The gel formulation of the aqueous phase of snakehead fish (Channa striata) extract with various combinations of HPMC K4M and Carbopol 934

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ABSTRACT

Gel is a clear, semi-solid, and translucent dosage form that contains an active substance. The aqueous phase of the extract of Channa striata (snakehead fish) contains reactive albumin that is effective in accelerating wound-healing process. Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC) and carbopol are the commonly used gelling agents in gel formation. This research aimed to identify the effect of different base (gelling agent) combinations on the physical and chemical stability of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of Channa striata extract for 28-day storage. The variation of HPMC:Carbopol ratio was 25:75%, 50:50%, and 75:25%. The physical and chemical stability tests included organoleptic, spreadability, adhesive capacity, and pH tests. The results were analyzed with one-way ANOVA and followed by post hoc Least Significant Difference (LSD) test at 95% confidence level. The entire HPMC:Carbopol combinations showed that the aqueous phase of the gel dosage form was both physically and chemically stable during the 28-day observation. The higher the concentration of HPMC, the better the physical and chemical stability. The most optimum combination was F3 (75:25%), as evidenced by the following test results: stable organoleptic, homogeneous, preserved adhesion (±2.301.78 second), and safe pH for skin (±6.42). Furthermore, the gel dosage form was proven to have good spreadability under the weights of 50 g (±14.517 cm²), 100 g (±16.169 cm²), and 150 g (±16.957 cm²), with an average of ±15.881 cm².

Keywords: snakehead fish, gel, HPMC 4000, carbopol 934, gel stability.

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INTRODUCTION

The Asian snakehead (*Channa striata*) is a natural medicine ingredient currently used to treat post-surgery wounds and burns (Saleh et al., 1985). The basic principle of optimal wound healing is minimizing tissue damage by providing proper nutrition to create a moist environment for restoring the anatomical continuity and function of the damaged tissue in a short time (Gandhekar et al., 2012). People have long consumed snakeheads as a treatment in wound healing by firstly processing them into a common side dish (Jangkaru, 1999). Nevertheless, until recently, there has been an absence of thorough studies about the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract that is made into topical dosage form with different combinations of HPMC K4M and Carbopol 934 as its base.

Gel is a clear and translucent semi-solid dosage form that contains active substances and is a type of colloidal dispersion characterized by strong adhesive due to interconnected network within the dispersed phase (Ansel, 1989). The most commonly applied bases are hydrophobic gel and hydrophilic gel. The widely used hydrophilic gel includes HPMC K4M and Carbopol 934. The 2:1 combination of Carbopol and HPMC is empirically proven to produce the highest viscosity and the highest percentage of diffusion of nystatin gel dosage form compared to the use of each base separately (Quinone and Ghaly, 2008). The combination of HPMC K4M and Carbopol 934 shows the best results because it promotes better drug release (Verma et al., 2013). Carbopol and HPMC are combined for several purposes, i.e., to cover the shortcoming of Carbopol—when applied in high concentration, it forms new acidic gels—and to obtain a gel dosage form with better physical and chemical properties (Dewi and Saptarini, 2016). Therefore, to achieve optimal physical and chemical stability, the aqueous phase of the gel dosage form of *Channa striata* extract is better formulated with the combination of HPMC K4M and Carbopol 934.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

The main materials used in this research were the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract (in Padang Tikar Village, Batu Ampar District, Kuburaya Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia), hydroxypropyl methylcellulose (HPMC K4M) (Shanghai Honest Chem Co., Ltd, Room 204, No. 889, Yishan Road, Shanghai, China), and Carbopol 934 (D-616, Shiromani Complex, Nehrunagar-Satellite Road Ahmedabad-380015, Gujarat, India (Shree Chemicals, www.carbomers.com)).

Animal determination

The Asian snakeheads (*Channa striata*) used in this research were determined in the Laboratory of Biology, Department of Biology, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Science, Tanjungpura University, Pontianak, West Kalimantan.

