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The Biosorption Features of Cr (VI) Ions by Dried Biomass of a Facultative Anaerobic *Bacillus cereus* Strain Pf-1

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author PFN designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors ZL and ZMM managed the analyses of the study. Author LJJ managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Many studies were undertaken on the biosorption potential of different kinds of biomaterials. However, there is a paucity of data regarding the biosorption mechanism of Cr (VI) using dried cells. In our study, the removal of Cr (VI) from aqueous solution was investigated in a batch system

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by the dried biomass of a chromium-resistant bacterium isolated from activated sludge samples. Equilibrium and kinetic experiments were undertaken at various initial metal concentration, pH, and biosorbent dosage. *Bacillus cereus* biomass was characterized using Energy-Dispersive X-ray (EDX), Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR). Biosorption process was found to be pH dependent. The optimum pH was found to be 2.0. The Langmuir and Freundlich were considered to identify the isotherm that could better describe the equilibrium adsorption of Cr (VI) onto the biomass. Langmuir and Freundlich models fitted our experimental data. The suitability of the pseudo-first order and pseudo-second order kinetic models for the biosorption of Cr (VI) onto *Bacillus cereus* was also performed. The mechanism for the adsorption was studied by fitting the kinetic data with the Boyd plot and intra-particle diffusion model. External mass transfer was found to be the rate-determining step. Based on the ionic nature of the metal, the intra-particle diffusion and extent of film diffusion varied.

Keywords: Pf-1 strain; biosorption; langmuir; Cr (VI); biomass.

1. INTRODUCTION

Release of large quantities of heavy metals into the natural environment has resulted in a number of environmental problems. Constituting one of the major causes of environmental pollution, chromium, in hexavalent form [Cr (VI)], is one of the most toxic heavy metal and has become a serious health concern [1]. Although some metals are necessary for biological processes, all of them are toxic at high concentrations. This is due to their oxidative capacity to form free radicals and their ability to replace essential metals in enzymes, interrupting their normal activity [1,2]. Non-essential metals are very toxic even at low concentration and can be accumulated in different organisms. Chromium in the hexavalent form is toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic to animals as well as humans and is associated with decrease plant growth and change in plant morphology [3]. Biosorption of metal is an example of a wide variety of potential and actual applications of bioremediation technique in wastewater treatment [4].

Bacillus cereus is a facultative anaerobic, gram-positive bacterium, commonly used in many microbiological tests. As a common soil/activated sludge bacterium, *Bacillus cereus* is well adapted for growth in the intestinal tract of insects and mammals [5]. Different studies in the field of bioremediation were conducted with different strains of Bacillus cereus, suggesting that Bacillus cereus could be used as a target microorganism in the bioremediation of heavy metals in the environment [4,6].

Conventional removal of Cr (VI) from the environment involves expensive physico-chemical treatments generating secondary waste that adds to the problem [7]. Biological systems employing processes such as bioreduction, bioaccumulation or biosorption with living cells have been extensively examined for their Cr removal abilities [4-8].

Previous studies have been reported in this context employing a wide variety of microorganisms like fungi, algae, protozoa, and bacteria. Among the microorganisms, bacteria are better candidate as they can be easily cultured with simple nutrients and ease to handle [1,9,10,11]. Biosorption is a passive process which utilizes the cell wall of biomass to sequester the Cr (VI) ions from aqueous solutions. The mechanisms of cell surface sorption are independent of cell metabolism which is based on physico-chemical interactions between the metal and functional groups of the cell wall. The cell wall of a microorganism mainly consists of polysaccharides, lipids, and proteins that serve as binding sites for metals. Further, this biological approach is cost effective and is considered to be a green technology [3,8].

Microbial cells, either living or dead biomasses, are effective biosorbents of soluble and particulate heavy metals via their cell wall surfaces which act as sites for metal in attachment. With the inception of microbial bioremediation, this study may be of future use in removing Cr (VI) from the environment. Once complete removal of Cr (VI) from the environment has been achieved, cleaner and metal-free water and soil systems will be obtained and preserved for future generations. Many results have been documented on the biosorption ability of *Bacillus cereus* biomass to remove heavy metal ions from aqueous solution. However, limited studies reported the metal biosorption potential using dried biomass.

In the present study, the main objective was to investigate the biosorption characteristic of Cr (VI)

by using dried biomass of Bacillus cereus Pf-1 strain in aqueous solution. First of all, we determined the optimum conditions (pH, sorbent dosage, and Cr (VI) concentration) for the maximum biosorption yield for Cr (VI), secondly we explored the biosorption mechanisms of the sorbent in terms of equilibrium, isotherms and kinetics studies, and finally we characterized the *B. cereus* biomass using SEM-EDX and FTIR imaging.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Biosorbent

Pure culture previously isolated from activated sludge sample was grown on Nutrient Broths medium (NB) previously sterilized (121˚C for 15 min), the pH was adjusted to 7.0±0.03 with 10% (W/v) NaOH or 10% (V/v) HCL solutions and the reaction was incubated at 30˚C under orbital shaking (100rpm). After 24 h of incubation, cells were collected by centrifugation (10,000 ×g for 5 min), washed three times with phosphate buffer (pH 7.2), dried in oven at 80˚C for 24 h (Model DHG-9240A), crushed in a blender, sieved through a 24-mesh sieve [12]. Samples were stored in a tight container for further use.

