

**ISOLATION, CHARACTERIZATION AND ANTIMICROBIAL EFFECT OF
HUMIC ACID OBTAINED FROM SOIL AT DIFFERENT SITES IN ILE- IFE**

BY

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MANAGEMENT***

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research study was carried out by ADU Adedamola Abiodun (SCP11/12/H/0055) of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Studies, as part of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Environmental Control and Management, of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to the Glory of The Almighty God and My late parents Mr. and Mrs. Adebola Victor Adu. May God grant them eternal rest.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	Page
Certification	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Table Of Contents	v
List Of Tables	xi
List Of Plates	x
List Of Figures	xi
Abstract	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Backgrounds to the study	1
1.2 Justification of the Study	3
1.3 Objectives of the Study	3
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 Humic Acids	4
2.2 Humus and Humic Acids	4
2.3 The Origin of Humic Acids	5
2.4 Chemical Composition and Structure of Humic Acid	7
2.5 Distribution of Humic matter	8

2.5.1	Humic matter in soils	10
2.5.2	Humic matter in soils of the Wetlands	11
2.5.3	Humic matter in Geologic deposits	11
2.5.4	Humic matter in Agricultural, Industrial and Municipal waste	12
2.6	Extraction and Isolation of Humic Substances from soils	13
2.6.1	Inorganic Reagents	14
2.6.2	Organic Reagents	16
2.7	Fractionation of Humic Substances	17
2.7.1	Filtration Technique	18
2.8	Bioavailability and Toxicity of Heavy metals in Humic Substances	18
2.8.1	Health and Environmental Impact of Heavymetals in soils and Aquatic Environment	20
2.9	Application of Humic Acid in Medicine	21
2.9.1	Antiviral Activity	22
2.9.2	Antimicrobial Activity of Humic substances	22
2.9.3	Anti- inflammatory effect and Pro-inflammatory properties	24
CHAPTER THREE: MATERIALS AND METHODS		25
3.1	Collection of soil samples	25
3.2	Extraction of Humic acid	25
3.3	Characterization of the Humic Acid from Different Sources	25
3.4	Determination of the Heavy metal load of the soil and Humic Acid	26
3.4.1	Determination of Chromium (Cr) and Lead (Pb) content	26
3.4.2	Determination of Iron (Fe) and Copper (Cu)	26
3.5	Sensitivity Testing of Humic Acid Extract and the Fractions on Bacterial Isolates	27

3.6	Determination of Anti- plant viral Activity of Humic Acid	27
3.6.1	Location of Study Area	27
3.6.1.1	Experimental Layout of the Study Area	28
3.6.2	Data Collection	28
3.6.2.1	Analysis of Data	28
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS		29
4.1	Characterization of the Humic Acid Isolated	29
4.1.1	Humic acid Isolated from soils of Hospital waste dumpsite	29
4.1.2	Humic acid Isolated from soils of Municipal waste dumpsite	29
4.1.3	Humic acid Isolated from soils from Auto mechanic workshop	30
4.2	Heavy metal load of the soil and Humic Acid	30
4.3	Antimicrobial Activities of Humic acid samples on Bacterial isolate	30
4.4	Plant anti- viral Activities of Humic Acid	31
4.4.1	Effect of Humic Acid Extract on Plant Height	31
4.4.2	Effect of Humic Acid on Number of Leaves	31
4.4.3	Effect of Humic Acid on Yield Parameters	32
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION		51
5.1	IR Absorption Frequencies of the isolated humic acid	51
5.1.1	The humic acid extract from soils of hospital waste dumpsite	51
5.1.2	The humic acid extract from soils of municipal waste dumpsite	51
5.2	Heavy metal load of the soil and Humic Acid	52
5.3	Antimicrobial Activities of Humic Acid extract and the fractions on Bacterial Isolates	53
5.4	Plant anti- viral Activity of Humic Acid	54

5.4.1	Effect of Humic Acid extract on Plant height	54
5.4.2	Effect of Humic Acid extract on number of leaves	55
5.4.3	Effect of Humic Acid on Yield Parameter	56
5.5	Conclusion	57
REFERENCES		59

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Title
Page	
4.1	Heavy metal content of the three (3) soil samples and humic acids isolated from them
36	
4.2	Inhibition zone of various microbes to humic acid in an <i>in vitro</i> experiment.
41	
4.3	The effect of humic acid on the Plant height of two cowpea varieties infected with Cowpea mild mottle Virus (CMMV).
42	
4.4	The effect of humic acid on the number of leaves of two cowpea varieties infected with Cowpea mild mottle virus.
43	
4.5	Mean Square of effect of humic acid on the yield parameters of two cowpea varieties infected with Cowpea mild mottle virus.
44	

