



**ChemTech**

**International Journal of ChemTech Research**

CODEN (USA) : IJCRGG ISSN : 0974-4290, ISSN(Online):2455-9555

**Vol. 09, No. 06, 2016**

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CODEN (USA) : IJCRGG ISSN : 0974-4290, ISSN(Online):2455-9555

**Vol. 09, No. 06, 2016**

This website is best viewed in 1024 x 768

INDEX Page-1.

S.N.(Page Numbers)	Title of Paper and Names of Authors			
(01-16)	Preparation of Single Layer Nonwoven Fabric Treated With Chitosan Nanoparticles and Its Utilization in Gas Filtration			
	H. M. Ibrahim, M. M. Saad, Nermin M. Aly			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(17-22)	Changes in Some Constituents of Kalamata and Picual Olive Fruits During Development			
	Desouky I.M., Shaltout A. D., Laila F. Haggag and Esraa M.M. Farahat			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(23-30)	Efficiency of integration of intercropping culture of potato varieties (Spunta & Nikola) and sticky traps in controlling some sucking insect pests in the field of fruit seedlings.			
	M. I. Mogahed and N. M. Abdelmaksoud			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(31-38)	Disperse Dyes Based on Pyrazolopyrimidinones I: Their Dyeing Applications and Antimicrobial Activities			
	Abu-Bakr A. A. M. El-Adasy, Magda M. Kamel, Mohamed O. Saleh, Abdel Haleem M. Hussein, Morsy A. El-Asasery			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(39-47)	The effects of Gamma irradiation on the Microbiological quality, Sensory evaluation and Antioxidant activity of Spinach			
	Amnah M. Al-Suhaibani and Amal N. Al-Kuraieef			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(48-54)	QSAR, Brine Shrimp Lethal Assay and antimicrobial studies on Synthesized L-Tryptophan-2,4-dihydroxy benzaldehyde Schiff Base			
	R.Jayaprakash, Saroj Kumar Sha, S.Hemalatha, D.Easwaramoorthy			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(55-63)	Allelopathic effect of dry leaves of lantana and guava for controlling root knot nematode, Meloidogyne incognita on cowpea and some associated weeds			



	<b>Wafaa M.A. El-Nagdi, M.M.A. Youssef and Kowthar G. El-Rokiek</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(64-69)	<b>Response of onion (<i>Allium cepa</i> L.) plants to peanut compost and sulphur fertilizer.</b>		
	<b>Hala Kandil</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(70-77)	<b>Effect of foliar application of growth regulators (GA<sub>3</sub> and Ethereal) on growth, sex expression and yield of summer squash plants (<i>Cucurbita pepo</i> L.) under plastic house condition</b>		
	<b>Shafeek M.R.; Y.I. Helmy; A.A. Ahmed and A.A. Ghoname</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(78-85)	<b>Effect of Spraying Kalamata and Picual Olive Trees with GA<sub>3</sub> and ZnSO<sub>4</sub> on Fruit Oil Content and Oil Properties</b>		
	<b>Desouky I.M., Laila F. Haggag, and Esraa M.M. Farahat</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(86-98)	<b>Estimate the outside demand functions of Orange and grape crops in Egypt</b>		
	<b>Hanan M. Mahrous and Yomna Shehata Mostafa</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(99-106)	<b>The Economic and Social Problems Facing Rural Development in Arab Society and the Ways to face them</b>		
	<b>Mohamed Gamal Mady Abou El-Azayem, Nagwa Mosaad El-Agroudy and Monia Bahaa El- Din Hassan</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(107-120)	<b>Role of Tryptophan or Prozac (5-hydroxytryptamine) on some Osmolytes and Antioxidant defense system of Sunflower cultivars grown in Saline soil</b>		
	<b>H.M.S. El-Bassiouny, A.A. Abdel-Monem</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(121-130)	<b>Natural Bioactive Mixture Composed of Lemon, Onion and Garlic Juice for Feeding Rabbits</b>		
	<b>Sawsan M. Ahmed; H.A.A. Omer; Azza M.M. Badr; Neamat I. Bassuony and A.A. Baker</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(131-141)	<b>Combined Effect of a ChitinaseProducing Bacteria and <i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> Against <i>Muscadomestica</i>, (Diptera: Muscidae) Larvae</b>		
	<b>Elham M. Salama, I.A. Ismail and Abeer A. Khattab</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(142-152)	<b>Soil application of <i>Bacillus pumilus</i> and <i>Bacillus subtilis</i> for suppression of <i>Macrophomina phaseolina</i> and <i>Rhizoctonia solani</i> and yield enhancement in peanut</b>		
	<b>Hassan Abd-El-Khair, Karima H. E. Haggag and Ibrahim E. Elshahawy</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(153-164)	<b>Partial Replacement of Integrated Mineral Fertilizer through Biofertilization to Maximize Economic</b>		

	<b>Yield of Faba Bean under Saline Soil Conditions</b>		
	<b>Hanan S. Siam, Samia H. Ashmayer, Mona G. Abd El-Kader and Awatef A. Mahmoud1</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(165-173)	<b>Phytochemical and SDS-dissociated proteins of pathogenic and nonpathogenic <i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> isolates</b>		
	<b>Lubna S. Nawar</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(174-184)	<b>In Vitro Evaluation of Nickel Nanoparticles against Various Pathogenic <i>Fusarium</i> Species</b>		
	<b>Ahmed I. S. Ahmed, Dil Raj Yadav and Youn Su Lee</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(185-197)	<b>Comparative Diagnosis Utilizing Molecular and Serological Techniques of <i>Theileria equi</i> Infection in Distinct Equine Populations in Egypt</b>		
	<b>Olfat A. Mahdy, Ahmed M. Nassar, Bassma S. Mohamed, Mona S. Mahmoud</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(198-202)	<b>Preservability of Buffalo semen using tris-extender enriched with different concentrations of Strawberry [<i>Fragaria</i> spp.] Juice</b>		
	<b>Mona El-Hamidi, Ferial A. Zaher and Safinaz M. El-Shami Reda I. El-Sheshtawy, Walid S. El-Nattat and Gamal A. Ali</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(203-207)	<b>Effect of clarified Tris egg yolk extender supplemented with strawberry juice (<i>Fragaria</i> Spp.) on some characteristics of chilled and frozen cattle semen</b>		
	<b>Reda I. El-Sheshtawy, Walid S. El-Nattat, Gamal A. Ali</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(208-214)	<b>Controlled Particle Size of Miniemulsion Polymerization in Presence of Different Hydrophobic Agents</b>		
	<b>Saber A. Ibrahim, Omar R. Soliman</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(215-225)	<b>Multiple Resistance of Pathogenic Bacteria in Poultry from Malang District, Indonesia</b>		
	<b>Indah Amalia Amri, Sri Murwani, Dahliatul Qosimah, riski arya pradikta</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(226-241)	<b>A Promising Use for Potassium Alum as Controlling Agent Against <i>Blattella germanica</i>(L.) (<i>Dictyoptera</i>:<i>Blattellidae</i>)</b>		
	<b>Elham M. Salama, I.A. Ismail and R.S. Abdel-Rahman</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(242-250)	<b>Chemical Composition and Antimicrobial Activity of Essential Oil of <i>Callistemon Viminalis</i> from the South Syria</b>		
	<b>Mohamad Jawad Khubeiz and Ghaytha Mansour</b>		

