



# Assessment of Optimum Salinity Level for Maximum Growth and Survival of Nile Tilapia, *Oreochromis niloticus* (Linnaeus 1758)

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## ABSTRACT

Assessment of optimum salinity level (10‰, 15‰, 20‰, 25‰ and 30‰) for growth performance, food conversion, body composition and survival rate of Nile tilapia, *Oreochromis niloticus* (mean body weight 4.5±0.5 g) were investigated. Fingerlings were randomly distributed into the glass tanks (60 x 30 x 45 cm each). Ten fish per tank were stocked with two replications. Fish were fed with commercial floating pellet (35% protein) with 3% of total biomass day<sup>-1</sup> for 50 days. Results showed that the growth increment reared on 10‰ - 20‰ salinity were significantly highest in term of weight gain, WG % of initial weight, daily weight gain, specific growth rate, condition factor and survival rate than those reared on 25‰ and 30‰. Feed conversion ratio was found similar in all levels which is not significantly different ( $P > 0.05$ ). Whole body composition *i.e.* protein (53.16% – 53.26%), moisture (71.16% – 71.26%), lipids (2.49% – 2.52%), ash (4.16% – 4.18%) contents of fish whole body were not significantly ( $P > 0.05$ ) different at varying salinity levels. Mean values of water quality were found acceptable for tilapia *i.e.* temperature 28.42±0.08°C, dissolved oxygen 7.48±0.06 mg/L, pH 7.64±0.04 and ammonia 0.022±0.004 mg/L. Relationship between log body weight and log total length of the the fish shows that Nile tilapia fingerlings reared from 10‰ - 20‰ was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher than 25% and 30% salinity levels. Present study suggests that Nile tilapia can be reared up to 20% salinity to get good growth and higher survival rate.

## Article Information

Received 19 June 2017

Revised 14 August 2017

Accepted 01 November 2017

Available online 26 February 2018

## Authors' Contribution

GA conceived and designed the study and wrote the manuscript. AM did experimental work. AG prepared blood slides. GD and SF analysed the data. LG edited the manuscript. AAM, AJ and KR helped in experiments.

## Key words

Nile tilapia, *Oreochromis niloticus*, Growth, Feed efficiency, Salinity level.

## INTRODUCTION

Salinity is one of the environmental factors which affect the growth performance of several fish species reared in ponds, tanks, raceways, and net-cages (Cruz *et al.*, 1990; Watanabe *et al.*, 1990; Naylor *et al.*, 2000; Cressey, 2009; Ferreira *et al.*, 2009; Martins *et al.*, 2010; FAO, 2014; Cao *et al.*, 2015; OECD/FAO, 2015). Salt control in these culture systems is a serious task for maintaining life in all higher organisms like bony fish including tilapia or cichlids.

Similarly, salt acceptance defines a complete fitness or production of fish in a saline atmosphere (Cnaani and Hulata, 2011). Several cichlids have shown curiously acceptance in brackish water or seawater environment for growing and even for breeding in sea water (Kamal and Mair, 2005; El-Syed, 2006; Parry, 2007; Lawson and Anetekhai, 2011; Sallam *et al.*, 2017). Due to shortage of freshwater in the biosphere, it would be helpful to raise tilapia stocks in brackish or seawater environments to certify a source of low-priced and high-quality protein (animal origin) for future (Mateen and Iftikhar, 2017; Hassan *et al.*, 2013; Sallam *et al.*, 2017).

Euryhaline species of tilapia can be found in saline water adjacent to the rivers (Barlow, 2000; Nelson, 2006;

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Cnaani and Hulata, 2011). A few tilapias are found primarily in saline or pure sea water, particularly *Sarotherodon melanotheron* (Jeanette *et al.*, 2007; Cnaani and Hulata, 2011). They have gained prolonged popularity, and confidently tilapia hybrids/cross-breed can grow in saline and pure sea water (Kamal and Mair, 2005; Sakamoto and McComick, 2006; Mancera and McCoemick, 2007; Lim and Webster, 2008; Kang'ombe and Brown, 2008; Cnaani and Hulata, 2011; Lawson and Anetekhai, 2011; Fitzsimmons, 2016; Sallam *et al.*, 2017). They are hardy, productive and fast growing warm-water fishes. They have short food chain and are recognized as adaptable and herbivorous which mostly eat plankton (zooplankton and phytoplankton), algae, aquatic macrophytes and other plant substances (Cnaani and Hulata, 2011; Ng and Romano, 2013; Saikia and Das, 2015). Therefore, tilapias support to reduce pressure on capture fisheries by rearing intensively (Yue *et al.*, 2016; Sallam *et al.*, 2017). Production response of several breeds and strains of tilapia have been significantly improved through breeding (Dey, 2000; Ponzoni *et al.*, 2011; Fitzsimmons, 2016; Nguyen, 2016). In addition, tilapias have also been cultured successfully in saline areas of 120 countries and is strongly suggested as future fish for brackish water aquaculture (Wassmann *et al.*, 2004; Fitzsimmons, 2016; Lim and Webster, 2008).

Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) have good position among the most sophisticated species in several parts of the world (Lawson and Anetekhai, 2011; Hernandez *et al.*, 2014). It has been successfully reared under an extensive variety of natural conditions, especially in saline areas of tropical and sub-tropical countries (Stickney, 1986; El-Sayed, 2002; Lawson and Anetekhai, 2011; Githukia *et al.*, 2014; Ogello *et al.*, 2014; Siddik *et al.*, 2014). But the data is scarce on its growth and survival with regard to the optimal salt tolerance for sustainable aquaculture in underground saline water or in coastal areas (Parry, 2007; Mateen and Iftikhar, 2007; Abdel-Tawwab, 2011; Hassan *et al.*, 2013; Sallam *et al.*, 2017). The present research reports optimal salinity level for best growth, feed intake efficiency, tolerance and maximum survival rate of

Nile tilapia in controlled conditions.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Experimental design

Fingerlings of Nile tilapia, *O. niloticus* (mean body weight  $4.5 \pm 0.05$  g and mean total length  $6.2 \pm 0.4$  cm) (Table I) procured into the aquaculture research laboratory, CEMB, University of Karachi. They were acclimated for one week and then treated with different salinity levels *i.e.* 10‰, 15‰, 20‰, 25‰ and 30‰ with two replications (10 fingerlings per tank) having size  $60 \times 30 \times 45$  cm. All tanks were well aerated throughout the experiment.

### Feeding protocol

Commercial floating pelleted feed manufactured by Oryza Organics Private Limited, Lahore, Pakistan, having 35% crude protein, 5.8% crude fat, 6.7% crude fiber, 9.8% moisture and 8.4% ash was offered at 3% of total biomass 2 time in a day, morning 9:00 and evening 16:00. Body weight and total length of individual fish was measured weekly basis and the amount of provided feed was adjusted accordingly. Siphoning was done after 1 h feeding to remove waste material from the tanks bottom and sea water was added to maintain the required water level.

### Measurement and analysis

At the end of the experiment, all fish from each tank were individually weighed and their total length was measured for calculation of biological data including weight gain, percent weight gain of initial body weight, feed conversion ratio, condition factor, specific growth rate and survival (Abbas *et al.*, 2011; Daudpota *et al.*, 2016). Water quality parameters like temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and ammonia were monitored throughout the experimental period. Temperature of the water was checked on daily basis with the help of digital thermometer (GH Zeal Ltd-London England).

**Table I.- Initial and final weight and length of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) reared on different salinity levels for 50 days.**

Parameters	Salinity level (‰)				
	10	15	20	25	30
Initial weight (g)	4.5±0.06	4.5±0.5	4.5±0.6	4.5±0.5	4.5±0.6
Final weight (g)	16.1±0.5	16±0.7	15.9±0.4	9.3±0.7	6.6±0.5
Initial length (cm)	6.24±0.3	6.24±0.4	6.24±0.5	6.24±0.4	6.25±0.3
Final length (cm)	11.5±0.2	11.4±0.3	11.3±0.3	8.6±0.4	7.1±0.3
Weight gain (WG)	11.6±0.04	11.5±0.07	11.4±0.05	4.8±0.07	2.1±0.05

Values of the same row carrying the same superscripts are not statically significant ( $P > 0.05$ ).