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Title
2.1	A simplified example of the Structure of Humic Acid extracted from the soil
9	
4.1	Level of Chromium (Cr) in the soil Samples and humic acid extracts
37	
4.2	Level of Lead (Pb) in the Soil samples and humic acid extracts
38	
4.3	Level of Iron (Fe) in the soil samples and humic acid extracts
39	
4.4	Level of Copper (Cu) in the soil samples and humic acid extracts
40	
4.5	Mean progression of plant heights from week 2 to week 9 for Ife Brown
45	
4.6	Mean progression for number of Leaves from week 2 to week 9 for Ife Brown
46	
4.7	Mean progression of plant heights from week 2 to week 9 for TVu 76
47	
4.8	Mean progression for number of Leaves from week 2 to week 9 for TVu 76
48	
4.9	Effects of humic acid on pod weight, number of pod, seed weight and pod

length of Ife Brown

49

4.10 Effects of humic acid on pod weight, number of pod, seed weight and pod

length of TVu 76

50

OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY

LIST OF PLATES

Plate	Title	Page
4.1	FTIR Spectrum of Humic Acid isolated from soils in a Hospital waste Dumpsite.	33
4.2	FTIR Spectrum of Humic Acid Isolated from Soils in a Municipal waste Dumpsite.	34
4.3	FTIR Spectrum of Humic Acid Isolated from Soils in an Auto mechanic Workshop	35

ABSTRACT

This study characterized and determined the heavy metal load and antimicrobial activity of humic acid (HA) isolated from different soils in Ile-Ife. It also examined the plant anti-viral activity of the isolated HAs. This was with a view to assessing the prospect of the usage of humic acid as antimicrobial and plant growth agent.

Soil samples were collected from three different areas (hospital waste dumpsite of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Teaching Hospital, municipal waste dumpsite of Moremi Hall of Residence, OAU and an automobile workshop, where spent oil has been deposited overtime in Ile-Ife. Humic acid was extracted by treatment of the soil samples with dilute NaOH (1:10) in 250 ml conical flasks. The Infra Red Spectroscopy of isolated HA was determined using a Perkin Elmer Fourier Transform Infra Red (FT - IR) Spectrometer. The digests from soil samples were analyzed for the selected heavy metals (Pb, Cu, Cr and Fe) using Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometry. The antimicrobial activity of the isolates was tested against clinical isolates of some aerobic bacteria using agar well diffusion method. A standard antibiotic (streptomycin) was used as positive reference standard. Clinical isolates of the following microorganisms were used for the study: *Escherichia coli*, *Proteus vulgaris*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Bacillus polymyxa*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Clostridium sporogenes*, *Corynebacterium pyogenes*, *Bacillus stearothermophilus*, *Enterococcus faecalis*, *Micrococcus luteus*, *Pseudomonas fluorescens* and *Bacillus subtilis*. These microorganisms were obtained from the laboratory stock of the Department of Microbiology, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. The antiviral activity of the isolates was evaluated using

two cowpea varieties (Ife Brown and TVu 76) as test plants in a Randomized Complete Block Design with six treatments which included the control experiment.

The results from the Fourier Transformed Infrared spectra of HA extracted from soils in Ile-Ife were found to be similar. The HA spectra showed strong hydrogen bonded O – H/ N – H stretching vibration at 3760.00 cm^{-1} , Dimeric O- H stretching vibration at 3453.00 cm^{-1} . A low intensity absorption indicative of an olefinic (C = C) or aromatic C = C bond was seen at 1639.57 cm^{-1} while an absorption at 1401.55 cm^{-1} indicative of phenols was also observed. Absorption at 1113.79 cm^{-1} and 1031.08 cm^{-1} indicative of C – O stretch of aliphatic or aromatic alcohol, cyclic/ acyclic esters, ethers or carboxylic acid. The HA from municipal waste dumpsite had less carbonyl content compared to that from hospital waste dumpsite and automobile workshop. The values of the heavy metals considered (Pb, Cu, Cr and Fe) for the soils and HAs from different sites are within the safe limit of the European commission except for Iron (Fe) with values higher than 1500 mg/kg which is the European commission limit. Results of the antimicrobial activity showed that HA displayed very good antimicrobial activity against *E. coli*, *P. vulgaris*, *K. pneumoniae*, *B. polymyxa*, *B. cereus*, *S. aureus*, *C. sporogenes*, *C. pyogenes*, *E. faecalis*, *P. fluorescence* and *B. subtilis* compared to the standard drug (streptomycin) but had no effect on *B. stearothermophilus* and *M. luteus*. For plant anti- viral activity, the treatments had significant effect on the yield parameters for the two cowpea varieties (Ife Brown and Tvu 76).

