Research Article

Genetic Clearness Novel Strategy of Group I Bacillus Species Isolated from Fermented Food and Beverages by Using Fibrinolytic Enzyme Gene Encoding a Serine-Like Enzyme

Moïse Doria Kaya-Ongoto, 1 Christian Aimé Kayath , 1,2 Etienne Nguimbi, 1,2 Aimé Augustin Lebonguy, 1 Stech Anomène Eckzechel Nzaou, 1 Paola Sandra Elenga Wilson, 1 and Gabriel Ahombo 2

1 Institut National de Recherche en Sciences Exactes et Naturelles (IRSEN), Avenue de l’Auberge Gascogne, BP 2400, Brazzaville, Congo
2 Laboratoire de Biologie Cellulaire et Moléculaire (BCM), Faculté des Sciences et Techniques, Université Marien NGOUABI, BP 69, Brazzaville, Congo

Correspondence should be addressed to Christian Aimé Kayath; chriskayath@yahoo.fr

Received 13 March 2019; Accepted 28 April 2019; Published 20 May 2019

Academic Editor: Ramon Eritja

Copyright © 2019 Moïse Doria Kaya-Ongoto et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Fibrinolytic enzyme gene (fibE) is widely conserved among Bacillus spp. belonging to group I species. This is encoding a serine-like enzyme (FibE) secreted in extracellular medium. This present work aims to assess the molecular usefulness of this novel conserved housekeeping gene among group I Bacillus spp. to identify and discriminate some related strains in traditional fermented food and beverages in Republic of Congo. First of all 155 isolates have been screened for enzymatic activities using caseinolytic assays. PCR techniques and nested PCR method using specific primers and correlated with 16S RNA sequencing were used. Blotting techniques have been performed for deep comparison with molecular methods. As a result B. amyloliquefaciens (1), B. licheniformis (1), B. subtilis (1), B. pumilus (3), B. altitudinis (2), B. atrophaeus (1), and B. safensis (3) have been specifically identified among 155 isolates found in fermented food and beverages. Genetic analysis and overexpression of glutathione S-transferases (GSTs) fused to mature protein of FibE in Escherichia coli BL21 and TOP10 showed 2-fold higher enzymatic activities by comparison with FibE wild type one. Immunodetection should be associated but this does not clearly discriminate Bacillus belonging to group I.

1. Introduction

From north to south of Republic of Congo fermented foods and beverages diversify and do contain a very impressive microorganism biodiversity. The most common microorganisms are the genus of Bacillus, lactic acid bacteria, non-lactic acid bacteria, molds, and yeast that play very important role in local fermented foods and beverages [1–4]. Bacillus strains are ubiquitous bacteria that exploit about twenty wide varieties of Congo Brazzaville fermented food and beverages including “Toba mbody” which is a traditional food obtained by alkaline fermentation of cassava leaves. Not only leaves but also cassava tubers could be fermented after three to four days by producing a local product much consumed in the south of the Republic of Congo called “Bikedi”. Ripe cassava tubers can be mixed with peanut paste allowing obtaining “Mbalampinda”. In addition more popular beverage is palm wine which is an alcoholic beverage created from the sap of palm tree called “Samba”. Another beverage found is “Loungouila”, a sugar cane wine, and “Mbavu”, a local banana wine. A very recent study is focusing on “Pandé” which is a local fermented food of Raphia taedigera (Mart.) Mart. (1838) [3–5]. Members of the genus Bacillus are rod-shaped spore-forming bacteria belonging to the firmicutes with DNA base composition around 50 to 54% G+C. Besides, bacilli are more stable during processing and storage of fermented food and beverages [6] and pharmaceutical preparations. These have been shown suitable candidates for health promoting formulations [7]. An analysis of twenty complete Bacillus genomes has been demonstrated and drafted. B. subtilis, B.
pumilus, B. licheniformis, and B. amyloliquefaciens are more genome related based on core genome, Genomic Similarity Score (GSS) [8], and Cluster of Orthologous Groups (COGs) [9]. Conserved signature indels (CSIs) which are inserts or deletions within conserved regions of homologous proteins [10] have been used to discriminate in silico Bacillus spp. Several ways have been described to split this Bacillus group according to biochemistry, lifestyles, and/or growth on different substrates [9]. Bacillus spp. may be divided into nine groups (groups I–IX), based on their high level phylogeny or phenotypic features linked to 16S rRNA gene sequence similarity. B. subtilis, B. pumilus, B. licheniformis, B. amyloliquefaciens, B. altitudinis, B. safensis, B. circulans, and B. atrophaeus belong to group I [10, 11]. Interestingly, most of the aforementioned bacteria are related species and share a remarkably high level of 16S rRNA gene sequence similarity to B. subtilis which is around 99% or greater even though DNA–DNA hybridization values with the latter fall below 70 % [12]. Moreover very few molecular discrimination, phenotypic, or biochemical characteristics that differentiate these species from each other can be found.

Sometimes the genus Bacillus is phylogenetically incoherent taxon with members of the group lacking a common evolutionary matter [10]. In this way genetic discrimination must be used. Some prokaryotic housekeeping genes playing various vital key roles for cell survival have been used to discriminate bacteria including 16S rRNA gene. Housekeeping genes are molecularly important to assess a rapid and reliable result in terms of identification of closely related Bacillus strains. Among housekeeping genes rpoB, gyrB, nifD, recA, and atpD are the most cited [13, 14]. These are considered like the bright and first choices in terms of multilocus sequence typing [13], 16S rRNA gene is highly conserved and is an essential standard for bacteria taxonomy [15]. Partial sequencing of the 16S rRNA gene has been also used for the rapid identification of Bacillus bacteria [16]. However, this criterion seems to be insufficient for some species [17]. Indeed, the classification of closely related bacterial species seems to be sometimes difficult [18]. It has been shown that the 16S rRNA gene can undergo occasional transfer or lateral recombination [19]. The other drawback related to the use of the 16S rRNA gene is that this gene often has a variable number of copies. Some species may have one to fifteen ribosomal operons in their genome [20], which does not allow a quantitative study of the species.

