

Integrated green bioprocessing of agro-waste for enhanced industrial enzyme production - kinetics and mixed culture optimization

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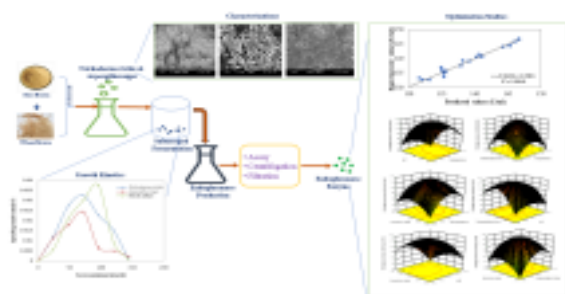
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Received: 23/05/2025, Accepted: 08/07/2025, Available online: 22/07/2025

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<https://doi.org/10.30955/gnj.07685>

Graphical abstract



Abstract

This study investigates the bioprocess optimization of enzyme production using agrowaste substrates and mixed fungal cultures. Kinetic studies were conducted to analyse endoglucanase production by *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger*, and their mixed culture. The modeling covered growth, product formation, and substrate consumption. To date, limited studies have systematically compared monoculture and mixed culture systems using rice bran and wheat bran under structured kinetic modelling. This synergistic interaction contributes to improved bioconversion efficiency compared to the use of single substrates, representing a novel approach in agrowaste valorization. The mixed culture, utilizing rice bran and wheat bran, achieved a maximum endoglucanase production of 145.35 U/ml, outperforming *T. viride* and *A. niger* monocultures by approximately 46% and 27%, respectively. Maximum specific growth rates (μ_{max}) were 0.02421 h⁻¹ for *T. viride*, 0.0325 h⁻¹ for *A. niger*, and 0.0375 h⁻¹ for the mixed culture. The Y_{xs} values were 0.2855, 0.2933, and 0.2601, while Y_{px} values were 6.5051, 5.6092, and 9.9631, respectively, highlighting the superior productivity of the mixed culture. The improved results were due to the combined action of both fungal species. They worked together, helping each other break down the material more effectively. This showed that using mixed cultures could be a low-cost and eco-friendly

way to produce enzymes from agricultural waste. It also supported the development of better and more efficient methods for bioprocessing strategies.

Keywords: Kinetics, Endoglucanase, Mixed Culture, *Aspergillus niger*, *Trichoderma viride*.

1. Introduction

The growing interest in sustainable waste management and bioresource utilization has highlighted the potential of enzymatic conversion of agricultural waste into valuable bioproducts. Recycling agrowaste into enzymes and biofuels offers a promising approach to address environmental challenges while adding economic value. Among the various biological conversion technologies, enzymatic hydrolysis of lignocellulosic biomass has gained particular prominence due to its efficiency and eco-friendly nature (Rath T *et al.* 2022; Sun L. *et al.* 2020; Martín A *et al.* 2019).

Lignocellulosic wastes such as rice straw, wheat bran, wheat straw, rice bran, corn stover, sugarcane bagasse, corn straw, and paper waste serve as abundant and low-cost substrates for microbial enzyme production, especially endoglucanase (Santos J *et al.* 2020; Celebioglu A. and Uyar T 2021; Rana S *et al.* 2020). Endoglucanase plays a crucial role in breaking down cellulose into fermentable sugars. Enzymatic treatment involves a two-step mechanism: initial depolymerization of cellulose into cellobiose, followed by its hydrolysis into glucose via cellulase enzymes (Xu D *et al.* 2020; Khalid S *et al.* 2021). Fungi and bacteria are the primary microbial producers of cellulases, offering potential for efficient enzyme production from lignocellulosic substrates (Korc E. and Varga L. 2021; Gaur *et al.* 2015). To date, there is limited data comparing mixed vs. monoculture systems using rice and wheat bran under structured kinetic modelling approaches. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for systematic studies evaluating the synergistic interactions of mixed fungal cultures for enhanced enzyme production.

The objectives of this study were to:

- Investigate endoglucanase production using *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger*, and their mixed culture grown on rice bran and wheat bran substrates.
- Apply Response Surface Methodology (RSM) to optimize process parameters influencing enzyme production.
- Model and analyse the growth, product formation, and substrate consumption kinetics under different culture conditions.
- Compare and evaluate the performance of monocultures and mixed cultures based on the optimized conditions identified through Response Surface Methodology.

2. Experiment

2.1. Materials and methods

The composition of the growth medium for *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture (*T. viride* and *A. niger*) is as follows: Potato nutrient broth-20 g/L, Agar-Agar - 10 grams per liter g/L, and the medium pH was set to 5. The culture media for all strains were maintained and incubated for a time over 6 days at a temperature 30° C and then stored in a refrigerator at 4° C (Zubair A *et al.* 2019; Khalid Sayed *et al.* 2022).

2.1.1. Preparation of mixed culture broth

Mixed cultures were grown on special PDA slants and the spores were removed aseptically from 6 days aged PDA slants. Sterile distilled water was added to all culture agar slants (*Trichoderma viride* and *Aspergillus niger*) and mixed for preparing uniform liquid mixture which was used as fungal inoculum. A total volume of 4.0 ml of conidial suspension (*Aspergillus niger* and *Trichoderma viride*) was used to initial growth in 250 ml conical flask containing 100 ml of E and P (Eggs and Pugh) medium supplemented with (g/L) mineral salt medium (Khalid Sayed *et al.* 2021; Sarma H *et al.* 2021).

2.1.2. Fermentation medium

For the growth of *Aspergillus niger* and *Trichoderma viride*, the following nutrients (in g/L) were used: 0.3 g urea, 2 g ammonium sulfate ((NH₄)₂SO₄), 2.6 g potassium dihydrogen phosphate (KH₂PO₄), 0.5 g calcium chloride (CaCl₂), 1.5 g magnesium sulfate (MgSO₄·7H₂O), 1.5 g zinc sulfate (ZnSO₄·7H₂O), 2 g cobalt chloride (CoCl₂), 10 g ammonium sulfate, 4 g KH₂PO₄, and 2 ml of Tween 80. For mixed culture growth (*A. niger* and *T. viride*), E and P media were used, containing (in g/L): 2 g KH₂PO₄, 1 g potassium chloride (KCl), 1 g ammonium sulfite ((NH₄)₂SO₃), 1 g MgSO₄·7H₂O, 1.5 g L-asparagine, 0.1 g CaCl₂, and 1 g yeast extract.

