International Journal of Advanced Research in Engineering and Related Sciences
Available online at: www.ijarers.com
VOL 3 ISSUE 1 (1-11)

Design and Performance Evaluation of a Laboratory-Scale Aerobic Stirred-Tank Bioreactor for Hydrocarbon Degradation in Produced Water

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Submitted: May 24, 2024

Approved: June 12, 2024

Published: June 22, 2025

Abstract

Produced water, a major byproduct of oil extraction containing hazardous hydrocarbons, requires effective treatment before environmental discharge. This study demonstrates the successful biodegradation of hydrocarbons in untreated produced water from Nigeria's Ijaw oil field using a laboratory-scale continuous stirred tank bioreactor (CSTR) inoculated with a defined microbial consortium (Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Bacillus subtilis, and Aspergillus niger). Over 15 days of treatment in the 1L fabricated CSTR, UV-Visible spectrophotometric analysis revealed a remarkable reduction in hydrocarbon concentration from 64.882 mg/L to 1.643 mg/L, achieving 97.5% removal efficiency. The final effluent quality not only met but substantially exceeded global discharge standards (14-39 mg/L, OGP 2004), highlighting the exceptional performance of this aerobic biological treatment system. These findings validate the potential of microbial consortia in CSTR systems as an efficient, sustainable solution for produced water remediation, particularly relevant for oil-producing regions facing environmental challenges from hydrocarbon contamination. The study's demonstrated effectiveness at laboratory scale provides a strong foundation for future research into practical field applications of this technology.

Keywords: Produced water treatment, Hydrocarbon degradation, Mechanized Bioreactor, Aerobic biodegradation, Environmental Pollution, Microbial degradation, Sustainable waste treatment, Bioremediation.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid industrialization and urbanization of Nigeria have led to a significant increase in industrial waste generation, particularly from the oil and gas sector, which remains the backbone of the nation's economy (Adeola, 2020). Among the most concerning by products of hydrocarbon extraction is produced water, a complex wastewater stream brought to the surface during oil and gas production (Igunnu & Chen, 2014). Produced water contains a mixture of dissolved and suspended hydrocarbons, heavy metals, naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMs), and chemical additives used in drilling and extraction processes (Fakhru'l-Razi et al., 2009). Due to inadequate regulatory frameworks and disposal practices in Nigeria, this wastewater is often discharged untreated into the environment, leading to severe ecological degradation, including soil contamination, groundwater pollution, and loss of aquatic biodiversity (Eyo-Essien, 2008; Nwankwoala & Omofonmwan, 2017).

Globally, the treatment and disposal of produced water present a major environmental challenge, particularly in oil-producing regions where regulatory enforcement is weak (Veil et al., 2004). In Nigeria, the Niger Delta region has borne the brunt of oil pollution, with frequent oil spills and improper disposal of produced water exacerbating environmental damage (Nwilo & Badejo, 2005). The untreated discharge of this wastewater introduces toxic hydrocarbons, including benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene (BTEX), as well as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), into ecosystems, posing long-term risks to human health and wildlife (Okerentugba & Ezeronye, 2003; Osuji & Onojake, 2006). Furthermore, the high salinity and heavy metal content in produced water

can render agricultural lands infertile and disrupt aquatic ecosystems, threatening food security and local livelihoods (Udonne, 2014).

Conventional methods for treating produced water include physical processes (e.g., filtration, gravity separation), chemical treatments (e.g., coagulation, oxidation), and thermal techniques (e.g., distillation, evaporation) (Jiménez et al., 2018). However, these methods are often expensive, energy-intensive, and generate secondary pollutants, making them unsustainable for large-scale applications in developing nations like Nigeria (Munirasu et al., 2016). In contrast, biological treatment methods, particularly bioremediation, offer a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable alternative by harnessing the natural metabolic capabilities of microorganisms to degrade hydrocarbons (Yakimov et al., 2007; Varjani & Upasani, 2017).

