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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-56275

Title: Biodiesel production from microalgae

Recommendation:
Accept as it is

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality	√			
Techn. Quality		√		
Clarity		√		
Significance		√		

Reviewer Name: Dr. Manju M

Detailed Reviewer's Report

1. Objective of the Study

The primary objective was to isolate naturally occurring microalgae and evaluate their suitability for biodiesel production. The study aimed to determine oil yield, biodiesel conversion efficiency, and fuel quality parameters. Another goal was to identify the most productive strain using both microscopic and molecular techniques. Optimization of extraction and transesterification conditions was also targeted. Ultimately, the research sought to demonstrate a cost-effective method for renewable fuel generation. This objective guided every stage of the experimental design.

2. Background and Energy Context

The rapid rise in global energy demand has intensified the search for sustainable fuel alternatives that can reduce environmental damage. Conventional fossil fuels release harmful pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter, contributing to climate change and air-quality deterioration. These environmental concerns have prompted scientists to investigate renewable fuel sources with lower emissions. Among these, biofuels derived from biological materials offer a promising pathway. Their renewable nature makes them suitable for long-term energy security. This study is situated within that global effort to identify efficient and eco-friendly fuel substitutes.

3. Rationale for Choosing Algae

Algae were selected as the experimental feedstock because of their exceptional oil productivity compared with terrestrial crops. They can yield many times more oil per unit area than soybean or palm plants. In addition, algae grow rapidly, require less land, and can thrive in non-arable environments. Their cultivation does not compete with food production, addressing food-versus-fuel concerns. These characteristics make algae an attractive candidate for next-generation biodiesel. Thus, they represent both an environmentally and economically strategic resource.

4. Sample Collection Strategy

Microalgal samples were collected from diverse aquatic and semi-aquatic habitats to maximize species diversity. Sampling from varied environments increases the likelihood of obtaining strains with distinct metabolic capabilities. Natural ecosystems often contain algae already adapted to fluctuating

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environmental conditions. Such adaptability can translate into improved cultivation performance in laboratory conditions. Samples were carefully transported to maintain viability. This initial step laid the foundation for successful isolation and screening.

5. Isolation of Microalgal Strains

Isolation was performed using the colony-picking technique, which allows individual algal cells to grow into pure cultures. This method ensures that each strain can be studied independently without contamination. Cultures were incubated under controlled light and temperature conditions to promote growth. Over time, visible colonies formed, confirming successful isolation. Repeated sub-culturing ensured genetic purity and stability. This careful process yielded three promising strains designated MG-1, MG-2, and MG-3.

6. Cultivation Methodology

The isolated strains were cultivated using an open-pond system, one of the simplest large-scale methods for algal growth. Open systems simulate natural environmental conditions, supporting robust biomass production. Shallow containers allowed efficient light penetration and gas exchange. Daily observations were conducted to monitor growth patterns and detect contamination. Within two weeks, visible algal proliferation confirmed suitability for further experimentation. This cultivation step provided sufficient biomass for subsequent analyses.

7. Growth Assessment through Biomass Measurement

To evaluate productivity, harvested algae were washed, dried, and weighed to determine dry biomass yield. Dry weight measurement is a reliable indicator of actual cellular mass. Among the isolates, MG-2 showed the highest biomass accumulation, followed by MG-3 and MG-1. This variation reflects differences in metabolic efficiency and growth rate. Such data are essential for selecting strains for biofuel production. Biomass productivity directly influences overall fuel yield potential.

8. Preliminary Identification by Morphology

Initial identification relied on microscopic examination of cellular characteristics. Features such as cell shape, pigmentation, arrangement, and structural elements were analyzed. Observations revealed distinct morphological traits for each isolate. These included differences in filament structure, spore presence, and cellular organization. Morphological identification provides a rapid and cost-effective classification method. It also guides further molecular confirmation.

9. Molecular Confirmation of the Most Efficient Strain

The most promising strain underwent genetic identification using 16S rRNA sequencing. DNA analysis confirmed a high similarity with known cyanobacterial sequences. Molecular techniques ensure precise taxonomic identification beyond morphological ambiguity. The verified sequence was submitted to an international genetic database for reference. Such documentation supports reproducibility and scientific transparency. This step validated the authenticity of the selected high-performing strain.

10. Preparation of Biomass for Oil Extraction

Before extraction, dried algal biomass was heated to remove residual moisture and then ground into fine powder. Removing moisture improves solvent penetration and extraction efficiency. Grinding increases surface area, allowing better interaction between biomass and solvent. Proper preparation ensures maximum recovery of intracellular lipids. Careful handling prevents degradation of valuable compounds. This stage is critical for achieving consistent oil yields.