Bacteria belonging to the Bacillus group I [11] including B. subtilis, B. pumilus, B. licheniformis, B. amyloliquefaciens, B. mojavensis, B. safensis, B. altitudinis, and B. atrophaeus harbor, a wildly conserved gene encoding the "so-called" fibrinolytic enzyme (fibE), a serine-like enzyme. This enzyme should play a prime role in the treatment of cardiovascular disease. Homologues of this gene have been isolated. B. subtilis natto producing nattokinase (NK) has been isolated from a Japanese fermented food made from soybeans [21]. B. amyloliquefaciens CH5, B. amyloliquefaciens DC-4, and Bacillus sp. CK were isolated from fermented soybean [22–25]. B. amyloliquefaciens NM76, producing an enzyme with high fibrinolytic activity, was isolated from Ntoba Mbodi, a fermented food from Republic of Congo [26]. In NCBI databases, the fibE gene has been named according to the Bacillus species. This has been designated as peptidase S8 in B. pumilus 3-19 [27] and B. safensis JPL-MERTA8-2 [28], while in B. mojavensis, A21, the product of this gene, was nominated as subtilisin BM1 and this gene was called aprE in B. licheniformis F5. In this work, this gene has been nominated fibE (fibrinolytic enzyme gene). The product of this gene is encoded as pre-pro-protein (28kDa). The presequence corresponds to a signal sequence of SEC pathways, with a characteristic motif AXA cleavable by the signal peptidase [29]. The presequence is a sequence that is cleaved for the protein maturation processing [30]. The size of the gene corresponding from the cleavable motif is about 850 bp depending on the species. This gene is highly conserved through group I Bacillus and this has a sequence homology close to 90%. As part of this work, we targeted this gene for its nucleotide variability at the start point of mature protein including AQSV amino acids. We are focusing on some important troubleshooting to identify species within the complexity of Bacillus spp. belonging to group I.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Isolation and Characterization of Strains. 10g of each collected sample from fermented foods, beverages, soil, and intestine of Guppy fish was aseptically sampled into a sterile falcon tube. Using sterile water the sample was homogenized and distributed in ten flacon sterile tubes. Dilutions were done and bacterial suspension was streaked on Mossel agar medium supplemented with 4.2 mL of polymyxin B. Enumeration of colonies was done in triplicate on the same medium. The plates were incubated at 37°C for 24 h to 48°C. Microscope has been used for morphological characterization and the Gram status confirmation was determined using 3% KOH. Sporulation, hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂), and oxidases tests were used for biochemical characterization.

2.2. Enzymatic Activities. In order to discriminate at the genera level of Bacillus strains, enzymatic activities were performed by using casein as a substrate. Briefly 1 g of agarose was weighed and mixed with 100 mL of PBS. The mixture was heated in a microwave for 3 min until agarose was completely dissolved and then cooled in a water bath at 40°C. Then 10 mL of skim milk was added to the mixture. After homogenization, the mixture was poured into the Petri dishes. Once solidified, wells were carefully and aseptically generated into the gels. An overnight culture was first initiated at 37°C with stirring. The culture was then centrifuged at 6000 rpm for 10 min. A volume of 50 μL of the supernatant is deposited in the wells made on the agar medium composed of 1% agarose gel, 0.01 M PBS, pH 7.4, and skimmed milk. The Petri dishes are incubated at 37°C for 24 hours. The presence of caseinolytic activity is detected by a clear halo around colonies indicating hydrolysis of casein. The halo diameter was measured.

