



Treatment of lipid-rich wastewater using a mixture of free or immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes from indigenous bacterial isolates

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ABSTRACT

The combined use of free or immobilized bioemulsifier produced by *Acinetobacter* sp. and enzyme pool (protease and lipase) from *Bacillus aryabhatai* in the reduction of organic pollutants present in lipid-rich wastewater was investigated. Physicochemical characterization of the raw wastewater revealed high pollutant load in poultry processing wastewater in comparison to dairy wastewater. Biodegradability of the wastewater was assessed by measuring the reduction of COD and lipid contents at time intervals under varying process conditions. In dairy wastewater treated at 37°C without pH adjustment, maximum COD (61 and 65%) and lipid (48 and 64%) reduction efficiencies were recorded at 120 h using free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively. However, under these conditions, maximum COD (86 and 94%) and lipid (52 and 69%) removal efficiencies of poultry processing wastewater were observed at 120 h when treated with free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively. At temperature of 50°C and pH 8.0, there was enhanced reduction of organic pollutants, with maximum COD (66 and 78%) and lipid (55 and 71%) removal efficiencies obtained in dairy wastewater at 72 h when using free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively. In the case of poultry processing wastewater, optimum COD (90 and 95%) and lipid (63 and 77%) removal was recorded at 72 h when treated with free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively. Reusability studies suggest that the immobilized bioproducts could be reused for up to six and seven times for the treatment of dairy and poultry processing wastewater, respectively. This study suggests the efficient and synergistic application of the developed immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes in the treatment of high fat-containing wastewater.

Keywords: Lipid-rich wastewater; Bioproducts; Biodegradation; Organic pollutants; Hydrolytic enzymes

1. Introduction

Lipid-rich wastewater is defined as a wastewater that consists of lipids along with vast array of dissolved organic and/or inorganic substances in suspension at high concentrations [1]. It is characterized by high chemical oxygen demand (COD), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), total suspended solids (TSS) and other toxic compounds [2,3]. Lipid-contaminated wastewater is discharged from a wide variety of commercial establishments including slaughterhouses, restaurants, fish processing industries, dairy industries, leather industries, edible oil refineries etc.

[4–8]. These industries consume large amounts of water for various processes, equipment and washing facilities, resulting in the release of huge volume of wastewater, which, if left untreated, could lead to increased disposal and severe pollution problems, thereby creating environmental hazards and hampering the normal operations of the ecosystems [8].

Due to increase in the production and discharge of raw and poorly treated lipid-rich wastewater coupled with stringent regulations for effluent discharge and increasing drive for re-use of treated wastewater, treatment of lipid-rich wastewater has become an issue of great necessity [9,10]. Various physicochemical methods including chemical coagulation, gravity separation etc. have been

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employed for the treatment of lipid-rich wastewater [11,12]. However, these techniques remain unsatisfactory due to low treatment efficiency in the removal of dissolved and/or emulsified fats, operational difficulties, high operational costs, generation of secondary pollutants, amongst others [13]. Hence, the need for adoption of biological technologies involving application of bioproducts for an efficient, cost-effective, sustainable and eco-friendly treatment of high fat-containing wastewater [14]. The use of biosurfactants facilitates enzymatic activity and degradation of lipids by accelerating their solubility and bioavailability, thus eliminating the need for additional processes [15–17]. In addition, application of hydrolytic enzymes reduces organic pollutant load in the effluent *via* enzymatic catalysis and further enhances performance of microbial population at a later phase of biological treatment [1,18–23].

Several studies on the combined use of free bioemulsifier and enzyme pool for oily wastewater treatment have been reported [4,16,24,25]. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have been reported on the comparative study of a mixture of free or immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes (protease, lipase) for lipid-rich wastewater treatment. Therefore, this study investigates the synergistic effects of free or immobilized extracellular glycoprotein bioemulsifier secreted from *Acinetobacter* sp. Ab9-ES and hydrolytic enzymes (protease and lipase) produced from *Bacillus aryabhatai* in the reduction of organic pollutants from two different lipid-rich wastewater types.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Materials

The bioproducts (hydrolytic enzymes and bioemulsifier) used in this experiment were produced by submerged fermentation from *Bacillus aryabhatai* and *Acinetobacter* sp. Ab9-ES, respectively. They exhibited robust activities at optimum pH and temperature of 8.0 and 50°C (protease), 9.5 and 60°C (lipase) and 7.0 and 50°C (bioemulsifier). Sodium alginate used as support material for immobilization was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). All other reagents were of analytical grade.

