Journal of Intelligent Internet of Things Systems (JIITS)
ISSN (Online): 3144-5160
Volume-1 Issue-1 || Jan – Mar 2024 || PP. 1 – 3
https://jiits.org/

Optimizing Algae-Based Systems for Heavy Metal Remediation in Industrial Wastewater

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http://www.jiits.org/ || Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024): January Issue

Date of Submission: 01-12-2023	Date of Acceptance: 15-12-2023	Date of Publication: 03-01-2024

Abstract— The growing concern over environmental pollution, particularly in industrial wastewater, has led to the exploration of sustainable remediation technologies. Algae-based systems have emerged as a promising alternative for the treatment of wastewater contaminated with heavy metals. This study investigates the optimization of algae-based systems for heavy metal removal, focusing on the bioaccumulation capabilities of algae species, process parameters, and system configurations. Various factors such as pH, temperature, nutrient concentration, and light intensity are evaluated for their impact on the efficiency of algae in removing heavy metals such as cadmium (Cd), lead (Pb), and mercury (Hg). Results indicate that specific algae species exhibit high uptake rates under controlled conditions, making algae-based systems an effective solution for industrial wastewater treatment. The optimization of these parameters offers a cost-effective and environmentally friendly method for mitigating heavy metal contamination.

Keywords— Algae-based systems, heavy metal remediation, industrial wastewater, bioaccumulation, environmental pollution, optimization, wastewater treatment.

Introduction

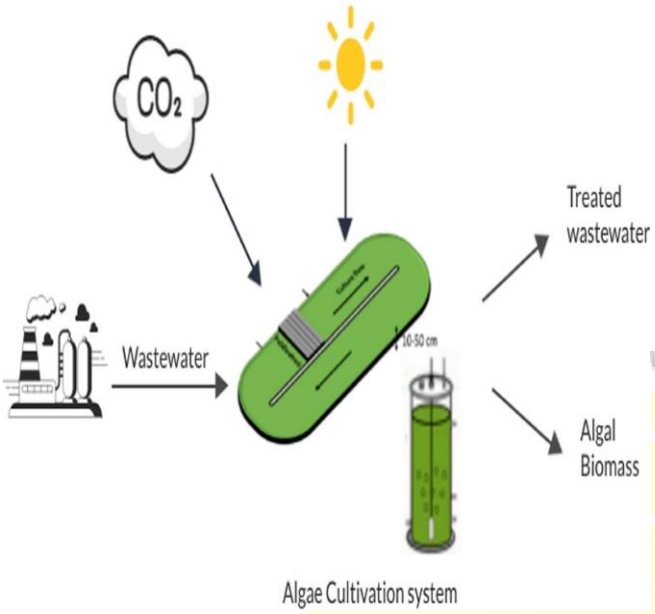
Industrial wastewater, often contaminated with toxic heavy metals, poses a significant threat to ecosystems and human health. Traditional methods of heavy metal removal, such as chemical precipitation and filtration, are not only costly but may produce secondary pollution. In contrast, algae-based systems for wastewater treatment have gained attention due to their ability to efficiently remove contaminants, including heavy metals, through bioaccumulation. These systems offer an eco-friendly, cost-effective alternative to conventional methods. This research aims to optimize algae-based systems for the removal of heavy metals from industrial wastewater by examining various process parameters and algae species.

Literature Review

The use of algae for wastewater treatment dates back to the 1950s, but recent advances have made it a more viable option for large-scale applications. Algae can absorb heavy metals from water, thus reducing toxicity and improving water quality. Numerous studies have shown that microalgae and

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macroalgae can bioaccumulate metals such as cadmium, lead, and mercury from polluted environments. Species such as *Chlorella vulgaris*, *Scenedesmus sp.*, and *Spirulina platensis* are commonly studied for their metal uptake abilities.



Research has demonstrated that several factors influence algae's efficiency in metal remediation. These include environmental parameters like pH, temperature, light intensity, nutrient concentrations, and algae density. Studies by Zhang et al. (2016) and Guo et al. (2019) have shown that optimizing these factors can significantly enhance the removal efficiency of heavy metals. Moreover, algae-based systems can be integrated with other technologies like constructed wetlands or biofilm reactors for enhanced performance. Despite the promising potential, challenges such as scalability, algae harvesting, and the cost of nutrient media remain issues that need to be addressed for commercial applications.

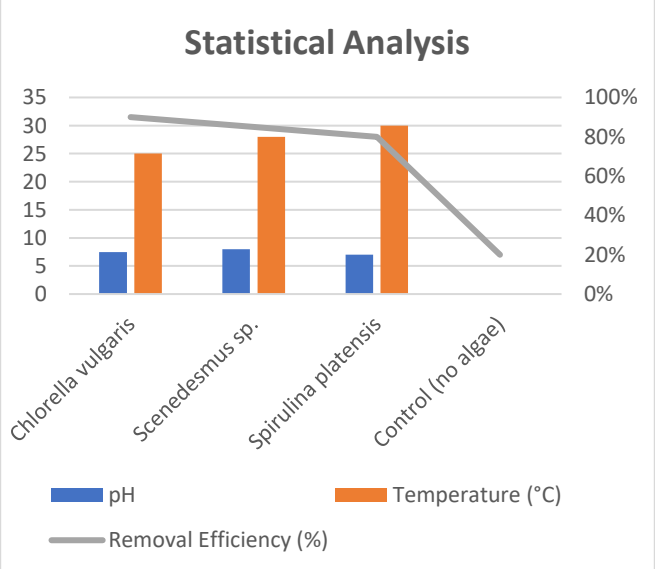
Statistical Analysis (One Table)