2.2 Experiments

2.2.1 Effects of biosorption conditions

The experiments were carried out in a set of Erlenmeyer flasks (250 mL) by shaking desired amount of biosorbent powder in 100 mL Cr (VI) solutions as potassium dichromate ($K_2Cr_2O_7$) of desired concentrations, pH, and temperature to reach equilibrium of the solid-solution mixture. Samples were pelletized in a centrifuge at 10,000 × g for 5 min and the supernatants were essayed for residual Cr (VI) concentration by 1, 5-diphenylcarbazide spectrophotometric method (DPC) measuring the absorbance at 540 nm by using a spectrophotometer (WFZ800-D3B UV/VIS spectrophotometer) [13].

Effect of pH was studied by adjusting the initial pH of Cr (VI) solutions using diluted hydrochloric acid (HCL) or sodium hydroxide (NaOH) solutions (pHs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6), and the solutions were agitated with 0.02 g/L sorbent dose for 10 mg Cr (VI)/L at 30˚C.

Four Cr (VI) concentrations (10, 20, 40, and 80 mg/L) were used for the study of initial concentration effect on the biosorption at 30˚C.

Effect of biosorption dosage was studied with different sorbent doses (0.02, 0.05, and 0.1g) and 100 mL of 10 mg Cr (VI)/L solutions at the favorable pH (2.0) and temperature (30ºC).

2.2.2 Kinetics

Kinetic studies were carried out in a set of 250 mL Erlenmeyer flasks at 30˚C, by shaking 0.02 g/L sorbent powder in 100 mL Cr (VI) solutions (10, 20, 40, and 80 mg/L) in each capped flask at the stirring speed of 100 rpm. The aqueous samples were taken from different flasks at different time intervals of 15, 30, 60, 120, 240, 420, 720, and 1,440 min respectively. All the samples were centrifuged as mentioned above, and the remaining Cr (VI) concentrations in aqueous solution were determined by DPC method. The amount of adsorbed Cr (VI) by the bacterial cells was calculated by the concentration difference method based on the mass balance of the metal ions expressed as [14]:

$$q_t = \frac{V(C_0 - C_f)}{X} \quad (1)$$

Where, q_t is the specific metal uptake (mg /g), V is the liquid sample volume (mL), C_0 is the initial concentration of the metal in the solution at time t_0 = 0 h (mg/L), and C_f is the final concentration of the metal in the solution at time t = t (min) and X the amount of added bio sorbent on the dry basic (g). At the sorption equilibrium, C_f equals the equilibrium concentration of the metal ion in the solution (C_e, mg/L) ant q_t equals metal sorption uptake or equilibrium bio-sorption capacity of Cr (VI) (q_e, mg/g).

For each sorption experiment, a control set containing only Cr (VI) solution of appropriate concentration was kept. All the experiments were conducted in triplicate and repeated twice.

2.2.3 Isotherms

Biosorption experiments were performed in a set of 100 mL Erlenmeyer flasks, where solutions of Cr (VI) with different initial concentrations (10, 20, 40, and 80 mg/L) were placed. Equal masses of 0.02 g/L biosorbent were added to Cr (VI) solutions, and each sample was kept in 30˚C at a stirring speed of 100 rpm for 1,440 min each to reach equilibrium of the solid-solution mixture. The flaks were then removed from the rotary

shaker, and the final Cr (VI) concentration in the solution was analyzed as mentioned above. A control set without biomass was kept and triplicate experiments were also kept and repeated twice. The statiscal software package Origin Pro 8.0 was used for regression analysis of experimental data.

2.3 FTIR Analysis

Infrared spectroscopic analysis for the biomass under investigation was performed in order to give a qualitative and preliminary characterization of the main functional chemical groups on the bacterial biomass which could be responsible for Cr (VI) biosorption. Infrared spectra of biomasses before and after biosorption were obtained on a FTIR (Thermo Fisher Scientific China, Nicolet 6700). The biomass/KBr mass ratio used for the preparation of the disks was 1:200. They were ground into fine powder and compressed into translucent sample disk using a manual hydraulic press at a pressure of 100kg/cm^2. The disk was then fixed in FTIR and the spectrum was obtained at a single scan. The shifts in the FTIR peaks were determined with references to reported standard values [15].

2.4 SEM-EDX Analysis of the Sample

Cells were fixed in glutaraldehyde (1%) and paraformaldehyde (2%) buffered with sodium phosphate buffer saline (0.1M, pH 6.8) for 12-18h at 4º C after which cells were washed in fresh buffer and then fixed for 2h in osmium tetraoxide (1%) in the same buffer at 4º C. The bacterial cells fixed were smeared with poly-L-lysine for 30 min in wet condition. The specimen was washed with phosphate buffer and then dehydrated in a series of ethanol-water solution (30%, 50%, 70% and 90% ethanol, 5 min each) and dried under CO_2 atmosphere for 20 min. Mounting was done on aluminum stubs, and cells were coated with 90Å thick gold-palladium coating in polar on Sc 7640 sputter coater (VG Microthech, East Sussex, TN22, England) for 30 min. coated cells were viewed at 20kV with scanning electron microscopy (Model-Zeiss EVO40). Energy dispersive X-ray spectrometer (EDAX, USA) was performed at 5kV for confirming the biosorption of chromium in the bacterial cell. X-ray absorption spectroscopy provides information on the electronic and structural state of an element [15,16].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Characterization of Pf-1 Strain Biomass