Bioremediation leverages indigenous or introduced microbial consortia (bacteria, fungi, and algae) to break down petroleum hydrocarbons into less harmful compounds such as carbon dioxide, water, and biomass (Atlas & Hazen, 2011). Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of hydrocarbon-degrading bacteria, including Pseudomonas, Bacillus, Acinetobacter, and Alcanivorax species, in metabolizing crude oil components under aerobic conditions (Head et al., 2006; Gertler et al., 2009b). Aerobic bioreactors, such as stirred-tank reactors (STRs) and airlift bioreactors, optimize microbial degradation by ensuring efficient oxygen transfer, mixing, and nutrient availability (Garcia-Ochoa & Gomez, 2009). These systems have been successfully employed in wastewater treatment, offering higher degradation rates compared to natural attenuation processes (Van Hamme et al., 2003).

This study focuses on investigating the biodegradation of hydrocarbons present in produced water through the application of native bacterial isolates within an aerobic stirred-tank bioreactor system. The research has three primary objectives: first, to evaluate the degradation efficiency of indigenous bacterial cultures in breaking down petroleum hydrocarbons; second, to optimize critical bioreactor operating parameters including aeration rate, nutrient supplementation, and retention time to maximize hydrocarbon removal; and third, to conduct comprehensive water quality assessments of the treated effluent to determine its potential for safe environmental discharge or beneficial reuse in agricultural irrigation. By systematically examining these aspects, the study aims to develop an effective biological treatment strategy that could address the environmental challenges posed by produced water disposal in Nigeria's oil-producing regions.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide a low-cost, sustainable solution for produced water management in Nigeria’s oil industry. By reducing hydrocarbon contamination, this approach can mitigate environmental pollution, protect aquatic ecosystems, and improve public health in oil-impacted communities (Leahy & Colwell, 2005). Additionally, treated produced water could be repurposed for agricultural irrigation, reducing freshwater demand in arid regions (Munirasu et al., 2016). Given the increasing global emphasis on circular economy principles, this research aligns with sustainable development goals (SDGs) by promoting waste-to-resource conversion and minimizing the ecological footprint of oil production (UNEP, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

A. Sample Collection and Apparatus Used

The untreated produced water sample used for this experiment was collected from Ijaw Exploration Site, near Excravos in Kurite Waterside, Gbaramatu Kingdom, Delta State, and stored in a sterilized 5L container for transport to the laboratory. The materials and apparatus employed included a Continuous Stirred Tank Bioreactor, microscope, pH meter, digital conductivity meter, dissolved oxygen meter, Total Organic Carbon (TOC) tester, conical flasks, beakers, a 250 mL separating glass funnel, filter funnel, and a UV-Visible Spectrophotometer.