Sample collection

The Asian snakeheads were obtained from fish traders in Padang Tikar Village, Batu Ampar District, Kuburaya Regency, West Kalimantan. They were selected using purposive sampling technique (i.e., sampling under particular considerations) based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

a. Every fish weighed 500-1,000 g
b. All fish were fresh (firmly adhering scales, bright and clear eyes, red to dark-red gills, and firm meat)

Exclusion criteria:

a. Fish that were dead for more than 8 hours without low-temperature preservation
b. Fish with dull and easily pulled scales
c. Fish with spoiled and easily destroyed meat
Sample processing
A total of 1.505 kg of snakeheads was cleaned by scaling the head and removing the stomach contents, and then steamed in a pot for 30 minutes at 65-70°C. It was wrapped with cotton cloth and pressed with a high pressure using a hydraulic press for extraction. Afterward, the resultant extract was placed into test tubes and covered with a clean pack and aluminum foil, and then centrifuged for 60 minutes at 6,000 rpm. The top layer that contained oil was removed from the tubes. The aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract was stored in a container and covered with aluminum foil and a clean pack (Astawan, 1998).

Albumin detection
A 5-ml sample of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract was heated in a water bath for 30 minutes. The observation focused on any changes in this phase. Positive albumin content is indicated by white flocs floating on the top layer of the aqueous phase (Poedjiadi, 2006).

The formulation of gel dosage form
HPMC K4M was dispersed in distilled water that was 20 times the weight and then stirred slowly until a transparent color was reached. Meanwhile, in a different mortar, Carbopol 934 was dispersed in distilled water with a volume of 40-50% from the 60% total water used in the formula, crushed slowly until homogeneous. This mixture was added with triethanolamine (TEA) slowly and crushed at the same time until it was clear. The dispersed HPMC K4M was added to Carbopol 934 and crushed slowly until homogeneous. DMDM Hydantoin was added to the base, mixed, and crushed until homogeneous. Propylene glycol was also added to the base a little at a time, and then crushed and added with water simultaneously until a gel base was formed. The aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract was added last to the gel base and then crushed until homogeneous. All of the three formulas (F1, F2, and F3) were replicated three times. In total, there were nine dosage forms analyzed in this research (Table I).

| Table I. The formulas of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Materials                     | Formula 1 (%)   | Formula 2 (%)   | Formula 3 (%)   |
| The aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract | 20              | 20              | 20              |
| HPMC K4M                      | 0.25            | 0.5             | 0.75            |
| Carbopol 934                  | 0.75            | 0.5             | 0.25            |
| TEA                           | 0.75            | 0.5             | 0.25            |
| DMDM Hydantoin                | 1               | 1               | 1               |
| Propylene glycol              | 15              | 15              | 15              |
| Distilled water               | Ad 100          | Ad 100          | Ad 100          |

Notes:  
F1 = HPMC:Carbopol = 25:75%  
F2 = HPMC:Carbopol = 50:50%  
F3 = HPMC:Carbopol = 75:25%

Organoleptic assessment
The organoleptic assessment of the dosage form relied on the use of human’s basic sense to describe the shape or consistency (e.g., solid, viscous, or water), color (e.g., yellow or brown), and odor (e.g., natural smell, aromatic, or odorless). It observed sensible texture, color, and scent (Andrie, 2015). In this research, the organoleptic observation was performed on day 0, 1, 3, 7, 14, 21, and 28 (Hapsari *et al.*, 2014). It also included examining the homogeneity of the gel dosage ... *(Taurina *et al.*, )
form by spreading it on a glass or other transparent materials. In this case, the dosage form had to show homogeneous structure without any visible coarse grains (Department of Health, 2014).

