



 Research Article

Optimized ICP-MS Methods for Matrix Interference Control in Food Matrices

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ABSTRACT

Inductively coupled plasma–mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) is a high-sensitivity analytical platform with substantial potential for multielement determination in complex food matrices. However, matrix-derived effects and spectral interferences can compromise analytical accuracy, precision, detection capability, and confidence in trace-element measurements. This paper develops a conceptual methodological framework for optimizing ICP-MS procedures for matrix interference control in food analysis. The framework emphasizes matrix characterization, sample preparation, interference identification, instrumental optimization, calibration strategy, internal-standard correction, and analytical quality assessment as interconnected components rather than isolated procedural steps. A structured synthesis of the references supplied by the author was also undertaken. Importantly, the supplied references primarily address postpartum depression and therefore do not provide empirical evidence concerning ICP-MS, food matrices, spectral interference, or elemental analysis. Consequently, no unsupported ICP-MS findings have been attributed to those sources. Instead, the methodological model is presented as a technically reasoned research framework requiring experimental validation. The proposed approach distinguishes spectral interference from nonspectral matrix effects and emphasizes adaptive optimization according to food composition and target analytes. The analysis indicates that reliable ICP-MS food analysis depends not merely on instrument sensitivity but on coordinated control of sample-derived ionization effects, polyatomic species, calibration behavior, and analytical verification. The framework provides a basis for



future experimental studies comparing interference-reduction strategies across representative food matrices.

KEYWORDS

ICP-MS; food analysis; matrix effects; spectral interference; elemental analysis; analytical optimization; interference control; trace elements; sample preparation.

INTRODUCTION

Accurate determination of elemental constituents in food is an important analytical requirement because food materials contain chemically diverse combinations of organic compounds, minerals, salts, proteins, carbohydrates, and other constituents. Such compositional complexity can influence the performance of highly sensitive analytical instrumentation. ICP-MS offers powerful capabilities for trace and multielement analysis, but analytical sensitivity alone does not guarantee reliable quantification when matrix components alter ion formation, transport, mass discrimination, or detector response.

Matrix interference can be conceptually divided into spectral and nonspectral components. Spectral interference occurs when ions with the same nominal mass-to-charge ratio as the analyte or closely related masses contribute to the measured signal. Nonspectral matrix effects, in contrast, may alter aerosol formation, plasma characteristics, ion transmission, or detector response. These mechanisms can coexist in a single food sample, making interference control an optimization problem rather than a single instrumental adjustment.

The central problem addressed in this paper is therefore how ICP-MS analytical procedures can be systematically optimized to minimize matrix-related measurement errors while maintaining sensitivity and analytical efficiency. Particular attention is given to the relationship between sample preparation, matrix composition, instrumental configuration, interference-management strategy, calibration, and quality control.

The conceptual importance of structured analytical evaluation is also consistent with the broader principle that methodological decisions should be connected to clearly defined measurement objectives rather than treated as independent technical choices. The supplied literature, although concerning a different clinical research domain, repeatedly demonstrates the importance of systematic assessment, measurement validity, and structured methodological interpretation (Suryawanshi, 2022). However, these references cannot legitimately be treated as evidence for ICP-MS performance.

The objectives of this paper are to develop an optimization framework for matrix interference

control in food matrices, distinguish the principal mechanisms that can influence ICP-MS measurements, establish a practical analytical workflow, and identify limitations and research priorities for experimental validation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1 Scope and Evidence Alignment

A critical examination of the supplied references reveals a substantial mismatch between the requested analytical topic and the available literature. Agrawal et al. (2022), Andrews-Fike (1999), Batt et al. (2020), Dadi et al. (2020), Hahn-Holbrook et al. (2018), Ji and Wang (2025), Lumley and Austin-MP, Park and Kim (2022), Peplau (1992), and Suryawanshi and Pajai (2022) concern postpartum depression, screening, epidemiology, interventions, or interpersonal nursing theory. None directly investigates ICP-MS, spectral interference, food matrices, elemental determination, plasma conditions, or mass-spectrometric interference correction.

This distinction is methodologically important. A research article should not present an unrelated citation as experimental support for an analytical chemistry claim merely because a citation has been supplied. Systematic scholarship requires correspondence between the research question and the evidence base. The supplied clinical literature illustrates the broader importance of evidence classification and methodological interpretation, but it cannot substantiate technical conclusions about ICP-MS. For example, systematic reviews in the supplied collection

emphasize structured evaluation of evidence and methodological validity (Dadi et al., 2020; Park and Kim, 2022). Such principles can inform the organization of the present methodological framework, but the underlying subject matter remains different.

Suryawanshi and Pajai (2022) provide a review-oriented example of synthesizing heterogeneous evidence around a defined research problem. Their work is therefore relevant only as a methodological analogy, not as an analytical chemistry source. This distinction prevents inappropriate citation transfer and preserves academic integrity.

2 Theoretical Positioning of the Present Study

The present work is consequently positioned as a conceptual methodological analysis rather than an empirical validation study. The framework is constructed around the premise that matrix interference is a system-level analytical problem. The quality of an ICP-MS result depends on interactions among sample composition, preparation chemistry, plasma behavior, ion generation, mass separation, calibration, and data interpretation.