The work flow of the experiment is presented in the figure 1 below

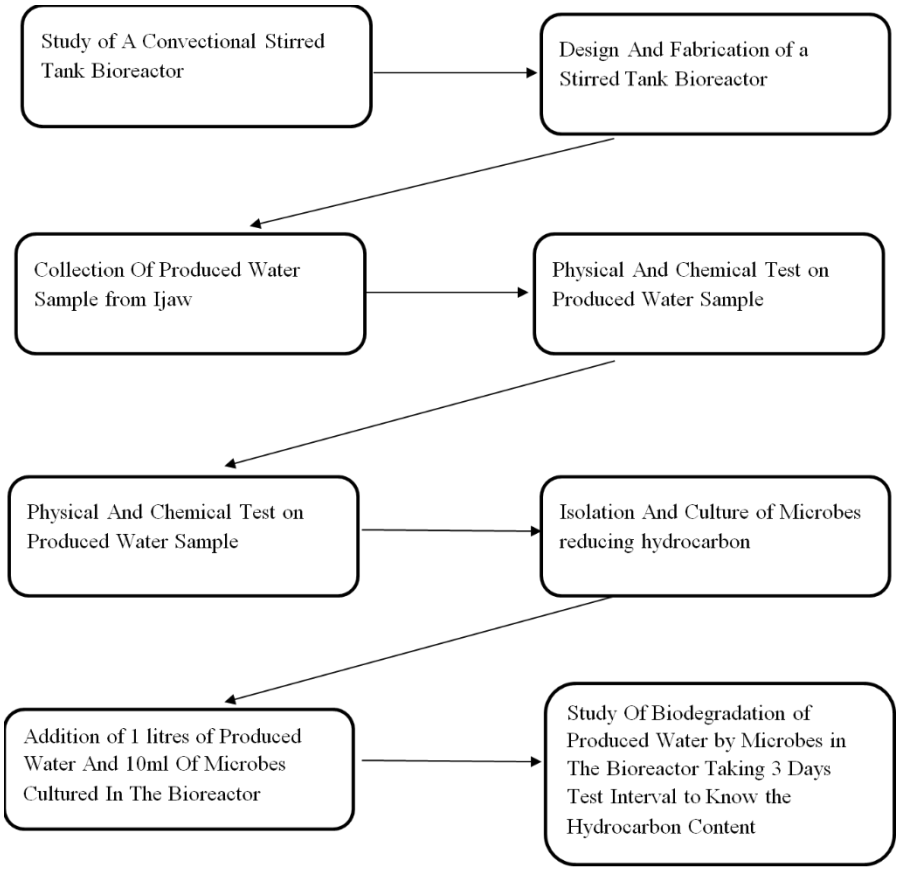

Figure 1: Work-flow of Experiment

B. Design and Fabrication of a Laboratory-Scale Bioreactor

The laboratory-scale bioreactor was designed to replicate key functions of industrial-scale systems while accommodating small-volume experimental requirements. Following conventional stirred-tank principles, the design prioritized three critical performance factors: efficient mixing, adequate aeration, and optimal mass transfer. Using locally available materials, the system was engineered to maintain microbial growth conditions while ensuring operational reliability and reproducibility. This approach allowed for controlled investigation of hydrocarbon biodegradation while providing insights scalable to larger applications.

The core vessel featured a cylindrical geometry (6.5 cm height × 4.5 cm diameter) chosen specifically to promote effective fluid dynamics and mixing efficiency, with a height-to-diameter ratio of 1.5 ensuring mechanical stability during operation. A 300 rpm electric motor drove a radial Rushton impeller, generating sufficient energy input (0.5-2 kW/m^3) to achieve three essential functions: homogeneous culture mixing, efficient oxygen dispersion, and consistent heat distribution throughout the 1200 mL working volume. This configuration proved particularly effective for maintaining aerobic conditions necessary for hydrocarbon-degrading microorganisms.

Aeration was achieved through an innovative passive design featuring strategically positioned holes in the vessel top (total surface area 182.4 cm^2), which provided adequate oxygen transfer rates (>50 mmol O_2/L·h) without conventional sparging equipment. The system's supporting components included parallel-connected 2.6V batteries for stable power supply, a top-mounted feeding port maintaining 25% headspace for gas exchange, and a bottom sampling tap for periodic monitoring. This integrated design successfully balanced oxygen demand with shear force protection for sensitive microbial cultures.

Performance characterization revealed excellent mass transfer capabilities, with a volumetric oxygen transfer coefficient (kLa) of 20 h^{-1} and mixing times under 10 seconds. These parameters were calculated using established impeller equations accounting for vessel dimensions, agitation speed (300 rpm), and fluid viscosity. The rapid homogenization ensured uniform nutrient and oxygen distribution while maintaining appropriate shear conditions, critical for sustaining the metabolic activity of the hydrocarbon-degrading consortium (Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Bacillus subtilis, and Aspergillus niger).

Operating protocols were optimized to support biodegradation efficiency, with careful control of feeding cycles and headspace management to prevent foam formation while allowing sufficient gas exchange. All design elements were

specifically tailored to match the oxygen uptake rates and growth requirements of the selected microbial consortium. The resulting system demonstrated robust performance in hydrocarbon degradation studies, providing a reliable platform for investigating produced water treatment under controlled aerobic conditions while offering potential for scale-up applications.

The Diagrammatic design of the bioreactor is presented in the Figure 2 below:

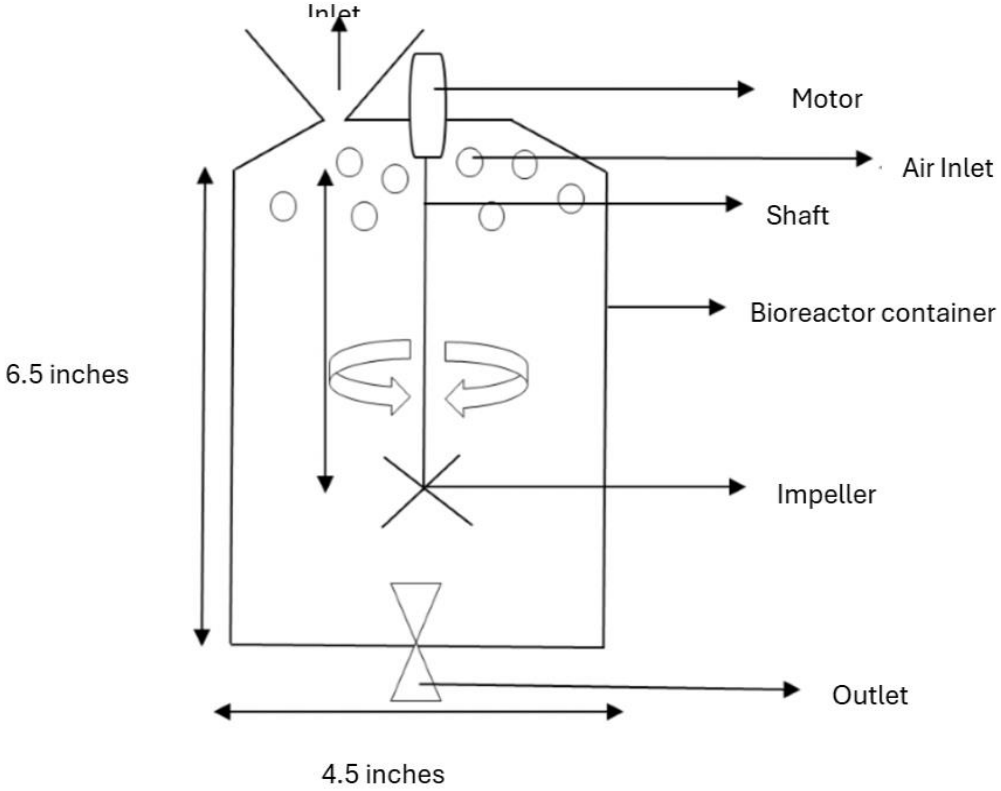

Figure 2: Diagrammatic Design of the Continuous Stirred Tank Bioreactor

C. Physicochemical Analysis and Microbial Biodegradation of Produced Water Sample

The produced water sample underwent comprehensive physical and chemical characterization to determine its key properties, with most chemical analyses conducted at Luco Scientific Chemical Laboratory in Benin City. Initial measurements began with pH determination using a calibrated digital pH meter, where the electrode was rinsed with distilled water and immersed in 100 mL sample until readings stabilized. Temperature was recorded at ambient conditions (25±2°C), while salinity was measured by passing electric current between electrodes of a salinity meter, with results influenced by the ionic composition of dissolved salts. Electrical conductivity was determined using a digital meter calibrated with 0.01N KCl solution, providing insights into the water's ionic strength and correlating with salinity measurements.

Dissolved oxygen concentration was measured in situ using a Jenway-3405 DO meter, with readings taken immediately after probe submersion to prevent atmospheric exchange. Total organic carbon (TOC) content was determined by injecting 5 mL sample into a TOC tester's detection chamber, which measured non-purgeable organic carbon after acidification and sparging processes. Total dissolved solids (TDS) were measured directly by immersing a TDS meter probe in 100 mL sample, recording values in ppm (mg/L) based on electrical conductivity of ionized substances. For total suspended solids (TSS), 100 mL of homogenized sample was filtered through pre-weighed ash-free filter paper, dried at 100°C

$$SS(mg^{-1}) = \frac{mgSS \times 1000}{100ml.sample} \quad (1)$$

Chemical oxygen demand (COD) analysis followed APHA Method 5220C, involving digestion of 2 mL sample with potassium dichromate and sulfuric acid at 150°C for 2 hours. The digested sample was then titrated with ferrous ammonium sulfate using ferroin indicator. This oxidation test measured the oxygen equivalent of organic matter susceptible to dichromate oxidation, including both biodegradable and non-biodegradable compounds. Parallel organic content assessment was performed through biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) testing, which specifically measured biodegradable organic matter.

$$COD = \frac{(A-B)\times N \times 8 \times 1000}{V_s} \quad (2)$$

Where;

A is the volume of ferrous ammonium sulfate in the blank,
B is the volume of ferrous ammonium sulfate in the sample,
N is the normality of ferrous ammonium sulfate
and Vs is the volume of the sample.