The surface morphology of the biomass without and with the sorption of Cr (VI) ions during bio sorption process was measured with the help of SEM-EDX, and the results were shown in Fig. 1. Without sorption of Cr (VI) ions, Pf-1 strain cells were rod-shaped, elongated and the presence of elements such as carbon, phosphorus, potassium, sulfate, magnesium, sodium, aluminum, chloride, and oxygen on the surface of the biomass (Fig. 1a). Through ionic exchange interactions, these elements could affect the sorption process. It could be clearly observed that the biomass shape and the amount and type of elements present in the biomass were considerably changed (Fig. 1b). Bacterial cells became small, round-shaped with uneven edges on cell wall. These changes in the amount and type of elements present in the biomass confirm that the sorption has taking place. However, the Cr peak (5.5 keV) was observed only in treated sample and which also confirms the adsorption of Cr (VI) onto the biomass. It has been reported that, with progressive increase in chromium concentration, the cell becomes both longer and wider. However, further increase in chromate led to decrease in cell size [17]. The process of uptake and retention of the heavy metals by the cell wall of *Bacillus* sp. has also been studied with the help of EDX analysis [17,18].

3.2 FTIR Analysis of PF-1 Strain Biomass

The FTIR spectra of the *B. cereus* biomass with and without Cr (VI) ions loaded which were obtained to determine the probable functional groups which may have contributed to the Cr (VI) ions sorption were presented in (Table 1). The FTIR spectra of B. cereus biomass in the control display a number of absorption peaks, indicating the complex nature of the bacterial biomass. The spectra of loaded and unloaded Cr (VI) ions were compared and a shift was found. The spectra of sorbent exhibit a broad absorption band at 3,065.66 cm^{-1} due to bonded O-H and N-H groups which is shifted to 2,964.54 cm^{-1} which might be possibly due to the complexation of amino groups of proteins and water representing hydration heavy metal [19]. The absorption peaks at 1,742.04 cm^{-1} due to bonded O-H group stretching from aliphatic ester is shifted to

1,743.56 cm^{-1} [19]. The peak at 1,538.78 cm^{-1} has been shifted at a lower frequency to 1,528.13 cm^{-1}, possibly due to the complexation of amide group (N-H stretching and C=O stretching vibration) with Cr (VI) ions [20]. The peak at 1,401.16 cm^{-1} was disappeared after the sorption was taking place. Another shift to a lower frequency was observed from 1,069.99 cm^{-1} to 1,056.70 cm^{-1} due to the interaction of nitrogen from the amino group with Cr (VI) ions may be attributed to the C-N stretching vibrations of amino groups [21]. The phenomenon of biosorption on the bacterial cell surface might be occurring due to the modification of functional groups. So, the functional groups like carboxyl, amide, and hydroxyl groups were likely to be responsible for the biosorption of chromium and help in detoxification process. The chromium binding sites were mostly carbonyl and amide groups [22]. Role of negatively charged COOH groups of the yeast for the absorption of metal like Pb has been studied through FTIR analysis [23]. Generally, heavy metals affect its bio-specific interaction with the expression and suppression of certain functional groups on bacterial cell wall which might help the bacterial strain to tolerate the toxicity of the heavy metals [24].

3.3 Effects of Biosorption Conditions

3.3.1 Effects of pH

As the initial pH increased (1 - 6), the biosorption capacity and the corresponding removal efficiency decreased (Fig. 2). The maximum

