

# Original and Innovative Advances in the Synthetic Schemes of Coumarin-Based Derivatives: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

Coumarin, a chemical nucleus, is award gifted from nature. This description is due to the versatile of its derivatives and the wide variety of their biological activities. Although many coumarins have been originally isolated from natural origins, there is a mounting interest in the past decades to synthesize the coumarins in the laboratory. Many synthetic routes have been documented named Perkin, Wittig, Pechmann, Claisen, Reformatsky, and Knoevenagel pathways. To maximize the yield, reduce the reaction period, minimize the side products, and make these reactions environmentally friend, several innovative approaches have been developed. These include the use of ultrasound, microwave, and solvent-free conditions to

satisfy these goals. This review was focused on the traditional synthetic routes of coumarins and their innovative improvements as well as the benefits arising from the use of each of them.

**Keywords:** Coumarins, Synthesis, Traditional methods, Innovative advances, Comparison.

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## INTRODUCTION

Coumarins reign their class term to 'Coumarou', which is the vulgarity name of the plant belongs to the *Fabaceae* family named tonka bean. The parent compound, coumarin itself, was novaly isolated by Vogel at 1820 (1).

This class of natural products is highly publicized throughout the plant, animal, and microorganisms kingdoms (2). However, most natural coumarins are isolated from the higher plants especially those belong to *Rutaceae* and *Umbelliferae* families (3). In these families,

coumarin-based derivatives can achieve towering levels in many plant parts including the roots, fruits, leaves, and stems. The ecological and seasonal variables can exert a considerable impact on the foundation of coumarins in these parts (4).

Some pharmacologically important coumarins as those shown in Figure 1 have been isolated from several microorganisms. For instance, aflatoxins and novobiocin were isolated from *Aspergillus* and *Streptomyces* species respectively (5,6).

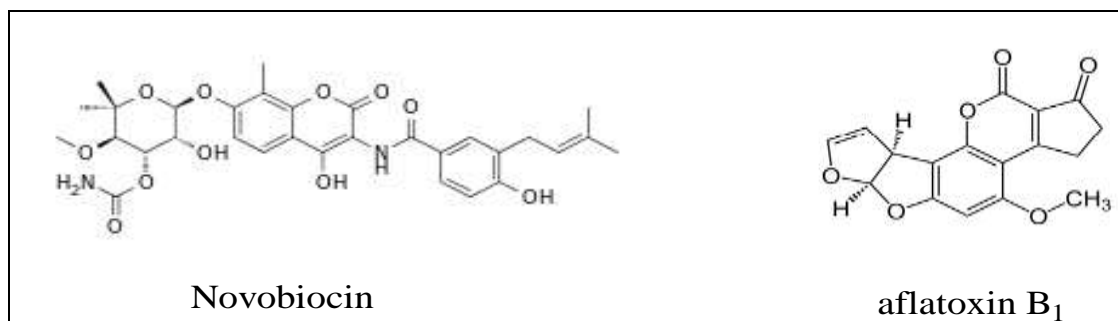


Figure 1: Natural coumarins isolated from microorganisms.

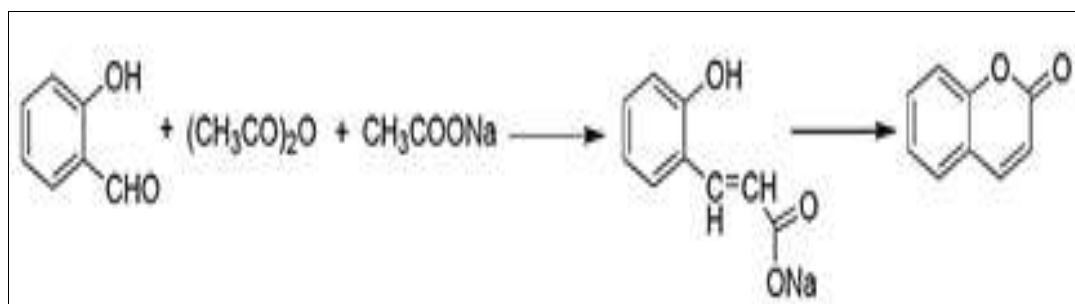
Coumarins with different structural characteristics may be useful in the management of various clinical conditions such as high protein edema (7), chronic infections (8,9), cancer (10–12), blood coagulation (13), oxidative stress (14), Alzheimer (15), and inflammation (16).

## Chemical synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives

Many routes for the synthesis of coumarins have been developed since now. These include the Perkin, Wittig, Pechmann, Claisen, Reformatsky, and Knoevenagel pathways (17).

## Perkin reaction

The chemical synthesis of coumarin was originally achieved by Perkin. In this reaction as displayed in Scheme 1, the coumarin-based derivative was generated from the heat-dependent reaction of acetic anhydride with salicylaldehyde utilizing a basic dry salt like sodium acetate. The reaction intermediate termed *ortho*-hydroxycinnamic acid is afforded and spontaneously lactonized forming the target product (18).

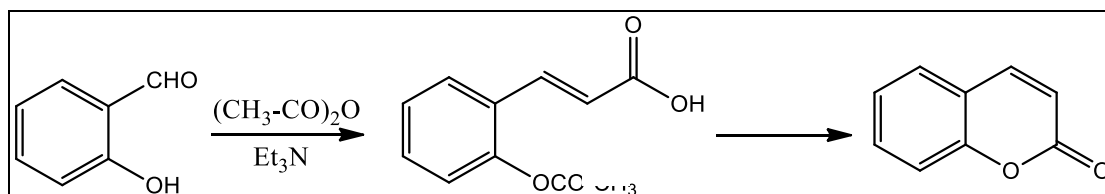


Scheme 1: The synthetic pathway of coumarin developed by Perkin.

As for many chemical reactions, Perkin synthetic route has several advantages and disadvantages. The most important reported benefit is the improbability for the generation of structural isomer named chromane-based derivative as a side-product. The most significant failure of this reaction is the low yield that results from the generation of many side-products as a consequence of the applied temperature.

However, this failure can be optimized by doubling the molar concentration of the employed anhydride at the expense of the aldehyde (19).

One of the most influential modifications of the Perkin reaction is shown in Scheme 2 and involved the utilization of tertiary amine instead of basic salt as a catalyst for the reaction involves acetic anhydride and salicylaldehyde (20).

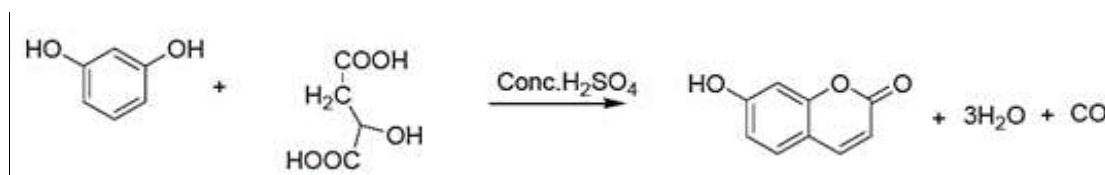


Scheme 2: The influential modification of Perkin synthetic reaction.