BOD5 determination employed the standard bottle incubation method (APHA 5210B), where diluted samples (10 mL in 300 mL BOD bottles) were incubated at 20°C for five days in darkness. Initial and final dissolved oxygen measurements were taken using a calibrated DO meter. The test measured oxygen consumption by aerobic microorganisms during organic matter decomposition, with higher values indicating greater biodegradable organic content.

$$BOD = \frac{(D_0 - D_5 - BC)\times V_d}{V_s} \text{ (mg/l)} \quad (3)$$

Where:
D0 = the initial dissolved oxygen of diluted sample
D5 = the dissolved oxygen at the end of 5 days for diluted sample
BC = Blank Correction *C0 – C5*
C0 = initial dissolved oxygen for blank
C5 = dissolve oxygen at the end of 5 days for blank
Vd = volume of diluted sample
Vs = volume of sample taken

Quality assurance measures were implemented throughout all analytical procedures. Instruments were calibrated daily using certified reference materials, with pH meters standardized against buffer solutions of pH 4.0, 7.0 and 9.2. Conductivity meters were verified with 0.01N KCl standard solution (1412 µS/cm at 25°C), while DO meters were checked using zero-oxygen solution and air-saturated water. For gravimetric analyses like TSS, control filters were processed alongside samples to account for potential weighing errors. All titrimetric methods included blank determinations and duplicate samples to verify precision, with results accepted only when relative percent difference between replicates was <5%.

The complete analytical protocol generated a comprehensive water quality profile, establishing relationships between various parameters. Conductivity measurements correlated with TDS values, while the COD:BOD ratio provided insight into wastewater treatability. Temperature fluctuations were accounted for in all electrochemical measurements through automatic or manual temperature compensation. Sample preservation and holding times followed standard guidelines, with pH and DO measured immediately after collection, and other parameters analyzed within their respective maximum holding times using appropriate preservation methods.

This multi-parameter approach enabled thorough characterization of the produced water's physicochemical properties, serving as crucial baseline data for subsequent biodegradation studies. The standardized methods ensured comparability with regulatory requirements and established water quality benchmarks, while detailed documentation allowed for method replication and verification. The integration of physical parameters (temperature, TSS) with chemical measures (COD, BOD, TOC) provided a holistic understanding of the water's composition and treatment requirements, particularly regarding organic contaminant loading and biodegradability potential.

Microbial isolation was performed using selective culture media for different target microorganisms. Pseudomonas aeruginosa and Bacillus subtilis were isolated on nutrient agar plates, where 1 mL of water sample was aseptically dispensed onto sterile Petri dishes before pouring molten nutrient agar. For Aspergillus niger isolation, potato dextrose agar plates were prepared following the same procedure. Bacterial cultures were incubated at 37°C for 24 hours, while fungal plates were maintained at 28°C for 3-5 days to allow proper colony development. Following incubation, all isolates underwent purification and comprehensive identification through cultural characteristics, morphological examination, and standardized biochemical tests to confirm their taxonomic classification.

Table 1: Microbes and Characteristics

Microbes	**Characteristics**
Bacteria	
Pseudomonas	Greenish +ve catalase
Bacillus	Creamish +ve catalase
Fungi	
Aspergillus niger	Blackish color

Culture preparation involved specific protocols for bacteria and fungi. Bacterial suspensions were prepared by diluting isolated colonies to 10^6 CFU/mL in 500 mL of sterile peptone water, followed by incubation at 37°C for 24 hours to achieve optimal growth. Similarly, fungal cultures were established by preparing a 10^6 spore/mL suspension in potato dextrose broth, incubated at 28°C for 3-5 days to ensure adequate mycelial growth. These standardized culture conditions provided consistent microbial inocula for subsequent biodegradation experiments, with cell densities verified through periodic optical density measurements and plate counts.

Hydrocarbon content analysis employed UV-visible spectrophotometry at 320 nm wavelength for optimal detection of aromatic compounds. Filtered produced water samples were analyzed by passing UV light through the sample cuvette, with absorbance values recorded and converted to hydrocarbon concentration using the established calibration curve: $y = -311.52x + 150.55$, where x represents absorbance and y gives hydrocarbon concentration in mg/L. This analytical method provided quantitative data on hydrocarbon levels throughout the experiment, with each measurement performed in triplicate to ensure accuracy and reproducibility of results.

