Simultaneous Biological Nutrient Removal from Municipal Wastewater and CO2-biofixation using Chlorella kessleri

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Research

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Abstract

Growing microalgae in tertiary wastewater offers a prospective avenue to remove and re-use the nutrients N and P simultaneously. Moreover, CO₂ fixation via microalgae is a potential and promising approach of capturing and storing CO₂. The impacts of various nitrogen to phosphorous ratios on the growth, nutrient removal from municipal wastewater, and the bio-fixation of CO₂ using Chlorella kessleri were evaluated in this study. For this purpose, the microalgae was grown in synthetic wastewater, similar in composition to tertiary municipal wastewater, with NP ratios of 2:1, 4:1, 6:1, and 8:1 in batch photobioreactors for 13 days. Biomass concentration increases at all NP ratios and the maximum biomass concentration is 606.79 mg/L at the NP ratio of 2:1. Nitrogen removal is more than 95% at all NP ratios except at 8:1, where it is only 72.4%. The removal efficiency of phosphorous is significantly affected by the NP ratio. The maximum phosphorous removal is about 97% for the NP ratio 6:1, whereas the lowest removal efficiency of about 20% is at the NP ratio of 2:1. The maximum CO₂ bio-fixation rate of 89.36 mgL⁻¹d⁻¹ at the end of the first 7 days of the cultivation period is at the NP ratio of 6:1. In this study, Monod growth kinetic model based on a single substrate factor was used and the experimental findings agree well with the predictions by the model.

Introduction

Rapid industrialization and urbanization are generating enormous quantities of wastewater that must be treated before safe disposal. The wastewater (WW) associated with over population and industrialization are the major wastes, which pose an immense challenge to ensuring environmental sustainability around the world (Eze et al. 2018). The presence of excessive nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorous in the wastewater, can lead to the eutrophication in receiving streams and disturb the stability of the ecosystem (Cai et al. 2013). Hence, the removal of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous from tertiary wastewater is vital to reduce the oxygen requirement of the receiving streams, save aquatic life, and prevent eutrophication in lakes and streams to protect human health. At present, a broad range of methods, including filtration, membrane technology, precipitation, the advanced oxidation process (AOP), and biological nutrient removal (BNR) using activated sludge are available for the removal of nutrients from tertiary wastewater. However, these techniques generally entail higher energy and maintenance costs, hazards associated with the disposal of chemicals, and the production of a large volume of waste sludge (Rajasulochana and Preethy 2016). In addition, the inability to eliminate nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) from tertiary wastewater simultaneously during the treatment process is a major drawback of these processes (Arbib et al. 2014).

Several studies have confirmed that microalgae can remove nitrogen and phosphorous during the treatment of tertiary municipal wastewater, which have gained much interest in recent years (Xin et al. 2010a; Khan and Yoshida 2008). The most widely applied cultures of microalgae for nutrient removal are based on species of Chlorella (Hernandez et al. 2006; Moreno Osorio et al. 2019), Scenedesmus (Shi et al. 2007), Botryococcus (Yu and Kim 2017) and spirulina (Olguín 2003). As the absence of one nutrient
inhibits the removal of the other and vice versa, the nutrients N and P must be simultaneously present in culture media for microalgae growth. The concentration of nitrogen and phosphorous in wastewater varies, with nitrogen concentration varying between 15 and 90 ppm and phosphorous concentration varying between 4 and 20 ppm in municipal wastewater (Beuckels et al. 2015). As the main route of removal of nutrients by microalgae is through their uptake during growth, the microalgal growth rate directly influences the rate of removal of nutrients. Also, nitrogen and phosphorous can be concurrently consumed and removed effectively only if the nitrogen to phosphorous (NP) ratio of wastewater is in an appropriate range (Xin et al. 2010b).