	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(251-259)	<b>Drugs/Antibiotics as potential corrosion inhibitors for Metals - A Review</b>			
	<b>S.Karthikeyan</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(260-269)	<b>Optimization on Stir Casting Process Parameters of Aluminium Alloy (AL6061) Nickel Coated Graphite (NCG) Metal Matrix Composite using Taguchi Based Rsm</b>			
	<b>Lakshmikanthan.P , Prabu. B</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(270-276)	<b>Observations of the effect of Chitosan and its nano compositions against the locust Schistocerca gregaria (Orthoptera: Acrididae )</b>			
	<b>Sabbour M.M</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(277-281)	<b>Extraction of Cetyltrimethyl Ammonium bromide with picric acid by spectrophotometry Method</b>			
	<b>Omid Espergham, Hossein Tavallali</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(282-288)	<b>Simultaneous determination of Dopamine and Ascorbic acid in real samples by Partial Least Squares method</b>			
	<b>Omid Espergham, Hossein Tavallalib</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(289-295)	<b>Evaluation of stabilize contaminants in biological sludge wastewater</b>			
	<b>Omid Espergham, Hossein Tavallali</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(296-301)	<b>Extractive Spectrophotometric determination of Ranitidine by ion pair complex formation with Indigocarmine</b>			
	<b>Hossein Tavallali, Farzad Bagheri, Omid Espergham</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(302-306)	<b>Spectrophotometric determination of chlorodiazepoxide in pharmaceutical preparations by ion pair formation</b>			
	<b>Hossein Tavallali , Zahra Kazemi</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(307-315)	<b>The Identification of Laor Worms (Polychaeta) in Marine Areas of Ambon Island, Mollucas Province,Indonesia Based on 16s rRNA Gene Sequence</b>			
	<b>Sintje Liline, Mohamad Amin, Umie Lestari, Aloysius Duran Corebima</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	



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This website is best viewed in 1024 x 768

INDEX Page-2.

S.N.(Page Numbers)	Title of Paper and Names of Authors			
(316-321)	Synthesis of Cyclo[tyrosyl-(N-Me)leucanyl-prolyl-threonyl-(nitro)Arginine]:A potent Anthelmintic Agent against Eudrillus eugeniae			
	M. Himaja, Patel Samir, Das Poppy			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(322-332)	Production of Biodiesel from Jatropha Curcas Seed Oil using Base Catalysed Transesterification			
	Fahad Ahmed, Saidat Olanipekun Giwa, Maryam Ibrahim and Abdulwahab Giwa			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(333-338)	A Rapid and Selective method for the Quantification of Naringenin in order to monitor Naringinase activity			
	Ajith Madhavan, Pandurangan Nanjan, Sindhu Shetty. K, Shanmugham. S.			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(339-346)	Effect of Salt Stress on Plant Growth and Free Endogenous Hormones of Primed Radish ( <i>Raphanus Sativus</i> L.) Seeds With Salicylic Acid			
	Ali Husain Jasim, Wassan Mudher Abo Al Timmen, Allyaa Saad Abid			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(347-361)	Assessment of Strength of Granules Prepared in Rotary Drum Granulator Based on their Residence Time			
	Savita Belwal, N. Rama, V. Suman, V. Vamshi Krishna, B. Rajesh			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(362-366)	Crystal structure of 7-chloro-2,3,3a,4,9,9a-hexahydro-3,9,9-trimethyl-5-nitro-1H-cyclopenta[b]quinoline			
	G. Sridhar, I. Mohammed Bilal, D. Easwaramoorthy, S. Kutti Rani and K. Anand Solomon			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(367-375)	Implementation of Switching Circuit between Grid and Photovoltaic system with fixed and Movable Tracking			
	N.Kalaiarasi, S.Paramasivam, SubranshuSekhar Dash			

	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(376-383)	<b>A Study on Domestic Wastewater Treatment by Pilot-Scale Constructed Wetlands</b>			
	<b>G.Chandrankanth, M. Srimurali, C.M. VivekVardhan</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(384-391)	<b>Structural Analysis of Pick-Up Truck Chassis using Fem</b>			
	<b>Rahul.V, Nirmal.R.U, Noraje Aniket Arunkumar, P.Baskar</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(392-399)	<b>The Effect of Pozzolanic Addition on Expansive Portland Cement</b>			
	<b>R. Elmrabet, M.S. Elyoubi and A. Elharfi</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(400-408)	<b>Preparation of Magnetite (Fe<sub>3</sub>O<sub>4</sub>) Thin Films by Sol- Gel Method and its Characterization</b>			
	<b>C. Manoharan, R. Sakthi Murugan, A. Dhanalakshmi</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(409-416)	<b>Dye degradation studies catalysed by green synthesized Iron oxide nanoparticles</b>			
	<b>D. Badmapriya, I.V. Asharani</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(417-423)	<b>Investigation on Mechanical Properties of Glass and Carbon Fiber Reinforced With Polyester Resin Composite</b>			
	<b>R B Durairaj, G Mageshwaran, V Sriram</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(424-431)	<b>Experimental Investigation on Fatigue Behaviour of Solar Receiver Tube under Assymetrical Flux Condition</b>			
	<b>G. Mageshwaran, S. Ramachandran</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(432-439)	<b>Pinch analysis of Acrylic Acid Process Plant</b>			
	<b>K. Nagamalleswara Rao</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(440-452)	<b>Detoxification of Methyl Orange and Trypan Blue Dyes by using Erbium loaded CuO nanoparticles</b>			
	<b>R. Sasikala, S. Kutti Rani, K. Karthikeyan, D. Easwaramoorthy and I. Mohammed Bilal</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(453-463)	<b>Production of Biodiesel from Desert Date Seed Oil</b>			