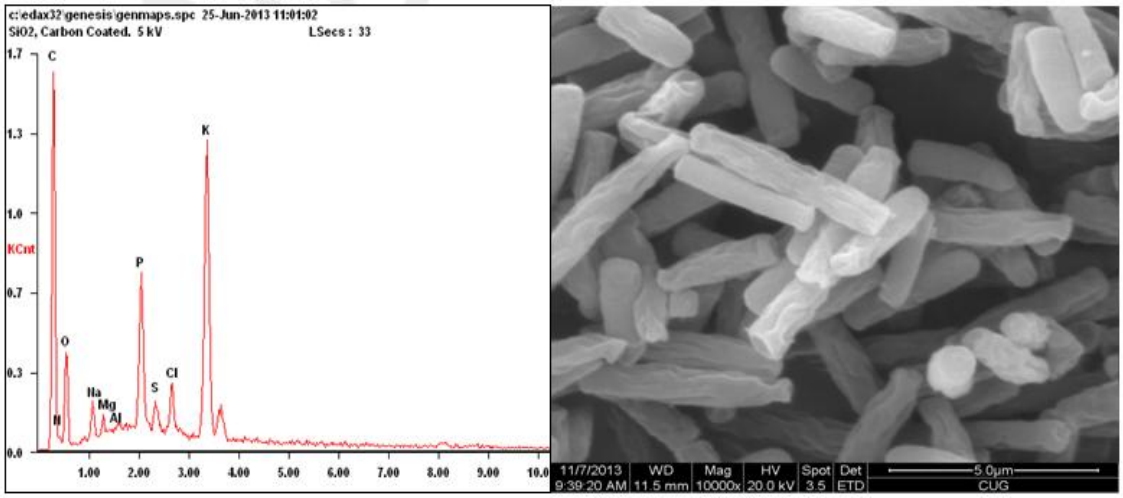

Fig. 1a. SEM-EDX images of *Bacillus cereus* without sorption of Cr (VI) ions

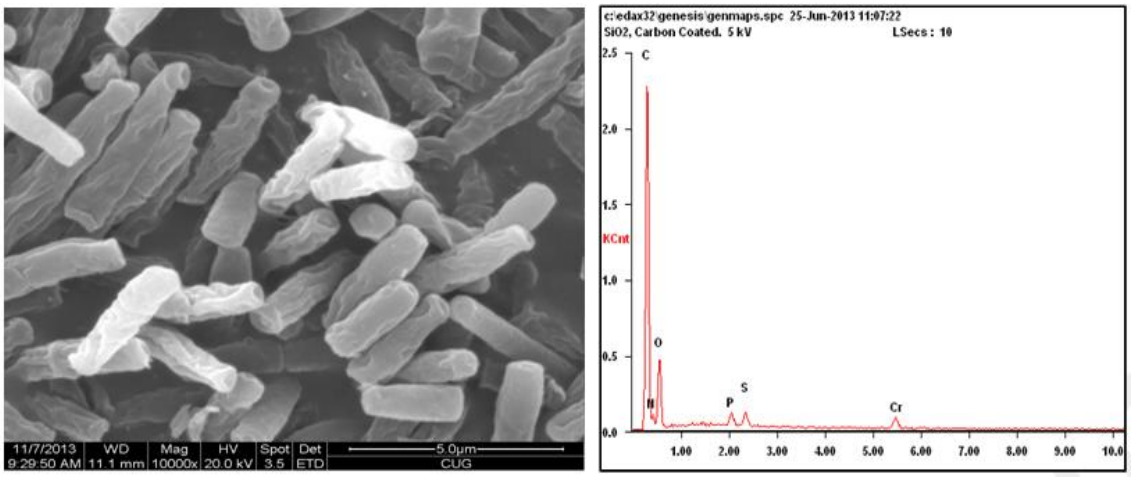

Fig. 1b. SEM-EDX images of *Bacillus cereus* with sorption of Cr (VI) ions

Table 1. Characteristic biosorption bands of Cr (VI) unloaded/loaded *B. cereus* biomass

Suggested assignment	Unloaded biomass frequency (cm^{-1})	Loaded biomass frequency (cm^{-1})
-OH, -CH and –NH stretching	3,065.66	2,964.54
-OH stretching	1,742.04	1,743.56
-NH and C=O stretching	1,538.78	1,528.13
-COO- anions band	1,401.16	-
-C-O and –C-N stretching	1,069.99	1,056.70

sorption capacity was observed at pH 2. The main predominant form of Cr (VI) is the acid chromate ions species, $HCrO_4^-$ at lower pH solution and subsequently $HCrO_4^-$ shifted to other forms, CrO_4^{2-} and $Cr_2O_7^{2-}$ as increasing pH. At lower pH, due to the excess amount of H^+ within the medium, the active sites on the adsorbent become positively charged. This causes a strong attraction between these sites and negatively charged $HCrO_4^-$ ions. As a result, adsorption of negative metals increases significantly. When pH value increases, surface of the adsorbent becomes neutral and biosorption reduces. When the adsorbent surface is negatively charged, adsorption decreases significantly. This behavior is specific to Cr (VI) and it is different for the divalent metals. Chromium ions release hydroxide ions to the solution instead of proton. This result also agrees with previous studies of Cr (VI) biosorption by different biosorbent [8,25,26,27].

3.3.2 Effects of initial metal ion concentrations and sorbent doses

When the initial concentration of Cr (VI) varied (10 - 80 mg/L), the sorption capacity of Pf-1 strain biomass was increased (16 - 86 mg/g) at the sorbent dosage of 0.02g/L (Table 2). In the contrast, at the same initial concentration of Cr (VI) ions, the adsorption efficiency was decreased (31-22 %). The increase of loading capacities of the sorbents with the increase of metal ion concentration is probably due to higher interaction between metals ions and each of sorbent [1,28,29]. Increase in biosorption efficiency with biosorbent dose can be attributed to increase bio-sorbent surface area and availability of more biosorption sites, but the biosorptive capacity decreased with increase in the biosorbent dose. This can be attributed to overlapping or aggregation of bio-sorbent surface area available to Cr (VI). Additionally, the active site of sorbent will reach the adsorption saturation after a certain time at different sorbent doses. This saturation time depends on the type of biomass and the conditions of the pretreatment. Similar conclusions were found in the literature [29-30].

3.3.3 Kinetics

In order to investigate the mechanism of sorption, we have chosen the most commonly use kinetic models namely, the pseudo-first order equation and the pseudo-second order equation. Intra-particle diffusion model and Boyd plot were also investigated.