Microalgae cultivation in wastewater through photosynthesis can overcome the aforesaid problems and offers many advantages, including the following: i) adds an economic value to tertiary wastewater effluents in terms of water and nutrient recovery (Arbib et al. 2014), ii) nitrogen and phosphorus are removed from wastewater simultaneously (Xin et al. 2010b), iii) microalgae grow about 10–50 times faster than terrestrial plants, resulting in the efficient conversion of CO$_2$ into organic compounds (Y. Li et al. 2008; Razzak et al. 2017), iv) can generate a large volume of water suitable for recycling on-site and off-site or safe to discharge to surface water bodies, and v) can produce algae biomass suitable for bioenergy generation (Driver et al. 2014).

Previous studies have demonstrated that concentration of nutrients has a great impact on the rate of growth of microalgae and bio-fixation of CO$_2$ (Razzak et al. 2017; Razzak et al. 2013). *Chlorella Kessleri* is a freshwater microalgae species, which is capable of removing nutrients from tertiary wastewater as well as capturing CO$_2$ from the atmosphere (Arbib et al. 2014; Lee and Lee 2002). Li et al. (2012) have investigated the ability of *Chlorella Kessler* to remove nutrients based on the intensity of light. Wang et al. (2012) have studied the heterotrophic cultivation of *Chlorella Kessleri* for the production of fatty acids with varying amounts of carbon and nitrogen supplements (Wang et al. 2014). Even though De Morais and Costa (2007) studied the growth kinetics of *Chlorella kessleri* under different CO$_2$ concentrations, they did not conduct a detailed study of the bio-fixation capacity of CO$_2$ (de Morais and Costa 2007). However, to the best of our understandings, a detailed study of the removal of nutrients by the microalgae *Chlorella kessleri* sp. as a function of the nitrogen to phosphorous ratio and the bio-fixation of CO$_2$ under photoautotrophic condition s has not been conducted.

Finding the most appropriate nutrient ratio for the growth of microalgae is vital for the effective coupling of advanced wastewater treatment with bio-fixation of CO$_2$. Hence, this study was conducted using a set of synthetic tertiary municipal wastewater samples based on the modified BBM with varying NP ratios. In this study, *Chlorella kessleri* sp. was cultivated in modified BBM to evaluate the growth, nutrient uptake, and CO$_2$ bio-fixation at different nutrient ratios.

**Materials And Methods**

2.1 Microalgae strain
The experiments were conducted using the microalgae strain *Chlorella Kessleri* (UTEX 2229) found from the University of Texas, Austin, USA.

### 2.2 Culture medium

The modified BBM (MBBM) was utilized as the medium of microalgae growth in the experiments. A set of synthetic wastewater media was prepared with varying nitrogen to phosphorous (NP) ratios, with the purpose of analyzing the removal of nutrients by growing microalgae in them to apply the results for the treatment of municipal tertiary wastewater. Nitrate (NO$_3$-N) and phosphate (PO$_4^{3-}$-P) were utilized as the nitrogen and phosphorus supplies, correspondingly. Besides, nitrogen and phosphorus, the cultivation medium consisted of the following: 25 mg/L CaCl$_2$.2H$_2$O, 25 mg/L NaCl, 75 mg/L MgSO$_4$.7H$_2$O, 31 mg/L KOH, 50 mg/L Alkaline EDTA, 4.98 mg/L FeSO$_4$.7H$_2$O (acidified), 11.45 mg/L H$_3$BO$_3$, and 1 mL/L of a solution of trace elements prepared according to the composition of the BBM. The solutions of trace elements were prepared separately by dissolving ZnSO$_4$.7H$_2$O, MnCl$_2$.4H$_2$O, CuSO$_4$.5H$_2$O, CoCl$_2$.6H$_2$O, and MoO$_3$ together in 1 liter of distilled water.