	<b>Seer MercyAkaagerger, Saidat Olanipekun Giwa, Maryam Ibrahim and Abdulwahab Giwa</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(464-475)	<b>Comparative in Silico analysis of the behavior of Laccases from marine and terrestrial origin against degradation of industrial dyes</b>		
	<b>JD Castaño, M Quintero, J Gomez L</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(476-487)	<b>Estimation of sex hormones in type 2 diabetes patients</b>		
	<b>Israa Harjan Mohsen, Haider Kamil Zaidan, Ali Hmood Al-Saadi</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(488-500)	<b>Bioinformatics informations for Constructed Mammalian expression vector using nested PCR technique</b>		
	<b>Mona Al-Terehi, Ali H. Al-Saadi, Haider K. Zaidan, Abbas N. Alshirifi</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(501-513)	<b>Histopathological Changes of Pancreatic Tissues in Hyperglycemic Male Rats Treated with Mixture of Plants Extracts</b>		
	<b>Maysaa' Adil Hadi, Haider Kamil Zaidan, Ali Hmood Al-Saadi</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(514-523)	<b>Synthesis and characterization of nano-sized hydroxyapatite and doped with some rare earth elements from phosphogypsum waste</b>		
	<b>Adly A.Hanna, Sahar M.Mousa, Marwa A.Sherief, Gehan M.Elkomy</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(524-529)	<b>Synthesis of a Proton Exchange Membrane from Natural Latex Modified with Vanadium Pentoxide for Application in a Fuel Cell</b>		
	<b>Álvaro Realpe, Yina Pino, María T. Acevedo</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(530-537)	<b>Optimization of seaweed and water content for the production of seaweed paste using response surface methodology</b>		
	<b>Xiren Guli Keyimu , Aminah Abdullah</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(538-545)	<b>Evaluation of Moringa oleifera seed extract coagulation in removal of some dyes in textile wastewater</b>		
	<b>N. F.Ali and R.S.R. EL-Mohamedy</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>
(546-551)	<b>BMI and Food Lifestyle Comparison B/W India and Germany and Specific Indian States</b>		
	<b>A Sai Abhishikth, Asmita Sen and Suneetha V</b>		
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>

(552-559)	<b>Air Quality Index for Makkah City, Saudi Arabia: Recommended Breakpoints and Bands</b>			
	<b>Abdel Hameed A. Awad, Alia A. Shakour, Yasser H. Ibraheim, Nasser Abdel-Latif</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(560-566)	<b>Experimental study to removal of methylene blue dye from aqueous solution by adsorption on eco-friendly materials</b>			
	<b>Jasim M. Salman, Maysam A. Baiee , Alaa R. Omran</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(567-579)	<b>Phycoremediation of Olive Wastewater for Sustainable Production</b>			
	<b>Moustafa, S., El Shimi, H.</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(580-595)	<b>Comparative Crystal Structure Analysis of (2S, 3S)-2-morpholino-3-phenylpentan-3-ol hydrochloride and (2S, 3R)-2-morpholino-3-phenylpentan-3-ol hydrochloride</b>			
	<b>Saravanan Rangan, S. Arul Antony, Abirami Kandhaswamy, Prabhu Mahendran, Borkatte Hitesh Kumar</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(596-602)	<b>Response Growth and the Effectiveness of the Absorption of Heavy Metal B-Iii by Limnochris Flava on a Scale Laboratory</b>			
	<b>Muhammad Rijal, Mohamad Amin, Fathur Rochman, Endang Suarsini</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(603-606)	<b>Fabrication of cellulose based scaffolds for bone regeneration application</b>			
	<b>Priya Ganesan, Amruta P. Barhanpurkar, Mohan R. Wani, U. Narendra Kumar, I. Manjubala</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(607-613)	<b>Geoelectric signatures of the coastal aquifer system of Adappa watershed</b>			
	<b>Ezhisaivallabi. K and Poongothai.S</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(614-619)	<b>A Study on combined effect of Methylene blue and Sodium anthraquinone-2- sulphonate on inactivation efficiency of Escherichia coli and Enterococcus hirae</b>			
	<b>Madhavi Singh, Kannan Pakshirajan and Vishal Trivedi</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(620-626)	<b>Prevalence of Mortality Rate Based on Type of Disease in Primary Class ICU of PTPN II Bangkatan General Hospital in Year 2014</b>			
	<b>Astri Gartika, Andriamuri Primaputra Lubis</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	



# ChemTech

## International Journal of ChemTech Research

CODEN (USA) : IJCRGG ISSN : 0974-4290, ISSN(Online):2455-9555

**Vol. 09, No. 06, 2016**

This website is best viewed in 1024 x 768

INDEX Page-3.

S.N.(Page Numbers)	Title of Paper and Names of Authors			
(627-634)	A New Route of Biodiesel Production through Chemical Interesterification of Jatropha Oil using Ethyl Acetate			
	Ratna Dewi Kusumaningtyas, Riris Pristiyani, Heny Dewajani			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(635-646)	Study of Electrochemical Behaviour of ZK21 Alloy			
	P.Kalpana, K.Kayalvizhi			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(647-656)	Effect of Rhizobacterial isolate ALKP 12 on the seed germination and growth pattern of Hordeum vulgare L. and its comparison with chemical fertilizer and other treatments			
	Paratpar Sarkar, Deepika Rawat, R.N Singh and Ashish Thapliyal			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(657-668)	The Calculation of Average Vehicles Emission from Environmental Audit in Toll-Road Surabaya-Gresik at Indonesia			
	Mohammad Razif and Satria Fadil Persada			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(669-676)	Intelligent food packaging: Concepts and innovations			
	Amiri Qandashtani Roya, Mahdian Elham*			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(677-685)	Genetic Relationships between Selected Wild Olive Types and two Cultivars Grown in Moseif Region / Syria using ISSR Technique			
	Ghada Kattmah, Faisal Hamed			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(686-693)	Osteogenesis at Tension Site by Stichopus hermanii Application as Relapse Orthodontic Prevention			
	Noengki Prameswari, Soetjipto, Retno Pudji Rahayu			

	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(694-708)	<b>Analysis of Liquid Smoke Chemical Components with GC MS from Different Raw Materials Variation Production and Pyrolysis Temperaturelevel</b>			
	<b>I Ketut Budaraga, Arnim, Yetti Marlida, Usman Bulanin</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(709-717)	<b>Antibacterial activity, time-kill profile and morphological effects of Streptomyces sp. SRF1 extracts against the foodborne pathogen Bacillus cereus</b>			
	<b>Sangdee K, Pimta J, Seephonkai P, Sangdee A</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(718-724)	<b>Potency of Bacterial Consortium From Apple Crops as Production of Indole Acetic Acid (IAA)</b>			
	<b>Eva Watamtin Widhiya, Suharjono, Tri Ardiyati</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(725-732)	<b>Synthesis of Hydroxy-sodalite from Fine Fractions of Sandy Clay Loam Soil (Natural Aluminosilicate)</b>			
	<b>Lawrence Tatanah Nanganoa, Ketcha Joseph Mbadcam, &amp; Seuil. Kang</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	
(733-737)	<b>Resistant bacteria isolated from soil contaminated oils engines for some heavy metals</b>			
	<b>Atheer S.N.AI-Azawey, Wameed A.K.AI-Taee, Hala F.A.AI-Jawahery</b>			
	<a href="#">Abstract</a>	<a href="#">Full Text PDF</a>	<a href="#">Full Text XML</a>	

[Next](#)

[1](#)
[2](#)
[3](#)
[\(Back to Journal section\)](#)



