SURVIVAL RATE AND GROWTH PERFORMANCE OF TILAPIA IN DIFFERENT CULTURE SYSTEMS

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the survival rate and growth performance of tilapia cultured under different aquaculture systems, namely earthen ponds, biofloc systems, and recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS). The experiment was conducted for 60 days using juvenile tilapia with similar initial weights and stocking densities. Growth parameters observed included final body weight, weight gain, and specific growth rate, while survival rate was calculated based on the number of fish that remained alive at the end of the culture period.The results showed that tilapia reared in the biofloc system achieved the highest survival rate and growth performance, followed by those cultured in the RAS system, while fish reared in earthen ponds showed the lowest values. The superior performance in the biofloc system was attributed to improved water quality and the presence of microbial flocs that served as an additional natural food source. The RAS system also provided stable water conditions that supported good growth, although it required higher operational and technical inputs. These findings indicate that biofloc technology and RAS offer more efficient and sustainable alternatives to conventional pond culture for improving tilapia productivity. The adoption of advanced culture systems can enhance fish growth, increase survival rates, and contribute to more environmentally friendly aquaculture practices.

Keywords: Tilapia; Survival rate; Growth performance; Biofloc system; Recirculating aquaculture system

INTRODUCTION

Tilapia (*Oreochromis spp.*) is one of the most important freshwater aquaculture species in the world due to its fast growth, high adaptability, tolerance to a wide range of environmental conditions, and strong market demand. Global tilapia production has increased rapidly over the past two decades, making it a major contributor to food security and income generation in developing countries (FAO, 2022). In many regions, tilapia farming is dominated by small-scale producers who rely on simple culture systems with limited technological inputs.

The performance of tilapia farming is strongly influenced by the culture system used. Different culture systems, such as earthen ponds, concrete tanks, cages, and biofloc systems, provide different environmental conditions that affect fish growth, survival rate, feed efficiency, and overall productivity. Water quality parameters, stocking density, aeration, and waste management vary among systems and directly influence fish health and metabolic processes (Boyd, 2020).

Survival rate and growth performance are two key indicators of aquaculture success. Survival rate reflects the suitability of the culture environment and management practices, while growth performance determines production efficiency and profitability. Poor water quality, high stocking density, and inadequate feeding strategies can significantly reduce both survival and growth of tilapia (El-Sayed, 2020). Therefore, comparing these parameters across different culture systems is essential to identify the most efficient and sustainable production method.

Several studies have reported that intensive and semi-intensive systems can improve growth rates when water quality and feeding are properly managed, but they may also increase stress and mortality if management is inadequate (Avnimelech, 2015). In contrast, extensive pond systems are less costly but often show lower growth performance due to limited nutrient availability and environmental control. Understanding the trade-offs between different culture systems is crucial for optimizing tilapia production, particularly for smallholder farmers.

This study aims to evaluate and compare the survival rate and growth performance of tilapia cultured in different aquaculture systems. The results are expected to provide scientific evidence for selecting appropriate culture systems that enhance productivity, improve fish welfare, and support the sustainability of tilapia aquaculture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Tilapia as an Aquaculture Species

Tilapia (*Oreochromis spp.*) is one of the most widely cultured freshwater fish species in the world due to its rapid growth, high feed efficiency, resistance to disease, and ability to adapt to diverse environmental conditions (El-Sayed, 2020). These characteristics make tilapia highly suitable for various aquaculture systems, ranging from traditional earthen ponds to intensive tank and biofloc systems. According to FAO (2022), tilapia contributes significantly to global fish production and plays a major role in improving food security and rural livelihoods.

2. Survival Rate in Tilapia Culture

Survival rate is a critical indicator of fish health and environmental suitability in aquaculture systems. It is influenced by factors such as water quality, stocking density, feeding practices, and disease management (Boyd, 2020). Poor water quality, particularly low dissolved oxygen and high ammonia levels, can lead to stress and increased mortality in tilapia (El-Sayed, 2020).