### 2.3 Experimental procedure and design

*Chlorella Kessleri* was cultivated in batch photobioreactors (2 L Erlenmeyer flasks) and 1500 mL of the working liquid medium was added to each photobioreactor. The pre-cultured microalgae sp. was used to avoid the lag phase affecting the results. The flasks were capped with foam stoppers to protect the content from contamination. The photobioreactors were placed in a fume hood under continuous illumination with four perpendicularly oriented Grolux fluorescence (Sylvania F18W/T8/GRO) tube lights to cover a maximum area of the photobioreactor surfaces. The light intensity recorded at the reactor surface was in the range of 62–74 µmol/m$^2$/s, applying a Fisher Scientific™ Traceable™ Dual-Display Light Meter. Figure 1 depicts a schematic diagram of the experimental set-up employed in this experiment.

The air-CO$_2$ mixture was delivered to the bottom side of the photobioreactor precisely with the help of an air-CO$_2$ mixer device FC-SH (Live Cell Instruments, South Korea). Gas bubbles rise through the liquid medium and leave at the top side of the reactor, ensuring a well-mixed culture medium, thereby preventing cell sedimentation, and providing inorganic carbon. During photosynthesis, algae utilize carbon dioxide as the carbon source for cell growth. *Chlorella kessleri* is a photosynthetic microorganism with the capacity to grow in aqueous suspensions consuming nutrients from wastewaters, while simultaneously combining water and CO$_2$ photosynthetically to produce value added biomass.

The mechanism of conversion of CO$_2$ to biomass has been well explained by Sorensen et al. (Halling-Sørensen et al. 1996) as follows:

During the experiments, the temperature of the media was monitored daily applying a temperature sensor (Fisher Scientific™ Thermometers with a Stainless Steel Probe on Cable) in the Celsius scale and maintained at 25 ± 2 °C. In addition, the pH of the culture media was observed daily utilizing a pH meter.
(Fisher Scientific Accumet® Basic AB15 plus Meter) and recorded in the range of 6.7 to 7.9 in all experimental runs.

2.4 Analytical methods

2.4.1 Effect of the nitrogen to phosphorus (NP) ratios

*Chlorella kessleri* was cultured in media prepared with varying NP ratios to examine how the concentration of nitrogen and phosphorus influences the microalgae growth, the extent of nutrient removal, and bio-fixation of CO₂. The range of nitrogen and phosphorous concentration of the culture media was maintained in the range of observed concentrations of municipal wastewater with high and low waste content (Abdelaziz et al. 2013). The batch experiments were conducted in culture media with NP ratios of 2:1, 4:1, 6:1, and 8:1, while the carbon dioxide concentration in air supplied to the culture media was maintained at 2% for each experimental run. The same light intensity, temperature, and pH was used in all experiments and they are described in the section on experimental procedure and design. The nitrogen and phosphorous concentration were computed by determining the total nitrogen (TN) in the form of NO₃⁻-N and total phosphorus (TP) in the form of PO₄³⁻ in the culture media on a daily basis utilizing a spectrophotometer (DR 3900-HACH, USA) and a reactor (DRB 200-HACH, USA). In batch kinetics, the rate of TN and TP removal were determined using the following equation as percentage basis:

\[
\text{% removal} = \frac{S_0 - S_t}{S_0} \times 100
\]

1

where \(S_0\) and \(S_t\) is the substrate concentrations at the beginning, time \(t_0\) and at the end of the cultivation time \(t_t\) correspondingly.

2.4.2 Biomass concentration, specific growth, and biomass productivity

Biomass concentration

The algal biomass in each photobioreactor was observed daily by computing the optical density (OD) at a wavelength of 690 nm (\(\text{OD}_{690}\)) (Wang et al. 2014) utilizing a UV-VIS spectrophotometer (Evolution 260 Bio-Thermo Scientific). At the same time, a 20-mL microalgae sample was withdrawn daily from the photobioreactors to determine the dry weight (mg/L) of the biomass. Hence, the magnitude of the dry weight represents the biomass concentration of the microalgae species (Razzak 2019). The relationship between the dry biomass weight and \(\text{OD}_{690}\) is linear, expressed as \(y = mx_{\text{OD}_{690}} + C\), with \(m = 0.2228\), \(C = 0.0333\), and an \(R^2\) of 0.989.