## A New Route of Biodiesel Production through Chemical Interesterification of Jatropha Oil using Ethyl Acetate

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**Abstract :** The classical methods of biodiesel production is transesterification of triglycerides and the esterification of free fatty acid (FFA) using alcohol. Those two routes have problem in terms of by-products resulted throughout the processes. Transesterification of triglyceride and FFA esterification generate glycerol and water, respectively, as side product. Those by-products are regarded as waste in the biodiesel production. Therefore, a series of separation process is essential to achieve high purity biodiesel product. On the other hand, purification steps usually require high capital, operation, and energy cost in industrial process. Thus, to reduce separation process, a new route of biodiesel production which eliminated generation of glycerol and water by-products was proposed in this work. In this research, biodiesel production was carried out via chemical interesterification of jatropha oil with ethyl acetate over potassium hydroxide catalyst. Through this new route of biodiesel production, triacetin was yielded rather than glycerol or water. Triacetin is acknowledged as additive which functions as an anti-knocking agent for biodiesel in diesel machine. Thus, the production of biodiesel through interesterification reaction of vegetable oil with ethyl acetate would not need a further separation of by-product. In this work, the influence of main parameters on the interesterification reaction was evaluated. The effect of catalyst concentration was studied in the range of 0.5 – 1.25% w/w oil. The reaction temperature and molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate were varied at 60 and 70°C, and 1:6, 1:9, 1:15, 1:30, and 1:60, respectively. The influence of the reaction time was tested from 0 to 8 hours. The highest reaction conversion was attained at reaction temperature of 70°C, molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate at 1:6, 6 hours reaction time, and catalyst concentration of 0.5%.

**Keywords :** Biodiesel, interesterification, triacetin, jatropha oil, ethyl acetate.

### Introduction

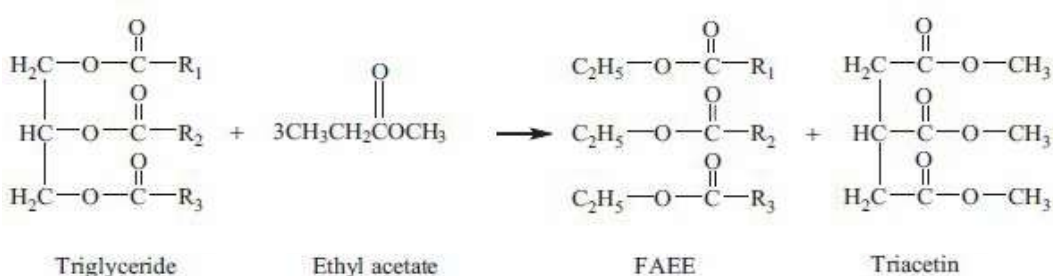
Biodiesel is a prospective renewable alternative fuel for diesel engines. It has many advantages, among others are: less polluting than petroleum diesel, contains a smaller amount of sulfur thus can extend the lifetime of the catalytic converters, high cetane number, and has caloric value which is comparable to petroleum diesel. Besides, biodiesel fuel can also be applied in conventional diesel engines without making any modification in the machine. *Biodiesel* is generally *made* of methyl esters of fatty acids, which can be produced via the two main routes, i.e. base-catalyzed transesterification reaction of triglyceride of vegetable oil or acid-catalyzed esterification of the free fatty acid (FFA)<sup>1, 2</sup>. The two classical routes of biodiesel production has drawback in term of the by-product resulted in the reaction. Transesterification of triglyceride with short-chain alcohols result in a large amount of glycerol as by-product, meanwhile the esterification of FFA yields water as by



product. Both glycerol and water by-products are handled as waste. Therefore, to obtain a high purity biodiesel<sup>12-25</sup>, a series of separation processes becomes a mandatory. On the other hand, separation process is commonly one of the most energy and cost-intensive steps of a chemical process. Besides, separation process often creates a significant environmental impact due to the existence of the used separating agent, which is released as wastes<sup>3</sup>. Thus, reducing separation steps in chemical process industry is crucial in order to improve the efficiency and achieve the high economical process.

In biodiesel industry, separation steps can be reduced by producing biodiesel through an alternative route which avoids the formation of glycerol or water side-products. One interesting option is synthesizing biodiesel via transesterification reaction of vegetable oils by using methyl or ethyl acetate as reactant instead of short-chain alcohols. Chemical transesterification of oils with methyl/ethyl acetate will result in methyl esters (biodiesel) and triacetin, whereas glycerol would not be produced in this reaction. Triacetin is well known as fuel bio-additive which can increase fuel quality in terms of viscosity, oxidation stability, and cloud flow properties such as cloud point and pour point<sup>4</sup>. It also has a function as anti-knocking agent for diesel fuels.

The transesterification of oils and fats with methyl/ ethyl acetate is attractive since it can simultaneously synthesize biodiesel and fuel bio-additive. This reaction can be written as depicted in Figure 1. Transesterification reaction is a complex reaction comprising three consecutive reversible reactions<sup>5</sup>. The first step is the reaction of triglyceride with ethyl acetate resulting fatty acid ethyl ester (biodiesel) and monoacetin diglyceride, the second step is the reaction of monoacetin diglyceride with ethyl acetate to result in fatty acid ethyl ester (biodiesel) and diacetin monoglyceride, and the last step is the reaction of diacetin monoglyceride with ethyl acetate yielding fatty acid ethyl ester (biodiesel) and triacetin. Hence, the entire reaction stoichiometrically requires 1 mol of triglyceride and 3 mol of ethyl acetate to produce 3 mol of fatty acid ethyl ester (biodiesel) and 1 mol triacetin. This reaction can be carried out by using various types of base or acid catalysts.



**Figure 1. Transesterification of Triglyceride**

Transesterification of vegetable oil is a new route of biodiesel production which could transform triglycerides into biodiesel without glycerol formation. This route is a promising way of the process intensification on biodiesel production. In this research, biodiesel production via the transesterification reaction of crude jatropha oil with ethyl acetate was investigated. Potassium hydroxide catalyst was employed to enhance the reaction rate. The experiments were conducted in a batch reactor at different temperature, reaction time, oil to ethyl acetate molar ratio, and catalyst concentration to evaluate the effects of those parameters on biodiesel yield from jatropha oil. To prevent the side-saponification reaction due to the high FFA content in oil feed-stocks, crude jatropha oil was primarily neutralized using Na<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> solution.

## Experimental

### A. Material

Crude jatropha oil (from PT. Pura Energi, Indonesia) and ethyl acetate (from Merck, Germany) were the main reactants for the biodiesel synthesis. Potassium hydroxide was utilized as catalysts for the chemical transesterification reaction. Physical properties of this crude jatropha oil were reported in Table I.