2.2. Extraction of bioproducts

The bioemulsifier was extracted from bacterial culture supernatants by precipitation using three volumes of cold ethanol followed by incubation overnight at –20°C. Thereafter, the precipitated bioemulsifier was re-dissolved in distilled water, dialyzed in cellulose tube membrane (cut-off: 12.4 kDa) (Sigma-Aldrich, USA) for 24 h against distilled water (1%, w/v) and then lyophilized [26,27]. The hydrolytic enzymes (protease and lipase) were recovered by ammonium sulphate precipitation of the obtained cell free culture supernatant, followed by dialysis [28,29].

2.3. Immobilization protocol

The bioproducts were immobilized separately by entrapment method using the modified method of Guleria

et al. [30] and Ferhat et al. [31]. Bioproduct solution was added to a suitable amount of 2% (w/v) sodium alginate suspension. The mixture was extruded dropwise through a syringe into a CaCl₂ solution. Alginate drops solidified when in contact with CaCl₂ solution, forming beads and thus entrapping the bioproduct. The obtained beads were allowed to harden for 1 h and washed with sterile distilled water for the removal of excess Ca²⁺ ions.

2.4. Collection of raw lipid-rich wastewater

Raw lipid-rich wastewater samples were collected from two different sources namely, dairy and poultry processing industries, all in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, into separate sterile 1 L Schott bottles. The wastewater was generated mainly from production line, equipment, and floor cleaning operations.

2.5. Physicochemical characterization of lipid-rich wastewater

Raw lipid-rich wastewater samples were characterized for BOD, COD, TSS, total dissolved solid (TDS), turbidity, resistivity, salinity, electrical conductivity (EC), total nitrogen (TN), total phosphorus (TP), pH and temperature in accordance with standard methods [32,33]. The BOD of the diluted wastewater was measured using HACH LD 101 probe following incubation at 20°C for 5 d while COD, TN and TP were measured by chromosulfuric acid oxidation and persulfate digestion method, respectively using Spetroquant NOVA 60 [34]. The pH and temperature of the wastewater were determined by direct measurement using a bench pH meter (HI 2002–01, Hanna Instruments, Woonsocket, RI, USA) and glass thermometer, respectively. In addition, salinity, TDS and EC of the wastewater samples were measured directly using CDC401 probe while turbidity was measured by nephelometric method using turbidimeter 2100P. TSS was determined by gravimetric method, in which aliquot of the wastewater was transferred through a pre-weighed filter paper, dried at 103°C for 1 h. The obtained residues were then weighed. The lipid content was determined using a partition gravimetric method of Kirschman and Pomeroy [35] while protein concentration was determined according to the method of Lowry et al. [36] using bovine serum albumin (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) as a standard. All analyses were performed in triplicate.

2.6. Batch biodegradation of lipid-rich wastewater

The synergistic effects of bioemulsifier and enzyme pool in the biodegradation of pollutants present in lipid-rich wastewater were investigated in 1 L Erlenmeyer flasks containing 500 ml sterile lipid-rich wastewater. Lipid-rich wastewater sample was treated by addition of 5% (v/v) each of the free bioproducts or 2.5, 3 and 3.75 g of immobilized protease, lipase and bioemulsifier, respectively. These bioproducts had enzymatic (protease and lipase) and emulsifying activities of 151.14 U/ml, 81.43 U/ml and 83.3%, respectively, obtained under standard assay conditions using the method of [37] (protease), [38] (lipase) and [39] (bioemulsifier). The flasks were incubated separately and simultaneously at 150 rpm for 120 h in a shaking incubator

under two different experimental conditions: 37°C without adjustment of pH of the wastewater samples and 50°C by adjusting the pH of the wastewater to 8.0. A control flask without enzyme or bioemulsifier preparation was kept under similar conditions. Biodegradability of the lipid-rich wastewater samples was assessed by determining percentage removal efficiencies of COD and lipid contents at 24, 72 and 120 h using the formula shown in Eq. (1) [40]. All analyses were conducted in triplicate.

$$\text{Removal efficiency (\%)} = \frac{C_{\text{control}} - C_f}{C_{\text{control}}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

where C_{control} is the value of COD or lipid contents of the control lipid-rich wastewater, and C_f is the amount of these parameters after treatment.