The study concluded that the isolated humic acids exhibited good broad spectrum antimicrobial activity and that humic acid was a multifunctional compound.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Humic substances are major components of the natural organic matter in soil and water as well as in geological organic deposits such as lake sediments, peats, brown coals and shales. They make up much of the characteristic brown colour of decaying plant debris and contribute to the brown or black colour in surface soils. They are major components of Natural Organic matter in surface waters and at higher concentrations can impart a dark colour, especially in brown fresh water ponds, lakes and streams. In leaf litter or composts, the colour may be yellowish brown to black, depending on the degree of decay and concentration.

Humic substances are complex and heterogeneous mixtures of polydispersed materials formed by biochemical and chemical reactions during the decay and transformation of plant and microbial remains (a process called humification). Plant lignin, and its transformation products, as well as polysaccharides, melanin, cutin, proteins, lipids, nucleic acids, fine char particles, etc., are important components taking part in this process.

Numerous studies have shown that Humic Substances enhance root, leaf and shoot growth but also stimulate the germination of various crop species (Piccolo *et al.*, 1993). These positive effects are explained as an interaction between humic substance and physiological and metabolic processes (Musolo *et al.*, 1999; Nardi *et al.*, 2002). The addition of humic substance stimulate nutrient uptake (Dell'Agnola and Nardi, 1987; Piccolo *et al.*, 1993), cell permeability (Vaughan and Ord, 1981) and seems to regulate mechanisms involved in plant growth stimulation (Lee *et*

al., 1976; Dobbss *et al.*, 2007). It is not easy to distinguish between the direct and indirect effects of these substances. In fact, some of their positive effects may be ascribed to a general improvement of soil fertility, leading to a higher nutrient availability for plants. Whilst in other cases, humic substances seem to positively influence metabolic and signaling pathways involved in the plant development, by acting directly on specific physiological targets (Davis *et al.*, 2001; Danuta *et al.*, 2002). For this reason, understanding humic substance biological activity and the molecular mechanisms through which they exert their functions is becoming an important ecological task and a valid tool in facing environmental problems.

Humic substances in soils and sediments can be divided into three main fractions: humic acids (HA), fulvic acid (FA) and humin. These HA and FA are extracted from soil and other solid phase sources using strong base (NaOH or KOH). Humic acids are insoluble at low pH, and they are precipitated by adding strong acid. Humin cannot be extracted with either a strong base or a strong acid.

Humic substances are known to be of high molecular mass polyhydroxycarboxylates which contain poly-aromatic and aliphatic subunits. The degree of ionization of these macromolecules is governed by the amount of ionized phenolic and carboxylic groups, which is a function of pH of the solution. Their most common classification is based on the solubility at different pH values such as Humic acid, insoluble at pH less than 2 (under acidic condition); Fulvic acid, is soluble at all pH values and Humin, is insoluble at all pH values (Stevenson, 1972; Davies *et al.*, 2001; Karen *et al.*, 2005).

Humic acid is one of the most important forms of humic substances. Humic acid plays an important role in various fields such as agriculture, environment and biomedicine. On the other

hand, they can raise aquatic environment pollution, induce cytotoxicity for many mammalian cells and induce growth retardation and apoptosis of fibroblasts (Danuta *et al.*, 2002; Kuo-Jang *et al.*, 2003; Mei- Ling *et al.*, 2003; Thomas *et al.*, 2004). These important properties of humic acid have attracted attention of many investigators and the results over the years have brought new understanding on their structure and physicochemical properties.

Because humic acids are ubiquitous and can be extracted in different proportions by many solvents, they were extracted from many sources by varying methods. Naturally, the resulting extracts had different solubilities, colours, and textures, the principal properties used to differentiate compounds at the time.

1.2 Justification of the Study

Humic substances (consisting of humic acid, fulvic acid and humin) are ubiquitous in the environment. They exist on different waste media and in some instances constituting environmental nuisance. However, there is the prospect of the usage of humic acid as antimicrobial and plant growth agent when appropriately isolated, purified and applied, hence this study.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to isolate humic acid from different environment and determine the heavy metal load (Cr, Pb, Fe and Cu) in the soil samples and humic acid isolated from them. The specific objectives of the study are to

- (a) characterize and quantify humic acid from the different sources;and
- (b) determine the antimicrobial and plant anti- viral activities of the humic acid.

1.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study has provided additional information on the antimicrobial and plant anti- viral activity of humic acid as well as its ability to increase the yield of cowpea.

For more information, please contact ir-help@oauife.edu.ng

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