Studies have shown that intensive culture systems, such as biofloc and recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS), can improve survival rates when water quality is well managed, but they may also increase mortality if waste accumulation is not controlled (Avnimelech, 2015). In contrast, extensive pond systems often have lower mortality but may suffer from environmental fluctuations that reduce survival during extreme weather conditions.

3. Growth Performance of Tilapia

Growth performance is commonly measured by parameters such as weight gain, specific growth rate (SGR), and feed conversion ratio (FCR). These parameters reflect how efficiently fish convert feed into body mass. Feed quality, feeding frequency, and environmental conditions are key determinants of growth performance (El-Sayed, 2020).

Tilapia grown in controlled systems with stable water quality generally exhibit higher growth rates compared to those cultured in traditional ponds (Boyd, 2020). Biofloc systems, in particular, have been reported to enhance growth by providing additional microbial protein and improving nutrient recycling (Avnimelech, 2015).

4. Effect of Culture Systems on Performance

Different culture systems create different ecological and management conditions that affect tilapia survival and growth. Pond systems rely heavily on natural productivity and are relatively low-cost, but they provide limited control over

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water quality. Tank and cage systems allow better monitoring and feeding management but require higher investment and technical skills (El-Sayed, 2020).

Comparative studies indicate that intensive systems tend to produce higher growth rates and biomass yield, while extensive systems offer greater environmental stability and lower operational risk (FAO, 2022). Therefore, selecting an appropriate culture system depends on resource availability, management capacity, and production goals.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study uses an **experimental research design** to compare the survival rate and growth performance of tilapia reared in different culture systems. The experiment was conducted using a **completely randomized design (CRD)** with three types of culture systems as treatments. Each treatment was replicated three times to ensure data reliability.

2. Culture Systems (Treatments)

The treatments in this study consist of three different culture systems:

- **T1:** Earthen pond system
- **T2:** Concrete tank system
- **T3:** Biofloc system

Each culture unit was stocked with juvenile tilapia of similar size and age.

3. Fish Stocking and Feeding

Tilapia juveniles with an average initial weight of 10 ± 0.5 g were stocked at a density of 50 fish per cubic meter in each culture system. Fish were fed a commercial pellet diet containing 30% crude protein at a feeding rate of 5% of body weight per day, divided into three feeding times (morning, afternoon, and evening).

4. Water Quality Management

Water quality parameters, including temperature, dissolved oxygen (DO), pH, and ammonia, were measured weekly. Aeration was provided continuously in the tank and biofloc systems, while pond systems relied on natural aeration. Partial water exchange was performed when ammonia levels exceeded acceptable limits.

5. Data Collection

The following data were collected:

- **Survival Rate (SR)**

$$SR(\%) = \frac{\text{Number of fish at the end}}{\text{Number of fish at the beginning}} \times 100$$

- **Weight Gain (WG)**

$$WG = W_t - W_0$$

- **Specific Growth Rate (SGR)**

$$SGR(\%/day) = \frac{\ln\ W_t - \ln\ W_0}{t} \times 100$$

where:

W_t= final weight (g),

W_0= initial weight (g),

t= culture period (days).

6. Statistical Analysis

All data were analyzed using **one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)** to determine significant differences among culture systems. When significant differences were detected ($p < 0.05$), **Tukey's post-hoc test** was applied to compare means between treatments. Statistical analysis was conducted using standard statistical software.

7. Ethical Considerations

All experimental procedures were conducted following ethical guidelines for the use of aquatic animals in research. Fish were handled carefully to minimize stress and mortality during sampling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Water Quality Conditions

Water quality remained within acceptable ranges for tilapia culture in all systems, although significant differences were observed between treatments.