**Tabel I. Physical Properties of Crude Jatropha Oil**

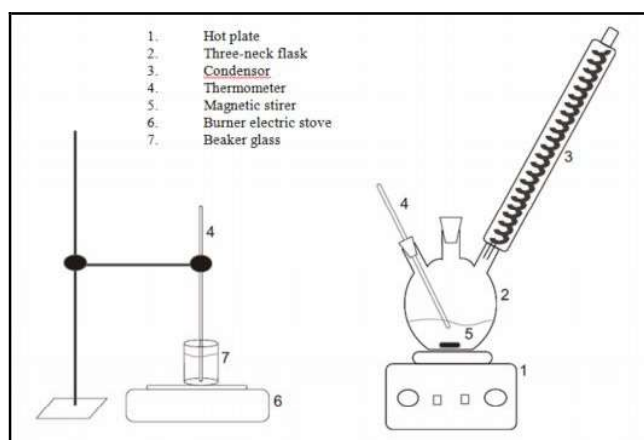
Properties	Value
Density	970 kg/m <sup>3</sup>
Viscosity	38.83 mm <sup>2</sup> /s
Acid Number	17.71 mg KOH/g oil
Acidity (Acid Content)	8.9 w/w oil

### B. Neutralization of Crude Jatropha Oil

Neutralization of crude jatropha oil was conducted in a 500 ml three-necks flask using Na<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>. Soda ash (Na<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>) was initially dissolved into aquadest to obtain saturated aqueous solution of sodium carbonate. Subsequently, 100 ml of crude jatropha oil was heated to 90°C in a three-necks flask equipped with a glass condenser. After the desired temperature was attained, a solution of Na<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub> was added to the jatropha oil and stirred for 60 minutes using magnetic stirrer. During the neutralization process, saponification reaction of FFA contained in the oil with alkali took place and resulted in soap. The neutralized jatropha oil was then separated from the soap using filtration method.

### C. Interesterification of Jatropha Oil

Alkaline-catalyzed interesterification of jatropha oil with ethyl acetate was carried out in a batch reactor equipped with condenser and stirrer as depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Batch Reactor for Interesterification Process**

First of all, potassium hydroxide catalyst was dissolved into ethyl acetate in a certain concentration and subsequently poured into the reactor. The solution was then heated to the desired temperature. In the other flask, refined jatropha oil was also heated to similar temperature. After the desired temperature was reached, the oil was decanted into the reactor. Interesterification reaction of jatropha oil with ethyl acetate using potassium hydroxide catalyst was conducted in different reaction time, temperature, catalyst concentration, and molar ratio of the reactants. Catalyst concentration was varied in the range of 0.5 – 1.25% w/w oil. The effects of reaction temperature and molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate were studied at 50, 60, and 70°C, and 1:6, 1:9, 1:15, 1:30, and 1:60, respectively. The reaction time was tested from 0 to 8 hours.

### D. Analysis

Yields of biodiesel in the interesterification process was determined using *High Performance Liquid Chromatograph* (Quaternary Gradient System with UV-Vis Detector, Type LC-20 Prominence, Shimadzu) and *Gas Chromatograph - Mass Spectrometer* (Type QC-2010 Ultra EI Mode, Shimadzu)

## Results and Discussion

### A. Neutralization Process of Crude Jatropha Oil

Neutralization is a method for chemical refining of high FFA vegetable oils. The objective of this process is to reduce FFA content in oil feedstock by saponification reaction using an alkaline solution, which results in soaps in water phase<sup>6</sup>. The soap produced is then separated from the oil feedstock. In this work, neutralization process was performed using  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ . Alkaline neutralization of FFA in jatropha oil with  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$  solution can be written in Figure 3. Carbonic acid resulted in this reaction will dissociate to  $\text{CO}_2$  gas and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . Carbon dioxide gas forms foam in the soap, so that the soap will float on the oil. The soap therefore can be easily separated using filtration method. In this work, rendement of the refined jatropha oil after neutralization process was 72%. The FFA content of the neutralized oil was 0.17% or it was identical to 0.3506 mg KOH/g oil. This acidity value could fulfill the requirement for the reaction of oil using alkaline catalyst. Subsequent to the neutralization step, jatropha oil was used as the feedstock for the biodiesel synthesis via alkaline interesterification with ethyl acetate.

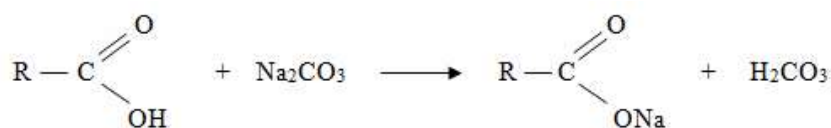


Figure 3. Neutralization Reaction using Natrium Carbonate

### B. Effect of Catalyst Concentration on the Biodiesel Yield

The effect of catalyst concentration on the biodiesel yields during the alkaline-catalyzed interesterification of jatropha oil with ethyl acetate was investigated at the reaction time of 1 hours, temperature of 60 °C, and molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate of 1:6. Potassium hydroxide catalyst was varied at 0.5, 0.75, 1, and 1.25% w/w oil. The result of the experiment is demonstrated in Figure 4.

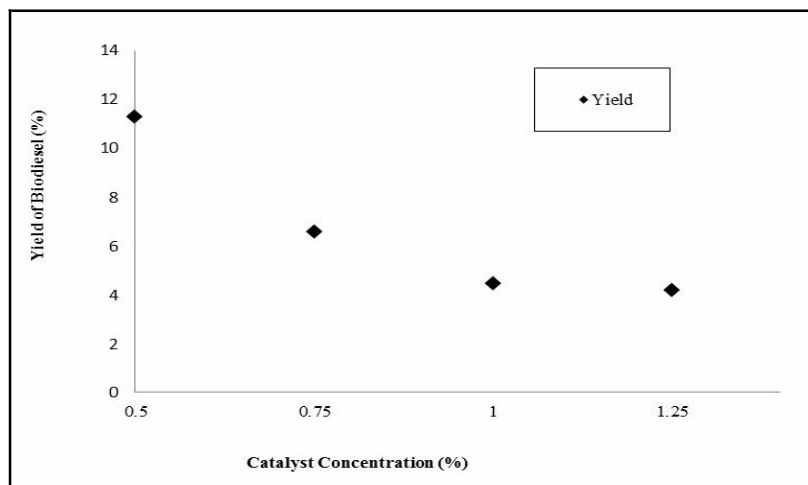
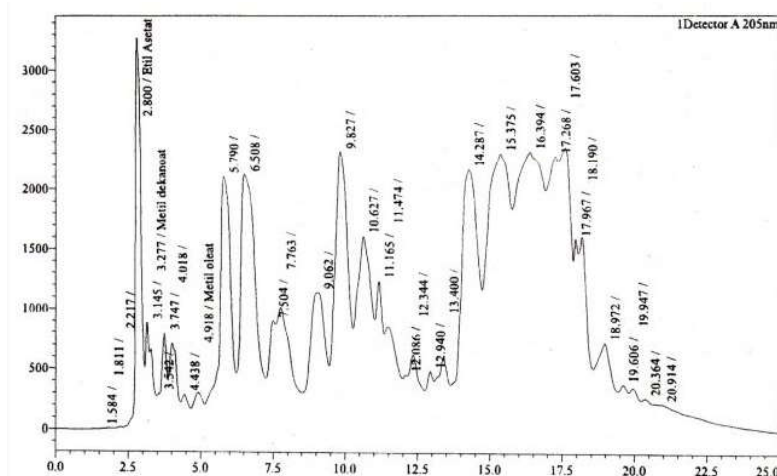


