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# Advancements in Lithium Quantification for Complex Matrices: Analytical Techniques, Interference Mitigation, and Comparative Performance

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## Abstract

*Lithium has emerged as a critical element in modern technology, particularly in energy storage, electronics, and industrial applications. Accurate quantification of lithium in complex matrices such as ores, brines, and recycled battery materials—is essential for resource evaluation, process optimization, and quality control. However, the presence of chemically similar elements (e.g., sodium, potassium, calcium) introduces significant spectral and chemical interferences, complicating analytical measurements. This review provides a systematic comparison of classical and modern techniques for lithium determination, including flame photometry, atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), inductively coupled plasma–optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES), inductively coupled plasma–mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), ion-selective electrodes (ISE), and chromatographic methods. Special emphasis is placed on interference mitigation strategies such as selective extraction, ion exchange, and matrix-matched calibration. Recent advancements in hyphenated techniques (e.g., LC-ICP-MS, IC-ICP-MS), machine learning-driven interference correction, and portable analytical tools are also discussed. By consolidating current knowledge and identifying future research directions, this review serves as a practical guide for selecting and optimizing lithium quantification methods in diverse analytical contexts.*

***Keywords:*** *Lithium quantification; ICP-MS; Interference mitigation; Flame photometry.*

## 1. Introduction

Lithium, the lightest solid element and a strategically critical resource, plays an indispensable role in modern industry and technology (Dorn & Peyré, 2020). Its applications span diverse sectors, including energy storage (Chen et al., 2020), electronics (Wang et al., 2025), glass and ceramics (Dudney, 2003), pharmaceuticals, and metallurgy (Kudryavtsev, 2016). In particular, its dominance in lithium-ion batteries, which power electric vehicles and portable electronic devices, has driven a surge in global demand over the past decade. This trend has amplified the necessity for accurate quantification of lithium in both geological and industrial samples.

Lithium occurs naturally in a range of sources such as spodumene- and lepidolite-bearing pegmatites, lithium-rich brines (H. Aral and Vecchio-Sadus, 2019), and certain clays. However, the accurate determination of lithium concentrations in these matrices presents significant analytical challenges due to the complexity of mineralogical composition and the presence of interfering species (Chaudhry et al., 2025). Alkali metals such as sodium and potassium, which share similar chemical and spectral properties with lithium, can cause spectral overlaps, matrix suppression, and ionization interferences. Consequently, the development and application of robust analytical techniques capable of delivering high sensitivity, precision, and effective interference mitigation remain essential for ensuring reliable lithium quantification.

Over the decades, lithium analysis has evolved from time-consuming wet-chemical methods—such as those pioneered by Lawrence Smith for mineral analysis (Kallmann, 1944) to advanced instrumental techniques, including flame photometry, atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS), inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry (ICP-OES), inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), ion-selective electrodes (ISEs), and ion chromatography (IC). While these methods offer superior sensitivity, selectivity, and multi-element capability, their accuracy in complex matrices depends heavily on tailored sample preparation, separation, and calibration strategies. This review comprehensively evaluates classical and emerging methods, highlighting their principles, advantages, and limitations, with a focus on overcoming interference challenges. It also explores innovations such as AI-assisted spectral correction and portable analytical devices, providing a practical guide for researchers and industry professionals to optimize lithium determination in diverse, interference-laden matrices.

Lithium and its compounds serve critical roles across medicine, aerospace, materials engineering, nuclear energy, and emerging technologies. In neuropsychiatry, lithium carbonate ($Li_2CO_3$) has been the first-line treatment for bipolar disorder since its discovery by Cade (1949), exerting mood-stabilizing effects through inhibition of glycogen synthase kinase-3β (GSK-3β) and modulation of serotonergic and dopaminergic pathways (Jope, 1999), alongside neuroprotective actions that reduce oxidative stress, preserve mitochondrial function, and mitigate neuroinflammation (Chiu & Chuang, 2013). Recent findings suggest therapeutic potential in Alzheimer's disease through GSK-3β inhibition and amyloid-beta modulation (Nunes et al., 2022). In aerospace, lithium's low density ($0.534\ g\ cm^{-3}$) enables lightweight yet strong aluminum–lithium alloys such as AA 2099, used in aircraft like the Boeing 787 for 10% weight savings (Rioja & Liu, 2012), while lithium-ion batteries power missions such as NASA's Perseverance rover on Mars (Marshall et al., 2020); the defense sector is advancing lithium–sulfur batteries for high-energy UAV applications (Manthiram et al., 2021). Lithium aluminosilicate (LAS) glass-ceramics, characterized by near-zero thermal expansion, are essential in Gorilla Glass displays (Ellison & Cornejo, 2023), dimensionally stable telescope mirrors like Zerodur® (Höland & Beall, 2019), and thermal shock–resistant cookware such as Schott CERAN® (Deubener et al., 2022). In nuclear energy, the isotope lithium-6 ($^6Li$) enables tritium breeding in ITER fusion reactors via the $^6Li + n \rightarrow {}^3H + {}^4He + 4.8\ MeV$ reaction (Zinkle et al., 2021), while its deuteride form ($^6LiD$) has long served as a thermonuclear fuel (Gsponer, 2020).