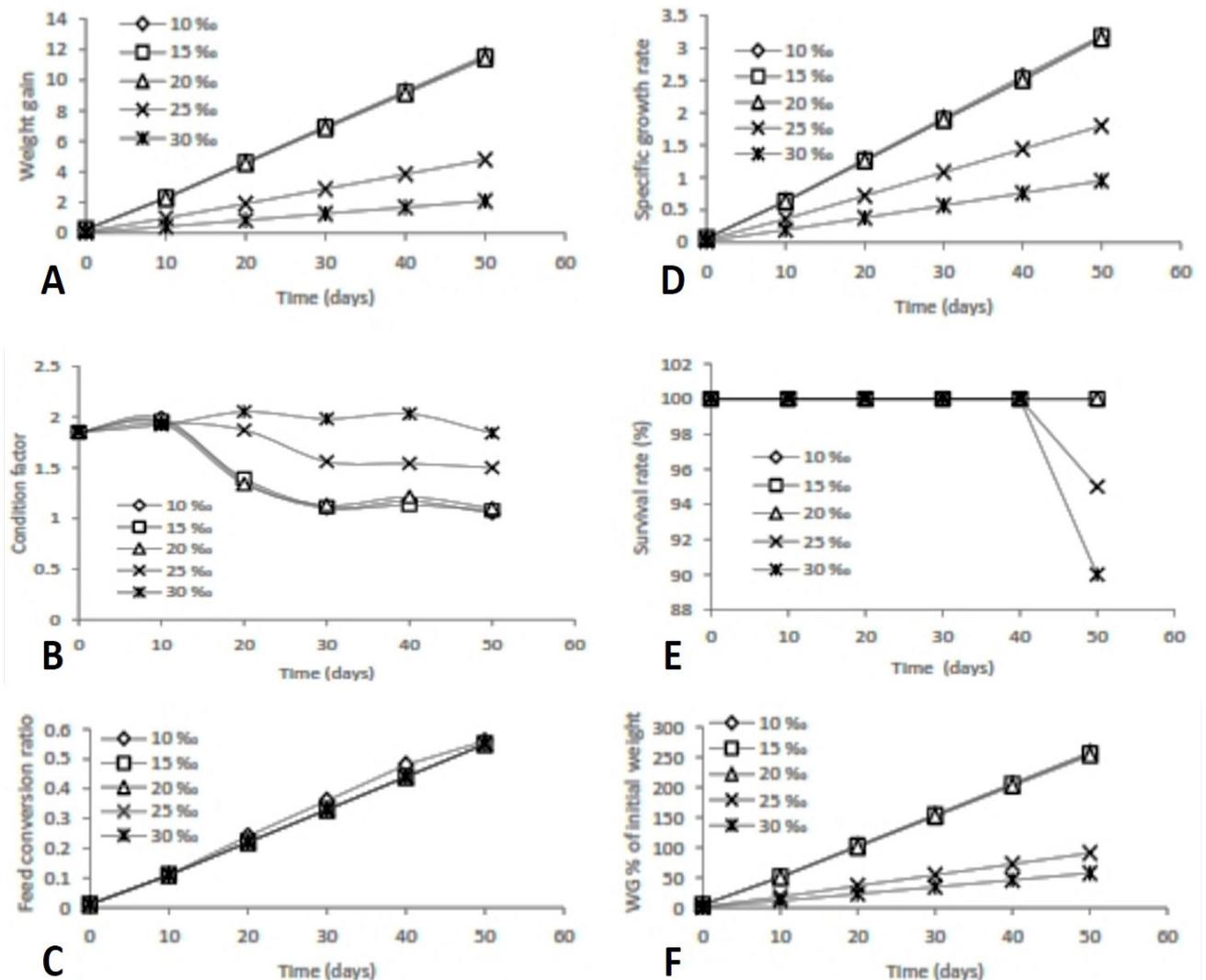


Fig. 1. Growth performance of Nile tilapia in terms of weight gain (A), specific growth rate (B), condition factor (C), survival rate (D), feed conversion ratio (E) and weight gain, % of initial weight (F) at different salinity levels for 50 days.

Dissolve oxygen (DO) of the tanks water was noticed by the help of portable test kit (Merck KGaA, 64271, Germany). The water pH was calculated by pH meter (EzDO 6011, Taiwan) and ammonia of the water was monitored with portable test kits (Merck KGaA, 64271, Germany) and salinity was observed by hand-held refractometer (Atago, S/Mill-E, 0.100‰, made in Japan) on daily basis (Daudpota *et al.*, 2016; Malik *et al.*, 2018).