11. Solvent Extraction Procedure

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Oil extraction was performed using a mixture of hexane and ether, which effectively dissolves lipid components. The solvent mixture was heated to enhance extraction efficiency. After settling, two layers formed, allowing easy separation of oil from solvent. This method produced higher yields than single-solvent approaches. Solvent extraction is widely used because of its simplicity and effectiveness. The technique demonstrated strong potential for laboratory-scale biodiesel research.

12. Influence of Temperature on Oil Yield

Temperature significantly affected lipid recovery from the algal biomass. Boiling conditions increased oil yield for most strains compared with room temperature extraction. Heat enhances solvent diffusion and disrupts cell walls, releasing stored lipids. However, one strain showed minimal temperature sensitivity, indicating species-specific responses. Understanding such variations helps optimize extraction protocols. These findings highlight the importance of process parameter control.

13. Comparative Oil Productivity of Strains

The three isolates displayed distinct oil production capacities. One strain produced the highest oil volume, while others showed moderate or lower yields. Such variability is expected due to genetic and metabolic differences. High-yield strains are more desirable for commercial biodiesel production. Comparative analysis allows researchers to prioritize the most efficient candidates. This step narrowed the focus to the best-performing microalga.

14. Biodiesel Conversion via Transesterification

Extracted algal oil was converted into biodiesel through an alkali-catalyzed transesterification reaction. This process transforms triglycerides into fatty acid methyl esters, the chemical form of biodiesel. Methanol and a base catalyst facilitated the reaction. After settling, biodiesel separated from glycerol by-product. The method is widely used because it is relatively fast and economical. Successful conversion confirmed the suitability of algal oil as a fuel precursor.

15. Yield Efficiency of Biodiesel Production

From a measured quantity of algal oil, a substantial volume of biodiesel was obtained, indicating high conversion efficiency. The leading strain produced the greatest biodiesel output among all tested isolates. High conversion rates reduce production costs and improve feasibility. Such efficiency demonstrates that microalgae can be practical feedstocks for fuel manufacturing. Yield data also validate the effectiveness of the chosen reaction conditions. This step confirmed the technical viability of the process.

16. Physicochemical Fuel Characterization

The produced biodiesel was evaluated using standard fuel quality tests. Parameters measured included density, pH, specific gravity, and ignition performance. These properties determine how well the fuel performs in engines. Results fell within acceptable ranges for biodiesel standards. Reliable fuel characteristics indicate compatibility with existing diesel systems. Such analysis ensures that the product meets functional requirements.

17. Cetane Number Evaluation

The cetane number is a key indicator of ignition quality in diesel fuels. The best-performing biodiesel sample exhibited a high cetane value of 54. Higher cetane numbers correspond to smoother combustion and reduced engine knocking. This value compares favorably with many conventional diesel fuels. A high cetane rating enhances engine efficiency and reduces emissions. Therefore, the tested biodiesel demonstrates strong performance potential.

18. FTIR Spectroscopic Analysis

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Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy was used to identify functional groups in the biodiesel. The spectral peaks confirmed the presence of chemical bonds typical of diesel-like hydrocarbons. Similarity between algal biodiesel and petroleum diesel spectra indicates chemical compatibility. This technique provides rapid confirmation of fuel composition. It also ensures that the transesterification process produced the expected molecular structure. Spectroscopic validation strengthens the reliability of the findings.

19. Purification of Biodiesel

Crude biodiesel was purified using column chromatography with activated charcoal. This step removed impurities such as residual catalysts and pigments. After purification, the fuel appeared clearer and burned longer. Improved ignition time indicates enhanced combustion quality. Purification is essential for producing high-grade biodiesel suitable for practical use. The results show that simple purification methods can significantly improve fuel quality.

20. Environmental Significance

Algal biodiesel offers substantial environmental benefits compared with fossil diesel. It is biodegradable, renewable, and produces fewer harmful emissions. Algae also absorb carbon dioxide during growth, helping offset greenhouse gases. This dual function makes them valuable for climate mitigation strategies. Adoption of algal biofuel could reduce dependence on petroleum resources. Therefore, the study supports sustainable energy development.

21. Overall Scientific Significance

The research demonstrates that naturally isolated microalgae can serve as efficient biodiesel feedstocks. It highlights the importance of strain selection, cultivation conditions, and extraction methods. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on renewable biofuel technologies. They also show that small-scale laboratory methods can identify commercially viable strains. Such work bridges fundamental biology and applied energy science. This strengthens the scientific basis for algal biofuel innovation.

22. Recommendations and Future Prospects

Future studies should explore large-scale cultivation systems to evaluate industrial feasibility. Optimization of nutrient conditions could further enhance lipid productivity. Genetic improvement of high-yield strains may increase efficiency. Alternative eco-friendly solvents should be tested to replace conventional chemicals. Life-cycle and economic analyses are recommended to assess sustainability. Continued research in these directions can accelerate the transition toward commercially viable algal biodiesel.