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Emerging applications include lithium niobate ($LiNbO_3$) in photonic quantum computing due to its strong Pockels effect and low optical loss (Wang et al., 2023), lithium zirconate ($Li_2ZrO_3$) for high-temperature $CO_2$ capture with >90% cyclability (Shi et al., 2022), and lithium-doped bioceramics that enhance bone regeneration via Wnt/β-catenin activation and osteoclast suppression (Wu et al., 2021). Collectively, these diverse applications underscore lithium's unique combination of chemical, structural, and functional properties, driving innovation across energy, technology, healthcare, and advanced materials sectors. Table 1 provides an overview of the major lithium-bearing ores, detailing their chemical formulas, typical interfering radicals or elements, and notable compositional characteristics. Such mineralogical and chemical information is critical for selecting appropriate sample preparation protocols, mitigating matrix effects, and improving the accuracy and precision of lithium quantification in complex geological matrices. This compilation also serves as a reference framework for correlating ore composition with analytical challenges encountered during instrumental determination of lithium.

| Ore/Mineral | Chemical Formula | Major Interfering Elements / Radicals | Key Chemical Composition Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Spodumene** | $LiAl(SiO_3)_2$ | $Na^+$, $K^+$, $Ca^{2+}$, $Fe^{3+}$ | Pyroxene group mineral; high lithium content; may contain trace Fe and Mg substitutions. |
| **Petalite** | $LiAlSi_4O_{10}$ | $Na^+$, $K^+$, $Ca^{2+}$ | Framework silicate; stable at high temperatures; often associated with spodumene. |
| **Lepidolite** | $K(Li,Al)_3(Al,Si,Rb)_4O_{10}(F,OH)_2$ | $K^+$, $Rb^+$, $Cs^+$, $Na^+$, $Mg^{2+}$ | Lithium-rich mica; contains rubidium and cesium, which can interfere in analysis. |
| **Amblygonite** | $(Li,Na)AlPO_4(F,OH)$ | $Na^+$, $Ca^{2+}$, $Mg^{2+}$, $Fe^{3+}$ | Phosphate mineral; fluorine/ hydroxyl substitution; Na substitution common. |
| **Zinnwaldite** | $KLiFeAl(AlSi_3O_{10})(F,OH)$ | $K^+$, $Fe^{2+/3+}$, $Na^+$, $Mg^{2+}$ | Iron-bearing lithium mica; higher Fe content leads to additional spectral interference. |
| **Eucryptite** | $LiAlSiO_4$ | $Na^+$, $K^+$, $Ca^{2+}$ | Rare lithium aluminum silicate; high thermal stability; interference from alkalis. |
| **Triphylite** | $Li(Fe^{2+},Mn^{2+})PO_4$ | $Mn^{2+}$, $Fe^{2+/3+}$, $Mg^{2+}$ | Phosphate mineral; iron and manganese dominate interference patterns. |
| **Cookeite** | $LiAl_4(Si_3Al)O_{10}(OH)_8$ | $Na^+$, $K^+$, $Ca^{2+}$, $Mg^{2+}$ | Lithium-bearing chlorite; commonly occurs with other mica group minerals. |
| **Holmquistite** | $Li_2Mg_3Al_2Si_8O_{22}(OH)_2$ | $Mg^{2+}$, $Fe^{2+}$, $Na^+$ | Amphibole group; Mg-rich composition complicates lithium isolation. |
| **Jadarite** | $LiNaSiB_3O_7(OH)$ | $Na^+$, $B^{3+}$, $K^+$ | Unique borosilicate; sodium interference prominent. |

**Table 1** Major lithium-bearing ores with their chemical formulas, typical interfering radicals/elements, and compositional notes.

## 2. Accurate Determination of Lithium in Complex Matrices

The accurate quantification of lithium (Li) in complex matrices remains a challenging analytical task, primarily due to spectral and matrix interferences from coexisting alkali metals such as sodium ($Na^+$) and potassium ($K^+$), as well as alkaline earth metals like magnesium ($Mg^{2+}$) and calcium ($Ca^{2+}$). These interferences complicate lithium measurement by overlapping spectral lines or causing signal suppression, which has driven continuous innovation in chemical separation and instrumental correction techniques over the past six decades (Rohiman, 2023). Initial efforts in chemical separation began in the late 1960s with solvent extraction methods. Dean and Rains (1969) pioneered the selective complexation of $Li^+$ using crown ethers like dibenzo-14-crown-4, which was further refined by Izatt et al. (1985) to improve selectivity. However, these early methods were limited by sensitivity to pH, contamination from organic solvents, and relatively low sample throughput.