After 50 days of the completion of experiment, three fishes were caught from each tank and were frozen for chemical analysis. Fish body constituents like lipid, protein, ash, moisture etc were determined (AOAC, 2000). The data thus obtained was analyzed statistically by using statistical softwares like Minitab and SPSS (Zar, 1996).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Growth performance

Weight gain (WG), specific growth rate (SGR) and survival of Nile tilapia (*O. niloticus*) fingerlings reared at salinity level of 10‰ to 20‰ was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher than of those reared at 25‰ and 30‰ salinity (Fig. 1). Relationship of the salinity level with growth parameters was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher up to 20‰ (Figs. 2 and 3). Similar results have been reported by Solomon and Okomoda (2012) while studying the effects of duckweed based diets given to *O. niloticus*. Evidence to support this is available in another study of Daudpota *et al.* (2016). They obtained best growth of Nile tilapia

when reared at 10‰ salinity level with different feeding frequencies in seawater tanks. In the present study, specific growth rate (SGR) of the fish at 10‰–20‰ was higher than the findings of Sallam *et al.* (2017). According to them, red tilapia showed good growth (SGR 0.56–0.85%) at salinity ranging from 9‰–36‰. These observations are advocated by Rahim *et al.* (2017a, b) who described SGR (3.21%) for black fin sea bream fed oil based diets at salinity level of 20‰. Moreover, Kapute *et al.* (2016) obtained maximum SGR (1.8%) for *Tilapia rendalli* reared in 200 m<sup>2</sup> brakishwater ponds. In addition, Abbas and Siddiqui (2009) reported SGR (0.9% to 2.2%) of mangrove red snapper (*Lutjanus argentimaculatus*) cultured at salinity level of 35‰. Similar results were also

reported by Solomon and Okomoda (2012) and Daudpota *et al.* (2016), showing that *O. niloticus* could efficiently culture up to 25‰–30‰ salinity level. Feed conversion ratio (FCR) was found similar (0.55) among all salinity levels ( $P < 0.05$ ) as shown in Figure 1. These findings are in agreement with those reported in other studies, in terms of the possible culture of tilapia at different salinity level (Daudpota *et al.*, 2014; Rahim *et al.*, 2017a, b). However, another study of Daudpota *et al.* (2016) showed higher FCR (0.84) of red tilapia in concrete tanks as compared to the results of this research. Condition factor (CF) was significantly ( $P < 0.05$ ) higher at salinity level of 25‰ and 30‰ than those of 10‰ to 20‰ (Fig. 1) indicating well-being of the fingerlings at these levels.