#### Pechmann reaction

This reaction as shown in Scheme 3 implies the synthesis of coumarin-based derivative via the utilization of

concentrated inorganic acid to catalyze the condensation of dicarboxylic acid-containing compound with phenolic derivative (21).

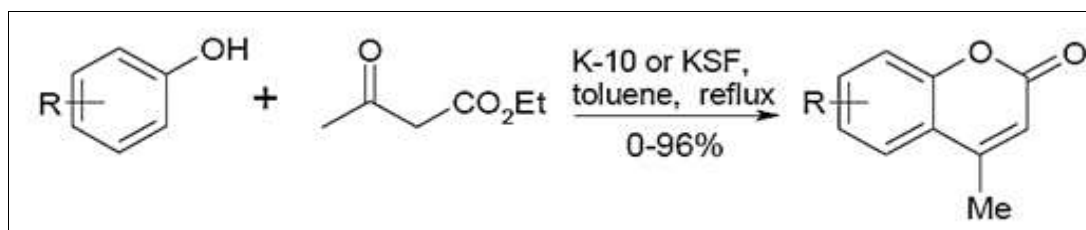


Scheme 3: The synthetic pathway of coumarin-based derivative developed by Pechmann.

It is reported that the Pechmann reaction is the most applicable synthetic route for the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives that affords the target product in an encouraging yield. Pechmann reaction can be carried out by utilizing either homogeneous or heterogeneous acid catalyst. The first type may include inorganic acids such as trifluoroacetic, phosphoric, hydrochloric, and sulphuric acids, and Lewis acids such as aluminum, zinc, iron (III), titanium, and tin (IV) chlorides (22). The heterogeneous acid catalysts may include zeolite-HBEA, Nafion-H, cation-exchange resins, and other solid acids (23).

It is reported that the highest yield of the synthesized coumarin-based derivative as shown in Scheme 4 can be achieved via the Pechmann reaction facilitated by a solid

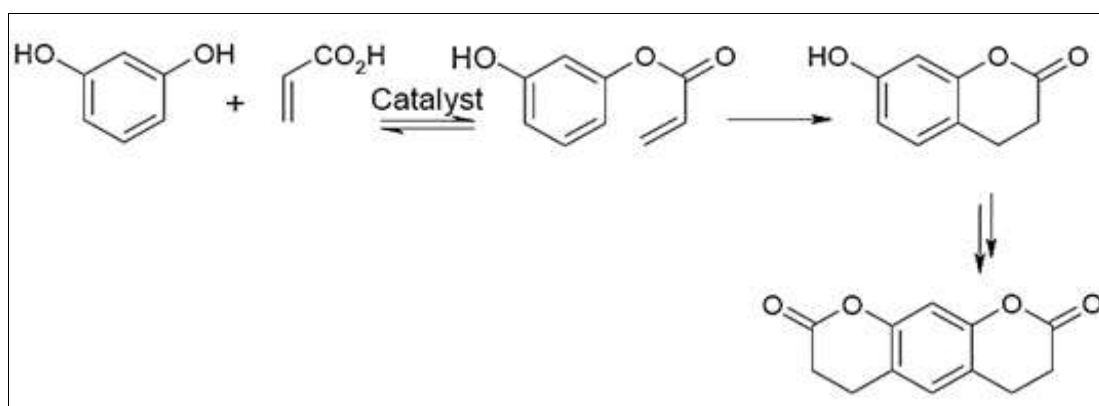
catalyst like KSF or montmorillonite K-10. This procedure is cheaper and ecologically friendly than that involves the utilization of a homogenous acid catalyst (24). Concerning that issue, Zhan-Hui Zhang et al have reported three concerns; the first is the Pechmann reaction proceeds better with a heterogeneous acid catalyst than that belongs to the homogenous catalysts corresponding to the reaction yield and time. The second is that the KSF as a catalyst is less effective than montmorillonite K-10. The final one is that the heterogeneous catalysts have advanced characteristics such as the minimum ecological risk, facilitated separation of both the catalyst and product, and the possibility of reuse this catalyst for several times (25).



Scheme 4: The synthetic pathway of coumarins developed by Pechmann using a heterogeneous acid catalyst.

Concerning the utilization of the cation exchange resins as heterogeneous solid catalysts for Pechmann reaction, these catalysts such as Amberlite ir-120 and Zeokarb 225 offer several advantages. Among them are the cheapness, recycling, and facile separation of both the catalyst and product (26). Additionally, the reaction yield can be optimized by employing such resin in the w/w ratio of 30% to the aggregated weight of the reactants (27). It has been reported that the synthesis of 7-hydroxycoumarin can be carried out by reacting the

resorcinol with acrylic acid or its ester. The highest yield can be achieved by the employment of equimolar amounts of these reactants in the existence of Amberlyst-15 or zeolite H-beta [Si/Al=14] as a heterogeneous solid catalyst. The hypothesized mechanism as shown in Scheme 5 involves the esterification of the phenolic derivative to succeed with the lactonization affording the side-product termed chemically as 3,4,6,7-tetrahydrobenzo[1,2-b:5,4-b'] dipyran-2,8-dione in addition to the target dihydrocoumarin product (28).

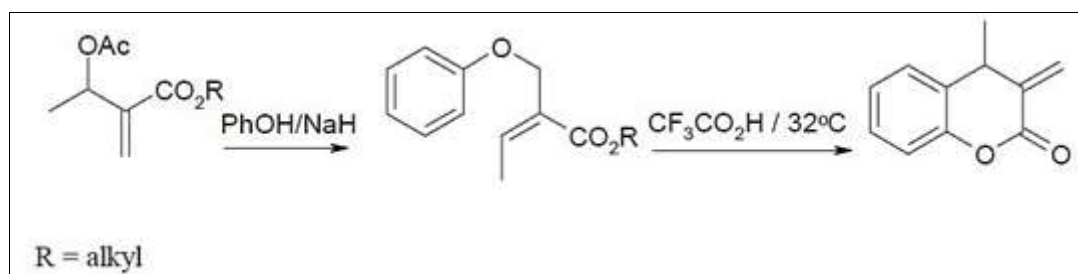


Scheme 5: The hypothesized mechanism for the synthesis of dihydrocoumarin using a heterogeneous solid factor.

#### Claisen rearrangement

It has been reported that the synthesis of 3,4-dihydro-4-methyl-3-methylenecoumarin as shown in Scheme 6 can be performed via the Claisen rearrangement by reacting the aryl ether intramolecularly using a trifluoroacetic acid as a homogenous catalyst (29). Although this compound has been priorly prepared by others, Drewes and his co-workers have developed a novel synthetic method. This involved the

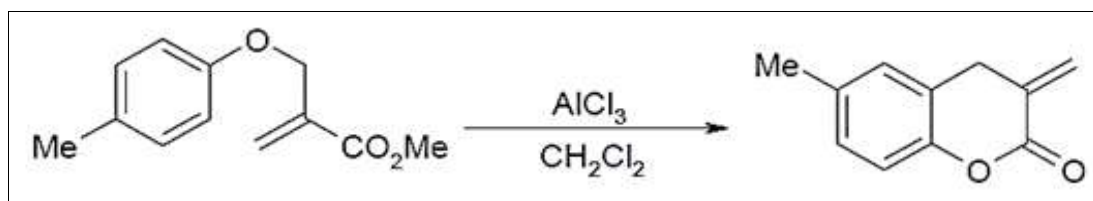
*in situ* preparation of the intermediate termed chemically as 2-methylene-3-acetoxy alkylbutanoate by acetylating of what is called Baylis-Hillman product. The cyclization of this intermediate was facilitated by trifluoroacetic acid to give 86% yield of the target product in a one-pot technique (30).



