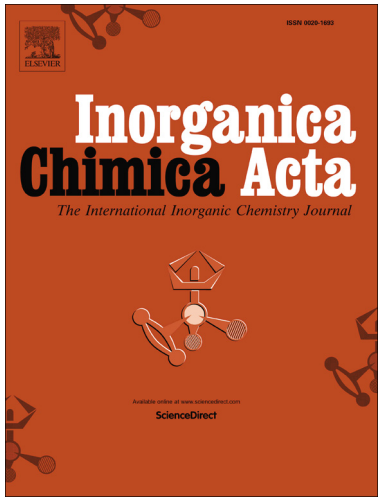


Research paper

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# Supramolecular Self-Assembly, DNA interaction, Antibacterial and Cell Viability studies of Cu(II) and Ni(II) Complexes derived from NNN donor Schiff Base ligand

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**Abstract**

In the present study, synthesis of two complexes, namely $[Cu(L)Cl_2]$ (1) and $[Ni(L)Cl(H_2O)_2)]Cl$ (2), where L = piperidin-2-yl-N-(1-(pyridin-2-yl) ethylidene)methanamine were reported along with their characterization by spectroscopic techniques. The crystal structures were elucidated by single crystal X-ray diffraction technique. The structures of the complexes showed square pyramidal geometry for Cu(II) and octahedral geometry for Ni(II) centers. Different characterization techniques including electronic absorption spectroscopy, viscosity measurements and fluorescence spectroscopy were used to study the binding interaction of complex 1 and 2 with Calf thymus DNA (CT-DNA). The result reflected that both the complexes were able to exhibit DNA binding potential by intercalation pathway. Study of antibacterial activity using the bacterial strain E. coli showed that only complex 1 exhibited antibacterial property. Besides, metal, ligand and its complexes were evaluated individually for cell viability studies through MTT assay of HeLa cells. It is observed that cell viability increases with time for all the systems illustrating biocompatible nature of metals, ligands and their complexes. Among the complexes 1 and 2, complex 1 is suitable for higher cell viability.

**Keywords:** X-ray crystallography; antibacterial properties; DNA binding; Cu(II) and Ni(II) complexes

## Introduction

There are huge applications of transition metal complexes in the vast areas of materials science to biological sciences. This attracts the chemists very much to be interested in this field. In the last decade a greater interest had been observed for transition metal complexes of Schiff bases due to their anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic, antipyretic, anti-diabetic, anti-bacterial and antifungal properties [1-8]. Besides, opportunities to enhance the solubility, inducing substrate chirality, tuning the metal centered electronic factor and also the stability of either homogeneous or heterogeneous catalysts are offered by Schiff bases [9-11]. Complexes derived from Schiff bases are the most widely studied coordination compounds in the past few years, because they are now increasingly used as biochemical, analytical and antimicrobial reagents [12-14]. It has also been found that among tridentate and bidentate Schiff base ligands, the tridentate Schiff base ligands are more suitable ligand systems for stabilizing organo-metal complexes due to having additional donor atom for coordination. Actually the various factors control the coordination geometry of these complexes. Among these factors the size and electronic configuration of the central metal ions, non-bonding interactions between atoms in different ligand arms and the inherent rigidity due to the presence of aromatic rings are very much important. Self-assembly via weak interaction has been projected as a useful and powerful protocol to construct the predesigned and well-defined architectures. Molecular self-assembly which is at the heart of crystalline molecular materials can be constructed through various forces such as hydrogen bonding, C–H---π and π---π interactive forces [15-20]. For directing molecular self-assembly, the key factors which are essential are identification and control of recognition among a set of molecular building blocks. In this context, the hydrogen bonding which is of primary importance in molecular recognition has been utilized extensively in the design of functional materials.

Besides, the DNA interaction of Schiff base metal complexes has also gained much interest towards their applications in biotechnology and medicine. The scientific community has showed that metal coordination compounds have shown some outstanding DNA-binding and cleavage properties, as well as antibacterial activities [21-25]. It is seen that transition metals are particularly suitable for this purpose, because they can adopt a wide variety of oxidation states, coordination numbers and geometries, in comparison to other main group elements. So, over the past decades, considerable interest in the synthesis and characterization of transition metal complexes with Schiff Base ligands had been developed to check the role of metal active sites in several catalytic biological processes.

In the present study, the synthesis and characterization of two mono-nuclear Cu(II) and Ni(II) complexes derived from a tridentate Schiff base ligand has been reported. Crystal structures of those complexes have been detected by X-ray diffraction method and molecular recognition has been done involving mainly hydrogen bonding interaction. Besides, the potential CT-DNA interactions and antibacterial behavior of the complexes 1 and 2 have been examined. Several techniques including electronic absorption titration, viscosity measurements and fluorescence spectroscopy have been employed to monitor their prospective binding interaction with CT-DNA. Their antimicrobial properties against *E. coli* and cell viability studies have also been determined through the agar-well diffusion method and MTT assay of HeLa cells respectively.

## Material and method section

### Materials

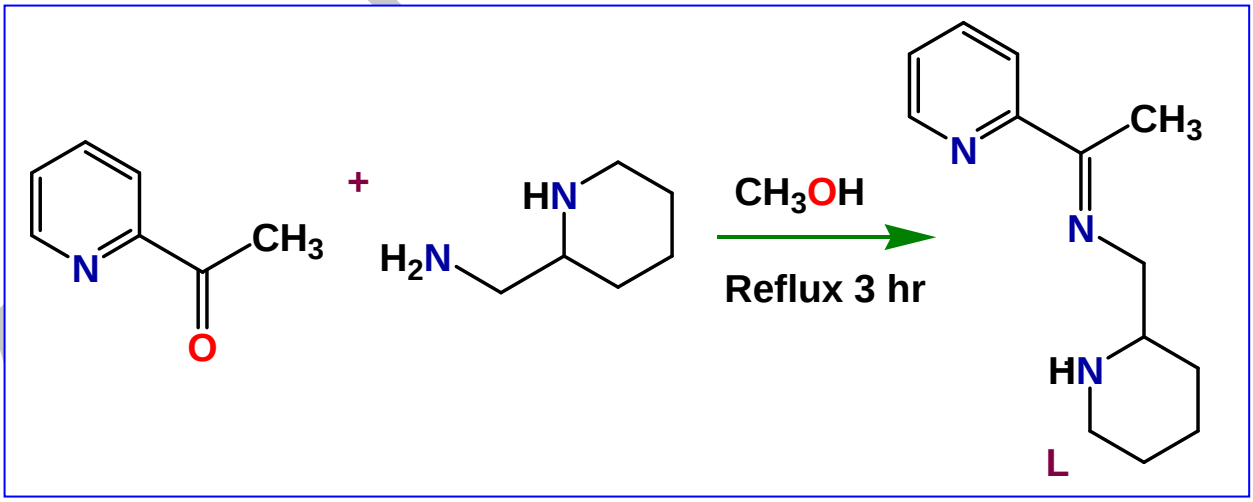
All the chemicals which were used in this work were of reagent grade and used without purifying them. 2-acyl pyridine, methanol, $NiCl_2.6H_2O$ and $CuCl_2.2H_2O$ were purchased from Merck. CT-DNA and Ethidium Bromide (EB) were obtained from Sigma-Aldrich Chemicals Co., (St. Louis, MO, USA). CT-DNA concentration and EB concentration were

measured photometrically on the basis of molar extinction coefficient values (13,200 $M^{-1}$ $cm^{-1}$ at 260 nm for CT-DNA and 5000 $M^{-1}$ $cm^{-1}$ at 480 nm for EB); no deviation from Beers law was observed during concentration measurement.

Citrate -phosphate (CP) buffer prepared from Millipore water (10 mM [$Na^+$]) (pH 7.12) was used to prepare the reagent solution and also used to carry out whole interaction study. Unnecessary particulate from the buffer solutions was removed by passing the whole buffer solution through 0.45 μm (Millipore India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India) filter paper (repeated two times) and prior to use the solution was stored in 4 $^0$C.

**Synthesis of ligand L**

The Schiff base ligand L was prepared from the reaction of 2-acyl pyridine (1.21 g, 10 mmol) and piperidine-2-yl-methylamine (1.14 g, 10 mmol) in MeOH solvent (35 ml) by refluxing the mixture for 3 h. A change in color was observed but no precipitate was obtained. Then the solvent was evaporated and a gummy mass was obtained (Scheme 1). This crude product was then used directly for the preparation of the complexes.




**Scheme 1** Synthetic pathway for ligand L

**Synthesis of [Cu(L)$Cl_2$] (1)**

To synthesize the complex 1 a solution of $CuCl_2.2H_2O$ (0.170 g, 1 mmol) in MeOH (10 ml) was added to a stirred raw tea color solution of L (0.203 g, 1 mmol) in MeOH (15 ml) and the mixture was then refluxed in air for 3 h. It resulted to a green color solution. The solution was filtered and kept for slow evaporation. Single crystals of the complex suitable for X-ray crystallography were obtained after 1 month from the solution.

