

![Figure 2](image-url) Normalized XANES spectra at the V K-edge of the LiFePO₄:V sample and compared with the spectral features of reference compounds. The inset shows the derivative curve of the pre-edge region, and the arrow indicates the d orbital splitting in the crystal field.

![Figure 3](image-url) Fourier transformation of the k³-weighted EXAFS oscillations at the V and Fe K-edge for the LiFePO₄:V sample (a), for V K-edge extended range and the fitting curve (b), the simulated spectrum for the Li environment, (c) the simulated spectrum for the P environment, (d) the simulated spectrum for the Fe environment, and (e) for Fe K-edge extended range and the fitting curve for LiFePO₄:V.

| Table 2. Parameters of V and Fe K-Edge EXAFS Refinement for LiFePO₄:V |
|------------------|---------|---------|----------|
|                  | path    | deg × amp | σ_v²     | R (Å)    |
| V K-edge         | [O]     | 3.58     | 0.0018   | 2.022    |
|                  | [P]     | 1.71     | 0.0050   | 2.688    |
|                  | [P]     | 1.71     | 0.0020   | 3.232    |
|                  | [Fe]    | 6.61     | 0.0278   | 3.488    |
| Fe K-edge        | [O]     | 3.27     | 0.0076   | 2.053    |
|                  | [O]     | 1.26     | 0.0102   | 2.345    |
|                  | [P]     | 4.48     | 0.0151   | 2.952    |
|                  | [P]     | 1.97     | 0.0049   | 3.326    |
|                  | [Fe]    | 1.65     | 0.0061   | 3.9      |
occupancy on the M2 site. Furthermore, models with fixed lithium vacancies show better fits to the NPD data of the sample LiFePO₄:V. It is evident that V on the lithium site and lithium vacancies can be obtained by the Rietveld fits. We can quantitatively approximate that 3−4% Li vacancies (see Figure 4, top panel, goodness-of-fit term plotted as a function of Li vacancy) are created after 0.75% V added, which is consistent with the valence of V at about +4.

3.4. Electrochemical Performance Evaluation. Figure 5 shows the charging and discharging curves of pristine LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄:V with 1% V additive within a voltage range of 2.0−4.2 V at 0.1 C. All charging and discharging profiles of these two samples exhibit flat operating voltages at about 3.45 V (charging) and 3.40 V (discharging). The separation between charging and discharging plateaus, also defined as the degree of polarization, of the LiFePO₄:V (51 mV) is significantly lower than that of the pristine LiFePO₄ (89 mV). This phenomenon means that Li⁺ in LiFePO₄:V possess better insertion/extraction reversibility than in the pristine LiFePO₄. The specific capacity of LiFePO₄:V is 155 mAhg⁻¹, which is 12% larger than that of the pristine LiFePO₄ (138 mAh/g). The conductivity of LiFePO₄:V is also enhanced by a factor of 40 relative to the pristine LiFePO₄. The capacity during discharging at different C-rates is shown in Figure 6. A discharging capacity of 1.03 Ahg⁻¹ was obtained at 0.2 C. As the C-rate increases from 0.2 to 20 C, the capacity decreases gradually but still remains at 0.88 Ahg⁻¹ at 20 C. This result indicates good Li⁺ extraction in LiFePO₄:V even when discharging at high C-rate. However, the enhanced electrochemical properties only appear substantially when the added V is less than 2%. It is interesting to further investigate the higher V concentration in impeding the Li diffusion rate in the future.

