

## Research Article

# Effect of different cobalt ( $\text{CoCl}_2$ ) concentrations on cell growth, some biochemical composition, and fatty acids profile of the marine microalga, *Tetraselmis subcordiformis*

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### Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the effects of cobalt concentration on cell growth, some biochemical composition, and fatty acids profile of the marine microalga *Tetraselmis subcordiformis*. Cobalt deprivations did not cause a considerable change in growth photosynthesis activity as compared to the control group. Induction of maximum lipid production was achieved using  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  of cobalt-deprived *T. subcordiformis*. The highest crude protein content ( $33.75 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) was observed in  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  cobalt. The highest and lowest lipid accumulation in *T. subcordiformis* was observed in  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  and  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  cobalt, respectively. Under cobalt deficient conditions, *T. subcordiformis* produced a large quantity of saturated fatty acids and iodine and saponification value. Biodiesel characteristics were enhanced with  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  reduction. Also, biodiesel quality decreased with increase of cobalt. The results showed that the maximum and minimum carotenoids were observed in  $0.1$  and  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  cobalt, respectively.

**Keywords:** Cobalt, Proximate composition, Fatty acids profile, Lipid, *Tetraselmis subcordiformis*

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## Introduction

Nowadays, microalgae have attracted considerable attention according to their specific features, like rapid growth rate, accumulation of high level of lipid, and high nutritional value (Mata *et al.*, 2010; Hosseini Shekarabi *et al.*, 2019).

Microalgae are capable of completing an entire growing cycle every few days, whenever sufficient amounts of sunlight, water, carbon dioxide, and nutrients are available (Liu *et al.*, 2008; Brennan and Owende, 2010). Due to the unique biochemistry of algae, they have been probed for several primary (e.g. protein, lipid, and carbohydrates) and secondary (e.g. carotenoids and alkaloids) metabolites (Liu *et al.*, 2008; Douskova *et al.*, 2009; Hadizadeh *et al.*, 2019). Alternative fuel sources such as biofuels have been extensively studied to break the restriction of fossil fuels. Environmental pollution leads to the release of sulfur emission through fossil fuels combustion, as bioremediation microalgae can put forward a promising substitute for petroleum products (Sharma *et al.*, 2012; Ghayal and Pandya, 2013; Ullah *et al.*, 2014). Earlier investigation on generating a large quantity of lipid content confirmed that the type of fatty acids and other biochemical compositions of algae have a prominent role in increasing oil for biodiesel production (Palit *et al.*, 1994; Sharma *et al.*, 2012; Elsalhin *et al.*, 2016; Sabzi *et al.*, 2018).

It has been stated that some factors, including nutrient stress, light intensity,

temperature, CO<sub>2</sub>, and salinity augment lipid accumulation of microalgae (Layer *et al.*, 2010; Rastar *et al.*, 2018). In this regards, cobalt (Co<sup>+2</sup>) as a combination of cyanocobalamin vitamin, is a necessary compound of numerous co-enzymes and enzymes (Elsalhin *et al.*, 2016). Also, this chemical element plays a prominent role in the photosynthesis process (El-Sheekh *et al.*, 2003). With increasing concentration of cobalt in the medium, the rate of cell volume and cell deviation is reduced linearly (Palit *et al.*, 1994).

Generally, heavy metals are essential at low concentration but they can be toxic at high concentration (Gholamiourimi and Soltani., 2014). Czerpak *et al.* (1994) stated that cobalt in concentration of  $5 \times 10^{-6}$  mol L<sup>-1</sup> induced growth phase in *Auxenochlorella pyrenoidosa* exponentially. Lustigman *et al.* (1995) demonstrated that growth of *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* significantly decreased at 20 ppm cobalt. *Tetraselmis sp* is considered to be an appropriate candidate for biofuel because of it's high biomass and starch content. Nevertheless, its biomass product depends not only on primitive nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen), but also on metals (iron, zinc, cobalt, manganese, copper, molybdenum, zinc), vitamins and other minerals (Dammak *et al.*, 2017).

*Tetraselmis subcordiformis* is suggested as a good candidate green microalgae species for biofuel because

of its high biomass and starch production. In this study, it is attempted to investigate the effect of cobalt on *Tetraselmis subcordiformis* growth, lipid accumulation, and biochemical compositions at different dosages. The object of this research was to examine tolerance of the mentioned microalgae to cobalt, and its capacity for production of pigment, and fluctuating the level of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) and saturated fatty acids (SFAs). The results of this study can be used for obtaining maximum microalgae biomass production, optimal lipid production, and determining the pollutant-forming chemistry of algae-derived biofuels.

## Materials and methods

### *Culture conditions*

The unicellular marine microalga, *T. subcordiformis*, was obtained from Persian Gulf Biotechnology Park (PGBP), Gheshm, Iran. All experiments were fulfilled in Zakariya Razi Laboratory Complex, IAU University, Tehran, Iran. *T. subcordiformis* was cultured in F/2 growth medium correspondent to Guillard *et al.* (1962), with the following ingredients (per liter), 6 mg Na<sub>2</sub>HPO<sub>4</sub> 2H<sub>2</sub>O, 75 mg NaNO<sub>3</sub>, 0.5 µg vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, 100 µg Thiamine HCl, 0.5 µg biotin, 10 mg Na<sub>2</sub>SiO<sub>3</sub> 9H<sub>2</sub>O, 3.16 mg FeCl<sub>3</sub> 6H<sub>2</sub>O, 4.4 mg Na<sub>2</sub>-EDTA, 21 µg ZnCO<sub>4</sub> 7H<sub>2</sub>O, 0.01mg CoCl<sub>2</sub> 6H<sub>2</sub>O, 70 µg CuSO<sub>4</sub> 5H<sub>2</sub>O, 7 µgNa<sub>2</sub>MoO<sub>4</sub> 2H<sub>2</sub>O and 0.18 mg MnCl<sub>2</sub> 4H<sub>2</sub>O. All of the chemicals were from Merck. *T. subcordiformis* strain was

grown in 50 mL medium in 100 mL flasks, at an optimum temperature of 25±1°C and under continuous illumination (84 µmol m<sup>-2</sup>s<sup>-1</sup>) from luminescent with white fluorescent lamps at pH 7. Cultures were continuously aerated to maintain constant CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the growing medium.