Yield: 0.25 g (67%). Anal. Calc. for $C_{13}H_{19.4}Cl_2CuN_3O_{0.2}$: C, 43.94; H, 5.35; N, 11.83.Found: C, 43.8; H, 5.2; N, 11.80. Selected FTIR bands (KBr, $cm^{-1}$; s = strong, vs = very strong, m = medium, br = broad): 3437 (br), 3051 (vs), 2916 (vs), 1490 (m), 1340 (s), 1305 (m), 1666 (s), 1203 (m). UV−vis spectra [λmax, nm (ε, L $mol^{-1}$ $cm^{-1}$); MeOH solution]: 285 (3041).

**Synthesis of [Ni(L)Cl$(H_2O)_2$]Cl(2)**

The complex 2 was synthesized from a solution of $NiCl_2.6H_2O$ (0.130 g, 1 mmol) in MeOH (15 ml) and a stirred raw tea color solution of L (0.203 g, 1 mmol) in MeOH (15 ml) by refluxing the mixture in air for 3 h. A deep pink color solution was resulted at the completion of the reaction. The solution was then filtered and single crystals of the complex suitable for X-ray crystallography were obtained after 1 month from the solution through slow evaporation.

Yield: 0.21 g (63%). Anal. Calc. for $C_{13}H_{23}Cl_2N_3NiO_2$: C, 40.73; H, 6.00; N, 10.96.Found: C, 40.65; H, 6.01; N, 10.90. Selected FTIR bands (KBr, $cm^{-1}$; s = strong, vs = very strong, m = medium, br = broad): 3502 (br) 3435 (br), 3053 (vs), 2918 (vs), 1489 (m), 1342 (s), 1307 (m), 1664 (s), 1205 (m).UV−vis spectra [λmax, nm (ε, L $mol^{-1}$ $cm^{-1}$); MeOH solution]: 278 (917).

**Physical Measurements**

Elemental analyses (C, H and N) were carried out on a Perkin Elmer 2400II elemental analyzer. FTIR spectroscopic analyses were done from neat samples between KBr discs on a Perkin Elmer 883 spectrometer. Electronic absorption spectra were recorded using a Systronic India UV-Vis spectrophotometer.

**X-ray crystallography**

A single crystal of suitable dimensions was used for data collection in a Xcalibur, Sapphire 3 diffractometer. Using Olex2 [26], the structure was solved with the Superflip [27] structure solution program for copper(II) complex and with olex2.solve [28] structure solution program for nickel(II) complex, by the Charge Flipping solution method. The model was refined with version 2016/5 of ShelXL [29] using Least Squares minimization. Cell parameters were retrieved using the Crys Alis (Pro) software and refined using Crys Alis (Pro) on 10318 reflections, 48 % of the observed reflections. Data reduction was carried out using the Crys Alis (Pro) software which corrects for Lorentz polarization. All non-hydrogen atoms were refined anisotropically. Hydrogen atom positions were determined geometrically and refined using the riding model. The locations of the heaviest atoms (Cu, Ni) were determined easily, and the O, N, and C atoms were subsequently determined from the different Fourier maps. Information regarding X-ray data collection and crystal structure refinement is summarized in Table 1 for complexes 1 & 2. Crystallographic data (excluding structure factors) have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre under the accession code CCDC1515618 & 1515614 for complexes 1 & 2 respectively.

| **Table. 1:** Crystal Parameter and Refinement Data for complex 1 and 2 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Compound reference | Complex 1 | Complex 2 |
| Formula | $C_{13}H_{19.4}Cl_2CuN_3O_{0.2}$ | $C_{13}H_{23}Cl_2N_3NiO_2$ |
| $D_{calc.}$/ g cm$^{-3}$ | 1.513 | 1.503 |
| $\mu$/mm$^{-1}$ | 1.734 | 1.468 |
| Formula Weight | 355.35 | 382.95 |
| Colour | clear light green | clear light blue |
| Shape | irregular | irregular |
| Size/mm$^3$ | 0.56×0.32×0.17 | 0.80×0.50×0.27 |
| $T$/K | 120(2) | 120(2) |
| Crystal System | monoclinic | monoclinic |
| Space Group | $P2_1/n$ | $P2_1/c$ |
| $a$/Å | 8.6528(2) | 7.5010(4) |
| $b$/Å | 10.6852(3) | 9.4291(3) |
| $c$/Å | 17.0483(4) | 23.9342(9) |
| $\alpha$/° | 90 | 90 |
| $\beta$/° | 98.315(2) | 90.033(4) |
| $\gamma$/° | 90 | 90 |
| V/Å$^3$ | 1559.66(7) | 1692.81(12) |
| Z | 4 | 4 |
| $Z'$ | 1 | 1 |
| Wavelength/Å | 0.71073 | 0.71073 |
| Radiation type | Mo$K_\alpha$ | Mo$K_\alpha$ |
| $\theta_{min}$/° | 2.819 | 2.715 |
| $\theta_{max}$/° | 29.998 | 30.000 |
| Measured Refl. | 21366 | 11692 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Independent Refl. | 4551 | 4921 |
| Reflections Used | 4079 | 4128 |
| $R_{int}$ | 0.0266 | 0.0341 |
| Parameters | 182 | 305 |
| Restraints | 0 | 203 |
| Largest Peak | 0.815 | 0.574 |
| Deepest Hole | -0.223 | -0.587 |
| GooF | 1.061 | 1.143 |
| $wR_2$ (all data) | 0.0712 | 0.1140 |
| $wR_2$ | 0.0688 | 0.1084 |
| $R_1$ (all data) | 0.0307 | 0.0584 |
| $R_1$ | 0.0262 | 0.0472 |
| CCDC Number | 1515618 | 1515614 |

**Antibacterial screening**

To investigate the antibacterial activity of the complex against several bacteria, the agar well diffusion method on nutrient agar medium was used with necessary modifications [30]. Antibacterial activity was studied using the bacterial strain E. coli. The bacterium under investigation was obtained from the Microbial Type Culture Collection and Gene Bank (MTCC). Agar media (broth) prepared by mixing 500 mg each of beef extract, NaCl, peptone and 3 g of agar agar in 100 ml distilled water was used. 100µl of bacterium E. coli was added to 30 ml of broth and incubated for 24 h.

**DNA Interaction Studies**

Absorption measurement for DNA interaction studies was monitored in Shimadzu Pharmaspec 1601 unit (Shimadzu Corporation, Kyoto, Japan). A fixed concentration of 10

mM for complex **1** and 15 mM for complex **2** was used by regular adding of CT-DNA. Reference buffer solution was also incorporated with same amount of DNA to minimize the absorption of DNA during titration. The intrinsic binding constant (K) obtained from absorption titration was calculated from the following equation [31]

$$\frac{[DNA]}{(\varepsilon_a-\varepsilon_f)} = \frac{[DNA]}{(\varepsilon_b-\varepsilon_f)} + \frac{1}{K(\varepsilon_b-\varepsilon_f)} \ldots\ldots (1)$$

Where [DNA] is the concentration of CT-DNA in the base pairs, $\varepsilon_a$ is the apparent absorption coefficient corresponding to $A_{obs}$/ [complex], $\varepsilon_f$ is the extinction coefficient of the free complex, and $\varepsilon_b$ is the extinction coefficient of the complex when fully bound to CT-DNA. From the plot of [DNA]/($\varepsilon_a - \varepsilon_f$) versus [DNA] , K can be calculated by the ratio of the slope to intercept.

A Hitachi F7000 fluorometer (Hitachi Ltd., Tokyo, Japan) was used to study competitive fluorescence binding of the complex **1** and **2** with EB. For this study the CT DNA−EB complex was prepared first by adding 5 μM EB and 10 μM CT- DNA. Then this CT-DNA −EB complex was excited at 515 nm. The emission range was recorded at 560–700 nm followed by the regular addition of complex solution [32].

Viscosity experiments was performed in a Brookfield rotational Viscometers (Middleboro, MA 02346 U.S.A.) armed with a 1 mL LCP spindle operating at 40 rpm at 25$^{o}$C. In this experiment the viscosities of a DNA solution (1 mM) were measured in the absence and presence of increasing concentrations of the complex (0.05-0.2 mM). The relation between the relative solution viscosity ($\eta/\eta_0$) and DNA length ($L/L_0$) is given by the equation

$$L/L_0 = (\eta/\eta_0)^{1/3}$$

where L and $L_0$ indicate the apparent molecular length in the presence and absence of the compound respectively [33, 34]. The obtained data are presented as $(\eta/\eta_0)^{1/3}$ versus r, where $\eta$ denotes the viscosity of DNA in the presence of complex, and $\eta_0$ signifies the viscosity of DNA alone in buffer solution, and r represents the ratio of [complex] / [DNA].