2.7. Reusability of immobilized protease, lipase and bioemulsifier

Batch biodegradation of lipid-rich wastewater was repeated several times using a combination of immobilized protease, lipase and bioemulsifier at 50°C, pH 8.0 for 72 h, since considerable biodegradability was recorded under these optimum conditions. After each cycle, the beads were separated, washed with sterile distilled water and then added into a fresh wastewater sample. Removal efficiencies of COD and lipid contents were determined after every cycle. All experiments were carried out in triplicate.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Characterization of lipid-rich wastewater

The physicochemical characteristics of dairy and poultry processing wastewater were determined using standard procedures, and the mean values of the parameters are shown in Table 1. Both wastewater types are characterized with unpleasant odor coupled with whitish (dairy wastewater) and brownish (poultry processing wastewater) appearance. Furthermore, wastewater from poultry processing industry contained high concentrations of organic matter in form of lipids (88900 ± 10468 mg/L), COD (7518 ± 378 mg/L), BOD₅ (707 ± 13 mg/L), TDS (807000 ± 0.00 mg/L) and TSS (4667 ± 2887 mg/L) in comparison to dairy industry wastewater with lipid contents (53367 ± 4306 mg/L), COD (5693 ± 17 mg/L), BOD₅ (691 ± 16 mg/L), TDS (5700 ± 0.00 mg/L) and TSS (2333 ± 1528 mg/L). However, in both wastewater samples, the COD values were found to be higher than those of BOD, suggesting slow biodegradation of organic compounds in the wastewater [41]. Similar characteristics of poultry and dairy wastewater with high pollutant load have been reported in literature [4,16,18,42–44].

In addition, pH of poultry processing wastewater was found to be acidic while that of dairy wastewater was extremely alkaline, probably due to the presence of acidic and caustic cleaning agents, respectively, in the wastewater [45–47]. Furthermore, high salinity of dairy wastewater (5.88 ± 0.00‰) which is about 7-fold higher than that of poultry processing wastewater may be due to the presence of high concentrations of Na and Cl, resulting from the use

Table 1
Physicochemical characteristics of raw dairy and poultry processing wastewater

Parameter	Dairy wastewater	Poultry processing wastewater
Color	Whitish	Brownish
Odor	Unpleasant	Unpleasant
Temperature (°C)	24.7 ± 1.5	22.6 ± 2.0
pH	12.6 ± 0.1	6.6 ± 0.1
COD (mg/L)	5693 ± 17	7518 ± 378
BOD ₅ (mg/L)	691 ± 16	707 ± 13
TSS (mg/L)	2333 ± 1528	4667 ± 2887
TDS (mg/L)	5700 ± 0.00	807000 ± 0.00
Salinity (‰)	5.88 ± 0.00	0.81 ± 0.00
Resistivity (Ω·cm)	96 ± 0.00	620 ± 0.00
Total nitrogen (mg/L)	129 ± 3	79 ± 11
Total phosphorus (mg/L)	27.2 ± 1.3	24.3 ± 0.9
Lipid content (mg/L)	53367 ± 4306	88900 ± 10468
Turbidity (NTU)	1962 ± 7	2077 ± 83
Electrical conductivity (mS/cm)	10.42 ± 0.00	1614 ± 0.58
Protein content (mg/L)	785 ± 96	507 ± 40

*All values are expressed in mean; ± indicates SD.