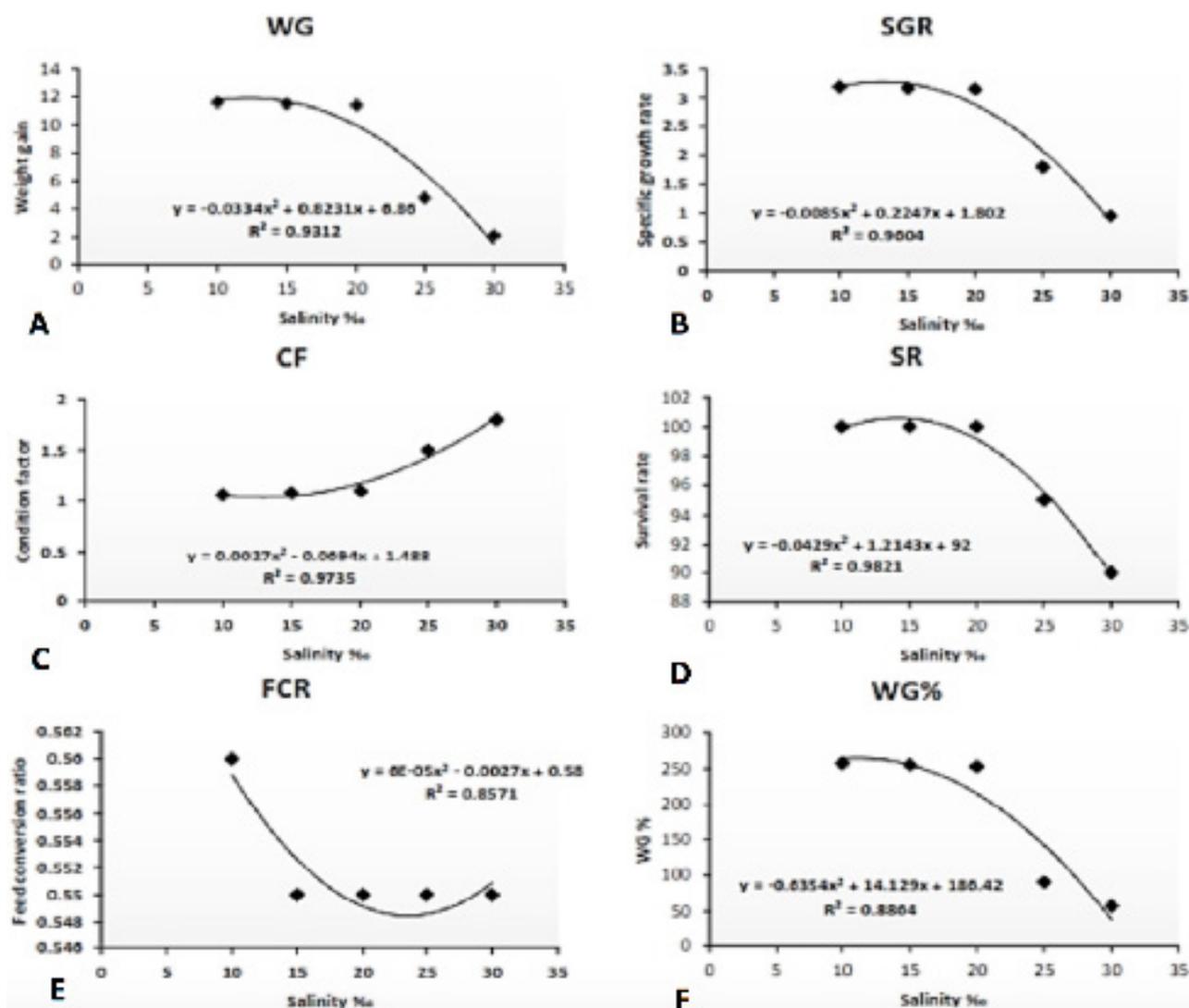


Fig. 2. Regression among the growth parameters of Nile tilapia in terms of weight gain (A), specific growth rate (B), condition factor (C), survival rate (D), feed conversion ratio (E) and weight gain, % of initial weight at different salinity levels for 50 days.

