Science World Journal Vol. 21(No 2) 2026 https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/swj.v21i2.21
www.scienceworldjournal.org
ISSN: 1597-6343 (Online), ISSN: 2756-391X (Print)
Published by Faculty of Science, Kaduna State University

DEVELOPMENT AND CHARACTERIZATION OF A LOCALLY DERIVED H_2S TEST KIT FOR QUICK AND COST-EFFECTIVE WATER QUALITY MONITORING

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ABSTRACT

In many low-resource settings, the lack of safe drinking water and the high prevalence of microbial contamination highlight the need for simple and affordable testing approaches. This study focused on the development and evaluation of a hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) test kit produced from locally available materials for the rapid detection of fecal pollution in water. The test media were prepared using yeast extract, beef extract, bile salts, and peptone derived from soybeans. Spectroscopic analysis (FTIR) indicated the presence of key functional groups, including O–H, N–H, and C=O, in the water sources, which are associated with organic compounds that support microbial growth. Elemental analysis (XRF) revealed a relatively high sulfur content (4.128%) in the beef extract, along with essential elements including iron, magnesium, calcium, and potassium. The test kit demonstrated its effectiveness by forming a black precipitate upon reaction of H_2S with iron. The cost per test was significantly lower than conventional methods, making it suitable for field use. The kit provides a practical and sustainable option for water quality monitoring in underserved areas.

Keywords: Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) test kit; microbial water quality; fecal contamination; low-cost detection; locally sourced materials; FTIR analysis; XRF analysis; sulfur content; water monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

Access to safe drinking water is a critical challenge across Africa, where microbial contamination contributes to an estimated 502,000 annual deaths from waterborne diseases, with Nigeria bearing a significant burden as one of the continent's most populous nations (Izah & Ogwu, 2025). In Nigeria, over 70% of water at the point of consumption is contaminated, exacerbating vulnerabilities in rural and peri-urban areas that rely on sources such as shallow wells, boreholes, and surface water from rivers such as the Niger and Benue (Irene *et al*., 2025). These sources are frequently contaminated with fecal matter from open defecation, agricultural runoff, and inadequate sanitation, leading to the presence of pathogens such as *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), *Vibrio cholerae*, and *Salmonella spp*., which drive outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, and diarrhea (Archana *et al*., 2025). Recent data indicate that diarrhea accounts for 16% of under-five mortality in Nigeria, with cholera cases reaching 7,485 in North-eastern states like Borno in 2022 alone (Okem *et al*., 2024).

The hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) test, developed in the 1980s, offers a viable alternative for detecting fecal contamination in resource-limited African settings (McMahan *et al*., 2011). It identifies H2S-producing bacteria as proxies for fecal indicators through a color change from yellow to black when sulfur compounds are reduced to H2S gas and react with iron salts. In Africa, adaptations include paper-strip and vial formats, with successful applications in South Africa, Tanzania, and rural communities across sub-Saharan Africa for emergency and community monitoring (Wanzala, 2009). For instance, in rural Tanzania, locally produced kits using glass bottles and absorbent pads enabled household testing, increasing water treatment practices by 24%. In Nigeria, where traditional methods like membrane filtration cost ₦10,500–₦16,000 per test and require labs that are inaccessible to 60% of the population, H2S tests could reduce costs to under ₦1,500, aligning with national efforts to scale up water testing kits, as highlighted by the Federal Government in 2025.

Across Africa, where 40% of the population lacks access to improved water sources, H2S tests have been adopted by UNICEF and NGOs, showing a positive correlation with *E. coli* (ρ = 0.89) in field studies (Matwewe *et al*., 2018). As per the report of the World Health Organization (WHO), about 600 million cases of diarrhea and dysentery, and 46000 infant deaths were stated per year because of polluted water and insufficiency of sanitation (Singh, 2019). Surface water is potentially dangerous as a carrier of pathogenic microorganisms wherever it comes in contact with human waste or sewage from the surrounding locality (Denchak, 2018). So, the water contaminated with microbes becomes extremely dangerous for drinking, swimming, bathing, etc. Apart from that, sewage in water primarily disturbs the oxygen balance, which is alarming to aquatic flora and fauna (Sharma, 2018). Water quality monitoring has been conducted to assess the suitability of the water resource for a specific use.