3.3.3.1 Pseudo-first order Kinetic model

The equation corresponding to the pseudo-first-order kinetic model is the following differential form used by [30]:

$$\frac{dq_t}{dt} = K_1(q_e - q_t) \quad (2)$$

Integrating this for boundary conditions $q_e = 0$ at $t = 0$ and $q_t = q_t$ at $t = t$, gives:

$$\ln\frac{q_e}{q_e - q_t} = K_1 t \quad (3)$$

Where q_{e1} and q_t refer to the amount of Cr (VI) bio sorbed (mg/g) at equilibrium and at any time, t (min), respectively, and K_1 is the equilibrium rate constant of the pseudo-first-order sorption (min^{-1}). Equation 3 can be rearranged to obtain a linear form:

$$\ln(q_e - q_t) = \ln q_e - K_1 t \quad (4)$$

The plot of ln ($q_e - q_t$) versus t should give a straight line with slope $-K_1$ and intercept $\ln q_e$. K_1 and q_e, who represented the pseudo-first order constants at different initial Cr (VI) concentration (Table 3). The correlation coefficient value R^2 for Cr (VI) bio sorption onto the biomass varied to (0.712 - 0.944). (Fig. 3a) shows a plot of linearized form of pseudo -first order model at different Cr (VI) concentrations.

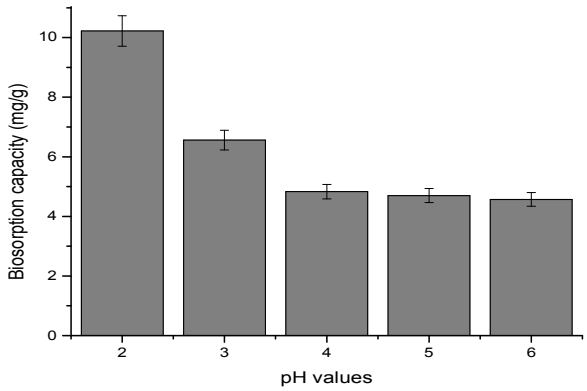

Fig. 2. Effect of pH on Cr (VI) biosorption (initial Cr (VI) concentration 10 mg/L, contact time 1,440 min, temperature 30ºC, agitation speed 100 rpm, biomass dosage 0.05 g/L)

Table 2. Equilibrium adsorbed quantities of Cr (VI) ions obtained at different initial metal ion concentration and different sorbent dosage (Ad%: adsorption efficiency; C_0: initial Cr (VI) concentration, q_e: equilibrium sorption capacity; SE: standard error)

Sorbent (g/L)								
0.02			0.05			0.1		
$C_{0\ (mg/l)}$	$q_{e\ (mg/g)\ \pm SE}$	Ad%	C_0 (mg/l)	q_e (mg/g)	Ad%	C_0 (mg/l)	q_e (mg/g)	Ad%
10	16±0.38	31	10	10±0.28	51	10	7±0.11	67
20	24±0.24	24	20	17±0.15	44	20	10±0.10	51
40	46±0.33	23	40	27±0.31	34	40	17±0.15	38
80	86±0.33	22	80	46±0.22	28	80	29±0.22	36

3.3.3.2 Pseudo-second order kinetic model

The equation corresponding to the pseudo-second kinetic model is the following [31]:

$$\frac{dq_t}{dt} = K_2(q_e - q_t)2 \quad (5)$$

Integrating this for the boundary condition t = 0, q_e = 0, t = t, q_t = q_t gives:

$$\frac{1}{q_e - q_t} = \frac{1}{q_e} + K_2 t \quad (6)$$

Where K_2 is the equilibrium rate constant of the pseudo-second order biosorption (g/mg^{-1} min^{-1}). Eq. 6 can be rearranged to obtain a linear form:

$$\frac{t}{q_t} = \frac{1}{K_2(q_e)2} + \frac{1}{q_e} t \quad (7)$$

The equilibrium adsorption capacity and the pseudo-second order constant K_2 can be determined experimentally from the slope and the intercept of the plot t/q_t versus t. The correlation coefficients calculated were closer to the unity (R^2 = 0.977 – 1) and the linear form of the pseudo-second order model was shown in Fig. 3b.

3.3.3.3 Intra-particle diffusion model

The intra-particle diffusion equation is giving as [32]:

$$q_t = K_i t^{1/2} + C \quad (8)$$

Where q_t is the amount of solute on the surface of the sorbent at time t (mg/g) and K_i is the intra-particle diffusion rate constant (mg/g min½). When the intra-particle diffusion alone is the rate limiting step, then the plot of q_t versus $t^{1/2}$ passes through the origin. When film diffusion is also taking place then the intercept is C, which gives the idea on the thickness of the boundary layer. From the intra-particle diffusion plot shown in (Fig. 4a), it was evident that the adsorption process followed two steps. The first linear portion followed the boundary layer diffusion followed by another linear portion which represents the intra-particle diffusion. This shown that the adsorption process was not only the intra-particle diffusion but the film diffusion also played a role in the observed process [33,34].

3.3.3.4 Boyd plot

The Boyd plot predicted the actual slow step involved in the biosorption process. The Boyd kinetic expression is given by [33]:

$$F = 1- (6/\pi (22)^2) \exp (-B_t) \quad (9)$$

And

$$F = q_t/q_0 \quad (10)$$

Where q_0 is the amount of Cr (VI) adsorbed at infinite time (mg/g) and q_t represents the amount of adsorbent adsorbed at any time t (min), F represents the fraction of solute adsorbed at any time t (min), and B_t is a mathematical function of F. substituting Eq. 9 in Eq. 10,

$$1 – F = (6/\pi (24)2) \exp (- B_t) \quad (11)$$

Or

$$B_t = - 0.4977 – \ln (1 – F) \quad (12)$$

The B_t values at various contact times can be calculated using Eq. 12 for various time intervals.