Then the growth media were supplied with different quantities of substrate wheat bran and rice bran. All experiments were carried out in 250 ml flasks containing the prepared medium. The mixed culture medium was sterilized at 121° C under 15 psi pressure for 45 minutes, and the medium was allowed to cool afterward, all conical

flasks were inoculated with the fungal mycelial inoculum prepared as mentioned above. The inoculated flasks were incubated for 0 to 144 hrs. at 30° C. The culture samples were spun at 10,000 rpm for 15 minutes, and the resulting clear supernatant was collected for enzymatic processing (Irfan M *et al.* 2017; Khalid Sayed *et al.* 2024).

2.2. Cellulosic materials

Lignocellulosic waste materials wheat bran (WB) and rice bran (RB) were used as substrates. Lignocellulosic materials were collected from the local industries.

2.2.1. Rice bran

The proximate composition of rice bran is as follows in (%): moisture – 10.1, crude fat - 11.3, crude protein-12.6, crude Fiber – 19.3, total ash – 10.2, Nitrogen Free Extract (NFE) – 36.5.

2.2.2. Wheat bran

The proximate composition of wheat bran is as follows in (%): moisture – 10, crude fat - 13.5, crude protein-2.6, crude fiber – 12.2, total ash – 3.00, Nitrogen Free Extract (NFE) – 58.7.

2.3. Pretreatment of cellulosic materials

A quantity of 500 gram of the pretreated lignocellulosic material was treated separately with 2L of 5% sodium hydroxide solution and autoclaved at 121° C for 1 hour. Then the medium was filtered and the solution was neutralized with phosphoric acid. Again, the residue material was dried at 75° C in an oven after that the same volume of distilled water was added and heated at 75° C for 30 minutes. The suspension was filtered, and the residue was dried at 75° C. (Soeka YS. 2019; Pan M *et al.* 2010; Manikandan K and Viruthagiri T 2009).

2.4. Analytical techniques

Batch process was carried out on mixture of rice bran and wheat bran hydrolyzed with fermentation elements. The endoglucanase activity, concentration of substrate, pH, process temperature and biomass concentration were determined every 24 hours for 8 days. A reactive mixture of one ml of 1% (W/V) carboxymethyl cellulose solution in 0.01 M citrate buffer (pH 5.5) and one ml of fermentation culture supernatant was incubated at 65 ° C after incubation period for 30 min the reducing sugars were adding with 10 ml of DNS reagent. Samples were prepared with 15 min boiled endoglucanase enzyme and activity was expressed as the amount of endoglucanase required to release 1μ mol reducing sugars per ml under the above-mentioned conditions by using glucose as standard curve. For cellulose evaluation, 1ml of sample, 10 ml of 1.0% Anthrone reagent solution and 10 ml of distilled water and the solution incubated in boiling water for 45 min. The samples were analyzed using spectrophotometer technique at 620 nm and crude cellulose was used as standard (Kola S.O *et al.* 2018; Guichuan Ye *et al.* 2017).

2.5. Estimation of biomass

A 5 ml portion of culture broth was withdrawn and kept at 4° C for 3 hrs. The lighter mycelia were separated from the fermentation broth. A sample was centrifuged at high

speed for 30 minutes. The top portion of the fermentation broth was discarded and the solid mass was dried and dry weight of the biomass were estimated.

2.6. Response Surface Methodology (RSM) for endoglucanase production

The effect of temperature, pH, fermentation time and inoculum size were studied using central composite design (CCD) for the monoculture and coculture fungal strains of *Aspergillus niger* and *Trichoderma viride*. The effects of four major key factors responsible for enzyme production were studied at five different levels ($-\alpha$, -1 , 0 , $+1$, $+\alpha$) by CCD. Here the independent variable X_1 is temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$), X_2 is pH, X_3 is fermentation time (hrs) and X_4 is inoculum size % (v/v). The CCD contained 30 experiments to optimize the parameters for the production of endoglucanase.

A second-order model can be constructed efficiently with Central Composite Design (CCD). CCD is first-order (2N) design augmented by additional centre and axial points to allow estimation of the tuning parameters of a second-order model. The design involves 2N factorial points, 2N axial points and 1 central point. CCD presents an alternative to 3N designs in the construction of second order models because the number of experiments is reduced as compared to a full factorial design for the multi objective design of a flywheel. A full factorial design which, includes all possible factor combinations in each of the factors, is a powerful tool for understanding complex processes, the detailed mechanisms of which are not known and for describing factor interaction in multifactor systems. A combination of the levels of the factors that leads to a certain optimum response can also be identified through this approach.

The second-order model used to fit the response to the independent variable is shown in equation (1). The data obtained from RSM on endoglucanase production are subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Robert Marian *et al.* 2018).

$$Y = \beta_0 + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i X_i + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_{ii} X_i^2 + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \sum_{j=i+1}^k \beta_{ij} X_i X_j \quad (1)$$

Where, Y is the predicted response k the number of factor variables, X_i and X_j are the input variables that influence the response variable Y, β_0 is the intercept, β_i represents the linear effect of X_i , β_{ij} represents the interaction between X_i , X_j and β_{ii} represents the quadratic effects of X_i . However, in this study, the independent variables are coded as X_1 , X_2 , X_3 and X_4 .

$$x_i = \frac{X_i - X_0}{\Delta X_i}, i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, k, \quad (2)$$

Where x_i is the dimensionless value of an independent variable. X_i is the real value of an independent variable, X_0 is the real value of the independent variable at the center point, and ΔX_i is the step change value. The second order polynomial model equations (3) for the four factors take the following form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_{11} X_1^2 + \beta_{22} X_2^2 + \beta_{33} X_3^2 + \beta_{44} X_4^2 + \beta_{12} X_1 X_2 + \beta_{13} X_1 X_3 + \beta_{14} X_1 X_4 + \beta_{23} X_2 X_3 + \beta_{24} X_2 X_4 + \beta_{34} X_3 X_4 \quad (3)$$

The quality of fit of the second order equation was expressed by the coefficient of determination R^2 , and its statistical significance was determined by F-test. The significance of each coefficient was determined using student's t-test. The coefficients of the equation were determined by employing Design Expert software version 8.0.7.1. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the final predictive equation was done using the same software package.