**Cell Culture and maintenance**

To culture HeLa (Human cervical cancer cell line) cells, Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (DMEM) containing 10% heat inactivated (FBS) fetal bovine serum, 100U/ml penicillin and 100 µg/ ml streptomycin was used. Cells were incubated at 37$^{o}$C in a $CO_2$ incubator with 5% $CO_2$ supply.

**Cell viability**

Cell viability studies of metal, ligand and its complexes were performed through MTT assay of HeLa cells [35]. Briefly HeLa cells of $1\times10^{5}cm^{-2}$ were seeded first onto the 96-well culture plates in DMEM media. After 24 h of incubation, fresh DMEM containing 20µg/ml of the samples replaced the medium in the each well and were incubated for 24, 48, and 72 h time intervals. Untreated cells grown in media were used as control. After incubation, 100 µl of MTT dye solution (0.5 mg/ml in PBS, pH 7.4) was added to each well by replacing the media containing samples and was incubated for another 4 h. 100µl of DMSO was added in each well to dissolve the formazon crystals. The absorbance was measured at 570 nm using a micro plate reader. Cell viability was calculated by the following equation:

$$\%\ \text{cell viability} = \frac{\text{OD of t}}{\text{OD of c}}\times100$$

Where, c is the optical density of 'control' representing HeLa cells incubated in medium alone and t is the optical density of test specimen representing HeLa cells treated with the corresponding samples.

**Fluorescence imaging**

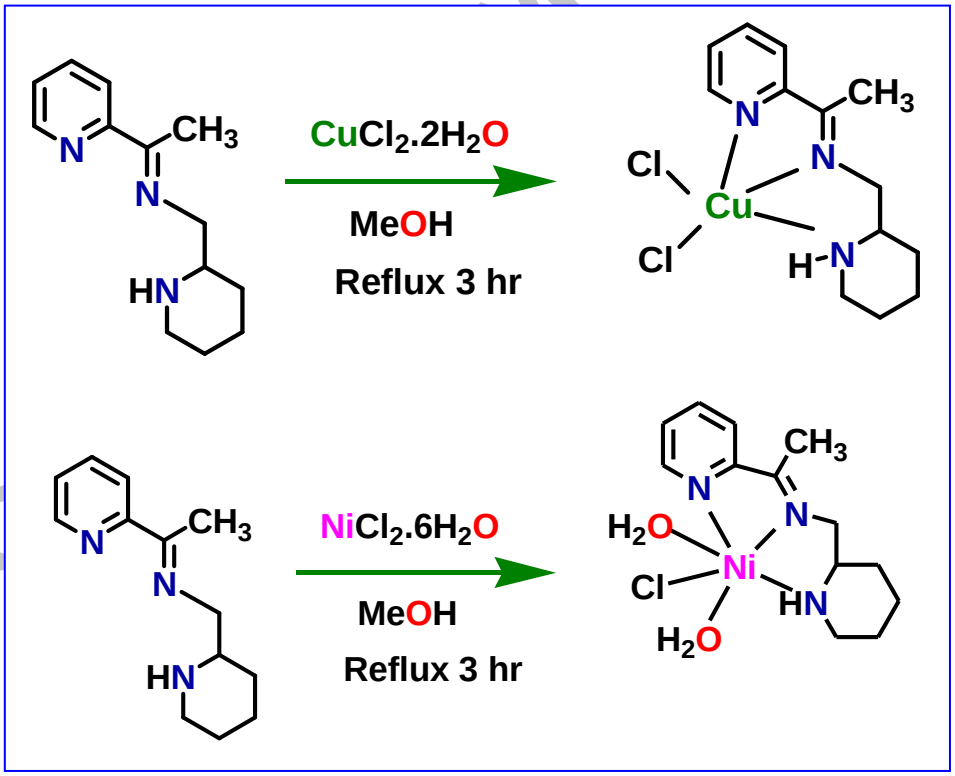
For fluorescence imaging HeLa cells were seeded in 24 well plate on cover slips as described earlier and after treated with 80 µg/mL concentration of pristine metal, ligand and metal complexes, $1\times10^{4}cm^{-2}$ cells were incubated at 37$^{o}$C in $CO_2$ incubator. Cells on coverslips

were stained with 100 µg/ml acridine orange and 100 µg/ml ethidium bromide. Then cells were incubated in dark for 30 minutes and were washed with PBS twice. Fluorescence microscope (Leica, Germany) captured the images.

**Results and discussions:**

**Synthesis, IR and UV-Vis analyses**

The Schiff base, L obtained from the condensation reaction of 2-acyl pyridine and piperidine-2-yl-methylamine yielded complex (1) and (2) on reaction with copper (II) chloride and nickel (II) chloride respectively. The formation reaction of the complexes is shown in Scheme 2.




**Scheme 2:** Synthetic pathway for Complex (1) and (2)

In the FTIR spectrum of the complex 1(Fig. S1), a dissimilar prominent band at 1649 $cm^{-1}$ is observed which is attributed for azomethine (C=N) group. Peaks at 3437 and 1490 $cm^{-1}$ are characteristic peaks which are assigned for N-H stretching and bending modes respectively. C-N and C=C aromatic ring stretching frequencies are obtained at 1305 and 1666 $cm^{-1}$ respectively. The peaks at 1203 $cm^{-1}$ is due to C-C stretching. The other characteristic peaks at 3051, 2916 and 1340 $cm^{-1}$ are attributed to aromatic C-H, aliphatic C-H stretching and C-H bending respectively.

In the FTIR spectrum of the complex 2 (Fig. S2), same characteristic bands were observed at the following regions: C=N: 1664 $cm^{-1}$, N-H stretching and bending: 3435 and 1489 $cm^{-1}$, C-N and C=C aromatic ring stretching: 1307 and 1664 $cm^{-1}$, C-C stretching: 1205 $cm^{-1}$, aromatic C-H, aliphatic C-H stretching and C-H bending: 3053, 2918 and 1342 $cm^{-1}$ respectively.

In the UV–Vis spectra of the complexes, the relatively intense band at around 278–285 nm region (285 nm for complex 1 & 278 nm for complex 2) could be assigned to the $\pi$ - $\pi^*$ transitions of aromatic rings and azomethine groups. The UV–Vis spectra of the Schiff base ligand also contained a band at around 330 nm which had been attributed to the n– $\pi^*$ transition, but this band was absent in the spectra of the complexes. The other bands were assigned to the charge transfer transitions between the metals and the ligands and d-d transition. The d–d bands of complexes were observed small intensities because of small molar absorption coefficient of these forbidden transitions.

**Description of the structure for complex 1**

The complex 1 crystallizes in the space group $P2_1/n$. Fig. 1 shows the pictorial view of the discrete mononuclear unit of it with the atom labeling scheme. In this complex, Cu(II) centre adopt square pyramidal geometry by coordinating three N atoms of L and two chlorine atoms of copper chloride. Bond parameters associated with the Cu(II) center are listed in Table S1. The Cu…..N, bond distances are in the range1.99 – 2.03Å which are well agreement with the

literature [36-44]. The tridentate ligand forms two five membered chelate rings by coordinating to the copper via N atom of the piperidine ring (N1), the azomethine N atom (N2) and the pyridine N (N3). The two chlorine atoms (Cl1 and Cl2) are coordinated in a mutually *cis* arrangement. The basal plane around the Cu atom is formed by N1, N2, N3, Cl2 (bond lengths 1.99-2.276 Å) and the apical position is occupied by Cl1 (Cu-Cl distance 2.469 Å).

The N-Cu-N, N-Cu-Cl and Cl-Cu-Cl angular distributions indicate that the coordination polyhedron is distorted. This distortion in the Cu(II) coordination polyhedron results from steric interactions. The distortions from an ideal square pyramidal geometry occurs for the N(1)-Cu(1)-N(2) [82.16(5)º], N(1)-Cu(1)-Cl(1) [96.13(4)º], N(1)-Cu(1)-Cl(2) [96.75(4) º], Cl(2)-Cu(1)-Cl(1) [105.655(15)º], N(2)-Cu(1)-Cl(1) [104.13(4)º], N(2)-Cu(1)-Cl(2) [150.13(4)º], N(2)-Cu(1)-N(3) [78.99(5) º], N(3)-Cu(1)-Cl(1) [93.69(3)º] and N(3)-Cu(1)-Cl(2) [96.89(3)º] angles respectively. The added hydrogen bond parameters are given in Table S3 & S4 for complex 1 and 2 respectively.

The solid-state structure of **1** includes a combination of intermolecular N–H···Cl, hydrogen bonds (Fig. 2) which finally turns the mono nuclear units to 1D polymer. The distance of N–H···Cl hydrogen bond is 2.320Å. Besides, it is observed that in asymmetric unit the water molecule is in partial occupancy.