The introduction of ion-exchange chromatography by Strelow et al. (1971) marked a significant advance, employing cation-exchange resins such as Dowex 50W-X8 to efficiently separate lithium from geological and brine matrices. This approach offered enhanced selectivity and effectively reduced matrix effects, particularly in high-salinity environments common in brine samples. More recently, the development of advanced solid-phase extraction (SPE) materials—including lithium-imprinted polymers (Zhang et al., 2023), $TiO_2$-coated adsorbents (Chen et al., 2022), and hybrid membrane–nanofiltration systems (Wang et al., 2024)—has enabled superior $Li^+/Na^+$ selectivity ratios exceeding 500:1. These innovations align with emerging trends such as machine learning–assisted ligand design, microfluidic real-time brine analysis, and environmentally friendly ("green") separation chemistry, all aimed at enhancing throughput, selectivity, and sustainability.

Complementing chemical separation, instrumental correction methods have become indispensable for reliable lithium quantification. Matrix-matched calibration techniques, formalized by Thompson et al. (2002), remain fundamental in minimizing signal suppression across a wide variety of sample types, including geological, biological, and industrial matrices. However, this method requires detailed prior knowledge of the sample composition. Internal standardization, typically utilizing scandium or yttrium as reference elements (Becker, 2007), helps correct for plasma instabilities, nebulizer variability, and signal drift, thus improving precision to relative standard deviations (RSD) of approximately 1–3%. The current gold standard for lithium quantification is isotope dilution inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ID-ICP-MS), which uses enriched $^6Li$ spikes to provide absolute quantification with detection limits at the sub-ppb level and measurement errors within ±1–2%, as demonstrated by Yamada et al. (2019).

Recent technological advances are catalyzing a paradigm shift towards greater precision, automation, and rapid analysis in lithium quantification. The integration of artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning models for predicting and correcting matrix effects (Liu et al., 2023 and Xing, P. etal., 2021) is significantly enhancing analytical robustness. This is complemented by instrumental innovations such as triple-quadrupole ICP-MS (ICP-QQQ), which utilizes reactive gases to eliminate polyatomic interferences with exceptional efficiency. Furthermore, Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) has

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emerged as a powerful tool for rapid, minimally destructive, and potentially field-deployable analysis. LIBS operates on the fundamental principle of generating a laser-induced plasma that atomizes and excites a micro-sample of the material. The emitted characteristic atomic emission lines, such as the prominent Li I line at 670.8 nm, are then spectrally resolved and detected (Karim, N, etal., 2025). However, its quantitative accuracy can be compromised by matrix effects due to variations in plasma properties influenced by sample composition, thereby requiring sophisticated chemometric techniques for calibration and spectral deconvolution. While LIBS offers unparalleled speed and minimal sample preparation, its sensitivity and limits of detection are generally higher (less sensitive) compared to mass spectrometry techniques. A comparative assessment of common techniques (Table 2) highlights that methods like Electron Microprobe Analysis (EMPA) provide exceptional spatial resolution for micro-analysis, and X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) offers robust, non-destructive bulk analysis, though both face challenges with light elements like lithium. The convergence of these advanced instrumental and computational approaches is paramount for achieving reliable, fast, and accurate lithium measurement across diverse and complex matrices, meeting the escalating demands of both research and industrial applications.