The suitability of water is assessed against acceptable concentrations of specific water quality variables, as defined by guidelines, standards, or maximum permissible concentrations (WHO, 2017). The existence of faecal coliform bacteria in the water body specifies that the water has been polluted with the faecal substance of warm-blooded animals (da Silva *et al*., 2024). The existence of faecal coliform bacteria in the water body specifies that the water has been polluted with the faecal substance of warm-blooded animals (da Silva et al., 2024). Therefore, the enumeration of fecal bacteria is important for basic and applied research in aquatic microbial ecology and for the development of parameter-based technologies for drinking water quality assessment. The presence of feacal *streptococci*, *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Klebsiella* also indicates the feacal pollution of water. Apart from that, *Salmonella typhimurium*, *Salmonella typhi*, *Salmonella enteritidis*, *Shigella spp*., *and Proteus spp.* are predominant bacterial flora in sewage samples (Curtis, 2024). The quality of water also depends on various physicochemical parameters, which include conductivity, pH, turbidity, chemical oxygen demand (COD), total suspended solids (TSS), biological oxygen demand (BOD), total dissolved solids (TDS), alkalinity, salinity, and concentrations of heavy metals (Korajkic, 2018).

This study highlights the development of an H_2S kit using locally available Nigerian materials, promoting sustainability and supporting Africa's Sustainable Development Goal. This research aims to develop a Hydrogen Sulphide (H_2S) test kit that uses animal bile, baker's yeast, and beef extract to enable rapid, cost-effective assessment of microbial contamination in various water sources. The objectives include the following: developing a formulation and procedure for producing an H_2S test kit. The study centres on the formulation and validation of a low-cost, locally sourced Hydrogen Sulphide (H_2S) test kit for rapid, robust microbial water quality assessment in resource-limited settings, with a focus on detecting feacal contamination indicators.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

250 mL Beakers, 250 mL Conical Flasks, Mortar and Pestle, 100 mL Measuring Cylinders, Reagent Bottles, 100 mL Volumetric Flask, Spatula and Glass Stirring Rod, Polyethylene Bags, Plastic Hand Gloves, Cloth Mesh Filter, Cloth Strainers and Stainless Tray, Electric Blender (1000 mL capacity), Centrifuge (MRC, Model LCEN–402N), Analytical Balance (Mettler Toledo, Model XP6002S), Autoclave (LASE, Model KTR-3065A), Hot Air Oven (UNISCOPE England, Model SM9053), Water Bathe (Nickel Electro Ltd, Serial No. 62546) and Laboratory Freezer (Model DW–86L158)

Method for the Preparation of Algae Powder: Sample Preparation for Algae Powder Production & Preparation of Agar Powder from Red Algae

Red algae (seaweed) were collected from the bank of Lagos Lagoon, Lagos state. The seaweed was thoroughly washed with distilled water to remove sandy impurities. 250g of the seaweed was boiled in 500 ml of distilled water for 1.5 hours to release agar from the algae's cell walls. The solution obtained was filtered through a cloth strainer to remove solid weed material, leaving a solution containing agar.

Agar concentrate

The agar solution was concentrated by boiling off water, and the resulting solid mass of agar was cooled to room temperature. The solid agar mass obtained was further purified by washing with 70% ethanol, filtering through a cloth strainer, and drying in a hot-air oven at 60 °C. The solid mass of pure agar obtained was left to cool, powdered, and stored in a reagent bottle.

Preparation of Yeast Extract from Baker's Yeast

Fresh Baker's yeast was purchased from Kakuri Market, Kaduna. 50 g of yeast was washed with distilled water to remove contaminants and then suspended in 150 mL of distilled water for 30 minutes. The resultant was incubated at 75°C for 24 hours to release yeast intracellular materials via autolysis. After 24 hours of incubation, the yeast cells were further disrupted by vigorous stirring (Zarei *et al*., 2016).