F/2 medium consisted of 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup> CoCl<sub>2</sub>. To ascertain the effect of various concentrations of CoCl<sub>2</sub> on growth and lipid content, the modified solution for experiments was prepared using the concentrations of 0.001, 0.01 (control), 0.1, 1.0 and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> CoCl<sub>2</sub>. The test flasks were incubated under the same illumination condition and temperature as those used for stock culture. The primary cell density of 5×10<sup>5</sup> cells mL<sup>-1</sup> was used for starting the experiments. Each experiment consisted of three replicates.

### *Growth measurement*

The biomass (dry weight, DW) was used to measure biomass concentration in microalgae cell suspensions spectrophotometrically at 680 nm (OD<sub>680</sub>) (UV-2501PC UV-VIS, Shimadzu). Then the OP<sub>680</sub> (OD<sub>680</sub>) level was multiplied with 0.38 (the coefficient conversion factor) to convert the OD<sub>680</sub> value to dry weight (Zhou *et al.*, 2013).

### *Extraction and estimation of pigments procedure*

The extraction procedure was performed according to Dammak *et al.* (2017), with

some modifications. 2 mL of culture was centrifuged at 5000×g for 10 min. Then, the pellet was suspended with 2 mL methanol (90%) and ethanol and sonicated at 65°C for 30 min. Afterward, the incubation was centrifuged at

5000×g for 5 min, and A<sub>666</sub>, A<sub>653</sub>, and A<sub>470</sub> were measured to determine chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), *b* and total carotenoid in days of 4, 6, 8, and 14 as presented by Eqs. 1-3:

$$\text{Chl } a \text{ (mg L}^{-1}\text{)} = 15.65 \times A_{666} - 7.340 \times A_{653} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Chl } b \text{ (mg L}^{-1}\text{)} = 27.05 \times A_{653} - 11.21 \times A_{666} \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Total carotenoid content} = [1000 (A_{470}) - 1.63 \text{ Chl } a - 104.96 \text{ Chl } b] / 221 \quad (3)$$

### *Protein and lipid contents*

A small mass of dried *T. subcordiformis* was selected for protein and lipid analysis at the end of the trial (14<sup>th</sup> day). Protein content was assayed by Zor and Selinger (1996) method. Lipids were extracted from the dried algae by methanol-chloroform extraction (Bligh and Dyer, 1959). Chloroform-methanol (2:1, v/v) was added to the dried cells, then ultrasonication was practiced to destroy cells, and then methanol and water were added to achieve the last solvent ratio of chloroform/methanol/water of 1:1:0.9. After 3-h standing, chloroform and aqueous methanol films were separated. The chloroform film with total lipids was washed with a 5 % NaCl solution and vaporized to dryness. Consequently, the total lipids were assayed gravimetrically (Bligh and Dyer, 1959).

### *Fatty acids profile*

Fatty acid methyl esters (FAMES) were corrected via acid transesterification. Concisely, lyophilized cells were produced with a solvent mixture of

toluene and 1 % sulphuric acid in methanol (1:2, v/v) at 50°C for creating FAMES, which were then extracted with hexane. The FAMES were assayed by utilizing an HP 6890 capillary gas chromatography (Hewlett-Packard, Palo Alto, CA) equipped with a flame ionization detector (FID) and capillary column (30m×0.32 mm) (Agilent, Inc., Wilmington, DE). Nitrogen was used as vector gas. The first column heat was set at 170°C, which was progressively increased to 230°C at 1°C min<sup>-1</sup>. The injector was held at 250°C with an injection volume of 2 µL under splitless mode. The FID heat was set at 270°C. FAMES were recognized by chromatographic correlation with reliable standards (Sigma).

### *Iodine value (IV)*

IV is a parameter that has been usually used by the vegetable oil industry to evaluate the degree of unsaturation or the number of double bonds in a molecule of oil (Lapuerta *et al.*, 2009). One aliquot of the algal lipid extract was used to determine iodine value

according to the European standard method EN 14111 and expressed as g I<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup>.

#### *Saponification number (SN)*

SN is one of the biodiesel quality indicators obtained from the equation 4 (Zhou *et al.*, 2013):

$$SN = \sum(560 \times N) / M$$

that N and M are fatty acid percentage, and molecular weight of each fatty acid, respectively.

$$SN = \sum(560 \times A_i) / MW_i \quad (4)$$

#### *Statistical analyses*

Results are exhibited as mean±standard deviation (SD) from three replicates. A one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's test was used to recognize differences between treatments. All comparisons were performed by SPSS software version 19.0 (SPSS, Chicago, USA). Also, differences were considered significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Results**