2.7. Optimization using response surface methodology for mixed culture of *Trichoderma viride* and *Aspergillus niger*.

To optimize the combined effect of four different experimental parameters, on the production of endoglucanase, 30 trials were performed. The regression constants were calculated and the data was close-fitting to a second –order polynomial equation. The response, Y (Endoglucanase activity, U/ml) by mixed culture was stated in terms of the following regression equation (4)

$$Y = 146.650 - 1.88125X_1 - 1.86125X_2 - 1.49042X_3 - 0.584583X_4 - 1.51740X_1^2 - 2.45365X_2^2 - 2.05990X_3^2 - 3.81865X_4^2 - 3.38062X_1X_2 + 1.87813X_1X_3 + 1.4688X_1X_4 + 1.61812X_1X_3 + 0.750625X_2X_4 + 0.499375X_3X_4 \quad (4)$$

The response value Y and X_1 , X_2 , X_3 and X_4 were the coded levels of temperature, pH, fermentation time and inoculum size respectively. Statistical testing of the model was executed for analysis of variance. The ANOVA result of quadratic regression model for Y is described in **Table 3**. ANOVA of the regression model for Y proved that the model was significant due to an F-value and low probability value. Values of “Prob > F” less than 0.0500 indicate model terms were significant. The P-values were used to check the significance of each of the coefficients.

To fix the optimum levels of variables for maximum endoglucanase production, isoreponse contour plots and three-dimensional response surface plots were built by plotting the response, Y (Endoglucanase activity) on the Z axis against two variables, while keeping other variables at their optimum levels. **Figure 1** show the isoreponse contour and response surface plots of the endoglucanase production with the interactive result of incubation temperature, initial pH, fermentation time and inoculum size respectively.

The figure of the corresponding contour plots showed whether the mutual interactions between the independent variables were significant or not. From the response surface plots, the optimal values of the independent variables were observed and the interaction between each independent variable pair was described.

The isoreponse contour plots of RSM as a function of two variables at a time, holding all other factors at fixed level, were helpful interaction between the two variables (fermentation time and temperature) showed that the endoglucanase production was complex even when inoculum size and temperature were subject to minor alterations. Under certain conditions, a maximal contour (endoglucanase production 146.65 U/ml) were

determined. The endoglucanase production was significantly affected by fermentation time, pH, inoculum size and temperature. Constructed on the model, the optimal working conditions were obtained to achieve high percentage conversion of wheat bran and rice bran. The

optimum values of the parameters X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , X_4 were found to be 36 °C, pH 5.4, 97.38 hrs and 3.78 ml respectively.

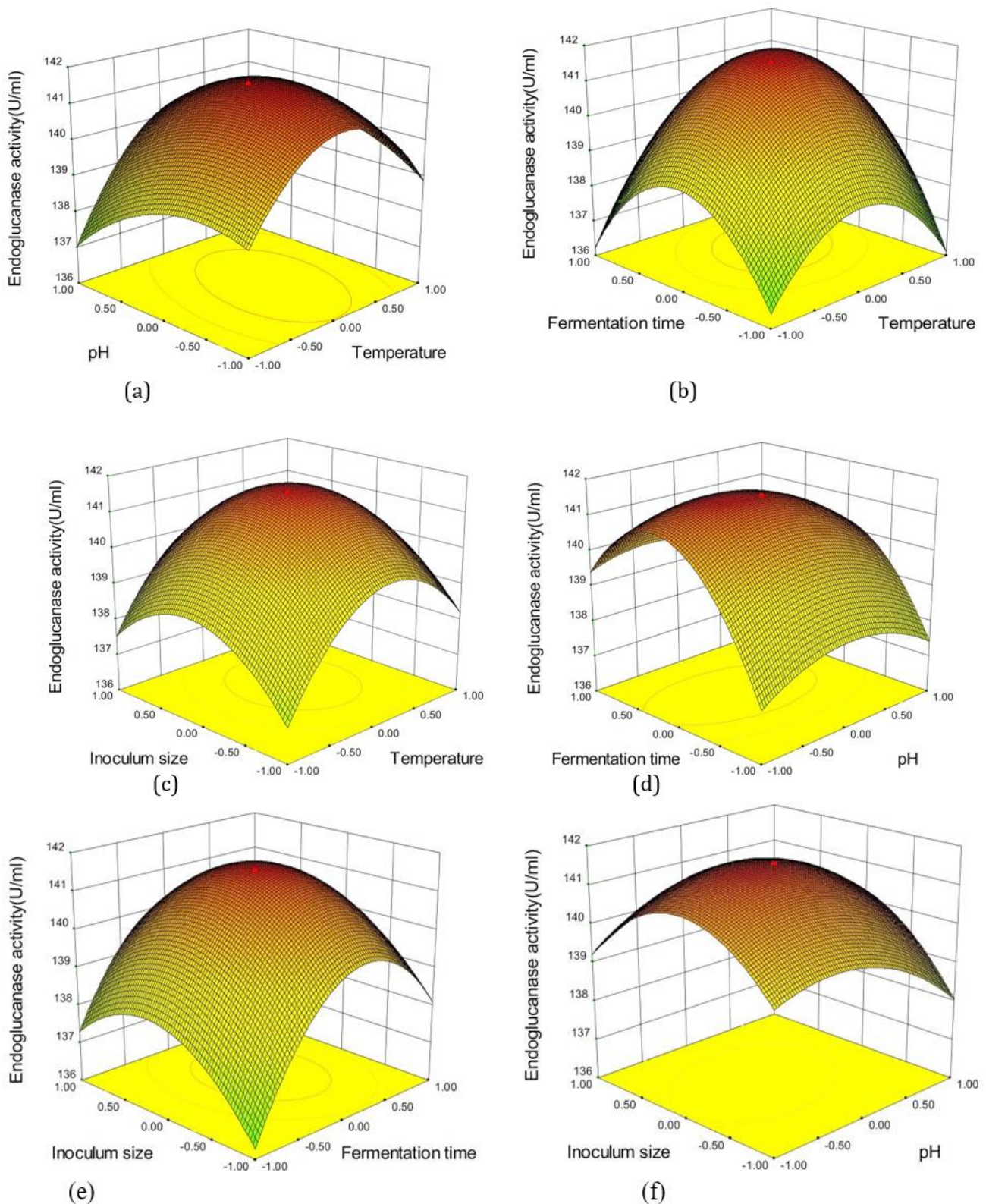


Figure 1 (a,b,c,d,e,f) Three dimensional response surface plot and isoresponse contour plot on endoglucanase production by mixed culture

2.7.1. Validation of the Model for *Trichoderma viride* and *Aspergillus niger*

The values of process variables were obtained. The (CCD) central composite design and the response yielded maximum endoglucanase production. There were very minor differences in the predicted response (146.65 U/ml) and the observed value (147.37 U/ml) during the experiments when carried out at optimal conditions. The comparison of predicted and experimental values for the endoglucanase production was shown in the **Figure 2**. The linear line in the figure showed that the predicted data of the response have an agreement with the observed values.

