

Original Research Article

Effects of Smoking and Sun Drying on the Carcass Quality of *Oreochromis niloticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Abstract

The effect of some processing methods on the carcass quality of *Oreochromis niloticus* from Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi Fisheries Research Farm was studied to determine their proximate composition and organoleptic qualities. A total sample of 40 *O. niloticus* were collected, of which 20 samples were smoked dried in a smoking kiln fueled by *Tectona grandis* and *Cocos nucifera* firewood while the remaining 20 were sun-dried. The samples were analyzed using standard methods according to AOAC (2005) to determine moisture, ash, crude protein, lipid, and fibre content. The organoleptic quality was assessed using a structured questionnaire based on Hedonic scale (Excellent = 10; very good = 8; good = 6; fair = 4 and poor = 2) using a panel of 12 randomly selected judges from the College of Forestry and Fisheries. Attributes for rating were taste, aroma, texture, appearance, and overall acceptability. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS statistics 20.0 software. Results obtained showed that crude protein (52.57 ± 0.03) and lipid content (8.90 ± 0.01) were higher in sundried carcass than in smoked carcass, with 47.88 ± 0.02 and 8.31 ± 0.01 for crude protein content and lipid content, respectively. Smoked *O. niloticus* maintained higher organoleptic quality with a higher acceptability ratio of 4.80 ± 0.12 compared to the sundried samples (3.00 ± 0.29). Sun-drying gave an optimal retention of nutrient content while smoking enhanced the organoleptic quality of the fish. It is concluded that both methods are effective for the preservation of *O. niloticus*. Sun-drying is however recommended for nutritional retention while smoking remains the better choice for enhanced flavour and consumer preference.

Key words: *Oreochromis niloticus*, Nutrient value, Sunlight, Consumer Preference

INTRODUCTION

Fish plays a crucial role in global food security (Belhabib *et al.*, 2019; Chan *et al.*, 2021) by providing high-quality nutrition which is rich protein, essential fats, vitamins, and minerals (Gbolahan, 2023; Abdulwakil *et al.*, 2024). Total contribution to the animal protein consumed in African is about 17% (FAO, 2022), making fish an important component of diets. The Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) is known to be one of the most popular fish species in the African region (Vajargah, 2021; Siddhnath *et al.*, 2022; Geletu & Zhao, 2023). The fish is specifically valued for its high adaptability, rapid growth, and resilience to changing environmental variables (Ashouriet *et al.*, 2023; Tynchenko *et al.*, 2024). In addition to these characteristics, the versatility and mild flavor of *O. niloticus* makes it a staple food in both local diets with high in aquaculture markets across the tropical and subtropical regions (Firmat *et al.*, 2013; Bandyopadhyay, 2022). Currently in Nigeria, animal protein intake from fish accounts for approximately 40 % (FDFA, 2021), thus an urgent need for effective

preservation methods to ensure the continuous availability of fish and its products so as meet with increasing demand as the population of the country continue to multiply rapidly (Ayuba *et al.*, 2019; Kafayatet *et al.*, 2021). Fish is however a highly perishable food which experience spoilage immediately after harvest as a result to its high water and protein content (Abd El-Hay, 2022), thus creating an ideal environment for the growth of microorganisms which further accelerate the rate of deterioration (Mahmud *et al.*, 2018; Zhuang *et al.*, 2021). Fish quickly becomes unsuitable for consumption if it is not processed as a result of enzymatic activity, microbial contamination, and lipid oxidation (Ali *et al.*, 2022; Cortés-Sánchez *et al.*, 2024). High economic losses and issues of food security are prevalent in regions with limited access to modern processing facilities like refrigerators (Tesfay and Teferi, 2017). For example, it is estimated that 30-50% of fish harvested in Nigeria is lost due to poor handling and inadequate processing facilities (FAO, 2022). This makes traditional preservation methods such as smoking and sun-drying very crucial in extending shelf life of fish. It also reduces post-harvest losses especially in rural areas where other methods of preservation are difficult to find due to their cost implications which are often not affordable by locals.