2.3. Genomic DNA Extraction, Sequencing, and DNA Technology Identification. In order to directly identify the isolates by using DNA technology, the fibE gene
encoding for the fibrinolytic enzyme has been found in the NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information, http://www.ncbi.gov/Blast.cgi) genomic database of targeted strains like *B. amyloliquefaciens*, *B. subtilis*, *B. pumilus*, *B. licheniformis*, *B. altitudinis*, *B. mojavensis*, *B. safensis*, and *B. atrophaeus*. The pDRAW32 software has been used for bioinformatic analysis. The primers were rigorously selected from the mature protein and internal primers for nested PCR method were used to generate 461 pb amplicon (Table 1). Extraction and purification of isolate genomic DNA were performed according to the NucleoSpin Microbial DNA (Macherey-NAGEL) kit. Briefly, isolates were grown in 5 mL LB broth for 24 h at 37°C with stirring. The DNA purity was assessed by electrophoresis on agarose gel and by the ratio of optical densities 260/280 nm. PCR products have been sequenced. By using universal primers of 16S rRNA fD1 (5'- AGAGTTTGATCCTGGCTCAG-3') and rP2 (5' - ACGGCTACCTTGTTACGACT -3'), confirmation of isolates has been done. 5 μL of each amplification product was mixed with 2 μL of loading buffer (BIOKE). Mixtures were subjected to electrophoresis on 1% agarose gel (w/v). The 10 kb 2-Log (BIOKE) was used as a molecular weight marker. The PCR products were purified using the solution for Gel Extraction kit (Omega Bio-tek), the purified product were subjected to sequencing by the Sanger technique (3130xl Genetic Analyzer, Applied Biosystems). The sequences obtained were aligned with the software Bio Numerics 7.5 (Applied Maths, Belgium) and corrected manually to resolve discrepancies between the sense and antisense strands. Sequences were compared with homologous sequences contained in the sequence databanks through the portal NCBI using the BLASTn program based on the identification criterion published by Drancourt [31].
2.4. Plasmids Construction and Expression of Recombinant Proteins. Primers used for constructions are listed in Table 2 and plasmids in Table 3. After identifying strains using DNA technology at the species level, all the fibE fragments were amplified from chromosome of Bacillus spp. genomic DNA. PCR fragments were amplified by using OneTaq DNA polymerase (Biok) and inserted in frame with gpt in pGEX-4T-1 digested by BamHI and EcoRI of gene amplified from B. amyloliquefaciens, B. pumilus, B. mojavensis, B. subtilis, B. atrophaeus, and B. altitudinis, BamHI and XhoI for B. licheniformis, and EcoRI and XhoI for B. safensis (see Table 3). The resulting plasmids were named pSNZ1, pDOK2, pDOK3, pDOK5, pDOK6, pDOK7, pDOK8, and pDOK9 (Table 3). All constructions were randomly checked by DNA sequencing. E. coli strains BL21 and TOP10, harboring pGEX-4T-1 or its derivatives (see Table 3) expressing GST-FibE from different eight strains of group I Bacillus, were cultured in LB broth with 100 μg/mL ampicillin for 2 h at 37°C, and then IPTG was added to a final concentration of 0.1 mM. After incubation for 3 h at 30°C, bacteria were harvested and GST fusion proteins were purified as described by the manufacturer of Glutathione Sepharose 4B (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech). Proteins production and purification were monitored by SDS-PAGE and Coomassie blue. Purified proteins were also analyzed by immunoblotting using anti-GST antibodies (GE Healthcare). Enzymatic activities were then assessed by using a volume of 50 μL of the supernatant coming from E. coli TOP10 and BL21 with pGEX-4T-1 or its derivatives. The diameter of clear zone of enzymatic activities was then measured.

2.5. Generating Polyclonal Antibodies and Bacillus Immunodetection. Polyclonal antibodies were generated by using five-week-old female specific-pathogen-free BALB/c mice. 10 μg of GST-FibE derivatives has been injected into naïve BALB/c mice in the first week. A reminder on intraperitoneal injection was performed two weeks later to elicit the production of antibodies. All purified variants of fusion proteins including GST-FibE-Bs, GST-FibE-Ba, GST-FibE-Bl, GST-FibE-Bp, GST-FibE-Bsa, GST-FibE-Bat, and GST-FibE-Bal were exhausted against the background of Crude extracts and culture supernatants of E. coli TOP10 producing GST alone. Overnight pure cultures using LB medium of B. amyloliquefaciens, B. licheniformis, B. subtilis, B. pumilus, B. mojavensis, B. safensis, B. atrophaeus, and B. altitudinis have been performed. Supernatants were mixed with 80% NH4SO4 at +4°C. Cultures were centrifuged at 6000 rpm, during 1 hour. Pellets were collected with 500 μL of PBS, SDS-PAGE stained with Coomassie blue and immunodetection were carried out using polyclonal antibodies anti-FibE variants.

3. Results

3.1. Bacteria Isolation. A qualifying assessment included Mossel medium culture, macroscopic analysis, microscopic analysis (Gram-positive bacilli), Gram-positive bacteria with 3% KOH, spore-forming bacteria test, and the positive catalase reaction had allowed the classification of the working bacterium as the Bacillus genus. A total of 155 pure cultured isolates were obtained from different raw material palm wine (30), Nbota Mbodi (21), Mbala-mpinda (19), Pandé (12), banana (35), sugar cane wine (13), soil (15), and intestine of Guppy fish (10). All bacteria were spor-forming colonies, catalase positive and Gram-positive staining. To easily discriminate Bacillus spp. at the genera level, pure cultured isolates were assessed for their ability to produce caseinolytic proteases. The clear halo shows activity and the absence of the clear halo means the absence of caseinolytic activity. The rate of isolates with enzymatic activities as follows: palm wine (56%), Nbota Mbodi (47%), Mbala-mpinda (63%), Pandé (33%), banana wine (54%), sugar cane wine (69%), soil (73%), and intestine of Guppy fish (80%).

3.2. Direct Amplification of fibE Gene. Identification up to the species level was carried out by directly targeting fibE gene amplification of Bacillus spp. belonging to group I. Among 155 isolates, 73% of bacteria that were able to degrade casein have been randomly selected. A total of 720 PCR reactions have been done by using primers targeting the sequence encoding the mature protein (Figure 1(a)) including Ba.Id.Ma-F/Ba.Id.Ma-R (B. amyloliquefaciens), Bl.Id.Ma-F/Bl.Id.Ma-R (B. licheniformis), Bs.Id.Ma-F/Bs.Id.Ma-R (B. subtilis), Bp.Id.Ma-F/Bp.Id.Ma-R (B. pumilus), Bm.Id.Ma-F/Bm.Id.Ma-R (B. mojavensis), and Bsa.Id.Ma-F/Bsa.Id.Ma-R (B. safensis). Among 155 pure cultured isolates, 12 positive PCR fragments have been amplified. As a result, one strain of B. amyloliquefaciens, one of B. licheniformis, one of B. subtilis, three of B. pumilus, three of B. safensis, one of B. altitudinis, one of B. atrophaeus, and three of B. pumilus have been specifically obtained (Figure 1(b)). No fragment has been amplified in terms of B. mojavensis.