Specific growth
The specific growth rate, $\mu_g$, described as the growth of the dry biomass weight per day, was computed applying the subsequent equation (Das et al. 2011; Abreu et al. 2012).

Specific growth rate,

$$\text{Specific growth rate}, \mu_g = \frac{\ln \left( \frac{X_2}{X_1} \right)}{t_2 - t_1} \quad (2)$$

where,

where, $X_1$ and $X_2$ is the dry biomass weight at time $t_1$ and $t_2$ of the exponential growth phase.

**Biomass productivity**

The biomass productivity ($P_b$), which is also described as the rate of biomass production, was computed applying the following equation (Tang et al. 2011; Mohsenpour et al. 2012; Andruleviciute et al. 2014).

Biomass productivity,

$$\text{Biomass productivity}, P_b = \frac{X_t - X_0}{t_t - t_0} \quad (3)$$

where, $X_0$ and $X_t$ is the dry biomass weight at the beginning, time $t_0$ and at the end of the cultivation time, $t_t$.

### 2.4.3 Growth kinetic model based on a single substrate factor

Growth of microalgae relies on the accessibility of nutrients such as N, P, and C in water environments under light saturation. Several kinetic models proposed for the growth are based on the concentration of a single nutrient (Lee et al. 2015). As the growth rate is regulated by the external nutrient concentration, it depends on the concentration of nutrients in the culture medium. The Monod model (Monod 1949) is a representative model, which considers only the limitation of nutrients. In this study, the Monod model expressed by the following equation is used to study the growth kinetic model:

$$\mu = \frac{\mu_m S}{K_S + S} \quad (4)$$
where, $\mu$ is the specific growth rate, $\mu_m$ is the limiting nutrient concentration (mg/L), and $K_s$ is the half saturation coefficient (mg/L).

Rearranging Eq. 4), provides the following forms of the equation:

\[
\frac{1}{\mu} = \frac{K_s + S}{\mu_m S}
\]

\[
\frac{1}{\mu} = \frac{K_s}{\mu_m} \cdot \frac{1}{S} + \frac{1}{\mu_m}
\]

A linear plot of $\frac{1}{\mu}$ vs $\frac{1}{S}$ will provide the values of $K_s$ and $\mu_m$.

### 2.4.4 Determination of the carbon content and the bio-fixation rate of carbon dioxide

The bio-fixation rate of CO$_2$, $R_{CO_2}$, was computed by determining the total carbon content of microalgae utilizing a TOC analyser (Teledyne Tekmar$^R$ Torch Combustion TOC/TN Analyzer). The amount of carbon in microalgal biomass was calculated using the following equation:

\[
\% C = \frac{TOC_{biomass}}{X} \times 100
\]  

where, $TOC_{biomass}$ is the total organic carbon of microalgal biomass (mg/L), $X$ is the biomass concentration (mg/L) on a given day, and $\% C$ represents the percent carbon content in dry biomass.

According to De Morais and Costa (de Morais and Costa 2007), the bio-fixation rate of carbon dioxide ($R_{CO_2}$) was computed using the following equation:

\[
R_{CO_2} = C_{carbon} P_B \left( \frac{M_{CO_2}}{M_c} \right)
\]

where
where $C_{\text{carbon}}$ carbon content of the microalgae species *Chlorella Kessleri*, $M_{\text{CO}_2}$ is the molecular weight of CO$_2$, $M_c$ is the atomic weight of carbon, and $P_B$ is the productivity of biomass.