Smoking and sun-drying are fish preservation methods that have been widely utilized in tropical climates (Al-Ismaili, 2021; Marbade *et al.*, 2024). The former involves exposing fish to controlled heat and smoke, during which the fish flesh is dehydrated and natural antioxidants are introduced to help prevent fish spoilage (Devi & Ramalakshmi, 2024). The process of smoking fish does not only prolong its shelf life but also enhances the sensory characteristics of fish such as flavour, aroma, and colour. This value addition makes fish more appealing to consumers (Okpanachiet *et al.*, 2018). The latter on the other hand, derives its energy from solar radiation which gradually reduces moisture content in a bid to inhibit microbial activities and delay fish spoilage (Gupta *et al.*, 2024). Areas with abundant sunlight benefit better from this method of preservation. Fish preservation by sun-drying has been reported to effectively retain the nutritional quality of fish when performed under a good hygiene (Fitriet *et al.*, 2022).

While preservation of fish by both smoking and sun-drying helps to decrease the rate of spoilage, the impact of the two methods on the nutritional composition and sensory quality of fish varies (Rasulet *et al.*, 2022). Each of the two preservation techniques present peculiar challenges and advantages. Even though smoking is more efficient and relatively fast, it is energy-intensive and demands for a consistent fuel source, which can be costly or cause climate change (Rasulet *et al.*, 2022; Aman-Hassan, 2024). Furthermore, the high temperatures generated through smoking can denature proteins and cause degradation of particular nutrients like vitamins and minerals that are heat-sensitive which could lead to a reduction in the nutritional quality of the fish (Sultana *et al.*, 2022). Sun-drying which is however a low-costly and sustainable preservation method, depends heavily on prevailing weather conditions for it to be effective making it unpracticable when there is high humidity (Al-Ismaili, 2021; Rasul *et al.*, 2022). Fish is also exposed to contamination by dust, microbes and insects if not properly handled during sun-drying (Zhuang *et al.*, 2021). Scientific studies have produced different reports on the nutritional impact of these preservation methods, with some documenting sun-dried fish as retaining higher protein content compared to smoked fish while other studies report the opposite (Tenyan *et al.*, 2020). There is also disagreement on

the effect caused by these two preservation methods on the lipid content of fish. Mahmud *et al.* (2018) reported the possibility of reduced lipids due to higher temperatures by smoking which accelerates lipid oxidation, whereas sun-drying may result in higher lipid retention. These discrepancies therefore present the need for a comprehensive and standardized analyses to determine the specific impacts of smoking and sun-drying on the quality of *O. niloticus* carcass considering its dietary importance especially in areas with limited protein resources. The current study focuses on key quality parameters which include proximate composition (protein, moisture, lipid, and ash content) and sensory characteristics such as taste, texture, and colour. This comparative study seeks to provide relevant information that can help consumers, producers, and policymakers in making informed decisions as to which is the optimal processing technique for *O. niloticus*. Findings of the study will also contribute to the development of best practices in fish preservation, ultimately supporting food security and economic resilience in regions that depend on fish as their primary source of protein.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Location

The research was conducted at the Fisheries Research Farm of Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi-Nigeria. The research farm houses equipment required to carrying out studies in aquaculture and fisheries, thus permits studies on fish processing to be performed in a controlled setting. The climatic conditions of the location are also ideal for traditional fish processing methods like sun-drying, smoking and fermentation.

Sample Collection and Preparation

A total sample of 40 live *Oreochromis niloticus* (Nile tilapia) were harvested from the grow-out ponds of the university. Each fish was properly eviscerated to prevent spoilage. The fish samples were then divide into two equal halves of 20 fish samples and was used for both smoking and sun-drying. Fish preparation was carried out concurrently for the two preservation methods.

Process of Smoking

Smoking for 20 fish samples was done traditionally using smoking kiln. Firewood (*Tectona grandis*) and *Cocos nucifera* (coconut) was used as sources of energy and smoke. These were with considered based on their steady, controllable burning properties and their accompanying peculiar aroma. The fish samples were evenly spread on metal wire mesh which was on the chamber of the smoking kiln. This was done to ensure optimal exposure of the fish to heat and smoke. While on the under smokin, the fish samples were monitored and observed periodically. Smoking was complete when the fish samples showed a golden-brown colour with a constant weight which confirmed attainment of expected level of dehydration. 5 fish samples were then randomly selected from the group of smoked *O. niloticus* samples and ground into a homogeneous mixture. The mixture was then stored in airtight containers for proximate composition analysis while the remaining samples were preserved for organoleptic assessment.