| Technique | Fundamental Principle | Key Advantages | Limitations / Challenges | Recent / Emerging Advancements | Representative References |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS)** | Focused high-energy laser pulse creates a micro-plasma on sample surface; plasma emission lines analyzed for element ID and quantification (Li I at 670.8 nm). | – Very rapid, minimally destructive, field-deployable potential. – Little to no sample preparation. – Multi-element detection simultaneously. | – Quantitative accuracy affected by matrix effects and plasma variability. – Higher detection limits than MS techniques. – Requires robust chemometric calibration. | – Chemometric spectral deconvolution (PCA, PLS, machine learning). – Calibration-free LIBS and hybrid LIBS-ICP-MS approaches. | Liu et al., 2023; Rohiman et al., 2023 |
| **Triple-Quadrupole ICP-MS (ICP-QQQ)** | Sample aerosolized, ionized in plasma; mass separation in tandem quadrupoles with reactive gases for interference removal. | – Ultra-trace detection limits. – High throughput multi-element capability. – Excellent interference removal via reaction cell chemistry. | – Requires liquid sample preparation. – Higher operational cost. – Limited spatial resolution (bulk analysis). | – Reactive gas modes ($O_2$, $NH_3$) for polyatomic interference elimination. – AI-assisted signal correction and drift compensation. | Liu et al., 2023; |
| **Electron Microprobe** | Focused electron beam | – Exceptional spatial | – Poor sensitivity for Li and other | – Advanced detector | Yuan, M. et. Al, 2025. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Analysis (EMPA)** | excites sample; characteristic X-rays measured for elemental composition at micro-scale. | resolution and phase mapping. – Well-established standards. – Minimal sample alteration. | light elements. – Requires polished solid samples. | technology for lighter elements. – Coupled with wavelength-dispersive spectrometry (WDS) for improved Li detection. | |
| **X-ray Fluorescence (XRF)** | X-rays excite inner shell electrons; secondary X-rays (fluorescence) analyzed for bulk composition. | – Non-destructive, robust, rapid analysis of bulk samples. – Minimal sample prep. – Portable instruments available. | – Weak response for light elements (Li, Be). – Matrix effects at trace levels. | – Synchrotron-based micro-XRF for trace Li mapping. – Advanced FP (fundamental parameter) quantification models. | Korbel, C., et. Al, 2024 |
| **AI/ML-based Matrix Effect Prediction & Correction** | Data-driven models trained on large spectral datasets to predict and correct for matrix effects in real time. | – Enhances accuracy across diverse matrices. – Reduces calibration burden. – Automates quality control. | – Requires high-quality training data. – Model transferability across instruments can be limited. | – Deep learning for non-linear spectral corrections. – Integration with LIBS/ICP-MS workflows for real-time corrections. | Liu et al., 2023; Sullivan, V. et. Al, 2024. |

**Table 2** Comparative Overview of Advanced Techniques for Lithium Quantification in Complex Matrices

## 3. Enhancement via Instrumental Innovation

### 3.1. Recent Advancements in Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS)

Recent hardware advancements have significantly addressed LIBS's traditional limitations in sensitivity and reproducibility (Bolea-Fernandez, E., et. al. 2024). The development of Double-Pulse LIBS (DP-LIBS), where two sequential laser pulses interact with the sample, has been a major focus. As demonstrated by De Giacomo et al. (2016) and reviewed by Babushok et al. (2006), this approach can enhance emission intensity by an order of magnitude by re-heating the plasma and improving ablation efficiency, leading to substantially lower limits of detection. In parallel, the adoption of ultrafast lasers has gained traction. Using femtosecond pulses, as explored by Cristoforetti et al. (2019), reduces the heat-affected zone and promotes a more stoichiometric ablation process, thereby mitigating the matrix effects that have long plagued quantitative nanosecond LIBS analysis.

The Data Revolution: Chemometrics and Machine Learning Perhaps the most transformative advancement in LIBS has been the sophisticated integration of chemometrics and machine learning (ML) for data processing. Moving beyond univariate calibration, modern LIBS relies on multivariate techniques that utilize the entire spectral information. Partial Least Squares Regression (PLSR) and Support Vector Regression (SVR) have become standard tools for building robust calibration models that compensate for matrix effects, as extensively documented by Moncayo et al. (2017) and Rezaei et al. (2018). Furthermore, the field is increasingly adopting advanced deep learning algorithms. For instance, Dong et al. (2021) applied convolutional neural networks (CNNs) to LIBS spectra for accurate coal classification and quantification, showcasing superior performance over traditional methods by automatically extracting complex, non-linear features from the data.

Hybrid Techniques for Ultimate Sensitivity and Selectivity

To push detection limits to ultra-trace levels, researchers have successfully hybridized LIBS with other analytical techniques. A prominent example is Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy coupled with Laser-Induced Fluorescence (LIBS-LIF), as pioneered by Yin et al. (2019). In this method, a tunable diode laser is used to resonantly excite atoms within the LIBS plasma, boosting the emission signal of specific target elements like lithium or lead by several orders of magnitude and achieving parts-per-billion sensitivity. Another powerful synergy is between LIBS and Raman spectroscopy, often in a shared instrumental platform. This combination, as implemented by Moros et al. (2020), provides simultaneous elemental and molecular information from a single micro-scale spot, offering a comprehensive material characterization solution that is invaluable for complex matrices like geological samples or biological tissues.

### 3.2. Expansion into New Applications and Fields

These technological advancements have directly enabled LIBS's expansion into novel and demanding application fields. In **industrial process control**, the robustness and speed of LIBS are being leveraged for real-time monitoring. Cui et al. (2022) developed an online LIBS system for the continuous analysis of element composition in sintering mixtures, demonstrating its critical role in optimizing industrial quality control. In **planetary exploration**, LIBS has proven its worth as a primary analytical tool. The ChemCam and SuperCam instruments on NASA's Mars rovers, Curiosity and Perseverance, whose results have been analyzed by Wiens et al. (2021), have performed thousands of remote geological analyses, validating LIBS's capability to operate reliably in extreme environments and provide crucial compositional data for extraterrestrial geology.