**Results And Discussion**

**3.1 Biomass concentration and the specific growth rate at different NP ratios**

Healthy growth of microalgae determines the efficiency of the treatment process. Understanding and controlling the essential factors that directly impact microalgae growth is important to maintain a healthy growth of microalgae. Several environmental issues influence the rate of nutrient consumption by various species of microalgae. Together with other environmental issues, nutrient concentration and the NP ratios have a direct impact on the removal of nutrients, ultimately influencing the microalgal growth (Cai et al. 2013). Figure 2 depicts the time profiles of the biomass concentration and the specific growth rate of *Chlorella kessleri* cultivated at various NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO$_2$ concentration of 2% in air supplied to the culture media. Different NP ratios have a significant impact on the microalgae growth, which is confirmed by the biomass concentration and the specific growth rate depicted in Fig. 2. The biomass concentration increases at all investigated NP ratios of 2:1, 4:1, and 6:1 during the cultivation period of 13 days. However, the maximum biomass concentration of 606.79 mg/L was gained for the NP ratio of 2:1 at the end of the cultivation period. After reaching its highest value at each NP ratio in the first few days, the specific growth rate gradually decreases during the cultivation period. The specific growth rate at the NP ratio of 2:1 is higher than other two NP ratios (4:1 and 6:1) over the entire cultivation period, with a maximum specific growth rate of 1.74 d$^{-1}$ attained on day 1.

**3.2 Kinetic model based on a single substrate factor for microalgae growth**

At constant temperature, light intensity, and homogeneous mixing, the substrate concentration and nutrient accessibility normally determines the rate of biomass accumulation during microalgae growth. The Monod model, as expressed in Eq. (4), is usually applied to analysis the microalgae growth restricted by a single nutrient (in this study nitrogen). This model has been used to predict and control algae cultivations in wastewater media. Figure 3 (a, b, and c) shows the experimentally determined specific growth rate and its Monod model predictions plotted as a function of the available nutrient (nitrogen) concentration in media for the cultivation of *Chlorella kessleri* at NP ratios of 2:1, 4:1, and 6:1 and a 2% concentration of CO$_2$ in the supplied air. The microalgae kinetic model was standardized utilizing experimental *Chlorella kessleri* sp. cultivation results to establish the maximum specific growth rate ($\mu_m$) and half saturation constant ($k_s$). The kinetic model was validated utilizing supplementary experimental data for the cultivation of *Chlorella kessleri* in wastewater media.

**3.3 Effect of the NP ratio on the inorganic nutrient removal**
The nitrogen to phosphorous (NP) ratio has been found to influence the removal of nutrients from wastewater. In this study, the synthetic wastewater media with different NP ratios were prepared using a constant total nitrogen (TN) concentration and varying the total phosphorous (TP) concentration. Figure 4a shows the time profiles of the total nitrogen (TN) concentration and the percent total nitrogen (TN) removal by *Chlorella kessleri* cultivated under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a concentration of 2% CO₂ in the supplied air. Corresponding time profiles of the total phosphorus (TP) concentration and the percent total phosphorus (TP) removal are depicted in Fig. 4b. In general, the concentration of total nitrogen and total phosphorous decreases steadily during the cultivation period (13 days) at all evaluated NP ratios due to the consumption of N and P nutrients needed for the microalgae growth. The corresponding removal efficiency of nitrogen and phosphorous at the end of the 13-day cultivation period is shown in Table 1. The removal efficiency of nitrogen is more than 95% for all NP ratios evaluated except 8:1, at which the efficiency is only 72.4%. The lower nitrogen removal efficiency at an NP ratio of 8:1 may be due to the unavailability of the required amount of phosphorous in the culture media (Xin et al. 2010b). On the other hand, the NP ratio has a large effect on the removal efficiency of phosphorous. The maximum phosphorous removal efficiency at the NP ratio of 6:1 is about 97%. However, the maximum removal efficiency of phosphorous at the NP ratio of 2:1 is about 20%, which is the lowest among the NP ratios evaluated. The significant variation of the removal efficiency of phosphorous at different NP ratios may be due the variation of the initial concentration of phosphorous and the limited availability of nitrogen in the culture media (Beuckels et al. 2015).

| Initial TN (mg/L) | 43.6 | 47.5 | 48.1 | 48.1 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|
| NP ratio         | 2:1  | 4:1  | 6:1  | 8:1  |
| TN removal efficiency (%) | 99.54 | 96.46 | 95.45 | 72.4 |

| Initial TP (mg/L) | 18.1 | 9.7 | 5.6 | 5.7 |
|------------------|------|----|----|----|
| NP ratio         | 2:1  | 4:1 | 6:1 | 8:1 |
| TP removal efficiency (%) | 19.92 | 88.85 | 96.26 | 50.87 |