Process of Sun-drying

The remaining 20 samples of *O. niloticus* for sun-drying were split open to increase surface area for drying. The fish were then placed on elevated drying racks to ensure maximum exposure to sunlight and prevent them from being contaminated with dust and soil. This setup also facilitated effective airflow around the fish. The fish samples were turned at intervals to ensure uniform drying across all surfaces. The drying process lasted for several days until the samples attained a stable weight, indicating moisture reduction. Similarly, 5 sun-dried fish samples were ground into powdered form and preserved in airtight containers for proximate analysis. The rest of the samples were kept for sensory test.

Methods of Proximate Analysis

The proximate analysis of smoked and sun-dried *O. niloticus* samples was conducted according to standard methods (AOAC, 2005). This analysis included the determination of moisture, ash, lipid, fibre, crude protein and nitrogen free extract content for both smoked and sun-dried fish samples. The procedures that were followed are stated below:

Moisture Content

Moisture content was determined by weighing about 10 g of each sample which was then oven-dried at 105 °C for a duration of 6 hours. The samples were then taken out in a desiccator and allowed to cool and were weighed at intervals until there was no change in the weight of the sample. The difference between the initial and final weight of the sample was calculated as the moisture using the formula:

$$\% \text{ moisture content} = \frac{\text{initial weight} - \text{final weight}}{\text{initial weight}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

Ash Content

Determination of ash content involved measuring approximately 3 g of each sample and placing in a crucible that was pre-weighed. The sample was then burnt in a muffle furnace at 550 °C for 12 hours. Ash content was calculated as the cooled residue (mineral content) as follows:

$$\% \text{ ash content} = \frac{\text{weight of mineral content}}{\text{weight of sample}} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

Lipid Content

The Soxhlet extraction method was utilized to analyze the lipid content of both smoked and sun-dried samples of *O. niloticus*. About 5 g of each sample was placed in a muslin cloth bag and put into Soxhlet extractor which contained 65 % petroleum ether (boiling point range 60-80°C) as the solvent. The extraction lasted for 6 hours, after which the solvent was evaporated and the weight of the extracted fat was used to calculate lipid content. The formula is given as:

$$\% \text{ lipid content} = \frac{w_1 - w_2}{w_1} \times 100 \quad (3)$$

Where w_1 = weight of muslin cloth bag with sample; w_2 = weight of cleaned empty muslin cloth bag.

Fibre content

The trichloroacetic acid method was employed to determine crude fibre. The sample was digested to remove soluble components and the remaining residue was dried and weighed. The difference in weight of the sample was calculated as the crude fibre as given in the formula below:

$$\% \text{ crude fibre} = \frac{w_1 - w_2}{w_3} \times 100 \quad (4)$$

Where w_1 = final weight; w_2 = initial weight and w_3 = weight of processed sample

Crude Protein

Crude protein determination was carried out using the Kjeldahl method. The crude protein in the smoked and sun-dried fish sample were calculated by multiplying the total nitrogen by an empirical factor of 6.25.

$$\% \text{ crude protein} = \% \text{ nitrogen} \times 6.25 \quad (5)$$

Nitrogen-free extract (NFE)

The nitrogen-free extract which is an estimate of water-soluble polysaccharides was calculated by subtracting the sum of percentages of moisture, ash, lipid, fibre and crude protein from 100. It was calculated as follows:

$$\% \text{ NFE} = 100 - (\% \text{ moisture} + \% \text{ ash} + \% \text{ lipid} + \% \text{ fibre} + \% \text{ crude protein}) \quad (6)$$

Organoleptic Assessment

A structured questionnaire based on a 10-point Hedonic scale (Excellent (10), Very Good (8), Good (6), Fair (4), and Poor (2)) was used to quantify preferences. A sensory panel of 12 judges was constituted to include both staff and students of the College of Forestry and Fisheries. They were guided on the criteria for scoring points on five attributes which were taste, aroma, appearance, texture, and overall acceptability. Both smoked and sundried samples of *O. niloticus* were then consistently presented to panel in a blind-tested format for rating based on their perceptions.