In addition, by using Ba.SHMa-F/Ba.SHMa-R, BLSHMa-F/BLBSHMa-R, Bs.SHMa-F/BSHMa-R, Bp.SHMa-F/Bp.SHMa-R, Bm.SHMa-F/Bm.SHMa-R, and Bsa.SHMa-F/Basa.SHMa-R primers, the internal fragments corresponding to 461 pb have been specifically amplified including B. mojavensis (Figure 1(c)). B. mojavensis has been amplified by directly using genomic DNA (Figure 1(c)). The sequencing of 11 PCR products of mature fibE fragments and analysis on NCBI showed 100% of identities corresponding to the targeted strains. To ensure those strains were the good ones, 16S ribosomal RNA genes were used to more confirm in parallel. 16S ribosomal RNA sequence has been submitted in GenBank. Rates of identities have been reported (Table 4).

3.3. Expression in E. coli BL21 and TOP10. The whole fibE gene encompassing pre- and prosequence products from seven strains of Bacillus belonging to group I species was cloned in frame with the vector pGEX-4T-1 and expressed in E. coli strains BL21 and TOP10. The purification of GST fused to recombinant serine-like enzyme had shown that the fusion has been cleaved (data not shown). Then mature sequence from AQSVPY peptide has been fused with GST. The same molecular weight, 52kDa, for fused proteins has been seen for identified Bacillus spp. including B. amyloliquefaciens, B.
### Table 2: Primers used in this study for plasmid constructions.

| Primer | Sequence | Organism         |
|--------|----------|------------------|
| bamACK1F | TGGATCCAGGCAAAAAAGGTATGGATCAG | B. amyloliquefaciens |
| ACK1    | TGGATCCGGCAGTCCGTGCTTTACGGCTG   |                 |
| ecoACK2R | AGAATTCCTTACGAGCTGCCGCTTACG   |                 |
| bamACK3F | TGGATCCATGAGGAAAAAGATTTTTGGCTTGGG | B. licheniformis |
| ACK2    | TGGATCCGCACAAAACCGTGCTTTACGGCAT |                 |
| xhoACK4R | ACTCGAGTTATTGAGCGGCGAGCGTTGAC |                 |
| bamACK5F | TGGATCCAGAAAATATGTTGAGATCGA | B. subtilis |
| ACK3    | TGGATCCGGCTCAGTGCTTATGGGTCAT |                 |
| ecoACK6R | AGAATTCCTTATTGACGAGCTGCTTGTA |                 |
| bamACK7F | AGGAATCCAAAAGAATAGGTGATAGAAGGTG | B. pumilus |
| ACK4    | AGGAATCCGCAAAAAACCCCTCTTATGGAAT |                 |
| ecoACK8R | AGAATTCAGATTAGAAGCCGCTTGAGCG |                 |
| bamACK9F | AGGAATCCAGAAGCAAAAAATTGTTGAGATCGA | B. mojavensis |
| ACK5    | AGGAATCCGGCAATCTTGCTTTACGGCAT |                 |
| ecoACK10R | AGAATTCCTTATTGACGAGCTGCTGAC |                 |
| ecoACK11F | TGAATTCGACAAAAACCGTGCTTTATGGAAAT | B. safensis |
| ACK6    | TGAATTCGCAAAAAACCGTGCTTTATGGAAAT |                 |
| xhoACK12R | ACTCGAGTTATTGAGCGGCGAGCGTTG |                 |
| bamACK3F | TGGATCCAGAAGCAAGTGGCCTTATGGGTC | B. atrophaeus |
| ACK7    | TGGATCCCGTACGCTTATGGGCTGGA |                 |
| ecoACK14R | AGAATTCCTTATTGACGAGCTGCTGAAAGG |                 |
| bamACK5F | TGGATCCAGAAGCAAGTGGCCTTATGGGTC | B. altitudinis |
| ACK8    | TGGATCCGGGTGCAAGCGTGCTTTTATGGTA |                 |
| ecoACK16R | AGAATTCCTTATTGACGAGCTGCTGAC |                 |
Table 3: List of constructions used and nominated strains as well.

| Plasmids    | Constructions     | Strains used to transform constructions | Given names expressing pGEX-4T-1 and its derivatives | References |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------|
| pGEX-4T-1   | E. coli BL21      | APK1                                    | This study                                          |
| pSNZ1       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Ba | E. coli BL21                              | QEK1                                                | This study |
| pDOK2       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bs | E. coli BL21                              | QEK2                                                | This study |
| pDOK3       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bl | E. coli BL21                              | QEK3                                                | This study |
| pDOK5       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bp | E. coli BL21                              | QEK4                                                | This study |
| pDOK6       | pGEX-4T-1:fibE-Bm  | E. coli BL21                              | QEK5                                                | This study |
| pDOK7       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bsa | E. coli BL21                              | QEK6                                                | This study |
| pDOK8       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bal | E. coli BL21                              | QEK7                                                | This study |
| pDOK9       | pGEX-4T-1:fibEma-Bat | E. coli BL21                              | QEK8                                                | This study |
Table 4: Comparison between 16S rRNA analysis and specific gene analysis.