Scheme 6: The preparation of 3,4-dihydro-4-methyl-3-methylenecoumarin via Claisen reaction.

Previously, a comparable advancement for the synthesis of 3-methylenecoumarin has been documented. This synthesis involved the Claisen rearrangement of the reaction intermediate chemically termed as  $\alpha$ -aryloxymethylacrylate

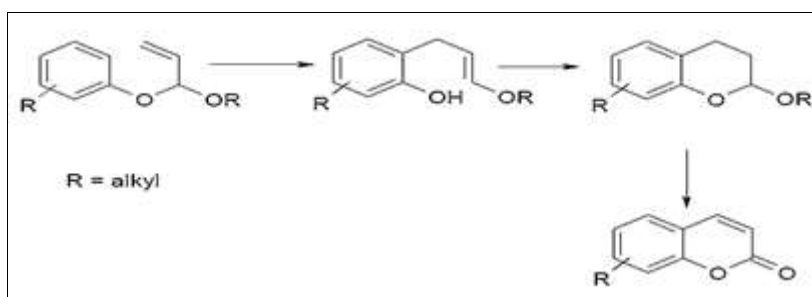
ester in the presence of Lewis acid as shown in Scheme 7. The dimer may be afforded in a tiny amount in this reaction as a by-product and usually results from the high reactivity of the double bond of the aforementioned intermediate (31).



Scheme 7: The Lewis acid-catalyzed synthesis of 3-methylenecoumarin using a Claisen rearrangement.

In an attempt to clobber the obstacles linked to the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives via Pechmann reaction, a novel modification of the Claisen rearrangement has been reported. This modification as shown in Scheme 8 involved the utilization of aryl ethers conjugated via their oxygen with the double or triple bond (32). This modification was applied in case of failure of the formation of a coumarin-

based derivative by ordinary Pechmann reaction. Considering its reaction mechanism, this modification proceeded through the transformation of the reactant to form an intermediate chemically termed as alkoxychroman, which is subsequently oxidized to coumarin-based derivative (33).

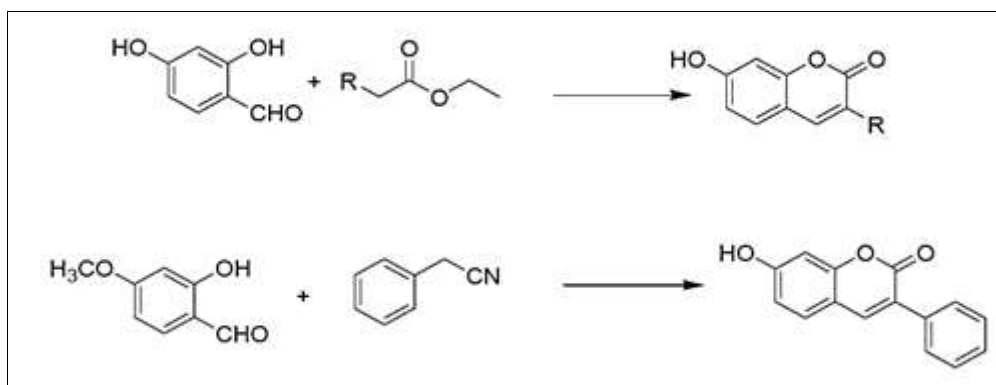


Scheme 8: The synthesis of coumarin derivative using oxygenated allyl or propargyl aryl ethers in a Claisen rearrangement reaction.

Knoevenagel reaction

It involved the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives as shown in Scheme 9 by condensing orth-hydroxy aryl

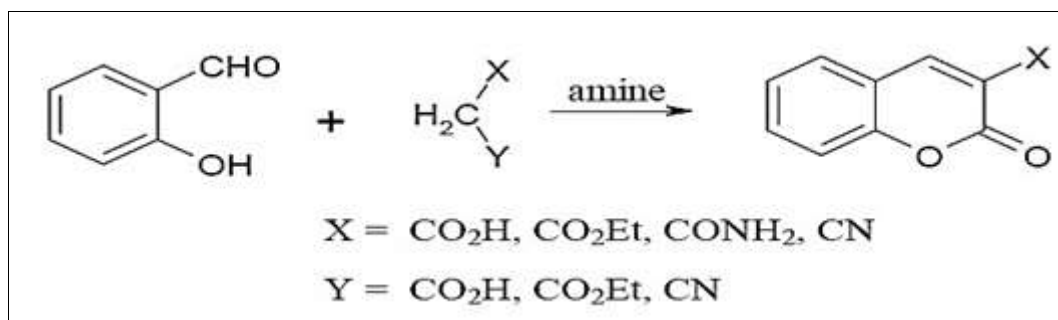
aldehydes with  $\beta$ -ketoester such as ethyl cyanoacetate, ethyl acetoacetate, and ethyl malonate utilizing an organic base like piperidine or pyridine as a catalyst (34).



Scheme 9: Coumarin-based derivatives synthesized by Knoevenagel reaction.

The Knoevenagel reaction as represented in Scheme 10 is usually utilized to vanquish the collateral obstacles associated with the generation of coumarin-based derivatives by the employment of Perkin reaction. This is because the requirements of the Knoevenagel reaction are milder than those recommended in the Perkin reaction. Although a high number of coumarin-based derivatives

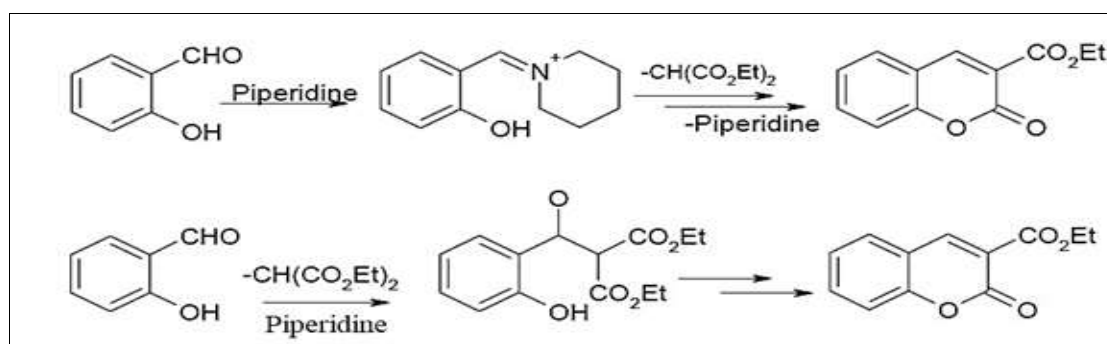
have been synthesized by this preparative route, the same essential structural feature should be present in the reacting aryl aldehyde. This is the presence of the phenolic hydroxyl group ortho to the aldehyde. This electron-donating group directs the reaction toward the formation of a coumarin-based derivative rather than its corresponding cinnamic acid derivative (35).