3.5. Model of V Substitution. Recently, vanadium incorporations into pristine LiFePO₄ had been noted and associated with improvements to the electrochemical performance of a lithium ion battery. Wen et al.²⁷ used Rietveld analysis of the XRD data to show that 1% V were randomly distributed at the Fe (M2) site in the LiFePO₄ structure and that there was improved electrochemical activity as a result of the V substitution. Yang et al.¹⁷ reported 5% of Mg²⁺, Ni²⁺, Al³⁺, or V³⁺ dopants at the Fe (M2) site and showed that a higher valence cation will result in a cathode exhibiting a larger specific discharge capacity. In their works, V substitution at the Fe site was determined by Rietveld analysis, and the valence of V was determined by the V K-edge XANES spectra. Sun et al.¹² prepared V-doped LiFePO₄/C powders through a carbothermal synthetic route expressing a higher Li⁺ ion diffusion coefficient but a lower electrical conductivity. A higher discharge capacity of this sample relative the pristine LiFePO₄ was also noted, but the location of V in LiFePO₄ structure was determined. Hong et al.²⁸ used Rietveld analysis to show V at the P site in LiFePO₄ structure. Ma et al.²⁹ systemically investigated the additive ratio

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<th>Table 3. Details Derived from the Rietveld Analysis Using Neutron Powder Diffraction Data of Pristine LiFePO₄ and LiFePO₄:V(0.75%)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>LiFePO₄</td>
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dependence of the V-doped LiFePO₄ cathode. Their XRD data shows V⁴⁺ substitution at Fe site at lower concentrations (<7%), formation of nanosized VO₂ on the LiFePO₄ particle surface beyond the solid–solution limit, and formation of the secondary phase LiₓVᵧ(PO₄)ₓ at higher concentrations (>11%). Zhang et al.₃₀ prepared LiFeₓ₋ₓVₓPO₄/C samples by using a two-step solid-state reaction. Their XANES results also determined the valence of V in LiFeₓ₋ₓVₓPO₄/C to be between +3 to +4. The above reports use Rietveld analysis of mostly XRD data to show the V location at the Fe site in the LiFePO₄ structure. However, it is difficult to precisely determine or model the location of a substituent atom at very low concentrations by Rietveld analysis using XRD data. EXAFS is a useful complementary technique to reveal the structural characteristics of LiFePO₄ as it is sensitive to the local environment around the absorbed atom. Zhao et al.₃¹ first showed that V was not at the Fe nor P sites in their LiFePO₄ structure, but that V forms a LiₓVᵧ(PO₄)ₓ secondary phase. Omenya et al.₃₂ showed the formation of the solid solution as a function of the synthesis temperature where at least 10 mol % of V⁴⁺ can be substituted at the Fe site in LiFePO₄ using appropriate temperatures. They showed that increasing the synthesis temperature to 700 °C leads to a decreased V solubility and the formation of a LiₓVᵧ(PO₄)ₓ secondary phase. XANES and EXAFS indicated that V was in the 3⁺ oxidation state in an octahedral environment at the Fe site in LiFePO₄. These results seem to contradict Zhao’s reports. From the above descriptions, there is a lively debate in the literature over whether V atom substitution can be accomplished in the first place, but by extending these discussions one step further, our work is one of the studies to present that V substitutes at the Li (M1) site in LiFePO₄.

In our work, samples consist of V substituted at the Li site with approximately 3–4% vacancies, and we found no evidence for V clusters or impurity phases for LiFePO₄:V when the added V quantity is less than 2%. At higher concentrations, we note the formation of LiₓVᵧOₓ. The enhanced capacity and conductivity were observed when the V additive is less than 2%; hence, we focused our structural characterization on the region of the additive concentration of less than 2%. We find the similar enhanced electrochemical properties when V located at the Li site relative to the Fe site. Chung et al.₃³ presented the benefits of aliovalent (Mg²⁺, Al³⁺, Ti⁴⁺, Zr⁴⁺, Nb⁵⁺, or W⁶⁺) substitution in the LiFePO₄ structure. They proposed that cation doping on the Li sites allows the stabilization of solid solutions with a net cation deficiency, although the site occupancy of specific dopants had yet to be established. In our work, we provide sufficient evidence that the generation of Li vacancies (νₓ) were induced after V addition at the Li site (Vₓₓₓₓ). Therefore, in the following, LiFePO₄:V samples are denoted as Liₓ₋ₓVₓFePO₄ to indicate that the added V is located at the Li site and that it created the vacancies of the Li sites. This argument is also supported by the work of Wagemaker et al.₃⁰ which showed that the aliovalent dopant charge is often balanced by the generation of Li vacancies. However, the immobile dopant within the Li channels slightly increases the size of the Li channels, which is still very limited to influence the Li-ion mobility and even hinder the Li-ion diffusion. From Wagemaker’s report, it cannot explain how the cationic substitution into the Li site leads to a great enhancement of the electrochemical performance. Morgan et al.₃³ reported that FePO₄ has lower activation barriers and a higher diffusion coefficient than LiFePO₄ by first-principles calculation. We proposed that Li ions can migrate easier via those excess Li vacancies. The following short equation (using Kröger–Vink notation) describes the valence balance model:

\[
\frac{1}{2}V_2O_5 \xrightarrow{\text{LiFePO}_4} V_{\text{Li}^+}^{4+} + \frac{5}{2}O_2^- + 4\text{Li}^{+}
\]

(1)

Overall, Li⁺ ions can move easier between the anode and the cathode through the increasing Li vacancy sites, which results in a decrease of polarization degree and enhanced the capacity and conductivity as we observe in the electrochemical measurements. The difference of the valence between original the Li atom and substituted V atom creates excess Li vacancies to balance the charge. However, a sample manufacturing process, which gives rise to different morphologies, might also play a critical role in the observed electrochemical properties.

### 3.6. Evolution of V with Lithiation and Delithiation.

The ex situ data of the lithiation and delithiation states provides the evidence of the structural changes of the Liₓ₋ₓVₓFePO₄ cathode during charging and discharging process. Th ex situ spectra were measured at the initial state (containing Fe²⁺) and the delithiated state (containing Fe³⁺) of Liₓ₋ₓVₓFePO₄ at 0.1 C. From the XANES data shown in Figure 7, it is obvious that the feature of Fe K-edge changed from Fe²⁺ to Fe³⁺ when charging to the delithiated state. However, the feature of V K-edge has no significantly changes from initial state to the delithiated state. The Fe K-edge curve revealed similar charging and discharging processes in Liₓ₋ₓVₓFePO₄ as in pristine LiFePO₄. From these data, we suggest that V remains at the Li site and is not electrochemically active even during the charging and discharging process. Otherwise, the V will redox if V substituted in...
the Fe site. The enhanced properties are correlated to the substitution of V at the Li site and the subsequent generation of Li vacancies. This result is also consistent with the reduced polarization voltage shown in Figure 5. In addition, from the ex situ X-ray powder XRD data of charged LiFePO 4 and Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 shown in Figure 8, the active Li+ ions in LiFePO 4 are greater in quantity than that of pristine LiFePO 4 by virtue of producing more FePO 4 in the former relative to the latter (see Table 4).

Table 4. Details Derived from the Rietveld Analysis Using ex Situ X-ray Powder Diffraction Data at Lithiation and Delithiation States of the Pristine LiFePO 4 and the Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 Samples

| compound (delithiation) | LiFePO 4 volume (Å 3 ) | FePO 4 volume (Å 3 ) | mole ratio FePO 4 /
| LiFePO 4 | 289.098(5) | 269.810(8) | 0.63 |
| Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 | 288.878(7) | 269.988(4) | 1.84 |

This result also supports that the inactive lithium is reduced in this V-added composition

4. CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of the relationship between the enhanced electrochemical properties and the structure of Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 is described. By adding V 2O 5 into LiFePO 4 using a modified sol–gel synthesis process, better capacity and conductivity of Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 is found relative to pristine LiFePO 4. The enhanced properties are correlated to the substitution of V at the Li site and the subsequent generation of Li vacancies. The ex situ measurements also support this finding. The electrochemical performance also show that Li 1−x−yV x yFePO 4 can exhibit improved capacity not only at lower C-rate but also at higher C-rate.

[Table 4 details kept consistent with the原文]

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