### 3.3. Comprehensive Method Validation for Lithium Quantification

Ensuring reliability across diverse sample types mandates rigorous method validation for lithium quantification. Accuracy assessment typically involves recovery studies using certified reference materials (CRMs) such as NIST SRM 1640a (water) and JG-2 (granite), with spike recovery values between 95% and 105% considered acceptable according to ISO 17025 guidelines (Kane, Evans, & Smith, 2003). Precision is evaluated through intra-day and inter-day repeatability tests; intra-day RSD values below 3% are standard for ICP-MS, while flame atomic absorption spectroscopy (FAAS) typically requires RSDs below 5% (Feldmann, Salaun, & Lombi, 1999). Inter-laboratory reproducibility is commonly verified via international proficiency testing programs such as GeoPT (Thompson & Walsh, 1989).

Detection limits remain critical performance indicators. Instrumental limits of detection (LOD, defined as 3σ) are generally reported as approximately 50 ppb for FAAS, 5 ppb for ICP-OES, and as low as 0.01 ppb for ICP-MS (Dean & Rains, 1969; Thomas, 2013). Nonetheless, practical method LODs are often elevated by 3 to 10 times due to matrix effects, consistent with ICH Q2(R1) validation guidelines. Linearity is verified by calibration curves exhibiting correlation coefficients ($R^2$) greater than 0.999 for ICP-based techniques, supported by residual analysis to confirm minimal deviation from linearity (Thompson, Ellison, & Wood, 2002; Weiss, 2016).

### 3.4. Comparative Performance of Analytical Techniques

Comparative analyses of lithium quantification techniques reveal distinct trade-offs between sensitivity, selectivity, throughput, and operational complexity. Flame photometry (FP) is valued for its simplicity and low cost but suffers from poor selectivity in complex samples, with detection limits in the range of 0.05–0.1 mg/L (Dean & Rains, 1969). Flame atomic absorption spectroscopy (FAAS) improves selectivity and sensitivity, achieving detection limits around 0.02–0.05 mg/L, but is limited to single-element analysis (Thomas, 2013). Graphite furnace AAS (GF-AAS) offers superior sensitivity (0.5–5 µg/L) but requires skilled operators and suffers from slower sample throughput (Feldmann et al., 1999).

Inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectroscopy (ICP-OES) provides multi-element detection with detection limits between 1 and 10 µg/L, though spectral interferences from Na and K demand correction strategies (Weiss, 2016). ICP-MS distinguishes itself by ultra-trace detection capabilities (0.1–1 µg/L) and isotopic analysis potential, albeit with higher operational costs (Yamada, Tanaka, & Kobayashi, 2019). Coupling ion chromatography (IC) with ICP-MS detection enables effective separation in high-alkali matrices and detection limits down to 0.5–1 µg/L (Zhang et al., 2023).

### 3.5. Analytical Challenges and Interference Mitigation

Matrix-induced interferences remain a persistent obstacle in lithium quantification. Spectral overlap at lithium's characteristic 670.8 nm emission line challenges flame-based methods, whereas polyatomic interferences complicate ICP-MS analysis (Becker, 2007). Mitigation strategies include chemical modifiers such as lanthanum ($La^{3+}$) and strontium ($Sr^{2+}$) to counteract phosphate and sulfate interferences (Feldmann et al., 1999). Collision and reaction cell technologies in ICP-MS employ reactive gases like hydrogen or ammonia to reduce polyatomic ion interference (Yamada et al., 2019). ID-ICP-MS further refines quantification by enabling absolute lithium measurements at sub-ppb levels (Liu, Chen, & Wang, 2023).

### 3.6. Advances in Separation and Computational Approaches

Innovative separation technologies have propelled lithium quantification forward. Lithium-imprinted polymers (Zhang et al., 2023) and hybrid membrane–nanofiltration systems (Wang, Li, & Zhao, 2024) deliver exceptional $Li^+/Na^+$ selectivity exceeding 500:1. Simultaneously, computational methods such as machine learning (ML)–assisted spectral deconvolution enhance interference correction. Deep learning frameworks, including convolutional neural networks (CNNs), have reduced ICP-MS interference errors by approximately 40%, significantly improving data quality and robustness (Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2021; Zhang, Yang, & Liu, 2024).

### 3.7. Overview of Recent Advances in Lithium Quantification in Complex Matrices

The past two years (2024–2025) have witnessed notable progress in analytical methodologies for lithium (Li) quantification, with a growing emphasis on mitigating the persistent interferences from coexisting alkali ($Na^+$, $K^+$) and alkaline earth ($Ca^{2+}$) metals. Accurate lithium determination is crucial across sectors including battery manufacturing, metallurgy, and geochemistry, yet complex sample matrices—ranging from lithium-bearing ores to high-salinity brines—pose significant challenges to precision and reproducibility.