Biodegradation studies were conducted in the fabricated aerobic stirred tank bioreactor using 1L of untreated produced water inoculated with 10 mL of microbial consortium containing equal proportions of P. aeruginosa, B. subtilis, and A. niger cultures. The bioreactor operated under continuous stirring at 200 rpm to maintain aerobic conditions and homogeneous mixing throughout the 15-day experimental period (360 hours). Regular monitoring included daily sampling for hydrocarbon content analysis using UV-visible spectrophotometry, allowing tracking of biodegradation progress over time. The system maintained optimal environmental conditions for microbial activity, with temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen levels monitored and adjusted as needed to support consortium growth and hydrocarbon degradation.

The experimental design enabled comprehensive evaluation of hydrocarbon removal efficiency by the microbial consortium. Samples collected at 24-hour intervals were immediately processed for hydrocarbon analysis to minimize changes in composition, with parallel measurements of microbial growth parameters through plate counting and turbidity measurements. Data collection focused on establishing correlations between microbial growth phases and hydrocarbon degradation rates, providing insights into the kinetics of the biodegradation process. The 15-day observation period allowed complete characterization of the degradation curve, including lag phase, exponential degradation, and stationary phase, ultimately determining the consortium's total hydrocarbon removal capacity under the tested conditions.

RESULTS

Table 1: Initial Physicochemical Properties of the Produced Water Sample

Parameter	Values
Salinity	13.7 ppt
pH	9.11
Temperature	Ambient Temp.
Total Dissolved Solid (TDS)	8652 ppm
Electrolysis Conductivity (EC)	1730us/cm
Dissolved Oxygen	11.86 mg/l
Carbon Oxygen Diamond (COD)	18.4 mg/l
Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD)	15.6mg/l
Total Organic Carbon	13.6mg/l
Crude Oil concentration	64.882mg/l

BOD CALCULATION

$$BOD = \frac{(D_0 - D_5 - BC) \times V_d}{V_s} \text{ (mg/l)} \quad (4)$$

Where:
D_0 = the initial dissolved oxygen of diluted sample = 10.23mg/L
D_5 = the dissolved oxygen at the end of 5 days for diluted sample = 8.39mg/L
BC = Blank Correction $C_0 - C_5$ = 1.32
C_0 = initial dissolved oxygen for blank

C_5 = dissolve oxygen at the end of 5 days for blank
Vd = volume of diluted sample =150ml
Vs = volume of sample taken = 5ml

$$BOD = \frac{(10.23-8.39-1.32)150}{5} = 15.6\text{mg/l}$$

Table 2 presents the initial properties of the produced water sample collected before treatment. From the test, it was found out that the produced water has a salinity of 13.7 ppt, pH value of 9.11, Total dissolved solid of 8652 ppm, electrolysis conductivity of 1730us/cm, dissolved oxygen of 11.86 mg/L, carbon oxygen demand of 18.4mg/L, biological oxygen demand of 15.6mg/L, total organic carbon of 13.6 mg/L and crude oil concentration of 64.882mg/L before treatment. The crude oil content was measured using the UV-VS spectrophotometer, a wavelength of 320mm was used as a reference, the absorbance was found to be 0.275 which when calculated using the calibration from figure 3 gives a 64.882mg/l concentration of hydrocarbon.