Figure 4. Effect of Catalyst Concentration on Biodiesel Yield [Reaction Condition: Temperature = 60°C; Reaction Time = 1 hr; Molar Ratio of Jatropha Oil to Ethyl Acetate = 1:6]

It was disclosed that biodiesel yield decreased with the increasing potassium hydroxide concentration. As depicted in Figure 4, an increase in catalyst concentration from 0.5 to 1.25% w/w oil brought about a corresponding reduction in the biodiesel yield from 11.27 to 4.21%. It means that catalyst concentration of 0.5% was the optimum point. Maddikeri *et al.*<sup>5</sup> reported the similar phenomenon in the interesterification of waste cooking oil and methyl acetate in the presence of potassium methoxide catalyst. The decreasing yield comes about since the excessive amount of catalyst will enhance the formation of an emulsion. The emulsion leads to the formation of gels, which lowers the fraction of Fatty Acid Ethyl Ester in product mixture<sup>7</sup>.

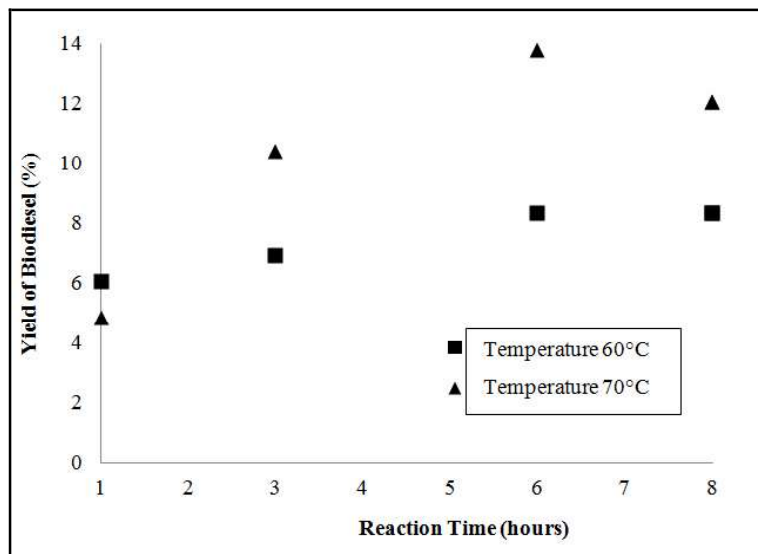
Chromatogram of the HPLC analysis on product mixture obtained at the reaction time of 1 hours, temperature of 60°C, molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate of 1:6, and catalyst concentration of 0.5% is presented in Figure 5. It was found that triacetin has not been detected due to its low percentage in the product mixture. Meanwhile, ethyl acetate, methyl decanoat, and methyl oleate were found out at the retention times of 2.8, 3.277, and 4.918 min, respectively



**Figure 5. HPLC Chromatogram for Product Mixture [Reaction condition: Temperature = 60°C; Reaction Time = 1 hr; Molar Ratio of Oil to Ethyl Acetate = 1:6; Catalyst Concentration 0.5%]**

### C. Effect of Temperature and Reaction Time on Yield

The influence of operating temperature and reaction time on the yield of jatropha biodiesel in interesterification reaction was studied over the temperatures of 60 and 70°C within 0 – 8 hours reaction time. The reactant molar ratio and catalyst concentration were fixed correspondingly at 1:6 and 0.5%. The experimental result is illustrated in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Effect of Temperature and Reaction Time on Biodiesel Yield [Reaction condition: Catalyst Concentration of 0.5% and Molar Ratio of Oil to Ethyl Acetate = 1:6]**

It was revealed in Figure 6 that the reaction temperature of 70°C provided higher yield than that of 60°C. This finding can be described by the fact that the higher reaction temperature leads to a better solubility of ethyl acetate in the oil phase. It therefore decreases the mass transfer resistance between the two phases and

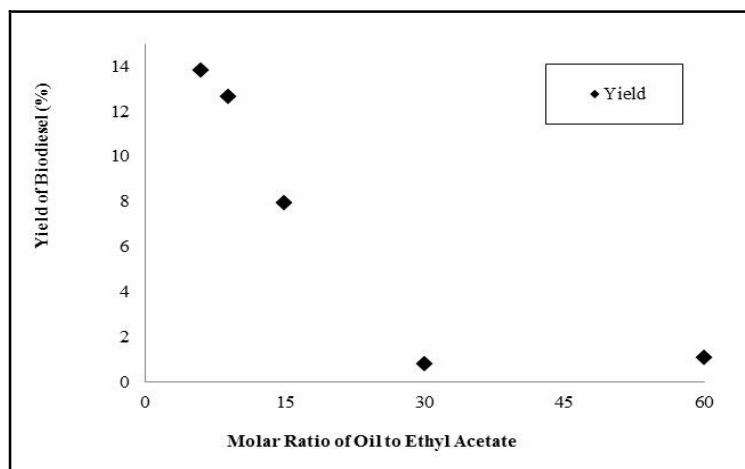
improves the contact of the reactants, resulting in the higher biodiesel yield<sup>5</sup>. The effect of reaction temperature on biodiesel yield can also be explained by the classical theory on kinetics and reaction rate. It is generally stated that the higher reaction temperature denotes the higher kinetic energy of the system, which causes the possibility of the higher reaction rate and conversion<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, Maddikeri *et al.*<sup>5</sup> as well as Tan *et al.*<sup>8</sup> gave an account that an increase in the reaction temperature will improve the reactivity between ethyl acetate and triglycerides. Hence, it raises reaction rate and generates the higher yield.

The influence of reaction time is also presented in Figure 6, as well. It was demonstrated that the yield of biodiesel increased with the increase in reaction time from 0 to 6 hours. However, the yield slightly declined when the transesterification reaction was extended until 8 hours. The lessening on the yield is most likely due to the thermal decomposition of biodiesel during a prolonged reaction time of transesterification reaction<sup>9</sup>.

#### D. Effect of Reactant Molar Ratio on the Biodiesel Yield

Molar ratio of reactants is a significant aspect influencing the yield of biodiesel in the transesterification reaction. Stoichiometrically, transesterification reaction requires three moles of ethyl acetate for each mole of triglycerides. It indicates that the molar ratio of 1:3 is necessitated for a stoichiometric reaction. Nonetheless, transesterification reaction is a reversible reaction which usually need an excess of ethyl acetate above the stoichiometric requirement to shift the equilibrium towards the right<sup>5</sup>. In this work, effect of molar ratio of triglycerides in jatropha oil to ethyl acetate was evaluated at 1:6, 1:9, 1:15, 1:30, and 1:60. The other variables were maintained constant at the reaction temperature, reaction time, and catalyst concentration of 70°C, 8 hours, and 0.5%, respectively.