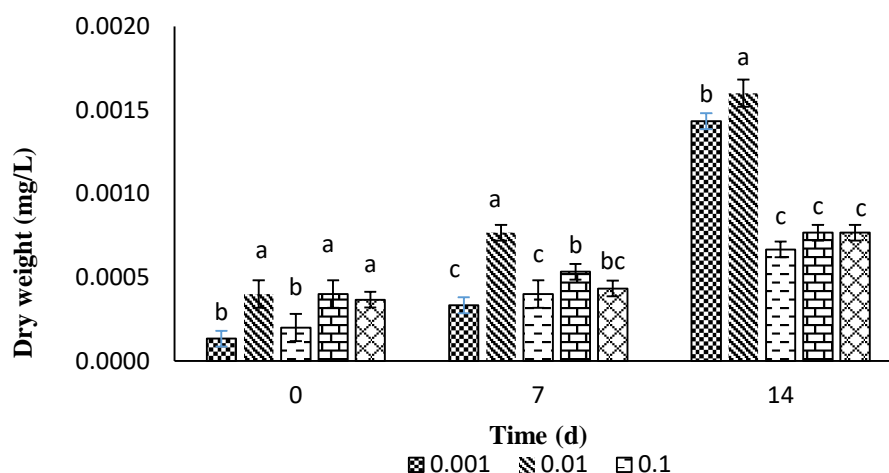
#### *The effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on the dry weight of T. subcordiformis*

The effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on dry weight of *T. subcordiformis* is presented in Figure 1. As can be seen, there were certain extents of Co<sup>+2</sup> effect on dry weight of *T. subcordiformis*. It was shown that dry weight of *T. subcordiformis* reached the maximum value (0.0016 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) when concentration of Co<sup>+2</sup> was 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup>. The experiment value was followed by the treatment with 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> in

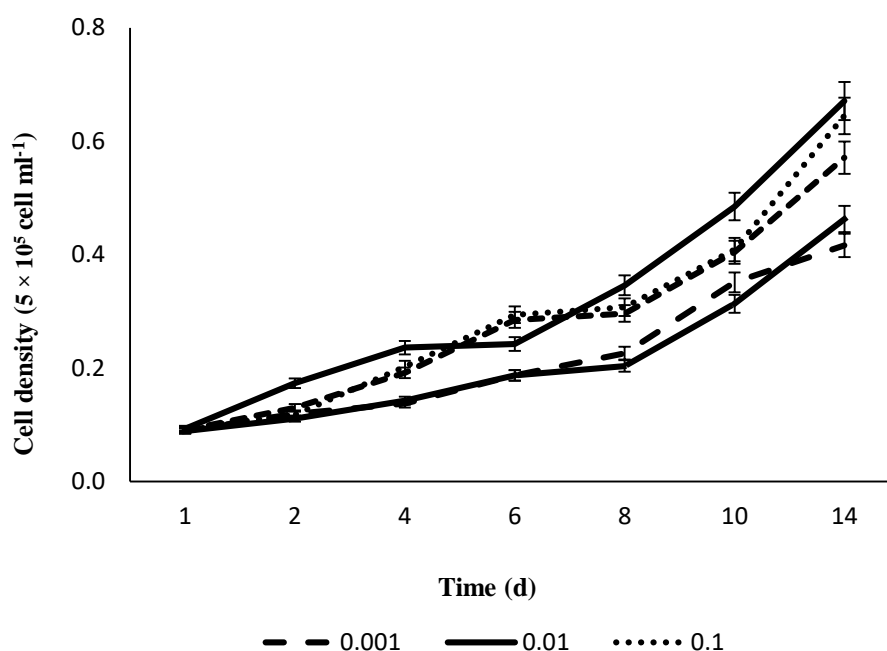
the 14<sup>th</sup> day. According to the results, the lowest dry weight (0.0007 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) was observed in the groups treated with 0.1, 1, and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> (Fig. 1).

#### *Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on the growth of T. subcordiformis*

The data shown in Figure 2 depict the response of growth parameters to Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations. There were significant differences in cell density of algal cells between control and treated ones when microalgae cells were exposed to different concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup>. It was found that lower and higher Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations could not promote the growth of microalgae. As can be seen in Figure 2, *T. subcordiformis* could grow under all experimental conditions, and the cells cultured in 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup> media (control) showed the highest cell density (0.67 cell mL<sup>-1</sup>) in the 14<sup>th</sup> day of incubation. The minimum cell density was observed in the group treated with 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> (0.42 cell mL<sup>-1</sup>).



**Figure 1:** Effect of Co<sup>2+</sup> concentrations on dry weight of *T. subcordiformis*. All points represent mean of the three individual replicates. Error bars show standard deviation.



**Figure 2:** Effect of Co<sup>2+</sup> concentrations on cell density of *T. subcordiformis*. Error bars show standard deviation.

#### Effects of Co<sup>2+</sup> on pigments content of *T. subcordiformis*

Figure 3 shows that the treatment with 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>2+</sup> led to a sharp decrease in Chl *a* content compared to the control.

Co<sup>2+</sup> concentration of 1 mg L<sup>-1</sup> slightly stimulated the Chl *a* content by 4.93 mg L<sup>-1</sup>. However, other manipulated cultures of Co<sup>2+</sup> concentrations led to reductions in Chl *a* biosynthesis. The

highest ( $5.13 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) and lowest ( $1.99 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) Chl *a* were observed in  $0.01$  and  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$ , respectively. A similar impact of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  on Chl *b* biosynthesis was also noted. The data presented in Figure 4 indicated that application of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  in different concentrations led to a

significant reduction Chl *b* content. The maximum ( $2.24 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) and minimum ( $1.23 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) Chl *b* contents were obtained in the groups treated with  $0.01$  (control), and  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$ , respectively.