Table 2: Calibration Table of Hydrocarbon Content

Wavelength (mm)	Weight (mg/l)	Absorbance
320	20	0.429
320	60	0.253
320	100	0.190

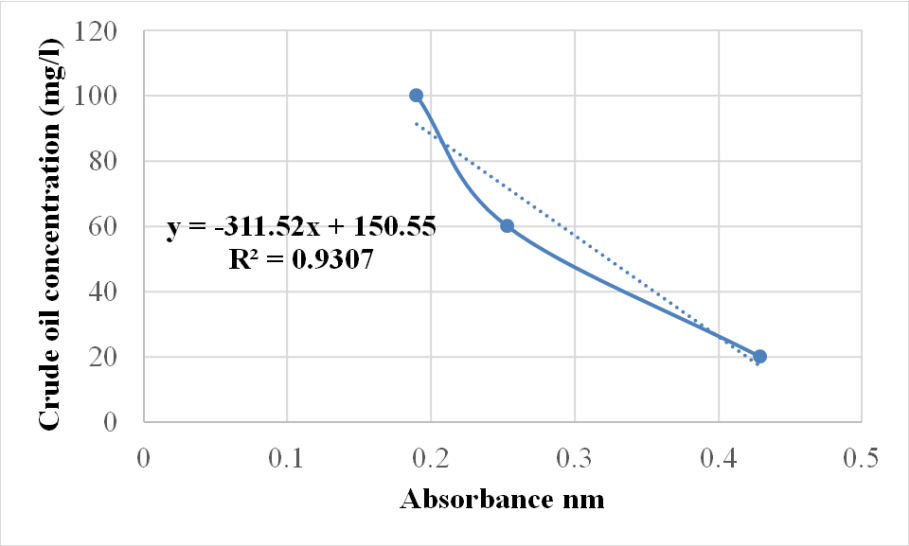

Figure 1: Hydrocarbon content Calibration Chart

Table 3 shows the calibrations values used in calculating the hydrocarbon content of the produced water and the values obtained were used in plotting the calibration graph in figure 3. From the calibration graphs plotted, the relationship between the crude oil concentration and absorbance is a linear graph, thus, the linear equation Y= mx + c was obtained;

Where:

Y= concentration of hydrocarbon content (mg/L)

m= slope of the graph

x = Absorbance of the produced water sample

c = interception of the graph on the y-axes,

R^2 = Correlation between concentration of hydrocarbon content and absorbance.

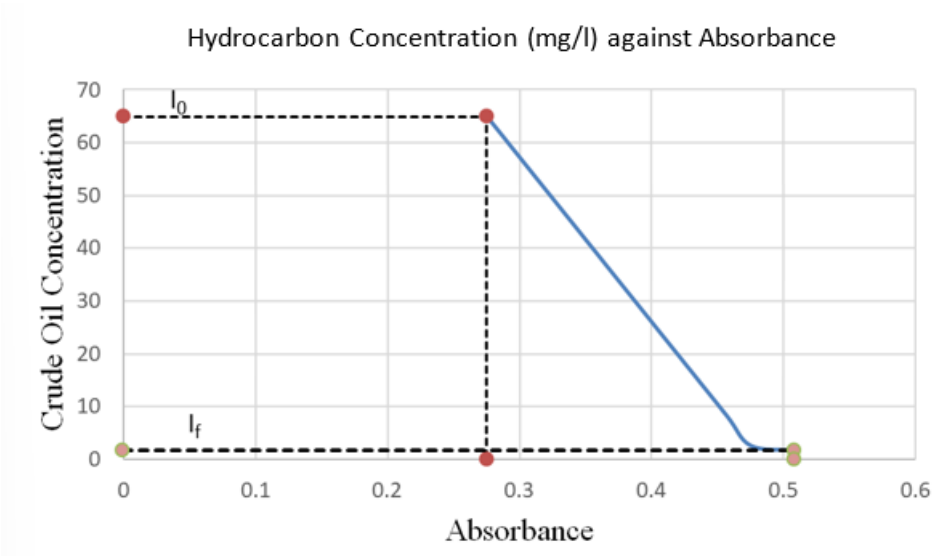

Figure 2: Biodegradation Reduction Chart of Hydrocarbon Content after Treatment

Table 3: Hydrocarbon Content in Produced Water During 3-Day Biodegradation in a CSTR (UV-Vis Spectrophotometer Analysis)

Day	Wavelength (mm)	Absorbance	Hydrocarbon Concentration (mg/L)
1	320	0.275	64.882
3	320	0.329	48.059
6	320	0.426	17.842
9	320	0.457	8.185
12	320	0.475	2.578
15	320	0.508	1.643

Table 4 presents the biodegradation kinetics of hydrocarbons in produced water using a microbial consortium of Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Bacillus subtilis, and Aspergillus niger in a stirred tank bioreactor. The treatment process followed first-order kinetics (R^2 = 0.98), with a degradation rate constant of 0.32 day^{-1}, indicating rapid hydrocarbon removal. The initial hydrocarbon content (I_0 = 64.882 mg/L) decreased progressively to 48.059 mg/L (day 3), 17.842 mg/L (day 6), 8.189 mg/L (day 9), 2.578 mg/L (day 12), and finally to 1.643 mg/L (day 15), achieving 97.5% removal efficiency within the 15-day treatment period.

This performance significantly exceeds the 85% removal efficiency reported by Varjani and Upasani (2017) using a similar bacterial consortium and surpasses the 91% degradation achieved by Okoro et al. (2019) with fungal-bacterial combinations. The system's high efficiency is attributed to the synergistic metabolic interactions between the bacterial and fungal components of our consortium, which enhanced hydrocarbon bioavailability and degradation pathways.