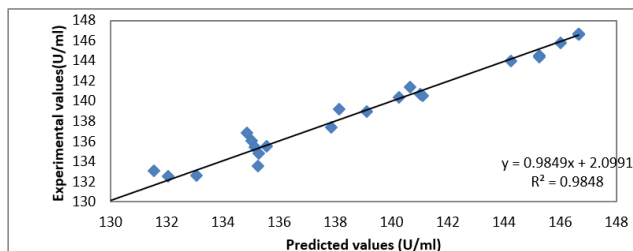


Figure 2 Comparison of experimental and predicted values for the endoglucanase production

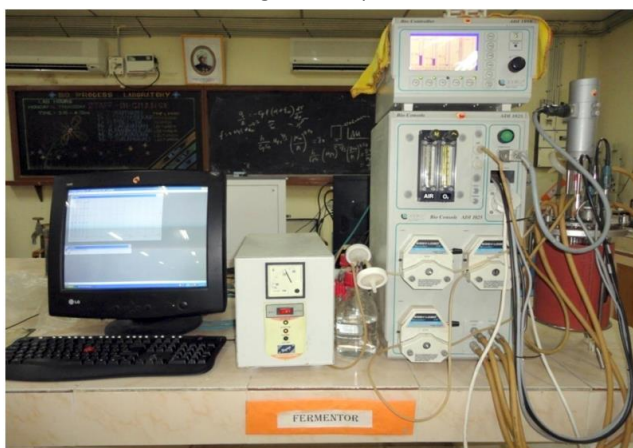


Figure 3 Online monitored batch fermenter (APPLICON Biotech, Holland)

2.8. Preparation of SDS-PAGE

Acrylamide/Bis: (30 % T, 2.6 % C): Dissolve 87.5 g of acrylamide and 3.0 g of N'Nbis- methylene-acrylamide in 300 ml. The solution was stored in the dark and stable for maximum of 30 days.

10 % Ammonium per sulphate (APS) (w/v): 0.1 g of APS was liquified in 1 ml of ddH₂O. The solution was prepared fresh daily.

10 % SDS (w/v): Liquify 10 g of SDS in 90 ml ddH₂O with gentle stirring and make up to 100 ml with ddH₂O. 0.5 % (w/v) Bromophenol blue: Liquify 1.0 g of bromophenol blue in 100 ml ddH₂O.

Gel Buffer: Tris base (27.23g) was liquified in 80 ml of ddH₂O; the pH was adjusted to 8.8 with 6 M HCl.

Stacking Buffer: Tris base (5 g) was dissolved in 60 ml of ddH₂O and adjusted to pH 6.5 with 6 M HCl. The total volume was carried up to 100 ml with ddH₂O and stored at 4 °C.

Sample Buffer: Double deionised water (3.55 ml), 1.25 ml of stacking gel buffer, 2.0 ml of glycerol, 2.5 ml of SDS and

0.5 ml of bromophenol blue were mixed to make solution A. Beta-mercaptoethanol (5 µl) was added to 950 µl solution A prior to use. Dilute the sample at least 1:2 with sample buffer.

10 × Electrode (Running) Buffer, pH 8.3: Dissolve 30.3 g of Tris base, 144 g of glycine and 10 g of SDS in ddH₂O and make up to 1 l with ddH₂O. Store at 4 °C. Dilute (1:10) before use. Staining Solution: Brilliant blue R-staining solution (Sigma, B6529).

Coomassie Gel Destain: Mix 100 ml of methanol and glacial acetic acid and make the total volume up to one liter with dH₂O.

2.9. Online monitored batch fermenter

Experiments were carried out in a pilot plant scale batch fermenter (APPLICON BIOCONSOLE ADI 1025 controller, Holland) for endoglucanase production, with 2L volume, furnished with flat blade impeller, oxygen, and pH electrodes, temperature and DO₂ probe. All operating parameters were online monitored with Bio expert Lite 1.00 software. 1000 ml of production medium was taken in the fermenter and sterilized in the autoclave at 121°C for 30 minutes. The sterilized medium was inoculated with the required inoculums and fermentation was carried out for 6 days at controlled condition of temperature, pH and agitation speed. The samples were drawn at every 24 hrs and the supernatants are analyzed for endoglucanase concentration.

2.10. Kinetics and modeling of endoglucanase production

Endoglucanase fermentation kinetics is one important research area. It was a mathematical model of the metabolic processes of *Trichoderma viride* and *Aspergillus niger*, which are contained in a batch reactor. Bio catalyst reaction engineering was wide area, which includes the influences of reaction kinetics, and its mode of operation process and kinetic models were used for the design and operation of bioreactor. In modeling bioreactor system, however. In these case unstructured models have been used to describe only the quantity of the biological species. In these situations, cell population biological phase and composition changes significantly influence in kinetics parameters and structured models. (Khalid Sayed *et al.* 2024; Hamouda R A *et al.* 2016; Lakhundi S *et al.* 2015).

The optimum operating conditions to obtain maximum endoglucanase production for batch processes having different of operating variables and extended fermentation time per cycle particularly for complex systems like endoglucanase production. Generally different interacting systems were involved in the process, the biological phase and growth medium (Douglas E *et al.* 2009; Marko Božinović *et al.* 2023). The growth medium is a multicomponent system which must contain all the required nutrients for fungal growth, and which will accumulate, as the fungal grows, different end products of cellular metabolism. During biological reactions, both temperature, pH, ionic and all process properties many change with time. (Chukwuemeka U *et al.* 2017; Karunakaran S *et al.* 2022)

2.10.1. Representations of rates in terms of equations

Mathematical modeling and simulation are an important method in the design of production process for its implementation and control. Modeling means arriving at equations for the experimental data. A typical bioprocess has three terms namely, substrate (Input), Microbes (Output), Product (Output).

The balance equations for the substrate, biomass and product are given as

$$\text{Substrate consumption}(s): \frac{ds}{dt} = f(s, x, p) \quad (5)$$

$$\text{Cell growth rate}(x): \frac{dx}{dt} = g(s, x, p) \quad (6)$$

$$\text{Product formation}(p): \frac{dp}{dt} = h(s, x, p) \quad (7)$$

The functions f , g , h depends purely on the mechanism of the bioprocess which was very complex in nature. In this process, the mass transfer property was lumped together with the biological reactions and the expressions were represented in terms of the properties of the organism. Thus, the concentrations of the system represent the conditions at the bulk only. Mathematical models are described to represent change in concentrations of biomass concentration(x), mixture of wheat and rice bran concentration (s) and endoglucanase concentration (p) in the bulk as a function of process time.

3. Kinetics of microbial growth

Microbial growth kinetics can be represented using various models namely Monod model, Logistic model, Andrew model, Moser model, Tessier model, etc (Muthuvelayudham R and Viruthagiri T 2006; Narasimha G *et al.* 2006).

