Myco-deterioration of Smoke-Dried African Catfish (Clarias gariepinus) Stored at Ambient Temperature

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Authors’ contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors MAA, AMO, OAA and AAO designed the experiment. Authors MAA, AMO and OAA performed the experiment. Author MAA analysed the data. Authors MAA, AMO, AAO and FHI interpreted the data. All the authors wrote, carefully edited and approved the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/MRJI/2020/v30i1130282
Editor(s):
(1) Dr. Ana Cláudia Coelho, University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Portugal.
Reviewers:
(1) Majid M. Taher, Basrah University, Iraq.
(2) Akeem Oladipupo Sotolu, Nasarawa State University, Nigeria.
Complete Peer review History: http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/65050

Received 27 October 2020
Accepted 29 December 2020
Published 31 December 2020

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

The current study was carried out on moulds associated with sequential deterioration of smoke-dried Clarias gariepinus stored at ambient temperature. Samples of smoke-dried catfish were obtained from street shops, commercial vendors and as well as from neighbouring rural markets where large percentage of population used to buy for consumption. Mould infestation, nutritional composition, pH and moisture content were determined in parallel at week 0, 3 and 6. Results of the study pointed that mould load increased with storage period and ranged from $2.00 \times 10^2$ to $11.31 \times 10^2$ cfu/g. The associated moulds were identified as Aspergillus flavus, A. versicolor, A. niger, A. fumigatus, Fusarium solani, Penicillium species and Mucor species. As the storage duration advances at the ambient temperature, the associated moulds maintained sequential succession in the smoke-dried catfish. Specifically, A. flavus and A. versicolor succeeded A. niger and A. fumigatus till week 3, and A. flavus activated the succession till week 6. Unfortunately, apart from Penicillium commune that joined the activities of P. crysogenum at week 6, other moulds were not

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succeeded. The crude fat, fibre, protein and ash content decreased while the moisture content of the smoke-dried catfish gradually increased. Slightly acidic to neutral pH was maintained throughout the period of storage. Our study therefore revealed that sequential myco-deterioration of smoke-dried catfish is possible when stored for long period at ambient temperature.

Keywords: Catfish; myco-deterioration; mould; nutritious food; smoke-dried.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, fish is an important protein source for human dietary protein [1-2]. In Africa, consumption of fish is now in high demand as representative of animal dietary protein [3-6]. In addition to proteins, fish use to supply a good balance of vitamins and minerals. Hence, its role in nutrition cannot be over-emphasized [7]. In spite of the nutritional importance of fish, it is highly perishable especially in the hot climatic regions where average temperature is warm enough to enhance proliferation of mycodeteriogens. For example, available records show that about 40% of the total fish catch in Nigeria are lost annually due to inadequate or poor preservation, processing and handling methods [8]. Also, the rate of fish spoilage depends on acidity level, fish species, weather, mode of storage and temperature during transportation [9].

Chemical breakdown of protein, fat and water contents also contribute to quick spoilage of fish. Therefore, to prevent the huge loss of fish during and after harvest, and during storage to consumption [10], smoking was employed in many regions of Africa as sustainable practice for preservation of fish prior to consumption. Smoking does not require sophisticated and technology based equipment or highly skilled workers [11]. Smoking contributes to fish preservation and improved shelf-life by drying to maintain nutritional quality and reduction of microbial contaminants [12-18]. Unfortunately, quality instability during storage presents a challenge for all fish types which include catfish. Generally, in Africa countries, smoke-dried catfish is usually hawked without taking cognizance of the microbial contamination from the environment. The smoke-dried Clarias gariepinus could be contaminated with microorganisms from the processing units and in storage at the market centres before reaching the consumers [19]. Thus, could act as bioindicators for deterioration [20] of nutritional contents in smoke-dried fish.

Among the microbial flora, the presence of fungi especially the mould play significant role as baseline indicator to ensure the saving of smoke-dried catfish for consumption [21-23]. Moulds have the potentials to influence changes in sensory and nutritional characteristics of smoke-dried catfish [24-27]. During storage, mould contaminants used to compromise ambient temperature and appear invisible on smoke-dried catfish even after long duration of storage. Therefore, in comparison to other studies that have focused on mould infestation and nutritional deterioration of smoke-dried catfish in southwestern Nigeria [28], current study systematically investigates sequential colonization and mould succession on nutritional composition of smoke-dried catfish based on duration of storage.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Sample Collection, Preparation, Isolation and Identification of Moulds