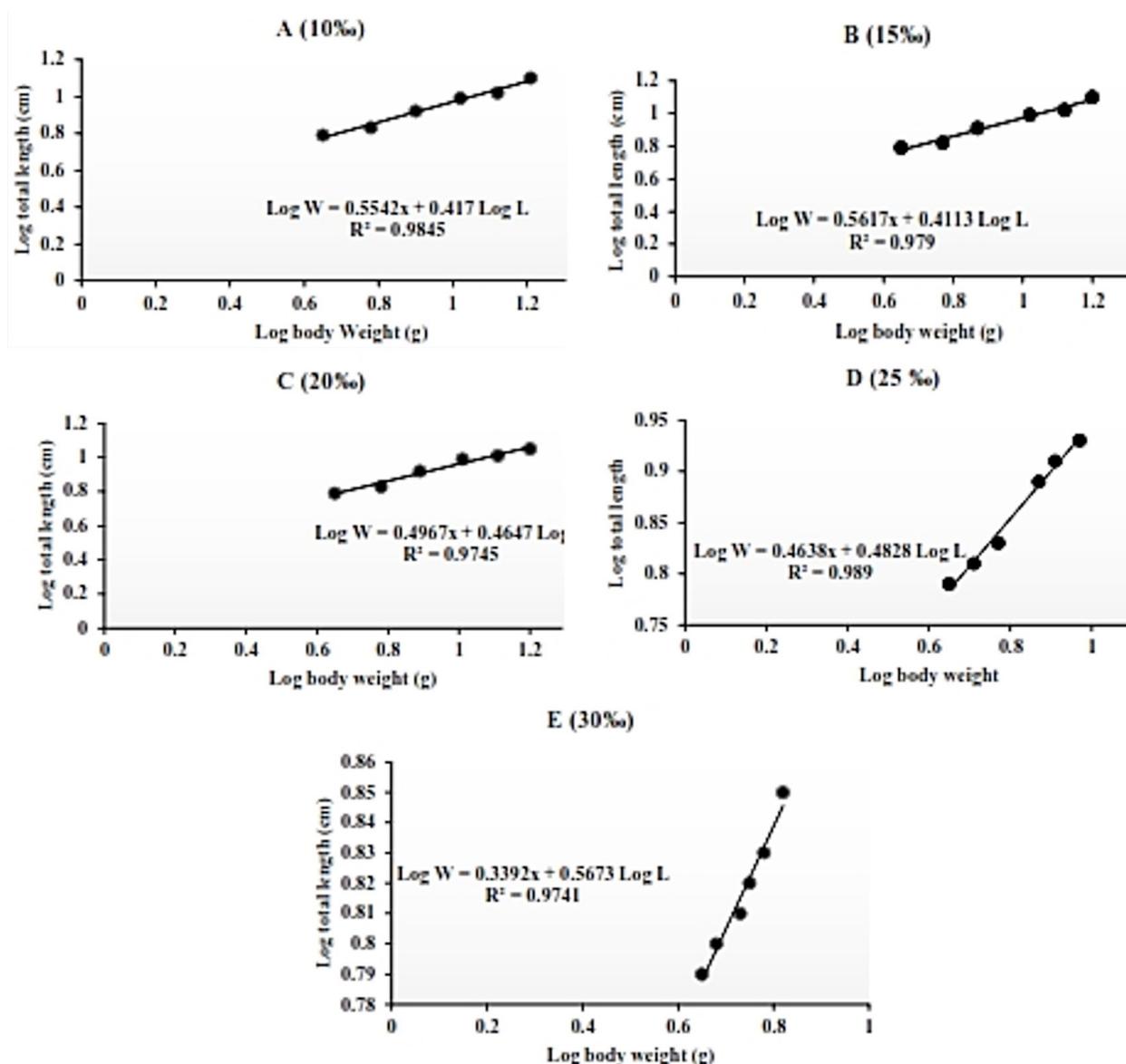


Fig. 3. Log total length (cm) and log body weight (g) relationship of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) fingerlings reared at different salinity levels (A-E) for 50 days.

**Table II.- Chemical composition of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) reared at different salinity levels for 50 days.**

Parameters	Salinity levels (‰)				
	10	15	20	25	30
Protein (%)	53.16±0.2	53.23±0.3	53.18±0.4	53.26±0.3	53.23±0.2
Moisture (%)	71.16±0.2	71.23±0.3	71.18±0.4	71.26±0.3	71.23±0.2
Lipid (%)	2.52±0.12	2.50±0.11	2.51±0.12	2.49±0.12	2.50±0.11
Ash (%)	4.18±0.43	4.18±0.43	4.17±0.43	4.17±0.42	4.16±0.42

Values (Mean±SE, n=3 and each n consists of 10 fish per replicate) in the same row with different superscripts are significantly different ( $P > 0.05$ ). Chemical composition of initial body was: moisture 70.57%, protein 52.21%, lipid 2.49.0% and ash 4.13%.

**Table III.- Hematological parameters of juvenile Nile tilapia reared at different salinity levels for 50 days.**

Parameters	Salinity level (‰)				
	10	15	20	25	30
Haematocrit <sup>1</sup>	40.4±1.1 <sup>a</sup>	40.1±3.2 <sup>a</sup>	40.3±2.3 <sup>a</sup>	40.1±2.2 <sup>a</sup>	40.1±3.2 <sup>a</sup>
Total lipids <sup>2</sup>	1275.4±46.1 <sup>a</sup>	1266.2±48.0 <sup>a</sup>	1223.2±36.7 <sup>a</sup>	1259.3±50.5 <sup>ab</sup>	1277.1±32.0 <sup>a</sup>
Triglycerides <sup>2</sup>	143.5±56.1 <sup>a</sup>	146.1±51.1 <sup>a</sup>	149.2±52.6 <sup>a</sup>	147.9±42.2 <sup>a</sup>	145.8±58.2 <sup>a</sup>
Cholesterol <sup>2</sup>	142.4±50.2 <sup>a</sup>	145.5±49.5 <sup>a</sup>	146.2±56.3 <sup>a</sup>	144.4±47.9 <sup>a</sup>	143.0±50.5 <sup>a</sup>

Values (Mean±SE,  $n=3$ ) in the same row with similar superscripts are not significantly different ( $P > 0.05$ ). Initial fish blood analysis was: haematocrit 41.5%, total plasma lipids 1495.1 mg 100 ml<sup>-1</sup>, triglycerides 156.8 mg 100 ml<sup>-1</sup> and cholesterol 147.7 mg 100 ml<sup>-1</sup>. <sup>1</sup>Measured as%. <sup>2</sup>Measured as mg 100 ml<sup>-1</sup>.