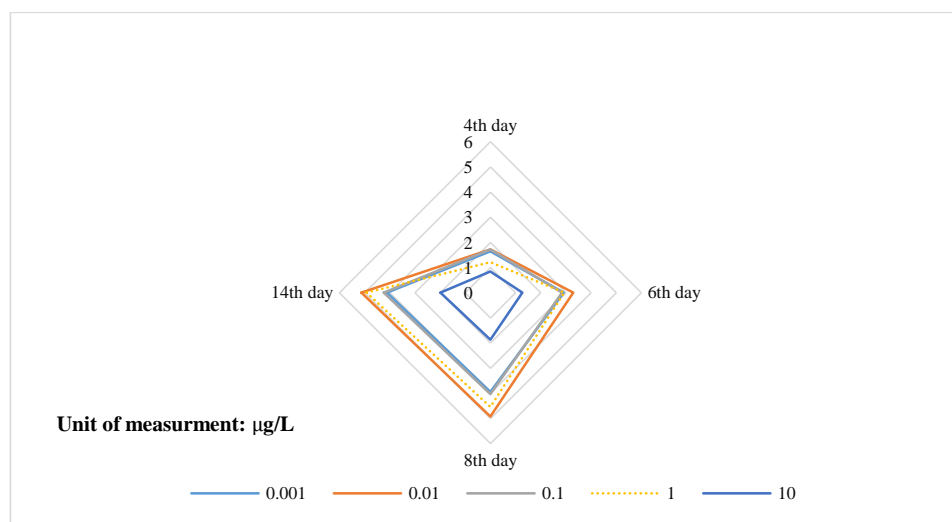


Figure 3: Effect of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentrations on Chl *a* of *T. subcordiformis*.

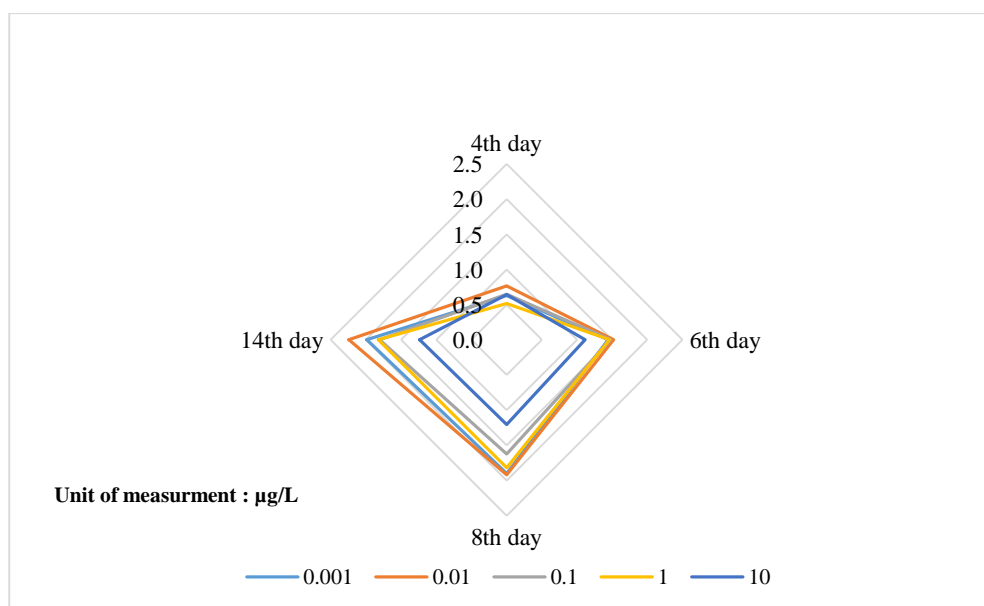
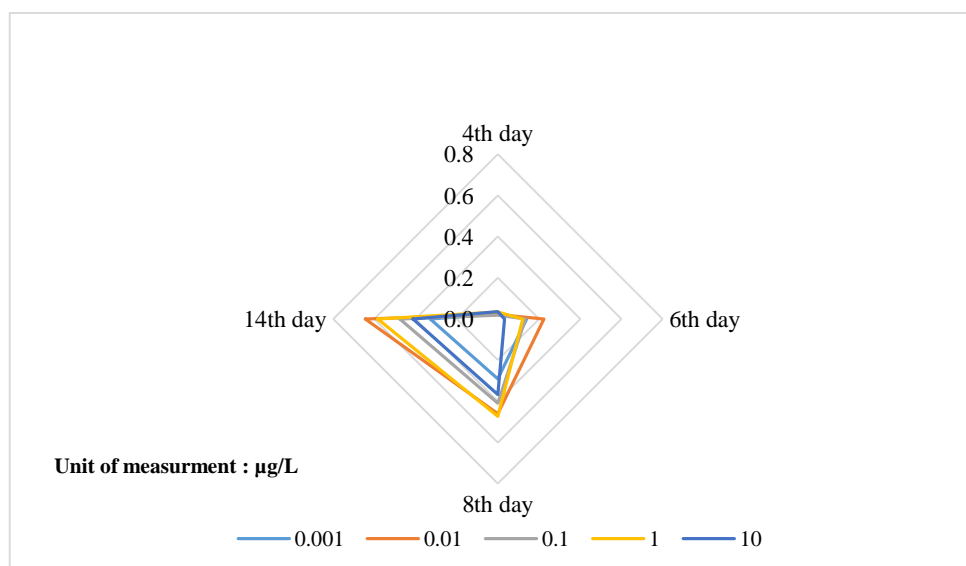


Figure 4: Effect of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentrations on Chl *b* of *T. subcordiformis*.

In carotenoids study adding 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> led to the maximum value (0.64 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) at the end of the incubation period. Also, the lowest Co<sup>+2</sup> concentration

(0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) resulted in the lowest carotenoid accumulation (0.32 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) during 14 days (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5:** Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on carotenoids of *T. subcordiformis*.

#### *Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on protein accumulation of T. subcordiformis*

The results obtained for protein content in *T. subcordiformis* revealed that the value of total protein content increased under the effect of 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> at the end of the experiment (14 days). On the contrary, excessive increases in Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations led to a reduction of protein content (Table 2). In this experiment, the lowest (16.85%) and highest (33.75%) protein contents were obtained in the treatments with 0.001 and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>, respectively.