Fifteen samples of smoke-dried catfish were obtained from local markets (Ajegunle, Akesan and Awe) in Oyo town, Nigeria. Five samples were obtained from each market to form a composite per experimental sample and transported to the laboratory in sterile polythene bags. The samples were randomly mixed together, replicated to make three sample preparations and stored at ambient temperature for a period of six weeks. Isolation of moulds from the smoke dried catfish samples was carried out at week 0 (immediately after purchase), week 3 and week 6. Portions of the tissues were aseptically cut from all the regions of the fish body and ground. Briefly, 1 g of the ground sample was weighed and macerated in 9 ml of sterile distilled water. From this, subsequent serial dilution was made and an aliquot was inoculated into already set plates of potato dextrose agar (PDA). The plates were allowed to solidify and were incubated at 28±1°C for 5-7 days and observed daily for growth [29]. The mean number of all mould colonies appearing was taken into consideration. This was used to estimate the number of mould colony forming units per gram of fish sample. The colony forming unit per gram (cfu/g) was
calculated using the formula: Total viable counts per gram = average number of colonies counted per dilution factor. All observed colonies with distinct morphologies were subculture on PDA, incubated at 28 ± 2°C for 3 to 5 days and observed daily for growth. The identification of each isolated fungus was based on observable characters on the culture plates and under the microscope. The notable features used for identification were colony diameter, the obverse and reverse view of the mycelium, pigment production and texture. Microscopic identification was also aided by the use of a photomicrograph which focused on the presence or absence of phialides, vesicle structure, presence of metulae, chlamydospires, microconidia and macroconidia (for Fusarium) and structure of the conidia using the illustration manual for identification of Aspergilli, Fusaria, and Penicilli [30] and Introduction to Industrial Mycology [31].

2.2 Determination of pH

Five grams of fish samples were macerated in 95 millilitre of distilled water in triplicates and stirred thoroughly to make a fish slurry. The average pH of the triplicates was taken as the pH value. The pH readings were taken using digital pH meter (at 31°C) equipped with a glass electrode, pH5-25 pH metre, serial number 601308129087 [32].

2.3 Moisture Content

Moisture content was carried out following the protocol described by AOAC [32]. Oven temperature at 105°C was used for 24 hours. The weight of the dry sample and the dish was recorded and percentage moisture content and dry matter was calculated as: Percentage (%) moisture content = W1 – W2 / 5 x 100, Where W1 = Weight of sample + dish before drying, W2 = Weight of sample + dish after drying, 5 = Weight of sample.

2.4 Proximate Analyses

The proximate analysis of the samples which included crude fat, crude fibre, ash content and crude protein were periodically carried out at week 0, 3 and 6 during storage in-line with the methods described by AOAC [32]. Apart from the fact that, the experiment was carried out under close observation for six weeks of storage at room temperature, other protocols were maintained before contact with the smoke-dried catfish to avoid contamination. Five grams of fish samples in triplicates were equally maintained for each proximate analysis. For crude fat, the extracted fat was calculated using the formula: W1 – W2 / 5 x 100, Where: W1 = Weight of the flask with the fat, W2 = Weight of dry extraction flask and petroleum ether, 5 = Weight of sample, while that of crude fibre was calculated as Weight of crude fibre = Residue - Ash dried residue. % crude fibre = Weight of crude fibre / Weight of sample x 100. AOAC [32] was also used for ash content. The percentage ash content was calculated as % Ash content = Weight of ash –Weight of sample / Weight of sample x 100. The protein content is an integral part of nutritional composition of smoke-dried catfish. In this study, the protein content in the smoke-dried catfish was determined using nitrogen concentration based on Micro-Kjeidal method [33].

2.5 Statistical Analysis

Data collected on physico-chemical and nutritional composition analyses of smoke-dried catfish were subjected to proper statistical analysis of variance using Student-Newman-Keuls Test [34]. Also, frequency of occurrence of each mould was determined.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Moulds Associated with Smoke-Dried Catfish

At week 0, the mean mould count in the PDA plates was 2.00 x 10² cfu/g, this increased to 4.78 x 10² cfu/g at week 3 and 11.31 x 10² cfu/g at week 6 (Fig. 1). Based on identification, a total number of 18 mould were isolated from the smoke-dried catfish during storage. Aspergillus flavus dominated, followed by A. niger and Penicillium chrysogenum while the least moulds were A. fumigatus, P. commune, Fusarium solani and Mucor species (Table 1). With respect to occurrence, A. flavus isolated at week 0, 3 and 6 had the highest occurrence (27.8%), followed by A. niger (16.7%) and Mucor species (16.7%) at week 0 and 3 (Table 1). At week 3 and 6, A. versicolor (11.1%) and P. chrysogenum (11.1%) were similar in their occurrence (Fig. 1 and Table 1). During storage, A. flavus, A. niger and A. versicolor dominated at week 0. At week 3, A. niger gradually reduced while A. versicolor succeeded disappearance of A. fumigatus. At week 6, only A. flavus and A. versicolor maintain succession of other Aspergillus species. P. commune was not succeeded but joined the activities of P. chrysogenum in smoke-dried catfish.
catfish. *Mucor* species was evidence at week 0 and 3, *F. solani* at week 0 but their presence was no longer evidence at week 6.