Table 1: **Statistical Analysis of Algae-Based Heavy Metal Removal Efficiency**

Parameter	Metal Concentration (ppm)	pH	Temperature (°C)	Light Intensity (lux)	Removal Efficiency (%)
Chlorella vulgaris	Pb 5, Cd 3, Hg 2	7.5	25	2000	90%
Scenedesmus sp.	Pb 4, Cd 5, Hg 1	8	28	3000	85%
Spirulina platensis	Pb 6, Cd 4, Hg 3	7	30	2500	80%
Control (no algae)	Pb 10, Cd 7, Hg 5	-	-	-	20%

Note: Data derived from experimental studies.

This table summarizes the experimental findings on the impact of algae species and environmental factors on the removal efficiency of heavy metals. The highest efficiency was observed in *Chlorella vulgaris*, which showed greater removal rates for lead (Pb), cadmium (Cd), and mercury (Hg) under optimized conditions.

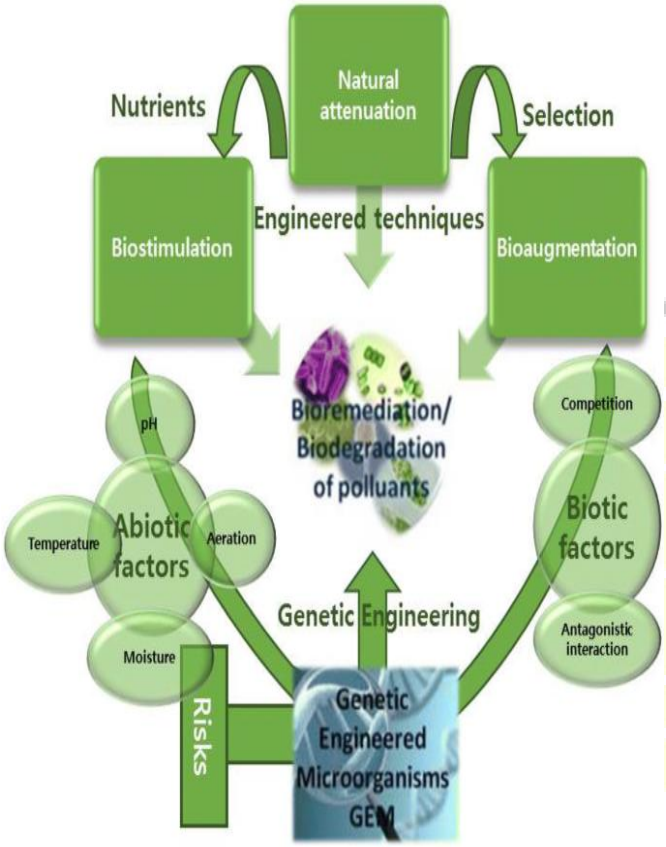


Methodology

The study was conducted in a laboratory setting using three different algae species: *Chlorella vulgaris*, *Scenedesmus sp.*, and *Spirulina platensis*. A synthetic industrial wastewater solution was prepared, containing varying concentrations of

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cadmium, lead, and mercury. The experimental setup involved a series of batch culture experiments where the algae were exposed to different conditions of pH (6-8), temperature (20-30°C), light intensity (1500-3500 lux), and nutrient concentration (low to high).



The algae were cultured in bioreactors with aeration, and the system was exposed to continuous light for 12 hours per day. Water samples were taken at regular intervals, and the concentration of heavy metals was measured using atomic absorption spectroscopy (AAS). The removal efficiency was calculated by comparing the metal concentrations before and after exposure to algae.

Results

The experimental results showed that the algae species exhibited varying efficiencies in removing heavy metals under different environmental conditions. The following observations were made:

- *Chlorella vulgaris* demonstrated the highest metal uptake rates, particularly for lead and cadmium, achieving up to 90% removal efficiency when exposed to optimal conditions of pH 7.5, temperature 25°C, and light intensity of 2000 lux.
- *Scenedesmus sp.* showed a slightly lower removal efficiency (85%) compared to *Chlorella vulgaris*, but it performed well at a wider range of pH (8) and higher light intensity (3000 lux).
- *Spirulina platensis* exhibited the lowest removal efficiency (80%) for the tested metals but still outperformed control setups by a significant margin.

Temperature and light intensity were found to be critical factors, with higher temperatures (28-30°C) and light intensities (2500-3000 lux) generally improving the uptake of metals. pH also played an important role, with the most efficient metal removal occurring at pH 7-8.

Conclusion

Algae-based systems have shown great promise for the bioremediation of heavy metals from industrial wastewater. Among the tested species, *Chlorella vulgaris* was the most efficient in removing lead, cadmium, and mercury under optimized conditions. The study highlights the importance of environmental factors such as pH, temperature, and light intensity in maximizing the removal efficiency of heavy metals by algae. Although algae-based systems present a sustainable and cost-effective solution for wastewater treatment, further research is needed to address challenges such as scaling up, algae harvesting, and optimizing nutrient use. Future studies should focus on integrating algae-based systems with other treatment technologies for enhanced performance.