The analytical model can be represented as a sequence:

Food matrix → sample preparation → aerosol generation → plasma ionization → ion transmission → mass separation → detection → calibration correction → validated elemental result



An error introduced at any stage may propagate into the final concentration estimate. Accordingly, optimization should not focus exclusively on instrumental sensitivity.

3 Research Gap

The principal research gap identified within the supplied evidence is not an absence of ICP-MS knowledge but an absence of directly relevant references in the provided bibliography. Consequently, the current paper cannot legitimately claim that a particular collision/reaction-cell condition, digestion protocol, dilution factor, calibration technique, or interference-removal mechanism has been empirically established by the cited sources.

This limitation is itself a significant methodological finding. A publication-ready experimental paper on the stated topic requires analytical chemistry literature and preferably original validation data. Without these, the most defensible contribution is a structured optimization framework that can subsequently be tested experimentally.

METHODOLOGY

1 Research Design

A conceptual analytical framework was developed to organize ICP-MS optimization for complex food matrices. The framework consists of six interconnected stages: matrix characterization, sample preparation, interference diagnosis, instrumental

optimization, calibration and correction, and analytical validation.

The approach is designed for research settings in which multiple elements must be quantified across food samples with variable compositions. Rather than assuming one universal operating condition, the framework treats optimization as matrix- and analyte-dependent.

2 Matrix Characterization

The first stage involves characterization of the food matrix. Relevant characteristics include expected concentrations of major elements, total dissolved solids, organic loading, acidity, and the presence of components capable of generating interfering ions.

For example, a mineral-rich food and a high-organic-content food may behave differently during aerosol generation and plasma processing. Applying identical dilution and instrumental conditions to both samples may therefore produce inconsistent analytical performance.

Matrix characterization should establish whether dilution alone is sufficient or whether additional sample preparation is required. The decision should be based on the expected analyte concentration and the anticipated interference environment.

3 Sample Preparation Optimization

Sample preparation is a major control point because the original food matrix is transformed into a solution suitable for introduction into the ICP-MS system. A suitable preparation procedure

should maximize analyte recovery while minimizing contamination, analyte loss, residual solids, and excessive matrix loading.

The optimization model should evaluate digestion efficiency, dilution requirements, reagent contribution, and sample stability. Excessive dilution may reduce matrix effects but can also lower analyte concentrations toward or below useful detection levels. Conversely, insufficient dilution may preserve sensitivity while increasing matrix-induced signal distortion.

Therefore, the optimum preparation condition represents a balance between analyte detectability and matrix suppression.

4 Spectral Interference Diagnosis

Spectral interference should be investigated at the selected analytical masses before final quantification. Potentially interfering species should be evaluated according to the composition of the food matrix and the chemistry introduced during sample preparation.

The methodological sequence should include measurement of blanks, standards, representative samples, and matrix-matched controls. If a signal appears at the analyte mass in a sample but is absent or substantially reduced under appropriate control conditions, additional investigation is required before interpreting the signal as genuine analyte concentration.

The distinction between an actual analyte signal and an interfering contribution is fundamental to analytical validity.

5 Instrumental Optimization

Instrumental optimization should consider plasma conditions, sample introduction behavior, ion transmission, and interference-management configuration. The objective should not simply be maximum counts per second. Instead, performance should be assessed using a combination of sensitivity, stability, background response, interference suppression, and reproducibility.

Where an instrument provides collision- or reaction-based interference control, the operating mode should be selected according to the target element and anticipated interfering species. A universal mode may not provide optimal performance for every analyte.

For example, an operating condition that effectively reduces a polyatomic interference for one element may simultaneously influence sensitivity for another. Consequently, multi-element methods require compromise analysis and, where necessary, analyte-specific operating conditions.

6 Calibration and Matrix Matching

Calibration strategy represents another important component of matrix-effect control. External calibration is convenient but may become less reliable when sample matrices differ substantially from calibration solutions. Matrix



matching, internal-standard correction, dilution, or alternative calibration designs may therefore be considered according to analytical requirements.

The theoretical objective is to ensure that changes in measured signal are attributable primarily to analyte concentration rather than uncontrolled differences in matrix behavior.

7 Quality Assurance and Validation

Validation should include precision, accuracy, linearity, detection capability, recovery, blank assessment, and stability of analytical response. Replicate measurements are particularly important when matrix composition is heterogeneous.

A hypothetical validation experiment could divide food samples into untreated, diluted, and interference-controlled groups. Comparing recovery and precision across these groups would allow the investigator to determine whether the selected optimization strategy actually improves analytical reliability.

The methodology should also incorporate quality-control samples throughout an analytical sequence rather than relying exclusively on a single beginning-of-run calibration. This permits detection of signal drift and unexpected changes in analytical behavior.

RESULTS

The conceptual analysis identifies matrix control as the central determinant of reliable ICP-MS

optimization in complex food analysis. Instrumental sensitivity, although important, cannot independently guarantee accurate elemental measurements. The analytical workflow indicates that sample composition, preparation, spectral diagnosis, instrumental configuration, and calibration must be treated as interacting variables.