The experimental data which were obtained based on the GC-MS analysis is presented in Figure 7. It was exhibited that the yield of biodiesel diminished with the increasing molar ratio of ethyl acetate to jatropha oil from 6:1 to 60:1. It occurred since the amount of ethyl ester (biodiesel) produced during this transesterification reaction was far less than the amount of unreacted ethyl acetate. Thus, the higher amount of ethyl acetate employed in the reaction, the smaller fraction of biodiesel in the product mixture will be found.



**Figure 7. Effect of Molar Ratio of Ethyl Acetate to Jatropha Oil on Biodiesel Yield [Temperature = 70°C; Reaction Time = 6 hrs; Catalyst Concentration = 0.5%]**

Based on the data achieved from all the experiments conducted, it was shown that the best yield was 13.79%, provided by the transesterification reaction performed at the molar ratio of jatropha oil to ethyl acetate of 1:6, catalyst concentration of 0.5%, temperature of 70°C, and reaction time of 6 hours. Biodiesel yield obtained through this transesterification can be enhanced by optimizing the process variables. The main aspect to be evaluated is the catalyst employed in the reaction. This work utilized potassium hydroxide which was dissolved in ethyl acetate reactant. Since there was no alcohol in this transesterification reaction, the active catalyst compound of potassium alkoxide cannot be formed. Meanwhile, the catalytic activity of potassium oxide is significantly lower than alkoxide. Thus, for the further experiment, a small amount of alcohols (methanol/ethanol) should be utilized to dissolve potassium hydroxide and form alkoxide which will perform as an active



catalyst for interesterification reaction. Besides, the low yield was also attributed to the existence of side reaction between potassium oxide and ester forming potassium acetate. Hence, the addition of a small amount of alcohol will convert potassium hydroxide into potassium methoxide and prevent the formation of potassium acetate<sup>10</sup>. It will consequently enhance biodiesel yield.

## Conclusion

The application of the new route of biodiesel production through chemical interesterification of jatropha oil with ethyl acetate has been investigated in this work. Before performing the interesterification reaction, jatropha oil was neutralized using  $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$  solution to reduce the FFA content from 8,9% to 0,17%. Subsequently, the interesterification reaction was carried out in the presence of potassium oxide catalyst to enhance the reaction rate. It was demonstrated that the highest yield was obtained at the reaction temperature of 70°C, potassium hydroxide catalyst concentration of 0.5% w/w oil, and molar ratio of oil to ethyl acetate of 1:6 with the biodiesel yield of 14%. The further research should be conducted at the higher temperature and different types of catalyst to achieve the higher reaction yield.

## Acknowledgement

The authors would express appreciation to the Indonesian Direktorat General of Higher Education for the financial support through the HIBAH BERSAING Project 2015 with Contract Number: 523/UN37.3.1/LT/2015 dated 10 April 2015 and for the funding of Bantuan Seminar Luar Negeri 2015.