Scheme 10: The general presentation of the Knoevenagel reaction.

For Knoevenagel reaction, two different mechanisms as shown in Scheme 11 have been hypothesized (36). In the first hypothesized mechanism, the aryl aldehyde condenses with an organic base affording an imine or its iminium salt. At the same time, the enolate intermediate generates from the deprotonation of the active methylene-containing compound by the same organic base. Then, the last intermediate nucleophilically attacks the primary generated

one eliminating the amine and cyclizing into a coumarin-based derivative. The second hypothesized mechanism initiates via the deprotonation achieved by organic base on the active methylene-containing compound and the subsequently formed a carbanion that attacks the carbonyl carbon of the aryl aldehyde. This attack is followed by the oncoming processes: the proton migration, the cyclizing of the ring, and the dehydration (37).

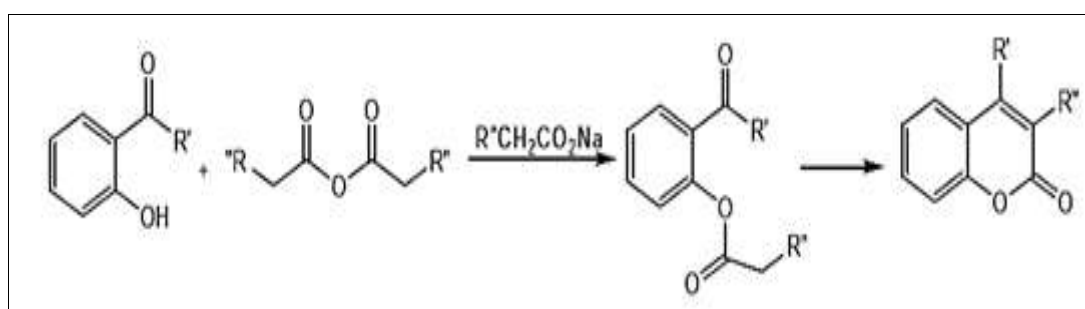


Scheme 11: The two hypothesized mechanisms of Knoevenagel coupling.

Kostanecki-Robinson coupling reaction

In this reaction as depicted in Scheme 12, the condensation of aliphatic anhydride with aryl ketone substituted at

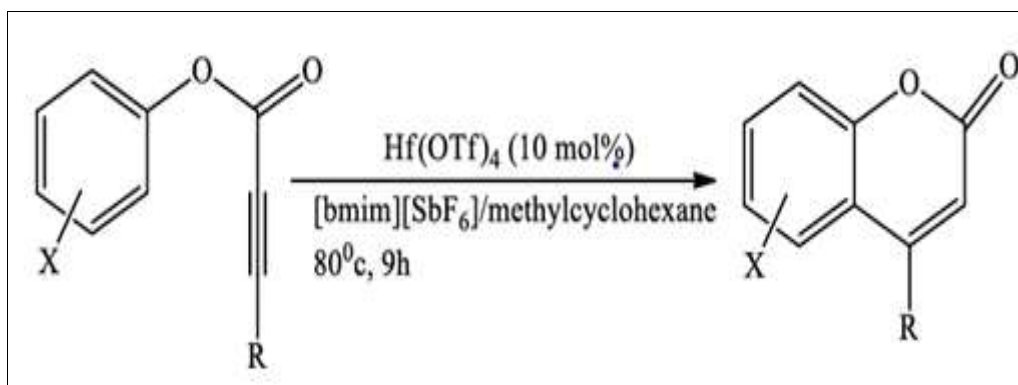
position 2 by hydroxyl group results in the generation of coumarin-based derivative functionalized at carbon number 3 or 4 (38,39).



Scheme 12: The general synthetic route of coumarins by the Kostanecki-Robinson reaction.

Besides, several transition metals can be employed to mediate the synthesis of different coumarin-based derivatives. Song and his co-workers, for instance, have reported a two-phase reaction related to that of Kostanecki-Robinson. In which, 4-butyl-3-methylimidazolium bromide

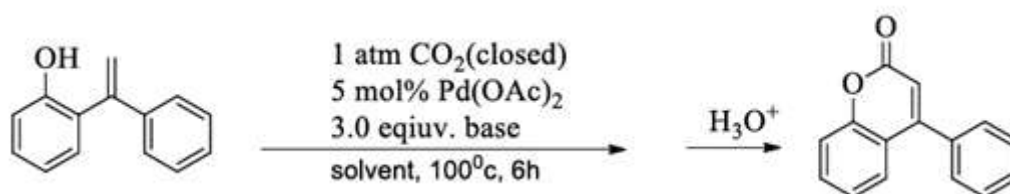
and  $\text{Hf}(\text{OTf})_4$  were utilized as phase transfer and metallic catalysts respectively. This reaction as shown in Scheme 13 resulted in a good yield of the target product named 4-phenylcoumarins (40).



Scheme 13: The utilization of transition metal to mediate the synthesis of different coumarin-based derivatives via the Kostanecki-Robinson reaction.

Sasano and his co-workers have investigated a commensurate reaction as shown in Scheme 14 catalyzed by palladium metal. In this reaction, the isolable alkenylpalladium intermediate can be nucleophilically

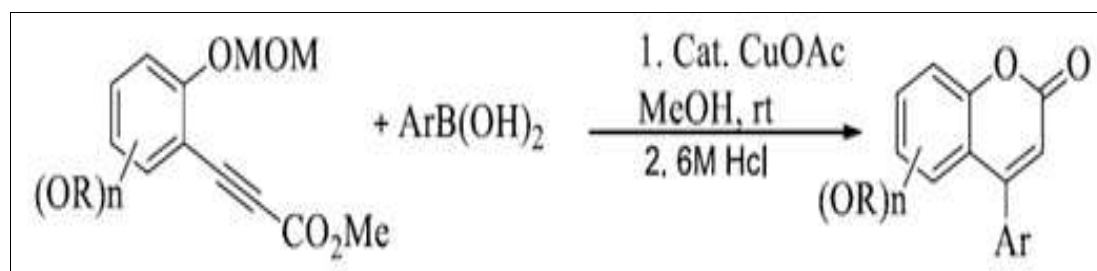
added to the environmental  $\text{CO}_2$  affording the target coumarin-based derivative. Also, this reaction requires an enclosed atmosphere and heat-stable solvent (41).



Scheme 14: The Pd-catalyzed synthetic pathway proposed by Sasano et al.

Also, it has been reported the possibility of the synthesis of coumarin-based derivative functionalized at position 4 with an aryl group as shown in Scheme 15. This reaction is

catalyzed by copper (I) acetate and involved the condensation of boronic acid with an oxygen-protected methyl phenylpropiolate derivative (42).