3.1. Monod model

Most fungal fermentation studies were performed using a growth limiting substrate to control the microbe. A limiting substrate material which was used to change concentration, affects the growth of organism, substrate consumption, and formation of endoglucanase. Mathematical models such as Monod's explained the limiting substrate concentration, which has detailed explanation on the specific growth rate. Monod model described the growth of two parameters. Since growth of fungal species was an effect of catabolic and anabolic enzyme behavior, these processes i.e., substrate utilization process or growth associated product formation process, can also be quantitatively described based on cell growth models.

$$\frac{dx}{dt} = \frac{\mu_{\max} s x}{k_s + s} \quad (8)$$

3.2. Logistic model

The growth kinetics of microorganisms in the logarithmic phase which attains stationary phase was explained by the logistic model and the population growth with the assumption that inhibition is proportional to the square of the microbial concentration (x). This was given by.

$$\frac{dx}{dt} = kx(1 - \beta x) \quad (9)$$

The constant terms k and β were logistic constants. The sigmoidal logistic curve leads a stationary population of size $x = 1/\beta$. Hence, it can be given that, higher the value of β , low value of the stationary phase concentration obtained. Mathematical modeling and simulation studies from experimental data based on the logistic models find an important tool in the design of kinetic studies for its implementation and control (Pandey A *et al.* 2000; Marulasiddaiah R *et al.* 2012). In fermentation processes involving various microbial populations, the performance and behavior of the tool depend not only on the cell growth characteristics of the individual microbial species but also on the interaction patterns among them. Kinetic studies of mixed microbial fermentation in batch mode of operation and process schemes can be developed only through better understanding of the interaction of species and development of suitable microbial models (Kavitha S *et al.* 2020; Sasikumar E and Viruthagiri T, 2008; Dhanasekar R and Viruthagiri T, 2005). During mixed culture operations, the growth of all fungal species depends on not only the environmental surroundings and the available nutrients for each fungal species but also on the interaction among them.

logistic curve was explained by using Riccati equation.

$$X = \frac{X_0 e^{kt}}{1 - \beta' X_0 (1 - e^{kt})} \quad (10)$$

3.3. Other models

$$\text{Andrew} \frac{dx}{dt} = \frac{\mu_{\max} s x}{k_s + s + s^2 / k_i} \quad (11)$$

$$\text{Tessier} \mu = \mu_{\max} \left(1 - e^{-s/k_s} \right) \quad (12)$$

$$\text{Moser} \mu = \mu_{\max} \left(1 + K_s^{-1} \right) \quad (13)$$

4. Model evaluation of growth kinetics

Monod model, Logistic model are tried for representing the experimental data obtained with *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture of *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* using mixed substrate (Kamaluddeen, S.Y and Madika 2023; Nawaz S *et al.* 2006). A better prediction of biomass concentration in the log phase regime is obtained using the logistic model. The logistic constants were estimated using MATLAB 7.1 and the values were given in **Table 1**. The comparisons between experimental and predicted data for the three models were portrayed in **Figure 6**. And the values shown in **Table 7**.

Percentage Error is calculated using the following equation.

$$\text{Error} = \frac{\sqrt{(\text{Predicted} - \text{Experimental})^2}}{\text{Experimental}} \quad (14)$$

The average error was found to be minimum for mixed culture compared to monocultures. The average errors for

the *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture were found to be 11.9103, 8.800425 and 5.2285 percentages respectively. It is evident from the **Table 1** that the value of k is maximum and the value of β is minimum for the mixed culture when compared to the monocultures. This reflects the experimental observation

that the mixed culture growth was more than the single. The maximum specific growth rate of *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture were found to be 0.02421, 0.0325 and 0.0375 h⁻¹ respectively. Also, they are shown in **Figure 5**.

Table 1. Experimental design of central composite for four factors and the production of endoglucanase from mixed culture.

Run	Coded Levels				Real variables				Endoglucanase activity (U/ml)	
	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	^a X ₁	^b X ₂	^c X ₃	^d X ₄	Exp	Pred
1	1	-1	-1	-1	40	4.5	72	3	128.45	126.79
2	-1	1	-1	1	25	5.5	72	5	185.05	191.63
3	1	-1	1	1	40	4.5	120	5	135.25	133.56
4	-1	1	1	-1	25	5.5	120	3	141.02	140.69
5	1	1	-1	1	40	5.5	72	5	135.26	134.80
6	0	0	0	0	35	5	96	4	146.65	147.37
7	0	2	0	0	35	6	96	4	141.09	146.52
8	2	0	0	0	45	4.5	96	4	134.85	136.81
9	-1	-1	-1	-1	30	5	72	3	144.25	144.00
10	0	0	0	0	35	5	96	5	146.65	147.37
11	0	0	0	0	35	5	96	5	146.65	147.37
12	0	0	0	2	35	5.5	96	6	129.65	130.20
13	-1	1	-1	-1	30	5	72	3	138.12	139.23
14	0	0	0	-2	35	5.5	96	2	132.05	132.54
15	1	1	1	-1	40	5	120	5	145.25	144.51
16	-2	0	0	0	25	5	96	4	145.26	144.34
17	0	0	0	0	35	5	96	4	146.65	147.37
18	0	0	0	0	35	4.5	96	4	146.65	147.37
19	1	-1	1	-1	40	5.5	120	3	129.35	129.29
20	-1	1	1	1	30	5	120	5	135.01	136.09
21	0	0	0	0	35	5	96	4	146.65	147.37
22	0	0	2	0	35	5.5	144	4	140.65	141.39
23	1	1	-1	-1	40	4.5	72	3	135.56	135.54
24	-1	-1	1	-1	30	5	120	3	139.12	138.97
25	0	0	-2	0	35	4.5	48	4	135.12	135.43
26	-1	-1	1	1	30	5.5	120	5	137.85	137.39
27	1	1	1	1	40	4.5	120	5	146.65	147.37
28	-1	-1	-1	1	30	5.5	72	5	140.25	140.40
29	1	-1	-1	1	40	4	72	5	129.21	129.06
30	0	-2	0	0	35	5	96	4	131.53	133.11