The calculated B_t values were plotted against time t (Fig. 4b). It can be shown through the figure that the plots were almost linear for all the concentrations tested.

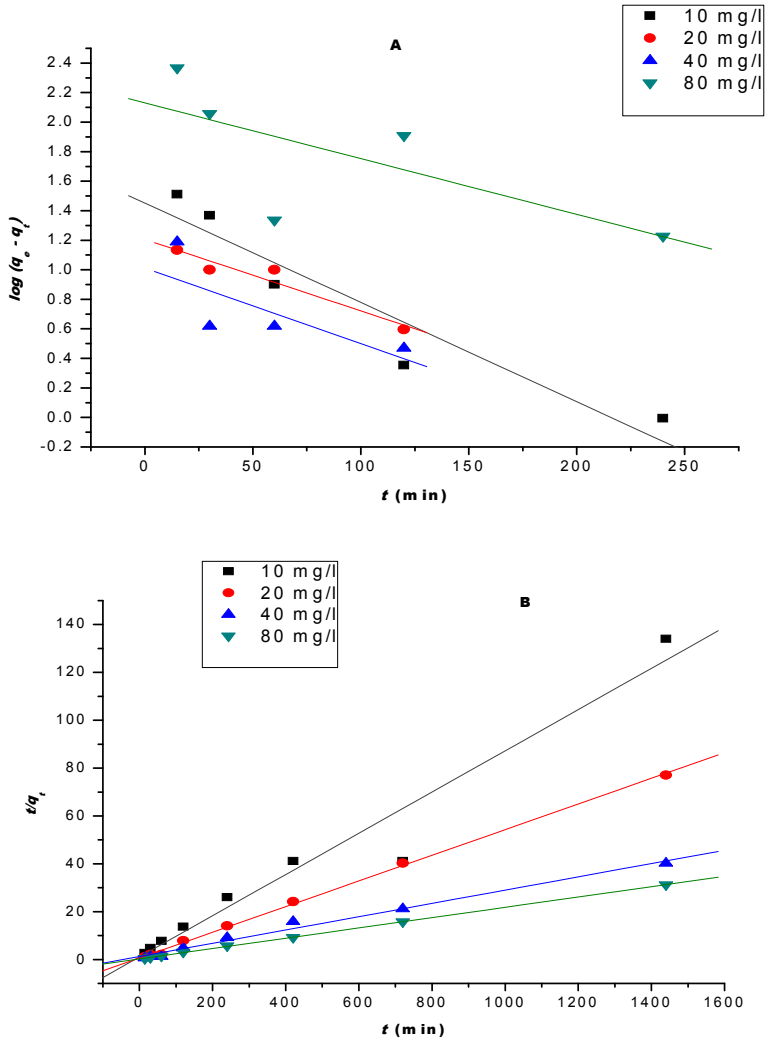

Fig. 3. Linear form of the pseudo first-order (A) and pseudo second-order (B) models at different Cr (VI) concentration (biomass dosage: 0.05 g/L, pH 2, 100 rpm, and 30˚C)

Table 3. Pseudo-first and pseudo-second order kinetic model parameters at different Cr (VI) concentration

Initial Cr (VI) concentration (mg/l)	Pseudo-first order			Pseudo-second order			Experimental q_e (mg/g)
	K_1 (min^{-1})	q_{e1}(mg/g)	R^2	K_2 ($gmg^{-1}min^{-1}$)	q_{e2}(mg/g)	R^2	
10	6.7x10-3	4.27	0.948	3.9x10-3	11.61	0.977	10.74
20	4.8x10-3	3.34	0.963	4.4x10-3	18.66	0.999	18.68
40	5.1x10-3	2.75	0.747	6.3x10-4	35.97	0.994	35.78
80	3.8x10-3	8.42	0.712	1.8x10-3	46.30	0.1	46.03

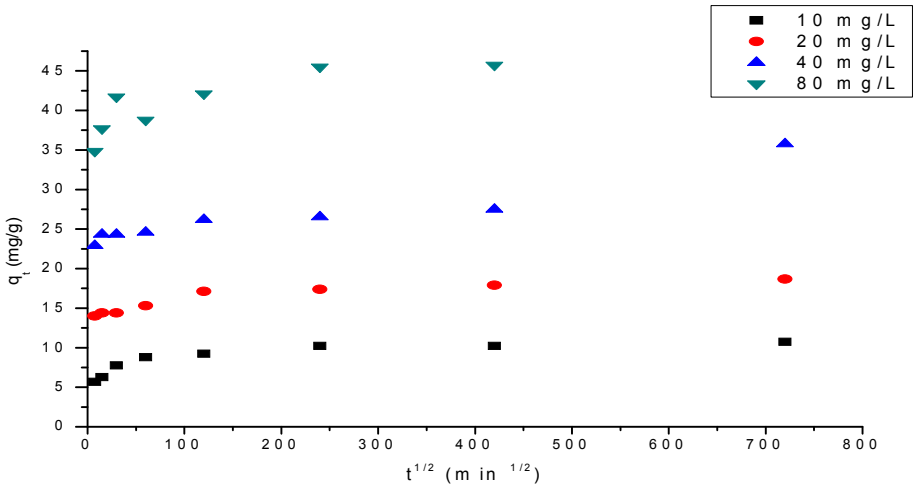

Fig. 4a. Intra-particle diffusion model for biosorption of Cr (VI) onto *Bacillus cereus* biomass (biosorbent dosage: 0.1 g/L; pH 2; temperature: 30˚ C; agitation: 100 rpm)