Extraction of soluble components

The yeast slurry above, now containing broken yeast cells and other soluble components, was mixed with 50 ml of distilled water, incubated at 60 °C, and left for 24 hours to solubilize proteins, amino acids, peptides, nucleotides, vitamins, and minerals.

Filtration

The resulting mixture was centrifuged to remove insoluble debris, yielding a clear supernatant containing the yeast extract.

Concentrating the yeast extract

The yeast extract was concentrated by gently evaporating part of its liquid content using a water bathe. This procedure helped to increase the amount of dissolved nutrients available in the extract while preventing excessive heat damage to important components such as amino acids, peptides, vitamins, and other substances required for microbial growth. The extract concentration improved the suitability of the extract as a nutrient source in the formulated H_2S test medium. The use of a water bathe provided controlled, uniform heating, which reduced the risk of burning or decomposition of sensitive biological compounds during evaporation (Fellows, 2009; Stanbury, Whitaker, & Hall, 2017).

Drying yeast extract

The concentrated yeast extract was placed in a beaker and dried at 70 °C in a hot-air oven.

Production of Beef Extract Powder

About 250 g of lean beef with minimal fat content was sourced from Monday Market, Kakuri, Kaduna. Lean meat was chosen to minimize lipid interference and improve nutrient extraction efficiency. The meat was washed thoroughly, cut into small pieces, and prepared to increase surface area for better release of soluble components such as amino acids, peptides, vitamins, and minerals (Stanbury *et al*, 2017; Acumedia, 2025).

The pieces were gently boiled in distilled water in a water bathe to extract soluble nutrients. The resulting mixture was filtered with a cloth mesh to remove solid residues, and the filtrate was concentrated by controlled evaporation in a water bathe. It was then dried further in a hot-air oven to obtain a stable beef extract powder, which was stored in an airtight container for later use in the H_2S test kit formulation.

Extraction of soluble components

The meat was placed in a stainless-steel pot, 500 ml of water was added, and the mixture was brought to a boil and simmered for 4 hours at 100 °C with occasional stirring. This is done to extract soluble protein, amino acids, peptides, and minerals from the meat into the water. The foam of impurities that rose during the simmering process was skimmed off. The resulting broth was removed from the heat source, cooled, and filtered through a cloth strainer to remove insoluble beef material.

Concentrating the beef extract

The filtered beef broth was evaporated in a water bathe at 100 °C until the volume was reduced by more than half, thereby concentrating the extract. The concentrated extract was oven-dried at 80 °C to a solid mass and allowed to cool. The dried, cooled beef extract, now a brittle solid, was ground in a blender to a fine powder and stored in a reagent.

Preparation of bile content from animal bile for the extraction

of bile salt

The following stepwise procedures were used to extract bile salts from animal bile.

Collection of bile by the post–mortem method

Bile was harvested from a slaughtered goat by careful removal of the gall bladder. The gall bladder was opened using a sterilized knife, and its contents (bile) were emptied into a sterilized beaker (Mateus *et al*, 2023)

Purification of the bile

The bile was separated from solid impurities by high-speed centrifugation. The supernatant containing the bile salt was collected in a beaker.

Solvent Extraction

10 ml of chloroform was added to the supernatant in a beaker, the mixture was stirred gently for 10 minutes, and then left to settle. The solvent dissolves the bile salt, leaving other components such as cholesterol behind. The supernatant containing the salt was decanted.

Drying the Bile Salt

The beaker containing the bile salt and solvent was placed in an 80 °C water bathe to evaporate the solvent, leaving a small residue of bile salt. The dried bile salt was removed from the water bathe and cooled. The cooled bile salt was collected in a reagent bottle and stored in a cool, moisture-free environment.

Production of Peptone from Soybeans:

Production of soybean powder suspension

A 500g soybean powder was purchased from the Monday market in Kakuri, Kaduna. 200 g of the powder was added to 200ml of distilled water in a one-liter capacity beaker, and the mixture was uniformly stirred with a stirrer to obtain a suspension.

Hydrolysis of the soy protein

400 mL of 2 M HCl was added to 200 mL of the soy suspension in a 1-litre beaker, and the mixture was heated at a controlled temperature of 90 °C for 6 hours.