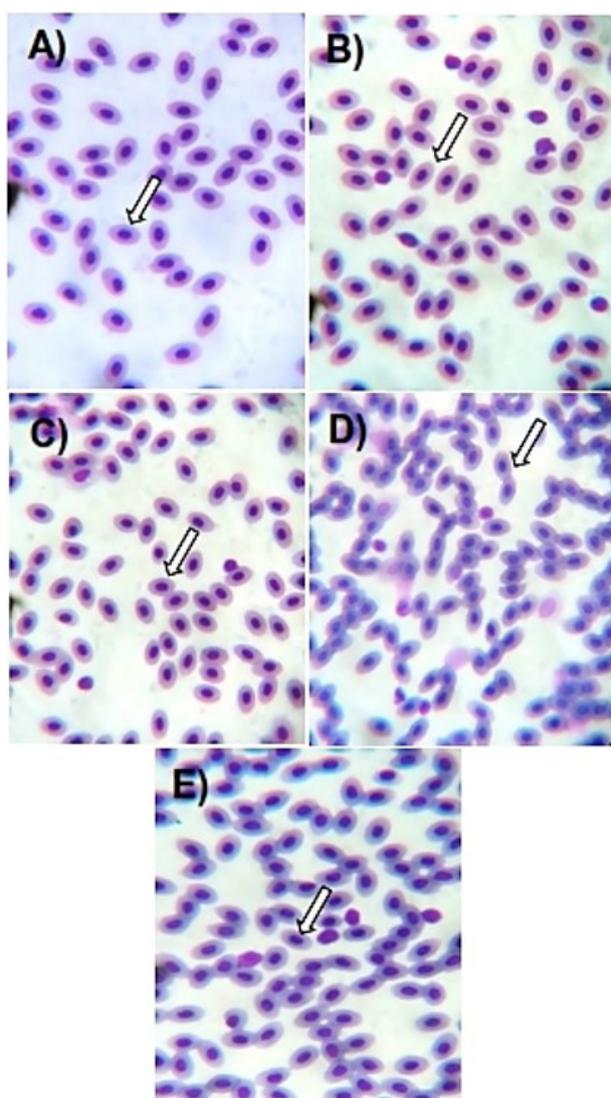


Fig. 4. Blood smear of Nile tilapia fingerlings (*Oreochromis niloticus*) reared on different salinity levels (A=15‰, B=20‰, C=25‰, D=30‰, E=35‰). Arrow, micronucleus (Giemsa stained: 1000X).

#### Body composition and hematology

The protein content (53.16%–53.26%), moisture (71.16%–71.26%), lipid (2.49%–2.52%), ash (4.16%–4.18%) content of fish whole body were not significantly ( $P > 0.05$ ) different among treatment groups (Table II) as has been noted in other fishes (Daudpota *et al.*, 2014; Kapute *et al.*, 2016; Rahim *et al.*, 2017a, b). Generally, blood is considered as important tool for carrying metabolites and nutrients including inorganic ions and blood chemistry is used for the evaluation of an organism (Osuiwge and Obiekezle, 2007; Abbas and Siddiqui, 2009, 2013). In the present study, hematological parameters did not show any disorder in blood smears of the fish reared at different salinity levels (Table III; Fig. 4). Similar trend has been reported in mangrove red snapper (Abbas and Siddiqui, 2009, 2013) and flounder (Daniels and Gallagher, 2000).

#### Water quality

Water quality in farming system is important for regulating fish metabolism, feed intake efficiency and survival rate of fish (Ertan *et al.*, 2015). In the present study, water quality parameters like temperature, dissolved oxygen (DO), pH and ammonia were monitored on daily basis throughout the study period. Water temperature was recorded as 28.42±0.08°C (Fig. 5). DO remained as 7.48±0.06 mg/L and water pH was 7.64±0.04 (Fig. 5). Ammonia never exceeded 0.02±0.004 mg/L (Fig. 5). These values were in coincidence with the findings of Daudpota *et al.* (2014), Malik *et al.* (2014), Chughtai *et al.* (2015), Iqbal *et al.* (2014), Emmanuel *et al.* (2014) and Shah *et al.* (2014).