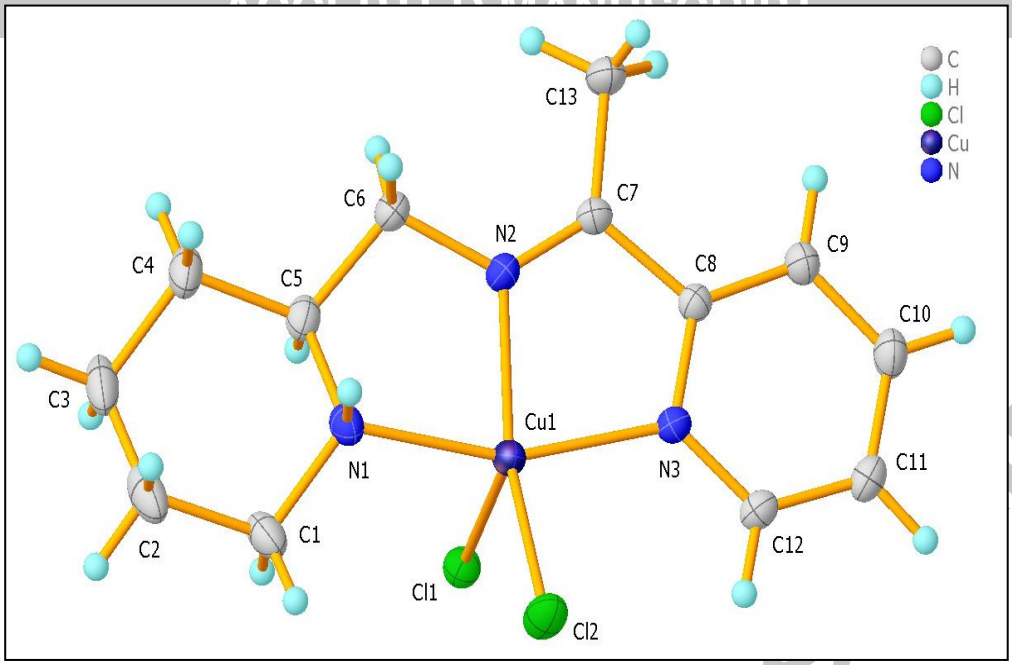



**Fig. 1** ORTEP representation of the complex 1 showing 30% probability ellipsoids

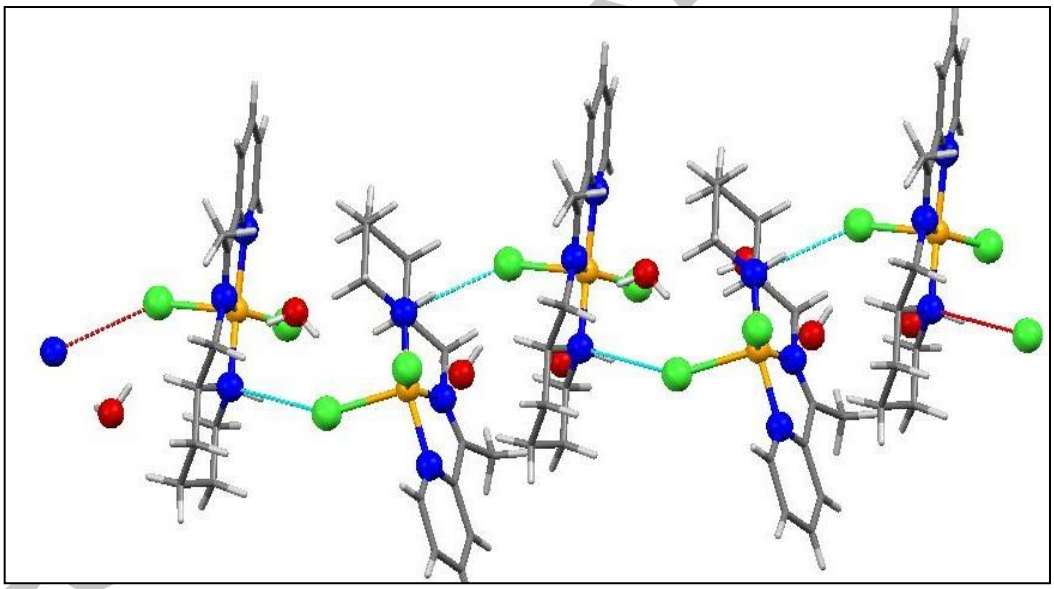


**Fig. 2.**1D polymer structure of complex 1

**Description of the structure for complex 2**

The space group of the complex 2 is $P2_1/c$. A pictorial view of the discrete mononuclear unit of the complex with the atom labeling scheme is shown in Fig. 3. In the complex, Ni(II) centre has an octahedral coordination. Bond parameters associated with the Ni(II) center are listed in Table S2. The tridentate ligand coordinates to the nickel via the N atom of the

piperidine ring (N1A), the azomethine N atom (N2) and the pyridine N (N3), forming two five membered chelate rings. The two oxygen atoms (O1L and O2L) are coordinated in a mutually *trans* arrangement and one chlorine atom (Cl1L) is also coordinated to the nickel. The bond lengths of the metal to the Schiff base (NNN donor) are, Ni1–N1A = 2.106(6) Å, Ni1–N2 = 2.017(2) Å and Ni1–N3 = 2.090(2) Å. In the complex 2, the Ni(II) center has a distorted octahedral coordination. Due to this elongated octahedral coordination environment of the metal center, two five-membered chelate rings were formed. The angular distributions [N–Ni–N, N–Ni–O and N–Ni–Cl] indicate the distortion around the coordination polyhedra. The distortion of the coordination polyhedron around the Ni(II) ion arises due to the steric interactions in which the maximum distortion from an ideal octahedral geometry occurs for the N(1A)–Ni(1)–O(1L) [98.25(16) º], O(1L)- Ni(1)-Cl(1L) [91.32(6) º], O(1L)-Ni(1)-O(2L) [173.93(9) º], O(2L)-Ni(1)-Cl(1L) [91.57(6) º], O(2L)-Ni(1)-N(1A) [86.53(16) º], N(2)-Ni(1)-Cl(1L) [178.61(7) º], N(2)-Ni(1)-O(1L) [88.68(9) º], N(2)-Ni(1)-O(2L) [88.31(9) º] and N(2)–Ni(1)–N(3) [78.50(9) º] angles.

Actually, the structure of complex 2 which is represented in Figure 3 is disordered in a ratio of 55/45. The major part (labeled A) is shown in the figure as 'solid' while the minor part is shown as a transparent 'ghost' image. The disorder is 'whole ligand' disorder, where one ligand is in the 'up' position, and the other one in the 'down' position. ORTEP representation of the complex 2 (Figure 3) showed 50% probability ellipsoids of the structure.

Besides, each mono nuclear unit of complex (2) forms a 1D chain (Fig. 4) via O-H…Cl hydrogen bond. The $O_{2L}$-$H_{2LA}$…Cl (3) distance is 2.251Å and that for $O_{1L}$-$H_{1LA}$…Cl (3) distance is 2.259 Å which are in accordance with reported distance [45-48]. It is also noticed that these two parallel chain further hydrogen bonded through O-H…Cl having $O_{2L}$-$H_{2L}$…Cl (1L) and $O_{1L}$-$H_{1LB}$…Cl(1L) distances are respectively 2.312 and 2.328 Å and thus form a ladder like 1D polymer (Fig. 4).