of large amounts of alkaline cleaners in the dairy plant [48]. The EC of poultry processing wastewater was 155-fold higher than that of dairy wastewater, an indication of the presence of high ionic substances in the wastewater [49]. The higher turbidity of poultry processing wastewater (2077 ± 83 NTU) in comparison to that of dairy wastewater may probably be due to the presence of residual blood, fats and intestinal content in the wastewater. The high nutrient levels in dairy wastewater as compared to that of poultry processing wastewater is indicated by high TN (129 ± 3 mg/L) and TP (27.2 ± 1.3 mg/L) values, suggesting increased eutrophication risk of the receiving water bodies [46]. In general, variation in the physicochemical properties of the wastewater to previously reported studies is a function of the type of products being produced and different operating procedures adopted at each plant [47]. The pollutant load of these wastewater types was found to exceed the South African guidelines for effluent discharge, thus necessitating treatment before disposal [50].

3.2. Simultaneous treatment of lipid-rich wastewater using a mixture of free or immobilized bioemulsifier and enzyme pool

In the first set of experiment, there was a significant reduction in the COD and lipid contents of the wastewater in comparison to control during treatment with free or immobilized bioproducts for 120 h. Maximum COD (61 and 65%) and lipid (48 and 64%) reduction efficiencies were recorded after 120 h in dairy wastewater when treated with the free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively (Figs. 1A and B). These results were found to be lower

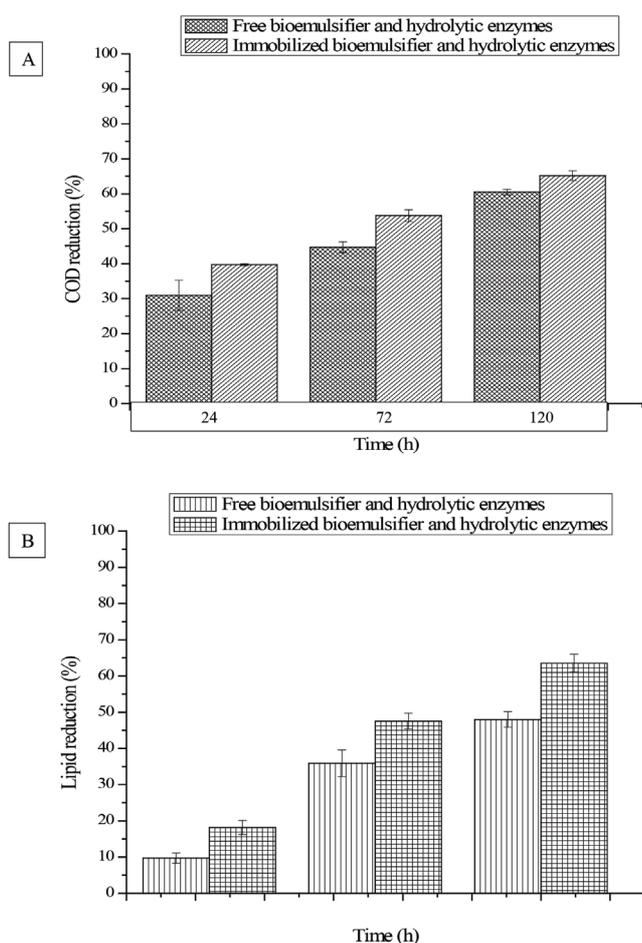


Fig. 1. Reduction in (A) COD and (B) lipid content during treatment of dairy wastewater with free or immobilized bioproducts and hydrolytic enzymes. The wastewater was treated at 37°C without pH adjustment. Values indicate the average of triplicate values while the error bars represent the standard deviation.

when compared to COD (86 and 94%) and lipid (52 and 69%) removal efficiencies obtained after 120 h during treatment of poultry processing wastewater using free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively (Figs. 2A and B). The lower degradation of dairy wastewater compared to poultry processing wastewater suggests higher affinity of the bioproducts to poultry effluent constituents [51]. This may probably be due to the presence of high salt content inhibiting the degradation of pollutants in the dairy wastewater [52].