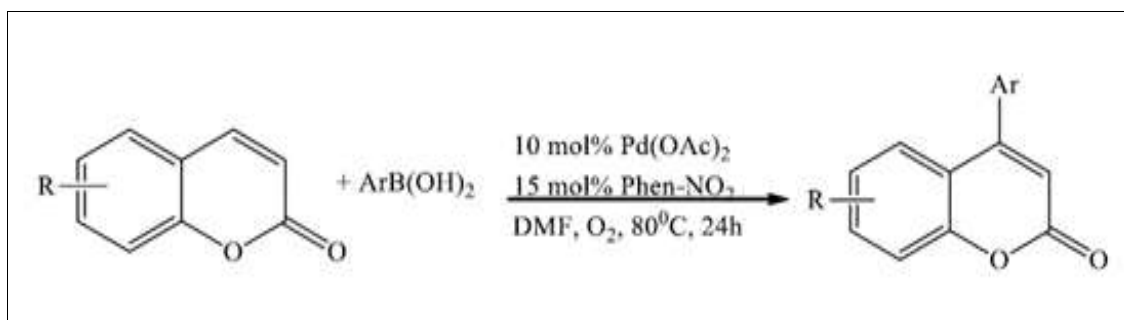


Scheme 15: The synthetic route of 4-arylcoumarins developed by Yamamoto and Kirai.

Recently, an efficient protocol was investigated by Wang et al and involved the preparation of coumarin-based derivatives functionalized at position 4 with aryl group as shown in Scheme 16. This protocol involved the reaction of coumarin-based derivative in the presence of metallic

palladium with arylboronic acid. This protocol was successful when the aromatic ring of the coumarin nucleus functionalized by different electron-donating or -withdrawing groups (43).

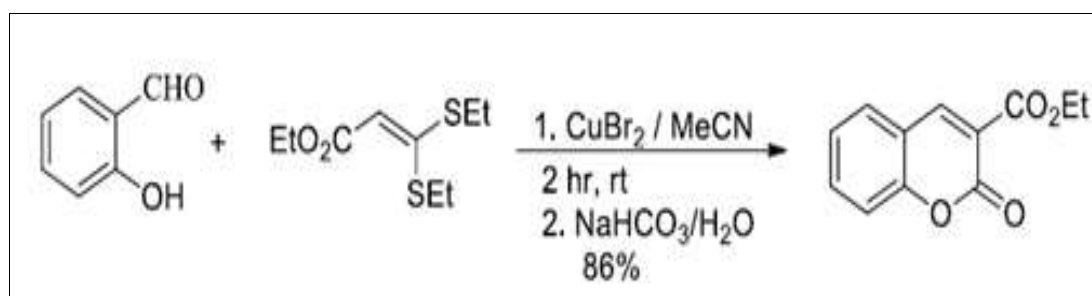




Scheme 16: The synthetic route of 4-arylcoumarins developed by Wang et al.

Analogue to this, Yuan et al have reported the preparation of coumarin-based derivative functionalized at position 3 by

the substituent of different types as shown in Scheme 17 (44).

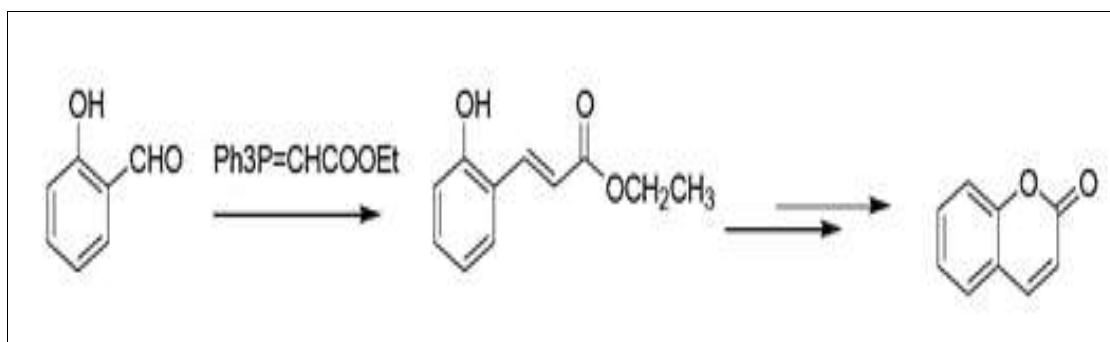


Scheme 17: The synthetic route of 3-substituted coumarin developed by Yuan et al.

#### Wittig reaction

In this reaction, phosphonium ylide reacts with aryl aldehyde or aryl ketone as shown in Scheme 18 resulting in the generation of conjugated alkene, which is transformed into coumarin-based derivative by one of the oncoming reaction intermediates: oxaphosphetane or betaine (45). On

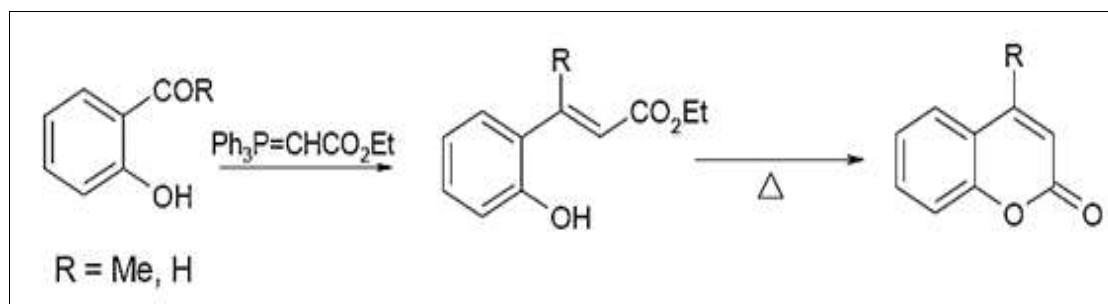
the basis of Wittig reaction, many synthetic coumarin-based derivatives were prepared (46). Also, some natural coumarin-based derivatives were naturally synthesized depending on the basis of this reaction especially those belonged to the prenylated and allylated classes of coumarins (47).



Scheme 18: The general synthetic route of coumarins by Wittig reaction.

It is documented that the coumarin-based derivatives functionalized at position 4 can be prepared via Wittig reaction as shown in Scheme 19. This was carried out by coupling aryl aldehyde or aryl ketone substituted at ortho

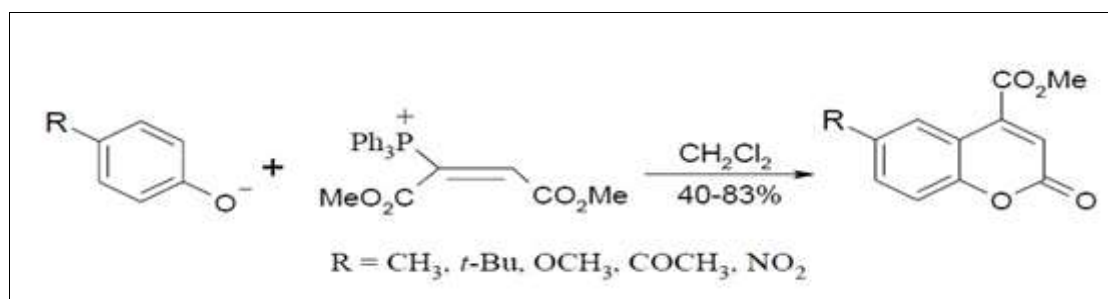
position with a phenolic hydroxyl group and the stable phosphorene like (carboxymethyl)triphenylphosphonium bromide ethyl ester (48).