Table 2. CCD coefficients values for endoglucanase production from mixes culture

Term constant	Coefficient	Estimation Coefficient	t-statistics	P-value
Constant	146.650	0.4022	364.605	0.000
X ₁	-1.881	0.2172	-8.661	0.000
X ₂	1.861	0.2172	8.568	0.000
X ₃	1.490	0.2172	6.861	0.000
X ₄	-0.585	0.2172	-2.691	0.016
X ₁ *X ₁	-1.517	0.1990	-7.625	0.000
X ₂ *X ₂	-2.454	0.1990	12.330	0.000
X ₃ *X ₃	-2.060	0.1990	-10.351	0.000
X ₄ *X ₄	-3.819	0.1990	-19.189	0.000
X ₁ *X ₂	3.381	0.2660	12.707	0.000
X ₁ *X ₃	1.878	0.2660	7.060	0.000
X ₁ *X ₄	1.467	0.2660	5.514	0.000
X ₂ *X ₃	1.618	0.2660	6.082	0.000
X ₂ *X ₄	-0.751	0.2660	-2.821	0.012
X ₃ *X ₄	0.499	0.2660	1.877	0.079

$R^2 = 0.984$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.971$

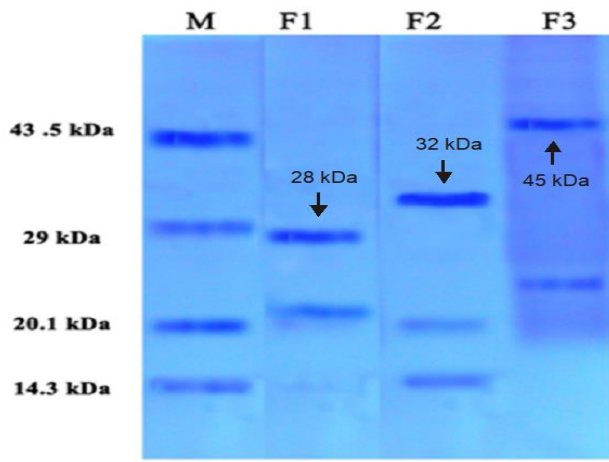


Figure 4. SDS – PAGE Analysis of the purified endoglucanase

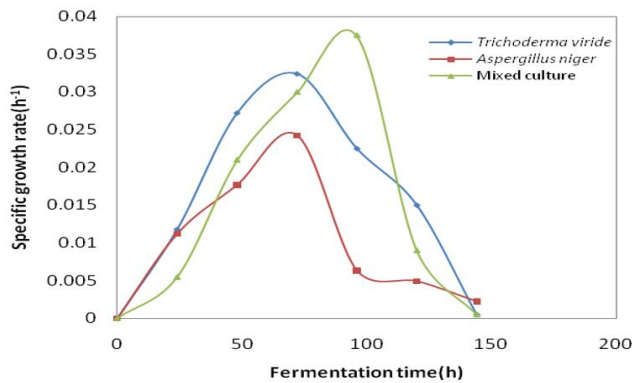


Figure 5. Specific Growth rate for Mixed and Monocultures

4.1. Substrate utilization kinetics of endoglucanase production

Fungal growth involves consumption of mixed substrates, which supply energy and raw materials required for the synthesis of additional biomass (Immanuel G *et al.* 2006; Robert M R *et al.* 2018; Elumalai S and Thangavelu V 2010). The general purpose in making a culture medium

Table 3. ANOVA analysis for the quadratic polynomial model of endoglucanase production from mixed culture.

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom(DF)	Sum of squares(SS)	Mean square(MS)	F-value	P-value
Regression	14	1176.60	84.043	74.21	<0.001
Linear	4	229.59	57.399	50.69	<0.001
Square	4	618.38	154.595	136.51	<0.001
Interaction	6	328.62	54.770	48.36	0.004
Error	16	18.12	1.132	-	-
Lack-of-Fit	10	18.12	1.812	-	-
Pure Error	6	0.00	0.000	-	-
Total	30	1194.71	-	-	-

Table 4. Logistic constant for *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture.

Microorganisms	Logistic constants		
	k (h ⁻¹)	β (ml/mg)	R ²
<i>Trichoderma viride</i>	0.0303	0.0495	0.9191
<i>Aspergillus niger</i>	0.0315	0.0448	0.9583
Mixed culture	0.0312	0.0476	0.97521

Table 5. Substrate utilization kinetics constants for *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture.

Microorganisms	Substrate utilization kinetics constants	
	Y _{xs}	% Error
<i>Trichoderma viride</i>	0.2855	6.5415
<i>Aspergillus niger</i>	0.2933	9.3681
Mixed culture (<i>T.viride</i> and <i>A.niger</i>)	0.2601	8.8004

was to maintain growth and high production rates. In this process excessive concentration of a nutrient can inhibit or even poison microbial growth and disrupt the normal biochemical processes of the cells. The cell growth was controlled by limiting the amount of one nutrient in the medium.

A mass balance equation on limiting substrate that couples to the cell mass balance since substrate concentration depends on substrate concentration. In the substrate balance, the yield factor Y_{x/s} equation becomes,

$$Y_{x/s} = \frac{\text{Weight of Cells formed}}{\text{Weight of Substrate consumed}} \quad (15)$$

It has been obtained often that the total amount of biomass formed by growth is proportional to the weight of substrate (carbon source, energy source or oxygen) used. The yield factor Y_{x/s} was defined as

$$Y_{x/s} = \frac{\Delta X}{\Delta S} \quad (16)$$

It should be noted that yield factor has dimensional units implied by the units used for cell amount and substrate amount (Sudhakar P and Nagarajan P 2010).

The substrate balance for batch culture is given as

$$\frac{ds}{dt} = -\frac{1}{Y_{XS}} \frac{dx}{dt} \quad (17)$$

The Y_{xs} values of *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture were calculated using the plot of x vs s for the three cases are found to be 0.2855, 0.2933 and 0.2601 respectively. The theoretical substrate concentrations are found to be in close approximation with the experimental values and the average error was found to be minimum (%) for mixed culture compared to monocultures. Experimental and predicted values of substrate concentration were presented in Table 3,4 and 5.

4.2. Product formation kinetics on endoglucanase production

The simplest types of product formation kinetics arise when there was simple stoichiometric connection between product formation and substrate utilization of cell growth. The number of products formed by the cell growth was often proportional to the amount of consumption of substrate (Karmakar M and Ray RR 2011; Zhang Y *et al.* 2010; Jahangeer S *et al.* 2005).