Termination of Hydrolysis Process

The hydrolysis process above was stopped by adding 150 mL of 1 M NaOH solution to the hydrolyzed soy suspension until the pH reached 7.

Filtration and Clarification

The neutralized hydrolyzed solution was filtered and centrifuged to remove undigested residue.

Concentration and Drying of the supernatant (peptone solution)

The supernatant obtained above was concentrated by evaporating it over a water bathe, and the concentrate was finally dried in an oven at 55 °C until a powdery form was obtained. The dried peptone produced was stored in a reagent bottle.
bottle (Xu, 2014).

Media Formulations for Hydrogen Sulfide Test Vials

Formula 1

Peptone powder	0.500 g
Lactose	0.125 g
Bile salt	0.040 g
Di potassium phosphate	0.040 g
Sodium Chloride	0.125 g
Lead acetate	0.250 g
Soybean powder (Cysteine source)	0.200 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50 ml-capacity reagent bottle. The bottle with media was sterilized by autoclaving at 121 °C for 15 minutes.

Formula 2

Bismuth Sulphate	0.250 g
Sodium thiosulphate	0.200 g
Glucose	0.150 g
Peptone	0.500 g
Bile salt	0.035 g
Beef extract	0.250 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50 ml-capacity reagent bottle. The bottle containing the media was sterilized by autoclaving at 121 °C for 15 minutes.

Formula 3

Peptone powder/meat extract	0.700 g
Iron sulphate	0.280 g
Sodium thiosulphate	0.280 g
Bile salt	0.140 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50 ml-capacity reagent bottle. The bottle with media was sterilized by autoclaving at 121^0C for 15 minutes.

Formula 4

Peptone	0.250 g
Yeast extract	0.125 g
NaCl	0.125 g
$MgSO_4$	0.025 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50ml reagent bottle. The bottle containing the media was sterilized by autoclaving at 121 °C for 15 minutes.

Formular 5

Peptone	0.500 g
Lactose	0.125 g
Bile salt No.3	0.054 g
Di potassium phosphate	0.040 g
NaCl	0.125 g
Sodium sulfide	0.300 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50 ml-capacity reagent bottle. The bottle containing the media was sterilized by

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autoclaving at 121 °C for 15 minutes.

Formula 6

Meat extract	0.250 g
Yeast extract	0.250 g
Lead acetate	0.200 g
Lactose	0.300 g
Sodium thiosulfate	0.300 g
Bile salt	0.100 g

Each of the compositions above was weighed into a ceramic mortar with its pestle, sterilized in a hot-air oven at 200 °C for an hour, homogenized with the pestle, and emptied into a 50 ml-capacity reagent bottle. The bottle containing the media was sterilized by autoclaving at 121 °C for 15 minutes.

Reasons for Local Materials Substitution

Table 3: Local Materials Substitution

Component	Imported/Commercial KIT	Locally Developed KIT	Cost Implication
Sulphur detector	Lead acetate (imported)	Bismuth sulphate	Cheaper and non-toxic
Source of Nitrogen	Imported peptone	Soy beans	Locally sourced
Container	Vials from the factory	Recycled glass bottle	Minimal cost

Spectrophotometric Analysis of Extract using XRF and FTIR

Procedure for the Determination of Elemental Composition of Beef Extract, Yeast Extract, and Bile Extract using XRF

4g of dry meat extract powder was mixed with boric acid and subjected to a hydraulic press to form a pellet. The XRF machine was allowed to warm up for 30 minutes and calibrated using a standard reference. The blank was run to check for accuracy. The program was selected for oxides and metals, and the measurement set was for 60 seconds. The sample pellet was put inside the sample chamber, and the chamber was closed. Analysis was started and is pending completion; both the spectrum and quantitative results have been saved. This procedure was repeated for both bile extract and soya extract.