### 3.2 Moisture Content, pH and Nutritional Composition of Smoke Dried Catfish

A significant level of moisture content was observed across the duration of storage from week 0 to week 3 and then to week 6 (Fig. 2). Specifically, the moisture content at week 6 was higher (11.17%), followed by week 3 (9.38%) while that of week 0 was the least (8.79%). The smoke-dried catfish maintained acidic to neutral pH during storage (Fig. 3). The highest (1.09%) crude fibre content was observed at week 0. However, there was a reduction in this value at week 3 to 0.63% and week 6 to 0.01% (Fig. 4). The crude fat content showed that its highest value (36.44%) was at week 0, reduced to 24.24% at week 3 and 18.48% at week 6 (Fig. 5). The crude protein significantly (*P* ≤ 0.05) reduced from week 0 to week 3 and then to week 6. The ash content value was highest (15.32%) at week 0, reduced to 11.59% at week 3 and 7.39% at week 6 (Fig. 7).

![Fig. 1. Mould load of the smoke-dried catfish in storage at ambient temperature for six weeks](image1)

![Fig. 2. Moisture content (%) of the smoke-dried catfish in storage at ambient temperature for six weeks](image2)
Table 1. Frequency of occurrence of isolated moulds and percentage of occurrence

| Week of occurrence | Frequency of isolation (Total) | Occurrence (%) |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Week 0             | A. flavus (1)                  | 5              | 27.8           |
|                    | A. niger (2)                   | 3              | 16.7           |
|                    | A. fumigatus (1)               | 1              | 5.6            |
|                    | A. versicolor (1)              | 2              | 11.1           |
|                    | P. chrysogenum (1)             | 3              | 16.7           |
|                    | Mucor species (1)              | 2              | 11.1           |
|                    | Fusarium species (1)           | 1              | 5.6            |
| Total              |                                | 18             | 100            |
4. DISCUSSION

In many African countries, storage of smoke-dried catfish are always compromised by ambient temperature which directly and indirectly encourage the growth of moulds. In the present study, high level of mould load was observed especially at week 6. Although, the mould load falls within the acceptable limit ($5 \times 10^5$ cfu/g) for quality fish product [35,36] from microbiological point of view. However, the presence of these moulds at week 3 and 6 were considered relevant in the study to ascertain safety of smoke-dried catfish for consumption in Nigeria. Parts of the study revealed sequential mould load based on duration of storage [18].

Fig. 5. Crude fat of the smoke-dried catfish in storage at ambient temperature for six weeks

Fig. 6. Crude protein of the smoke-dried catfish in storage at ambient temperature for six weeks
The isolated moulds are of significant to public health. *Aspergillus* species, *Penicillium* species and *Fusarium* species dominated [18]. In southwestern Nigeria, Fafioye et al. [37] reported similar occurrence of *Aspergillus* species, *Fusarium* species and *Mucor* species in smoke-dried catfish. *Aspergillus* species and *Penicillium* species were the most dominant genera [38,39]. Mould occurrences in smoke-dried catfish have been catalogued for *Aspergillus*, *Rhizopus*, *Penicillium* and *Fusarium* not only in Nigeria but also in Indonesia [40], Sri Lanka [39] and China [41]. On a more specific note, *A. flavus*, was the most prevalent in smoke-dried catfish [18,37,41]. The duration of storage has significant implications on the occurrence of *Aspergillus* species. It was observed that *A. flavus*, *A. niger* and *A. versicolor* occurred [42] in clean and odour free smoke-dried catfish at week 3. Thus, the presence of *A. flavus* and *A. versicolor* at week 3 posed significant threat to public health due to their mycotoxigenic potentials. Notably, *A. flavus* was adequately present from week 0 to week 6 [18]. The presence of this mould could be attributed to handling processes during smoking and cross contamination during storage or sales in commercial market. The occurrence of *Penicillium* species, *Mucor* species and *Fusarium* species could not be underestimated [18,37,41] on safety of smoke-dried fish for consumption in Nigeria.

*A. flavus*, *A. niger* and *A. fumigatus* successfully colonized smoke-dried catfish and maintained succession for *A. versicolor* till week 3. It was observed that, *A. flavus* activated the succession till week 6 [18]. Similar trend of succession was observed between *Penicillium chrysogenum* at week 3 and *Penicillium commune* at week 6. This suggests that as the storage duration advances, the mould associated with smoke-dried catfish at ambient temperature have the potentials to maintain sequential succession [18]. Also, the metabolites involved could be an advantage for succession among moulds. In addition, Odu et al. [43] stated that warm humidity and environmental temperatures can facilitate growth and succession of moulds in smoke-dried catfish during storage. The occurrence of these moulds suggests that the heat supplied during smoke-drying might not be adequate to kill the mould contaminants, and this may negatively enhance other unfavourable factors that can lead to mycodeterioration of smoke-dried catfish.