In this case, product formation occurs late in the log phase (approaching the stationary phase). Leudeking- Piret kinetic model was used to combine both cell growth associated (α) and non-cello growth associated (β) contributions:

$$r_{jp} = \alpha r_{jx} + \beta x \quad (18)$$

This two-parameter kinetic model has proved in fitting of endoglucanase product formation data of different fermentation processes (Xu P 2020; Chellapandi P and Jani HM 2008; Duncan SM 2006). The equation represents the energy used for the growth and maintenance. The above equation can be written as

$$\frac{dp}{dt} = \alpha_{LP} \frac{dx}{dt} + \beta_{LP} x \quad (19)$$

Since the endoglucanase production is growth associated and produced during growth phase, β value is negligible, it almost zero. Hence the equation becomes,

$$\frac{dp}{dt} = \alpha_{LP} \frac{dx}{dt} \quad (20)$$

In such case α becomes the yield coefficient Y_{PX}

$$Y_{PX} = \frac{\text{weight of product formed}}{\text{Increase in weight of cell mass}} \quad (21)$$

The Y_{PX} values of *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture were calculated using the plot of p vs x for the three cases is found to be 6.5051, 5.6092 and 9.9631 respectively and the predicted and experimental error values were found to be 10.3383, 13.3510 and 8.6234 respectively. The average error is minimum for mixed culture compared to monocultures (Dror TW *et al.* 2005; Parry N J *et al.* 2002). Experimental and predicted values of product concentration for single and mixed cultures are shown in **Table 3**, **Table 4** and **Figure 2**. This indicates Leudeking Piret model is more suitable for predicting the endoglucanase production using mixed culture. Since the above equations are nonlinear and difficult to solve using simple integration, they are solved using the numerical integration applying Runge – Kutta's method. The predicted values of the substrate, microbial and product are simulated using this integration with ODE solver in MATLAB14 software (Muhammad I *et al.* 2016; David H 2016). The comparisons between the experimental and simulated values for each of the three cases were presented in **Table 7** and **Figure 6(a, b, c)**.

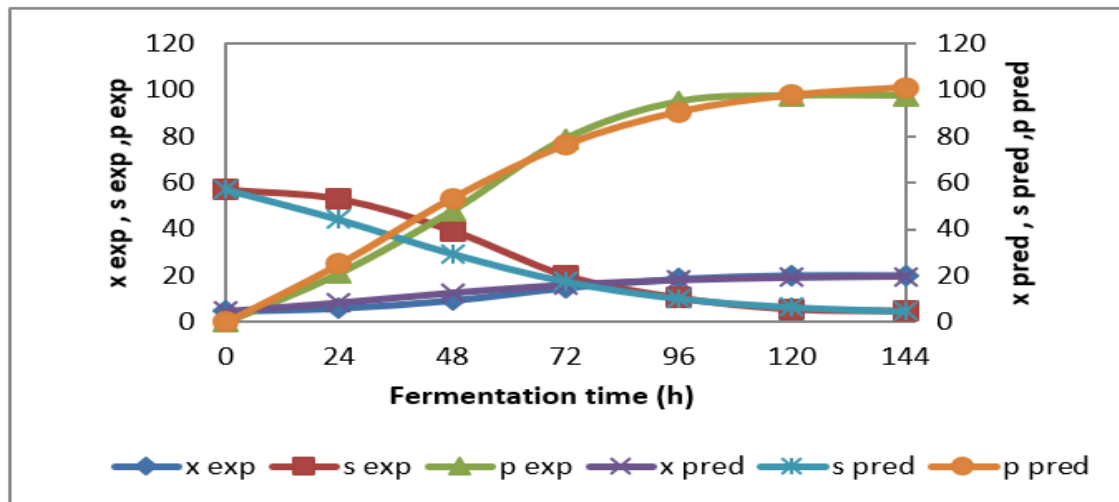
Table 6. Leudeking Piret model constants for *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed culture

Microorganisms	Leudeking Piret constants	
	Y_{PX}	% Error
<i>Trichoderma viride</i>	6.5051	10.3383
<i>Aspergillus niger</i>	5.6092	13.3510
Mixed culture (<i>T.viride</i> and <i>A.niger</i>)	9.9631	8.6234

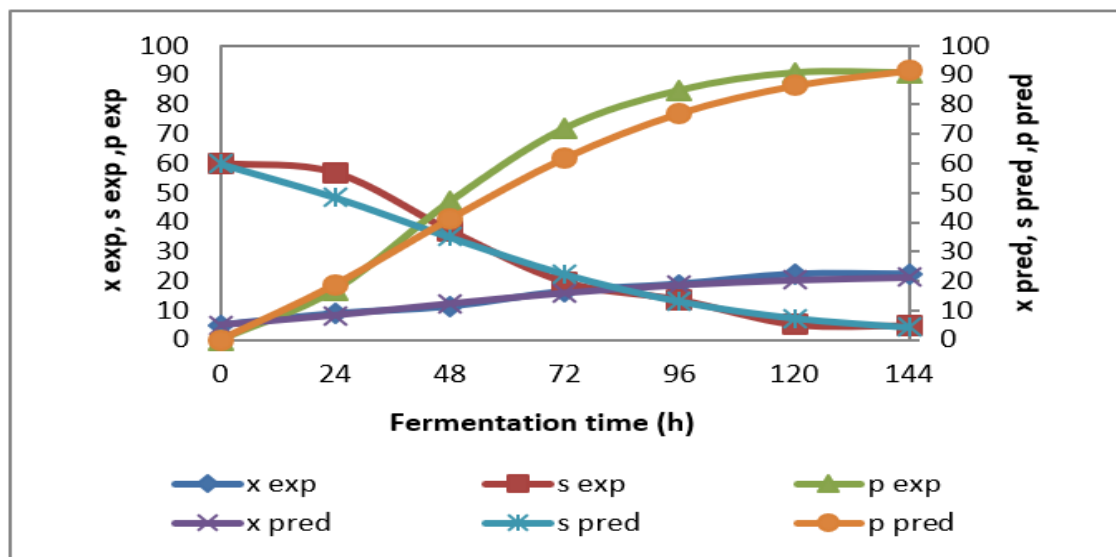
Table 7. Experimental and predicted values for cell concentration(x), substrate concentration(s), and endoglucanase concentration (p) for *Aspergillus niger*, *Trichoderma viride* and mixed culture