Procedure for the determination of the Organic Compound in Beef Extract, Yeast Extract, and Bile Extract using FTIR

The FTIR machine was warmed up for 30 minutes, the wavenumber was set to 4000–400 cm-1, and a background scan was conducted. 1mg of the meat extract powder was placed directly on the ATR crystal and positioned. The sample was scanned at 4000– 400 cm-1 with 4 cm-1 resolution over 30 scans. The sample spectrum displayed was saved, and the raw data. This procedure was repeated for bile extract and yeast extract.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Spectroscopic Analysis of Beef Extract Using Fourier Transform Infra-Red (FTIR)

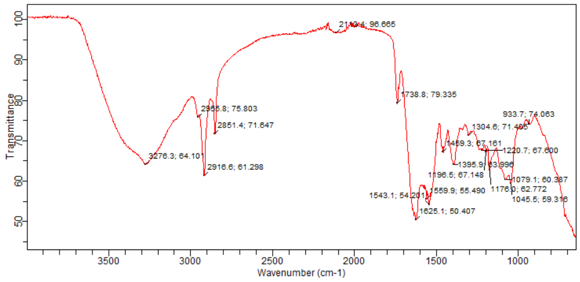

Figure 1: Meat Extract FTIR spectrum

Table 4: Interpretation of FTIR analysis carried out on beef extract

Peak Position	Functional Group	Class
3276.3	O-H	Alcohol
2953.8	N-H	Amine salt
2916.6	N-H	Amine
2851.4	N-H	Amine
2558.6	S-H	Thio
1738.8	C=O	Esters
1625.1	C=C	Conjugated alkene
1559.9	N-O	Nitro compound
1543.1	N-O	Nitro compound
1459.3	C-H	Alkane
1395.9	S=O	Sulfate
1220.7	C-O	Alkyl aryl ether
1176.0	C-O	Tertiary alcohol
1045.5	S=O	sulfoxide

Spectroscopic Analysis of Yeast Extract using Fourier Transform Infra-Red (FTIR)

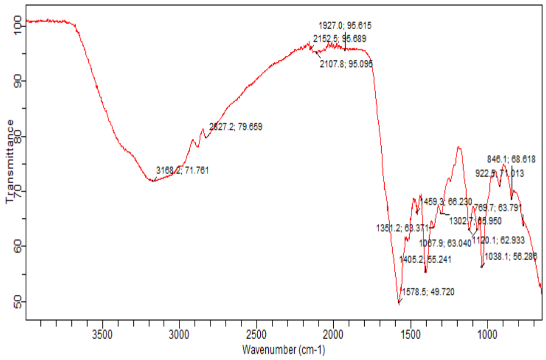

Figure 2: Yeast Extract FTIR spectrum

Table 5: Interpretation of FTIR analysis carried out on yeast extract

Peak Position	Functional Group	Class
3168.2 cm^{-1}	O-H	Carboxylic acid
2827.2 cm^{-1}	N-H	Amine salt
2152.5 cm^{-1}	N=N=N	Azide
2107.8 cm^{-1}	C ΞC	Alkyne
1927.0 cm^{-1}	C=C=C	Allene
1578.5 cm^{-1}	N-H	Amaine
1405.2 cm^{-1}	S=O	Sulfonyl chloride
1351.2 cm^{-1}	S=O	Sulfonic acid
1302.7 cm^{-1}	S=O	Sulfoxide
1067.9 cm^{-1}	S=O	Sulfoxide
1100 cm^{-1}	C=O	Sulfone
1038.1 cm^{-1}	CO-OCO	anhydride
922.5 cm^{-1}	C-O	Tertiary alcohol

Spectroscopic Analysis of Extracted Bile Salt Using Fourier Transform Infra-red (FTIR)

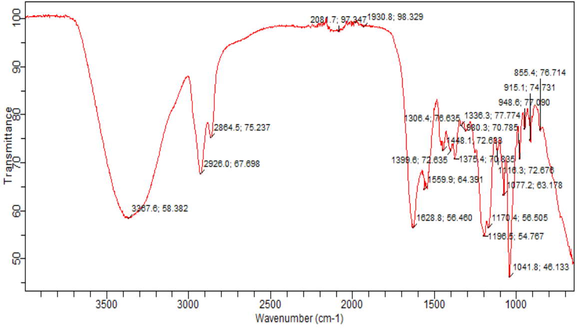

Figure 3: Bile Extract FTIR Spectrum

Table 6: Interpretation of FTIR analysis carried out on extracted bile salt extract