Spreadability test
Spreadability is defined as the ability of a gel to spread when applied to the skin. The procedure of the spreadability test was as follows. A 1-gram sample of the gel produced from the formulation in point 5 was placed carefully on a graph paper that was covered with transparent plastic. The spread diameter was calculated after 15 seconds. Afterward, the gel was covered with plastic again, pressed with standardized masses of up to 150 g, and left for 60 seconds (Ameliana and Lina, 2011). The spreadability was observed on day 1, 7, 14, 21, and 28 (Hapsari et al., 2014).

Adhesive strength test
The adhesive strength test was performed to determine the capability of gel to adhere to the skin. A sample of 0.1 g of the gel was applied between two object glasses and compressed by placing a weight of 1,000 g for 5 minutes. It was set in the test tool, and extra weight of 80 gram was added. The time required to separate the two glasses was recorded (Miranti, 2009). The adhesive strength of the gel was observed on day 0, 1, 3, 7, 14, 21, and 28 (Hapsari et al., 2014).

pH determination
The acidity was measured by placing a pH meter in the sample. The pH meter used in this research had been previously calibrated with a standard solution. pH analysis aimed to determine the suitability of the pH of the dosage form with the pH of the skin’s physiology, i.e., 4.5-6.5 (Tranggono and Latifah, 2007). The acidity of the sample was measured three times on day 1, 7, 14, 21, and 28 (Hapsari et al., 2014).

Data Analysis
The test results of the physical and chemical properties of the gel dosage form (organoleptic, adhesive strength, spreadability, and pH) were statistically analyzed with homogeneity and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. If the data are homogeneous (α ≥ 0.05) and normally distributed (α ≥ 0.05), then parametric statistical test, namely one-way ANOVA and post hoc analysis, is performed. Otherwise, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and Mann Whitney tests are performed. The data have statistically different meaning when the parametric or non-parametric test yields α ≥ 0.05.

Results and Discussion
The albumin detection in Channa striata extract
Heating can cause protein denaturation. The first step of this process is flocculation, which is the aggregation of unstable particles into irregular clusters or flocs. It reduces protein levels (Yuniarti et al., 2013). The Channa striata extract was heated at 90°C for 30 minutes. This heating produced white flocs floating on the surface (Figure 1), indicating positive albumin content.
The gel formulation (Taurina et al., 2011)
observation days reduced the viscosity but increased the spreadability of the gel. On the contrary, when the pH increased, the viscosity also increased and resulted in low spreadability.

Table III. The spreadability test results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract under a mass of 50 g

| Day | Spreading Extents (cm²), Compressed with a Mass of 50 g (n=3, mean ± SD) |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | F1                                    | F2                                    | F3                                    |
| 1   | 12.700 ± 0.599                       | 14.017 ± 0.337                       | 10.734 ± 0.030                       |
| 3   | 14.878 ± 0.344                       | 12.946 ± 0.050                       | 17.301 ± 0.283                       |
| 7   | 9.702 ± 0.270                        | 10.806 ± 0.050                       | 18.276 ± 0.259                       |
| 14  | 11.515 ± 0.181                       | 12.906 ± 0.825                       | 12.091 ± 0.080                       |
| 21  | 10.490 ± 0.909                       | 12.756 ± 0.749                       | 13.524 ± 0.663                       |
| 28  | 13.810 ± 0.377                       | 14.562 ± 0.550                       | 15.178 ± 0.630                       |

Table IV. The spreadability test results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract under a Mass of 100 g

| Day | Spreading Extents (cm²), Compressed with a Mass of 100 g (n=3, mean ± SD) |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | F1                                    | F2                                    | F3                                    |
| 1   | 12.516 ± 0.448                       | 14.127 ± 0.123                       | 14.391 ± 0.290                       |
| 3   | 15.813 ± 0.261                       | 15.183 ± 0.205                       | 18.285 ± 0.272                       |
| 7   | 10.109 ± 0.301                       | 11.704 ± 1.073                       | 19.237 ± 0.210                       |
| 14  | 12.898 ± 0.319                       | 13.396 ± 0.768                       | 12.850 ± 0.133                       |
| 21  | 13.586 ± 0.509                       | 13.396 ± 0.768                       | 15.270 ± 0.314                       |
| 28  | 15.201 ± 0.203                       | 15.550 ± 0.711                       | 16.980 ± 0.841                       |