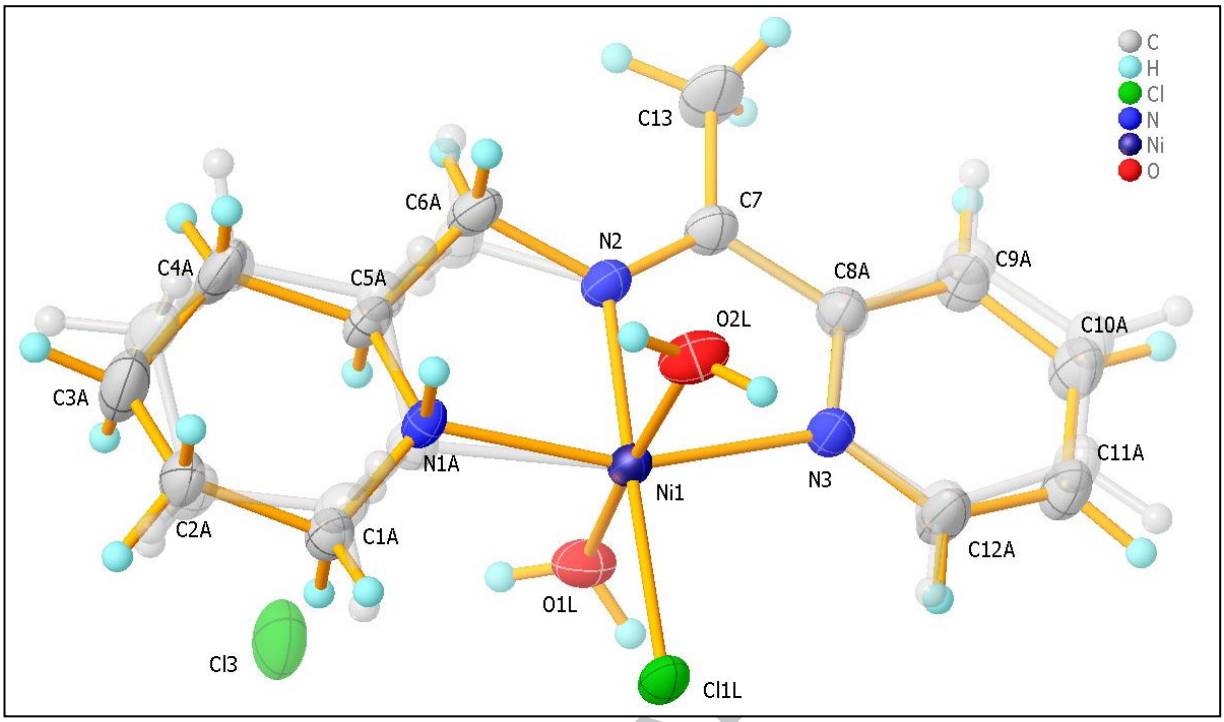



**Fig. 3** ORTEP representation of the complex 2 showing 50% probability ellipsoids

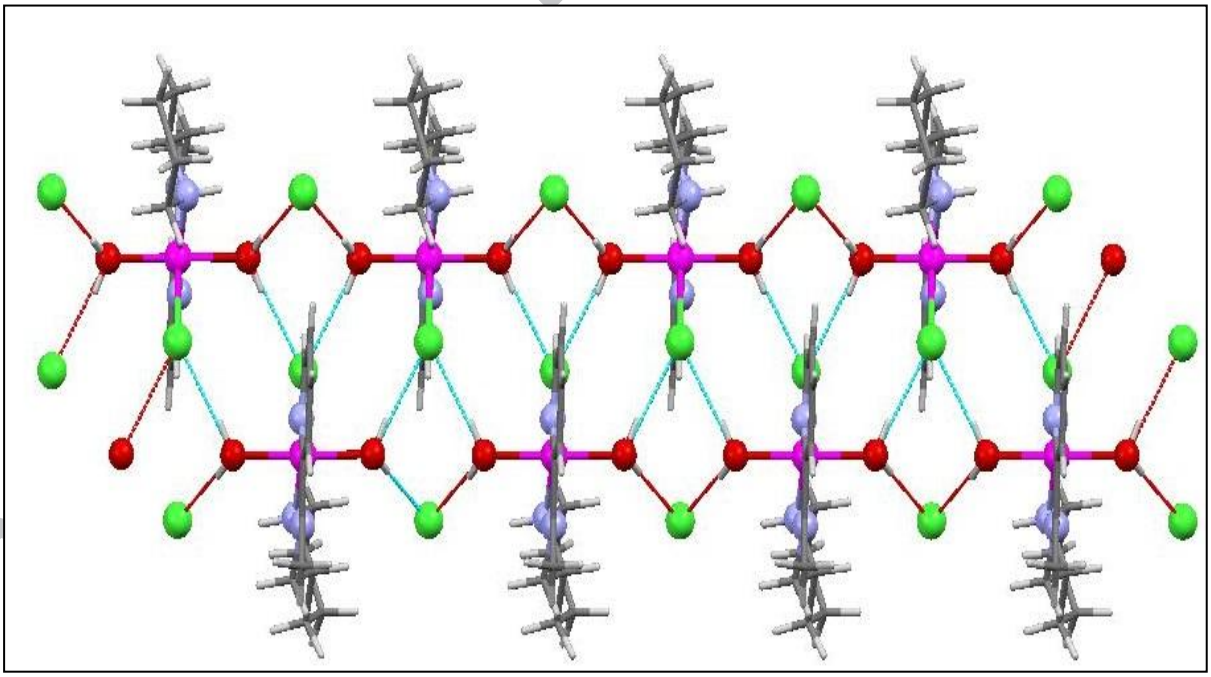


**Fig. 4** 1D polymer structure of complex 2

**Antibacterial activity**

Antibacterial activity was studied using the bacterial strain E. coli using Agar media (broth).

To 30 ml of broth, 100µl of bacteria was added and incubated for 24 h. The next day turbidity

in Petridis indicated bacterial growth [49]. Now treatment was done by adding metal, ligand and their complexes (50µl) in each Petridis and incubated at 37 $^{O}$C for overnight (Figure S3). It was found from the figure that turbidity appeared for metal salt $CuCl_2$ and complex 1. Since turbidity in petridish after treatment indicates bacterial growth and clarity denoted inhibition of bacterial growth so from the result it is clear that among metals only $CuCl_2$ and among complexes only complex 1 exhibited anti bacterial property.

**DNA binding studies**

**UV-vis absorption titration and binding affinity evaluation**

The binding interaction has been speculated by the absorption titration of complexes **1** & **2** with CT-DNA. The bands at 260 and 280 nm observed in the spectrum of CT-DNA in the buffer authenticate that the DNA is adequately free from protein [50]. The binding affinity of complexes **1** & **2** with CT-DNA has been determined at constant complex concentration and with regular addition of CT-DNA. The absorption titration of the complex **1** & **2** with the increase in the concentration of CT-DNA has been represented by Fig. 5. The figure represents that complex **1** & **2** shows maxima at 642 and 807 nm respectively which on addition of CT-DNA gradually decrease with a hypsochromism along with a blue shift for both. An interesting observation is that absorption band splits into two new shoulder (at 682 and 596 nm for complex **1** & 831 and 727 nm for complex **2**) on gradual addition of CT-DNA into complex (**1** & **2**) solution with continuous decrement up to saturation. This observation suggested a strong interaction between complex and DNA as well as generation of a new species upon interaction. The presence of isosbestic points at 523 nm (complex **1**) and 658 nm (complex **2**) clearly indicates a strong reversible equilibrium external binding occurred in presence of CT-DNA. Experimental results revealed the intercalating binding nature for $\pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ stacking interactions between the base pairs of CT-DNA and complex **1** & **2** [51, 52]. However, absorption titration is not able to give the quantitative mode of binding.

The calculated binding constant ($K_b$) is acquired from the ratio of the slope to the y-intercept in plots ([DNA])/ ($\varepsilon_A - \varepsilon_f$) versus [DNA] according to equation 1. Fig. 5 represents the best fit of the experimental value to equation (1). The binding affinity ($K_b$) obtained from this titration experiment was $8.1\times 10^5$ $M^{-1}$ (for complex **2)** and $9 \times 10^5$ $M^{-1}$ (for complex **1**). These confirmed that the complex bind to CT- DNA quite strongly. The binding constant values obtained from this experiment are very much comparable with the reported other Cu and Ni complexes [53-58]. The calculated DNA binding affinity of complex **2** is slightly higher than that complex **1**.