## CONCLUSION

From the results given above, it is concluded that Nile tilapia, *O. niloticus* can be cultured up to 20‰ salinity level under the experimental conditions of the present study. Moreover, this specie is also recommended for sustainable aquaculture development as it has potential for growing in brackish water or saline areas.

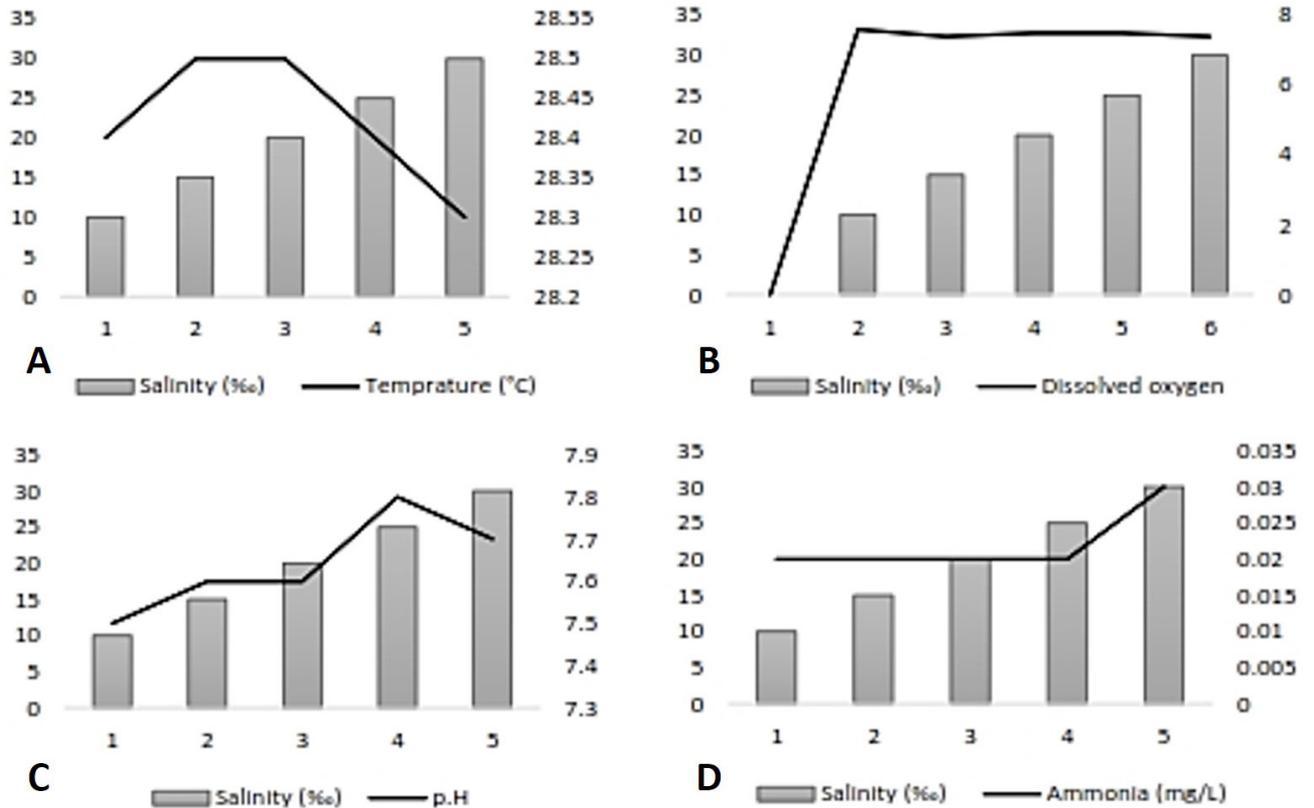


Fig. 5. Water quality parameters: A) temperature (°C), B) dissolved oxygen, C) pH and D) ammonia of the experimental tanks.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The senior author is grateful to the HEC for providing fellowship to complete this work as a part of Ph. D.

### Statement of conflict of interest

Authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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