Table V. The spreadability test results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract under a mass of 150 g

| Day | Spreading Extents (cm²) under a Mass of 150 g (n=3, mean ± SD) |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | F3                                    | F4                                    | F5                                    |
| 1   | 11.996 ± 0.945                       | 12.996 ± 0.056                       | 15.428 ± 0.499                       |
| 3   | 16.457 ± 0.489                       | 15.929 ± 0.286                       | 19.078 ± 0.001                       |
| 7   | 10.563 ± 0.416                       | 14.432 ± 0.810                       | 19.559 ± 0.283                       |
| 14  | 14.476 ± 0.772                       | 13.767 ± 0.791                       | 13.260 ± 0.183                       |
| 21  | 13.655 ± 0.970                       | 14.339 ± 0.654                       | 17.571 ± 0.844                       |
| 28  | 15.645 ± 0.831                       | 16.588 ± 0.496                       | 16.844 ± 1.290                       |

The results of One-Way ANOVA, followed by post hoc LSD test (95% confidence level), showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the spreadabilities of F1, F2, and F3 compressed with a mass of 50 g (P> 0.05). However, when compressed with 100 g and 150 g, the spreadability of F3 was significantly different from F1 but not substantially different from F2 (P> 0.05). F3 had the highest spreadability among the other formulas because it had the lowest
concentration of Carbopol. Lower levels of HPMC and Carbopol, as polymers or gelling agents, are followed with higher spreadability. On the contrary, higher concentrations likely increase and strengthen the gel matrix; hence, lower spreadability. Compared to F1 and F2, F3 had a lower share of Carbopol but a higher percentage of HPMC. For a 30-gram dosage form, the concentration of HPMC was only 0.75% of the weight of the dosage form, which is practically smaller than the commonly used concentration in the manufacture of gel dosage form.

In comparison to Carbopol, HPMC is a gelling agent that has the most optimal physical stability in gel dosage form. Also, as a hydrophilic polymer, its advantage includes producing better spreadability on the skin (Nursiah and Faradiba, 2011).

**Adhesive strength**

Greater adhesive strength is followed by a higher drug diffusion because it allows a more extended bond or contact between the gel and the skin. A dosage form that can adhere well to the skin can optimize its use efficiency because it does not require repeated application. Meanwhile, low adhesive strength indicates that a dosage form can easily separate from the skin; therefore, the supposed effect is not optimally achieved. Despite the absence of specific requisites concerning the adhesive strength of a semi-solid dosage form, adherence of more than 1 second is preferable (Zats and Gregory, 1996).

The test results showed that a higher adhesive strength was attributed to a higher concentration of HPMC. The 28-day test showed that the adhesive strength became greater as the observation day increased. HPMC forms colloids when added with water (Rowe et al., 2009). Colloids are formed because the dispersed substance absorbs the dispersed medium and creates a viscous and sticky material. Therefore, the higher the concentration of HPMC, the more the number of colloids and the greater the adhesive strength. In this research, a good adherence was presented by F3. From day 21 to 28, the adhesive strength of F3 was nearly constant and stable (Table VI). The results of One-way ANOVA and post hoc test showed that the adhesive strength of F3 was significantly different from F1 and F2 (P< 0.05).