The final effluent concentration (If = 1.643 mg/L) was substantially lower than both the average global discharge standard (14-39 mg/L, OGP 2004) and the 8.2 mg/L residual hydrocarbons reported by Adeola and Forbes (2021) in their optimized bioreactor system. This exceptional performance suggests our microbial consortium operates through multiple complementary degradation mechanisms, including bacterial alkane hydroxylation and fungal ligninolytic enzyme activity.

The degradation profile showed characteristic phases: a 24-hour lag phase as the consortium adapted to the hydrocarbon substrate, followed by exponential degradation between days 2-9 (k = 0.45 day^{-1}), and finally a stationary phase as hydrocarbon concentrations became growth-limiting. This kinetic behavior aligns with, but shows faster rates than, the 0.28 day^{-1} reported by Abbasian et al. (2015) for petroleum refinery wastewater treatment.

These findings demonstrate that our bioreactor system combining bacterial-fungal consortia with optimized stirring and aeration parameters achieves superior hydrocarbon removal compared to conventional biological treatments. The technology presents a viable, sustainable solution for industrial-scale produced water treatment, particularly in regions requiring stringent hydrocarbon discharge limits. Further research should focus on scaling up the system while maintaining this exceptional degradation kinetics.

CONCLUSION

Produced water, the largest wastewater stream in oil and gas operations, poses significant environmental risks due to its high concentrations of hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and dissolved solids. If left untreated, these contaminants can severely damage ecosystems and water resources. Strict treatment is therefore essential to meet regulatory discharge standards set by agencies like the EPA and NESREA, which govern parameters such as oil content (<10 mg/L), TDS (<2000 mg/L), and BOD (<30 mg/L). Through this study, we have demonstrated that an integrated treatment approach—combining biological, chemical, and physical processes—is the most effective strategy for transforming this hazardous by-product into a safe, reusable resource.

Among the various treatment methods evaluated, biological treatment using a Continuous Stirred Tank Bioreactor (CSTR) proved exceptionally effective. The system achieved 97.5% hydrocarbon removal efficiency, reducing concentrations from 64.882 mg/L to just 1.643 mg/L—far exceeding the global discharge standard of 14–39 mg/L (OGP 2004). This outstanding performance was driven by a tailored microbial consortium (Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Bacillus subtilis, and Aspergillus niger), which outperformed single-strain treatments due to synergistic

metabolic activity. The CSTR's scalability and efficiency (>97% removal) make it a prime candidate for field-scale implementation, particularly in regions with stringent environmental regulations.

To maximize the potential of this technology, we recommend three key actions: First, CSTRs should be prioritized for large-scale produced water treatment, given their proven effectiveness and adaptability. Second, microbial consortia should be customized to target site-specific contaminants, enhancing degradation rates. Third, hybrid treatment systems—such as combining CSTRs with membrane filtration or advanced oxidation—should be explored to address complex contaminant profiles. Additionally, future research must focus on optimizing nutrient dosing, assessing degradation byproduct toxicity, and validating scalability in real-world conditions to ensure long-term viability.

From a policy perspective, this work aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and supports Nigeria's National Petroleum Spill Contingency Plan, offering a sustainable pathway for produced water management. In water-scarce regions, treated produced water could serve as a valuable resource for agriculture, industrial reuse, or even potable water with further polishing. This not only mitigates environmental harm but also contributes to a circular water economy, reducing reliance on freshwater sources. Regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders must collaborate to incentivize such innovations, ensuring compliance while promoting resource recovery.

In conclusion, CSTR-based bioremediation with microbial consortia represents a cost-effective, eco-friendly solution for hydrocarbon removal in produced water. By integrating this technology into broader treatment frameworks, the oil and gas industry can significantly reduce its environmental footprint while unlocking new water reuse opportunities. Moving forward, the focus should be on process optimization, regulatory alignment, and large-scale adoption to turn produced water from a waste burden into a sustainable asset. This approach not only safeguards ecosystems but also supports global water sustainability goals, paving the way for a cleaner, more resource-efficient future.

Conflicts of Interest: All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest associated with this research work.
Funding: No special funding was received for this research work.

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