Statistical Analysis

Data that was obtained from both proximate analysis and organoleptic assessment were used to perform a pairwise t-test at 95 % confidence level ($P < 0.05$) to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between the variables of both fish samples.

RESULTS

Proximate Composition Analyses

Table 1 shows the results of the proximate composition of smoked and sundried *Oreochromis niloticus* at 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$). The sundried *O. niloticus* lost a significant higher amount of moisture (5.51 ± 0.29) compared to the smoked samples (8.08 ± 0.14). The smoked samples had a mean value of 7.31 ± 0.01 for ash content less than the sun-dried

carcass(7.99±0.01) while higher mean value of 8.90±0.01 was recorded for lipid contents for sundried *O. niloticus* against the smoked carcass with mean value of 8.31±0.01. The fibre content of sundried and smoked *O. niloticus* were 1.48±0.03 and 1.41±0.02, respectively which is statistically significant at ($p < 0.05$). The crude protein of the sundried fish sample had a higher value of 52.57±0.03 than the smoked carcass (47.88±0.02). Lastly, the mean values of 23.56±0.25 and 27.02±0.14 were recorded as nitrogen free extract of *O. niloticus* for sundried and smoked carcass, respectively.

Table 1: proximate composition of smoked and sundried *Oreochromis niloticus*

Treatment	Moisture	Ash	Lipid	Fibre	Protein	NFE
Sundried	5.51±0.29	7.99±0.04	8.90±0.01	1.48±0.03	52.57±0.03	23.56±0.25
Smoked	8.08±0.14	7.31±0.01	8.31±0.01	1.41±0.02	47.88±0.02	27.02±0.14
P- value	0.015*	0.003*	0.001*	0.015*	0.000*	0.007

*Significant at 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$), NFE- nitrogen free extract

Organoleptic Assessment

The result of organoleptic assessment of sundried and smoked *O. niloticus* are presented in table 2. The sundried sample had a lower score of 3.05±0.18 for mean taste than the smoked carcass with (4.60±0.13). The mean aroma was significantly different ($p < 0.05$) in the two samples with smoked carcass of *O. niloticus* recording a greater mean score of 4.10±0.16 against 2.75±0.24 for sundried *O. niloticus* sample. Furthermore, the mean score for colour was also significantly different ($p < 0.05$) in the two samples, smoked *O. niloticus* had a higher score of 4.50±0.15 compared to sundried with 3.20±0.29. Similarly, the mean texture score was significantly different ($p < 0.05$) in the two samples, as the smoked *O. niloticus* sample recorded a mean score of 4.20±0.16 against the sundried with 3.00±0.26. For general acceptability, sundried samples scored lesser (3.00±0.29) than smoked *O. niloticus* samples (4.80±0.12).

Table 2: Organoleptic assessment of Sundried and Smoked *Oreochromis niloticus*

Treatment	Taste	Aroma	Color	Appearance	Texture	GA
Sundried	3.05±0.18	2.75±0.24	3.50±0.25	3.20±0.29	3.00±0.26	3.00±0.29
Smoked	4.60±0.13	4.10±0.16	4.30±0.16	4.50±0.15	4.20±0.16	4.80±0.12
p-value	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*

*Significant at 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$), GA- General acceptability