Scheme 19: The synthetic route of coumarins as reported by Hepwarh et al.

A novel advancement in the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives functionalized at position 4 with carboxymethyl group was dependent on the aromatic electrophilic substitution reaction. This advancement as shown in Scheme 20 involved the formation of betaine intermediate by condensing the dimethyl acetylenedicarboxylate and stable triphenylphospine (49). This intermediate was then

reacted with phenoxide-containing compound to afford the target product (50). Comparing with the other methods for the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives, this advancement offers a very efficient technique for the synthesis of coumarins substituted by acid- or base-susceptible groups (51).

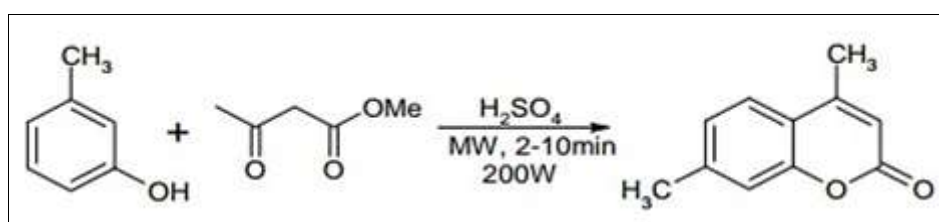


Scheme 20: The synthetic route of coumarins as reported by Yavari et al.

Innovative advancements for the synthesis of coumarins  
 Microwave-helped synthesis  
 In comparison with the conventional methods of heating, microwave irradiation has revealed many benefits such as the potential inner heating that results in a marked reduction in the time required for the reaction to be finished, in addition to being an ecologically benign source of energy (52). Also, the use of microwaves to evoke the chemical reactions may reveal a high % yield due to the dropping in the possibilities of the unwanted side reactions.

Accordingly, this type of heating can be considered as a part of the global trend toward the application of green chemistry (53).

It has been reported the utilization of a microwave-helped Pechmann reaction can offer an efficient technique to synthesize coumarin-based derivatives in a fast, simple, economically working method. For instance, the synthesis of 4,7-dimethylcoumarin as shown in Scheme 21 from the condensation of *m*-cresol and ethyl acetoacetate utilizing H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> as a homogenous acid catalyst (54).

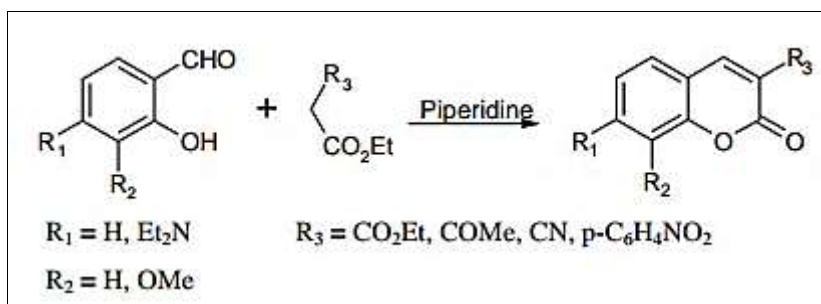


Scheme 21: The synthesis of 4,7-dimethylcoumarin via microwave-helped Pechmann reaction.

It has been shown that the utilization of microwave irradiation as a source of energy may rise the possibility of getting up the ideal %yield. For instance, the microwave-helped synthesis of trisubstituted coumarin-based

derivatives as shown in Scheme 22 by reacting different carboxylic ester- and salicylaldehyde-based derivatives. This condensation is usually performed in a solvent-free environment and catalyzed by an organic base (55).

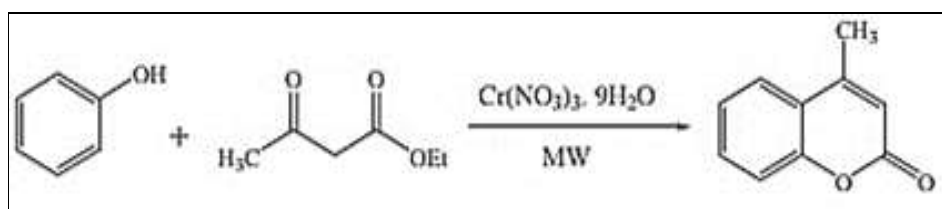




Scheme 22: The microwave-helped synthesis of coumarins as reported by Bogdal.

To investigate the ability of  $\text{Cr}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$  to act as an efficient catalyst in the microwave-helped Pechmann condensation, the reaction as shown in Scheme 23 of the ethyl acetoacetate and phenol was chosen as a model. It is indicated that, under microwave irradiation, the use of a very small amount of this catalyst (10 mmol) can

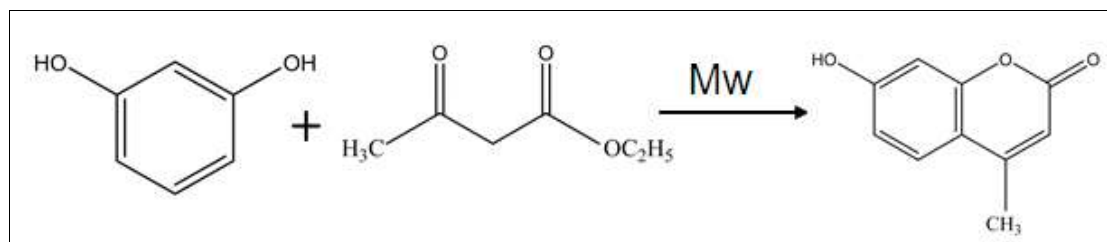
dynamically promote the finishing of the reaction in several minutes. Unfortunately, this type of reaction used the aforementioned conditions was failed to prepare coumarin-based derivatives functionalized with electron-withdrawing group(s) at the benzene component of the coumarin frame (56).



Scheme 23: The microwave-helped Pechmann condensation catalyzed by  $\text{Cr}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$ .

Latterly, the microwave-helped Pechmann condensation reaction catalyzed by  $\text{Cr}(\text{NO}_3)_3 \cdot 9\text{H}_2\text{O}$  was investigated by

using the reaction of the ethyl acetoacetate and resorcinol as a reaction model as shown in Scheme 24 (52).