In the second set of experiment, during 120 h treatment of dairy wastewater, maximum reduction efficiencies of COD (66 and 78%) and lipid contents (55 and 71%) were recorded at 72 h using free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively (Figs. 3A and B). In contrast to dairy wastewater, there was enhanced reduction of organic matter in poultry processing wastewater, with maximum COD (90 and 95%) and lipid (63 and 77%) removal efficiencies obtained at 72 h when treated with free and immobilized bioproducts, respectively (Figs. 4A and B). The observed decrease in the removal efficiencies of both wastewater types after 72 h incubation may be attributed to reduction in the activities of

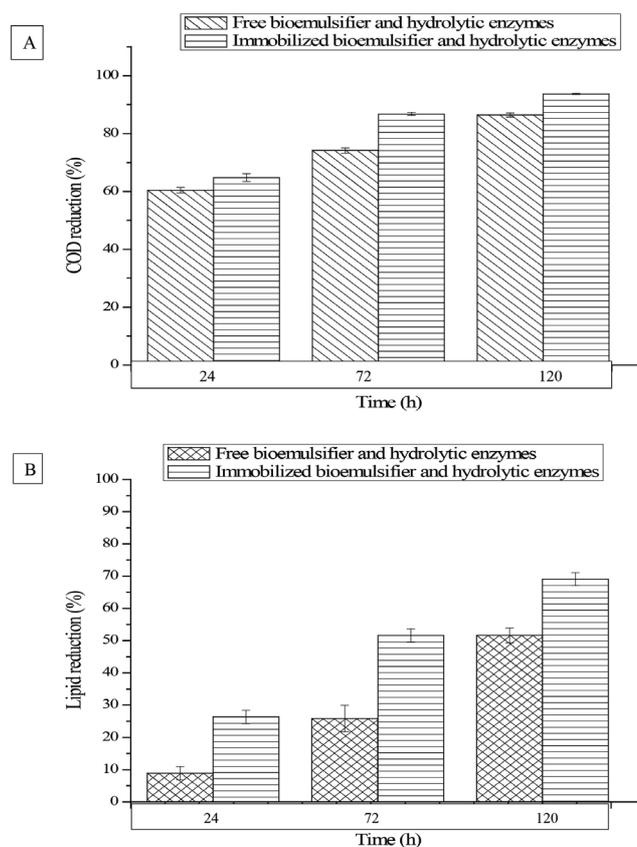


Fig. 2. Reduction in (A) COD and (B) lipid content during treatment of poultry processing wastewater with free or immobilized bioproducts and hydrolytic enzymes. The wastewater was treated at 37°C without pH adjustment. Values indicate the average of triplicate values while the error bars represent the standard deviation.

the bioproducts at longer treatment period, thus rendering them ineffective towards the bioconversion reactions [53]. This corroborates the findings of Jacobucci et al. [53] where a decrease in the degradation of oily wastewater was reported between 72–120 h during 5 d treatment with bioproduct produced from *Planococcus citreus*.

In general, the combined application of the bioproducts and enzyme pool was found to be more effective in the reduction of COD and lipids from poultry processing wastewater in comparison to dairy wastewater. In addition, the immobilized bioproducts recorded higher pollutant removal efficiencies in contrast to the free counterparts, an indication of protective role provided by the support material, thus stabilizing the bioproducts and, as a consequence maintain their activities [54,55]. Such cocktail application of biosurfactant and enzyme pool has been reported for enhanced removal of COD and lipids from lipid-rich wastewater [4,16,25]. Furthermore, the degradation potential of the bioproducts increased when applied for the treatment of wastewater at 50°C and pH 8.0 in comparison to wastewater treated at 37°C without pH adjustment, an indication that temperature and pH had effects on the physical nature and chemical composition of the oily wastewater constituents as well as on the rate of