DISCUSSION

The results of this study present obvious differences between smoking and sun-drying preservation methods in respect to their effect on the nutritional and organoleptic qualities of *Oreochromis niloticus*. A very key finding was that the sun-dried fish samples retained a higher crude protein content after processing compared to smoked carcass of *O. niloticus*. This result agrees with the findings of Musa *et al.* (2017), who also reported greater protein preservation in sun-dried fish. The reason to this may be as a result of lower heat generated from sunlight as compared to high temperatures from smoking, thus reduced denaturing and degrading of proteins (Nanaobiet *al.*, 2023). Exposure to heat in smoking could cause structural break of protein molecules which will eventually lead to lower protein retention in the fish product. This shows that the sun-drying preservation method is a better choice when there is a target to maintain protein levels in fish. This method is more suitable for communities where fish is the major source of protein. Another fascinating result of the current study was the little difference in the mean values of lipid content of the two samples with the sun-dried sample being higher. This contradicts the report of Tenyanget *al.* (2020), who documented greater lipid content in smoked fish. An explanation to the observed difference could be due to high levels of heat and duration of smoking which could lead to rapid oxidation and subsequent volatilization of lipid, as such leading to reduced content. Reports shows that lipids are susceptible to oxidation when heated which is further exacerbated when smoke compounds react with fatty acids, causing a break down and reduction in levels of lipid. This result means that in order to ensure the preservation of lipids, the sun-drying method may be preferred to smoking. The former however makes fish product more susceptible to contamination especially when carried out in unhygienic conditions.

Statistical analysis shows there was a significant difference in the moisture content of the two fish samples with smoked *O. niloticus* carcass retaining higher moisture content than the sun-dried samples. This result is similar with reports of Hei and Sarojnalini (2012), who stated that smoking generally leads in higher retention of moisture retention in fish products as a result of the enclosed environment peculiar with smoking kiln, which tends to trap some of the moisture. Sun-drying on the other hand allows for exposure to open-air which facilitates complete dehydration. Lower moisture in sun-dried fish lengthens its shelf life which can be kept for some time without refrigeration. Nevertheless, one advantage with the higher moisture in smoked fish is that it often contributes to a softer texture which could be a better choice for many consumers though at the expense of reduction in the lifespan of the product. This presents both methods with peculiar advantages in that while sun-drying will extend the shelf life of fish products, smoking tends to improve quality in terms of texture which may permit greater acceptability and marketability. The mineral content represented by ash in the current study was also insignificantly higher in sun-dried *O. niloticus* samples than in smoked samples. This finding corroborates the research of Msuku and Kapute (2018), who reported greater ash content in sun-dried fish. This difference could be as a result of the low heat generated by sun-drying, which prevents the loss of volatile minerals. In communities where, mineral intake from other food sources is limited, fish preservation using sun-drying method provides a nutritional advantage of mineral preservation using sun-drying method. These

results further confirm sun-drying method as a better option to retain nutritional quality of fish as smoking method could make fish vulnerable to loss of minerals due to volatilization at high temperatures.

In terms of fish quality assessment using sensory perception, the scores obtained for both preservation methods differed with the proximate analyses as smoked fish samples of *O. niloticus* scored higher on attributes such as taste, aroma, and overall acceptability. These results are similar with those documented by Akinneye *et al.* (2010) and Okpanachiet *al.* (2018) and who stated that smoked fish has superior sensory appeal as a result peculiar flavors imparted by smoke. The compounds from the smoke interact with the natural flavor of fish and lipids therein, which gives fish an aroma and taste that is appealing. Adding to it, the golden-brown colour that accompanies smoking enhances visual appeal which could be a crucial factor in consumer preference. Sun-dried fish which however lacks these flavours but rather maintains a firmer texture consequent complete dehydration recorded lower scores in organoleptic assessment. Despite the assurance of retaining more nutrients by preserving fish using sun-drying method, it's natural flavours and textures may be less appealing causing reduced market acceptability (Siddhnath *et al.*, 2022).

The results of the current study provide a better comprehension of salient issues that accompany fish preservation most especially in communities that cannot afford modern fish preservation methods like canning and refrigeration. The sun-drying method proves to better retain nutrients in fish and extend shelf life of fish and fish products especially in areas which refrigeration is not a choice. However, fish that is smoked may be more desirable in markets where consumers place much value on the improved flavour and texture not minding if some nutrients were lost in the process of smoking. The marked differences between the two preservation methods emphasizes the need to always consider the specific demands of a population or target market with respect to both nutrient content and sensory attributes before making a choice of which fish preservation method to use.

Conclusion

This study concludes that higher levels of protein, lipids, and mineral in *Oreochromis niloticus* are better retained using the sun-drying method of preservation while smoking on the other hand better enhances sensory attributes, thus giving fish superior taste, aroma, and appearance which may attract higher market value.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare. All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. We certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other journal for publication.

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