### 3.8.High-Precision Isotope Analysis

Recent work by Scott et al. (2025) demonstrates that multi-collector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (MC-ICP-MS) equipped with MS/MS capabilities can deliver highly precise ^6Li/^7Li isotope ratios across geological and environmental matrices. Their protocol integrates ion-exchange resin purification to effectively remove sodium, thereby minimizing matrix effects and enhancing both accuracy and reproducibility.

### 3.9. Improved Reference Materials for LA-ICP-MS

To address calibration limitations in laser ablation ICP-MS (LA-ICP-MS), Zhang et al. (2025) developed homogeneous lithium-rich reference pellets from spodumene and lepidolite using wet-milling and sedimentation. These pellets achieved <5% relative standard deviation (RSD) in Li measurements, representing a ~30% improvement in accuracy over conventional glass standards, particularly for heterogeneous mineral matrices.

### 3.10. Simultaneous Multi-Element Determination

Gong and Lu (2024) advanced multi-element capability by integrating ICP-MS with ICP-OES for simultaneous lithium and trace element determination in geological samples. Optimized spectral line selection combined with ^185Re and ^103Rh internal standards effectively compensated for matrix drift and spectral interference, improving analytical robustness in complex multi-component matrices.

### 3.11. Matrix-Specific Method Validation

Recent ICP-MS applications in environmental matrices—including water, soils, and plant tissues—have highlighted the effectiveness of tailored method optimization. In 2024 studies, recoveries ranged from 92.9% to 111% with low RSD, confirming that matrix-specific protocols can sustain high analytical accuracy despite diverse chemical backgrounds.

### 3.12. Emerging Trends

Collectively, recent research reflects several key trends:

i. Enhanced interference mitigation via chemical separation and spectral optimization.
ii. Development of matrix-specific, homogeneous reference materials for improved calibration.
iii. Adoption of hybrid, multi-technique platforms to balance selectivity, sensitivity, and throughput.
iv. Increased emphasis on validation protocols adapted to specific environmental and industrial matrices.

These advances are progressively improving the reliability of lithium quantification in ores, brines, and recycled materials, helping overcome the persistent challenge of interference from chemically similar elements.

### 3.13. Analytical Challenges and Strategic Innovations

Lithium, the lightest alkali metal, underpins a wide range of modern technologies—from high-energy-density lithium-ion batteries to advanced ceramics, aerospace alloys, and specialty pharmaceuticals (Bakhtiarv and Bakhtiari et al., 2021). With global demand accelerating due to the clean energy transition and digital technology expansion, accurate and reproducible lithium analysis is of growing strategic importance. Yet, the determination of lithium in geological, industrial, and recycled matrices remains analytically demanding due to overlapping spectral lines, ionization suppression, and matrix effects introduced by $Na^+$, $K^+$, and $Ca^{2+}$.

Conventional approaches such as flame photometry and atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS) offer simplicity but lack the selectivity required for complex matrices. More sophisticated techniques, including ICP-MS, provide superior sensitivity but demand rigorous interference correction, often involving chemical separation or collision/reaction cell technology. The increasingly diverse nature of lithium sources—ranging from spodumene and lepidolite ores to continental brines and spent battery feedstocks—necessitates analytical solutions that integrate robust sample preparation, high-resolution instrumentation, and advanced computational tools.

## 4. Recent Advances and Earlier Developments in Lithium Quantification Techniques

Pöllmann and König (2021) developed an innovative approach combining X-ray diffraction (XRD) with Rietveld refinement, partial least squares regression (PLSR), and cluster analysis for lithium quantification in various ore minerals including spodumene, lepidolite, and petalite. Their mineralogical decomposition method achieved detection limits below 1% for mineral phases and approximately 0.1% for $Li_2O$ content, effectively managing spectral interferences through computational analysis rather than physical chemical separation (MDPI).

In a comparative study of analytical techniques, Levy and Katz (1970) evaluated flame photometry versus atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS) for lithium determination in biological matrices containing varying concentrations of sodium and potassium. Their results demonstrated flame photometry's superior sensitivity and operational simplicity, though they noted measurable interference effects from $Na^+$ and $K^+$ that required matrix-matched calibration (De Gruyter Brill).

Early methodological developments were documented by Brumbaugh and Fanus (1954), who pioneered spectrophotometric and flame photometric techniques for lithium analysis in spodumene ores. Their work represented a significant advancement over traditional gravimetric methods, particularly for complex silicate matrices where conventional approaches were time-consuming and labor-intensive (De Gruyter Brill).

Ottolini and colleagues (1993) made important contributions to microanalysis techniques through their application of Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry (SIMS) to lithium quantification in silicate minerals. Their research addressed critical challenges of matrix effects and inter-element interferences for light elements including lithium, beryllium, and boron, establishing fundamental protocols for accurate SIMS measurements in geological materials (Wikipedia).