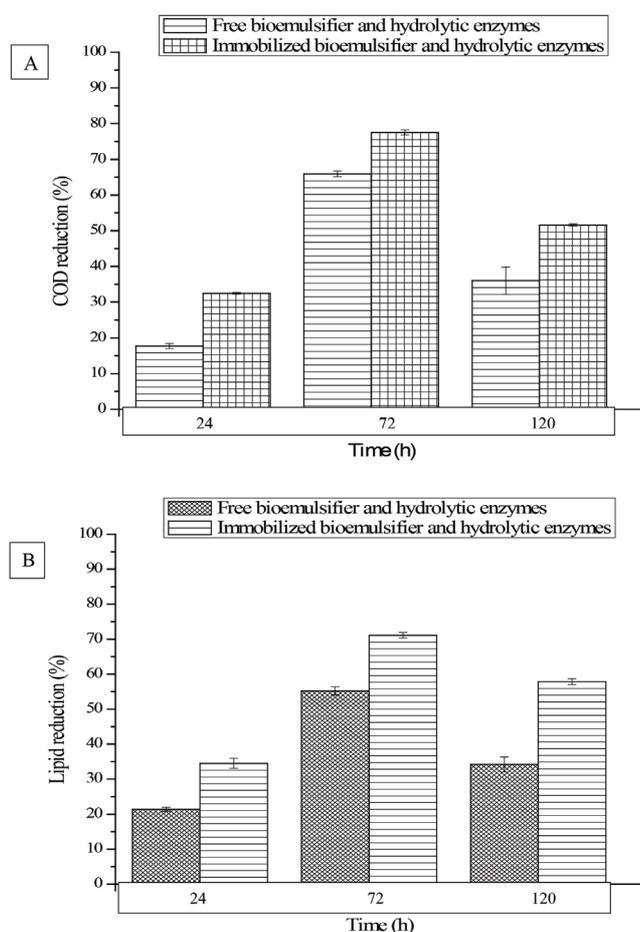


Fig. 3. Reduction in (A) COD and (B) lipid content during treatment of dairy wastewater with free or immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes. The wastewater was treated at 50°C and pH 8.0. Values indicate the average of triplicate values while the error bars represent the standard deviation.

pollutants degradation by the bioproducts [56,57]. Batch treatment of coconut mill effluent using celite-immobilized lipase from *Staphylococcus pasteurii* COM-4A at 50°C and pH 9.0 has been reported [58]. Results showed removal efficiencies of COD (29%) and O and G (45%).

3.3. Reusability potential of immobilized bioproducts

The reusability of immobilized bioemulsifier and enzymes is a key factor for a cost-effective application of the bioproducts in the degradation of pollutants present in lipid-rich wastewater. In this study, cycle number affected the reduction of both COD and lipid contents in the wastewater by the immobilized bioproducts. In dairy wastewater, the immobilized bioproducts could be reused for a maximum of six cycles for the reduction of COD and lipid contents, retaining 22% and 18% removal efficiencies, respectively at sixth cycle (Fig. 5A). In the case of poultry processing wastewater, the immobilized bioproducts could be reused repeatedly for up to seven batches for the removal of COD and lipids, with reduction efficiencies of 40% and 30%, respectively recorded at the seventh cycle

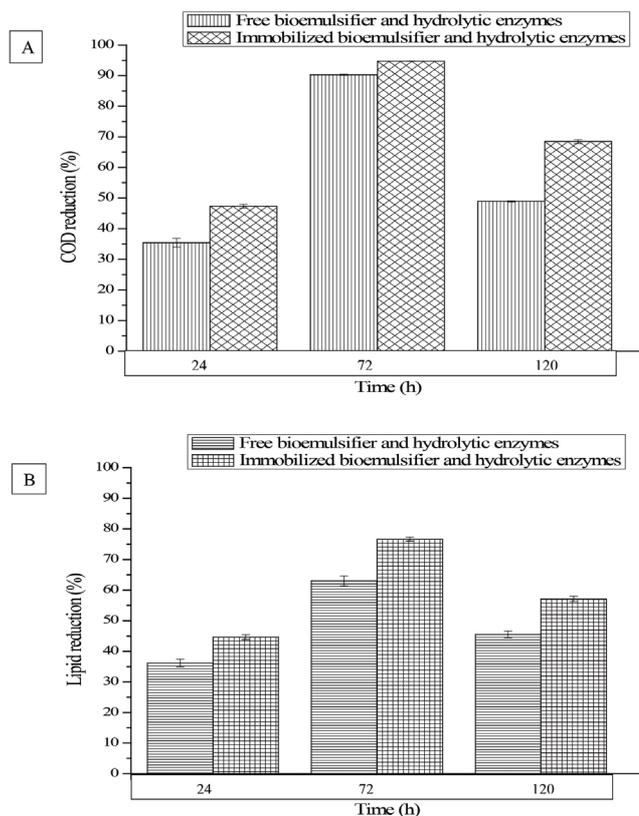


Fig. 4. Reduction in (A) COD and (B) lipid content during treatment of poultry processing wastewater with free or immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes. The wastewater was treated at 50°C and pH 8.0. Values indicate the average of triplicate values while the error bars represent the standard deviation.