### 3.4 Carbon content and biomass concentration under different NP ratios

The time-course profiles of the carbon content and biomass concentration of *Chlorella kessleri* cultivated under different nutrient levels at a temperature of 25°C and a concentration of 2% of CO₂ in the supplied air are presented in Fig. 5. The carbon content of the microalgae increases in the first five days of the cultivation period and starts decreasing after reaching a maximum at all NP ratios. On the other hand, the biomass concentration steadily increases during the entire cultivation period at all NP ratios. The increased percentage of carbon content in microalgae during the early stages of the cultivation period
may be due to the uptake of high C-rich metabolites during cultivation (Beuckels et al. 2015). The percent carbon content of microalgae reaches the highest value of 56% at the NP ratio of 2:1.

### 3.5 Effect of the NP ratio on the CO₂ bio-fixation rate ($R_{\text{CO}_2}$)

A lot of research and development studies is carried out around the world on a variety of methods to mitigate the effects of CO₂ on the environment. Among them, using microalgal photosynthesis for biological CO₂ fixation has been found to be an efficient method (Shaikh A. Razzak et al. 2013; Wang et al. 2008; Yanagi et al. 1995). During photosynthesis by microalgae, CO₂ is converted into lipids and other hydrocarbons, during which water acts as an electron donor and its hydrolysis emits the oxygen. The overall reaction for photosynthesis, resulting in CO₂ fixation, can be written as (Razzak et al. 2013)

$$H_2O + CO_2 + \text{photons} \rightarrow [CH_2O]_n + O_2$$

In several studies, photobioreactors have been used to examine the influence of the concentration of nutrients on the growth of microalgae. The CO₂ fixation rate is clearly associated with the light consumption efficiency and the biomass concentration of microalgae. Morais and Costa (2007) (de Morais and Costa 2007) reported that CO₂ concentration has an impact on microalgae growth and CO₂ bio-fixation rate when *Chlorella kessleri* is cultured in a modified Bristol medium. However, in this study, the bio-fixation rate of CO₂ by *Chlorella kessleri* at different NP ratios was evaluated in synthetic wastewater media. Figure 6 shows the time-course profiles of carbon dioxide bio-fixation by *Chlorella kessleri* cultivated under different nutrient levels at a temperature of 25°C and with 2% CO₂ in the supplied air. The rate of bio-fixation of CO₂ increases in the first 7 days of the cultivation period at all NP ratios, reaching its highest value before gradually decreasing during the remainder of the cultivation period. The maximum CO₂ bio-fixation rate of 89.36 mg/L/d during the 7 days of cultivation period was obtained at an NP ratio of 6:1 and a concentration of 2% CO₂ in the air supplied to the culture media.

### 3.6 Comparison analysis

The bar chart in Fig. 7 depicts the overall productivity of the biomass (PB), rate of bio-fixation of CO₂ ($R_{\text{CO}_2}$), and TN and TP removal by *Chlorella kessleri* under different NP ratios (2:1 to 6:1) in a cultivation period of 13 days at a temperature of 25°C and a concentration of 2% CO₂ in the supplied air. PB undergoes a minor variation when the NP ratio increased from 2:1 to 6:1, with the maximum PB observed at an NP ratio of 2:1. The rate of bio-fixation of CO₂ ($R_{\text{CO}_2}$) also undergoes insignificant changes when cultivated at NP ratios ranging from 2:1 to 6:1. The removal of TN is more than 95% at all NP ratios, whereas the removal of TP significantly increases when the NP ratio is varied from 2:1 through 4:1 to 6:1.