These studies collectively demonstrate the evolution of lithium analytical methodologies, from early photometric techniques to advanced mineralogical and mass spectrometric approaches, each addressing the persistent challenge of interference effects in different matrix types. The progression of methods reflects both technological advancements and an increasing understanding of lithium's geochemical behavior in complex natural systems.

| Author(s) & Year | Analytical Technique / Focus | Key Findings (Interference-related) |
|---|---|---|
| Pöllmann & König (2021) | XRD + Rietveld quantitative analysis with PLSR and cluster analysis | Achieved rapid, reliable Li quantification in ores (spodumene, lepidolite, petalite, etc.). Detection limits <1 % mineral, ~0.1 % $Li_2O$. Interferences managed via mineralogical decomposition rather than chemical separation. (MDPI) |
| Levy & Katz (1970) | Flame photometry vs. AAS in presence of varying protein, $Na^+$, and $K^+$ levels | Flame photometry was more sensitive and easier to use than AAS; minor but noticeable impacts from Na and K on measurement accuracy. (De Gruyter Brill) |
| Brumbaugh & Fanus (1954) | Early spectrophotometric & flame photometric methods for Li in spodumene | Introduced a faster alternative to classical gravimetric approaches for Li determination in complex silicate matrices. (De Gruyter Brill) |
| Ottolini et al. (~1993) | Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry (SIMS) for silicates | Developed SIMS-based quantification of Li (plus Be, B) in complex silicate matrices; addressed "matrix effects" and inter-element interferences. (Wikipedia) |

**Table 3** Lithium quantification methods, with interference management strategies, and technological progression from early photometric to advanced mineralogical and mass spectrometric approaches.

### 4.1. Cutting-Edge Methodologies for Lithium Analysis (2024-2025)

Scott et al. (2025) made significant advancements in lithium isotope analysis through their development of a Neoma MS/MS multi-collector ICP-MS methodology. Their technique achieved unprecedented precision in $^6Li/^7Li$ ratio measurements across diverse geological and environmental matrices. A key innovation was their optimized ion-exchange purification protocol that effectively minimized sodium matrix effects, which have historically compromised lithium isotope ratio accuracy. This work, published in RSC Publishing, establishes new benchmarks for lithium isotopic studies in geochemical research.

Zhang et al. (2025) addressed critical challenges in laser ablation ICP-MS analysis by developing novel sample preparation techniques for lithium-bearing minerals. Their wet-milling and sedimentation approach produced homogeneous reference pellets from spodumene and lepidolite, achieving remarkable reproducibility (<5% RSD) and approximately 30% improvement in accuracy compared to conventional glass standards. Published in Atomic Spectroscopy, this methodology significantly enhances the reliability of microanalytical lithium quantification in complex mineral matrices.

Gong and Lu (2024) presented an innovative combined ICP-MS/ICP-OES approach for comprehensive lithium analysis in geological samples. Their method featured optimized spectral line selection and strategic use of $^{185}Re$ and $^{103}Rh$ internal standards to correct for matrix-induced signal drift and spectral interferences. Published in Spectroscopy Online, this dual-technique approach provides laboratories with a

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robust solution for simultaneous multi-element analysis while maintaining lithium measurement accuracy.

In a comprehensive 2024 study published in PMC, Romanian researchers (author list unspecified) developed an optimized ICP-MS protocol for lithium determination across diverse environmental matrices (water, soil, and plant tissues). Their methodology demonstrated excellent analytical performance, with recovery rates of 92.9-111% and low relative standard deviations. Notably, their systematic evaluation confirmed the absence of significant spectral interferences for lithium in these sample types when using their optimized operating conditions, establishing a reliable framework for environmental lithium monitoring.

These recent studies (2024-2025) collectively represent significant progress in lithium analytical chemistry, addressing long-standing challenges related to matrix effects, spectral interferences, and method validation across different sample types and concentration ranges. The development of specialized sample preparation techniques, advanced instrumentation configurations, and rigorous interference correction protocols has substantially improved the accuracy and precision of lithium quantification in both geological and environmental applications.

| Authors & Year | Technique / Focus | Findings (Interference-related) |
|---|---|---|
| **Sean R. Scott et al. (2025)** | Li isotope analysis via Neoma MS/MS MC-ICP-MS | Demonstrated high-precision $^6$Li/$^7$Li ratio measurement across geological and environmental samples. Emphasized purification via ion-exchange to reduce Na matrix effects (RSC Publishing). |
| **Cuicui Zhang et al. (2025)** | LA-ICP-MS reference material preparation | Developed a wet-milling and sedimentation approach to create homogeneous Li-rich reference pellets (spodumene/lepidolite). Achieved <5 % RSD for Li, improving accuracy by ~30 % compared to glass standards (at-spectrosc.com). |
| **Cang Gong & Haichuan Lu (2024)** | Combined ICP-MS and ICP-OES for geological samples | Developed a simultaneous multi-element method. Optimized spectral lines and selected internal standards (^185Re, ^103Rh) to correct for matrix drift and interference effects (Spectroscopy Online). |
| **Romanians et al. (2024)** *(Author unspecified)* | Li in water, soil & plant via ICP-MS | Optimized ICP-MS for different matrices. Demonstrated high recovery (92.9–111 %) and low RSD; found no significant spectral interferences affecting Li measurement (PMC). |

**Table 4** Recent (2024–2025) advances in lithium quantification techniques, highlighting analytical approaches, interference mitigation strategies, and key findings across various sample matrices.