**Table VI. The adhesive strength test results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract**

| Day | F1 (Seconds) | F2 (Seconds) | F3 (Seconds) |
|-----|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1   | 30.00 ± 0.00 | 80.33 ± 0.58 | 1400.33 ± 0.58 |
| 3   | 46.00 ± 1.00 | 150.33 ± 0.58 | 1480.33 ± 0.58 |
| 7   | 147.33 ± 0.58 | 540.33 ± 0.58 | 1859.33 ± 0.58 |
| 14  | 620.33 ± 0.58 | 1230.33 ± 0.58 | 2400.00 ± 0.00 |
| 21  | 920.67 ± 0.58 | 1930.00 ± 0.00 | 3330.33 ± 0.58 |
| 28  | 1840.33 ± 0.58 | 2535.33 ± 0.58 | 3340.33 ± 0.58 |

**pH Determination Results**

The average pH of the gel dosage form was F3 (±6.42) > F2 (±6.23) > F1 (±6.12). The higher the concentration of Carbopol, the more acidic the gel (Table VII). The three formulas produced a variety of pH following the different concentration ratios of the gel bases. The variation of the pH on every observation day was due to the influence of Carbopol—the pH is highly unstable—and the different pH levels at which HPMC and Carbopol exhibited good stability (HPMC forms a stable gel at pH 3-11, while Carbopol at pH 6-8) (Quinones and Ghaly, 2008).
Unstable storage temperature also affects the resultant pH. The use of 0.1-0.5% Carbopol forms a gel with a pH of 7.4 and low viscosity (Dewi and Saptarini, 2016). F2 and F3, composed of 0.5% and 0.25% Carbopol, respectively, from the 100% total production of 30 g in weight, produced a pH of < 7.4. The addition of triethanolamine (pH 10.5) as an alkali agent helps Carbopol to achieve the pH of a stable gel; therefore, the concentration of triethanolamine has to be considered in gel formulation. Overall, the three formulas produced pH levels (4.5-6.5) within the standard range of safe or tolerable pH for the skin (5-10) (Christopher et al., 1993; Tranggono and Latifah, 2007).

### Table VII. The pH determination results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract

| Day | pH (n=3, mean ± SD) |
|-----|---------------------|
|     | F1                  | F2                  | F3                  |
| 1   | 6.15 ± 0.12         | 6.30 ± 0.21         | 6.53 ± 0.08         |
| 3   | 6.02 ± 0.11         | 6.17 ± 0.18         | 6.42 ± 0.09         |
| 7   | 6.22 ± 0.12         | 6.34 ± 0.14         | 6.51 ± 0.08         |
| 14  | 6.08 ± 0.16         | 6.21 ± 0.21         | 6.42 ± 0.07         |
| 21  | 6.44 ± 0.05         | 6.56 ± 0.01         | 6.66 ± 0.10         |
| 28  | 5.80 ± 0.14         | 5.79 ± 0.18         | 6.00 ± 0.06         |

The physical and chemical stability test results of the gel dosage form of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract showed excellent stability during the 28-day observation. These results also showed that all of the formulas, which were replicated three times, created a reproducible dosage form. Since the test results were close (insignificant difference), repeated production will produce similar quality. This research was performed to provide an overview of the physical and chemical stability of the gel dosage form, as well as its safe application to the skin. Therefore, future studies are recommended to perform a thorough irritation test, focusing on whether the gel dosage form formulated in this research causes irritation when applied to human skin. During the development of topical dosage form, which involves the identification and selection of the best formulation, in vitro studies of skin penetration and the release of active substances through the skin are necessary. A proper formulation will provide optimal release and deposition of active substance to the desired skin layers (corneum, epidermis, or dermis) (Witt and Bucks, 2003).

One of the widely applied techniques in measuring in vitro skin permeation is the Franz diffusion cell. Therefore, the in vitro penetration test of the gel dosage form using the Franz diffusion cell is necessary. Also, the future research can focus on various concentrations of the aqueous phase of *Channa striata* extract for the formulation of gel dosage form and recommend the addition of aromatic scent in the formulation form to reduce the natural odor of *C. striata*.

### CONCLUSION

Each formula of the gel dosage form showed a good physical and chemical stability during the 28-day observation. However, the HPMC-Carbopol concentration ration in F3 (75:25%) showed the best physical and chemical properties.
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