### Conclusion

The growth of the microalgae *Chlorella kessleri* sp. was evaluated in synthetic wastewater under different photoautotrophic conditions for the simultaneous CO₂ bio-fixation and the removal of nitrogen and
phosphorous. The synthetic wastewater is considered as equivalent to municipal tertiary wastewater for cultivating the microalgae sp. under different NP ratios and a concentration of 2% CO$_2$ in the supplied air. The maximum specific growth rate ($\mu_m$) of *Chlorella kessleri* sp. and the concentration of the nutrients are in accordance with the Monod model. In this study, the NP ratio was maintained in a suitable range (2:1 to 6:1) to increase the removal efficiency of nitrogen by *Chlorella kessleri* sp. However, the removal efficiency of phosphorous is significantly affected by the variation of the NP ratio. According to the results of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Biomass concentration increased at all studied NP ratios and the maximum biomass concentration of 606.79 mg/L was found at an NP ratio of 2:1.
2. The NP ratio and initial nutrient concentration are substantial factors affecting the efficiency of the removal of nutrients in wastewater. More than 95% of nitrogen is removed for at all evaluated NP ratios except 8:1, at which the percent removal is only 72.4%. On the other hand, the maximum 97% phosphorous removal efficiency is observed at an NP ratio of 6:1.
3. For all NP ratios, the bio-fixation rate of CO$_2$ gradually increases over the first seven days of the cultivation period and the maximum bio-fixation rate of CO$_2$ of 89.36 mgL$^{-1}$d$^{-1}$ is observed at an NP ratio of 6:1.

In terms of CO$_2$ bio-fixation rates as well as both TN and TP removal efficiency, *Chlorella kessleri* has the potential to be used for low-cost tertiary municipal wastewater treatment.

**Declarations**

**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not Applicable

**Consent for publication**

Not Applicable

**Availability of data and materials**

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

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Authors' contributions

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**Tables**

**Table 1:** Nutrient removal efficiency at different initial TN or TP concentrations at the end of the 13-day cultivation period

| Initial TN (mg/L) | 43.6 | 47.5 | 48.1 | 48.1 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|
| NP ratio          | 2:1  | 4:1  | 6:1  | 8:1  |
| TN removal efficiency (%) | 99.54 | 96.46 | 95.45 | 72.4 |
| Initial TP (mg/L) | 18.1 | 9.7  | 5.6  | 5.7  |
| NP ratio          | 2:1  | 4:1  | 6:1  | 8:1  |
| TP removal efficiency (%) | 19.92 | 88.85 | 96.26 | 50.87 |

**Figures**
Figure 1

A schematic diagram of the experimental set-up.
Figure 2

The time-course profiles of the biomass concentration (filled markers) and specific growth rate (empty markers) of Chlorella kessleri cultivated under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO2 concentration of 2% in the supplied air.
Figure 3

Experimental and Monod model predictions of specific growth rate, $\mu$ (d$^{-1}$) as a function of the available substrate (nitrogen) concentration in media supplied with 2% CO2 in air during the cultivation of Chlorella kessleri at an NP ratio of (a) 2:1, (b) 4:1, and (c) 6:1.
Figure 4

The time-course profiles of (a) total nitrogen (TN) concentration (filled markers) and total nitrogen (TN) removal (empty markers), (b) total phosphorus (TP) concentration (filled markers) and total phosphorus (TP) removal (empty markers) during cultivation of Chlorella kessleri under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO2 concentration of 2% in the supplied air.
Figure 5

The time-course profiles of carbon content (filled markers) and biomass concentration (empty markers) during the cultivation of Chlorella kessleri under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO2 concentration of 2% in the supplied air.
Figure 6

The time-course profiles of the capacity of bio-fixation of carbon dioxide during the cultivation of Chlorella kessleri under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO2 concentration of 2% in the supplied air.

Figure 7

Biomass productivity (PB), rate of CO2 bio-fixation (RCO2), and total nitrogen (TN) and total phosphorus (TP) removal using Chlorella kessleri cultivated under different NP ratios at a temperature of 25°C and a CO2 concentration of 2% in the supplied air.

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