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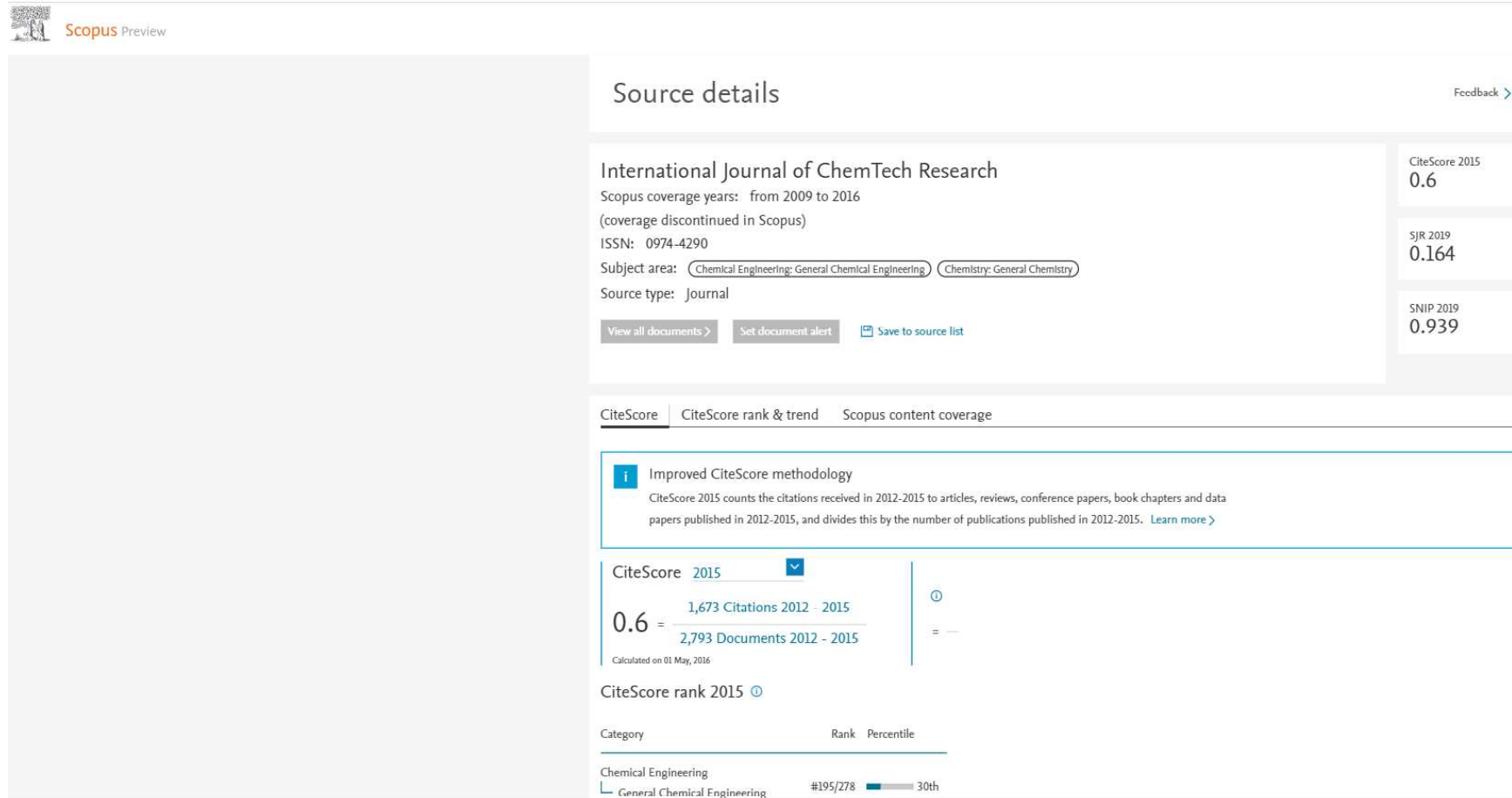
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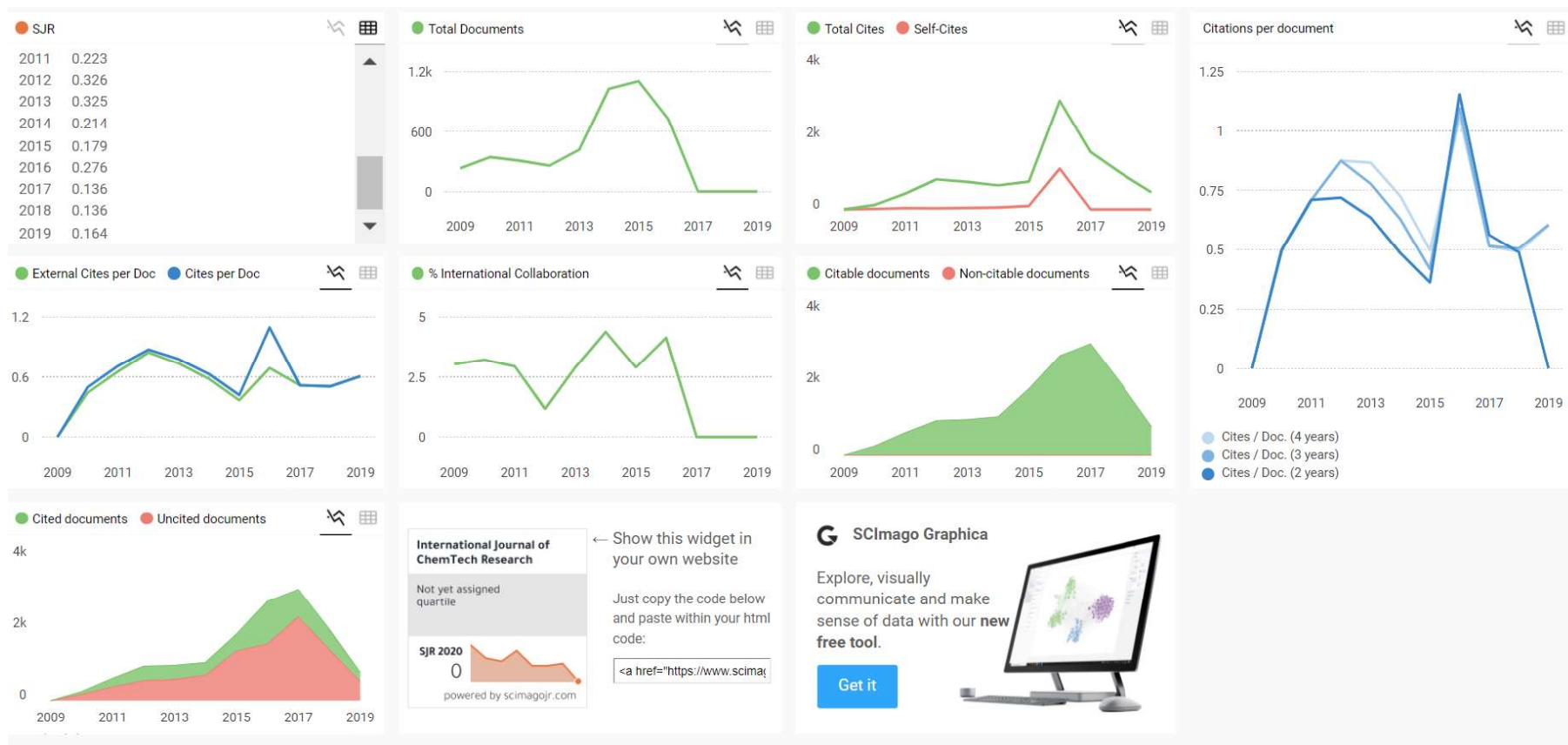
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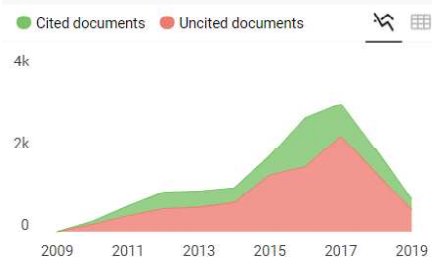
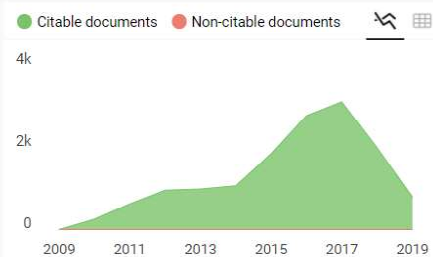
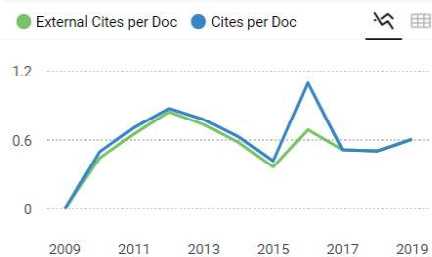
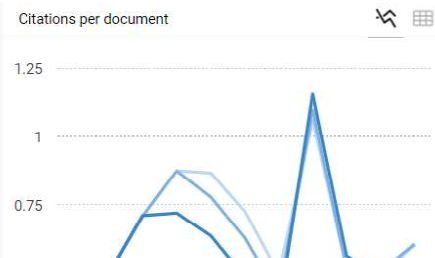
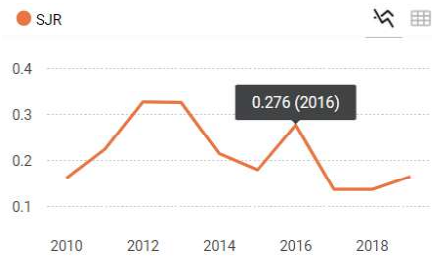
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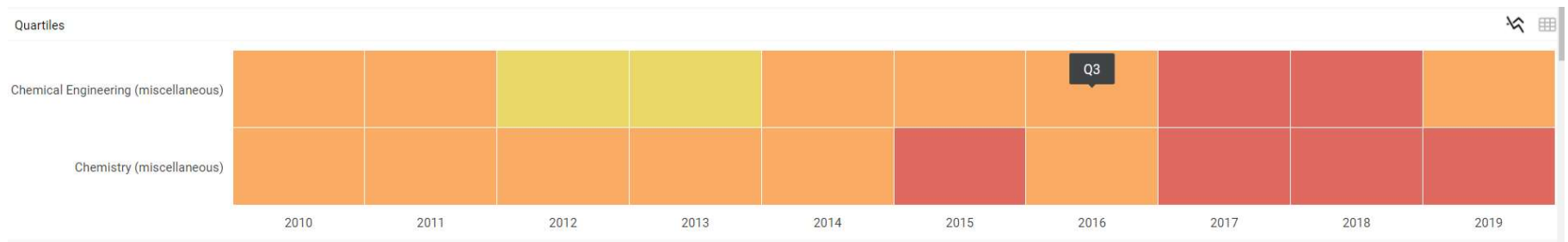


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Website: <http://sphinxsai.com/chemtech.php>

Publisher: Sphinx Knowledge House

Country: IN

Language of publication: *n/d*