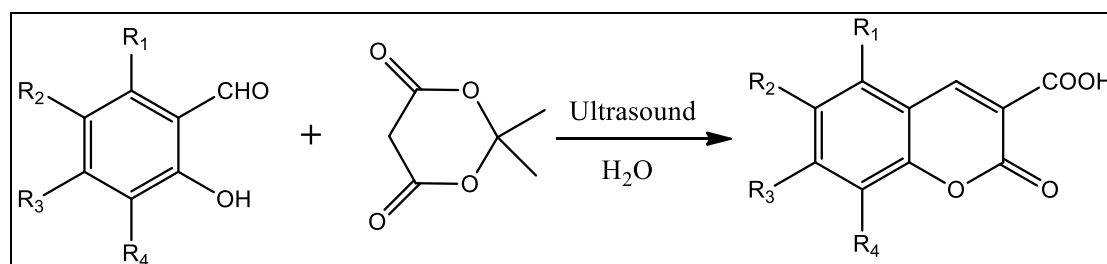


Scheme 24: Pechmann condensation catalyzed by a microwave irradiation.

#### Ultrasound-helped synthesis

The utilization of ultrasound radiation has been grown for organic chemistry in the last three decades. This may be attributed to the efficiency and ease of monitoring this type of energy. In the literature, it seems to find a huge number of scientific papers utilized this type of energy to facilitate many synthetic pathways (57,58). Although most of these reactions were carried out by utilizing organic solvents,

there are many attempts to replace these organic solvents with water. These attempts were evoked by the desirable properties of water such as the availability, cheapness, safety, and ecologically friendly compound. For instance, the ultrasound-helped synthesis of tetrasubstituted coumarin-3-carboxylic acid derivatives performed in an aqueous medium as shown in Scheme 25 (59,60).

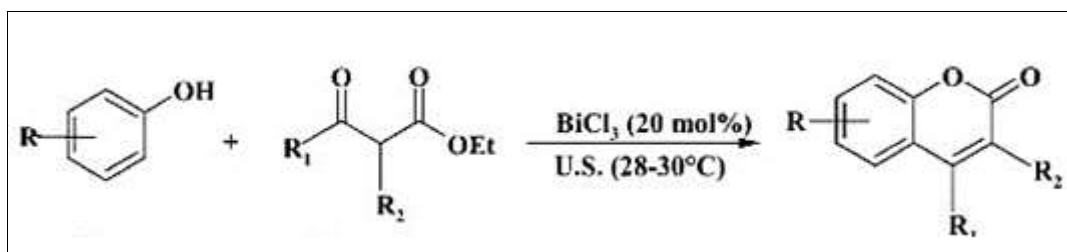


Scheme 25: The ultrasound-helped synthesis of tetrasubstituted coumarin-3-carboxylic acid derivatives.

As Lewis acid catalysts, the bismuth-related products have been characterized by their reasonable safety, cost, and stability (61). Recently, they have regarded as potential catalysts for various organic transformations including those that contributed to the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives (62). In this context, it is documented that the utilization of this type of catalyst for the reactions operated

and performed under ultrasound radiation has been reported in many types of reactions including brominating reaction (63) and Heck reaction (64).

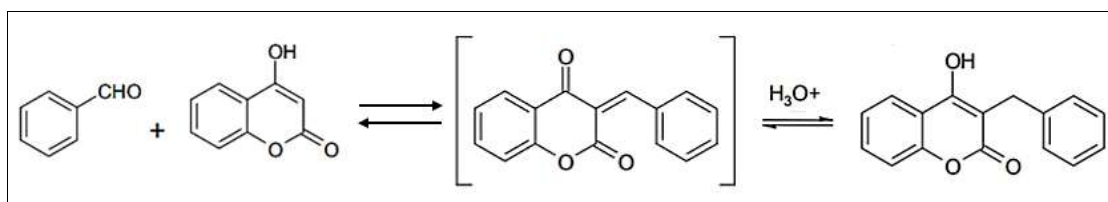
For instance, the condensation shown in Scheme 26 between the  $\beta$ -ketoester derivatives and phenol-based products utilizing  $\text{BiCl}_3$  and ultrasound as a catalyst and source of energy, respectively (38,62).



Scheme 26: The sonication reaction catalyzed by  $\text{BiCl}_3$ .

Another example is the reaction shown in Scheme 27 between the coumarin substituted at position 4 with a hydroxyl group and benzaldehyde. This ultrasound-helped

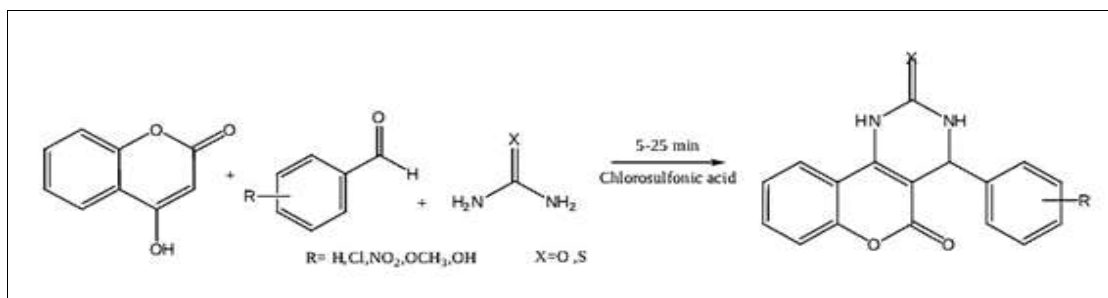
reaction performed in an aqueous environment at 40°C for 90 minutes to afford the target product in a very high percent (88%) (65).



Scheme 27: The reaction between benzaldehyde and hydroxycoumarin as investigated by Palmisano et al.

The efficient and simple synthesis of pyranopyrimidine derivatives as shown in Scheme 28 using chlorosulfonic acid as a catalyst under ultrasound radiation was developed to

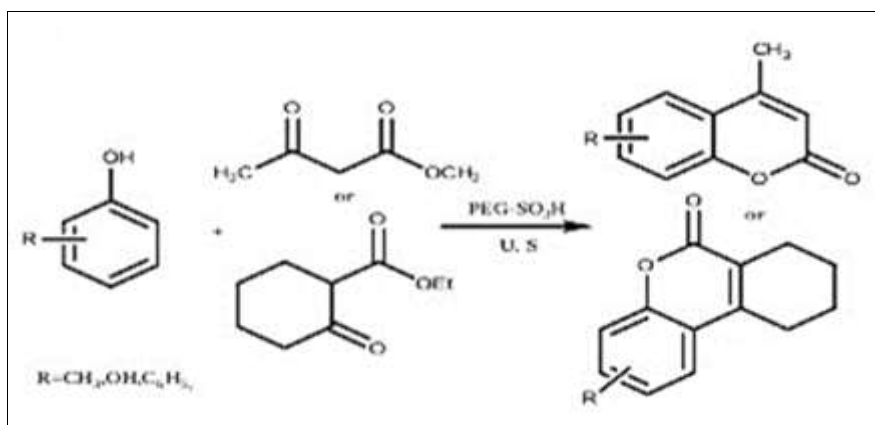
further functionalize these nitrogen-heterocycles with another moiety that is recognized for its numerous useful properties (66).



Scheme 28: The ultrasound-helped one-pot synthesis of pyranopyrimidine derivatives.

The synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives can also be performed by utilizing  $\text{PEG-SO}_3\text{H}$  as a catalyst. For instance, the ultrasound-helped reaction shown in Scheme

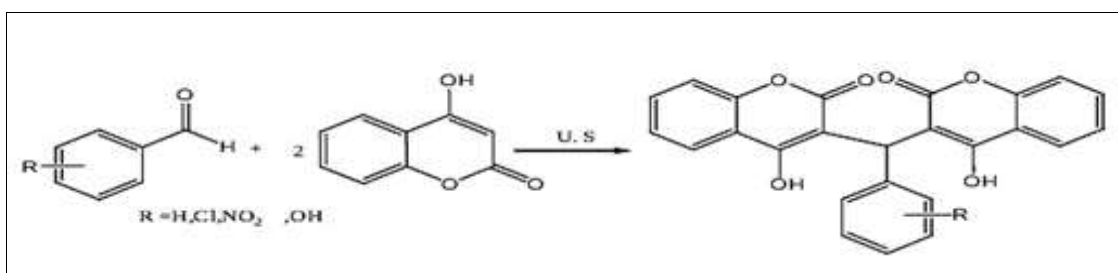
29 between the active methylene compounds and phenol-related products (67).



Scheme 29: The ultrasound-helped synthesis of coumarins utilizing PEG-SO<sub>3</sub>H as a catalyst.

The ultrasound-helped synthesis of biscoumarin derivatives performed in an aqueous medium was investigated efficiently in many scientific papers (68). To further functionalize these derivatives, many attempts have been initiated to achieve this goal by reacting two moles of

hydroxycoumarins with one mole of aldehydes in an aqueous environment. One of the most successful trials involved the utilization of ultrasound radiation in a catalyst-free methodology as shown in Scheme 30 (69).

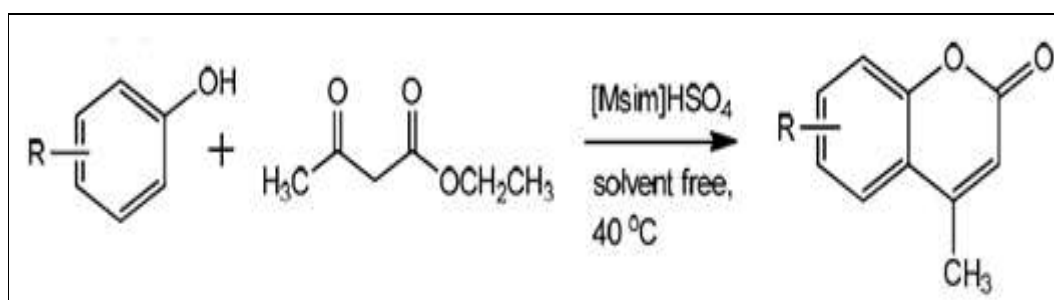


Scheme 30: The ultrasound-helped reaction for the functionalization of biscoumarin derivatives.

#### Solvent-free synthesis

The traditional way of carrying out the organic reactions requires the use of toxic organic solvents. Owing to their volatile and toxic features, nowadays many efforts are being made by the scientific community to make these reactions solvent-free (70).

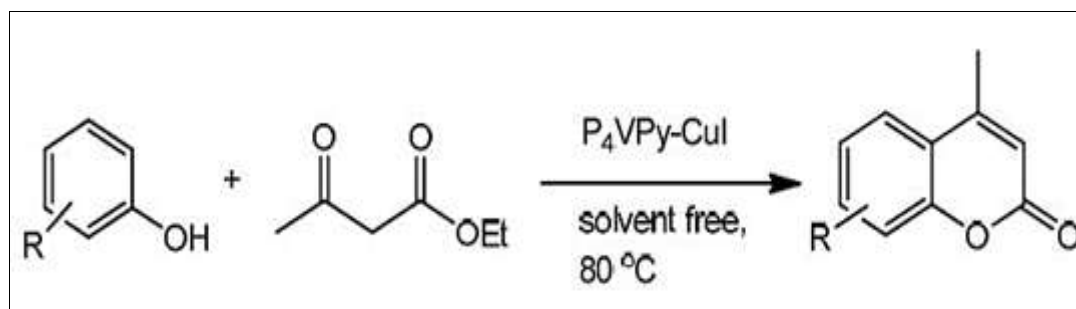
It is reported the possibility of synthesizing coumarin-based derivatives via a green methodology from the reaction of the phenol-based product and  $\beta$ -keto esters. This solvent-free reaction as shown in Scheme 31 was facilitated by [Msim]HSO<sub>4</sub> and carried out at 40°C. Also, this methodology offered the recycling of the employed catalyst for several times without any potential influence on its catalytic activity (71).



Scheme 31: The synthesis of disubstituted coumarin-based derivatives in solvent-free conditions.

In a scientific paper reported by Jalal et al, the synthesis of disubstituted coumarin-based derivatives was investigated under a solvent-free environment utilizing a specific catalyst chemically named poly (4-vinylpyridine)-CuI. This reaction

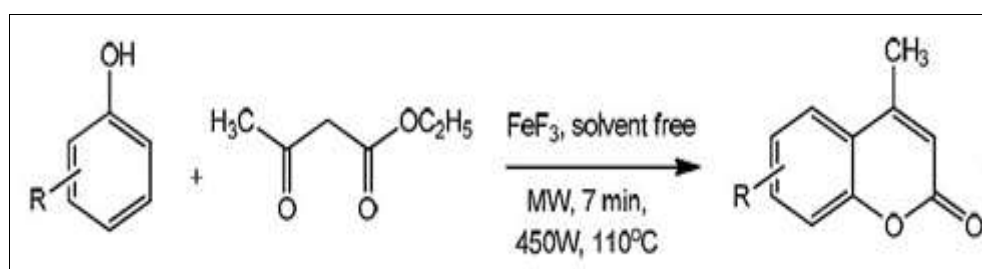
as shown in Scheme 32 was designed to involve this catalyst as well as the phenol-related products and ethyl acetoacetate (72).



Scheme 32: The use of poly (4-vinylpyridine)-CuI as a catalyst for the Pechmann reaction.

Alternatively, it is reported the use of FeF<sub>3</sub> instead of poly (4-vinylpyridine)-CuI to facilitate the solvent-free synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives. This microwave-helped

reaction as shown in Scheme 33 was performed at a high temperature but afforded a high yield (73).



Scheme 33: The use of FeF<sub>3</sub> as a catalyst for the Pechmann reaction.

## CONCLUSION

There are many synthetic routes for the preparation of coumarin-based derivatives such as Perkin, Wittig, Pechmann, Claisen, Reformatsky, and Knoevenagel pathways. Although these aforementioned reactions have been utilized for several decades, new advancements such as microwave-, ultrasound-helped, and solvent-free were applied in an attempt to maximize the percentage of yield, short the reaction time, and reduce the side reactions as well as making these reactions more ecologically benign. This review concluded that these advancements can play a mounting role in the synthesis of coumarin-based derivatives by modifying the undesirable conditions associated with the traditional synthetic routes.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors reported that there are no conflicts of interest.

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