	Time	cell concentration(x)		substrate concentration(s)		Product (Endoglucanase) concentration(p)	
	(Hrs)	x exp	x pred	s exp	s pred	p exp	p pred
T.viride	0	4.7	4.7	57	57	0	0
	24	6	8.3858	53	44.0931	21	24.9375
	48	9.3	12.5847	39.3	29.3898	48	53.3456
	72	14.7	15.9928	20	17.4555	79	76.4038
	96	18.5	18.0771	10.4	10.1565	95	90.5062
	120	20	19.1381	5.5	6.4412	97.5	97.6846
	144	20	19.6254	4.7	4.7349	97.5	100.9813
A.niger	Time(hrs.)	x exp	x pred	s exp	s pred	p exp	p pred
	0	5.02	5.02	60	60	0	0
	24	8.9	8.3659	56.8	48.5884	17	18.7676
	48	11.3	12.3485	37.2	35.0051	47	41.1067
	72	16.5	16.0442	19.7	22.4003	72	61.8367
	96	18.9	18.7623	13.6	13.1299	85	77.0829
	120	22.3	20.4383	5.2	7.4137	91	86.4837
Mixed culture (T.viride and A.niger)	144	22.3	21.3601	4.8	4.299	91	91.654
	Time(hrs.)	x exp	x pred	s exp	s pred	p exp	p pred
	0	5.7	5.7	60	60	0	0
	24	6.9	9.1491	55	46.7417	33	34.3633
	48	12.6	12.9224	35.9	32.2366	78	71.9579
	72	16.5	16.1341	20	19.891	115	103.9557
	96	19.2	18.3339	15.5	11.4348	125	125.8729
	120	21	19.6255	6.3	6.47	145	138.7408
	144	21	20.3146	5.5	3.8209	145	145.6085

(a)



(b)



(c)

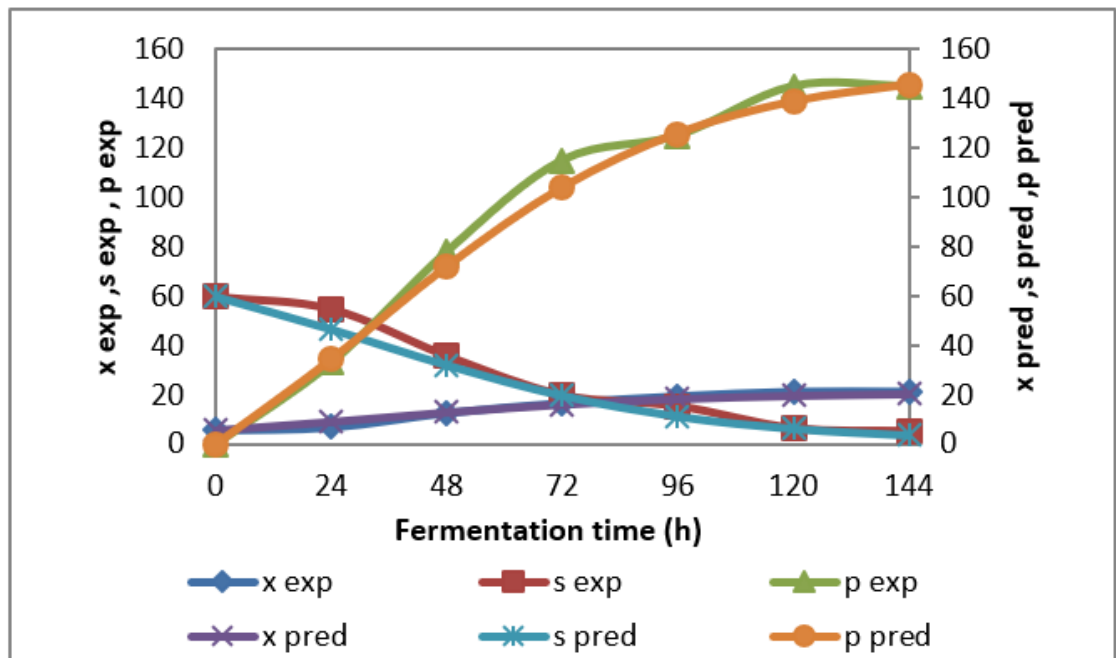


Figure 6 (a,b,c). The comparative study between the experimental and predicted values of concentration(x), substrate concentration(s), and product (endoglucanase) concentration(p).

5. DS – PAGE analysis of the purified endoglucanase from *Trichoderma viride*, *Aspergillus niger* and mixed cultures

(SDS-PAGE) method for determining the molecular weight (MW) of an unknown protein. The gel was then analyzed to obtain the R_f values for all band. The distance should be measured from the top of the resolving gel to the band. A plot of log MW versus R_f was generated from the bands in the gel shown in Appendix -IV to determine the MW of the unknown protein. The simplest method for this is to base the MW determination on a standard curve. Analysis of SDS –PAGE for endoglucanase showed that the molecular weight from *Trichoderma viride* was found to be 27 kDa, *Aspergillus niger* was found to be 31 kDa and mixed culture was found to be 32 kDa.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, our study revealed significant insights into endoglucanase production by the mixed culture of *Aspergillus niger* and *Trichoderma viride*. The utilization of 5% rice bran in the medium led to an impressive production level of 142.21 U/ml, while a similar concentration of wheat bran yielded slightly lower at 140.65 U/ml. Remarkably, the highest endoglucanase activity of 145.35 U/ml was achieved when utilizing a mixed substrate of rice bran and wheat bran in a 4:1 ratio (RB: WB), under optimized conditions of 35°C temperature, pH 5.0, 2 ml inoculum size, 200 rpm agitation speed, and a 96-hour fermentation period. These findings underscored the superior potential of mixed substrate combinations over single substrates for endoglucanase production. Furthermore, the utilization of both rice bran and wheat bran in conjunction with a mixed culture demonstrated enhanced enzyme activity compared to monoculture scenarios. The kinetics of endoglucanase production for both *Aspergillus niger* and *Trichoderma viride*, along with the mixed culture, were thoroughly examined. Modelling of endoglucanase production using single and mixed cultures provided valuable insights into growth kinetics, product formation kinetics, and substrate utilization kinetics, paving the way for future research endeavours in this domain.

Nomenclature

K	-	Constant
K_s	-	Monod constant
P	-	Product concentration (U/mL)
S	-	Cellulose concentration, (mg/mL)
T	-	Time (hrs)
X	-	Cellmass concentration, (mg/mL)
X_0	-	Initial concentration, (mg/mL)
X_m	-	Maximum concentration, (mg/mL)
X_s	-	Concentration in the Stationary phase, (mg/mL)
$Y_{x/s}$	-	Yield coefficient (cell mass)
$Y_{p/s}$	-	Yield coefficient (product)

Greek symbols

α	-	Cell growth associated parameter (mg _p /mg _x)
β	-	non-cell growth associated parameter (mg _p /mg _x h)
μ	-	Specific growth rate, (h ⁻¹)
μ_0	-	initial growth rate, (h ⁻¹)
μ_m	-	Maximum growth rate, (h ⁻¹)

Abbreviations

X	–	Cell mass concentration, (mg/mL)
P	–	Concentration of endoglucanase (U/mL)
C	–	Concentration of Substrate, (mg/mL)
CMC	–	Carboxyl Methyl Cellulose

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