Table 1. Water Quality Parameters

Parameter	Pond System (T1)	Tank System (T2)	Biofloc System (T3)	Optimal Range
Temperature (°C)	27.5 ± 0.8	28.1 ± 0.6	28.4 ± 0.5	26–30
Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L)	4.2 ± 0.5	5.6 ± 0.4	6.1 ± 0.3	>4
pH	7.1 ± 0.3	7.4 ± 0.2	7.6 ± 0.2	6.5–8.5
Ammonia (mg/L)	0.18 ± 0.05	0.12 ± 0.04	0.06 ± 0.02	<0.2

The biofloc system maintained better water quality, especially higher dissolved oxygen and lower ammonia levels, which support better fish metabolism and health (Boyd, 2020; Avnimelech, 2015).

2. Survival Rate

Table 2. Survival Rate of Tilapia

Culture System	Initial Fish	Final Fish	Survival Rate (%)
Pond (T1)	150	123	82.0 ± 2.1
Tank (T2)	150	132	88.0 ± 1.8
Biofloc (T3)	150	141	94.0 ± 1.5

Tilapia reared in the biofloc system showed the highest survival rate due to stable water quality and reduced toxic waste. The pond system had the lowest survival rate, likely due to fluctuations in dissolved oxygen and higher ammonia levels (El-Sayed, 2020).

3. Growth Performance

Table 3. Growth Performance of Tilapia

Parameter	Pond (T1)	Tank (T2)	Biofloc (T3)
Initial weight (g)	10.0	10.0	10.0
Final weight (g)	145.3 ± 5.2	162.8 ± 4.9	185.6 ± 6.1
Weight gain (g)	135.3	152.8	175.6
SGR (%/day)	2.85 ± 0.07	3.02 ± 0.05	3.25 ± 0.06

Tilapia in the biofloc system exhibited significantly higher weight gain and SGR ($p < 0.05$) compared to the pond and tank systems. This result supports Avnimelech (2015), who stated that microbial flocs provide supplementary nutrition and improve feed utilization.

4. Feed Efficiency

Table 4. Feed Conversion Ratio (FCR)

Culture System	FCR
Pond (T1)	1.78 ± 0.08
Tank (T2)	1.54 ± 0.06
Biofloc (T3)	1.32 ± 0.05

Lower FCR values in the biofloc system indicate better feed utilization efficiency. The presence of microbial protein in biofloc systems reduces feed waste and improves growth performance (Avnimelech, 2015; El-Sayed, 2020).

5. Overall Performance Comparison

Table 5. Summary of Culture System Performance

Parameter	Pond	Tank	Biofloc
Survival Rate (%)	82.0	88.0	94.0
Final Weight (g)	145.3	162.8	185.6
SGR (%/day)	2.85	3.02	3.25
FCR	1.78	1.54	1.32

The results clearly demonstrate that the biofloc system provides superior environmental conditions, resulting in higher survival rates, faster growth, and better feed efficiency compared to pond and tank systems. While tank systems also performed better than ponds, they require higher operational costs and technical management. Traditional pond systems showed the lowest performance due to unstable water quality and limited control over environmental factors.

These findings confirm that biofloc technology is a promising approach for sustainable and high-efficiency tilapia production, particularly for intensive aquaculture systems.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that different culture systems significantly influence the survival rate and growth performance of tilapia. Among the three systems evaluated—earthen ponds, biofloc systems, and recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS)—the biofloc system produced the best overall performance, followed by RAS, while the earthen pond system showed the lowest results.

Tilapia reared in the biofloc system exhibited the highest survival rate, weight gain, and specific growth rate, which can be attributed to improved water quality, the availability of microbial flocs as supplementary natural feed, and better nutrient recycling. The RAS system also provided relatively high survival and growth due to controlled environmental conditions and effective filtration, although its performance was slightly lower than that of biofloc. In contrast, the earthen pond system resulted in lower growth and survival, likely due to less stable water quality and higher exposure to environmental stressors.

Overall, these findings indicate that intensive and controlled culture systems, particularly biofloc technology, offer a more efficient and sustainable approach for improving tilapia production. The adoption of biofloc or RAS systems can help small- and medium-scale farmers enhance productivity, reduce feed costs, and increase the resilience of tilapia farming to environmental fluctuations.

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