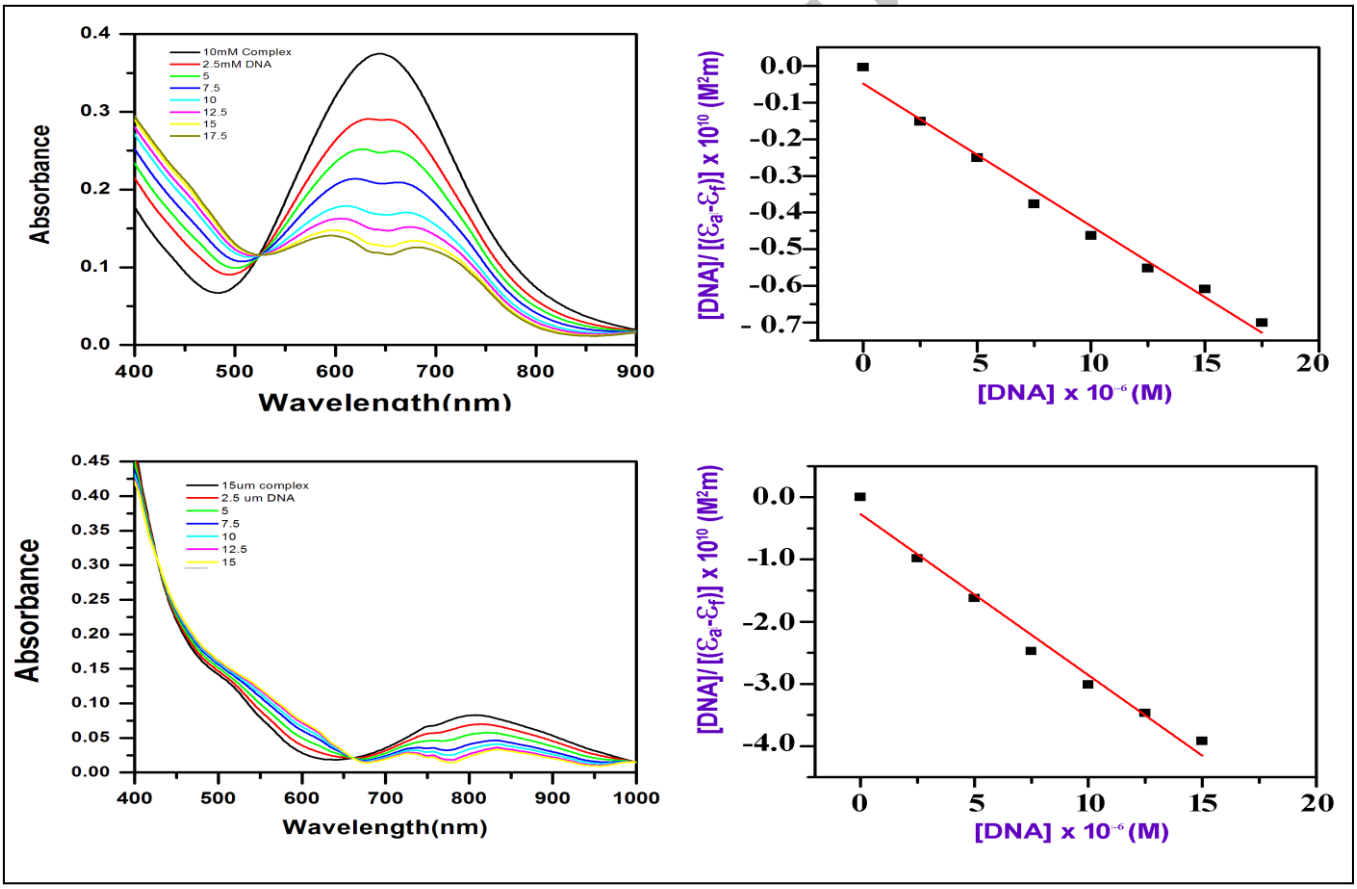



**Fig 5** UV–Vis absorption spectra of complexes **1** and **2** upon the addition of CT-DNA ([complex **1**] = 10 μM ; [CT-DNA] = 2.5 to 17.5 μM for complex **1** and [complex **2**] = 15 μM ; [CT-DNA] = 2.5 to 15 μM for complex **2** ). *Inset* plot of [DNA]/($\varepsilon_a - \varepsilon_f$) versus [DNA] for the titration of DNA to

**Ethidium Bromide (EB) Displacement Studies**

EB displacement studies were performed to speculate further insights of the binding behavior between CT-DNA and complex **1** & **2**. EB, a phenanthiridine fluorescence dye, is a typical example of intercalator because in a single probe it shows very weak fluorescence but on incorporation of CT–DNA in it a large enhancement was observed. This is because of the fact that planar phenanthiridine ring is perfectly fitted in to the adjacent base pairs of the double helix [59]. A notable decrease in emission intensities (Fig. 6) is observed upon increase in the concentration of complex **1** & **2** to the EB-CT-DNA system. It is due to the intercalation of Cu and Ni complexes to DNA base pairs. During this process some EB molecules have been replaced from the EB–CT-DNA system i.e. the decrease in fluorescence intensity was observed due to the reduction of the number of binding sites on the CT-DNA available to the EB. Quenching parameters were analyzed following the Stern−Volmer equation.

$$\frac{F^0}{F} = K_{SV}[Q] + 1$$

Where $F^0$ is the emission intensity in the absence of the compound, F is the emission intensity in the presence of the compound, $K_{SV}$ is the quenching constant, and [Q] is the concentration of the compound. The $K_{SV}$ value is obtained as a slope from the plot of $F^0/F$ versus [Q]. The quenching constant ($K_{sv}$) obtained for complex **1** & **2** are 1.73 x $10^5$ and 2.3 x $10^5$ respectively.

With the help of the following equation the apparent DNA binding constant ($K_{app}$) values were also calculated

$K_{EB}[EB] = K_{app}[complex]$

where [complex] is the value at 50% decrease in the fluorescence intensity of CT-DNA- EB complex, $K_{EB}$ (1.22 ± 0.72× $10^7$ $M^{-1}$and [EB] = 5 μM ) is the DNA binding constant of EB. The $K_{app}$ values for the complex were found to be 0.87 × $10^6$ $M^{-1}$ (for complex **1**) and 1.24 ×

$10^6$ $M^{-1}$ (for complex 2). The observed quenching and binding parameters conclude that the complex bind DNA via intercalation mode [54-57, 59].

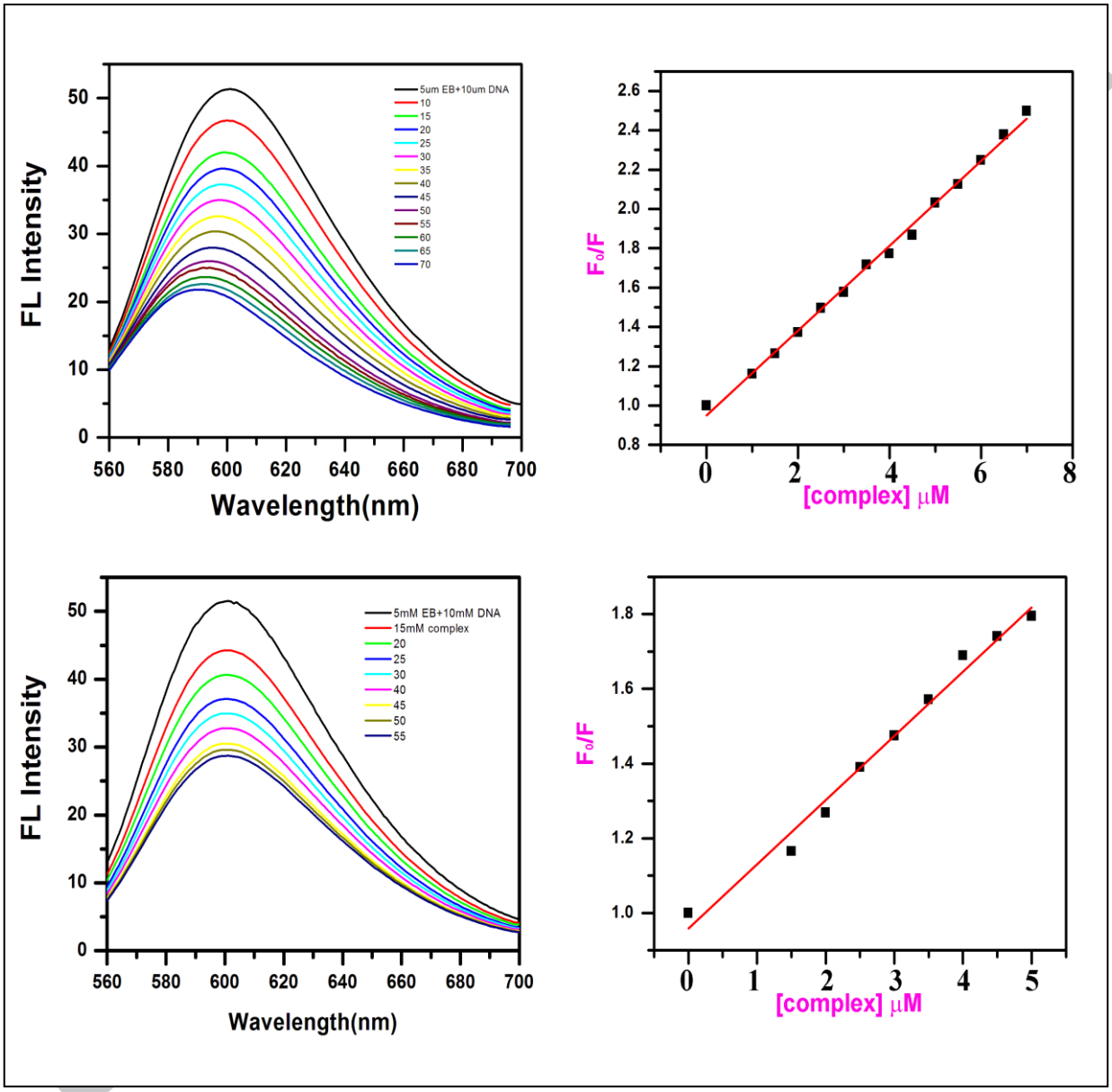



**Fig 6.**Effect of the addition of complexes **1** and **2** on the emission intensity of the CT-DNA bound EB at different concentrations ([EB] = [CT-DNA] = 5 μM; [Complex **1**] = 0-70 μM, [Complex **2**] = 0-55 μM. Stern–Volmer plot of the fluorescence data.