Peak Position	Functional Group	Class
3367.6 cm^{-1}	N-H	Aliphatic amine
2926.0 cm^{-1}	C-H	Alkene
2864.5 cm^{-1}	O-H	Alcohol
2081.7 cm^{-1}	N-H	Amine salt
1930.8 cm^{-1}	C=C=C	Isothiocyanane
1628.8 cm^{-1}	C=C	Conjugated alkene
1559.9 cm^{-1}	N-H	Amine
1375.4 cm^{-1}	O-H	Phenol
1196.5 cm^{-1}	C=O	Tertiary alcohol
1170.4 cm^{-1}	C=O	Tertiary alcohol
1041.8 cm^{-1}	CO-O-CO	Anhydride
1077.2 cm^{-1}	C-O	Primary alcohol

The development of an H_2S test kit using locally sourced materials aims to provide a rapid, affordable, and practical alternative for microbial water quality testing in resource-limited settings. The principle of the H_2S test is that certain indicator microorganisms, particularly gut bacteria, reduce sulphur-containing compounds to hydrogen sulphide (H_2S), which reacts with metal salts to produce a visible black precipitate. The effectiveness of such a test kit depends largely on the availability of suitable nutrients, source of sulphur and growth-supporting cofactors.

FTIR analysis of yeast extract, meat extract, and bile salt extract, as revealed in tables 4, 5, and 6, showed the presence of functional groups that are biochemically relevant for the growth of indicator organisms, such as amino acids, peptides, proteins, carbohydrates, and lipids. The observed absorption bands corresponding to O–H, N–H, C=O, and C–N stretching vibrations confirm the presence of organic molecules necessary for microbial metabolism and growth. These functional groups are characteristic of complex growth media traditionally used in microbiological assays, indicating that the locally prepared extracts can adequately replace imported commercial media.

Yeast extract is a good source of B vitamins, nitrogenous compounds, and readily absorbed carbon sources that promote rapid microbial growth (Tao, 2022). Meat extract provides peptides, cysteine, and other amino acids, while bile salt extract ensures selectivity for enteric bacteria by inhibiting non-enteric organisms. The FTIR results, therefore, confirm the biochemical suitability of the selected local materials for supporting the growth of H_2S-producing indicator organisms.

XRF Spectrum of Beef, Yeast, Bile Extract.