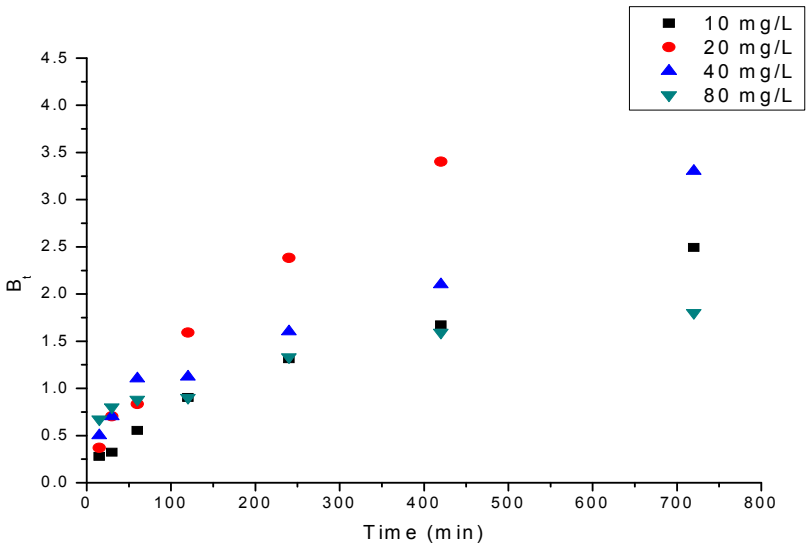

Fig. 4b. Boyd plot for the biosorption of Cr (VI) onto Bacillus cereus biomass (biosorbent dosage: 0.1 g/L; pH 2; temperature: 30˚ C; agitation: 100 rpm)

The regression coefficients (R^2) calculated for the pseudo-first order equation showing that experimental data do not well agree with the pseudo-first order kinetic model, compare to the pseudo-second order kinetic model. Therefore, the biosorption kinetic could well be approximated more favorable by pseudo-second order kinetic model for Cr (VI) biosorption onto this bacterium biomass. The calculated q_e values from the pseudo-second order equation at different sorbate concentrations were also in good agreement with the experimental values, suggesting that the bio sorption of Cr (VI) ions onto Bacillus cereus followed the pseudo-second order kinetic model. It was already demonstrated that the pseudo-second order kinetic equation for adsorption was much similar to the universal rate law for a chemical reaction. Since the processes followed the pseudo-second order equation, it literally suggests that the adsorption was mainly by simple chemical reaction between Cr (VI) ions and the surface functional groups on *B. cereus* biomass [3], [35]. The plot of the intra-particle diffusion did not pass through the origin indicating that the adsorption process not only followed the intra-particle diffusion but the film diffusion also played an important role in the adsorption process. It was also in coincidence with the fact that the process followed the pseudo-second order model. The fact that the film diffusion also played a major role in the studied adsorption process suggested that the adsorption was mainly by covalent bonding by the surface acid functional groups. Also the Boyd plot suggested that the rate-determining step is the external mass transfer since the plot was linear and does not pass through the origin.

In general the mechanism for metal removal by adsorption/bio adsorption on a sorbent material may be assumed to involve the following four steps: (a) migration of the metal from bulk of the solution to the surface of the adsorbent (bulk diffusion); (b) diffusion of metal through the boundary layer to the surface of the adsorbent (film diffusion); (c) transport of metal from the surface to the interior pores of the particle (intra-particle diffusion or pore diffusion); (d) adsorption of metal at an active site on the surface of material (chemical reaction via ion-exchange, complexation and/or chelation).

Heavy metal sorption is governed usually by either the liquid phase mass transport rate or the intra-particle mass transport. Hence diffusion mass transport is incorporated into the adsorption process. In diffusion studies, the rate can be expressed in term of the square root time. The mathematical dependence of q_t versus $t^{1/2}$ is obtained if the process is considered to be influenced by diffusion in the particles and convective diffusion in the solution. But from (Fig. 4a), it was evident that the plot did not pass through the origin, this was indicative of some degree of boundary layer control and these further shows that the intra-particle diffusion was not the sole rate controlling step, but other processes may also control the rate of adsorption. From (Fig. 4a), the diffusion mass transfer occurred up to $t^{1/2}$ of around 30 min. This suggests that since chromium is an anionic metal, there was not more intra-particle diffusion due to the presence of some acidic functional groups on the surface of the biomass and hence the adsorption efficiency also decreased accordingly.

It is important to find the slowest step which is the rate-determining step. It was proved by the Boyd plot that external mass transfer is the rate-determining step for the metal. But the extent of the film diffusion and intra-particle diffusion varied based on the ionic nature of the metal [Cr (VI)].

3.3.4 Isotherm

In this study, the equilibrium data of the biosorption of Cr (VI) ions onto *Bacillus cereus* sorbent at 30˚C were fitted with Langmuir and Freundlich equations.