**Viscosity measurements**

Since viscosity changes are sensitive to the increase in length so viscosity measurement has been performed on getting the indication of intercalation mode from the ethidium bromide

(EB) displacement study. Generally in intercalation mode insertion of the compound between the base pair increases the length of DNA and thereby increases viscosity [60]. On the other hand, groove, stacking and non-classic intercalation binding result in a twist or bend in the DNA helix and cause slightly reduce its actual length. So in this case viscosity is either slightly decreased or remains in unchanged [61-64]. Fig. 7 shows the relative viscosity of CT-DNA-EB and CT-DNA- complex 1 & 2 solutions with the increasing amount of EB/complex. A slight increase in the relative viscosity of CT-DNA is observed on the addition of complex (0.1-0.28 mM) which indicates that insertion of complex between the CT-DNA base pair results in lengthening the original size of DNA. However, it is clear from the comparison study with EB that the change in relative viscosity during the interaction is very much smaller than the EB (a classical intercalator). So it can be concluded that binding mode is not fully intercalation rather it is a partial intercalation [34, 65].

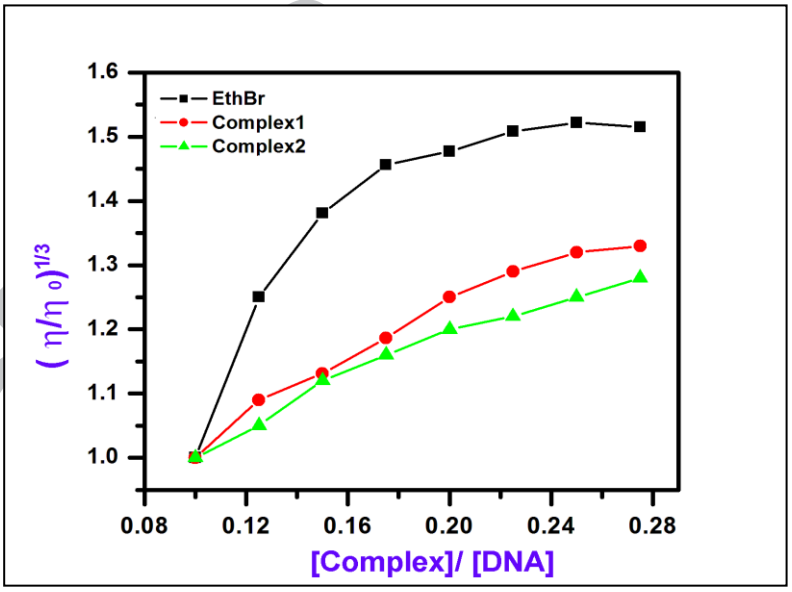



**Fig 7** Effects of increasing concentration of ethidium bromide (EB). Effect of increasing amounts of Complex **1** and complex **2** on the relative specific viscosity of Calf Thymus DNA (CT-DNA = 2 mM).

**Cell viability**

The present study also emphasized on cell viability analyses. For that, MTT assay has been used to check cell viability of Hela cells on metal, ligand and its corresponding complexes 1 & 2. The results are represented in Fig. 8. It is observed from figure that cell viability increases with time for all the systems i.e metals, ligands and their complexes illustrating their biocompatible nature. It is also clear that among the complexes 1 and 2, complex 1 shows higher cell viability. The biocompatible nature is also evident from cell morphology obtained through fluorescence images of Hela cells of metal complexes after staining with acridine orange and ethidium bromide dye [66] (Fig. 9 & 11). It is worth mentioning here that cell health as well as number density of cells is better that means the metal complexes are biocompatible in nature.

Another technique i.e. adhesion behavior of Hela cells on pure metal, ligand and its complexes is also used to check biocompatibility of the said compounds. It was clearly observed that cells were adhered properly on both the metal complexes 1 & 2 as compared to pure metal and ligand. This observation further demonstrates their biocompatibility indicating their uses as biomaterial transplants (Fig. 10 & 12).