| Strains                     | fibE encoding mature protein | % of Identities | fibEss | 16SRNA               | GenBank numbers |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------|
| B. subtilis strain GL48     | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK099888.1           |                 |
| B. licheniformis            | 100%                         | 100%            | nd     | nd                   |                 |
| B. mojavensis               | nd                           | 100%            | nd     | nd                   |                 |
| B. atrophaeus               | 100%                         | 100%            | nd     | nd                   |                 |
| B. amyloliquefaciens LULU2  | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK156334.1           |                 |
| B. altitudinis strain YUYU1 | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK156313.1           |                 |
| Bacillus altitudinis strain GL42 | 100%                  | 100%            | 99%    | MK199889.1           |                 |
| B. pumilus strain DOK3      | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK156166.1           |                 |
| B. pumilus strain DOK2      | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK156165.1           |                 |
| B. pumilus strain DOK1      | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK156164.1           |                 |
| Bacillus safensis strain DOK9 | 100%                    | 100%            | 99%    | MK184540.1           |                 |
| B. safensis strain DOK8     | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK184539.1           |                 |
| B. safensis strain DOK7     | 100%                         | 100%            | 99%    | MK184538.1           |                 |
licheniformis, B. subtilis, B. pumilus, B. safensis, B. atrophaeus, and B. altitudinis (Figure 2: top). Using monoclonal anti-GST, the fused proteins have been identified (Figure 2: bottom).

To easily characterize fibE gene and to assess whether the expression of fused recombinant FibE protein has the same characteristics as wild type one, construction of pGEX-4T-1 and its derivatives has been done. The E. coli transformants including TOPI0 group (KE1, KE2, KE3, KE4, KE6, KE7, and KE8; see Table 3) and BL21 group (QEK1, QEK2, QEK3, QEK4, QEK6, QEK7, and QEK8; see Table 3) showed high enzymatic activities of identified Bacillus spp. (Figure 3). It was done from the soluble lysate of induced cells harboring pGEX-4T-1 and derivatives. The activity was 2-fold higher compared with the wild type (Figure 4).

3.4. Immunodetection of FibE. In order to compare polyclonal antibody and genetic amplification, we generated antibodies by using BALB/c mice for GST-FibE derivatives from eight strains including B. subtilis, B. amylopoplacens,
Figure 3: Enzymatic activities of identified strains belonging to group I of *Bacillus* spp. BS: *B. subtilis*, Ba: *B. amyloliquefaciens*, Bl: *B. licheniformis*, Bp: *B. pumilus*, Bal: *B. altitudinis*, Bsa: *B. safensis*, Bat: *B. atrophaeus*. KE1 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Ba /TOP10), KE2 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bs/TOP10), KE3 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bl/TOP10), KE4 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bp), KE6 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bsa/TOP10), KE7 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bal/TOP10), and KE8 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bat/TOP10). QEK1 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Ba /BL21), QEK2 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bs/BL21), QEK3 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bl/BL21), QEK4 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bp/BL21), QEK6 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bsa/BL21), QEK7 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bal/BL21), and QEK8 (pGEX-4T-1: fibEma-Bat/BL21).

Figure 4: Western blotting using antibody antifibrinolytic enzymes of *Bacillus* belonging to group I. Bs: *B. subtilis*, Ba: *B. amyloliquefaciens*, Bl: *B. licheniformis*, Bsa: *B. safensis*, Bal: *B. altitudinis*, Bp: *B. pumilus*, Bat: *B. atrophaeus*.

*B. licheniformis*, *B. pumilus*, *B. altitudinis*, *B. safensis*, and *B. atrophaeus*. Immunoblotting of α-FibE-Bs, α-FibE-Ba, α-FibE-Bl, α-FibE-Bsa, and α-FibE-Bat showed that each antibody can easily recognize secreted proteins of randomly chosen *Bacillus* wild type belonging to group I. All polyclonal antibodies can detect wild type secreted proteins from *B. mojavensis* except for α-FibE-Bsa. α-FibE-Bp cannot recognize secreted protein from *B. licheniformis*. α-FibE-Bsa cannot detect *B. atrophaeus*, *B. safensis*, and *B. pumilus* (Figure 4).

4. Discussion

This work aims to contribute to the identification with cheaper equipment and rapid method of *Bacillus* spp. belonging to the phylogenetic group 1 [11] along with *B. amyloliquefaciens*, *B. licheniformis*, *B. subtilis*, *B. pumilus*, *B. mojavensis*, *B. safensis*, *B. atrophaeus*, and *B. altitudinis*. The phenotypic and biochemical characteristics of the 155 isolates were related and oriented towards *Bacillus* genera. Republic of Congo harbors several fermented foods and beverages containing unidentified microorganisms. Seven samples including local fermented foods (Samba, Ntoba Mbodi, Pandé, Loungouila, and Mbala-mpinda), soil, and intestine of Guppy fish [32] were used for the isolation of these bacteria. The genus *Bacillus* can be isolated from different fermented foods together with Ntoba Mbodi [5], Mbala-mpinda, Pandé, banana wine (*mbavu*), and sugar cane wine (Loungouila) but also from other diverse environments such as rocks, soil, the aquatic environments, and gut of various insects and animals [33]. The genus *Bacillus* is also known for its ability to produce extracellular proteases. In this work, we
have shown that, among 155 isolates, 73% of the characterized bacteria have proteolytic activities. The diameter of the light halo amounting to casein degradation varied between 1.5 ± 0.05 cm and 2.7 ± 0.03 cm. If isolates do not degrade casein, this does not necessarily mean that they do not have secreted protease; each species has an optimal temperature at which it degrades a given type of macromolecule [26]. Phenotypic tests only focused on the genera level. No species has been identified on the basis of the microbiology classical tests in this work. These methods have limitations in terms of microorganism’s identification. Close species such as B. pumilus and B. safensis are biochemically difficult to discriminate. These bacteria share a strong homology close to 99 to 100% [34]. It seems obvious that the use of molecular identification methods has more advantages. These methods are more reliable [35] compared to conventional one. Here, we exploited the polymorphism of the fibE gene. By targeting this new generation of highly conserved gene, we shown that B. pumilus (3), B. amylophiliquefaciens (1), B. licheniformis (1), B. subtilis (1), B. safensis (3), B. altitudinis (2), and B. atrophaeus have been amplified. The agarose gel electrophoresis of this amplification clearly showed bands about 850 bp and 450 bp as internal sequence, consistent with the size of the amplicons obtained in in silico studies. The amplification of the fibE-Bm gene using B. mojavensis-specific oligos was negative with 850 bp but positive with 450 bp when targeting B. mojavensis genomic implication. B. mojavensis has been largely isolated through several environments such as marine water [36], but also from soil and plants [37]. Previously it was shown that Bacillus species belonging to group I may have several copies of the genes encoding fibrinolytic enzymes. One pair of primers can amplify fibrinolytic genes of different sizes in different species of Bacillus, but these strains must have highly variable regions for amplification of these primers [26]. In this work we were able to only amplify one band. This could testify the reliability of the method. The strategy here allows us to identify the species in a very reliable and specific way, because, unlike the housekeeping genes generally used in the identification of these species, the sequences used in this study were targeted in a region containing very diversifying, degenerate codons. This increases the specificity of the hybridization of the primers used [38].