#### *Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on lipid accumulation of T. subcordiformis*

The bioassay results shown in Table 1 indicated the distinct differences in lipid

contents of *T. subcordiformis* cells between the control and treated samples when the microalgae were exposed to different concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup>. The lipid content showed a marginal decrease in the cultures supplemented with higher concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup> (0.1, 1 and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup>). On the other hand, lower Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations significantly increased the lipid content. The results showed that low amounts of Co<sup>+2</sup> (0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) had a stimulatory effect on lipid content (22.59 %). The minimum lipid value (11.54 %) was observed in the samples which were incubated with 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> (Table 1).



**Table 1: Effects of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on proximate composition in *T. subcordiformis* harvested on 14-day.**

Proximate analysis (%)	Co <sup>+2</sup> concentration (mg L <sup>-1</sup> )				
	0.001	0.01	0.1	1	10
Protein	33.75±0.03 <sup>a</sup>	32.83±0.5 <sup>b</sup>	29.23±0.0 <sup>c</sup>	25.67±0.02 <sup>d</sup>	16.85±0.09 <sup>e</sup>
Lipid	22.85±0.03 <sup>a</sup>	21.23±0.16 <sup>b</sup>	19.16±0.01 <sup>c</sup>	15.09±0.03 <sup>d</sup>	11.5±0.37 <sup>e</sup>

Values in the same row with different superscripts represent significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ). All points represent mean  $\pm$  standard deviation of the three individual replicates.

#### *Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on fatty acids composition of *T. subcordiformis**

The results of fatty acid profile in *T. subcordiformis* are given in Table 2. The significantly increased fatty acids, including C14:0, C16:0, and C15:1, were detected in 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> medium. The highest amount of Oleic acid (C18:1 cis) was measured in 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> medium. However, the

percentage of linolenic acid (C18:3n6) significantly increased in 0.01 and 0.1 Co<sup>+2</sup> media compared to other treatments. Albeit, the dominant saturated fatty acid (SFA), monounsaturated fatty acid (MUFA) and polyunsaturated fatty acid (PUFA) were observed in 0.001, 1, and 0.01 medium, respectively (Table 2).

**Table 2: Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on fatty acids profile of *T. subcordiformis*.**

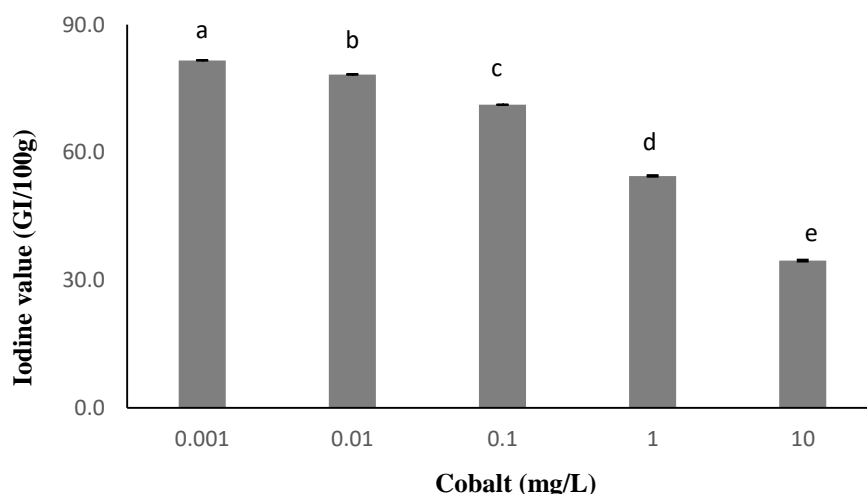
Fatty acid (%)	Co <sup>+2</sup> concentration (mg L <sup>-1</sup> )				
	0.001	0.01	0.1	1	10
C14:0	3.82±0.58 <sup>b</sup>	2.00±0.06 <sup>a</sup>	2.06±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	2.19±0.07 <sup>a</sup>	3.42±0.00 <sup>b</sup>
C15:0	0.2±0.05	ND	0.47±0.5	0.33±0.01	0.54±0.00
C16:0	42.83±0.31 <sup>c</sup>	40.49±0.53 <sup>ab</sup>	39.36±0.37 <sup>a</sup>	42.28±0.76 <sup>bc</sup>	41.6±0.06 <sup>bc</sup>
C17:0	0.08±0.1	0.15±0.0	0.19±0.0	0.17±0.0	0.17±0.02
C18:0	0.8±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.94±0.31 <sup>ab</sup>	1.38±0.09 <sup>b</sup>	0.79±0.01 <sup>ab</sup>	1.02±0.0 <sup>ab</sup>
C21:0	0.26±0.07	0.48±0.09	0.93±0.36	0.27±0.02	0.35±0.02
C22:0	0.02±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.02±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.07±0.02 <sup>b</sup>	0.02±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.04±0.0 <sup>ab</sup>
C24:0	0.02±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.04±0.01 <sup>a</sup>	0.13±0.0 <sup>b</sup>	0.02±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.06±0.01 <sup>a</sup>
C14:1	0.05±0.01 <sup>a</sup>	0.23±0.05 <sup>b</sup>	0.13±0.0 <sup>ab</sup>	0.38±0.01 <sup>c</sup>	0.82±0.0 <sup>d</sup>
C15:1	9.52±0.03 <sup>c</sup>	7.22±0.19 <sup>b</sup>	6.54±0.09 <sup>a</sup>	9.09±0.1 <sup>c</sup>	7.09±0.02 <sup>b</sup>
C16:1	3.03±0.07 <sup>a</sup>	4.21±0.19 <sup>b</sup>	3.66±0.12 <sup>ab</sup>	4.27±0.29 <sup>b</sup>	4.28±0.19 <sup>b</sup>
C17:1	0.72±0.0 <sup>b</sup>	0.67±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.72±0.01 <sup>b</sup>	0.69±0.01 <sup>ab</sup>	0.67±0.0 <sup>a</sup>
C18:1 tra	0.65±0.08 <sup>b</sup>	0.44±0.03 <sup>b</sup>	1.24±0.17 <sup>a</sup>	0.64±0.0 <sup>b</sup>	0.52±0.0 <sup>b</sup>
C18:1 cis	14.55±0.03 <sup>ab</sup>	14.58±0.34 <sup>ab</sup>	14.31±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	14.58±0.28 <sup>ab</sup>	15.17±0.02 <sup>b</sup>
C20:1	0.3±0.02	0.07±0.0	0.14±0.06	0.15±0.0	0.1±0.02
C22:1	0.04±0.02	0.05±0.02	0.08±0.04	0.04±0.0	0.04±0.0
C24:1	0.02±0.01	0.14±.12	0.25±0.03	0.03±0.0	0.07±0.01
C18:2 tra	0.36±0.01 <sup>b</sup>	0.39±0.03 <sup>b</sup>	0.59±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.37±0.04 <sup>b</sup>	0.43±0.0 <sup>b</sup>
C18:2 cis	11.3±0.07 <sup>a</sup>	12.35±0.21 <sup>b</sup>	11.66±0.16 <sup>a</sup>	11.41±0.2 <sup>a</sup>	11.73±0.02 <sup>ab</sup>
C18:3 tra	0.57±0.0 <sup>ab</sup>	0.45±0.06 <sup>ab</sup>	0.41±0.01 <sup>a</sup>	0.47±0.07 <sup>ab</sup>	0.62±0.0 <sup>b</sup>
C18:3n3	0.33±0.02 <sup>a</sup>	0.53±0.0 <sup>b</sup>	0.49±0.03 <sup>b</sup>	0.29±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.47±0.02 <sup>b</sup>
C18:3n6	9.99±0.32 <sup>a</sup>	11.68±0.11 <sup>b</sup>	11.14±0.04 <sup>b</sup>	9.89±0.31 <sup>a</sup>	9.61±0.0 <sup>a</sup>
C20:2	0.07±0.04 <sup>ab</sup>	0.02±0.0 <sup>a</sup>	0.08±0.02 <sup>ab</sup>	0.09±0.0 <sup>ab</sup>	0.15±0.0 <sup>b</sup>
C22:2	0.01±0.0	0.3±0.0	0.07±0.02	ND	0.02±0.0
ΣSFA <sup>a</sup>	48.04±0.65 <sup>b</sup>	44.3±0.6 <sup>a</sup>	44.63±0.09 <sup>a</sup>	46.09±0.86 <sup>ab</sup>	47.23±0.0 <sup>b</sup>
ΣMUFA <sup>b</sup>	28.64±0.24 <sup>ab</sup>	27.63±0.52 <sup>ab</sup>	27.1±0.09 <sup>a</sup>	29.89±0.65 <sup>c</sup>	28.77±0.12 <sup>bc</sup>
ΣPUFA <sup>c</sup>	22.65±0.45 <sup>a</sup>	25.46±0.23 <sup>c</sup>	24.46±0.16 <sup>bc</sup>	22.54±0.63 <sup>a</sup>	23.05±0.04 <sup>ab</sup>