A second finding is that interference control should be analyte-specific and matrix-specific. Food matrices differ substantially in their chemical composition, and therefore a single universal operating condition is unlikely to provide optimal performance for every target element. Optimization should instead begin with identification of the dominant interference mechanism and proceed toward the least disruptive corrective strategy.

The framework further indicates that sample preparation and instrumental optimization are complementary rather than interchangeable controls. Increased dilution may reduce matrix loading but can simultaneously decrease analyte signal. More aggressive preparation may improve solution homogeneity but introduce contamination or analyte loss. Consequently, the preferred condition should be established through recovery and precision testing rather than assumed from theoretical considerations.

A fourth finding concerns calibration robustness. When sample and calibration matrices differ considerably, observed signal differences may not correspond exclusively to differences in analyte concentration. Internal-standard



monitoring and matrix-aware calibration strategies can therefore become important components of quality assurance. Their effectiveness, however, requires experimental validation for the specific food category and analytical target.

Finally, the evidence audit reveals an important limitation: the supplied bibliography does not contain ICP-MS or food-analysis studies. Therefore, quantitative claims about detection limits, recovery percentages, interference-reduction rates, or comparative instrumental performance cannot be derived from the supplied sources. This finding prevents fabrication of numerical results and establishes that the present results should be interpreted as a conceptual analytical framework rather than experimentally demonstrated performance.

The literature-synthesis principle underlying this cautious interpretation is consistent with the need to align conclusions with the evidence actually evaluated (Suryawanshi, 2022). Thus, the principal contribution is methodological organization rather than unsupported empirical claims.

DISCUSSION

The proposed framework suggests that optimization of ICP-MS for food matrices should be understood as a multi-stage decision process. The traditional emphasis on instrument sensitivity is insufficient when the analytical environment contains multiple potential interferences. A highly sensitive system can still

generate misleading results if the measured signal contains contributions from matrix-derived species.

The most important theoretical implication is that analytical accuracy is an emergent property of the entire measurement chain. Sample preparation affects matrix loading; matrix loading influences plasma and ion behavior; ion behavior influences signal formation; and calibration determines how that signal is converted into concentration. Consequently, optimizing only one stage may produce limited or even counterproductive improvement.

A practical trade-off exists between dilution and sensitivity. Increasing dilution can reduce matrix-related effects, but excessive dilution may compromise detection capability. Conversely, concentrated samples may provide stronger analyte signals but create greater matrix burden. The appropriate balance must therefore be established experimentally for each food category.

Another trade-off concerns interference-control modes. Collision- or reaction-based approaches can potentially improve selectivity, but changes in instrumental conditions may influence analyte transmission and signal intensity. The optimal method should consequently be defined by overall analytical performance rather than interference suppression alone.

The evidence base supplied by the user creates a substantial limitation for comparison with previous ICP-MS research. The cited articles concern postpartum depression and related

clinical or theoretical questions rather than elemental analysis. Studies by Agrawal et al. (2022), Batt et al. (2020), Hahn-Holbrook et al. (2018), Ji and Wang (2025), and others cannot be interpreted as technical evidence for ICP-MS. Their inclusion in an ICP-MS manuscript would therefore be scientifically inappropriate if presented as direct support.

Nevertheless, the supplied references reinforce a broader research principle: methodological conclusions should be derived through systematic evaluation rather than unsupported generalization. The systematic-review orientation apparent in the provided literature emphasizes structured comparison, validity, and evidence interpretation (Park and Kim, 2022). Applied to analytical chemistry, this means that interference-reduction claims should be demonstrated through controlled comparisons rather than inferred solely from instrument configuration.

The principal practical implication is that future experimental studies should establish standardized test matrices and compare alternative preparation, dilution, calibration, and interference-control strategies using predefined analytical performance criteria. Such work would transform the conceptual framework presented here into an empirically validated analytical method.

CONCLUSION

Optimized ICP-MS analysis of food matrices requires integrated management of sample

preparation, matrix loading, spectral interference, instrumental conditions, calibration, and analytical validation. The proposed framework emphasizes that no individual parameter should be considered sufficient for interference control. Instead, analytical performance should be evaluated across the complete measurement pathway.

The analysis also demonstrates the importance of evidence-source alignment. The references supplied for this manuscript concern postpartum depression and do not provide direct scientific evidence for ICP-MS or food-matrix analysis. Accordingly, this paper deliberately avoids inventing experimental values or attributing analytical findings to unrelated clinical publications. The resulting contribution is a publication-oriented conceptual framework that can guide subsequent experimental validation.

Future research should test the framework using representative food matrices, target elements, controlled interference conditions, alternative sample-preparation procedures, and statistically evaluated performance indicators. Such studies could establish matrix-specific optimization models and determine the comparative effectiveness of different interference-control strategies. The methodological discipline of matching conclusions to available evidence remains essential to credible scientific reporting, a principle also reflected in the systematic literature orientation of the supplied references (Suryawanshi, 2022).

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