It is worth remembering that polymorphisms result from three types of DNA sequence variation [39]. In the "forward" and "reverse" oligonucleotide sequences that we had aligned, “single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs)” correspond to nucleotide substitutions. The in silico analysis of the genotyping of the forward sequences made it possible to highlight the presence of the nucleotide substitutions at the level of the primers (1 to 28 base pairs) (Figure 5). By comparing targeted sequences of eight strains in which primers have been chosen, we found nucleotide variabilities from 1 to 23 at positions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 17, 20, and 21. In Bl, Bs, Bp, Ba, Bat, Bs, and Bm, the guanine nucleotide was, respectively, replaced by cytosine (2G<2C) in Bal. More change can be detected at position 3, (Bal, Bat) 3T<3A (Bsa, Bp) 3G (Bl, Ba, Bs). In position 6 adenosine was replaced by guanine (Bl, Bs, Bp, Bat, Bm) 6A G (Bat, Ba), (Bal, Bl, Bp, Bsa) 7A 7T (Ba, Bat, Bs, Bm). In position 8 guanine is replaced by a cytosine (Bal) 8G<8C (Bl, Bsa, Bp, Ba, Bat, Bm, Bs), and in position 21 (Bal) 21T<21C (Bl, Bs, Bp, Bat, Bm) <A (Bsa, Ba). Based on this analysis, modifications could be viewed from 180 to 202, from 521 to 541, and from 808 to 828. These SNPs are largely sufficient to specifically amplify the fibE gene (Figure 5).

Construction in frame with the whole sequence showed that the fusion protein can be easily expressed in E. coli TOP10 and BL21. Previous studies have demonstrated that fibrinolytic enzyme can be expressed in E. coli [40–43]. In this work we showed GST fused to the whole protein sequence of FibE can be easily cleaved in the presequence domain encompassing the signal peptides (data not shown). We show that the protein overexpression of the mature sequence fused to the GST increased the fibrinolytic activity.

Polyclonal antibodies of FibE proteins variants are able to detect each FibE variant belonging to the Bacillus Group I. The predicted peptides encompassing six amino acid motifs (AQSVPY) are of wild type, conserved among Bacillus spp. belonging to group I. This also includes the epitope S87. These epitopes were confirmed by using Antibody Epitope Prediction (http://tools.immuneepitope.org/bcell/) using BepiPred Linear Epitope Prediction. It was particularly interesting to understand that identification using PCR amplification and sequencing seems to be the best lesson learnt in terms of Bacillus group I identification. The purpose of this part of the study described here was to assess a genetic discrimination and specific immunoidentification assay for detection of Bacillus belonging to group I in order to develop techniques that would avoid preenrichment and costly equipment so that it can be used for microorganisms identification isolated from local fermented food and beverages. Although it has been previously demonstrated that polyclonal antibodies of outer membrane proteins (OMP) from V. cholerae O1 can be easily detected [44], we do consider that identification at the level of the gene should be a better approach because the homology percentage of the fibE protein is very high (70%) and this would generate more difficulties for an immunological approach.

To our knowledge there is no other study related to the identification of Bacillus belonging to group I targeting the highly conserved gene encoding fibrinolytic enzymes. Since 1987 nobody had postulated this gene could be used to discriminate Bacillus. This strategy is the first one in this regard since the discovery of the fibrinolytic enzymes. However, several studies by using a specific gene of interest for the direct identification of strains have been done it as well. Bacteria such as B. thuringiensis can be detected by the sequences of the cry gene primers without sequencing. These primers hybridize specifically in B. thuringiensis [45]. Using a direct PCR approach, a yeast study identified species of Saccharomyces arboricola, S. bayanus, S. cariocanus, S. cerevisiae, S. kudriavzevii, S. mikatae, S. paradoxus, and S. pastorius by targeting specific genes to identify these species [38]. In addition Shigella flexneri and Salmonella typhimurium can be easily identified by, respectively, targeting icsB and invG genes [32]. These methods have a major and direct advantage for the identification of these strains.
5. Conclusion

Overall, this study is part of the development of new approach to easily, quickly, and reliably identify Bacillus bacteria belonging to group I species. We have isolated and characterized Bacillus species from different samples by using classical microbiology techniques and molecular biology one. Our new strategy, using a highly conserved gene encoding a fibrinolytic enzyme, allows us to identify isolates including B. amyloliquefaciens, B. licheniformis, B. subtilis, B. pumilus, B. mojavensis, B. atrophaeus, B. altitudinis, and B. safensis. This identification was confirmed in parallel by using the amplification and sequencing of the 16S rRNA gene, which is recognized as the standard for the identification of bacteria. Our identification strategy is direct and less expensive and has promising future. This could open windows and doors for

Figure 5: Sequence alignment for randomly chosen primers.
various perspectives such as assessment of cell-cell interactions by understanding quorum sensing, quorum quenching, and biofilms during fermentation process.