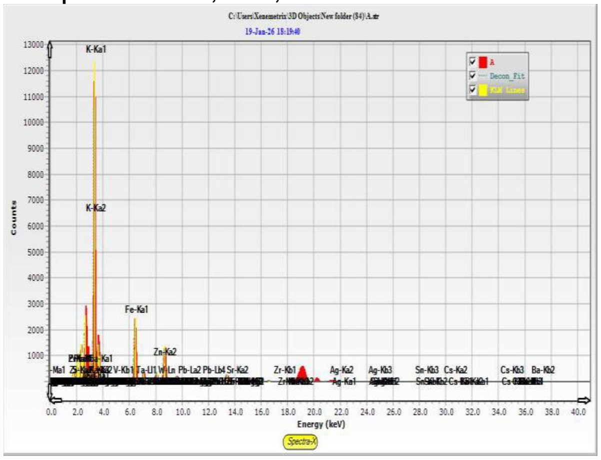

Figure 4: XRF Spectrum of Beef Extract

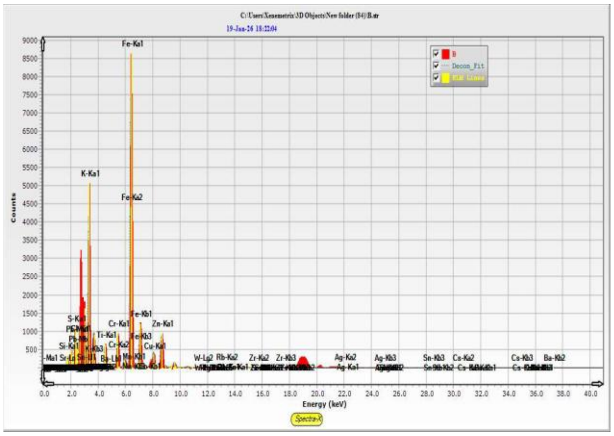

Figure 5: XRF Spectrum of Yeast Extract

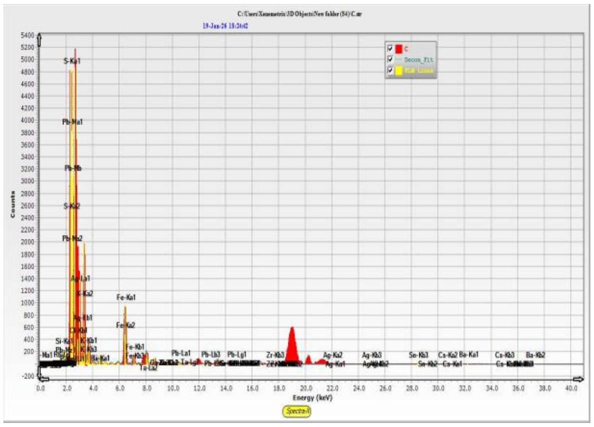

Figure. 6: XFR Spectrum of Bile Extract

XRF analysis of beef extract in Figure 4 showed that the meat extract contained a notably high sulphur content of 4.128%. This finding is important for the performance of the H_2S test kit, as sulphur is a critical element required for hydrogen sulphide production by indicator organisms. In meat extract, sulphur is largely derived from sulphur-containing amino acids, particularly cysteine and, to a lesser extent, methionine. Cysteine is a primary substrate for microbial sulphur metabolism, in which enzymatic breakdown releases H_2S.

The presence of sulphur in the cysteine molecule enhances the sensitivity of the test by ensuring that H_2S-producing bacteria can readily generate detectable levels of H_2S within a short incubation period. This supports prompt visual detection, which is a major advantage of the H_2S test method for field applications.

In addition to sulphur, XRF analysis indicated the presence of some other elements in the extracts as shown in figures 4, 5, and 6, including essential macro and trace elements. These elements play important roles as enzymatic cofactors and structural components needed for microbial growth and metabolism. For example, elements such as iron, magnesium, calcium, potassium, and phosphorus are involved in enzymatic reactions, membrane integrity, energy utilization, and nucleic acid synthesis. Iron, in particular, is relevant to H_2S detection, as it reacts with hydrogen sulphide to form iron sulphide, producing the characteristic black coloration (Thakur *et al*., 2021).

The presence of these elements in the right proportions contributes to the overall effectiveness of the locally formulated test kit by aiding robust microbial growth and metabolic activity without the need for expensive purified reagents.

The combined FTIR and XRF findings showed that locally sourced yeast extract, meat extract, and bile salt extract possess the necessary chemical composition to support the growth of H_2S-producing indicator organisms. The relatively high sulphur concentration in the meat extract, together with other essential elements that act as cofactors, supports the reliability and sensitivity of the developed H_2S test kit.

These results highlight the potential to develop an effective, low-cost microbial water-quality assessment tool using locally available materials. Such a test kit is particularly suitable for rural and local communities, where access to standard laboratory facilities and commercial microbial media is limited. The study therefore supports the possible application of this locally developed H_2S test kit as a practical alternative for rapid screening of microbial contamination in drinking water.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of developing simple, reliable approaches to monitoring drinking water quality, especially in areas where microbial pollution poses serious health risks. The results show that locally sourced materials can be successfully used to produce an affordable hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) test kit for identifying fecal contamination in water. Analytical evaluations confirmed that the formulated media contain the required biochemical and elemental components needed to support the growth of H_2S-producing microorganisms, indicating that the test system is effective. Compared with conventional laboratory techniques, which are often costly and require specialized facilities, the developer kit offers a more practical option for low-resource environments. Its ease of use, low cost, and reliability make it well-suited for on-site testing, community-level monitoring, and educational purposes. The findings suggest that locally produced H_2S test kits can serve as sustainable and efficient tools for water quality assessment and for promoting safer water and better environmental health.

Availability of data

Data availability is not applicable.

Funding
This research work is self-funded.

Conflicts of interest

No conflict of interest was associated with this work.

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