Notes: ND, not detected; ΣSFA, total saturated fatty acids; ΣMUFA, total monounsaturated fatty acids; ΣPUFA, total polyunsaturated fatty acids. All points represent the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation of three individual replicates. Means in the same row sharing the same superscript letter are not significantly different ( $p > 0.05$ ). Absence of letters indicates no significant difference among treatments.

### Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on biodiesel quality of *T. subcordiformis*

The high iodine values (IV) of 81.62 and 78.29 gI<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup> were obtained from *T. subcordiformis* grown in the media supplemented with 0.001 and 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup> (control), respectively. The

excessive increase of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations resulted in lower IV. The lowest iodine value (34.60 gI<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup>) was observed in the samples treated with 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> (Fig. 6).

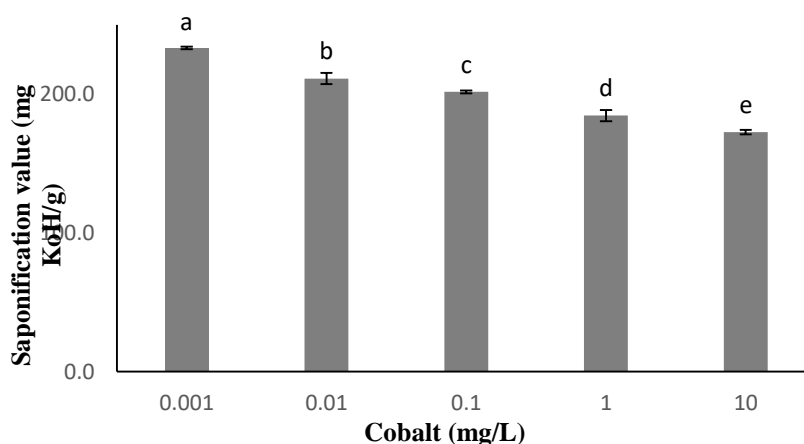


**Figure 6:** Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on iodine value of *T. subcordiformis* harvested on day 14. Error bars show standard deviation.

### Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> on saponification number of *T. subcordiformis*

As shown in Figure 7, the maximum (233.33 mg KOH g<sup>-1</sup>) and the minimum

(172.67 mgKoHg<sup>-1</sup>) SN numbers were obtained at 0.001 and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> in the 14<sup>th</sup> day of culture (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7:** Effect of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations on saponification number of *T. subcordiformis* harvested on day 14. Error bars show standard deviation.

## Discussion

The outcome of this study revealed that increasing  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentration to  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  resulted in a decrease in crude protein and lipid content and an elevate in SFA that has biodiesel property.  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  is a crucial element for the synthesis of the vitamin cobalamin which catalyzes the reactions of adenosyl cobalamin and methyl cobalamin, two vital cofactors in the activity of methylmalonyl-coenzyme A mutase and methionine synthetase (Layer *et al.*, 2010).