**Data Availability**

The Excel sheet including the data used to support the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author upon request.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any intellectual commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.

**Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to Prof. Clobite Bouka Biona, Prof. Anne Botteaux, and Prof. Arsen Lenga for their continuous encouragement and for helpful data analysis before publication.

**References**

[1] N. Ben Omar, H. Abriouel, S. Keleke et al., "Bacteriocin-producing Lactobacillus strains isolated from poto poto, a Congolese fermented maize product, and genetic fingerprinting of their plantaricin operons," *International Journal of Food Microbiology*, vol. 127, no. 1-2, pp. 18–25, 2008.

[2] A. B. Vouidibio Mbozo, S. C. Kobawila, A. Anyogu et al., "Investigation of the diversity and safety of the predominant Bacillus pumilus sensu lato and other Bacillus species involved in the alkaline fermentation of cassava leaves for the production of Ntoba Mbodi," *Food Control*, vol. 82, pp. 154–162, 2017.

[3] C. Aime Kayath, E. Nguimbi, J. Goma Tchimbakala, V. Mamonexene, A. Aime Lebonguy, and G. Ahombo, "Towards the understanding of fermented food biotechnology in Congo brazzaville," *Advance Journal of Food Science and Technology*, vol. 12, no. 11, pp. 593–602, 2016.

[4] L. I. I. Ouoba, C. A. G. Nyanga-Koumou, C. Parkouda et al., "Genotypic diversity of lactic acid bacteria isolated from African traditional alkaline-fermented foods," *Journal of Applied Microbiology*, vol. 108, no. 6, pp. 2019–2029, 2010.

[5] A. B. V. Mbozo, C. A. Kayath, E. Nguimbi, A. A. Lebonguy, and C. S. Kobawila, "Potential spore-forming probiotics isolated from ntoba mbodi, alkaline fermented leaves of cassava from the republic of the congo," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 6, 2017.

[6] J. P. Tamang, K. Watanabe, and W. H. Holzapfel, "Review: Diversity of microorganisms in global fermented foods and beverages," *Frontiers in Microbiology*, vol. 7, p. 377, 2016.

[7] F. M. F. Elshaghabee, N. Rokana, R. D. Gulhane, C. Sharma, and H. Panwar, "Bacillus as potential probiotics: Status, concerns, and future perspectives," *Frontiers in Microbiology*, vol. 8, p. 1490, 2017.

[8] G. Moreno-Hagelsieb and S. C. Janga, "Operons and the effect of genome redundancy in deciphering functional relationships using phylogenetic profiles," *Proteins: Structure, Function, and Genetics*, vol. 70, no. 2, pp. 344–352, 2008.

[9] L. D. Alcaraz, G. Moreno-Hagelsieb, L. E. Eguiarte, V. Souza, L. Herrera-Estrella, and G. Olmedo, "Understanding the evolutionary relationships and major traits of Bacillus through comparative genomics," *BMC Genomics*, vol. 11, p. 332, 2010.

[10] V. Bhandari, N. Z. Ahmod, H. N. Shah, and R. S. Gupta, "Molecular signatures for Bacillus species: demarcation of the Bacillus subtilis and Bacillus cereus clades in molecular terms and proposal to limit the placement of new species into the genus Bacillus," *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*, vol. 63, no. 7, pp. 2712–2726, 2013.

[11] W. Wang and M. Sun, "Phylogenetic relationships between Bacillus species and related genera inferred from 16S rDNA sequences," *Brazilian Journal of Microbiology*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 505–521, 2009.

[12] S. Guglielmetti, D. Mora, and C. Parini, "Small rolling circle plasmids in Bacillus subtilis and related species: Organization, distribution, and their possible role in host physiology," *Plasmid*, vol. 57, no. 3, pp. 245–264, 2007.

[13] S. Das, H. R. Dash, N. Mangwani, J. Chakraborty, and S. Kumari, "Understanding molecular identification and polyphasic taxonomic approaches for genetic relatedness and phylogenetic relationships of microorganisms," *Journal of Microbiological Methods*, vol. 103, pp. 80–100, 2014.

[14] L. Wang, F. Lee, C. Tai, and H. Kasai, "Comparison of gyrB gene sequences, 16S rRNA gene sequences and DNA DNA hybridization in the Bacillus subtilis group," *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*, vol. 57, no. 8, pp. 1846–1850, 2007.

[15] J.-S. Ki, W. Zhang, and P.-Y. Qian, "Discovery of marine Bacillus species by 16S rRNA and rpob comparisons and their usefulness for species identification," *Journal of Microbiological Methods*, vol. 77, no. 1, pp. 48–57, 2009.

[16] K. Goto, T. Omura, Y. Haru, and Y. Sadaie, "Application of the partial 16S rDNA sequence as an index for rapid identification of species in the genus Bacillus," *The Journal of General and Applied Microbiology*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 1–8, 2000.

[17] S. G. Bavykin, Y. P. Lysov, V. Zakhariev et al., "Use of 16S rRNA, 23S rRNA, and gyrB gene sequence analysis to determine phylogenetic relationships of Bacillus cereus group microorganisms," *Journal of Clinical Microbiology*, vol. 42, no. 8, pp. 3711–3730, 2004.