There was sharp increase in moisture content from week 0 to week 3 and then from week 3 to 6. Edema and Agbon [44] also observed in their study that moisture content increases within the range of 14.42 to 26.7% which is totally unacceptable for smoke-dried catfish [45]. A standard moisture content of 12% was reported by [45] as the level beyond which fish products begin to grow moulds after few days. In the present study, the moisture contents were within the acceptable limit but sample collections at week 0, 3 and 6 justify the presence of moulds and this could be attributed to slight increase in moisture content which is enough to enhance growth of moulds in tissues of smoke-dried catfish.
catfish. In agreement with the present study, Daramola et al. [18] also reported gradual increase in moisture content of smoke-dried catfish stored for 6 weeks at ambient temperature. They attributed the increase to the absorption of moisture from the surroundings since there was no re-drying during storage. This implied that the moulds contamination were as a result of high level of increase in moisture content. Thus, it could be deduced that the smoke-dried catfish is not at safe level for consumption at week 3 and 6 due to the fact that the moisture content was 9.38% and 11.17% at week 3 and 6 respectively in comparison to moisture content that was recommended safe (6-8%) for dried fish by Foline et al. [46]. In addition, Kaneko [47] have reported that a lot of proteolytic, lipolytic deterioration and microbial proliferation are encouraged at moisture levels higher than recommended standard. The increase in moisture content directly influence the pH. It was observed that the pH increases as the storage duration increases. Daramola et al. [18] stated that the pH of smoke-dried catfish may slightly change though within the acceptable limit. As the storage duration increases, the pH of our smoke-dried catfish slightly changes [48]. Shenderyuk and Bykowski [49] reported that the increase in pH could be as a result of decomposition of protein content due to increase moisture content that may have resulted to decomposition of protein content in smoke-dried catfish with passing time [50].

The nutritional contents of stored smoke-dried catfish may affect wholesomeness, safety and shelf-life of the products [51]. The crude protein slightly decreased between week 0 and 3, and between week 3 and 6. The crude protein may have degraded to more volatile products such as total volatile bases, hydrogen sulphide and ammonia [3]. In addition, as the storage duration increases, water soluble protein may have diffused out to the surrounding for exosmosis [52]. In the study conducted by Agbolagba and Osifo [53], the crude protein content of Heterobranchus longifilis significantly reduced during storage. In-line with our study, the reduction in crude protein of smoke-dried catfish is not new as similar observation has been documented by Daramola et al. [18]. The study carried out by Hassan et al. [52] revealed that ash content changes with duration of storage due to absorbance of moisture and loss of protein, thus, could be as a result of why there was reduction in ash content in both week 3 and 6. Similarly, the crude fat and fibre contents reduced drastically in the smoke-dried catfish [18,54]. The low fat level could be probably due to rancidity problems during storage [54] while that of low crude fibre could be attributed to energy content in smoke-dried catfish since crude fibre is considered as indigestible [55].

Generally, following 6 weeks storage of smoke-dried catfish, the mould may have invisibly colonized and proliferated the smoke-dried catfish due to alteration of pH in favour of moisture content, thus, significantly reduced the nutritional contents. This implies that, the moulds deteriorated the smoke-dried catfish throughout the storage period as they cannot be seen with the naked eyes except with the aid of microscope. Therefore, it could be deduced that, under ambient temperature condition, smoke-dried catfish may look physically fit for consumption but nutritionally low and as well posed public health threat due to the presence of toxigenic moulds. Daramola et al. [18] established similar fact that smoke-dried catfish could not keep up well till the 6th week under ambient temperature. Directly or indirectly, this suggests that the shelf-life of smoke-dried catfish is contingent to the state of dryness [56].

5. CONCLUSION

During storage of smoke-dried catfish, ambient temperature deceptively encouraged growth and proliferation of moulds. Apart from the fact that the smoke-dried catfish still maintained good appearance till 3rd and 6th week, the nutritional composition have reduced due to high moisture content and pH. That is, the longer the smoke-dried catfish stays in storage at ambient temperature, the higher the mould load and consequently, the rate of deterioration. Hence, smoke-dried catfish is not fit for consumption most especially at week 3 and 6 after purchase. Strategic methods should be employed in the preservation of smoke-dried catfish for optimum shelf stability and retention of its nutritional quality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful to Mr. Okunlola for his technical assistant

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.
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