(Fig. 5B). The decreased degradation potential of the immobilized bioproducts in both wastewater types, after every cycle, may be due to leakage of the bioproducts from the beads or its inhibition by substrate/product molecules [58,59]. This supports the findings of Kanmani et al. [58], in which lipase immobilized in celite beads was repeatedly used for up to seven cycles during treatment of coconut mill effluent. Similarly, *Candida rugosa* lipase entrapped in alginate beads has been reported to be reused for up to four batches during enzymatic treatment of high strength lipid-rich wastewater [59].

4. Conclusions

Mixture of free or immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes was employed for the degradation of organic pollutants present in dairy and poultry processing wastewater. Despite the high pollutant load observed in poultry processing wastewater, higher COD and lipid removal efficiencies were recorded at all the treatment conditions in comparison to dairy wastewater. The immobilized bioproducts were found to be more efficient in the degradation of organic pollutants (COD and lipid contents) when compared to the free mixtures. In addition, temperature, pH and incubation time seemed to be crucial

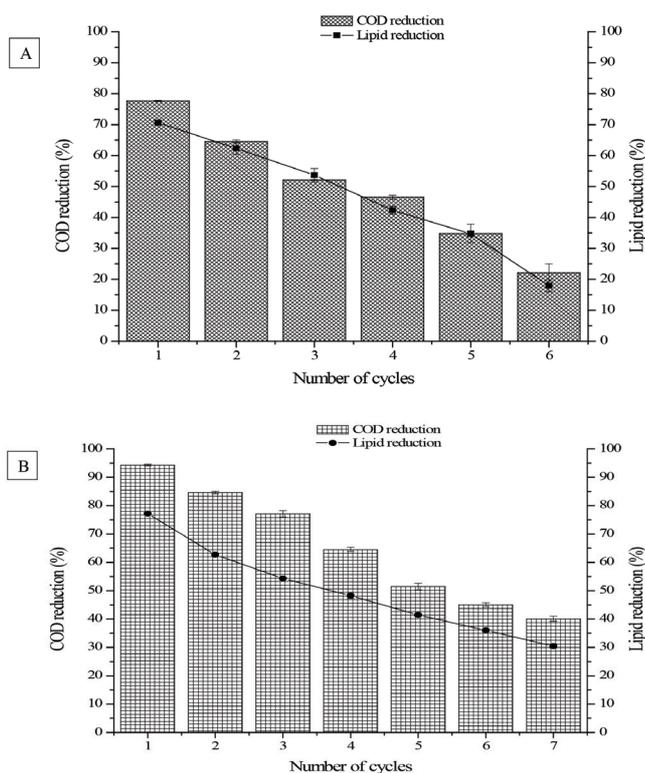


Fig. 5. Reusability potential of immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes in the treatment of (A) dairy and (B) poultry processing wastewaters. Values indicate the average of triplicate values while the error bars represent the standard deviation.

factors influencing reduction of COD and lipid contents from the wastewater, with the treatment conditions of 50°C, pH 8.0 and 72 h showing higher removal efficiencies (in terms of COD and lipid contents) when compared to 37°C without pH adjustment for 120 h. The poultry processing wastewater, when treated with a mixture of immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes at 50°C and pH 8.0 gave removal efficiencies of 95% COD and 77% lipids. Meanwhile, under similar process conditions, dairy wastewater gave removal efficiencies of 78% COD and 71% lipids when treated with a mixture of immobilized bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes. Based on these findings, the combined use of bioemulsifier and hydrolytic enzymes should be applied as alternative remedy in the treatment of high strength fat-containing wastewater.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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