Accessibility of nutrients, such as phosphorus, nitrogen, metals, and vitamins, is the most crucial agent adjusting cell growth, photosynthesis, and other processes in microalgae (Yao *et al.*, 2013; Rastar *et al.*, 2018). El-Sheekh *et al.* (2003) stated that high levels of heavy metals could diminish the number of Chl and carotenoids. They also suggested that algae exposure to  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  reduces pigments leading to the chlorophyll-degrading enzyme activity. Earlier reports indicated that growth promotion under low  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentrations could be attributed to replacement with  $\text{Zn}^{2+}$  in some metalloenzymes in vitro and in vivo (Price and Morel, 1990). As indicated by Lustigman *et al.* (1995), the *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* culture medium supplemented with 10 ppm  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  reduced the growth, without changing the morphology of the cells or pH. Conversely, at 20 ppm  $\text{Co}^{+2}$ , the growth was considerably reduced compared to the control.

The results obtained in the present study illustrated that  $0.01 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{ Co}^{+2}$  (control) was the optimal range of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  for *T. subcordiformis* growth rate. However,  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  deficiency and excessive  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  resulted in growth inhibition. As previously reported, the metal deficiency could hinder growth rate in marine phytoplankton (Hokin *et al.*, 2004; Jiang *et al.*, 2012). The results of the our research showed that both treatment methods (using low and high  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  doses) were not able to improve *T. subcordiformis* cell densities. Elibol and Çakmak (2016) stated that  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  deprivation did not make a significant difference in the growth of *Dunaliella* strain during an incubation period of 30 days, which was not in agreement with the presented results. They reported that this noncompliance could be due to different growth solutions.

The efficiency performance of the photosynthetic process in microalgae is predominantly exhibited by the Chl and carotenoid levels. Production of Chl pigments needs a proper and sufficient supply of metal ions (Küpper *et al.*, 2002). A high concentration of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  seems to impede the incorporation of iron in protoporphyrin molecule, leading to Chl pigment decrease. Heavy metals in growth media can impair Chl synthesis by blocking the synthesis and activities of the enzyme proteins responsible for Chl biosynthesis (Singh *et al.*, 2012). El-Naggar and Osman (1999) noticed that lower  $\text{Co}^{2+}$  concentrations (0.01 ppm) excited the

growth of *Desmonostoc muscorum* and had an insignificant effect on the growth of *Calothrix fusca*. The results of the present research showed that Co<sup>+2</sup> treatments (both low and high doses) had a negative effect on *T. subcordiformis* Chl *a*, *b* and total carotenoid. Gholamiourimi and Soltani (2014) reported the highest rates of photosynthetic pigments in *Chara sp* (Chl *a*, *b* and total carotenoids) in control samples (without Co<sup>+2</sup>). They concluded that the amount of photosynthetic pigments was reduced with increase of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentration from 10<sup>-6</sup> to 10<sup>-3</sup> μM. Their results were in line with the presented data.

As previously reported, algae have a tremendous ability to grow in presence of heavy metals concentrations by a variety of tolerance mechanisms, including binding to the cell wall, sedimentation in vacuole and synthesis of heavy metals binding compounds such as organic acids, proteins, and phenolic compounds (Mehta and Gaur, 2005). Olafson *et al.* (1979) elucidated the importance of proteins and lipoproteins in trapping metals as a means to detoxify them within the cell.

The data presented in this study revealed the sensitivity of *T. subcordiformis* to high concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup>. The results indicated that the protein content increased at a low concentration of Co<sup>+2</sup> (0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>). However, the microalgae protein content was clearly decreased with the increase of Co<sup>+2</sup> during the trial.

Moreover, the algae treated with 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup> led to the least protein yield (16.85%) at the end of the experiment. Osman *et al.* (2004) clarified that low Co<sup>+2</sup> concentrations of 0.1 and 1 ppm for *Scenedesmus obliquus*, and 0.5 and 1.5 ppm for *Navicula perminuta* significantly increased the protein content. They also reported that further increases in Co<sup>+2</sup> concentration (2-4 ppm for *S. obliquus* and 2.5, 3.5 and 5 ppm for *N. perminuta*) were correlated with a decline in protein content of the two algae tested.

Elsalhin *et al.* (2016) stated that low concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup> (1.0 and 1.5 mg L<sup>-1</sup>) induced a significant increase in protein content of *Arthrospira platensis* until the 4<sup>th</sup> day of culture. They found that more increase in Co<sup>+2</sup> levels was responsible for a continuous reduction in protein content of the algae. The same outcomes were obtained by Larsen and Nilsson (1983). The results obtained in our study were in agreement with all the mentioned reports regarding the positive effects of low concentrations of Co<sup>+2</sup> on protein accumulation. It is assumed that they employed protein accumulation by microalgae at a low heavy metals level as a method to eliminate the toxic effects. It should be noted that increased respiration can also contribute to protein accumulation in response to carbohydrate consumption (Mohammady and Fathy, 2007; Coesel *et al.*, 2008).

In line with our study, Jiang *et al.* (2012) stated that nutrient deprivation is

one of the lipid induction techniques widely used in microalgae TAG production for many species.

However, nutrient deprivation often alters the cellular macromolecular composition (Mittelbach, 1996; Yodsuwan *et al.*, 2017). The results obtained in our investigation indicated that different concentrations of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  affected the lipid content of *T. subcordiformis*. Increasing in  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentration in the experiments were associated with low lipid accumulation in *T. subcordiformis*. The chemical composition of the microalgae which are exposed to a range of environmental stresses is extremely affected by nutrient availability and light intensity. Therefore, it is conceivable that different cultivation growth conditions lead to different results (Mittelbach, 1996; Kyriakidis and Katsiloulis, 2000).