3.3.4.1 Langmuir isotherm

Langmuir isotherm is represented by the following equation:

$$\frac{1}{q_e} = \frac{1}{q_{max}} + \frac{1}{bq_{max}} \times \frac{1}{C_f} \quad (13)$$

The Langmuir's constant b (L/mg) and q_{max} were calculated from the initial slope of the linear plot of 1/q versus $1/C_f$ where q and C_f were the adsorption capacities (mg/g) and the final Cr (VI) concentrations (mg/L), respectively. The q_{max} varies from 100 to 25 mg/g at the sorbent dose of 0.02 to 0.1g/L, respectively. The regression coefficient (R^2) for Langmuir isotherm varies from 0.958 to 0.993. The b constant for Langmuir varies from 0.01 to 0.04 (Table 4).

The essential features of the Langmuir biosorption isotherm can be expressed in term of dimensionless constant called the separation factor or equilibrium parameter (r), defined by Weber and Chakkravorti [36]:

$$r = \frac{1}{1+bC_0} \quad (14)$$

Where b is Langmuir biosorption constant and C_0 is the initial Cr (VI) concentration (mg/L).

Biosorption is favorable if 0 < r < 1; unfavorable if r > 1; linear if r = 1; irreversible if r = 0.The r values for the present study were found to be 0.23 – 0.91 for the initial Cr (VI) concentrations tested.

3.3.4.2 Freundlich isotherm

The Freundlich isotherm can be used for non-ideal sorption that involves heterogeneous surface energy systems and is expressed by the following equation:

$$q_e = KC_e e^{\frac{1}{n}} \quad (15)$$

Where q_e refer to amount of Cr (VI) biosorption (mg/g) at equilibrium, C_e is the equilibrium concentration of Cr (VI) in solution (mg/L). Freundlich constant K is a rough indicator of the bio sorption capacity and 1/n is the biosorption intensity. In general, as the K value increases the biosorption capacity of a bio sorbent for a given biosorbate increases. Eq.15 may be linearized by taking logarithms:

$$\log q_e = \log K + \frac{1}{n}\log C_e \quad (16)$$

The plot of $\log C_f$ versus logq was employed to generate the intercept value of K and the slope of 1/n. The value of K varies from 3 to 4 and the n values vary from 1.27 to 1.84 (Table 4).

The regression coefficients (R^2) of Langmuir and Freundlich models were greater than 0.9 and were closer to one, indicating that both models adequately described the experimental data. It was obviously that heterogeneous surface conditions co-exist within the monolayer adsorption under the applied conditions. The values calculated from the separation factor (r) and the values of Freundlich exponent (n), confirmed the favorable sorption process onto the biomass.

Previous research showed that Cr (VI) removal capacity of dead *Bacillus licheniformis* was 69.4 mg/g [37]. Another isolated Bacillus thuringiensis has approximately 83.3 mg/g of Cr (VI) biosorption capacity [38]. Other research also suggests that the Cr (VI) removal capacity was 70.25 mg/g for *Bacillus cereus* M16 [39]. Our preliminary research showed that the dried biomass of a facultative anaerobic *Bacillus cereus* Pf-1 was more effective for the removal of Cr (VI) ions from aqueous solution than other *Bacillus* strains previously used (Table 5).

Table 4. Langmuir and Freundlich isotherms parameters

Sorbent (g/l)	Langmuir constants				Freundlich constants		
	R_2	q_{max} (mg/g)	b(l/mg)	$q_{e,exp}$(mg/g)	R_2	K	N
0.02	0.978	100.3	0.01	86	0.992	3	1.27
0.05	0.993	50.1	0.02	46	0.998	4	1.68
0.1	0.959	25.4	0.04	29	0.986	3	1.84

$q_{e,exp}$: sorption capacity, experimental values

Table 5. Comparison of sorption capacities of the sorbent for the removal of Cr (VI) ions with other *Bacillus* strains

Metal	Bacterial species	Maximum sorption capacities (mg/g)	References
Cr (VI)	*Bacillus licheniformis*	69.4	[37]
	Bacillus marisflavi	5.783	[19]
	Bacillus megaterium	30.7	[39]
	Bacillus circulans	39.9	[39]
	Bacillus thuringiensis	83.3	[38]
	Bacillus cereus M16	70.25	[20]
	Bacillus cereus Pf-1	100.3	Present study
	Bacillus phaericus	7.62	[2]

4. CONCLUSION

Our results indicated that strain Pf-1 can be potentially used as an efficient biosorbent material compared to other strain of *Bacillus*, because of its remarkable biosorption capacity (100 mg/g) observed during this study. Biosorption data followed the pseudo-second-order kinetic model, suggesting that the rate-limiting step was a chemical biosorption process between Cr (VI) ions and the biomaterial used. Langmuir and Freundlich isotherms adequately described the experimental data indicating that heterogeneous surface conditions might co-exist within the monolayer adsorption under the applied conditions. External mass transfer was the rate-determining step for the adsorption. The adsorption is not only the intra-particle diffusion but the film diffusion also played an important role. The dried biomass of the Pf-1 strain significantly enhanced the biosorption capacity compare to the living or dead biomass previously used. These results show interesting characteristics from the standpoint of biotechnology because the development of a future remediation process using Pf-1 strain can represent an efficient and highly profitable technology for removing the toxic form of Cr.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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