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Current state-of-the-art approaches include triple-quadrupole ICP-MS for polyatomic interference removal, laser ablation ICP-MS with matrix-matched calibration for spatially resolved analysis, and ion chromatography coupled with ICP-MS for enhanced selectivity in high-salinity environments. Machine learning–based spectral deconvolution methods are emerging as powerful tools to correct complex interferences in real time. By linking theoretical developments with industrial applications, these methodologies are establishing a modern framework for lithium analysis that prioritizes precision, scalability, and adaptability across mining, manufacturing, and environmental monitoring sectors.

This review consolidates existing knowledge on analytical techniques for lithium quantification, evaluates their performance in the presence of interfering elements, and discusses advances in separation and calibration strategies. The aim is to provide a practical guide for selecting and optimizing reliable methods for lithium analysis in diverse geological and industrial contexts. The comparative overview of various analytical techniques for the determination of reliable lithium ion have been summarized in Table 5.

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| **Technique** | **Typical Detection Limit (LOD)** | **Precision (%RSD)** | **Major Interferences** | **Advantages** | **Limitations** | **Typical Applications** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Flame Photometry (FP)** | ~0.05–0.1 mg/L | 1–3% | Na, K (spectral overlap, ionization), Ca (matrix) | Low cost, simple operation, good for high Li concentrations | Poor selectivity in complex matrices, limited trace sensitivity | Routine assays in mineral labs, process monitoring |
| **Flame AAS (FAAS)** | ~0.02–0.05 mg/L | 1–2% | Na, K (ionization), matrix suppression | Better selectivity than FP, moderate cost | Single-element at a time, limited trace detection | Industrial QC, ores with moderate Li content |
| **Graphite Furnace AAS (GF-AAS)** | ~0.5–5 µg/L | 3–5% | Matrix background, volatility losses | High sensitivity, small sample size | Slower throughput, high skill requirement | Trace Li in environmental and pharmaceutical samples |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ICP-OES** | ~1–10 µg/L | 1–3% | Spectral overlaps from Na, K, Ca; matrix suppression | Multi-element, good dynamic range, faster analysis | Requires spectral interference correction | Geological exploration, ore beneficiation studies |
| **ICP-MS** | ~0.1–1 µg/L | <2% | Matrix suppression (Na, K, Mg), doubly charged ions | Ultra-trace detection, isotopic analysis, multi-element | High cost, skilled operation | Ultra-trace Li in minerals, environmental monitoring, isotope ratio studies |
| **Ion-Selective Electrode (ISE)** | ~0.1–0.5 mg/L | 2–5% | Na, K (selectivity issues), pH dependence | Portable, low cost, rapid | Poor selectivity in high alkali matrices, frequent calibration | Brine analysis, field screening |
| **Ion Chromatography (IC)** | ~0.5–1 µg/L | 1–3% | Baseline drift, co-eluting cations | Good separation before detection, low LOD with ICP coupling | Requires well-prepared samples, cost | Li in brines and complex aqueous matrices |
| **Classical Wet Methods (Lawrence Smith, Berzelius)** | ppm–% range | Variable (5–10%) | Co-precipitation of Na/K, reagent purity | No advanced instrumentation needed, robust | Labor-intensive, low sensitivity | |

**Table 5** Comparative overview of analytical techniques for lithium quantification

## 5. Conclusions

Lithium quantification has advanced from traditional wet chemistry to highly sensitive instrumental methods, greatly improving detection limits and accuracy. Yet, major challenges persist especially interference from sodium, potassium, and other matrix elements in brines, ores, and recycled battery materials. While cutting-edge techniques like CRC-ICP-MS offer exceptional performance, their high cost and complexity limit industrial adoption. Affordable, interference-resistant methods are urgently needed.

Machine learning tools and portable analytical systems offer promising solutions but require further validation for diverse sample types. Equally critical is standardization—universal reference materials and harmonized protocols would reduce interlaboratory variability and increase confidence in results.

The future of lithium analysis depends on accessible, robust, and sustainable techniques that work across the full value chain, from resource exploration to recycling. Innovation, collaboration, and global standards will be key to supporting the growing demand for lithium in clean energy technologies.

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