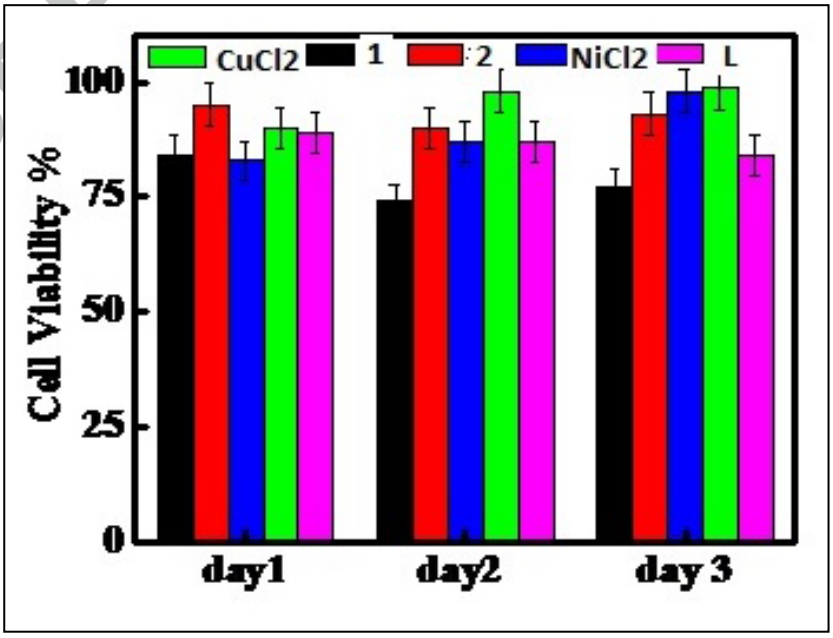



**Fig. 8** Cell viability of Hela cells on metal ($CuCl_2$, $NiCl_2$), ligand L and Complexes 1 & 2

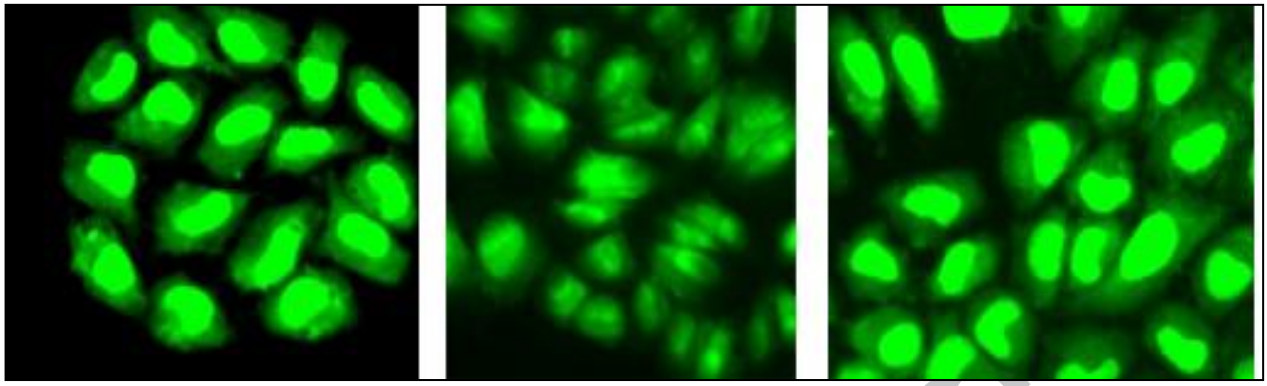


**Fig. 9** Fluorescent images of AO/EB staining of (a) $CuCl_2$, (b) L and (c) Complex 1

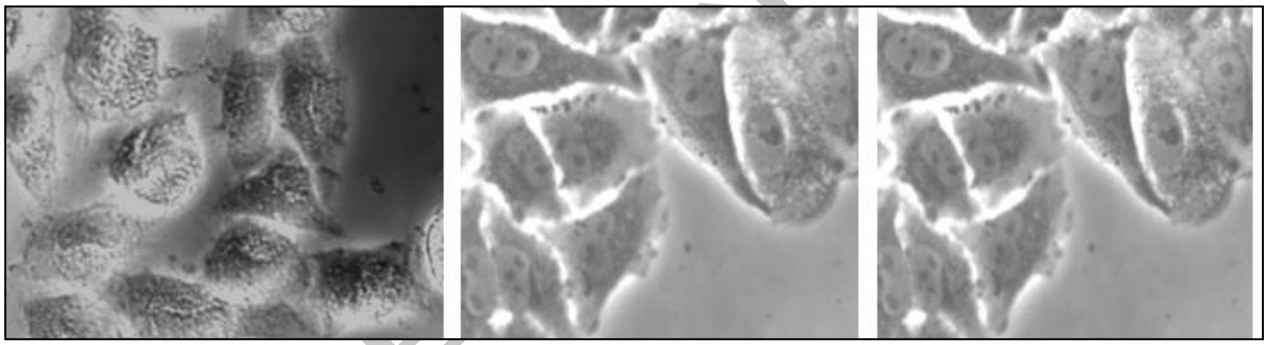


**Fig. 10** Cell adhesion images (a) $CuCl_2$, (b) L and (c) Complex 1

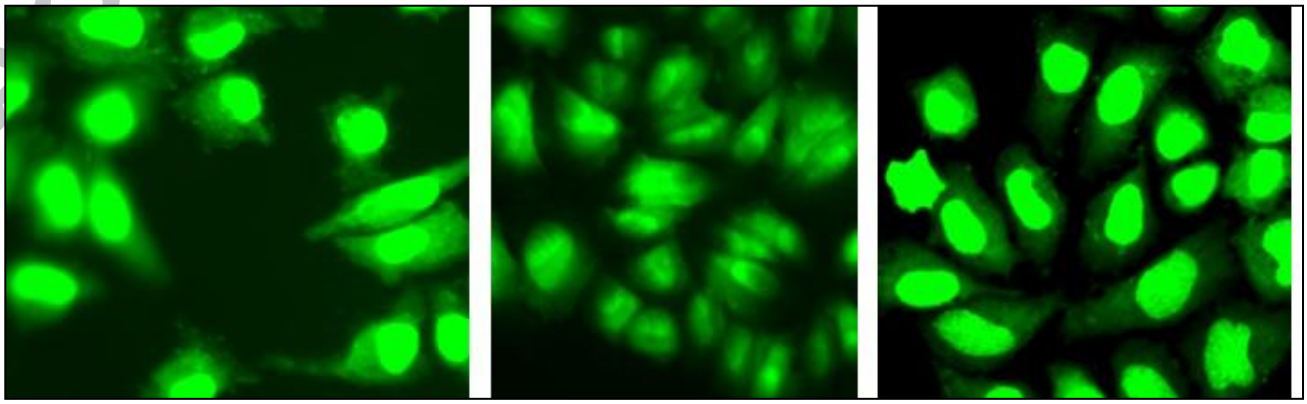


**Fig. 11** Fluorescent images of AO/EB staining of (a) $NiCl_2$, (b) L and (c) Complex 2

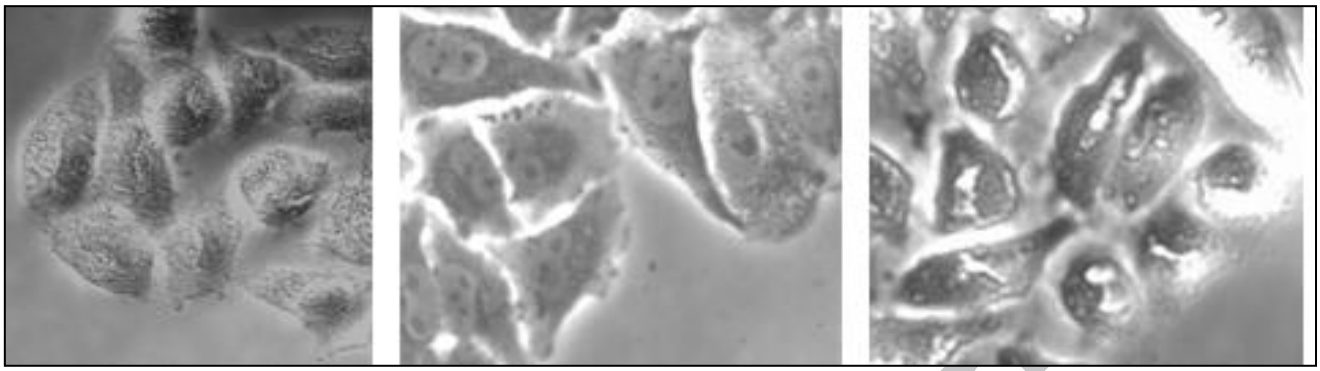


**Fig. 12** Cell adhesion images (a) $NiCl_2$, (b) L and (c) Complex 2

**Conclusions**

The present paper discusses the synthesis and characterization of new Cu(II) and Ni(II) complexes of a tridentate NNN Schiff base ligand which is readily synthesized from the Schiff reaction of an aldehyde and amine. In the complexes, Cu(II) occupies square pyramidal coordination and Ni(II) center occupies octahedral coordination. The backbone of the net supramolecular arrangement dictated by hydrogen bonds has been constituted by the primary structural motifs which are revealed from the MOFs in the title complexes. From the antibacterial screening it is shown that among metals only $CuCl_2$ and among complexes only complex 1 exhibited anti bacterial property. DNA interactions with the complexes have been investigated by a range of experimental techniques that express the partial intercalation mode of DNA binding with the complexes. From cell viability test it is observed that all the systems i.e. metals, ligands and their complexes are biocompatible in nature since cell viability increases with time. Among the complexes 1 and 2, complex 1 shows higher cell viability. It was also clearly observed that cells were adhered properly on both the metal complexes 1 & 2 as compared to pure metal and ligand. This observation again demonstrates it biocompatibility indicating its use as a biomaterial transplant. Further studies on the antioxidant, antifungal as well as DNA cleavage studies, are planned for the future.

**Conflicts of Interest**

There are no conflicts to declare.

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**Supplementary data**

Crystallographic data (excluding structure factors) for the structures reported in this article have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre as supplementary publication number CCDC1515618 & 1515614for complexes 1 & 2 respectively. Copies of the data can be obtained free of charge on application to CCDC, 12 Union Road, CambridgeCB2 1EZ, UK.

Fax: +44-1223-336033; e-mail:(deposit@ccdc.cam.ac.uk).

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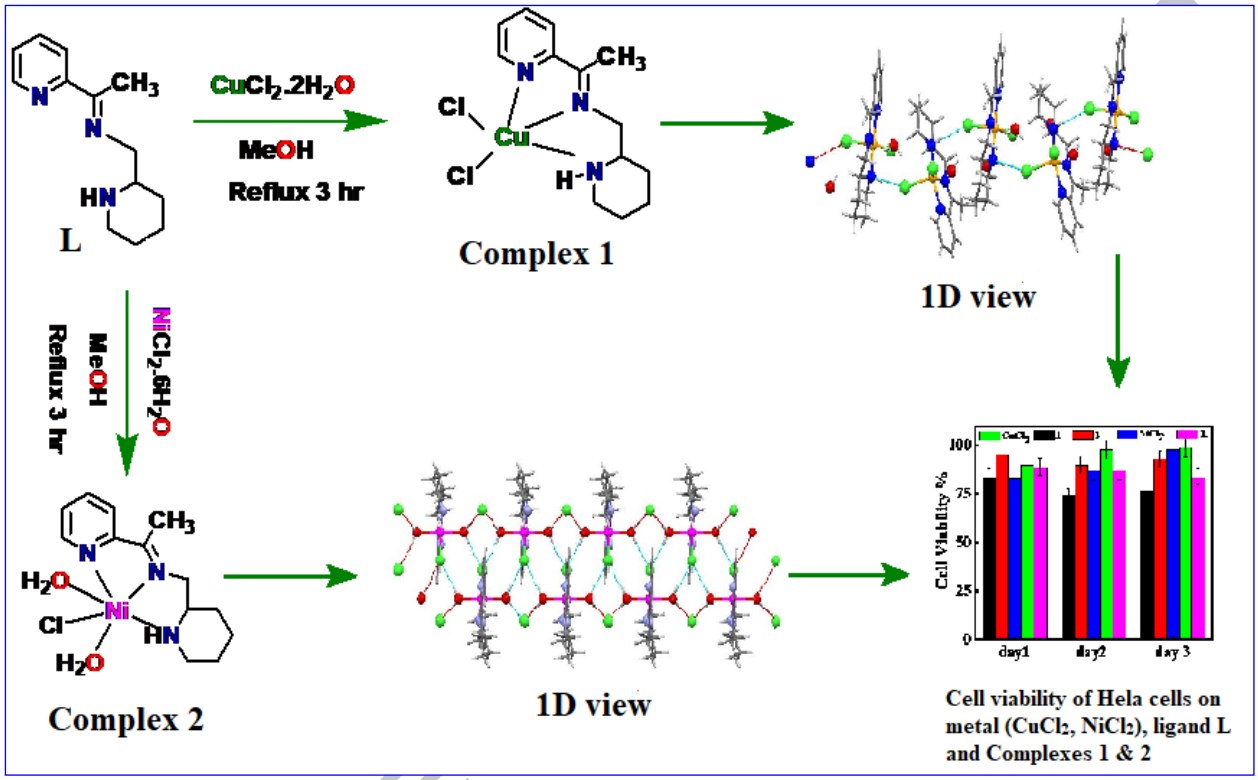
## Graphical Abstract



## Highlights

The work on Supramolecular Self-Assembly, DNA interaction, Antibacterial and Cell Viability studies of Cu(II) and Ni(II) Complexes is novel and can effectively be used in the fields of applied biology.