The results showed that  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$  roughly boosted the microalgae lipid accumulation compared to the control treatment ( $0.01 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$ ). The results achieved by Elibol and Çakmak (2016) revealed that  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  deprivation prompted neutral lipid and  $\beta$ -carotene production in *Dunaliella tertiolecta*. Chia *et al.* (2013) noted that with the increase of total lipid concentration, the growth rate of *Chlorella vulgaris* decreased under cadmium stress. Lipid accumulation under high concentrations of  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  attributed to interruption of algal metabolism by inactivation of the photosynthetic machinery. This

phenomenon leads to the formation of lipids as storage compounds in favor of carbohydrates (Bellou and Aggelis, 2013).

The present study showed that different  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentrations slightly affected the fatty acids profile in *T. subcordiformis*. Application of  $0.001$  and  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$  increased the SFA by 48.04% and 47.23%, respectively, while  $1$ ,  $10$  and  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{Co}^{+2}$  slightly enhanced the MUFAS in *T. subcordiformis*. Heavy metals can alter the fatty acid structure of algae. Pinto *et al.* (2011) showed that SFA and MUFA contents of *Agarophyton tenuistipitatum* increased with the increase of cadmium (Cd) concentration. Also, Chia *et al.* (2013) reported the same results and concluded that SAFA and MUFA productions in *Chlorella vulgaris* increased in the presence of Cd in the culture media. Mohammady and Fathy (2007) revealed that proportions of fatty acids composition of *Dunaliella salina* remarkably changed under  $\text{NiCl}_2$  treatment. In the presence of  $\text{Ni}^{+2}$ , the saturated fatty acids (including C14:0, C16:0, C20:0, and C22:0) strongly increased and the synchronous unsaturated fatty acids compositions, including C16:1, C16:4, C18:3, C22:4, and C24:1, reduced.

In our study, the accumulation of PUFAs under  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  concentrations was significantly different in  $0.01 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$  treatment, and the process of increasing cobalt did not match PUFA enhancement. The mechanisms include

regularly oxidative stress and generation of reactive oxygen/nitrogen species that lead to oxidation of lipids (Pinto *et al.*, 2011; Battah *et al.*, 2015). Battah *et al.* (2015) showed that the treatments with 12  $\mu$ M manganese chloride, 2.5  $\mu$ M Co<sup>+2</sup> nitrate and 4 mM hydrogen peroxide significantly decreased the total SFAs to 15% and 19% (lower than the values obtained in the control treatment), with a noticeable increment in unsaturated fatty acids.

Biodiesel quality considerably depends on feedstock such as chain length, degree of unsaturation and fatty acids compositions in TAG molecules which determine physical characteristics of these molecules (Hempel *et al.*, 2012). In the present study, biodiesel characterization was determined using IV and SN. Calculated SN increased in algal cultures with supplementation of 0.001 and 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup> (control) Co<sup>+2</sup>. According to Yodsuwan *et al.* (2017), SN of *Phaeodactylum tricornutum* increased with addition of NaNO<sub>3</sub> (16.45, 32.09, and 64.29 mg L<sup>-1</sup>). IV is regularly applied to verify the quality of biodiesel, and its permissible level in Europe is 120 gI<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup> (Mittelbach, 1996). IV is a measure of the relative value of unsaturation in oil ingredients. The lower the IV is, the better the oil quality (Kyriakidis and Katsiloulis, 2000; Knothe, 2005; Sabzi *et al.*, 2018). In the present study, IV decreased with increase of Co<sup>+2</sup> concentration in the media, and the mean IV was calculated as 34.60 gI<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup> in the samples treated

with 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>. On the other hand, the maximum IV (81.62 gI<sub>2</sub> 100g<sup>-1</sup>) was observed in the samples which were treated with 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>. The obtained results implied that *T. subcordiformis* has SFA-rich lipids (48.04%) and low PUFA (22.65%), which may exhibit better IV levels according to the European Standard parameters for biodiesel synthesis. The degree of oxidation in unsaturated fatty acids compounds progresses with different rates depending on the abundance and location of double bonds. In the current study, *T. subcordiformis* lipids showed low levels of linoleic acid (C18:2n6) and linolenic acid (C18:3n3), which can provide methyl ester fuels with high oxidative stability (Ramos *et al.*, 2009). Because USFAs heating results in polymerization and better oil quality, a low IV for biodiesel FAME would be necessary (Mittelbach, 1996; Kyriakidis and Katsiloulis, 2000; Knothe, 2002).

Results of the present study suggested that Co<sup>+2</sup> deficiency was effective in enhancing lipid production by *T. subcordiformis*. The dry weight of *T. subcordiformis* reached the highest level at the Co<sup>+2</sup> concentration of 0.01 mg L<sup>-1</sup>. In spite of growth inhibition by Co<sup>+2</sup> deprivation, protein content, biodiesel characteristics, and proportion of saturated fatty acids (SFA) were enhanced in the culture treated with 0.001 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>. The highest and lowest Chl *a* and *b* were detected in 0.01 and 10 mg L<sup>-1</sup> Co<sup>+2</sup>, respectively. In the

case of lipid,  $\text{Co}^{+2}$  deprivation ( $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ ) led to an increase in lipid accumulation. The maximum IV and SN were achieved in the group treated with  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{ Co}^{+2}$ , and the lowest were obtained in  $10 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{ Co}^{+2}$  treatment. Therefore, it was concluded that  $0.001 \text{ mg L}^{-1} \text{ Co}^{+2}$  was suitable for lipid and protein accumulations. Measurement of some properties such as density, viscosity, flash point, and cold filter plugging point is essential to determine the suitability of *T. subcordiformis* lipids as a feedstock for biodiesel production.

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