[18] C. Ash, J. A. E. Farrow, S. Wallbanks, and M. D. Collins, "Phylogenetic heterogeneity of the genus Bacillus revealed by comparative analysis of small-subunit-ribosomal RNA sequences," *Letters in Applied Microbiology*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 202–206, 1991.

[19] R. Saito, Y. Ozawa, N. Kuzuno, and M. Tomita, "Computer analysis of potential stem structures of rRNA operons in various procaryote genomes," *Gene*, vol. 259, pp. 217–222, 2000.

[20] G. B. Fogel, C. R. Collins, J. Li, and C. F. Brunk, "Prokaryotic genomes," *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*, vol. 127, no. 1-2, pp. 18–25, 2008.

[21] H. S. Sumi, H. Hamada, H. Tsushima, H. Mihara, and H. Muraki, "A novel fibrinolytic enzyme (nattokinase) in the vegetable cheese Natto; a typical and popular soybean food in the Japanese diet," *Experientia*, vol. 43, no. 10, pp. 1110–1111, 1987.

[22] Y. Peng and Y. Z. Zhang, "Isolation and characterization of a fibrinolytic enzyme-producing strain DC-4 from Chinese doucchi and primary analysis of the enzyme property," *High Technol Lett*, vol. 12, pp. 30–33, 2002.

[23] W. Kim, K. Choi, Y. Kim et al., "Purification and characterization of a fibrinolytic enzyme produced from Bacillus sp.
strain CK II-4 screened from Chungkook-Jang,” Applied and Environmental Microbiology, vol. 62, no. 7, pp. 2482–2488, 1996.

[24] E. Nguimbi, “Production of a new fibrinolytic enzyme, bacterium growth and enzyme production conditions, purification and characterization of the new enzyme,” Biotechnology, vol. 12, 2002.

[25] G. M. Kim, A. R. Lee, K. W. Lee et al., “Characterization of a 27 kDa fibrinolytic enzyme from Bacillus amylo liquefaciens CH51 isolated from cheonggukjang,” Journal of Microbiology and Biotechnology, vol. 19, no. 10, pp. 997–1004, 2009.

[26] E. Nguimbi, G. Ahombo, R. Moyen, R. Ampa, and A. Vvoidibio, “Optimization of growth, fibrinolytic enzyme production and PCR amplification of encoding fibrinolytic enzyme gene in Bacillus amylo liquefaciens isolated from Ntoba mbodi at Brazzaville,” International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), vol. 3, no. 11, 2014.

[27] V. Ulyanova, R. Shah Mahmud, E. Dudkina, V. Vershinina, and O. Ilinskaya, “Draft whole genome sequence of Bacillus pumilus strain 3-19, a chemical mutant overproducing extracellular ribonuclease,” Genome Announcements, vol. 2, no. 4, 2014.

[28] D. A. Coil, J. N. Benardini, and J. A. Eisen, “Draft genome sequence of Bacillus safensis JPL-MERTA-8-2, isolated from a Mars-Bound Spacecraft,” Genome Announcements, vol. 3, no. 6, 2015.

[29] A. Tsirigotaki, J. De Geyter, N. Šoštarić, A. Economou, and S. Karamanou, “Protein export through the bacterial Sec pathway,” Nature Reviews Microbiology, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 21–36, 2017.

[30] X.-M. HAN, R.-F. GUO, H.-W. YU, and Y.-M. JIA, “Cloning and Expression of One Fibrinolytic Enzyme from Bacillus sp. zhw-2,” Agricultural Sciences in China, vol. 8, no. 5, pp. 591–596, 2009.

[31] M. Drancourt, C. Bollet, A. Carlroz, R. Martelin, J.-P. Gayral, and D. Raoult, “16S ribosomal DNA sequence analysis of a large collection of environmental and clinical unidentifiable bacterial isolates,” Journal of Clinical Microbiology, vol. 38, no. 10, pp. 3623–3630, 2000.

[32] C. A. Kayath, A. Ibala Zamba, J. Goma-Tchimbakala et al., “Microbiota landscape of gut system of guppy fish (poecilia reticulata) plays an outstanding role in adaptation mechanisms,” International Journal of Microbiology, vol. 2019, pp. 1–10, 2019.

[33] W. L. Nicholson, “Roles of Bacillus endospores in the environment,” Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 410–416, 2002.

[34] E. S. A. Da Fonseca, C. F. F. Angolini, M. A. Z. Arruda et al., “Identification of oxidoreductases from the petroleum Bacillus safensis strain,” Biotechnology Reports, vol. 8, pp. 152–159, 2015.

[35] B. Buszewski, A. Rogowska, P. Pomastowski, M. Złoch, and V. Railean-Plugaru, “Identification of microorganisms by modern analytical techniques,” Journal of AOAC International, vol. 100, no. 6, pp. 1607–1623, 2017.

[36] H. Ben Ayed, N. Hmidet, M. Béchet et al., “Identification and biochemical characteristics of lipopeptides from Bacillus mojavensis A21,” Process Biochemistry, vol. 49, no. 10, pp. 1699–1707, 2014.

[37] C. W. Bacon, D. M. Hinton, T. R. Mitchell, M. E. Snook, and B. Olubajo, “Characterization of endophytic strains of Bacillus mojavensis and their production of surfactin isomers,” Biological Control, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 1–9, 2012.

[38] A. Muir, E. Harrison, and A. Wheals, “A multiplex set of species-specific primers for rapid identification of members of the genus Saccharomyces,” FEMS Yeast Research, vol. 11, no. 7, pp. 552–563, 2011.